

Cold Quiet Country

By

John E. Spare

Based On The Novel
"Cold Quiet Country"
by Clayton Lindemuth

johnearlspare@gmail.com

(724) 712-0937

EXT. FOREST - DAWN

Snow falls thick through the barren tree branches as if THE UNIVERSE poured an enormous sack of flour over the Earth.

GRUNTING and SHUFFLING combines with the rapid CRUNCH of twigs and underbrush SNAPPING.

SUBTITLE FADES IN: BITTERS MITH, WYOMING - DECEMBER 26, 1971

A tall, limping figure appears. Sinew and bone, hair like a rusted out Chevy. GALE G'WAIN(18), glassy-eyed and frantic, lumbers through the forest.

A BLACK "X" scrawled across his forehead. Large snowflakes fight to cover the dried blood on his cheek.

He grimaces, clutching his exposed right calf, a wounded mess of ravaged muscles and ligaments.

Frozen blood crystallizes the surrounding wound, the once white fleece lining his denim jacket a blotchy red.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Dirty snow falls in town as if it knows it's not good enough to join it's pure siblings in the forest.

A Sheriff's cruiser pulls to a stop in front of The County Seat Diner.

The driver door swings open. A liver spotted hand empties a full mug of steaming coffee onto the street.

Slowly, authoritatively, the worn, clean shaven face of Sheriff BITTERS MITH(75), examines the sidewalk.

INT. THE COUNTY SEAT - DAY

Sheriff Bittersmith enters the diner, proceeds to make his way to the end of the counter. Guests turn their gaze away from the oncoming lawmen, some due to respect, others from fear.

He sits at the counter, places his mug down.

JEANIE, a pleasant waitress,(22), plain but not aging well, approaches with a coffee pot.

JEANIE
You're back soon.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
Need a refill.

JEANIE
Storm's whipping up pretty good in
the hills they say.

Her comment receives only a stare. She pours the Sheriff's coffee.

JEANIE (CONT.)
Somethin' on your mind?

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
Couple a few things...

He takes a manly gulp of the steaming brew.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)
This here's my last day.

JEANIE
Really? Now how's an institution
like you get to retire?

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
Retire? Shit, forced out's more
like it. Damn town council. Back
room, brandy snifters, cigar smoke,
public not gettin' a say so.

Jeanie's pleasant smile morphs into confusion. Bittersmith leans in, lowers his voice.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)
Jeanie, I'll shoot ya straight. You
started here 'bout two years ago.
I've come by, right as rain, every
mornin' since. Every time I leave,
it's been with the thought that one
day we'd get familiar.

JEANIE
Familiar?

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
I know where you come from, girl.
Elderberry has a Sheriff. Stevens.
Good man. Good friend of mine.

Her expression turns from confusion to concern.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)

Weather like this, it'd be a shame
for him to have to drive up here
and fetch you home. Why, you'd end
up in that jail across the street
for least a week 'til the roads
clear.

JEANIE

You wouldn't...

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

I'd be obliged. That's why I
thought we might find a reason it
don't make no sense to call him.
Try to find a way around some of
the... uglier aspects of the law.

Jeanie chews her bottom lip, puts the carafe down.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)

Just think it through now. You know
the price of a good lawyer? You'll
need some lawyerin' for sure. Grand
theft auto's a big deal, great
state of Wyoming.

Beaten, she takes off her apron, daggers stare holes into
the Sheriff.

JEANIE

Eddy, I'm going out for some air.

INT. SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH'S CRUISER - DAY

The cruiser rests in the back alley of the diner.

Bittersmith relaxes receiving oral sex, sips his coffee.

The car radio SQUELCHES to life with a female voice, FENNY.

FENNY (OS)

Josephus, you listenin'?

Jeanie, repulsed, raises her head from Bittersmith's lap.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

What the hell you stoppin' fer?

He pushes her head back down, reaches for the wired handset.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
Can't it wait, Fenny?

FENNY (OS)
No it can not, and you're not gonna
take that tone with me.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
All right, all right. Mrs.
Llewellyn lock herself out the
house again?

FENNY (OS)
Odum's on his way to the Haudesert
farm. Say's there's a big problem.

A YOUNG BUS BOY drags garbage to the dumpster, noticing
Jeanie's bobbing head. Bittersmith tips his hat towards him.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
Odum? What the hell's he thinkin'?
He ain't Sheriff yet.

FENNY (OS)
You best boogie up that way right
quick, sounded urgent.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
Bittersmith don't boogie. I'll be
there in a bit, and Fenny, don't
radio me for about five.

Bittersmith returns the handset to the dashboard. Closing
his eyes, he returns to the twisted pleasure at hand.

EXT. HAUDESERT FARM - DAY

Bittersmith's cruiser struggles up the snow covered drive.
Waiting on the porch is DEPUTY ODUM (40),pale, pacing and
FAY HAUDESERT (43),haggard and worn.

The Sheriff exits, cautiously treads to the pair. He tips
his hat to Fay.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
Ma'am. Hear we got some issue?

FAY
Gwen's gone...Burt's killed.

ODUM
The daughter.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
Yep, I know her...where's Burt dead
at then?

INT. HAUDESERT BARN - DAY

Odum leads the trio to the entrance of the barn.

The body of BURT HAUDESERT, (45), STANDS, the business end of a pitchfork through the front of his neck, protruding clean through the back.

The handle, abnormally propped, bears his weight.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
Fuck me runnin'...Sorry, ma'am, my
apologies. Look at that....

Bittersmith moves closer to the body, notices the handle of the pitchfork wedged into a bullet hole on the wooden floor.

FAY
He's got my daughter! Ain'tcha
going to go get her, kill that son
of a bitch?

The Sheriff looks away from the deceased.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
Who's "he"?

FAY
Gale G'Wain!

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
G'Wain?

ODUM
He helped Burt and the boy with
work over the summer. You know this
feller?

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
Know of him. Red in the head like
the dick on a dog. Fay, do us a
favor, huh? Go fetch Gwen's warmest
coat, some boots fer her, too.

Satisfied with the promise of progress, Fay leaves.

ODUM

It is a site, ain't it?

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

Well, he either done hisself in,
but a fuckin' stupid way to do
it...or, hell, things had to be
just right.

ODUM

How's that?

Bittersmith ignores the Deputy, his eyes scan the barn.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

The wife didn't see nothin'?

ODUM

No...but she has a real hard on for
this G'Wain character.

The Sheriff turns his attention to the side door of the
barn, left slightly ajar.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIDE OF BARN - DAY

A Blood trail runs along two sets of tracks fighting to
remain visible against the hammering snow. One, large boots,
the other smaller and barefoot.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

Where's the son?

ODUM

I...don't know...didn't see him,
didn't ask.

Bittersmith shakes his head with this ineptitude.

Odum follows as Bittersmith walks along tracks leading into
the forest.

Arriving at the corner of the barn, the Sheriff looks to his
left.

ODUM

Joe?

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
"Joe"? We friends now?

ODUM
Oh, cut the shit! We've got a body
and a missin' girl--

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
That ain't all you got.

He points to two sets of snowmobile tracks, running parallel
the forest.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
More than just us lookin' for 'em.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Gale, still bleeding from his calf, stumbles through an
opening in the woods. He sees a large home covered in
several feet of snow.

Weathered rocking chairs reside on the distant porch. A
rusty hatchet leans against the stairs.

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - DAY

The small axe SMASHES the window. Exploding glass lands
inside the home. Gale use the hatchet handle to clear the
shards. He squirms his way inside.

All is QUIET. Studying his surroundings, he notices the
house is fully furnished, as if the owner simply vanished.

He spots a fireplace, logs already set inside. Wincing,
he drops the small axe, grabs a novel from a nearby
bookshelf, "Moby Dick", and proceeds to rip out pages.

He places the paper in the hearth, strikes a match from the
mantel igniting the pages.

EXT. HAUDESERT FARM - DAY

Odum, stands on the porch, clumsily holding a girl's coat
and boots. Bittersmith, irritated, smokes a pipe.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
Want to go out and catch a
murderer, is that it? Start your
non-elected career off right? So
where you think they at genius?

ODUM

Looks like they took off through
the woods there.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

You don't say? But where they
going? Who's following 'em?

The only response, a blank stare.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)

She ain't wearing shoes, one of
'em's bleeding, fucking storm of
the century coming....

ODUM

Doc Coates' place...

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

Doc's been dead two months, place
is empty. Everyone in town knows,
gotta figure G'Wain knows. Coates
had more guns inside that place
than butter.

ODUM

I got help coming for you.
Coroner's en route, too.

Bittersmith furiously sucks his pipe.

Another cruiser pulls in, failing to make it up the drive as
the heavy snow continues to pummel the countryside.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

That's my help? Sager? He don't
have the sense to pull his pecker
outta a hive of hornets!

Odum unhitches the radio from his belt. DEPUTY SAGER, (32),
beefy and balding, dragging a reluctant bloodhound, trudges
up the drive.

ODUM

Fenny...get Roosevelt over to the
Coates' house. Tell him he's gonna
need the bronco. He's not to do
nothing 'til I meet up with him.

FENNY (OS)

You run this past the Sheriff?

Bittersmith smiles.

ODUM
Goddammit, Fenny, do it!

DEPUTY SAGER
Where's the body at?

Odum points a pissed off finger towards the barn. Excited, Sager heads in that direction.

Odum holsters his walkie, turns his gaze to Bittersmith.

ODUM (CONT.)
It's your last damn' day and that's not my fault. Tomorrow this is my responsibility. We need prints off the fork handle. Photos before the body's moved. You got to write down the widow's statement. You got to mind the rules, Joe.

Odum's stare down is disrupted by the YACKING of Deputy Sager, still holding the dog's leash, as he throws up his breakfast just outside the barn door.

Bittersmith, eyes still fixed on Odum, shakes his head.

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - DAY

Wet clothes dry by the fire. Gale, shivering, limps to the kitchen wearing only boxer shorts.

Grimacing, he furiously opens cabinets, finding only plates, glasses and coffee mugs.

Under the sink he discovers a bottle of rum and cleaning products. Unscrewing the cap, he smells the alcohol. Leaning against the sink, he dowses the rum over his calf wound.

The coagulated blood melts, leaving the skin clean and the wound raw.

Scrambling through the cleansers, he selects a can of Lysol and a roll of duct tape. He limps to the kitchen table, crashing down into a chair.

Grabbing a Bic pen from the table, Gale disassembles the guts, keeping only the hollow exterior tube.

Fearfully, he jams the plastic into the open wound, hitting the bone. With large pieces of duct tape, he secures the pen shell to his calf.

A swig of rum. He proceeds to tear the cap and white nozzle from the Lysol can.

Tentatively, he aims the nozzle nub into the open end of the hollow pen tube, spraying Lysol directly into the wound.

A BLOOD CURDLING SCREAM resonates throughout the house.

Sweating, in agony, he runs his hands through his red hair. His feverish eyes catch a glimpse of a cheap, vending machine ring residing on his finger.

INT. GROCERY STORE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

SUBTITLE FADES IN: MARCH 25, 1971

GWEN HAUDESERT, (16), skinny and blonde, awkward but pretty, places coins in a toy vending machine.

Cranking the knob, retrieving her treasure, uncapping the plastic bubble, she is pleased with the ring inside.

FAY (OS)

Oh, for Pete's sake, Gwen, you're sixteen years old! what're you doing buyin' junk toys?

Gwen places the ring on her finger.

GWEN

There's no age on what you like.

TWO TEENAGE BOYS walk past, admiring her beauty. Gwen returns their attention.

FAY

Gwen Haudesert!

GWEN

Make up your mind, Momma! Am I too young or too old?

INT. GROCERY STORE - LATER

Fay places groceries on the small register conveyor as the overweight proprietor, MR. HALLAS, tallies the items.

MR. HALLAS

Ok, ladies, let's see, that's twelve eighty-eight.

FAY
My Lord, just for canning supplies?

MR. HALLAS
Oh, I know you like bustin' my
chops every time, Mrs. Haudesert.

The conversation continues but is drowned out by a LOUD HUM only Gwen can hear.

FAY
Gwen...Gwen! What's wrong with you?
Let's go, it's almost dark and you
know your daddy don't like us late.

Confused, Gwen follows her mother, glancing back at Mr. Hallas ringing up another transaction.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Fay places the supplies into the bed of a beaten pick up. Gwen continues looking back at the storefront.

GWEN
Momma, he's in trouble!

FAY
What're you goin' on about?

Gwen's long legs sprint to the store entrance.

INT. GROCERY STORE - NIGHT

As she enters, the two teen boys and several CUSTOMERS stand around the fallen body of Mr. Hallas.

MISC. VOICES
Get an ambulance!...Looks like a
heart attack..Our Father who art in
heaven...Help him!

Gwen, stunned, stands apart from the gathered crowd. A single tear rolls down her cheek. An arm appears, encircling her shoulder.

FAY
Baby...come on, ain't nothin'
neither of us can do for him.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Gwen walks with LIZ SUNDAY, (15), an early bloomer with dark hair and doe eyes looking much more mature than her age.

LIZ

You didn't *kill* him, Gwen.

GWEN

I know that...but I knew he was gonna die. It's not the first time, Liz. I knew my Pappy died before Momma got the call, a full hour after I heard the music.

LIZ

Maybe you're a witch, like one of them Manson girls...

GWEN

I'm nothin' like that! I'm never tellin' you anything ever again!

LIZ

Sorry, it's just, I don't know, weird. Cal got powers, too?

GWEN

My brother? He couldn't pour dog piss from a boot if the directions were right there on the heel.

A car slowly pulls up beside the laughing girls.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTTH (OS)

You two get over here!

Bittersmith leans out the passenger window, pipe in mouth. The girls stop in their tracks.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTTH (CONT.)

Don't make me get out of this vehicle now.

Slowly, they approach the car.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTTH (CONT.)

School ain't done for another forty minutes, why you two ditchin'?

Liz clears her throat, nervously looks to Gwen.

GWEN

Mr. Norman brought a soldier just back from Vietnam in to talk to everybody. Said anyone opposed to listen' could leave...Sir.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

Uh-huh. And you figure that since your your big brother too dumb to be drafted what that soldier has to say don't mean nuthin' to you, is that right?

Gwen looks down. He directs his attention to Liz.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)

What's your story, girl?

Unable to answer, tongue-tied, Bittersmith continues.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)

You can start with your name?

LIZ

Liz...

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

Spit it all out now. I can take kids to the station, too.

LIZ

Liz Sunday.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

Sunday...your daddy's that hippie commie, lives up past you're place, ain't that right?

He aims his pipe towards Gwen.

GWEN

Yes sir, she lives up by us.

Bittersmith opens the passenger door.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

Git in then.

The girls look at each other. Cautiously, Liz enters the car, placing her books on the floor.

Gwen inches closer to the open door.

Bittersmith leans over and pulls the door shut, leaving Gwen on the sidewalk.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)

Tell your ole' man I said
hello. Git along now.

The Sheriff puts the car in gear, pulls off.

INT. SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH'S CRUISER (MOVING) - DAY

Liz hugs the door as Bittersmith drives out of town.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

How old are you Miss Sunday?

LIZ

I'll be sixteen July the fourth.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

Ahh, a firecracker baby.

Dust flies from the tires as the cruiser approaches a tall, redheaded figure carrying a duffel bag. The site of Gale G'Wain intrigues Bittersmith as he continues his interrogation.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

You gotta boyfriend yet?

As the vehicle passes, Bittersmith and Gale G'Wain make eye contact, each suspicious of the other.

LIZ

No, sir.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

Where's your momma?

LIZ

Don't know...never known. It's just
me and my dad, was like that in
California, too.

Bittersmith looks in the rear view to see Gale standing in the middle of the road watching the departing vehicle.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

Cal I Forn I A and sixteen in
July....You've done oral work, I
take it?

LIZ
I'm not old enough to have a real
job yet.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
Hell, any girl old enough for
freckles is old enough.

Another farmhouse, more rundown than the first, approaches
on the right.

