

E-Town

After surviving a brutal frontier killer, a resilient woman escapes with evidence of his crimes and teams up with a battle-hardened gunfighter whose own brand of justice is feared as much as the man they're hunting.

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Based on true events and real people from 19th century America. Some characters, dialogue, and incidents have been fictionalized for narrative purposes. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or deceased, is not intended to be a definitive historical account.

FADE IN

EXT. NEW MEXICO - MORNING

Sunrise crests jagged peaks. Snow clings to high ridges while the valley below warms under an autumn sky.

A creek weaves through stone, its surface flashing silver. A gentle wind sways tall green pines.

CLAY ALLISON (VO)

When I was a young man, Maw used to sit us kids down in the evenings... read from a book by some fella named Thoreau. Yankee writer, I reckon.

Crows CAW overhead.

CLAY ALLISON (VO) (CONT'D)

One line always stuck with me. Don't rightly know why. *"The hero is most often the simplest and obscurest of men."*

A deer stands on the ridge - still, watchful.

CLAY ALLISON (VO) (CONT'D)

Ain't nothin' simple about me. Obscure, maybe. But a hero? Never aimed to be one.

The wind dies. The trees settle.

CLAY ALLISON(V.O.)

When doin' what needs doin' puts a man at odds with the law, makes him wonder if right and legal ever shared the same bed.

The land opens wide. Below, Elizabethtown fills the valley - chimney smoke rising, figures crossing dirt streets, wagons threading between buildings. Laundry snaps like flags.

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN - CONTINUOUS

SUPER: ELIZABETHTOWN, NM - Late September 1870

Hammers RING as fresh frames rise along Main Street. Townsfolk thread across the rutted road, their voices

blending into a low, constant hum.

At the forge, a blacksmith pauses mid-swing, soot streaked across his brow.

Across the way, Mrs. Wilson hurries past with a basket tucked to her hip.

BLACKSMITH  
Morning, Mrs. Wilson!

She smiles, waves, disappears around the corner.

Miners spill out of Mutz's Hotel - pickaxes slung over their shoulders, boots caked with dust, faces burned red by the sun. They climb into a mule-drawn wagon.

A Wells Fargo stagecoach thunders past. Reins SNAP. Wheels RATTLE. The guard scans the street, rifle resting across his lap. He blows a sharp WHISTLE.

Two kids leap clear as the wagon blasts them with dust - then bolt into the general store, laughter trailing behind.

Out front, two travelers argue beside a cloth-covered wagon.

TRAVELER #1  
The pass will save us a day.

TRAVELER #2  
(shakes head)  
Not worth the risk.

Traveler #1 studies the mountains. A beat. Then nods.

We rise above the rooftops, past chimneys and over the tree line. Town noise thins, then falls away. Wind takes over.

The valley drops beneath us as we glide toward the distant mountains.

EXT. TAOS PASS - DAY

A deep ox SNORT breaks the silence, steam blooming in the cold air. Its hooves STOMP in the snow.

A small cart CREAKS behind it, stacked with pelts and whiskey barrels.

FRANCISCO PADILLA (late 20s, Mexican trader) and MANUEL HERRERA (late 20s, fur hunter) trudge alongside, shoulders hunched against the cold.

MANUEL

Cold's settin' in quicker than I'd like. We'll need a fire tonight one way or another.

FRANCISCO

Cabin on the far side still standin'?

MANUEL

Last time I passed. Wind don't cut as bad inside.

A GUNSHOT cracks in the distance.

The men freeze, eyes widening - then darting to each other. The ox halts with them.

FRANCISCO

Reckon it's Kennedy out huntin'?

MANUEL

Let's keep movin'.

(beat)

Best not find ourselves tangled with that man.

They tap the ox. The cart CREAKS forward. Tools CLANK against one another.

The trail opens into a white bowl of snow. Thirty yards ahead, a figure lies facedown.

From the pines, a colossus of a man - CHARLES KENNEDY (30s, thick beard, black-eyed) - lumbers into view. He crouches, rifles the body's pockets with slow, practiced hands.

The traders slow - then stop.

Kennedy's head cocks slightly, listening to something no one else hears.

KENNEDY

I know what I'm doing.

He stills.

He straightens.

Then his head snaps toward the slope behind him - sharp, animal-fast.

The traders jolt. Breath plumes - quick, shallow. Their eyes never leave him.

MANUEL  
(trembling voice)  
He... he dead?

Kennedy doesn't answer. His gaze drifts back to the body. He rolls his shoulder once.

KENNEDY  
Yup.

MANUEL  
You knew him?

KENNEDY  
Injun. Slipped out the trees. Came at me.

The ox SNORTS. Both men flinch.

A beat.

Slowly, they step back, edge the cart between themselves and Kennedy.

FRANCISCO  
(whispering)  
Ain't no good in this. I ain't gettin' closer.

MANUEL  
(whispering)  
Nor me.

Reluctantly, Manuel forces himself to speak, swallowing hard.

MANUEL (CONT'D)  
You want us to say somethin' in Taos?  
(beat)  
His kin will want him buried right.

Kennedy's head drifts toward them again. His eyes settle on them. Doesn't blink.

KENNEDY  
Best not draw attention.

The traders take the hint, flick their sticks. The ox lurches forward.

As they pass above him, Kennedy's eyes track them.

He bends, lifts his axe from the snow, grip tightening.

For a moment, it looks like he might follow. He tilts his head, listening.

Slowly, his fingers loosen. He exhales - irritated - and drops the axe back into the snow. PLOP.

The cart CREAKS away. Harness CLINKS - a farewell in sound only.

Distance slides between them until Kennedy becomes a shadow swallowed by pine.

Francisco glances back once. Then again.

FRANCISCO

You ever know Indians to jump a man  
like that?

MANUEL

Not 'round these parts, no.

Downslope, Francisco spots a disheveled wagon through the trees. He points.

FRANCISCO

That man wern't no Indian.

MANUEL

Best we find a new trail from  
Cimarron. This one's turned mean.

FRANCISCO

Was thinkin' the same.

Manuel glances back. Nothing.

Then his eyes lift.

Kennedy stands on the ridge above them. Same stance. Same stare. As if he never moved at all.

Watching them fade into the distance.

EXT. CIMMARON CANYON - DAY

Hoofbeats THUNDER through the canyon.

Three riders tear around a bend, riding flat-out - panic etched across their faces.

Behind them, MONROE ALLISON (40s, sharp - dressed, grizzled) and JOHN ALLISON (30s, steady) give chase, their horses pounding the earth.

The canyon narrows. Rock walls close in, squeezing the sound tighter.

One rider twists in his saddle and fires blind over his shoulder - BANG.

The shot ricochets wild. Sparks FLASH off stone.

John ducks, laughing despite himself.

JOHN ALLISON  
That all you got?

Monroe raises his rifle one handed and fires - BANG.

The bullet KICKS dust just ahead of the lead rider's horse. The animal rears, nearly throwing him.

He hauls back on the reins, then whips them hard, surging forward.

RIDER  
Yah!

Another rider fires back - BANG.

The shot snaps uselessly into the trees. Echoes RICOCHET, bouncing violently off the canyon walls.

EXT. CIMMARON CANYON NARROW PASS - CONTINUOUS

Gloved hands stretch a thick rope between two trees. A cigarette dangles from unseen lips, smoke curling into the cold air.

Distant HOOFBEATS THUNDER, growing fast.

The cigarette drops.

The grip tightens. A hard heave-

The rope snaps taut.

The lead horse hits it and TUMBLES. The rider sails forward, SLAMMING into the dirt.

The second and third riders crash into the chaos - hooves, bodies, curses colliding. Dust EXPLODES as the chase ends.

Horses scramble free and scatter. The riders groan, stunned, sucking air as they claw their way upright.

From the canyon wall's shadow, CLAY ALLISON (30s) steps forward. Calm. Confident. A smile cuts across his face.

CLAY ALLISON

Afternoon, boys.

He levels his already - cocked gun - relaxed, practiced.

More HOOFBEATS POUND closer. Monroe and John rein up hard, dismount in a blur. Guns out.

John squints at the men, recognition flickering.

JOHN ALLISON

Sandbag Jimmy? I thought that was you.

Behind Jimmy, Rider 1 leans close to Rider 2, voice tight.

RIDER 1

I told you that was the Allison brand.

Jimmy lifts his head, steps forward. Anger burns behind his eyes.

He clocks Monroe - then John. A flicker of a smile.

JIMMY

Figures. The Allison brothers only hunt in a pack.

(eyes to John)

You finally make your mark Johnny?

John winces. Looks away, jaw tightening.

Clay's smile tightens. His eyes settle on Jimmy.

CLAY ALLISON

You know better than to steal from me.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

(beat)

What would your brother think of this?

JIMMY

He don't think much these days. Thanks to you.

Monroe steps in, even toned.

MONROE ALLISON

That fight wasn't on us.

Jimmy's eyes snap to him.

JIMMY

(pointing to Clay)

He started that fight.

That lands. Clay's smile disappears. He studies Jimmy.

CLAY ALLISON

I ain't proud of that night.

(beat)

I don't aim to add to it either.

Jimmy blinks as Clay lowers his gun.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

Get outta here, Jimmy.

Monroe stiffens. John doesn't hide his disappointment.

MONROE ALLISON

Clay?

CLAY ALLISON

We take what's ours. You take your horses and the trail.

(beat)

You don't come back.

Jimmy studies Clay. Something doesn't add up.

A sharp laugh slips out.

JIMMY

Well, I'll be dammed.

(beat)

Has Clay Allison gone soft?

Clay holds.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

We're even now. That what you think?

Jimmy glances back once - a subtle signal.

One of the riders gives the faintest nod.

Monroe clocks it immediately.

MONROE ALLISON

Clay-

Jimmy steps closer, voice low.

JIMMY

Funny thing about debts.

(beat)

They don't just disappear.

CLAY ALLISON

Get on your horse, Jimmy. This is your only chance.

Jimmy smiles - not relieved. Testing.

JIMMY

Or what?

Hands flash behind Jimmy.

Clay spins - POP! POP!

Jimmy's friends drop.

Jimmy's hand dives for his belt - too late. POP!

He stiffens but doesn't fall. Eyes wide. Mouth open. A red bloom spreads across his chest. His hand freezes at his belt.

Clay steps in, calm. Grabs Jimmy by the shirt, pulls him close.

CLAY ALLISON

You forced my hand.

(beat)

Damn you for that.

He lets go. Jimmy collapses.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

(mumbles)

So much for a clean start.

Clay adjusts his hat.

He turns, passing Monroe and John. They exchange a look.

EXT. TAOS PASS - AFTERNOON

A modest homestead nestles in a shallow valley of Taos Pass. White smoke curls from the chimney.

Outside, ROSA (late 20s, Ute, steady-eyed) works the wash. Her hands are red from the cold water as she hangs each garment with quiet care.

SAMUEL (9) runs wild across the yard, chasing chickens and shadows. His laughter carries on the wind.

