

VERVE

ESCAPE

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Inspired by true events

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VERVE
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OVER BLACK -- the sound of WAVES crashing and ROPES CREAKING.
WRITTEN WORDS crawl across the screen:

Between 1788 and 1868, the British Empire shipped more than 150,000 convicts to penal colonies in Australia and its wild, uncivilized neighbor -- the notoriously brutal TASMANIA.

No distinction was made between first-time and repeat offenders. Petty larcenists commonly served with thieves, rapists, murderers.

This process was not called imprisonment.

*It was called **TRANSPORTATION**.*

MAIN TITLES:

ESCAPE

FADE IN:

A SEAGULL pecks at an apple core. PECK. PECK-PECK. The garbage around it STIRS, a sleeping DRUNKARD rolling over--

EXT. SEEDY PORT CITY - DAWN

--And our gull TAKES FLIGHT, over this VICTORIAN-ERA PORT CITY. Quiet. Still. Shrouded in morning fog. In the harbor, tall-masted ships CREAK.

The gull lands on a sign, hanging from a RAMSHACKLE INN. The sign sways a little in the wind. Hinges squeaking. *SQUEAKK...*

--TINK. A BAYONET steadies the sign. We TRACK DOWN the blade to a rifle, held by a hard-lived BRITISH SOLDIER.

And he has friends. WIDEN to reveal... On roofs, in alleys, aiming rifles, SURROUNDING THE INN -- **40 SOLDIERS**. Preparing for a RAID. And whoever, or whatever is inside has the fear of God in every last one of these men. A SUPER appears:

Harbortown, Tasmania.
June, 1824.

A pocket-watch OPENS. **COMMANDANT JOHN CUTHBERT** (50s), scarlet officer's uniform, stares at it with raw eyes. The glass is cracked. Hands frozen. But Cuthbert holds it like it's the most precious object he owns. Gently wipes away a RED SMUDGE--

WHISPERING SOLDIER (O.S.)
There's no escape, sir.
(Cuthbert's eyes flick up)
Awaiting your order.

Cuthbert... gives a SMALL NOD. Three VETERAN SOLDIERS creep towards the inn, silent as ballet dancers. A board CREAKS...

They RUSH INSIDE. Cuthbert's eyes fixed now on the inn. A horsefly lands on his cheek. He ignores it. Unblinking. *Man, we wish he'd swat that fly.* But just as it becomes unbearable--

SHOUTS from within. GUNSHOTS. SCREAMS. One of the veterans STAGGERS OUT, ON FIRE, and collapses in the street.

Soldiers murmur, exchanging glances. But Cuthbert's unfazed.

CUTHBERT
Try not to hit any of the whores.

Guns erupt as 37 soldiers SANDBLAST the inn with musketballs.

Our seagull flees, squawking, HANGING SIGN splintering until it snaps loose, clattering to the ground.

INT. INN - MOMENTS LATER

Glass crunches as Cuthbert leads his men in. Dust clouds the air. A pudgy INNKEEPER cowers under a table. Cuthbert finds a broken gas-lamp at the foot of the stairs; looks up--

To discover the TORN BODIES of his troops. *They look mauled.*

Cuthbert's gaze hardens, seeing, at the top of the stairs -- A DOOR. Firelight seeps from around its edges.

INT. UPSTAIRS ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The door CREAKS OPEN, revealing -- a REDHEADED MAN, seated on the bed, his back to us. Compact, sturdy frame. Shirtless. Powerful shoulders covered in tattoos and old flogging scars.

But oddly, Cuthbert's eyes dart around the rest of the room.

CUTHBERT
Where is he? The other.

REDHEADED MAN
(head tilts, not turning)
So you need me alive for questioning.

CUTHBERT
Nobody has ever needed you.

Cuthbert waves his soldiers forward, when--

REDHEADED MAN
--Since you've spoken so kindly,
I'll allow any lad who wishes it to
leave the room now, with a face his
sweetheart will still recognize.

The soldiers exchange glances. Cuthbert prods them forward, redheaded man not resisting as they work manacles around ONE CHAFED WRIST, reaching for the other, which is when--

THE MAN RISES.

And now everything happens very fast:

A tattooed arm WHIPS AROUND, manacles swinging, BLINDING ONE SOLDIER-- chain encircling another's throat; a rifle DROPS; the redheaded man's free hand catches, spins, and FIRES IT-- BLASTING APART a third soldier's JAW--

And we still haven't seen the redheaded man's FACE as--

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

--He SMASHES through a window, falling TWO STORIES--

And SLAMS to the cobblestones below, back on his feet with barely a limp, racing around a corner--

To find NINE MORE SOLDIERS waiting.

Rifles BURST, a shot carving out a piece of the man's bicep as he BARRELS into the soldiers like a wild animal, BITING an ear; BOOT-STOMPING a leg; WRENCHING an elbow a way God never meant it to bend, its owner spittle-gasping:

BRITISH SOLDIER
--Gahh--

But MORE SOLDIERS lunge in. Struggling to cuff the man, hiking up pant-legs to reveal ankles ringed in OLD LEG-IRON SCARS, clapping manacles over them.

They drag him up, giving us our first good look at his face:

Mutton-chop sideburns. Cheshire-cat grin. Meet **ALEXANDER PEARCE** (38). History paints him as a monstrous man, but boisterous and quick to laugh, and some of that spirit should show, even as he breathes hard, smiling with bloody teeth at--

CUTHBERT, staring down at him through the smashed window.

INT. GRIM CELL - LATER

WHAM! Fists pound flesh as a huge soldier tenderizes Pearce, wrists chained to the ceiling, teeth missing, eyes blacked.

This has been going on for some time.

Cuthbert grabs Pearce by the hair, pulling him close. Softly:

CUTHBERT
Where is he? Where is Greenhill?

PEARCE
John. I told you. He is inside us.

CUTHBERT
Answer plainly. Or it goes on.

PEARCE
I have. Greenhill is inside you. You put him there. The moment that pocket-watch stopped. Want him out, you'll have to carve out your own heart... Or spill open my guts -- because that's where the rest of him is.

Cuthbert's eyes cinch, reading Pearce's face.

PEARCE
I done it before. You know I have.

BRITISH SOLDIER (O.S.)
 --Sir. We found something. In the swamps, outside town.

A soldier displays TORN, BLOODY CLOTHING. Cuthbert finds a grimy WOVEN BRACELET among the rags. Stares at it, boiling--

CUTHBERT
 No. He's alive. Greenhill is alive.
 And you're going to give him to me.

Cuthbert pulls a HOT POKER from a cast-iron furnace. Pearce's eyes follow the glowing tip as Cuthbert brings it closer...

CUTHBERT
 Now. Where. Is. Greenhill.

Cuthbert presses the HOT POKER to PEARCE'S ARMPIT, as we--

SLAM TO:

A SHRIEKING STEAM WHISTLE. A white-haired MINE OWNER (60) pulling the cord, frantic eyes darting to--

INT. COAL MINE - MORNING

A COLLAPSING MINE TUNNEL. Earth and stone crumbles down as soot-faced MINERS scramble for the exit. A beam CRASHES DOWN, pinning a BOY MINER (14). He SQUIRMS, terrified--

BOY MINER
 Someone -- *please* --

A TALL MINER halts, his back to us. Lean frame, shoulders slick with sweat. On his wrist, a familiar WOVEN BRACELET, now new and clean. He tries to lift the beam. It won't budge. He grabs a passing miner, **BOLGER** (30s, buttons straining):

TALL MINER Help me.	BOLGER (eyes dart, terrified) ...To hell with you.
------------------------	--

Bolger stagger-runs off. Our tall miner tries to lift the beam alone, STRAINING-- it faintly INCHES UPWARD--

EXT. COAL MINE - SAME

--When the entire mine COLLAPSES. Miners stare, faces ashen.

MINE OWNER
 Sweet 'Jasus.
 (removes his cap, eyes wet)
 Somebody better go tell Sarah.

BOLGER

...I-- I tried to help him, but
there was nothing to be done.

Debris stirs, a TALL SILHOUETTE emerging through the dust:
Coughing, limping, soot-covered, face streaked in blood, the
boy in his arms. Meet **ROBERT GREENHILL** (30s). Workers swarm:

MINER

It's Greenhill! Water-- get
him water!

GREENHILL

--No; the boy--

Bolger reddens, meeting Greenhill's gaze a moment... And
grabs the boy, carrying him off.

BOLGER

I got him -- make way, make way.

Greenhill falls to his knees. LOOKS UP. It's an honest face;
strong, capable. A face you'd trust -- but despite the
rainfall, it's a face that never quite seems to get clean.

WIDE SHOT: Greenhill sits apart, just a speck, dwarfed by
mountains and dark valleys shrouded in mist. SUPER:

County Wicklow, Ireland.
Three Years Earlier.

INT. ONE-ROOM STONE COTTAGE - DAY

Teeth clench as Greenhill winces, his FOOT BADLY BRUISED.

GREENHILL

That's an ankle you're
mending, not a fence post--

SARAH

--Oh, would you listen to the
mouth on him. Hold still.

SARAH GREENHILL (30) pins a bandage with one hand, INFANT
squirming in the other. A stubborn beauty, her hands delicate
but worn. Used to hard work.

SARAH

If your father could milk a cow
half so well as he milks an injury,
we'd all be swimming in cream.

COLIN (9) smirks, cutting mold away from a crust of bread.

COLIN

You could've just kept running.
Nobody would've known.

GREENHILL

I would have known.

COLIN

But what if you'd died?

GREENHILL

And if I'd kept running. And lived.
How would I be able to look you in
the eyes when I got home?

Colin stares at his father. Admires him.

SARAH

Ach, Maggie! Down!

MAGGIE (4) startles, reaching for sunlight in a window. She eyes her mother, carefully climbing down...

...But Greenhill LIFTS her back up into the light. She grins, trying to catch DUST MOTES swirling all around her.

GREENHILL

Know what those are, Maggie?
They're stars. Tiny little ones.

MAGGIE

They aren't really.

GREENHILL

'Course they are. Be a waste, if
God made a thing so pretty as
stars, then kept them all out of
reach in the sky. They're all
around us. Whole world's made up of
them. Even you and me.

MAGGIE

What about Colin?

COLIN

Ugh. No. I'm made of rocks.
And fire.

GREENHILL

Colin is made of rocks and fire.
But also stars.

Sarah allows a careworn smile, setting down the baby, as--

SARAH

A'right, out, the both of you.
First to scrounge 3 good potatoes
gets an extra spoonful of pie.

Maggie squeals, running out, Colin chasing her, shouting.
Greenhill and Sarah draw closer to each other.

GREENHILL

Begging your pardon, miss, but I'll
be wanting some of that pie too.

SARAH

Will you now? How do you take it?

It's worth noting here that there are two types of married couples: those who lose their sexual chemistry, and those who do not. These two fall squarely into the latter group.

GREENHILL
Soft crust. Firm potatoes.

SARAH
Not as firm as they used to be.

GREENHILL
It's a dirty lie. I won't have you slandering my wife's pie.

And as she smirks and PUSHES HIM out of FRAME we--

CUT TO:

A fire smolders. Late night. We drift through the cottage. Children sleep, sharing a cot. In a sagging bed, voices low:

SARAH
...We're back three months on rent.
One more, we'll be on the street in
the dead of winter--

GREENHILL
I'm not going to let that happen.

SARAH
There's not a job in the whole of
Ireland. And that mine just put 90
more men out of work--

GREENHILL
It wasn't the mine. It was me.
(Sarah frowns)
We'd reached the end of the seam.
The foreman said it was unstable.
But all I could see was you, and
the children, with empty bowls and
empty stomachs. I would've dug 'til
my pick melted in the fires of hell
before I let that happen.

SARAH
...You take too much on yourself.

GREENHILL
You know how I lived as a child. I
won't see this family back there.

She studies his face. And believes him, as -- WE HEAR:

OLD IRISH PRIEST (V.O.)
O ye of little faith. Take heed.

EXT. WICKLOW, MAIN STREET - DAY (BEGIN MONTAGE)

Snow falls. Homeless FORMER MINERS look for work on every corner. Greenhill hauls a cart through the slush, wearing an apron with a dry goods merchant insignia. He looks thinner.

OLD IRISH PRIEST (V.O.)
A man's life is not found in the abundance of things he possesses.

Greenhill slows, recognizing the miner BOLGER, now in the blue coat of a CONSTABLE, arresting a beggar.

INT. WEALTHY MANOR - NIGHT

Greenhill hauls groceries back and forth into a pantry.

OLD IRISH PRIEST (V.O.)
A man's life is more than food; his body, more than clothing.

Standing in a doorway, a WEALTHY WOMAN (50s) eyes Greenhill's patched clothing, his ragged shoes, the wet and grimy footprints in his wake. Her nose wrinkles.

EXT. DRY-GOODS MERCHANT SHOP, STOREROOM - MORNING

Greenhill refills his cart. A MERCHANT (60s, hair in his ears) stops him. Gestures to Greenhill's clothes; shoes--

MERCHANT
 Forgive me. But our patrons expect a certain standard of dress. Leave your cart in the back.

He walks off. Greenhill's face floods with shame. And anger.

OLD IRISH PRIEST (V.O.)
Consider the lilies of the field. They labour not -- yet even King Solomon, in all his mighty glory, was never clothed in such finery.

The merchant grabs a "FOR HIRE" sign, marching to a window where UNEMPLOYED WORKERS eagerly peer in, the BOY MINER whose life Greenhill saved in front--

--But Greenhill blocks the merchant's way. Startles him. Rips the sign from his hand. Something almost violent in the act.

GREENHILL
No. I'll come back with proper attire. By Wednesday next.

MERCHANT

...Come back with it tomorrow. Or
don't come back a'tall.

INT. OLD STONE CHURCH - AFTERNOON

CLOSE ON: The lined face of an **OLD IRISH PRIEST** (60s), in a country church, reading the very SERMON we've been hearing:

OLD IRISH PRIEST

"Consider the sparrows; they
neither sow nor reap, and yet God
feeds them. Does He not love you,
His children, more than sparrows?"

Greenhill kneels in a pew, hands tightly knit. In turmoil.

INT. STONE COTTAGE - EVENING

Sarah ladles out potato stew. Mostly broth. Maggie peers into the pot for more. Empty. Sinks back in her chair. Greenhill stares at her, his heart boiling over with frustration.

OLD IRISH PRIEST (V.O.)

*So reserve no thought for what you
shall eat; neither for your body,
what you shall put on.*

Colin watches his father grab a threadbare coat, walking out.

EXT. WICKLOW, MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Greenhill stares into a gas-lit SHOP WINDOW, filled with rows of leather boots. His reflection in the glass, super-imposed over a set of sturdy workman's clothes.

OLD IRISH PRIEST (V.O.)

*Your Father knows you have need of
these things. Endure well this trial,
and you shall receive a treasure in
heaven, which time can never corrupt--*

Greenhill eyes the price tags; looks down at a meager handful of coins. He turns to go -- but STOPS.

WIDE SHOT: the street is empty. Greenhill frowns. Alone.

BLACKOUT.

OLD IRISH PRIEST (V.O.)

Nor thieves break through and steal.

We hear the sound of GLASS SHATTERING.

I/E. STONE COTTAGE - NIGHT

A POUNDING KNOCK. Sarah looks up from nursing the infant. She frowns, pulling open the door to find--

THREE CONSTABLES outside. Bolger and two officers. He scans Sarah's thin nightgown. She pulls a shawl around herself.

BOLGER
Your husband in, ma'am?

SARAH
In bed, sir. Like any sensible fellow ought be. I'll thank you to be coming back in the morn--

She tries to shut the door, but Bolger BLOCKS IT WITH HIS TRUNCHEON. Her eyes dart. Greenhill appears behind her.

GREENHILL
Sarah. It's alright. What's the trouble, lads?

The constables part, revealing a figure behind them:

The BOY MINER whose life Greenhill saved. The boy swallows, meeting Greenhill's stricken gaze; looks down. Unable even to speak the condemning word.

BOLGER
The night is cold, boy. Is it himself you saw stealing the goods, or no?

BOY MINER
It-- it was dark.

GREENHILL
Perhaps you have the wrong house.

BOLGER
Just to be certain-- search it.

Sarah blinks as the constables storm past her into the cottage -- but COLIN blocks their way.

COLIN
My father's no thief. Get out.

The constable SHOVES Colin aside; he FALLS--

GREENHILL
(steps forward)
Easy now, there's no need to--

WHAM! Bolger's truncheon DROPS Greenhill to his knees. Bloodying his nose. Maggie SCREAMS.

BOLGER
Not so high and mighty now, are we?

Sarah restrains Greenhill, who watches, seething, as they ransack the cottage, until--

They find the STOLEN BOOTS AND CLOTHES under Greenhill's bed.

Sarah's eyes close, realizing what's happened. Colin stares at his father, something seeming to die in his young eyes. Greenhill can't even look at him.

GREENHILL
It's just a terrible mistake. I'll speak to the shop owner; return the goods. Pay for the window. You know me; know my family.

The other constables exchange glances, softening, but--

BOLGER
(straightens his uniform)
...Note for the report, the accused resisted the search. And attempted to assault an officer of the crown.

The constables grab Greenhill, leading him away. He looks back at Sarah, their WORLD CRUMBLING as--

MAGISTRATE (PRE-LAP)
You have painted a vivid picture, Mr. Greenhill, of the hardships your family has endured these months.

INT. STONE COURTROOM - MORNING

PAN OVER a cramped gallery, finding Sarah juggling Maggie and the baby, fighting for a view. Colin stands apart, jaw tight.

On the dock, unshaven, in prison garb, stands Greenhill.

MAGISTRATE (O.S.)
The court should therefore wish to oblige your request for leniency.

GREENHILL
Thank you, mi'Lord--

The **MAGISTRATE** (70, yellowing wig), folds his bony hands.

MAGISTRATE
However.
(Greenhill's heart stops)
There are men and women in difficult circumstances across Ireland.
(MORE)

MAGISTRATE (CONT'D)
 Should the court fail to make
 example of those who disregard the
 King's laws, the whole country could
 fall prey to the criminal class.

Sarah can't breathe. Already knows what's coming.

MAGISTRATE
 It is therefore ordered by this
 court that you, Robert Greenhill,
 be transported across the seas,
 beyond the seas, to MacQuarie
 Harbor Penal Installation of
 Tasmania. For the term of 5 years.

The gavel BANGS. Greenhill's mind goes down a chasm. Sarah's eyes close. Onlookers murmur, shocked. Even the boy miner is ashen, in his NEW DRY-GOODS APRON. Bolger appears satisfied.

MAGGIE
 What's five? How many is five?

COLIN
 ...Longer than you've been alive.

But Greenhill won't accept it. He edges toward the judge.

GREENHILL
 I beg mercy; my family will starve.
 Will you destroy four innocent
 lives over one set of boots?

MAGISTRATE
 Should destruction be their fate,
 the responsible party -- is you.

Bailiffs grab Greenhill, but something in him seems to SNAP. He makes a WILD LUNGE for his family, REACHING OUT-- a TRUNCHEON swings, BREAKING Greenhill's arm. Sarah SHRIEKS--

SARAH
 --Don't hurt him-- please--
 Oh God--

MAGGIE
 (reaching for him)
 Daddy, no-- don't leave--

GREENHILL
 I'll come back-- I'll find a way;
 on my very soul, I'LL COME BACK--

Greenhill struggles wildly, fingers straining to touch Maggie's tiny hand-- almost there, when--

A TRUNCHEON hits Greenhill's head. His head hits the floor.

BLACKOUT.

The sound of WAVES crashing and ROPES CREAKING.

INT. COLONY TRANSPORT SHIP - NIGHT

LANTERN LIGHT flickers as we dip in and out of consciousness with Greenhill, deep in the bowels of a FETID SHIP. Grim, BRUTAL FACES loom around us. Cruel eyes. Scarred bodies.

BLACKOUT.

LIGHTNING FLASHES. A storm rages. SHOUTS above deck. Greenhill pours sweat; cradles his broken arm, looking down, finding it a swollen, purple mass. The ship PITCHES--

SLAMMING his arm into a beam. His eyes POP, sucking breaths through his teeth. He tries to stabilize himself; turns--

--A prisoner with no teeth THROWS UP on him.

BLACKOUT.

The sound of prisoners COUGHING. Greenhill's eyes flutter open, surprised to see his bad arm now in a makeshift SPLINT.

BILLINGS (O.S.)
Miracle, innit?

Greenhill turns to find **THOM BILLINGS** (late 20s) beside him. Shining eyes, wild hair. A buoyant spirit, even in this hell.

BILLINGS
You been courting death two weeks, mate. Was me, got some food down you; set that boomerang you call an arm.

GREENHILL
I... I don't-- why?

BILLINGS
Old habits. Regimental surgeon, in my former life. Tried to send my unit to India; told them I took an oath to protect King-and-Country, not put down an uprising in someone else's.
(holds up his manacles)
Transportation, 12 years. Left a girl back home. Molly. Think she'll wait?

GREENHILL
If she has any sense.

BILLINGS
Could be a problem. She's dumb as a lump of salt. But pretty as a sunrise so-- comes out on balance.

A grin. Billings has immediately become Greenhill's favorite person ever. They exchange nods:

GREENHILL
Robert Greenhill.

BILLINGS
Thom Billings. What you in for?

