

THE SHADOW OF THE DEADMAN'S DAUGHTER

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. BOONE HOMESTEAD - SHOOTING FIELD - DAY - 1869

A weathered BOTTLE sits on a fence post. Twenty yards away, MERCY BOONE, 22, shoulders a rifle. She FIRES.

CRACK.

Dirt spits beside the post. Mercy lowers the rifle, annoyed. Behind her, CALEB BOONE, 40s, watches with an easy smile.

CALEB
Again.

MERCY
I missed.

CALEB
Saw that.

She gives him a look. Caleb steps behind her. Adjusts her elbow. Her shoulder. Familiar. Practiced.

CALEB (CONT'D)
You're fighting it.

Mercy sights down the barrel.

CALEB (CONT'D)
Breathe.

She inhales. Shoulders rising. Caleb places a hand against her stomach.

CALEB (CONT'D)
Not there. Here.

Mercy glances down at his hand.

CALEB (CONT'D)
Breathe from where you're afraid.

She does. A slow inhale. Her stomach presses against his palm. Exhale. The rifle steadies.

CALEB (CONT'D)
There.

He steps back.

CALEB (CONT'D)
You listen to me, you'll be fine.

Mercy settles the sight on the bottle. Caleb watches.

CALEB (CONT'D)
Your call.

Mercy FIRES. The bottle EXPLODES. She stares at the empty fence post. Then turns, delighted.

MERCY
I got it.

CALEB
You did.

At the edge of the field, SARAH BOONE, late 30s, stands with a basket against her hip. Watching them. Mercy spots her.

MERCY
Mama! You see?

Sarah manages a smile.

SARAH
I saw.

Caleb hands the rifle back. Again. Sarah's eyes remain on him.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Caleb.

He looks over.

SARAH (CONT'D)
She's had enough.

MERCY
I ain't tired.

A beat between Sarah and Caleb. Nothing openly wrong. Caleb smiles.

CALEB
One more.

Mercy resets eagerly. Sarah doesn't move. Mercy raises the rifle. Her shoulders rise with the breath— She catches herself. Moves it lower. Caleb sees.

CALEB (CONT'D)
Good.

Mercy glances back at him.

MERCY
Then listen.

CALEB
To who?

Mercy smiles.

MERCY
You.

Caleb's smile softens.

CALEB
That's my girl.

CRACK.

The second bottle SHATTERS. Mercy laughs. Caleb pulls her against him. For a moment, she's simply his daughter. Safe.

MERCY
Daddy?

CALEB
Yeah?

MERCY
What if you're not here?

Caleb looks at her. No joke now.

CALEB
I'll be there.

MERCY
Always?

CALEB
Always.

Mercy accepts it without hesitation. Caleb kisses the top of her head. Across the field, Sarah watches. Mercy doesn't see her.

On the dirt before father and daughter, their SHADOWS merge into one.

CUT TO:

INT. BOONE HOMESTEAD - BEDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON - 1869

An open TRUNK on the bed. SARAH folds a dress into it. Another. Mercy's clothes are already packed beneath them. Sarah adds coins wrapped in cloth.

A FAMILY PHOTOGRAPH.

Caleb. Sarah. Mercy. She hesitates. Puts it in.

FOOTSTEPS.

Sarah reaches for the lid- MERCY appears in the doorway.

MERCY

Mama?

Sarah turns. Mercy sees the trunk.

MERCY (CONT'D)

What're you doing?

SARAH

Packing.

MERCY

For what?

Sarah sits on the bed.

SARAH

Come here.

Mercy does. Sarah takes her hand. Studies her daughter's face.

SARAH (CONT'D)

If I asked you to come somewhere
with me-

Mercy waits.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Would you?

MERCY

Where?

SARAH

Away.

Mercy looks at the trunk.

MERCY
Daddy coming?

Sarah's thumb stills against Mercy's hand.

SARAH
No.

Mercy pulls back.

MERCY
Why not?

Sarah searches for an answer.

SARAH
Mercy, your daddy—

The door opens. CALEB stands there, carrying a small paper parcel. Sarah goes still. Mercy doesn't.

MERCY
Daddy.

CALEB
There you are.

He enters. Sees the trunk. Then Sarah. Nothing changes in his face. He offers Mercy the parcel. Inside—a piece of HARD CANDY.

CALEB (CONT'D)
Brought you something.

Mercy smiles. Caleb kneels beside the trunk.

CALEB (CONT'D)
Your mama cleaning again?

Mercy looks at the packed clothes.

MERCY
She's packing.

A beat. Caleb picks up one of Mercy's blouses.

MERCY (CONT'D)
That's mine.

CALEB
I know.

He folds it carefully. Places it back.

MERCY

Mama says we're going somewhere.

Sarah looks at her.

MERCY (CONT'D)

Just us.

Silence. Caleb smiles.

CALEB

Sounds like your mama's got an
adventure planned.

Mercy brightens.

MERCY

Can we all go?

Caleb looks across her at Sarah.

CALEB

Wouldn't be much of a family if we
didn't.

Sarah holds his gaze. Mercy sees none of it. Caleb stands.

CALEB (CONT'D)

Go fetch some water.

MERCY

I just did.

CALEB

Then you're getting good at it.

Mercy rolls her eyes and heads out. At the door—

MERCY

Mama?

Sarah looks at her.

MERCY (CONT'D)

You coming?

Sarah almost answers. Caleb waits.

SARAH

In a minute.

Mercy leaves. Her footsteps fade. Caleb and Sarah stand on opposite sides of the trunk. Neither speaks. Caleb reaches for the lid. Sarah puts her hand on it. He looks at her hand.

Then Sarah. Patient. Sarah removes it. Caleb closes the trunk.

CLICK.

He leaves. Sarah waits. Then opens it. Mercy's blouse goes back into the drawer. Then the dresses. The coins. Finally, the family photograph. Sarah's thumb passes over Mercy. Then Caleb. She returns it to the drawer. The trunk is empty.

Sarah closes the lid.

CUT TO:

EXT. BOONE HOMESTEAD - EVENING - 1869

An AX bites into wood. Mercy splits another log.

HOOFBEATS.

She looks toward the road. A RIDER pushes a tired horse toward the house. Sarah steps onto the porch. The Rider reins up. Removes his hat.

RIDER
Mrs. Boone?

SARAH
Yes.

RIDER
It's Caleb.

Mercy approaches.

MERCY
What about him?

RIDER
They caught him outside Red Creek.

Mercy stops.

RIDER (CONT'D)
Trial was this morning.

SARAH
This morning?

The Rider nods.

MERCY
Where is he?

RIDER
County jail.

Mercy drops the axe.

MERCY
Then we'll go.

The Rider doesn't answer. Mercy sees it.

MERCY (CONT'D)
What?

RIDER
They're hanging him tomorrow.

Silence. Mercy turns toward the barn. Sarah catches her arm.

SARAH
Mercy.

MERCY
Let go.

SARAH
You're not going.

Mercy stares at her.

MERCY
That's Daddy.

SARAH
I know.

MERCY
They're going to kill him.

Sarah holds on.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Mama.

SARAH
No.

Mercy yanks free. The Rider reaches inside his coat.

RIDER
He asked me to give you this.

A folded scrap of paper. Mercy takes it. Two words:

LITTLE BIRD.

Her anger falters. Sarah sees the words. She reaches beneath her collar and removes a thin chain. At its end—a small SILVER BIRD. Sarah places it in Mercy's palm.

MERCY

Mama—

Sarah closes Mercy's fingers around it.

SARAH

This was mine.

Mercy looks at the bird.

MERCY

Why?

Sarah looks at Caleb's message. Then her daughter.

SARAH

Because it is.

Mercy waits for more. None comes. Sarah folds Mercy's fingers tighter around the bird.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Stay home tonight.

Mercy looks toward the road. Then at the note in one hand. The silver bird in the other.

She closes both fists.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTY JAIL - DAWN - 1869

A GALLOWS in the morning mist. A small CROWD gathers below. Mercy pushes through them. Too late to turn back. On the platform—CALEB BOONE, wrists bound. Bruised. Alive. Mercy stops. For one terrible second, Caleb is simply her father. He sees her. Something softens.

CALEB

Little bird.

Mercy fights tears. The SHERIFF steps forward.

SHERIFF
Caleb Boone, having been found
guilty of murder—

CALEB
Mercy.

The Sheriff stops. Caleb never takes his eyes from her.

CALEB (CONT'D)
Look at me.

Mercy does.

CALEB (CONT'D)
Not them.

A DEPUT places the noose around Caleb's neck. Mercy's
breathing quickens. Shoulders rising. Caleb sees.

CALEB (CONT'D)
Where do you breathe?

Mercy understands. Forces the breath lower. Into her stomach.
The same lesson. The same voice.

CALEB (CONT'D)
That's it.

The Sheriff signals. A hood is offered. Caleb refuses it.

CALEB (CONT'D)
No.

He wants to see her. Mercy's fist closes around the SILVER
BIRD.

CALEB (CONT'D)
You listen to me.

The executioner reaches for the lever.

CALEB (CONT'D)
You survive.

Mercy's face breaks.

MERCY
Daddy—

CALEB
Whatever it takes.

The trap DROPS. Caleb falls. Mercy flinches— But doesn't look away. The rope CREAKS. Her fist tightens around the silver bird until its edges bite into her palm. Blood threads between her fingers. Caleb hangs against the pale morning sky. Mercy breathes. Low.

Controlled.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN STREET - MORNING - 1869

Mercy walks away from the gallows. Fast. Her breath fractures. She stops beside a darkened STOREFRONT. Hand against her stomach. In. Out. Again. Nothing.

MERCY

Daddy.

Silence. Mercy closes her eyes. Tries again.

CALEB (V.O.)

Breathe.

Her eyes snap open. Empty street.

MERCY

Daddy?

A beat.

CALEB (V.O.)

I'm here.

Relief hits before fear can. Mercy turns toward the voice. Nobody. Then she sees the storefront glass. Her own reflection. Pale. Tear-streaked. Sarah's SILVER BIRD at her throat. A wagon passes behind her, its reflection sliding across the glass. And for an instant— CALEB stands behind Mercy. No rope. No blood. Just Daddy. Mercy spins. Nobody there. Back to the glass. Only Mercy. Her fingers touch the silver bird. She breathes. In. Out. And walks.