LIZ
That's my house, right there.

He speeds up passing the house, grabs her left forearm.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
I know you know how to use your
mouth. Git the fuck over here.

LIZ
No! God help me!

She breaks his grip, the vehicle reaching 55 miles per hour.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
God? You can't appeal to God cause
he don't exist, darlin'. Only God
in these parts is me. You had a
momma she'd tell you the same damn'
thing!

Liz, too sacred to cry.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)
I know all about that pinko daddy
of yours. Raised an uppity girl for
damn sure. The only way you're
going to enjoy your wretched life
is to accept the rules 'round here.

Sobbing, she bends, picks up her books.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)
Fuck your attitude. Fuck god. Git
with the program and drag your ass
over here now.

Liz flings her text books at his face, forcing him to slam
on the brakes. Immediately, she opens the door and runs off
into the woods.

Bittersmith smiles, watching her run through the forest.

EXT. HAUDESERT FARM - DAY

Burt Haudesert sits in the driver seat of an idle tractor. His son, CAL, (20), beefy, strong, confused, stands before the open hood.

BURT
All right now, I'm gonna turn
it. You're lookin' to jerk that
pulley.

CAL
The chain link lookin' thing?

BURT
God damn', boy, how many times I
gotta show ya?

CAL
Daddy....

Burt looks over the hood from his perch to see his son's gaze focused not on the engine, but a stranger standing in the distance at the mouth of the driveway.

Both their eyes shift from the redhead to Gwen, walking towards him from the direction of town.

CAL
You want me to run him off?

CUT TO:

EXT. HAUDESERT DRIVE - DAY

GWEN
You lookin' for Burt?

GALE
I don't know. I was told there
might be some work out here?

Gwen, still walking, notices her father and brother watching. She continues past the stranger, but keeps the conversation going with no eye contact.

GWEN
Talk to the dumb one up there.

Gale follows her gaze.

GALE
Which one?

GWEN
Take your pick.

Picking up his duffel bag, Gale follows Gwen up the drive.

CUT TO:

EXT. HAUDESERT DRIVE - DAY

Gwen walks silently past her brother and father as Burt continues to try to start the tractor.

GALE (OS)
Sir?

Ceasing the task, Burt sits back in the driver's seat.

BURT
You sniffin' out my daughter, boy?

GALE
No, sir. I'm Gale G'Wain, just in from Monroe. I'm lookin' for work.

CAL
Monroe? Ain't nothin' up there but a boy's home.

Burt studies this redheaded stranger.

BURT
Know anything 'bout engines?

GALE
Yes sir, a bit.

The father nods to his son to step away from the hood.

Staring holes into Gale, Cal relinquishes his spot.
Gwen watches from the kitchen window.

Taking off his jacket, rolling up his sleeves, Gale buries himself under the hood.

Burt pulls out a cigarette, lights it up, smiles at Cal.
Smoke storms from his nostrils like a dragon.

GALE

Can you turn it over, sir?

The key is turned with a CLUNKING SPUTTER.

GALE (CONT.)

Give 'er gas quick!

Burt engages the pedal. The engine begins to purr.

BURT

Calvin, go wash up for dinner.

Cal storms off towards the farmhouse, noticing his sister giggling from behind the glass. He rips off his work gloves and throws them at the window.

INT. HAUDESERT BARN - DAY

Burt drops his cigarette butt into a coffee can, pulls out his pack and lights another. He offers the pack to Gale, who silently declines.

Each man studies the other.

BURT

So they say in town I could use some help?

GALE

Cook at the County Seat mentioned so. Is that not right?

BURT

Well, I don't think you was exactly given a bum steer. Hell, April first's a week away, I'd be a damn fool to think I could stay on schedule with just the boy's help.

GALE

That's your son?

Gale looks towards the pens that hold the cows. Manure overflows the floors.

BURT

Boy means well, but useless as tits on that tractor out there. He knows it, hell, sounds like everybody at the County Seat knows it, too.

GALE
I'll work real hard. I just need a
chance. You'll see I'm---

BURT
Boy, stop selling when you've sold.
I can't pay much, but I can feed
ya, you can sleep up there.

Burt points to the loft.

BURT (CONT.)
Might be cold now, but come May,
especially June and July you'll be
real comfy.

INT. HAUDESERT BARN - MORNING

The barn door swings open forcefully. Burt stands in the doorway, noticing the area seems cleaner.

He climbs up the ladder to the loft.

BURT
Let's get crackin' boy, we start
early 'round here.

Arriving on the top rung he sees only a well made,
unoccupied cot.

GALE (OS)
Down here, sir.

Burt turns from his perch to see Gale pushing a wheelbarrow
loaded with manure.

EXT. HAUDESERT FARM - DAY - MONTAGE

Gale continues to shovel manure from the cow pens,
stalls nearly clean enough for the Virgin Mary to eat off
of.

The guts of the tractor engine are torn apart, Gale hand
cleans each component.

Cal struggles to keep up with Gale stacking bales of
hay. Burt watches from the porch, sipping coffee between
drags from his Pall Mall.

Gale feeds the pigs.

Cal and Gale collect eggs from the chicken coop.

Sweating, but undeterred, Gale splits logs as a school bus comes to a stop at the mouth of the driveway.

Gwen exits the bus, walks down the driveway. Gale places his axe down.

END MONTAGE

GWEN

Where's everybody at?

GALE

All of 'em ran to town. Burt said you'd fix me a sandwich.

GWEN

That so?

Gale smiles.

GALE

That's what he said.

GWEN

Uh huh...refrigerator's in the kitchen. Bread's in the box. You don't have hooks for hands.

She returns his smile, continuing to the house.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

The Haudesert family exit the hardware store carrying supplies.

A crowd is gathered on the sidewalk, surrounding CHIP SUNDAY,(36), unkempt and greasy with coal black hair.

On Chip's easel, a painting in progress depicting peaceful protesters standing their ground against soldiers.

CHIP

You can all help end this craziness. Peace really is the only answer. Acceptance.

The family pauses to watch this hippie's act of civil disobedience.

SEWARD POUNDER,(43), a scrawny but hardcore patriot, approaches Burt.

SEWARD

Haudesert, you seein' this?

Burt piles his boxes on top of Cal's.

BURT

Calvin, take your momma back to the truck.

Cal looks to the scrappy Seward.

SEWARD

Boy, you best listen to him.

CAL

Come on Momma.

Burt lights a smoke as his son escorts Fay.

SEWARD

We ain't waitin' no more. Them fuckin' Weathermen lighting a bomb....in our nation's capital?

BURT

We wait. It's not about going someplace else. This's about stopping them commies from coming *here*. Takin' *our* houses and guns.

SEWARD

What the fuck'd you say? You think you're runnin' this outfit?

BURT

You think I'm going to let you get the boys riled up for someone else's fight?

SEWARD

Someone else's fight? You talking like that hippie fag over there!

This comment draws the attention of several of the crowd, including Deputy Odum.

SEWARD (OS)

These freaks need old fashioned schoolin'. Gotta know enough to support this country, not shit on it. You gettin' soft? Hell, I'll bet you don't even know your girl skipped out on that soldier's

SEWARD (OS)
 speech the other day. Now, why
 would that be?

This news visibly rocks Burt.

SEWARD (OS)
 Maybe her daddy's a commie, but he
 hides it real well.

BURT
 You best not be questionin' my
 integrity Seward!

The crowd is now more focused on this quarrel than Chip
 Sunday's art. Odum approaches.

ODUM
 Seward. Burt. We all good here?

They stand eye to eye. The SQUEAL of car brakes disrupts the
 stare down. Sheriff Bittersmith slams his cruiser into park.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
 All right, now everybody, move
 along. I mean it now, skedaddle.

CHIP
 I'm within my rights, I have a
 permit to paint outdoors.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
 Boy, you ain't never asked me for
 that privilege.

The crowd disperses. Bittersmith grabs Chip by the scruff of
 the neck, throws him on the hood of the cruiser.

Odum leaves Seward and Burt in an attempt to
 intervene. Burt blows smoke in Seward's face and walks up
 the sidewalk.

ODUM
 Joe, whoa! What're you doing?

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
 Deputy, you best get the fuck out
 of here! The day I can't handle
 some hippie spoutin' pinko
 propaganda is the day I take the
 bridge.

Bittersmith kicks Chip's legs apart, forcefully frisks him.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTTH (CONT.)
I'm serious, don't make me repeat
myself or you'll be doing Travis'
shit duties for the next year.

Odum turns, enters the hardware store.

CHIP
Hey, man, I got my rights!

SHERIFF BITTERSMTTH
Fuck you say? You're a criminal
boy, lookie there!

Bittersmith throws a joint onto the hood.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTTH
Is that grass...damn. I'll bet both
wrinkled balls there's a lot more
where that came from.

He wheels Chip around, now humbled and docile.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTTH (CONT.)
Relax. We're gonna work this out.

Odum watches from the storefront window.

INT. CHIP SUNDAY'S HOUSE - DAY

Liz prepares a sandwich in the kitchen, SINGING to an AM
radio blasting from the counter. Passing the window, she
sees her father's VW van kicking dust up the drive.

Her indifference morphs into concern. A police vehicle
follows the van.

LIZ
Shit!

She watches as Chip exits the van, waiting for Bittersmith,
who hands him a stack of text books.

The front door opens. Chip enters first with an insincere
smile. Bittersmith roughly walks past him.

CHIP
Liz, honey, the Sheriff found your
text books.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
Hey, darlin'.

Liz takes the books from her father. Bittersmith enters the kitchen, opens the refrigerator, retrieves a beer.

CHIP
Baby...Sheriff Bittersmith here
wants to talk to you---

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
In private. Let us be for a spell.

LIZ
Daddy?

Chip leans closer to his daughter.

CHIP
I am so sorry about this. He wants
to take me to jail. You'd end up in
a home--

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
Git goin', boy. The girl and I got
a conversation to finish.

Chip's quivering lips kiss her forehead. He exits the house.

Bittersmith takes a long swig of Gennese, offers the bottle to the shaking girl. She shakes her head.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)
Suit yourself.

He unbuckles his pants.

Liz, confused, unsure, awkwardly kneels in front of him, head down, refusing to look at this monster.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)
Oh, no, Miss Lizzie. That ship done
sailed. Git up.

She looks up, meeting the gaze of this vermin.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)
Drop them gutchies and bend over
that table there.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHIP SUNDAY'S HOUSE - DAY

Chip walks towards his barn, places his hands over his ears, whimpering. He slides open the barn door.

CUT TO:

INT. SUNDAY'S BARN - DAY

A large opening in the floor. He approaches the spot.

He gets down on one knee, places a foot into the mouth of the hole, finding a ladder rung. Slowly, he descends.

CUT TO:

INT. SUNDAY'S STUDIO - DAY

His hand reaches for a pull chain. Light illuminates this subterranean studio.

Directly under the opening resides a work in progress: a sculpture resembling soldiers raising the flag at Iwo Jima.

In Chip's version, soldiers are replaced by a cross section of housewives, kids, flower children and Native Americans.

The highest part of the flagpole chiseled into a sharp, GLEAMING POINT.

INT. HAUDESERT KITCHEN - DAY

Fay cooks eggs and bacon for Burt, Cal and Gale, seated at the table.

FAY

Burt, honey, this is about the last of the bacon. Looks like Gretchen's time's about up, don'tcha think?

BURT

Gonna have to wait a bit. She's still in heat. Do it now meat'll be so rank a dog'll lick his ass to rid the taste.

CAL

Time comes you gonna let me do it?

BURT
 (to Gale)
 You ever kill an animal before?

GALE
 No sir, not yet.

Burt nods.

BURT
 There's your answer, Calvin. Got a
 man gotta break his cherry.

Fay places full plates in front of the men.

FAY
 Gwen! Get down here you gonna miss
 the school bus!

Gwen hesitantly appears from the hallway. She quickly enters the kitchen, opening the refrigerator in an attempt to hide her face.

FAY (OS)
 What you lookin' for there?
 Everything's on the table.

GWEN
 I ain't hungry.

CAL
 Then get outta the fridge, dummy!

Burt chuckles, Gale's lingering gaze shifts from the refrigerator to Cal, who notices his glare.

Realization washes over Cal's face....this redhead is soft for his sister.

FAY (OS)
 What's wrong with your face?

Everyone's attention turns to Gwen, except for Burt.

Her face, red and swollen on the right side, her neck, littered with bruises the size of manly fingers, sloppily covered with make up.

GWEN
 Stupid cat slept on my face again.

Immediately, Fay turns her back on her daughter. Burt continues to ignore the conversation. Gale notices the body language of the players involved.

CAL

And you call me stupid! Any moron would have a lick of sense to just shut the bedroom door.

BURT

All right, finish up now, that field ain't gonna tend itself.

Burt stands from the table. Cal follows his lead, bolting upwards, wiping his mouth on his sleeve. Gale rises more slowly, stunned by what has just transpired.

EXT. HAUDESERT FARM - DAY

Burt drives the tractor, towing a large flat bed carrying Cal and Gale, each collecting bales of hay, stacking them into large walls.

Cal studies Gale, who in turn contemptuously studies Burt.

EXT. HAUDESERT PORCH - NIGHT

Sitting on the porch swing, smoking, Burt takes a swig of whiskey from the bottle. Gale appears from the darkness.

Silently, he stands in the yard. Burt points to an empty chair. Gale ascends the stairs, takes the seat.

BURT

Son, why weren't you drafted?
There's a war goin' on, you know?

GALE

I plan to volunteer soon, got some things I need to do first.

BURT

Here in Bittersmith? Lucky you didn't get selected then I reckon'.

GALE

Father Sharps, he runs the home, he says there's some law about drafting boys from hospitals, orphanages and such.

Satisfied with the answer, Burt offers the bottle to Gale. He declines.

BURT

If you had a daddy he'd tell ya
it's proper to take a drink when a
man offers.

Gale accepts the bottle, takes a swig, grimaces and coughs.

BURT (CONT.)

Know anything 'bout The Weathermen?

GALE

Sir?

BURT

A bunch of commies running around,
thinkin' they're too good for the
rest of us. Some rumblin's they
gonna join with the niggers. Want
to straighten out our country.

GALE

Sounds like trouble to me.

Burt takes the bottle back from Gale, another long chug.

BURT

Some fellas from the lodge think we
should put a stop to it.

GALE

You're a Mason?

A drunken grin gives Burt the appearance of a rabid coyote.

BURT

I am a travelin' man, but those
ain't the people I'm referring to.
Some are, but not the asshole I'm
referencin'. He's a militia man.

GALE

I'm not sure I'm educated enough
about it to offer any type of
opinion, sir.

Burt nods.

BURT

You know, we got somethin' in
common, you and I. Don't know my
daddy neither. Well, that ain't
entirely true. I known him all my
life, he just don't know me.

Gale silently sits through a long pause. Burt's thoughts trail off, eyes looking up to the moon.

BURT (CONT.)
 Man's an vermin. Wouldn't've been
 able to teach me nothin' I didn't
 learn myself anyways.

From her second floor bedroom window, Gwen listens to the conversation.

The voices of the men suddenly become muffled by a LOUD HUM. Gwen's pupils dilate.

CUT TO:

INT. HAUDESERT HOUSE - NIGHT

Gwen races down the stairs two at a time, bolting through the kitchen where Fay, back turned, is talking on the phone.

She bursts out the front door onto the porch.

CUT TO:

EXT. HAUDESERT PORCH - NIGHT

Startled by the sudden appearance of his daughter, Burt drops the Jack Daniel's bottle.

BURT
 Goddammit, girl, what the hell's
 wrong with you?

Confused, Gwen realizes her father is now alone on the porch. She looks to the barn to see Gale entering the doorway, retiring for the night.

GWEN
 I...

BURT
 Get your ass back in the house!

GWEN
 But...

FAY (OS)
 Burt...

Burt and Gwen turn to Fay, standing in the doorway.

FAY

That was your step sister on the phone. Your momma's passed.