The wind SNAPS the wet laundry on the line, the sheets billowing - momentarily blocking Rosa's view.

Samuel's laughter stops.

Quiet settles in around the homestead.

ROSA

Samuel?

She peers around a hanging sheet-

Finds Samuel standing still, eyes fixed down the trail.

SAMUEL

Momma, here comes a man.

In the distance, a lone rider approaches at an easy, unhurried pace.

ROSA

I see him. Go on inside.

Samuel moves - then slips behind the cabin instead.

ROY ELLIS (30s) reins up short. Dusty. Worn. He tips his hat as Rosa approaches.

ROY

Ma'am. I hear you offer a place to bed  
down for the night.

Rosa's eyes stay on the ground a beat longer than needed.

She glances toward the house. Then back to him.

ROSA

You're best-off riding on to E-Town.  
Road's easier now you've cleared the  
pass. Plenty of places to bed down  
there.

ROY

Horse won't make it that far today.  
Truth be told, neither will I.

Rosa studies him.

ROSA

Not much comfort here. Just a hard  
bunk and walls to keep the wind off.

ROY

After the week I've had, walls and a  
bunk sound just fine ma'am.

Rosa holds his gaze a moment longer than she should.

Then -

ROSA

Suit yourself. Twenty for the bed,  
another ten to tend your horse.

Roy nods, nudges his horse forward.

Suddenly - Samuel darts out from behind the cabin.

SAMUEL

Hey mister-

Roy's horse startles. He steadies it fast.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

-wanna see somethin'?

He holds up a small, lifeless bird.

Roy chuckles.

ROY  
Got yourself a lively one.

Rosa pulls Samuel close - firm, protective.

ROSA  
Yes, sir. He's all I got.

The wind SNAPS the laundry again.

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN - LATE AFTERNOON

Dust ROLLS down Main Street as the Allison brothers ride in from the far end of town. Three bodies hang limp across their horses' flanks.

They pass a crude wooden sign at the street's edge - TAOS, a splintered arrow pointing the way. An uncovered carriage sits abandoned beside it.

A woman hurries off, dragging a child by the hand. A man follows, gesturing back toward the road.

She shakes her head - doesn't slow, doesn't look back.

Clay clocks it. Just a glance.

From the magistrate's office, HENRY LOWERY (40s, local magistrate - trusted, respected) steps onto the wooden boardwalk.

He takes in the bodies.

A slow exhale. He removes his spectacles. Wipes them once with a handkerchief.

Clay reins in short, swings down.

Monroe stays mounted, scanning the street. John shifts in his saddle - tight with frustration.

HENRY  
I assume this is your handiwork.

Before Clay can answer-

JOHN ALLISON  
Course it is. I never get to shoot nobody.

MONROE ALLISON

John.

CLAY ALLISON

Shut up!

John shrugs. Unashamed.

HENRY

Tell me this isn't what it looks like.

CLAY ALLISON

They were rustlin' our stock. Caught  
'em red.

Henry steps down. He walks the length of the horse, checking  
the body's wounds.

HENRY

You didn't catch them. You ended them.

CLAY ALLISON

I gave'em a chance. This is what they  
chose.

Henry straightens. He looks past Clay - to Monroe, then John.

They hold his gaze.

JOHN ALLISON

They went for their guns.

Henry absorbs it - but doesn't accept it.

HENRY

I've got folks going missing on the  
pass.

(beat)

Now I've got this.

CLAY ALLISON

These men were criminals. Got what  
came to 'em.

HENRY

We have laws to handle rustlers.

CLAY ALLISON

Law's just paper.

MONROE ALLISON

Only works when a man is willing to  
stand behind it.

That lands. Henry turns to Monroe.

HENRY

You think I don't? Paper is what keeps  
this town standing.

Henry lifts his spectacles, rubs the bridge of his nose.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I don't need you making my work harder  
than it already is.

CLAY ALLISON

Then you better hope your paper holds.

Henry holds Clay's gaze.

He almost says more. Doesn't.

Then - louder -

HENRY

Get these men off my street!

Clay remounts, reins back.

Henry steps forward with one last warning.

HENRY (CONT'D)

You want to stay on the right side of  
the law, Clay? Act like it.

He turns and storms back into his office. The door SLAMS  
behind him.

INT. CABIN - EVENING

Lantern light flickers across rough-hewn walls. A simple  
table - stew steaming in bowls, bread torn in half.

Rosa slides a small, oil-stained guest ledger across to Roy.  
One corner torn. Pages thick with names.

ROSA

Please make your mark, Mr. Ellis.

Roy signs, hands it back.

Rosa takes the ledger. Her thumb brushes the torn corner.

She checks the name. Closes it.

Sets it on the shelf near the door.

A fly ticks against the window. TICK. TICK.

Roy clocks it. Sniffs once - something faint in the air. Lets it pass.

Samuel bounces in his chair, legs kicking, spoon TAPPING the bowl.

SAMUEL

When we eatin', Momma?

ROSA

Mind your manners in front of company.  
We're waiting for your father.

Samuel sets a toy horse on the table, trots it in small circles.

ROY

You got yourself a real horse yet,  
son?

SAMUEL

Yes, sir! Call him Thunder.

ROY

Fine name. He got any speed?

Without warning - the door BURSTS open. The lantern flame jumps.

Charles Kennedy fills the frame, his shadow swallowing the room. He lowers an axe to the floor, rests it against the wall.

His eyes lock on Roy.

Rosa stills. Lowers her eyes.

ROSA

(quiet, cautious)  
We have a guest tonight.

Roy rises politely, extends a hand.

ROY  
Name's Ellis. Your wife was kind  
enough to-

Kennedy looks at the hand. Then past it.

He kicks the door shut - THUD. Boots CLOMP across the floor,  
slow, deliberate.

A half-full whiskey bottle SLAMS onto the table.

He drags a chair back, wood SCRAPING, and sits.

His eyes drift to Samuel - and linger.

ROSA  
Do excuse my husband, Mr. Ellis. He  
puts in long days, and weariness has a  
way of makin' him... quiet.

Rosa sets a steaming bowl in front of him.

Kennedy eats fast. Rough.

Rosa catches Samuel's eye. A small nod.

Samuel lifts his spoon. Carefully. Quietly.

Kennedy pauses mid-bite. His head tilts, listening toward the  
corner.

Roy watches him.

A beat.

Kennedy blinks - shakes it off.

Without explanation, his spoon CLINKS back into the bowl.

Roy's gaze wanders - A woven sash draped over Rosa's chair.  
Familiar.

ROY  
Your sash reminds me. I spent a season  
in Ute country, San Luis way.

ROSA  
Very observant, Mr. Ellis.

Kennedy's eyes lift, fix on Roy. Suspicious.

ROY  
Folks upriver speak of Apache stealing  
horses and stock.  
(beat)  
Y'all have any Indian trouble round  
here?

Samuel blurts.

SAMUEL  
Can't you smell the one Papa put under  
the floor?

Rosa's foot SNAPS into Samuel's under the table.

Roy freezes.

ROY  
That a joke, son?

Kennedy stops eating. Leans back. Eyes never leave Roy.

Roy sniffs again. His gaze sweeps the room.

The fly ticks the window. TICK. TICK.

His eyes land on the axe by the door - its edge nicked, a  
dark smear drying along the steel.

Then Rosa - looking away. Holding her breath.

Kennedy sees it.

Their eyes meet.

A beat.

Kennedy's hand flashes to his pistol - BANG.

Roy jerks back, breath blasting out of him. He collapses  
forward onto the table, bowl SKIDDING away.

Samuel bolts. His chair SCRAPES back.

SAMUEL  
Momma...

Kennedy rises, turns after him.

KENNEDY

What I say about blabbin' our affairs,  
boy?

Rosa lunges - grabs Kennedy's arm with both hands.

ROSA

No!

He backhands her without looking. She SLAMS to the floor.

Kennedy towers over her. Fists clenched. Breathing tight.  
Eyes gone black.

WACK.

Kennedy flinches. Slowly turns.

Samuel stands trembling behind him. The wooden toy horse lies  
at Kennedy's feet.

Rosa scrambles up, grabs Kennedy again, pulling with  
everything she has.

Without effort, he jerks free - the recoil sends Rosa  
CRASHING into the wall.

Kennedy steps toward Samuel.

CRUNCH.

The toy horse snaps beneath Kennedy's boot.

Rosa pushes up, rushes toward the doorway.

KENNEDY (O.S.)

Think you a man now?

We stay on Rosa - frozen in the doorway.

A sickening THUD from the other room.

Silence.

Rosa turns, scrambles for a shelf -

A revolver.

Kennedy's hand flashes out - catches her ankle and twists.

SNAP.

He hauls her back and flings her across the room by the leg. She SLAMS into the wall and slides down near Samuel.

We don't see him - but she does.

Rosa's face collapses.

Kennedy is already on her. His weight driving the air from her lungs.

Rosa claws blindly, fingers scraping across the wood until they find a loose log.

With everything she has left - she swings.

THUD.

Kennedy reels back, dazed. Blood trickles from his scalp.

He touches the blood. Looks at it.

A beat.

His eyes go flat.

He lunges back. Hands crushing her throat.

She fights - but it does nothing.

Her movements slow.

She softens.

Goes still.

A beat.

He rises. Rolls his shoulder once.

He steps over her, lifts the bottle from the table and drinks. He glances toward the other room - nothing moves.

He exits the cabin, taking the bottle with him. The door SLAMS behind him.

EXT. KENNEDY PROPERTY - CONTINUOUS

Kennedy steps onto the stoop. Looks left. Then right.

Nothing moves but the night air.

He locks the door from the outside - CLICK.

He lowers himself onto the step.

He scoops up a handful of snow and presses it to the gash on his head. Blood seeps between his fingers.

A long pull from the bottle.

His breathing slows.

The bottle slips from his hand and rolls across the boards.

INT. KENNEDY HOUSE - SHORT TIME LATER

Rosa lies motionless on the floor.

A long beat.

Then - a breath. Sudden. Real.

Her eyes flutter open as her breathing quickens.

Slowly, she turns her head. Samuel lies where she last saw him. Grief surges - sharp, suffocating - but she swallows it down just as fast. Now is not the time.

She scans the room. Silent. Still.

Alone.

Her gaze locks onto the fireplace poker near the hearth.

Rolling onto her stomach, biting back pain, she hooks the poker and drags it close.

Using it for leverage, she pulls herself upright - careful. Quiet.

She limps into the next room and tests the door. Locked.

The window - nailed shut. Breaking it would alert him.

She's trapped.

Her eyes flick to the fireplace. Cold stone.

A match FLARES. She peers up the chimney.

Narrow. Jutted edges. Just maybe.

She grabs a blanket and wraps it tight around her waist.

One breath. Then another.

She stops - turns.

The worn, oil-stained ledger on the shelf.

She snatches it, tucks it deep into her torn, bloodied dress.

