

1883

Written by

Name of First Writer

Based on, If Any

Address  
Phone Number

OPEN ON:

Nothing. The world is black. There is no sound. Except --

A heavy exhaled breath. Then silence. Then air whistled in through tight nostrils and held, then exhaled. Then the pattern repeats ...

VOICE

I remember the first time I saw it,  
tried to find words to describe it,  
but I couldn't ... Nothing had  
prepared me -- no books, no  
teachers, not even my parents ...

A FACE FILLS THE FRAME. Or most of one. Eyes the color of caramel sit in a face freckled from a life spent outside. They stare into the distance toward an ocean of pale yellow grass ...

VOICE (CONT'D)

I heard a thousand stories, but  
none could describe this place. It  
must be witnessed to be understood.  
And yet ...

Hard to say where lands ends and sky begins -- the yellow grass bleeds into the pale blue sky in a hazy soup of color -- as if God was frustrated by the horizon for some unknown offense and smashed earth and sky together.

BACK WITH THE EYES --

Blinking. Tears run from them, cutting a path through the dirt on her face.

VOICE (CONT'D)

I've seen it ... And understand it  
even less than before I first cast  
eyes on this place.

The eyes and freckled face belong to a girl, seventeen maybe. Long and lean, like a young horse. Her name is ELSA. Somehow, Elsa lays in shade while the world around her is bathed in sunlight. She peeks out at the sunny world like a terrified child peering out from under her bed ...

ELSA (V.O.)

Some call it 'The American Desert',  
others 'The Great Plains', but  
those phrases were invented by  
professors at universities,  
surrounded by the illusion of order  
and the fantasy of right and wrong  
... To know it you must walk it.  
Bleed into it's dirt. Drown in its  
rivers. Then it's name becomes  
clear. It is hell. And there are  
demons everywhere.

Slowly, she crawls to the light. Disappears into it ...

WITH HER AS SHE STANDS --

She is tall. As tall as most men these days. Her hair is the  
color of straw.

She turns back and looks behind her --

The shade was provided by a covered wagon. A wagon that is  
now engulfed in flames. Like the horizon, the angry flames  
reach to the sky, then fade into it ...

Elsa walks from the burning wagon. Looks to her right and  
spots more wagons -- all burning.

THE THUNDER OF A GUN SHOT SHATTERS THE SILENCE.

She looks to her left, sees --

From a wagon, bullets punch through white canvas and into two  
men painted the color of the sky -- blue and white. They fall  
back from their horses as more men scream and fire flaming  
arrows into the wagon, which bursts into flames as well ...

More rifle rounds erupt from the wagon, then a man leaps from  
the rear of it, firing as he runs ...

The LAKOTA WARRIORS race after the man on horseback, firing  
rifle rounds and arrows into him. He drops, screaming. The  
warriors' horses dance around him as they fire arrows into  
the man's chest and stomach. Then he is silent ...

Elsa looks to her burning wagon then the endless horizon,  
then runs ...

The Lakota watch as she runs, look over the other wagons,  
then give chase ...

Elsa hears the horses' hooves behind her, sees the body of a  
man in front of her.

Races toward it, leaps on the dead man and begins pulling a pistol from the dead man's holster as an arrow slams into his back.

She looks back at a Lakota warrior staring down at her. He shakes his head 'no'. Her hand is on the pistol butt. The warrior knocks another arrow ...

WARRIOR

I said no.

ELSA

Will you let me go?

WARRIOR

I will sell you.

She pulls the revolver from the holster. He raises the bow.

WARRIOR (CONT'D)

Or I will kill you.

ELSA

You speak English ... HOW CAN YOU  
DO THIS?!?!?!?!?

WARRIOR

You speak English. And all your  
people do this ...

She raises the pistol as she stands. He fires an arrow that pounds into her side as she pulls the trigger and blasts the man backwards off his horse ...

Three more Lakota warriors ride toward her at a gallop, firing as they approach. She walks toward them, screaming like an animal and firing in return ...

ELSA (V.O.)

But if this is Hell, and I'm in it,  
I must be a demon too. And I'm  
already dead ...

She runs toward the men shooting as the men race toward her doing the same -- rapping the silence with bullets and screams.

EXT. FARM HOUSE -- SEGUIN, TEXAS -- 1881.

Giant oaks spread their branches over the roof of a house like worried parents shielding it from the sun. Not a mansion or a manor, but not a peasant's house either: it's a home ...

A MAN sits alone on the porch. Stares out at nothing. If one can look past the sunburn and sadness etched into his face, one would call him handsome. But it is impossible to look past the sadness. His name is SHEA BRENNAN(45) ...

His powerful shoulders are slumped forward. His thick neck drops, exhales heavy breaths then sucks emotion deep inside him -- never to return. He stands and walks in the house.

INT. FARM HOUSE -- SEGUIN, TEXAS -- 1881.

Shea walks down a hallway. Comes to a door. Takes a moment to find the strength to open it. Finds it, pushes open the door.

INT. BEDROOM -- CONT.

He walks into the room, stares at a bed and the form of a girl. She lays on her side, knees tucked to her chest. Blonde hair peaks from blankets.

Shea walks to the bed, stares down ...

The blanket is pulled over her head. Shea exhales rapid breaths -- seeking more strength, then scoops the girl up, blanket and all ...

INT. FARM HOUSE -- BRENHAM, TEXAS -- 1881.

Shea carries the blanketed girl up a flight of stairs and disappears from view. CAMERA stares at an empty staircase as his footsteps echo, then silence ...

INT. UPSTAIRS BEDROOM -- SEGUIN FARMHOUSE -- MOMENT LATER.

Bedroom door opens. Shea stands at the threshold, cradling the blanketed girl. Walks toward another bed, lays the girl down beside another body bundled in blankets ...

Shea walks around the bed, looks down --

The lifeless eyes of a woman stare up at the ceiling. Her skin is littered with pustules -- looks like a thousand ticks have burrowed into her face and feasted to the point of bursting.

Shea pulls the girl's pustule-covered hand from beneath the blanket and places it over the woman's heart.

Shea looks down at them and clenches his teeth so tight they might break. He kisses the tips of his fingers, then places them to the woman's head, turns and walks out of the room.

EXT. FARM HOUSE -- SEGUIN, TEXAS -- 1881.

Shea stands in front of the house. He holds an axe wrapped in cloth. He lights a match and holds it to the cloth. Lets the fire engulf it, then hurls the axe through the front window.

The drapes catch first -- fire devours them, then curls out the broken window, as if to scowl at the man who set it free.

Flames hiss and curl their way up the stairs, snapping boards and bursting windows. It seems the house itself is screaming as fire overtakes it ...

EXT. NORTH TEXAS MEADOW -- APRIL 9TH, 1882.

Shea sits in a field staring at the horizon -- silhouetted by the orange sphere of flames as it rises. He looks up at the sky -- the deep indigo of night and all her stars dissolve into the pale lavender of dawn ...

Shea looks to the pistol in his lap. Curles his lip in contemplation. Places the barrel to his temple. Closes his eyes and cocks the hammer ...

VOICE

Captain.

SHEA

... Yeah.

VOICE

We're ready.

