

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.

GINNY

Amen.

EMMA

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 awright. Thats '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 fellas.

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

Ooookay. 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 fronta 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 anywhere?

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 nowheres 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  
Prolly 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 CAMP SITE - 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 Naw, he didn't. Sure did.

Kurt eyes Lamar, shakes his head ever so slightly.

## KURT

EMMA

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

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 CAMP SITE -- 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.

Calmy, 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 reigns, 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 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 scarf's 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 sledge 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. Alright. 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 discomforting.)*

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 tolta 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 awright--

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, alright?

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 alright, 'kay?  
It's all gonna be alright, 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, alright? 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  
awright?

EMMA

This cain't wait.

Solomon sighs, pulls himself upright.

SOLOMON

Awright 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.

EMMA

Amen.

GINNY

Amen.

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 *FIRE!*

*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 awright? 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