INT. BLACKLEDGE RANCH - BARN - PRE-DAWN

Horses stir and pace, black silhouettes in dark stalls, frail morning aglow in the gaps between wall boards, as a MAN enters. He murmurs in greeting and moves easily among them.

A SERIES OF SHOTS: The Man checks and feeds each animal, changes water, examines saddles and tack; the sounds of these tasks alone punctuate the early hour’s church-quiet.

EXT. BLACKLEDGE RANCH - DAWN

The Man slides a rattling door open, revealing himself fully - JAMES BLACKLEDGE (late 20s, work-strong, determined, but with an open face quick to smile) - as he guides a glossy black horse from the barn to a fenced ring under an empty sky.

GEORGE BLACKLEDGE (60s, straight-backed, of few words but sly humor, with a perpetual squint from gauging great distances, weather, and the character of other men) steps to the fence as his son clicks his tongue and gets the animal moving.

George watches the horse circle at the end of its lead, studying the animal as it canters past, appraising, nodding.

GEORGE
Yep. Yep.

The sleek black creature throws off sparks as the sun crests the soft far hills to light the horse ring with a gold fire.

INT. BLACKLEDGE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAWN

An egg yolk breaks and smears with a hiss in a hot pan and LORNA (20s, blinking and watchful, bird-like) winces.

Her eyes shoot from the egg she’s broken to MARGARET BLACKLEDGE (still handsome over five decades in, faintly lined by a life under open skies, a jut to her chin) engrossed by paperwork at the table.

Lorna shifts the INFANT BOY squirming in her arms and surreptitiously flips the egg before Margaret can see, just as Margaret looks up from her work to the door opening.

George and James enter on a trajectory for the large farmhouse sink where they wash and dry their hands.

MARGARET
How’s that black doing?
GEORGE
Leg seems better. Looking good.

He helps himself to Margaret’s coffee as he takes a seat and she nudges her plate of toast towards him with a smile.

JAMES
Thinking I’d take him out to check fence line after breakfast.

LORNA
It’s almost ready.

James spins the radio dial from cattle reports to George Jones singing and dances across the room, clowning, to nuzzle Lorna. He snatches the baby, launches it into the air...

MARGARET
(laughing)
Careful.

JAMES
Oh, he likes it. Don’t you, Jimmy?

He catches the happily gurgling baby, tosses him up again.

INT. BLACKLEDGE HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER

Lorna playfully rubs the baby’s tummy with her nose as she undresses him on the drain board while water pours steaming from the faucet to fill the giant white sink for a bath.

MARGARET
Lorna. This is too hot.

Lorna glances over to find Margaret pulling her fingers from the stream of water, face creased with impatient concern.

LORNA
Oh. I know. I didn’t--. Haven’t checked it yet--

Margaret spins the cold water tap, comes to tend the child.

MARGARET
Here. Let--. You rest.

Lorna holds a beat, weighing a response, but then steps away.
INT. BLACKLEIDGE HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER

The baby stares up in mesmerized wonder at the shifting patterns of shadow and light cast by the leaves of the yard’s shade tree as Margaret soaps him in the giant white sink.

MARGARET
What is it? What do you see?

The infant’s eyes roll and search until they finally come to rest on Margaret. His mouth twitches into a smile.

MARGARET (CONT’D)
Yes, I’m right here. Hello.

The baby’s smile flickers and fades as he continues to stare, eyes locked on hers in a spell of deep, penetrating inquiry.

Margaret slows, arrested by the steadiness of his gaze and her own humming sense of profound communion.

The baby’s expression screws down into a tight furious knot. He squeaks as he passes gas, then relaxes again with a smile.

Margaret laughs. She cups water in her palm and sluices it over his head, a bit of suds running into the baby’s eyes.

As he begins to fuss and cry, movement beyond the window snags Margaret’s attention and she glances out, just as the black horse James had trained earlier enters the yard, alone.

She watches the dark animal bring itself to a stop under the shade tree, where it stomps the ground and flags its tail.

Margaret sees nothing but the empty saddle on its back.

INT. BLACKLEIDGE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Lorna looks up from reading Life magazine on the sofa when Margaret hustles through with the wet, crying baby.

Margaret pushes out the screen door with a hip and dashes off the porch. The door springs back behind her with a slap.

MARGARET (O.S.)
George! George!

EXT. BLACKLEIDGE RANCH - DAY

George shields his eyes against the sun as he steps from the barn to look in the direction Margaret points, running towards him with the bawling baby. He spots the black horse.
He turns back to Margaret, the urgency on her face, then drops the tools in his hands and breaks into a run.

He crosses the yard in a bound, seizes the horse’s trailing reins, and launches himself up into the empty saddle.

GEORGE
Yah!

He spurs the animal which takes off in the direction it had come; across the stretch of rolling fields beyond the fence.

The screen door claps again and Lorna comes to join Margaret, who stands with the baby, eyes pinned on George as he goes.

LORNA
Where’s George going?

Margaret shakes her head vacantly as Lorna tentatively reaches to reclaim her baby, to jiggle and soothe.

LORNA (CONT’D)
Shhh... It’s okay. It’s okay. (to Margaret)
Where’s James?

Margaret opens her mouth, but nothing comes out as the horse carries George away from her, over the edge of the world.

INT. BLACKLEDGE HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

The shadows of bare branches ripple the blank wall reflected in a bureau’s mirror; a patch of hard winter sunlight.

Margaret steps into the mirror’s frame.

She checks herself; a simple dark dress, hair scraped back. She meets her own eyes at last, and all the sadness there. She steels herself and applies a line of red lipstick.

The floor creaks, breaking the mournful quiet, and she turns to George, who holds out two neckties, one in each hand.

Margaret chooses one, loops it around George’s neck, and begins to form a knot. She pauses, wipes a dab of missed shaving cream from his earlobe, and returns to tying his tie.

George watches his wife closely as she concentrates, but she avoids his gaze, focusing on her task.
INT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

LORNA
I, Lorna Blackledge...

She stumbles slightly over the last name, throwing a quick, nearly apologetic glance at George and Margaret standing witness. Margaret holds hands with JIMMY (now 3 years old).

LORNA (CONT'D)
Take you, Donnie--

She breaks off with a nervous laugh, a cluster of white flowers and holly trembling in her hands, takes a breath.

LORNA (CONT'D)
Take you, Donald Weboy, to be my lawfully wedded husband.

DONNIE WEBBOY (20s, darkly handsome) gives her an encouraging wink, the two of them standing in their best clothes before a JUDGE. A portrait of President Kennedy hangs on the wall.

JUDGE
To have and to hold. From this day forward. For better, for worse.

LORNA
To have and to hold. From this day forward. For better, for worse.

Jimmy watches all the adults, George and Margaret stoically enduring this ceremony with ramrod-straight backs.

JUDGE
For richer, for poorer. In sickness, and in health.

LORNA
For richer, for poorer. In sickness, and in health.

JUDGE
Until death do us part.

LORNA
(a breath)
Until death do us part.

JUDGE
By the power vested in me by the State of Montana, I now pronounce you man and wife. You may kiss the bride.
Donnie turns to Lorna with a sexy, teasing grin.

DONNIE
Thank you, sir. I think I will.

Margaret drops her eyes as Donnie kisses Lorna, catches Jimmy watching her. She smiles thinly, gives his hand a squeeze.

George steps forward as the couple parts and offers his hand to Donnie, who makes a big show of respect; looking George in the eye, nodding solemnly as he shakes his hand.

Margaret meets Lorna stiffly; patting at her without embracing, without meeting the girl’s searching expression.

Lorna gives up, and drops down to Jimmy’s level...

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Lorna throws her arms open to Jimmy, who lets go of Margaret’s hand to run to his mother in the snowy side yard.

Lorna catches him up, laughing, and Margaret watches her pepper the boy with kisses as feathery flakes swirl the air.

George retrieves a box of Jimmy’s toys and a small cardboard suitcase from the back of a parked station wagon.

He turns for the ramshackle building and follows Margaret up a peeling wooden exterior staircase behind Lorna and Jimmy, toward Donnie standing in an open second story doorway.

INT. LORNA AND DONNIE’S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

George sets the box of toys down in the all-but-empty living room; a couch, a lamp, chipped enamel-topped kitchen table.

LORNA
We’ve got some more stuff coming.
I put some chairs on lay-away...

She gives an anxious tour of the few rooms wanting to impress and George observes his wife take it all in without comment.

INT. LORNA AND DONNIE’S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY

Lorna ratchets up her enthusiasm for Jimmy’s benefit as she opens the door to a narrow room, the only one freshly painted. A cowboy-theme blanket on a twin bed makes it nice.
LORNA
And this is your room!

Jimmy throws himself on the bed with delight and Lorna turns to Margaret with a smile that goes unreturned.

Margaret nods at the bare window overlooking the parking lot.

MARGARET
We can sew you some curtains.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

George looks on as Margaret clutches Jimmy to her in the yard with Lorna and Donnie. Margaret kisses the boy tenderly.

MARGARET
(choked)
You’ll come visit soon.

INT. BLACKLEDGE’S CAR - DAY - (MOVING)

Margaret watches Jimmy waving her good-bye in her passenger side mirror as George turns them out of the building’s lot.

A last glimpse of the boy, hand in the air, beside his mother, Donnie already climbing the stairs... Then they all slide from the mirror and Margaret’s field of vision.

She closes her eyes because there’s nothing left to see.

INT. BLACKLEDGE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

George enters to find Margaret standing motionless at the sink, staring out the window into the snowy yard.

He leans a hip against the counter, studying his wife transfixed by the bare arms of the shade tree outside.

He sees her chin begin to quiver.

GEORGE
(quietly)
He isn’t far. Just in town.

Margaret angles her face away. She won’t get caught crying.

MARGARET
Fix you some lunch.
She straightens up and steps away from the sink, leaving George alone to contemplate the white glowing porcelain, as dry and empty as the fields beyond the window.

**EXT. GROCERY STORE - PARKING LOT - DAY**

Margaret steps out the door into bright summer sunshine, following a BAG BOY who carries her groceries to the car.

**CUT TO:**

Margaret tips the boy with a couple dimes and a nickel.

**BAG BOY**

*Thank you, Mrs. Blackledge!*

He rattles the change in his palm as he lopes back to the store and Margaret climbs behind that station wagon’s wheel.

**INT. BLACKLEDGE'S CAR/EXT. GROCERY - STREET - DAY**

Margaret backs her car out from its space and navigates the lot to the exit, where she stops to wait for a break in the cross street’s traffic. She signals to turn.

Her eyes flick to the far sidewalk as she scans the passing cars and she spots Jimmy holding hands with Lorna, walking with Donnie, each with an ice cream cone.

Jimmy gives his scoop of ice cream a lick, and it tumbles from the cone, landing on the sidewalk with a dull plop.

**MARGARET**

*Oh--*

She sees Jimmy stop walking and abruptly drop Lorna’s hand.

Lorna turns back to Jimmy, who stares in forlorn confusion at the lost ice cream at his feet, the empty cone in his hand.

Jimmy looks up at the sudden bark of Donnie’s laughter, sees he’s being laughed at, and his own face caves in despair.

Donnie impatiently grabs Jimmy by the arm to drag him along, but Jimmy digs in his heels, yanks his arm free, and--

Donnie’s hand lashes out, quick as a striking snake. He slaps Margaret Blackledge’s grandson across the face.

The boy’s sudden shock matches Margaret’s, sitting helplessly in the station wagon across the street. She blinks.
Jimmy bursts into hot tears.

Lorna swoops down to comfort him, but Donnie jerks her back to her feet. She tries squirming from his grip, but Donnie squeezes her upper arm and she twists in pain.

Jimmy stops crying instantly, seeing his mother struggle, and Donnie releases Lorna. The three stand a breathless beat.

Lorna scowls at Donnie, then extends her ice cream to Jimmy, but Donnie swats her hand and the cone falls into the street.

Margaret can’t hear from this distance, but Lorna spits a few choice words at Donnie, who may be nodding his head tightly, but he’s not agreeing with anything she says. He’s coiling.

And then he springs. He mashes his own ice cream in Jimmy’s face, surprising the boy, who falls back on his butt.

Lorna lunges at Donnie, but he’s anticipated this and meets her with a sharp slap across the face.

Lorna’s hand goes to her cheek as Margaret’s hand flies to the car’s horn... just as another car sounds its horn.

Margaret glances in the rearview mirror and sees a line of three cars waiting directly behind her.

She pulls out of the parking lot and quickly over to the side, but by the time she’s stopped and cranes around, Jimmy, Lorna, and Donnie are nowhere to be seen.

INT. BLACKLEDGE HOUSE - KITCHEN - EVENING

Two steaks sputter and pop in an iron pan.

The back door opens and George enters in his work clothes, making a beeline for the sink where he washes his hands, dries them with a dish towel hanging there.

He observes Margaret adding frosting to the top of a coffee cake, and smiles. He dabs up a taste with a clean pinky.

GEORGE

Mm!

Margaret blocks him from taking more with her elbow.

MARGARET

That’s not for you.
INT. BLACKLEDEGE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

George eyes Margaret as they eat their steaks at the table. Something’s going on, but she’s keeping it to herself.

GEORGE
Barlow Ott says he might have something for Donnie next month. Needs a couple of fellas to help put a new roof on the Lawson place.

Margaret lifts her eyebrows and lets them drop. That’s it.

George considers his reticent wife as she chews her food, and he glances at the coffee cake on the counter for a clue.

INT. BLACKLEDEGE'S CAR - DAY

Margaret checks herself in the rearview mirror then picks up the coffee cake from the seat beside her, opens the door.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Margaret knocks on the door at the top of the rickety stairs and waits, listening, the coffee cake offering in her hands.

She glances at the building’s small lot where trash blows free, then brings her attention back to this closed door.

She knocks again with a frown.

MARGARET
Hello? Lorna?

A dark window reflects morning sky on the other side of the railing, and Margaret leans out, straining for a peek inside.

WOMAN (O.S.)
Who you looking for?

Margaret startles, wheels about in surprise.

WOMAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
You the girl’s mother?

It takes Margaret a moment to locate the voice; a WOMAN (40s, sallow) clutching a bathrobe closed tight at her neck in an open doorway at the bottom of the stairs.

MARGARET
No. I’m her--
Margaret comes down the stairs and the woman retreats to stand just inside her apartment door, out of the light.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Lorna was married to my son.

She notices drawings scratched with a rock on the surface of the cracked cement landing under her feet. A child’s work.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
The little boy’s my grandson.

WOMAN
Well, you missed ‘em. Gone now.

MARGARET
Gone?

WOMAN
Gone to his family. Took off last night.

MARGARET
His family--? Donnie’s? They mention when they’d be back?

NEIGHBOR
Not no time soon be my guess. Took all they had.

INT. BLACKLEDGE HOUSE – KITCHEN – DAY

The clock on the wall ticks. Ticks. Ticks. Ticks.

The coffee cake, minus one piece, sits off to the side on the table as Margaret absently presses up each and every last crumb from the empty plate in front of her with a fingertip.

She works a thing over in her mind. And over again...

Tick. Tick. Tick. Then, she’s suddenly up and moving.

INT. BLACKLEDGE HOUSE – BEDROOM – DAY

Margaret pulls a suitcase down from a high shelf in the closet, opens it on the made bed, and turns for the dresser.

INT. BLACKLEDGE HOUSE – BATHROOM – DAY

Margaret takes a stack of worn-thin towels from the linen closet and retrieves the cake of soap from the bath.
INT. BLACKLEDGE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Margaret takes the iron pan from the stove and sets it in a crate with the coffee pot, starts loading in canned goods.

INT. BLACKLEDGE HOUSE - DEN - DAY

Margaret hesitates in front of a heavy wooden office desk, then kneels to work its stubborn bottom drawer open.

She reaches past papers and files to pull out a metal box and sets it on the desktop. She opens its hinged lid.

Inside, a Colt service revolver gleams dully silver, snug in its burnished leather holster, along with a box of bullets, and a star-shaped badge - SHERIFF George Blackledge.

EXT. BLACKLEDGE RANCH - DAY

George rounds the drive in his truck, parks by the barn.

He notices the station wagon pulled close to the house and stops at its open back hatch as he crosses the yard.

His brow furrows in surveying all Margaret’s piled inside; the kitchen supplies, an old canvas tent, a lantern, and...

George plucks a child’s well-worn stuffed toy horse from its perch atop a suitcase, turns its light weight in his hands.

INT. BLACKLEDGE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

George enters and washes his hands at the sink, ignoring Margaret waiting at the table as he takes in the missing pan, missing coffee percolator, all the house’s shades drawn down.