Back at the hearth, she steps inside and reaches up.

Pain rips through her injured foot. No sound escapes.

She climbs.

Stone by stone.

Breath by breath.

EXT. KENNEDY HOUSE ROOF - CONTINUOUS

A soot-blackened hand breaks into open air. Then another.

Rosa emerges, soot-streaked and exhausted, hauling herself over the edge before collapsing onto the roof.

For a moment, she lies still, chest heaving.

After a beat, she rolls onto her side, crawls to the edge and peers down.

Kennedy sprawls on the stoop below. Not dead. Not safe.

Rosa doesn't hesitate. She wedges the blanket into a narrow crack beside the chimney, pulls it tight, tests it.

It holds.

She swings her legs over and lowers herself down. Pain tears through her with every movement, but she keeps going - hand over hand.

Slow. Controlled.

EXT. KENNEDY PROPERTY GROUND - CONTINUOUS

Rosa drops the final distance - THUD - hitting hard into the snow. She winces sharply but makes no sound.

Kennedy stirs.

Rosa freezes.

A beat -

She yanks the blanket free and drapes it over her shoulders.

One last look at the house.

One look at Kennedy.

Then the trail.

Rosa limps away - bleeding, broken, but alive - disappearing into the night.

INT. PEARSON'S SALOON - NIGHT

Dice CLATTER, cards SHUFFLE. Glasses SLAM onto tables as the saloon buzzes with low voices and laughter.

At a front table, three RANCHERS drink, voices kept deliberately low.

RANCHER 1

Here's to drivin' the cattle that made it to market. Only lost three this year.

RANCHER 2

Hear, hear!

Their glasses CLINK.

The saloon doors SWING open, and the Allison brothers step inside. The room shifts instantly - conversations dip, eyes slide away.

Clay notes it as he scans the room.

RANCHER 3

Monroe's steady. Can't say the same  
for the other two.

RANCHER 1

I heard he carved a man open in Ft.  
Sumner just for trippin' on his foot  
while dancin'. Didn't even flinch.  
Steel flashed, and it was all over.

The Allisons reach the bar. Without comment, the bartender  
slides three drinks across.

RANCHER 2

You had trouble with him?

RANCHER 1

Naw. It's them stories you hear that  
keep you watchin' your step.

Clay turns. Crosses the room.

He kicks the chair out from under Rancher 1.

The man yelps and SLAMS to the floor. The saloon falls dead  
quiet.

Rancher 2 and Rancher 3 jump to their feet.

Monroe and John are already moving - guns out, smooth and  
practiced.

Clay crouches, grabs the fallen rancher by the shirt and  
hauls him upright.

CLAY ALLISON

You got somethin' to say about me?

The rancher trembles, breath coming fast.

RANCHER 1

I... I didn't-

Clay shoves his gun barrel up under the rancher's chin.

The rancher goes still. Eyes wide.

Monroe steps in. His hand clamps over Clay's.

MONROE ALLISON

Easy, brother. Just the words of an  
(MORE)

MONROE ALLISON (CONT'D)

old drunk.  
(beat)  
Not the time or place.

A long beat. Clay breathes hard, then lowers the gun.

Monroe guides him away - gentle, insistent.

John keeps his weapon leveled a moment longer.

JOHN ALLISON

Careful what stories you tell.

The ranchers collapse back into their chairs, shaken.

The Allison retreat to their usual table. Clay drops into his seat, rigid, and lifts his drink, swallowing it in one hard pull.

MONROE ALLISON

Save it for when it matters.

Clay doesn't answer.

Conversations slowly return. Music swells. Dice roll again.

EXT. TREE LINE - NIGHT

Rosa stumbles into the trees and collapses against a trunk, gasping for air. Each breath shallow. Ragged.

Her injured ankle buckles beneath her.

She presses her forehead to the bark. Eyes close.

A beat.

Rosa forces them open.

Through the branches, a faint glow shimmers in the valley below - lanterns. Firelight.

Elizabethtown.

She stares.

Then pushes herself upright, leaning hard on a stick.

Pain lances up her leg. She nearly falls - catches herself.

One step. Then another.

A small stone tumbles down the slope behind her.

Rosa spins.

Silence.

Nothing moves. Nothing follows.

Rosa turns forward and keeps walking.

INT. PEARSON'S SALOON - NIGHT

Laughter, drinks, and music roll on.

Suddenly - the saloon doors CRASH open. The noise dies mid-breath as every head turns.

Rosa stands in the doorway. Her dress is torn and soaked with blood, one sleeve hanging loose. Her face is swollen, blood streaking her temple as she grips the doorframe, barely upright.

ROSA

(hoarse)

Help.

Her knees give out. She hits the floor hard.

The room GASPS as one.

Saloon owner, JOHN PEARSON, is already moving, dropping to his knees beside her.

JOHN PEARSON

Joseph! Water and a rag! Now!

A small crowd gathers - tense, silent.

PATRON

(whispers)

That's Kennedy's wife.

Pearson hears it. His eyes flick up - then back to Rosa.

Joseph rushes in. Pearson dabs gently at Rosa's face. The rag

darkens red. He looks to Joseph again.

JOHN PEARSON  
Fetch the Doc. Quick!

Joseph bolts for the door.

Pearson studies Rosa more closely - the bruising, the swelling, the way she flinches at his touch.

At the back table, Clay's thumb digs into the rim of the glass.

Clay's hand tightens around his glass.

He inhales - sharp.

His eyes close.

MEMORY FLASH - YOUNG CLAY (POV):

- A fist SLAMS the table. Dishes jump. Clay and his brothers flinch.

- His mother cowers, tears streaking her face.

- Small in the doorway, Clay can't move. He holds his breath.

BACK TO PRESENT:

The glass is still shaking in his hand.

MONROE ALLISON  
Clay... you alright?

He doesn't answer. His knuckles whiten around the glass.

Pearson looks up, scans the room.

JOHN PEARSON  
Someone ride for the sheriff.

CUSTOMER  
That's a days ride. Both ways. She  
won't last that long.

Silence settles. Pearson looks back down at Rosa, worried.

JOHN PEARSON  
Then get Henry. We can't just sit  
here.

PATRON

Someone oughta fetch her husband. Let  
him know what's happened.

Rosa's eyes snap open.

She thrashes, panicked - hands clawing at the floor, at  
anyone near her.

ROSA

No! No... not Charles.  
(beat)  
Please.

Clay flinches.

MEMORY FLASH - YOUNG CLAY (POV):

CLAY'S MOTHER

(soft)  
Please.

BACK TO PRESENT:

His chair SCRAPES back. He stands fast.

The crowd parts without a word as he crosses the room, eyes  
locked on her.

He kneels beside Rosa. Pearson eases back, cautious.

Clay's hand hovers - just for a beat - before touching her. A  
flicker of something old in his eyes.

He gently brushes her hair aside, revealing the bruises  
beneath. His expression hardens - then steadies.

CLAY ALLISON

I'll take her.

A hush falls over the room.

Clay slides his arms beneath Rosa, lifting her with care.

Monroe steps in, grips Clay's arm. Clay's arm is rigid under  
Monroe's hand.

Clay doesn't look at him.

MONROE ALLISON

Clay... you sure?

His eyes are locked on Rosa.

CLAY ALLISON

She needs someone.

(beat)

Tell Doc, I've got her at Mutz's.

Monroe releases him.

Clay carries Rosa toward the door, tender and steady. The only sound is the CREAK of floorboards beneath his boots.

The saloon watches. The music never resumes.

INT. MUTZ HOTEL ROOM - LATER

Rosa lies on the narrow bed, still as bone. Her breathing is shallow - but steady.

DOC SIMMS (40s) stands at the foot of the bed, wiping blood from his fingers. His worried gaze shifts to Clay.

DOC SIMMS

I've set her ankle in a splint. It's not broken but she will need to stay off it a few days.

CLAY ALLISON

She gonna be all right, Doc?

DOC SIMMS

That's up to her.

They both glance at Rosa. Clay doesn't blink.

DOC SIMMS (CONT'D)

If she made it from the pass in *that* condition... her will is strong.

He exhales, gathers his bag.

DOC SIMMS (CONT'D)

There's nothing more I can do now. She just needs rest and someone to stay with her.

CLAY ALLISON

I've got that covered.

Clay offers his hand. As Doc takes it, Clay presses a silver coin into his palm.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

Thank you, Doc.

DOC SIMMS

My pleasure, Mr. Allison.

The Doc turns to leave - then stops. Something unsettled in him. He doesn't look at Clay.

DOC SIMMS (CONT'D)

It's not the first time I've patched her up.

Clay's fingers curl once at his side.

DOC SIMMS (CONT'D)

I worry she won't survive the next one.

He opens the door, hesitates a moment longer, then closes it gently behind him.

Clay stands alone with Rosa. He takes her in - the bruises, the stillness, the work of each breath.

MEMORY FLASH - YOUNG CLAY (POV):

- His mother lies in a bed much like this one. Face bruised. Breathing shallow.

- A younger Clay sits nearby, fists clenched, watching.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Clay's hand drifts toward his belt.

Stops.

MEMORY FLASH - YOUNG CLAY (POV):

- His mother tries to sit up, winces - then forces a smile at him anyway.

CLAY'S MOTHER

(whispers)

Don't fret.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Clay's jaw tightens. A muscle ticks in his cheek.

CLAY ALLISON

There won't be a next one.

He turns from the bed, straightens his coat and leaves.

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN MAIN STREET - NIGHT

HOOFBEATS THUNDER down Main Street.

Clay rides point. Monroe tight on his flank. John a half-length back - wired, coiled.

Windows go dark. Doors SLAM shut. Townspeople scatter off the dirt road, vanishing into alleys and doorways.

Ahead, a shadowed figure steps into the street. Feet planted.

BOOM! A shotgun blast tears into the night sky.

Horses rear, screaming, skidding through dust and smoke as Monroe's hand drops instinctively to his gun.

From the haze, Henry steps forward - shotgun raised, barrel smoking.

HENRY

Clay... I know what you're thinking.  
You know I can't allow it.

CLAY ALLISON

Damn it, Henry. She needs justice.  
Charles Kennedy must be dealt with.

MONROE ALLISON

He's right, Henry. We've seen this  
before.

HENRY

We're in agreement. He will get served  
justice... *inside* the law.

CLAY ALLISON

We ain't got time.

Henry steps closer and PUMPS the shotgun - slow, deliberate.

HENRY

You *will* allow me to handle this proper.

CLAY ALLISON

Men like him have ways around the law. Seen it too many times.

HENRY

Fine. Don't trust the law.

(beat)

Trust me.

Clay studies Henry. Then Monroe - who gives a small, reluctant shrug.

John shifts in the saddle, already keyed for violence.

Clay looks past Henry - toward the dark road.

CLAY ALLISON

I'll bring him in alive.

Henry lets out a short chuckle - not relieved. Aware.

HENRY

I'm coming with you.

A beat.

John's hand tightens on his reins.