CUT TO:

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY - LATE AFTERNOON - 1874

The SILVER BIRD flashes in hard sunlight. Tarnished now. At the throat of MERCY BOONE, 27. Five years have hardened her. Revolver. Knife. Dust. She rides toward a lonely CABIN. A folded paper in her hand: BENJAMIN COLE. Caleb's voice comes easily now.

CALEB (V.O.)
You don't gotta do this today.

Mercy folds the paper.

MERCY
I know.

CALEB (V.O.)
Your call.

She rides on.

CUT TO:

EXT. BENJAMIN COLE'S CABIN - DUSK

BENJAMIN COLE, 50s, cleans a rifle on his porch. Mercy dismounts at the fence.

MERCY
Benjamin Cole?

He looks up. Sees her. Then the silver bird.

BENJAMIN
Jesus. Mercy?

Mercy approaches.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
You remember me.

Benjamin's eyes drop to her revolver.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
What do you want?

MERCY
You testified against my mother.

Benjamin looks away.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Said she heard things. Wasn't fit to keep me.

BENJAMIN
I was called before the court.

MERCY
You ever see her hurt me?

BENJAMIN
No.

MERCY
Neglect me?

BENJAMIN
No.

Mercy waits. Benjamin knows what's next.

MERCY
Then you lied.

BENJAMIN
I said what I was told.

MERCY
By who?

No answer.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Deeks?

Benjamin looks toward the road.

BENJAMIN
Leave it alone.

MERCY
Why?

Benjamin grips the rifle.

BENJAMIN
Because your mother wanted out.

Mercy stills.

MERCY
Out of what?

Benjamin regrets saying it.

BENJAMIN
Go home.

MERCY
Ain't got one.

That lands. Mercy steps closer.

MERCY (CONT'D)
She asked you for help.

Benjamin says nothing.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Didn't she?

BENJAMIN
I had a family.

Mercy glances through the open doorway. Bread on a plate. A coat on a peg. An ordinary life.

MERCY
So did she.

Benjamin rises with the rifle.

BENJAMIN
Get off my land.

Mercy's hand settles near her revolver.

CALEB (V.O.)
Easy.

Mercy doesn't draw. Not yet.

MERCY
Say you're sorry.

BENJAMIN
Mercy—

MERCY
For her.

Benjamin keeps the rifle trained on her.

BENJAMIN
I'm sorry it happened.

Mercy's eyes harden.

MERCY
No.

A beat.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Say you did it.

BENJAMIN
I didn't have a choice.

MERCY
Neither did she.

Benjamin raises the rifle— Mercy DRAWS.

BANG.

Benjamin slams against the cabin wall. His rifle FIRES harmlessly into the porch roof. Mercy stands frozen. Smoke curls from her revolver. Benjamin looks down at the blood spreading across his shirt.

BENJAMIN
Help me.

Mercy's gun lowers. She looks toward the empty darkness beside her.

MERCY
Daddy?

Nothing. Benjamin collapses. Mercy drops beside him. Presses both hands against the wound.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Hold on.

Blood floods between her fingers. She presses harder.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Come on.

Benjamin looks at her. Terrified now. Not a name in a ledger. Just a dying man.

BENJAMIN
I'm sorry.

Mercy stops. The words she came for.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
I'm sorry.

His eyes lose focus.

MERCY
Benjamin?

Nothing. His body goes slack. Mercy's bloody hands remain against him. A beat. Then she pulls them away. Looks toward the darkness.

MERCY (CONT'D)

Daddy?

No answer. Mercy looks back at Benjamin.

Dead.

CUT TO:

EXT. CREEK - NIGHT

Mercy drops to her knees in the mud.

VOMITS.

She wipes her mouth. Benjamin's blood covers her hands. Mercy plunges them into the creek. Scrubs. Red curls through the water. She scrubs harder.

MERCY

Come off.

Again. Mercy stops scrubbing. Silence. She looks into the darkness.

MERCY (CONT'D)

Daddy?

Nothing.

MERCY (CONT'D)

Daddy.

Only water. Mercy stares at her hands. The blood is gone. She keeps scrubbing.

MERCY (CONT'D)

Mama.

That breaks her. Mercy folds over herself. Cries. Alone. Then— She scrubs. Harder. Her knuckles redden. For an instant— They aren't her hands.

SARAH'S HANDS.

Older. Mercy freezes. Her own hands again. Clean. She scrubs anyway.

EXT. CAMPSITE - LATER

A small FIRE. Mercy sits wrapped in a blanket. Her revolver lies several feet away. The LEDGER beside her. Closed. Her hands are clean. She rubs them anyway.

CALEB (V.O.)
You'll take the skin off.

Mercy stops. Relief. Then anger.

MERCY
Where were you?

CALEB (V.O.)
Here.

MERCY
I called you.

CALEB (V.O.)
I know.

Mercy looks at the ledger.

MERCY
He said Mama wanted out.

Silence.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Out of what?

The fire POPS.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Who was she running from?

Nothing. Mercy's fingers find the SILVER BIRD.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Was it Deeks?

CALEB (V.O.)
Get some sleep.

Mercy looks into the darkness. She hears the evasion.

MERCY
I killed him.

CALEB (V.O.)
Yeah.

MERCY
Thought it'd feel different.

A beat.

CALEB (V.O.)
I know.

Mercy looks toward the revolver. Then away.

MERCY
I don't want to be alone.

Silence. Mercy's face falls. Then—

CALEB (V.O.)
I'm here.

Her eyes close. Relief wins. Mercy lies beside the fire. On the ground, her SHADOW stretches into darkness. Another shape seems to settle beside it. Shoulder to shoulder. Mercy sees it. Doesn't turn.

MERCY
Daddy?

CALEB (V.O.)
Sleep, little bird.

Mercy's hand closes around Sarah's silver bird. She watches the two shadows. Comforted.

Afraid.

CUT TO:

EXT. ELI TURNER'S FARM - LATE AFTERNOON

A modest farmhouse. Laundry on the line. Chickens in the yard. Mercy watches from the tree line. The LEDGER open in her hand.

ELI TURNER.

She closes it. Last chance.

CALEB (V.O.)
Mercy—

MERCY
No.

She rides in.

EXT. ELI TURNER'S FARMHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

ELI TURNER, 40s, steps onto the porch. Sees Mercy.
Recognition follows.

ELI
Mercy Boone.

She dismounts.

MERCY
You testified against my mother.

Eli glances toward the house.

ELI
You shouldn't be here.

MERCY
Did she hurt me?

ELI
No.

MERCY
Neglect me?

Eli says nothing.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Then why'd you say she did?

ELI
Deeks.

Mercy stills.

ELI (CONT'D)
He told us what to say.

MERCY
Why?

ELI
Because Caleb wanted you.

That lands.

MERCY
My daddy was dead.

ELI
Didn't matter.

Mercy steps closer.

MERCY
What does that mean?

Eli looks toward the house again.

ELI
I got children in there.

MERCY
So did my mother.

Eli looks at her. Benjamin's excuse. Mercy hears it too.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Did she ask you for help?

A long beat.

ELI
Yeah.

Mercy's jaw tightens.

MERCY
And?

ELI
I was scared.

MERCY
Of Deeks?

Eli doesn't answer.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Or Caleb?

Eli looks at her. That's answer enough. A CHILD laughs somewhere inside the house. Mercy glances toward the sound. Eli sees an opening. His hand slips behind his back— Toward a PISTOL tucked into his waistband.

CALEB (V.O.)
Mercy.

She looks back. Sees Eli's hand.

CALEB (V.O.)
Now.

Mercy DRAWS.

BANG.

Eli drops against the porch. A WOMAN SCREAMS inside. Mercy stands with the smoking revolver. Eli gasps. Looks toward his front door.

ELI

Don't let them see me.

Mercy stares at him. Then at the doorway. Small FOOTSTEPS approach from inside. Mercy moves. Pulls Eli down beside the porch, out of sight. His breathing weakens.

ELI (CONT'D)

Tell them—

He can't finish. Mercy waits. Eli dies. The front door begins to open. Mercy backs away. A LITTLE GIRL peers through the crack. Mercy turns before the child can see her father's body. She mounts. Rides. Movement in the doorway. Mercy looks. The LITTLE GIRL stands there. Still. Watching. A blink— YOUNG MERCY stands in her place. Same doorway. Same stare. Mercy blinks again. The little girl. Nothing more.

EXT. ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Mercy rides hard. No vomiting. No tears. Caleb's voice beside her.

CALEB (V.O.)

Breathe.

Mercy already is. Low. Steady.

She doesn't answer him.

CUT TO:

EXT. RED CREEK - DAY

Mercy rides into a dying settlement. A weather-beaten sign:

WELCOME TO RED CREEK

She slows. Across the road—an abandoned SCHOOLHOUSE. For an instant— SARAH, younger, hurries past its windows. Mercy turns. Empty. A CHURCH BELL tolls in the distance. Once.

Mercy looks toward the steeple. Then— A newer sign nailed beneath the town marker:

SHERIFF HARLAN DEEKS

LAW & ORDER
Mercy's face hardens.

MERCY
Deeks.

Nothing from Caleb. Mercy waits.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Daddy?

Silence. She looks toward the church. Then the Sheriff's sign. The bell tolls again. Mercy rides toward town.

CUT TO:

EXT. SILAS VENN'S HOMESTEAD - DUSK

A collapsing house at the edge of nowhere. Mercy approaches on horseback.

CALEB (V.O.)
Keep riding.

Mercy slows.

MERCY
Why?

No answer. She dismounts.

CALEB (V.O.)
Mercy.

She heads for the porch.

MERCY
You been awful quiet about Deeks.

The front door opens. SILAS VENN, 60s, gaunt and sickly, stares at her. Recognition. Then dread.

SILAS
Caleb's girl.

Mercy stops.

MERCY

You testified against my mother.

Silas almost laughs.

SILAS

That what he told you?

MERCY

Deeks told you what to say.

SILAS

Deeks told everybody what to say.

MERCY

Why?

Silas studies her.

SILAS

You really don't know.

CALEB (V.O.)

Leave.

Mercy's eyes flick toward the empty yard. Silas notices.

SILAS

You hear him?

Mercy looks back.

MERCY

Hear who?

Silas knows better.

SILAS

Your daddy.

Mercy's hand drifts toward her revolver.

SILAS (CONT'D)

Sarah heard him too.

Mercy freezes.

MERCY

My mother heard things.

SILAS

That's what they called it.

MERCY
She was sick.

SILAS
No.

A beat.

SILAS (CONT'D)
She was scared.

Mercy says nothing. Behind Silas—

SARAH.