GREENHILL
...Being poor.

BILLINGS
Only crime you can commit, just by
being born. Wife, I wager? Wee'uns?

Greenhill just touches his WOVEN BRACELET.

BILLINGS
Want to see 'em again, we got to
look out for each other. We're
pickled in with lifers. Bludgers,
rapers. We aren't careful, we'll
end up their next victims-- or end
up just like them. They say once
you go to Tasmania, you never go
home again. Not really.

GREENHILL
I'm going home.

And off Greenhill's QUIET DETERMINATION--

EXT. COLONY TRANSPORT SHIP - MORNING (WEEKS LATER)

A BELL CLANGS as prisoners are marched on-deck. Greenhill,
scraggly beard, flinches from the sun. SPLASH. A couple
convicts who didn't survive the voyage are tossed overboard.

LIP-SCAR SOLDIER
'At's what we call an early pardon.

Soldiers laugh, leading the new arrivals down a gangplank--

EXT. HARBORTOWN, TASMANIA - CONTINUOUS

--Into the PORT CITY from our opening. Wharf now teeming with
merchants, beggars, slavers, whores. Pigs and rats scurry at
Greenhill's feet as they're escorted toward a set of WAGONS.

GREENHILL
How far to the prison?

BILLINGS
Two weeks, I heard. Opposite end of
the whole bloody island.

GREENHILL
...I expect that's by design--

--CHAINS wrap around Greenhill's throat! A WILD-EYED CONVICT wrenches him out of line, using him as a human shield!

WILD-EYED CONVICT
No! You can't make me go back! I'll pop his feckin' head off!

All around, LONG-RIFLES SNAP UP:

LIP SCAR SOLDIER Just shoot 'em both.	GREENHILL (gasps, struggling) -- no -- wait --!
--	---

SOLDIER
On my mark: 3-- 2--

Blood showers Greenhill as a SWORD sprouts from his captor's neck. The convict blinks. Lets go. And FALLS facedown, OFFICER'S SABRE between his shoulders. The crowd STARES...

...and all ACTIVITY RESUMES as before. Greenhill breathes hard as a WHITE-GLOVED HAND retrieves the sabre--

GREENHILL
Th-- thank y--

--And PRESSES it to Greenhill's chin. Tilting back his head.

Greenhill blinks up at his 'savior': Spotless uniform, the sleeves too big. Pale face not yet able to shave. **ABEL** (19).

ABEL
Weren't for your sake I done it.
Speak to me again without I speak
to you first, I'll cut you fine as
I did your man over there. Clear?
(Greenhill just breathes)
You a mumbler? Speak up.

GREENHILL
I understood you. You don't need to threaten me.

Abel BLINKS. All around, soldiers GO QUIET, looking over--

ABEL
What did you say? Y-- you trying to tell me how to do my job, mumbler?

GREENHILL
I don't even know what your job is.
You can lower the sword. You won't have any trouble from me.

All around, soldiers stifle SNICKERS. Abel's jaw works, deciding his response. Then -- a twinkle in his eyes:

ABEL
We'll just see about that, won't we?

The soldiers haul Greenhill up; cram him in a wagon beside:

BILLINGS
Look at you. First day, and already making friends.

Abel snatches a canteen from a soldier; mounts up, leading the caravan out. Greenhill kneads his throat, eyes locked on THE WHARF receding behind them; SHIPS casting off to sea...

CUTHBERT (V.O.)
Banish from your minds, all fancy of escape.

As the caravan winds out of the city-- WE RISE UPWARD--

EXT. TASMANIAN WILDERNESS - VARIOUS (BEGIN MONTAGE)

AND RACE AHEAD, getting a bird's-eye-view of the 300 MILES of INHOSPITABLE TERRAIN that will soon separate Greenhill from civilization: DESERTS. SWAMPS. WHITE MOUNTAINS. RIVER RAPIDS.

CUTHBERT (V.O.)
For survival is impossible, beyond these walls.

EXT. WAGON/PENAL COLONY - NIGHT (DAYS LATER)

Rain thunders, wagons rattling past a weatherbeaten sign:

"MACQUARIE HARBOR PENAL INSTALLATION." The haggard prisoners murmur, Greenhill peering ahead as RUSTED GATES GROAN OPEN...

CUTHBERT (V.O.)
*Judgment Day will come for us all.
But upon you men, it has come early.*

They ride into a medieval-looking PENAL COMPLEX, built into coastal cliffs. At the mouth of a white-water bay below, TWIN BASALT TOWERS give this colony its nickname: "HELL'S GATES."

CUTHBERT (V.O.)
The world is full of sheep.

They ride past a mud-pit. Greenhill watches as two SHIRTLESS CONVICTS viciously fight. Soldiers CHEER, placing bets.

CUTHBERT (V.O.)
*But each of you has been judged to
 be a wolf.*

HANOVER (40) a pockmarked brute, SLAMS his opponent's skull into a ROCK again and again until something gives-- then looks up, meeting Greenhill's eyes. Smiles. Welcoming him.

INT. COMMANDANT'S OFFICE - SAME

A figure clutches a rosary before a small shrine. Candles and religious icons surround a portrait of a COMELY BEAUTY.

CUTHBERT (V.O.)
*From you, the sheep have no defense.
 Except me. I am the shepherd.*

The figure turns, revealing: CUTHBERT. He hears approaching shouts, MARCHING FEET; opens a familiar POCKET-WATCH. Only now, the glass is intact. Hands ticking.

EXT. PRISON YARD - MOMENTS LATER

On a platform in the rain, Cuthbert completes his speech:

CUTHBERT
 The life you knew is over. This place is your home. These men, your family. Accept that, and your time here shall pass swiftly. Accept it not -- and you shall never leave.

In the prison yard, 30 NEW ARRIVALS look up at Cuthbert-- all but Greenhill, who eyes the STONE WALLS; the METAL GATES...

ABEL
 Alright you filth, fall-in for grooming and marking. MOVE, MOVE!

EXT. STABLES - MOMENTS LATER

NAKED PRISONERS shiver in line as a BRANDING IRON HISSES off Billings' neck, leaving "M.H." He's dragged off whimpering.

Greenhill's next. **FELTON** (50s), former guard, current inmate, his nose partly chewed-off, re-heats the iron in a furnace.

FELTON
 Call it, "The MacQuarie Kiss."
 (whispers, to Greenhill)
 Used to be a guard here; for a haypenny, I can get you salve to put on it. Can get you just about anything. Tobacco. Girly pictures--

Greenhill shakes his head; stares at his clenched fist. Felton shrugs. The brand comes down. TSSS... Greenhill reddens. Agony.

ABEL
You there. Open that fist.

Guards force open Greenhill's hand; find his WOVEN BRACELET.

ABEL
Very pretty, mumbler. You steal it?

GREENHILL
My wife... made it.

ABEL
I see. Is that-- her hair? May I?

Abel bends, eyes never leaving Greenhill's as his nostrils INHALE DEEPLY, SMELLING the bracelet.

ABEL
Mmmmm... Still smells of her.
Smells like -- pie.
(Greenhill is sickened)
Place it on the ground.

Greenhill clenches his jaw, forcing himself to comply.

ABEL
Know what your problem is? You
still think you don't belong here.

The sound of LIQUID SPATTERING. Abel urinating on the bracelet. Greenhill's muscles are taut, exercising every atom of self-restraint he possesses not to tear Abel apart.

ABEL
Enjoy her smell.

Abel chuckles, cinches up his pants; turning -- to find CUTHBERT behind him. Abel's bravado melts away.

ABEL
He-- this prisoner had contraband.

CUTHBERT
...Have a wife, do you?

ABEL
Answer the Commandant when he asks
you a question.

GREENHILL
Yes. And three children.

CUTHBERT
 Serve your time here uprightly, and
 I promise, you shall see them again.
 Go on. Go to your bunk assignment.

Greenhill PICKS UP the bracelet. Abel SCOWLS after him...

ABEL
 The man is a born trouble-maker--

CUTHBERT
 So by spoiling the memory of the
 only thing he has to live for, you
 reasoned you'd make him obedient?

ABEL
 Father. Men obey persons they fear.

CUTHBERT
 They obey persons they respect.
 (steps closer, voice low)
 One day, Abel, the administration of
 this facility will be your duty. It's
 time you started acting worthy of it.

Cuthbert turns on his heel, marching off. Abel stands there, turning red. Then he notices some prisoners watching him.

ABEL
 Get back to work or I'll have your
 arses flogged off!

INT. BUNKHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The line of NAKED PRISONERS streams toward the bunkhouse. Greenhill is handed coarse grey clothing; yellowing bedsheets. He continues inside, where--

A 7-FOOT ABORIGINE CONVICT blocks his way, mopping the floor. This is **WHYLIE** (40). Rail-thin. Covered in tribal marks.

GREENHILL
 Excuse me--

But Whylie GRABS GREENHILL'S WRIST. Stripping off his GRIMY BRACELET. Plunging it into his bucket of SOAPY WATER. Wrapping it out. Returning it clean.

Greenhill blinks at the Aborigine, surprised, grateful--

KENNELLY (O.S.)
 --Hey! Claw off 'im, darkee!

KENNELLY (30), a cynical, fast-talking lifer, leads Greenhill away from Whylie, shaking his hand vigorously.

KENNELLY

Mick Kennelly. Careful around Old Abo. His type'll spear you, soon as look at you.

GREENHILL

He was-- kind to me.

KENNELLY

Kind to you. Uh-huh. 'Me ask you a question: How long you in for?

GREENHILL

Five years.

LAUGHTER all around him. Kennelly washes his face and hands in a basin of grey water.

GREENHILL

The magistrate gave me five y--

KENNELLY

Your magistrate forgot about you the moment you was out his door. His job was to send you here. Cuthbert's job is to keep you here. Watch. Fast as a dog'll lick a dish them five years turn into ten; ten into twenty--

(Greenhill frowns--)

Put it this way: When you was coming off that boat-- how many men you see going the other way?

GREENHILL

Just one. You coming with me?

KENNELLY

Sure thing, mate. But only if we travel first class.

(claps Greenhill's BRAND)

Welcome to MacQuarie.

Kennelly chuckles, joining a dice game. Greenhill peers back at Whylie, who quietly lifts his mop, moving on.

INT. BUNKHOUSE - LATE NIGHT

A distant CLANG. Greenhill's eyes open, waking up in a narrow bunk. Across the bunkhouse, convicts murmur:

SCRAWNY PRISONER

Look. They're midnighting someone.

FELTON

--Haven't had a midnight in a long time.

KENNELLY

Wager a quid it's him. Back again.

Everyone presses to the windows, Greenhill peering OUTSIDE--

GREENHILL'S POV:

A WHEELED CAGE is brought in. Cuthbert gives a nod. Soldiers unlock the cage; push LONG POLES inside--

Pulling out a COMPACT, POWERFULLY BUILT MAN. Naked. Covered in blood. Someone else's. IRON BOXES cover his hands and feet. Head in an IRON GRILLE MASK, poles hooked into it, soldiers guiding him along like a velociraptor...

BACK TO:

KENNELLY	SCRAWNY PRISONER
Third attempt this year; gone 9 weeks this time--	Rumor was he got clear to Harbortown. 300 miles.

GREENHILL
...Who is he?

FELTON
Polite society don't have words for what he's called. But his Christian name -- Alexander Pearce.

EXT. PRISON YARD - MORNING

ALEXANDER PEARCE cracks his neck, getting comfortable, as a PIMPLY SOLDIER (20) nervously binds his hands to a pillar.

FELTON (V.O.)
Said to have spent his life in prisons across God's green globe.

The soldier drops a FLOGGING WHIP. Looks at it; at Pearce--

But Pearce just bends down. Handing the whip back to the soldier, oddly *smiling*, never breaking his gaze.

FELTON (V.O.)
Some lands didn't even have names for his crimes. No one but 'im had ever thought to commit them before.

WHIP-CRACKS echo across the yard, where Felton, Greenhill, and a line of prisoners are being marched to the MESS HALL.

GREENHILL
What did he do to end up in here?

I/E. PRISON - VARIOUS (MONTAGE)

In the mess hall, the bunkhouse, the laundry, PRISONERS tell Greenhill various versions of Pearce's origins:

SCOTTISH PRISONER
 Way I heard it, 'spent his
 youth on the Dutch East ships
 riding the winds. Finest
 whaler, ever pulled a rope--

FRIENDLY PRISONER
 --Fought with Wellington's
 grenadiers at Waterloo.
 Buried more frogs that day
 than the bloody black plague.

ERUDITE PRISONER
 --From there, 'e was part of
 a sheep-stealing ring down in
 Hobart--
 (frowns)
 ...No, no, it was Hobart.

OTHER PRISONER (O.S.)
 --Queenstown, I heard.

PRISON CHAPLAIN
 He'd taken Benedictine orders, and
 was three years a priest, when...

INTERCUT: Again and again, the WHIP CRACKS, loud as a gunshot.
 But Pearce doesn't even flinch. This is routine for him.

SCOTTISH PRISONER
 ...One day, he turned his
 harpoon on his captain.
 Slaughtered his whole crew.
 Said he done it for sport.

PRISON CHAPLAIN
 (crosses himself)
 They found the girls below
 the monastery, hung upside
 down. Violated in the most
 appalling ways--

HOARSE OLD PRISONER (PRE-LAP)
I'll tell'ya bout Alexander Pearce.

INT. COASTAL FOREST - MORNING

PICKS CLANG as prisoners clear rocks. Greenhill and Billings
 work alongside a **HOARSE OLD PRISONER** (60, sun-damaged skin).

HOARSE OLD PRISONER
 Few winters back, his regiment got
 snowbound on the Khyber Pass. By
 time search party found them, Pearce
 was the only survivor. Found him
feasting on his superior officer.
 Called his flesh *delicious*. Far
 better than fish or pork.
 (spits)
 Direct quote, 'at is. Believe me.
 You don't wanna be his friend.

GREENHILL
 Still... He's the only man who ever
 made it across the island...

BILLINGS
 I don't care if he sprouts wings. I
 wouldn't get near Pearce for all
 the apples in the King's orchard.

Greenhill glances at Billings, considering it, as -- a SHADOW passes over them. Abel patrolling past on his horse.

ABEL

Keep up the pace, boys! Slothabouts get the double shift tomorrow.

SOLDIER

How far they going today?

ABEL

Not far.

(nods into the DISTANCE)
Just 'til we make that ridge.

Billings' face drops; Greenhill's chest heaving, as we go--

ANGLE FROM ABOVE:

In a series of DISSOLVES, the prisoners slowly inch toward the distant ridge. Their shadows shrink as the sun PEAKS.

RETURN TO:

Greenhill, shirt soaked through, struggles to swing his pick with his SPLINTED ARM, when-- Billings PASSES OUT beside him. Greenhill catches him, SLAPS his face--

GREENHILL

Thom. Thom--

OTHER PRISONER

'E's coming.

Down the line, Abel wheels his horse around, patrolling back.

GREENHILL

Pick it up. Pick it up--

BILLINGS

(almost delirious)
--I c-can't-- please--

Abel gets closer and CLOSER, Greenhill forcing the pick into Billings' blister-covered hands, when--

ABEL

Water break!

(Greenhill can't believe it)
Next thirty minutes, any man who wishes can jump in that river.

Billings drops his pick, staggering numbly down toward--

EXT. RIVERBANK - MOMENTS LATER

CLEAR WATER glides along. Billings and others splash their necks; gulp water, about to leap in. But Greenhill is wary.

GREENHILL BILLINGS
Wait. What? Why--?

GREENHILL
How come only the new prisoners are going in?

Behind them, the other prisoners are JUST WATCHING in dread. Billings frowns, when-- from the water, a BLUR of movement--

CROCODILE JAWS SNAP UP, inches from Billings' face! Greenhill wrenches him back from the waterline as RIOTOUS LAUGHTER ERUPTS from the soldiers. Abel grins ear-to-ear.

ABEL
Tasmanian saltwater crocodiles.
Island's overrun with 'em. Abo's call
them *kurdaitcha*. "Executioner." Snap
your spine in one bite. Or just drag
you to the bottom. Wait you out.
(nods to the river)
Tell you what. I'll offer you a
deal. If you can make it to the far
shore... you're free. What'ya say?

Greenhill stares at the crocodile. At the far shore, fifty yards away. And turns back. His PICK lands at his feet.

ABEL
Day's not over, mumbler.

INT. MESS HALL - NIGHT

ENVELOPES flutter down as a SOLDIER dumps MAIL on a table. Prisoners excitedly grab letters as Greenhill limps over, sunburnt, exhausted. He rakes through the envelopes, finding--

Nothing.

Greenhill's face sags.

FELTON (O.S.)
Oy. Greenhill, weren't it? Snagged
a letter from your old lady.

Felton hands Greenhill a WORN ENVELOPE. His face lights up. He immediately tears it open, almost shaking with excitement:

SARAH (V.O.)
My dear Robert. I am sorry it has taken so long to write; acquiring the money for postage was difficult. I wish I could say fate has dealt with us kindly in your absence, but I have only sorrowful news to--

--The letter is SNATCHED from Greenhill. His eyes dart up to:

ABEL
The reading of personal material is restricted to the bunkhouse.

GREENHILL
(reaches for the letter)
...I had forgotten; please--

ABEL
Maybe this will help you remember.

Abel TOSSES the letter into a FIREPLACE. Greenhill lunges, hand darting into the flames, desperate to recover the BURNING PAGES. But he's too late. Greenhill clutches at cinders.

ABEL
Chin up. There'll be other letters.
You'll be here a long time.

Abel walks away, wearing a satisfied grin, when--

--GREENHILL TACKLES ABEL FROM BEHIND; hurls him to the floor, absolutely wild, pounding his face like a speed-bag. WHAM, WHAM-- prisoners SWARM, HOLLERING and CHEERING--

BILLINGS HANOVER
No-- Robert, don't--! It's Yes! Bleed him! Yes!
what he wants--

Soldiers finally PRY Greenhill off Abel. Restraining his arms as Abel RISES, his bloodied face twisting into a smile.

ABEL
Sorry, mumbler... but you should have listened to your friend.

Off Greenhill, chest heaving, realizing HE JUST FUCKED UP--

INT. STONE-WALLED PIT - DAY

A HATCH OPENS. Abel peers in; gestures to his men, who lower Greenhill by chains into this CONVERTED TIDAL WELL. His eyes pop and wince, bad arm getting STRETCHED, touching down--

--into ICY SEAWATER, rising and falling with the swell of the ocean. Greenhill gasps, plunged waist-deep, breaths clouding--

ABEL
No food. No water. Three days.

The HATCH SHUTS, plunging Greenhill into DARKNESS. A wave CRASHES IN, tossing him like a rag doll. He SHIVERS, arm twisting, eyes filling with tears of rage -- but just when Greenhill's SPIRIT seems about to BREAK...

He sees a tiny shaft of SUNLIGHT overhead. Swirling with DUST MOTES. He steals himself, muttering an OLD MINER'S SONG:

GREENHILL

*Down the mines, no sunlight shines;
those pits they're--*
(CRASH; he grits his teeth)
*--Bl-black as hell. In mud and
slime, they do their time;
It's Paddy's prison cell...*

CUT TO:

Greenhill FLINCHES AWAKE, realizing: THE TIDE'S IN. A wave POUNDS OVER HIM, mouth filling with ocean, as he's pulled--

UNDERWATER.

Greenhill struggles, feet pawing for the well bottom. His toes brush a STONE BLOCK. YES. He perches atop it, face--

SURFACING.

He GULPS AIR DESPERATELY -- when the BLOCK WOBBLES and he's swept under again. Has to use his splinted arm to PULL HIMSELF UP. The pain excruciating. He dangles.

Then Greenhill GETS AN IDEA. He peers down at the BLOCK...

EXT. PRISON YARD - DAY

DAYLIGHT. Cuthbert storms across the yard toward THE PIT.

CUTHBERT <u>Three days?!</u> The pit is to be used for hours--	ABEL (hurries after him) --You told me to teach them respect, I don't--
--	--

CUTHBERT

Open it. Bring him up. Gently. His arms will be weak.

The soldiers open the hatch. Reeling up the chains, link upon link. Cuthbert leans, peering in... and FLINCHES back, as--

Greenhill emerges. Shivering. Salt-cured. So weak he can't even crawl. Just a bag of bones landing at Cuthbert's feet.

ABEL
(nudges him with a boot)
Get up.

Greenhill can't move. But his eyes SNAP UP. BLAZING. DEFIANT.

CUTHBERT
 ...Bring this man to the infirmary.
 When he's capable of understanding
 it... inform him that three years
 have been added to his sentence.

The soldiers drag Greenhill away. But not even those words
 can dim the NEW FIRE kindling behind his eyes.

ABEL
 See? Your wolf is just another dog.
 We'll have no more trouble from hi--

Cuthbert WHIRLS -- BACKHANDING ABEL. He drops like a brick.
 Abel probes his cheek, speechless, mouth working--

CUTHBERT
 Do you wish to spark an uprising?!

ABEL
 I gave him what he *d-deserved*--

CUTHBERT
 And what will God give you in
 return? What do you deserve?
 (Abel recoils)
 It was a blessing your mother never
 lived to see you grown.

Cuthbert storms away. Abel stares after him, lip quivering.

ABEL
 Was an animal like *him* what took
 her, wasn't it?