A tall man stands behind him: African American. Maybe 40. Not an ounce of fat on him, but there's no fat on anyone out here -- fat is a rich man's jacket. And these aren't rich men ...

His name is THOMAS. He wears the coat of a UNITED STATES CAVALRY OFFICER. The hat of an officer. The rest is the wardrobe of a cowboy.

THOMAS

You coming?

SHEA

Thinking about it.

THOMAS

Think on it quick -- if I'm digging  
a hole I'd rather do it before the  
sun's high.

Shea takes that in. Lowers the pistol.

SHEA

I'm coming.

Shea stares at the rising sun for a moment, then stands and  
walks toward Thomas ...

It is only now that we see the PINKERTON DETECTIVE AGENCY  
badge on his chest. He takes the reins of his horse, swings  
into the saddle. They turn their backs to the sun and ride  
like they are running from it ...

EXT. RIVER VALLEY -- MORNING.

CAMERA looks down on a wagon pulled by four horses through a  
field. Fast ...

Behind it, five men on horseback race after the wagon. One  
rider comes alongside it and a gunshot echoes out over the  
valley ...

The rider wheels his horse away and another races up, readies  
a pistol to shoot the wagon-driver, when the wagon pulls to a  
stop and the rider suddenly finds himself ahead of the wagon.

BOOM.

The man is blasted off his horse. The wagon resumes hauling  
ass away from its pursuers ...

ANGLE ON --

Shea and Thomas look down from a ridge overlooking the wagon  
and its attackers.

THOMAS

Pretty smart.

SHEA

They won't fall for it again. Soon  
enough they'll just shoot his  
horses.

THOMAS

Horses is probably what they're  
after. Farmers ain't got nuthin'  
else worth taking.

SHEA

They'll shoot 'em anyway. Then the farmer.

The farmer leans out the side with a shotgun, blasts both barrels at an approaching rider, knocking both him and horse over ...

WITH THE FARMER --

He is maybe 40. A mustache that was once kept neat is beginning to go wild. The rest of his face saw it's last shave a week ago. His name is JAMES DILLARD DUTTON.

James reloads the shotgun. Watches as the thieves run wide of his wagon and race out ahead of him. They stop their horses and turn back toward James and his wagon ...

James pulls his team to a stop. Studies the men just sitting there, horseback. James sets the shotgun on the seat of the wagon, reaches back and grabs a long, leather scabbard ...

James steps from the wagon and walks out into the field.

WITH THE THIEVES --

They study the man walking out through the field as their horses pant and suck heavy breaths. One thief looks to the other -- a man with a scar running the length of his cheek.

THIEF

What's he doing?

SCAR CHEEK

Don't know. Don't give a shit.

Scar Cheek reloads his pistol, spurs his horse toward James, who now stands alone in the field of waist high grass.

As the riders race toward James, he lays down in the grass. James pulls a rifle from the scabbard -- a long, brass scope runs the length of the barrel.

He sits, using his knees as braces for his elbows, and shoulders the rifle. Looks down the scope ...

THROUGH THE SCOPE --

James places the cross-wire reticle over scar cheek's heart, pulls the trigger. Smoke fills the frame, then rises and fades from view, revealing --

Scar cheek's riderless horse runs wildly through the field.



The other thieves pull their horses to a stop, then turn and race toward the safety of the distant trees.

James racks the lever of his rifle, places the cross-wires on one of the fleeing thieves and pulls the trigger ...

That man falls as well. The last man spurs his horse to run faster, if that's possible. James settles the scope on the man's back, pulls the trigger ...

WITH SHEA AND THOMAS --

They watch as the last thief falls from his horse.

THOMAS

Good shot.

SHEA

Yep.

Shea clucks to his horse, begins walking down the ridge toward the field. Thomas follows him ...

James stands from the grass, walks toward scar-cheek's horse, grabs the reins, and begins leading him toward his wagon. Freezes when he sees --

Shea and Thomas walk in his direction. James shoulders his rifle ...

THROUGH THE SCOPE --

He sees Thomas's uniform and Shea's badge ...

James lowers the rifle, keeps walking. Ties the thief's horse to an iron ring on the back of the wagon. Shea and Thomas ride past him.

JAMES DILLARD

Thanks for the help.

SHEA

You seemed to have it figured.

THOMAS

Don't take the horse.

JAMES DILLARD

I figure I earned it.

SHEA

Thieves run in pretty big packs around here.

(MORE)

SHEA (CONT'D)

If one of his pack sees it ...  
You're just advertising for the  
next gunfight.

James chews that as Thomas and Shea ride past him. James unties the horse, pulls the saddle from its back and yanks off the bridle, tosses it on the ground. Climbs back in his wagon. Looks toward the two men as they fade into the trees in the distance ...

It is only now that the adrenaline begins to leave him. Sweat pours from his brow and soaks through his shirt. He leans over and vomits off the side of the wagon ...

James takes a drink from his canteen, spits the water to the ground, then slaps the reins against his wagon team and begins moving them toward the forest ...

EXT. HELL'S HALF ACRE -- FORT WORTH, TEXAS -- DAY.

James leads his wagon team through the commercial center of Fort Worth. Seems there are people and horses and wagons everywhere --

Travelling salesmen sell everything from human scalps to Buffalo pelts to bottles of liquid sworn to cure anything.

Casinos and saloons and brothels line the streets, as do supply houses, barbers, clothiers -- if you want it and have the money, you can find it here.

James pulls past the madness toward the stockyards and a livery stable. Stops his wagon, steps off.

A line of men stand holding their horses as LIVERY WORKERS call out numbers.

LIVERY WORKER

THIRTY-ONE, THIRTY-TWO, THIRTY-THREE ...

Three men walk toward him, leading horses.

James walks to a small kiosk where a LIVERY MANAGER sits.

JAMES DILLARD

Can you take a wagon and team?

LIVERY MANAGER

How many in your team?

JAMES DILLARD

Four.

The livery manager looks up at the wagon, stands and walks to it. Peers inside ...

Foot lockers and bedding are neatly stacked inside along with a chair and cooking equipment. The livery manager shakes his head ...

LIVERY MANAGER

Folks leave their wagons out back, but ... They're empty when they do it. All this shit'll be stolen by morning.

JAMES DILLARD

Ain't got nowhere you can keep it?

LIVERY MANAGER

I'll put it in the hay barn for ten dollars. But I can't make any promises it won't get robbed there either.

JAMES DILLARD

It's the promise I'm paying for.

LIVERY MANAGER

For twenty I'll have someone stay with it.

JAMES DILLARD

How much for the horses?

LIVERY MANAGER

Two apiece.

James hands him another eight dollars.

JAMES DILLARD

There a decent hotel?

LIVERY WORKER

Just you?

JAMES DILLARD

Got my family with me. Six total.

The man stares at James.

LIVERY MANAGER

You don't want your family here. Go to Dallas.

JAMES DILLARD

Here's where they're meeting me.

The man shakes his head.

JAMES DILLARD (CONT'D)  
Best bet's the Calhoun.

The manager hands him four numbers branded into leather squares.

LIVERY MANAGER  
You're seventy-seven, eight, nine,  
and eighty.