Barely there. Not looking at Mercy. Looking past her. Mercy follows Sarah's gaze— Caleb. Mercy turns back. Silas stands alone. Mercy's certainty slips.

MERCY
Of Deeks?

Silas shakes his head.

SILAS
Of Caleb.

Silence.

CALEB (V.O.)
He's lying.

MERCY
Shut up.

Silas recoils. Mercy realizes what she just said.

SILAS
She used to come here after he died.

MERCY
Why?

SILAS
Said Caleb wouldn't leave her alone.

Mercy's hand closes around the SILVER BIRD.

MERCY
He's dead.

SILAS
Sarah knew that.

MERCY
Then what did she hear?

SILAS
Same thing you do.

Mercy draws. Silas doesn't move.

CALEB (V.O.)
Do it.

Mercy looks toward the voice.

SILAS
There he is.

Her gun trembles.

CALEB (V.O.)
He's one of them.

Silas looks directly at Mercy.

SILAS
Ask him why Sarah ran.

Mercy can't breathe.

CALEB (V.O.)
Mercy.

SILAS
Ask him.

CALEB (V.O.)
Shoot him.

Mercy raises the revolver. Silas closes his eyes. Mercy's finger settles on the trigger— A memory: Sarah's hand closing Mercy's fingers around the SILVER BIRD.

SARAH (V.O.)
This was mine.

Mercy lowers the gun. Silas opens his eyes.

MERCY
Where's Deeks?

SILAS
Red Creek.

MERCY
He know what happened to my mother?

SILAS
He knows all of it.

Mercy holsters the revolver.

CALEB (V.O.)
Don't walk away from this.

Mercy turns toward her horse.

CALEB (V.O.)
Mercy.

She mounts.

CALEB (V.O.)
You listen to me.

Mercy looks toward the empty space beside her. For the first time—

MERCY
No.

She rides.

Silas watches her disappear.

CUT TO:

INT. RED CREEK SHERIFF'S OFFICE - NIGHT

A lamp burns low. HARLAN DEEKS, 60s, sits behind his desk. Older than Mercy expected. Mercy stands in the doorway. Deeks looks up. Sees the SILVER BIRD. His expression changes.

DEEKS
Mercy Boone.

She closes the door behind her.

MERCY
You remember me.

DEEKS
I remember your mother.

Mercy draws her revolver. Sets it on the desk between them. Not aimed. Yet.

MERCY

Tell me what happened to her.

Deeks looks at the gun. Then Mercy.

DEEKS

Which version you want?

MERCY

The true one.

DEEKS

Those usually cost more.

Mercy doesn't blink.

MERCY

Benjamin Cole is dead.

A beat.

MERCY (CONT'D)

Eli Turner too.

Deeks absorbs that.

DEEKS

Silas?

MERCY

Alive.

That surprises him.

MERCY (CONT'D)

He said Mama was afraid of my father.

CALEB (V.O.)

Careful.

Mercy hears him. Doesn't react.

MERCY

He said she heard him after he died.

Deeks leans back.

DEEKS

She did.

MERCY

Was she sick?

DEEKS
She was terrified.

MERCY
Of a dead man?

DEEKS
Of what he'd left behind.

Mercy's jaw tightens.

MERCY
You took me from her.

DEEKS
Yes.

MERCY
You made them lie.

DEEKS
Yes.

Mercy wasn't prepared for the admission.

MERCY
Why?

DEEKS
Because Sarah couldn't prove a dead
man was hurting her.

Mercy stares.

CALEB (V.O.)
He's lying.

DEEKS
And because the truth would've
sounded crazier than the lie.

MERCY
What truth?

Deeks studies her.

DEEKS
You hear Caleb?

Mercy's hand moves toward the revolver.

CALEB (V.O.)
Don't answer him.

Deeks sees enough.

DEEKS
Sarah used to do that.

MERCY
Do what?

DEEKS
Listen before she answered.

Mercy goes still.

DEEKS (CONT'D)
Like somebody was standing beside
her.

In the dark window behind Deeks—

CALEB.

Only a REFLECTION.

CALEB
Kill him.

Mercy looks at Caleb. Deeks follows her eyes. Sees only
glass.

DEEKS
There?

Mercy looks back at him.

MERCY
What happened to Mama?

DEEKS
She came to me for help.

A beat.

DEEKS (CONT'D)
Said Caleb wouldn't leave her
alone.

Mercy grips the edge of the desk.

DEEKS (CONT'D)
She wanted to take you and run.

The trunk. Sarah packing.

SARAH (V.O.)
Would you?

Mercy blinks it away.

MERCY
She tried.

DEEKS
More than once.

MERCY
Then why'd you take me from her?

Deeks looks ashamed now.

DEEKS
Because Caleb had friends.

MERCY
He was dead.

DEEKS
Didn't make him powerless.

Mercy waits.

DEEKS (CONT'D)
Men still owed him. Feared him.
Loved him.

A bitter beat.

DEEKS (CONT'D)
Some all three.

MERCY
You?

Deeks meets her eyes.

DEEKS
Yeah.

That answer hurts more than denial.

DEEKS (CONT'D)
Sarah begged me to get you away
from everything he'd built around
you.

MERCY
So you called her crazy.

DEEKS
I thought I could control what
happened next.

MERCY
Could you?

DEEKS
No.

Silence. Mercy picks up the revolver. Caleb's reflection
stands behind Deeks.

CALEB
You know what he is.

Mercy raises the gun. Deeks doesn't reach for his.

DEEKS
I deserve plenty.

CALEB
Do it.

DEEKS
But if you're here because you
think killing me finishes your
mother's story—

Mercy's finger tightens.

DEEKS (CONT'D)
—it won't.

CALEB
Mercy.

DEEKS
Sarah didn't need vengeance.

A beat.

DEEKS (CONT'D)
She needed somebody to believe her.

Mercy's gun wavers. Caleb steps closer in the reflection.

CALEB
You listen to me.

Mercy looks directly at him. Then— She lowers the revolver.
Caleb's reflection disappears. Deeks exhales. Mercy doesn't.

MERCY
Where did she go?

Deeks looks at her.

DEEKS
She didn't.

Mercy freezes.

MERCY
What?

DEEKS
Sarah Boone never left Red Creek.

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH MILLER'S HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

A slice of APPLE PIE lands in front of Mercy. She looks at it. Then at SARAH MILLER, 50s.

MERCY
I ain't hungry.

SARAH MILLER
Didn't ask.

Sarah sits opposite her. Mercy eyes the pie.

SARAH MILLER (CONT'D)
Your mama used to burn these.

Mercy looks up.

MERCY
Mama could cook.

SARAH MILLER
Not pie.

A faint smile.

SARAH MILLER (CONT'D)
First one she brought me, crust was
black enough to shoe a horse.

Despite herself- Mercy smiles. Sarah catches it.

SARAH MILLER (CONT'D)
There she is.

The smile disappears.

MERCY

Who?

SARAH MILLER

Sarah's girl.

Mercy looks down.

MERCY

Everybody says I look like Daddy.

SARAH MILLER

You do.

A beat.

SARAH MILLER (CONT'D)

You laugh like her.

That lands differently. Mercy takes a bite of pie. Stops.

MERCY

Jesus.

Sarah grins.

SARAH MILLER

Her recipe.

Mercy LAUGHS. A real one. Short. Surprised. For an instant—Sarah Boone isn't frightened. Isn't packing a trunk. Isn't somebody Mercy failed to save. She's a woman who couldn't bake a pie. Mercy's laughter fades into something softer.

MERCY

What was she like?

Sarah considers.

SARAH MILLER

Funny.

MERCY

Mama?

SARAH MILLER

Mean funny.

Mercy almost smiles again.

SARAH MILLER (CONT'D)

Cheated at cards.

MERCY

She did not.

SARAH MILLER

Terrible at it, too.

Mercy laughs. And for one impossible instant— SARAH sits across from her. Alive. Laughing too. Warm sunlight across her face. Then— Sarah Miller. The same table. The same light. Mercy's smile disappears. Not from fear. From loss.

MERCY

You're lying.

SARAH MILLER

Ask her.

The words hang there. Sarah realizes.

SARAH MILLER (CONT'D)

Sorry.

Mercy shakes her head. Not offended. Remembering.

MERCY

She hated yellow.

Sarah smiles.

SARAH MILLER

Despised it.

MERCY

Said it made everybody look sick.

SARAH MILLER

See?

Mercy looks at her.

SARAH MILLER (CONT'D)

She's still in there.

Mercy's fingers touch the SILVER BIRD.

MERCY

Everybody remembers what happened to her.

SARAH MILLER

Easy thing to remember.

Sarah takes another bite.

SARAH MILLER (CONT'D)
Harder's remembering who it
happened to.

Silence. Mercy looks down at the pie. Takes another bite
anyway. Then—

MERCY
I need to know about the land.

Sarah's expression changes. The visit is over.

SARAH MILLER
Amos Bell.

MERCY
Who's that?

SARAH MILLER
Kept records back then.

Mercy stands. Sarah wraps another piece of pie in cloth.
Hands it to her. Mercy looks at it.

MERCY
You trying to kill me?

SARAH MILLER
Your mama never managed.

Mercy smiles. Takes it. At the door—

SARAH MILLER (CONT'D)
Mercy.

Mercy turns. Sarah looks at her. Not the outlaw. Not Caleb's
little bird. Sarah's daughter.

SARAH MILLER (CONT'D)
Remember her laughing.

Mercy holds her gaze. Then nods.

Leaves.

CUT TO:

INT. COUNTY RECORDS OFFICE - NIGHT

Dust. Shelves bow beneath rotting LEDGERS. At a desk under
one oil lamp sits AMOS BELL, 70s. Paper-thin. Half-dead
already. Mercy enters. Amos doesn't look up.

AMOS
Mercy Boone.

She stops.

MERCY
Sarah Miller sent me.

That gets his eyes up. He studies her. Not her face. The way she stands. Mercy scratches absently at her jaw. Amos goes pale.

AMOS
Don't do that.

Mercy's hand stops.

MERCY
Do what?

Amos stares past her.

AMOS
Caleb used to stand just like that.

Mercy shifts. Uncomfortable.

MERCY
I need the records on my mother's land.

AMOS
No.

Mercy plants both hands on his desk. Leans forward.

MERCY
I didn't come all this way for no.

Amos stares at her posture. Behind him, reflected in a dark window— CALEB stands exactly the same way. Hands planted. Head slightly cocked. Mercy doesn't see him.