He ruminates on these words. Takes another swallow.

BURT

She weren't never nothin' but a whore anyways.

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - DAY (PRESENT)

Gale gets dressed, his clothes dried from the fire. He throws more wood from the pile into the flames.

He finds a notepad and pen on the coffee table. Pulling a few dollars from his pocket, he lays it on the table, scribbling a note.

He places the paper back on the table, retrieves his rusty axe and struggles to stand.

Dragging his injured leg, he ascends the staircase to the second floor.

A large gun cabinet beckons from the end of the hall. Limping, he reaches the door, realizing it's unlocked.

For the first time, he sees the BLACK "X" on his forehead. Disgusted, he rubs it off with his sleeve.

Inside he finds several rifles, shotguns and a revolver, as well as enough ammunition to feed a small army. He checks the turret of the six-shooter...it's loaded.

Struggling with his injuries, he secures the gun into the waist of his pants.

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE BATHROOM - DAY

He places the rusty axe on the toilet tank. An enormous, free standing, sterile white vanity looms in front of him. Gale's dirty hand opens the latch.

His amazed expression turns to frustration, as his gaze moves to his leg wound.

GALE

Shit.

Inside the vanity, every form of medicinal equipment rests neatly on the shelves: syringes, bandages, large jars of medication, Mercurochrome, peroxide, gauze and tape.

A medical bag reveals this house belongs to a doctor.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Deputy Odum drags the barrel of his rifle through the snow, along the path of nearly covered blood and footprints.

He turns to ensure the track made by the rifle remains as a guide back. The heavy snowfall works hard to ensure this improvised breadcrumb attempt is near futile.

The bloodhound stops, looks up to Odum.

ODUM

Get moving Ernie! I don't like it anymore than you!

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE BEDROOM - DAY

Spread out on the meticulous bed are several of the found firearms, medical supplies and ammunition.

Gale opens the closet door, pulling out warm sweaters and camouflage hunting pants. A large footlocker rests in the corner, begging his attention.

He limps to the trunk, opens it. Several dozen ANIMAL TRAPS in various sizes. He shuts the lid.

EXT. HAUDESERT FARM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A rattlesnake, coiled and crazed, lies in wait.

Gale feeds Gretchen, the mother pig living on borrowed time. Her babies follow her every step. Somber from the sight of this swine family, he closes the gate.

Gale walks from the pig sty towards the barn, carrying two slop buckets, oblivious to the snake just four feet away.

GWEN (OS)

I'd stop there if I was you.

Still walking, he smiles in the direction of the voice. Gwen, stands near the fence, a pitchfork by her side.

GWEN
I'm serious!

Gale stops.

GALE
I don't have time for playin' now.

GWEN
And I don't have time to suck out
rattler venom.

She nods with her chin towards Gale's feet. Looking down, seeing the serpent, he tenses.

GALE
Holy shit!

GWEN
Don't move now, not even an inch.

Frozen in place, sweat forms on his forehead, his eyes glued on the snake slowly slithering towards his boots.

From her distance, Gwen clutches the pitchfork.

In an instant, the tines of the pitchfork impale the snake to the ground. Gale looks up, Gwen still several feet away.

Unceremoniously, he stomps on the mortally wounded reptile.

GALE
How'd you do that from way over
there?

GWEN
Spent all my life on a farm, girl
gotta learn to protect herself.

She approaches, takes one of the slop buckets from his hand. She still wears the toy ring. She walks towards the barn. Gale looks at the crushed, bloodied rattlesnake.

INT. BURT & FAY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The moon shines through the bedroom window. Fay, laying on her left side faces the window, eyes open. The digital flip clock rotates: "2:58 AM".

Burt rises from the left side of the bed. Hurriedly, she shuts her eyes as he exits the room.

CUT TO:

INT. GWEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Gwen lies awake, the gloved hands of her Mickey Mouse alarm clock point to twelve and three.

A CREAK on the floorboards in the hallway. She tenses.

Dim light shines from under the closed door, slowly darkened by the appearance of bare feet. The door swings open.

INT. MASON'S LODGE - NIGHT

Dozens of ROUGH AND TUMBLE MEN take their seats in the smoke filled room, MURMURING amongst themselves.

Seward Pounder sits in the front row, across the aisle from Burt, Cal and his hulking friend JORDAN,(19).

DEPUTY ROOSEVELT,(30), blue collar, ruggedly handsome in uniform, stands with Burt in front of the gathering.

DEPUTY ROOSEVELT

Now, I know we got us a divide in how to proceed here. There's unsanctioned talk about us gearing up with our Colorado brethren.

Seward Pounder nods in agreement, as does a solid third of the room.

DEPUTY ROOSEVELT (CONT.)

Let me stress that word, unsanctioned. Seward, you got somethin' to say, now's the time.

Pounder stands, walks towards the front of the room, his eyes bore holes into Burt. He faces the congregation.

SEWARD

Brothers, them groups outside of Denver are true patriots, if I have to say so myself. They know somethin' ain't done, and done quick, the Jews and the jigs are gonna be the ones dictating the future of this country.

APPLAUSE, as the minority of the room tries to reinforce his words through pure mob mindset. Burt stands.

BURT

Quiet down, now! Shush it! You numnuts are too young to even understand what's going on. I hate the darks and the heeb more than any of ya!

SEWARD

Doubt that highly.

BURT

Boy, you even know any of those Colorado fellers?

No response.

BURT (CONT.)

Well, do ya'?

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (OS)

I know 'em all.

Every head in the room turns to see Bittersmith, in street clothes, standing at the rear of the room.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)

I ain't saying their right with what they're plannin', but I certainly ain't saying they're wrong neither.

SEWARD

So what are you sayin'?

Bittersmith pulls out his pipe, lights the bowl, taking his time, too wise to let a piss ant like Seward Pounder get a rise out of him.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

Boy, my family's been callin' things since my great granddaddy named Bittersmith after hisself. Let's not forget who wears the ring here.

SEWARD

I'd be more likely to kiss a sow's ass than to kiss your ring.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

You don't havta kiss it, but you damn well need to know who owns it.

SEWARD

You been throwing your weight
around this county more than a bit
too long, Sheriff.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

Seems we got some yahoos here with
gumption. Let me tell you fellas
somethin' 'bout gumption. Hell,
I've heard tale of a drifter, come
to town, quite some time back now.
He thought he was ripe with
gumption. I remember him being told
to suck on a broom handle, best he
got it wet as possible, too. Rumor
has it one of our stand up
residents had a good heart, gave
this feller a minute to pick off
any splinters so they wouldn't give
him problems later. That patriot
had to spend a week scrubbing the
shit off his knuckles, he rammed
that thing so far up that drifter's
asshole, so they say. Come to think
of it, I seem to recall something
'bout all that was left of his
gumption was a pile of shit and
blood down the on the corner of
Alcott street.

SEWARD

Now what the fuck does that havta
do with our situation, Sherrif? You
threatin' me? You think these
men'll stand for that?

Nonplussed, Bittersmith continues with his monologue.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

I got one question fer y'all. Ever
seen a coyote take down it's prey?
Cunning fuckin' animals, coyotes.
They don't pounce, they stalk.
Nuthin' ever good came from rushin'
into somethin'.

The more intelligent members of the room understand this
analogy. Seward Pounder's minority begin to rumble.

MISC. VOICES

What the hell's that mean?...No
fuckin' sense...shouldn't even be
here...pussy...soft old man.

Bittersmith puffs on his pipe.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
Deputy....you on duty, boy?

Deputy Roosevelt easily reads between the lines.

DEPUTY ROOSEVELT
This unofficial meeting's over. Go
on now, everybody go home.

Hesitantly, the crowd rises, beginning to disperse. Seward again, face to face with Burt.

SEWARD
It's startin' already. What
happened to our right to assembly?
You don't have final say on this.
The future of my rights, yours to,
you dumb shit, rely on men like us.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (OS)
You heard what the law said
Pounder? Git goin'

Bittersmith stands behind Pounder, sucking his pipe.

Seward leaves as Burt locks eyes with Bittersmith, who returns the gaze with a slow nod.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

MR. SHUCKERS, (50's), stands in front of the classroom.

MR. SHUCKERS
All right, everybody, I know you're
all itching to get out of here and
start your summer, but I feel
compelled to remind you...we still
have one full day of school.

The class laughs, including Gwen who sits in the back row. Liz, wearing a blouse two sizes too large for her, nervously looks at her desktop.

MR. SHUCKERS (CONT.)
We still have three more students
who need to present their Hawthorne
speeches. So let's get this show on
the road, what do you say?

The teacher flips through his paperwork.

MR. SHUCKERS (CONT.)
Ok, Ms. Sunday, the floor is yours.

Liz, flushed, slowly stands.

MR. SHUCKERS (CONT.)
Whenever you're ready, Liz.

Clutching her papers, she proceeds to the front of the room.
She clears her voice, hands trembling.

LIZ
I chose to write about the
character of Pearl.

MR. SHUCKERS
Nice choice. We all remember Pearl,
Hester Prynne's daughter born out of
wedlock? Class?

BOY
(under his breath)
Bastard girl from a whore momma.

The class LAUGHS, breaking her concentration.

Concerned for her friend, Gwen silently motions for Liz to
present just to her.

LIZ
It wasn't her fault. She didn't ask
to be born.

MR. SHUCKERS
Interesting. So you think Pearl was
a victim?

Gwen nods, trying to coach her, but something is
wrong. Stains begin to appear on Liz's breasts.

LIZ
I just don't think she deserved to
be born into a situation like that.

Mr. Shuckers notices the stains as well. His eyes meet
Gwen's, the sole attentive student.

He cranes his neck towards the door, signaling Gwen to take
Liz from the classroom. Gwen rises without hesitation.

INT. GIRL'S RESTROOM - DAY

In the farthest stall, Gwen holds her sobbing friend.

GWEN
How do we make it stop?

LIZ
It's going to stain!

Gwen blots her blouse with toilet paper.

GWEN
It won't stain, it's only...

LIZ
Oh, God, everyone saw!

GWEN
No one saw.

LIZ
Mr. Shuckers gawked at my boobs!

GWEN
He's a boob gawker. Yours, mine.
Everything's going to be fine. And
if he says a word, I'll kill him.

Liz forces a smile. Gwen continues to blot.

LIZ
Can you do that?

GWEN
Do what?

LIZ
Kill somebody? Use your powers?

Gwen feels something odd inside Liz's bra as she tries to negate the colostrum.

GWEN
I told you, it's not like that. I
just know when, that's all.

Gwen pulls two thin leaves of cabbage from Liz's bra.

LIZ
Dad said this would dry me up.

GWEN

He knows?

The question goes unanswered as Liz begins to weep harder. Gwen hugs her tight.

GWEN (CONT.)

Can't you press the milk out?

LIZ

You make more that way.

Gwen reaches into her pockets, pulling out coins. She places them in the sanitary napkin dispenser. Retrieving the pad, she repeats the process as the bell RINGS.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY

Liz and Gwen sit in the last seat of the moving bus.

LIZ

Why would God let this happen?

GWEN

You could runaway, Lizzie.

LIZ

Will you go with me?

GWEN

I can't...

LIZ

It's that redheaded boy, ain't it?

Gwen blushes. Liz momentarily reverts to a typical girl.

LIZ (CONT.)

What's he like, besides the hair?

GWEN

I don't know...his joints are too big. He works from sunup to sundown, never really saying nothing.

LIZ

Does he like you?

GWEN

I'm not sure he likes anything but food and laboring. There's times I

GWEN
 catch him lookin' at me. Not dirty,
 like when someone holds a puppy.

Childishly, Liz smiles in wonderment.

LIZ
 I'll bet you'd runaway with him.

INT. HAUDESERT HOUSE - DAY

Gwen lounges on the couch, a soap opera on television, but her attention focused outside on a laboring Gale.

A KNOCK. She opens the door to reveal TWO YOUNG GIRL SCOUTS.

GIRL SCOUT #1
 Hello, Miss. Care to buy some
 cookies to help support our troop?
 They're only a dollar a box?

GWEN
 I don't know...what kind you got?

GIRL SCOUT #1
 All kinds...we got peanut butter,
 shortbread...

GWEN
 Let me see if I can find some
 money.

Gwen trots up the stairs. The second, silent Girl Scout mesmerized by the drama unfolding on the television.

INT. CAL'S ROOM - DAY

Gwen rifles through Cal's unattended wallet left on his dresser. Her eyes grow wide with discovery.

EXT. HAUDESERT FARM - DAY

A sealed Trojan condom lands at Gale's feet.

GWEN (OS)
 Pick it up!

GALE
 You don't know what that's for.

GWEN
I surely do, Gale G'Wain.

GALE
Where'd you get it?

GWEN
Not tellin'.

GALE
If your father saw you with that...

Gwen sniggers, retrieves the rubber. Walking over to the nearby garden, she sits cross-legged, pulling a cucumber from the earth.

GWEN
You watchin'?

She rips the package open with her teeth, clumsily proceeding to roll the prophylactic over the vegetable.

Proud of her efforts, she holds the protected cucumber up for Gale's inspection.

GALE
So now it won't get you pregnant?

INT. HAUDESERT BARN - NIGHT

Gale tries to sleep in the loft, tossing, turning, covered in a ratty blanket. He pulls a tattered, well worn photograph from his duffel bag.

A photo of a young, attractive redheaded woman. He studies the photo full of wistful wonder.

EXT. HAUDESERT FARM - DAY

Leading GRETCHEN, the mother pig, via a rope, Gale somberly brings her to Burt standing by a blue child's wading pool.

Burt, holds a pistol, a large knife strapped to his hip. A wooden tripod meets at a point six feet above the pool.

BURT
That's good, just tie her up there.

Gale ties his end of the rope to a hook at the precipice.

BURT (CONT.)

Here.

He hands Gale a black grease pencil.

BURT (CONT.)

Draw an X between her eyes.

The pig stares lovingly at Gale.

Gale draws the mark on the ignorantly blissful swine.

Burt hands him the pistol. Hesitantly, Gale cocks the gun, aiming at the "X" on the animals head.

BURT (CONT.)

You gotta get closer, boy. Need a kill shot, not a crazy scampering beast with brains pumping out.

Gale inches closer to the docile pig. He places the barrel of the pistol flush against her head. Burt grins.

BURT (CONT.)

Come on now, nice sos she don't scare.

Gale turns his head, preparing to pull the trigger. He lowers the gun.

GALE

I can't do it.

BURT

Can't or won't?

GALE

I'm not sure...both?

In one motion, Burt retrieves the pistol, BAM! The pig drops to the ground.

A matter of course, he pulls the knife from it's sheath.

BURT

Can't be squeamish anywheres in this life, boy, 'specially on a farm. All right now, let's hoist her up and get to the guttin'.

EXT. HAUDESERT PORCH - NIGHT

Gale sits on the porch studying the moonlight in isolation. A hard rain falls, lightning flashes across the sky, a ROAR of thunder.

His thoughts disrupted by a COMMOTION inside.

 GWEN (OS)
 Calvin, stop it! I didn't!

A THUNDERING CRASH echos from the living room.

CUT TO:

INT. HAUDESERT HOUSE - NIGHT

Cal has Gwen pressed against the living room wall, his hands gripping her frail biceps.

 CAL
 Slut, I know you took it!

 GWEN
 What would I want with something
 like that?

 GALE (OS)
 Let her go!

Cal, still securing his sister, turns.

 CAL
 You having your way with her,
 ain'tcha boy!

 GWEN
 Stop it! Get your hands offa me!

 GALE
 I said let her go!

Grinning the smile of the powerful, Cal punches Gwen in the stomach. With the grace of a lion, Gale pounces.

Both men locked, hands around the throat of the other. Gwen slumps to the floor, holds her stomach, gasping for air.

Lamps CRASH from end tables. Pictures PLUMMET off walls.

Fay appears in her nightgown.

FAY
Stop it! Both of you!

The brawl continues, Gale gains the upper hand.

Fay tends to her daughter, still slumped on the floor in pain combined with anger from her mother's concern.