Hands him another patch of leather, this one a circle with an H branded in the middle.

LIVERY MANAGER (CONT'D)  
For the wagon. If you ain't settled  
up in thirty days, everything goes  
to auction.

JAMES DILLARD  
What's the rule about firearms in  
this town?

LIVERY MANAGER  
This place'll pick you clean if you  
ain't got one. But if you pull your  
pistol in this town, mister ...  
You'd better know how to use it.

James pulls his shotgun from the wagon and walks down the street ...

EXT. STREET -- FORT WORTH, TEXAS -- MOMENT LATER.

James walks past a crowd that lines both sides of the street. They shout and cheer and wave money in the air as two horses blast past at forty miles-per hour -- their cowboy riders whipping their flanks to run faster ...

He rounds the corner past impromptu card tables where three card monte is played. Prostitutes linger outside a brothel. James walks past, carrying his bag and shotgun -- everything about him screams out-of-towner -- and they zero in on him.

PROSTITUTE  
You should come in for a shower and  
bath.

The women laugh at him as he ignores them.

PROSTITUTE (CONT'D)  
Hell, I might let you bathe me.

Another prostitute, wearing a red and white dress, puffs on a cigar like a man, and eyes James as he walks past ...

RED DRESS

Forget the bath, baby. You come  
climb mama like a tree.

Seems the whole city knows he is from out of town -- eyes follow him everywhere. James' gaze shifts from one man to the next, sizing the threat in each of them.

A large man slams into him, almost knocking him down. Another man reaches in his coat so quick, James never feels his wallet lifted from his pocket.

BIG MAN

WATCH WHERE THE HELL YOU'RE GOING.

James touches his jacket, feels the emptiness in his pocket.

JAMES DILLARD

Give it back.

BIG MAN

Give what back.

JAMES DILLARD

My wallet.

BIG MAN

I didn't take your fucking --

James swings the shotgun like a golf club into the big man's groin, doubling him over, then swings it again into the big man's chin, knocking him backward onto the sidewalk.

James leaps on him, begins tearing through his pockets yanking wallets, pocket watches, and coin purses, then tossing them on the ground beside him.

James looks up, sees a skinny man in his twenties looking back at him. Then the skinny man turns and runs. James shoulders the shotgun and fires a round of buckshot into the man's ass. He shrieks, falls down, stumbles to his feet and keeps running. A boy points at the skinny man and shouts --

BOY

PICK POCKET.

A cowboy slams his arm into the skinny man as he runs past, knocking him to the street where the mob begins kicking him as the skinny man curls into a ball.

ANGLE ON --

Shea and Thomas watch from across the street as James stands and marches toward the skinny man as men tear and pull at his coat.

THOMAS

Farmer ain't scared to use that  
shotgun ...

SHEA

Farmer's gonna pick a fight he  
can't win before long.

They watch as James walks up to the skinny man and reaches into his jacket, retrieving his wallet.

TOWN MARSHALS rush toward the chaos as the street is now a shouting mass of people crowding around the pick pocket. Two marshals rush up to James, push him back -- shout questions at him, but the crowd is so loud it's impossible to hear a word the man says ...

The big man has gotten to his feet, but a dozen cowboys attack him like a swarm of wasps. Before long, he is back on the ground with cowboys raining punches down on him ...

One cowboy slams a whiskey bottle into the back of his head, splitting his scalp in two ...

More cowboys have fashioned a noose and are hoisting the skinny man up -- hanging him from the sign over the brothel. It is madness ...

Marshals rush to the skinny man's aide and fight with cowboys to release him. As the skinny man is being lowered, a GUNSHOT rings out from the crowd, and the skinny man is shot in the side of the head.

The crowd scatters like quail in every direction. More gunshots ring out. James takes in this insanity, then turns and walks down the street in the opposite direction.

Shea watches him disappear around the corner, then steps inside two double doors. Above the doors is a sign that reads: PINKERTON DETECTIVE AGENCY.

INT. PINKERTON DETECTIVE AGENCY -- CONT.

ABOUT FIFTY MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN COWER IN THE BUILDING. They stare out the windows. Women huddle behind chairs and sofas, holding their children close ...

SHEA

Thomas, stay by the door. Don't let any of that bullshit spill in here.

Shea looks to the crowd.

SHEA (CONT'D)

That should answer any questions about how dangerous this journey will be. It will be that and worse, all the way to Oregon.

All eyes now shift to Shea as he leans against a table. He studies the faces staring at him. Studies their clothes ... None are dressed for the West. The men wear ill-fitting suits, the women heavy, wool dresses.

The men are clean-shaven. The women have the heavy features of Eastern Europe. Everyone stares at Shea as if he is speaking a foreign language, because to them, he is ...

SHEA (CONT'D)

Does anyone speak English?

One man leans forward. Dark hair and features. Broad shoulders of a laborer. His name is JOSEF(38).

JOSEF

I speak English.

SHEA

Does this group have a leader?

Josef points to a man in his sixties. NIKOLAI(63). Grey hair. Hollow cheeks.

SHEA (CONT'D)

But he doesn't speak English.

JOSEF

No English for him.

Shea exhales.

SHEA

You have wagons?

Josef nods.

JOSEF

And ox to pull them.

SHEA

Ox ...

Josef nods. Shea shakes his head.

JOSEF

Ox won't make the trip. Heat and no water will kill them. Sell the ox. Get horses.

JOSEF (CONT'D)

We don't know horses.

Shea shakes his head.

SHEA

Where's your gear?

JOSEF

Gear ...

SHEA

Your supplies. Your suitcases. What you take with you.

Josef nods.

JOSEF

In the room. In the back.

SHEA

Show me.

INT. SUPPLY ROOM -- PINKERTON DETECTIVE AGENCY -- CONT.

Shea, Thomas, and Josef look over a large room filled with everything from dinner tables to pianos.

SHEA

What is all this shit.

JOSEF

Everything we brought from home.

SHEA

Should have left it there. None of this will make the trip.

JOSEF

It must.

Shea looks at Josef.

JOSEF (CONT'D)

This is everything we own.



Shea looks at a piano, walks toward it.

SHEA

How am I supposed to load this on a wagon and get it across A FUCKING RIVER?!?!? AND OVER MOUNTAINS ...

Thomas studies the man.

THOMAS

He don't have a pistol.

JOSEF

No.

SHEA

Against your religion?

JOSEF

Against our laws. We weren't allowed.

SHEA

None of you have firearms?

JOSEF

... Do we need them?

Shea stares at him, then laughs.

SHEA

Do you need them ...

Thomas looks at the ground, shakes his head.

SHEA (CONT'D)

We need more men. To protect you. To help hunt for food. Talk to your group and see how much money you can come up with so we can hire them.

JOSEF

More money ... Two hundred per family is the price.

SHEA

There's a new price.

JOSEF

The church warned us about people like you. You try to change rules.

(MORE)

JOSEF (CONT'D)

You try to rob us. You take us FOR  
FOOLS --

Shea grabs Josef by the throat and slams him into the wall.

SHEA

You have no horses. No guns. Can't  
ride. YOU ARE A FUCKING FOOL. For  
thinking you can travel two  
thousand miles with no skills to  
survive it.