Clay looks at him.

HENRY (CONT'D)

You don't know Charles Kennedy. You have no idea what you're riding into.

That stops Monroe. He really looks at Henry now.

MONROE ALLISON

What are you saying?

Henry doesn't answer. He doesn't have to.

Clay absorbs it. Then nods once.

CLAY ALLISON

(to John)

Tell the boys to mount up.

John doesn't hesitate. He wheels his horse and spurs hard into the dark.

Henry lowers the shotgun.

He and Clay hold each other's gaze.

EXT. KENNEDY PROPERTY - MORNING

The Sangre de Cristos glow beneath a pale dawn. Frost clings to the ground. The Kennedy cabin rests in deceptive silence.

On the stoop, Kennedy lies unmoving.

A twitch. A sharp breath. His eyes snap open.

In a flash, he's upright - dried blood crusting his face like rust.

A whiskey bottle rests by his boot. He lifts it, drains the last drop, lets it fall - CLUNK.

Slowly, he rises, unsteady at first, then shakes off the haze.

He tries the door. Still locked. He digs through his pockets for the key.

INT. KENNEDY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

BAM. The door swings open.

The room is wrecked - chairs fallen, meals half-eaten.

Kennedy moves through it slow and methodical. At the wash basin, he rolls up his sleeves and dunks a dish towel into the water. The basin clouds pink.

He wipes his hands. His face. Careful. Thorough.

Stepping back, he nudges Roy's boot with his heel.

Roy lies sprawled across the table, one arm dangling. Blood stains the wood, already drying dark. His eyes stare at nothing.

KENNEDY  
You still here?

Without hesitation, Kennedy grabs Roy's arm and hauls the body toward him.

A small pocket Bible slips free - THUD. Pages fan across the blood-spattered floor. Kennedy steps on it absently to keep it from sliding.

He hoists Roy over his shoulder with a grunt. As he turns, the table SCRAPES across the boards.

EXT. KENNEDY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The dawn air bites sharp. Kennedy squints against the light as he carries the body around the side of the house.

KENNEDY  
(muttering, harsh)  
Ain't no call for company.

He grabs the cellar handle and yanks. Hinges GROAN.

Kennedy lurches forward and heaves the body down into darkness.

A dull, wet THUD answers from below.

Casually, he wipes his palms on his shirt and turns back toward the house.

INT. KENNEDY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

He pauses, scans the room.

By the hearth, a faint, human - shaped outline stains the floorboards - already drying. Rosa's shape.

Kennedy steps over it like a puddle.

He stops at Samuel. The boy's small body lies twisted against the stones, a toy horse split in two beside him.

Kennedy sighs - irritated, not grieving.

KENNEDY  
Wake up, boy!

A beat.

He grips Samuel by the trousers and hauls him up, blood streaking dull across the planks.

Kennedy pauses, scanning the room.

KENNEDY (CONT'D)  
Rosa! You best clean up now.  
(beat)  
Whole damn place gone to hell.

Footsteps POUND across the floor.

EXT. KENNEDY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Kennedy drops Samuel into the cellar. The small body lands hard beside Roy.

The cellar door SLAMS shut, the sound reverberating across the still morning.

INT. MUTZ HOTEL - ROSA'S ROOM - LATER

Rosa jolts awake, GASPING, her body shifting before her mind can catch up. Pain shoots up her ankle. She cries out before she can stop herself.

For a moment, she doesn't know where she is. Plain walls. A low ceiling. Morning light leaking through thin curtains as her breathing quickens.

She looks down at herself - the same torn dress, caked with blood and mud.

Her ankle is bound in a crude splint: boards lashed together with cloth, already darkened with blood. The foot sits wrong. Swollen.

She reaches for it, barely touches - then winces and pulls back.

Rosa wipes her mouth. Her fingers come away bloody.

Across the room, a small mirror catches her reflection. A bruised cheek. A split lip. One eye ringed in purple and yellow. She barely recognizes the woman staring back.

She swings her legs off the bed and tries to sit up. The ankle won't take it. Pain buckles her and she collapses back onto the mattress, gasping.

Outside, faint sounds of morning drift in - wagon wheels CLATTER, hammers ring somewhere down the street. Life, continuing.

Rosa lies staring at the ceiling, blinking back tears she refuses to shed.

Rosa closes her eyes. Not to sleep. To steady herself.

EXT. TAOS PASS - LATER

A boot CRUNCHES along the frozen trail.

Then another.

Then a dozen more.

Seven men peel off the ridge, sliding cautiously down toward the Kennedy place - guns drawn, eyes wide, breath held tight.

Clay moves at the center. His fist snaps into the air, and the men halt as one. All eyes drift to him.

Clay points. Monroe and John left. JACK and WILLIAM right. DAVY with him up the middle.

Henry stays back.

They break like water, slipping down the slope in silence. Every shadow is watched. Every sound clocked.

EXT. KENNEDY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

At the front of the house, Clay and Davy creep toward the stoop - low, steady.

The brothers slide along the left side. The flankers melt right.

Henry vanishes behind a tree.

Davy flattens beneath a window as Clay sets a boot on the porch and leans in, ear pressed to the door.

Nothing.

Clay's attention shifts.

Davy jabs a finger - urgent.

At the corner of the house, Jack waves, frantic, pointing toward the barn behind them.

EXT. KENNEDY PROPERTY - CONTINUOUS

The men fan out, closing on the barn - hunters circling their prey. Henry peers from the side of the house, cautious, keeping his distance.

From inside the barn comes a soft shuffle.

A dull THUD.

Then a low, grinding sound that swallows the quiet.

The men form a loose semicircle, breath held, grips tightening on pistols.

Clay steps forward.

CLAY ALLISON  
Charles Kennedy!

The noises inside cut off.

Silence.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)  
Charles, your surrounded. Come on out now.

A shadow fills the barn doorway - still, massive.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)  
We got six guns on you. You don't come quiet... you ain't walkin' out of here alive.

Kennedy steps forward into the morning light, revealing himself fully.

Jaws tighten. A boot shifts in the dirt. Someone swallows hard.

Kennedy studies them one by one, measuring each man with a slow, cold look.

A faint twitch jumps at his temple, like something whispering only to him. A thin smile creeps in.

KENNEDY

Ain't your fight.

CLAY ALLISON

It is now...

(beat)

You crossed a line.

Kennedy's eyes slide past Clay - to Henry. Something unreadable passes between them.

Slowly, Kennedy sinks to his knees, deliberate - almost graceful.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

Tie him, John. Careful.

John glances at Clay - unsettled.

Clay nods.

John steps in.

Kennedy doesn't resist. His eyes track every movement.

Monroe closes in, presses his barrel to Kennedy's temple.

MONROE ALLISON

You blink wrong... this chamber spins.

John loops the rope, binding Kennedy's wrists behind his back. The knot cinches tight.

Kennedy flexes his wrists once - testing.

He lifts his head to meet Clay's eyes.

A faint smile touches his mouth.

Gone just as quickly.

EXT. KENNEDY PROPERTY - LATER

The posse shifts uneasily across the frozen ground, spread loose and wary. No one speaks. Nerves remain wound tight.

Kennedy sits bound to a chopping stump, hands tied behind him. His breath fogs the air - steady. Calm.

Monroe stands guard, revolver leveled at Kennedy's chest. Clay beside him, eyes scanning the property.

Nearby, Henry keeps his notebook open, scratching notes with a hand that trembles more than he'd ever admit.

A faint odor rides the air. Sweet. Wrong.

Jack moves along the side of the house. He slows - then stops.

The frost is disturbed. Scuffed boot marks, dragging backward. A dark smear cuts through the white.

Jack crouches, touches it - then pulls his hand back fast.

Blood.

JACK

Boss!

Clay strides over, boots CRUNCHING through frost. He lifts his bandana and crouches, brushing snow aside.

The smell hits him mid-motion.

Rot.

A stiff foot protrudes from the frozen ground.

They follow the trail - dragged, uneven - straight to the cellar door. The handle is streaked dark.

Jack grips it and yanks. Hinges GROAN as a wave of stench rolls up from below. Jack reels back, choking.

JACK (CONT'D)

Jesus.

Clay leans in, peers into the black.

Still shapes. Too many.

CLAY ALLISON

Lantern!

Jack strikes a match. The flame sputters as they start down.

INT. CELLAR - CONTINUOUS

Lantern light spills into the darkness, shadows wavering along the earthen walls.

The men reach the cellar floor and stop dead.

Two bodies lie at the base of the ladder. Roy - sprawled awkwardly, eyes open. Samuel - small, twisted beside him.

Clay kneels beside the boy and gently straightens Samuel's collar.

John shifts his weight. His boot sinks.

He looks down and angles the lantern. Fresh-packed dirt. Loose. Recently turned.

He raises the lantern higher.

The light finds the rest - mounds of earth, some collapsed, some new, others sharp - edged.

Graves. Too many.

In the far corner, a half-buried bundle catches the light. The lantern reveals the remains of a Native man. The clothing makes it unmistakable.

Clay exhales slowly. Controlled.

Deadly calm.

EXT. KENNEDY PROPERTY - CONTINUOUS

They bring Samuel up first.

No one speaks.

A blanket is laid out and the boy is placed gently at its center.

Clay folds the blanket over him, careful and deliberate. The men step back, hats lowering without instruction. Even the horses stand still.

A tic forms in Clay's jaw as he turns, eyes locking on Kennedy - still bound, hollow, unreadable.

CLAY ALLISON

Was it that boy's fight?

Kennedy doesn't look up. Doesn't even blink.

Clay's hand drifts to his pistol.

His thumb hooks the hammer.

A breath.

Henry is there instantly - close. One palm rests on Clay's forearm.

HENRY

(low, soft, respectful)

Clay, no.

(beat)

Remember what you promised.

Clay doesn't look at him. His eyes stay fixed on Kennedy. The moment stretches, grinding.

Then, with sudden violence, Clay rips his arm free and shoves the pistol back into its holster, hard enough the leather CREAKS.

He turns away, shaking. Not done. Just contained.

EXT. KENNEDY PROPERTY - LATER

Work drags on across the frozen homestead. Men move slow. Shovels bite into earth. Ropes CREAK. Each discovery weighs heavier than the last.

Clay stands on the rise, refusing to look at Kennedy. Instead, his eyes fix on the blankets laid out in a row below.

Something flickers across his face - closer to grief than rage.

Footsteps approach. Monroe and John climb the slope toward him.

MONROE ALLISON

We've found three more over by the garden. Bones in the fireplace too.

Monroe lifts Kennedy's axe. The blade is black with old blood.

MONROE ALLISON (CONT'D)

This ain't from no deer.

CLAY ALLISON

Six down in the cellar... five in the yard. That's damn near a dozen souls by my count.

JOHN ALLISON

We got him now. He'll swing before winter sets.

Henry approaches - pale, but steady - his notebook clutched tight.

CLAY ALLISON

I reckon you found your answer to the folks missin' from the pass.

