DELIVERANCE CREEK

PILOT

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FADE IN:

SUPER: KANSAS, OCTOBER 1864, 7 MONTHS BEFORE THE END OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. KANSAS PRAIRIE - DAY

Wind waves blow over the Kansas prairie, an endless ocean of golden wheat beneath a brilliant blue sky. We sink below the horizon to find...

DOZENS OF UNION SOLDIERS' CORPSES lie "hidden" in the grassy plains, the beauty of the pastoral landscape marred by decay. A GANG of bedraggled BUSHWHACKERS pick over what's worth taking.

TOBY HARPER, reddish-blonde hair, filthy, but despite that, handsome. He wearily watches BUZZARDS circle overhead as he TUGS at something...

He re-focuses on the task at hand, pulling the jacket off a dead Union soldier. He finally succeeds and slips it ON, the sleeves inches above his wrist bone.

TOBY
Goddamnit if this wasn't a platoon of Union dwarves --

He KICKS the dead body out of frustration --

We PULL BACK TO REVEAL fifteen YOUNG MEN all doing the same -- trying on boots, snapping off gold chains from broken necks, stealing mementos. Stealing memories. Nothing sacred. Nothing of value left behind.

CYRIL BALFOUR, ragged scar across his face, soulless black eyes, watches something with just a flicker of amusement...

CYRIL
Lookie here, one's still alive...

A UNION SOLDIER attempts to crawl away, pulling his limp and bloodied body across the dusty earth...

A few of the gang look up to watch Cyril as he inches along behind him, like a cat who's grown interested once again with his half-dead thing.

CYRIL (CONT'D)
Runt -- c'mere and get your pecker out.

RUNT, clearly too young to serve, looks up at Cyril fearfully.

Cyril lets the soldier continue on his pointless path, turning on Runt instead...

CYRIL (CONT'D)
Come *here*.

Runt shoots a pleading glance over to the leader of their group, JASPER GATLIN. Jasper wears his stolen Union blues like they were tailor-made for him. His war-weary blue eyes meet Runt's, but he remains silent.

CYRIL (CONT'D)
Do it.

Runt's hands shake as he takes a step forward and undoes his trousers. A few of the gang whistle and clap.

CYRIL (CONT'D)
(re: soldier)
He looks thirsty, don't he?

Runt looks down at the soldier, his mouth open... it dawns on him what he's meant to do.

RUNT
I, I -- I can't -- I just went.

Cyril whips out his pearl-handled BOWIE KNIFE while looking down at Runt's exposed genitals.

CYRIL
Wouldn't take much to remove that lil' peckerwood, now would it?

JASPER
Cyril -- leave 'im be.

Cyril slowly retreats from Runt, then with one long stride, places his boot in the middle of the Union soldier's back, pinning him. He grabs a handful of the soldier's hair and then presses the blade into the soldier's forehead -- beginning to SCALP him alive when --

BAM -- a single bullet KILLS the soldier instead. Cyril recoils from the shot -- angrily turns on Jasper who evenly looks back at him before he holsters his gun.

JASPER (CONT'D)
(to MEN)
LET'S PULL OUT, I WANNA HIT KANSAS CITY BEFORE NIGHTFALL.

CUT TO:

SUPER: DELIVERANCE CREEK, MISSOURI

EXT. FIELDS - DAY

BELLE GATLIN BARLOWE, 28, steers a horse-drawn plow through the clumpy, dry earth. She wipes her brow, leaving a dirt streak across her pretty face. Belle is thinner than she needs to be, but her steely blue-gray eyes reflect a strength that's gotten her through this war...

Belle stumbles, quickly righting herself. This is hard work. This is man's work. But the men are off to war... well, most of them...

BELLE
(pulling back on reigns)
Whoa, whoa, whoa...

Sensing something, Belle peers across the endless Prairie. Not a soul. But after a moment, a LONE RIDER appears over the horizon. Too far to know for certain... but whoever Belle *thinks* it is, fills her with dread...

But then she sees the GLINT of METAL wink in the noonday sun and relief floods her face. She smiles, and it's RADIANT.

CLOSE ON THE LONE RIDER

NATE COOPER, 30, handsome. His deputy's BADGE reflects the sun. Nate gallops up, just a few yards from Belle, who pretends she hasn't seen him and continues to plow...

Nate slips off his horse and takes her in for a moment before moving towards her... he follows along behind until he reaches her, then slips his arms through hers, brushing past her waist, he takes the reins in his hands, stopping her mare.

They stand like that, still, the breeze blowing against them. Belle closes her eyes as he kisses the back of her neck. She slowly turns into him, kissing him back as they stumble into the tall grass and disappear...

Hungrily they start unbuttoning buttons, pulling off clothes, passionately devouring one another...

...From far away, children's voices ring out, their joyful shouts and laughter coming closer and closer...

Finally unable to ignore it, they pull away, lying flat on their backs, looking up at the clouds together.

Nate laughs. Belle shoves him.

BELLE
You have the *worst* timing...

NATE
C'mon now... I'm one of only *two* deputies left, I've been busy...

Belle turns away from him so he can button her back up.

BELLE
Let me guess, Roy got drunk *again* and exposed his willy *again* to Sally Kirkland?

Nate just laughs as he fastens her buttons.

BELLE (CONT'D)
That's what I thought.

Belle watches her children, FRANNY (5) ABNER (9) and CALEB (12) chase each other through the tall grass. She looks past them up to the ridge line where Nate just came from...

BELLE (CONT'D)
(quiet)
At first when I saw you ridin' up... I thought you were Harlan coming home. People are sayin' the war's gonna be over soon...

Nate buttons her last button, then picks a stalk of prairie grass, working it over in his hands.

NATE
You want me to stop comin' round, just say so.

Belle turns around to face Nate, she touches his cheek.

BELLE
No, I want to see *more* of you, Nate. I don't know why we're waiting anymore. Not even a letter in over two years, if that don't make me a widow...
(looks to children)
It'll be hard to tell them when the time comes, but *me*...

Belle shakes her head...

BELLE (CONT'D)
I just want to be with you.

Nate takes her hand and kisses her palm, then delicately moves the "ring" he fashioned out of prairie grass up her slender finger and positions it on top of her wedding band. The symbol and his intent clear.

She trails her hand down his chest to his belt buckle, then gives it a good tug.

BELLE (CONT'D)
But you're not saying we have to *wait* 'till then...?

NATE
No, ma'am.
(smiles)
I'm off duty Sunday. Come to my house after dark. You can be back before sunup.

SUPER: KANSAS CITY, KANSAS

EXT. KANSAS CITY - SALOON - NIGHT

Jasper and his gang, now all wearing their stolen union blue uniforms, walk steadily towards a saloon where DOZENS of horses are tied up outside.

JASPER
Remember boys, we're from the Illinois 7th.

INT. KANSAS CITY - SALOON - DUSK

Jasper and his men ENTER the saloon. Jasper scans the smoky bar filled with UNION SOLDIERS. Soldiers drunkenly sing, play poker and chase WHORES upstairs. Jasper and Toby step up to the bar.

JASPER
(to Bartender)
Two whiskeys.

Jasper rests his hand on his revolver. Out of the corner of his eye, Jasper sees a YOUNG SOLDIER eyeing them. Feeling his gaze, Jasper follows it to where it lands -- on the emblem on the side of Toby's Union jacket -- the same as what's on the soldier. This is the rest of the regiment, here, at the bar... the SOLDIER sees Jasper's caught him.

YOUNG SOLDIER
So... you just got here?

JASPER
That's right.
(then)
See Toby, here's the rest of our regiment...

Jasper nods to Toby who PULLS HIS GUN on the SOLDIER. Jasper trains his on the Bartender.

JASPER (CONT'D)
(to Bartender)
Empty your cash register, NOW --

The Bartender doesn't move. Jasper LEAPS over the bar -- presses his gun into the soft of the Bartender's cheek --

JASPER (CONT'D)
You open that register or prepare to meet your maker --

Jasper DRAGS the Bartender by his collar over to the register and SCANS the room as he OPENS it -- Jasper sees a SOLDIER reach for his gun and SHOOTS HIM FIRST without letting go of the Bartender --

Jasper's SHOT releases an EXPLOSION OF VIOLENCE as his GANG SHOOTS and ROBS their way through the saloon --

UPSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Toby shoots his way through the brothel -- he CLEARS anything of value off night stands -- CASH, POCKET WATCHES, etc., -- a WHORE crouched down in the corner shouts over to Toby --

WHORE
I WORKED MY ASS OFF FOR THAT --

TOBY
I'm sure you did, darlin'. My apologies --

Toby PEELS a few BILLS from his wad of CASH and drops it back onto the night stand as he tips his hat and moves on --

BACK DOWNSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Cyril's bowie knife digs into the neck of a YOUNG SOLDIER --

YOUNG SOLDIER
DON'T -- DON'T -- I KNOW SOMETHIN' --

Toby rejoins them, he sees Cyril cowering over the soldier.