THOMAS

Captain.

Shea looks back -- the emigrants stand at the door, horrified  
at what they are witnessing. Shea releases Josef and turns to  
them.

SHEA

Take the train to Portland. You  
won't make this trip.

The old man speaks. Josef translates.

JOSEF

We can't afford the train.

SHEA

Then I suggest you buy farms around  
here.

JOSEF

Here is hot. Here is dry. We come  
from mountains. Mountains we know.

He speaks to the old man in Slovak. Then looks to Shea.

JOSEF (CONT'D)

How much do more men cost.

SHEA

Hundred apiece maybe. Maybe more.  
Let me ask around.

Shea walks to the door.

JOSEF

So, in the morning we leave?

SHEA

We leave when you're ready and you  
won't be ready in the morning.

Shea and Thomas walk out the door.

INT. SOUTHERN PACIFIC RAILWAY -- LATE AFTERNOON.

Elsa sits in a packed rail car. She gazes out the window as pine trees give way to prairie ...

A MAN IN HIS 30's -- smile of a salesman, sits across from her. Studies the soft curves of her cheek. She feels him looking. His name is CALVIN.

CALVIN

You're staring out that window like there's a prize to be had. You ain't half-wrong.

ELSA

Never seen a sunset.

CALVIN

Sun don't set where you're from?

Elsa smiles.

ELSA

The pine trees block it.

CALVIN

Tennessee ...

ELSA

How'd you know?

CALVIN

I know the pines. And I know the accent. Where you headed?

ELSA

West.

CALVIN

... All by yourself?

ELSA

With my family.

Calvin smiles.

CALVIN

I don't see much family. Just see you ...

Elsa's smile fades.

ELSA

They're um ... Our seats are in the back. I just wanted to look out the window so I --

Calvin laughs. Waves her off.

CALVIN

Sit here as long as you like. Then just a little bit longer ...

Her smile returns.

CALVIN (CONT'D)

I question your father's judgement, though. If had a daughter as pretty as you she would never leave my sight.

Elsa blushes, looks down. Calvin leans back.

CALVIN (CONT'D)

Don't do that. Don't hide from it. Beauty is meant to be admired. Let me look ...

Elsa feels a charge of electricity move through her body. Dares herself to look up at the handsome man. He smiles in return, nods.

CALVIN (CONT'D)

Yes. Look at you ...

A small purse smashes into Calvin's perfect smile. He recoils back, looks up as the purse swings back toward him again, thumping him on top of the head, hard.

MARGARET DUTTON (40) pulls the purse back for another swing.

CALVIN (CONT'D)

ALRIGHT!!! I GET YOUR POINT, MA'AM.

MARGARET

Elsa, let's go.

Elsa stands, moves into the aisle. Margaret looks down at Calvin.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Good day to you, sir.

Margaret pushes Elsa down the aisle.

MARGARET (CONT'D)  
 You will be the death of me, I  
 swear.

ELSA  
 I was just looking out the window.

MARGARET  
 Mmhmm. Window sure wears a fancy  
 suit.

Margaret pushes her through the rear door of the rail car.

INT. COACH CLASS -- CONT.

Immigrant families and luggage -- some holding chickens --  
 are packed like sardines into the rear car. Elsa looks toward  
 the windows, which are obscured by the huddled mass of  
 passengers.

ELSA  
 Where's Spencer?

MARGARET  
 With your aunt.

Margaret pushes through the crowd toward a five year-old  
 SPENCER DUTTON, sitting on the floor in front of a plain  
 looking girl in her late teens.

ELSA  
 (Mumbles) You left him with *her*?

MARGARET  
 You left me no choice. Sit.

Elsa sits. The armpit of a heavy man hovers above her head,  
 she turns from his stench, drops her head and hides from it.

ELSA  
 Someday I'll only ride in the front  
 of the train.

MARGARET  
 That's a child's goal. A woman's  
 goal is never ride a train again.  
 Because she has a home she never  
 wants to leave.

ELSA  
 I guess we're both a ways from our  
 goal then.

They stare hell at each other, then both turn away -- ignoring the noise and the stench that surrounds them. Margaret stares at CLAIRE DUTTON(38), her fierce eyes focused on Margaret ...

CLAIRE  
Ought not let her talk to you like that. If she were my daughter ...

MARGARET  
Think you can get her to listen?

No sooner has Margaret spoken than the full force of Claire's palm is slammed into Elsa's cheek.

CLAIRE  
Traipse off into harm's way then back-talk your mother for saving you?

ELSA  
I wasn't in harm's --

Another slap. This one harder. Margaret draws a breath to object when Elsa says --

ELSA (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry.

Another slap.

CLAIRE  
It didn't worry me. Apologize to her.

Elsa's face whips to her mother.

ELSA  
I'm sorry, Mama. Tell her to stop.

Margaret stares, stunned at her daughter -- seems as intimidated by Claire's actions as Elsa. Margaret steps in front of Elsa, facing Clair.

MARGARET  
You proved your point.

CLAIRE  
You'll hit a stranger, but not your own daughter -- when it's exactly what she needs. Spare the rod, Margaret, and the freedom will ruin her. If it hasn't already.

Across from Elsa sits a girl a year or so younger. Her name is MARY ABEL DUTTON(17), brown hair, plain in every way. She has spent the past three days on a train marveling at Elsa's beauty -- and absolutely hating her for it ...

She leans toward Elsa as she wipes tears from her swollen cheek, smiles.

MARY ABEL

You had it coming.

INT. RESTAURANT -- CALHOUN HOTEL -- NIGHT.

The place is packed. Barely room to move. Shea and Thomas sit across from two cowboys in their late twenties, WADE(28), AND ENNIS(26).

WADE

How's it pay?

SHEA

Hundred a month.

ENNIS

It'll take four months to get there, then we're stuck in Oregon for the winter. We'll burn through the money waiting to get home.

SHEA

We can send you back on the train.

Wade and Ennis look at each other.

WADE

Look, Captain ... I've pushed cattle all the way to Omaha and come across a fair amount of these emigrant wagons: these sons of bitches are trying to die. Can't swim. Can't ride. Bandits gonna plague you all the way to Nebraska and when you get to the Indian country ...

THOMAS

Indians are on reservations.

ENNIS

They're on reservations 'till they ain't. And when they see you coming 'round the bend they gonna saddle up and pluck y'all like chickens.

Wade pushes back from the table.

WADE

It's dangerous enough around here --  
I ain't gotta go two thousand miles  
to find trouble. All the trouble  
I'll ever need is right outside the  
door.

Wade and Ennis stand and walk out.

THOMAS

We could have a look in the saloon.

SHEA

If they're in a saloon when we find  
'em I don't want 'em.

Shea looks across the restaurant, sees James Dutton eating alone.

SHEA (CONT'D)

Look who it is.

THOMAS

That farmer's everywhere at once,  
ain't he.

Shea stands. Walks toward James. Thomas follows.

SHEA

Mind if we sit?

James looks up at the men.

JAMES DILLARD

Whatever you're selling I ain't  
buying.

SHEA

... Mind if we sit.

James stops eating. Shea and Thomas sit. Shea sets a few dollars on the table.