HENRY

I'll see every name, every grave recorded proper.

(beat)

This place will stand as evidence.

CLAY ALLISON

You still think a man like that deserves process?

HENRY

That's the difference between justice... and you.

Clay hates to admit it - but knows he's right.

Their eyes drift - to Kennedy.

HENRY (CONT'D)  
He say anything yet?

MONROE ALLISON  
Not one word.  
(beat')  
Not even a blink since we found the  
boy.

A gust lifts the blankets on the wagon, revealing Samuel's feet.

Clay studies Kennedy. No reaction. No remorse. Just existence.

CLAY ALLISON  
Somethin' don't sit right about this.  
(beat)  
He's waitin' on somethin'.

Henry closes his notebook. The sound is small - but final.

HENRY  
Then we make sure he waits behind  
iron.

His eyes never leave Kennedy.

EXT. TAOS PASS - LATER

Three horses wind through the narrow pass, shadows stretching long against the rock. Clay rides point.

Behind him, Kennedy walks - hands bound, a rope running from his neck to Clay's saddle horn.

John and Davy trail close, rifles trained.

Farther back, Henry rides steady. Uneasy.

Kennedy's silence gnaws at Clay.

CLAY ALLISON  
Awfully quiet for a man like you.

Kennedy doesn't answer. His eyes stay forward.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)  
That boy was no threat.

Nothing.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)  
Shame you didn't finish your wife.

Kennedy finally speaks.

KENNEDY  
How many necks that rope of yours  
seen?

Clay reins hard. The horse stops short.

He turns in the saddle - looks at Kennedy now.

KENNEDY (CONT'D)  
You shoot a man in the street. I shoot  
him in the dark.

CLAY ALLISON  
I only killed them that had it comin'.

KENNEDY  
Still dead.

Clay's hand drifts toward his Colt.

Kennedy clocks it - steps closer.

John and Davy glance at each other.

Henry spurs forward, raises a hand.

HENRY  
You fire that pistol, you prove him  
right.

Clay's breath rasps. His hand trembles - then stills.

CLAY ALLISON  
There's a special place in hell for  
you.

Kennedy's lips curl - not quite a smile.

KENNEDY  
I have no doubt.  
(beat)  
But you'll be right next door.

Clay faces forward again and spurs his horse.

Kennedy stumbles as the rope snaps taut.

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN - EVENING

Dusk settles over Elizabethtown as four riders move slowly down Main Street. Kennedy walks between them - bound, head lowered.

The news has beaten them home. Doors CREAK open. Curtains shift. Faces appear in windows, half-hidden. Whispers ripple ahead of the group.

A man pauses mid-step. A woman pulls her child closer as they pass.

John clocks the attention. His jaw tightens. Almost a grin.

He kills it.

Davy scans the faces, measuring the mood.

Clay keeps his eyes forward. Too many stares. Too many questions waiting. This was meant to be quiet.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE MAGISTRATE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The riders rein up in front of Henry's office.

The street is crowded now - watching eyes everywhere. People linger in doorways. Faces press to windows. Whispers pass hand to hand.

Henry dismounts and turns slowly, taking in the crowd.

HENRY

Alright, folks. That's enough. You've  
seen this before. Best head on home  
now.

The murmurs soften. No applause. Just reluctant acceptance. Some drift back to porches. Others stay, watching.

Clay swings down, uncoils the rope, and gives Kennedy a hard shove forward.

CLAY ALLISON

You wanted him alive.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

(beat)

He's yours.

HENRY

We'll have to hold him here. Circuit  
won't reach us 'til next month.

CLAY ALLISON

He ain't to be left alone. He's  
schemin'. I can feel it.

(beat)

My boys'll guard him.

HENRY

This is *my* cell, Clay. As long as your  
boys remember that... they're welcome.

(beat)

He answers to the law, not you.

CLAY ALLISON

As long as the law remembers what it  
promised me.

Henry nods, unlocks the door.

HENRY

Bring him in.

Kennedy disappears inside.

The door GROANS shut. The lock CLICKS.

EXT. OUTSIDE MAGISTRATE'S OFFICE - LATER

Night settles over E-Town. Lanterns blooming in windows cast  
long shadows across Main Street.

Clay steps out of the magistrate's office. He doesn't get  
far.

Townfolk drift in from the shadows - curious, uneasy, hungry  
for answers.

MAN

Is it true? Is that him?

WOMAN

They say he haunted the pass.

OLDMAN

Did he really kill his own boy?

Clay doesn't answer.

He spots John - already basking in the attention.

JOHN ALLISON

Took six of us to corner him. Didn't  
fight much. Big fella though. Mean  
eyes.

The crowd presses closer.

Clay steps between John and the townsfolk.

CLAY ALLISON

That's enough.

The crowd quiets. Begins to peel away.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

You two stay here. Don't leave him  
alone.

(beat)

I'll send relief come mornin'.

John glances back at the onlookers.

DAVY

This ain't over. Get some rest.

CLAY ALLISON

Indeed. Night, boys.

Clay turns and walks off.

Behind him, whispers rise again - louder now, reshaping what  
they've just seen.

Clay doesn't look back - disappearing into the dark.

INT. MUTZ HOTEL - ROSA'S ROOM - LATER

Lamplight flickers low. A half-eaten meal rests on the  
nightstand.

Rosa lies curled on the narrow bed, blankets pulled tight.  
Her ankle is propped on a folded towel. Bruises darken her

cheek and throat.

A soft KNOCK.

Rosa's eyes snap open - instant panic.

She jerks upright, dragging the blankets with her as her gaze darts - door, window, corners. Her hand sweeps the bedside table and closes around a fork.

Another KNOCK. Gentle. Controlled.

Clay's voice comes through the door, low and careful.

CLAY ALLISON

Miss?

The door opens slowly and Clay steps in, cautious.

Rosa presses back against the headboard, breath stuttering. The fork stays raised, pointed at him.

Clay sees it immediately and stops just inside the threshold. He removes his hat and holds it to his chest.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

Easy there. I ain't here to hurt you.

Rosa's eyes flick to his hands - then to his gun.

Clay clocks it. He stops, reaches back, and slowly unbuckles his gun belt. It slides from his hip. He sets it on the floor and nudges it farther away with his boot.

Rosa tracks every inch of the movement. The fork remains raised.

Clay keeps his voice soft, steady.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

My name is Clay.

Rosa's breathing is still fast - but no longer frantic. The fork trembles in her grip.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

You don't know me.

(beat)

And that's alright.

He risks eye contact, careful not to stare.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)  
Doc says you're gonna be fine.  
(beat)  
Hurt for a spell. But you'll heal.

Rosa swallows. Her grip loosens - just a fraction.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)  
I'm glad to see you awake.

Rosa doesn't move. Her eyes stay locked on him.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)  
Charles-

Her eyes widen. Her body tightens.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)  
- he's in jail.

The words land. Rosa's trembling slows. Her shoulders drop - just a little. She exhales. A real breath, like a rope slipping loose inside her.

The fork lowers an inch. Clay notices. Says nothing.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)  
Put him there myself.  
(beat)  
He ain't gonna hurt you anymore.

Rosa meets his eyes now - searching. Testing.

Clay doesn't move. Quiet. Guarding.

Her hand slips. The fork falls onto the blanket.

A single tear tracks down Rosa's cheek as her strength gives out. She winces and curls inward.

Clay remains standing, hat still in his hands. He looks at the room instead of her.

After a moment, Rosa's breathing evens.

Clay exhales - slow, careful. He stays where he is.

INT. MAGISTRATE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Lantern light pools across Henry's desk. Ledgers lie open. Loose pages are stacked with care, evidence arranged precisely.

Henry sits with his sleeves rolled, eyes worn thin. His gun belt rests on the edge of the desk.

Across the room, behind iron bars, Charles Kennedy sits on the bench. Hands folded. Back straight. His eyes remain fixed on the far wall.

In a dark corner outside the cell, boots shift softly. Davy and John sit watch, silent.

Henry clears his throat.

HENRY

I've counted eleven bodies so far.

KENNEDY

Sounds right.

HENRY

Names?

KENNEDY

Elias Pruitt.

Kennedy never looks at him. His eyes remain on the wall.

HENRY

Where was he from?

KENNEDY

Wrong place.

Henry stops writing.

HENRY

Next?

KENNEDY

Caleb Moore.

HENRY

How'd you come across him?

KENNEDY

He lied.

Henry pauses, then sets his pen down.

HENRY  
And... the others?

KENNEDY  
Men who thought hospitality meant  
permission.

Henry leans back in his chair.

HENRY  
You're not giving me much to work  
with.

Kennedy smiles - thin, private.

KENNEDY  
Truth ain't always useful.

Henry studies him a moment longer than necessary.

HENRY  
You want to talk about the boy?

Silence.

Kennedy's head turns - slow, deliberate. For the first time,  
his cold eyes settle on Henry.

KENNEDY  
That boy said things he didn't  
understand.

Henry senses the shift, leans forward.

HENRY  
He was your son.

No response.

Henry waits.

Then - carefully-

HENRY (CONT'D)  
What about Rosa?

Kennedy doesn't move. Doesn't blink. His eyes go distant.

After a beat, Henry closes the ledger. The sound is small,

but final.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Very well.

He stands, slips on his coat, fastens his gun belt.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I'll send word to your attorney first  
thing tomorrow.

Kennedy doesn't respond.

Henry lifts the lantern and pauses at the door, nodding once to John and Davy. John tips his hat. Davy shifts his rifle.

As Henry turns to leave, Kennedy's head tilts slightly - listening.

He eases back on the bench, letting the lantern light slip from his face.

INT. MUTZ HOTEL - ROSA'S ROOM - NIGHT

A lamp burns low, shadows pooling in the corners.

Rosa sleeps, shallow breaths barely breaking the silence.

Clay sits in the chair beside her bed, rifle laid across his knees. His eyes never leave her.

A faint CREAK in the hall snaps his attention to the door.

Shadows slide beneath it. Heavy boots. They stop a beat too long.

The handle JIGGLES. Wood CREAKS.

Clay's thumb eases back the hammer - CLICK.

The shadows move on.

Clay exhales, but the tension doesn't leave him. He rises, rifle steady, and cracks the door open.

INT. MUTZ HOTEL - HALL - CONTINUOUS

Down the hall, a man and woman stumble past-drunk, tangled, kissing.

They crash into the next room. The door SLAMS shut.

INT. MUTZ HOTEL - ROSA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Clay exhales hard as he closes the door - CLICK. His shoulders finally drop.

He turns back-

Kennedy is there. Standing over Rosa.

Axe raised. Both hands steady on the handle. Calm. Patient. His eyes locked on Clay.

Clay freezes. The rifle trembles in his grip. He can't breathe. Can't move.

The axe starts down-

-Clay jolts awake, GASPING. The rifle CLATTERS to the floor. His shirt is soaked through with sweat.

His eyes snap to Rosa-

She lies as before. Still. Fragile.

