

DIG

by

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*Look within.
Within is the fountain of good,
And it will ever bubble up,
If thou wilt ever dig.*

-Marcus Aurelius

FADE IN:

EXT. APPALACHIAN FOOTHILLS - DUSK

A LONE FIGURE treks through the breathtaking Appalachian wilderness. Snow-sprinkled canopies top the surrounding hills. A bone-white plain of powder below.

Not a track in sight but those behind:

SOLOMON, known to most as **SOL**, on the wrong side of forty, a dark, grey-specked beard, eyes that have seen too much. A Thoreau-like air about him like he's endured a silent solitude and returned with wisdom we'll never understand.

Sol hauls a large BACKPACK and ARROW SLEEVE through three feet of fresh snow into...

A WOODED AREA

where he unloads his pack and snaps together a TAKE-DOWN BOW.

Sol nocks an arrow, draws the string, and does what we will see him do many times:

Closes his eyes
Sucks a calm breath
Releases steady and slow
And opens those eyes again -- now hard, dark, focused.

TWANG! The arrow launches ahead...

Between trees.

Through bushes.

Over broken branches.

THWACK! And into the belly of a WILD TURKEY. A short gobble-gobble and its dead to rights.

Sol inspects the kill. There'll be good eating tonight.

EXT. CAMP FIRE - (THAT) NIGHT

A CHARRED TURKEY roasting on a spit. Sol's bear claw of a hand spinning it slowly.

He removes the spit, slips off the cooked animal, sterilizes his HUNTING KNIFE over the fire heat.

THE KNIFE slices meat slivers onto two plates. Sol offers the plates to two girls: **EMMA** and **GINNY**, 14 and 10.

Sol cuts more meat for himself, mutters to the girls:

SOL

Eat up.

GINNY

Gotta say grace, Daddy.

Sol sighs, stabs his knife into the turkey.

SOL

Go'n, then.

His girls hold hands, offer their free hands to him. He takes them, but we may note the hesitance.

Sol watches them lower their heads, close their eyes. But he does not do the same.

EMMA

We thank you, Lord, for this food.
We thank you for our water. And for
this place to sleep. We thank you
for bringing our Daddy back to us
and for keeping him safe on his
hunt. We thank you for keeping us
safe and we pray that you will
always do so. We thank you for...
For, um...

GINNY

Keeping Momma alive.

EMMA

Right. For keeping our mother
alive.

Sol's eyes gloss over. He swallows hard, a lump growing in his throat.

We stay with Sol as he watches his girls. Something behind his eyes -- lost hope or lost pride or both.

EMMA (O.S.) (cont'd)

And we pray, as we do every night,
that you will allow us to keep her.
Please, Lord, don't take her from
us.

GINNY (O.S.)

Please, Lord.

EMMA (O.S.)
Please. Leave her here with us.
Leave her with her family.

GINNY (O.S.)
Please, Lord.

EMMA (O.S.)
Please. And thank you.

Amen. GINNY EMMA
Amen. Amen.

Sol watches his girls slowly raise their heads, wipe their wet eyes, pick up their plates.

He just rips into a sliver of meat, his version of an *amen*.

EXT. SOL'S TRAILER - (THE NEXT) DAY

Sol and his girls emerge from the nearby woods, packs-and-all. They move toward a TRAILER that rests alone in the foothills.

It is quiet. It is secluded. It is lonely.

A salt-coated pickup truck rests in the driveway, its bed weighed down with firewood.

INT. SOL'S TRAILER - DAY

Small, cluttered, even dirtier than its owner. Nothing pretty about it. Nothing except for the...

MOUNTED PHOTOS

of Solomon's family that we find...

DOWN THE HALLWAY

as we follow the girls to their bedroom. But we don't follow them inside. We wait on them. Finding SNAPSHOTS of:

-- *Sol holding a small, naked, pinkish being. Emma at birth. APRIL, her mother, rests beside them in hospital attire.*

-- *A birthday party. Emma blowing out candles. Four of them. With April's help. Sol cradles a newborn Ginny behind them.*

-- All four of them at AN ISOLATED LOG CABIN. The girls are 9 and 5. Sol holding April around the waist.

-- The girls and Sol, last year, without April. They both kiss his cheeks. Making the best of a bad situation.

Finally, the girls emerge. They've changed into something comfortable.

At the kitchen table, they find OJ and muffins.

On the couch, Sol gulps a cup of water as he shuffles through BILL after UNPAID BILL. Most of them with medical symbols.

He moves to the sink, refills his cup with water. Stares out a frosted window at the unforgiving Appalachian terrain. That ever-present WHISTLING HOWL of winter wind echoing outside.

EXT. SOL'S TRAILER - DAY

Sol and his girls file out, move toward his pickup truck. The girls eat their muffins. Sol carries their backpacks.

EXT./INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL, SOL'S PICKUP - DAY

Sol's pickup parks curbside. The girls climb out and their daddy hands them their backpacks.

SOL
Have a good'n.

EMMA
You too.

GINNY
Love you, Daddy.

SOL
Y'too, girls.

Emma helps Ginny squirm her backpack over her shoulders and Sol watches them until they're safely inside the school.

INT. LOCAL HOSPITAL - DAY

A frail woman resting in a hospital bed. This is **APRIL**, Sol's wife and the girls' mother. She's dying slowly, painfully. But as Sol walks through her door, she brightens, seems to forget her pain at the sight of...

APRIL
Solomon.

SOL
How are ya, honey?

APRIL
No, how are you?

SOL
I'm awright.

APRIL
How're the girls?

SOL
They're awright.

APRIL
Where are they?

SOL
School. Like you want'em to be.

APRIL
Good. Good.

As they converse, it may become clear that any day could be the day for her. And right now, we may realize that April senses that today is her day...

Today is the day.

SOL
We was happy, wasn't we?

No words needed, she simply pulls him to her. He rests his forehead against hers and the room is filled only with April's labored breathing and Sol's resistant whimpering.

There's love here. Something unbreakable and transcendent.

APRIL
(whispered)
Remember what I asked. Remember what you promised me.

Off Sol's sorrowful eyes, we:

CUT TO:

EXT. CEMETERY - (ANOTHER) DAY

A RUSTED SHOVEL

forced through frozen dirt by the boot of...

SOLOMON

at his job, digging a grave like he does on most days. Always some poor soul who needs burying.

DARREL, the grounds keeper, approaches Sol. He watches him for a long moment. Removes his hat, speaks up:

DARREL

Need some help on this'n?

Sol ignores him, wipes his brow, keeps digging.

DARREL (cont'd)

Figgered you might wanna take'is one off. You dug just'bout every grave round here. Don't seem right havin to do it for yer own kin.

(still no response)

At least take a breather, buddy. I'll take over fer a few.

Sol pauses, speaks over his shoulder:

SOL

Please leave me the fuck alone.
Thank you, Darrel.

Darrel raises his hands in a truce, replaces his hat, strolls back the way he came.

And Sol SPEARS his shovel back into the frozen earth.

INT. MORTUARY - DAY

The stale stench of death-for-profit somehow in the air. The last place you wanna go before you become one with the earth again. All flowery and colorful, everything death isn't.

INT. MORTUARY BASEMENT - SAME

Eerily lit. Concrete floor and walls. Cold even to the sight.

A FIGURE hunches over a CADAVER. Doing everything that has to be done. Everything we do not want to see.

Finished, the figure removes his gloves and white coat. And we see now, that the cadaver is April -- pale and lifeless.

The figure strokes her face lovingly, longingly.

See him now: an old body ravaged by time. A war-torn veteran, his face still fierce and murderous. Eyes that hardly blink and burn like the dying embers of some long held flame. Cold, calm, and terrifying. This is **OLD LUC**, April's father.

He kisses her blue cheek, combs her hair, slowly applies lipstick to her sewn-shut lips.

The sadness of this moment mirrored not in his stoic face, but in those dark, lost eyes. Piercing and hollow.

EXT. CEMETERY - AFTERNOON

SNOW FALLS into an open grave.

Around it: Emma and Ginny crying, Sol holding their hands, braving the day for his girls. Across from them stands...

Old Luc watching them, studying Sol. He's already paid his dues to his daughter. He's here for something else.

Beside him are **KURT** and **LAMAR**, sons to Old Luc and brothers to April. In their mid-30s, they're young and virile. Kurt's GUITAR is ever-present. Lamar's mind is not.

A WIND-BURNT PREACHER nears the end of his sermon, Kurt strumming his guitar lightly beside him.

Now finished, the small congregation mutters an "amen."

Kurt's guitar playing goes out of tune, voice chokes, face tenses. He's crying.

LAMAR

Kurt, it's alright. That's 'nough
fer now. That's enough.

Kurt wipes his tears, leans down and tosses dirt onto April's lowered casket.

KURT

I'll watch over yer girls. Promise.

Old Luc regards Solomon. Something between them, unsaid but understood.

EXT. SOL'S PICKUP - MOMENTS LATER

As Sol and his girls make way for his truck, Old Luc approaches from behind.

OLD LUC
Girls, don't Pappaw get a hug?

The girls turn about and he kneels to hug them both.

OLD LUC (cont'd)
Love you girls. Now get in the truck, get yerselves warm.

The girls climb into the truck, close the doors. Old Luc turns to Sol:

OLD LUC (cont'd)
I have a word?

SOL
Sure, Luc. What is it?

OLD LUC
Not now. Drop by later, affer dark.

SOL
I got the girls, now.

OLD LUC
Bring them too.

SOL
Don't want 'em around there no more. They need to forget about death, not be reminded of it.

OLD LUC
Then I'll come to you.

SOL
Won't be there.

Old Luc's demeanor seems to change abruptly. That's the last thing he wanted to hear.

OLD LUC
Wha'for?

SOL
Just need a few days. Give us that. Then we'll talk.

Old Luc studies Sol for a winded moment, almost to himself:

OLD LUC
Be seein' ya.

INT. SOL'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Sol and his girls eat dinner at a small table, a CAST-IRON FURNACE roaring behind them.

LATER,

Sol washes and dries plates as Ginny emerges from the small hallway, now in her pajamas.

 SOL
Brush yer teeth?

 GINNY
Yep.

 SOL
Yer sister?

Ginny just shrugs. Doesn't know.

Sol sighs, stacks one more dry plate and heads down...

THAT HALLWAY

Nears a barely-cracked bathroom door.

 SOL
Em?

No response and Sol peeks...

THROUGH THE CRACKED DOOR

Spots Emma leaning against the sink, toothbrush still dripping with toothpaste, mouth still frothed...

And crying.

Frantically, desperately. Gasping for air.

She may seem tough, might even be tough. But not right now.

IN THE HALLWAY

Sol can't stand to watch, doesn't know what to do. April used to take care of this.

So he just turns around, stalks slowly down the hallway, returns to the...

KITCHEN

And continues drying dishes.

GINNY
'Kay daddy?

SOL
Fine. Y'ready fer bed?

Ginny nods, adjusts her pajamas. Getting too big for her now.

GINNY
Read me a story?

Sol pauses mid-wipe, puts down a bowl. Gulps hard.

SOL
Not tonight, Gin.

GINNY
But momma used to--

SOL
Not tonight.

Ginny huffs and crosses her arms, starts for her bedroom, when...

Emma rounds the corner into the kitchen, eyes still red and puffy, hoping no one notices.

EMMA
Whoa, where y'going speedracer?

GINNY
Bed.

EMMA
What's wrong?

Ginny pushes past her sister, disappears into the dark hallway. To her dad:

EMMA (cont'd)
What'd y'do?

SOL
Read her a story, Em? I got
somewhere to be...

EMMA
'Course you do.

Emma turns to follow her sister, but...

SOL
Em!

Emma stops, looks back just to humor him.

SOL (cont'd)
Come'ere.

EMMA
What?

SOL
Just come here.

Emma does, steps to her father as he places a callused hand
on each cheek, kisses the top of her head.

SOL (cont'd)
It's gone get better, awright?

Forcing down tears, choking down the reemergence of the
emotion that caught her in the bathroom...

EMMA
Awright.

SOL
Now getcha some shut-eye. Leavin'
at sun-up.

Off Sol's fading smile, we...

CUT TO:

EXT. SOL'S TRAILER -- (LATER THAT) NIGHT

CLOSE ON clanking boots as they climb into that salt-coated
pickup. Boots that are dirty with years of wear and neglect.

V-V-V-VROOOM! and the truck roars to life.