Burt, wearing only boxer shorts, stumbles bleary eyed down the stairs carrying a shotgun.

Enraged, Gale hammers fists into a bloody-mouthed Cal.

The butt of the rifle CRASHES into the back of Gale's skull, forcing him to crumple onto his victim. Holding his head, he rolls over onto his back.

BURT
What the fuck you doin', boy?

GALE
(gasping, grimacing)
He hit her...

BURT
(to Cal)
What the hell you do that fer?

Cal slowly stands, blood pouring from his face. He looks to his father, then to his sister still cowering on the floor. He delivers a solid KICK to Gale's chest.

BURT (CONT.)
You best answer me!

CAL
(hesitantly)
She took somethin' of mine.

BURT
I know she didn't take the sense
God never gave ya! What she take?

Gwen looks to her brother, silently pleading for compassion.

CAL
He's balling her, daddy...took a
rubber outta my wallet, too.

Burt's bloodshot eyes shift into slits. He turns his attention to Gwen. Confusion turns to anger, then jealousy.

BURT
Get up boy!

Holding his chest, half bent over, Gale stands.

GALE
It's not like that---

The business end of the rifle immediately appears directly on Gale's chin.

BURT
You think I'm stupid, son? I give you work, meals...this how you show your appreciation?

GWEN
Daddy, that ain't true!

Burt and Gale, eye to eye.

BURT
You shut your dirty cocksucker, girl! Right now this here's between me and him.

CAL
Shoot him in the pecker, daddy, that'll teach him.

BURT
Ain't nobody asked for your two cents, Calvin!

Burt moves the barrel up to Gale's forehead.

BURT (CONT.)
I shoulda known...let a bastard into my family...trying to take what's mine...tell me...who's around to miss ya if I kill you right here, right now, feed your carcass to the hogs...

Carefully, Fay approaches her husband.

FAY
Burt...we don't need this...you don't want this kind of trouble. Even if nobody'd find out, these things can stay with a man.

Gwen watches Gale intently, as if she is waiting to hear the precognitive HUM....nothing.

He lowers the rifle.

BURT

I want you outta here first thing
in the mornin'.

Gale solemnly nods.

BURT (CONT.)

Next time I see you sniffin' round
my property I'm gonna shoot you
dead. Understand what I've told ya?

Without looking at Gwen, Gale slowly walks past Burt and
exits the home.

INT. HAUDESERT BARN - NIGHT

Standing in the barn entrance, his duffel packed, Gale
watches the storm. Heavy winds whip twigs and debris across
his field of vision.

He looks towards the house in pitch blackness. Lightening
momentarily illuminates the yard, providing a glimpse of a
figure running towards the barn carrying...something.

He drops his bag, preparing to defend himself.

As the figure gets closer, another burst of lightening
reveals Gwen carrying a sack.

GWEN

What're you doin'?

She enters the barn, soaking from the rain, feet muddy and
bare.

GWEN (OS)

You're not thinking to leave
tonight, are you?

BURT

I can't stay here. You shouldn't be
here either...you gotta git.

GWEN

It's ok, he's drunk, asleep. I
brought you some food to take.

GALE

What I meant was you shouldn't be
living here. I saw him punch you---

Gwen opens the bag to show him biscuits, rolls, fruit and leftovers.

GALE (CONT.)

---and I swear when he talked to you like that, you're daddy...I could've killed him.

She looks up from the burlap to his eyes, smiling, seeing a different breed of man than she is accustomed to.

GWEN

Why are you here? Why of all places did you end up here?

GALE

I didn't end up here, I set out to come. I got somethin' needs done.

GWEN

What could make Bittersmith, Wyoming so important to anyone?

GALE

That ain't your concern.

GWEN

You want to know what I think, Gale G'wain? No, let me tell you what I know is true.

New emotions flood over Gale. His ruddy complexion becoming even more flushed.

GWEN (CONT.)

Whatever brought you here...it brung us together, too. You know that, don't you?

Hearing these soft words, Gale opens his mouth to respond, but nothing comes out.

Gently, he takes the burlap sack from Gwen's hands, lays it on the ground near her muddy feet. She trembles, not used to sincerity from a man.

His fingernails, holding a day's worth of dirt, the hands, rough and calloused, gently move wet hair from her face.

He leans in, awkwardly kisses her, then pulls back.

Her eyes smile to his. She turns her gaze upwards, then back to meet his. She lifts her eyes to the loft. He follows her glance with sudden, silent understanding.

CUT TO:

INT. HAUDESERT BARN - MORNING

Gale's eyes flutter open, as he awakes in the loft...alone.

GALE

Shit!

Bolting up, he shakes hay from his clothing, gathers his duffel and descends the ladder. He notices his left hand on the rung.

Residing on his ring finger: a cheap, plastic, toy ring.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Gale walks with purpose, his duffel across his shoulder.

A Deputy cruiser pulls alongside him.

DEPUTY ROOSEVELT (OS)

Hey son, need a lift?

Gale continues to walk as the cruiser slows to his pace.

GALE

No thanks.

DEPUTY ROOSEVELT

You that young guy Burt hired to help out, ain'tcha?

GALE

Yes sir.

DEPUTY ROOSEVELT

Hell, son, I'm a good friend of the Haudesert's, get in.

INT. DEPUTY ROOSEVELT'S CRUISER (MOVING) - DAY

Sitting in the passenger seat, Gale clutches his duffel, staring straight ahead.

DEPUTY ROOSEVELT

Yeah, me and Burt, pretty much known each other all our lives. He's a good man.

Gale turns in disbelief to the oblivious deputy.

DEPUTY ROOSEVELT (OS)

He's always been there when I needed somethin', not that I ever needed much, I'm talking like advice and stuff. I never was any good at memorizing thing. He helped me figure out a way to recall my Masonic Catechisms. Never thought I'd be able to do it, but no sir, Burt was there for me. He ever talk to you 'bout joining?

GALE

He seemed more focused on the militia.

DEPUTY ROOSEVELT

He told you 'bout that?

GALE

Not much, just asked me what I thought about the Negros and the commies causing trouble. Told him I'm going to enlist soon.

DEPUTY ROOSEVELT

That right? Good for you son! We could use more boys like you, fellers that take actual with pride in their country.

As the car enters town, Gale sees a weather beaten sign: "Haynes Automotive Help Wanted".

GALE

Mind if you let me out here?

Roosevelt cranes his neck to see what caught Gale's eye. He pulls into the empty garage lot.

Gale opens the door as Roosevelt bends down level to the open passenger window.

DEPUTY ROOSEVELT

You're a good man, son. Gale, inini't?

GALE

Yes sir, Gale G'Wain.

DEPUTY ROOSEVELT

Well, you need a ride back to Burt's you just flag me

DEPUTY ROOSEVELT
down. Anything else, just let me
know!

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - DAY (PRESENT)

Exhausted from his struggles, Gale sleeps restlessly on the sofa, encased in a long afghan.

The flames in the fireplace attempt to fight off the wind and snow swirling in from the broken window.

A figure appears blocking the hearth. A boot kicks Gale roughly in the leg.

VOICE (OS)
Get up, murderer!

Gale opens his eyes to see Deputy Roosevelt standing in front of him, pistol aimed directly at the fugitive.

Painfully he attempts to rise from the sofa.

DEPUTY ROOSEVELT
Sit down you son of a bitch!

Silently, Gale complies.

DEPUTY ROOSEVELT (OS)
Murder. Breakin' and entering.
Kidnapping. Where's the girl?

Gale looks around, attempting to recall what has transpired.

GALE
I didn't kill nobody. I had to get
outta the storm. I'm paying my way.

He nods to the notepad and crumpled money on the coffee table.

The gun still set on Gale, he bends down and picks up the pad.

DEPUTY ROOSEVELT
"To who evers house this is, I took
some rum, Lysol and plan to eat
something. Also burned a book to
get a fire started. Here's all the
money I have on me. Gale
G'Wain." Well, now, a
conscientious killer.

Roosevelt cocks the gun.

DEPUTY ROOSEVELT (CONT.)
 You got three seconds to tell me
 where Burt's girl is, boy.

Gale's eyes dart, contemplating his predicament.

GALE
 Hold on a second, you don't
 understand---

DEPUTY ROOSEVELT
 One...

There is no way of rationalizing with this man.

GALE
 ---I didn't kill Burt...couldn't
 never harm Gwen, neither---

DEPUTY ROOSEVELT
 Boy, you best shut up and start
 talkin'!

GALE
 You gonna shoot me no matter what,
 ain'tcha?

DEPUTY ROOSEVELT
 Three!

BANG! A pistol shot. Deputy Roosevelt crumples to his knees,
 dropping his firearm.

He falls face down onto the coffee table, blood drips from
 his forehead onto the notepad.

Billowing smoke from a hole in the afghan. Gale throws the
 covers back to reveal the smoldering barrel of the earlier
 found pistol.

GALE
 Shit...

CUT TO:

A table linen is pulled roughly from the dining room table
 causing a bowl of rotten fruit to CRASH to the floor.

EXT. ABANDONED HOUSE - DAY

With tremendous difficulty, Gale drags the wrapped body through the snow. Arriving behind a wood pile, logs stacked to a height of six feet, he looks around.

Enormous drifts continue to build as the storm worsens. In the distance, he glimpses Roosevelt's cruiser, the cherry top lights trying to peek from the snow.

He unwraps the tablecloth, searches the corpse's pockets.

INT. DEPUTY ROOSEVELT'S CRUISER - DAY

CRUNCH...RIP...CRUNCH. The driver door finally flies open. Gale thrusts himself into the seat, starts the car.

In gear, the vehicle refuses to cooperate, snow encased around all wheels. He sinks his head to the steering wheel.

A LOUD STATIC CRACK shakes him back to reality.

ODUM (OS)

Roosevelt? You got your ears on?

Gale picks up the portable radio from the passenger seat.

ODUM (OS)(CONT.)

Bittersmith, you listen'?

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (OS)

I'm here, what you got?

Bittersmith's voice causes Gale's eyes to harden.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - DAY

ODUM

The dog found her.

Odum stands over Gwen's lifeless body, half covered in snow, laying on her back under a tree.

Her left foot wrapped in a makeshift denim shoe. Her hands, folded over her bloody chest, just under the handle of a large knife.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (OS)

Well?

ODUM

You best talk to her mother.
Coyotes might not leave nothing for
an open coffin if I don't stand
watch. Send Sager up here with a
snowmobile. Tell 'em to try to
follow my tracks.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (OS)

Fuck...figured as much.

ODUM

This is one vicious bastard. Looks
like he beat the hell out of her,
face all swollen up.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (OS)

Think I see a toboggan here, I'll
send it with him.

ODUM

Joe...somethin' else. She got a
knife plunged in her chest, but her
hands, they're all folded up like
she was prepared by the undertaker.

CUT TO:

INT. HAUDESERT BARN - DAY

Bittersmith stands in front of a rusted toboggan in the
corner of the barn. Deputy Sager assists the coroner placing
Burt's body bag onto a gurney.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

Her eyes, they open or closed?

ODUM (OS)

Closed.

CUT TO:

INT. DEPUTY ROOSEVELT'S CRUISER - DAY

Gale holds his head in his hands listening to his pursuers.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (OS)
 You listen to me, now. This G'Wain
 ain't got nothing to lose. He needs
 put down, no question 'bout
 it. You understand me? Roosevelt,
 you best be listenin' to that, too.
 Take that son of a bitch down.

He turns off the ignition, exits the vehicle.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Odum slumps down, turns his radio off, hangs his head as
 Ernie, the bloodhound also decides it's time for a break.

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE BEDROOM - DAY

DARKNESS. Light breaks through to reveal Gale standing
 overhead. He reaches down, retrieving... something.

INT. HAUDESERT HOUSE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Gwen lays on her bed, headphones on, meticulously cutting
 paper pink hearts with large scissors, totally oblivious to
 the conversation occurring on the porch below her window.

CUT TO:

Burt slugs a Schlitz, sitting on the porch swing, holding
 court with Cal and his militia friend Jordan.

BURT
 You boys know this needs done?

JORDAN
 Yes sir, we won't let you down.

BURT
 Yeah, well, you two ain't gonna
 just be making me proud, you
 understand that? This decision is
 bigger than me. All great men got
 that way by their actions.

CAL
 We got this, daddy. When?

BURT
 Give it a week, maybe two. I don't
 need to know 'til it's done.

The three silently study each other, unspoken understanding.

BURT (CONT.)

Alright then. Cal, take the truck.
Might find some whiskey under the
seat. Yous two go out and chase
tail tonight, make some memories.

INT. HAUDESERT HOUSE - NIGHT

Cigarette dangling from his mouth, Burt walks into the house. Fay dozes on the sofa, an episode of "Ironside" on the television.

He walks to the set, incrementally increasing the volume, checking to see that his wife is still sound asleep.

INT. GWEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Laying on her stomach Gwen smiles, headphones still in place. Her nose wrinkles, a scent she knows all too well.

Burt stands in the doorway, admiring his daughter's colt like appearance. He closes the door.

Gwen retreats to the headboard of the bed, the headphones fall to her neck.

GWEN

This is wrong.

BURT

That's a relative opinion.

GWEN

You better never come for me again.

BURT

You don't like what I've been
giving you? Liked it enough when we
started. Came on real strong. Now
you changing your mind. That it?

Burt crosses the room, moving towards the bed.

GWEN

I never liked it. Don't come any
closer!

BURT

Or?

She clutches the scissors.

GWEN

I'll cut you!

BURT

Cut me? Bitch, I'll kick your little hind end up through your shoulder blades.

He takes the scissors from her trembling hand, places them back on the night stand. Sits on the bed. His large hand grabs her thigh.

BURT (CONT.)

I see...some suitor come in, younger than me. You thinkin' he's the one, he's gonna treat ya good, make ya cum? Girl, ain't nobody knows you or your pussy better'n me. Nobody ever gonna.

GWEN

You know she smells you on me.

He caresses her hair.

BURT

Don't you worry none about your momma, she knows she got it good.

He leans in to kiss her. Gwen SPITS in his face. He smiles, face dripping. Burt buries his head into her chest, wiping the spit over her young breasts.

Smiling, he raises his face to hers. He SLAPS her soundly across the face.

INT. HAYNES AUTOMOTIVE GARAGE - DAY

A grubby garage corner set apart with a shower curtain.

Behind the curtain, Gale sleeps on a cot, under a paint stained moving blanket.

The ROLL of a large garage door. HAYNES, (40's), a happy to be alive grease monkey, enters carrying two mismatched mugs.

HAYNES

Wakey, wakey, eggs and bakey.

Shirtless, Gale sits up, rubs his eyes, the toy ring prominent on his finger. He accepts the coffee.

GALE

Don't look like bacon and eggs.

HAYNES

Well, it'll hafta do. I'll buy lunch at the County Seat later.

GALE

Thank you.

Haynes pulls an overturned bucket to the cot, sits down.

HAYNES

Boy, I gotta tell ya', I don't know how you ended up on my doorstep all them weeks ago, but it couldn't of come at a better time.

GALE

Well sir, I was always taught things tend to work out.

HAYNES

I'm serious, now. Word was going 'round all four counties if work needed done, don't take your truck to Haynes', won't get it back for a month, and that was true, only so much one man could do. Ain't no one wants to learn the mechanics of being a mechanic no more....and then, just like Heaven opened the gates and dumped you out fer clogging the commode, you show up.

GALE

That wasn't me, was framed by Gabriel himself.

Haynes chuckles solidly.

GALE (CONT.)

I'm serious, those angels crap big!

He laughs even harder, the belly encased in his too small, grease stained jumpsuit, rolls heartedly.

INT. THE COUNTY SEAT - DAY

Jeanie The Waitress places two plates of burgers and fries in front of Haynes and Gale sitting in a window booth.

JEANIE

There you go fellas, you just let me know if you need anything else.

She winks at Gale, who nervously looks down to his food. Smiling, Jeanie walks away.

HAYNES

Looks like you got a fan.