YOUNG SOLDIER (CONT'D)
Please, don't kill me, I... I've got somethin' I think you'd be mighty interested in -- I heard where our next payroll is going --

TOBY
JASPER, C'MERE --

Jasper joins them, looking down at the crouched soldier.

YOUNG SOLDIER
And Union payroll comes all in gold...

JASPER
Where?

YOUNG SOLDIER
Into Deliverance... Deliverance Creek --

Jasper and Toby look at one another.

TOBY
WHEN?

YOUNG SOLDIER
I don't know --

Cyril SLICES THE SOLDIER'S NECK wide open -- They hear a ROAR and look up to see the CURTAINS ON FIRE --

EXT. KANSAS CITY - MIDDLE OF TOWN - NIGHT

THE GANG BUSTS OUT OF THE SALOON SHOOTING --

TOWNSPEOPLE fire back as they ride out of town --

BULLETS RIP through Toby who's SHOT off his horse.

Jasper STOPS AND LOOKS BACK -- Cyril does the same --

CYRIL
LEAVE 'IM --

Jasper pulls his gun on Cyril --

JASPER
COVER ME --

Jasper dismounts, reaching Toby who clutches his shoulder. Blood spurts out between his clenched fist. Jasper sees the other bullet hole at his backside before swiftly gathering him up and throwing him onto the back of his horse.

EXT. BELLE'S RANCH - NIGHT

Smoke rises from the chimney, a few lanterns illuminate the inside of the house.

INT. BELLE'S BARN - CONTINUOUS

Belle dumps FEED into the draft horses's feedbag. She strokes the large animal's chest and down its front foreleg, checking the hooves...

IN THE BARN DOORWAY

JEB CAULFIELD (early 50s) watches Belle's every move. His predatory gaze lingers over her backside, her breasts as she tends to the horse... he stealthily moves towards her...

Belle hears his footsteps and turns -- He's just a few feet away. She's instantly wary...

BELLE
Jeb -- what do you want?

JEB
(tips his hat)
Just making sure everything's alright over here, neighbor...

Belle, still on her guard, peers at him in the darkness...

BELLE
I thank you for checking in on us, but we're making do. Now, if you'll excuse me, I've got supper to fix.

Belle attempts to walk past, he side-steps to prevent her --

JEB
I see Deputy Cooper ridin' out here all the time...

Belle smells the whiskey on his breath...

JEB (CONT'D)
Now why let him help, when I'm right next door?

Jeb tries to take her arm and pull her close, Belle yanks it away, stepping back into the stall door. Cornered.

BELLE
You're drunk. Go back home and sleep it off --

Belle scans the barn wall for her rifle -- too far away to reach. Jeb leans his body into hers, pinning her against the door while running his hands slowly down her sides -- he leans forward to kiss her and Belle spits in his face --

JEB
(flinches)
You are a feisty one --

Belle KICKS his shin -- he releases her arm just long enough for her to SLAP him across the face -- HARD -- knocking OFF his hat --

JEB (CONT'D)
(stumbling back)
You goddamn *bitch* --

Belle GRABS the pitchfork behind her -- then holds it out in front of her as he slowly stands.

BELLE
I'll take that as a compliment comin' from a coward.

Belle PRESSES the tines of the pitchfork into his chest.

BELLE (CONT'D)
Now get off my ranch.

Belle SPEARS Jeb's hat off the floor, holding it out for him.

JEB
(taking his hat)
You're gonna regret this...

BELLE
Give my regards to your wife.

EXT. CAULFIELD RANCH HOME - LATER

Jeb quietly lets himself in. His wife, CORDELIA CAULFIELD, looks up from setting the table for two. Even in the dim light, she can see the RED HAND MARK on his cheek. She peers at it, taking a few steps forward...

CORDELIA
Where've you been?

JEB
Always with the goddamn questions.

Jeb ducks out of the room, Cordelia turns and stares out at Belle's ranch, visible through their dining room window.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - MORNING

Belle drives her wagon towards a little red schoolhouse that sits atop a hill, her children in the back.

INT. SCHOOL HOUSE - MORNING

HATTIE GATLIN, 22, Belle's younger sister, straightens the school desks. She's pretty, but in a different way than Belle, more delicate.

Franny and Abner run in, hugging their aunt.

HATTIE
Hey, you're here early!

FRANNY
Mama brought us.

HATTIE
Oh?

EXT. SCHOOL HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Hattie walks out to greet them, tussles Caleb's hair before he ENTERS the schoolhouse.

CALEB
Hi Aunt Hattie -- Bye, Ma.

Hattie waits for him to be out of earshot.

HATTIE
Everything alright?

BELLE
It is, I just... have a favor to ask.

Belle realizes this is harder to ask than she thought.

BELLE (CONT'D)
Can you come Sunday night?

More children arrive for school, Belle lowers her voice...

BELLE (CONT'D)
I won't leave 'til the kids have gone to bed. Be back before sunup.

HATTIE
Are you spending the night with...

Belle nods. More CHILDREN run past greeting Hattie...

HATTIE (CONT'D)
(carefully)
This war isn't going to last forever, Belle... What if Harlan finds out?

BELLE
He's dead. I know he's dead.

HATTIE
You *don't* know he's dead.

Belle is taken aback by her little sister's resistance.

HATTIE (CONT'D)
People 'round here are gonna figure it out, Belle.

BELLE
Tongues wag no matter what I do --

HATTIE
Not if you don't give them reason to!
(taking Belle's hand)
Wait 'til the war ends, then marry Nate, the whole town'll celebrate!

BELLE
We are -- but who knows how much longer this war is gonna drag on for.

HATTIE
You were love sick over Toby once --

BELLE
I'm not that sixteen year old anymore, Hattie. And now that Daddy's dead and gone, maybe this time I get to choose who I love.

Belle starts for her wagon. Hattie watches her for a moment.

HATTIE
Belle --

Belle stops and smiles to herself, then turns to face Hattie.

HATTIE (CONT'D)
Of course I'll watch the kids. I just hope all this turns out like you want it to.

EXT. CAULFIELD RANCH HOME

Jeb hooks the horses to the wagon, but all the time looks over to Belle's ranch. His eyes rove over her land... Cordelia comes out and gets into the wagon.

JEB
(still looking next door)
That should be ours... all that land.

CORDELIA
I'm going to be late.

JEB
That's how your Pa saw it. This parcel was for *you and me,* and that was your sister Florence's -- it was supposed to stay in the family.

They've been over this before.

CORDELIA
Harlan remarried after Florence passed, Jeb, he married into it.
(pointedly)
Just like you.

But Jeb seems oblivious to the jab.

JEB
And what if Harlan's dead? You gonna let her just keep your kin's land?

Off Cordelia thinking about that...

EXT. DELIVERANCE CREEK - DOWNTOWN

A small town on the banks of the Mississippi.

EXT./INT. THE SMITH & CAULFIELD COMPANY BANK - TOWN - DAY

Three TELLERS behind bars help CUSTOMERS. In a back office with the door open is Cordelia Caulfield poring over papers.

BEN CAULFIELD, Cordelia's nephew, missing half his leg from the war, hobbles back with the use of a cane.

CORDELIA
Why didn't you tell me Belle Barlowe is late on her payments?

Ben hesitates, leaning on his cane.

BEN
Everyone's late on their payments, Aunt Cordelia...
(off her glare)
She pays a little something each month. Same as most other widows in town.

CORDELIA
Last I heard, Belle Barlowe is not a widow.

BEN
How's she gonna round up her cattle alone? She's got lil' ones --

CORDELIA
Why do you defend her so...?
(then it occurs to her)
You're sweet on her little sister, Hattie, aren't you?

Ben looks away uncomfortably. Cordelia smiles, taking pride that she guessed right.

CORDELIA (CONT'D)
Draft up a lien and nail it to her front door.

EXT. BARLOWE RANCH - AFTERNOON

Belle drives her horses home, she squints, seeing something on her front door, FLUTTERING IN THE WIND --

BELLE
(to horses)
Whoa, whoa, whoa...

Climbing down she makes her way to the NOTICE stuck to her front door... snatching it down she reads:

CAULFIELD & CO. BANK - NOTICE OF DELINQUENT LOAN --

Belle SCANS through the legalese language when she hears her KIDS CALLING OUT TO HER as they run across the fields. She turns and watches them run towards her... CRUMPLES the notice, stuffs it in her pocket as she walks down to meet them. Caleb instantly reads Belle's expression.

CALEB
Ma, what is it?

BELLE
Let's go brand the calves.