INT. PRISON, INFIRMARY - LATE NIGHT

ABEL (V.O.)
 --WASN'T IT?!

Greenhill lies in a heap, chained to a cot. Eyes shut.
 Billings sets a bowl of soup on a table, turning to leave--

GREENHILL GRABS BILLINGS' WRIST. Billings startles.

BILLINGS
 Guess I won the bet. Couple the
 other wags didn't think you'd ever
 wake up again.

GREENHILL
 (a whispered rasp)
Tell Felton I need a chisel.

BILLINGS
 What? What are you talking about?

But as Greenhill pulls Billings closer, WE RISE UP--

--TRACKING past partitions between SICK PRISONERS. Finding one on his belly, back RAW with WHIPPING LACERATIONS. PEARCE.

GREENHILL (O.S.)
...I found a way out of here.

Pearce's eyes SNAP OPEN. Head turning slowly toward Greenhill.

INT. PRISON LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY

Steam fills the air as Greenhill works a laundry shift, dropping LYE into boiling vats with Kennelly and Billings.

BILLINGS	GREENHILL
There's two low tides: morn at six, or eventide at seven. We go under cover of darkn--	--No. We go during breakfast. They won't expect it then. What about the map?

KENNELLY
(taps his skull)
Up here. Took years, but I filled
my head with it to the last detail--

Greenhill suddenly quiets him as a SOLDIER patrols past...

GREENHILL
Move along. I'll finish up.

Billings and Kennelly move off. Greenhill is alone. He pulls a LAUNDRY HOOK up from a vat, SHEETS surfacing. Greenhill looks around; RIPS a long FABRIC STRIP from the sheets, when--

The distant CLANG of a door shutting. The click of a LOCK.

GREENHILL
(frowns, looking around)
...Billings?

One by one, window shutters CLOSE, leaving Greenhill in near darkness. A feeling of DREAD rises in him as -- FOOTSTEPS approach. Greenhill grabs the LAUNDRY HOOK, backs away, when--

AN ARM

Darts out of the darkness. Grabbing Greenhill by the collar, pinning him to a wall. Hook CLANGING to the floor, as--

The face of ALEXANDER PEARCE comes into the light.

PEARCE
Quit your squirming. I'm just
having a look at you.

GREENHILL
What do you want?

Behind Pearce, Greenhill's fingers strain to grab a clump of LYE. Right at his fingertips, as--

PEARCE
Question isn't what I want. It's what you want. And what you're willing to do to get it.

GREENHILL
What are you talking about?

PEARCE
--Have you reached the lye yet?
(Greenhill blinks--)
Jam it in my face, you'll burn out my eyes. Nasty business, but it'll make good your escape. Maybe you do have what it takes.

Greenhill's hand hesitates... moving away from the lye.

GREENHILL
What it takes -- to do what?

PEARCE
To get home.
(Greenhill frowns--)
You're planning an escape. But for your sake, I'm here to warn you -- it's not going to work.

Without a word, Pearce LETS GO. Greenhill slides to the floor; breathes hard, kneading his throat, watching Pearce walk away.

INT. MESS HALL - DAY

Pearce scoops gruel from his tin. Other prisoners give him a wide berth. Greenhill approaches. Sits a few seats away.

GREENHILL
...What am I missing?
(Pearce just keeps eating)
I've got a couple partners; a clean way out of the prison--

PEARCE
This whole island's a prison.

Across the room, Billings notices them talking. Frowns.

PEARCE

Rivers. Mountains. Aboriginals.
Swamps, a'light with insects
that'll bore into your fingernails
and eat you from the inside out.

Pearce notes a WEEVIL, slithering on the bottom of his bowl.
Picks it up with two fingers, watching it squirm.

PEARCE

And then -- *there's the hunger*. Any
route you take, you got days upon
days of desolate terrain. Men have
gone insane seeking to quench it.
Seen men eat their own belts. Even
drink sand thinking it was water.

GREENHILL

You made it all the way to
Harbortown. Tell me how.

PEARCE

God told men how he made the Earth.
In 6,000 years, no one's yet been
able to replicate it. I can't tell
you how to get across this island.
(looks in Greenhill's eyes)
But I can show you.

GREENHILL

...I'm not interested.

Greenhill stands, turning to leave--

PEARCE

I was never at Waterloo.
(Greenhill hesitates)
Didn't steal no sheep, neither.
What else they say I done, got you
so frightened about me?

GREENHILL

I'm not the one who's frightened.
They are. Whole damn prison.

PEARCE

I done my share of things, ought
not be spoken of. Every man in here
has. But there's a difference
between them and me.

GREENHILL

What?

PEARCE

I'm the one who can get you home.

GREENHILL

Why me? What do you need me for?

PEARCE

Cowards here won't even eat near me. Much less cross an island. But you, they might trust. You could get me exactly what I need -- to go all the way this time.

GREENHILL

And what is that.

PEARCE

(a smile forming)
...I need five men.

Greenhill frowns... And keeps walking. But we STAY WITH PEARCE as he watches the weevil SQUIRM. And EATS IT ALIVE.

INT. BUNKHOUSE - AFTERNOON

A soldier hands out LETTERS. *No mail for Greenhill.* He stares at the empty mail sack. Mind going to dark places.

BILLINGS (V.O.)

Are you out of your bloody gourd?!

INT. BUNKHOUSE - LATE NIGHT

In a corner, whisper-shouting:

BILLINGS

I'm not partnering with Alexander Pearce. And neither are you.

GREENHILL

You think I want to partner with any of these people? Rapers, killers? Kennelly's just a pick-pocket, I don't even trust him.

BILLINGS

What good's getting home, if you sell your soul along the way?

GREENHILL

I can handle Pearce. Come with me. I'll get you back to Molly. Remember Molly? Thom--

BILLINGS

It's not just Pearce I'm worried about. What about him?

Billings nods to the window, where Greenhill can see, walking the prison walls, SILHOUETTED against the stars -- CUTHBERT.

BILLINGS

You think he chose this job? *It chose him.* Know how he got here?

(Greenhill frowns)

I heard Cuthbert was off at war in the colonies, when some bludger broke into his home in London. Three days, his poor wife suffered. Abel was in a crib through it all, saw everything. Turns out, the man that did it was *an escaped convict...*

GREENHILL

(doing the math)

So Cuthbert devoted his life to the prison system.

BILLINGS

In his eyes, the minute we walk out those gates? We're no different from the man who killed his wife.

And off Greenhill, the ante having just been RAISED, we--

DISSOLVE TO:

Morning sun shines on the TWIN BASALT TOWERS. Waves crash.

INT. MESS HALL - MORNING

Gruel slops into bowls. Prisoners plod in parallel lines. Greenhill eyes patrolling SOLDIERS; bad arm falling to his side, now in a bandage, hand OPENING as--

Billings SLIPS HIM a CHISEL as he passes.

EXT. PRISON YARD - MOMENTS LATER

Greenhill walks outside, head down, approaching the latrines. A group of soldiers pass him by...

...Greenhill TURNS a corner. Heads for THE PIT. Looks both ways.

INT. MESS HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Soldiers patrol past tables, prisoners eating silently. Billings and Kennelly exchange a glance, when--

A COMMOTION at the far end of the table. Convicts SCATTER as Whylie violently RETCHES. A soldier comes over, grimaces:

LIP-SCAR SOLDIER
 Ughhhh. You there. Billings. Take
 old Abo to the infirmary.

BILLINGS
 Me? Alone? With that savage?

Kennelly wipes his mouth, getting up--

KENNELLY
 --I'll go with him. Always wanted
 to see the inside of a bush-monkey.

They pull the moaning Whylie up; drag him out and--

INT. INFIRMARY - MOMENTS LATER

--into the INFIRMARY, finding: Felton and Hanover, grinning through bloody faces, a soldier chaining them up to beds.

PIMPLY SOLDIER
 These two got into a dust-up in the laundry. Have them stitched up.

The soldier bumps into Kennelly on his way out. Kennelly holds his hands up, apologizing. But as soon as the soldier is out of sight, we reveal--

Kennelly got his KEYS. Moving to unlock Felton's manacles. Everyone moving quickly, knowing they're IN IT now, as--

FELTON
 Any word from Greenhill?

INT. STONE-WALLED PIT - SAME

A makeshift ROPE, painstakingly woven from torn FABRIC STRIPS, hangs down the wall to the pit-bottom, where--

Greenhill scrambles to CHISEL OUT a familiar LOOSE BLOCK from the wall. Prying away bits of crumbling masonry, dislodging other rocks around it, slowly revealing:

A FLOOD TUNNEL. 3 feet X 3 feet. And 30 yards out: DAYLIGHT.

GREENHILL
 ...God help me.

Greenhill CRAWLS INTO the TUNNEL.

INT. MESS HALL - SAME

A sack of LETTERS swings at ABEL'S side as he pushes in the door to the MESS HALL:

ABEL
 Post came early this week. Line up.
 I said LINE UP, you worms!

WE FOLLOW ABEL'S HAND as he fishes around in the sack. His hand passes by an envelope addressed to 'ROBERT GREENHILL'.

INT. STONE-WALLED PIT - MOMENTS LATER

FIVE MEN climb into the hatch: Billings, Kennelly, Whylie, Felton, and Hanover, climbing down into the pit, finding:

GREENHILL
 (crawls out of the tunnel)
 We've got a problem. Part of the passage collapsed. We won't fit.

HANOVER
 Daft prig. You said it was clear.

GREENHILL
 Rough tide last month must have jostled the rocks loose.

Whylie just eyerolls. Billings starting to climb out.

BILLINGS	KENNELLY
Good enough for me, gents--	--You don't go anywhere without we tell you first.

FELTON
 I say 'e's right. Go back now, there's a chance we wasn't missed.

GREENHILL
 What if they catch us when we're climbing out? We'll never get another shot at this.

BILLINGS
 We're fast-talking our way to the flogging post. What's the call?

PEARCE (O.S.)
 We clear the blockage.

Everyone looks up, seeing Pearce climb into the pit. He coils the makeshift rope, pulling it down behind him as--

GREENHILL
 If we're still in there when the tide comes in, we'll all drown.

PEARCE
 Your concern is touching. Now dig.

INT. MESS HALL - SAME

CLOSE ON: Abel's hand roots around in the mail sack. Passes Greenhill's envelope... then RETURNS TO IT, pulling it out.

ABEL
Greenhill... GREENHILL...

No hands rise. Prisoners exchange looks. Abel's eyes narrow.

INT. TUNNEL - MOMENTS LATER

Crammed in the tunnel, Greenhill and the men clear rocks, passing them back, hand-over-hand, like a bucket brigade.

INT. MESS HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Abel pulls a soldier aside, conferring:

LIP-SCAR SOLDIER
Bunkhouse is empty. So's the
infirmary. That makes six missing.
Plus the Old Abo--

ABEL
Not a word to my father about this.
Search the complex. *Find them.*

EXT. PRISON YARD - MOMENTS LATER

Soldiers FAN OUT over the prison, scouring every inch of the place. Abel's gaze strays over the buildings...

...And notices, on THE PIT -- THE HATCH IS UNLATCHED.

ABEL
Why is the pit open?

INT. TUNNEL - SAME

Inside the pit, Greenhill and the others RACE to clear the blockage. The water is now WAIST-HIGH around them.

GREENHILL
The water's rising! PEARCE
Move faster.

Billings tries to squeeze through the HOLE they've made--

BILLINGS
It's still too tight, I can't fit!

EXT. PRISON YARD - SAME

Abel, now flanked by THREE SOLDIERS, walks toward the pit.

INT. TUNNEL - MOMENTS LATER

The men work frantically now, surf POUNDING back and forth all around them, up to their CHESTS now--

BILLINGS KENNELLY
We'll all be buried in this (eyes darting)
hole! --He's right, we're bugged!

GREENHILL

UNDERWATER, the men's hands clear rocks, blockage widening until -- Whylie waves them off, contorts his wiry frame--

--and SQUEEZES THROUGH the hole!

GREENHILL
That's it! All of you, go-go-go--

PEARCE
Wait. One at a time.
(stops Hanover)
You last.

EXT. PIT - MOMENTS LATER

The hatch opens and Abel peers down into the pit. EMPTY.

LIP-SCAR SOLDIER
Just like I said, nothing out of
the ordinary. Checked it me'self.

ABEL
(removing his coat)
Lower me down.

INT. TUNNEL - MOMENTS LATER

Waves RUSH THROUGH as Greenhill and Hanover wait their turn, faces pressed to the ceiling, grabbing precious breaths.

GREENHILL
(looks back, alarmed)
Someone's climbing dow--

HANOVER
Move, damn you!

Greenhill TURNS-- but ANOTHER WAVE catches him unprepared. He chokes on seawater as it fills the tunnel, trapping him--

UNDERWATER. Greenhill constricts his chest, trying to cram himself through the hole. Wriggling through the blockage like a cork in a bottle, a centimeter at a time, until--

--*his BANDAGED ARM gets stuck.* Greenhill frantically tugs on his arm, WINCING, eyes BULGING--

INT. PIT - SAME

Abel descends on a chain, the soldiers lowering him down, as--

INT. TUNNEL (UNDERWATER) - SAME

Greenhill struggles, twisting his arm; bandage finally ripping off, as-- he shoots ahead, frantically swimming for a DISTANT LIGHT at the tunnel's end--

--When he's JERKED backward. It's Hanover, CLINGING to his FOOT, eyes wild, thrashing, STUCK!

Greenhill grabs Hanover's wrist, fighting to pull him through, but HE'S TOO BIG-- Greenhill's EYES BULGE, LUNGS BURNING, as--

INT. PIT - MOMENTS LATER

Abel shivers as he plunges waist-deep at the pit bottom; he takes a breath, going--

UNDERWATER, seeing the LOOSE BLOCK; THE OPEN TUNNEL. His eyes narrow as he elbows his way INSIDE, finding...

...HANOVER'S DROWNED BODY. Abel SCREAMS.

EXT. HELL'S GATES - SAME

Greenhill SURFACES, GASPING, swimming after Pearce:

GREENHILL
Hanover's still back there!

PEARCE
(crawling ashore)
Don't be stupid. I used him to plug up the tunnel behind us.

Pearce reaches back to offer Greenhill a hand up. But Greenhill just stares up at him, breathing hard, horrified--

PEARCE

The man was a degenerate. Better this way. Now they have to go the long way 'round. Come on.

Greenhill stares at Pearce's hand. *The hand of a madman.*

PEARCE

(a distant BELL CLANGS--)
They're coming. Take my hand.

Greenhill sets his jaw-- and reaches up, taking Pearce's hand.

EXT. PRISON COMPLEX - SAME

AN ALARM BELL CLANGS as soldiers distribute rifles and ammunition; Cuthbert leading a group of men to the stables--

ABEL (O.S.)

Father, wait--

Abel blocks his path, looking driven, uniform soaked--

CUTHBERT

Move aside, boy.

ABEL

No. It were on my watch they escaped. Let me bring them back--

Cuthbert tries to push Abel aside, but--

ABEL

You're right about me.

(Cuthbert hesitates)

It's time I started acting worthy of my duty. Let me put this right.

Cuthbert glares at his son. Slowly nods, making a decision, reaching into his coat, pulling out -- his POCKET-WATCH.

CUTHBERT

Your mother gave me this. Ever has it been a reminder of what they took from me. Come back honoring it--

(puts it in Abel's hand)
--Or don't come back at all.

OFF ABEL, realizing just how much is riding on this now--

EXT. OLD-GROWTH FOREST - SAME

Six sets of legs RACE over the underbrush as the escapees scramble through the forest. Greenhill huffing at the rear.

EXT. PRISON COMPLEX - MOMENTS LATER

Gates OPEN, as Abel rides out at the head of 20 CAVALRYMEN. These are His Majesty's DRAGOONS. Hooves POUNDING EARTH, as--

EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY

The prisoners fan out, searching the brush for something. Greenhill and Billings stand apart, voices low:

BILLINGS
 Pearce did what?
 (Greenhill quiets him--)
 If that's what he had planned for
 Hanover -- what's he got planned
for the rest of us?

GREENHILL
 All we know is, he needs five men.
 Long as we control the group, we
 maintain the upper hand on him.

FELTON (O.S.)
 Over 'ere!

Felton clears branches, finding-- a HIDDEN ROWBOAT. Greenhill grabs a BURLAP SACK from inside. Moldy rags spill out.

PEARCE
 Where's the rest?

KENNELLY
 There was s'posed to be guns. Food.
 This is just a bunch of fusty rags!

FELTON
 I traded in favors for weeks to get
 those clothes. Put 'em on.

GREENHILL
 --Do as he says. Sink your greys in
 the river. Quickly.

The men listen to Greenhill. Pearce finally following suit.

GREENHILL
 You two, get the boat in the water.

Billings and Whylie lift the boat, sliding it into the river. Kennelly steps aboard, and--

--*CRUNCH*. His shoe instantly PUNCHES through the rotten hull.

KENNELLY
Come on. You had one job!
--Better that 'n starving!

FELTON
And what's your job? Talking
shite til they drag us back
by the short and curlies?

GREENHILL
Stop it, the both of you; they
could be here any moment--

Felton SHOVES Kennelly, Greenhill getting between them; but
just when it looks like it's about to come to blows--

FEENEY (O.S.)
Trouble with your boat?

Everyone freezes; turning to see -- a fisherman passing in a
KEELBOAT. Call him **FEENEY** (50s, hair in his ears, kind eyes).

KENNELLY
(seeing an angle)
...Yeah. Yeah, merchant swindled
us. Shame. Had a big day planned.

FEENEY
Rough country to get stuck in.

GREENHILL
Yes, but we'll manage, I'm sure.
Good day to y--

PEARCE
--Could we trouble you for a ride?
It's just a few miles downstream.
(arm around Greenhill)
This one here's got a little girl
waiting back home. Not five years
old. Cute as a thimble, she is.

FEENEY
...Really. Got two myself. Seven
and nine. What's her name?

ON GREENHILL. Deciding whether to put this man at risk with
this rogues gallery; he glances at Pearce; at the woods--

GREENHILL
Maggie. After my wife's mum.

Feeney smiles; tosses Greenhill a ROPE--

--but Pearce catches it, muscular arms reeling it in like a
spider. Greenhill grabs the line; leans to Pearce, quiet:

GREENHILL
We accept the ride and leave this
man. Unharmed. Understood?

PEARCE
Never harm anyone I don't have to.

Pearce smiles. Greenhill is not terribly reassured.

EXT. KEELBOAT - AFTERNOON

The tiller CREAKS as Feeney steers. Eyeing the SIX STRANGERS in his boat. Whylie glances back at the treeline. *Nothing yet.*

FEENEY
Did your Black forget something?

BILLINGS
He's just-- enjoying the view.

GREENHILL
Steady ride. How fast can you get her up to?

FEENEY
Oh, she'll move. Just prefer not to work her boiler too hard.
(glances around)
But if you fellows are in a rush...?

Pearce just stares at the man.

FEENEY
Well. I don't want to hold you up.
(moving towards the boiler)
Who's the no-good anyhow, sold you the rotten boat?

KENNELLY
Fellow in Brighton.

Feeney reaches past Greenhill to grab a couple of fire logs.

Greenhill pivots, adjusting his collar to cover the PRISON BRAND on his neck; glancing to Feeney... did he see?

FEENEY
This fellow. He have a name?

KENNELLY
We wasn't exactly best mates. Get it?

FEENEY
All the same, if you describe him, maybe I could help put it right.
(tosses logs in a boiler)
I know all the boat-men in Tasmania. And a fellow's only as good as his reputation.

PEARCE
And you? What sort of reputation do
you have?

Almost imperceptibly, Greenhill notices Pearce, Kennelly, and Felton getting in position to surround Feeney...

FEENEY
I like to believe people think of
me as honest.

PEARCE
Doesn't matter what people think.
Only matters what they do.

FEENEY
(shuts the boiler)
I couldn't agree more.

Feeney spins. Now pointing a FLINTLOCK PISTOL at Pearce.
Greenhill's hands go up--

GREENHILL
Wait-- You don't want to do that.

FEENEY
Don't threaten me, son. Too long,
I've watched your type pollute this
pretty country. I'm taking you
right back where you belong. Right
back where you got *that brand*.

PEARCE
We're six. Only two shots in that
toy. The math don't add.

FEENEY
For you it does.

PEARCE
It may. It may not.

Pearce smiles. And LUNGES-- THE GUN GOING OFF, as--

EXT. OLD-GROWTH FOREST - SAME

HOOVES slide to a HALT, a GUNSHOT echoing in the distance.
Abel wheels his horse around--

ABEL
The river. GO--

Abel and his men gallop off the trail.

EXT. KEELBOAT - SAME

Pearce rips away Feeney's pistol and SMASHES HIS FACE with it. His nose spurts blood, legs going out from under him.

PEARCE

(holds it away from him)
I didn't hurt him. You did, when you gave yourself away. And now that you've told him my name, I'm going to have to hurt him... even more.

Feeney crab-walks backward, eyes darting between the men--

FEENEY
Take the boat. It's yours. I know
how to keep my lip buttoned.

(pleading, to Greenhill)
Tell them. Tell them--

Pearce finds Feeney's pouch of shot and powder, reloading. Whylie mutters in disapproval. Greenhill's mind races--

GREENHILL
We kill this man, by crown law,
they can shoot us on sight. Catch
us alive, they can hang us.