GEORGE
Headed any place in particular?

MARGARET
Sit down, George.

She indicates his place at the table, set with a bowl of soup and crackers. She has a glass of water for herself.

GEORGE
That my last meal?

MARGARET
I’m going to get Jimmy. Bring him home to live with us.
George can’t find a dish towel, dries his hands on his jeans.

    GEORGE
    Well, you’re sure packed for a trip into town.

Margaret indicates his chair again, the soup. She’s serious.

    MARGARET
    Sit down, George.

INT. BLACKLEDGE HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER

George sets his spoon down in the now-empty bowl, thinking.

    GEORGE
    You didn’t see fit to share this with me?

Margaret sweeps cracker crumbs from the table top into the bowl and carries it to the sink.

    MARGARET
    Sharing it now.

George studies his wife’s back as she rinses the bowl.

    GEORGE
    Anyone else see it happen?

    MARGARET
    You mean other than me?

    GEORGE
    I’m asking if you’re sure what you saw.

Margaret turns off the water, faces her husband.

    MARGARET
    I saw exactly what I’ve felt all along about Donnie Weboy. What you’ve felt, too, whether anyone’ll ever get you to admit it or not. And I saw that girl can’t protect her child.

    GEORGE
    On that account you expect she’s just going to hand him over to you? That what you see happening?

Margaret scoffs, but George clocks a dip in her confidence.
GEORGE (CONT'D)
And when Lorna says no? Margaret, Jimmy’s her boy.

The color rises hot in his wife’s face.

MARGARET
He is your grandson, George Blackledge.

George nods, explores the table’s grain with his fingers.

GEORGE
And your plan for finding them?

MARGARET
Donnie’s from somewhere in North Dakota. I’ll find them. You ought to know me well enough by now.

GEORGE
(laughs)
Oh, I do.

MARGARET
I won’t come back here without him.

GEORGE
Nope. And you’re going with me or without me?

Margaret waits for George to look at her.

MARGARET
That’s your choice. I packed you a bag. Depending on what you decide.

INT. BLACKLEDGE HOUSE – BEDROOM – DAY

George stands alone, considering the empty spot where one of the two pillows should be at the head of the double bed.

He looks over the contents of the suitcase left laying open there for him, examines a fresh razor from the dopp kit, picks up a heavy wool sweater, in August.

GEORGE
(calling)
How long you planning on being gone?

Margaret comes to lean in the doorway, watch George intently.
MARGARET
Long as it takes.

George nods to himself, turns to regard his wife, her anxious expectation. The truth is she can’t do this without him.

They hold a beat in silent negotiation, then George decides. He drops the sweater and passes Margaret on his way out.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
You’re not coming?

George speaks over his shoulder as he heads down the hall.

GEORGE
I’m turning off the water. Don’t want to come home to busted pipes.

Margaret smiles, but doesn’t want to make too big a deal.

EXT. BLACKLEDGE RANCH – DAY

George locks the door and walks the house keys to Margaret waiting in the passenger seat. He climbs in, starts the car.

He glances at Margaret, a wordless last check. She nods and trains her eyes forward, chin out; ready.

George puts the car into drive, rounds the shade tree, and heads for the main road, leaving the house and barn behind.

EXT. ROAD – DAY

The car crests a swell, the ranch now distant but still visible, the road rolling for a notch in the green hills.

INT. BLACKLEDGE’S CAR – DAY – (MOVING)/EXT. UNPAVED TRAIL

Margaret makes herself comfortable, settling in for a long drive, when George suddenly pulls the car hard to the left.

MARGARET
No. No, George. Don’t.

George takes them off the main road at an unpaved trail.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
George, No.

George keeps driving until they reach the top of a rise, where he finally stops the car and turns it off.
He opens his door. Margaret makes no move.

GEORGE
You don’t know when you’ll be back.

MARGARET
I don’t need reminding. I know what I’ve lost.

George pauses half out of the car to regard his wife.

GEORGE
Sometimes that’s all life is, Margaret. The list of what we’ve lost.

Margaret crosses her arms and turns to look out her window.

George stands and walks away, leaving his door hanging open.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

George leaves the trail and hikes up to a level spot where weathered gravestones stand penned within an iron fence.

There aren’t many markers, but they all bear the name BLACKLEDGE. The newest, still burning white: JAMES A. BLACKLEDGE. 1933-1961. BELOVED SON AND FATHER.

George stands a long beat in front of the clustered stones, the wind through the high grass the only sound up here.

Then he turns to face the same direction as all the gravestones and gazes out over the magnificent verdant land.

EXT. HIGHWAY 90 - DAY

Mountains rise and rise and then fall away behind the car as it heads east towards the Great Plains.

INT. BLACKLEDGE'S CAR - DAY - (MOVING)

Margaret unwraps the coffee cake and cuts two slices, handing one to George with a napkin as he drives.

GEORGE
Oh, I do get a piece.

He bites into it with a smile as Margaret turns on the radio, and Johnny Cash’s rumbling voice carries them on their way...
EXT. HIGHWAY 90 (VARIOUS) - DAY

The car crosses the Yellowstone river at Reed Point, passes roadside diners and gas stations, Indian trading posts... George and Margaret pass cattle trailers and families packed into cars on late summer road trips, suitcases strapped atop.

The sun travels with them, carving the vast dome of the sky as Margaret and George enter ever-flatter land, and the shadow of their car stretches long before them.

INT. BLACKLEDGE’S CAR - DAY - (MOVING)

George spies a sign up ahead as the day fades: BENTROCK.

He considers the upcoming exit, debating, and Margaret rouses from a doze when he signals and leaves the highway.

EXT. BENTROCK - MAIN STREET - DAY

George drives down Main Street, easily finding the town’s modest commercial district and the town hall and courthouse building with its sheriff’s office, and parks out front.

George and Margaret climb out and stretch their stiff bodies.

MARGARET
Now, don’t tell him more than you have to.

GEORGE
I couldn’t if I wanted to.

INT. BENTROCK SHERIFF’S OFFICE - DAY

Margaret assesses the MAN wearing a badge, SHERIFF NEVELSON (40s), leaning on the other side of the counter from her husband; the men nearly identical but for the span of years.

NEVELSON
Wesley Hayden’s been out of office, oh, seven years now.

GEORGE
Good man. Beat me to it. He helped me track down a couple men I was looking for back in ’52.

NEVELSON
(impressed)
The Pettus brothers.

(MORE)
NEVELSON (CONT'D)
I remember that. That was you?
   (marvels at George)
You sure got 'em.

GEORGE
I had some help.

NEVELSON
Well, how can I help?

GEORGE
We’re trying to locate a Donnie
Weboy. He’s got family over in
North Dakota.

NEVELSON
I know the name. Not Donnie. But,
Weboy, sure.

GEORGE
He’s married our son’s widow. Got
our grandson with them. Boy’s only
three.
   (a look to Margaret)
We just want to know where they
are. Make sure they’re safe.

Margaret nods when Nevelson checks with her.

NEVELSON
Let me call around some.

INT. RESTAURANT - BENTROCK - DAY

George scans a local paper’s front page as he eats across
from Margaret in a booth, a sparse handful of other DINERS
scattered about; BUSINESS MEN, TWO OLD GALS, A YOUNG FAMILY.

Margaret idly watches the family’s MOTHER cut the meat on her
DAUGHTER’S plate into bite-sized pieces. The Mother glances
Margaret’s way and smiles as she saws. Margaret turns away.

MARGARET
How’s that pot roast?

GEORGE
Yours is better.

He rotates one end of his oval plate in Margaret’s direction.
She reaches to fork a sample, tastes.

MARGARET
You’re just used to mine.
EXT. BENTROCK - MAIN STREET - SUNSET

Margaret slips her arm through George’s as they stroll the sidewalk back towards the town hall and courthouse.

George looks at Margaret in surprise, but doesn’t comment, and they continue on, taking in the town’s evening activity, PEOPLE heading home for supper or to the one movie house.

They pass a liquor store and George spontaneously unHOOKS Margaret’s arm from his and goes inside without a word.

From out here, her lips compressed into a straight line, Margaret watches George buy a pint bottle of whiskey.

He comes back to meet her, bottle in a paper sack, and they resume walking as he unscrews the cap. He offers it to her.

MARGARET
    Thank you. No.

George takes a nice pull, and recaps the bottle.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Happy?

GEORGE
    Happy not to hear a lecture.

Together, they wander back to the town hall and Sheriff’s office, but Margaret doesn’t take George’s arm again.

George stops at their parked car, opens the driver’s door.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
    Gonna hide the evidence.

He bends to slip the bottle of whiskey beneath the driver’s seat and meets something already hidden there.

He pulls the heavy object wrapped in a dish towel from beneath the seat and drops it on the upholstery with a thump.

Margaret opens her mouth to speak, but--

GEORGE (CONT'D)
    What the hell, Margaret?

He turns from the Colt service revolver on the car seat to glare at his wife.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
    What the hell?
MARGARET
That was before I knew you were coming--

GEORGE
And you thought you’d need it?

MARGARET
I didn’t want to find out I did and not have it.

GEORGE
Christ, Margaret.

He wraps the gun back up in the dish towel and grabs Margaret roughly by the elbow, angrily shaking her. He pulls her with him to the rear of the car.

GEORGE (CONT’D)
Was this going to be part of your argument?

MARGARET
George, I would never--

GEORGE
It’s got bullets in it.

He lets her elbow go, still furious, and opens the back gate to pull out his suitcase. He glances around to make sure no one’s watching, and packs the swaddled gun away inside.

He slams the rear door closed and heads for the Sheriff’s office carrying the suitcase, shaking his head.

GEORGE (CONT’D)
Margaret.

INT. BENTROCK SHERIFF’S OFFICE - NIGHT

Nevelson consults notes, Margaret in the chair beside his desk, George standing over them both, listening.

NEVELSON
There’s a branch of the Weboy clan over in Forsyth. Townsfolk. A little down on their luck but hardworking. Frontier Saddlery there is a Weboy operation, or it was started by the family. Ain’t North Dakota, but I’d start there.
GEORGE
That’s what we’ll do, then.
Appreciate your help.

George picks up the suitcase and shakes Nevelson’s hand.

MARGARET
We’re also hoping you might
recommend a hotel in town for the
night. Anyplace clean.

NEVELSON
If clean’s the priority, my Nora’s
in charge of the jail here. Cells
are empty. Got fresh sheets. Not
sure what feelings you got on it.

Margaret lifts her chin in George’s direction.

MARGARET
They called him Sheriff nearly as
long I’ve been going by Blackledge.
I’m not spooked by a jail house.
Or a cell. We’d be right at home.
Thank you, Sheriff Nevelson.

INT. BENTROCK SHERIFF’S OFFICE – CELLS – NIGHT

Margaret snaps open a sheet to make up one of the bunks.

Nevelson glances back at her from the end of hall as he gives
George a tour. He lowers his voice so Margaret can’t hear.

NEVELSON
You think they’re running?

George looks back at Margaret as well. He shakes his head.

GEORGE
No. Not that I know. But, they
did take off in a hurry. Forgot to
say good-bye.

He nods toward his wife smoothing a blanket on the bunk.

GEORGE (CONT’D)
I’m just looking to give her that.
Let her say a good-bye.
EXT. FIELDS – DAY

George arrives at the top of a ridge astride the black horse that had returned with only an empty saddle, without James, the horse onto which George had climbed and has ridden here.

The animal hesitates and George scans the landscape, searching the horizon. He spurs the horse.

EXT. FENCELINE – DAY

George pulls up on the reins, stopping the horse near a line of fencing, where James lies motionless across uneven rocks beneath a cluster of cottonwood trees.

George climbs down from the saddle.

Eyes soft with pain, he takes in the details of James’s body; boots tangled, head turned on a neck broken where he fell.

A buffeting wind crosses the fields and rustles the branches of the trees overhead, stirring James’s straw-colored hair.

George picks up his son’s hat from the rocks.

INT. BENTROCK SHERIFF’S OFFICE – CELL – NIGHT

George’s eyes open. He takes a beat to orient himself in the crypt-silent dark, alone in a cell bunk.

He sits up and looks to where Margaret sleeps in the next cell, the jail’s iron bars separating him from his wife.

INT. BENTROCK SHERIFF’S OFFICE – NIGHT

George fills a paper cone with water from the cooler, drinks.

He nods to a DEPUTY manning the night desk, looks around.

He steps to a large-scale map of Montana on the wall and scans the eastern-most towns. He traces a line along connecting roads from Bentrock to Forsyth with a finger.

EXT. FIELDS – DAY

George lifts his dead son’s body up in his arms.

The horse shies when he approaches.
GEORGE
Shh... Shh... S’okay, boy.

He lays James’s body across the saddle on the animal’s back.

George’s worn fingers form knots with a soft rope, tying the body down. He takes his time, there’s no need to rush now.

He cups the back of his son’s head with his hand when he’s done, and stands a silent beat, eyes open.

Then he secures James’s hat on the saddle’s horn and starts to lead the black horse on the long walk for home.

INT. BENTROCK SHERIFF’S OFFICE - CELL - NIGHT

George stands over Margaret in the dim light of her cell, watching the even rise and fall of her breath in sleep.

He leans closer to her, whispering.

GEORGE
Home. Go home. Go home.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. FRONTIER SADDLERY - DAY

A bell clangs over the door as George and Margaret enter and a YOUNG MAN (20s, scrawny) looks up from behind the counter.

MARGARET
Good morning!

The Young Man nods tightly and Margaret pours on the sunshine, making a show of astonishment at the array of saddles, while George scans the shop’s layout.

Margaret slips a wrist through the stirrup of one elaborately hand-tooled saddle, the new leather creaking loudly.

MARGARET (CONT’D)
Sounds like my knee in the morning.
But, beautiful saddles. Wouldn’t you say, George?

George doesn’t say as he takes up a tactical position just inside the door where he can keep his eye on everything.

YOUNG MAN
Fella in Miles City makes ‘em. The fancy ones.
MARGARET
Very impressive...
(smiling bigger)
But, we’re not shopping for saddles
today. Or bridles and bits.

She advances on the Young Man who backs up a step behind the
display counter, his eyes darting to George, who allows
Margaret the stage.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Now, would you be a Weboy, too?

YOUNG MAN
No, ma’am. A cousin to. I’m a
Tucker.

Closer now, Margaret sees the freshly sewn welt, puckered as
a mattress seam, that runs throbbing-red down the Young Man’s
neck from one ear. She blinks, forces her eyes from it.

MARGARET
Well, we’re relations, too, then.
Of a sort. Donnie Weboy married
our daughter-in-law. Former
dughter-in-law. Which makes him
stepdaddy to our grandson...

The Young Man cocks his head, raw stitches straining.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
My husband and I found ourselves
over in this part of the state, and
I said to him, let’s look in on
Lorna and Donnie while we’re here.
So here we are. To see Donnie.
Well, really, our grandson, of
course, but.

YOUNG MAN
I don’t know no Donnie. Or a Laura.

MARGARET
Well, I understood it’s why they
relocated here. Donnie was going
to hire on at his uncle’s saddlery.

YOUNG MAN
His uncle’s saddlery--? Who?

MARGARET
George, didn’t Lorna say?
YOUNG MAN
You sure you don’t want Gladstone?

GEORGE
Gladstone?
The Young Man looks to George at the door, nods.

YOUNG MAN
North Dakota. Just the other side of the line. Not that there’s work there either. No good work anyway. But they got a Weboy or two.

MARGARET
Well, maybe we should give there a try. Though I don’t know why Lorna and Donnie would have been talking up Forsyth like they did.

Her eyes light on items under the counter’s display glass; blade-sharp spurs and knives, skins, snake rattles...

YOUNG MAN
What was your names again?

GEORGE
Any idea who we might ask to find Donnie if we went to Gladstone?
The Young Man reaches up a hand, rakes his stitches; itchy.

YOUNG MAN
You let it be known you’re looking for a Weboy, they’ll find you.

EXT. BADLANDS – DAY
An armada of mountain-high clouds sails the sky over the endless bleak landscape in ringing silence.

Light and shadow paint the land in undulating waves as a faint droning growl pierces the vacuum, growing, until...

George and Margaret’s car appears, tiny in the distance.

INT. BLACKLEDGE’S CAR – DAY – (MOVING)/EXT. BADLANDS
Patsy Cline crackles and fades on the radio. Margaret tries to chase her on the dial, but Patsy evaporates into static.
Margaret fishes around as a sign flies past - WELCOME TO NORTH DAKOTA, and a VOICE suddenly leaps from the radio.