Clay wipes his face with a rag, forces his breathing to slow, and settles back into the chair.

ROSA  
(hoarse, slipping out  
unconsciously)  
Samuel...

Clay's head snaps up.

Rosa doesn't stir. A single tear slips from the corner of her eye.

Clay watches her, unmoving.

The word echoes in his skull.

EXT. MILLS MOUNTAIN HOMESTEAD - LATE MORNING

A messenger rides hard through tall grass, rounds a fence, and reins up before a modest, well-kept homestead.

KNOCK.

The door opens just enough to reveal a man's hand.

MESSENGER

Letter from Magistrate Lowery, sir. In  
Elizabethtown.

The hand takes the envelope.

The door closes without a word.

INT. MILLS MOUNTIAN HOMSTEAD - CONTINUOUS

The envelope is opened with care.

We stay on the letter - Kennedy's name. Charges. Formal language.

He taps the page once with his finger - thoughtful.

A calm voice, almost pleasant-

MELVIN MILLS (O.S.)

Well now... that's unfortunate.

A chair SCRAPES softly.

We finally see MELVIN MILLS (40s), composed and neat, eyes that never rush.

He smooths a crease in the paper with his thumb before reading it again.

When he's finished, he folds the paper carefully and slips it into a satchel already half-packed.

Mills rises, pulls on his coat, and heads for the door.

We linger on a framed degree hanging on the wall - Bright, perfectly centered, dustless:

MELVIN MILLS - ATTORNEY AT LAW

FOOTSTEPS.

A door CLICKS shut.

INT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

A bell JINGLES as Clay steps inside. A few customers glance up, registering who's entered. The room settles into an uneasy quiet.

Clay moves down the aisles with purpose. He finds a folded floral dress - simple, small - and takes it. Shoes. Plain. A bar of soap. A packet of cloth ribbons.

At the counter, a small leather sketchbook catches his eye. He weighs it once in his hand, then adds it to the stack.

The merchant approaches, wary.

MERCHANT

Four bits.

Clay's hand drops toward his belt.

The merchant stiffens.

Clay's hand rises again and places a silver coin on the counter - PLINK.

The merchant exhales and sweeps the coin into the till, wrapping the goods without a word.

Behind Clay, low WHISPERS ripple.

WOMAN

That's the one that carried her in...

MAN

Or put her there.

Clay closes his eyes for a brief moment, breathes out. He doesn't turn.

The merchant clears his throat - pointed.

MERCHANT

Some folks feel safer when you're ridin' out.

Clay turns - slow. He doesn't say a word. That's enough.  
He adjusts the bundle under his arm - protective.  
The bell JINGLES again as he exits.

INT. MUTZ HOTEL - ROSA'S ROOM - DAY

Rosa sits upright on the narrow bed as daylight filters through thin curtains.

Doc Simms kneels beside her, gently rewrapping the splint around her ankle.

A soft KNOCK.

Rosa flinches hard, her hand snapping out to grab the fork from the tray. Her breathing turns quick, shallow.

DOC SIMMS  
Easy now, Rosa.

The door opens slowly. Clay stops just inside the threshold.

DOC SIMMS (CONT'D)  
Perfect timing.

Rosa stiffens, guarded. Clay clocks it and doesn't move.

The Doc calmly takes the fork from her hand and sets it aside.

DOC SIMMS (CONT'D)  
This is the man who carried you here.

Rosa keeps her eyes on Clay, measuring.

Clay removes his hat and holds it loosely in his hands. He stays by the door.

CLAY ALLISON  
Afternoon, Miss.

Rosa doesn't answer.

The Doc finishes tying the splint and rises.

DOC SIMMS  
That will do for today. No weight on  
(MORE)

DOC SIMMS (CONT'D)

it yet.

Rosa nods, her eyes never leaving Clay.

The Doc gives her shoulder a reassuring squeeze, nods once to Clay, and exits.

Clay shifts his weight and steps just far enough into the room to set the bundle on the table near the bed. He doesn't explain it.

CLAY ALLISON

Just a few supplies.

Rosa watches closely. Her eyes flick to the bundle - then back to him.

An awkward silence settles between them.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

I'll check back. Got something to tend to.

He exhales quietly and steps out, closing the door behind him.

Rosa's gaze stays on the door for a moment. Then it drifts to the bundle.

She leans forward, careful of her ankle, pulls it into her lap, and slowly unwraps it.

A clean dress - light, floral.

She looks down at her own clothes, torn and stiff with blood.

As Rosa presses the new dress to her chest, her shoulders ease for the first time.

INT. BANK - DAY

Monroe Allison sits across from the BANKER, composed and business minded. Clay sits beside him, hat resting in his lap.

Silent. Present.

Monroe lays a folded, sun-creased notice of balloon payment

on the counter. Beside it, a hand-drawn map - twenty acres along the creek. A narrow rectangle marked: BLACK WILLOW PASTURE.

MONROE ALLISON

That ground's improved. Fence line, water access, cleared pasture. It'll carry more head come spring.

The banker studies the map.

BANKER

On paper, yes.

MONROE ALLISON

On paper?

The banker looks up - not at Monroe. At Clay.

Clay shifts in his chair. The wood CREAKS.

BANKER

Paper isn't the only thing that travels.

MONROE ALLISON

What's the problem?

The banker leans back, exhales.

BANKER

You'll understand, Mr. Allison... some folks don't see you boys as a safe bet.

MONROE ALLISON

We ain't askin' for charity. Just some breathing room.

BANKER

Room costs money. Collateral too.

He opens a ledger and runs a finger down a column.

BANKER (CONT'D)

Your original note comes due soon. If that debt isn't met, it won't matter whose name is on it.

He taps the notice once.

Monroe and Clay exchange a look.

BANKER (CONT'D)

My advice, sell your herd, make your  
payment.

Monroe gathers the papers, measured, controlled.

MONROE ALLISON

Appreciate your time.

He slips the notice into his breast pocket - the edge still  
visible as he stands.

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN - BANK - CONTINUOUS

They step into daylight. Clay stops and breathes once through  
his nose.

CLAY ALLISON

I didn't say a word.

MONROE ALLISON

Doesn't matter.

(beat)

Your name walked in before you did.

A distant CLATTER interrupts the town's rhythm - hooves on  
dirt, measured, unhurried.

A black carriage rolls past on Main Street - polished,  
precise, out of place. It pulls up in front of the  
magistrate's office.

The driver dismounts and opens the door.

Melvin Mills steps down - sharp suit, gold watch chain. A man  
dressed for courtrooms, not dirt. A slim leather case in  
hand. He doesn't look around so much as assess.

Down the boardwalk, two women pause as Mills passes. He tips  
his hat - polite, disarming. They smile without knowing why.

CLAY ALLISON

Who is that?

MONROE ALLISON

Name's slippin' me... but I know that  
face.

Mills adjusts his gloves. For the briefest instant, a thin, knowing smile touches his mouth as he slips inside Henry's office.

MONROE ALLISON (CONT'D)

Men like that don't travel without purpose.

The magistrate's door CLOSES behind him.

Clay watches the door a beat too long.

INT. MAGISTRATE'S OFFICE - LATER

Daylight slants through dusty windows.

Henry sits behind his desk; papers stacked with deliberate care.

Across from him, Melvin Mills sits with composed ease, gloves folded beside a slim leather case.

At the far side of the room, behind iron bars, Charles Kennedy sits on a bench. Hands folded. Spine straight. Eyes forward. Not listening. Not worried.

Outside the cell, Jack and William stand watch - still, alert.

Henry flips a page.

HENRY

Six written witness statements have been submitted thus far.

MELVIN MILLS

Those are ex-parte writings, Magistrate. Not testimony.

Henry lifts a hand - he expected this.

HENRY

They won't be received for their truth. They'll be marked for identification only.

(beat)

Sworn testimony will carry the weight.

MELVIN MILLS  
I'll require copies to accept.

HENRY  
Granted.

He turns another page.

HENRY (CONT'D)  
Two travelers present in town claim to have seen Mr. Kennedy on the pass rifling through a deceased man's coat.

MELVIN MILLS  
Uncharged matters, Mr. Lowrey. Limit scope to the offenses laid.

HENRY  
Agreed. I'll allow witnesses to testify only to events tied directly to the charged offenses. Nothing broader.

Henry closes the file.

HENRY (CONT'D)  
Remember, Counselor, this hearing isn't a trial. It's about probable cause.

MELVIN MILLS  
You believe you have it.

HENRY  
I do.

Mills rises, unbothered, buttons his coat.

MELVIN MILLS  
Well then, I suppose we'll let the process unfold.

He gathers his case, then pauses.

MELVIN MILLS (CONT'D)  
If you don't mind, Magistrate... I'd like a moment with my client.

Henry considers, then nods. He motions to Jack and William. They step out.

Henry exits last, closing the door behind him.

Mills turns toward the bars and approaches - not close enough to touch, just close enough to be heard.

MELVIN MILLS (CONT'D)

You've been busy.

KENNEDY

You said not to worry.

MELVIN MILLS

(smiling)

And you shouldn't. This is a hearing.  
Not a reckoning.

Kennedy tilts his head, listening - not to Mills. To something else.

MELVIN MILLS (CONT'D)

Sit still. Say little. Let them talk  
themselves tired.

(beat)

Be patient.

KENNEDY

You always did like patience.

MELVIN MILLS

It wins more cases.

Mills steps back, straightens his coat, and heads for the door.

Kennedy remains seated. Calm.

EXT. MAGISTRATES OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Henry stands just outside his office with Jack and William posted nearby. Quiet. Watchful.

The office door opens.

Mills steps out, adjusting his gloves - composed, unhurried. He tips his hat politely to Henry, then descends the steps.

EXT. FEED STORE - CONTINUOUS

Across the street, half-hidden beneath the feed store awning, Clay watches. Still. Measuring.

Monroe stands beside him, arms folded, eyes sharp.

Mills's carriage rolls off. Wheels RATTLE as it disappears down Main Street.

Clay doesn't follow the carriage with his eyes.

He watches Henry instead - the way he exhales, the way his shoulders settle just a touch.

Clay lifts two fingers to his mouth and WHISTLES - short, sharp.

Jack and William glance over. Henry clocks it too and gives a small nod.

Jack and William cross the street.

JACK  
Everything alright, boss?

CLAY ALLISON  
Who was that man?

JACK  
Kennedy's lawyer. Something... Mills.

That catches Monroe's attention.

MONROE ALLISON  
Melvin Mills?  
(beat)  
Well, I'll be dammed.

Clay's eyes shift to Monroe.

CLAY ALLISON  
You know him?

MONROE ALLISON  
Man don't walk into a courtroom 'less  
the judge already owes him somethin'.

CLAY ALLISON  
They talk about anything?

JACK  
Don't know. Kicked us out.

Clay looks off, thinking.

CLAY ALLISON  
Thanks, boys.

Jack and William exchange a look, then nod and head off.