KENNELLY
Wait. Is 'at true?

FELTON
(loosens his collar)
Yeah. Yeah, 'tis.

Pearce sees he's outnumbered. Flashes Greenhill a smile.

PEARCE
Very well, Robert. What is it you'd prefer to do?

EXT. MUDDY INLET - MOMENTS LATER

BOOTS hit mud, as Greenhill hurries to help Feeney ashore--

FEENEY

GREENHILL
...Real as you or me.

FEENEY
 (wipes his nose, softening)
 Better to turn yourself in now,
 son. While you still can. Go back
 home with a clear conscienc--

--*CLANG!* Pearce suddenly BASHES Feeney in the back of the neck with a shovel. He drops. Greenhill is HORRIFIED.

BILLINGS KENNELLY
 Oh my-- Christ! --Now, we're all murderers!!

PEARCE
 I was already a murderer. Now, the rest of you are, too.

FELTON
 Told you he was bad. Told you we should have nothing to do with 'im--

Whylie lunges for Pearce, but he SPINS, pistol aimed--

PEARCE
 Easy, nightshade. Need five men to make it across this island. Be a pity to lose another so soon. And I'd prefer not waste the shot.

WHYLIE
 [...*Seethes, grinding his jaw...*]

BILLINGS
 Oh my Christ. Oh my Christ.

PEARCE
 Greenhill. Get back in the boat.

But Greenhill can't even move, kneeling beside Feeney, who twitches. Gurgling. Not quite dead. A halo of blood spreading from his hairline.

PEARCE
 Oh... oh, I see, Robert. You've never seen a man kilt before.

FELTON
 We got to move. Every tick we waste here, they get closer--

But Pearce holds up a hand, giving Greenhill a moment.

PEARCE
 I was nine, first I saw someone kilt. Passed her in the gutter. Night woman. So scared she was. Knew it was happening. Asking me, hold her hand awhile. So I does.
 (MORE)

PEARCE (CONT'D)

(close to Greenhill, quiet)
 That's when she pulls down her blouse. Shows me the babe, little mouth working at her teat. Please, she says. Have mercy on him. So I tells her sure. Soon I realizes -- my breath is still misting. And hers ain't no longer. So I gathered up the little one. Bundled him. And took him straight to London Bridge.

(pause)

It was Christmas time.

Greenhill stares, jaw trembling, unable to tear his eyes away from the dying man, as -- Feeney shudders. And goes still.

PEARCE

Now get back in the fucking boat.

Everyone stares at Greenhill, who rises. Face to face with Pearce, eyes filled with righteous indignation. For a moment, it looks like he might TEAR PEARCE APART--

But Greenhill just climbs aboard. Heading for the tiller.

GREENHILL

Shove off. Full ahead.

EXT. RIVERBANK - LATE AFTERNOON

Dragoons fish out a bundle of sunken PRISON GARB.

DRAGOON CAPTAIN

No way they swam it across. Whole river's full up with crocs.

ABEL

(notes a FURROW in the mud)
 ...There was a second boat here.

EXT. KEELBOAT - SAME

Greenhill hurls logs in the boiler as Felton and Kennelly ransack the hold, tossing out on-deck: ROPE. A FLASK. FISHING GEAR. A KNIFE, MATCHES. A GREEN COAT. A PORTRAIT--

KENNELLY

Looke, gents. The missus was quite a flower, in her day.

He tosses the painting aside. It lands near Greenhill. The woman's eyes on it seem to stare up at him.

Greenhill turns the painting facedown-- seeing, written on back: *"Catch another prize one, luv."* Greenhill finds himself touching the bracelet on his wrist, when, from behind him--

BILLINGS

Why did you get back aboard? We could've left them. We could've--

GREENHILL

I'm going home.

(pause)

You're going back to your girl. That's the end of it.

BILLINGS

...Right.

Greenhill reaches for more logs. Leaning down, close to Billings' ear, whispering:

GREENHILL

First chance we get, one of us has to get ahold of that gun. Don't look at me. Just nod if you agree.

Billings hesitates, expression blank. Nods.

KENNELLY (O.S.)

The hell's that? Some kind of darkie sacr'ment?

Nearby, Whylie touches the BLOODY SHOVEL; paints a line down Pearce's forehead in blood, muttering in his eerie language.

PEARCE

It is a mark, so that in the end times, his gods will know that man's blood is on my head.

KENNELLY

You let him do that? I don't need no dusky curse on my bones.

PEARCE

I welcome it. If his gods be true, can't hide from them anyway.

Whylie reaches for Felton, who just swats his hand away.

FELTON

Sacrilegious, you ask me.

GREENHILL

...I'll take one.

FELTON

Why? Weren't you that killed him.

GREENHILL
Doesn't matter. I let it happen.

Pearce gives Greenhill a nod, respecting that. Whylie extends a RED INDEX FINGER toward Greenhill's forehead, when--

BILLINGS
(jolts around suddenly)
Everybody down--!!

GUNFIRE suddenly EXPLODES all over the boat, as--

EXT. RIVER - SAME

--THE DRAGOONS come THUNDERING out of the forest, galloping towards them, RIFLES FIRING!!

EXT. KEELBOAT (MOVING) - SAME

The escapees hit the deck, bullets whizzing, splinters flying everywhere. Pearce jams the throttle--

PEARCE
Steer for the far shore--!

GREENHILL

Reaches up, managing to give the tiller a SHOVE, before--
BLAM -- he quickly retracts his hand, seeing--

The meat of his palm's been SHOT OFF. Eyes darting, he wraps his shirt around the wound with his shaking other hand. White shirt instantly DYED CRIMSON, as--

BILLINGS

Flattens himself, flinching at each gunshot. He looks over at Pearce reloading THE PISTOL, just inches away, as--

Pearce pops up from behind a gunwale, FIRES--

EXT. RIVERBANK - SAME

A dragoon's BLASTED off his horse. The man crashes down; sits up, trying to roll clear, just as--

ABEL (O.S.)
Make way.

--*Abel TRAMPLES over him*. Doesn't even look back. Relentless. Jumping his horse from bank to river and back again, aiming his rifle over the crook of his elbow-- *BLAM*--

EXT. KEELBOAT (MOVING) - SAME

--the shot catches Felton in the shoulder! Red mist explodes out of him as he's SPUN over the SIDE and--

INTO THE WATER. Felton SURFACES, bloodied, frantically clambering for the passing hull. Greenhill reaches down--

GREENHILL Grab my hand-- grab it! (catches his wrist) I got you, I got you!	FELTON Don't let me go. Oh, Jesus!
--	---------------------------------------

Greenhill starts PULLING HIM UP, when--

A FUCKING CROCODILE roars up like the wrath of God, ripping Felton from his grasp. Greenhill stumbles back in horror as crocodiles swarm, tearing into Felton like a chew toy.

Greenhill watches, chest heaving. We don't see what he sees, but that's small consolation. The sound is worse.

BILLINGS WHITEWATER AHEAD -- WHITEWATER!!
--

And things somehow JUST GOT WORSE as Greenhill TURNS TO SEE--

EXT. RIVERBANK - SAME

A RUMBLING. Abel rounds a bend, pulling back on the reins.

ABEL Whoa--

Up ahead, Greenhill's keelboat is SWEPT OUT OF FRAME, as if it fell off the Earth. Swallowed by a WHITEWATER CASCADE. Like a double-black diamond, with teeth.

ABEL Prepare to go around. We'll cut them off at river's end.
--

DRAGOON CAPTAIN That'll take days! We'll never retrieve the bodies.
--

ABEL Perhaps you'd prefer to swim it.
--

EXT. KEELBOAT (MOVING) - SAME

Our five surviving escapees struggle to hang on, hurtling down the roaring cataract. White foam pounds over Greenhill as he staggers for the FISHING GEAR, balanced on a railing--

BILLINGS
 [...inaudible yelling...!]

Greenhill cups an ear, turning, as--

--WHAM. He's knocked off his feet by a FALLEN TREE. Its jagged branches RAKE OVER THE DECK like CLAWS, sweeping the fishing gear into the vortex, scraping over Pearce's body--

Pearce's eyes dart over the boat, patting himself down--

PEARCE
 The pistol! Where's the pistol!?

WHYLIE
 (points frantically)
 [...JABBERING, YELLING...]

Greenhill's squinting eyes follow Whylie's jabbing finger, peering through the haze, as--

A COLOSSAL ROCK FORMATION slams into focus. Dead ahead.

BILLINGS
 Fuck me.

Greenhill throws himself at the tiller-- SHOVING-- Pearce and Whylie joining him, all STRAINING TOGETHER, boat threatening to tip over as it adjusts course-- NOSE INCHING OVER--

--KARUNNNNCH. Everyone JOLTS FORWARD as THE ROCK SCRAPES the hull. Boards buckle and splinter all down the boat until--

They're SPUN CLEAR. Everything slowly QUIETS. Waters calming.

GREENHILL
 We're out. We made it.

KENNELLY
 Right! Miserable stream -- get
 buggered! Ha, ha!

Instantly, all along the hull, WATER begins to spray in.

PEARCE
 Bollocks. We lost the pistol.

GREENHILL
 Lost Felton too. Or hadn't you
 noticed?

PEARCE
 Always figured we'd lose someone on
 the river. I'm just grateful it
 wasn't you, Robert.

GREENHILL
 (tosses Pearce a BUCKET)
 Start bailing.

Off Pearce, half-smiling, watching Greenhill like a hawk, we--

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FAR DOWNRIVER - EVENING

Bat silhouettes fill the air as stars slowly become visible.

BILLINGS (O.S.)
 In the service, we called those
 blighty wounds.

In the stern of the keelboat, Billings dresses Greenhill's wounded hand -- animated, wry. Almost his old self again.

BILLINGS
 Bad enough to get you home without
 getting you in a grave. 'Spoded to
 report when men done it themselves,
 but I never had the heart.
 (nudges him a little)
 But you caught it honestly. Right
 in the meat, ay, Robert? Robert.

Billings nudges him, eyes flickering down; Greenhill follows his gaze, seeing, hidden among the bandages -- THE PISTOL.

GREENHILL
 ...Thank you, Thom. This is feeling
 better already.

Greenhill furtively reaches down, grabbing the pistol, as-- Billings stands up, sloshing through TEN INCHES OF WATER to help Whylie bail out the tilting boat. Calls up to Pearce:

BILLINGS
 You blokes get tired up there, let
 us know, right? Don't want to be
 neglecting the important work.

PEARCE (O.S.)
 This is the important work.

In the prow, a nervous Kennelly tries to keep still as Pearce stands over him, using the fishing knife to SHAVE HIS HEAD.

KENNELLY
 (sips Feeney's flask)
 I pray your hands don't shake.

BILLINGS

While you're at it, pray the river
out of our hull.

GREENHILL

He's right. We're sinking. We have
to get off this boat.

PEARCE

Best we find out where exactly we
are before doing that.

Greenhill scans their surroundings. The river almost still
now as they drift through an eerily silent gorge. An ancient
place, walls covered in Aboriginal ROCK PAINTINGS.

Whylie mutters reverentially, bowing to a painted spiral.

KENNELLY

What's that one he's bowing at?

PEARCE

Means the dreamtime.

(as he shaves Kennelly)

Abos believe the world's got two
parts. The part we see. And
another. Parallel to this one. Full
of loved ones, long gone. Children,
not yet born. A place men only
visit when they dream. Or they die.

Greenhill eyes the spiral as it recedes...

KENNELLY

Bloody stupid, you ask me.

PEARCE

(wipes the knife clean)

Explains your lack of curiosity.
Your head's already full.

BILLINGS

You got to be joking.

Greenhill frowns, seeing -- with his hair gone, Kennelly's
scalp is covered in tattoos: A MAP of the ENTIRE ISLAND.

GREENHILL

When you told me you'd filled your
head with a map of the island, I
thought that meant *memorized* it--

KENNELLY

Would've hurt a lot less.

BILLINGS

With your brains? Not likely.

KENNELLY
Getting real tired of your mouth.

BILLINGS
That's rich, coming from you.

PEARCE
(as Kennelly tenses--)
Hold still.

Pearce traces a finger over Kennelly's skull, plotting their location. He frowns. Squints up at -- SNOW-CAPPED MOUNTAINS.

PEARCE
We're south of the Western Tiers.

KENNELLY
No. No. We was supposed to get off this river long ago, head inland. We have to go back--

BILLINGS
With Cuthbert's boy on us? We ought just drown ourselves here and spare him the ammunition.

GREENHILL
(stares at the mountains)
What if we cut over them?

Silence. Everyone thinking that one over, until--

BILLINGS
I prefer the plan where we drown ourselves. Same result; less painful.

GREENHILL
I'm not saying it'd be easy. But it puts a wall between us and Abel.

KENNELLY
Shove your wall. We get stranded up there at night, we'll freeze.

Whylie grunts, seconding that. But Pearce's eyes kindle.

PEARCE
No... No, we'd have to complete the crossing by day.
(taking to the idea)
Once we're up there, there'll be no stopping. We climb 'til our lungs turn to flame, our legs to cold jam. But if we make it to the far side by sunset, we're home free.

KENNELLY
And if we don't?

GREENHILL
...If we don't, we die.

That lands. The five surviving escapees stare at the distant mountains. Whylie pulls on Feeney's GREEN COAT, buttoning it up. Then, almost afraid to ask:

BILLINGS
Is there anything to eat up there?

The men exchange glances. No idea, as we--

DISSOLVE TO:

Rain spatters over the portrait of Feeney's wife, as--

EXT. RIVER'S END - DAY

--A BOOT stomps through her face. A dragoon kicks the torn canvas away as Abel and his men pore over the grounded keelboat, now abandoned, far downriver.

DRAGOON CAPTAIN
Near as we can tell, they struck
out that-away. Two days ago.

Abel looks up: Towering in the distance -- The Western Tiers.

DRAGOON CAPTAIN
They's as good as dead up there. Cold
don't take them, starvation will.

ABEL
Justice can't be meted out on a
corpse. My father wants them alive.

DRAGOON CAPTAIN
We can't follow them up the
mountain. The shale up there's too
loose. Horses will never make it.

Abel studies a map, a thin smile spreading--

ABEL
Funny thing about *kurdaitcha*,
Captain. He can't outrun his prey.
So he relies on patience. Can go
months without eating. He finds a
spot, feels promising, settles in --
and waits for prey to come to him.
(folds up his map)
Send word to my father.
(MORE)

ABEL (CONT'D)
 Tell him to meet us at Mole Creek
 Canyon. Tell him -- I have them.

Abel spurs his horse, leading them toward the WESTERN TIERS--

EXT. WESTERN TIERS - CONTINUOUS

--As we begin a LONG, SLOW ZOOM into the mountains. The great rock face slowly gaining definition, as we start to hear:

PEARCE (O.S.)
*"By the light of a candle,
 I happened to spy--
 A pretty young couple
 together did lie..."*

FIVE ANT-LIKE FIGURES come into focus, making their way up a narrow ridge, Pearce climbing in front, singing a BAWDY SONG.

Far behind them, Greenhill spiders from ledge to tree to ledge. The climb increasingly arduous, narrow trail twisting, steepening. He pauses to knead his BAD ANKLE.

PEARCE
*"Said Nelly to Pearce:
 'If you'll pull up my smock,
 You'll find a young hen
 full as good as your--'"*

KENNELLY
 Enough already. If I fall to my death, the last image I want in me' head is your cock. No offense.

PEARCE
 At this height, you'd survive a fall. Unfortunate for you.

KENNELLY
 Why unfortunate?

Without looking, Pearce points to the sky. Vultures circling.

KENNELLY
 Rats with wings. I'd fight 'em off.

PEARCE
 If you hadn't broke too many parts on the way down -- maybe. But in time, you'd weaken.

KENNELLY
 See you've given this some thought.

PEARCE
 First law of nature. It governs
 beasts, lovers, nations, the very
 stars above: *That which is weaker is
 consumed by that which is stronger.*
 So shall it be with us all.

Further back, Greenhill CLOCKS THAT... Billings muttering--

BILLINGS
 I'd give gold bullion to plug his
 mouth up with horse manure.

GREENHILL
 I was just thinking about what you
 said earlier. About Pearce's plan.
 (off Billings' frown)
 We lost one man in the escape. Lost
 another on the river. That's two.
 Pearce said he needed five.

BILLINGS
 ...Had a term for that in the
 service, too. *Cannon fodder.*

Greenhill peers up at Pearce, who has RESUMED SINGING, as--

GREENHILL
 Question is, who's nex--

--THE LEDGE BREAKS OFF UNDER GREENHILL! His cheekbone SLAMS
 into rock as he slides down the mountain, scrabbling for a
 grip, tumbling into an ABYSS, when--

WHYLIE snags his wrist. Greenhill dangles, watching pebbles
 shrink away toward the ground far below.

UP ABOVE

PEARCE shouts down to Greenhill and Whylie:

PEARCE
 When you ladies is done resting, I
 suggest you quicken your pace. It's
 already half-noon!

Pearce chuckles, watching Whylie pull Greenhill up, when-- he
 squints, noticing -- THE PISTOL protruding from the back of
Greenhill's waistband. And Pearce stops laughing.

BACK TO:

Whylie finally manages to get Greenhill back on firm ground.

GREENHILL
 Thanks... Thank-you. How do I say--

WHYLIE

[...Nods; mutters his language...]

GREENHILL

In your language-- your words, is
there a-- 'friend?' 'Friend'?

Whylie stares, long and hard. Mutters something. Sounds like:

WHYLIE

Gamarada.
(subtitle:)
[Friend.]

GREENHILL

...Game-redda.
(subtitle:)
[I am the shit spirit.]

Whylie stares. BURSTS OUT LAUGHING. Claps Greenhill's back.

WHYLIE

Game-redda. Game-redda.

GREENHILL

(laughs along, confused)
Yes. Good. Friend.Whylie wipes his eyes, still laughing, helping Greenhill up.
Overhead, the sun has begun its descent.**EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL - MOMENTS LATER**

YELLOW BERRIES sprout from a shrub. Kennelly stuffs some in his mouth. Chewing ravenously. He forces them down, then--

--RETCHES. Billings shakes his head as he trudges past.

BILLINGS

Yew Berries. Next time, listen when
I tell you not to eat something.

Kennelly scowls, watches him walk on as -- Pearce sidles up.

PEARCE

You know, you shouldn't let them
disrespect you like they do. You're
the one with the map on his head.

KENNELLY

What's it to you?

PEARCE
 (a smile)
 Does memory serve correctly that
 one of the crimes you were put away
 for -- was pick-pocketing?

KENNELLY
 ...What about it?

EXT. OUTCROPPING - LATE AFTERNOON

Greenhill, Whylie, and Billings drag one another over an outcropping, squinting up at the summit, still far above them.

BILLINGS
 This is no climb. It's a bloody endurance test.

GREENHILL
 Alright let's rest a moment--!

Everyone sags to the ground. For a moment we just listen to their LABORED BREATHING. Pearce remains standing, but even he shows signs of exhaustion, mopping his brow.

PEARCE
 Sun's dropping. Need to go faster.

KENNELLY
 (points at Greenhill)
 It's that ankle of his. If not for him holding us back, we'd be part-way down the far side!

BILLINGS
 We haven't eaten in two days. We're all slower than we should be.

Greenhill watches Whylie use the knife to sharpen a stick. Hefting it onto his shoulder. Aiming it at a VULTURE.

KENNELLY
 Crazy Abo. Have to be quicker than Cain to spear one of them.

Whylie HURLS the spear -- CLIPPING the vulture's wing. It squawks, scattering feathers.

The men exchange glances.

CUT TO:

A SCRUB TREE, growing out of the mountainside. Kennelly descends upon it, ripping it out by the roots. A *mass of STONES CRUMBLING* from its base, as--

Kennelly SNAPS off branches. Everyone whittling with RAVENOUS FURY, forming JAGGED POINTS--

GREENHILL BILLINGS
Whittle fast, before they fly (looks around)
away-- Anyone eaten vulture before?

PEARCE
The meat is gamey. Flavored by the
blood of every beast it's eaten--

Good enough for Billings, who hurls his spear; the others do the same, vultures SQUAWKING, SCATTERING as--

Greenhill whittles another stick, when -- a PEBBLE pings off his shoulder. Then another. He frowns, glancing upward to see MORE STONES sliding down from above.

THUD. A vulture lands at Pearce's feet, spear in its side.

KENNELLY
Fuck me, he got one!

Everyone eagerly surrounds Pearce, who crouches over the twitching bird, SNAPPING its neck, when--

A distant DEEP RUMBLING reaches their ears. Getting louder.

BILLINGS
That's not *cannon* fire is it?

GREENHILL
No. It isn't.

Pearce follows Greenhill's gaze UP THE MOUNTAIN. From here, it looks like the mountaintop is MELTING. SLOUGHING OFF.

KENNELLY
(color leaving his face)
Is-- is that a--

PEARCE
AVALANCHE! Move, now--

The men SCATTER, ground now beginning to SHAKE--

And if any of us has ever wondered in our nightmares what it's like to be INSIDE A ROCK-SLIDE, wonder no more.

The world SHAKES to a BLUR as a TIDAL WAVE of boulders and rocks pound over, around, into the men, the sound of it an EAR-SPLITTING ROAR, like an army of stone gods in battle.