    VOICE (O.S.)
    What you have done to your Christ!
    How you made him suffer! Crucified
    him! Spilled his blood! For your
    sins--!

George snaps the radio off.

    MARGARET
    Goodness.

    GEORGE
    Turn it back on if you want.

    MARGARET
    I don’t want it, either.

She rearranges herself on the seat, leans against the window.

    MARGARET (CONT'D)
    Sounds like your Daddy. Thumping
    his bible.

    GEORGE
    Wasn’t just bibles he thumped.

He scrolls his window down to let in a jet of air, blowing a fine grit of the pulverized land.

EXT. BADLANDS - DAY

A buffeting breeze reaches George and Margaret, perched on a mesa overlooking the distant small city of Gladstone; a grid-like concentration of buildings spread out as randomly as buckshot across the desolate valley below.

    MARGARET
    You’re with me on this, right?

    GEORGE
    I’m right behind you.

His tone, flat as the land before them, turns Margaret from the view to study her husband’s profile.

    MARGARET
    I don’t want you behind me, George.
    I want to know you’re beside me.
GEORGE
Who’s been doing the driving?

MARGARET
You could say you want him back. I haven’t heard that yet.

George turns now, selects his words with great care; coaxing an animal in a direction it doesn’t wish to go.

GEORGE
We’re not young, Margaret.

MARGARET
(laughs)
Well, we’re not old.

GEORGE
We’re not young.

Margaret looks across the valley, away from George, who clocks a slithering movement in the pebbled dust behind her.

A black and tan snake oils a path for Margaret’s turned back.

MARGARET
You saying you don’t miss him?

George snatches the snake up and flings it away.

GEORGE
I’m saying he’s not even in school yet. Years before he’ll read. He hasn’t had measles. Or rode a bike. He’s young. And we’re not.

Margaret stands, oblivious of having been saved from a snake, dusts the back of her pants.

MARGARET
Well, you can drive me into town then. Drop me off and turn around, take yourself back home. I’ll do what I need to do and take a bus back to Dalton with Jimmy.

GEORGE
Once Lorna’s handed him to you. A smile on her face, happy as a clam. And if they’re not down there? What? You gonna chase them around the country on a bus?

Margaret pulls a face.
GEORGE (CONT'D)
What if they go where Greyhound
doesn’t?

MARGARET
I’ll walk.

GEORGE
(a resigned laugh)
You would too. And when you
finally learn that what you want to
make happen isn’t going to happen?
What then, Margaret Meloy?

MARGARET
I suppose I’ll learn what I’ve
never been able to. Isn’t that
what you’ve told me? Over and
over? That I don’t know when it’s
time to call it quits.

George stands now, shies a rock at the far distant town.

GEORGE
Yep. And I’ll be the one gets the
job of picking up those pieces.

EXT. BADLANDS - DAY

George and Margaret trudge back from their lookout as the sun
falls, walking together but separate, lots of space between.

George spots the shape of a horse, and then a MAN leading it,
by his and Margaret’s car.

He blinks. Is it James? His son? A phantom? Then he sees
that the Man is nosing around the parked car, peering inside.

GEORGE
Hey!

Margaret looks up and sees the Man and horse too.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
The gun.

They both break into a run and the Man jumps on his horse.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Halt! Right there!

The Man throws up his hands, astride the horse, and Margaret
grabs the horse’s worn bridle while George goes for the car.
MAN
Okay! Okay! I didn’t take
nothing. I was just--

MARGARET
You were just what?

Face to face, Margaret now sees the Man for what he is;
barely twenty, Native American, more skittish than his horse.

MAN
Fishing.

GEORGE
Fishing around this car.

MAN
No, sir. I’m coming from fishing.

He indicates the rod tied to his horse, pulls a bundle of
fish from a tackle box as George joins them.

MAN (CONT’D)
I just seen your car, and was
wondering who’s setting up camp out
here. That’s all.

GEORGE
And who are you?

MAN
Peter Dragswolf, sir. I live over
there. Have my own place.

He lifts his chin to the other side of a rise.

PETER
I’ve got my own money, too. I
don’t need none of your goods.

Margaret strokes his horse’s long nose; the animal’s quiet
ease rendering a verdict for her on Peter himself. She
flicks a glance at George, then extends a hand to Peter.

MARGARET
I’m Margaret Blackledge, Mr.
Dragswolf. This is my husband,
George. Sorry if we’re trespassing.

PETER
Where you’re standing’s as much
yours as mine.
MARGARET
And what’s this girl’s name?

PETER
Can’t say. She don’t belong to me.
But, I call her Silverflower.

Margaret regards the horse warmly, like an old friend.

GEORGE
How’d you come by her?

PETER
She come by me. Showed up outside
my shack one morning. Out of the
snow last February. Thought she
was wild at first, but...

(shrugs)
She came from somewhere I don’t
know. But, she found me.

MARGARET
Same as us.

EXT. BADLANDS - SUNSET

The horse’s pounding hoofs churn up dust as she gallops,
hanging a gossamer contrail bright as flame behind her in the
evening air, lit by the lowering sun as it settles.

The horse rockets forward, arrow-straight, neck lunging,
surrendered to Margaret on her back, and the joy of motion.

Margaret suddenly pulls the reins hard to the right, and the
horse follows easy, wheeling around, and Margaret whoops.

George sits with Peter on the hood of the car, watching
Margaret turn the horse again and spur the animal.

PETER
Maybe the horse belongs to her.

GEORGE
Near about every horse does.

Margaret sails past, all-but-standing in the saddle, as the
horse reaches speed, legs a blur.

CUT TO:

Margaret dances the horse through various walks, turns, and
tricks, the two in natural rhythm, and George tracks his wife
becoming easier, more fluid, as she remembers an old self.
EXT. BADLANDS - DUSK

MARGARET
I used to ride.

Peter watches his fish roast over a fire as Margaret prepares 
a meal and George finishes pitching his and Margaret’s tent, 
the lights of Gladstone pepperling the distant valley floor.

GEORGE
She’s being modest with you.

MARGARET
I used to break horses. Along with 
our son, James. Then he died. And 
I guess I lost my appetite for it.

George stops working, watches his wife stare into the fire a 
thoughtful beat, then she looks to the horse tied to the car.

MARGARET (CONT’D)
Haven’t kept animals for a while. 
It’s nice to spend time with a 
sweet one like your girl there.

PETER
I’m sorry. About your son.

George comes to join Peter and Margaret at the fire.

GEORGE
What about you? How long you been 
out here?

PETER
Three years?

MARGARET
All on your own? No family?

Peter shrugs, circumspect.

GEORGE
Where were you before?

PETER
(vaguely)
Indian school, sir.

GEORGE
You don’t have to call me sir. 
George’ll do the job.
MARGARET
You finished that school? How old are you?

Peter stands abruptly, stepping toward the horse, escape.

PETER
I don’t bother anybody. If somebody comes for the horse they can have her back. The skins I sell, those are animals I catch. The fish are free. I don’t steal. I mind my own business.

George and Margaret don’t even look at one another, neither moving, as Peter remains standing uncertainly, ready to flee.

GEORGE
That’s a good business. Sit.

Margaret portions food onto three tin plates.

MARGARET
Peter. Come eat what you caught.

Slowly, he returns to accept the plate she offers.

PETER
Thank you.

MARGARET
Thank you.

She passes a plate to George as Peter sits, and they eat.

GEORGE
You’re familiar with the area, though. Gladstone.

PETER
I can tell you where the folks are buried that ain’t buried in the cemeteries.

GEORGE
Weboys?

Peter stops chewing, swallows.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
You had any dealings with them?
PETER
I go careful through life so I
don’t have dealings with Weboys.

George and Margaret exchange a glance.

MARGARET
We’re looking for our grandson.
Our boy’s boy.

GEORGE
He’s with a man named Donnie Weboy.
You ever heard of him?

PETER
No. But, if you’re looking in
Gladstone look for Bill Weboy.

GEORGE
You think he’d help us?

PETER
Help? Maybe. But... Go careful.

EXT. BADLANDS - NIGHT
Margaret wraps the last of her coffee cake in a dish towel
and gives it to Peter as he climbs up and sits in his saddle.

He shakes hands with the Blackledges and turns the horse for
the near hills.

Together, George and Margaret watch after the horse and rider
as they cross the rocky land beneath a dense river of stars,
and vanish over a ridge.

EXT. GLADSTONE - STREET - DAY
The Blackledge’s car rolls slowly down a raw-looking street
in the shadow of Gladstone’s water tower.

A tall MAN rakes leaves from the gutter into the road up
ahead in front of an unadorned house painted mint green.

INT. BLACKLEDGE’S CAR - DAY - (MOVING)
George and Margaret scrutinize houses as they drive.

MARGARET
That’s got to be it. Only green
house on the street.
George pulls to the curb and the Man (40s, strangely handsome despite a shattered nose) lines himself up with the center of their car’s hood and leans on his rake, staring with a grin.

George’s brow furrows, but Margaret’s quick out of the car.

EXT. BILL’S HOUSE - DAY

MARGARET
Mr. Weboy?

MAN
Who’s asking?

George steps from the car, taking measure of this Man as Margaret goes to offer her hand and shake.

MARGARET
Margaret Blackledge. And my husband, George. If you’re a Weboy, we’re family. After a fashion.

MAN
How you figure that?

The Man shakes George’s hand as he joins them, but his focus is wholly on Margaret as he unfolds a smile.

BILL
Bill Weboy. A cousin, are you?

MARGARET
Could be! But, probably not exactly. Our former daughter-in-law married a Donnie Weboy. He’s step-dad to our grandson now. That’s pretty tangled up, isn’t it?

BILL
Like family usually is.

GEORGE
We heard they might have come to settle here in Gladstone.

MARGARET
We wanted to pay a visit. See our grandson, Jimmy. Since we were in the neighborhood.
BILL
Since you’re in the neighborhood.
And since you didn’t find them up
in Forsyth.

George eyes Bill narrowly while Margaret turns up the dial on
her smile.

MARGARET
You heard we were coming, did you?

BILL
Oh, I did. I did. A little birdie
flew over here ahead of you.

He pinches the air to make a bird’s beak.

BILL (CONT’D)
Cheep. Cheep. Cheep.

GEORGE
(enough with this guy)
Are they here or not?

Margaret shoots George a sharp look and Bill hooks a thumb.

BILL
Is he always like this? Big hurry.

MARGARET
My husband likes to get down to
business.

BILL
A hell of a lot of men are like
that. Can’t wait to get to where
they’re going. Women, in my
experience, would as soon take
their time.

(winks at Margaret)
Enjoy the ride, so to speak--

GEORGE
Mr. Weboy, I’m going to tell you--

BILL
Oh, they’re here. I’m just funnin’
you, George. Donnie’s my nephew!
They’re safe and sound out at his
mom’s place. Why don’t we all go
inside and give the old homestead a
call? See if anybody’s at home.

(MORE)
BILL (CONT'D)
Hell, maybe you can drive out there
this morning and see that precious
grandson of yours.

MARGARET
He is that to us, Mr. Weboy.

BILL
Doesn’t even need to be said.

He starts for the house, flinging the rake onto the scorched
patch of earth that passes for a yard. Margaret looks to
George, who lifts his chin: let’s get this done.

INT. BILL’S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

BILL
Had your coffee yet? I could put a
pot on.

Bill pauses in the center of the room as they follow him in.

MARGARET
We’re fine. Thank you.

BILL
Well, make yourself at home. I’ll
make that call. See what their
schedule is like.

He exits for the kitchen and Margaret survey’s the home;
spare as a furniture store, not one sign of hobby or habit.

George hears the heavy rattle and clunk of a wall phone’s
handset as it’s lifted from its cradle in the kitchen.

BILL (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Hey, Mabel. Can you connect me
with the ranch?

Margaret takes a seat on the davenport and George sits beside
her, alert, his ear cocked toward the kitchen.

MARGARET
What? What is it?

George gives his head a tight shake.

BILL (O.S.)
Blanche! It’s Bill.

MARGARET
What?
GEORGE
(quietly)
You don’t want this man’s help.

MARGARET
We can’t do this on our own.

George turns slowly to his wife, but then there’s the clatter of the telephone again and Bill suddenly enters the room.

BILL
You two have plans for supper?

MARGARET
(impulsively)
We surely don’t.

George fixes Margaret with a look.

BILL
How would you like to be the guests of the Weboy clan out at the ranch?

Margaret hesitates, deferring now to George.

GEORGE
We don’t want to be any trouble.

BILL
No trouble at all. My sister-in-law wants to meet you. Says you all can swap grandma-and-grandpa stories. And just between me and you, she’s a hell of a cook.

Margaret turns to look at George as she addresses Bill.

MARGARET
You’d have to give us directions.

BILL
 Nope. Not a chance. I could be the best damn direction-giver in the world and you still wouldn’t find it. You’d be out there wanderin’ all over Four Bridges Road and never see a one. No. You make your way back here at four o’clock and you can follow me.

The sun ducks behind a cloud and the room irises dim.

Not one of the three people moves. Then the sun reemerges, the room flares bright, and Margaret gets to her feet.
MARGARET
Thank you. We’ll come back then.

EXT. BILL’S HOUSE – DAY

George takes Margaret’s elbow as they walk towards their car.

She glances at him, but George isn’t looking at her. He’s
scrutinizing the line of wires that run overhead, pole to
pole down the street, bypassing the house they just left.

George gets Margaret in the car and takes a furtive look back
at Bill’s house as he goes around, but the dark windows make
it impossible to tell if anyone’s watching from inside.

EXT. SCHOOL – GLADSTONE – DAY

The empty seats of children’s swings sway on rusty chains.

George idly eyes a CLUSTER OF YOUNG BOYS lighting matches in
boredom and mischief in the distance as he eats a sandwich,
seated beside Margaret on a cracked wooden bench overlooking
the school’s bone-dry playground. He checks his watch.

MARGARET
Time is it?

GEORGE
I’m thinking I should find a phone
booth, give Jack Nevelson a call.
See what he might know about your
friend Bill Weboy.

MARGARET
What’s there to know?

GEORGE
How he managed to make that call
when there’s no phone wire to his
house. For starters.

He fishes the bottle of whiskey from his pocket and Margaret
looks elsewhere as he takes a sip.

MARGARET
I thought you were done with that.

GEORGE
There’s a lot I thought I was done
with.
Margaret’s head swivels to look at George askance, but he stands, tucks the bottle, and jerks his chin towards town.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Come on. Let’s scout a hotel for tonight.

MARGARET
Hotel? We’re heading home tonight. I don’t need to stay a second longer than I have to in this place, thank you very much. (decisively) We get Jimmy, we start driving.

George laughs, an astonished exhale, and shakes his head.

GEORGE
Now, there’s something you do. Count a thing done because you want it so.

Margaret surveys the withered houses that ring the school.

MARGARET
You’ve walked through Gladstone now. Seen this town, same as me. Tell me what there is here for a boy.

GEORGE
I’d think you’d be able to answer that for yourself easy enough.

MARGARET
Help me--

GEORGE
His mother, Margaret.

Margaret stops, looks up at George flatly a long beat.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Open your eyes, honey. See what’s in front of you.

Margaret looks away.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
You’re not going to get him back.

Margaret shakes her head and folds the rest of her sandwich away in its paper for something to do, then she stands.
She avoids George’s eye as she angles around him and heads for their car.

GEORGE (CONT’D)
Can’t leave me here. I’ve got the keys.

EXT. BILL’S HOUSE - DAY

The rake still lays in Bill’s yard, right where he’d thrown it, when George and Margaret pull up out front.

Bill emerges from a truck parked alongside his house and ambles to the passenger window as Margaret rolls it down.

INT. BLACKLEGGIE’S CAR - DAY

BILL
About time.

He flashes a smile and leans low to the window.

BILL (CONT’D)
One of you should ride with me and the other follow. I can tell you where we’re going and why and that way maybe you can find your way back on your own.

He turns without waiting and starts away back to the truck, spinning his keys on a finger.

Margaret looks to George who shakes his head watching Bill go. She reaches for her door handle.

GEORGE
Where do you think you’re going?

MARGARET
You think he wants you in the passenger seat?

GEORGE
(a sour laugh)
No, I know he doesn’t.

They watch Bill climb into his truck, see him reach across and swing the passenger door open.

GEORGE (CONT’D)
I don’t care what he wants. I’m going, you drive.
Margaret opens her door.

MARGARET
It’s fine, George.

He grabs for her arm, but she slips from the car, snatching up the old stuffed toy horse from the back seat as she goes.

GEORGE
Margaret, get back in--

MARGARET
Follow close.