EXT. BARLOWE RANCH - FIELD - AFTERNOON

Belle and Caleb work in unison. Four calves race back and forth as they take turns trying to lasso them -- Franny sits on top of the fence watching, Abner holds the poker in the coals, the brand reads "HB" for Harlan Barlowe.

Caleb herds a few in Belle's direction --

CALEB
YAH, YAH -- GIT -- YAH --

BELLE
CALEB -- IN THE CORNER --

Belle RELEASES the lasso -- it just misses the calf.

Then Caleb SWINGS his lasso as Belle herds one towards him -- ANOTHER MISS. Belle throws her lasso out -- HOOKS ONE --

CALEB
YEAH!!!

Belle LEAPS off her horse and WRESTLES the calf to the ground, kicking up a halo of dust. Caleb jumps off his horse and dives to his knees, tying the calves' front and back legs together -- Abner shakily holds the hot poker out in front of him as he approaches the calf. Belle realizes he can't do it...

BELLE
Caleb, mark him --

CALEB
It's already been branded --

Belle scrambles from beneath the animal, crawling in the dust to see for herself --

CALEB (CONT'D)
That's Jeb Caulfield's mark, ain't it?

Belle heads for the other calves huddled in the corner -- she pushes through the animals, holding one, she brushes back the fur of one -- then another --

BELLE
That thievin' son of a bitch branded *all* our calves --

EXT. OUT HOUSE - DAY

Jeb EXITS, his trousers still undone when he hears the distinct CLICK of a rifle hammer being pulled back.

He FREEZES. His back to us.

CLOSE ON BELLE HOLDING HER RIFLE

Jeb already in her sights. Caleb stands tall beside her.

BELLE
TURN AROUND --

Jeb slowly shuffles around...

JEB
You're not gonna shoot an unarmed man comin' out of his privy...?

BELLE
I'll do whatever I goddamn please.
(then)
Isn't that what you do, Jeb?

Belle fires into the ground BETWEEN HIS LEGS -- just inches from his boot, making him leap --

JEB
JESUS --

CALEB
(leaning in)
You miss your mark, or are you askin' him to dance?

BELLE
Haven't rightly warmed up yet.

Caleb nods. The SHOT brings Cordelia and WOMEN from her sewing circle OUT onto the front porch...

JEB
Get my gun, Cordelia --

BELLE
DON'T -- or the next bullet lands.

The women murmur --

CORDELIA
Any harm comes to my husband,
they'll put you in jail Belle.

Belle speaks loud enough for everyone to hear.

BELLE
Who'd fault a rancher who'd had
cattle *stolen* from them?

Cordelia OPENS the screen door and reaches for their gun, Belle SHOOTS again -- it GRAZES Jeb's leg -- he DROPS to his knees.

JEB
STAY PUT, WOMAN!

Cordelia lets the screen door go... the only sound is the door banging on its hinges and the wind... Caleb leans into Belle.

CALEB
I think he's listening now...

BELLE
(nods)
JEB -- YOU OWE ME FOUR CALVES, YOU
HEAR?

JEB
A trade? 'Cause there's nothin'
wrong with those --

Belle leans down to take aim again --

JEB (CONT'D)
Alright, alright --
(swears under breath)
Fine -- four.

Belle nods, then she and Caleb turn in unison and head back to their ranch. After a moment of silence:

CALEB
I'm quite certain if Jeb hadn't
just visited the privy, he'd a wet
his pants for sure!

Belle laughs, the tension finally broken. She takes a few deep breaths, calming herself as she pulls her son closer.

CALEB (CONT'D)
You know what we *should* do...

BELLE
What's that?

CALEB
Set out tomorrow and look for the rest of our herd. I see no reason we couldn't skip out on church.

BELLE
Skip out on church, huh?

Caleb nods. Belle remembers her plans with Nate, smiles...

BELLE (CONT'D)
No, Sunday's our day of rest. The day we put our work aside and thank the good Lord for all that we have.

CALEB
Amen!

EXT. DELIVERANCE CREEK - TOWN CENTER - SUNDAY MORNING

Belle, Hattie and the children in their sunday best. Belle drives her wagon, passing DUKE'S SALOON. A few WHORES sit up in the windows watching the town go by. It's their day of rest, too, at least until church lets out.

DUKE LAUGHLIN sits on the front porch, feet up on the railing, smoking a cigar. Matinee idol good looks, sharp wit. When he sees Belle and Hattie, he grins his Cheshire grin...

DUKE
(calling out)
Mornin' Miss Gatlin... Hattie.

BELLE
I've been a Barlowe for some time now, Duke.

DUKE
You'll always be the Gatlin sisters to me.
(tips his hat)
Pray for me, Hattie, won't you?

HATTIE
If you think it'll help.

He winks and raises his glass of whiskey as a 'thank you.' Abner looks back as a pretty prostitute who waves 'goodbye'...

ABNER
Why don't Duke and those ladies ever turn out for church?

Belle and Hattie look at one another, suppressing a smile.

BELLE
Everyone worships in their own way.

INT. CHURCH - SUNDAY SERVICE - MORNING

The whole town shows up for Sunday service. Belle and her children sit with Hattie and their mother PEARL GATLIN and her sister-in-law MARGARET GATLIN. Belle and Hattie share a prayer book, singing.

INT./EXT. CHURCH - AFTER SERVICE - DAY

Nate times his EXIT perfectly to match Belle's as the crowd carries them out of church. He leans forward, whispers into the back of her neck...

NATE
Tonight?

She merely nods, never looking back at him. He squeezes her hand -- unseen in the crowd -- before they EXIT the church.

EXT. BELLE'S RANCH - DAY

The distant church bells are drowned out by the sound of thundering hooves as JASPER'S POSSE gallops across the open prairie, heading straight for Belle's ranch. Toby's bleeding and half-dead body slumped against Jasper...

EXT. COUNTRY LANE - AFTERNOON

Belle drives her wagon home, the children sing, all's right with the world.

INT. BELLE'S HOUSE - LATER

Belle and the children ENTER the house and Belle instantly sees a TRAIL OF BLOOD -- she looks up to find a grizzled MAN (CYRIL BALFOUR) STEP OUT FROM THE SHADOWS. Belle pulls her children behind her -- looks around to see the room full of Union Soldiers...

Cyril smiles slowly, menacingly, doing nothing to quell her fear as he walks slowly towards her...

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. BELLE'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Belle's eyes dart from Cyril to the other MEN who look at her leeringly... her children cling to her skirts...

BELLE
If it's food you want, I'll fix it.

MAN'S VOICE
(from the next room)
Alright then, I'll have steak and kidney pie with the crust *almost* burnt, and an extra helping of bread pudding. If'n you could manage apple crumble I might even forget this war ever happened...

BELLE
(catching in her throat)
Jasper!

CALEB
(face lights up)
Uncle Jasper!

Jasper steps out of the shadows. Belle runs to him, hugging him... Caleb just steps behind her. But as soon as Belle pulls back she punches his shoulder. Hard.

JASPER
What the hell's that for?

BELLE
For scaring me and the children half to death -- what're you doing in those uniforms?

But Jasper purposely turns his attention to the children.

JASPER
Caleb, last time I saw you, you were between grass and hay!
(looking over)
Is that baby Franny and Abner I see?

Belle's trying to put this all together, a sense of dread spreading through her...

BELLE
So is the war over?

JASPER
No... We just... cut out a little early is all.

Belle looks down at the blood trail across the floor...

BELLE
You look in one piece, so whose blood is all over my parlour floor?

JASPER
It's Toby...

Belle's face instantly drops --

JASPER (CONT'D)
He could use a little help.

BELLE
Caleb, you take the kids on up now.

CALEB
But, Ma --

Belle looks carefully at Caleb. He nods, taking each of their hands he leads them upstairs.

BELLE
Where is he?

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

A mix of emotions cross Belle's face upon seeing Toby lying in her bed, looking pale, breathing labored. Just from the sight of him, Belle can see how serious it is.

BELLE
I'll have Caleb go fetch Doc Burton --

JASPER
No, Belle -- You've got to help him. No one can know we're here.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BELLE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Several kerosene lamps burn in a circle around Toby's bed. Belle holds a whiskey bottle up to his lips, Toby blearily looks up at her, muttering incoherently... Jasper looks on.

TOBY
Belle... why's your Pa hate me so much? He wants to kill me...

BELLE
Shhhhhh. He's long dead now, Toby, so don't you worry about it.

Toby blearily looks up at Belle.

TOBY
You sure are pretty...

Belle holds the whiskey bottle up to Toby's lips again.

JASPER
You better stop stalling, Belle. If you're not careful, the liquor's going to kill him, not the bullets.

BELLE
Alright, alright... give me the knife.

Jasper takes the knife and holds it in the flame, then hands it over. She stares at it, then at Toby's bare, inflamed flesh. Belle slowly leans in... Jasper leans in, too.