Gale stands.

GALE

Gotta go make some room.

HAYNES

Out with the old, in with the new, huh?

GALE

Don't take none of my fries, now.

He departs. A bell hanging from the entrance door CLATTERS as Cal and Jordan enter, taking a seat at the counter.

Haynes savagely eats his burger as Cal approaches the booth.

CAL

Hey Billy.

Smiling, Haynes look up.

HAYNES

What's going on there, youngster?

CAL

Lookin' to bring Daddy's truck in. Jordy and I had a little too much fun a few weeks back, ass ended it into a tree.

HAYNES

Now how the hell'd you do that?

CAL

Whiskey, how else? Crushed the whole tail gate, both rear lights busted, too.

HAYNES

Well, drop her off tonight, gotta new guy. We'll get you fixed up.

CAL

Can't, got something to do tonight, I'll bring it by tomorrow or ---

Gale reappears, taking his seat. Cal is stunned to see him.

HAYNES

Speak of the devil. Cal, this here's Gale G'Wain. Seems Calvin busted up his daddy's truck out drinking.

GALE

That so?

CAL

Yeah...well...tomorrow then.

Cal returns to the counter. Gale pushes his plate away. Haynes, mouth full of meat and bun looks on confused.

HAYNES

What?

INT. HAYNES AUTOMOTIVE GARAGE - NIGHT

Sitting in his corner, curtain closed, Gale again studies the photo of the redheaded woman. He plays with the toy ring, spinning it on his finger.

HAYNES (OS)

Knock, knock.

Gale pulls the curtain open.

HAYNES

Hope I ain't interrupting nothing. Need you to run over to Seward Pounders junkyard.

GALE

Tonight?

HAYNES

Right now. Can't get him on the phone, but he'll be there. He's gotta a fifty Chevy he's got stripped, I need that alternator.

INT. HAYNES' TRUCK (MOVING) - NIGHT

Driving down a country road, Gale signals left.

A speeding pickup truck appears from the upcoming left turn, making a sharp right turn approaching Gale.

Nearly clipped by the wild pickup, Gale looks into the side view mirror. This departing truck has a smashed in gate and two broken tail lights.

EXT. SEWARD POUNDER'S JUNKYARD - NIGHT

The truck door opens. Gale approaches the closed garage. LOUD MUSIC emanates from inside. Light shines through the grease on all six tiny garage windows.

Gale pulls a chain, CLANGING a large bell. No response. He KNOCKS on the garage door.

GALE

Mr. Pounder?

He KNOCKS again, much harder.

GALE (CONT.)

Mr. Pounder, Billy Haynes sent
me. Said you got an alternator fer
me?

Still no response. Gale wipes a window with his sleeve, peers into the garage.

Swinging from a noose, the lifeless body of Seward Pounder, face purple, neck hanging by an industrial extension cord.

INT. GWEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Laying in her bed, lights on, Gwen reads "The Outsiders". Her eyes glance to the bedroom door, the lock secured.

PING...PING...her attention turns to the window. She rises, opens the window to find Gale, pacing nervously.

GWEN

(whispering)

I knew you'd come back.

GALE
(whispering)
Meet me in the loft?

INT. HAUDESERT BARN - NIGHT

They lay, snuggled in the loft. Gwen, blissfully nuzzled across Gale's chest.

GWEN
I don't care about Seward Pounder,
I just want to leave with you,
right now, why can't we?

GALE
We will, but I told you, not yet.

GWEN
I can't take it no more here...you
don't understand...I'm dying...he
takes everything from me. I know
you know, you know everything 'bout
me, don't you?

GALE
Yes...

GWEN
We're connected, me and you...I
ain't never felt that before.

GALE
Same here.

GWEN
Then why can't we go?

GALE
I told you, we will. Soon.

He touches her face.

GALE (CONT.)
I promise. I'm going to take you
away from here. We'll get married
proper, go anywhere in the world.

GWEN
You going to be held to that
promise, Gale G'Wain. Where we
gonna go?

GALE
Not sure...anywhere, I guess.

GWEN
Mexico!

Gale looks at her, daydreaming on his chest.

GWEN (CONT.)
No, wait! Canada.

She thinks for a moment, nods her head.

GWEN (CONT.)
Canada...definitely.

GALE
Why we gotta go to a whole new
country.

GWEN
Just cause you're born here don't
mean you can't leave.

SILENCE, both lost in their thoughts of the future. Gwen
breaks the quiet, disturbed.

GWEN
This thing you gotta do, can I
help?

GALE
You can't. It's somethin' for
me...for my momma.

GWEN
I thought you didn't know her?

GALE
Didn't say that. I never met her,
that don't mean I don't know her.

Gwen props herself up. Kisses Gale tenderly.

GWEN
Don't get involved in this hangin'.
Ain't none of our business. Just do
what you need to so we can leave.

GALE
(smiling)
To Canada?

INT. SEWARD POUNDER'S GARAGE - DAY

Bittersmith smokes his pipe studying Seward Pounder's hanging corpse. Deputy Odum walks around the body.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

Boy, you on work release. Why'd you even call this in? Coulda' been three states away by now.

BRADY, (40's), a skittish, balding man with long hair down the sides, tall enough to hunt geese with a rake, stands at a distance from the lawmen.

BRADY

Now if I woulda done that you'd be thinking I did it...right?

ODUM

Did you?

BRADY

Hell, no! Seward treated me like a brother, offering me a job, helping me get time cut off my sentence. No sir, he was a good man.

This comment produces a chuckle from Bittersmith.

Odum focuses on a stool resting perfectly under a workbench.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

So you was soft on ole Seward?

BRADY

I don't quite follow...

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

You came in this mornin', first thing you said, birds chripin', ain't that right?

BRADY

Yep, same as always.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

You see Seward like a dead chicken, call us...which phone did you use?

BRADY

Uh...that one, right over there.

Bittersmith looks at his watch: "TEN AFTER TEN".

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
 Prison van dropped you off 'bout
 ten til nine. I known Henry for
 years, punctual that feller.

BRADY
 (nervously)
 Yeah....he's a good one too.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
 Brady, ya see, I'm pretty punctual,
 too. We come right out as soon as
 Fenny got the call, ain't that
 right, deputy?

Odum, trying to visualize how Pounder could have committed
 this supposed solitary act, responds without looking up.

ODUM
 Didn't even finish my coffee.

BRADY
 Hold on now, I didn't do this. Like
 ya said, why would I even a called
 it in?

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
 Hell, boy, I know you too dumb to
 do this yourself. Deputy, go get
 the fingerprint kit.

Deputy Odum exits the garage.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)
 Know what's on a garage phone,
 Brady?

Brady blinks, confused.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)
 Grease. Your grubby prints should
 be all over that dial. Now, you
 want to tell me what you stole from
 the house?

BRADY
 Stole? I ain't got nothin' on me!

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
 I know you ain't got nothin' on ya,
 you skinny bastard, but I guarantee
 I ain't gonna find your
 fingerprints on that phone. I will,

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
 however, bet my full nut sack
 they're all over the house phone.

The convict stutters, shifts from side to side.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)
 Boy, I'm not gonna fuck with you
 all day. I say the word and you
 spend the rest of your life jacking
 off to a concrete wall. Once a
 thief, always one. Where'd you put
 the stuff you keifed?

Odum returns with the kit.

BRADY
 (crestfallen)
 Blue mustang, below the spruce.
 Couple guns. Little cash. Fifty
 bucks. That's all.

Bittersmith pulls his pipe from his clenched teeth.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
 Get him back to the pokey.

BRADY
 Wait a minute now, I got just over
 a year left...I called it in...

Odum cuffs the criminal.

ODUM
 Let's go.

He escorts the dejected, skinny thief into the back of the
 cruiser. Bittersmith slides the stool Odum was studying
 closer to the hanging body.

Once in place, he kicks it over. The returning Odum sees
 what is transpiring.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
 Suicide. Shame. Call the coroner
 out here, tell him I said so.

ODUM
 Sheriff...it's not...

Bittersmith turns, walks towards his vehicle.

ODUM (CONT.)
Wouldn't there be a note or
something?

Without looking back the Sheriff holds a piece of paper up.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
Sloppy work, boy. Don't know how
you missed it.

He starts the engine, pulls out, tires spitting gravel.

INT. HAYNES AUTOMOTIVE GARAGE - NIGHT

Another long day ended, Gale shuts off the overhead
fluorescents, heads to his corner shanty.

He opens a can of tuna, smiling at the toy ring.

A RAPID KNOCKING startles him from the moment. Hesitantly,
he walks through the garage to the side door.

GALE
Who's there?

FEMALE VOICE (OS)
Gale G'Wain?

GALE
Maybe...what do ya' want?

FEMALE VOICE (OS)
Come on, it's freezing out here!

He opens the door, confused to see Liz Sunday wearing an
oversize coat, carrying a satchel.

LIZ
You gonna let me in?

He steps aside as she rushes past him.

GALE
Do I know you?

LIZ
You really are cute!

She looks around the garage.

LIZ (CONT.)
 Got anything to eat around here?

Unbuttoning her coat, Gale sees her large belly.

GALE
 You're Gwen's friend, ain'tcha? She
 said you had a situation.

LIZ
 Is that what she called it?

He bends to a footlocker, retrieving potato chips, hands
 them to the pregnant visitor.

GALE
 You're daddy know where you are?

LIZ
 That bastard don't deserve to know
 nothin' about me, that includes my
 comings and goings.

Ripping open the bag, she devours the chips in an unladylike
 fashion. Gale points at the satchel.

GALE
 Look, I don't know what you're
 plannin', but you can't stay here.

LIZ
 Good, cause I don't aim to. I'm
 heading out, leavin'.

GALE
 That so?

Liz nods, mouth full.

GALE (CONT.)
 I'm figuring you didn't just stop
 by here for snacks?

Crumbs flow from her lips.

LIZ
 I was thinking you'd go with me.

GALE
 Uh huh...and where would we
 be headin' to?

LIZ
Out West, I got an aunt in
California I think.

Gale takes the bag of chips from her.

GALE
Now why would I want to go to
California with a pregnant girl?

LIZ
Cause Gwen said you was a good
person, the best man she's ever
known, including her dead pappy.

This second hand compliment induces Gale to smile.
Instinctively he touches the ring.

GALE
I got other plans, and they don't
include you and your kid.

LIZ
They include Gwen?

GALE
That ain't none of your concern,
now, is it?

Liz approaches Gale, places her hands on his chest.

LIZ
You know she's damaged,
don'tcha? Worse than me, even.

He grabs her by the wrists.

GALE
Look here. I got a girl, and I
ain't gonna let no harlot, with a
baby in her belly no less, convince
me otherwise.

She looks deeply into his eyes, too young to understand the
art of seduction, too old to think she can fake it.

LIZ
You're from the boy's home. She
told me so. My daddy says that's
where my baby's gonna go.

He releases her wrists, she steps back.

LIZ (CONT.)
What's it like?

GALE
What's what like?

LIZ
The orphanage. Is he gonna be happy there?

Gale leans against the table.

GALE
It's different for everyone.

Tears form in her eyes.

LIZ
But it worked out for you?

GALE
I guess so...know for sure it's a boy?

She shakes her head, trying to be brave.

GALE (CONT.)
If it's a girl they'll send her to St. Tobias.

He walks closer to her.

GALE (CONT.)
That'd be better. Girls go quicker than boys, families pick 'em first.

Liz wipes tears from her cheek.

LIZ
I don't want to give my baby away. Don't know why, but I don't.

GALE
Where's the daddy?

Her attempt at bravado fails as she breaks down.

LIZ
Can you just drive me home?

Liz rises her face to meet Gale's gaze.

LIZ (CONT.)
I won't flirt with you or
nothin'...I just want to go home.

INT. HAYNES' TRUCK (MOVING) - NIGHT

Gale drives silently.

LIZ
I can't run off all by myself with
a baby ready to come out.

Without looking at his passenger he offers his response.

GALE
Ain't that what family's for?

LIZ
I guess, but this baby needs a
daddy if it's gonna have a chance.

GALE
I don't have a daddy.

LIZ
Well, yeah, you do. That's how it
works, everyone has a dad---

GALE
Not me.

His harsh tone forces Liz into silence. A long,
uncomfortable pause.

LIZ
You know Calvin, don'tcha?

Gale turns to look at his passenger.

LIZ (CONT.)
He's always been soft on me. Think
he would help?

Silently, Gale returns his attention to the road.

EXT. CHIP SUNDAY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Chip sits on the porch step smoking a joint. The truck pulls
down the long driveway. He darts up to meet the vehicle.

Liz exits as Gale puts the truck in reverse. Chip embraces
his frigid, distant daughter.

CHIP
Where have you been?

She pushes him away as the exiting Gale watches the scene.

LIZ
Nowhere!

CHIP
You can't just leave like that! I
thought he took you. Who was that?

LIZ
Nobody! Stop touching me!

INT. HAYNES' TRUCK - NIGHT

Backing up to the end of the driveway, Gale cuts the wheel,
puts the truck in drive.

Pausing momentarily, he sees the daughter and father
continuing their argument in the distance. Releasing the
brake, stomping on the accelerator, he pulls off.

INT. MASON'S LODGE - NIGHT

A capacity house for this militia meeting.

BURT (OS)
I don't believe in talkin' ill
'bout the dead, but you all need to
know. Seward Pounder was a coward.

Burt stands at the podium holding a crumpled piece of paper.

BURT
Took the shameful way out. Says so
right here in his own words. Didn't
think we were prepared to do
anything about the situation going
on in this country. Not enough of a
man to control his emotions,
couldn't think things through. We
all know he wasn't a patient man.

He gauges their reaction. Many nod, others look away.

MISC. VOICE (OS)
Bullshit!

BURT
Somebody want to stand up and
repeat that?

SILENCE envelops the room.

BURT (CONT.)
Suicide. Coroner said so.

MISC. VOICES (OS)
My ass...Ain't so...Not Seward
Pounder...

Bittersmith steps from the side of the room, approaches Burt who graciously turns over the podium. The MURMURING quiets.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
Men, there ain't never been a
homicide in Bittersmith on my
watch. Anyone here think different,
now's your chance to be heard.

The Sheriff waits, scanning the room, looking for any brave or foolish soul that wants to question the official story.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)
Mr. Haudesert, unless you got
anything else to discuss I think
you can call this meeting closed.

INT. HAYNES AUTOMOTIVE GARAGE - DAY

Gale's head is buried under the hood of a station wagon.

HAYNES
Hey boy, news just said we got a
huge storm coming early next week,
just in time for Christmas.

GALE
You don't say.

HAYNES
A big one, too. Means there's gonna
be a run on shit paper and rock
salt. I need about three hundred
pounds of the later.

He pulls his head away from his work.

GALE

You tryin' to tell me somethin'?

HAYNES

Take a fifty from the drawer, and
bring back the receipt. Get us a
couple Coca Colas too.

INT. HARDWARE STORE - DAY

Gale enters the store. THE BELL on the door draws attention from the FEMALE CLERK (20), as well as Sheriff Bittersmith, casually sitting on the counter above his prey.

Stopping dead in his tracks, Gale watches Bittersmith, passively studying him, as he proceeds to chat up the clerk.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

Yes, ma'am, pretty thing like you
shouldn't haveta be all by herself
on the holidays.

Gale proceeds down the aisle, making eye contact with the girl. She silently pleads with Gale for assistance.

Rounding an end cap, Gale finds himself in front of a display of motor oil, pretending to browse.

FEMALE CLERK

Well, my family and little girl is
plenty of company for
me. Christmas' about kids anyways.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

So they say.

Bittersmith looks up to the large, shoplifting deterrent mirror. He sees Gale staring holes into him.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

You passing through?

Gale looks over the shelving.

GALE

I work for Billy Haynes.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

That so? Billy don't got enough oil
at the garage?

GALE

He sent me to fetch rock salt.

FEMALE CLERK

We keep it in aisle eight.