EXT. BILL’S HOUSE - DAY

Margaret shuts her car door and walks across the dirt yard. Not one other thing in the world moves; not a leaf, not Bill in the truck’s cab, or George watching her from their car.

INT. BLACKLEDGE’S CAR - DAY

George grips the wheel; a hawk on its a perch.

He sees Margaret arrive at the truck’s open door. She glances back at him for the briefest moment, then climbs up.

GEORGE
(a muttered curse)
God bless it.

Margaret pulls the truck’s door closed behind her. SLAM!

EXT. HIGHWAY - GLADSTONE - DAY

Bill’s truck rips down the knife-straight blacktop heading out of Gladstone, George’s car right behind, the land on either side flat as still water.

INT. BLACKLEDGE’S CAR - DAY - (MOVING)

George drives, eyes locked on Bill’s truck in front of him.

INT. BILL’S TRUCK - DAY - (MOVING)

Margaret sits rigidly, keeping her eyes on the road ahead, though she’s fixed on tracking Bill peripherally, alert.
Bill’s eyes move from the toy horse Margaret holds in her lap to explore the curve of her hip, her breast. He flicks his eyes to George following in the rearview mirror.

BILL
Pretty bird, that old jalopy won’t have trouble keeping up, will it?

MARGARET
You’re looking in the mirror often enough. You know where he is.

BILL
I guess he don’t want you to get too far out of his sight. Which I understand.

He pulls a White Owl cigar from his shirt pocket.

BILL (CONT’D)
You mind?

MARGARET
Your car. You don’t need my permission.

BILL
You strike me as the kind of woman a man is always asking permission of. Or excusing himself to.

MARGARET
An expert, are you? On kinds of women?

BILL
I’ve been around more than a few women who want men to ask before drawing a breath.

MARGARET
Well. Air is free, Mr. Weboy. And so are men.

BILL
You and I got a lot in common.

Margaret turns sharply to look at him, and Bill meets her with a sly wink and grin as he lights his cigar.

BILL (CONT’D)
Seems you’re an expert, too.

Margaret cranks her window down an inch to let the smoke out.
MARGARET
And Mrs. Weboy? I’ll bet she’s an expert.

BILL
Blanche? Donnie’s mom?

MARGARET
I meant your wife.

Bill draws deeply on his cigar, fills the car as he exhales.

BILL
You saw my place, how tidy it is? Used to be a regular pigsty. Or so my wife called it. Sniped away at me for years. “I’m sick of cleaning up after you.” “Just leave it!” I’d say. “Who gives a damn?” Oh, we’d go round and round. Then her mother took sick, and Clara-- that was my wife--. Off to Idaho. To take care of her. “I’m leaving this house clean and I don’t want to find it any different when I come back.” Ha. I tore the place apart. Every room, right down to the lath. Opened it up real good. Me, a claw hammer, and Mr. Jack Daniels. Well, Clara comes back, the sight of the place scares the hell out of her. She saw to it I was locked up. For destroying something that belonged to me, if you can imagine. She cleared out while I was behind bars. Left me nothing but a bowl, a spoon, and a house without walls.

He checks Margaret, can tell she’s listening, but she keeps looking straight ahead.

BILL (CONT’D)
I put that house back together. You saw it; walls just where they’re supposed to be. Plastered and painted. The hell of it was, once I finished the place, I was finished with her. Now, that house ain’t ever anything but neat as a pin, just the way Clara would like it. Except she’s never setting foot inside again.
Margaret denies Bill a reaction when he looks to her again. He grinds out his cigar and they ride on in prickly silence.

BILL (CONT'D)
We turn here.

MARGARET
Why don’t you signal instead of telling me so George knows what’s coming?

Bill turns a smirking smile on Margaret.

BILL
Aye, aye, cap’n.

INT. BLACKLEDGE’S CAR - DAY - (MOVING)
George explicates where an unmarked road ahead will meet the highway so he’s ready when Bill signals at the last possible second before swinging the truck from the blacktop onto dirt.

George spins the car’s wheel, makes the sharp turn, and rocks and gravel explode beneath the vehicle as it leaves the pavement to follow in the truck’s billowing wake.

INT. BILL’S TRUCK - DAY - (MOVING)
Margaret grips the armrest on the door out of Bill’s sight as he speeds them along the rutted trail. She tries to keep an eye on George, obscured by dust in her side mirror.

MARGARET
How much further is it?

BILL
You mean how much more of me do you have to put up with?

MARGARET
(trying for lightness)
I--. We just want to see Jimmy.

BILL
(not buying it)
Yeah. Fine-looking boy there. And his mother is a good-looking woman. You know, Donnie never asked me for a word of advice in his life--
MARGARET
(laughs, despite herself)
Is that so?

BILL
But, if he had I might’ve told him
to do exactly as he’s done. “Marry
yourself a widow, Donnie. You’ll
be getting a grateful woman.”

He bounces his eyebrows at Margaret when she looks at him.

MARGARET
You could slow down.

BILL
But, then it’d be longer until you
see your grandson.

EXT. BADLANDS - DAY

Dark clouds hang heavy with rain at the horizon, sheering the
rays of the lowering sun as George’s car keeps pace through
every hard climb, steep descent, and sudden curve with Bill’s
truck, as it leads him further and further from Gladstone.

INT. BLACKLEDGE’S CAR - DAY - (MOVING)

George never blinks, keeping his eyes fixed on Margaret in
the truck in front of him, using her silhouette to steer by.

EXT. WEBOY HOMESTEAD - SUNSET

The carcasses of vehicles litter the property as though
they’d tried to crawl on rusted rims to reach the brittle two-
story Victorian farmhouse in the middle of nowhere, and died.

George’s car passes the wrecks as it follows Bill’s truck
through an open gate and circles to the back of the house.

Margaret is out of Bill’s truck before he kills the engine.

Bill takes his time sliding out, saluting George as George
moves quickly to meet Margaret with an unspoken exchange,
with mere looks. Are you okay? Yes.

Thunder rumbles deep in the distant dark clouds.

BILL
Never be able to find this on your
own. Was I right?
George ignores Bill, who laughing, shakes his head as he leads the way past a tree from which an engine block swings on a creaking rope over the open hood of ruined car.

George tracks the hammering and clanging coming from a nearby shed as he and Margaret climb the worn steps of the house’s sagging enclosed porch, Bill holding open the screen door.

BILL (CONT’D)
After you.

INT. WEBOY HOMESTEAD - BACK PORCH - DUSK

George and Margaret navigate a path ahead of Bill through a clutter of shotguns, boxes of shells, snow shovels, boots, cans of kerosene, tumbling piles of firewood, farm catalogues, and broken jars of nails to reach the house door.

BILL
Blanche!

INT. WEBOY HOMESTEAD - KITCHEN - DUSK

The Blackledges step into the semi-dark room, similar in shape to their own kitchen, yet different in every other way.

A thin haze smudges the air, from cook smoke or the cigarette burning in an ashtray on the table over which a lamp hangs low, casting the only light in the apparently empty room.

BILL
We’re here!

Bill enters behind George and Margaret, who have stopped.

BILL (CONT’D)
calling into the house
Blanche?

A slender white hand floats down to take up the burning cigarette on the table and lift it from the pool of light.

Only now is it clear that a WOMAN stands directly in front of them, though on the far side of the table, her dress blending into the background, her head obscured by the hanging lamp.

They hear her inhale on the cigarette, see the exhaled smoke. Then she leans down, bringing her face into the lamp’s light.
BLANCHE WEBOY’s smile stretches over fifty years from one ear to the other, but there’s nothing friendly in all that span. A fuss of makeup undermines her striking natural beauty.

      BLANCHE
      I hope you like pork chops.

George squints, getting a bead on this woman as Margaret rounds half the table, stretching out her hand to her.

      MARGARET
      My mouth’s watering already.

      BLANCHE
      You’re the grandma.

      MARGARET
      I am. Margaret Blackledge.

Blanche looks at Margaret’s hand before she shakes it, clocking the stuffed horse in Margaret’s other hand.

      BLANCHE
      Blanche Weboy.

      MARGARET
      Thank you for having us.

Blanche rotates her head in George’s direction.

      BLANCHE
      And you’re the lawman.

      GEORGE
      Retired, ma’am. George Blackledge.

He goes and shakes the hand she trails in the air before him.

      BLANCHE
      Well, why don’t we all retire to a seat at the table? Shall we?

Bill double-times it to pull out a chair for Blanche, taking the seat beside her as she sits. George and Margaret seat themselves opposite, empty chairs separating the two couples.

Margaret rests the toy horse on the table set for dinner and Blanche picks up an open bottle of wine already there.

      BLANCHE (CONT’D)
      Now, who can I interest in a glass?

      MARGARET
      No, thank you.
Blanche looks to George, who shakes his head. She shrugs and refills the jelly glass in front of her.

BLANCHE
Well, I don’t mind drinking alone.

She takes a long sip, stubs out her cigarette.

BLANCHE (CONT'D)
(a prepared speech)
I was born Blanche Gannon. My people originally came from Illinois. Filed a homestead claim north of Gladstone before there was a Gladstone. I’m one of eight. Lost an older sister to pneumonia. My brother Carl drowned in a neighbor’s cistern. Another fell off a truck; lived in a wheelchair the rest of his days. My aunt Ruth got caught in a white out. Froze and died, right where she stood, not thirty feet from that back door. Hard life. And not for everyone. My other brothers and sister lit out as soon as they could, never looked back. I stayed.

Thunder crashes overhead, startling everyone at the table with its nearness. Blanche lifts her eyebrows, laughs.

BLANCHE (CONT'D)
When I first met Henry Weboy, he couldn’t stop talking about heading for Florida. I figure I had more than a little to do with his decision to stay. Now he’s buried in the same cemetery as my folks and his. And my boys are fourth generation Weboys and Gannons born and living on North Dakota soil.

Thunder rolls low as George watches Bill drape an arm across the back of Blanche’s chair, intimate.

Blanche slides her gaze to George, then Margaret.

BLANCHE (CONT'D)
But, you didn’t come to hear me yak. You came to eat. Bill, why don’t you call the boys for supper?

Bill jumps up and goes out the way they came in and Blanche moves to the oven to pull out a pan of charred chops.
BLANCHE (CONT'D)
I suppose you could tell a story
not a hell of a lot different from
mine. Am I right? About family.
Hardships.

Neither George nor Margaret answer and Blanche turns to catch
them glancing about for any sign of their grandchild.

Bill returns, trailed by TWO MEN (30s, nearly identical, both
enormously tall and hulking, in grease-stained coveralls).

BLANCHE (CONT'D)
Meet the boys. Tall one’s Elton
and the other’s Marvin.
(to her sons)
Say hello to our guests.

The brothers grab cans of beer from the refrigerator with oil-
black hands, pop them open using a church-key on a string.

ELTON
That your wagon out there?

MARVIN
We tried to get inside. Take a
look.

ELTON
Tighten a couple bolts we could
probably get you a few more horses.

George ignores both sons as he slowly stands up to his full
height.

GEORGE
Where’s Jimmy? Where’s the boy?

Blanche leans against the counter, lights another cigarette.

BLANCHE
Why he’s not here. He’s with his
daddy.

MARGARET
His father--!

George quiets Margaret with a staying gesture of his hand.

GEORGE
We came here to see our grandson.
BLANCHE
You mean you didn’t come here to
eat my pork chops?

The Weboy men join Blanche in a laugh.

GEORGE
If you brought us all the way out
here for the sake of a joke...

BLANCHE
Lorna said you were rough bark.

She points her cigarette at Margaret.

BLANCHE (CONT'D)
And I can see already you’re no day
at the races. No, ma’am.

She brings the pan to the table where Elton and Marvin grab
seats and she forks chops onto each person’s plate. She
gestures for George to sit again.

BLANCHE (CONT'D)
Your grandson’s with my Donnie. He
took Jimmy along to pick up the
boy’s mother from work.

MARGARET
Lorna?

BILL
She’s working at Monkey Ward.

MARGARET
In Gladstone? We could’ve seen
Lorna and Jimmy in Gladstone?

BLANCHE
Now, I am feeling insulted by you.
You really don’t give a damn about
sharing a meal.

MARGARET
(dialing herself back)
I just meant—

BLANCHE
Maybe you’re a Jew. Maybe you
can’t eat pork chops.

Margaret looks to George, who regards Blanche unflinchingly
from the far side of the table. Thunder rumbles outside.
BLANCHE (CONT'D)
Oh, breathe easy. Anyone who knows me knows I can’t be insulted. Eat my chops or don’t.

Her sons eat her chops. They gobble them up, seemingly oblivious to the tension at the table.

MARGARET
We’d certainly hoped to meet Donnie’s family someday.

BLANCHE
Had you? Well, I’m glad to learn it. I thought we should meet too. Have ourselves a chat. It would have been nice if it was at the wedding. But, maybe that was too much to ask. For his mother to be invited. Or his brothers.

BILL
His poor Uncle Bill.

Margaret looks to George again, then back at Blanche.

MARGARET
You weren’t invited? He didn’t--?

BLANCHE
You recollect seeing us there?

Margaret blinks at the heat and absurdity of Blanche’s blame.

MARGARET
And that’s our fault?

BLANCHE
You didn’t stop and think to yourselves, he must have come from somewhere? Must have family.

MARGARET
Frankly, we thought only that Donnie was a grown man.

Blanche studies Margaret a long, measuring beat.

BLANCHE
Your son’s dead.

She blows smoke into the center of the table.
BLANCHE (CONT'D)
It’s understandable you forget.
We’re never really done raising
them. Teaching them the right way.
Why I had to bring my boy home,
where I can keep an eye on him.

George watches his wife as Blanche stubs out her cigarette.

BLANCHE (CONT'D)
Your boy’s perfect now. Not really
fair to compare him and Donnie.

MARGARET
I wouldn’t ever compare Donnie to
our son.

Blanche’s smile stretches unnaturally, Cheshire cat-wide.

BLANCHE
He says you two don’t approve.

GEORGE
I’m surprised to hear he gives a
damn what we think. He couldn’t be
bothered to let us know they were
leaving.

Blanche looks at George in surprise; he’s been so quiet.

BLANCHE
My boy doesn’t have to answer to
you.

GEORGE
(almost a laugh)
No. He does not.

MARGARET
And we don’t have to answer to you.

Blanche’s eyes go wide turning to Margaret and she brings
both hands slapping down on the table with a high hoot.

BLANCHE
Hoo! We better get some food in our
bellies before this get-together
turns into a real blood feud!

BILL
And we’ve got numbers on you.

A car’s headlight’s sweep the room.
BLANCHE
Why, here come the newlyweds now.

Everyone falls silent, waiting, listening for the slam of car doors that finally comes. Footfalls sound on the porch and Lorna and Donnie’s voices pitched in hushed squabbling.

Donnie enters the room first, scanning all the faces turned in his direction. He reaches reflexively for his hat’s brim on seeing George; a tell of deference as he removes it.

Blanche’s eyes twitch in tracking this signal of respect from Donnie to this retired sheriff, who merely nods at her son.

Donnie steps aside to reveal Lorna, frazzled after a work day, in a blouse and skirt a size too big, Jimmy on her hip.

GEORGE
Lorna.

Lorna glances around; the Blackledge’s car outside and her former-in-laws in here are all apparently fresh news to her.

Margaret has eyes only for her grandson, softening completely at the sight of him, a naked longing opening her face.

MARGARET
Hello, Jimmy.

George sees the boy’s head snap in his grandmother’s direction, recognition flaring bright in Jimmy’s eyes.

Then the child glances furtively at Donnie, Blanche, the other men in the room, and he pops a thumb in his mouth.

BLANCHE
Uhn-uhn.

She hastily snatches his thumb out.

BLANCHE (CONT'D)
Am I right? Sure way to end up with buck teeth.

Margaret rises from the table and walks to the boy, her arms floating out in front of her, extending, reaching.

MARGARET
May I?

George watches Jimmy fall into Margaret’s arms, wrap his arms around her neck and bury his face; an animal hiding.
He sees his wife’s eyes fill as she presses her nose to the boy’s skull, his hair, breathing him in deeply.

She kisses the top of the boy’s head and he squeezes her.

Lorna looks to Blanche who observes this reunion with a mask-blank face, then turns back to Margaret, laughs nervously.

LORNA
He’s turning into quite a load.

DONNIE
I told you, you pick him up too much. How’s he supposed to learn?

LORNA
Learn what? How to walk? He knows how to walk.

DONNIE
Hell, I’d probably unlearn how myself if someone carried me everywhere I wanted to go. That’s flat-out spoiling him.

Margaret hefts the child in her arms, thinner than he was.