JASPER
You might want to open your eyes when you do that!

BELLE
(snaps)
Why are you making me do this?!!

JASPER
You've got a steady hand, you're good at stitchin' and such --

BELLE
No. That was Hattie, not me!

Jasper pats his sister's back, reassuring her.

JASPER
Come on... you can do it.

TOBY
Don't tell me you never wanted to stick a knife in me. Now's your chance!

BELLE
(suppressing a smile)
Bring that lamp closer...

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

Hattie drives her wagon in the inky darkness. She approaches a lone farm house. No lights.

Suddenly, she sees one appear. Then go OUT. Then APPEAR. A SIGNAL. Hattie shakes the reins and heads for it.

BEHIND THE FARMER'S BARN - CONTINUOUS

Hattie pulls the wagon up to a barn. The barn doors slide open and we see Ben Caulfield (from the bank) waiting for her inside. Is this a lover's tryst? No. Out of the shadows emerges another MAN. Without a word, Hattie drives the wagon into the barn, Ben closes the doors.

They work by the light of a single lantern. The farmer OPENS a trap door in the floor to reveal four escaped SLAVES. All men, the youngest barely a teenager. Hattie jumps down from the wagon.

HATTIE
I can't take four... my sister's grain cellar will barely hold three what with the grain she's already got in there.

Ben and the FARMER look at one another.

BEN
There's bounty hunters all over lookin' for escaped slaves --

FARMER
I got an uneasy feelin'...

HATTIE
I'll see what I can work out tomorrow, but I can't take more than three now.

OLDER SLAVE
I'll stay. Take my boy, please...

He gently pushes forward the teenage boy. Hattie nods, then peels back the tarp revealing a wagon half-filled with GRAIN. Without another word, the slaves climb into the back of the wagon. And with Ben and the farmer's help, Hattie covers them with grain...

INT. BELLE'S HOUSE - BACK BEDROOM - NIGHT

Toby's eyes are closed. His breathing regular. Jasper drinks from the half-empty whiskey bottle while Belle finishes sewing Toby up.

JASPER
You did good, little sis...

Belle takes the whiskey bottle from Jasper, takes a swig.

BELLE
You see Harlan... heard anything?

JASPER
He's dead, Belle... crossed paths with Rennie right after we left Bloody Bill. He fought with Harlan at Palmito Hill, no one from the Creek survived 'cept Ren.

BELLE
Where?

JASPER
Texas.

BELLE
I didn't even know he was in Texas...

JASPER
You don't have to play the grieving widow with me, Belle.

BELLE
I'll grieve for my children, for Caleb especially, he's at that age where he needs his Pa.

Jasper heads for the door.

BELLE (CONT'D)
Why are y'all wearing those Union jackets?

JASPER
(without turning around)
We were wearing rags before.

Belle doesn't believe that for a second...

BELLE
You burn them, you hear?

Jasper nods then leaves. Belle turns around to sterilize the needle in the open flame when Toby opens his eyes, watching her... As she turns back, he CLOSES his eyes again.

Belle looks down at Toby, studying his face. She leans across him to pull the last stitch through his skin at his shoulder, bending down to tear the string with her teeth. Hovering over him close enough to kiss...

With his eyes still closed, Toby reaches his good arm around and runs his hand up the back of her bare leg, beneath her dress, all the way up to her ass. When he gets there, he OPENS his eyes, staring straight into hers. They stay that way for a moment, the sexual tension palpable. Belle stands up without a word and walks out of the room.

EXT. BARLOWE RANCH - NIGHT

Out in the field, Jasper and his gang strip off their Union uniforms, throwing them in the growing bonfire...

EXT. BACK OF THE BARLOWE RANCH - NIGHT

Hattie drives her wagon along the cover of the ravine, approaching her sister's ranch from the field and not the road. She gets out of the wagon, then quietly opens the barn door...

INT. BELLE'S BARN - CONTINUOUS

Hattie opens the clay grain pit door and the three escaped slaves help her shovel the grain in -- all in darkness -- all in silence. Hattie signals for them to get in. She continues shoveling in the last of the grain around them as they cover themselves up to their shoulders. She drops to her knees, keeping her voice low as she speaks to them.

HATTIE
I'll bring you food later tonight.

Hattie lowers the trap door...

EXT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

Hattie walks quietly between the barn and the house, but before she reaches it -- Cyril GRABS HER FROM BEHIND -- a pistol at her head.

CYRIL
You alone?

She nods, his hands still clamped over her mouth, the other cinched around her waist.

CYRIL (CONT'D)
You better hope somebody knows you.

INT. BELLE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Belle walks out of the bedroom to observe a MAN stationed at each window, hands on rifles. The DOOR is kicked OPEN to reveal Cyril dragging Hattie inside.

BELLE
Let her go. That's my sister!

Hattie wrestles out of his grasp, wildly looking around at all the MEN in Belle's house --

HATTIE
Belle -- what's going on?!

BELLE
It's alright, Hattie.

Jasper walks in from outside --

JASPER
Hattie? C'mere --

But Hattie stays put, glaring at Jasper.

HATTIE
This some kind of joke to you? Why would you bring these men here to terrify us?

JASPER
(points at Cyril)
You heard her, git! Stop scarin' all my kin. If my Ma stops by, try not to lay your damn hands all over her.

A few of the MEN sitting around grin.

JASPER (CONT'D)
(to rest of the men)
THAT GOES FOR THE REST OF YA, GIT --

Hattie watches the men clear out.

HATTIE
What's this? You desert?

JASPER
(shakes his head)
You're looking at my own personal regiment. We started off with Quantrill, Bloody Bill Anderson, then... just us.

HATTIE
You with Quantrill when he raided Lawrence? You murder all those innocent women and children?

Belle puts a hand on Hattie to quiet her. Jasper slowly smiles.

JASPER
So, you a Yankee now, Hattie?

Belle takes Hattie's hand, squeezing it as a warning.

BELLE
She's no such thing.

JASPER
How could you forget Daddy being hog tied and hung by those very same Yankees you seem to love so much? Hell, just the thought of it makes me want to ride across the river and kill some more --

HATTIE
Those were innocent women and children --

JASPER
Whose fathers and husbands and sons murdered our daddy --

BELLE
That's enough, Jasper. Come on, Hattie, we're gonna fix supper.

KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

BELLE
You best watch yourself, Hattie --

HATTIE
Your *grain's* in the barn --

Belle's face drops -- she looks past Hattie to the barn...

BELLE
We gotta get them out of there --

EXT./INT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

Belle stands "guard" holding her shotgun while Hattie gets the slaves back into the wagon.

HATTIE
You can't let Jasper and his gang stay, Belle --

BELLE
Toby's too shot up to ride on.

Hattie stops shoveling grain back in the wagon.

HATTIE
Wait -- Toby's here?!!

Belle takes the shovel out of Hattie's hand.

BELLE
There's no time for that --

Belle quickly collects burlap sacks, about to toss them into the back of the wagon when she STOPS -- seeing the BOY.

BELLE (CONT'D)
How old is he?

HATTIE
He can understand you, Belle...

Belle's gaze shifts back to the boy.

BOY
Twelve, ma'am.

BELLE
This your Pa?

Belle looks at one of the men. The boy shakes his head.

HATTIE
We had to leave his Pa. No room.

Belle forces herself to look away from the boy's large fearful eyes as Hattie gestures for them to lie down. She and Belle throw the tarp back over them. They get to work tying down their respective sides.

BELLE
You're going to take them back, <u>now</u>.
At least he'll be back with his Pa.

HATTIE
Old man Spencer's worried about
bounty hunters --

BELLE
So should you be. They find you
with slaves, they'll hang you --

Hattie refuses to look up. Belle walks around and takes Hattie in her arms, making her sister look at her.

BELLE (CONT'D)
Hattie, you're making me sick with worry. This is too dangerous --

HATTIE
I don't have family like you --

BELLE
We are your family, Hattie... *I* am your family. And that boy should be with his. Take them back.

Belle takes Hattie's hand, helping her up onto the wagon.

BELLE (CONT'D)
You gotta go tell Nate I'm not coming. Just don't tell him why. If you think you've been followed, tell him. He'll help you.
(slides open doors)
Now you be careful --

EXT. BARLOWE RANCH - NIGHT

Smoke rises from the Barlowe ranch house chimney, but the small bonfire out in the field can also been seen from...

INT. CAULFIELD RANCH HOME - NIGHT

CORDELIA peers out her window, watching Belle's ranch... the bonfire visible. Jeb sleeps in bed behind her.