GREENHILL

Chokes on dust, managing to squeeze into a crevice, squinting through the haze to see, racing toward him--

WHYLIE

Dodging rock-slabs, leaping nimbly from foot to foot--

GREENHILL
(coughing)
OVER HERE-- OVE--

A BOULDER slams into Whylie. Blasting him out of frame so fast, Greenhill wonders if he imagined it. Ducking down, as--

EXT. WESTERN TIERS - MOMENTS LATER

WIDE: A cloud of dust billows, blanketing the mountaintop. The avalanche slows... and finally, stops. SILENCE, then--

COUGHING, as a filthy Greenhill crawls from his crevice.

GREENHILL
...Billings? WHYLIE!

KENNELLY
(climbs down from a tree)
Damn fool. Keep your voice down.
You wanna trigger another one?

Greenhill catches his breath -- when he notices something. Patting his waistband, realizing: *The pistol is gone.* Greenhill's eyes sweep the area, when--

He spots WHYLIE pinned under rocks. Straining to get out.

GREENHILL
Whylie.

WHYLIE
[...Jabbering and grunting...]

GREENHILL
(scrambling over)
We'll dig you out. Everybody--

A dust-covered Billings hurries over, clearing rocks, Whylie helping dig with a battered free hand. Greenhill tries to pry up a **HUGE SLAB** with a tree-branch. It SNAPS--

GREENHILL
Kennelly, find me another--

PEARCE (O.S.)
Don't bother.

Pearce appears. Unscathed. Silhouetted by the SETTING SUN.

PEARCE

There isn't time. Temperature's dropping too fast.

GREENHILL

What are you--

PEARCE

Every moment you waste digging him out, you're digging your own grave. In half-an-hour it'll be below freezing up here. Your breath is already betraying you, brother.

Greenhill looks down -- his BREATH is beginning to MIST.

GREENHILL

We need Whylie. He gets us passage through Aboriginal territory.

PEARCE

Ain't nobody going through Abo territory if we freeze on this fucking mountain. Leave him.

Greenhill's gaze shoots to Billings -- but he's stopped digging as well. Seeing the logic in Pearce's words.

KENNELLY

(spits)

He's just a darkie.

Whylie reaches for Greenhill, eyes desperate. Plaintive.

WHYLIE

Game-redda? Game-redda?

GREENHILL

No.

(making a decision)

As long as this man's alive, we're making every effort to dig him out. I'll do it alone if I have to.

PEARCE

Unacceptable. We're already down three men. I can't lose another.

Greenhill turns back to Whylie, resumes digging--

GREENHILL

Then it seems you've got no choice but to help us bot--

--BLAM. PEARCE SHOOTS WHYLIE THROUGH THE HEAD. Presses FEENEY'S PISTOL to the shocked Greenhill's temple. Cocks it.

PEARCE
There. I helped.

Kennelly backs away, hands up, face white. Billings swallows, legs weakening. Has to steady himself.

Greenhill's eyes BURN, shaking with adrenaline, hissing visible breaths through clenched teeth. Pearce just smiles, poking Greenhill's cheek with the muzzle.

PEARCE
Feel that? Pounding in your ribs?
Taste that burning at the back of
your throat? It's called hate. Use
it proper, it'll carry you clean
over this mountain. My gift to you.

GREENHILL
I'm going to kill you.

PEARCE
Are you now? The man you sought out. The only man on this whole island who can carry you back to your family hearth? You really think you can do it without me?
(lowers the gun)
That's a question only you can answer. But this, I promise: the next bullet you make me waste will be the one going into you.

Pearce stuffs the gun in his belt. Stalking off. Kennelly trails after him. As if in a daze, Billings follows too.

LIGHT SNOW begins to fall. Greenhill is alone. He turns back to Whylie. Reaches down. Fingers coming back red. He traces a line down his own forehead in Whylie's blood. Starts walking.

Snow dusts the motionless Aborigine like angel tears.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ICY RIDGE - NIGHT

SNOW SWIRLS as the men trudge upward, a line of wretched souls, tied together now with Feeney's rope, Pearce in front, then Greenhill, their threadbare rags giving no quarter.

KENNELLY
[...Inaudible shouting...] --What?!

KENNELLY
MY LEGS! I CAN'T FEEL THEM!

BILLINGS

It's exposure! Our muscles are shutting down! We have to rest, or we'll die!

Greenhill scans the mountainside. The clouds are beneath them now. Flashes of lightning flickering inside them.

GREENHILL

Where?! There's nowhere. No rest.
We keep-- moving!

KENNELLY

I can't.

PEARCE

We're near the top. Taste the air.
Unsullied by the lungs of men. We
may be the first ever to breathe it
 (takes a STEP FORWARD)
It will get easier from here--

--A loud CRACKING NOISE. The men halt. Gazes all turning to ground under their feet, as--

GREENHILL
... *Nobody move.*

Greenhill gingerly crouches, brushing snow off the ground. And his FACE WHITENS, realizing they're standing on--

A SHEET OF ICE. Cracks already spiderwebbing through it.

KENNELLY
Go-back, go-back--

GREENHILL

Kennelly tries to BACKPEDAL-- and the ICE GIVES WAY! He FALLS, rope pulling taut, YANKING the rest of them down too!

EXT. MOUNTAIN - SAME

WHAM, WHAM-- Billings, Kennelly, and Greenhill SLAM DOWN on a lower cliff. Greenhill blinks up, stunned, only to see--

PEARCE falling wide, OVERSHOOTING THE CLIFF, rope pulling TAUT again, and--

--JERKING the rest of them TOWARD THE EDGE! Greenhill manages to brace himself at the last second, Kennelly and Billings clinging to the icy rocks behind him, all breathing hard--

KENNELLY
(glancing back)
Pearce -- Pearce?!

BILLINGS
Can you see him?! Where is he?!

Greenhill's eyes trace his rope to the CLIFF'S JAGGED EDGE, where it rubs and twists back and forth, as if Pearce is STRUGGLING below, dangling just out of sight.

Greenhill's free hand reaches for the rope-- *when it starts to FRAY*. WINNOWING. Sawing along the cliff's edge.

KENNELLY
Can you pull him up?!

ON GREENHILL. Making a decision. His hand falls to his side.

GREENHILL
(just staring at the rope)
...I'm trying.

The rope suddenly SNAPS. Relieved of a tremendous burden on the other end. Greenhill waits for a THUD. But it never comes.

KENNELLY
What happened?!

GREENHILL
He's gone.

BILLINGS
He fell?! Should we go back?

GREENHILL
No.
(rising to his feet)
We keep moving.

Billings stares at Greenhill, who just STARTS WALKING as we--

DISSOLVE TO:

The snow has turned to SLEET. Wind HOWLING, stinging their eyes as the men inch up an ICY, STEEPENING TRAIL--

GREENHILL
I swear I can almost see it-- just
a few more yards--

The crest the trail, only to find -- *THEIR OWN TRACKS in front of them*. Now partially filled with snow. The peak seems farther away than ever. Billings falls to his knees.

KENNELLY
I told you we went the wrong way at
that last switch-back! I told you!

BILLINGS
I'm finished.

GREENHILL

No. NO--
 (tries to pull him up)
 MOLLY. Think about Molly.

BILLINGS

There was never a Molly, you idiot.
 (Greenhill scowls)
 I'm not even a deserter. A Colonel
 died on my operating table. Wasn't
 even hurt bad. I was just drunk.
 I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I thought
 it would make you feel better.

Greenhill's gaze slackens. A light in his eyes seems to dim.

KENNELLY

Someone's coming.

A FIGURE in the storm. Stalking toward them, spectral. The
 men can't even move. Greenhill clutches the knife, when--

HUSKY VOICE (O.S.)
*"By the light of a candle,
 I happened to spy--
 A pretty young couple
 together did lie..."*

--PEARCE appears out of the storm. In Whylie's GREEN COAT.

PEARCE

Follow me.

INT. MOUNTAIN CAVE - MOMENTS LATER

A TINY FLAME flickers, Pearce cupping his hands around it like a newborn, flames catching tinder as he nudges kindling around it. Greenhill and Kennelly warm themselves desperately.

BILLINGS

Not too fast. Gotta warm the blood
 slowly, or you'll lose your toes--

Greenhill blows on his fists, eyeing Pearce's GREEN COAT.

KENNELLY

W-where were you? After the rope
 gave way, we thought--

PEARCE

"Gave way."
 (looks at Greenhill)
 That what happened?

GREENHILL

It tore on the rocks.

PEARCE

Mmm.

Pearce just stares at Greenhill. But he stares right back.

GREENHILL

Whylie was wearing that coat.

PEARCE

Keen eye you've got.

GREENHILL

You doubled back for it?

PEARCE

After the rope... gave way-- didn't have much choice, did I? Besides, I needed sustenance. We all do.

BILLINGS

(frowns)

Sustenance? What sustenance?

PEARCE

Should have dug it out before.
Carried it with us.

GREENHILL

...Dug what out?

They watch in morbid fascination as Pearce crosses the cave, reaches behind a rock, dragging from behind it...

...The DEAD VULTURE.

PEARCE

(tosses it to Greenhill)

Dress it. I'll gather more wood.

Pearce stalks out into the howling wind. Greenhill looks to Billings, who chuckles to himself--

BILLINGS

Altitude must be getting to me. A second there, almost thought he was about to pull out the old Abo.

KENNELLY

Don't be ridiculous.

(grabs the bird)

Was hardly any meat on him.

Kennelly cackles, PLUCKING FEATHERS from the mangy bird. But an unsettling feeling has been stirred in Greenhill, as we--

DISSOLVE TO:

CLOSE ON: Teeth chewing. Mouths sucking bones clean. Picking scraps from fingernails. Pearce nurses FEENEY'S FLASK.

PEARCE
 Toast, gents. We're halfway.
 Tomorrow, we enter Abo territory.
 Then the desert. Then Harbortown.

GREENHILL
 ...Where is it you think you'll go
 if we get there?

PEARCE
 Dozen ships come and go every day.
 Can go anywhere you like.

GREENHILL
 No. I asked -- where will you go?

Pearce looks at him, as if considering it for the first time.

PEARCE
 Nowhere. Remember, mate? You're
 going to kill me.

SILENCE. Billings and Kennelly exchange glances. Pearce claps Greenhill on the back, grinning--

PEARCE
 That's just how he said it, right?
 "I'm going to kill you."

KENNELLY
 (laughing now)
 "I'm going to kill you." Ha, ha!

BILLINGS
 Thought he's gonna burst a vessel.

PEARCE
 (sips the flask, singing)
*Down the mines, no sunlight shines
 Those pits they're black as hell--*

Greenhill looks at Pearce, surprised. He's been a miner, too?

PEARCE
*In mud and slime they do their time
 It's Paddy's prison cell...*

Pearce offers him the flask. Greenhill looks at it. At Pearce. And takes it. Sips. Quietly starts singing along.

GREENHILL & PEARCE
*Backs will break and muscles ache
 In hell there's no time to dream--*
 (singing louder now)
 (MORE)

GREENHILL & PEARCE (CONT'D)
*Of fields and farms, a woman's arms
 Just -- dig -- that -- bloody seam!*

Kennelly snickers. Even Billings can't repress a smile, as--
 WE PULL AWAY from the singing men, from the cave, and--

CUT TO:

UNKNOWN SPYGLASS POV: Looking up at the distant snow-swept slopes. Totally dark... save for a single dot of orange flickering inside the cave, smoke rising up, as we-

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MOLE CREEK CANYON - DAY

JOHN CUTHBERT, in full uniform, rides at the head of fresh soldiers, hauling EMPTY WHEELED CAGES as they enter a CAMP at the canyon's mouth. All around, dragoons rise, saluting.

Abel emerges from a tent, caught off guard.

ABEL
 Father. I only sent word a week ago. You must have rode all night.

CUTHBERT
 (dismounts, curt)
 I was told you'd re-acquired the prisoners. Where are they?

ABEL
 I-- here. See for yourself.

Abel leads his father over to a table with a TOPOGRAPHIC MAP.

ABEL
 They camped here, in the storm; just this morning, I spied them here, on the descent--

CUTHBERT
 Then -- you don't have them.

ABEL
 They should be along any minute. Every path off that mountain converges at this canyon.
 (pointing up)
 Right there. I've posted riflemen at every ridge. There's no escape.

Cuthbert frowns, stares into the canyon. Back at the map.

CUTHBERT
 So you stopped chasing them.
 (Abel hesitates--)
 And instead, decided to camp here.
 And wait for them to come to you.

ABEL
 ...Yes, sir.

Abel stares at him, eager for approval. Cuthbert looks up.

CUTHBERT
 Not a bad bit of soldiering. Well
 done, boy.

Relief floods Abel's face. For the first time in our story, Cuthbert regards him with something like paternal affection.

ABEL
 Thank you, father.
 (turns to go, eagerly)
 I-- I posted a watchman. At the top
 of the ridge; I'll go check if he's
 seen hide or hair of 'em yet--

Abel pulls out his father's POCKETWATCH to return it, but--

CUTHBERT
 Keep it. Your mother would be
 pleased. Yes. I think she would.

Abel smiles with his whole face. He slides the watch back into his vest, when--

--He DROPS IT. But Cuthbert catches it. Returns it to Abel.

CUTHBERT
 Be careful.

ABEL
 (a warm smile)
 Don't worry.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON: A uniformed WATCHMAN... as his THROAT IS SLIT OPEN.

EXT. TOP OF THE RIDGE - SAME

The watchman sags over like a sack of grain. Blood pooling. Pearce tilts his head, wiping the fishing knife on his leg.

KENNELLY
 He fell funny.

PEARCE
 (grabs the soldier's rifle)
 Seen one land holding his pecker
 once. Me mate thought the corpse
 was getting saucy with him.

Greenhill stares at the body, eyes goggling up at him, as if in accusation. Greenhill reaches down and gently closes them. MUTED FOOTSTEPS. Billings hurries toward them, keeping low--

BILLINGS
 It's no good. There's no other way
 down. Not without more rope. Only way
 off this mountain, is through them.

They peer over the ridge: Far below, CUTHBERT orders more soldiers into position. They fan out. Rifles up. Eyes sharp.

BILLINGS
 Could go back up. Wait them out.

KENNELLY
 Shove that. My balls only just thawed.
 Down there, they got guns, rations--

GREENHILL
Horses.

They follow Greenhill's determined gaze to the HORSE PADDOCK.

PEARCE
 (nods, gears turning)
 ...A'right. One of us stays here,
 draws their fire. Other three makes
 a run for that paddock.

GREENHILL
 Draws their fire -- how?

PEARCE
 By shooting Cuthbert.

Said it like he's describing the weather. Greenhill frowns, watching Pearce prep the rifle--

BILLINGS
 You shoot a Commandant, you'll
 never leave this canyon alive. The
 whole army will come after you--

PEARCE
 Who says I'm gonna shoot him?

Pearce smiles. The men exchange glances.

CUT TO:

THE KNIFE SPINS on a stone. Men in a circle around it, waiting for it to STOP. It slows, pointing at Greenhill...

...Then wobbles another half-inch -- pointed at BILLINGS.

BILLINGS

I can't do it. I'm a doctor. I took an oath to do no harm.

PEARCE

(extends the rifle butt)
Aim for the shine of his buttons.
Even if it goes wide, you'll catch a piece of him. Liver. Groin. So long as Cuthbert goes down.

BILLINGS

I never even fired at a man before.

KENNELLY

Same as firing at a rabbit. Just bigger. And a bit more blood.

BILLINGS

What if I say no?

Pearce, picking up the knife.

PEARCE

You don't.

Billings' eyes dart between the rifle and the knife. He swallows; reaches for the rifle, hand trembling, when--

GREENHILL

Wait.

(heads turn)
I'll do it. I'll shoot him.

But Pearce holds onto the rifle, studying Greenhill, curious--

BILLINGS
Robert, what are you--?

KENNELLY
--Give him the gun. Let 'im stick his pecker in the wasp nest, that's what he wants.

PEARCE

Ten days ago you turned green at the sight of blood. Expect me to believe now you'd kill a man?

GREENHILL

Tried to kill you. Last night.

Pearce's eyes narrow, mind working... Billings and Kennelly exchange an uncertain glance, when -- Pearce *smiles*.

PEARCE
 It's a'right. I didn't take it
 personal.
 (hands him the rifle)
 Consider this your penance.

Greenhill accepts the rifle. Pearce leads Kennelly off. But Billings waits a moment, staring at Greenhill, perplexed--

BILLINGS
 Hell you think you're doing?

GREENHILL
 Mouth of the canyon. See that tree?
 (Billings squints)
 Soon as you hear the shot, grab the
 horses and I'll meet you there.

BILLINGS
 You'll never make it--

GREENHILL
 Thom. I'll make it.
 (Billings frowns; turns--)
 ...But if I don't. You get off this
 island. You go to County Wicklow,
 Ireland. Find Sarah Greenhill. Make
 sure she's taken care of. Tell her--

BILLINGS
 Tell her what?

GREENHILL
 Tell her I never stopped digging.

EXT. LEDGE - MOMENTS LATER

Greenhill crawls to the end of a rocky ledge. The camp now 100 YARDS BELOW HIM. He spots Cuthbert. Reaches for the rifle. Squinting down the barrel.

RIFLE POV: The gun-sights line up. Hovering over Cuthbert's chest, as he feeds his horse. Patting the animal's side.

BACK TO:

Greenhill's squinting eye opens. He glances to the FAR RIDGE, where -- Pearce and the others keep low, ready to make a run for the horses. Pearce GIVES A SIGNAL--

Greenhill AIMS; finger hovering over the trigger, when--

GREENHILL
 (eyes open, hesitates)
 ...I would have known.

And Greenhill ADJUSTS HIS AIM. TILTING the gun-sights DOWN. Aiming instead at CUTHBERT'S LEG. About to FIRE, when--

ANOTHER HAMMER COCKS. A PISTOL appearing behind his ear:

ABEL

Pegged you for a troublemaker from the start, mumbler. Never allowed you could be this much trouble.

(a grin; eyes flashing--) Where are the others?

GREENHILL

Dead.

ABEL

Not much of a liar, though.

Abel reaches for Greenhill's rifle...

...But he freezes, eyes tracing Greenhill's aim down into the camp to -- HIS FATHER. Abel's face twists with outrage.

ABEL

You-- you miserable swine--

WHAM-- Abel PISTOL-WHIPS Greenhill's ear. And that had to hurt, Greenhill swallowing a pained cry, Abel CALLING OUT:

ABEL

Up here! I FOUN--

--Greenhill SPRINGS UP, TACKLING ABEL!

EXT. DOWN BELOW - SAME

A DRAGOON looks up -- just as Greenhill and Abel ROLL out of VIEW a 100 yards above him. He frowns, trying to decide whether or not he imagined it...

EXT. LEDGE - SAME

Greenhill and Abel wrestle for control of the pistol. Brutal. Up close, personal. Abel trying to SHOUT AGAIN:

ABEL

UP H--

Greenhill's HAND CLAMPS around ABEL'S NECK. Trapping the words in his throat. Abel CHOKING. Greenhill SQUEEZING; all of a sudden he looks frightening, every muscle taut. Abel's eyes BULGING UP at him when--

The bracelet of Sarah's hair slides down Greenhill's wrist, catching his eye. He BLINKS...

And pulls back from the brink. Grip slackening--

ABEL
Arrrhggh--!

Abel makes a FIERCE LUNGE and the two go rolling over rocks, each taking a turn on top, struggling wildly for the pistol--

Greenhill ends up underneath Abel, who presses his advantage, spittle stringing down as he turns the muzzle toward Greenhill's chest, inch by inch...

GREENHILL ABEL
No-nono-- --Shh-- shhh--

Abel's FINGER claws for the trigger... Greenhill's arms shaking as he struggles desperately to push away the gun...

EXT. ENCAMPMENT - MOMENTS LATER

--BLAM. A distant gunshot ECHOES from far above the camp.

Cuthbert's head SNAPS UP toward the sound. He rises, starts walking; JOGGING now, soldiers following him, as--

CUTHBERT
Everyone on me!

EXT. ACROSS THE CANYON - SAME

Pearce, Kennelly and Billings watch from their hiding spot as down below, THE CAMP EMPTIES. Pearce gestures to the others; they follow him, creeping towards THE HORSE PADDOCK, as--

EXT. LEDGE - SAME

Greenhill and Abel LOCK EYES, faces INCHES APART....

...And Abel rolls off him. Eyes wide as a child's as he tears open his uniform, finding A HOLE BLOWN THROUGH HIS CHEST.

ABEL
You -- you bled me.

Greenhill's eyes dart from Abel to the PISTOL IN HIS OWN HAND, instantly disgusted with what he's done. He drops the gun like it's on fire. Reaches for Abel to help him--

ABEL
(recoils, astonished)
You bled me. You k-kilt me.

GREENHILL

I-- I was just trying to--

ABEL

Murderer. MURDERER.

Abel begins to shake and foam. Greenhill pressing his hands to the wound, slippery with blood. Tossing his gaze wildly:

GREENHILL

Don't speak. Save your strength--

Hands GRAB GREENHILL, ripping him away from Abel as Cuthbert kneels, taking the boy in his arms. Assessing the injury. Instantly knowing his son has mere moments.

CUTHBERT

It's alright, boy. I've got you.
I'm not letting go.