Clay watches them go, then turns back to Monroe.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)  
You reckon Kennedy's got a play?

MONROE ALLISON  
If he's hired Melvin, he's already  
halfway there.

They fall in together and head down the boardwalk.

INT. MUTZ HOTEL - ROSA'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

Rosa sits upright on the bed, the sketchbook open in her lap, charcoal smudged across her fingers.

She wears the new dress - simple, clean. Her ankle remains splinted. Bruises still mark her skin, but her posture is composed.

A soft KNOCK.

Rosa's eyes flick to the door - then to the fork. She doesn't reach for it.

The door opens slowly. Clay steps in, careful.

They share a look. Different now.

CLAY ALLISON  
Afternoon.

Rosa closes the sketchbook - as if sealing something inside.

Clay clocks the dress. He doesn't comment - but something in him eases.

He sits, looking worn and thin.

Rosa studies him. Really studies him. A question in her eyes.  
Clay answers it.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)  
Melvin Mills is here.

Rosa's breath catches - just a little. Her fingers tighten on the sketchbook.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)  
You know him. Don't you?

Rosa nods. Once.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)  
That ain't good.

She shakes her head.

Clay rubs his face, exhales.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)  
He's good at what he does. Isn't he?

She nods again.

Clay sits with it - with something he can't fix.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)  
Henry is doing what he promised.  
(beat)  
I guess we'll see what happens at the hearing tomorrow.

He looks up.

Rosa meets his eyes.

Something shifts - resolve. A decision forming.

Clay doesn't see it yet.

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN - MORNING

Clay stands outside Henry's office, collar turned up against the chill. His eyes never leave the Mutz Hotel.

Monroe and John linger nearby. Quiet. No jokes today.

Across the street, a black carriage waits. Mills stands beside it, gloves on, posture easy. Watching everything.

Henry checks his pocket watch.

HENRY

It's time.

Clay nods, but his gaze drifts back down the street. Still nothing. He turns to Monroe and John-

John stops him, pointing.

The hotel door opens.

Rosa steps out. She wears the dress Clay bought. Shoes too. Her ankle stiff beneath the hem. A cane in hand.

She pauses on the threshold. The distance ahead suddenly feels long.

Clay sees her. Relief flashes - then tightens into concern.

Mills sees her too. His expression shifts. Not surprise. Interest.

Clay moves fast.

CLAY ALLISON

That ankle ain't ready for this.

Rosa doesn't answer. She shoots him a look - *don't stop me*.

Clay registers it. A small smile touches his face. He falls in beside her instead, offering support.

They walk. Each step measured. Painful. Deliberate.

Mills watches them approach. A thin smile curls - pleased. Almost amused.

Near the steps, Mills adjusts his gloves and moves ahead. As he passes Rosa, he tips his hat politely. The smile is meant only for her.

MELVIN MILLS

Mrs. Kennedy.

She trembles. Just enough to see. Her hand tightens on the cane.

Mills enters Henry's office.

Rosa exhales and looks to Clay. His eyes soften.

She straightens, steadies herself, and keeps moving.

Clay matches her pace.

Together, they climb the steps. One measured step at a time.

INT. MAGISTRATE'S OFFICE - LATER

The room falls silent as Clay and John march Kennedy to the front. Boots ECHO; floorboards CREAK.

Kennedy drops into the chair with a heavy THUNK, leans back - relaxed, smug.

Beside him, Melvin Mills sits neat as a sermon, pen poised, a faint smile already waiting.

Monroe stands in the corner, eyes locked on Mills.

At the back row, Rosa sits small and rigid, shawl tight at her neck. Every sound Kennedy makes pulls a flinch from her. Her breathing stays shallow, uneven.

Directly beside her, Francisco and Manuel sit stiff, their eyes refusing to land on Kennedy.

HENRY

Attention!

(beat)

This preliminary hearing is now called to order.

He clears his throat.

HENRY (CONT'D)

The purpose is to determine whether sufficient evidence exists to bind the accused over for trial.

Mills makes a note.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Charles Kennedy, you stand accused of the following: eleven counts of murder, one assault.

HENRY (CONT'D)

(beat)

No plea is required today.

Mills rises, voice measured.

MELVIN MILLS

My client maintains his innocence. We ask that noted for the record.

HENRY

Noted.

Kennedy says nothing. Stares ahead - already elsewhere.

Rosa shifts, hands trembling in her lap.

Outside, townsfolk crowd the windows, curiosity pressing close.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Witness statements have been collected and marked for trial.

(beat)

Anyone present today wish to testify with direct evidence against the accused?

Silence. Thick. Pressurized.

Rosa swallows. Her throat tightens. She lowers her gaze, breath shallow.

A baby CRIES outside.

Rosa flinches. Her eyes snap to Kennedy. For the first time, he turns his head - not to look at her, just enough to let her know he knows she's there.

Her breath stutters. Her foot slides back beneath the chair, testing the distance to the aisle. To the door.

Henry shifts, ready to move on.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Anyone at all?

Rosa's jaw tightens. Her hands curl into fists. She looks once more toward the door, draws a long, shaking breath - eyes closing.

MEMORY FLASH (ROSA POV):

- Kennedy looming over her. His eyes empty.
- Her ankle snapping. Pain. Sudden. Blinding.
- Facing Samuel.
- His voice, low in her ear: "Don't."

BACK TO PRESENT:

Rosa opens her eyes. Something has hardened behind the fear.

ROSA  
(quiet, breaking)  
I do.

Heads turn. Murmurs ripple.

Kennedy tilts his chin - just slightly.

Rosa sees it. She stands firm.

HENRY  
Name for the record.

ROSA  
(shaky)  
Rosa... Rosa Kennedy.

HENRY  
Testify to what you saw and heard.  
Briefly.

Rosa breathes once and begins-

ROSA  
It started a few years back. Charles  
would come home with more than just  
meat. Belongings... sometimes blood.  
Always a story.

Her fingers twist together.

ROSA (CONT'D)  
He'd say it was rustlers. Or natives.  
But his stories... they changed. Got  
shorter. Then, no stories at all.

She risks a glance to Kennedy - quick, frightened - then back

to Henry.

ROSA (CONT'D)

People went missing on the pass. I warned travelers when I could.

Mills rises, swift.

MELVIN MILLS

Objection. Prior disappearances are uncharged.

HENRY

Sustained. Witness will stick to events tied to the charged offenses.

Rosa nods, swallows hard. Closes her eyes.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. KENNEDY HOME - ONE WEEK AGO

The table overturned. Roy Ellis already down.

Rosa backs away as Kennedy advances.

ROSA (V.O.)

He shot Roy Ellis at the table. Went after my boy.

Rosa lunges, claws at him-desperate.

Kennedy backhands her without looking.

ROSA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Samuel tried to protect me.

ROSA POV: Samuel stands firm, terrified.

He raises his wooden toy horse and hurls it. It strikes Kennedy's back - does nothing.

Kennedy turns.

We stay on ROSA'S FACE as she understands what's coming. Her scream catches in her throat.

BACK TO PRESENT:

INT. MAGISTRATE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Rosa slowly opens her eyes. Tears spill now - uncontrolled.

ROSA

(through tears)

I spent every ounce of energy I had fighting him off of Samuel. When he was done... I didn't have anything left in me.

Her voice steadies - fragile, but firm.

ROSA (CONT'D)

My boy... was alive. Happy. Until he wasn't.

(points to Kennedy)

He did that.

No one moves. Even Mills' pen stills.

ROSA (CONT'D)

My silence won't be his cover anymore.

Her hand slips beneath the shawl. Paper CRACKLES.

She produces a small, oil-stained ledger and offers it forward.

Kennedy watches the ledger change hands.

A blink.

Henry accepts it carefully.

ROSA (CONT'D)

I took it when I escaped. The name of every traveler who was unfortunate to cross our door.

Mills rises immediately.

MELVIN MILLS

Objection. Foundation. Hearsay. Improperly obtained evidence.

HENRY

She lived under that roof, Counselor.

(beat)

(MORE)

HENRY (CONT'D)

I'll receive it for identification and  
investigative direction only.

Rosa remains standing a moment longer than necessary. Her  
breathing uneven. She gathers herself.

Silence settles heavy.

Even men hardened by blood and loss shift uncomfortably. A  
rancher discreetly wipes his eyes.

Rosa lifts her gaze to Kennedy. Their eyes lock.

For the first time, Mills stops writing. His eyes rise to her  
as well.

Her body trembles now. Eyes flicker, searching.

Clay starts to move-

-but Rosa turns first. Her body protests immediately. She  
grips her cane tighter, steadying herself. Then she walks  
toward the door.

Each step costs her.

Whispers follow as she passes - something closer to awe.

Rosa steps outside, letting the door SLAM behind her.

EXT. MAGISTRATE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Rosa lowers herself onto the edge of the boardwalk. For a  
moment, she sits perfectly still - back straight, chin  
lifted. Sunlight catches in her hair.

She draws one steady breath. Her hands tighten around the  
cane.

Her jaw trembles - just once - as if trying to hold something  
back.

It doesn't work.

A breath tears loose from her chest. Not a sob. Something  
breaking.

Her shoulders cave. Her spine folds. She clutches at her ribs

as if the pain has turned physical.

Her face crumples. Tears come fast now - uncontrolled, ugly.

They streak down her cheeks, drip from her chin, darken the wood beneath her.

Rosa bows forward, forehead nearly to her knees, shaking.

This isn't grief anymore.

This is everything she survived crashing through her all at once.

She gasps for air between sobs - breath hitching, breaking.

INT. MAGISTRATE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Clay watches from the window. Letting her have the release she earned.

Henry folds his hands atop the desk. His fingers tighten slightly.

HENRY

Probable cause is found on the assault  
and murder counts. Attempted counts  
are not bound over at this time.

Kennedy flicks a glance to Mills.

Mills' hand settles on Kennedy's arm - calming.

MELVIN MILLS

Request release to counsel's custody.

HENRY

Request denied.

Mills' jaw tightens. Barely.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Given the severity of the crimes your  
client's accused of, I can't allow him  
free run of Colfax County.

MELVIN MILLS

Note my objection. I request access to  
my client twice daily.

HENRY  
Granted. Morning and afternoon.

Henry closes the ledger - THUMP.

HENRY (CONT'D)  
Date to be set when the judge rides  
circuit.  
(beat)  
This hearing is adjourned.

Chairs SCRAPE. Breath returns to the room.

Clay and John step in.

Kennedy rises calmly, leans into Mills - just enough to murmur without being heard.

Mills doesn't react at first. Then - single nod.

Kennedy is pulled away.

Mills drifts to the window. He looks down at Rosa on the boardwalk. Not with concern. With calculation.

EXT. MAGISTRATES OFFICE - A SHORT TIME LATER

The Allison brothers step out onto the boardwalk.

A gathered crowd surges forward - cheers spilling over one another.

TOWNSFOLK (O.S.)  
The haunting is over!