EXT. COUNTRY LANE - NIGHT

Hattie heads back to the farmer's house in the black of night. She drives her wagon over a rise in the road, seeing a GLOW UP AHEAD --

THE SPENCER'S BARN AND HOUSE ON FIRE

TWO BODIES HANG FROM THE TREE -- From the glow of the fire we just make out it's the bodies of the farmer and his wife. Over the crackling FIRE the sound of a bullwhip as the SLAVE she could not take gets whipped by BOUNTY HUNTERS -- Hattie -- panicked -- turns her horses around and flees --

FROM THE BACK OF THE WAGON

The teenage BOY peeks out from under the tarp to see his father getting whipped over and over again. WIDE EYES, a muffled cry. Horror. A hand gently pulls him back under.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. BARLOWE RANCH - BACK BEDROOM - NIGHT

Belle changes Toby's bloodied bandages. She mops down his brow. He shifts, then opens his eyes. They take each other in for a long moment...

BELLE
I hoped I'd never set eyes on you again.

TOBY
And I was hopin' you'd be fat and ugly by now. So I guess we're even.

Belle *almost* smiles, which is just enough of an opening...

TOBY (CONT'D)
I don't know why you're so dang mad at *me*. *You* were the one to run off and marry that old son of a bitch.

BELLE
And when the Preacher said 'does anyone here object to this union', you were nowhere to be found...

A flicker of pain lands, resting in his eyes. Still raw. Like it was days ago instead of years.

TOBY
Just like a woman to use that kind of logic.
(softly)
But we was only kids then...

Toby reaches for her hand, but Belle stands.

BELLE
And now that you're all grown up, Toby, you ever take the time to think back and figure maybe it wasn't *my* idea to become Mrs. Harlan Barlowe?
(heading out)
Rest up now.

DOORWAY

Belle quickly closes the door behind her, then leans against it, trying to breathe... Trying not to cry... The men's voices from the other room take her out of her own thoughts:

ANOTHER'S VOICE
Ambush them on the road --

JASPER'S VOICE
There'll be Union calvary escorting them to the bank.

The voices die down again, but she hears 'gold', 'bank robbery' and enough to figure out what they're talking about.

THE LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Belle ENTERS. All the MEN STOP talking. Belle looks over at her brother who holds a straight RAZOR.

JASPER
How's Toby?

BELLE
Fever's down.

JASPER
(nods)
I was gonna suggest you cheer us all by playing the piano, but uh...

Jasper taps his boot on the floor where the ghostly, faded shadow of where the piano used to be still remains...

JASPER (CONT'D)
Seems to be... missin'.

BELLE
Times are tough.

JASPER
Daddy gave you that piano, you loved playing...

BELLE
I love my children eating more.

JASPER
You still got a washing basin, or you sell that too?

UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Jasper lathers his face for a shave. Belle sits on the edge of her bed, watching him. Their eyes meet in the mirror, their likeness to one another undeniable.

JASPER
What?

BELLE
You were born with that beard, weren't you?
(off his laugh)
Why shave it off now?

JASPER
It's time for a change.

BELLE
Or...

Belle walks to the window and pulls back the curtain... she watches Jaspers men standing guard...

BELLE (CONT'D)
Maybe it'll be harder for witnesses to identify you. What'd you do?

JASPER
Robbed a saloon in Kansas.

Belle sits on the window sill...

BELLE
And that's how you help the Confederates win the war?

JASPER
They were Union soldiers, Belle. Instead of dying in a ditch, they died drunk and somewhere warm.

BELLE
So now you think you're ready to rob a bank?

JASPER
Didn't take you long to figure that out.

BELLE
Less time than it's taking you to figure out that robbing drunken soldiers is a far cry easier than robbing a bank...

JASPER
We didn't plan that. I'm *planning* this one.

BELLE
Why here? Why our home town?

JASPER
Because when opportunity knocks...

BELLE
What opportunity? As far as I can tell the bank is as empty as my pantry!

JASPER
Six Union regiments are getting their payday from Deliverance. Coming by stagecoach. Solid gold bars.

BELLE
When's it coming?

JASPER
Don't know.

BELLE
Hell, that's the most important part, Jasper!

JASPER
Well, it's comin' into Deliverance and when it does, we're robbin' it.

BELLE
Not while staying here you're not.

Belle heads for the door. Jasper grabs her arms and pulls her back...

JASPER
I appreciate your hospitality.

Jasper pulls out a wad of cash from his shirt pocket and holds it out for Belle.

JASPER (CONT'D)
Don't act proud, Belle. I can see you're struggling...

Jasper picks up the crumpled lien off her vanity.

JASPER (CONT'D)
Looks like you've been struggling for some time now.

BELLE
That's Caulfields thinking that with one little piece of paper they can take away what's rightfully mine.

JASPER
Then why not help us rob them blind?

BELLE
(bemused)
Can't you see my life has changed? *I've* changed... *look at me,* Jasper. I've got three younguns who depend on me. Those days of runnin' wild are done for me, and they should be for you, too.
(then)
You really want to help me? I've got cattle to roundup for auction and you've got men.

Off Jasper's silence.

BELLE (CONT'D)
That's what I thought.

JASPER
Alright, alright. We can do that.

BELLE
Tell your men we leave at dawn.

Belle goes to leave -- then turns around and TAKES the money from Jasper and EXITS without another word.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Men scattered asleep on the floor. Jasper sleeps in a chair in front of the window.

EXT. HOUSE - PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Cyril sleeps off his whiskey, propped up in a chair on the front porch, his shotgun cradled in his arms.

INT. BELLE'S HOUSE - BELLE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Belle's eyes snap OPEN as she hears her dog bark... She quickly disentangles herself from Franny; pulls the blankets up around her and Abner, then grabs her shotgun...

IN THE WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Nate slides off his horse, tying it up. He takes in the dying bonfire. Belle's dog bounds up to greet him -- he gets down, petting him, then stealthily moves towards the ranch, Belle's dog at his heels...

BELLE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Belle gingerly navigates between the sleeping bodies, heading to...

TOBY'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

She peers out the window, looking across her field, seeing shadows but nothing else, and then peers up at the FULL MOON. She steps away from the window...

And turns to check on Toby...

EXT. BELLE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Nate silently approaches the house. He sees CYRIL on guard. Nate draws his gun, Nate steps on a twig -- SNAP --

ON PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Cyril's head rotates to the sound -- his eyes scanning the shadows. He cocks his pistol, walking straight towards the copse of trees --

FROM THE DARKNESS

Belle's dog RUNS OUT --

Cyril slowly lowers his gun, turns and walks back...

BACK TO WOODS

Nate remains motionless, making sure Cyril returns to his post, then resumes moving towards the house...

EXT. SIDE OF HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Nate PEERS into the windows, SEES DOZENS OF MEN ASLEEP on Belle's floor...

OUTSIDE THE BEDROOM - SAME

Nate watches Belle tenderly check Toby's temperature with the back of her hand. As if *feeling* Nate watching her, Belle looks out again... This time, Nate steps out of the shadows.

EXT. RANCH - NIGHT

Belle joins Nate beneath a cluster of trees.

NATE
Are you and the kids alright?

BELLE
Hattie shouldn't have said anything --

NATE
She didn't. You tell her to lie to me?
(off her silence)
Who are those men?

BELLE
It's my brother, and some of the men he served with --

NATE
And he's been shot?
(gestures to window)
Your brother?

Belle finds herself staring at the window...

BELLE
No. He's... an old friend.

It feels strange coming out of her mouth and they both know it. Nate can see she's covering something...

NATE
Get the kids up, I'm taking you with me.

Nate takes her arm firmly, starts walking her to the house --

NATE (CONT'D)
Because I'm sure as hell not going to ride off and just leave you here --

Belle wrestles out of his grasp, incensed --

BELLE
Well that's not your say --

NATE
Belle... what's it look like for a woman to be out here alone with them? It's a small town. There's no secrets here.

And the way he says it means he's already heard a few things about Belle that she's not told him. Belle looks away...

NATE (CONT'D)
I know who you are, Belle... but others aren't going to be so understanding --

BELLE
I don't need you to protect me.

After these words, a jagged silence...

BELLE (CONT'D)
I can take care of myself.

NATE
If that's what you want, fine, you can have it.

And with that, Nate turns and leaves her, disappearing into the woods as Belle stands alone in the moonlight.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

EXT. DUKE'S SALOON - ESTABLISHING

Illuminating the darkness, smoke and tinny music drift through the night air. Hattie walks past, disappearing into the alley...

INT. DUKE'S SALOON - NIGHT

Hattie walks through the darkened hallway, clearly knowing her way. Straight, right, and towards a door with just a sliver of light coming beneath it... She reaches for the door knob, silently turns it...

INT. DUKE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Duke COUNTS his MONEY from the night at a large oak desk, his cigar resting in a crystal ashtray in front of him. He hears someone ENTER without knocking and quick as a flash PULLS his REVOLVER, training it at the "intruder" -- HATTIE.