AMOS
Jesus Christ.

MERCY
What?

AMOS
Nothing.

He reaches beneath the desk. Produces a smoke-damaged LEDGER. Drops it between them.

AMOS (CONT'D)

Paper remembers what men don't.

Mercy opens it. Land transfers. Forged signatures. Sheriff initials. Bank stamps. Then— Mercy stops. Ink. Signatures. Her mother's name. In the dark window beside her— Mercy's reflection. Caleb stands behind it. Mercy raises her eyes. For a moment, Caleb's reflection and hers occupy the same space. His face where hers should be. Then Mercy shifts. The reflections separate. She looks back at the paper.

SARAH BOONE.

Stamped across the entry:

VOID.

Mercy touches her mother's name.

MERCY

What is this?

AMOS

They erased her claim.

Mercy turns pages. More transfers. More names.

AMOS (CONT'D)

Land changed hands before the
bodies were cold.

Mercy finds the Boone property. A transfer recorded after Caleb's death. Another after Sarah's disappearance.

MERCY

Who did it?

AMOS

Men with badges.

Men with money. Men afraid of your daddy. Mercy looks up.

MERCY

Deeks?

Amos doesn't answer. He doesn't need to. Mercy turns another page. Stops. A notation beside Sarah's name.

MERCY (CONT'D)

What's this?

Amos leans closer. Reads it.

AMOS
Petition.

MERCY
For what?

AMOS
Transfer of guardianship.

Mercy looks at him.

AMOS (CONT'D)
You.

Silence. Mercy reads.

MERCY
She filed this?

AMOS
Sarah did.

MERCY
Before Daddy died?

Amos nods. Mercy's world shifts. Sarah packing the trunk.
Would you? Caleb closing it. Mercy stares at the signature.

CALEB BOONE — APPLICANT.

CLICK.

FLASH—
Caleb's hand closes the trunk.

CLICK.

FLASH—
A woman's fingers curl over the
edge.

The lid comes down— Mercy jerks back. The records office. The
document beneath her hand. Caleb watches from across the
room.

CLICK.

Mercy shuts the ledger. Hard.

CALEB (V.O.)
Records lie.

Mercy looks toward the voice. Nothing there.

AMOS
He talking?

Mercy turns sharply. Amos knows.

AMOS (CONT'D)
Sarah used to look at empty rooms
like that.

MERCY
Don't.

AMOS
Your mother came here herself.

Mercy freezes.

AMOS (CONT'D)
Wanted copies. Names. Anything she
could use to get you away from him.

CALEB (V.O.)
He's lying.

Mercy's breathing quickens.

AMOS
She wasn't trying to steal you from
your father.

A beat.

AMOS (CONT'D)
She was trying to save you.

Mercy grips the ledger. Caleb appears behind Amos. Solid
enough now to occupy the room.

CALEB
Don't listen.

Mercy looks at him. Amos follows her gaze. Sees nothing.

AMOS
Same place?

Mercy looks back.

AMOS (CONT'D)
He used to stand behind me too.

That hits.

MERCY
When?

AMOS
When Sarah came for the records.

Mercy goes still.

AMOS (CONT'D)
Caleb knew.

Caleb's expression hardens.

CALEB
Enough.

Mercy looks from Amos— To Caleb. Then takes the ledger.

AMOS
Where you going?

MERCY
To find out which one of you is
lying.

She heads for the door.

AMOS
Mercy.

She stops.

AMOS (CONT'D)
That book ain't a list of people to
kill.

Mercy looks down at it.

AMOS (CONT'D)
It's what they did.

Mercy leaves.

Amos looks toward the empty space where Caleb stood.

CUT TO:

INT. DRYRIDGE HOTEL - HAYWORTH'S ROOM - NIGHT

A writing desk. Documents arranged with obsessive precision. HORACE HAYWORTH, 60s, looks up as Mercy enters. He sees her. Stops.

HAYWORTH

Boone.

Mercy closes the door. Locks it. She places AMOS'S COPY on his desk.

MERCY

Why was my father there?

Hayworth looks at the document.

HAYWORTH

He arranged the meeting.

Silence.

CALEB (V.O.)

He's lying.

Mercy doesn't look toward him.

MERCY

For Deeks?

HAYWORTH

For himself.

Mercy stares.

MERCY

Why?

HAYWORTH

Cash.

MERCY

For what?

HAYWORTH

Didn't say.

Mercy leans over the desk.

MERCY

Who came first?

Hayworth understands. Doesn't answer. Mercy draws her revolver. Sets it on the desk.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Who walked through whose door?

CALEB (V.O.)
Mercy.

Hayworth looks at the gun.

HAYWORTH
Caleb came to me.

Mercy goes still.

CALEB (V.O.)
No.

HAYWORTH
Wanted to know how fast property
could be transferred without his
wife's signature.

MERCY
Mama's name was on the deed.

HAYWORTH
That was the problem.

Mercy's breathing changes.

MERCY
Why?

HAYWORTH
Sarah intended to leave.

A beat.

HAYWORTH (CONT'D)
Take you with her.

FLASH—
The open TRUNK.

Sarah holding Mercy's hand.

SARAH
Would you?

BACK TO SCENE.

Mercy shakes her head.

MERCY
No.

HAYWORTH
He wanted the property beyond her
reach.

CALEB (V.O.)
Bullshit.

Mercy's eyes flick toward the empty room. Hayworth notices.
He opens a leather case.

CALEB (V.O.)
Don't.

Hayworth removes an OLD DOCUMENT.

CALEB (V.O.)
Mercy.

Hayworth slides it across the desk.

CALEB (V.O.)
Don't look at that.

Mercy does. At the bottom—

CALEB BOONE.

Not witness.

APPLICANT.

Mercy stops breathing. She compares it to Amos's copy. Same
signature. Same hand. The original reads:

TRANSFER
REQUESTED BY:

CALEB BOONE

Dated weeks before his arrest. Mercy's hand starts toward her
jaw. She catches it. Lowers it.

MERCY
Why's Amos's copy different?

HAYWORTH
This one wasn't supposed to
survive.

Mercy looks up.

HAYWORTH (CONT'D)
Your father changed his mind.

MERCY
Why?

HAYWORTH
Don't know.

MERCY
What happened then?

HAYWORTH
The men he'd brought in didn't
change theirs.

Mercy absorbs it.

MERCY
Deeks.

Hayworth says nothing.

MERCY (CONT'D)
You.

Nothing. Mercy looks at Caleb's signature.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Daddy started it.

HAYWORTH
Yes.

Silence. Caleb has nothing.

MERCY
He told me you came for us.

Hayworth looks at her.

HAYWORTH
Maybe by then we had.

Mercy looks up.

HAYWORTH (CONT'D)
One truth doesn't erase the other.

Mercy picks up the revolver. Aims it at him.

MERCY
Don't make him innocent.

HAYWORTH

I'm not.

MERCY

Don't make yourself innocent.

HAYWORTH

I'm not.

CALEB (V.O.)

Shoot him.

Mercy's eyes shift toward the voice.

CALEB (V.O.)

He helped hang me.

Hayworth watches her.

HAYWORTH

Is he talking now?

Mercy freezes.

MERCY

What?

HAYWORTH

Caleb.

Mercy's gun remains trained on him.

HAYWORTH (CONT'D)

You look at the same empty place he
used to.

That hits.

CALEB (V.O.)

Mercy.

Hayworth looks at her gun. Then her.

HAYWORTH

Whatever he's saying—

BANG.

Hayworth drops. Dead. Mercy stands over him. Smoke curls from
the barrel.

CALEB (V.O.)

Good.

Mercy looks toward the voice.

MERCY
Wasn't for you.

She takes Caleb's original application. Heads for the door. At the HALLWAY MIRROR- Mercy stops. CALEB stands behind her in the reflection. Not a flicker. Not a suggestion. Stable. Clear. Mercy doesn't turn.

Caleb looks back at her.

CUT TO:

INT. DRYRIDGE HOTEL - MERCY'S ROOM - NIGHT

The door closes. Mercy locks it. Caleb's ORIGINAL APPLICATION lands on the table. Mercy removes her gun belt. Sets it beside the document. She catches herself in the mirror. CALEB stands behind her. Stable. Ordinary. Mercy looks at him.

MERCY
You're dead.

CALEB
Been dead awhile.

Mercy turns. Empty room. Back to the mirror. Caleb remains. Mercy studies him. Not frightened. Testing.

MERCY
Why didn't you let her?

Caleb says nothing.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Mama.

A beat.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Why didn't you let her?

Caleb looks at Mercy's reflection.

CALEB
Didn't think I could.

Mercy absorbs that.

MERCY
Let her what?

Caleb doesn't answer. Mercy looks at the application.

MERCY (CONT'D)

Go.

Caleb's silence confirms enough. Mercy looks back at him.

MERCY (CONT'D)

You knew.

CALEB

Some.

MERCY

You went to Hayworth.

CALEB

Yeah.

MERCY

Before they arrested you.

CALEB

Yeah.

Mercy waits. No excuse comes.

MERCY

You told me they came for us.

CALEB

They did.

MERCY

After you went to them.

Caleb says nothing. Mercy looks down at her hands. One begins to shake.

CALEB

Breathe.

Her body almost obeys. Mercy stops it. Looks at herself in the mirror. Not Caleb. Herself. She breathes. Slow. Low. Her own rhythm.

MERCY

I can do that myself.

Caleb watches her. No anger. No disappearance.

CALEB

I know.

Mercy looks at the silver bird at her throat.

MERCY
Did you love her?

Caleb answers without hesitation.

CALEB
Yeah.

MERCY
Did she love you?

A beat.

CALEB
Yeah.

MERCY
Then why was she scared of you?

Caleb looks away. The first time Mercy has seen him do it.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Why'd she try to take me?

CALEB
Thought she knew better.

MERCY
Did she?

Caleb looks back at her.

CALEB
Sometimes.

Mercy almost laughs. Doesn't.

MERCY
You make everything feel certain.

Caleb says nothing. Mercy touches the application.

MERCY (CONT'D)
This doesn't.

CALEB
Paper ain't people.

MERCY
Neither are memories.

That lands. Mercy looks at him.

MERCY (CONT'D)

What do you remember?

Caleb's face gives nothing away.

CALEB

Enough.

MERCY

That's what everybody keeps saying.

Mercy folds the application. Puts it away. Caleb remains in the mirror.

CALEB

Where you going?

Mercy picks up her gun belt.