THE CHAINED TIRES roll quietly away from the trailer.

EXT. SMALL TOWN STREETS -- MOVING -- NIGHT

Sol's truck maneuvers the hilltown streets, snow and slush on every corner. Town's dead save for the lit-up Waffle House.

Always a Waffle House in every shit town.

EXT. SOL'S TRUCK -- NIGHT

THOSE CHAINED TIRES roll to a stop.

Not sure where we are but it's a long moment before THOSE DIRTY BOOTS drop to the snow below.

EXT. APPALACHIAN HORIZON -- NIGHT

The tree-lined horizon backed by a FULL MOON.

TIME-LAPSE as the moon swims its way through the night sky. Nature's ticking clock.

EXT. SOL'S TRUCK -- (EVEN LATER THAT) NIGHT

THOSE DIRTY BOOTS climb back into the truck. If they were dirty before, the boots are now filthy.

EXT. WAFFLE HOUSE -- NIGHT

CHAINED WHEELS creep to a stop, truck parks, THOSE BOOTS drop down again, clank their way to the door.

INT. WAFFLE HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

DRING! DRING! as the entry door announces Sol's arrival.

A WHITE TRASH WAITRESS wipes down the main counter, only one COOK cracking and frying some eggs behind her.

Sol eyes the only other customers. TWO FAT TRUCKERS. Probably home from a long haul.

FAT ASS TRUCKER
You seen better days fella.

SOL
Seen better faces too.

FAT FUCK TRUCKER
Yer wife was April Sanders?

SOL
She was.

FAT FUCK TRUCKER
I's sorry to hear she'd gone.
(then...)
Finest piece-a-ass this side a the
(~~Missis~~)sippi 'fore I dropped out.

Quicker than a snake strike, Sol's grimy paw grips Fat Fuck's throat and pins his head to his plate of sunny side eggs.

Finds a knife and levels it to the man's bloodshot eyeball.

SOL
Say again?

Egg yolk bleeds beneath the man's wet-wire mane as he takes sight of the sharp blade inching closer.

WHITETRASH WAITRESS

freezes mid-wipe as...

THE COOK

turns about, leaves hashbrowns to *SIZZLE* and burn behind him.

FAT ASS TRUCKER
Now, let off'im. He ain't mean it.

SOL
(to Fat Fuck)
Is 'at right?

FAT FUCK TRUCKER
(barely audible...)
It is.

Whitetrash Waitress leans over the countertop, offers:

WAITRESS
Not that I wouldn't mind seein'
Melvin here buried, but I don't
reckon yer girls wanna see you in
prison garb. What y'think?

Sol's hand trembles, the knife's edge so close to the man's eye that Fat Fuck would get an eyelash trim if he blinked.

WAITRESS (cont'd)

Sol?

Finally, Sol drops the knife, shoves the man to the ground and his buddy helps him to his feet.

WAITRESS (cont'd)

Now, then. What can I get ya, hun?

SOL

Cup a coffee.

She finds a stagnant pot of black coffee and a mug, pours it as Sol takes a seat at a counter stool.

Beside him, those Fat Truckers leave little-to-no tip and stagger out the front entrance. No looking back.

WAITRESS

Sorry 'bout them. And sorry 'bout April. She's too young.

As she sets down the mug:

SOL

Leave the pot.

Waitress eyes Sol a moment, sets the pot down too.

WAITRESS

Whatcha eatin'?

SOL

Lemme get some eggs, sausage patties, biscuits-n-gravy.

(then)

Coupla waffles-n-syrup. Hashbrowns. Buttered toast and jam.

(oh, and...)

Steak topped with fried onions.

Side a slaw.

(after a thought)

And a slice a that pie up there, if y'don't mind.

Waitress scribbles it all down, smirks.

WAITRESS

You'd think it's yer last supper or sumpin.

SOL

Y'could say.

She glances at him shortly, slightly disturbed by that.

But Sol just stares out a far winter-worn window, the sun awakening that tree-lined horizon.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - MORNING

Sol and his girls hike through a clearing, a worn PACK MULE striding alongside.

As his girls catch snow on their tongues, Sol studies the mountain wilderness ahead, rubs his bloodshot eyes, yawns. Clearly didn't sleep last night.

He adjusts an OVERSIZED ARMY RUCKSACK saddled to the mule. Carefully, softly. It's about 2x5. Oddly shaped. Whatever's inside is apparently heavy and fragile.

Something important.

EXT. CEMETERY -- DAY

A GUARD SHACK hugging the gated entrance, the only window smashed. Forced entry.

INT. CEMETERY GUARD SHACK -- CONTINUOUS

Kurt and Lamar cover the entrance, backs to us.

In a corner, Darrel cowers in his chair, eyes trembling as...

Old Luc pushes between his sons, keeps that unwavering stare on Darrel. Matter-of-factly:

 OLD LUC
 Where is he.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

ON SOL'S FACE

as he leads his girls up the mountain. Something betraying his eyes, like he knows something's after him.

Been a long time coming.

INT. SOL'S TRAILER -- DAY

Front door implodes. Lamar strolls inside, then Kurt and Darrel, followed by...

Old Luc, sliding through the doorway like unwinding smoke.

THAT PHOTO of the log cabin, Old Luc's face reflected in the glass as...

CRACK! it shatters under the force of his fist.

He slips that photo out of the broken frame, stuffs it in a jacket pocket.

EXT. SOL'S TRAILER -- CONTINUOUS

Old Luc's burning eyes spot TRACKS that Sol and his girls left behind. Leading up the foothills and into the wild.

EXT. HORSE FARM -- DAY

Old Luc speaking with an Appalachian HORSE FARMER. We can't hear what's said, but it's convincing enough for the Farmer to nod with hesitant approval.

INT. BARN, HORSE FARM -- MOMENTS LATER

Old Luc, Kurt and Lamar mount horses. Darrel climbs on behind Kurt, wraps his arms around his waist.

KURT

Watch the guitar, will ye?

Darrel nods. Terrified. No mistaking it.

YAW! And the horses are off.

Riders of the storm. The four fucking horsemen. Apocalypse is coming for someone.

EXT. FOREST -- DAY

Trees are so thick here that sunlight and snow cannot even break the canopy.

On the forest floor, Sol spots barely-visible ANIMAL TRACKS. Motions for Emma to kneel with him.

SOL
See 'em?

EMMA
What is it?

SOL
A fox, looks like. Can y'find the
next one?

Emma searches in front of the tracks, her hand feeling
amongst the moss and fallen branches.

EMMA
Here.

Sol clears the area, finds the tracks.

SOL
Follow'em.

Sol and Ginny stay behind Emma as she follows the tracks.

SOL (cont'd)
A fox is a predator and predators
are difficult to hunt.

QUICK-FLASH of the four horsemen ascending the mountain.

SOL (cont'd)
They are always alert, always
hunting.

QUICK-FLASH of Luc scouring the landscape for any tracks.

SOL (cont'd)
Hunting a hunter takes incredible
skill, patience and will.

QUICK-FLASH of OLD LUC'S EYES following Sol's tracks just as:

SOL'S EYES

spot something far ahead.

THE FOX'S TAIL

behind a large oak tree. Dull orange and white. A sharp
contrast to the forest surroundings.

Emma follows the tracks, rummaging through branches and
bushes, making too much noise.

Ever alert, the fox scurries away.

SOL (cont'd)
Let the fox hunt. There's 'nough
for us all.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - DAY

A mountain grassland. Snow collecting atop tendrils of grass.

Hiding at the edge of the forest, Sol's eyes follow another set of TRACKS into the open grassland.

A LONE BUCK grazes, burrowing his snout below the snow to find his food.

Sol kneels, slips off his rucksack and arrow sleeve. Motions for the girls to do the same.

He snaps his take-down bow together, nocks an arrow and...

Hands the weapon to Emma.

EMMA
You sure?

SOL
It's yer kill.

She smiles slightly, takes aim and, just like her father...

Eyes close.

Mouth breaths in.

Releases out.

Eyes open. Hard, dark, focused. Then:

She draws the string, arms shaking, aim wavering. Her arms aren't strong enough to hold the arrow steady.

TWANG! The arrow flies free...

Out of the trees.

Through falling snow.

Over snowy grass.

THWACK! And into a tree just beyond the buck. The beast startles and bounds into the forest.

EMMA
Shit!

SOL
It's awright. Just takes time.

Sol takes the bow from Emma, nocks another arrow, calmly stalks into the clearing after the fleeing animal.

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

A ROARING FIRE licks at falling snow. The buck has been cut, stripped, and cooked. To Emma:

SOL
Yer gonna get stronger. Stronger
y'are, better the aim.

Sol hands plates to his daughters as the pack mule WHINEYS behind them, beaten and hungry.

Sol tosses an apple at the mule's feet, just outta reach of his taught collar.

Emma stands and feeds the animal as she spots that oddly shaped RUCKSACK nearby. To Sol:

EMMA
Mind me askin' what's in there?

Sol hesitates to answer. May or may not be hiding something.

SOL
Supplies. Fer the cabin.

EMMA
Why we goin' there? We ain't done
this in two years.

SOL
Time we did.

EMMA
But why?

SOL
She wanted us to git back to
normal, awright?

Emma lets the mule cough down the rest of the apple, core and all, and takes her seat again. Rips into the deer meat.

EMMA
Ain't nothin' normal no more.

Sol studies his girls. Their long, sad faces. Sighs as he sets down his plate.

SOL
It's fer one night. One night at
the cabin and we'll put it behind
us. Do somethin' fun after.

GINNY
Fun?

Sol nods, notices Ginny light up a bit. But Emma's resistant.

GINNY (cont'd)
What kinda fun?

SOL
Yer choice.

Ginny looks to Emma, who finally raises her head, offers:

EMMA
Road trip.

SOL
Where to?

EMMA
Somewheres warm, that's fer sure.

Ginny tears into a piece of meat, speaks with a mouthful:

GINNY
Hawaii!

SOL
Cain't drive there, honey. It's an
island.

GINNY
Then Australia!

SOL
Oookay. Maybe. How 'bout you, Em?

Emma just stares into the fire, entranced. Finally mutters:

EMMA
I always did wanna go to a beach.

SOL
Did you?

EMMA

I wanted to be like one of those families who takes pictures in front of their sand castles. Me and Ginny and Momma would build it and take pictures and then you'd come and destroy it. And we'd pretend like we're mad, but really I'd just be happy that we could do it all over again. Like it would never end. We'd just spend all day right there. All day together building sand castles.

Sol collects himself, fakes strong for his girls.

SOL

Florida's still warm this time-a-year. How's Florida sound?

Before the fire, Emma's eyes glisten with longing. Those flames reflected in her glossy blues.

EMMA

Anything's better than here.

SOL

Gin?

GINNY

I guess that's okay. But it ain't better than Hawaii Island.

Sol doesn't have to fake a laugh after that. He pulls his girls close, hugs them both.

SOL

Get some rest. Coupla days and it's Florida-or-Bust.

The girls climb into their sleeping bags as Sol feeds more timber to the crackling fire.

He eyes the darkness beyond the slumbering mule. Sips from a tin of burnt coffee, determined to stay awake.

Off Sol's short yawn, we:

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPSITE - MORNING

WISPS OF SMOKE still rising from the smoldering fire that looks to have died hours ago.

Emma yawns herself awake, squirms out of her sleeping bag. Takes her a minute before she realizes...

SOLOMON IS GONE.

She pulls on her boots and shakes Ginny awake.

EMMA

You seen Dad anywheres?

Ginny shakes her head and yawns, finds her boots too.

GINNY

Prolly using the outhouse.

EMMA

Maybe.

Emma searches the campsite. The deer jerky is gone, so is Sol's hunting knife, the mule and that strange rucksack.

His arrow sleeve is still here and... so are his boots?

That can't be good.

EMMA (cont'd)

Why would he leave his boots?

GINNY

Huh?

EMMA

His boots. He wouldn't walk in the snow barefoot.

GINNY

I don't know. Maybe he--

EMMA

(calling out)

Dad!

GINNY

He's prolly just using--

EMMA

Dad! You out there? Dad!

GINNY
 (calling too)
 Daddy! Daddy, where are you?

EMMA
 Come on, get yer stuff together.

GINNY
 What, why?

EMMA
 Just do it, Gin. We gotta look
 for'im.

Ginny, unable to grasp the weight of it all, slowly rises and folds her sleeping bag.

Emma does the same. Faster, frantic.

Then, just as they're ready to head out...