SHEA (CONT'D)

For your dinner. For the  
interruption.

JAMES DILLARD

I can pay for my own dinner.



SHEA

Four horses to your wagon. What are you hauling?

James studies them. Says nothing ...

SHEA (CONT'D)

Wagon moved pretty fast to be full. My guess is you're filling it in town. Then headed ...

James says nothing. Shea laughs ...

THOMAS

Mister, if we wanted to rob you we'd have done it long before now. We're leading a wagon train north. Thought you might be headed the same way. We could use some capable men with us. And you seem to be that ...

SHEA

That's all we're asking.

JAMES DILLARD

My family meets me tonight. We're headed up north tomorrow.

SHEA

North where.

JAMES DILLARD

Don't know.

SHEA

You don't strike me as a man who travels without a plan.

JAMES DILLARD

I got a plan.

They wait for more. But more doesn't come. Shea laughs.

SHEA

You will make a man work for an answer, won't you.

JAMES DILLARD

Don't have the answer myself. Everybody running off west and north and they ain't even seen the country. Don't even know if it's worth the journey. Not me.

(MORE)

JAMES DILLARD (CONT'D)  
 I'll head north 'till I find  
 country worth the journey.

THOMAS  
 How many in your group.

JAMES DILLARD  
 Six.

SHEA  
 How many men.

James just looks at them.

SHEA (CONT'D)  
 We could help each other.

JAMES DILLARD  
 Ain't looking for help. I'm worried  
 enough about my own family to be  
 worrying about somebody else's.

Shea nods without agreeing. Stands.

SHEA  
 You got lucky in that field. Got  
 lucky on the street. Hope you got  
 some luck left for the folks coming  
 with you.

Shea and Thomas stand and walk out of the restaurant, leaving  
 James alone to ponder the truth of that statement.

INT. TRAIN -- NIGHT.

People, packed like sardines, sleep. Or try to as the train  
 rolls and bounces down the tracks. The door opens, and a  
 BELLMAN stands there, earning his name by ringing a bell.

BELLMAN  
 NEXT STOP FORT WORTH.

He turns and walks out, closing the door behind him.  
 Passengers begin shifting, standing -- gathering belongings  
 and children. Elsa bolts upright, stands and rushes to the  
 door.

MARGARET  
 ELSA!

ELSA  
 I'M JUST LOOKING OUTSIDE.

Elsa yanks open the rail car door. Steps outside ...

EXT. RAIL CAR -- NIGHT.

Elsa hangs over the rail, looking toward the lights of Fort Worth, Texas. The gas lights of town glow a dim orange, like stars through a mist.

She lets the wind whip through her hair as she stares out. Breathes in the warm air ...

ELSA (V.O.)

The air was different. The air at home is heavy, like a musky soup. Here it is light. With a strange scent of pollen and smoke, like burning flowers ... It smelled wild. Untamed. It was beautiful.

EXT. RAIL STATION -- FORT WORTH, TEXAS -- NIGHT.

The rail station is mostly empty -- a few baggage handlers, a night watchman, a couple of husbands and fathers. James stands on the platform, watching them. And watching more men who stand off in the shadows ...

The distant light of the train creeps slowly closer. The tracks moan softly as the air horn of the train screams its arrival.

As it gets closer, the smoke from its stack becomes visible, churning out in angry plumes.

A wall of noise moves ahead of the train -- three hundred tons of metal racing along iron tracks makes a sound that can only be compared to thunder, if thunder were somehow beneath the ground rather than above it.

The chugs of the engine sound like angry, exhaled breaths of this giant, steel monster racing toward them.

Then a screech -- the shrill, deafening cry of brakes gripping tracks. Sparks plume out as the engine screams past. Seems to be going to fast to stop -- seems as if the conductor has given up on stopping at all and is headed to the next town ...

INT. RAIL CAR -- CONT.

It's even louder inside the rail car. Sparks can be seen outside the window, then the momentum of the train comes almost instantly to a stop with everyone and everything hurled forward in a brief, painful lesson of physics ...

As the train stops, people steady themselves -- those who fell to the floor stand and dust themselves clean. A RAILROAD WORKER opens the door and people begin pushing their way out, any sense of courtesy for other passengers completely abandoned ...

Margaret, Claire, Spencer, hell -- all of them, get pin balled around by the rushing crowd.

CLAIRE  
JUST WAIT FOR EVERYONE TO GET OFF.

MARGARET  
DO YOU SEE ELSA??

Claire looks at Margaret.

MARGARET (CONT'D)  
ELSA, DO YOU SEE HER?

Claire shakes her head in disgust.

CLAIRE  
... You lost her again?

EXT. RAIL CAR -- NIGHT.

Elsa stands alone on the little platform between cars, exhilarated, looking out over the city.

ELSA (V.O.)  
If 'possible' can describe a feeling, that's how I felt. The whole world felt possible. And I was ready for it ...

EXT. PLATFORM -- NIGHT.

James walks along the train, scanning the massive exodus for a familiar face. Sees none. Keeps walking. Worry creeps in, as worry is known to do, and his walk becomes a jog.

He scans every face, every form. Then hears something. Stops. Hears it again ...

ELSA (O.S.)

Daddy!

He turns to the sound. Hunts for it.

ELSA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Daddy!!!

Her calls echo. She sounds behind him. He looks back.

ELSA (CONT'D)

DADDY.

He turns and sees her, standing alone on the tiny walkway between cars. Walks to her.

JAMES DILLARD

How did you get there?

ELSA

There's a door.

JAMES DILLARD

Go back through it.

ELSA

Too many people now. I have to wait.

He walks closer.

ELSA (CONT'D)

I can't wait.

She swings a leg over the railing. Claire makes her way down the stairs, looks to her left and sees --

Elsa scaling down the side of the rail car, her skirt halfway up her legs.

CLAIRE

OH MY GOD.

Elsa jumps to the ground and runs to her father, buries him in a hug.

JAMES DILLARD

If you keep growing I'm gonna stack bricks on your head.

ELSA

You need a shave, Daddy. Mama's gonna throw a fit.

JAMES DILLARD  
She might like it.

Margaret leads Spencer off the train, spots Elsa with James.  
Shakes her head ...

MARGARET  
That girl ...

She walks to them.

MARGARET (CONT'D)  
How did you get down here?

No worry of punishment when she's in the presence of her  
father, Elsa smiles, says simply --

ELSA  
I jumped.

MARGARET  
She is your daughter and you can  
have her.

Margaret hugs James deeply. Looks at his face.

MARGARET (CONT'D)  
You look like a ruffian.

JAMES DILLARD  
I was planning on a shave.

MAGRARET  
Should've planned harder.

JAMES DILLARD  
I'll get one first thing tomorrow.

She holds a hand to his cheek, studies his face, gives him a  
sly smile ...

MARGARET  
Well ... There's no rush now.

James looks down at Spencer.

JAMES DILLARD  
I see you survived the journey.

SPENCER  
Barely. The man beside me shit  
hisself in Mississippi and I had to  
smell it all the way here.

Claire walks up with Mary Abel, dragging her suitcase behind her, shaking her head in disgust.

CLAIRE

James, you're children are feral.  
Absolutely feral.