MARGARET
He weighs nothing.

BLANCHE
Has he eaten?

DONNIE
I got him a burger at Ressler’s while we were waiting.

BLANCHE
And did he eat it?

DONNIE
Half.

BLANCHE
Does he want a pork chop? Some potatoes?

She tugs at Jimmy’s trailing foot.

BLANCHE (CONT'D)
Do you? Can I cut up a little meat for you?

Jimmy won’t lift his head from Margaret’s shoulder.
JIMMY

No.

Blanche yanks harder on the toe of his shoe.

BLANCHE
What’s that? What are you supposed to say?

He rolls his face away from Blanche and into Margaret’s neck.

JIMMY
No, thank you.

Blanche lets go of his foot and looks to Lorna.

BLANCHE
Take him up to bed then.

George clenches his jaw, bracing.

MARGARET
What?

Lorna doesn’t move but looks between the two women.

MARGARET (CONT’D)
We just--. He just got here.

BLANCHE
We believe in early-to-bed in this house.

She pats Jimmy’s bottom in Margaret’s arms.

BLANCHE (CONT’D)
And we believe in walking up stairs on our own two feet.

Margaret backs away from Blanche, tightening her hold on Jimmy as her eyes dart from one Weboy to the next.

Bill strolls to stand in front of the back door.

BILL
Easy now, Grandma. You know who makes the rules around here.

George’s chair scraped the floor as he stands abruptly.

Marvin pushes away from the table at the same time, but remains in his chair, hands on his knees; ready.
A crack of thunder pins everyone in place; Margaret clutching the blinking child, the men cocked and tensed, Blanche turned casually toward the counter, and Lorna stuck in the middle.

Thunder booms again, with a crackling tail, then a hush. Finally, the hiss and patter of falling rain fills the room.

Elton spears another pork chop. Marvin takes a sip of beer. Donnie rolls his shoulder. And Bill slowly unwraps a cigar. Each Weboy man makes himself known, one way or another.

Margaret looks to George. He meets her desolate gaze, nods.

She holds, then slowly bends down and sets Jimmy on his feet. The boy looks up at her in bewilderment. Abandoned.

JIMMY
There was mustard.

MARGARET
On your hamburger?

Jimmy bobs his head and Margaret follows his gaze to the toy horse as he spies it on the table. Margaret picks up the horse, extends the old toy towards her grandson.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
You don't like mustard, do you?

He wags his head forlornly as he reaches for the horse, but Blanche claps her hands and the boy flinches at the sound.

BLANCHE
Off you go. Up the stairs.

MARGARET
Please...

BLANCHE
Now that you know where to find us, you'll have to visit more often.

Donnie gives Lorna a shove and she lurches forward, reaches down to take her son's hand.

LORNA
Come on, Jimmy.

The boy slips his hand into hers and lets himself be led towards the dark mouth of a back staircase.

Margaret reflexively follows, pulled as by a magnet, still holding the stuffed horse in her hand.
MARGARET
Please...

GEORGE
That’s enough.

He moves quickly to Margaret’s side, encircling her shoulders with his arm, either to support or restrain her.

GEORGE (CONT’D)
Enough.

Jimmy looks back at his grandparents from the stairwell, then matches his steps to Lorna’s as they climb out of sight.

GEORGE (CONT’D)
(whispers to Margaret)
Don’t beg.

The stuffed horse slips from Margaret’s hand as George steers her now towards the door.

GEORGE (CONT’D)
We thank you, but we’ll be on our way.

Blanche scoops the horse up from the floor and holds it out, but George has already maneuvered Margaret out the door.

BLANCHE
Well, I guess we know who matters to you. You’re rushing off before the pie. But if you have to go, you have to go.

INT. WEBOY HOMESTEAD – BACK PORCH – NIGHT

George hustles Margaret through the labyrinth of junk, kindling, and spare parts, the tin roof ticking with rain.

BIL (O.S.)
Hey, Blackledges!

EXT. WEBOY HOMESTEAD – NIGHT

BILL
Hold up there!

Bill appears on the porch behind them as George and Margaret reach the car, George unlocking Margaret’s door in the rain.
BILL (CONT'D)
You need me to show you the way?

George mutters angrily but doesn’t answer as he gets the door open and Margaret into her seat. Suddenly Bill is with them.

BILL (CONT'D)
If you left a trail of bread crumbs, the coyotes have got ‘em by now. Or they washed away.

He passes the stuffed horse to Margaret, who vacantly turns the toy in her hands as though she’s never seen it before.

BILL (CONT'D)
She won’t say so, but I can tell.
Running off like this, you hurt
Blanche’s feelings--

MARGARET
(instantly ignites)
Her feelings! We’ve come all this way to see Jimmy--! Our grandson.
Not hers! And she gives us less than two minute’s time--!

George slams the door, cutting Margaret off, and heads around for the driver’s side to unlock his own door.

GEORGE
Go back inside, Mr. Weboy.

BILL
Why was your car locked?

George stops Bill with a look across the car’s roof, rain splattering the metal plane between them.

GEORGE
What’re you doing out here?

Bill smirks, seems to realize the rain now.

BILL
Damned if I know.

He spits as he turns and heads back to the house, where a figure in a lit upstairs window snags George’s eye; Lorna holding Jimmy, watching after him and Margaret.

George pauses a moment with the rain pelting down, then Lorna steps away from the window, leaving the empty frame behind.
INT. BLACKLEDGE'S CAR - NIGHT - (MOVING)

GEORGE

Goddamnit.

The wipers scrub a throbbing tempo as George finds himself lost on the trail through the dark rain.

He stops, reverses, turns the car around and heads in another direction, checking Margaret throughout, but she’s turned away from him in her seat, turned into herself.

George reaches a hand to comfort Margaret, but she bats it away and the toy horse spills from her lap to the footwell.

EXT. BADLANDS - NIGHT

The car arrives finally at the intersection of the highway with the end of the unpaved track and pauses a deliberating moment, rain slashing through its headlights.

Then it turns right onto the empty stretch of slick blacktop leading back towards the lights of Gladstone.

INT. BLACKLEDGE'S CAR - NIGHT - (MOVING)/EXT. MOON WINK

George drives aimlessly through town until he spots a neon sign of a moon with a face, winking - Moon Wink Motor Court - at the entrance to a U-shaped drive studded with tiny cabins.

INT. MOON WINK MOTOR COURT - CABIN - NIGHT

George lays curled around Margaret on top of the bedspread, both still dressed, listening to the drumming of rain on the cabin’s roof. His eyes drift closed...

MARGARET

Today’s Friday, right?

GEORGE

It is.

MARGARET

Do you think Lorna will be working tomorrow?

INT. MONTGOMERY WARD - MEN’S DEPARTMENT - DAY

Lorna helps a WOMAN select a neck tie to go with a shirt, her easy, confident smile fading when she spots the Blackledges.
Her cheeks flush red as they land at her counter and Margaret pretends interest in the trays of handkerchiefs on display.

Lorna turns to ring up the woman’s purchase at the register, and becomes flustered; hits every wrong key, again and again.

LORNA
(to the Woman)
I’m sorry--

A rigid FLOOR MANAGER goes behind the counter to take over and Lorna steps back from the register in embarrassed defeat.

INT. MONTGOMERY WARD – MEN’S DEPARTMENT – MOMENTS LATER

LORNA
I didn’t think you’d just go home.

Lorna comes to the opposite side of the counter from George and Margaret, who idly picks through a tray of handkerchiefs.

MARGARET
I’m like a bad penny.

Lorna doesn’t respond, flicks her eyes to George with a small smile of greeting as she shifts from one foot to the other.

MARGARET (CONT’D)
Who watches Jimmy while you’re here?

LORNA
Who do you think? Donnie. His mom. Or maybe you think I just tie him to a tree until I get home.

Margaret looks fully at Lorna now, stung.

MARGARET
You’re a good mother, Lorna. I know that.

LORNA
(tell me another one)
Right.

MARGARET
I was merely wondering how you’re working things out with this job.

George tracks Lorna glance at the Floor Manager who watches them all from a distance.
LORNA
Well, I just started, so...

GEORGE
We don’t want to get you in trouble. Can we buy you lunch?

LORNA
My break’s not until noon.

MARGARET
Noon straight up?

Lorna sighs. How’d she get roped in already?

GEORGE
We’ll meet you outside.

LORNA
No. I’ll meet you at Ressler’s.
It’s across the street.

Margaret indicates the handkerchiefs.

MARGARET
Can we buy some of these from you?

Lorna shrugs, shakes her head.

LORNA
They’re cheaper if you order by catalogue.

The Floor Manager glares disapprovingly at the Blackledges as Lorna steps away to attend to another CUSTOMER.

INT. RESSLER’S RESTAURANT – DAY

George and Margaret watch Gladstone’s PROFESSIONAL SET come for lunch from a booth at the rear, eyes on the front door.

Lorna enters with a quick backward glance, nervously making sure she wasn’t being followed on the sidewalk, and walks briskly towards George and Margaret in the back.

INT. RESSLER’S RESTAURANT – MOMENTS LATER

WAITRESS
And to drink?

LORNA
Tea, please. With lemon.
The Waitress’s face flickers at “lemon;” a request with airs.
She collects menus from the Blackledges and leaves them to sit with their former daughter-in-law in an awkward silence. The clap and ring of lunch hour dishes fills the void.
Lorna peers at them both but it’s George she finally addresses.

LORNA (CONT’D)
I was going to write. Once we got settled. It was kind of a last-minute decision. Coming here.

GEORGE
That Donnie’s decision?

LORNA
(a mirthless laugh)
You met Blanche.

MARGARET
Well, we found you. That’s the important thing.

Lorna’s tea arrives and George watches her try to squeeze juice from a dried wedge of lemon with jittery fingers.

MARGARET (CONT’D)
Jimmy looks bigger. Growing so fast.

LORNA
He’s counting now. To ten. At first he’d just say the words, you know. One, four, five, two. But, now he understands they go in order. And I’m working on his alphabet. He can spell his name.

MARGARET
Smart. Right from the start.

Lorna attempts a sip of scalding tea, sets the burning cup down with a clatter; too hot. She stares at the cup a beat.

LORNA
He misses you. Both of you.

Margaret looks to George at this opening.
MARGARET
We miss him too. Both of you. That’s what we wanted to talk to you about, Lorna. And I won’t beat around the bush.
(pauses, winding up)
I remember when James first introduced us. This wonderful girl he’d told us so much about. So beautiful and funny. No family of her own, but--

LORNA
Thought you weren’t going to beat around the bush. I have to be back at the store by one. Just get to it.

George smiles to himself at Lorna’s show of grit, and she catches him. She smiles herself, rolls her eyes.

MARGARET
All right. Here it is. Let Jimmy come back with us.

Lorna’s smile goes fast.

MARGARET (CONT’D)
Not just a visit. I mean for good.

Lorna looks from Margaret to George; betrayed.

LORNA
(incredulous)
You--? You want me to give Jimmy to you? Want me to give up my son?

MARGARET
You know he’d have a good home. One he knows. One he remembers--

LORNA
Stop.

MARGARET
You know the school he’d go to. The teachers he’d have--

LORNA
No! God. Stop! I can’t hear this!

Her outburst hushes the nearest tables and the three sit in silence until conversation and the scrape of cutlery resume.
MARGARET
(discreetly)
I saw Donnie hit Jimmy. On the
street. I saw him hit you. And it
didn’t look like a first time.

Lorna drops her eyes again, reaches for her tea, but then
remembers its heat and leaves it.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
A little or a lot, no amount’s
good. That’s why we’re here.

LORNA
You came to take him.

GEORGE
Lorna.

Lorna looks up at George’s voice, its inherent authority.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
We came to help. Whatever the
situation is.
(simply)
Jimmy can’t stay there.

Margaret blinks in surprise at her husband’s verdict. When
did he come to this? She watches Lorna’s eyes fill as George
holds her with his sure gaze.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
He can’t stay here.

LORNA
(almost a question)
He needs his mother.

MARGARET
You come with us then. You and
Jimmy. Live with us. Like before.
We’ll take care of you too.

Now George looks to Margaret in surprise; he hadn’t
anticipated this invitation. Lorna checks George and he nods
his ascent just as their meals arrive. None of them eat.

LORNA
We were supposed to have a place in
town. That’s what Donnie said. Or
what they told him. What they
promised. Now we’re stuck out
there.
She fidgets the frilled toothpick holding the sandwich together on her plate with zero appetite.

    LORNA (CONT'D)
    He’d kill me. Him and his mother. She couldn’t care less if I fell off the face of the earth, really, but... She’d never let me go. Or Jimmy. Donnie got away from her once. She’s not gonna let that happen again.

Tears stand in her eyes when she looks up, miserable.

    LORNA (CONT'D)
    I don’t want him to grow up like them... To be like them.

Margaret gets up to slide into the other side of the booth beside Lorna, the young woman swiping her eyes dry.

    MARGARET
    Then you know what’s right.

George sees Lorna’s almost imperceptible nod.

    MARGARET (CONT'D)
    You want us to drive you out there? We can do that. Right now. Right, George? The three of us. We can get Jimmy. Pack you up. Take you home.

Lorna shakes her head, easing away from Margaret.

    LORNA
    No. No.

Margaret looks to George for help.

    LORNA (CONT'D)
    I’ll meet you.

Margaret perks, tempers her relief.

    LORNA (CONT'D)
    They... Everyone’s usually asleep by midnight. One at the latest. I’ll have to wait. To make sure.

George’s brow knits.
GEORGE
Lorna, you sure that’s the way you want to do this? We should come get you--

LORNA
No. This is the way. The safest way. Trust me.

George reads a dark weight in the urgency of Lorna’s insistence, her look specifically to him.

MARGARET
Well, that’s... That’s what we all want most, isn’t it? For you and Jimmy to be safe. And happy.

Lorna almost laughs. Happy?

MARGARET (CONT'D)
We’re staying at the Moon Wink.

LORNA
Okay.

MARGARET
Cabin 7. At the Moon Wink Motor--

LORNA
I heard you. I know where it is.

She calculates the timing of her plan, looks to George.

LORNA (CONT'D)
I should be there by two. But, we’ll have to leave then. Right when I get there. No waiting.

George nods tightly.

89

INT. RESSLER’S RESTAURANT - DAY 89

Margaret watches Lorna exit through the glass front door while she waits in line with George at the CASHIER.

On impulse, she takes off after Lorna, pushes outside.

MARGARET
Lorna! Wait!

George looks out to the street where Lorna spins back at the curb and furtively scans the CROWD as Margaret walks to her.
EXT. GLADSTONE - STREET - DAY

MARGARET
Lorna, I know we haven’t always seen eye to eye--

LORNA
I don’t know if we’ve ever seen eye to eye.

Margaret laughs; fair enough.

MARGARET
We will, Lorna. I promise.

LORNA
You’re just saying that to make sure I go with you.

Margaret shakes her head. No. That’s not why.

MARGARET
Jimmy needs his mother.

Lorna nods, bright tears springing to her eyes.

MARGARET (CONT’D)
You could have used one too. I could have been that to you. I should have been. But, I wasn’t.

LORNA
It’s okay...

MARGARET
(emotional)
I’m sorry, Lorna. I should have been... much more to you.

INT. RESSLER’S RESTAURANT - DAY

CASHIER
Your change, sir.

George receives his change without looking; all his attention on Lorna hugging Margaret on the busy sidewalk outside.

If he weren’t seeing this for himself, he’d never believe it.

He stops just inside the door, not wanting to interrupt Margaret and Lorna’s embrace. The two women finally part.
George watches his wife, standing all alone in this strange town, looking after Lorna dodge traffic to cross the street.

Margaret turns back to the restaurant and breaks into a smile seeing George. She carries the smile to him at the door.

EXT. MOON WINK MOTOR COURT - DAY

George pulls the car into the lot, parks beside their cabin.

EXT. MOON WINK MOTOR COURT - CABIN - DAY

Margaret opens the rear passenger door and begins moving the boxes around, rearranging their belongings on the back seat.

GEORGE
Help you find something?

MARGARET
I’m making room. For Jimmy and Lorna.

He observes her pulling out a box to set on the ground, going back for more; she won’t be satisfied until she’s unraveled the whole thing. He wags his head, heads for the cabin.

Margaret stands the toy stuffed horse upright with care in the middle of the seat; awaiting Jimmy and the ride home.

INT. BLACKLEDGE HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY

FFSSSHT! George squirts a dollop of shaving cream into Jimmy’s tiny two-year-old hand.

(Or is James the little boy standing in his underwear on top of a kitchen step stool to share the mirror with George?)