RUSTLING nearby. Twigs CRACKING, snow SHUFFLING.
 Someone... coughing?

GINNY
 That's him. Daddy! Come on.

EMMA
 Wait.

The girls stand still, watching for something.

With the light breaking through the forest canopy, it's hard to see very far through the trees. But they spot:

A FIGURE

far in front of them. Hard to make it out. It advances.

Closer and closer.

Until it breaks into TWO FIGURES.

Closer... closer.

And finally, they can make out:

Kurt and Lamar on horseback, trotting toward the camp. Their horses traverse the snow, squirm through the maze of trees.

Emma steps in front of Ginny, watches her uncles approach until they're so close she can feel the horses' breath.

KURT
Mornin, girls.

GINNY
Uncle Kurt, you seen my daddy?

KURT
Sure did. Told us he's headin home.
Said to look after you two for'im.
Promised him I would.

EMMA
He wouldn't do'at.

LAMAR
Why wouldn't he, girl?

EMMA
Cause he don't trust you two.

LAMAR
Why's not?

EMMA
Cause yer both fuckups, that's why.

KURT
Now that's just unnecessary, Emma.

EMMA
It's true is what it is.

LAMAR
How's that?

EMMA
Cause ya fuck everything up, that's
why.

KURT
Told ya once, Emma, that's
unnecessary. Now, come along.

EMMA
We ain't goin nowhere with you.

LAMAR
What do we fuck up?

KURT
Get on these horses, now.

EMMA
 (to Lamar)
 Yer lives, genius.

KURT
 Shut up, Lamar.

EMMA
 You think we're goin with you,
 you're stupider than I thought.

KURT
 Get on up here, Ginny.

Kurt extends a hand to Ginny. She takes it and Kurt heaves her up onto his horse, plants her behind him.

EMMA
 (to Ginny)
 Get off there, gi'down.

GINNY
 They're takin us to Daddy.

EMMA
 No they ain't neither.
 (to Kurt and Lamar)
 I don't know what's goin on here,
 but my daddy don't trust you and
 neither do I.

LAMAR
 Awright, then.

Lamar swivels off his horse, wraps his arms around Emma.

EMMA
 Get the fuck off me, Lamar!

He swings Emma onto his horse, climbs on behind her.

LAMAR
 Be best to watch yer mouth, girl.

Lamar whips the reigns and his horse trots off, following Kurt's lead.

EXT. FOREST, ELSEWHERE - DAY

We're looking up at the sky, dark clouds rolling by, through the bare branches of White Birch Trees. Their limbs still collecting flakes of a passing snowstorm. Below:

A SNOW-COVERED RAVINE winding inconspicuously through the forest floor.

We follow the ravine, filled with three feet of snow. Resting amidst the powder, a hardly noticeable change in terrain.

As we close-in, this mound begins to MOVE.
Hard to make it out, but then the mound GROANS.
Closer still, and we can make out:

A FACE.

... Sol's face, to be exact. Dotted with fresh snowflakes.

BLUEVEINED EYELIDS flutter open, eyes squinting at the broken sunlight.

He lies motionless, shivering, breathing slowly. Tries to rise, but winces. A sharp pain.

His frozen-stiff hand feels its way to his left side, emerges stained with blood.

He peels up his shirt, spots the wound. It's bad. Deep. Won't heal itself but it looks to have missed his major organs.

Sol rolls to his right, squirms his way out of the ravine.

He rests, composes himself, seems confused -- How did he get here? And what the hell happened?

QUICK-FLASHES:

... Sol feeding timber to the crackling fire.

... Watching his girls sleep.

... Falling asleep himself, leaning against a log as...

... Kurt and Lamar, cover his mouth, drag him away from camp.

... Kurt watching as Lamar stabs Sol and kicks his broken body into the same ravine where we found him.

BACK WITH SOLOMON

As he realizes the gravity of his predicament -- his bleeding wound... exposure to the elements... his girls, now alone... likely with Kurt and Lamar... likely the doing of Old Luc...

He pulls HIS BELT from his pants, uses it to fasten around his waist. A makeshift tourniquet.

SOL
Get up... Get up...
(then)
... the fuck up, Solomon!

He rises unsteadily, leans against a tree, rests his forehead against the frozen, peeling bark. Moans deep, guttural.

After a long moment, he turns back to the ravine... searching for something... muttering:

SOL (cont'd)
Find yer camp. Just find camp. Find
camp, Sol, find yer girls.

His eyes scan the blanket of snow beneath him... lock on tracks... *human tracks*.

Sol follows the tracks, keeping pressure on his makeshift tourniquet with his left elbow.

EXT. CAMP FIRE - MOMENTS LATER

Sol hobbles into camp, fire coals still smoldering. His girls sleeping bags still here... but empty.

He rests for a moment, thinks, notices the heavy rucksack is gone, it's outline still etched in the snow.

SOL
... Luc.

His boots within reach, he tugs them on, laces them up. Checks his wound and grimaces at the sight.

He spots his HUNTING KNIFE buried partially in the snow. Jams it into the remaining fire coals and lets it char.

Sol removes his tourniquet belt and peels up his shirt.

Eyes the mess...

Curses to himself...

Pulls the knife from the fire...

Bites down on his belt, and...

PSSSHHHH! AS HE PRESSES THE FIRE-HOT BLADE AGAINST HIS WOUND.

His skin fries as he chomps his belt and GROWLS in pain.

He removes the knife, cools it off in the snow. Checks his wound: a mangled mess of dried blood and charred skin.

He collapses onto a sleeping bag and rests his eyes. Tries to forget the pain.

EXT. FOREST PATH - DAY

HORSE TRACKS in the snow. The uncles and sisters up ahead, moving slowly through thick trees and brush.

EXT. CAMPSITE - DAY

Sol sits up, searches the campsite for supplies.

Packs a sleeping bag, bow and arrow sleeve, hunting knife. Piles snow into his metal pot, places the pot atop the coals and leaves it to boil.

LATER,

Sol chokes down half the pot, pours the rest in a canister.

He stands and searches the surrounding area for tracks. He finds them... those same HORSE TRACKS.

EXT. FOREST PATH - DAY

Sol is on the right trail. No horses or girls in sight, but the tracks are still fresh and they're easy to follow.

FURTHER ALONG THE PATH

Sol breaths hard, heaving for air. He takes a breather against a tree. Looks about and notices...

THAT SAME FOX

watching him through a thicket of brush. Ears perked up, eyes ever-weary, like it's stalking wounded prey -- a meal worth waiting for.

Sol checks his wound. Still bleeding, but not as profusely.

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL - DAY

The uncles' horses stomp through the snow-covered woods. Ginny holds onto Kurt. Lamar holds Emma firmly in his grasp.

Emma cranes her neck to look behind Lamar, searching for any sign of her father.

LAMAR
Whatchew lookin fer?

EMMA
Just lookin.

She turns to search around the other side of Lamar, who seems wary now.

LAMAR
Said what the hell you lookin fer?

EMMA
I'm just lookin, damn. I ain't allowed to look around, now?

Lamar looks behind him, same way as Emma. And Emma turns to look ahead, notices a TREE BRANCH hanging within reach.

Just before Lamar turns to face her, she SNAPS IT so it's hanging by a thread.

LAMAR
Ain't nothin back there.

EMMA
No shit.

EXT. OLD LUC'S CAMPSITE - DAY

A FIRE-PIT filled with icy logs. THREE TENTS already constructed.

Emerging from a thicket, Darrel aides Old Luc in heaving another log near the fire-pit, as, in the distance:

Those two horses mosey into the snow-covered clearing, carrying the girls and their uncles.

DARREL
There they is, Luc. Mind my leavin', now?

OLD LUC
Stay the night. I have use fer you
still.

DARREL
But y'said...

OLD LUC
I said stay the night.

Darrel nods, sits by the pit, obedient as a broken dog.

OLD LUC (cont'd)
Girls.

GINNY
Pappaw!

The uncles tie their horses to trees and follow the girls as they approach their grandfather.

EMMA
Seen our Daddy?

OLD LUC
I did. He gone back to town. We'll
take ya to him in the morn'.

EMMA
Why?

KURT
Cause he wanted us to bring ya back
to'im.

EMMA
No, why'd he go back without us?

OLD LUC
Didn't say.

GINNY
Proolly left on the lights. He hates
it when we leave on the lights.

OLD LUC
Could be, Gin. Could be that.

Emma, clearly not convinced, doesn't offer a response. Just a shake of the head. All of this stinks and she can smell it.

OLD LUC (cont'd)
(to Kurt)
Take the girls to their tent.
(MORE)

OLD LUC (cont'd)
 Show'em where to use the bathroom.
 (then)
 And don't let'em outta yer sight.

Kurt and Lamar escort the girls toward their tent as we...

CUT TO:

INT. THE GIRLS TENT - LATER

Emma and Ginny sit facing one another. Ginny twirls a boot lace, her face oblivious to the world around them.

EMMA
 Gin, do you understand what's
 happening here?

GINNY
 Hmm?

EMMA
 I mean, you understand that Daddy
 didn't leave us, right?

GINNY
 He sent Pappaw to get us.

EMMA
 He did not. Daddy wouldn't do that,
 Gin. It don't make no damn sense.
 He wouldn't do it.

GINNY
 Only for tonight, Emma. We'll see
 Daddy come tomorrow. At home.

EMMA
 I don't think you understand...

Emma studies the innocent face of her sister. The hope in her eyes. The very definition of "ignorance is bliss."

EMMA (cont'd)
 You're prolly right. Daddy's just
 waiting at home. We'll see'im soon.

Emma gazes above, through the see-through netting of the tent as snow falls through bare tree branches. Snow falling...

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL - SAME

... just like it's falling above Sol as he searches for more broken branches.

Sure enough, he finds ANOTHER broken branch. Emma's leading him right to their camp.

He kneels, sucks his water bottle, and checks his wound: still trickling blood.

Sol gathers himself and sets off through the trees ahead, in the direction of the next broken branch.

EXT. OLD LUC'S CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Old Luc rises from the fire he's built, turns to Kurt:

 OLD LUC
 Fire some beans.
 (re: Lamar)
 Don't let him near the flames.

He turns and traverses the camp toward...

INT. THE GIRLS TENT - SAME

Emma and Ginny hold hands, still facing one another.

 EMMA
 Just close your eyes.

 GINNY
 Why're we praying?

 EMMA
 Cause we need to, okay. Just do it.
 Close your eyes.

Ginny does and Emma does too.

 EMMA (cont'd)
 Dear, Lord. We pray for you to keep
 our Daddy safe. We pray that you
 watch over him down here.

 GINNY
 And that you watch over Momma up
 there.

EXT. THE GIRLS TENT - SAME

Old Luc leans near the tent, listens to the girls' prayer.

EMMA (O.S.)

Right. Watch over our Momma too. We hope she is safe and happy with you. And that she is watching over us too.

GINNY (O.S.)

We love you, Momma.

INT. THE GIRLS TENT - SAME

Emma squints at her sister, in awe of her innocence.

EMMA

We do. We love you. And we love Daddy too.

(then)

Please, Lord, bring him back to us. Please?

GINNY

And thank you.

EMMA

Thank you. Amen.

GINNY

Amen.

Ginny smiles. Emma smiles back. And Old Luc peels open the tent door.

OLD LUC

Amen.

EXT. OLD LUC'S CAMPSITE - MOMENTS LATER

THE FIRE CRACKLES below a charred pot of beans. Kurt and Lamar rip into the deer jerky they took from Sol's camp.

The girls sit before the fire opposite their uncles and Darrel, who's very uncomfortable.

Old Luc nears the fire, carrying Sol's HEAVY RUCKSACK. He lowers it before the fire, sits on a log behind it.

EMMA

My Dad give you that?

OLD LUC
Returned it to me, yes.

EMMA
(to Kurt and Lamar)
My Daddy give you'at jerky, too?

KURT LAMAR
Naw, he didn't. Sure did.

Kurt eyes Lamar, shakes his head ever so slightly.

KURT
Gave it to us to give to you.

EMMA
Then why you eating it?

KURT
Just testing it. Make sure it's
safe for you.

Kurt hands the remaining jerky to the girls.

Emma offers a piece to Ginny, bites into one of her own,
never taking her eyes off Kurt.

EMMA
(re: Darrel)
And who the hell's this?

Darrel glances to Old Luc as if for approval. A slight nod
from Luc and:

DARREL
Name's Darrel Quarles. I help yer
daddy at the cemetery.