JAMES DILLARD

Hello Claire. Sorry about Henry. He was ... A patient man.

CLAIRE

Nothing to be sorry about. It's the Lord's will. Can't believe in heaven then be sad when people go there.

James moves them all toward a row of horse drawn carriages. Leads them to one. Hands money to the driver.

JAMES DILLARD

The Calhoun.

James helps the ladies in, then Spencer. Elsa looks out at the city.

JAMES DILLARD (CONT'D)

Elsa.

She turns, walks to the carriage.

JAMES DILLARD (CONT'D)

This is a dangerous town. No wandering.

ELSA

I don't wander.

JAMES DILLARD

All you do is wander, and you ain't doing it here. Promise.

ELSA

I promise.

She steps into the carriage. James closes the door, climbs up on the seat beside the driver.

INT. CARRIAGE -- FORT WORTH, TEXAS -- NIGHT.

The carriage moves through Hell's Half Acre and its endless row of bars, brothels, and gambling houses.

MUSIC filters out windows and doors. As does shouting. Two men fight in the middle of the street -- pounding drunken, angry punches into each other as a young woman laughs and drinks right from a bottle of whiskey.

YOUNG WOMAN  
WHIP HIS FUCKING ASS!!!

Claire covers Mary Abel's ears.

SPENCER  
What did she say?

MARGARET  
Nothing, honey.

Elsa stares out the window, fascinated. There are people everywhere -- dancing, shoving, laughing, shouting ...

EXT. CARRIAGE -- FORT WORTH, TEXAS -- CONT.

James clocks every danger as they pass. The carriage driver looks over at James.

CARRIAGE DRIVER  
Staying in Fort Worth long?

JAMES DILLARD  
Not if I can help it.

CARRIAGE DRIVER  
You know ... There's some real nice parts. You just ain't in one of em.

INT. HOTEL CALHOUN -- NIGHT.

James, Margaret, Claire, Mary Abel, Spencer, and Elsa -- in that order -- make their way up a long, dark flight of stairs.

They reach the top and turn down a long hallway of hotel rooms. Second floor of the hotel is no escape from the revelry either -- laughter filters down the hallway. People push their way past the Dutton clan.

James stops beside a door, unlocks it.

JAMES DILLARD  
Claire.

She walks to the door, peeks inside like a weary animal.



CLAIRE  
Mary Abel, let's go.

Don't have to tell her twice. She hurries into the room,  
Claire closes the door behind them.

JAMES DILLARD  
Losing her husband didn't soften  
her much.

MARGARET  
You could soak that woman in  
buttermilk for a month and not  
soften her.

James unlocks another door, swings it open.

JAMES DILLARD  
Spencer, you and your sister are  
here.

SPENCER  
Where are you?

JAMES DILLARD  
Right next door.

Margaret looks at Elsa.

MARGARET  
Look after your brother.

ELSA  
I will.

MARGARET  
Yes ma'am.

ELSA  
I said I will.

MARGARET  
I know what you said. What you  
didn't say is 'yes ma'am'.

ELSA  
Women don't say that to each other.

MARGARET  
Oh, you're a woman now.

ELSA  
Aren't I?

Elsa closes the door behind her. Margaret fights her frustration with a weary laugh.

MARGARET  
That child ...

JAMES DILLARD  
She ain't wrong.

James unlocks their door. Margaret walks in.

MARGARET  
Oh, so you're ready for her to start courting.

JAMES DILLARD  
Not a chance.

MARGARET  
What I thought.

Margaret looks around the room -- it's a step above decent. Two steps even. Not lavish, but nice. Attempts were made at luxury.

MARGARET (CONT'D)  
How much did you spend on this room?

JAMES DILLARD  
It's the last room we'll see for a while. You deserve it.

She looks at the copper bath tub opposite the bed.

MARGARET  
A bath.

JAMES DILLARD  
Imagine that.

MARGARET  
I wonder if there's hot water in the lobby.

JAMES DILLARD  
There's hot water.

She raises an eyebrow.

MARGARET

I read about a hotel in New York where they pipe directly to the rooms. You turn a faucet and out it comes. Imagine *that* ...

JAMES DILLARD

For now, you're gonna have to imagine me carrying it up the stairs.

MARGARET

I can do that.

He smiles, walks out the door ...

INT. WHITE ELEPHANT SALOON -- FORT WORTH, TX -- NIGHT.

This is the heart of Fort Worth's hedonistic half acre -- a long bar runs the length of the wall. Gas lamps illuminate red fabric walls. The place is packed with every cowboy, gambler, gunman, prostitute, show girl, and saloon maid in North Texas.

Gambling tables are filled. Music bounces off the wood ceiling. One must shout to be heard.

Shea sits in the corner at a table. His eyes move absently over the crowd. A young prostitute spots him. Slinks her way in his direction ...

Sits beside him. Studies his drink. Picks it up, Sniffs it. She speaks with an accent. Could be French. Could be fake. Who knows ... All we know is it works, and it is beguiling. Her name is MELODI(28).

MELODI

Absynthe?

SHEA

Soda water.

MELODI

I don't know this water.

SHEA

You probably use it to remove stains.

MELODI

Why do you drink it?

SHEA  
Because I don't drink alcohol.

MELODI  
Why not.

SHEA  
Because I don't.

MELODI  
Don't gamble either.

SHEA  
No.

MELODI  
Do you dance?

SHEA  
Not anymore.

MELODI  
Maybe you should go home and sleep.  
Let me guess: you don't sleep  
either.

SHEA  
Not much.

MELODI  
So you sit here and drink your  
drink that isn't a drink and watch  
people do all the other things you  
don't do.

SHEA  
That's a fair observation.

MELODI  
Why ...

Melodi fascinated by the odd contradiction of a man sitting  
across from her.

MELODI (CONT'D)  
It's not money. Poor men stare  
across this room little puppies  
hungry for a scrap. You have money.

SHEA  
I have enough.

MELODI

You don't want to be alone with  
memories is why you don't sleep.  
So, you sit here until you are too  
tired for memories.

SHEA

You're too smart to be working  
here.

MELODI

I make more money than bankers. I'm  
right where I'm supposed to be.  
What was her name.

Shea stares at her for an eternity. He seems surprised when  
he says --

SHEA

Helen.

Melodi stands from her seat, then sits in his lap. He lets  
her. She leans close. Her hand runs across his chest -- more  
comforting than sexual.

MELODI

And you've known no one since.

He shakes his head 'no'.

MELODI (CONT'D)

You can call me her name.

He looks at her as she runs her fingers across his face.

MELODI (CONT'D)

You can close your eyes and call me  
her name and you can be with her  
again. I can give that to you --

Shea hurls her from his lap.

SHEA

*Get the fuck off me.*

She stares at him, as do other patrons around him. One of the  
DEALERS turns around, eyes Shea.

DEALER

He causing problems?

MELODI

He pushed me.

The dealer grabs a sawed off axe handle from beneath the table, turns to stand.

Shea pulls his pistol so quick most don't notice until the barrel is pressed beneath the dealer's chin.

SHEA

Know what I'm doing here? Looking for a reason. You want to be my reason?

DEALER

No, I do not.