She rounds the corner, eager to distance herself. The Sheriff studies the body language of both as Gale is led to the proper location.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

I don't like you, boy.

The young girl turns pale. Gale stiffens.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)

I don't like the way you've been watching me, like you're set to rob the place.

GALE

I'm no thief.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

You ought to move along, 'fore I decide you and me need to have a more thorough conversation.

SILENCE...broken by the CLANG of the entrance door. An ELDERLY COUPLE enters the store, the man grabs a basket.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)

I see you again, it's royal goddamn trouble.

Bittersmith bounces off the counter, tips his hat to the old lady, proceeds to the exit. The door again RINGS, inducing a sigh of relief from the clerk.

INT. HAYNES AUTOMOTIVE GARAGE - DAY

Christmas morning. Gale slicks back his red hair, looks in the mirror.

He dons his nicest clothing: a ratty sweater, clean jeans, everyday work boots, his plastic toy ring.

Haynes stands in the doorway, watching Gale primp.

HAYNES

Merry Christmas, Gale G'Wain.

Gale turns, smiling.

GALE
Merry Christmas, boss.

Haynes approaches, an envelope in his hands.

HAYNES
I'm gettin' ready to see my momma
up in Big Horn. This is fer you.

He hands him the envelope.

GALE
What's this?

HAYNES
A token of my appreciation.

Gale opens the envelope, a mixture of cash, various denominations, several twenties, mainly fives.

GALE
I can't take this...

HAYNES
Forgive my French on this holiest
day, but bullshit. You came outta
nowhere, saved my skin.

Gale folds up the envelope, puts it in his back pocket. Extends his hand to his employer.

Haynes playfully pushes Gale's hand away, gives him a solid, brotherly hug. This foreign embraces initially startles him, but he gives in to the sincerity of the moment.

HAYNES (CONT)
I know you ain't got no one here.
Don't suppose you want to go meet
momma with me?

GALE
I got somewhere I need to go. Think
you can give me ride on your way
out?

INT. HAUDESERT HOUSE - DAY

Burt sits at the kitchen table, drinking coffee, smoking. Fay checks a ham in the oven. From the living room Calvin, studies a new double barrel rifle.

He rises with the gun, enters the kitchen, hugs his mother.

CAL(CONT.)
Thanks, momma.

FAY
I had nothin' to do with it.

Fay refills her husband's mug with hot java, steam streaming from the open mouth.

BURT
You can't kill what you're huntin'
without two shots you ain't much of
a hunter, boy.

Burt smiles, taking a drag from his cigarette.

Cal cocks the rifle, staring down the barrel, pointing it out the window. He notices a truck pulling up the drive.

CAL
We expectin' someone?

Fay looks from her preparations, color drains from her face.

FAY
Burt...

Cal opens the door before Gale can knock. Haynes' truck already pulling off in the distance.

The rifle pointing at his head, Gale doesn't even blink, his fleece lined denim coat over his ratty sweater.

CAL
You sure are stupid Gale G'Wain.

GALE
I need to speak with Burt.

The two study each other for a long moment. Burt, still sitting at the table, without turning, addresses his son.

BURT
Let him in.

Cal steps aside, the rifle still raised, following Gale as he enters the house.

BURT (CONT.)
Sit down.

Slowly, Gale walks to the table, sits down across from him.

BURT (CONT.)
 More balls than brains...you want
 some coffee?

GALE
 No thank you.

Gale's eyes firmly on Burt, who focuses only on his resting
 coffee mug.

GALE (CONT.)
 Sir, you think you can ask Calvin
 to take his sights offa me?

BURT
 Not yet.

Slowly spinning his coffee mug, Burt knows his wife is
 silently watching the scene.

BURT (CONT.)
 That pig ain't gonna cook itself.

Fay turns her back on the table, continuing with her work.

BURT (CONT.)
 You got somethin' to say?

GALE
 Mister Haudesert, I love Guinevere
 and I want to marry her. I want
 your blessing.

Exhaling, eyes watering, Fay forces herself not to turn
 around and interrupt.

CAL
 You want me to shoot this son of a
 bitch right here or take him
 outside?

BURT
 Calvin, take your toy upstairs and
 go play with yurself.

CAL
 Daddy?

BURT
 Boy, I said git!

Cal lowers his weapon, exits the room. Burt stubs out his
 smoke in an overflowing beanbag ashtray, calmly lights
 another one.

BURT (CONT.)
You was sayin'?

GALE
Guinevere and I want to get
married. I've got a good wage in
town, and I'll take care of her. I
came for your blessing.

Coolly, casually, the lit cigarette dangles from his mouth.

BURT
My blessin'?

SILENCE. Gwen appears in the doorway of the kitchen, she
opens her mouth but nothing comes out.

FLASH! Burt throws his hot coffee in Gale's face, surprising
the redhead. Gale falls off his chair.

GWEN
Gale!

Nimble, like a panther, Burt pushes his chair back, kicks
the table over onto his prey.

FAY
Burt, don't!

He grabs Gale by both legs, dragging him to the door. Cal
THUNDERS down the stairs hoisting his rifle.

Burt FLINGS the door open, continues to drag Gale onto the
porch. THUD! THUD! THUD! Gale's head hits each step on the
way to the yard.

Crashing boots stomp on Gale's chest. KICKS to the
head. Gale doesn't have a chance in this position.

Burt pauses, catching his breath, wiping a sleeve across his
nose.

On the porch, Fay holds Gwen back, both fearful of the end
result. Cal stands silently as well, rifle aimed and cocked.

Burt circles Gale, every quarter orbit taking another stomp
on his victim.

Breaking away from her mother, Gwen pushes the barrel of
Cal's rifle skywards. BANG! An errant shot goes off.

BURT
Gimmie that!

The son hands the rifle to the father.

BURT (CONT.)
You all get back in that house
right now, or so help me God you'll
all wish you did!

Stunned, concussed, laying on his back, Gale's eyes meet the horrified Gwen's. Weakly, he holds up his hand showing her he still wears the ring.

With one hand carrying the rifle, the other grabbing Gale's ankle, Burt drags him through the cold snow to the barn.

Like a wildcat, Gwen unsuccessfully tries to breakaway from her mother and brother, as they drag her into the house.

CUT TO:

INT. HAUDESERT BARN - DAY

Huffing for air, Burt drops Gale inside the barn. Eyes glazed, Gale rolls, attempting to get up.

Burt kicks him soundly in the ribcage, forcing him down again to his back.

Burt stomps to the work bench, searching.

Gale struggles to breathe, blood pours from his face.

Finding the pig slaughter instruments, Burt straps the encased knife to his belt, clutches the black grease pen.

Returning with the rifle, Burt kneels down, draws a "X" on his victim's forehead.

BURT
Not only do you come back to my
property, after I told you not to..

He straddles Gale, placing the barrel of the rifle directly on the "X".

BURT (CONT.)
...you think you're gonna come in
here and take my girl away?

GALE
(wheezing)
Does Missus Haudesert mind you
fucking Gwen?

Burt smiles.

GALE (CONT.)
Cal visit his mother while you're
with your daughter?

BURT
I shoul'da known better than to
bring a drifter into my home.

Gale shifts his gaze from Burt's dead eyes to the dirty fingernail encasing the trigger.

Drawing his remaining strength, he KICKS Burt soundly in the nuts. The final shot from the rifle, firing just left of Gale's head.

A HOLE blasted into the wooden floor, just a bit smaller than the circumference of a pitchfork handle.

Burt crumples to the ground, gasping for air.

BURT (CONT.)
You rotten bastard...

Gale, dizzy, concussed, gets himself into a sitting position. Burt plunges the large knife into Gale's calf.

On his belly, Burt twists the knife with a wicked smirk. Gale unleashes an AGONIZING SCREAM.

With his uninjured leg, Gale kicks Burt squarely in the jaw, causing him to lose his grip on the still buried blade.

Instinctively, Gale rips the knife from his flesh, causing a rush of muscle and blood to hang from his limb.

Self-preservation takes over. He holds the knife to his enemy's grinning, bloodied face. Pausing to consider the situation, he throws the knife across the barn.

Burt grins even more devilishly.

BURT
You a pussy, boy! A queer!

Gale spits squarely in his face, soundly delivers another kick to Burt's forehead.

Scrambling to a hunched stance, Gale staggers through the door into the cold Christmas day.

INT. HAUDESERT KITCHEN - DAY

Burt, blood drying on his mouth, forehead beginning to swell walks into the kitchen, the family sits at the now upright table.

All are SILENT, with the exception of Gwen, whimpering, distraught. Fay consoles her daughter.

Opening the cabinet under the sink, Burt retrieves a bottle of Wild Turkey, takes his seat. Dumping a full water glass onto the floor, he refills it with whiskey.

FAY

Burt---

BURT

Bitch, you say one fuckin' word
I'll beat you 'til you bleed then
beat you some more for bleedin'!

He takes a long swallow. SILENCE, stillness.

BURT (CONT.)

That bastard's gone.

Gwen's SOBBING becomes more hysterical.

Fay and Cal silently contemplate the repercussions of this statement. He pours himself another whiskey.

Cal reaches for the platter of ham. Burt violently stabs the back of his son's hand with his fork.

CAL

Christ!

BURT

We don't eat til we've said grace.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Dazed, bleeding from the side of his head, Gale staggers towards a barren oak. The black "X" emblazoned on his forehead, he slumps, propped up by the massive tree trunk.

Weakly, he rips larger the knife hole in his jeans, the wound, a mixture of meat, pink flesh and glistening blood.

Scraping together handfuls of snow, he packs the coldness over the gaping hole, his lips quivering in pain.

His eyes close, as he swoons out of consciousness.

CUT TO:

INT. RECTORY OFFICE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A younger Gale sits across the desk from FATHER SHARPS, (50's), a balding, weary priest, wire frame glasses perched on his nose.

GALE

I feel it's time, I know it is.

FATHER SHARPS

I can't stop you, but I will say the boys will miss you.

GALE

And I'm gonna miss them, but that don't change anything. You understand, right Father?

FATHER SHARPS

All too well, I'm afraid.

GALE

I need to know about my mother.

Taking his glasses off, the priest pinches his nostrils.

FATHER SHARPS

Is that really so important, Gale, when you have your whole life ahead of you?

GALE

Someone made a decision.

FATHER SHARPS

The circumstances? That's what this is about?

Gale's committed stare provides his response.

FATHER SHARPS (CONT.)

Why does it matter? In my years here, many young men have asked for their stories. I've always believed in telling them, because a man's

FATHER SHARPS (CONT.)
history belongs to him. But if you
can, I'd like for you to forget
that you want to know. These things
are immaterial.

GALE
Did you know *your* mother?

A pause. Father Sharps turns his gaze to the window.

FATHER SHARPS
I will tell you what I know, but I
fear you will take an incomplete
story and fill in the blanks with
your imagination. Before I tell
you, promise me you will always
favor yourself with absolution for
wrongs which were not yours and for
which no one holds you accountable.

GALE
That bad?

The concerned priest frowns, pushing his glasses into place.

GALE (CONT.)
I do, Father, I promise.

FATHER SHARPS
An unsubstantiated story. Your
mother was a good woman. She didn't
cause the trouble she found herself
in. Did her best to be responsible.
She was a good woman.

GALE
You said that already, don't stall
me.

Father Sharps stands, crosses to an old filing cabinet.

FATHER SHARPS
Tell me when you want me to stop.

GALE
At the end of it.

Pulling out a folder, he hands Gale a photo of an attractive
young redhead.

FATHER SHARPS

She came to me with a baby, just a day old. She passed this child to me. Physically handed you over, only a cloth diaper and that wasn't even clean. I was surprised, thinking she only wanted me to hear her confession, and here a baby crying in my arms. You were a noisy one. But when you learned to talk, you ceased communicating almost entirely.

GALE

Who was she?

FATHER SHARPS

I don't recall her Christian name.

GALE

Father....Gary...it has to be on a form or something.

Hearing Gale use his first name momentarily stuns the priest. He sits on the corner of the desk, faces Gale.

FATHER SHARPS

The laws are clear, son. I can't tell you her name. And she doesn't live around here anymore. She placed you in my arms and simply disappeared.

GALE

Who was she?

FATHER SHARPS

Truly, I only know what she told me. She was poor, alone, from the East she said. I recall she was passing through on her way to Oregon. She hoped family there would help her get established. A fresh start.

GALE

Passing through and decided to drop off her baby?

FATHER SHARPS

She was passing through when she got pregnant, stayed in the area until she delivered you.

GALE

But that don't make any sense.

FATHER SHARPS

She had no intention of getting pregnant, and the family that awaited her...they wouldn't have understood.

GALE

What family doesn't understand being in a family way?

Father Sharps rises, grasping for a reason to end the conversation.

FATHER SHARPS

I'm telling you what she told me.

GALE

What about my daddy?

FATHER SHARPS

Gale, please, it doesn't---

Gale stands, determined to get his answers.

FATHER SHARPS (CONT.)

She only said she was passing through a neighboring town and was hauled into jail for being a vagrant. It was there, she said a man...took advantage of her.

GALE

I'm the son of a rapist?

FATHER SHARPS

I don't know that. She might have been trying to save face. The social pressures of an unwed mother--

GALE

She said she was raped?

Sharps closes his eyes, contemplating ending the discussion.

GALE (CONT.)

Gary, was she raped?

FATHER SHARPS
That's what she said.

GALE
Who was it?

FATHER SHARPS
I don't recall.

GALE
Bullshit! She told you!

FATHER SHARPS
It was a long time ago...

Gale's intense glare confirms the priest's fear. Pandora's Box now open the priest attempts to salvage the situation.

FATHER SHARPS (CONT.)
What will you do? Revenge? It doesn't matter. You're here. You're talented and smart and will have whatever success in life you choose. You can start a business. Be a teacher, you're very skilled with motors. You can do anything. The man who made you isn't you.

The redheaded orphan moves closer to the only father figure he has ever known, fist clenched in rage.

FATHER SHARPS (CONT.)
Who runs a jail, Gale?

GALE
Where?

FATHER SHARPS
Bittersmith.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

The snowstorm is in high gear as Odum oversees the countryside. Ernie, the bloodhound, seems oblivious to the storm, his floppy ears perk up.

In the distance, the ROAR of an engine signals the arrival of Deputy Sager.

EXT. ABANDONED HOUSE - DAY

The engine HUMMING resonates in the distance.

Limping, Gale has difficulty opening the front door. Making it to the porch, exhausted, he slumps with his back to the wall, struggling to catch his breath.

Strange mounds of snow, like large anthills, strategically surround the perimeter of the front and side yard.

The HUMMING gets increasingly LOUDER, different than that of Deputy Sager's vehicle. Gale squints through the storm searching for this new sound's origin.

BANG! Splinters of wood siding erupt next to Gale's head.

Two snowmobiles race towards the home from a distance of three hundred yards.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Ernie watches as the two lawmen strap the sheet covered body, onto the toboggan.

ODUM

Think you can get Ernie and the girl back to my truck?

Sager checks the tethered rope between the snowmobile and the sled.

DEPUTY SAGER

This ungodly storm's gonna make it rough, but I reckon I'll manage. It'd be nice if Roosevelt was respondin'...maybe he got that drifter in cuffs or dead already.

ODUM

Maybe...

A DISTANT GUNSHOT. The two look at each other. ANOTHER SHOT.

ODUM

That's not Roosevelt's pistol...

Odum jumps on the snowmobile seat, turns the engine.

ODUM (CONT.)

Take the girl down to the truck,
nearly a mile down near the bend of
Rattlesnake Road, you know where I
mean?

Sager nods unconvincingly.

ODUM

Christ! Ok, just find the truck,
get her in the back and get up to
Doc Coates house.

He hands Sager the truck keys.

CUT TO:

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - DAY

With much difficulty, Gale aims a rifle out the broken
window, unable to get a shaky bead on either of the rapidly
approaching snowmobiles.

Both riders are large, menacing, wearing full snowsuits,
goggles and wool hats, the lead driver brandishing a rifle.