MERCY

To find somebody who knew Mama.

CALEB

You've done that.

MERCY

Somebody who knew her before
everybody decided what she was.

Caleb watches her buckle the gun belt.

CALEB

And if you don't like what she
says?

Mercy meets his reflection.

MERCY

Your call?

A beat. Caleb almost smiles. Mercy doesn't.

MERCY (CONT'D)

No.

She heads for the door.

Caleb remains in the mirror.

CUT TO:

EXT. AGNES VALE'S HOUSE - MORNING

A plain house beyond Dryridge. No fence. No flowers. AGNES VALE, 70s, sits on the porch trimming green beans into a bowl. Mercy approaches. Agnes doesn't look up.

AGNES

You gonna stand there or sit?

Mercy sits. Agnes snaps another bean.

MERCY

You knew my mother.

AGNES

Yep.

MERCY

Before Caleb?

AGNES

Yep.

Mercy waits. Agnes keeps working.

MERCY

You gonna make me ask everything?

AGNES

Seems like you came all this way to.

Mercy looks out across the yard.

MERCY

Everybody's got a different version of her.

AGNES

Usually happens when somebody dies.

MERCY

She ain't dead.

Agnes finally looks at her.

AGNES

Didn't say she was.

Mercy holds her gaze. Agnes returns to the beans.

MERCY

Was she weak?

AGNES
No.

MERCY
Crazy?

AGNES
No.

MERCY
Scared?

Agnes considers.

AGNES
Sometimes.

MERCY
Of my father?

AGNES
Sometimes.

Mercy's jaw tightens.

MERCY
Everybody keeps saying that.

AGNES
Maybe quit asking if you don't want
the answer.

Mercy looks away. A bean SNAPS.

MERCY
He taught me everything.

AGNES
Doubt that.

MERCY
Taught me to shoot.

Another bean.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Read people.

Another.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Stay alive.

Agnes drops the pieces into the bowl.

AGNES
Useful things.

Mercy looks at her.

MERCY
That's it?

AGNES
What else you want?

MERCY
Everybody acts like if he hurt
Mama, everything he gave me's
poisoned.

Agnes studies her.

AGNES
Keep what works.

Mercy waits.

MERCY
And the rest?

AGNES
Question's who decides what you do
with it.

That lands. Mercy looks down at her hands.

MERCY
Sometimes I hear him.

Agnes snaps another bean. No reaction.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Sometimes I see him.

AGNES
All right.

Mercy looks at her.

MERCY
That's all you got to say?

AGNES
You asking me if he's a ghost?

MERCY
I don't know what I'm asking.

AGNES

Good.

Agnes drops another handful into the bowl.

AGNES (CONT'D)

Means you ain't decided the answer
before asking.

Mercy touches the SILVER BIRD.

MERCY

He taught me how to breathe when
I'm afraid.

AGNES

Works?

MERCY

Yeah.

AGNES

Then breathe.

Mercy almost smiles.

MERCY

Feels like his.

Agnes shakes her head.

AGNES

Ain't his just because he taught it
to you.

Silence. Wind moves through the yard. No Caleb. No
apparition. Just two women on a porch.

MERCY

You know where my mother went?

AGNES

No.

Mercy accepts the answer.

AGNES (CONT'D)

But I know somebody she talked to.

Mercy looks over.

AGNES (CONT'D)

Eliza Ward.

MERCY

Where?

AGNES

North road.

Agnes points with the knife.

AGNES (CONT'D)

White house past the cottonwoods.

Mercy stands. Agnes holds out a handful of snapped beans.
Mercy looks at them.

MERCY

What am I supposed to do with
those?

AGNES

Eat 'em.

Mercy takes them. Starts toward her horse.

AGNES (CONT'D)

Mercy.

She turns. Agnes resumes trimming.

AGNES (CONT'D)

Knowing where something came from
ain't the same as knowing what to
do with it.

Mercy considers that. Then rides.

Agnes keeps snapping beans.

CUT TO:

INT. ELIZA WARD'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Coffee pours into two cups. ELIZA WARD, 60s, sets one before
Mercy. A quiet room. No clutter. No records. Mercy sits
across from her.

ELIZA

Agnes said you might come.

MERCY

She send word?

ELIZA

No.

Mercy waits.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
You been asking about Sarah. Wasn't
hard to figure you'd get here
eventually.

Mercy looks into the coffee.

MERCY
You knew her well?

ELIZA
Well enough.

MERCY
Better than Sarah Miller?

ELIZA
Different.

Mercy looks up.

MERCY
Everybody knew a different woman.

ELIZA
Everybody does.

A beat.

MERCY
Tell me yours.

Eliza studies her.

ELIZA
I know what Sarah told me.

Mercy waits.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
That's all.

MERCY
All right.

Eliza wraps both hands around her cup.

ELIZA
She came here when things got bad.

MERCY
With Daddy?

ELIZA
With Caleb.

The distinction lands.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
At first she'd just sit.

MERCY
Why?

ELIZA
Didn't want to go home yet.

Mercy's fingers tighten around the cup.

MERCY
Did he hit her?

Eliza doesn't soften it.

ELIZA
Sometimes.

Mercy absorbs it.

MERCY
Me?

ELIZA
She never said he did.

Mercy looks away.

A CHILD'S BREATH.

Soft. Mercy looks toward the doorway. YOUNG MERCY stands there. Watching. Beyond her—

SARAH.

Blood at her mouth. Mercy's breath catches.

CALEB (V.O.)
Don't stare.

Young Mercy doesn't move. Sarah wipes her mouth. Looks toward someone Mercy cannot see.

CALEB (V.O.)
Mama's fine.

Mercy rises—

ELIZA (O.S.)

Mercy?

The room snaps back. Empty doorway. Coffee. Eliza. Mercy is standing.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

You all right?

Mercy looks at the doorway. Then sits.

MERCY

Yeah.

She breathes. Low. Slow. Her own rhythm. Eliza watches. Doesn't interrupt.

MERCY (CONT'D)

She ever tell you why she stayed?

ELIZA

Loved him.

Mercy looks up.

MERCY

That's it?

ELIZA

You think loving somebody keeps you from being afraid of them?

Mercy says nothing.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Sarah spent a long time believing the good Caleb was the real one.

MERCY

Wasn't he?

Eliza considers.

ELIZA

Being there ain't the same as understanding.

Mercy looks at her.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

I wasn't in their house.

A beat.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
I know what Sarah told me.

The boundary again. Mercy nods.

MERCY
Did she tell you about leaving?

ELIZA
Yes.

Mercy's eyes sharpen.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
She had clothes packed. Money put
away.

FLASH—
Fabric inside the trunk.

Coins wrapped in cloth. A photograph. Caleb's hand. Sarah's
hand. The lid—

CLICK.

BACK TO SCENE.

Mercy's fingers clamp around the edge of the table.

ELIZA
Mercy?

MERCY
I remember the trunk.

Eliza waits.

MERCY (CONT'D)
I thought she was taking me away
from him.

ELIZA
She was.

MERCY
I didn't want to go.

Eliza says nothing. Mercy stares into the coffee.

MERCY (CONT'D)
I told him.

Eliza remains still. Mercy looks up.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Didn't I?

ELIZA
I don't know.

Mercy absorbs that. No rescue. No certainty.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
Sarah said Caleb always knew when
she was planning something.

Mercy's face changes. Another fragment— The trunk. Caleb's
hand on the lid. Sarah's hand beneath his.

CLICK.

Mercy closes her eyes.

ELIZA (O.S.)
She blamed herself for that.

Mercy's eyes open.

MERCY
For what?

ELIZA
For letting you think leaving meant
taking you away from your father.

Mercy can't speak.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
She said you loved him.

Mercy's fingers find the SILVER BIRD.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
Said that wasn't your fault.

Mercy looks at her.

MERCY
Where did she go?

Eliza hesitates.

ELIZA
Last time I saw her, she said she
was going home.

MERCY

Why?

ELIZA

For you.

Mercy looks toward the doorway again. Nothing there.

MERCY

What happened?

ELIZA

I don't know.

Mercy waits for more. None comes. Eliza reaches across the table. Stops before touching Mercy's hand. Leaves the choice. Mercy looks at the offered hand.

Then takes it.

CUT TO:

INT. BOONE HOMESTEAD - BEDROOM - DAY - 1869

The TRUNK. Open. Packed clothes. Coins wrapped in cloth. The family photograph. Sarah stands over it. Not frightened yet. Resolved. CALEB appears in the doorway. Sarah sees him. Neither speaks. Caleb enters. Looks into the trunk.

CALEB

Where you going?

SARAH

Away.

CALEB

Where?

SARAH

Doesn't matter.

Caleb looks at Mercy's clothes.

CALEB

Taking her.

SARAH

Yes.

Caleb touches one of Mercy's blouses.

CALEB

She's my daughter.

SARAH
She's mine too.

Caleb looks at her. Calm.

CALEB
You think she's gonna choose you?

Sarah says nothing. Caleb lifts the family photograph.
Studies it.

CALEB (CONT'D)
You tell her what you think I am?

SARAH
I don't have to.

CALEB
Then ask her.

Sarah's certainty falters. Caleb sees it.

CALEB (CONT'D)
Ask her who she wants.

Sarah reaches for the photograph. Caleb doesn't release it. A
beat. Then he does. Sarah puts it back.

SARAH
I'm not making her choose.

CALEB
You already are.

Sarah looks at him.

SARAH
I'm leaving.

Caleb's hand settles on the trunk lid. Sarah puts hers there
too. The same hands. The same lid.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Don't.

Caleb looks at her hand. Then Sarah.

CALEB
You listen to me—

SARAH
No.

A beat. Caleb almost smiles. Then—

FOOTSTEPS.

Mercy approaches. Sarah pulls her hand away. MERCY appears in the doorway. Caleb's entire face changes. Warm. Familiar. Daddy. Mercy smiles at him. Sarah watches. Not Caleb. Mercy.

MERCY

What're you doing?

Sarah looks toward the trunk. Then Caleb.

SARAH

Packing.

MERCY

For what?

Sarah crosses to Mercy. Takes her hand.

SARAH

Come here.

Caleb watches.

SARAH (CONT'D)

If I asked you to come somewhere
with me—

Mercy waits.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Would you?

MERCY

Where?

SARAH

Away.

Mercy looks toward Caleb.

MERCY

Daddy coming?

Sarah's face breaks.

CALEB

Sounds like your mama's got an
adventure planned.

Mercy smiles.