SHEA

Then sit down.

Shea stands, walks to Melodi who stares at him like a snake. He leans close, his mouth to her ear, whispers --

SHEA (CONT'D)

Helen.

He pulls back, looks at her.

SHEA (CONT'D)

Didn't work.

Shea turns and walks out of the bar ...

INT. ELSA'S HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT.

Elsa looks out the window onto the street, watches revelers laugh and stumble along the red brick road ...

Sees A COUPLE walk hand in hand, then turn into an alley. The man presses the woman against the wall, devours her in a kiss.

The woman tears at the buckle of his belt. The man yanks at the draw string of her dress, pries it open. Runs his hand against her breasts ...

She tosses her head back and emits a moan so passionate, it almost sounds angry.

She raises her leg and wraps it around his waist as he tears at the buttons of his pants, then thrusts himself inside her.

Elsa watches, fascinated. She looks back -- checks that her brother is sleeping, then places her hands on the window and slowly pushes it up, allowing the woman's moans inside.

ELSA (V.O.)

All I knew of sex was rumors.  
Stories traded among friends as we  
tried to imagine what that word  
really meant. Now I knew ...

As the woman's moans grow louder, Elsa grows worried -- she  
closes the window, and watches them make love in silence ...

INT. JAMES AND MARGARET'S HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT.

James and Margaret sit in the tub, facing each other. She  
runs a straight razor across his cheeks. She shakes the razor  
clean in the water, then returns it to his face.

MARGARET

I've read a lot about Wyoming.

JAMES DILLARD

Not enough rain in the east, too  
much snow in the west.

MARGARET

So, no to Colorado, no to Wyoming.

JAMES DILLARD

Oregon. Washington. Plenty of rain.  
Not much snow. Cool summers and  
mild winters.

MARGARET

Sounds like a song.

JAMES DILLARD

To you it sounds like a song.

James runs a hand over her neck, pulls her to him.

MARGARET

James ...

JAMES DILLARD

You think I carried forty gallons  
of water up those stairs to get  
clean? I'm wooing you.

MARGARET

Ohh, you're wooing me ...

JAMES DILLARD

Yes ma'am.

She kisses him.

MARGARET

Those water buckets sure looked heavy.

Kisses him again.

JAMES DILLARD

They were, honey.

MARGARET

Poor thing.

She kisses him, presses her body into his, and they lose themselves in each other ...

INT. ELSA'S HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT.

Elsa lays awake, staring at the ceiling. The sounds from the street now come from her parent's room next door. But they are different sounds. Sounds more like joy than passion -- stifled giggles then silence. Then something like a moan ...

ELSA (V.O.)

So much I don't know about life. We learn to read, we learn rules, learn scripture and manners, and how to avoid saying or doing things that make others uncomfortable. All those things seem to be the opposite of life. Seem to strangle it. But now, I'm sleeping on the edge of civilization, and soon we leave the edge behind. Then no rules. Then only life. What an adventure. What an adventure for all of us ...

INT. HOTEL CALHOUN -- FORT WORTH, TEXAS -- NIGHT.

Clock on the wall reads 3am as a man stumbles past it, stumbles into the wall, bounces off it and makes his way to the stairs. Teeters his way up them ...

INT. HALLWAY -- HOTEL CALHOUN -- FORT WORTH, TEXAS -- NIGHT.

Up the stairs, the man leans against the wall. Fishes out his room key, stumbles down the hall ...

He is a big man, dirty beard, dirty everything ... Manages to stumble his way to his door. Puts the key in, turns. Key doesn't turn ... Pulls it out, tries again.



Key slides in but still doesn't turn. Hmm. Man puts the key in one last time, twists -- nothing. The man then grabs the door knob and twists so hard the knob breaks. He pushes open the door, closes it behind him ...

INT. ELSA'S HOTEL ROOM -- CONT.

The drunk man starts pulling off clothes, stumbles toward the bed and lets his body fall on it. Elsa's eyes open as she feels a new presence in the bed.

She is frozen stiff. Doesn't move. Looks to the floor beside her where Spencer sleeps on a blanket. Tries to stop her breathing. Listens --

Hears nothing but the big man breath in and out. Then a stir. His weight moves and it shifts her like a wave on open water. Then silence ...

SLOWLY she turns her head around and sees --

The big man is staring right at her, as surprised as she is. He pulls back the blanket and sees the imprint of her body against her nightgown.

His hand moves to her mouth, grips it tight -- no air can leave her much-less sound. He moves on top of her and she jabs her finger into his eye socket -- and doesn't remove it until his hand releases her mouth.

She leaps out of the bed, grabbing Spencer as she goes. She screams as she runs for the door, the big man now finding his feet and racing after her ...

She races to the door, swings it open, and shoves Spencer through it. As she steps from the hotel room, a giant hand grabs her.

ELSA  
NGHAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!!!!

Her scream is more animal than human as the man wraps her in his arms and pulls her back in the room. She kicks and flails and slams her head into his face until his nose is bloody, then he tosses her to the ground. As she looks up, his fist thunders into her cheek, knocking her senseless ...

She looks up from the floor as he looms over her. Then his head explodes and he disappears from her view ...

She rolls to her stomach, gets to her knees and sees her father standing shirtless, pistol in his hand, arm outstretched.

She runs to him and he pushes her into the hall.

JAMES DILLARD  
GO TO OUR ROOM.

She runs to her mother's arms and Margaret pulls her into the hotel room. James spins and faces the open doors of every room -- men poking out their doors, pistols in hand ...

JAMES DILLARD (CONT'D)  
ANYBODY ELSE?! ANYBODY ELSE WANT TO  
COME AFTER MY FAMILY?!?!?

Doors close as quickly as they opened. James leans into his hotel room, watches his wife cradle his terrified daughter. Watches his son rock back and forth, wailing for comfort -- and not understanding that he isn't the one who needs it.

James leans against the doorway and watches them, wondering what the hell he'd gotten his family into, knowing there was no way to get them out. They had no choice but to endure. Yes, what an adventure indeed ...

EXT. STOCK YARDS -- MORNING.

Shea and Thomas stand with the STOCK YARD MANAGER(50), looking over a corral filled with ox (bulls that were not castrated until adulthood, then trained to be draft animals, for those who don't know ...)

STOCK YARD MANAGER  
What the hell am I gonna do with  
these?

SHEA  
Sell 'em.

STOCK YARD MANAGER  
To who?

SHEA  
Farmers.

STOCK YARD MANAGER  
Farmers don't use ox no more. They  
got these steam engines now that  
can pull a plow all day. All you  
gotta do is feed the furnace.

SHEA  
Never seen one. And neither have  
you. Swap me even.

STOCK YARD MANAGER  
I'll swap you for mules.

SHEA  
We want horses.

THOMAS  
These folks can't handle mules.  
They're real green.

STOCK YARD MANAGER  
Green's their problem. Not mine.

SHEA  
I'll take a mix, but it needs to be  
half horses.

STOCK YARD MANAGER  
Alright. But don't give me any lip  
about the horses -- they are what  
they are. They cowboys got all the  
good ones these days.

Shea and Thomas walk back toward town.

THOMAS  
When you want to pull out?