DUKE
I wasn't expecting you...

His tone is calm, and judging by the fact that he's not surprised to see her, you can tell this isn't the first time they've met like this.

Duke holsters his revolver. He can see she's upset.

HATTIE
I need your help, Duke. I've got a shipment that needs to go out *tonight*.

DUKE
I wish I could help, really I do. But it's Jimmy's night off.

Hattie eyes his pile of cash...

HATTIE
Isn't there *something* you could do to persuade him...?

DUKE
You're very persuasive. Ask him yourself. He's in the bar -- But then again, you might not want a drunken ferryman in charge of your precious cargo.

Hattie glances out the window, checks her wagon...

HATTIE
Can you let them stay the night?
(tentatively)
Here, in your office, maybe?

DUKE
I thought the *last* time was a one time favor? Which I granted because I think you may be the only truly good person I know...
(resumes counting his money)
Myself, well, I'm bound to burn in Hades, but I like to play the odds. Way I see it, sometimes you *can* beat the house.

Hattie finds it difficult to breathe, she begins to cry, she wanted to keep it together, but here... she can't.

DUKE (CONT'D)
(looks up)
Hey, hey now... what is it?

Duke rises and comes around his desk, gathering her in his arms.

HATTIE
They hung old man Spencer and his wife... slave bounty hunters, I couldn't take all four... said I'd come back for him...

DUKE
(holding her up)
Shhhhhh, shhhhhhh...

Duke looks into her eyes and then kisses her. It's clear from the intensity of the kiss that they are lovers.

DUKE (CONT'D)
You've got to stop this... it's not a game, Hattie.

But Hattie can't stop crying.

DUKE (CONT'D)
They can stay until we figure something out. Then no more. You hear?

INT. BARLOWE RANCH - BARN - SUNRISE - NEXT MORNING

Jasper and his gang saddle up to go out with Belle. Caleb appears, dressed and ready to go.

CALEB
Why didn't you get me up?

BELLE
I need you here --

CALEB
(angry)
But Ma, you promised -- *we* was planning this!

Belle walks over to him, lowers her voice so only he can hear.

BELLE
I need you *here*. Toby's gonna need lookin' after. You and the kids stay home, you keep them here, you understand?

Caleb still mad, finally nods.

BELLE (CONT'D)
You're the man of the house now, Caleb. So act like it.

CALEB
(stands straighter)
Yes ma'am.

Belle climbs up on her horse, nods to Jasper. Caleb follows them out, watching them ride off...

INT. CAULFIELD RANCH HOME - MORNING

Jeb grabs his hat off the rack, about to put it on when he holds it up to the light. He sees the half dozen HOLES left from Belle's pitchfork. He throws the hat down on the ground, grabs another...

EXT. BARLOWE RANCH - FIELD - MORNING

Jeb tentatively makes his way across the field, his hunting rifle slung across his chest, but his hand resting lightly upon it. He furtively eyes Belle's ranch and the approaching cinder pile from the bonfire...

Bits of singed paper get caught up in swirls of dust devils, spinning past him. He takes his rifle and pins one of the papers to the ground.

Bending down, he picks up the half-burned document. Sealed with a wax stamp it reads: ILLINOIS 7TH REGIMENT. He creeps towards the bonfire, seeing a shiny object through the blackened pile of ash he pokes around with his rifle, unearthing a BRASS NAMEPLATE of a Union soldier...

He looks over to Belle's lifeless ranch, but sees nothing.

INT. TOBY'S ROOM - LATER

Caleb stands in the doorway, holding a plate of food, afraid to disturb the bloody, dirty strange man who sleeps here...

TOBY
(eyes still closed)
I don't bite...

Toby OPENS his eyes, taking in Caleb.

TOBY (CONT'D)
Unless it's breakfast...

After a moment's hesitation, Caleb walks the rest of the way in and hands Toby the plate. As soon as it's in Toby's possession, he shovels the food in. Caleb can't help but STARE...

TOBY (CONT'D)
(mouth full)
Could ya fetch me a water, boy?

Caleb proceeds to pour Toby a glass. He hands it to him.

Caleb drops his gaze to the floor. Toby's fancy SILVER SPURS on the back of Toby's boots catches his eye -- Toby leans over to see what Caleb is so taken with...

TOBY (CONT'D)
Those were given to me by my Pa.

Caleb picks a boot up, spins the spur, admiring it.

TOBY (CONT'D)
Go on, try 'em on.

Toby sees Caleb is struggling to get the spurs off.

TOBY (CONT'D)
C'mere, give 'em here...

Caleb sits on the edge of the bed as Caleb shows him...

TOBY (CONT'D)
You got sausage fingers like
me...there.

Caleb nods a 'thanks', pulls his boots on...

CALEB
So what was my Ma like as a kid?

TOBY
Hot headed. *Brave.* This here's at least the third time she's saved my life.

CALEB
Really?

TOBY
Time before this, we was oh, probably 'bout your age. Before Duke cleaned up the whorehouse I lived there with my Ma --

CALEB
What was it then?

TOBY
A dirty, rundown whorehouse.

Caleb laughs. Toby is oblivious that this is *not* a conversation to have with a boy his age...

TOBY (CONT'D)
A cowboy came in after roundup all liquored up and flush with cash. He liked this whore named Sadie who had a reputation for a famously powerful cooch...

Toby trails off, *now* realizing this story might be too much.

TOBY (CONT'D)
Hold on. I gotta better story --

CALEB
Wait, what happened with the other?

TOBY
I'll skip to the good part. The cowhand brought his bullwhip and started using it on Sadie. Well, I tried and stopped him, so he turned that whip on me, and he wasn't gonna stop, he was in a feverish rage. Well your Ma probably heard me screamin' from next door -- and showed up with her daddy's peacemaker.
(MORE)

TOBY (CONT'D)
She put a bullet clean through that cowhand's leg, then told him one of her famous tall tales -- that her daddy the *sheriff* was ridin' over so unless he wanted to meet his maker he should git. Well he took off outa there so fast he didn't even put his britches on!

Toby's laughter turns into coughing... Caleb stands.

CALEB
I should let you rest up, if you need anything, just holler --

TOBY
What should I holler?

CALEB
Oh. Caleb. Caleb, sir.

Toby extends his good arm to shake Caleb's hand. Toby looks into the boy's eyes, so much like his own...

TOBY
How old are you, boy?

CALEB
Twelve. Twelve, sir...

Toby nods, slowly letting go of his hand. Caleb takes a STEP. Remembers spurs.

CALEB (CONT'D)
Better take these off --

TOBY
No. No, I want you to keep 'em --

CALEB
Nah, I couldn't --

TOBY
I tell you what. If'n I ever have a boy, I know where to find ya. But rest easy,'cause I got a feeling I'm gonna have a house full a girls, just my damn luck, so take 'em!

They laugh at his joke, Caleb looks down, admiring his spurs.

EXT. MISSOURI PRAIRIE - DAY

Jasper's gang herd about thirty head of Barlowe cattle along the wide Missouri river. Belle rides a pace behind Jasper and Runt, within earshot...

RUNT
So when's we robbing the bank, Jasper? D'you know when the gold's coming in?

Belle laughs behind them, Jasper shoots her a look.

JASPER
You'll be the first to know, Runt... now go on up front for awhile, keep your eyes peeled for injuns.

Runt nods and takes off. Belle takes his place.

JASPER (CONT'D)
Don't you start...

BELLE
Seems like a perfectly reasonable question...

JASPER
Well go on... you've always been the clever one. How would you go about this?

BELLE
Well, seein' as how I'm the clever one, I wouldn't.

Jasper turns and looks at Belle who smiles.

JASPER
That ain't fair. I know you've got a notion or two how to figure it out. Hell, you've probably already figured it out, haven't you?

BELLE
(changing the subject)
Jasper... when this war's over, you could still move back home. Find yourself a wife. Have kids, settle.

JASPER
There won't be jobs for men like me after the war, Belle...
(MORE)

JASPER (CONT'D)
the only thing I know how to do is rob and kill. That's all any of us know how to do. And when the south falls, there'll be no heroes' welcome for us. No goin' back to the way life used to be... It's over.
(smiles sadly)
And I don't see why you need to work so hard to keep that ranch. With the money we'll make from the bank, you can take the kids and leave, start over somewhere fresh.

Belle looks down at her hands loosely holding the reins, we see she wears the grass ring Nate made for her...

BELLE
Maybe I want to start my life over right here at home... in Deliverance.

JASPER
You got yourself a fella, Belle? Is that what's *changed* you?
(off her silence)
Well, we're robbing the bank. With or without you.

BELLE
This is where we part.
(stops her horse)
Here's the Shawnee Trail... you tell your boys if they see a badge riding up to hold their fire. See you back at the ranch, big brother.