MERCY

Can we all go?

Caleb looks at Sarah.

CALEB
Wouldn't be much of a family if we
didn't.

Sarah says nothing. Mercy looks between them.

MERCY
Mama?

Caleb smiles. Sarah sees Mercy relax. Understands. She cannot tell her. Not like this. Not with Mercy already looking at Daddy for the answer. Caleb kneels beside the trunk. Picks up one of Mercy's blouses. Folds it. Carefully.

MERCY (CONT'D)
That's mine.

CALEB
I know.

He places it back. Gentle. Normal. Mercy watches him. Trusting. Caleb looks up at her.

CALEB (CONT'D)
Your mama's had herself a morning.

Sarah closes her eyes.

MERCY
Mama's been acting strange.

Silence. The words land differently now. Mercy doesn't know. Sarah does. Caleb does. Caleb looks at Sarah. Then- Smiles.

CALEB
She'll be alright.

Mercy nods. She believes him.

CLICK.

The trunk closes.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. ABANDONED SHELTER - NIGHT - 1874

MERCY'S EYES OPEN.

Caleb stands across from her. Present. Silent. Mercy looks sick.

MERCY
I said it.

Caleb doesn't answer.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Mama's acting strange.

FLASH—
Young Mercy looking at Caleb.

MERCY
Mama's been acting strange.

Caleb smiling.

BACK.

Mercy looks at Caleb.

MERCY (CONT'D)
You'd already told them.

Silence.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Deeks.

Caleb says nothing.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Everybody.

Nothing. Mercy's eyes fill.

MERCY (CONT'D)
And then I said it too.

CALEB
You didn't know.

MERCY
I helped you.

CALEB
No.

MERCY
I made you right.

CALEB
Mercy—

MERCY
To them.

That stops him. Mercy sees it now. Her innocent observation.
Her father's smile. Her mother's silence. Three pieces
occupying the same memory.

MERCY (CONT'D)
That's why she stopped.

Caleb says nothing.

MERCY (CONT'D)
She looked at me—

FLASH—

Sarah looking at Mercy after:

MAMA'S BEEN ACTING STRANGE.

BACK.

MERCY (CONT'D)
—and knew I'd believe you.

CALEB
You loved me.

Mercy stares at him.

MERCY
So did she.

Caleb has nothing. Mercy looks away. Her breathing climbs.
Caleb takes a step.

CALEB
Breathe.

Mercy raises one hand. Stops him.

MERCY
No.

She breathes. By herself. In. Out. Again. Her breathing
steadies. Caleb watches. Mercy looks at him. Not gone. Not
defeated.

Just no longer deciding what the breath means.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS - MORNING - 1874

BLACK.

A GASP.

Mercy's eyes open. Leaves above her. She lies on the ground. Disoriented. Her HORSE stands several yards away. Saddled. Nervous. Mercy pushes herself up. Pain. She touches the back of her head. A shallow cut. Blood on her fingers. Her right hand is already bloodied. Mercy stares at it. Her REVOLVER lies several feet away. She looks down. Her sleeve is TORN at the shoulder. Then— A MAN lies nearby. Dead. Thirty-something. Travel clothes. Mercy doesn't recognize him. A wound beneath his ribs.

MERCY

Jesus.

Across the clearing— CALEB sits on a fallen log. Watching. Mercy stares at him.

MERCY (CONT'D)

Who is he?

Caleb says nothing. Mercy gets to her feet. Unsteady.

MERCY (CONT'D)

Daddy.

Nothing. She approaches the body. Looks at the wound. Then her revolver. Separated from her. No answer there. Mercy's hand drops to her knife sheath. Empty. Her breath stops. Several feet away— Her KNIFE. Blood on the blade.

MERCY (CONT'D)

No.

She looks at Caleb.

MERCY (CONT'D)

What happened?

Caleb says nothing.

MERCY (CONT'D)

Did I kill him?

A beat.

CALEB
You don't remember?

Mercy's fear deepens.

MERCY
No.

Caleb looks toward the body.

CALEB
He came at you.

Mercy looks at the dead man's hand. His KNIFE lies nearby. She looks at her torn sleeve. Touches the back of her head again. Blood. Evidence. Not memory.

MERCY
He hit me.

CALEB
Looks that way.

Mercy looks sharply at him.

MERCY
Looks?

Caleb says nothing. Mercy kneels beside the Unknown Man. Studies the pieces. His knife. Her bloody knife. Her torn sleeve. The wound beneath his ribs. Her revolver in the leaves. She begins assembling them.

MERCY (CONT'D)
I fought him.

Silence.

MERCY (CONT'D)
He hit me.

Nothing.

MERCY (CONT'D)
I stabbed him.

Caleb watches. Mercy hears herself. Stops. Looks at him.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Did you see it?

No answer.

MERCY (CONT'D)

Daddy.

A beat.

CALEB

You were scared.

Mercy stares at him. Not an answer. She looks back at the body. At her own hand. Blood drying across the knuckles. Mercy reaches for her knife. Wipes the blade once against the grass. Stops. Blood remains in the groove. She stares at it. No image comes. No memory. Nothing.

EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

The LEDGER lies open across Mercy's knee. A blank line. She writes:

UNKNOWN MAN - ATTACKED ME.

Mercy stares at the words. At the body. At Caleb. Back to the ledger. Her pencil moves.

SCRATCH. SCRATCH. SCRATCH.

She obliterates:

ATTACKED ME.

Mercy waits. Then writes beneath it:

I DON'T REMEMBER.

She looks at the sentence. Doesn't cross it out. Caleb watches. Mercy closes the ledger. Looks once more at the Unknown Man.

No verdict.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODED TRAIL - AFTERNOON

Mercy rides alone. Dried blood at her hairline. Her torn sleeve pulls at the shoulder.

A RIFLE CRACKS.

Bark explodes beside her head. Mercy drops from the saddle.
CALEB appears behind a tree.

CALEB

Left.

Mercy rolls—

BANG.

A BOUNTY HUNTER drops. Another charges from the brush. Mercy
FIRES twice. He goes down. Silence. Then—

YOUNG HUNTER (O.S.)

I surrender!

Mercy turns. A YOUNG MAN, barely twenty, steps from the
trees. Hands raised. His revolver still holstered. Caleb
watches him.

CALEB

Don't trust him.

Mercy keeps the Young Hunter covered.

MERCY

Turn around.

He does. Slowly.

MERCY (CONT'D)

Two fingers. Drop the gun.

The Young Hunter slowly draws his revolver with two fingers.
Drops it.

MERCY (CONT'D)

Kick it away.

He does. The revolver skids across the dirt.

YOUNG HUNTER

I ain't dying for them.

MERCY

Who?

YOUNG HUNTER

Poster out of Sagebrush. That's all
I know.

CALEB
He's lying.

Mercy studies the Young Hunter. Terrified. Hands still raised.

MERCY
Another gun?

YOUNG HUNTER
No.

MERCY
Knife?

YOUNG HUNTER
Boot.

Mercy looks. The KNIFE HANDLE protrudes from his boot. Still there.

MERCY
Take your boot off.

The Young Hunter lowers one hand.

CALEB
He's reaching.

Mercy FIRES. The Young Hunter drops. Silence. Mercy's revolver remains trained on him. Then she sees— His hand. Open. Empty. The knife remains in his boot.

MERCY
No.

She rushes to him. Presses both hands against the wound.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Stay with me.

Blood pushes between her fingers.

YOUNG HUNTER
Was taking—

He struggles for breath.

YOUNG HUNTER (CONT'D)
Boot off.

Mercy closes her eyes. The Young Hunter dies. His hand falls open. Empty. The knife remains in his boot. Mercy's bloody hands stay against him. She looks at his face.

BENJAMIN.

Dead beneath her hands. No words. Mercy recoils— The YOUNG HUNTER again. Dead. Empty hand. Knife still in his boot. Mercy looks at Caleb.

MERCY
He wasn't reaching.

CALEB
He moved.

MERCY
Because I told him to.

Caleb looks at the untouched knife.

CALEB
Could've.

Mercy stares at him.

MERCY
Could've.

A beat.

MERCY (CONT'D)
You saw him reaching?

Caleb doesn't answer.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Daddy.

CALEB
I saw him move.

Mercy goes still. There it is.

MERCY
No.

She rises. Blood on her hands again.

MERCY (CONT'D)
You told me what it meant.

Caleb looks at her.

CALEB
You'd just been shot at.

MERCY

Don't.

CALEB

He had a knife.

MERCY

In his boot.

CALEB

Could've gone for it.

MERCY

But he didn't.

Silence. Mercy's breathing tightens. Caleb steps toward her.

CALEB

Breathe.

Mercy looks at him. Then deliberately turns away. Her hand settles against her stomach. In. Out. Again. Steady. Mercy looks at the Young Hunter's empty hand. Then the knife. Still in his boot. Then Caleb.

MERCY

That's the problem.

Caleb waits.

MERCY (CONT'D)

You make everything feel certain.

Mercy looks at the dead Young Hunter. No uncertainty here. She knows what happened.

CUT TO:

EXT. ABANDONED WAY STATION - NIGHT

Rain taps a sagging roof. Mercy sits beneath it. Cleaning her revolver. Her blood-stained knife lies beside her. A HORSE approaches. Mercy is on her feet instantly.

Gun drawn.

CUT TO:

EXT. ABANDONED WAY STATION - NIGHT

Rain needles through the trees. Mercy stands beneath the sagging roof. Revolver leveled. A RIDER emerges through the rain. Hands visible.

RIDER

Easy.

Mercy doesn't lower the gun.

MERCY

Get off the horse.

The Rider dismounts. Slowly. ETHAN HALE, 30s. Wet. Tired. Unarmed at first glance.

ETHAN

Mercy Boone?

MERCY

Depends who's asking.

ETHAN

Ethan Hale.

Nothing.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Jonah Hale was my father.

Mercy knows the name. Her gun stays up.

MERCY

Turn around.

Ethan does.

MERCY (CONT'D)

Gun.

Ethan removes his revolver with two fingers. Drops it.

MERCY (CONT'D)

Kick it.

He does. The revolver disappears into mud. Mercy's eyes move over him.

MERCY (CONT'D)

Knife?

ETHAN

None.

Caleb stands beneath the opposite edge of the roof. Watching Ethan.

CALEB
He's lying.

Mercy looks at Ethan. Not Caleb.

MERCY
Why are you here?

ETHAN
Looking for you.

CALEB
There it is.