Margaret leans in the doorway watching her grandson (or son) studiously shadow every one of George’s gestures as he lathers his face; one side, then the other, under the nose.

George picks up his razor and the young boy uses a plastic comb to “shave,” Margaret observing with wet, smiling eyes.

George’s gaze shifts, catches Margaret’s in the mirror.

INT. MOON WINK MOTOR COURT - CABIN - BATHROOM - SUNSET

George meets Margaret’s eyes in the foggy mirror as he lathers his face. He pauses, looking at her in the doorway.
Margaret goes to her husband and snakes her arms around his
naked chest from behind, rests her chin on his shoulder.
He smiles at her in the mirror and leans his head into hers.
She kisses the back of his neck.

GEORGE
Don’t start what you can’t finish.
Margaret smiles, wraps her arms more tightly around George
and he turns to face her. They look at each other, studying.
George kisses Margaret. She meets him in the embrace.
George unbuttons Margaret’s shirt, his mouth on hers, and
pulls her against him. She breaks off with a laugh, and a
teasing indication of his arousal, smiling.

MARGARET
Who’s not young now?
George grins.

GEORGE
Come here.
They meet again in a deep kiss, to pursue what they started.

INT. FANCY RESTAURANT - NIGHT

George and Margaret follow a HOSTESS to a table in
Gladstone’s best restaurant; white tablecloths, candles.
They each wear the finest clothes they’ve brought on the
trip; Margaret in a dress, George sporting a jacket.
He pulls out Margaret’s chair for her, holds it as she sits,
his courtliness painting an amused smile on his wife’s face.

INT. FANCY RESTAURANT - MONTAGE - NIGHT

A SERIES OF SHOTS: The Blackledges order from oversized
menus, sip cocktails, take in other PATRONS. A sweet air of
playful intimacy ghosts them; two kids out on a date.

INT. FANCY RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A WAITRESS delivers their meals, and George considers the
steak she sets in front of him as he drains his glass.
GEORGE
I’ve had more restaurant food in
three days than I have in the last
five years.

MARGARET
We’ll be home soon.

The Waitress picks up George’s empty cocktail glass.

WAITER
Would you care for another?

MARGARET
Not for me, but he’ll have one.

The Waitress turns to leave...

MARGARET (CONT’D)
Actually, Miss...

Margaret swallows the last of her drink in one go, salutes
George with her empty glass, and hands it to the Waitress.

MARGARET (CONT’D)
Me too.

George smiles at Margaret who grins back.

GEORGE
Can you answer something for me?

MARGARET
Oh. Okay.

She folds her hands primly; teasing, flirting with him.

MARGARET (CONT’D)
I’ll do my level best.

GEORGE
That horse of yours. Strawberry.

MARGARET
Strawberry?

Margaret could not have guessed at George’s direction.

MARGARET (CONT’D)
I loved that horse. Rode her to
school every day. Doug Vance and I
were the only kids that came on
horseback. Real “country.” We got
 teased merciless.

(MORE)
MARGARET (CONT'D)
(pauses)
What brought that up?

GEORGE
(ponders)
Seeing you ride again.

Margaret studies her husband.

MARGARET
You had a question?

GEORGE
Something I’ve always wondered about. When we had to put her down. You whispered to her. Do you remember? Like you were telling secrets.

Margaret nods softly.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
What was it you told her?

MARGARET
I reminded her of things. How she liked to gallop through the first snow every year. About the time we raced Ernie Dahlberg and his big chocolate mare and left them choking in our dust. I reminded her of this one time, I was in high school, some October, we were heading home and the full moon was just coming up over Dollar Butte and she stopped. Stopped and stared. Like she cared about the moonrise as much as me. And when we put James on her back the first time, and she stood so still like she knew she had to take care of him...

She trails off, falls silent, lost in her own thoughts...
Then she comes back with a teary smile.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
I wanted to send her on her way with happy memories.

GEORGE
I’m sorry.

Margaret dabs at her eyes with her napkin, laughs at herself.
MARGARET
Sorry? Why?

GEORGE
I made you sad. I didn’t want that.

MARGARET
You didn’t make me sad, George.

She sets her napkin back in her lap.

GEORGE
What I wanted is to tell you what sticks with me. Strawberry and you. This woman I married but can’t figure; who doesn’t believe there’s any world but this one, but still believes a horse has got a soul somehow.

Margaret’s eyes shine in the candlelight as George whispers to her across the table in the crowded dining room.

GEORGE (CONT’D)
That’s the gal for me.

EXT. GLADSTONE - STREET - NIGHT

Margaret laces her fingers with George’s as they stroll the quiet street from the restaurant to their car.

INT. MOON WINK MOTOR COURT - CABIN - NIGHT

The bedside clock reads 2:40 AM. George drowses sitting up in bed while Margaret tensely watches the bedside clock.

GEORGE
She did seem quick to come around--

MARGARET
No. Please. Don’t say anything.

George sighs, knowing Margaret will wait a million years if she has to before she’ll give up hope and end this vigil.

He leans his head back, closes his eyes...

INT. BLACKLEDGE RANCH - BARN - DAY

George (40s) pulls the revolver from its oiled holster.
He opens its empty cylinder with a snap of his wrist, loads bullets in, and spins the cylinder back into the gun’s frame.

He turns with the gun to the rust-colored mare standing in the shaft of sunlight flooding through the tall open doors, gray hairs edging all her features, like a lacy frost.

Margaret (30s) whispers closely in the horse’s ear, words only she and the animal can hear, as she strokes its head and George comes to stand five feet in front of the old horse.

George takes a mental bead, gun still at his side, as Margaret raises the animal’s head to face him. He nods.

Margaret drapes sheeting across the horse’s cataract-clouded eyes, wraps its head. She kisses the fabric and steps away.

She goes to James (9) in the open doorway and folds him in, turning him with her to face out, to face the open land. Her eyes swim as she waits, tensed for the gun’s report.

George lifts the revolver and aims it at the shrouded head of the animal standing still and tall as a mountain before him.

His finger tightens on the trigger.

Margaret covers her son’s ears...

INT. MOON WINK MOTOR COURT – CABIN – NIGHT

BANG!

George’s eyes open in the dark, Margaret stirring beside him.

BANG! Another knock sounds at the door, a voice outside.

MAN (O.C.)
Mr. Blackledge? Mrs.? We have an emergency here!

George gets himself up and to the door while Margaret fumbles for the light switch.

MARGARET
Is it Lorna?

George opens the door and then struggles to shut it again just as fast, fighting against a force from the other side.

MARGARET (CONT’D)
George--?
The door flies open and George staggers back as Marvin and Elton shoulder their way in, followed by Bill Weboy.

GEORGE
What the hell? Get out!

Margaret pulls herself up as the men step aside to make room for Donnie to enter, Blanche Weboy bringing up the rear.

MARGARET
You can’t come in here!

BLANCHE
Too late for that, Grandma. We’re in.

She closes the door and slips its locking chain in place.

BLANCHE (CONT'D)
He let us in.

GEORGE
No. You get the hell out now.

He moves for the door, but Marvin cuts him off and Elton barricades the door with his body, his back against it.

George looks to Donnie, but Donnie won’t meet his eye.

Bill circles the bed, stopping near Margaret, while Blanche drops a canvas satchel heavy with shifting tools on the mattress with a clank and takes a seat on the other side.

BLANCHE
See, you think you can gang up on Lorna. But then when it’s done to you, it’s a different story.

MARGARET
What are you talking about?

BLANCHE
Is that what you’re going to do? Pretend like you don’t know what I’m talking about? Pretend like you two didn’t jump Lorna at work? Shame on you.

ELTON
Two against one.

George abruptly stops taking measure of each Weboy and their position in the room when Blanche turns her attention on him.
BLANCHE
Shame on both of you. Badgering and bullying her. To give up her boy.

She turns back to Margaret and George resumes casing the room, estimating his distance to the open suitcase laying on the dresser behind Bill. He begins inching his way there.

BLANCHE (CONT'D)
You’re lucky Lorna doesn’t have a little mama grizzly in her. Come between that kind of mama and her baby... You’re fixing to get your hand bit. Or worse than.

MARGARET
That’s not exactly what happened.

BLANCHE
Somebody would have tried to come between me and one of my boys? Tried to talk me out of my child--?

MARGARET
That’s not what--

BLANCHE
It’s no wonder Lorna don’t want to go with you. It’s a wonder she lasted long as she did in your house. Big bull-hen, always sure you know what’s best for everybody.

She lifts an eyebrow to George, half his way to the suitcase.

BLANCHE (CONT'D)
Pecking you to death, no doubt.

MARGARET
I never said she shouldn’t marry Donnie.

Blanche reels back, pointing a finger at Margaret, laughs.

BLANCHE
Oh-ho! I never said you had!

MARGARET
He hit the boy.

Blanche cocks her head at Margaret, who turns to Donnie.
MARGARET (CONT'D)
I saw you. Across the street from
the IGA. Jimmy dropped his ice
cream... And you hit him.

BLANCHE
Is that what all this fuss is
about? He hit--? Grandma, you
gonna tell me you didn’t paddle
your own? Not ever?

MARGARET
He knocked him to the ground. He
hit Lorna too.

Blanche turns, focuses on Donnie now as well.

BLANCHE
Come here.

George takes a step towards the suitcase when Donnie goes to
Blanche, but gets blocked by Elton as bodies shuffle in the
too-tight room. Blanche waves Donnie down to her level.

BLANCHE (CONT'D)
You hit your wife?

MARGARET
I saw him.

BLANCHE
How’d he do it?

MARGARET
With his hand.

Blanche rolls her eyes and hooks a thumb at Margaret.

BLANCHE
Alberta Einstein. I know his hand.
I’m asking how. Like--?

She lashes out, whip-quick, slaps Donnie in the face.

BLANCHE (CONT'D)
Was it like that?

Margaret blinks, too shocked to respond.

George watches Blanche’s other sons as she slaps Donnie
again; dull-eyed at the sharp crack of flesh on flesh.
BLANCHE (CONT'D)
Donnie, how’d you do it?
(turns to Margaret)
How was it?

MARGARET
It was harder.

BLANCHE
Harder? Like this?

Blanche slaps Margaret. A lightning strike; fleet, stinging.

The room goes still and George sees Blanche’s handprint rise red on his wife’s cheek, but Margaret never flinches.

MARGARET
Like that. But, harder.

Blanche smiles.

BLANCHE
Donnie, I think you’re going to have to show us how you done it--

George lunges for Donnie but Marvin knocks him sideways, and George falls, striking his head on the bed’s iron frame.

MARGARET
George!

Margaret scrambles the length of the bed as a gash opens above George’s left eye. He blinks, dazed, wipes blood from his brow as he hauls himself up unsteadily by the suitcase.

GEORGE
(reassuring Margaret)
I’m okay.

BLANCHE
Yeah? Maybe you want to try talking this over again now like reasonable folks. Or maybe you’d prefer gettin’ some sleep so you can get an early start back home tomorrow?

Bill drifts closer to Margaret now at this end of the bed, glancing briefly at George, who appears woozy, unfocused.

BILL
Or maybe you’d like to send him home while you stay on for a spell.

(MORE)
BILL (CONT'D)
I could take you back when you’re ready. Of course, by then you might decide you’d rather stay.

He snakes a finger inside the neck of Margaret’s shirt as George reaches his hand behind his back to the open suitcase.

BILL (CONT'D)
We could go for another ride.

Margaret slaps his hand away.

MARGARET
I want to take Jimmy back with me.

BLANCHE
I know what you want, woman!

Margaret doesn’t back down; meets Blanche, glaring fiercely.

MARGARET
I will not let you ruin him.

Blanche holds a beat, then gets up without a word, nodding to Bill; a shrugged signal of permission. She’s all yours.

BILL
Yeah?

He winks at Margaret as he starts towards her on the bed.

GEORGE
Stop! Right there!

Everyone spins to George, holding the gun pointed directly at Bill’s head, not as dazed as he’s been pretending.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
You move away from her.

Bill raises his hands in surrender and starts slowly easing back from Margaret, but Elton makes a run at George.

Margaret screams as George turns the gun on Elton.

Bill grabs the satchel of tools and swings it, knocking the gun from George’s hands at the same time Elton hits George.

BANG!

The gun fires hitting the floor at the same time as George; a stunningly loud concussion in the small space. George crawls for the gun...
BLANCHE
Get it! Get the gun!

Marvin, Bill, and Elton scramble to get the revolver before George, sending it skittering across the scuffed linoleum, where it stops at the toe of Donnie’s boot. He picks it up.

BLANCHE (CONT'D)
Get him up.

The brothers haul George to his feet and pin him against the wall, bleeding again from the cut above his eye.

Blanche takes the gun from Donnie to examine, shaking her head in a show of regret, looks between George and Margaret.

MARGARET
Please...

Blanche retrieves the canvas satchel from the floor and opens it on the dresser. She reaches in among the clanking items.

She locates what she wants and slowly draws it out; a long-handled, iron combination tool with a double-sided head. Hammer and hatchet both. A Farmer’s Ever-Ready Toolkit.

George surges against Marvin and Elton, already knowing what’s coming as Blanche holds the heavy tool out to Donnie.

DONNIE
What--? What do you want me to do?

Blanche impatiently forces the tool on him, repositioning it in his reluctant hand, hatchet blade leading.

BLANCHE
Make sure he can’t pull a gun on us again.

MARGARET
No!

George bucks and fights, breaks one arm free to punch Marvin.

Elton hangs on, grinding an elbow into George’s throat as Margaret screams. The men wrestle George, pin his right hand down on the dresser top. Bill forces George’s fingers apart, splays them over the lip of the dresser as George kicks.

Donnie looks miserably between George’s hand and the tool.

BLANCHE
I’m teaching you to teach him.
See?
George storms against the brothers holding him down and Bill cracks him on the back of the head.

MARGARET
Stop! Please! Stop! Please...

Donnie glances around the room as if for an exit, an escape.

BLANCHE
Quicker’s better.

Donnie swallows and hefts the Ever-Ready.

MARGARET
Donnie! Don’t!

George locks his eyes on Donnie’s; the fierce, sternly challenging glare of a steady parent. Don’t. Don’t. Don’t.

GEORGE
Donnie. You don’t have to.

Donnie yields the tool up over his head.

MARGARET
Donnie, please!

Donnie looks at George as he steels himself. George shakes his head, a single, tight shake. No.

BILL
Do it, boy!

GEORGE
Donnie--

Donnie swings his arm down and the hatchet’s blade plants itself in the dresser’s wooden top, separating George’s index, middle, and ring fingers from the rest of his hand.

His pinky hangs by a horrible, mangled thread of skin.

Margaret screams, yet George barely grunts at the blow. His knees fold beneath him and he slides silently to the floor.

Margaret scrambles down to throw herself over George as Bill pries the Farmer’s Every-Ready blade out of the dresser.

MARGARET
George! My God! George...

Blanche watches Donnie turn away from what he’s done as she opens the satchel for Bill to drop the tool inside.
BILL
Won’t be doing much shooting now.

Marvin picks up one of George’s fingers, goofing.

MARVIN
Trigger finger.

He drops it as Donnie unchains the door to bang out of the cabin, leaving the door open behind him.

Marvin and Elton follow him out as Blanche strips a pillow of its case and slips the gun inside.

BLANCHE
I’ll hang on to the evidence if you don’t mind.

She takes a last look around the cabin, at Margaret crying on the floor with George, shakes her head.

BLANCHE (CONT’D)
Lorna told me you don’t even go to church. Yet you think you’re the ones ought to be raising that boy.

She sniffs as if disappointed in the room itself, and leaves.

BILL
Safe drive, you two.

He closes the door behind himself, leaving them alone.

MARGARET
George. What have I done to you?

GEORGE
You haven’t done a goddamn thing to me. Not yet, anyway. But you’re going to have to drive me to the hospital.

EXT. MOON WINK MOTOR COURT - NIGHT

MARGARET
We should call the police.

George spies someone watching them from the motel office window as he gets in the car with Margaret, twisting a towel tightly around his hand.

The office light snaps off.
GEORGE
We’re on our own, Margaret.

She urgently glances about, sees a GUEST lower the paper blind in the window of another cabin. No one wants trouble.

INT. BLACKLEDGE’S CAR - NIGHT - (MOVING)

Margaret drives the night streets of Gladstone, turning down one street and then another, navigating by instinct and hunch, on the lookout, all the while keeping one hand tethered to George, slumped against the passenger door.

She looks over at his gray pallor, inert form.

MARGARET
George?

GEORGE
You haven’t lost me yet.