Greenhill looks on helplessly, the soldiers holding him.

ABEL

(sucking ragged breaths)
Told you-- they'd come-- this way--

CUTHBERT

You did good, son. You did good.

ABEL

My uniform's-- all tore up--

The boy utters a soft sob, Cuthbert cradling him gently.

ABEL

My uniform--

The sentence remains unfinished. Forever perched on the lips that will never utter another.

Cuthbert gently lays his boy down. A moment passes. Then he slowly RISES. Commandeers one of his men's rifles; checks it; COCKS THE HAMMER... And raises it to Greenhill's head.

CUTHBERT

Robert Greenhill. In the name of the Crown and King of England, you are hereby sentenced to summary execution, on charges of escape, and murdering an officer. If you have final words, speak them now.

Greenhill's mind races. This is it. This is really it.

GREENHILL

Forgive me. God forgive m--

--**BANG.** Greenhill FLINCHES -- then realizes the shot came from the camp below. IT'S PEARCE, stealing the horses! Cuthbert and his men whirl, FIRING DOWN AT THEM--

Greenhill doesn't think. Just acts. Uses the momentary distraction to make a DIVING LEAP OFF THE LEDGE--

And now everything SLOWS TO A CRAWL, as--

CUTHBERT

WHEELS BACK AROUND -- a shot EXPLODING from his rifle, catching the very edge of Greenhill's shoulder in mid-air, in the split-second before he DROPS OUT OF SIGHT, and--

EXT. CANYON - CONTINUOUS

WE SPEED RAMP BACK UP as Greenhill's body SLAMS DOWN on the steep, shale-rock slope, a sound escaping from him like:

GREENHILL

--Ugh--

WITH GREENHILL as he falls. BOUNCING, ROLLING, TUMBLING, a hundred yards down. Boulders. Brambles. Every twist and crack of his body making us flinch in our seats, mothers in the audience looking away, can't take it anymore, until--

EXT. MOUNTAIN ENCAMPMENT - CONTINUOUS

--*CRUNCH.* Greenhill SLAMS into a TREE-TRUNK, all the breath getting blown out of him. He wheezes, gasping--

A HORSEBOUND FIGURE with a RIFLE appears over him, silhouetted by the sun. Greenhill holds up a weak hand, a pitiful defense, more instinct than anything else. Figure GRABBING HIM:

BILLINGS

Hell of a short-cut. What happened up there?!

HOOFBEATS. Pearce and Kennelly ride up with an empty horse-- And GUNFIRE is raining down from the ledge-- Pearce popping off a SHOT, a dragoon howling as he FALLS--

PEARCE

GET ON, NOW--! RIDE--!

Pearce GALLOPS AWAY; Kennelly and Billings follow -- but Greenhill can barely stand, trying to mount his horse MID-RIDE, half-hanging from the saddle, hooves clipping his legs--

GREENHILL FALLS! He coughs in the dust, horse DRAGGING HIM, bullets impacting all around him, as--

BILLINGS

Looks back, seeing the fallen Greenhill--

--and makes a SNAP DECISION, wheeling his horse around INTO ENEMY FIRE, leaning down to GRAB GREENHILL, physically dragging him up onto the empty SADDLE, as--

EXT. LEDGE - MOMENTS LATER

WIDE SHOT: Four prisoners RIDE AWAY on FOUR HORSES as--

CUTHBERT (O.S.)
I've got you. I'm not letting go.

WE PULL BACK to find Cuthbert, buttoning up Abel's shredded uniform. Trying to make his boy presentable. His hand stops. Feeling something. He reaches into Abel's vest, pulls out...

THE POCKET-WATCH. Glass now cracked. Hands frozen at the moment of his son's death, *as in our story's OPENING SCENE*.

DRAGOON CAPTAIN
(races up, shaken)
Sir--

CUTHBERT
Empty the paddock. I want every horse we've got left on their trail.

DRAGOON CAPTAIN
That's just it, sir-- There are no more horses.
(Cuthbert turns-- *What?*)
They -- Pearce killed the rest. He cut their throats. They're all dead! All of them!

And off Cuthbert, his eyes SIMMERING with RAGE, we--

DISSOLVE TO:

TWO ROBERT GREENHILLS. The one below reaching up to touch the hand of the one above, as--

EXT. CREEKSIDER - AFTERNOON

--RIPPLES form in a creek, Greenhill's reflection disappearing as he tries to scrub Abel's blood off his hands. He finds more up his arms; down his elbows--

Greenhill starts to break down. Trying to hold it back. He tears off his shirt, staggering into the water, and--

EXT. UNDERWATER - SAME

Greenhill SUBMERGES HIMSELF, body going limp. Floating.

His eyes flutter open. All around him, in the water, grains of sand glitter -- almost like DUST MOTES in sunlight.

EXT. EDGE OF THE SWAMP - SAME

Kennelly stands in tall grass, his back to us. Pissing.

KENNELLY

Well... I think we can safely say --
the hard part's over.

The horses drink as Pearce rifles through the saddlebags. He nods toward a tangled SWAMPLAND up ahead, shrouded in fog.

PEARCE

Temper your expectations. Soon as
we cross over into them trees,
we're in Abo Territory.

KENNELLY

(re: saddlebags)
Find anything good?

PEARCE

Bit of hardtack. Few of the late
Abel Cuthbert's personal effects:
pomade, dirty pictures...

Pearce roots around in a bag, pulls out a wrinkled ENVELOPE, addressed to "ROBERT GREENHILL." He tucks it in his pocket.

PEARCE

...Nothing he'll miss.

KENNELLY

Gimme one of them molar-breakers.

Pearce tosses Kennelly a wafer of hardtack--

PEARCE

Make it last. We'll need it for the
desert. Keep an eye on Billings;
think his bowels has turned on him.

KENNELLY

(calls toward a bush)
Best to just get it all out! Use
both ends, you like. No shame in it.

Billings groans in a bush nearby, clutching his belly.

EXT. CREEKSIDER - MOMENTS LATER

Water is wrung from a cloth as a somber Greenhill dries his clothes on the shoreline. His shoulder is bandaged now.

PEARCE (O.S.)
You did well.

Greenhill turns to see Pearce walking up.

GREENHILL
I feel sick.

PEARCE
That'll pass.

GREENHILL
Maybe it shouldn't.

PEARCE
Was him, or it was you. Ask me, you did right. Ask anybody. Ask God.

GREENHILL
I don't think God would agree.

PEARCE
You don't think so? You think about all the suffering that boy inflicted. All the suffering he was yet to inflict. And when you're back in Sarah's arms, children at your feet, you're gonna tell me God would rather you was dead, and Abel Cuthbert alive?

(Greenhill frowns)
No. He'd have you do just like you done. And if you had it to do over again -- so would you.

Pearce turns to go. Greenhill looks up--

GREENHILL
...How'd you know her name's Sarah?

Pearce hesitates, hand moving to his pocket, where we saw him tuck the letter... but he decides to keep it.

PEARCE
We shouldn't dally any longer.

EXT. EDGE OF THE SWAMP - DUSK

The four surviving escapees stare into the dark heart of the swamp. Insects whirl. SAVAGE CRIES of beasts echo from within.

GREENHILL
How many days to the far side?

PEARCE
(re: Kennelly's map-tattoo)
Four. Three, we move a good clip.

Kennelly reaches for a RIFLE -- but Pearce shakes his head.

PEARCE
No munitions. Can't risk attracting
the attention of the Abos.

KENNELLY
What happens if they find us?

PEARCE
Either they kill us for the horses,
or they turn us over to Cuthbert.
(off Kennelly's frown--)
For each escaped prisoner they turn
in, they get enough reward money to
feed their tribe for a year.

Kennelly puts down the rifle, sliding it in his saddlebag.

GREENHILL
So we keep quiet, and we don't
stop. Until we're safely through.

They start forward, the fog swallowing them up...

...But we hang back with BILLINGS, who's pale, sweating. He
pulls a hand from his jacket, revealing -- A GUNSHOT WOUND.

GREENHILL (O.S.)
Billings, you alright?

BILLINGS
Fine... right as rain--

He winces; buttons his jacket tight, riding in after them.

EXT. GRASSY FIELD - NIGHT

TORCHES split the darkness as Cuthbert stalks through tall
grass, TWENTY SOLDIERS fanning out behind him. On the hunt.

Cuthbert crouches. Picks up a BLOODY BANDAGE. Smiles faintly.

CUTHBERT
One of them's wounded.

EXT. SWAMPLANDS - DAY

--WHAM. Billings FALLS from his horse. Face clammy, pale.

Greenhill hurries to his side; opens his jacket -- and recoils from what he sees.

KENNELLY

Ugh. And here I was thinking that smell was just the swamp.

BILLINGS

It's just a thru-and-thru-- I've seen a hundred men survive worse--

PEARCE

Was any of them riding through a fetid swamp? Or was they in a field hospital? Under your loving care?

Billings looks to Greenhill, eyes pleading, as we--

CUT TO:

Greenhill and the others stand apart, arguing quietly:

GREENHILL

No, no--

I'll carry him on my saddle.
Once we reach Harbortown--

KENNELLY

--He's suffering. It's not right, letting him suffer--

--Harbortown? We can't even find our way out this swamp!

PEARCE

Keep your voices down.

GREENHILL

We're not killing him.

PEARCE

He died the moment he caught that bullet. We're just making it official. We wait, he'll take us with him. Matter of hours he'll be delirious. Hollering, screaming...
(glances around the swamp)
Bring us all to a bad end.

KENNELLY

What's say we vote. Who's for doing him quick and easy?

Kennelly raises his hand. So does Pearce. Greenhill seethes. They turn toward Billings, who tries to back away, crawling.

PEARCE
 (pulls his KNIFE)
 If you don't squirm none, I can
 make it so the pain is less.

BILLINGS
 Robert? ROBERT--

Greenhill's eyes dart, searching for a way out of this; he spots the RIFLE on Kennelly's saddlebag, tied with a strap-- his fingers scrambling to UNTIE IT, as--

BILLINGS (O.S.)
 --No-- Nnno! Noooo!

PEARCE (O.S.) KENNELLY (O.S.)
 Hold 'im, dammit! --I am!

Greenhill finally rips the rifle from the saddle, wheeling around with it--

--To find himself FACE TO FACE WITH AN ABORIGINE WARRIOR.

GREENHILL
 (flinches back)
 ...Pearce. Kennelly--

The others freeze, as -- all around them, the trees seem to COME ALIVE. **ABORIGINALS** emerging from the mist. Wraith-like, nearly naked, bodies painted to match their surroundings--

WHITEBEARD, 60s, claw-marks on his chest, steps closer--

GREENHILL
 (rifle up)
 Easy. We're just passing through.

All around, SPEARS SNAP UP. Billings puts his hands up, not sure whether his situation has improved. Now it's a STANDOFF--

KENNELLY
 I say shoot. All they got's a bunch
 of darkie-sticks.

PEARCE
 They been using those spears since
 before the pyramids was laid.
 Moment he fires a shot, they'll
 skewer us clean as caught-fish.

WHITEBEARD
 [...Speaks quiet, eyes simmering...]

KENNELLY
 Sorry. I don't speak savage.

And that gives Greenhill AN IDEA; he frowns, remembering--

GREENHILL
 Game-redda.
 (subtitle:)
 [I am the shit spirit..]

WHITEBEARD
 [...Just blinks at Greenhill...]

GREENHILL
 Game-redda. All of us. Game-redda.

Slowly at first, the Aboriginals begin to laugh. SUBTITLES:

WHITEBEARD (SUBTITLE)
I think he's got the runs-- OTHER ABORIGINE (SUBTITLE)
*--Quick, cut open his guts,
 help him relieve himself.*

And now the Aboriginals are BELLY-LAUGHING. Greenhill managing an uneasy chuckle along with them as-- he TURNS, rolling down his collar to EXPOSE the PRISON BRAND--

GREENHILL
 Prisoners. All of us.

KENNELLY
 The hell are you doing?

PEARCE
 --Wait. I see where he's going.

GREENHILL
 Let us pass through--
 (points at Billings)
 ...And you can take him.

BILLINGS
 W-what?

Greenhill jerks down Billings' collar, exposing the brand. The Aboriginals react, murmuring to one another.

GREENHILL
 Prisoner, you see? Deal?

BILLINGS
 R-Robert? What are you d--

GREENHILL
 (quietly to Billings)
 Cuthbert takes you back to prison,
 a doctor treats your wound.

BILLINGS
 What? Cuthbert will hang me--

GREENHILL
I'm the one he wants. I'm the one
who killed his son. Cooperate with
him, you've at least got a chance.
Out here, you die for sure.

Billings just stares at Greenhill:

BILLINGS
I rode back for you.

GREENHILL
Thom--

BILLINGS
I got shot doing it -- And you're
trading me for your freedom?!

All around, spears TENSE, still pointed at the escapees--

GREENHILL
Thom. You're wrong.

BILLINGS
Enjoy home, Robert. Hope it was
worth it. Hope it was--

GREENHILL PUTS THE GUN TO BILLINGS' HEAD. To the Aborigines:

GREENHILL
Do we have a deal?

Whitebeard's EYES NARROW; the situation looking like it could EXPLODE ANY SECOND as we go to--

EXT. EDGE OF THE SWAMP - NIGHT

FOOTPRINTS. Cuthbert's eyes trace them into the GREAT SWAMP.

DRAGOON CAPTAIN
Better to wait for them on the far side. They make it out alive, we can take them then.

Cuthbert just unslings his rifle, starting toward the swamp--

When up ahead, the MIST PARTS, three ABORIGINE WARRIORS approaching. Dragging an almost-dead man. Soldiers back away. But Cuthbert stands his ground, rifle in hand, until--

ABORIGINE
Escaped man.

They throw him at Cuthbert's feet. Cuthbert grabs him by the hair, tilts his head up to reveal -- a bleary-eyed BILLINGS.

CUTHBERT

...This isn't the one I want. But there was another.

And we begin to hear a RHYTHMIC POUNDING as we--

CUT TO:

AN ABORIGINAL FIRE-DANCE. Warriors pound RHYTHM STICKS, twisting their bodies, smoke and flames swirling. We're in--

EXT. ABORIGINAL VILLAGE - NIGHT

And Pearce is right in the middle of it, stripped to the waist, totally at home. All around, WOMEN wave burning bundles of sacred leaves, filling the air with colored smoke.

WHITEBEARD whispers to a pair of NATIVE GIRLS, pointing at-- Greenhill and Kennelly. Kennelly eats roasted meat.

KENNELLY

If I was you, I'd eat.

GREENHILL

I don't see how he can dance when every second we sit here, Cuthbert is out there, getting closer--

KENNELLY

You want to march into the swamp at night without a guide? Go ahead.

(chewing meat)

Besides. It's not Pearce that's doing the dance -- it's the dance that's doing him.

GREENHILL

What?

KENNELLY

Part of that dream-time he was on about. Pearce told me the dance has existed forever. It will exist forever. He's just another vessel it's passing through.

(spits out a bone)

Least, that's what the Abo's think.

Greenhill watches Pearce dance, smoke billowing around him, lost in the tumult of motion and rhythm, when--

A delicate hand on Greenhill's shoulder. A NATIVE GIRL (19), lithe and all-but-naked. Another pulls Kennelly to his feet.

KENNELLY

Well well--
(wipes his mouth)
Looks like the rumors are true.

GREENHILL

What rumors?

KENNELLY

That it's dusky custom to give
guests access to their wives.

The girl takes Greenhill's hand; gently kisses his knuckles.

GREENHILL

(pulls his hand away)
No-- you don't have to--

KENNELLY

Hey. We don't play cricket, they
might think it an insult.

Kennelly pulls off his shoes; follows his girl to a dwelling.

Greenhill sees WHITEBEARD glaring at him from across the fire. Greenhill looks at the native girl.

INT. SHAG-BARK DWELLING - MOMENTS LATER

The girl gently peels off Greenhill's ragged shirt--

GREENHILL

Stop. I don't-- no--

NATIVE GIRL

[...*Soft words, incomprehensible...*]

She grabs a steaming cloth, gingerly cleaning his wounds, dressing them with herbs from a pot. His brow breaks.

GREENHILL

No. You don't understand. I don't
deserve it-- I--
(something jarring loose)
I killed a boy, barely a man. I
betrayed a friend. I sought the
company of murderers. I helped
them. I stole. I did those things.

He looks in her eyes, this least likely of confessors.

GREENHILL

Cuthbert said we were all wolves. I
didn't even listen. I thought I
wasn't like the others. But maybe--
(sets his jaw)
(MORE)

GREENHILL (CONT'D)
 How can I go home again? How can I
 look my son in the eyes? How can I--

She KISSES his forehead, taking him in her arms. Gently
 rocking him, laying him down, whispering an EERIE LULLABY in
 his ear-- long wild hair spilling over his face, as we--

DISSOLVE TO:

GREENHILL'S DREAMTIME. We move through a DARKENED COAL MINE
 as a WATER-GIRL (16) ladles out WATER to the miners. A grime-
 covered, younger Greenhill waits his turn as we reveal--

--It's SARAH. As she fills Greenhill's tin cup, their hands
 brush, a smudge of grime getting on her. She smiles. Just a
 little. And as we realize THIS is how they MET--

Greenhill brings the cup to his lips. But frowns, looking
 down. His cup is filled with DEAD FLIES.

Greenhill looks up again -- but Sarah is GONE, replaced by
 PEARCE. He tips the cup into Greenhill's mouth. Forcing him
 to DRINK. Greenhill CHOKING, when--

At the cup's bottom, a SPARROW emerges; takes flight toward a
 FAINT LIGHT outside the mine. Getting brighter, BLINDING US--

SMASH TO:

HANDS GRAB GREENHILL, Aboriginal warriors dragging him up,
 BINDING his hands; SHOVING a STICK through his bent elbows--

GREENHILL
 (frowns at his BARE WRIST)
 No-- wait-- where is it--

His eyes dart, looking for something-- they DRAG HIM OUTSIDE--

BUT WE HOLD A MOMENT on the dwelling, finding, in a heap in a
 corner-- Greenhill's TORN, BLOODY CLOTHING. And his BRACELET.

EXT. ABORIGINAL VILLAGE - MORNING

Whitebeard hands out TREASURES -- PELTS, GAME, BAYONETS. The
 NATIVE GIRL drapes a gold necklace over her shoulders,
 locking eyes with Greenhill as he's dragged off.

KENNELLY (O.S.)
 Golliwog in-breed! Get off'a me--

Greenhill is prodded at spear-point toward Kennelly, who's
 fighting mad, wearing nothing but long underwear now.

GREENHILL
 (looking around)
 What happened? Where's Pearce?

KENNELLY
Gone. Probably halfway to
Harbortown by now--

As they're marched out of the village, WE RISE UP, finding--
--Pearce, hiding on the village outskirts. He watches as
they're led off... turns away, disappearing into the swamp.

EXT. SWAMPLAND - MORNING

SPEAR-TIPS prod Greenhill and Kennelly forward--

GREENHILL
Where are they taking us?

KENNELLY
Where do you think? Tar-skin boony
bastards must have used Billings to
negotiate up and get a better
bargain, for us--

ON GREENHILL. Not ready to give up yet. His eyes dart,
looking for something, anything, when--

Greenhill shoots Kennelly a look. And suddenly TRIPS.

ABORIGINE Up and walking! Up!	GREENHILL My ankle; it's hurt-- (they KICK HIM--) Okay, okay-- I'm getting up. I'm standing-- easy--
----------------------------------	--

--Kennelly SNAPS into action, SHOVING a warrior into a MUD
PIT. *Quicksand!* The warrior flails, DROWNING; Greenhill
lunges for the man's fallen spear--

But another warrior snatches it from under his fingers and--

GREENHILL
Look-out, look-out!

--RUNS KENNELLY THROUGH. He falls to his knees. Clutches the
spear in him; trying to extract it. Greenhill can't watch.

The spear lands on the ground, steeped in gore.

Kennelly lands beside it. Dead.

Greenhill looks up as the two surviving ABORIGINE WARRIORS
surround him, weapons at his throat, ARGUING, SUBTITLED:

OTHER ABORIGINE
You can't kill him; he's
already been paid for--

ANGRY WARRIOR
That was my cousin he tossed
in the drink. It's my right.

OTHER ABORIGINE
*You're always complaining about
 your right, Gulpilli.*
 (points at Greenhill)
Fine. One eye. But that's it.

The angry warrior (GULPILLI, apparently) grudgingly shrugs, unslinging a STONE HATCHET, its jagged edge gleaming as he grabs Greenhill by the HAIR--

GREENHILL
 Wait a minute-- wait-wait-wait--

Greenhill STRUGGLES WILDLY as the hatchet blade presses into the corner of his EYEBALL, and--

--*BLAM!* GULPILLI'S BLOWN OUT OF FRAME, Greenhill flinching as blood showers his face, getting in his MOUTH as--

PEARCE appears. *WHAM*, clubs the other warrior with his rifle.

EXT. CUTHBERT'S CAMP - SAME

Cuthbert's head SNAPS UP from a map, hearing the GUNSHOT, birds scattering from deep within the swamp.

INT. SWAMPLAND - SAME

Pearce KICKS OUT the pole binding Greenhill's elbows.

GREENHILL
 Why did you come back?

PEARCE
 They will have heard those shots.
 Can you run?