Belle drives her cattle along the trail while Jasper watches her leave...

EXT. DELIVERANCE CREEK - DOWNTOWN

Belle rides back into town on horseback, her dog following, now free without her thirty head of cattle.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

UNION SOLDIERS and a high-ranking OFFICER crowd around Nate's desk. Nate pours over crude SKETCHES of CYRIL BALFOUR and some of the other men in Jasper's gang. SHERIFF KNOX beside him.

OFFICER
Any of them look familiar?

UNION SOLDIER
(nods)
There's a reward, dead or alive.

Nate takes a good hard look at the sketch, knowing now that Cyril is one of the men he saw at Belle's ranch that night.

NATE
No, sir... haven't. But I can take you around town to find out if anyone has.

INT. DELIVERANCE CREEK BANK - DAY

Belle walks into the bank and stands in line, her eyes find Hattie who stands at the counter talking in hushed tones to Ben Caulfield. We can't hear what they're saying, but Ben glances around quickly, making a show of "waiting" on Hattie.

BEN
Thank you, Miss Gatlin. Next...

Hattie turns around, pale, shaken, and then sees Belle. Belle steps out of line and follows Hattie out.

EXT. BANK - ALLEY

They talk barely above a whisper...

HATTIE
They hung old man Spencer and his wife last night, bounty hunters --

BELLE
Oh my God, what happened to...?

Hattie forces a smile at a PASSERBY...

HATTIE
Their at Duke's, hidden -- all but the father, they took him.

BELLE
Wait, Duke is involved in this?

HATTIE
(shakes his head)
I didn't know where else to turn...

Belle clocks that, but knows this isn't the time to ask. Belle stares at Duke's Saloon across the square... trying to think... she watches the BARMAN roll out an empty WHISKEY BARREL... then ANOTHER. Belle smiles, turns to Hattie.

HATTIE (CONT'D)
(beat)
What?

Belle takes a few dollars off the top of her pile.

BELLE
Give this to Duke, he's going to lose a few of his whiskey barrels.
(off Hattie's confusion)
I think a grown man could just about fit in one of those, and a boy would fit quite easily. I'm pretty sure Duke gets his whiskey supply from across the river in Kansas, isn't that so?

Hattie smiles, realizing the answer is that simple. Belle quickly kisses her cheek, then forces the money into Hattie's hand before heading back into the --

INT. BANK - DAY

Belle counts out the AUCTION MONEY in crumpled dollar bills onto the counter out loud to Ben Caulfield. Belle does this for Cordelia's benefit who is just visible in her back office...

BELLE
Thirty-six, seven, and that's five hundred... now, will that settle us up for awhile?

Ben smiles at Belle, she's about to leave, when --

CORDELIA
(appears at the window)
Could you wait just a moment, Mrs. Barlowe?

Belle sets her jaw, but then turns to look at a lady waiting in line behind her.

BELLE
Hi May, how're you today?

MAY
Just fine, Belle... you sell your cattle at auction then?

Ben Caulfield steps back up to the counter.

BEN
Just remember, Mrs. Barlowe, the rest is due by end of next month, or the bank will proceed to taking back your ranch.

BELLE
Well, you remind Mr. and Mrs. Caulfield that anyone who tries to take what's rightfully mine will be met by me and the end of my shotgun. Have a good day.

EXT. TOWN - OUTSIDE OF BANK - CONTINUOUS

Belle EXITS the BANK -- then STOPS when she sees UNION SOLDIERS *everywhere*. Belle quickly goes around the side of the building where she sees Nate. Her face floods with relief -- wanting to go to him, but then remembers their fight. She starts to go around the corner when he looks up and sees her -- signals for her to wait.

NATE
(approaching)
Hello, Mrs. Barlowe... have you seen a man of this likeness or any of these men around town?

Belle frowns, seeing now that Nate is being trailed by the Union soldiers. She forces herself to flip through the sketches, slowly shaking her head...

BELLE
No, I have not...

Belle hands them back to the Soldier. Nate tips his hat.

NATE
Alright then, you be careful riding back to your ranch now, Mrs. Barlowe.
(carefully)
Be sure to lock all your doors, we'll check on you later...

Belle feels his searing gaze and knows what she must do.

BELLE
Thank you, deputy... gentlemen.

ON THE BACK COUNTRY ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Belle GALLOPS at full speed --

INT. BACK OFFICE OF THE BANK - LATER

Ben stands beside Union Soldiers. Cordelia looks through the sketches...

CORDELIA
What are these men wanted for?

UNION SOLDIER
They're bushwhackers, ma'am. Robbed a saloon in Kansas, killed many of our men. Just across the river, we're checking all towns in the area, especially Confederate ones.

CORDELIA
Well, our kin is all Union supporters, Officer.

Cordelia sees Jeb ENTER the bank. She waves him over.

CORDELIA (CONT'D)
But our neighbor, her whole family are rebels... We've been thinking something's been going on at our neighbors ranch this week, haven't we Jeb?

JEB
I did go over today to check out a bonfire that was goin' all night...

Jeb takes the SCRAP OF ILLINOIS REGIMENTAL PAPER out of his pocket, slaps it down on the desk. All the SOLDIERS lean in to see the proof laid before them.

OFFICER
Sir, would you escort us to her ranch now, please.

INT. BELLE'S HOUSE - LATER

Belle bursts in, Jasper and his gang are sitting in her house --

BELLE
You gotta leave now, Jasper -- they're in town, Union soldiers everywhere in town looking for you. They've got sketches of Cyril, others... can Toby ride?

JASPER
No way he'd stay on a horse.

BELLE
Then move him to the barn --

EXT. SHERIFF'S STATION - DAY

Nate and Sheriff Knox come out, a UNION OFFICER with them.

UNION SOLDIER
That's right, a group of my soldiers got a tip that they might be hiding out on a ranch not far from here, they headed out.

NATE
(worried)
Which ranch?

UNION SOLDIER
I believe it was Barlowe?

BARN - CONTINUOUS

Belle looks down at Toby who waves he's okay as she CLOSES the CLAY PIT where the slaves were kept. Jasper's men are already getting onto their horses --

BELLE
Head for the ridge line --

Belle races for the house. She peers off in the direction to town -- sees a cloud of DUST as the soldiers GALLOP closer --

INT. BELLE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Belle rushes the children upstairs --

BELLE
You're to stay with Franny and Abner, do not come downstairs until I say it's safe -- no matter what, you hear? Hide in the back bedroom with the door closed.

CALEB
What's going on?

They hear POUNDING on the door downstairs. Belle puts her finger over her lips, kissing Franny who looks worried.

BELLE
It's just like hide-and-seek, but you gotta be quiet to win...

EXT. BELLE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Belle OPENS her door. She looks out to see a group of UNION SOLDIERS. At the back of the crowd is Jeb.

BELLE
What can I help you with, gentleman?

OFFICER
We'd like to search your property, ma'am.

BELLE
What for?

OFFICER
A band of bushwhackers. We've been informed they might be here...

BELLE
There's no such men here. You can come in and look for yourself -- But may I ask, what brought on this accusation besides wagging tongues?

He extends the singed piece of regimental paper and a few burnished name tags...

OFFICER
This was found here on your property. Can you explain why you would be burning Union Officer identification papers from the Illinois 7th regiment?

Belle looks from the singed paper back to the Officer.

BELLE
Why do you think I burned it? Because I'm ashamed. It's no secret my husband fights for the Confederates, as do many men from this part of Missouri. In the letters he sends home, he includes... little mementos for his sons from his victories. I won't even let the kids see them because it's shameful, which is why I burn them. We pray for soldiers both North and South, we pray this war to be over.

Silence as the MEN take this in, wanting to be civil to the attractive, young woman.

JEB
She's a bold faced liar --

Across the mob, Jeb and Belle square off.

JEB (CONT'D)
Everyone in town knows her husband hasn't written in years --

BELLE
You gonna listen to a *coward* who paid to get out of servin' in this war?

But SOLDIERS shove past Belle to get into her home --

OFFICER
YOU TWO, GO CHECK THE BARN --

INT. THE BARN - CONTINUOUS

Toby stays quiet in the bottom of the grain pit, hearing the feet shuffle above him...

EXT. THE ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Nate and Sheriff Knox gallop down the road to Belle's house...