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

The Blackledge’s car pulls up to the entrance and Margaret jumps out, runs around to the other side.

INT. HOSPITAL - EXAMINING ROOM - NIGHT

The blood-soaked towel is unwrapped, revealing George’s mutilated hand; crimson gristle, bone, the dangling pinky.

A DOCTOR (30s) looks up in shock from the hand to George, Margaret beside him, and an attending NURSE (40s).

DOCTOR
This was an axe, you said?

George’s thin lips barely move, white in this light.

GEORGE
I didn’t. A hatchet.

NURSE
Police are on the way.

The Doctor examines the hand more closely under a lamp.

DOCTOR
Look. I can put you under, or I can numb it up and you stay--
GEORGE
Awake. I’ll stay awake.

DOCTOR
Ma’am, you’re welcome to wait out—

MARGARET
You’d have to carry me out. I’m
not leaving him.

George smiles faintly at Margaret’s fire.

GEORGE
She’s a little excited.
(a joke)
Mittens are easier to knit than
gloves.

INT. HOSPITAL - EXAMINING ROOM - LATER

The doctor cleans George’s wounds, the stumps of his fingers,
trimming back the ragged skin to stitch with black thread.

Margaret grips her husband’s good hand, leaning her head on
his broad back, facing away from the Doctor and Nurse’s work.

George sits upright, rigid, and pale as dawn as he’s sewn
together, eyes fixed unwavering on a far distant point.

EXT. VALLEY - DAY

VIEW: From a horizon line across a great amber valley, a
range of mountains soar skyward, mantels of violet snow
draping their shoulders, crowning their craggy peaks.

INT. HOSPITAL - GUEST ROOM - DAY

A panoramic photograph of mountains hangs above the bed in
which George recovers, hand bandaged, Margaret sitting vigilant
in a chair beside him, lost in fretful contemplation.

A window on the opposite wall offers counterpoint;
Gladstone’s grim downtown and its omnipresent water tower.

A knock at the open door draws Margaret’s attention to the
MAN (40s, potbellied) standing there in sheriff’s uniform.
INT. HOSPITAL - GUEST ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

SHERRIF
Well, now, I’ve already been out to
the Weboys’s and had a chance to
hear their side of--

MARGARET
Their side--? Side of what?

George restrains Margaret at her perch on the edge of his bed
while the Sheriff prowls the room, a bad actor on stage.

SHERRIF
The way they tell it, it’s Mr.
Blackledge who pulled a gun--

MARGARET
In self-defense!

SHERRIF
(to George)
That your service revolver Blanche
showed me?

George eyes this Sherrif striking a pose at the window and
finds not one thing he likes.

GEORGE
I’m sure it is.

SHERRIF
You wore the badge once.

MARGARET
He wore it over thirty years.

SHERRIF
Then you know how the law works.

GEORGE
I’ve got a fair idea I know how it
works around here.

The Sherrif shows his teeth, but he’s not smiling.

SHERRIF
Blanche explained things got a tad
rough persuading you to set your
weapon down.

MARGARET
They chopped off his hand--!
George gives Margaret a squeeze with his good hand; cool it.

SHERRIF
Their account is that the two of you came here looking to take a child away from his mother. First with talk. Threats. Then a gun.

MARGARET
Lorna. The boy’s mother. Did you see her--?

SHERRIF
Oh, sure. She was there--

MARGARET
And you spoke with her? She’s terrified of them, you know. She’s--

SHERRIF
She was married to your son?

GEORGE
She was.

SHERRIF
He died. Right? He’s dead.

George regards the oily man, doesn’t bother answering.

SHERRIF (CONT’D)
How exactly did that happen?

GEORGE
Why don’t you tell us?

SHERRIF
An accident, she said. Thrown from his horse. Broke his neck. Snapped in two. An accident.

He sighs sadly, points to George’s hand.

SHERRIF (CONT’D)
An accident.

Margaret opens her mouth to object, but then closes it.

SHERRIF (CONT’D)
Blanche Weboy expressed real concern. How accidents follow your family. She fears for that little one she’s looking after now. (MORE)
SHERRIF (CONT'D)
And how the longer you two stick
around the chances of something
happening to him... Well, those
chances keep creeping up. I don’t
even want to contemplate what a
tragedy that would be.

He gazes out to the water tower, wags his head with a sigh.

SHERRIF (CONT'D)
Nothing smaller in this world than
a kid’s casket.

He gives this all the air it wants then turns back to the
Blackledges, Margaret now faded as gray as George.

SHERRIF (CONT'D)
Consensus over there is you won’t
be making any more trouble here.
And because you are family, by a
way, the Weboys aren’t going to
press charges. You are free to go.

George glares at the Sherrif who pushes away from the window,
 begins a slow showy amble towards the door.

SHERRIF (CONT'D)
If I were giving out advice--

GEORGE
You can save that.

SHERRIF
Well. See. I’m thinking on your
grandson here... He’s a Weboy now.

Margaret turns her anguished face to George.

SHERRIF (CONT'D)
Best you put Gladstone behind you.

EXT. MOON WINK MOTOR COURT - DAY
Margaret throws their suitcases into the back of the car.

SHERRIF (V.O.)
Just as quick as you can.

She climbs behind the wheel beside George, his arm in a
sling, and pulls the car out of the lot and onto the road.
INT. BLACKLEDGE'S CAR - DAY - (MOVING)

Margaret drives, her face a map of worry, passing a sign by the side of the highway: GOODBYE, GLADSTONE - COME BACK SOON!

GEORGE
Pull over.

Margaret glances at George, his eyes closed, head lolling.

MARGARET
What’s wrong?

GEORGE
Just pull over.

MARGARET
Are you going to be sick?

GEORGE
Pull over, goddamnit!

EXT. HIGHWAY - GLADSTONE - DAY

Margaret wrests the car to the shoulder of the highway and George clumsily shoves his door open, nearly tumbles out.

He catches himself and sits bent over, breathing hard, while Margaret scrambles out of the car and around to his side.

MARGARET
George? Are you all right? Talk to me.

GEORGE
(covering)
I’m fine.

She lowers herself to his level, touches him.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
I needed to stop s’all. Give me a second.

He leans back on the seat, sweat beading his pallid brow, and Margaret stands to scan the empty landscape helplessly.

A wind catches her hair, whipping it around, and she turns in that direction to pull it from her face.

She surveys the scrubby horizon thoughtfully, focusing, turns again and scrutinizes the ragged foothills and bluffs.
114  **INT. BLACKLEDGE'S CAR - DAY - (MOVING)**

The toy horse tumbles from the seat and George lurches like a rag doll with every rut and divot in the dirt track as Margaret drives; the distant town of Gladstone below them.

    GEORGE
    Criminy, Margaret. I’d like to keep my teeth.

115  **EXT. BADLANDS - DAY**

The car bounces along, dwarfed by the desolate terrain.

116  **INT. BLACKLEDGE'S CAR - DAY - (MOVING)**

Margaret crests a rise and exhales with relief.

117  **INT. BLACKLEDGE'S CAR/EXT. PETER'S SHACK - DAY**

A small shack crouches on a bare patch of land at the base of a bluff; gray asphalt roof shingles tacked to a patchwork of found lumber, red paint clinging to its sides, and a shed.

    GEORGE
    Where in hell are we?

Margaret sounds the car’s horn. She waits, sounds it again--

The shack’s door cracks open and Peter Dragswolf peers out. Margaret waves as the smiling young man steps from his home.

    MARGARET
    We’re here.

118  **INT. PETER’S SHACK - DAY**

Late sunlight cuts hard across the floor, climbs the bed.

Margaret gets up from her seat beside the bed to adjust the bit of faded fabric tacked above the window, shielding George’s face, slack in slumber, from the spill of light.

She glances around, taking in the details of the shack’s one large partitioned room: Plank floor. Low ceiling. Frayed magazines. Dirty dishes piled in a salvaged sink beside a small stove. A beaded buckskin displayed on the wall.
The bright chirp of a bridle’s bit and the thump of a hoof draw Margaret’s attention to the shack’s open back door and Peter removing the horse’s tack just outside.

She observes the young man tending to the animal that rubs his shoulder with its chin; one creature caring for another, the other wordlessly expressing its gratitude.

119
EXT. PETER’S SHACK – SUNSET

PETER
What will you do?

MARGARET
I don’t know.

Peter feeds the horse oats from a dented pan while Margaret replenishes the water in its trough with fresh.

PETER
I heard what the Weboys done to you. Except I didn’t know it was you.

MARGARET
What’d you hear?

PETER
They chopped off someone’s arm.

MARGARET
Who told you that?

PETER
My uncle in Gladstone.

MARGARET
You have family in town then?

PETER
An uncle and aunt. They sell skins for me. Other stuff.

Margaret studies the young man as he works.

MARGARET
Why do you live out here then? All alone? It’s not where you’re from.

Peter continues in his chores long enough that Margaret stops waiting for an answer, turns her attention back to the horse.
PETER
I ran away. From the school in Bismarck.

Margaret sneaks a glance at Peter.

PETER (CONT'D)
The government agents came into the house when I was eight. Took me.
Put me in their truck. I thought I’d done something wrong, that my mother didn’t want me anymore.
But, then I could see she was crying. All the mothers were.

MARGARET
You were eight?

PETER
They cut my hair off. Washed me in kerosene. Beat me. To kill the Indian inside. I guess they did.
When I came home I couldn’t understand my grandmother’s words anymore. “My name is Peter now,” I tried to tell her. But, she couldn’t understand me either.

He surveys the landscape as the sun drops from sight, shrugs.

PETER (CONT'D)
If I don’t belong any place, here is fine.

Margaret takes in the view beside him, sees the wide, flat disc of a nearly full moon on the rise, opalescent at dusk.

MARGARET
You picked a good spot.

She lays a maternal hand gently on his arm.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
But it’s not good to be alone.

PETER
I’m not alone.

He smiles and strokes the horse. Margaret nods, conceding.

PETER (CONT'D)
I’m talking to you.
INT. PETER’S SHACK - EVENING

Margaret pulls the iron skillet from the box she’d packed at home and sets it to heat on the stove, scraping in potatoes to brown. She tastes soup she’s making in a big enamel pot.

She takes a can of beans from the box of groceries... when her attention snags on a man’s humming, just shy of a tune.

She listens, then goes to the room’s makeshift partition and peers around to discover Peter humming as he rebinds George’s hand, weaving a meticulous web with a ribbon of white gauze.

She holds, watching Peter as he works, singing his hushed song in an ancestor’s tongue to her husband as he sleeps.

Peter glances up at Margaret.

    PETER
    Can you die from getting your fingers cut off?

    GEORGE
        (not asleep after all)
        Jesus Christ, I’m not deaf.

INT. PETER’S SHACK - NIGHT

Margaret ladles soup into a bowl at the stove.

INT. PETER’S SHACK - NIGHT

George sits himself up in bed to receive a bowl of soup from Margaret, and they both realize at the same moment that he won’t be able to hold it himself with his damaged hand.

George takes a spoon from Margaret and she sits facing him, cradling the bowl near enough so he can feed himself.

George exhaled a mirthless laugh at their pitiful setup.

Margaret leans close, lowers her voice so Peter won’t be able to hear on the other side of partition.

    MARGARET
        I have an idea.

    GEORGE
        That’s not a first.

He scoops a spoonful of the soup, eats.
MARGARET
Now, let me finish before you make
fun of me. And if you don’t know
what to say, don’t say anything.

GEORGE
Let’s hear it.

MARGARET
What if we stayed? Here.

George pauses the spoon and Margaret rushes ahead.

MARGARET (CONT’D)
I’m sure Peter’d be glad of the
company. We could build on to this
place, put another room on the
backside of the kitchen--

GEORGE
You hold the boards while I hammer
in the nails, s’that it?

MARGARET
You said you’d let me finish.

GEORGE
You’re finished now you just don’t
know it.

He drops the spoon in the bowl. Done.

GEORGE (CONT’D)
You want us to live in the shadow
of a rock with an Indian boy and a
lost horse? Just so you can drive
into town every now and again to
try and catch a peek at Jimmy?
(Shakes his head)
You gonna follow him to school?
Hope time untwists a sour mind and
Blanche Weboy lets you hold him
again. Someday. For more than
thirty seconds’s time?

MARGARET
George--

GEORGE
And when they hack off another
couple pieces of me? Or when they
start taking pieces of you, if
there’s anything left once you’re
done tearing yourself apart?
(MORE)
GEORGE (CONT'D)
What then? And when they hurt
Jimmy? And they will. Just for
spite. How’re you gonna feel then?

Margaret stirs the cold soup, unable to meet George’s eye.

MARGARET
First time I held him... He
arranged himself; easy. Just right
in my arms. Snug to me. And light
as can be. Like feathers--

GEORGE
Jesus Christ, Margaret. When will
you stop torturing yourself?

She stops, stung, but still can’t bring herself to look at
her husband as she struggles to keep her tears at bay.

MARGARET
I’m sorry. I know I’ve tortured
you too.

GEORGE
No.

MARGARET
I know I have.

She sets the bowl down to take his good hand in hers.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
We’ll go. But, not home. There’s
nothing for us there now. We’ll...
keep driving. Car’s packed. We
can go to California. Maybe see an
ocean. Or north. But... I can’t
go back...

Her voice breaks apart as she looks at George now.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
I tried. I tried, George...

George slips his hand from Margaret’s to wipe away her tears.

GEORGE
I know. Shhh... I know.

MARGARET
I couldn’t save him. God help me.
George pulls his wife to him and holds her tight, rocking her like a child as she finally surrenders to all her overwhelming grief. Margaret weeps in George’s embrace.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. PETER’S SHACK - NIGHT

An almost-full moon keeps unblinking watch over the land.

The horse stirs in her shelter, ears swiveling at a sound. They pan the still night air and she shudders.

INT. PETER’S SHACK - NIGHT

Peter lays sleeping, curled into himself for warmth, on a pile of blankets on the floor at the foot of the bed.

THUNK. A car door closes outside.

Margaret’s eyes open in the semi-dark. She listens in bed, suddenly alert; unsure what’s woken her.

Then the churn of a car’s ignition cuts the night.

She sits straight up as the car’s engine catches and she turns to George beside her.

MARGARET

George--?

But, he’s gone.

She scrambles up and dashes past Peter on the floor to fling open the door just as the car outside shifts into drive.

EXT. PETER’S SHACK - NIGHT

MARGARET

George!

Margaret runs after the car in her bare feet as it pulls away, but the cutting rocks bring her to a stop.

MARGARET (CONT’D)

George! No!

She watches helplessly as the car’s taillights bob and jump.

MARGARET (CONT’D)

Come back!
The car disappears over the ridge and into the night.

PETER
Where’s George going?

Margaret turns urgently as Peter joins her.

EXT. PETER’S SHACK - NIGHT

Margaret sets the saddle on the horse’s back and Peter jumps in to fit the bit and reins; working together with speed.

PETER
Fast as you are, I don’t think you’re going to catch him.

MARGARET
If he’s going where I think he’ll have to take the road. You’re going to show me a quicker way.

PETER
I’m going to show--? I’m not going.

MARGARET
You are.

EXT. WEBOY HOMESTEAD - NIGHT

The same moon hovers over the still two story wooden house, every window dark with sleep. Not a sound on the land.

Bill Weboy’s truck stands parked at the back.

INT. WEBOY HOMESTEAD - BACK PORCH - NIGHT

George examines the shotguns piled atop the firewood just outside the kitchen door, noiselessly makes a selection.

He breaks a double barrel shotgun open one-handed, cradles it in the nook of his arm to load in shells with his good hand.

INT. WEBOY HOMESTEAD - KITCHEN - NIGHT

George picks his way through patches of moonlight that tile the floor, testing for creaks, ear cocked to the still house.
He peers up the dark mouth of the back stairs, considering, then turns for the open doorway leading to the front hall, the moon aglow in the front door’s frosted glass window.

INT. WEBOY HOMESTEAD - FRONT HALL/STAIRS - NIGHT

George inches up the stairs in silence, riser by riser, the railing’s spindles painting bars of shadow across his face.

INT. WEBOY HOMESTEAD - UPSTAIRS HALL - NIGHT

George scrutinizes all the closed doors surrounding the open U-shaped railing at the top of the staircase, orienting himself to the layout of rooms in near-pitch blackness.

A muted cough and the faint twang of a bedspring stop him in place as someone rolls over in sleep behind one of the doors.

George waits.

EXT. BADLANDS - NIGHT

The horse’s hooves pound the earth as Margaret spurs her, Peter clinging on, galloping for the moon straight ahead.

PETER
Down the other side of that bluff.