GREENHILL
 ...What about Kennelly?

PEARCE
 Got Abos coming one way, Cuthbert
 the other -- and you're on about a
Christian burial?

GREENHILL
 I meant the map. Tattooed on his--

Greenhill nods to Kennelly's head. Pearce's eyebrows go up.

PEARCE
 Oh. Well, you got a point there.

Greenhill frowns, picks up Gulpilli's STONE HATCHET; tilts his head, looking at Kennelly. He looks at Pearce.

PEARCE
 (holds up his hands)
 Don't look at me, mate. This one's
 your idea.

Greenhill kneels beside Kennelly, trying to find a grip on
 his stubbly SHAVED HEAD. Grabs hold of an ear--

PEARCE
 No-- start at the hairline and peel
 back. Just like an orange.
 (scratches his neck)
 Choctaw squaw taught me. Shacked up
 with her one winter. Couldn't cook
 worth a damn, but she was murder in
 the sack.

ON GREENHILL'S FACE as he starts cutting. He begins to gag.

EXT. SWAMPLAND, OUTSKIRTS - DAY

--SCHRIPP. FABRIC TEARS, hands ripping apart a cloth, as--
 Pearce wraps the cloth around his head to shade himself,
 Greenhill following him up a hill, as--

GREENHILL
 How many days is the crossing?

PEARCE
 Don't know. Took twelve last time.
 And I only made it part-way.

GREENHILL
 What happened?

They crest the hill, now looking out over...

EXT. PINNACLES DESERT - CONTINUOUS

...A WHITE DESERT, dotted with limestone formations, towering
 up like the ribs of some skeletal giant, buried long ago.

PEARCE
 Ran out of food.

GREENHILL
 (checking a bag)
 Down to three pieces ofhardtack,
 and some kangaroo meat. We should
 go back. Forage for more.

PEARCE

And give the Abos another run at
your eyes? No. We'll travel light.
Forage out there.

GREENHILL

For what?

PEARCE

(looks at Greenhill, then:)
...Moses had manna. We'll see what
the heavens provide us.

Pearce starts forward. Greenhill following after him, as--

WIDE SHOT: The two men slowly shrink into MERE SPECKS, in an
endless DUNE SEA that stretches from horizon to horizon.

EXT. CUTHBERT'S CAMP - NIGHT

Cuthbert sharpens a KNIFE. Behind him, a dragoon reports:

SOLDIER

We followed the shots; found three
dead natives, and one white man.

CUTHBERT

Was it Greenhill?

SOLDIER

Well sir, it's -- hard to say.

Cuthbert follows the man to a wheelbarrow; he LIFTS A SHEET.
Cuthbert's eyes TWITCH at the sight of whatever's under it.

SOLDIER

Looks like whoever done it seemed
to have a-- a difficult time.

CUTHBERT

...Or never scalped a man before.

TENT FLAPS open nearby. A doctor in a bloody smock emerging.

DOCTOR

Fever's set in. Likely won't see
another morning.

CUTHBERT

Can he speak?

INT. MEDICAL TENT - MOMENTS LATER

Billings is laid out on a cot, pouring sweat, shirtless.

CUTHBERT (O.S.)
I understand you were in the service.

At a table, Cuthbert stands with his back to Billings, sifting through various medicinal tubes and bottles.

CUTHBERT
Nine years in infantry myself. Was two weeks from shipping home when I received word. About Eliza.

Billings watches Cuthbert pour amber liquid into a JAR...

CUTHBERT
Inspector told me the motive was burglary. But all he got was two candlesticks off the mantle.
(adding POWDER to the jar)
Weren't even real silver.

BILLINGS
Just, listen to me--

CUTHBERT
Leaves something unfinished in you, never having a chance to look in the eyes of the one who did it. Had to leave the infantry. I'd come to take too much pleasure in killing. Fancying every man was him.

Cuthbert sets down the bottle he poured the liquid from, Billings glimpsing the label: WHISKEY; the powder: SALT.

BILLINGS
...Please-- I already told the others, I don't know anything--

CUTHBERT
(nods to the doctor)
Note for the report that you had to use whiskey and salt to cleanse the departed's wounds.

In a corner, the doctor's eyes widen; nods, eyes downcast. Cuthbert swirls the jar around, carrying it toward Billings--

BILLINGS
I swear to you, on my mother's immortal soul-- I do not know where Pearce and Greenhill are--

CUTHBERT
Oh, I'm not interested in where they are. That's all over now.
(tilts the jar)
I'm asking -- where they're going.

BILLINGS

Please don't-- I'll tell you. I'll--

EXT. MEDICAL TENT - SAME

--SCREAMS erupt from within the tent, the SILHOUETTES of Cuthbert and a writhing Billings visible inside. Soldiers standing guard exchange frightened looks.

DISSOLVE TO:

THE SUN. WHITE ON BLUE. BURNING A HOLE THROUGH THE SCREEN.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Pearce and Greenhill huddle under tumbleweed, the only dot of shade in the rippling heat. Both now visibly scrawnier, all joints and sinew, sunburnt skin peeling off their bones.

Pearce squeezes a few precious drops from a water bladder, now creased, flattening. Greenhill divides a tiny meat-scrap.

GREENHILL

That's the last of it.

PEARCE

You take it.

GREENHILL

We've been on quarter-rations for days. Eat it.

PEARCE

I'm more compact of frame; don't need as much as you. Go on.

Greenhill hesitates... and sets upon the scrap of meat, half-crazed with hunger. Licking his fingers.

Pearce just stares at him.

PEARCE

Give me the map.

Greenhill unfolds a leathery, stubbled parchment, revealing a familiar TATTOOED MAP, as we realize -- *that's not parchment*.

PEARCE

If this is scaled right, we still got six days walk to the oasis.

GREENHILL

You said we could forage. I haven't seen so much as a cricket yet.

Pearce touches his own forehead. Examines a sweat-bead.

PEARCE

Long as we're sweating, we're still
alive. Last thing to go's the sweat.

GREENHILL

We're starving.

Pearce chuckles. Lays back. Closes his eyes, conserving energy. Then he pries one eye open, studying Greenhill.

PEARCE

Which story did you believe? About
me; what I done to get how I am.

GREENHILL

Didn't believe any of them. If I
had, I wouldn't be here.

Pearce looks off over the wasteland, almost wistful.

PEARCE

Greatest storyteller I ever known
was my old Papi. Spun 'em like a
weaver, he did. If he'd done near
half the things he put his name to,
he'd have a spot in Webster's
Encyclopedic. Prob'ly there anyway.

(a faint smile, then--)

Had a lot of people believing his
stories, too. Thinking him a goodly
parent. A man of property, morals.
All the while at home, he had a
drawer of debts, a rack of starving
children, and me mum with her tits
dry from terror at his rages.

Greenhill stares at him. The only sound now the wind, faintly whispering through the brush over their heads.

PEARCE

This one time, I's maybe 11, 12, he
disappears a week. And like always,
when he shows up, me mum's asking
where he been; her crying, him
putting the boot to her. Her
pleading with him to stop, God help
her, she'll do anything; him
carrying on like always--

Pearce smiles, suddenly looking very young. Almost childlike.

PEARCE

Only this time, I sticks a knife
'tween two of his ribs.

(MORE)

PEARCE (CONT'D)

You know, you jam a knife in a man's lung, you get that little pop, that little hiss. That bit of breath, escapes. I remember I could smell the whisky on it. Only sound ever came out of his body, wasn't a lie.

(itches his stubble)

Anyway, he falls, knife goes in worse, and he doesn't get back up. And mum goes a bit of irate. Screaming, hollering, cursing me for ever crawling out her guts like I done. Turned me in to the Royal Constabulary herself. Tossed me in Newgate that very night, shut away with all the garbage. Pickled in sin. She never came to see me, not once. But in her heart, I knew...

(pause)

I knew she was grateful for what I done. To this day, that's the last good thing I ever done for anyone.

Greenhill just stares. For a moment this seems to be the explanation for Pearce's entire life.

GREENHILL

Any of that true?

PEARCE

No, I'm having you on. He got kicked by a mule. But tell me, did my story best the others?

GREENHILL

Yes.

PEARCE

Then believe it, you want. Believe whatever you like. What about your old man?

GREENHILL

(shrugs)

Never knew him.

PEARCE

He run out on you?

GREENHILL

No. Hanged.

Greenhill stands; cracks his neck, stretching his legs--

GREENHILL

Sun will be sinking soon. We should start walking.

Pearce watches Greenhill start off. Then glances down to his pocket. The LETTER is still inside. He smiles. Getting up.

CUTHBERT (PRE-LAP)
The reward is 200 pounds.

EXT. CUTHBERT'S CAMP - DUSK

PAN OVER a sordid-looking group of TRACKERS, ABORIGINES, BUSH-RANGERS. Hardened, scarred men. *BOUNTY HUNTERS.*

CUTHBERT
 (pacing)
 It is the money I had thought to
 give my boy upon his marriage. Now,
 it is the sum I lay upon his grave,
 that his soul might find rest. Here
 is what I have ascertained...

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

Laying in a heap, looking ever THINNER, Greenhill SLEEPS.

CUTHBERT (V.O.)
*...If they survive the desert, there
 is a man in Harbortown who will help
 them secure passage on a ship.*

Across a flickering fire, Pearce stokes the flames. STARING at Greenhill. Something inscrutable in his gaze.

CUTHBERT (V.O.)
*We do not know who this man is. Use
 any means at your disposal to find
 out, but I want Greenhill alive.*

EXT. DESERT - AFTERNOON

A ROCKY PLATEAU wavers on the horizon, a few trees sprouting.

PEARCE (O.S.)
 ...This-- this is it. The oasis.

Greenhill staggers towards the apparition, limping, legs like rubber. Pearce at his side, haggard face lighting up--

PEARCE
 The farthest I ever made it. Up
 there's where I made camp.

GREENHILL
 You said that yesterday.

PEARCE
I swear to you, this is it.

Pearce's pace quickens, Greenhill forcing himself onward--

EXT. ROCKY PLATEAU - MOMENTS LATER

Hands claw rock as the two men drag themselves atop the plateau. They roll onto their backs, breathing hard.

GREENHILL
Skin's dry. No more sweat.

PEARCE
There's a freshwater creek.
Somewhere past those trees.

Greenhill nods. Summoning the strength to get back up--

PEARCE
Rest. I got something for you.

Pearce pulls out the LETTER, tattered and yellowing.
Greenhill's breath catching in his chest--

GREENHILL
That's-- is that--

PEARCE
Found it in Abel's saddlebags. Was
saving it, case your motivation
gave out. Now-- you've earned it.

Greenhill reaches for it, pulling out a page -- the *pages*,
YES -- hands almost trembling as he unfolds them:

SARAH (V.O.)
*Dearest Robert. It's only nineteen
months since our parting, and yet--*

Greenhill clutches it to his chest. Almost about to weep.

GREENHILL
Thank you. Thank--

PEARCE
Relish every word.
(standing)
I'll go see about that creek.

Pearce takes a few steps away... STOPS. Looks back. Greenhill is devouring the letter. HIS BACK TURNED.

WITH GREENHILL as he reads, eyes snapping back and forth:

SARAH (V.O.)
*...and yet each day seems eternal.
 We have suffered great hardship in
 your absence, but we are still under
 one roof, us four...*
 (his eyes LIGHT UP)
*Though I cannot be there to comfort
 you through the cruelty of these
 bitter days, I promise to make each
 moment after you return twice as
 sweet. Until then, be strong, and--*

A twig SNAPS behind him. Greenhill turns, seeing--

--*Nothing.* No sign of Pearce. Greenhill frowns, standing, looking around, pocketing the letter--

GREENHILL
 Pearce?

Silence. A slight wind. Greenhill starts forward. Wandering into a maze of trees and rock forms, as we--

CUT TO:

PEARCE, keeping low behind a boulder. *STONE HATCHET in his hands.* Greenhill walks past, doesn't see him...

GREENHILL
 Pearce!
 (peers ahead)
 Found your camp.

Greenhill pads forward, finding an abandoned FIRE PIT, covered in charred logs. He pokes at the ashes with a foot--

GREENHILL
 PEARC--

--Greenhill STOPS IN HIS TRACKS. Reaches down, fishing a DUSTY OBJECT from the ashes. Turning it around to face him:

A smashed-in HUMAN SKULL.

Greenhill's lip twitches, finding MORE and MORE HUMAN BONES... a CHILL running down his spine as REMEMBERED VOICES from across our story fill his head:

PEARCE (V.O.)
I need five men.

BILLINGS (V.O.)
*...What's he got planned for
 the rest of us?*

PEARCE (V.O.)
*That which is weaker is
 consumed by that which is
 stronger.*

GREENHILL (V.O.)
*--Why me? What do you need me
 for?*

PEARCE (V.O.)
*Only made it part-way, the last
 time... Ran out of food.*

Greenhill's chest heaves, a HORRIFYING REALIZATION DAWNING--

PEARCE (V.O.)
Which story did you believe?

HOARSE OLD PRISONER (V.O.)
*Pearce was the only survivor. Found
 him feasting on his superior
 officer. Called his flesh delicious.*

Greenhill sees a SHADOW slide over the ground at his feet;
 whirling around just in time to see--

PEARCE SWING THE STONE HATCHET TOWARD HIS HEAD.

Greenhill DUCKS, hatchet SMASHING into a boulder inches from
 his ear, cracks forming at the point of impact--

GREENHILL
 No--

PEARCE
 Yes.

*And it's happening. Greenhill vs. Pearce. Each man starving,
 weakened, fighting for his life. The HATCHET SWINGS--*

--but Greenhill TACKLES HIM-- WHAM-- they SLAM DOWN, TUSSLING
 tooth-and-nail along the PLATEAU'S EDGE, pages of Sarah's
 letter SCATTERING around them--

PEARCE
 (jamming Greenhill's chin)
 This doesn't -- have to be painful.
 It is -- the order of things.

And quickly Pearce is OVERPOWERING HIM, TWISTING the hatchet
 toward Greenhill, forcing the blade into his neck-- a
 beheading happening in excruciating slow motion--

GREENHILL
 (sucks in his neck)
 Wait-- stop--

A page of the letter blows by Greenhill's eyes. And with a
 last BURST OF STRENGTH, he makes a desperate move--

--AND ROLLS THEM BOTH OFF THE PLATEAU.

EXT. DESERT POND - CONTINUOUS

WHAM-- BAM-- knuckles and knees scrape rock, hatchet CLATTERING FREE as--

--SPLASH! They crash down into a shallow FRESHWATER POND, the two men struggling now in three feet of water, Pearce immersing Greenhill's face--

UNDERWATER.

Greenhill's eyes dart up in a panic, Pearce's watery silhouette hovering over him like the angel of death. Darkness gathering around him, Greenhill involuntarily taking water up his nasal cavity, eyes stinging from the inside, as--

PEARCE

Just holds him down. Shoulders bulging, giving no quarter. Soothing him, almost like a baby:

PEARCE
You've done your part, Robert. I'll take you home, now. Your strength in me. Mine-- in you--

Greenhill CLAWS WILDLY at Pearce's neck, face, jaw; KICKING, SPLASHING, FRENZIED, not giving in.

PEARCE
Shh. Shh. Almost done. Almost--

Greenhill starts to falter. Arms slackening. And for a moment, we think -- this is it. *This is how Robert Greenhill dies.*

But then, we perceive, out of focus, at the far edge of the frame -- something MOVES. Sliding softly into the water-- SPLISH, and now Pearce realizes it too, realizes they're not alone, his head slowly rotating, as--

A FUCKING CROCODILE

Launches up from the water, JAWS SNAPPING!

Pearce INSTANTLY ABANDONS Greenhill-- FEINTING, crocodile teeth shredding his shirt as Pearce THROWS HIS ARMS AROUND ITS JAWS, using all his strength to clamp its mouth shut; wrestling, howling, spitting--

PEARCE
YOU WANT ME?! YOU WANT-- MEEEE--

And now the crocodile begins to WRITHE and WRIGGLE as--

GREENHILL

Suddenly SITS UP FROM THE WATER! Choking, gasping, crawling from the pond, coughing water, the imprints of Pearce's knuckles VISIBLE all over his throat--

And now Greenhill turns to the THRASHING HORROR occurring behind him, Pearce struggling to hang on, the monstrous reptile snapping its neck BACK and FORTH like a dog shaking off water, hurling him about like a rag doll as--

PEARCE
YOU WAAAAAHAA-- MMMMM--

Greenhill scuttles backward, palm bumping into something on the rocks -- THE STONE HATCHET, as we--

PUSH IN ON GREENHILL. And all we hear are the screams, the splashing, the THRASHING of huge packs of reptilian muscle, Pearce's GARBLED, WATERY CRIES of DESPERATION--

PEARCE (O.S.)
GAAHH--! ARRGH---

And we go into EXTREME SLOW MOTION, as--

PEARCE

Fights to HANG ON, veins about to burst, face REDDENING, eyes BLOODSHOT -- but despite it all the CROCODILE JAWS are starting to INCH OPEN, teeth scraping the very flesh from his arms.

And suddenly Alexander Pearce's eyes are filling with something we've never seen in them before. COLD NAKED FEAR.

GREENHILL

Turns away from Pearce. Bending down and slurping up water. SLURP-- SLURP-- Pearce in his peripheral, a thrashing storm of misery. Greenhill glances back--

And STOPS. He squints. Maybe it's the dehydration. A hunger-born hallucination. But all around Pearce, Greenhill sees them -- FLOATING DUST MOTES. Greenhill shakes his head.

GREENHILL
No. No--

But the dust motes remain. Spiraling around Pearce and the crocodile, locked in their immortal dance.

INSERT: Pearce dancing in the firelight with the aborigines.

And slowly, Greenhill's hand closes around THE STONE-HATCHET'S HANDLE. Camera RISING WITH HIM NOW as he stands to his feet, summoning all his strength, and--

WITH A WAR SCREAM GREENHILL LEAPS ONTO THE CROCODILE!

It's hard to say who's more surprised by this development, Pearce or the crocodile.

--THWACK, THWACK-- Greenhill brings the hatchet down AGAIN and AGAIN on the monstrous reptile's HEAD, NECK, SPINE. But the blows seem to do nothing, blade

BOUNCING

OFF

Its hardened scales, the crocodile's TAIL WHIPPING AROUND, smashing broadside into--

GREENHILL

Who goes flying TEN FEET like he was hit by a TRAIN. Slams into the side of the crevasse, wind knocked-out--

But Greenhill THROWS HIMSELF right back into the fray; THWACK, THWACK, SCHLUNK-- axe SPLITTING THE BEAST'S EYE, a guttural WAIL erupting from somewhere deep within it.

PEARCE
I'M GOING TO LET GO--

GREENHILL

--NO--

PEARCE
(like a shot:)
ITS KILL SPOT IS UNDER THE TONGUE.
DROWN IT IN ITS OWN BLOOD.

Pearce RELEASES his arms-- crocodile jaws SPRINGING OPEN-- Greenhill SWINGING THE HATCHET with all he's got--

TING-- The blade DEFLECTS off its teeth, jaws SNAPPING back down like a sprung trap, about to bite through both of Greenhill's arms--

--but Pearce CATCHES its snout and chin with his BARE HANDS, fingers locked in its NOSTRILS, PRYING THE JAWS OPEN, its meaty tongue FLAILING like a suffocating snake--

PEARCE
Drown it in its own blood.

--SCHLUNK-- Greenhill sinks the axe in deep. Right under the tongue. Blood frothing and hissing as the crocodile goes into a panicked frenzy, making a WILD LUNGE at Greenhill, and--

It KNOCKS GREENHILL DOWN, four legs scrabbling up his body, red jaws OPENING, Greenhill flinching from what comes next, which is--

A *GURGLE*. As those great jaws at last... tremble shut. Tail still going -- until it finally spasms and falls limp.

GREENHILL
Ahuh-- ahuhuh--

And Greenhill SWINGS the HATCHET AGAIN, a PRIMAL SCREAM coming from deep in his gut, voice cracking, eyes spilling hot tears as the axe slashes wildly AGAIN and AGAIN until--

PEARCE catches Greenhill's wrist. Prying the hatchet from between his shaking, white-knuckled fingers.

The bloody hatchet hits the ground.

And so do the two men.

We slowly RISE UP, moving to an ANGLE FROM ABOVE. The pond, marbled with blood. The demolished crocodile. Two bedraggled human forms, barely conscious beside it. SILENCE.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON: CROCODILE MEAT, roasting, smoldering on a spit.

EXT. PLATEAU, CAMP - SUNSET

Pearce and Greenhill sit on either side of a fire. Eating. Gulping down water. Neither man taking his eyes off the other. Mistrust between them still palpable.

PEARCE
(chewing)
Well, Robert -- I do believe this proves me right, after all. Maybe you do have what it takes.

Greenhill just chews his meat. Spits out a bone.

PEARCE
Just one thing I can't figure.
(off Greenhill's look)
She had me. Had me hard and bloody.
I was set to decorate those teeth.
By all rights, I should be in this croc's belly. Not the other way 'round. What I wanna know -- why?

Greenhill thinks for a long time.

GREENHILL
I wanted to be able to look my son in the eyes again.

PEARCE
...Well, when you see him--
(tosses him a CURVED CLAW)
Give him this.

GREENHILL
We're not home yet.

PEARCE
...You sound tired.