EMMA
He ask you to look after us too?

DARREL
(disgusted with himself)
He did.

Old Luc reaches into the chest pocket of his winter coat,
pulls out a weathered wallet. Flips it open, finds something
in a wrinkled flap: a flattened DOGWOOD FLOWER.

GINNY
What's that, Pappaw?

Luc ignores her. He's in a world of his own.

KURT

Dogwood Flower. Surely, yer maw
tolt you the tale.

GINNY

Doggy wood?

Old Luc sucks down a shot of barrel bourbon, dabs the
remnants from his lips.

OLD LUC

The Tale of the Dogwood Flower.
T'was a favorite of yer mother's.

As Old Luc speaks, he stares at the flower, fixated.

OLD LUC (cont'd)

At the time of the crucifixion of
Christ, the Dogwood had been the
size of the oak and other giants of
the forest. So firm and strong was
the tree, that it was chosen as
timber for the cross.

Ginny leans in closer, very interested. But Emma just studies
the campsite. Her uncles, her grandfather, the tents and that
strange, heavy rucksack before Old Luc's seat.

OLD LUC (cont'd)

To be used for such a purpose
greatly distressed the tree. And
Jesus, as he was nailed upon it,
sensed this. In His pity for all
sorrow and suffering, Jesus said
unto the tree: "Because of your
regret and pity for My suffering,
never again shall the Dogwood grow
large enough to be cut for the
cross." He told the tree:

(now looking at the girls)

"Henceforth, ye shall be slender
and bent and twisted and your
blossoms shall be in the form of a
cross. Two long petals and two
short petals, each with nail
prints, brown with rust and stained
red as blood. In the center of your
flower shall be a crown of thorns,
and all who see you will remember.
They will know of My suffering and
of My forgiveness. They shall see
the Dogwood Flower, and they shall
never forget our sacrifice."

Old Luc hands the flower to the girls. As they inspect it, they notice the nail prints on each petal, the resemblance of a crown in the center.

Ginny is awed. Emma? Skeptical.

EMMA

At's all horseshit.

LAMAR

Why you reckon'at?

EMMA

Cause if He could change how a tree grows, He coulda saved my momma. But He didn't, now did He.

Emma hands the flower back to Old Luc, never meets his unblinking eyes as he throws back another tumbler of bourbon.

OLD LUC

Tolt yer mother that story many-a-time. She believed in it.

GINNY

I believe it.

OLD LUC

You would. Yer just like'er, Gin.

EMMA

I'm sure she believed in a lotta things 'fore she passed.

OLD LUC

Yer mother gave me that there flower so I'd never fergit that story. So I'd never fergit His forgiveness.

(then)

So I'd never fergit her.

EMMA

If you need a flower to remember all that, then I reckon you best git some post-it notes.

(then)

Come on, Ginny.

Emma moves toward her tent. Motions for Ginny to follow her. Toward Emma:

OLD LUC

The Dogwood flower represents the Lord's divine ability to forgive those who do things they are forced to do, who do things that are wrong but that must be done. Remember that. You look at that flower and you remember what your mother believed.

Luc slugs another shot as Emma stalks away from the fire, disappears into the tent.

OLD LUC (cont'd)

Go on, Gin. Get to sleep, now.
(looking at that rucksack)
Tomorrow is a new day.

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL - NIGHT

Sol stalks through the thick of nightfall. Only light from the rays of the moon peeking through the canopy above.

Ahead, Sol can barely make out a flickering orange signature burning against the horizon. A beacon for the lost.

Hope in his eyes, he limps along. Moth to a flame.

INT. THE GIRLS TENT - NIGHT

As the girls settle into their sleeping bags, Emma turns to her sister, very seriously:

EMMA

Don't you believe what he says.

GINNY

Pappaw don't lie.

EMMA

You just don't believe it, okay. Don't no one get to do wrong and get away with it, y'hear?

GINNY

But Pappaw says--

EMMA

--what he wants to hear. Don't make it right.

(then)

(MORE)

EMMA (cont'd)
 Try to sleep. We're gonna need to
 rest 'fore sun-up.

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL -- NIGHT

Sol nears the campsite, that glowing ember now a roaring fire that he can see through the clearing.

A RUSTLING nearby pulls his attention. He quickly nocks an arrow, draws the string, stalks slowly in that direction.

Near another Evergreen, he spots:

THAT SAME FOX

feasting on something. Sol approaches, notices it's scavenging off of:

THE PACK MULE'S CORPSE

splayed beneath the tree, its entrails tugged by the animal.

Sol covers his mouth and retches as the fox hightails it outta there.

EXT. OLD LUC'S CAMPSITE -- NIGHT

The four men surround the glowing fire, sharing that jug of barrel bourbon, flames reflected in Luc's dark eyes.

Kurt strums his guitar absentmindedly, playing some faint memory of a tune.

OLD LUC
 Come sun-up, we head back. The
 girls ride with you two.
 (re: the rucksack)
 She's with me.

Lamar nods, bites some left-over jerky. But Kurt just keeps playing.

DARREL
 What about me? What's it you want
 me fer?

OLD LUC
 In due time...

Old Luc rises, heaves that rucksack into his arms like a baby and strides toward his tent. But behind him:

Kurt's guitar playing goes out of tune. Is he crying again?

LAMAR (O.S.)
Kurt? What's wrong, Kurt?

Old Luc half-turns toward the fire, sees:

KURT

still strumming that guitar absentmindedly, in shock at the sight of the:

WOODEN ARROW

that has pierced through both his guitar's soundhole and his stomach, nailing the guitar to him like a framed photo.

It's an eerie sight and an even eerier sound. Like he's determined to keep playing, to ignore the fatal wound.

Calmly, Old Luc hoists that rucksack over the rear of Kurt's horse, barks at Lamar:

OLD LUC
Get the girls.

Kurt coughs up a thick mess of blood, slumps to the ground atop his guitar.

LAMAR
Git up, Kurt. Quit yer playin', git up! Kurt? *KURT!*

Old Luc ignores his son's suffering, douses the campfire with a snow-filled bucket and what happens next we can hardly see but by the filtered moonlight through the canopy above.

OLD LUC
You get'em girls now, boy.

Lamar wipes his eyes, strides through the snow to the girls' tent.

Old Luc reaches into a pouch hanging from Kurt's horse, retrieves a PATTERSON COLT REVOLVER and lowers himself to a knee by the beast.

And he waits... waits... waits...

THWACK! An arrow spears through Lamar's thigh. A SCREAM as...

Old Luc eyes the arrow's origin:

A THICKET OF BRUSH

not ten yards from the camp.

Luc swiftly aims that revolver, steadies, and *PWOP!* fires as a plume of gunpowder rises before his face.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - THAT MOMENT

The dark moonlit expanse of a silent Appalachian winter broken by the rippling thunder of gunshots.

EXT. OLD LUC'S CAMPSITE -- SAME

Luc advances toward the thicket, fires again, again, again.

PWOP! PWOP! PWOP!

He pushes branches and bushes aside, expecting to find a dead Solomon before him, but there's no one.

Just a depression of blood-soaked snow.

Old Luc smirks slightly -- he now knows that Sol's bleeding out and may never make it home alive.

EXT. FOREST PATH -- MOMENTS LATER

Old Luc straddles the lead horse, Ginny in front of him.

Darrel follows, that heavy rucksack over his horse's rear.

Lamar holds Emma firmly as before, following Luc's lead, that arrow still jutting from his thigh.

He SNAPS the arrow, slides it through his wound.

GINNY

What happened, Pappaw?

OLD LUC

Hunters hunting. At's all, Gin.

He cracks the reins, propels the horse up a ravine, moving to higher ground.

Darrel and Lamar's horses follow, Emma straining to look behind her, a defiant hope in her young eyes.

EXT. OLD LUC'S CAMPSITE -- NIGHT

Sol limps into the clearing toward the smoldering coals and dying embers of the campfire. He's holding his thigh, keeping pressure on a BULLET HOLE through his trousers.

He twists Kurt's body onto his back -- still breathing...

Frisks Kurt's pockets, finds a handful of SHOTGUN SHELLS, looks to the fire and then to his wound. He knows what to do.

No words needed, Sol rips the arrow from Kurt's body, uses snow to clean blood from the wood, slips it back in his arrow sleeve, and rolls Kurt back onto that guitar.

Lets him die slowly and alone.

He unearths the buried fire, uncovers still-burning embers, blows life back into the flames.

He rips open his pants, reveals the bleeding bullet wound.

Stabs an arrow into the fire and lets it char.

Similar to before, he slips off his belt, bites down on the leather, takes the arrow tip and...

DIGS INTO THE BULLET HOLE.

He gnaws on that belt, growls and grimaces as he feels around for the bullet and... finally... pops it out.

He breaths hard, relieved, but he's gotta close the wound.

He bites off the ends of two shotgun shells and pours a shot of gunpowder from each into his palm.

Sol growls as he packs the powder into his wound and snags a still-burning twig from the fire.

He uses the twig to ignite the gunpowder and...

SSSSCRACK! as it sparkles and pops, burning the bullet wound closed in an instant.

Overwhelmed by the pain, Sol struggles to keep his eyes open, to pour more gunpowder for his knife wound.

His hand shakes as he rips off the tip of another shotshell and pours the powder into his palm, lifts his shirt, but...

The pain's too much. He collapses to the snow and passes out.

OVER **BLACK:**

THE FAINT CRUNCH of horse hooves against snow and rock.

FADE UP ON:

EXT. FOREST PATH -- MORNING

The horses traverse a steep mountain path, something carved by centuries of migration and weather.

Lamar puts pressure on his thigh wound as he barks at Luc:

LAMAR
We cain't juss leave'im, paw.

Old Luc stares ahead, focused on what must be done.

LAMAR (cont'd)
Paw! We gotta go back, we gotta git
Kurt! Paw?

Old Luc stops his horse, whips the reigns so he can see Lamar as he speaks.

OLD LUC
He's gone, Lamar! He ain't comin
back and we ain't goin back, y'hear?

LAMAR
But he'd go back fer us.

OLD LUC
No he wouldn't neither.

LAMAR
He'd go back fer me.

OLD LUC
He'd do what had to be done. And
he'd expect you t'do the same.

Old Luc whips the horse back up the trail, leaving Lamar and Emma to watch Darrel follow him like a lap dog.

EXT. OLD LUC'S CAMPSITE -- MORNING

Sol stirs awake, shivering and still exhausted. Musters the strength to kick the fire coals, to salvage remaining heat.

But the fire's dead.

He checks his bullet wound. Charred and burnt skin. That's gonna leave a scar.

He peels up his shirt, checks the knife wound, still trickling blood.

Shotshells still in-hand, he searches for a coal hot enough to restart the fire. But they're all cold to the touch.

He can't burn the knife wound closed without fire, so he pockets the shells and pulls himself to an unsteady stance.

Eyes Kurt's corpse. Glad that fucker's dead.

And pushes off through the camp, toward the direction he saw those horses escape.

EXT. MOUNTAIN RIDGE -- DAY

Those horses carry their riders over a ridge, finally finding some level ground.

EXT. FOREST PATH -- SAME

Sol drags that injured leg behind him as he follows the horse tracks up the mountain. His will be the only thing that's carrying him now. A man possessed.

EXT. MOUNTAIN CREEK -- DAY

Old Luc and the horses follow a slow-flowing creek, moving down the mountain.

EXT. MOUNTAIN RIDGE -- SAME

Sol drags himself onto that same ridge the horses found hours ago. Downs his water canister and follows the tracks ahead.

EXT. MOUNTAIN GORGE -- LATER

The horses traversing an icy valley. The cold almost palpable for us as the girls and Darrel shiver through the fog.

Always on her game, Emma slips A FLASHLIGHT from Lamar's cargo pocket and drops it to the ground behind her.

EXT. ANOTHER FOREST PATH -- AFTERNOON

Old Luc leads his crew back up the mountain. Lamar and the girls just as confused as we are.

But Old Luc knows exactly what he's doing.

EXT. MOUNTAIN CREEK -- SAME

Sol slipping and tumbling his way down the mountain. No choice but to keep moving.

EXT. ANOTHER MOUNTAIN RIDGE -- NIGHT

Beaten and broke-backed, the horses crest the peak, find relief from level ground again.

LAMAR

Paw?

Old Luc's eyes pierce the night air, focused on the moonlit peaks and ridges in the distance.

LAMAR (cont'd)

We lost? Where we goin'?