Gale fires a shot, the kick knocks him onto his ass.

CUT TO:

EXT. ABANDONED HOUSE - DAY

The shell splatters across the front of the lead snowmobile
causing it to jerk to the left, directly into an unnatural
mound of snow.

Plowing through the mound, the skids of the vehicle lock,
bitten by a large STEEL ANIMAL TRAP, buried in the snow.

The sudden jerking of the vehicle expels the driver through
the air, headfirst into a large oak.

Nervously, stupidly, Gale sticks his head out the window.

The second snowmobile pulls to a stop. The seemingly
overweight driver rocks two times, attempting to dismount.

GALE

Just take your friend there and
turn around and leave!

Waddling to the sprawled body, the driver nudges the partner in the leg with their boot.

GALE (CONT.)

I'm serious, get him and git. You guys don't know nothin' 'bout this.

The plump driver removes their goggles, looks to the house. It is Liz Sunday. She yells loud enough to be heard over the storm.

LIZ

I think he's dead!

EXT. HAUDESERT DRIVE - DAY

Boot prints in the snow, walking in circles around the driver's door of Bittersmith's cruiser.

His lit pipe clenched in his teeth, lost in the throes of full blown contemplation, he finally opens the vehicle door, grabs the radio handset.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

Fenny?

The response is immediate.

FENNY (OS)

What the hell's going on out there Joe?

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

Can't say fer sure right now, but don't like it when I hear gunfire and the town don't have anyone stupid enough to go hunting in this bullshit.

FENNY (OS)

Want me to call in Elderberry's crew?

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

Dear, I love you, but you know they ain't gonna be able to make it out here til next week with this fuckin' storm. No...get Travis on the pipe, tell him to get his ass over to Election Road, close to Doc Coates' place as he can make it. I'll meet him on the road there.

FENNY (OS)
Travis? You sure, Joe?

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
Gotta let a greenhorn in when the
bullpen's empty.

INT. GWEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Eyes dry and red, weeks before her body would physically be able to produce anymore tears, Gwen sits on the floor in the corner.

Holding a kitchen knife in her hands, looking at her elegant, feminine wrists.

Startled from this life ending decision by the CLUMPING, stagger of drunken footsteps.

She rises to her feet, unaware of the proper manner in which to handle the weapon. She settles on two hands raised in front, blade pointing down at eye level.

The door slowly opens. Before it has reached the end of it's fulcrum, Gwen charges. Burt, nonplussed, pushes her to the floor like a dog swatting a flea.

He kneels down, grabs her wrist and applies sufficient pressure to induce her to drop the knife.

GWEN
You're going to hell...for
everything you've done, you're
going to hell!

BURT
That so? Figure I don't have to
waste no more time on church then.

With a full, closed fist, he punches her squarely in the face, hard enough to CLUNK the back of her head to the floor.

Dazed, she looks up with disgust at her father. Not an ounce of fight left in her. He rips her T-shirt down the middle.

BURT (CONT.)
This here's all your fault,
bitch. All of it! Smooth ass,
pussy hanging out all over.

GWEN
Just do it!

BURT
Oh, no, this time's gonna be
different.

Forcefully, he flips her to her belly.

EXT. HAUDESERT YARD - NIGHT

From the edge of the woods, Gale, using as much stealth as possible in his damaged condition, crawls towards the house.

He looks up to notice Gwen's bedroom light is the only one on, shining like a beacon through the darkness. Inching closer, he can see her staring out the window.

CUT TO:

INT. GWEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Her face already starting to swell, she clutches her bathrobe tight, looking across the fields. A movement in the yard attracts her attention. It's Gale.

INT. HAUDESERT BARN - NIGHT

Barefoot, Gwen runs into Gale's extended arms.

GWEN
Are you real?

GALE
We gotta leave this place, now.

She breaks the embrace, looks at his woeful condition: Black "X" on his forehead, gash in his leg, crystallized blood surrounding the wound, bleary, distant look in his eyes.

GWEN
You're leg...

Gale looks down, replaying the savage attack in his mind. He moves from Gwen, eying the floor of the barn. He spies the bullet hole, but this is not what he is hunting.

GWEN (CONT.)
Gale...

He finds Burt's large knife, in the corner. Gale snatches the blade.

GALE (CONT.)

We gotta go, right now!

GWEN

We can't go anywhere with that leg!
Oh, baby, stay here, in the
loft...at least 'til mornin'.

GALE

Dammit, Gwen, he'll kill me!

GWEN

We can't make it nowhere like this.

Gently, she takes the knife from his hand, places it in the pocket of her pink robe, only the handle protruding.

GWEN (CONT.)

Let me fix you a place up
there...I'll go fetch some alcohol
and bandages. I'll go talk to the
police first thing tomorrow--

GALE

No! We ain't callin' *him*.

She strokes his red hair, trying to calm him.

Gwen squeezes his arm, moves to the ladder. She moves A PITCHFORK resting against the rungs to the side. She climbs upwards, painfully, her posterior in pain from the rape.

Gale notices fresh bloodstains on her upper thighs as she struggles to climb.

BURT (OS)

You a stupid cunt and so is she.

Halfway up the ladder Gwen turns, Gale trembles as he looks to Burt, leaning in the doorway, rifle aimed on Gale.

GALE

Burt...you don't haveta do
this...you gotta let us get
married. It's the right thing.

BURT

The right thing, huh? What the fuck
you know about that?

GALE

You can't be doing what you've been doing forever, it ain't the way of things. Let me take her. You won't have that urge no more.

GWEN

Daddy, please! Why can't you just let me have this one thing? I ain't never told no one.

BURT

All but him, ain't that true?

Burt brings the rifle up this eye.

BURT (CONT.)

Get up that ladder, girl. Head to the corner. No need to see this.

Gwen scampers down the rungs.

GWEN

I won't! You gonna do this it's gonna be in front of me!

BURT

Suit yourself, makes no difference.

He cocks the rifle, aiming on Gale's black "X". Gale sweats profusely, breath escaping in heavy, frequent bursts of fog.

GWEN

Daddy...do you love me?

Burt drops the rifle.

BURT

That ain't got nothing to do----URRKKK.

The PITCHFORK handle extends from the front of Burt's neck, the tines sticking out of the back at the base of his brain.

He drops the rifle, stumbles forward, hands flaying to grab the long wooden handle.

Burt falls forward, the handle dowsing southward, landing perfectly in the existing BULLET HOLE. He twitches momentarily, then loses control of his bowels and bladder.

Like a half constructed scarecrow, his body lies limp propped by the pitchfork.

Gale looks to Gwen, who stands, relieved by her actions, the oppression from her sadistic father finally ended.

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Liz helps Gale to the sofa.

LIZ
You broke his neck.

Gale grimaces.

GALE
Stupid shit shoulda worn a
helmet...you too.

LIZ
Gwen upstairs?

Liz unzips her cumbersome snowsuit.

GALE
You can't stay here, they're coming
for me.

LIZ
Yeah, well Cal was gonna go with me
to California, he can't now, so
Gwen's gonna have to help.

He leans back on the couch, twisting the toy plastic ring round his finger. She walks towards the staircase.

LIZ (CONT.)
You can't go with us,
neither. Gwen! It's Lizzie!

GALE
She can't hear you.

Liz turns, her large belly points to the fugitive.

LIZ
What'd you do?

GALE
Sit down.

With concern, suspicion and fear, her gaze continues.

GALE (CONT.)

Sit. I'll tell you everything, all of it, all true too, I swear to God.

EXT. FORREST - NIGHT

The sun sets with the first layer of darkness, the snow continuing it's assault on the region.

Deputy Sager cradles Ernie the bloodhound as the snowmobile bounces onto what normally would be a rural road, but now blends with the rest of the white blankness.

He spots Odum's parked bronco, a large white iceberg in the distance. The sheet covered body, bouncing precariously on the attached toboggan.

EXT. ABANDONED HOUSE - NIGHT

Odum creeps to the edge of the property, ice and snow clings to his face. Seeing a tall woodpile, an ideal place for cover, he crawls in that direction.

Reaching his destination, relieved, he notices he is resting near a snow covered human shape. Shoveling with his hands reveals the body of Deputy Roosevelt.

INT. SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH'S CRUISER - NIGHT

Bittersmith chews on venison jerky, the windows of the cruiser a sheet of white ice. CLANK CLANK, a rapping on the drivers window.

He tries to crank the window, it's frozen shut. He opens the door to reveal DEPUTY TRAVIS, (23), young and frightened.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

Dammit, Travis, just go 'round.

He slams the door closed. Travis opens the passenger door, takes a seat. Pulls off his gloves, blows in his hands, holds them in front of the heating vents.

DEPUTY TRAVIS

Sure is gettin' bad out there boss,
had to walk the last quarter mile.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
 I don't need a fuckin' weather
 report boy, we got some seriousness
 goin' on.

The Sheriff studies this rookie, contemplates whether Travis is prepared for what lies ahead. He sighs, there are no other options.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)
 What time you got?

The deputy looks at his frost covered watch.

DEPUTY TRAVIS
 'bout half past five.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
 Half past...that means for thirty
 minutes I been retired.

DEPUTY TRAVIS
 Sir?

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
 I'm hoping by this point you been
 told 'bout Burt Haudesert's murder?

He nods.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)
 Daughter's been killed
 too. Redheaded drifter named
 G'Wain done 'em both. He's holed up
 at Doc Coates' place. This is
 serious, Travis. Gunshots heard,
 Roosevelt ain't responded all day.
 'Fraid he went up there half cocked
 and got hisself killed.

Bittersmith watches as the severity of the situation washes over the young deputy.

DEPUTY TRAVIS
 Where's Deputy...Sheriff Odum?

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
 Knowing him, right 'bout now he's
 hiding near that house, shittin' in
 his boxers wishing he woulda
 accepted that factory job over in
 Cheyenne twenty years ago.

Travis stares out the window.

DEPUTY TRAVIS

What are we gonna do?

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

I'm going back to the station. Drop off my firearm and badge, leave the keys to this here cruiser with Fenny, go home and get drunk.

DEPUTY TRAVIS

You can't do that!

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

Don't you fuckin' tell me what I can't do! They pushed me out, god dammit!

Bittersmith takes out his pipe, packs a bowl as he talks.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)

Son, you got a decision to make here. Odum's no good for this job. He just ain't smart enough, not seasoned. Sager, Christ....

DEPUTY TRAVIS

What can i do?

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

Kill Gale G'Wain. Shoot him dead 'fore he gets away, 'fore he kills you or any other innocent girl.

DEPUTY TRAVIS

Kill him? I ain't never killed a man. Hell, sir, I don't feel right huntin' buck. My daddy---

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

Then why the hell you wearin' that uniform! How'd that come to be?

Travis puts his head down, turns to stare at the ice on the passenger window.

DEPUTY TRAVIS

Wanted to stay outta Vietnam...sos I wouldn't have to kill nobody.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Gale leads Gwen through the cold, snow covered forest, neither of them looks back.

GWEN
Wait, wait!

His pulling ceases momentarily.

GALE
You want to go back?

GWEN
No!

She points to her feet. One of her pony legs exposed under her pink robe supports a foot with a slipper, the other has none.

GALE
Still got the knife?

Her numb fingers fumble through the pocket of her robe. She pulls it out by the blade. Gale takes it from her, kneels down and rubs her bare foot in his hands.

GWEN
I can't feel it....

GALE
Hold on, now.

He rips the knife through the already torn leg of his jeans, cutting a swath of denim. He then cuts a shoe lace from his boot, fastening a make shift shoe around her raw foot.

GALE (CONT.)
That ain't gonna hold up for long.
We have to go back.

GWEN
We can't! Cal will kill you!

CUT TO:

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Liz sits cross legged on the floor, entranced with Gale's account of the escape.

GALE

I kept thinking about her foot, and that there was no way she'd escape frostbite. We couldn't move fast enough, me like this, her like that.

LIZ

Go on....please.

GALE

She never complained, she just kept pushing on. I found us a spot under this giant Ponderosa tree where the snow was a bit thinner.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Gale collapses onto the ground, Gwen kneels, for the first time looking behind them.

GALE (VO)

There were so many things we could have done! She could have put on one of my boots and snuck back to the barn.

She leans over him, his exhaustion totally having taken over.

GALE (VO CONT.)

We could have built a fire to get her foot warm and then gone to Haynes's, where at least we could lay low through the storm. She could have gone back to her mother and said I dragged her away and she escaped. Anything!

LIZ (VO)

Gale, what did you do to her?

Gale's eyes closed, gasping for breath. Gwen softly kisses him on the lips, reaching into his coat pocket. He opens his eyes to find her loving stare.

GWEN

I love you Gale G'Wain.

The large knife in her hands, she plunges it into her chest, all the way to the handle. Gale, delirious, confused.

GWEN (CONT.)
I stole your music.

She whimpers, then smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Liz sits, speechless, a single tear reflects in her eye, rolling down her cheek, glimmering from the flames dancing in the fireplace.

GALE
I don't know what that meant. Why she did that...

LIZ
I do...

GALE
I didn't kill her, Liz, I swear.

Liz rocks, struggling to get up.

LIZ
I'm certain of that. She really loved you...

She turns, waddles to the staircase and slowly ascends.

GALE
Liz?

LIZ
I just need to be alone a bit.

EXT. SNOW COVERED ROAD - NIGHT

Deputy Sager slams the rear hood of the bronco closed, Gwen's body secure inside. Entering the truck, Ernie greets him from the passenger seat with a slight lift of his head.

He turns the key in the ignition. Nothing. He tries again receiving the same results. Sager looks to Ernie, who's only response is to drop his head.

EXT. ABANDONED HOUSE - NIGHT

Odum fights against the wind, gun drawn, trying to reach the porch. Slipping over a mound of snow, TWHACK, the jaws of a hidden steel trap bites into his left hand.

Understanding the purpose of his visit, and the need for stealth, he stifles his scream.

Dropping the pistol from his right hand, he bites the fingers to pull his glove off. With his now bare hand he wrestles with the uncooperative metal.

INT. SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH'S CRUISER (MOVING) - NIGHT

Creeping over the snow covered roads, ALONE, Bittersmith gnaws on his unlit pipe. He looks to the passenger seat, where Deputy Travis' sidearm and badge reside.

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE BATHROOM - NIGHT

Liz sits on the toilet, snow pants crumpled on the floor, thermal shorts pulled down to her ankles. She weeps softly for her lost friend.

She bends to reach a roll of toilet paper, noticing the RUSTY HATCHET still residing on the toilet tank lid.

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - NIGHT

Gale kneels on his good leg, stoking the fire with a poker

ODUM (OS)
Put it down, boy.

Quietly, with a sense of relief, Gale obeys. Slowly, from his crouched position, he painfully turns around.

Breathing heavy, blood pours from Odum's dangling, mangled left limb. His right hand aims an unsteady pistol.

ODUM
Nice and slow, God dammit.

Gale makes eye contact with his captor, palms out.

GALE
Your arm... it needs attention. I--

ODUM

Wonder why! I should shoot you dead
where you're kneelin'!

GALE

I didn't kill Haudersert.

ODUM

Yeah...maybe...but you killed his
little girl...

Odum cocks the pistol with a loud CLICK.

ODUM (CONT.)

...and you shot a good officer!

Gale hangs his head, defenseless, no explanation.

GALE

Yes, sir, I did...I'm sorry 'bout
that, and I'll turn myself in, just
not to you.

ODUM

Way I see it you ain't got no say
in that, boy.

GALE

I want to see the Sheriff.

ODUM

Then take a gander, asshole!

This comment confuses Gale.

GALE

Bittersmith, he's the Sheriff. Take
me to him and I'll admit it all,
just get me to him.

Odum's agitation increases.

ODUM

He ain't the Sheriff anymore, I am!

GALE

No...you're lying!

ODUM

I don't give a shit what you think,
he got himself removed for..hell
with it, lay down on your belly!

Gale notices the increased shaking in Odum's right hand. Blood from the left accumulates on the floor. Slowly, hands still raised, Gale rises on one good leg.