Mercy's finger tightens against the trigger.

MERCY
Why?

Ethan slowly reaches toward his coat. Mercy's revolver rises. Caleb steps closer.

CALEB
Mercy.

Ethan sees the change in her. Stops. His hand still.

ETHAN
Paper.

Mercy waits. Doesn't let Caleb answer for him.

MERCY
Slow.

Ethan reaches into his coat. Removes a folded document. Nothing else. He holds it out. Mercy takes it. Keeps the revolver on him. Opens the paper.

A LAND RECORD.

JONAH HALE.

Then—

SARAH BOONE.

Mercy looks up.

MERCY
Where'd you get this?

ETHAN
My father's things.

MERCY
Why's Mama's name on it?

ETHAN
Because she came to him.

Caleb watches.

MERCY
When?

ETHAN
After Caleb died.

Mercy looks at the document again.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
She needed somewhere to put land
Deeks couldn't touch.

MERCY
Why your father?

ETHAN
He owed her.

MERCY
For what?

ETHAN
Don't know.

Mercy studies him.

CALEB
Convenient.

Mercy ignores him.

MERCY
Where is Jonah?

ETHAN
Dead.

MERCY
How?

ETHAN
Winter fever.

No hesitation. No story attached. Mercy folds the paper.

MERCY
Why bring this to me?

ETHAN
Because Deeks knows you're coming.

Mercy raises the gun again.

MERCY
How?

ETHAN
Men rode through two days ago
asking after you.

MERCY
Whose men?

ETHAN
Deeks's.

CALEB
Kill him.

Mercy's eyes flick toward Caleb. Ethan sees only her
attention shift.

ETHAN
Somebody there?

Mercy looks back at him.

MERCY
No.

Caleb almost smiles.

CALEB
Good girl.

Mercy's jaw tightens.

ETHAN
You trust me?

MERCY
No.

ETHAN

Fair.

Mercy studies him. His empty hands. His revolver in the mud. The folded paper in hers. Ethan reaches slowly toward his coat again. Mercy prepares. Caleb leans in.

CALEB

Now.

Mercy waits. Ethan removes a SEALED ENVELOPE. Holds it out.

ETHAN

This too.

Mercy takes it. Her name is written across the front.

MERCY BOONE.

She recognizes the handwriting. Her mother's. Mercy's face empties.

MERCY

Where'd you get this?

ETHAN

My father kept it.

Mercy turns it over. Still sealed.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Said if you ever came asking, it was yours.

Mercy's thumb rests beneath the flap. She could open it. Doesn't. Caleb looks at the envelope. For once— No instruction. Mercy puts it inside her coat.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

You gonna shoot me?

Mercy looks at him.

MERCY

I'm choosing not to shoot you.

Caleb's expression changes. Ethan nods.

ETHAN

Appreciate the distinction.

Mercy holsters her revolver.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

What now?

Mercy looks toward the dark road.

MERCY

Show me the schoolhouse.

Ethan retrieves his revolver from the mud. Mercy watches. He holsters it. They mount. Mercy looks toward Red Creek. A decision.

MERCY (CONT'D)

One stop first.

Ethan understands. They ride into the rain. Caleb remains beneath the way-station roof. For a moment.

Then darkness takes the space.

CUT TO:

EXT. CREEK BED - OUTSIDE RED CREEK - NIGHT

Black water around Mercy's boots. Ahead - DEEKS' COMPOUND. Lanterns. Fence. Armed men. Mercy moves alone. Rain beads along the dried blood at her hairline. Her torn sleeve clings to her shoulder. A branch SNAPS behind her. She spins. CALEB stands in the creek.

MERCY

I told you to stay.

CALEB

Didn't.

Mercy keeps moving.

CALEB (CONT'D)

Left side.

A SHADOW shifts near the fence. Mercy's revolver rises.

CALEB (CONT'D)

Shoot.

Mercy waits. The shadow enters moonlight—

A HORSE.

Mercy lowers the gun. Looks at Caleb.

MERCY
You saw movement.

Caleb says nothing. Mercy moves on.

EXT. WEST WALL - MOMENTS LATER

A lone GUARD. Young. Cold. Rifle in hand. Mercy comes up behind him.

MERCY
Drop it.

The Guard spins. Mercy's revolver is already leveled.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Rifle.

He drops it.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Kick it back.

He obeys.

CALEB
He'll warn them.

MERCY
Hands.

The Guard raises them.

GUARD
I don't want trouble.

MERCY
Then don't make any.

Caleb watches.

CALEB
Kill him.

Mercy studies the Guard. Terrified. Nothing more. She gestures toward the darkness.

MERCY
Go.

The Guard hesitates.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Before I reconsider.

He runs. Caleb watches him disappear.

CALEB
He'll bring men.

MERCY
Maybe.

Mercy climbs the fence.

EXT. COMPOUND YARD - CONTINUOUS

Mercy drops inside. A SECOND GUARD spots her.

SECOND GUARD
Hey—

He reaches for his rifle. Mercy FIRES. He drops. Another man emerges from the bunkhouse. Gun already coming up.

BANG.

Down. Mercy moves. No flourish. No hesitation. Necessary violence. A THIRD MAN appears at the stable door. Empty hands. Mercy aims.

CALEB
Shoot.

Mercy waits. The man raises his hands.

THIRD MAN
Don't.

CALEB
He's with Deeks.

Mercy looks at him.

MERCY
Leave.

The man runs. Caleb follows Mercy.

CALEB
Getting soft.

MERCY
Getting particular.

EXT. MAIN HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Two MEN guard the porch. Mercy crouches behind a wagon.
Across the yard- Movement near the stable.

ETHAN.

He slips toward a side door. Exactly where he said he'd be.
Mercy watches him. Caleb does too.

CALEB
Deeks blood.

Mercy looks at Caleb. Then Ethan.

MERCY
He's Ethan.

Ethan disappears inside. One porch guard turns toward the
stable. Mercy rises.

BANG.

The first guard drops. The second dives behind a post and
FIRES. Mercy ducks. Wood splinters beside her.

CALEB
Right.

Mercy starts right- Stops. Looks left. A rain barrel. Better
cover. She goes left. The Guard fires again. Misses. Mercy
circles. One shot. The Guard falls. Caleb watches her.

CALEB (CONT'D)
Right would've worked.

Mercy reloads.

MERCY
Left did.

A CHILD SCREAMS inside the house. Mercy freezes. Caleb looks
toward the door.

CALEB
Deeks is in there.

Mercy approaches.

INT. MAIN HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Dark hallway. Mercy enters. A MAN steps from a doorway. Mercy aims. He drops his pistol immediately.

MAN

Please.

Caleb appears beside Mercy.

CALEB

He's between you and Deeks.

Mercy looks at the man's empty hands.

MERCY

Then move.

He does. Mercy passes him. Caleb stays beside her.

CALEB

Three now.

Mercy keeps walking.

MERCY

Three what?

CALEB

Men you left behind.

Mercy stops. Looks at him.

MERCY

Alive?

Caleb doesn't answer. Mercy continues. At the end of the hall— Ethan appears. Gun in hand. Mercy whips her revolver toward him. Ethan immediately lowers his.

ETHAN

Got the boy.

Behind him— A frightened BOY, maybe nine. Mercy looks from Ethan's gun— To Ethan. Waits. Ethan holsters it.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Deeks is upstairs.

Caleb steps close to Mercy.

CALEB

Shoot him.

Mercy looks at Caleb. Then Ethan.

MERCY
Get the boy out.

Ethan nods. Takes the child's hand. They head for the rear door. Caleb watches them go.

CALEB
You're letting a Deeks walk away.

Mercy looks up the staircase.

MERCY
I'm letting Ethan walk away.

She starts upstairs.

CUT TO:

INT. DEEKS' COMPOUND - UPSTAIRS ROOM - NIGHT

Mercy reaches the landing. A closed door. Caleb stands beside it.

CALEB
He's in there.

Mercy opens the door. HARLAN DEEKS sits at a table. Waiting. His REVOLVER rests on the tabletop. Within reach. He isn't reaching. Mercy enters. Closes the door. Deeks takes in the wet coat. Torn sleeve. Blood at her hairline. Then the revolver in her hand.

DEEKS
Figured you'd come back.

Caleb stands near the wall.

CALEB
Kill him.

Mercy ignores him. She draws. Deeks looks at the gun.

DEEKS
There it is.

MERCY
You made them lie about my mother.

DEEKS
I did.

MERCY
Helped take me from her.

DEEKS
Yeah.

MERCY
Stole her land.

DEEKS
Helped.

No excuses. That almost makes it worse.

MERCY
Why?

Deeks looks at her.

DEEKS
Because I was afraid of your
father.

Caleb smiles faintly.

CALEB
Hear that?

DEEKS
Then he died.

A beat.

DEEKS (CONT'D)
And I kept doing it anyway.

Caleb's smile disappears.

MERCY
So don't blame him.

DEEKS
Ain't.

Deeks looks at Mercy's revolver.

DEEKS (CONT'D)
You shouldn't either.

Mercy stiffens.

MERCY
I'm nothing like you.

DEEKS
Didn't say you were.

A beat.

DEEKS (CONT'D)
But fear makes a fine excuse after
the fact.

Mercy's gun rises.

CALEB
Do it.

Deeks looks straight down the barrel. His revolver remains on
the table.

DEEKS
Thought about this a long time?

MERCY
Every day.

DEEKS
Then do it.

Caleb steps beside Deeks.

CALEB
You heard him.

Mercy's finger settles on the trigger. Deeks doesn't move.

DEEKS
Just know whose hand it is.

Mercy freezes. Caleb looks at Deeks. Then Mercy.

CALEB
Yours.

Mercy looks at her hand. Her gun.

CALEB (CONT'D)
He took your mother.

Mercy breathes.

CALEB (CONT'D)
Took your home.

In. Out.

CALEB (CONT'D)
Made them call her crazy.

Mercy keeps breathing.

CALEB (CONT'D)
Kill him.

Mercy looks at Caleb.

MERCY
You want him dead?

CALEB
Yes.

MERCY
Why?

Caleb's certainty falters.

CALEB
You know why.

MERCY
No.

She turns the question on him.

MERCY (CONT'D)
You tell me.

Caleb says nothing. Mercy looks at Deeks.

MERCY (CONT'D)
You want to die?

Deeks considers it.

DEEKS
Some days.

MERCY
Tonight?

DEEKS
That's your decision.

Mercy almost laughs.

MERCY
Everybody keeps giving me those.