OLD LUC

Far as we gotta.

LAMAR

Paw, we needa bury Kurt. And my leg's hurtin' somethin' awful. Cain't we go home?

OLD LUC

Not till it's done.

LAMAR

Till what's done? Paw!

EMMA

(realizing)

Till my Daddy's done.

(to Old Luc)

He won't stop.

Old Luc keeps his eyes ahead, but somewhere behind that fierce façade we may infer that he knows it's true.

EMMA (cont'd)

You know he won't. He's comin fer you.

(MORE)

EMMA (cont'd)

Sure as the devil is waiting, he is
comin fer you. Won't let up till
it's yer grave he digs.

(to Lamar and Darrel)

All a you.

Old Luc ignores her, urges his horse forward.

EXT. MOUNTAIN GORGE -- NIGHT

Sol limps through a freezing night fog, scouting for a dry patch of land to rest upon.

Barely awake, he actually kicks THAT FLASHLIGHT, picks it up and smirks as he turns it on.

SOL

That's my girl.

He stumbles along, using his new light to gather any pine needles he can find, stuffs them in a pocket to dry them out.

For some reason, a birch tree catches his eye. He limps to it, feels the bark, wet to the touch like every other tree.

But there's a DRY PATCH where rain and snow have yet to soak through. He snags his hunting knife and pops off any dry bark he can. Stuffs that in his pocket too.

He spots A FALLEN OAK, could be used as a windbreak. So he stumbles toward it and collapses to the frozen bracken.

He empties his pockets and backpack. Pulls the contents together to build a fire.

Barely dry PINE NEEDLES.

Hardly dry slivers of TREE BARK.

A piece of STEEL WOOL.

And that FLASHLIGHT.

Sol clears a small area of snow, exposing the wet dirt beneath, and spreads the pine needles atop a piece of bark.

He twists off the cap of the flashlight, squeezes the lightbulb and *CCCCRACK!* as it shatters.

He clicks the flashlight on and *SP-SP-SPARK!* from the filament. Just what he needs.

Sol puts the steel wool and flashlight filament together atop the pine needles.

He clicks on the flashlight again and...

WHOOSH! as the filament sparks against the steel wool and ignites the pine needles.

Sol blows life into the fire, drops more pine needles on top.

Plants that tree bark about the fire like an Indian Teepee.

He nurtures the fire till it's large enough to sustain itself, then scours his nearby surroundings for firewood.

Finds pieces of DEADFALL, drags them near the fire to dry.

His hands still shivering, breath still fogging, he embraces the fire's warmth, lets it give him life as he did it.

EXT. MOUNTAIN RIDGE -- NIGHT

The men tie their horses to twisted spruce trees flagged with leaves only on their leeward side.

OLD LUC

Gather firewood, I'll set up camp.

Lamar nods, limps into the wilderness as he reaches for his flashlight. But he can't find it... Wonder why.

He turns back to Old Luc, summons the courage to state:

LAMAR

Cain't find muh light.

Old Luc murmurs to himself, tosses his flashlight to his son.

OLD LUC

Only one we got, don't lose it.

Lamar nods, flips on the light and lumbers away.

OLD LUC (cont'd)

That boy's a disease.

Old Luc fetches two tents and erects them by moonlight.

Ginny, Emma and Darrel watch on. No way they're doing anything till he tells 'em to.

EXT. MOUNTAIN GORGE -- NIGHT

Sol has the fire going now, pulls a can of Chef Boyardee ravioli from his pack. Cuts it open with his knife.

He places his metal pot atop the fire, shakes the can and the pasta flops into the pot... frozen solid.

EXT. MOUNTAIN RIDGE -- NIGHT

The tents now erected, Lamar and Darrel break soggy logs into pieces, set them around an already-roaring fire.

Old Luc warms a pot of beans, mutters to the girls:

OLD LUC
Si'down, git warm.

They do as they're told, breathe in the warmth.

Lamar sits down, as well, hands freezing from the moisture in the wood, leg raw and ragged, lost a lotta blood already.

OLD LUC (cont'd)
I say you could rest?

Lamar rises to a haggard stance, snaps another frozen log.

EXT. MOUNTAIN GORGE -- NIGHT

Sol scarfs down that ravioli from the now-charred pot. Couldn't possibly eat it any faster.

Lets out a belch and peels up his shirt.

His wound looks even worse. Might be infected.

He snags those shotshells from his pocket, pours two shots into his palm and packs it into his wound. That's gotta hurt.

He leans against the fallen Oak and, like before, uses a still-burning twig to ignite the gunpowder and...

SSSSCRACK! as it bursts into flame and seals the wound closed in an instant. He screams shortly and...

EXT. MOUNTAIN RIDGE -- SAME

Darrel, Lamar, and the girls startle as Sol's DISTANT HOWL echoes from the gorge below.

Lamar glances at Old Luc, but he just ignores the sound. Much ado about nothing for him.

DARREL

Jesus, he's comin'. He done found us.

Darrel lurches to a stance, motions to Lamar.

DARREL (cont'd)

Come on, now. We gotta get.

But Lamar just glances to Luc, knows who the boss is here.

DARREL (cont'd)

What's the hold up, dammit?

(realizing, to Luc:)

He ain't stoppin'. The sumbitch ain't gone stop.

OLD LUC

I know.

DARREL

Kill us all is what he'll do.
Slaughter us like fuckin' sheep.

OLD LUC

I know.

DARREL

Jesus, how the hell'd I get roped into all this?

(to girls:)

I didn't mean'im no harm. Weren't my intentions. Self-preservation, y'know?

(then...)

I'll explain it to him. He'll understand. We're friends. Friends forgive, right?

(to girls:)

Ain't that right?

Emma just smirks, glances right into the man's pupils...

EMMA

My daddy sure as hell don't.

DARREL

Aw, hell! Holy hell! I don't wanna die, goddammit.

(to Luc)

Please, I don't wanna die.

OLD LUC

... I know.

PRACK! as Old Luc sledges a kick through Darrel's kneecap, toppling the poor man in an instant.

Darrel on his back, dragging his broken leg from the fire.

DARREL

AHHHH! Please, Luc. Awright. I got no quarrel with you. Leave me be.

Luc stalking after him, slowly, like a puma readying to pounce on prey as...

Emma pulls Ginny into her chest, strokes her hair.

EMMA

Shhh. S'alright. S'okay.

GINNY

Where's daddy, Emma? Where is he?

EMMA

At home. He's at home.

GINNY

No, he ain't.

EMMA

Shhhh. Had to turn off the lights, like y'said.

Ginny's crying now, and Emma might as well be as she eyes Luc approaching the broken man.

OLD LUC

Yer time has come, Darrel.

DARREL

But you got use fer me, still. Remember?

OLD LUC

I do.

Luc flips open his pocketknife and within the firelight gleam we may notice the fight drain from Darrel -- acceptance.

Eyes brimming with tears, Darrel studies the faces of the girls before him. Their innocence, their youth, their very beauty magnified in this moment.

DARREL
 (to girls)
 Tell yer daddy I'm sorry--

SHINK! OLD LUC'S KNIFE INTO DARREL'S THROAT and Darrel's
 sprawled in the snowpack, WHEEZING DESPERATELY for breath.

EXT. MOUNTAIN GORGE -- SAME

DISTANT SCREAMING echoes through the valley, stirs Sol awake.
 He spots that fire atop the ridge, certain it's his girls.

EXT. MOUNTAIN RIDGE -- SAME

THE GIRLS SCREAMING as Darrel bleeds out beside the firepit.

DARREL
 (muddled, choking)
 Help, hel... Please, hel... Plea...

Darrel's hands around the knife in his throat, rivulets of
 blood through his fingers, the snow beneath him growing dark
 red as if the earth is bleeding too.

Old Luc straddles the dying man, stares into his eyes, into
 his soul. Studies him as if entranced by death.

OLD LUC
 Thank you fer yer assistance.

Darrel, eyes already lifeless, drops his hands to the snow at
 his sides and Old Luc softly closes his eyelids, slides that
 pocketknife from the hole in his neck, glides into the dark
 night air as gently as the rising firesmoke before him.

Turns to face his granddaughters, eerily calm:

OLD LUC (cont'd)
 In yer tent.

They're still screaming, terrified, but too frightened to run
 from a man with a weapon.

OLD LUC (cont'd)
 Now.

Emma pulls Ginny into the tent, closes the flap behind them.

EXT. MOUNTAIN GORGE -- MOMENTS LATER

Solomon collects his gear, his backpack and arrow sleeve as the *SHRIEKS* from the ridge die out.

Keeping his eyes on that ridge fire, he stalks through the fog-filled forest, a new desperation pushing him along.

EXT. FOREST PATH -- LATER THAT NIGHT

Sol drags himself up that same path the horses took. As quick as he can.

EXT. MOUNTAIN RIDGE -- EVEN LATER

Sol crests the mountain, stands atop that ridge and stalks in the direction of the fire.

EXT. OLD LUC'S RIDGE CAMPSITE -- NIGHT

The fire licks at falling snow, casting moving shadows about the frame of...

DARREL'S CORPSE

perched upright on a rock, back to the approaching Solomon.

Sol nocks an arrow, draws his bowstring, and stalks around Darrel. A hoarse whisper:

SOL
Turn 'round.

He waits for a response, any sign of movement.

SOL (cont'd)
Turn around, I said.

He pokes Darrel's shoulder with a boot-tip and...

Darrel collapses to the snow, face up, knife wound through his bloody neck.

Immediately, Sol spins around, aiming that arrow in every direction, certain he's stepped into a trap.

... Which he has.

PWOP! PWOP! Two shots and Solomon's on his back, hit in both his shoulders.

Suddenly, Old Luc's overtop of him, Patterson Revolver leveled between his eyes, poised to pull the trigger.

But Old Luc just smirks, sparks with an idea, and *SMACK!* as he slams the butt of the gun into Sol's temple.

FADE TO **BLACK.**

GINNY (V.O.)
Daddy? Daddy, wake up!

EMMA (V.O.)
DADDY!!!

FADE BACK IN:

INT. LOG CABIN -- MORNING

Solomon awakens strapped to a chair by FRAYED NYLON ROPE, notices he's in his own cabin (the one we saw in that photo).

Years of wear here. Collected dust and stilted air. No one's been here in a long while.

To his right:

A DANK HALLWAY

And the slightest glimpse of Old Luc forcing the girls into a backroom and locking the door.

EMMA (O.S.)
(from backroom)
Dad, get up! Get up, wake up!

(Over what plays next, the girls will constantly SCREAM AND STRUGGLE with the locked door. Making Old Luc's words all the more discomfoting.)

To Solomon's left:

A WEATHER-WORN LIVING ROOM.

Lamar on his back on a dust-coated couch. Skin pale, mouth parched. Leg bloody and bare.

Old Luc stalks back down that hallway, strides into the room, sits himself by his son's side.

Handles a wet rag from a water bucket, rings it over Lamar's cracked lips and sops up the bloodcrust from his open wound.

Luc dunks the rag back into...

THE WATER BUCKET

and the water swirls blood-red. He soaks the rag full and places it back on...

LAMAR

who takes a snapshot glance at his father and breathes-out with a final *FWOOSH*.

No final words or goodbyes. Just like that: dead without notice or spectacle.

As he pulls Lamar's eyelids shut, he kisses his son's forehead and drapes the blood-wet rag over his face.

A moment of silence as Luc prays and collects himself, then:

OLD LUC
(to Sol)
Git 'nough rest?

Luc stands and takes a seat opposite the dusty oak-carved table before Solomon.

SOLOMON
Lamar sure will.

Luc just lays that pocketknife on the table. Still closed.

SOLOMON (cont'd)
You kill Darrel in fronta them?

Luc unbuckles his belt, drags it out of his belt loops.

SOLOMON (cont'd)
Go'n then. Tell me what I'm in for.

Luc ties that leather belt to a table leg, yanks it tight.

SOLOMON (cont'd)
I ain't done nothin' she didn't ask
of me. It's what she wanted, Luc.

Luc flips open the pocketknife, still stained with Darrel's dried blood, and sharpens it against that leather belt.

Slow and deliberate.

OLD LUC

When I's a boy, my father was kilt in a hunting accident. Only it weren't no accident. His buddy gone'n fell for my mother. So he went'n shot up my paw. Made it look right and lawful. Took up with my mother'n raised me up himself. Taught me to hunt'n fish and loved me like I's his own. And then, I left fer the war. The day of my return home, I tolt him: "This is not yer family. May you now return to yours."