ODUM (CONT.)

Boy, I will put you down!

GALE

Why? Tell me why he was removed.

ODUM

Sit the fuck down!

GALE

He's a rapist.

Odum squints at his prey.

GALE (CONT.)

That's it, ain't it?

ODUM

He's a lot of things, but that ain't none of your concern.

GALE

But yes, sir, it is my concern. That's why I'm here.

Odum lowers his pistol, but just an inch.

ODUM

Bittersmith raped you?

GALE

He raped my momma.

The lawman staggers backwards into the stair railing, the loss of blood taking a severe toll. He shakes his head in an attempt to regain his composure.

ODUM

So what, boy? He's been having his way with whores and vagrants for decades.

GALE

My momma wasn't a whore!

ODUM

How do you know? Christ, he's got bastards all over the state, everyone knows it!

On the staircase behind Odum, Gale notices Liz's bare feet on the highest step. He watches as she creeps down another.

GALE

Everyone know it? Everyone knows it? And no one ever did nothin'? You call yourself a lawman? Piss poor, Sheriff!

ODUM

It don't matter now. It ain't my concern, never was!

GALE

Keepin' women and little girls safe from a snake like Bittersmith ain't your concern? What type of man are you?

ODUM

The kind that's going to kill you dead you don't shut your mouth and get on your belly!

GALE

No, I won't. You go ahead, you kill me.

Odum steadies himself, taking aim on the fugitive.

ODUM

Get down boy!

GALE

You're a fuckin' coward! You knew 'bout him! Makes you just as guilty if not more!

ODUM

Shut your mouth! Get down or I swear to Jesus I will shoot you dead!

GALE

Fuck you!

Odum's finger tightens even more on the trigger.

SPLAT! A RUSTY HATCHET splits his hat down the center. Liz holds onto the handle as if reeling in a fish.

Amazingly, Odum still stands. He turns to the stairs, his pistol now pointing to the ground. Liz succeeds in pulling out the axe, rising the handle and striking him once more.

LIZ

You coulda stopped it!

Finally, Odum crumples to the ground. Liz drops the rusty weapon. SILENCE. Gale looks from Odum to Liz on the stairs.

GALE

You shouldn't a done that.

Dazed, Liz leans over the railing, staring at the bloody body. Fluid pours onto her bare legs, SPLASHING over the wooden steps, dripping down the staircase wall.

GALE (CONT.)

Girl? Liz?

Liz looks from the body to Gale.

GALE (CONT.)

You're peeing all over...

She looks down at the puddles around her bare feet.

LIZ

It ain't pee...

INT. SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH'S CRUISER - NIGHT

Bittersmith pulls off the snow covered road. He retrieves his binoculars from the glove box.

Beyond the frosty windshield, through a clearing in the trees, he has an unencumbered view of the abandoned house.

INT. ABANDONDED HOUSE - NIGHT

Liz leans against the mantle, staring at Odum's body. Gale struggles to pull her snow pants over her trembling legs.

GALE

You can't stay here! I'm gettin' you to a hospital.

LIZ

Presby's at least ten miles in good weather.

Successful, he stands, placing Odum's pistol in his waistband, next to the other.

GALE

Well you can't have your baby here.

She whimpers, begins to cry.

GALE (CONT.)

Listen...they're gonna come and
they're gonna kill me..

He turns to look at the still body on the floor.

GALE (CONT.)

...'specially now.

LIZ

I wanna go home...please.

GALE

You'll never make it.

She grunts her reply.

LIZ

I can hold it in! Please!

INT. SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH'S CRUISER - NIGHT

Pipe lit, binoculars still to his eyes, he watches, just barely able to make out the figure of Gale G'Wain carrying a snowsuit covered body.

Instinctively, he pulls the binoculars away as if it will improve his vision.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

Balls on toast...

Binoculars back in place, he identifies the figure in the criminal's arms: Liz Sunday. The pipe is pulled from his mouth, quickly replaced with the radio microphone.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)

Odum, you hear me?...God dammit,
boy say somethin'!

Through the lenses, the couple awkwardly mounts a snowmobile, attempting to fire the motor. Finally, the radio CRACKLES.

DEPUTY SAGER (OS)

He weren't answerin' me neither.
Think you can come and get me down

DEPUTY SAGER (OS)
 far end of Rattlesnake? Damn bronco
 won't start.

In the distance, the lights of the snowmobile come to life.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
 Can't, got eyes on our man.

DEPUTY SAGER (OS)
 Sheriff, Ernie and I could freeze
 to death! We got the Haudesert
 girl's body in the back, too.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
 You're just gonna havta make do
 lest we have another girl to bury.

The snowmobile lurches to life, Gale driving, Liz cradled
 across his lap.

DEPUTY SAGER (OS)
 Don't think I follow...

Bittersmith puts the car in gear.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
 Don't expect you to.

EXT. FORREST - NIGHT

With as much speed as the snowmobile can muster, fighting
 the elements, Liz struggles to hold onto Gale.

EXT. CHIP SUNDAY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Chip circles the kitchen table, vinyl PSYCHEDELIC MUSIC
 blares from the turntable in a distant room. Each quarter
 lap around the kitchen provokes him to toke from a joint.

The front door CRASHES open. Gale enters, holding Liz like
 an over-sized infant.

CHIP
 Whoa! Lizzie!

GALE
 Clear off that table!

CHIP
Who the hell are you?

GALE
Move that shit, the baby's comin'!

CHIP
What?

Gale thrusts Liz into her father's hands, joint still dangling from his lips.

LIZ
Daddy? It hurts...

With one sweep of his arm, Gale clears the table, retrieves Liz, gently placing her on the table. MUSIC from the stereo reaching a crescendo.

GALE
Hold her legs wide apart.

CHIP
I don't know how!

Gale grabs Chip by the chest of his black T-shirt.

GALE
I swear to God if you don't shape
the hell up I'm gonna kill you! Now
hold her damn' legs apart!

Awakened to the reality of the situation, Chip nods, bracing his daughter's legs. Gale takes a knife from the counter, proceeds to cut her snow pants off, flinging them away.

LIZ
Oh, God, daddy! It hurts!

CHIP
It's going to be ok, baby, I'm
here. We're going to get through
this, ok? We always do.

Gale rolls up the sleeves of his fleece lined denim, reaches his hands between Liz's legs as if to catch a basketball.

CHIP (CONT.)
You know what you're doing?

Silently, Gale shakes his head. SILENCE between album tracks. Another, ROCKING SONG begins to play.

GALE
Ok, push, come on now, we're ready.

EXT. CHIP SUNDAY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Bittersmith's cruiser pulls into the long driveway.

CUT TO:

INT. CHIP SUNDAY'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

The three continue to stumble through the birthing process.

CHIP
That's it, baby, keep pushing,
you're doing great!

LIZ
I can't! It hurts too much!

GALE
I see somethin', I think...

CHIP
Hear that, Lizzie?

Gale reaches in, turning his head, mostly out of courtesy.

LIZ
OH MY GOD! DADDY!

A gasp of relief. Chip's pupils dilated, but eyeballs huge, stares at Gale's hands. A BABY CRIES, fighting to be heard above the MUSIC.

LIZ (CONT.)
Is it out?

GALE
Hand me that knife.

CHIP
Why? What are you going to do?

GALE
I'm gonna cut the damn
cord...unless you want to?

Chip shakes his head, trembling hands offer Gale the knife.

LIZ
I want to see...

Swiftly, Gale hacks the umbilical cord. THE BABY, bloodied and covered, WAILS on the kitchen table.

CHIP
Hand it to me? Please?

Slowly, Gale bends over to pick up the infant. BANG! Gale looks to Liz, who is looking at her father. Blood drips from the side of his head. He collapses to the floor.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHIP SUNDAY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Standing at the edge of the yard, Bittersmith lowers his still smoking rifle.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
You gotta be shittin' me.

INT. CHIP SUNDAY'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Gale takes the baby, ducks beneath the table.

LIZ
What's happening?

GALE
They found me.

BANG! Another blast shatters the window over the sink, tearing a hole in the wall. The child's CRYING, nearly drowning out the MUSIC.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (OS)
G'Wain! You're a dead man! Might as well come out, take it like a man!

LIZ
They know I killed that officer?

GALE
Can't say fer sure.

BOOM! A shot blows the front door open, gusting wind carries snow rapidly into kitchen.

LIZ
Take the baby!

GALE
Where?

EXT. CHIP SUNDAY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Bittersmith lowers his rifle, reloads.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
I'm comin' in there, boy! One of us
gonna come out in a bag!

He makes his way through the snowbanks towards the house.

INT. CHIP SUNDAY'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Crouching near the table, the child wailing inside the warmth of his fleece lining, Gale crouches face to face with Liz, still laying on the table.

LIZ
Keep him safe...is it a he?

Gale reaches to his belt, places a pistol in her weakened hands.

GALE
You get a chance you shoot that
bastard.

He scurries with the baby into the hallway, then up the stairs. Liz raises the pistol to her chest, both hands trying to steady her aim on the front door.

Breathing hard, Bittersmith enters the doorway, scanning the room with an eye on his rifle site.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
Where's he at bitch?

Hands shaking, she weakly points the firearm in his direction. This pathetic scene produces a sneering grin from the snow covered intruder.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)
Pointin' a loaded gun at an officer
of the law, huh?

He takes the weapon from her trembling hand, studies it.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)
State issued...now I wonder what
dead hand you stole this from...

INT. LIZ'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Gale kicks open the bedroom door, the infant swaddled inside his jacket, CRYING hysterically.

He moves to the window, flings it open. Huge snow drifts accumulate halfway up the exterior wall of the house.

BAM! A gunshot from downstairs.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (OS)
Self defense, boy! That crazy whore
pulled a gun on me! Why'd she have
to go an do that?

Left with no choice, Gale holds the baby tight to his chest, plunges backwards out the window into the largest snowdrift.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHIP SUNDAY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The impact from the drop knocks the wind from Gale. The naked child, exposed to the elements, covered in snow.

Immediately, Gale takes off his jacket, wraps the child as tightly as possible. he reaches for his remaining pistol...it's gone, knocked loose from the fall.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (OS)
I'm coming for you Gale G'Wain!

Furiously digging through the snow, Gale searches for the pistol. He sees Bittersmith in the windows above, rifle ready, moving from room to room.

CUT TO:

INT. LIZ'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Bittersmith, rifle cocked, enters. Wind whips the curtains from the open window, heavy snow billows inside.

The barrel leads to the window. He cranes his neck, prepared to fire, only to see deep tracks leading to the now deceased Chip Sunday's studio barn.

INT. SUNDAY'S BARN - NIGHT

The door slides open. Gale holds the wrapped newborn in his arms, frantically scanning the barn.

Art supplies, large sheets of FLAT CARDBOARD, bags of Plaster of Paris, nothing seemingly able to help him defend himself.

His eyes lock on the the cavernous floor opening leading to Chip's underground studio.

INT. CHIP SUNDAY'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Slowly but purposefully, Bittersmith makes his way into the kitchen. He pauses at the kitchen table. Liz's glazed eyes, terror frozen in her last death stare.

He makes his way through the kitchen door, into the stormy night.

INT. SUNDAY'S BARN - NIGHT

The barrel of the rifle enters the open sliding door first, followed closely by the smoke emanating from Bittersmith's pipe.

The remainder of the Sheriff arrogantly appears in the doorway, bemused to see the helpless fugitive standing in the center of the barn, clutching the crying child.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

That the best you could do, boy?
Shit, I've had more fun huntin'
inbred bears.

GALE

You raped my momma. Nineteen
Fifty-One. She was just passin'
through, no trouble to no one.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH

Bodies all over the fuckin' place
and you want to reminisce/

GALE

You made me. Made this baby,too.

Bittersmith, rifle pointed at his prey, creeps closer into the barn. Gale stands his ground.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
I ain't your daddy.

GALE
I'd never own to a wretched
creature like you being my father,
but I am here cause of your vile
actions all them years ago.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
Rusty, you say I had your momma,
and that's even odds, but you
surely didn't come out of it.

GALE
How many?

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
You want that bastard to die like
you, I suggest you just keep
holdin' it. Maybe I'll give it a
chance, ain't decided yet, but
you...

Bittersmith steps closer.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)
...I'm gonna put this here barrel
right between your eyes. Hell, they
might even erect a statue
commemorating this service...at
least ask me to come back to work.

GALE
You musta taken dozens, hundreds of
women, little girls...you ever had
to admit what you've done?

Bittersmith continues to creep closer, agitated by the
accurate accusations. Gale's eyes shift to the Sheriff's
moving feet.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
I've lawed this town forty years!

GALE
Whose laws? Yours? You're a ravager
with a badge in a town of cowards!
None of 'em have the guts to meet
your eye and you think their fear
gives you power! I'm callin' you
out! You raped my momma, this here
baby's momma...

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
 Boy, you just wrote that thing's
 death warrant.

Another step closer.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)
 After I'm done with you, I'm gonna
 take that problem there, maybe
 leave it out in the woods for the
 coyotes....hell, maybe I'll just
 step on it's fuckin' head, scrape
 it off my like boot like so much
 dog shit.

GALE
 You're goin' to Hell Joseph
 Bittersmith. I'm sure of it.

Two more steps. The Rifle aimed and cocked.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
 Ain't no hell worse than dealing
 with degenerates like---

As if the mouth of Hades opens, Bittersmith plummets through
 the floor. A large sheet of weak cardboard covering the
 studio entrance gives way.

The CLANG of the rifle bangs off the hard dirt floor, the
 clicking of his pipe falling from his mouth.

GRUNTING, identical to a wounded animal, emanates from the
 opening. Still holding the child, Gale looks over the edge.

Bittersmith, impaled through the rectum on the sharp point
 of Chip Sunday's flag sculpture. His arms flail wildly, his
 legs weakly kick, a twisted puppet on a stick.

This grotesque figure looks upwards to see Gale backing away
 from the hole.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH
 You crafty son of a bitch....You
 win...you gotta help me, boy!

No response.

SHERIFF BITTERSMTIH (CONT.)
 You hearin' me?

Bittersmith coughs blood, realizing this is his end.

SPLASHING liquid baptizes Bittersmith from above. He coughs, gags, looks again to the opening as even more SPLATTERING hits his face.

Gale stands silently, emptying a gas can, holding a box of wooden matches. For the first time, fear is evident in Bittersmith's soulless eyes.

Gale strikes a match, lights the end of the box. Emotionless, he drops the flames into the hole.

He stays to watch as Bittersmith burns alive.

GROWLING, HOWLING, the flames engorge this evil creature. His melting face looks up to his nemesis.

Gale unzips his fly, begins to urinate on the still alive burning Bittersmith, piss sizzles at it hits his face. The stream ends, Gale zips his trousers tight.

GALE

Sorry...that's all I got.

EXT. ST. TOBIAS CHURCH - DAY

Father Sharps shakes the hands of exiting parishioners.

INT. ST. TOBIAS CHURCH - DAY

In the sacristy, Father Sharps reverently removes his robes.

GALE (OS)

Gary.

Startled, recognizing the voice, the priest turns. Gale sits on a metal folding chair holding an infant wrapped in a stained towel.

FATHER SHARPS

Gale...

He approaches his visitors.

FATHER SHARPS (CONT.)

Everyone's looking for you...

GALE

I'm sure of that.

FATHER SHARPS

They're saying you murdered several people.

Sharps points to the infant.

FATHER SHARPS (CONT.)

They said you took a newborn for some type of occult ritual...I never believed it.

Gale stands, hands the child to the priest. Sharps instinctively accepts.

GALE

This here's my sister.

FATHER SHARPS

Your sister?

GALE

You're gonna take her.

Silently, he turns, walks to the door.

FATHER SHARPS

Gale, wait...where are you going?

GALE

North I'm thinkin', Canada I guess.

FATHER SHARPS

What's the child's name?

Gale turns his back on the priest and the infant, opens the door.

GALE

Her name's Gwen.

FADE TO BLACK