She lowers the gun. Caleb steps toward her.

CALEB

Mercy.

She raises it again. At Deeks.

BANG.

Deeks jerks. A bullet hole in the wall beside his head. Silence. Deeks looks at the hole. Then Mercy. Caleb stares at her.

CALEB

You missed.

Mercy looks directly at him.

MERCY

No.

Caleb goes still. Mercy holsters the revolver. Deeks looks almost offended.

DEEKS

That's it?

Mercy turns toward the door.

DEEKS (CONT'D)

After everything I did?

She stops. Looks back.

MERCY

Living with it ain't mercy.

A beat.

MERCY (CONT'D)

It's yours.

Mercy leaves. Deeks remains seated. Alive. His revolver still on the table.

Caleb follows Mercy into the hall.

CUT TO:

INT. ABANDONED WAY STATION - PRE-DAWN

Rain softens against the roof. Mercy sits alone. The SEALED ENVELOPE in Sarah's handwriting rests in her hands. Her thumb follows:

MERCY BOONE.

She opens it. Several folded pages. Mercy begins to read.

SARAH (V.O.)
My little bird-

Mercy stops. Her fingers find the SILVER BIRD. Then she continues.

SARAH (V.O.)
If you're reading this, then
somebody finally did what I
couldn't.

A beat.

SARAH (V.O.)
Put the truth in your hands and let
you decide what to do with it.

Mercy looks down at the letter. No Sarah. No apparition. Only ink.

SARAH (V.O.)
Your father loved you.

Mercy's eyes close.

SARAH (V.O.)
He hurt me.

A beat.

SARAH (V.O.)
Both are true.

Mercy breathes.

SARAH (V.O.)
There was nothing wrong with loving
your father.

Mercy's eyes open.

SARAH (V.O.)
I loved him too.

Mercy's face breaks. Not violently. Quietly.

SARAH (V.O.)
For a long time, I thought loving
the good parts meant I had to live
with the rest.

Mercy reads on.

SARAH (V.O.)
I was wrong.

The rain. The paper in Mercy's hands.

SARAH (V.O.)
I was leaving because I chose you.

Mercy swallows.

SARAH (V.O.)
Not because you needed saving from
loving him.

A tear lands on the page.

SARAH (V.O.)
Because you deserved the chance to
grow up and decide for yourself who
you were going to be.

Mercy looks toward the empty space across from her. Caleb is not there. She returns to the letter.

SARAH (V.O.)
If I failed you, it was because I
waited too long to understand that.

Mercy shakes her head.

MERCY
Mama—

Only rain answers.

SARAH (V.O.)
Don't use me to choose what comes
next.

Mercy stills.

SARAH (V.O.)
You do not owe the dead the rest of
your life.

Silence. Mercy finishes the page. There is more. She reads it privately. No voice now. When she reaches the end, she folds the letter along its old creases. Carefully. Keeps it. The KILL LEDGER lies beside her. Mercy looks at it. Pulls it into her lap. Opens it. Names. Marks.

BENJAMIN COLE.

Crossed out. Mercy's finger rests beside it. Turns the page.

ELI TURNER.

Another mark. Another page.

HORACE HAYWORTH.

Mercy keeps going. Then—

UNKNOWN MAN.

Below it:

I DON'T REMEMBER.

Mercy stares at the words. Doesn't alter them. Turns the page. Stops. A final name.

MERCY BOONE.

Mercy doesn't move. Across the room— Caleb stands in the shadows. Silent. Mercy looks at him. Then her own name. She lifts the pencil. Caleb watches. The point hovers beside:

MERCY BOONE.

Mercy lowers the pencil. No mark. She closes the ledger.

THUMP.

Caleb remains. Mercy places Sarah's letter inside her coat.

The ledger stays closed.

CUT TO:

EXT. ABANDONED SCHOOLHOUSE - DAWN

Morning light through cottonwoods. The old SCHOOLHOUSE waits at the edge of Red Creek. Mercy and Ethan approach on horseback. They stop. Mercy looks at the building.

ETHAN

You want me to come in?

Mercy dismounts.

MERCY

No.

Ethan nods. No argument. Mercy starts toward the schoolhouse.

ETHAN

Mercy.

She turns.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

I'll be here.

Mercy looks at him.

MERCY

I know.

She enters.

INT. ABANDONED SCHOOLHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Dust floats in shafts of morning light. Broken desks. A blackboard faded gray. Mercy's boots cross the floorboards. Each step CREAKS. She stops near the front. Nothing. Mercy looks around.

MERCY

Mama?

Silence. Her hand finds the SILVER BIRD. A faint sound—

CHILDREN LAUGHING.

Mercy turns. For an instant— The schoolhouse is alive. Children at desks. Sunlight. YOUNG MERCY among them. Then— Empty desks. Dust. Mercy moves deeper into the room. A desk near the window. Something carved into the wood. Mercy brushes away dust.

S.B.

Her fingers stop.

MERCY

Sarah Boone.

A memory— Sarah laughing across Sarah Miller's table. Then gone. Mercy smiles faintly. Not every memory hurts. She looks toward the blackboard. A WOMAN stands there.

SARAH.

Young. Healthy. Back to Mercy. Writing something Mercy cannot see. Mercy doesn't move. Sarah turns— The room is empty. No message on the board. No revelation. Mercy exhales.

MERCY

All right.

A FLOORBOARD shifts behind her. Mercy turns. CALEB stands in the back of the schoolhouse. Stable. Clear. Mercy looks at him.

CALEB

You find what you wanted?

Mercy considers the question.

MERCY

Some of it.

Caleb looks around.

CALEB

She hated school.

Mercy almost smiles.

MERCY

You know that?

CALEB

Think so.

Mercy notices the answer.

MERCY

Think so.

Caleb shrugs. Mercy looks at the carved initials.

MERCY (CONT'D)

I'm keeping the bird.

CALEB

Figured.

MERCY

Keeping the breathing too.

CALEB

Good.

Mercy looks at him.

MERCY

Not because they're yours.

Caleb says nothing.

MERCY (CONT'D)

Not because they're hers.

A beat.

MERCY (CONT'D)

Because I want them.

Caleb absorbs that. Mercy walks toward a cracked WINDOW. Her reflection appears in the glass. Caleb behind her. For a moment— Their reflections overlap. His face close to hers. The old contamination. Mercy studies it. Then shifts. Her reflection separates from his. Two figures. Mercy. Caleb.

CALEB

What happens now?

Mercy looks at herself.

MERCY

I decide.

Caleb's expression changes. Not wounded. Not angry. Something almost like pride.

CALEB

Your call.

Mercy looks at him in the glass.

MERCY

Yeah.

A beat.

MERCY (CONT'D)

Mine.

She turns away from the window. Caleb remains. Mercy walks toward the door. At the threshold— She stops. Looks back. Caleb stands in the empty schoolhouse.

MERCY (CONT'D)

You coming?

Caleb looks toward the open door. Then Mercy.

CALEB
If you want.

Mercy considers him.

MERCY
Not today.

Caleb nods. Mercy steps outside.

EXT. ABANDONED SCHOOLHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ethan waits beside the horses. He looks at Mercy. Doesn't ask. Mercy mounts. Ethan does the same. They ride away. Mercy doesn't look back.

INT. ABANDONED SCHOOLHOUSE - SAME

Empty. Morning light. The cracked window. For just an instantâ€” Caleb's reflection remains in the glass. Then the light shifts.

Only the schoolhouse.

CUT TO:

YEARS LATER

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE - AFTERNOON

Children pack books and slates. Older now, MERCY moves between the desks. The SILVER BIRD remains at her throat. At the back, ETHAN gathers books. His hand begins to shake. He stops. Clenches it. Worse. Mercy notices.

ETHAN
I'm fine.

Mercy says nothing. Ethan tries again. His breathing shortens.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
I said I'm fine.

MERCY
I heard you.

Mercy continues stacking books. No staring. No touching. No command. Ethan tries to steady himself. Can't. Mercy places a hand against her own stomach. Breathes in. Slow. Lets it out. Ethan watches.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Something my daddy taught me.

Another breath. Low. Steady.

MERCY (CONT'D)
Helped sometimes.

Ethan looks at his shaking hand. Then Mercy.

MERCY (CONT'D)
If you want.

Ethan tries. Too fast. Again. Slower. Mercy breathes with him. Not for him. Again. His hand settles. Ethan looks at it.

ETHAN
Huh.

MERCY
Yeah.

The SCHOOL BELL rings. The children ERUPT from their desks. Mercy steps aside as they race for the door. Laughing. Alive. Ethan gathers his books. Starts out. Stops.

ETHAN
Almost forgot.

He reaches into his pocket.

A SMALL WOODEN BIRD.

Roughly carved. One wing larger than the other. He holds it out. Mercy takes it. Studies the crooked little thing.

MERCY
You make this?

ETHAN
Yeah.

MERCY
I can tell.

Ethan smiles. Mercy's thumb passes over the uneven wing.

ETHAN

Thought you might want it.

Mercy looks at the wooden bird. Then the silver one at her throat. One inherited. One offered.

MERCY

I do.

She slips the wooden bird into her pocket. Ethan heads for the door. At the threshold—

ETHAN

Tomorrow?

Mercy looks around the emptying schoolhouse. Then at him.

MERCY

Tomorrow.

Ethan leaves. Children's laughter drifts through the open windows. Mercy stands alone. For a moment. Then begins gathering the abandoned slates.

Ordinary work.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Quiet now. Mercy erases the BLACKBOARD. Chalk dust falls. She stacks the last slate. Straightens a desk. Outside— Children laugh somewhere down the road. Mercy smiles to herself. She reaches into her pocket. The WOODEN BIRD. One uneven wing. She sets it on the teacher's desk. The SILVER BIRD remains at her throat. Mercy looks around the room. Ordinary. Lived in. Hers. She crosses to a cracked WINDOW. Late sunlight catches the glass. Mercy's reflection. Then— CALEB stands behind her. Clear. Quiet. Mercy sees him. Doesn't turn. Caleb looks older somehow. Or maybe Mercy does. A long beat.

CALEB

You did good today.

Mercy looks at herself in the glass. The silver bird. The schoolhouse behind her. Caleb.

MERCY

I know.

Caleb smiles. Small. Mercy picks up her coat. Moves toward the door. Her reflection slides out of the window.

Caleb remains in the glass. Mercy exits. The schoolhouse door closes softly. Caleb's reflection stays.

Alone.

CUT TO BLACK.