(as he stands:)

I gutted him as you might gut a pig, as that was his nature. Left him hanging from the bare branch of a Birch tree to drip his salt back to the earth like slit-up swine.

Old Luc violently STABS the pocketknife into the oak table.

He stalks about the small room, boots clacking against the floorboards. Studies...

HIS DEAD SON

Stiff and lifeless. Wet rag already slipped off his cold, pale face.

Luc turns to the fireplace mantle filled with dust-layered photos of Solomon's family.

His eyes land and stay on a...

PHOTO OF APRIL

Beautiful and serene. Hair as golden as a wheat field. Smile like a sunrise. The very definition of beauty and happiness.

OLD LUC (cont'd)

Y'see, Solomon, if someone goes'n takes yer family, well, you take their life. It's a simple matter. You took my family and now I have taken yours. You will die fer that. Or I will. Ain't no way around it.

(then)

Y'don't get to my age in a land as this without doing things of which you cannot speak.

Old Luc moves back toward Solomon, yanks that pocketknife from the table, opens and closes it repeatedly, slowly:

FLICK. FLACK. FLICK. FLACK.

SOLOMON

What is it you think I done?

OLD LUC

Think? No, Solomon. I know of your actions, of your deceit and trickery. It cannot be tolerated.

FLICK. FLACK.

OLD LUC (cont'd)

A man's family is all he has. All he needs. Take away the needs of a man, he'll wither to the earth that begat him. No call for such an unwarranted thing.

SOLOMON

You speakin' a me or yerself?

OLD LUC

My daughter chose you. She saw something in you and made it known. You were not to be touched. I honored that. I honored her as I always had. But then you...

FLICK...

OLD LUC (cont'd)

You got in her head. You took her from me, from her family. You changed her, warped her, molded'er into what you wanted. That ain't honor. That ain't husbandry or fatherhood. It's sinister, my boy.

... FLACK.

SOLOMON

That's what got me here? She made her choices, Luc. Chose to let you'n her brothers go. She was happy without you. We was happy without--

OLD LUC

You expect me to believe she would choose to ignore me? To shun me?

(MORE)

OLD LUC (cont'd)
 To hurt me? The man who fed her,
 bathed her, clothed her, raised
 her, loved her. Y'expect me to
 believe my first born child would
 forget me!

Old Luc's steaming, now. Eyes on fire.

FLICK-FLACK. FLICK-FLACK. FLICK-FLACK. Quicker. Manic.

Solomon pulls at his bindings, offers only:

SOLOMON
 Believe what you will. Always have.

FLICK! Old Luc whips that knife at Solomon and *THWACK!* as it
 spears into the oak table before him.

EMMA (O.S.)
 Daddy! Say sumthin, dammit! Dad!

SOLOMON
 (to Emma)
 I'm awrigh--

In one swift motion, Old Luc grasps that pocketknife and
STABS it directly into one of Sol's shoulder wounds.

Solomon screams through his teeth, trying to stomach the
 pain. Can't let his girls hear him.

OLD LUC
 Them bullets won't come out
 'emselves.

Old Luc twists the knife, searching for the bullet within the
 wound. *TAP, TAP.* Found it. But he doesn't dig it out.

OLD LUC (cont'd)
 In my company, there was a man
 called himself Jonah. Taught me of
 human anatomy. It's how I came to
 my line a work. Showed me the
 strong and weak points of the
 body... Of yer body.
 (as if reading from a
 dictionary)
 Deltoidius. Shoulder muscle
 separated into three parts.
 Anterior, lateral, posterior. The
 anterior deltoid raises the arm
 forward and is used in the initial
 phase of lifting.

SNIP! as Luc slices Solomon's anterior deltoid muscle.

Solomon can't hold back his scream this time. The girls panic from the backroom, screaming and kicking the door.

OLD LUC (cont'd)

In the war, Jonah instructed us to take our P.O.W.'s and strap 'em to a chair. Under his instruction, we severed their deltoids and had 'em dig their own graves.

He pulls the bullet out and STABS the knife into Sol's other shoulder wound. *TAP, TAP.* Finds the other bullet.

OLD LUC (cont'd)

You'll be surprised how well y'can dig with only part a yer shoulders.

SOLOMON

Don't. You don't gotta--

SNIP! as Luc slices his other anterior deltoid. And then he pulls out that bullet, stabs the knife back into the table.

Solomon's HYPERVENTILATING, doubled over in his chair.

Old Luc strides over to a pot of water that's been warming in a furnace. Cleanses his bloody hands.

OLD LUC

What yer gone be doin', I cain't have you lifting yer arms to me. Cain't have you raising a weapon, iron or wooden. Cain't have ye doin a thing but diggin' the grave that yer meant to.

Luc dries his hands on a rag, heaves that HEAVY RUCKSACK into his arms and lowers it onto the table before Solomon.

OLD LUC (cont'd)

Diggin' the grave...

He zips opens the rucksack and...

APRIL'S LIFELESS FACE

peaks from between the frozen zippers. Her eyes closed, face blue and bloated, cold as the snow beyond the windows.

OLD LUC (cont'd)

Fer her.

Solomon and Old Luc meet eyes for the first time in this conversation. And then...

A gruff, gravelly, pain-filled whisper:

SOLOMON

Don't.

We're not sure what he means by that, but Old Luc sure is.

SOLOMON (cont'd)

Please. If there's one thing you should be unable to do, it's this.

OLD LUC

Only right they know what kinda man you are.

SOLOMON

This ain't about them. She wouldn't want it. You know that.

OLD LUC

What would she want, then? *This?*

Luc gestures toward the unzipped sack and April's weather-warped appearance. Surely, no person would wish for this.

SOLOMON

I made a promise. One I cain't break.

OLD LUC

I can't believe that. I won't. Not from a man like you...

(then)

Bout time yer daughters see what you've done to mine.

Old Luc lumbers his way down that hallway toward the backroom.

Solomon just hangs his head. Arguing won't change this.

OLD LUC (cont'd)

Girls, y'can come out. Yer father and I have finished our dispute.

He unlocks the door, pushes it in...

But there's no one there.

WHACK! as a thick piece of FIREWOOD comes within inches of breaking Old Luc's face.

But he didn't move, didn't flinch. Just caught it.

He pulls the firewood away from Emma's hands and corrals both girls into the main room.

EMMA

Let go a me, Goddamnit! Let go!

Luc pushes the girls toward the rucksack, lets them take in the sight, knowing they'll be indisposed once they do.

GINNY

Momma?

Ginny puts her hands on the rucksack but Emma snatches them away, covers her sister's eyes.

GINNY (cont'd)

It's Momma.

EMMA

No, it ain't.

GINNY

Why's Momma in there?

Emma just zips up the rucksack, hugs her little sister, and burns holes through Old Luc from afar.

EMMA

Weren't our Momma, Gin. She's in heaven. Heaven lookin' over us.

OLD LUC

Should be, Emma. She should be in heaven lookin' over you. But she ain't. She's in that there bag. Like a rotting animal carcass. You thank yer father fer that.

Emma's pleading eyes look to Solomon who's still hanging his head, ashamed that it's come to this.

EMMA

Dad?

SOLOMON

I'm sorry, Em.

EMMA

Dad...

SOLOMON

She made me promise.

EMMA
 Promise what?

SOLOMON
 To bury her in the hills. On my
 family's plot.

EMMA
 Why ain't she just tell us? Why
 ain't she tell everyone?

SOLOMON
 (re: Old Luc)
 You think he'd've allowed it? Look
 at'im. He believes what he wants,
 not what is.

Behind Old Luc's fierce eyes we might detect a hint of
 fragility, like he knows Sol's right.

OLD LUC
 If yer mother wished to be buried
 here, she would have said it. But
 she wouldn't want that. No, she
 would want to be buried with her
 ancestors. With her family.

SOLOMON
We are her family! Us, not you. She
 knew you'd never allow me buried
 with her. She wanted to rest in
 peace with me by her side, plots
 saved for our girls and their
 children and their children's
 children. Never to be disturbed by
 you and yer kin again.

Old Luc takes Sol's words like a shot to the chin. Refuses to
 believe it no matter how much he fears it's true.

OLD LUC
 Y'see, girls? The lies never stop.
 It's the devil's work, this one...
 (as he strides away)
 The devil's work.

EXT. MOUNTAIN CEMETERY -- DAY

Old Luc escorts Solomon away from the cabin, toward an
 ancient, weathered collection of headstones.

Probably the cemetery for some long dead mining village.

A century of brutal Appalachian winters have made the names barely readable.

SOLOMON
Why're we here?

OLD LUC
You want her buried here, you dig the grave.

SOLOMON
You ain't gone leave'er.

OLD LUC
That remains to be seen.

Luc drops a rusted PLANTING MATTOCK to the snow-topped dirt.

OLD LUC (cont'd)
Git to work.

Solomon just studies Old Luc, never realized how far gone his mind was.

OLD LUC (cont'd)
Dig.

SOLOMON
I cain't move my fuckin' arms.

OLD LUC
You can't raise yer fucking arms. Yer anterior deltoids have been severed. Yer lateral and posteriors remain. Used for lateral and transverse extension. Meaning: you cain't raise yer arms, but you can lower them... into the ground.
(then)
Go'n and try it.

Solomon kneels and grabs that mattock weakly. Pushes it into the snow, slowly digs away. Like a dog would bury a bone.

Anytime he instinctively tries to raise his arms to gain more power to dig with, he winces. It'll take getting used to, but this can be done.

Painful though it is, he can still dig.

OLD LUC (cont'd)
Grave digger through and through. All y'ever were. All y'ever could be.

INT. LOG CABIN, BACKROOM -- SAME

The girls are locked in that room again. Emma peeks through a boarded-up window, sees Solomon digging in the dirt, Old Luc's revolver trained on his back.

Behind her, Ginny sits on a bone-bare bed, holds back tears.

GINNY

Why's Momma in that bag?

EMMA

Don't worry about that none.

GINNY

But I thought- She's s'posed to be in heaven.

EMMA

She is.

GINNY

Then why's she...

EMMA

Remember when dad told us what to do if we saw a bear?

GINNY

To play...

EMMA

Dead.

GINNY

... pretend. S'posed to play pretend.

EMMA

Right. That's all she's doin'. She was playin' pretend cause she knew we'd wanna see her. Now she's back in heaven, awright?

Emma kneels in front of her sister, wipes away a stray tear.

EMMA (cont'd)

Awright?

Ginny nods, smiles bravely.

EXT. MOUNTAIN CEMETERY -- DAY

Solomon has dug a shallow grave. Sweat and dirt clinging to his beaten body.

Old Luc sits on an overturned headstone. Revolver still aimed at Sol, he swigs a flask and grimaces.

OLD LUC

Ain't gotta be deep. You git'er where you can by sundown, y'hear?

SOLOMON

What you gone do with my girls?

OLD LUC

That don't concern you none.

SOLOMON

Concerns me quite a bit.

OLD LUC

I'll raise 'em up the way you cain't. Rest assured, they in good hands.

SOLOMON

Same hands yer sons was in?

Luc stops short of another swig from his flask, speaks with a calm rage:

OLD LUC

Same hands that'll be 'round yer throat, you mention 'em again.

INT. LOG CABIN, BACKROOM -- SAME

Emma and Ginny peek through the boarded-up window, curious to what Old Luc's up to.

GINNY

What's he doing, Emma?

EMMA

Diggin', looks like.

GINNY

Wha'for?

Emma just sighs and moves away from the window, tries the door again. Dead-bolted.

EMMA

Don't worry about that. Just help
me find a way outta here.

The girls scour the room, the closet, drawers, beneath
furniture. Searching for weapons and exits.

EXT. MOUNTAIN CEMETERY -- AFTERNOON

Luc throws back that flask, sucks down another shot, sighs as
the liquor warms him.

SOLOMON

She talked of you. Y'know that?

OLD LUC

Keep diggin'.

SOLOMON

Said she loved you, back when.
'Fore May died.

OLD LUC

A lifetime ago, that was.

Old Luc slugs another mouthful, coughs the liquor down.

SOLOMON

Didn't y'love May?

OLD LUC

Course I did.

SOLOMON

You'd a done anything fer her.
Remember how y'was when me and
April first married?

OLD LUC

Did ev'thing I ever could.

SOLOMON

Y'remember when you promised her
you'd take her to see the ocean?