Greenhill stares hard at Pearce. Desperately exhausted, but still unwilling to let his guard down in this man's presence.

PEARCE
You can go to sleep, Robert. I
won't do you no harm.
(alligator grin)
'Least-ways, not tonight.

And that's good enough for Greenhill. It's got to be, because he's asleep before his head even hits the sand. Pearce watches Greenhill sleep a moment...

...And lays back. Wide awake. Just looking up.

CUT TO:

THE NIGHT SKY, distant stars glimmering in the darkness, as--

EXT. HARBORTOWN - NIGHT

--A WHEEL splatters through them, reflection in a puddle dissipating as a TOOTHLESS OLD DRIVER steers a MANURE WAGON into Harbortown. SOLDIERS patrol everywhere.

INT. RAMSHACKLE INN - NIGHT

A KNOCK at a door. The pudgy INNKEEPER we glimpsed in our story's opening, **BOYLE** (50s, well-fed) opens it a crack--

Greenhill and Pearce slip inside, covered in manure. Greenhill shuts the door behind them. Exhaling with relief, when--

Boyle pulls out a FLINTLOCK PISTOL. Greenhill's heart sinks--

BOYLE
Turn around. Hands on the wall.

GREENHILL
...We're friends of Felton's. He--

BOYLE
(cocks the pistol)
I never cared much for Felton.
Hands on the wall.

Pearce and Greenhill exchange glances. Slowly turning, doing as he says. Boyle pats them each up and down--

GREENHILL
We're unarmed.

Boyle rips Greenhill's collar, scraping away the filth on his neck -- revealing the M.H. PRISON BRAND.

Boyle grunts, satisfied. Un-cocks the pistol.

BOYLE
Follow me.

INT. GRIMY BACK KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Boyle leads them into a messy kitchen, reaching in back of a pipe stove, producing two ratty MERCHANT SHIP TICKETS.

BOYLE
Won't be first-class accommodations. But it's a short trip. Two weeks to Manila. After that, you're on your own.
(offers them the tickets)
Ship departs tomorrow at 3:05.

GREENHILL
How do we know we can trust you?

BOYLE
Word is, you killed Abel Cuthbert.
That true?

GREENHILL
...Yes.

Boyle lowers his collar, revealing -- an old M.H. brand.

BOYLE
I just want to know: what was it like to hear that little turd squeal?

ON GREENHILL. No idea how to begin to answer that question.

PEARCE
It was delicious.

BOYLE
(fixes Greenhill's collar)
You're welcome to whatever you please. Food. Drink. Ladies is working, you like.

PEARCE
Oh? How old's your youngest?

BOYLE

Fifteen. Me daughter, Rose. Knows a way to use her--

Greenhill grabs the tickets, cutting in--

GREENHILL

--No thank you. No unnecessary eyes need to know we're here.

(Pearce shrugs: *oh, well*)

But there is one thing we'd like, if it can be arranged quietly.

INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

STEAM RISES. Greenhill and Pearce soak in metal tubs. Greenhill's clean-shaven now. But somehow, he still looks like a different man. He massages the wound on his palm.

PEARCE

What's the first thing you'll do when you get home?

GREENHILL

...Gather Sarah and the children in my arms. Just breathe them in.

(rubs his shoulder wound)

Then -- suppose we'll have to start fresh somewhere. Maybe America. What about you?

PEARCE

You've decided to let me live?

GREENHILL

Well. 'Least-ways, for tonight.

PEARCE

'Been escaping so long, have to confess, don't rightly know anymore what I started out intending to get back to. Probably some fool girl.

Pearce chuckles, but there's something sad in it. Greenhill just waits. Pearce, allowing his mind to wander--

PEARCE

Might like to see China or India. There's villages in the Himalayas, that have never seen a white man. They say a man can become something more than he is in those places. Escape himself. I'd like that.

GREENHILL

You're going to become a king then?

PEARCE
Have my sights set on a god.

And there it is, that alligator smile. Greenhill stares at Pearce, a man who's both his enemy and his ally. And allows himself to laugh. Pearce starts laughing along with him.

For a moment, they almost seem like friends.

As they laugh, WE DRIFT with the steam toward the window...

EXT. RAMSHACKLE INN - CONTINUOUS

...Following it OUTSIDE. Finding, on the road behind the inn-- a SCARRED TRACKER. We recognize him as one of the bounty hunters from Cuthbert's camp. Handing some COINS to--

TOOTHLESS OLD DRIVER, who points at the INN; tips a hat, climbing back onto a familiar MANURE WAGON.

INT. UPSTAIRS ROOM - DAWN

Greenhill's eyes open. He sits up in bed.

In the next bed over, Pearce sleeps in the arms of a STUNNING WOMAN, red hair flowing over him. Something almost maternal in the way she holds him. Pearce looks content as a child.

Greenhill just shakes his head. Starts pulling on pants.

EXT. BEHIND THE INN - MOMENTS LATER

Greenhill peers out a back door. Looks around. All clear. He hurries to an OUTHOUSE in bare feet.

INT. OUTHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Inside, Greenhill takes care of some personal business.

GREENHILL
(chuckles quiet to himself)
...Game-redda...

A shadow darts past the outhouse. Then another. Greenhill frowns; peers out a crack between the boards, seeing -- a BRITISH SOLDIER creeps past. Then another.

Greenhill blinks. Mind racing. He cinches up his pants, a board CREAKING under him. He WINCES; waits--

EXT. BEHIND THE INN - MOMENTS LATER

TINK-- a BOARD is carefully removed from the back of the outhouse, Greenhill slipping out. He stands flat against the wall, waits for ANOTHER SOLDIER to pass...

...Then hurries across the street. Keeping low, moving along a fence beside the INN. He glances to an UPSTAIRS WINDOW--

GREENHILL
(a whisper shout)
Pearce. Pearce--

Silence. Greenhill reaches for a PEBBLE. Tosses it. *PLINK--* hits the glass. The window doesn't move. Greenhill waits--

HULKING SOLDIER (O.S.)
--Hear what he did to Abel? Love to
see 'im try 'at with me--

Greenhill DUCKS, two more soldiers approaching on the far side of the fence. They pass Greenhill by. He reaches for another pebble, when--

A FOG BELL tolls in the harbor. Greenhill peers over the fence, seeing, in the distance -- THE HARBOR.

Greenhill looks up at the window.

At the harbor...

The window...

And Greenhill makes a decision. *He WALKS AWAY from the inn.*

EXT. GRIMY ALLEY - MOMENTS LATER

Greenhill races along a garbage-filled alley. Greenhill slows at the end, peering out to see--

The harbor is TEEMING with SOLDIERS. The entire British army may as well be between him and his ride out of here. And even worse -- SIX SOLDIERS are headed straight in his direction.

Greenhill ducks into the alley. His eyes dart left, right--

EXT. HARBORTOWN, STREET - MOMENTS LATER

The SIX SOLDIERS turn into the alley, to see--

Nothing. They walk on, when-- one nearly trips over a DRUNKARD, half-buried among the garbage. A soldier flips him a coin.

SOLDIER
 Sleep it off somewhere else, old
 man. This spot's 'bout to be a
 bullet farm.

The drunkard just groans a little. Soldiers moving on.

A SEAGULL lands in the alley. Pecking at an apple core. PECK. PECK-PECK. Our film's OPENING IMAGE, as-- the garbage around it stirs, our drunkard rolling over to reveal--

It's Greenhill. The gull TAKES FLIGHT--

Greenhill scampers to the alley's end, peering out at the HARBOR BUSTLING WITH SOLDIERS. No idea what he's going to do. Overhead, the seagull CIRCLES...

EXT. RAMSHACKLE INN - MOMENTS LATER

...And lands on the hanging sign outside the inn, as our story at last comes FULL CIRCLE. All around, in alleys and on rooftops, FORTY SOLDIERS aim rifles, surrounding the inn.

WHISPERING SOLDIER
 There's no escape, sir. Awaiting
 your orders.

CUTHBERT stares down at the pocket-watch. Cracked glass. Frozen hands. He wipes away a RED SMUDGE--

Cuthbert gives a nod. THREE SOLDIERS start toward the inn.

SMASH TO:

THE THREE SOLDIERS, now DEAD, heaped in a CART outside the inn. In the background, we notice soldiers MANACLING PEARCE while CUTHBERT stares down at him from a smashed window.

One DEAD BODY suddenly MOVES, getting dragged into an alcove--

EXT. ALLEYWAY - LATER

Where *Greenhill* hurriedly changes into the soldier's clothes! Pulling on a cap; squeezing into the jacket; shoving his feet into the BOOTS -- but they're WAY TOO SMALL. Won't fit.

Greenhill creeps back toward the cart, reaching for another pair, when-- a WHIP cracks, cart suddenly TRUNDLING AWAY.

Greenhill frowns. Looks down at his feet... as we CUT TO--

EXT. MAIN STREET - MOMENTS LATER

GREENHILL'S BARE FEET. We TRACK UP his ILL-FITTING UNIFORM to his nervous face, eyes darting as he moves past DOZENS OF SOLDIERS, headed for a MERCHANT SHIP, when--

CAPTAIN (O.S.)
 You there, soldier!
 (Greenhill freezes)
 Give us a hand with these posters.

The captain shoves a stack of WANTED POSTERS into Greenhill's hands -- each one bearing Greenhill's own portrait!

CAPTAIN
 Cuthbert wants these placed on
 every dock in the harbor.

Greenhill nods, trying to tilt his cap low-- starting off--

CAPTAIN
 Soldier!
 (Greenhill's eyes close--)
 ...Button that jacket. This is the
 King's service. Not some colonial
 bush-regiment.

GREENHILL
 Yessir.

Greenhill forces the buttons together, getting out of there. Hurries around a corner, glancing behind him, when--

EXT. HARBOR STREET - CONTINUOUS

--BAM. Greenhill bumps into someone. It's Cuthbert. But Cuthbert doesn't even see him, too busy glaring at a chained-up Pearce at his side, literally blinded by vengeance.

CUTHBERT
 Where is he? Where?

Cuthbert SHOVES GREENHILL ASIDE. Greenhill keeping his head down as the other soldiers pass by--

But Pearce turns, LOOKING BACK at Greenhill. Just long enough to make eye contact.

Greenhill stares.

Pearce stares.

And smiles.

PEARCE

By the way, John--
 (Cuthbert pauses)
 ...Portrait in these posters ain't
 much of a likeness for Greenhill.
 He's far uglier in real life.

Cuthbert yanks on Pearce's chains, pulling him onward -- as Pearce begins to LOUDLY SING the OLD MINER'S SONG:

PEARCE

*Down the mines, no sunlight shines
 Those pits they're black as hell...*

Greenhill forces himself not to look back. Moving on, DISAPPEARING into the harbor thrum.

INT. GRIM CELL - AFTERNOON

Pearce hangs from the ceiling, bloodied, flesh smoldering. Most other men would be dead from sheer exhaustion by now.

CLANG, the hot poker clatters to the floor. An unsatisfied Cuthbert nods to his men. They cut Pearce down. He lands in a heap. Cuthbert stalks past him, peering out a BARRED WINDOW.

CUTHBERT

You hear that sound?

A SQUEAK; a THUNK. Pearce pries open a swollen eye. Sees a GALLows outside. Soldiers test the trap door.

CUTHBERT

Word's spreading that we've caught you. That at dusk the Cannibal of Tasmania will hang by the neck until dead. Right there.

PEARCE

(a defiant rasp)
 Tell the truth, John, I'm rather looking forward to it. Nice to know where I'm headed for once.

CUTHBERT

I'll call it off.

Pearce frowns. Cuthbert grabs a parchment from a table, opening it for Pearce. We glimpse a stamp; a signature--

CUTHBERT

Town magistrate was Abel's godfather. I had him issue a full pardon. If you give up Greenhill, you'll be forgiven for all crimes committed under His Majesty's law.

Soldiers exchange glances -- what? Pearce eyes the gallows.

PEARCE

Saw a hanging once in Liverpool.
Had too much rope for the boy's
neck. Had to loop it 'round twice.
When he dropped, his head come off,
like an olive off a toothpick. Most
memorable thing the lad ever did.

(cracks his neck)

Hope I put on a proper show for the
locals. After all I done, be a pity
if all they get's another short-
drop and sudden-stop. No, I'd like
to bless them all with a good,
rollicking dance on air.

Cuthbert throws a PURSE to the floor. Coins spill out.

CUTHBERT

That's thirty guineas in gold.
They're yours. Enough to go anywhere
you'll be. Anywhere in the world.

Pearce glances at the gold. At the pardon. At Cuthbert.
Outside, a church-bell rings THREE TIMES.

PEARCE

I'll make you a counterproposal.
(Cuthbert waits)
I'll take your fancy paper, and
your thirty guineas, and I'll add
an additional condition. I'm afraid
it's non-negotiable -- but once
fulfilled, it gets you Greenhill.

CUTHBERT

What.

Pearce waves him closer. Closer. WHISPERS in his ear.

CUTHBERT

...That's what you want?

Pearce nods, sober. Cuthbert looks around. His soldiers
trying to remain at attention, trying to avoid his gaze.

CUTHBERT

And you'll give me Greenhill?

PEARCE

I've been called many things John,
but never a liar.

CUTHBERT

If you don't give me Greenhill you
will hang, Alexander Pearce. Do you
understand me? You will hang.

PEARCE

Better hurry John. He's leaving us.

Cuthbert straightens his jacket. Brushes himself off.

CUTHBERT

Fine. Very well...

(clears his throat)

I'd like to say, out loud, for all
creation to hear -- that to satisfy
my thirst for vengeance, I hereby
loose upon the world, the notorious
malefactor, murderer, and cannibal
Alexander Pearce. May whatever
crimes he commits henceforth be on
my soul forever. There.

This, now, is as close to heaven as Pearce will ever get.

PEARCE

Say it again.

CUTHBERT

...To satisfy my need for veng--

PEARCE

Say it louder.

CUTHBERT

--I HEREBY LOOSE, UPON THE WORLD,
NOTORIOUS MURDERER, CANNIBAL--

ALEXA-- Alexander--

(choking up)

May-- may--

PEARCE

It's alright, John. You can do it.

CUTHBERT

May -- whatever crimes he commits --
be on my soul -- forever.

Almost shaking, Cuthbert wipes his mouth. Pearce stares up at
him; from the angle he is looking, Cuthbert's neck lines up
perfectly with the hanging noose, in the window behind him.

PEARCE

Dock 9. Cargo hold. Best be quick.

EXT. WHARF - SAME

A MERCHANT SHIP inches away from a dock labeled "9."

INT. UNDER THE CARGO HOLD - SAME

We are in a dark place. Dusty light filters down through FLOORBOARDS as we reveal GREENHILL, hidden deep in a ship's hull, crammed into an alcove, ALMOST FREE, when--

CUTHBERT (O.S.)
Stop that ship! Stop it!

Greenhill's eyes shut. *No. No, not when I'm this close.*

EXT. WHARF - SAME

Chains rattle as the ANCHOR DROPS. Deckhands throw out ropes. A gangplank descends. Cuthbert and 15 SOLDIERS storm aboard.

INT. UNDER THE CARGO HOLD - SAME

Greenhill's eyes flash about. Looking for a way out. Something. Anything. Still trying to escape. A DISTANT VOICE:

CUTHBERT (O.S.)
We have reason to believe this
vessel is harboring a fugitive.
Show us to the cargo hold.

The sound of boots on stairs. *Oh no.*

INT. CARGO HOLD - MOMENTS LATER

Cuthbert and his men turn over barrels, rip open crates, tear through hay-bales, scouring every inch of the ship's hold.

SOLDIER
No sign of him, sir.

Cuthbert grinds his jaw, when -- he freezes. Eyes tilting DOWNWARD. Staring down at the floorboards.

INT. UNDER THE CARGO HOLD - SAME

Greenhill pours sweat, straining to see up through the cracks in the floor. DUST filters down, getting in his eye.

INT. CARGO HOLD - SAME

Cuthbert pulls his OFFICER'S SABRE. Motions to his men to do the same with their bayonets. Aiming the blades down.

CUTHBERT

Greenhill. Command yourself into our hands, or be run through.

(silence)

REVEAL YOURSELF.

Nothing. Cuthbert nods. Their blades all STAB into the floor.

INT. UNDER THE CARGO HOLD - SAME

But oddly -- Greenhill doesn't see any blades stabbing through. Not near him, not anywhere around him.

He's suddenly JOLTED. The ship around him beginning to MOVE. Greenhill frowns, surprised, as--

INT. CARGO HOLD - SAME

Cuthbert's men adjust position, STABBING DOWN in new spots.

CAPTAIN

You're tearing up our bloody under-deck, sir. You simply can't--

CUTHBERT

(wheels around in a rage)

If the Captain utters one more word, arrest him. Start prying up these boards. Every one. Nobody gets on or off this ship until I return.

EXT. MERCHANT SHIP - LATE AFTERNOON

The bloodied Alexander Pearce bears just the hint of a grin as Cuthbert shoves him up the gangplank onto the ship.

CUTHBERT

--You will go down into this hold and show me precisely where he is, or you will hang. Do you understand?

PEARCE

Wait a tick. Did I say dock 9?

Cuthbert's eyes burn as Pearce squints down the wharf, ships coming and going all along it, his eyes locking onto to an EMPTY PIER, where boys are sweeping up the area.

PEARCE
 ...It's a shame, you know?
 (looks to the horizon)
 I would have made an excellent god.

Cuthbert follows Pearce's gaze out to the horizon, where--

We see ANOTHER SHIP. GREENHILL'S SHIP. Silhouetted by the sun. Already miles away. And Cuthbert just stares at it.

Knowing he's been beaten.

EXT. SHIP - SUNSET

Greenhill emerges from the hold, stretching his neck. Sailors sharing puzzled looks as this haggard figure moves past them to the prow. Sea-spray hitting his face.

Greenhill inhales deeply, enjoying his first breaths in more than two years as a FREE MAN. And off the SETTING SUN ahead...

MATCH DISSOLVE TO:

A HANGING NOOSE. A ROWDY CROWD gathered around the gallows as--

EXT. HARBORTOWN SQUARE - SUNSET

--Pearce emerges from a wagon, a sign around his neck: "*THE CANNIBAL OF TASMANIA*." Onlookers cast hateful looks as this haggard figure is led past them. Pelting him with garbage.

SPIITTLE hits Pearce's face. He squints, seeing -- *Billings*. Wounds patched. Color back in his cheeks. A pair of soldiers yank him back, as--

Pearce begins to HUM the OLD MINER'S SONG. Bare feet stepping up the stairs to the gallows. The song CONTINUING OVER--

EXT. WICKLOW, IRELAND - SUNSET (MONTHS LATER)

Boots, stepping down from a carriage. A TALL MAN in new clothes steps onto a familiar street. The man's head turns, gaze sweeping around like a lifetime has passed.

On a corner, we find BOLGER, holes in his shoes, waving a tin cup. A coin rattles into it. Bolger looks up. A tall figure walking past him. Bolger frowns. Could it be?

EXT. STONE COTTAGE - DUSK

A hand with a scarred palm knocks on the door. It opens--

To reveal SARAH GREENHILL. Her expression drops. Hands falling to her sides. A tempest of emotions on her face.

Robert Greenhill stands before her. Clearly having expended some unknown effort to look well for his return. But his eyes tell a different story. The eyes of a man who has reached the limits of physical and spiritual endurance to return home.

EXT. GALLows - DUSK

The grimy noose descends, hovering over Pearce like a halo.

The soldiers slip it down over his head. Pearce giving no struggle, continuing to HUM THE OLD MINER'S SONG, over--

INT. STONE COTTAGE - DUSK

Greenhill, entering his home. It appears much the same, though most of the furniture is gone. Likely sold off, at some point. He picks up little Robert Jr., now 3; turns to Sarah -- man and wife not even knowing where to begin, as--

Colin appears from the kitchen, now a young man of 13. Wiping his well-worked hands. Stopping when he sees Greenhill.

Greenhill looks down in his son's eyes.

And Colin looks right back. Neither of them speaking. Father and son just staring at each other, as--

EXT. GALLows - DUSK

The noose is cinched down around Pearce's neck. Soldiers position his feet over the trap door; step back.

Pearce looks to the darkening sky. A night wind coming in, sweeping through the crowd. Women tighten shawls. Pearce closes his eyes, the wind in his face, hair blown back. He inhales deeply, enjoying every last breath.

A MASKED EXECUTIONER reaches for the TRAP-DOOR LEVER. But just before he pulls it--

Pearce gives a WARM, GENUINE SMILE. A far cry from his old alligator grin. STILL HUMMING, nearing the song's end, OVER--

INT. STONE COTTAGE - DUSK

Sarah EMBRACES GREENHILL. Tears in her eyes. Holding him tight. Greenhill's haunted face rests on his wife's shoulder. His eyes slowly closing, ALMOST at peace, when--

MAGGIE (O.S.)
Mother. Who is that man?

Greenhill looks up, seeing Maggie, now 8. Staring at the strange man in her house. Greenhill extends a calloused, scarred hand, almost trembling, reaching out for her.

Maggie frowns, tilting her head. Her arm slowly beginning to lift up from her side. But just before their hands touch...

Pearce's HUMMED TUNE is abruptly CUT OFF at the SOURCE.

BLACKOUT.

CREDITS ROLL IN SILENCE.