SHEA  
Let's see how much we can teach  
them first. I want to give them a  
chance.

THOMAS  
Hey, it's a job, Captain. And we  
took it. All I got's my word and  
I'll see it through, but half these  
folks ain't gonna make it, and we  
both know it. It's a free country  
and this is what they chose. We're  
doing what we can, but we need to  
get moving or winter's gonna kill  
us all.

SHEA  
They aren't ready.

THOMAS  
They won't ever be ready, Captain.

SHEA  
Just 'cuz they won't survive  
doesn't mean we don't try.

THOMAS  
Never said it did.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM -- PINKERTON DETECTIVE AGENCY -- DAY.

Shea and Thomas stand in front of the emigrant families. In front of them is a table filled with taxidermied animals and dried plants. Josef stands beside them, translating everything they say.

Shea holds a stuffed rattlesnake. Hands it to the crowd, who passes it around.

SHEA  
This is a rattlesnake. They hide under logs, under rocks -- if it's cold at night they will look for warmth and if you are sleeping on the ground that warmth is you. A bite will kill you ...

Shea grabs dried plants pressed in wax paper.

SHEA (CONT'D)  
This is poison oak and poison ivy. They won't kill you, you'll just wish you were dead. Do not touch them. Do not walk in them.

Shea looks at Thomas.

SHEA (CONT'D)  
What else.

THOMAS  
Water.

SHEA  
Do not drink water from the ground. When we make camp we will choose a latrine away from our water source.

Josef looks back.

JOSEF  
What is latrine.

SHEA  
Rest room.

Doesn't know that either.

SHEA (CONT'D)  
Water closet.

Nope.

SHEA (CONT'D)  
Thomas, help me.

THOMAS  
Toilette.

Josef nods.

SHEA  
What the hell is a toilette.

THOMAS  
It's French for shitter.

SHEA  
When did you learn French?

THOMAS  
I don't know French, I just know  
the French word for shitter --

SHEA  
How do you know the French word for  
shitter?!

THOMAS  
I used to fuck a girl from France!

SHEA  
Fine. That's all you had to say.  
Don't have to get angry about it.

THOMAS  
We should check them.

SHEA  
I know.

THOMAS  
All of them.

SHEA  
I know.

The door in the rear opens. James steps in.

THOMAS  
The farmer.

SHEA

Mmhmm.

Shea walks to the back of the room. Meets James.

JAMES DILLARD

You need help, I'll give it.

SHEA

I'll take it. Thank you. Pays a hundred a month.

JAMES DILLARD

Don't want your money. Not working for you. Just riding with you.

SHEA

Fair enough ... How many women in your group?

JAMES DILLARD

It's only women in my group. And a five year-old boy.

SHEA

Might need to borrow one of those womEn.

JAMES DILLARD

Borrow them for what.

EXT. PINKERTON DETECTIVE AGENCY -- MOMENT LATER.

James has the wagon hitched to his horses. Margaret and Spencer sit on the bench. Elsa, Claire, and Mary Abel are tucked in the wagon. James walks out, leans his head inside, looks at Claire.

JAMES DILLARD

Sister, I have a job for you.

INT. PINKERTON DETECTIVE AGENCY -- LATER.

Claire stands in a hallway with all the emigrant women lined up against the wall.

Claire looks to the heavens for comfort, finds none. Walks to the first woman. Motions to her. The woman drops her dress to the ground, stands before her, naked.

Claire makes a circling motion with her finger and the woman turns around. Claire studies her body, then nods. The woman gets dressed and Claire moves to the next woman ...

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM -- PINKERTON DETECTIVE AGENCY -- DAY.

The men stand in a line before Shea, Thomas, and James. They step forward, one by one, and strip their clothes. The men look them over, Shea nods, and the man gets dressed, then steps away. The next man walks up ...

A man steps up, strips his shirt. The man's eyes are red. Nose seems clogged. They study him.

SHEA

Turn around.

Around his waist are small boils, like pimples. James spots them first, points them to Thomas.

THOMAS

Captain.

Thomas points at the boils.

SHEA

Get dressed.

The man pulls on his shirt.

SHEA (CONT'D)

You have a wife?

The man nods. Shea looks at Josef.

SHEA (CONT'D)

Bring her here.

Josef walks out of the room.

MAN

What.

SHEA

Nothing.

MAN

What did I do.

SHEA

Didn't do anything.

Josef brings a young woman into the room.

SHEA (CONT'D)

Thomas.

Thomas grabs the man while Shea grabs the woman by the arm, pushes them to the front door and shoves them outside. The man looks back at Shea.

MAN

WHAT DID I DO?? WHAT DID WE DO??

Shea walks to him.

SHEA

You didn't do anything. You have smallpox. And you're going to die. In three days you're going to give it to everyone you meet. If you have a soul, you will leave the city and find a river, sit beside it and die in peace. If I see you again I'll kill you myself.

MAN

I DON'T HAVE THIS THING YOU SAY. I DON'T HAVE THIS THING!!!

A crowd is forming, and it isn't happy. The young man looks around, grabs his bride by the hand and hurries her off.

Shea and Thomas walk back inside ...

INT. PINKERTON DETECTIVE AGENCY -- CONT.

Shea and Thomas walk back to James standing in front of the room of men, who all huddle together.

SHEA

You ready to travel?

JAMES DILLARD

I've spent my last night in this town.

SHEA

I'll move north tomorrow. We'll camp on the Trinity, and see if we can teach these people how to drive a wagon.

JAMES DILLARD

Where on the Trinity?



SHEA

Head due north. There's an oak bent over like an old woman with a boulder against the trunk.. Looks like it's crying over a grave. I'll meet you there.

James turns and walks out of the room.

ELSA (V.O.)

I remember stories of the great War, how it seemed man had lost all reason. That we'd become animals, or perhaps we just surrendered to the fact that animals is all we've ever been.

EXT. TRINITY RIVER -- NEXT MORNING.

James's wagon sits beside a meandering river. His horses graze. He has a tent set beside the wagon. Spencer runs by the river, chasing grasshoppers ...

Elsa steps from the wagon in her nightgown. Stretches. Looks out over the carpet of green grass spilled out before her ...

ELSA (V.O.)

But there are moments where I feel we are more. Where we have evolved beyond a search for the next meal or the dominance to breed who we choose. Where we breathe fresh air deep and can almost taste its maker.

A long line of wagons ambles its way towards the Dutton camp. Shea and Thomas ride ahead. See James's camp in the distance and lope in its direction ...

Elsa stares at the meandering river, then walks into it. Walks until the water kisses her chest, then ducks her head and disappears beneath it.

ELSA (V.O.)

I wish I could freeze this moment. I would live in it forever, swimming in the possible while the mud of the real is stuck to the shore.

The wagons move closer -- like a giant, canvas snake, weaving its way to the river. Elsa pushes up from the water, wipes it from her eyes. Watches the wagon train approaching ...

James watches his wife and Spencer stoke a fire not far from shore, looks over the river and the rolling hills beyond ...

ELSA (V.O.)

We weren't poor. We weren't desperate. The road west is filled with failures, but failure isn't what drove him. It was a dream. And the dream was coming true ...

THE END.

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