Though Luc knows what Sol's doing, he smirks. A welcomed
memory.

OLD LUC

I do.

SOLOMON
 Couldn't afford it, so we all
 pitched in t'help you paint yer
 bedroom like that postcard.

That strikes home for Luc. He sucks down another shot, savors
 the fireburn in his throat.

OLD LUC
 She loved it. Said it was like
 sleepin' on a beach every night.
 Damn woman, saw beauty in anything.

Solomon stops digging, dirt and grime beneath his nails,
 dried and cracking on his exposed skin.

SOLOMON
 You made a promise and you did all
 y'could to keep it.
 (then...)
 That's all I done.

INT. LOG CABIN, BACKROOM -- SAME

All she could find, Emma piles discarded firewood in front of
 the only door, finds a set of matches in her pocket.

FLIT, FLIT, FLIT. Can't get a spark.

Tries another. *FLIT, FLIT, FLIT... SSSSSPOOF!*

The match ignites and Emma feeds it a wrinkled sheet.

It burns slowly, charring and blackening the cloth. Then...

WHOOSH! as it takes to flame.

Emma tosses it on the wood, lets it defrost the frozen bark,
 her eyes reflecting the growing flame.

EXT. MOUNTAIN CEMETERY -- AFTERNOON

Solomon bows his head, catches his breath. He doesn't have
 much left in him.

OLD LUC
 You keep on.

SOLOMON
 Let us go, Luc. Just look the other
 way, let us walk home.
 (MORE)

SOLOMON (cont'd)

Lemme take my girls and bury my wife, way she wanted, and let us leave. Lemme do as my wife asked. Let me do what yer daughter wanted...

OLD LUC

I may have been a good man once. Perhaps for a majority of my pathetic life, but no longer. That man died and rotted in me. Already decomposed and withered away with the wind. He's but a spec of dust, now. I've lost all the good in my life. Lost all that made me who I was. All I have now is bitterness and hate. Festering in my innards, boiling my blood. I got only one way now.

SOLOMON

I don't believe that. I cain't.

Old Luc responds, not with pointed rage, but with an air of inevitability:

OLD LUC

You'll believe it when my face is the last you see in this world.

Solomon smells at the air. Turns his head toward...

THAT CABIN

Where a raging fire licks through its roof.

SOLOMON

No...

OLD LUC

turns to the cabin, takes in the sight.

OLD LUC

Git up. Git yerself up, now...

Solomon climbs from the shallow grave, starts for the cabin, Old Luc on his heels, revolver still on him.

OLD LUC (cont'd)

Move, damn you!

Solomon's sprinting for the cabin, Old Luc pushing him along.

SOLOMON
Emma? Ginny! *EMMA!*

AT THE CABIN

Solomon kicks at the front door, tries the doorknob but his arms won't work.

SOLOMON
Get the door! Goddamn you, Luc, my arms are done. You git'em, dammit! Please, Luc!

Old Luc digests the situation, decides:

OLD LUC
Don't you go nowheres.

SOLOMON
Please.

Old Luc SLAMS through the front door and a WALL OF SMOKE swallows him.

Solomon kneels in the snow, watches the smoke and flames engulf the cabin.

SOLOMON (cont'd)
GINNY! EMMA!

His watery eyes reflect the flames just like the doe eyes of:

EMMA
(whispered)
Dad, over here. Dad!

Solomon looks to his left where Emma helps Ginny out that window and waves her dad over.

He limps to his girls and they embrace him.

INT. LOG CABIN -- SAME

Smoke fills the air, the heat overwhelmingly palpable.

Old Luc forces his way through the place, coughing between barks:

OLD LUC
Girls! Where is you? *GIRLS!* Where is you, dammit!

Old Luc kicks in that charred door. Takes him a few tries to push the firewood away, stumbles inside.

IN THAT BACKROOM

He waves the smoke away from his face, notices sunlight exploding through that broken window.

Knows immediately what's happened.

BACK IN THE MAIN ROOM

Luc plows into that kitchen table, heaves April's corpse (still in the bag) over his shoulder.

EXT. LOG CABIN -- CONTINUOUS

Old Luc stampedes out the front door, falls into the snow with April. Finds his breath and notices Sol's gone.

He stands, finds three sets of footprints leading into the distant forest.

OLD LUC

Bad girls.

(to April's corpse)

You should not have left them with that animal.

That cabin burning behind him, Old Luc retrieves his revolver and stalks after those footprints, his eyes darker than we've ever seen them.

IN THE FOREST

Sol uses his girls as crutches to weave through the pines.

SOLOMON

Keep movin', keep movin'.

EMMA

He won't make it outta there.

SOLOMON

He'll make it outta anything.

EMMA

Ain't nothin' but a mean old man.

SOLOMON
He's the fuckin' devil!

WITH OLD LUC

As he enters the forest, eyes trained on the tracks before him like a hunt-hungry bloodhound.

OLD LUC
Girls! This is not yer fight!
GIRLS!

WITH SOLOMON

as he pulls the girls to a tree, has to rest his shoulders. Catches his breath.

SOLOMON
I cain't use my arms. Goddamn him!
I cain't even run straight.

EMMA
What do we do?

Solomon composes himself, shuts his eyes for a moment.

SOLOMON
(to himself)
My bow.

EMMA
What?

SOLOMON
We gotta circle back 'round to the
cabin.
(to Gin)
Can you do that?

Ginny just nods. Wide-eyed and terrified.

SOLOMON (cont'd)
Good girl. It'll be awright, 'kay?
It's all gonna be awright, now.

The girls each take an arm and help Sol limp through the snow-covered forest.

WITH OLD LUC

as he jogs after the trio of tracks before him, revolver at-the-ready.

WITH SOLOMON AND THE GIRLS

as they circle back out of the forest, towards the still-burning cabin ahead.

But Sol pulls his girls back, eyes a low-hanging branch on a pine tree.

SOL

Emma, can you reach that branch?

EMMA

Come on, Dad, we gotta move.

SOL

Dammit, can you reach the branch?

Emma extends an arm for the branch Sol's looking at. She can reach it.

SOL (cont'd)

Break it off. Quick.

She struggles with it, twisting and bending it till...

SSSSNAP! as it breaks clean from the tree.

INT. LOG CABIN -- SUNSET

Solomon cautiously traverses the burning cabin, finds his arrow quiver and bow.

EXT. LOG CABIN -- SAME

Emma holds that branch, tries to see through the smoke-filled doorway as Ginny kneels beside that heavy rucksack.

GINNY

She's back in heaven now?

EMMA

That's right.

GINNY

Then what's in there?

Emma turns around, pulls Ginny away from the rucksack.

EMMA

Just don't think about it none.

Ginny, still staring at that rucksack, just nods. Then...

Sol stumbles out of the cabin, coughing quietly. Nods to Emma and she SWEEPS AWAY their trail with that pine branch as they move toward the opposite end of the clearing.

WITH OLD LUC

as he follows those tracks back toward the cabin. Finds only tracks leading inside, none coming out.

Searches the expanse of the clearing, can't find any disturbance.

EXT. FOREST -- WITH SOLOMON -- SUNSET

Moving with the trio, Emma still clearing their tracks with the pine branch.

They finally root themselves by a tree, spy on Luc from afar.

EXT. LOG CABIN -- SAME

Old Luc patiently studies the seemingly untouched terrain, spots a slight inconsistency: the pine-swept path.

No footprints or tracks, just a barely visible trail.

WITH SOLOMON

as Old Luc begins to follow that pine-swept path.

SOLOMON

Move.

WITH OLD LUC

as he increases his speed, certain he's on the right trail.

WITH SOLOMON

as his girls help him limp through the forest.

SOLOMON

That way.

He presses on with his girls, toward a distant...

MOUNTAIN POND

not far ahead. Frozen and glistening in the moonlight.

SOLOMON (cont'd)

Almost there. We're almost there.

WITH OLD LUC

as he sprints through the trees, nothing on his mind but blood. A devil in the white hills.

AT THAT MOUNTAIN POND

Solomon and his girls limp past it, their shadows playing in the moonlight's reflection.

EMMA

He's coming, Dad. We gotta hurry.

SOLOMON

Almost there, we're close.

Sol nods for his girls to turn into the forest, as they do...

OLD LUC

bursts into view, eyes that pond, the moon above, doesn't see the girls or Solomon. He presses on, follows the tracks.

IN THE FOREST

Solomon guides his girls toward a CAVE ENTRANCE ahead.

SOLOMON

There it is. There, hurry.

The girls help Sol limp into...

INT. SMALL CAVE -- NIGHT

Sol nods toward his pant pocket, to Emma:

SOLOMON
Get the flashlight. In my pocket.

She pulls it out, clicks it on. The bulb is shattered but the filament still lights up.

EMMA
Don't work.

SOLOMON
That's 'nough light fer now.

Solomon turns his girls into a tunnel, around another bend.

EMMA
You know where we're goin?

SOLOMON
I grew up in these hills. He cain't find us in here.

Solomon pushes on with his girls, through the expanse of these underground catacombs.

IN THE FOREST

Old Luc gallops after those tracks, spots that cave ahead.

OLD LUC
He wouldn't.

He approaches the entrance where the tracks disappear. Nothing but blackness in there.

If he goes in without light, he'll never come back out.

OLD LUC (cont'd)
SOLOMON!

IN THE CAVES

Solomon and the girls hear Old Luc's screams.

SOLOMON
We're safe in here. All he can do is wait us out.

EMMA
Then what?

SOLOMON
We git some rest, I'll think
somethin' up.

CUT TO:

LATER,

And Solomon has a small fire built, that flashlight and steel
wool laid beside it.

He's shirtless beneath his coat. All he could burn.

His girls are bundled up next to him, embracing the warmth.

GINNY
I'm hungry.

SOLOMON
I know.

GINNY
And thirsty.

SOLOMON
Me too, honey.

EMMA
Dad, how we gonna git outta here?

SOLOMON
I'm thinkin' on that, Em.

EMMA
But he's waitin' for us.

SOLOMON
I said I'm thinkin' on it!

Sol composes himself, sighs.

SOLOMON (cont'd)
I'm sorry. I got us into this and
I'll get us out, awright? Just
trust me and...

EMMA
What?

SOLOMON
... Have faith.

EXT. THE CAVES -- NIGHT

Old Luc has built his own fire next to the cave entrance. Nothing's getting out of there without him noticing.

INT. THE CAVES -- NIGHT

Solomon and Ginny have dozed off, but Emma's awake, studying their small camp:

The steel wool, flashlight, bow and arrows, hunting knife, and that frayed nylon rope.

Emma stares into that fire. Her mind working overtime.

EMMA

Dad?

She hates to wake him up, but she's gotta do it.

EMMA (cont'd)

Dad!

Solomon jumps awake, holds an arrow tip in front of him like he's under siege.

EMMA (cont'd)

Just me. It's only me.

He lowers his guard, yawns himself awake.

SOLOMON

You alright?

EMMA

... I think I got an idea.

SOLOMON

At's good, Emma. Get some rest alright?

EMMA

This cain't wait.

Solomon sighs, pulls himself upright.

SOLOMON

Alright then. What is it?

EMMA

He's after you, not us. Right?

Solomon searches her face, knows immediately what she's getting at.

SOLOMON
That ain't an option.

EMMA
It's the only option.

Off Solomon's worried eyes, we:

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CAVES -- NIGHT

Old Luc stabs at his fire, eyes fixed on that cave entrance like he doesn't even need sleep.

INT. THE CAVES -- SAME

Emma's speaking to Ginny, reassuring her.

EMMA
You can do this, Gin. You got to.

GINNY
But what if...

EMMA
What if nothin'. No what ifs. It's gotta be this way and it's gotta be now.

Ginny looks to Solomon. She needs his confidence. Needs his strength.

SOLOMON
Pray with me.

Emma and Ginny share a glance. Did they hear that right?

EMMA
You thinkin' straight?

SOLOMON
I'm thinkin' straight for the first time in a long time. Now, you gonna pray with me or am I doin' it myself?

Solomon and his girls join hands, lower their heads.

SOLOMON (cont'd)
Dear, Lord... well...

He clears his throat, readies himself. Even with everything that's happened, this is the last thing he expected to do.