INT. BELLE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Belle stands helplessly in the back of her home -- horrified to see them destroying everything as they search her house --

BELLE
CAN'T YOU SEE THERE'S NO ONE HERE --
STOP THIS --

A MAN starts to go upstairs --

BELLE (CONT'D)
STOP -- THAT'S JUST MY CHILDREN UP THERE --

Belle runs, following the Man, trying to stop them --

UPSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

CALEB, hearing his mother's shouts, runs to the top of the staircase --

DOWNSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Jeb looks up to the TOP OF THE STAIRS -- SEES THE BOOTS WITH SILVER SPURS--

JEB
THAT'S ONE OF THEM COMING DOWN NOW --

DOWNSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

A SOLDIER COCKS HIS RIFLE -- FIRING WITHOUT LOOKING --

BELLE
NO -- THAT'S MY SON --

FROM THE BARN - CONTINUOUS

THE CRACK OF THE RIFLE -- Toby presses his face against the slats of the barn wall -- Belle's front door wide open he sees --

CALEB TUMBLE DOWN THE STAIRS

INT. HOUSE - MATCH CUT

CALEB'S BODY CRUMPLES LIKE A LIMP DOLL -- LANDING AT BELLE'S FEET --

The only sound is Belle's piercing SCREAM as she collapses to the floor --

And once Caleb's in her arms, she frantically checks for a sign that he's survived this -- that's he's still alive --

A sob breaks through as she realizes he's dead -- a mourning sound that's more animal than human -- Belle rocks his lifeless body, so small in death, just a boy.

Nate bursts in -- too late to stop it -- he takes in what happened to Caleb, then stares down at all the silent men.

NATE
What have you done?
(then)
GET OUT OF HERE -- GO ON --

Jeb ducks his head, trying to blend in with the exiting soldiers, even he is unable to bear the sound of a mother's torment... Nate sinks down and puts his arms around Belle and Caleb while Franny and Abner look on from the top of the stairs...

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

EXT. BARLOWE RANCH - DAY

At the edge of the meadow on a rise overlooking their ranch is where they bury Caleb. Pearl, Hattie and Belle sit in front with Franny and Abner, everyone but Belle cries -- she seems to have no tears left. Nate stands at the back.

PREACHER
(reading from Bible)
The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Two MEN SHOVEL DIRT onto the small, wooden box. Belle flinches as each shovel-full of dirt hits Caleb's coffin.

PREACHER (CONT'D)
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil...

Belle rises, stumbling towards her ranch...

PREACHER (CONT'D)
for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies...

Nate goes to follow her, but Hattie reaches for him --

HATTIE
Leave her.

Nate nods, watching Belle walk across the prairie alone...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BARN - BARLOWE RANCH - DAY

Toby, now good enough to ride, hoists a saddle onto his horse. Belle appears silently in the doorway, watching him... Feeling her presence, he turns. They look at one another for a long beat.

TOBY
I'm leaving. But first, I'm riding over there and killing Jeb Caulfield.

Belle looks at Toby evenly.

BELLE
If you go over there all shot up, barely able to sit in a saddle, I might as well dig another grave right next to Caleb's because you won't come back alive.

TOBY
(filled with rage)
I want to kill all the Caulfields for what they took from you, Belle --

BELLE
(corrects him)
From what they took from *us,* Toby. He was your son. Caleb was your boy.

Shock and pain cross his face, confirming what he had just started to suspect...

BELLE (CONT'D)
But you must've known that? I think you knew it the moment my Daddy made me marry Harlan. I think you knew it when you took up with that girl from Carthage. But I know you knew it when you saw him. He looked just like you, Toby. He was your son. Harlan didn't know it... But I think you did.

Toby crumples into his horse, breaking down. Belle does not comfort him, but merely turns away and walks back to the house...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

Indian summer is over. The wind blows over the brittle Prairie grass... an eternity since Belle and Nate lay in their cove together.

CLOSE ON NATE: watching the wind waves blow over the land... Instead of a horse, Nate drives a wagon. We hear the faint plinking of piano keys. In the back of the wagon is a piano...

INT. BARLOWE RANCH - BELLE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Belle lies in bed, eyes open, she stares at nothing, listening to the wind... Franny stands in the doorway.

FRANNY
Mama, when are you going to get up?

Abner joins her, a worried look on his face.

FRANNY (CONT'D)
(plaintive cry)
Mama?

They can hear a KNOCK on the door from downstairs...

HATTIE'S VOICE
Franny and Abner, you come on down here now... someone's here to see you.

We stay on Belle, staring but unseeing. She listens to the low voices without hearing. Then just the wind...

NATE APPEARS IN THE DOORWAY...

He crosses over to her, sitting on the edge of the bed. He leans down and kisses the sides of her face.

NATE
(whispers)
I love you... you hear me?

Belle doesn't move. Nate sinks to his knees beside her.

Belle stares at the top of his head as he kisses her hands. She withdraws from him, turning away. He stares at her back, the row of buttons so familiar. He leans down and kisses her before he leaves.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Belle comes downstairs and STOPS when she sees the PIANO in the sitting room. She quietly walks over to it, touching the keys... Nate's gift to her. She turns to see Hattie watching her. Belle peers through the window into the inky darkness, having lost all track of time...

BELLE
(hopeful)
Is he still here...?

HATTIE
Left. Hours ago.

Belle slowly sinks to a chair in front of the window.

HATTIE (CONT'D)
I was going to go back to the inn... do you need me to stay?
(looks upstairs)
I think the kids are asleep.

BELLE
Go... We're fine.

Hattie nods, not sure, but collects her things.

BELLE (CONT'D)
I didn't get to ask... did they get across?

Hattie turns to Belle whose gaze remains fixed outside...

HATTIE
Yes. Your plan worked perfectly.

Belle turns and looks Hattie for the first time.

BELLE
You're not going to be reckless anymore, leave things to chance, understand? I'll help you, but you must tell me everything that's going on.
(quieter)
I'm not going to lose you, too.

Hattie tears up, then kisses the top of Belle's head before she slips out into the night...

DISSOLVE TO:

Belle has fallen asleep at the window. She stirs when she hears the sound of horses. She holds up her lantern, peering out to see...

OUTSIDE - NIGHT

Jasper and Toby on horseback. Belle EXITS her house -- once outside, the three take each other in...

TOBY
We've come back to murder Jeb and Cordelia...

JASPER
Tomorrow we'll rob the bank.

BELLE
Is that when the gold is coming?

JASPER
We don't know. We're just going to take whatever they've got.

Belle peers at them in the darkness, icy calm.

BELLE
I want revenge too... But a bullet for each of them while they sleep is little comfort. I want the Caulfields to *suffer* like I've suffered. I want them to *feel* what it's like to have everything they love stripped away from them piece by piece. And I don't want innocent people of Deliverance to lose lives because of it. He was my son. This happened in my house. And If you want my help, you'll do it my way.

Belle turns around and enters her house, leaving them in DARKNESS.

INT. BELLE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Belle places the lantern on the table and sits back down. After a moment, Jasper and Toby join her. They wait.

BELLE
We'll rob the bank in daylight. That's never been done before, and they won't expect it. No one but Caulfields get hurt.

JASPER
But we've got dynamite --

BELLE
And you'll blow up half the town. Why do that when you can walk right in?

TOBY
How we gonna find out when the gold's coming in?

BELLE
When every deputy in town is on duty.
I can get that information...

EXT. BELLE'S HOUSE - THROUGH THE WINDOW - CONTINUOUS

The three of them huddled over a small table as Belle continues to unspool her plan...

INT. BELLE'S HOUSE - MORNING

Belle looks at her reflection as she puts on her pearl earrings. Reaching for the other in her china dish, she instead picks up the Prairie grass ring that Nate made her. She puts it on her finger, and overcome with emotion, sinks back down to the chair... she looks up at her reflection.

DOWNSTAIRS - LATER

She heads out, but hesitates at the doorway, looking at the piano in the sitting room.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Belle ENTERS. Nate looks up from his desk. He quickly rises. Hope and longing written all over his face.

NATE
Belle...

Belle enters his arms, allowing him to hold her... but just for a moment as they are out in the world.

BELLE
(stepping back)
I wanted to thank you for the piano, it's beautiful...

She sees the pain on his face...

BELLE (CONT'D)
I also want to apologize --

NATE
Please don't. No need.

From the cell in the next room, a DRUNK starts to yell --

DRUNK
DEPUTY -- I NEED WATER --

NATE
Can you just... wait here?

Belle nods, sitting down at his desk. Like Belle told her brother, figuring out *when* the payroll comes into the Deliverance Creek Bank is the most important part...

Belle opens the CENTER desk drawer where she knew it would be, THE LEDGER. She glances behind her and sees Nate, then runs her finger down the days and weeks between now and the day that will forever change her life and those she loves...

She hesitates slightly, watching Nate as he talks kindly to a man behind bars. She closes the ledger before she can find the date, and half rises...

When she sees through the window Cordelia and Jeb passing by on their way to The Deliverance Creek Bank.

Belle sits back down and quickly flips open the book again... refusing to look back at the man she loves, for this is about *revenge*, not Nate. And Belle thinks she can have both.

Her eyes find what she came looking for...

And her delicate finger rests upon the date as we...

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF PILOT