Peter indicates an angle and Margaret fluidly adjusts course.

MARGARET
Hyal

INT. WEBOY HOMESTEAD - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jimmy sleeps on a folding army cot by the window, his mother in the room’s big bed, her back turned to Donnie.

Donnie sleeps on his back, but his eyes spring open when George covers his mouth and nose with his bandaged hand.

Donnie starts to struggle for air, reaching for George standing over him, but George presses the open barrels of the shotgun he holds in his good hand to Donnie’s temple.

GEORGE
Settle. Be still.

Donnie stops, staring up, wide-eyed, and George jerks his chin at Lorna, whispers low.
GEORGE (CONT'D)

Wake her.

Lorna’s already stirring when Donnie shakes her hip.

LORNA

Wha--?

She barely keeps herself from screaming when she rolls over to find George holding the shotgun on Donnie in the dark. Her eyes dart to Jimmy, still asleep on the cot, and back.

GEORGE

Do you want to go back to Dalton?
You and Jimmy? You have to decide.
Go or stay.

DONNIE

Lorna--

George presses the gun’s barrels, cutting Donnie’s temple.

GEORGE

Not you. You don’t get to say a goddamn word. This is up to her.

Lorna stares at George, paralyzed. He keeps his voice low.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

You know what life will be. Here or there, you know. This isn’t something you need to think on.

LORNA

Go. I’ll go.

She turns on the bedside lamp, revealing a ripe black eye to the light. She throws off the covers and goes to lift Jimmy, carries the child as he stirs in sleep back to George.

GEORGE

You know the car. It’s parked at the bottom of the drive. Keys are in it. Get in and drive straight to the Sherrif’s office in Bentrock. Ask for Nevelson.

LORNA

Bentrock?

GEORGE

Sherrif Nevelson. He’ll sort it out.
LORNA
But, what--? What about you--?

GEORGE
Go.

Lorna blinks as she figures it out; George intends to stay to ensure her and Jimmy’s escape. She glances at Jimmy’s bare feet, plucks at his pajamas.

LORNA
Jimmy’s things... I have to--

GEORGE
No. Out now. Quiet as you can.
Take the front door. Then run like hell.

Lorna steps into her shoes and puts her hand on the door knob. She takes a last look at Donnie glaring from the bed.

GEORGE (CONT’D)
Lorna.

She looks to George, Jimmy’s head on her shoulder.

GEORGE (CONT’D)
The front door.

Lorna nods, slowly eases the bedroom door open... its hinge chirps. She stops, holds, then dares to inch it wider.

Her nostrils flare when she detects the thin layer of smoke accumulating in the dark hallway, and turns back to George in alarm. He prods her forward with a look, mouths the words.

GEORGE (CONT’D)
Front door.

Lorna steps shaking into the hall and Jimmy lifts his head, squinting sleepily at George in the room behind them, smiles.

JIMMY
Grandpa.

The child’s clear voice carries bell-like on the night.

Lorna freezes mid-stride. Donnie’s eyes dart to George, who makes a shushing shape with his mouth for Jimmy.
INT. WEBOY HOMESTEAD - UPSTAIRS HALL - NIGHT

Lorna listens to the still house a breathless beat, eyes squeezed shut, then she exhales and dashes forward.

Lumbering movement erupts in one of the rooms and Lorna skids to a stop when a door bangs open and Elton steps out directly in front of her. He puts his nose to the air.

ELTON
Something’s burning.

He doesn’t give her a second look, but dashes for the rear of the house and the back stairs, pounding down to the kitchen.

MARVIN
Did you leave the stove on?

Marvin passes Lorna and Jimmy still frozen on the landing as he pulls on his coveralls, following right behind Elton.

DONNIE (O.S.)
Help!

Lorna’s head swivels towards the bedroom at Donnie’s shout.

INT. WEBOY HOMESTEAD - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Donnie grabs for the shotgun but George fights it free, spins it to bring its butt cracking down, knocking Donnie out. The force of the blow shears the skin back on Donnie’s forehead.

INT. WEBOY HOMESTEAD - UPSTAIRS HALL/STAIRS - NIGHT

Jimmy screams when the door right beside Lorna crashes open and Bill Weboy steps bleary-eyed into the hall.

BILL
The fuck is going on?

Lorna breaks for the stairs but Bill snags Jimmy by the sleeve of his pajamas, yanks the child from Lorna’s arms.

BILL (CONT’D)
Where ya think you two are going?

LORNA
No!

She springs at Bill, snatching for Jimmy, who falls to the floor, just as Blanche appears in the open door behind Bill.
BLANCHE
What's--?

BLAM!

The hall flashes blinding bright when George fires the shotgun, narrowly missing Bill, who pivots in his direction.

Blanche slams her bedroom door and Lorna scoops Jimmy up, but Bill grabs him back, clasps the boy to his chest as a shield as George advances. Lorna claws at Bill for her crying son.

LORNA
Stop! Stop it! Let him go!

Bill shoves Lorna away and she staggers backwards, blindly stepping right off the landing. She cries out as she falls, banging, banging, banging down the stairs to a stop midway.

George lunges and seizes Jimmy from Bill, hooking the arm of his damaged hand around the boy's torso, shotgun in his one good hand, but Bill keeps a grip on the boy's leg, and pulls.

The bedroom door springs open again and Blanche reappears, aiming George's service revolver at the men, and the boy.

George raises the shotgun, but Bill bats it from his grip. It clatters over the railing, lands in the hall far below.

BLANCHE
Bill! Outta the way! I got him!

BILL
Christ, Blanche! Don't shoot!

She squints an eye closed, finger tightening on the trigger, and Bill tries to dodge clear, but George seizes him back.

BANG!

The gun fires; cracking lightning-bright in the dark hall, the gathering smoke holding its flare like storm clouds.

LORNA
No!

Bill looks at George with bemused surprise, a small hole in his cheek. He opens his mouth as though to ask a question, and falls dead. Blanche gapes, blinking at George.

GEORGE
(calling down)
Lorna?
Blanche points the gun again at George holding Jimmy, and George swings the clinging child out over the railing, dangling him high above the steep stairs, Lorna craning up.

LORNA

Jimmy!

BLANCHE

Give the boy to me, old man. No one gets hurt.

George lets Jimmy go. The child drops through the smoky air. Blanche shoots George.

He falls, carried by the bullet that strikes him high in the chest... as Lorna catches Jimmy on the stairs below.

Blanche cranes over the railing, locks eyes with Lorna, and Lorna breaks for the front door standing open to the night across the deep foyer at the bottom of the stairs.

Blanche dashes for the top of the stairs at the same time Marvin and Elton explode up the back stairs into the hall.

ELTON MARVIN

Who’s shooting? We’re on fire!

Blanche comes around the end of the railing...

BLANCHE

Get her!

...And George’s hand suddenly closes over hers from behind. He snaps the gun up, still in Blanche’s grip, and fires.

Marvin drops dead while running, his momentum sending him down the front stairs as Blanche screams.

George pivots with Blanche, taking aim at Elton as he comes.

EXT. WEBOY HOMESTEAD - NIGHT

BANG!

The horse shies and rears up as the echoing gunshot reaches Margaret and Peter riding into view of the distant house; front door yawning open, a spiral of smoke threading skyward.

MARGARET

Oh my God.
And then she spots Lorna; a lone figure stumbling at a run away from the house, pitched forward with her son’s weight.

**EXT. WEBOY HOMESTEAD - FRONT DRIVE - NIGHT**

Lorna desperately searches the inky night ahead for the car.

**LORNA**
It’s okay, baby. It’s okay...

**MARGARET**
Lorna!

Lorna ducks at the call, reflexively veers away from the galloping horse headed in her direction.

**MARGARET (CONT’D)**
Lorna! Wait! Stop!

Lorna recognizes Margaret’s voice now and slows as Margaret and Peter arrive. She begins to cry as Margaret climbs down.

Margaret embraces Jimmy and Lorna with urgent relief.

**MARGARET (CONT’D)**
Are you all right?

Lorna nods rhythmically, but can’t speak.

**MARGARET (CONT’D)**
Where’s George?

Lorna shakes her head pitifully, her breath ragged and wet.

**LORNA**
He said to run... To take the car.

Margaret turns to Peter.

**MARGARET**
Stay with them.

He nods and Margaret takes off on foot.

**INT. WEBOY HOMESTEAD - FRONT HALL/STAIRS - NIGHT**

The shotgun lays on the floor where it fell from upstairs, deep in the foyer, far from the front door framing the moon.

Beyond the door, Margaret steps from the pitch night into a spill of light. She cautiously approaches, mounts the porch.
She peers from the threshold, taking measure of what she can; shotgun, smoke, the fire snarling behind the kitchen door.

She sees Marvin’s prone body, facedown on the staircase.

INT. WEBOY HOMESTEAD – FRONT HALL/STAIRS – MOMENTS LATER

Margaret breaches the double shotgun to check its load, plucks the spent cartridge from one barrel, closes the gun; the crack and click of metal ring loud in the stillness despite the fire’s growing voice at the rear of the house.

She scans the ground floor rooms for any sign of George, backing away from the snapping heat of the kitchen aflame.

She carries the shotgun to the stairs, inches her way up, straining for a view of the upper hall, one eye on Marvin.

She stops at his body, nudges him with her toe. Dead.

She stretches her neck to bring the upstairs floor into view.

A spray of blood clouds the far wall, Elton sitting blank-faced under its spatter, staring dumbly at Margaret in death.

She sees Bill lying dead in the murky hall, and George sprawled on his back on the floor.

MARGARET

George!

She clambers over Marvin’s body, scrambles up the stairs.

INT. WEBOY HOMESTEAD – UPSTAIRS HALL – NIGHT

Margaret drops to her knees beside George, his chest rapidly rising and falling beneath his bloodstained shirt.

MARGARET

George... George.

His eyes swim and search for Margaret in the smoky dim.

GEORGE

Jimmy? Where’s Jimmy?

MARGARET

He’s safe, George. With Lorna. And Peter. They’re waiting for us.

She helps him sit up and he takes count of Elton and Bill.
GEORGE
Where’s Blanche?

MARGARET
I don’t--. I don’t know.

GEORGE
Go. Get out of here.

MARGARET
Not without you.

She loops George’s arm around her neck and he leverages himself up with the railing. He takes the shotgun to use for support, shuffling with Margaret through the gathering smoke as the back stairwell glows bright with licking flames.

DONNIE (O.S.)
Momma?!

George looks behind them as Donnie pulls himself from the bedroom, crawling blind, blood running down his face.

INT. WEBOY HOMESTEAD – FRONT HALL/STAIRS – NIGHT

George grits his teeth navigating his way down with Margaret, Donnie calling above them as the fire enters the upstairs.

DONNIE (O.S.)
Help!

PETER (O.S.)
Margaret! George!

They both look to where Peter arrives on the porch outside.

GEORGE
Stay there! Where you are!

But Peter dodges inside despite the fire. He crosses the foyer, climbs the stairs to help, takes George’s other arm.

A crash sounds at the back of the house as the fire runs riot, roaring up the back stairs from the kitchen.

George, Margaret, and Peter reach the ground floor together, but only George senses Blanche as she enters the hall behind them, George’s revolver raised and pointed in her hand.

George pushes Margaret from as him as he turns...

BANG!
The banister’s newel post splinters beside George.

**BANG!**

George lurches backwards, stumbling out of Peter’s grip, and falls to the ground.

**MARGARET**

George!

She drops to the floor beside him as Peter spins around to see Blanche, framed by the kitchen in flames behind her.

**MARGARET (CONT’D)**

George... George.

His eyes won’t focus as fresh blood soaks his shirt.

**MARGARET (CONT’D)**

George. Look at me. Please...

He gropes for his wife’s hand as a widening pool of blood spreads from beneath him. She grasps his hand in hers.

**MARGARET (CONT’D)**

I’m here. I’m right here.

George places Margaret’s hand on the shotgun on the floor beside them.

**BANG!**

Peter ducks when Blanche fires again, advancing on them through the smoke, eyes dancing furious and bright.

**BLANCHE**

Why?! WHYYYYYYYY?!

Margaret lets go of George’s hand to take up the shotgun. She lifts it from the floor, fits its stock to her shoulder.

Blanche stops in place when she sees Margaret turn, sighting down the long length of the shotgun’s double barrels at her.

Blanche laughs, aims George’s revolver squarely at Margaret.

**BLANCHE (CONT’D)**

You. You go to hell.

**BOOM!**

Margaret fires. The shotgun flashes. And Blanche falls backwards into a wall of flame. Dead.
Margaret drops the shotgun and comes back to George; his face smooth now in complete stillness, eyes closed.

MARGARET
George? George?

Peter tugs at Margaret’s arm and she looks up at him.

Peter shakes his head softly, grimly.

Margaret looks back to George. Her husband. No longer.

DONNIE (O.S.)
Help me!

Peter glances to the top of the burning stairs where Donnie’s managed to drag himself among the flames.

Margaret traces George’s features with shaking fingers.

Peter pulls urgently at Margaret again. She tries to shake him off, jerk her arm free. But, he keeps his grip.

Margaret blinks at Peter in torn anguish.

She turns to George, searches his familiar face, now empty.

She lowers her lips to his and kisses him a last time... Then Margaret puts her mouth to George’s ear.

She whispers; words meant only for him.

Peter seizes Margaret forcefully and hauls her to her feet, and leads her away, through the smoke and blistering heat.

DONNIE (O.S.) (CONT’D)
Momma!

EXT. WEBBOY HOMESTEAD – NIGHT

The blazing structure reflects in the dark, gleaming eyes of the horse, standing with Margaret, Lorna, Jimmy, and Peter.

Margaret stares into the pyre; shattered, confounded by shock and fathomless loss. Lorna rocks Jimmy, shielding his view.

The house collapses into itself, the second floor caving under the burning roof. Swirling sparks and embers swarm the sky as the flames climb high to light the night.

PETER
People will come. We can’t be here.
EXT. WEBOY HOMESTEAD - FRONT DRIVE - NIGHT

The group hikes from the burning house towards George and Margaret’s parked car, highlighted by the setting moon.

EXT. BADLANDS - NIGHT

Peter settles Jimmy on Lorna’s lap in the car’s passenger seat and turns to Margaret, who holds the horse’s reins.

Margaret regards Peter in the near dark, then steps forward and embraces the young man, her voice faint and choked.

MARGARET
Thank you.

She hands him the reins then goes around the car, climbs into the driver’s seat, and reaches for the keys in the ignition.

She falters a moment when she takes the keys in her hand, but she sets her mouth decisively, starts the engine.

INT. BLACKLEDGE’S CAR - PRE-DAWN - (MOVING)

Margaret tracks Peter waving them goodbye from his mount; man and horse silhouetted against the night’s lightening sky, receding in her side view mirror, then swallowed by distance.

Margaret turns her eyes forward, navigating the way along the dirt road through the semi-dark, keeping her headlights off.

Jimmy sits beside Margaret, wide-eyed, encircled by his mother’s arms, Lorna scanning the gloom as tense as a doe.

The pop and crunch of rocks hitting the car’s underside and the running engine are the only sounds as they drive.

Jimmy spies the old stuffed horse laying on the floor of the car and reaches to pick it up, hugs it to him.

They come to the intersection of the main road with the end of the Weboy’s track and Margaret pauses, peering along the ribbon of black leading to Gladstone. No lights. No sirens.

LORNA
Go.

Margaret glances at Lorna, who indicates only forward. Go.

Margaret rolls them out onto the pavement and points the car in the opposite direction of town, switching on the headlights as they steal into the still-dim landscape.
The thrum of paved road beneath the tires creates a faint rhythm, a phantom heartbeat that invades the car.

Margaret searches the dark road ahead, her forehead knotting over with the twist and pull of thoughts.

Lorna lays a hand on Margaret’s arm and Margaret turns to meet her eyes shining at Margaret in the gray light before day; a steady gaze of witness, understanding, connection.

Lorna lowers her eyes to Jimmy, now asleep, his head in her lap, and takes her hand from Margaret’s arm to smooth the boy’s hair, raked by the breeze from her open window.

Margaret scrolls her own window down, letting fresh air in.

A flare of light sparks her eye in the rearview mirror.

She squints into the sheering ray of reflected light.

It takes her a moment to recognize the light for what it is; the sun breaking the distant horizon behind them in the east.

The strong light grows, illuminating Margaret’s face by the mirror, and floods the car with its warmth as she drives.

EXT. ROAD - DAWN

The car follows the road flowing west, chasing the endless string of pavement across the valley floor, and out of sight.

Gone.

The sun keeps coming, long fingers of light scrabbling for purchase on the land.