SOLOMON (cont'd)
It's been a while, ain't it? I wanna say I'm sorry fer turning my back on You. I felt abandoned and forgotten. I blamed You fer my folks and my wife. I blamed You fer not answering my prayers. Fer ignoring me. Fer punishing me fer things unknown. But I know now that I cain't blame You for all the shit times in my life. I don't know if You create the shit or if it exists in spite of You. But whatever it may be, I need to ask of You something that I never thought I'd ask again:

(then)

Please, Lord, look over me and protect my girls in these dark times. Forgive me for what I must do and see fit to not punish my children fer my own sins. Allow me the strength to defend what is mine and the courage to do so. Most importantly, allow me more time with my girls. Allow me more time to show 'em I can be a better father. More time to show You I can be a batter man. Bless me and guide me, O Lord. In Your name... *amen*.

Amen.

EMMA

Amen.

GINNY

Solomon snuffs out the fire. Emma straps the arrow quiver and bow on his shoulders, and she and Ginny help him limp through the tunnel.

SOLOMON (cont'd)
(to Ginny)
You understand what yer doin'?

GINNY

Yeah.

SOLOMON
And yer not scared, are you.

GINNY
No.

SOLOMON
Anything happens t'me, you follow
yer sister home, awright?

Ginny nods and Solomon kneels to kiss her cheek.

SOLOMON (cont'd)
Love you. Both a you.

They hug him so tight he can hardly breathe.

EXT. THE CAVES -- NIGHT

Ginny hightails it out of the cave, slides right into Old Luc, screaming, frantic:

GINNY
Pappaw! Pappaw, help! Help!

Old Luc holds his revolver on the cave entrance, even as he hugs Ginny into his arm.

OLD LUC
What's happened? What is it?

GINNY
Bear. Help, please. Bear! Emma's...
She's...

Old Luc adds it up. Knows what's happened.

OLD LUC
Show me. Where is she?

Ginny pulls Old Luc into...

INT. THE CAVES -- CONTINUOUS

Old Luc follows her as Ginny holds her flashlight down the tunnel, all the while whimpering Emma's name.

IN A SIDE TUNNEL

Basked in complete darkness, Emma and Sol watch Ginny and Old Luc pass them and disappear down the tunnel.

Slow and quiet, they slip out of the side tunnel and...

EXT. THE CAVES -- NIGHT

They burst into the snow, sprint through...

THE FOREST

Weaving through trees, both of their eyes fixed not ahead of them but on the...

TREE BRANCHES

They're studying them for something. Then, Sol spots one that's to his liking.

SOLOMON

There. That one, Em. Right there.

Emma uses her father to climb up to the branch, cuts it off with the hunting knife.

Shows it to her father.

SOLOMON (cont'd)

That'll work. Come on, hurry.

Emma helps her father limp toward...

THAT MOUNTAIN POND

Where the two climb a small hill and slide onto the pond's snow-covered ice.

Carefully, they move their way to the center of the pond.

INT. THE CAVES -- NIGHT

Ginny pulls Old Luc along, shining that dull flashlight in every direction.

GINNY

I don't know. I don't know. Emma!

OLD LUC

Where's yer father?

GINNY

Emma? Emma...

Old Luc yanks Ginny to face him, eyes ablaze.

OLD LUC
Where's yer dad, I said!

GINNY
I'm sorry. I'm sorry, Pappaw.
Let'im go. Please, juss let'im go.

OLD LUC
Goddamn you girls!

Old Luc lifts Ginny into his arms, stalks back the way he came. Down that tunnel, toward the entrance...

EXT. THE CAVES -- CONTINUOUS

Luc spots the tracks leading away from the cave. Knows he's been tricked.

OLD LUC
After I've killed yer father, you
and yer sister have somethin'
coming. You must be broken. I won't
stand fer this.

Old Luc follows the tracks, drags Ginny along.

OLD LUC (cont'd)
SOLOMON! Show yerself! You're
willing to sacrifice your daughter
for your own life? Is that what
this is? It's her for you?
(then)
So be it. You will pay for yer sins
or she will, y'hear me? It's you or
her, you make yer choice!

ON THAT MOUNTAIN POND

Emma holds Sol's takedown bow as Sol carves another. Slices off imperfections till the branch is seamless.

SOLOMON
That'll do.

Behind them, the HORIZON BURNS with a predawn glow.

SOLOMON (cont'd)
Over here, Luc! Y'hear me? On the
pond! We're on the pond!

Sol bends his branch. It's not perfect but it'll do.

OLD LUC (O.S.)
Show yerself!

Sol checks behind him as the sun's rays burn brighter. No telling how long it'll be till sunrise.

SOLOMON
We cain't! Ice is too thin, we're stuck out here!

IN THE FOREST

Old Luc slows his pace, mutters to Gin:

OLD LUC
You got one dumb fuckin' father,
y'know that, girl?
(then, to Sol:)
Y'got weapons out there?

SOLOMON
What you think?

Old Luc pulls Ginny up that small hill.

OLD LUC
(to Ginny)
You first.

GINNY
Why?

OLD LUC
Do as I say, damn you.

He nudges her and she peaks over the crest of the hill, sees:

SOLOMON AND EMMA

on the pond. Emma splits a fray of string from that nylon rope and ties it to both ends of the makeshift bow.

Puts a finger to her mouth and nods. *Shhhhhh*.

Ginny summons courage, nods back to Old Luc:

GINNY
They got a bow-n-arrow.

OLD LUC
That's a good girl.
(to Solomon)
Throw it here!

SOLOMON
Cain't do that.

Sol checks the horizon again. Sun's getting closer.

OLD LUC
You'll do it or yer girls're dead.
You such a coward you'll let 'em
die fer you?

SOLOMON
Promise me something.

OLD LUC
You ain't in a position ta
negotiate.

SOLOMON
Promise me you'll look after 'em.

Old Luc studies Ginny's face. Scared shitless. Can't hide it.

OLD LUC
I can promise 'at.

SSSSSLIP! as something slides across the ice.

SOLOMON
That's my bow.

Old Luc nods for Ginny to look. She does, nods an affirmative for Old Luc.

He pokes his head over the crest of the hill, sees the bow resting near the pond's edge. Doesn't realize it's the makeshift bow.

He studies Solomon and Emma out on the pond.

OLD LUC
Y'got a knife, I'm sure.

Sol nods to Emma and *SSSSSLIP!* as she slides that across the ice too.

Old Luc pulls Ginny in front of him and stands atop that small hill overlooking the pond.

ON THE HORIZON: the sun's burning brighter, the tree-topped mountains seemingly ablaze.

OLD LUC (cont'd)
How you get yerselves stuck out there?

SOLOMON
Weren't thinkin'.

OLD LUC
Recurring problem a yours, ain't it?

SOLOMON
Y'could say.

Solomon looks to Emma and we notice that takedown bow hiding behind her back.

They meet eyes. A kind of pre-emptive goodbye.

OLD LUC
Since you gone'n surrendered, I'll give you yer last words.
(then)
Go'n and say bye, if you'd like.

SOLOMON
Thanks, but no thanks.

OLD LUC
Sure 'bout that?

SOLOMON
I'll leave it where it is. They know what they need to.

OLD LUC
Awright, then.

Old Luc cocks his revolver, aims at Sol.

SOLOMON
Y'know, I do got somethin t'say.

OLD LUC
Make it quick, then.

SOLOMON
Ginny...

A sly smile from Sol as he feels that sunrise seconds away.

SOLOMON (cont'd)
Play pretend.

A confused glance from Old Luc to Ginny as she drops to the snow and plays dead.

Old Luc glances back to the pond as...

THE SUN CRESTS THE HORIZON!

An explosion of light as the sunrise reflects off the frozen pond, momentarily blinding Old Luc.

Within the blinding light, we can barely see Sol and Emma as they're blurred into one, skilled archer:

Emma does what Sol's arms can't do: raises the bow, nocks the arrow.

And Sol does what she can't do: pulls the arrow back, steadies and aims as they both...

Close their eyes
 Take a calm breath
 Release steady and slow
 And open their eyes again -- now hard, dark, focused.

TWANG! The arrow launches ahead...

From Sol's fingers.

Over ice and snow.

Past that gun as it *FIRES!*

THWACK! And into Old Luc's gut as he falls right beside Gin.

It all happened so quick that by the time we survey the scene, we notice both Luc and Sol are on their backs.

An arrow protruding from Old Luc's gut like a victory flag.

Sol holding his ribs as if he's been shot again.

EMMA
 Dad? You alright? Dad...

Emma lifts Sol's head, moves his hand to see the wound.

SOLOMON
 You did good.

EMMA
 Daddy...

SOLOMON

It's okay.

She can see only blood and broken skin.

EMMA

Please, no.

Solomon feels the wound, notices a BULLET HOLE in the ice beside him.

SOLOMON

Missed. Just grazed me.

Emma studies Sol's minor wound, sees the hole in the ice.

EMMA

You mean to tell me don't no one gotta dig a bullet outta you fer once?

SOLOMON

Surprise to me too.

Sol laughs through gritted teeth, climbs to his feet, but...

THE BULLET HOLE IN THE ICE

begins to *C-C-C-CCCCRACK!* as a spiderweb of splintering ice spreads beneath them.

SOLOMON (cont'd)

Move.

EMMA

Dad...

SOLOMON

NOW!

Solomon and Emma race for that small hill where Ginny waits.

WATER SEEPING through the cracks, pieces sliding and sinking like tectonic plates.

SOLOMON (cont'd)

Run! Go, Em! RUN!

Nearing the shore, Emma leaps but...

SOLOMON

slips and slides off a broken plate of ice, tumbles...

UNDERWATER

and sinks into the dark abyss. Can't raise his arms, all he can do is kick, but it's not enough.

BY THE POND

The girls scream for their daddy. Emma's on her stomach, reaching as far as she can into the freezing water.

EMMA

Grab my hand, grab it!

GINNY

Swim, daddy!

Emma leaps to her feet...

EMMA

Cain't work his arms.

... and *RRRRIPS!* that arrow out of Old Luc's gut.

UNDERWATER

Sol's sinking like a stone, not enough power in those legs to keep him afloat. But...

THAT ARROW dives into the water, just out of reach of Sol's dead arms. It's no use -- Sol quits trying.

Until...

THWACK! as Emma stabs that arrow right through one of Sol's shoulder wounds.

He screams soundlessly underwater as...

BY THE POND

Both girls tug that arrow and heave Sol out of the pond like a speared fish.

SOLOMON

Get it out, Em! Ahh pull it out!

Emma snaps the arrow, yanks it out.

EMMA
Sorry, only idea I had.

SOLOMON
(teeth chattering)
You'n yer ideas.

EMMA
I got one more: gettin' you to a
fire and off this Godforsaken
mountain.

Ginny and Emma help Solomon to his feet, away from the still-dying Old Luc, but...

SOLOMON
Wait.

EMMA
What're you doin'?

Solomon kneels over Old Luc and grasps his discarded gun in his shivering hands.

EMMA (cont'd)
Dad...

SOLOMON
Turn 'round, Em. Both a you.

They do as their told and Emma, knowing what's coming, covers her little sister's ears.

Sol presses the revolver to Luc's temple, stares into those eyes -- dying embers now doused -- notices they're gazing at:

THAT DOGWOOD FLOWER

that's clutched in Luc's hand. The only thing he wants to see before he becomes one with the earth again.

Sol cocks the hammer, whispers:

SOLOMON (cont'd)
This is not yer family. May you now
return to yours.

PWOP-OP-OP-OP! as Sol pulls the trigger and we...

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN CEMETERY -- ANOTHER DAY

We're back at that cemetery, searching the faces of the weathered headstones. We fall upon one in particular:

APRIL SANDERS

1966-2012

Beautiful wife and mother.

R.I.P.

Standing before it: Sol and his girls.

Sol's healthy now. Fresh bandages still littering his body, holding his girls hands as they brave the day for him.

Behind them: the skeleton of that burned cabin rooted in thawing snow. To April's headstone:

SOLOMON

Yer where yer s'posed be, now.

(then)

Kept my promise. Now y'keep yers
and watch over us. Love y'honey.

EMMA

Love y'momma.

GINNY

Love you.

Emma looks to Gin who seems bashful at the moment. Can't muster the words she wants to say.

Sol and his girls toss...

HANDFULS OF DIRT

for the grave, but the dirt transforms mid-air into...

EXT. FLORIDA BEACH -- DAY

... SAND as it flies from a...

... SANDCASTLE that Emma and Ginny fight to defend against...

... SOLOMON, who stomps the castle as...

... HIS GIRLS laugh and wrestle on the beach and...

... they rebuild the castle, Emma smiling brighter than ever.

FADE OUT