Hands reach in - gripping Clay's, slapping John's back. Hats lift. Smiles break loose.

Monroe sidesteps the praise with polite nods, already uncomfortable.

John, on the other hand, soaks it in - tips his hat, grins wide.

Clay accepts a handshake. Maybe two. Then pulls away. The noise crawls under his skin.

His eyes cut through the crowd.

At the edge of the boardwalk, Rosa sits slumped against a post, gaze unfocused. The weight of her testimony still clings to her.

Clay pushes through the noise and kneels beside her, careful. His hand settles lightly on her shoulder.

Rosa flinches - just a twitch - then recognizes him. Her breathing steadies.

For a moment, neither speaks. They just breathe.

CLAY ALLISON  
Are you alright?

ROSA  
Yes.

Clay studies her, then offers his arm.

CLAY ALLISON  
Let us walk you?

Rosa smiles and nods.

Clay rises - and spots John still basking in the attention, laughing, hat tipped back.

Clay lets out a sharp WHISTLE.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)  
John!

He jerks his chin - *let's go*.

John hesitates. One last grin toward the crowd. He breaks away and falls in.

The crowd quiets slightly as they pass. Respect now. Not celebration.

Down the boardwalk, Mills stands silent - alone. Watching.

INT. MUTZ HOTEL - LATER

The front parlor is quiet now. Just the soft TICK of the clock.

At the base of the stairs, they pass a stranger stands by the

coat rack. Dusty hat. Collar turned up. His hands warm over the stove's mica window, orange light flickering across his jaw.

ROSA'S POV: In the warped mica glass, the stranger's eyes aren't on the flame. They're on her. Measuring.

A thin burn scar rides his jaw where the light catches.

Rosa's fingers tighten around the cane.

Clay clocks her hesitation. Not the reason. Just the shift.

They start up the narrow staircase. Rosa leans on her cane. Clay steadies her at the elbow - careful not to crowd.

John lingers a step behind, eyes scanning the lobby by habit.

INT. MUTZ HOTEL - UPSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

They stop at Rosa's door.

ROSA

Thank you, Mr. Allison. For seeing me through.

CLAY ALLISON

It wasn't a hard choice.

She slips the key into the lock. Stops. Turns back.

ROSA

There's more to you than people say.

Clay opens his mouth, but the words don't come.

Sensing the sensitivity, Rosa places her hand over his - a silent thank you.

She eases inside and closes the door gently.

Clay lingers in the hall a moment longer than necessary.

INT. MUTZ HOTEL - DOWNSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Clay and John descend the stairs.

The stranger pulls his hands from the stove, rolls his right shoulder, lowers his hat, and slips outside.

Clay slows, watching him go. That shoulder roll. That scar. Something scratches at his gut.

John feels it too.

JOHN ALLISON

You know him?

CLAY ALLISON

No. But I know trouble when it walks past me.

Clay turns to John, voice low.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

Keep an eye on Mills. Not close. Just aware.

John's grin fades. He nods - once.

Clay takes one last look toward Rosa's door.

INT. MAGISTRATE'S OFFICE - HOLDING CELL - NIGHT

Lantern light flickers low. The office sits quiet.

Kennedy sits on the bench inside the cell - hands folded, calm.

Outside the bars, William stands watch, rifle resting easy but ready.

BOOTSTEPS approach.

William straightens as Melvin Mills enters, coat immaculate, hat in hand. Unhurried.

WILLIAM

Visiting hours are-

MELVIN MILLS

-mornings and afternoons. Specific hours were never agreed.

(beat)

Go stretch your legs.

WILLIAM  
Magistrate didn't-

MELVIN MILLS  
I'll accept responsibility.

William studies him a moment, then steps outside. The door  
CREAKS shut.

Mills turns toward the cell. Kennedy doesn't look at him.

KENNEDY  
My patience is thinning, Counselor.

Mills sets his hat on a chair and removes his gloves - slow,  
deliberate.

MELVIN MILLS  
Things are in motion.

KENNEDY  
I sit. I wait...

Kennedy turns his head now, eyes sharp. Accusing.

KENNEDY (CONT'D)  
... and she still breathes.

Mills steps closer to the bars. Not afraid. Not rushed.

MELVIN MILLS  
You pay me to make sure you never  
reach a rope.  
(beat)  
Let me do that.

Kennedy leans forward, voice low and venomous.

KENNEDY  
I don't need patience, Melvin.  
(beat)  
I need certainty.

MELVIN MILLS  
Then give it time. Let other men dirty  
their hands.

A faint smile touches Kennedy's mouth. Not gratitude.  
Recognition.

KENNEDY

Remember what I did for you.

Mills swallows - almost imperceptible. Looks away.

MELVIN MILLS

I remember.

(beat)

Kept me out of a grave I dug for  
myself.

Kennedy's smile widens. Not warm. Victorious.

KENNEDY

You pull this off... I'm in your debt.

Mills straightens, slides his gloves back on, and smiles.

MELVIN MILLS

Debts are my profession, Charles.

(beat)

A rather large one is coming due.

Mills takes his hat and exits.

Kennedy settles back onto the bench. Calm again.

William steps back inside as Mills passes him. The smell of  
expensive cologne lingers in the cell.

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Wind hums low through the shuttered street. Lanterns sway,  
their light stuttering across frost-packed dirt.

Mills exits the magistrate's office - coat buttoned, gloves  
precise. His cane TAPS a patient, unhurried rhythm along the  
boards.

A block behind, half-swallowed by shadow, John follows. Easy.  
Quiet. A hunter's patience.

Mills stops beneath a swinging lantern. Checks his watch.  
Then glances down a cross street.

Two figures linger beneath a hanging sign. Faces hidden.  
Waiting.

Mills lifts a polite hand. A faint, knowing smile. He crosses

toward them.

EXT. SIDE STREET - CONTINUOUS

John slides closer, keeping to the darkness.

Mills greets the figures warmly - handshakes, low voices.  
Familiar.

He tilts his head toward a narrow alley behind the  
blacksmith's.

The figures hesitate.

Mills gestures again - small, reassuring.

They agree and follow him.

When all three vanish into the alley, John moves.

EXT. ALLEY BEHIND BLACKSMITH - CONTINUOUS

Wind RATTLES warped tin and frozen boards.

A dim oil lamp burns inside a half-collapsed storage shed,  
its light bleeding through cracked planks.

John crouches behind a wagon, one hand near his revolver. His  
eyes lock on the thin seam of light.

INTERCUT: INSIDE THE SHED

Three men stand around a makeshift table. Mills is calm.  
Centered.

The other two shift uneasily.

MELVIN MILLS  
(low, measured)  
Gentlemen... misunderstandings like  
these can be corrected.

He removes one glove and sets a small leather pouch on the  
table. It JINGLES.

The men exchange a look.

INTERCUT: OUTSIDE

The wagon CREAKS faintly under John's weight. He freezes.  
Listens.

MELVIN MILLS (O.S.)  
... not a bribe, kindness. For your  
families.

The wind steals most of it. Only fragments reach John-

"... testify..."

"... better for everyone..."

"... I'm a man who honors generosity..."

INTERCUT: INSIDE THE SHED

The meeting ends without ceremony.

Mills smiles, slips his glove back on, adjusts his hat, and  
exits first.

The other two linger, lifting the pouch. Peering inside.

INTERCUT: OUTSIDE

Mills passes within yards of John - close enough for the  
scent of cologne.

He never looks his way.

A moment later, the other two step into lantern light. Manuel  
and Francisco.

They avoid each other's eyes, murmuring in Spanish too low to  
hear.

They head toward Mutz's Hotel, shadows stretching long behind  
them.

John follows.

EXT. MUTZ HOTEL - LATER

John hangs back outside, half in shadow, peering through a  
window.

Manuel and Francisco climb the stairs and stop at room seven.  
 Francisco fumbles with the key, glances down the hall.  
 John pulls back. Waits a beat. Then peers again.  
 The door slips open - then shuts softly behind them.  
 John clocks the number, commits it to memory.

JOHN ALLISON  
 (whispers)  
 Seven.

He turns, eyes tracking down the street toward Pearson's.

INT. PEARSON'S SALOON - EVENING

A celebratory buzz hangs over E-Town.

Piano music hops. Couples dance in the open space. Card games crowd the edges.

At their usual back table, Clay, Monroe, and the boys drink and laugh - loose, loud, comfortable.

DAVY  
 We ridin' this trail with the  
 Goodnight outfit in Colorado. All of a  
 sudden, John has to squat *real bad*. He  
 jumps off his horse and runs behind a  
 bush, barely gets his pants down to  
 his knees and I swear... that boy  
 jumped ten foot in the air. Started  
 screaming like a sissy girl.

Laughter bursts.

DAVY (CONT'D)  
 He nearly shit on a rattler.

The table erupts. Drinks slosh. Monroe grips the table, laughing.

DAVY (CONT'D)  
 He's hoppin' like a jackrabbit,  
 stompin' through the brush. Finally,  
 with all his trashing about, his pants  
 fall down to his ankles, he trips flat  
 (MORE)

DAVY (CONT'D)  
on his face... right into an ant bed.

Davy wipes tears from his eyes.

MONROE ALLISON  
It's true... I was there. Damned near  
fell off my horse, I was laughin' so  
hard.

DAVY  
He flies back up off the ground,  
swatting at ants, britches round his  
ankles, butt ass naked from the waist  
down.

The laughter peaks just as John steps up behind them.

JOHN ALLISON  
Wasn't funny the first dozen times you  
told that story either.

More laughter. John forces a grin - but his eyes flick to  
Clay.

Clay clocks it instantly. His smile fades.

CLAY ALLISON  
What's wrong?

JOHN ALLISON  
Kennedy ain't seeing a rope.

The laughter dies. Glasses lower. Chairs stop moving.

Clay goes pale, stands.

CLAY ALLISON  
Boys!

Chairs SCRAPE as the whole table rises and follows Clay  
toward the back room.

INT. PEARSON'S SALOON BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The door shuts. Saloon noise dulls to bass and piano.

John pulls off his hat, runs a hand through his hair.

Clay doesn't blink.

CLAY ALLISON

Talk.

JOHN ALLISON

Mills ain't here for a fair trial.  
He's buyin' one.

CLAY ALLISON

How'd you come of this?

JOHN ALLISON

I tailed him, like you said. Saw him  
meet with two men from the hearing. He  
paid 'em off.

Monroe exhales hard, slaps Clay's shoulder.

MONROE ALLISON

Told you. Crooked as they come.

CLAY ALLISON

What else?

JOHN ALLISON

Followed 'em back to Mutz's. Room  
seven.

Clay's fist SLAMS the table.

CLAY ALLISON

Then that's where we start.

INT. MUTZ HOTEL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Floorboards CREAK as Clay, Monroe, and John move slow and  
quiet down the narrow hall. Spurs whisper metal in the hush.

They stop outside room seven.

Clay leans in, listening. Inside - low voices, nervous  
laughter, the CLINK of a bottle.

Clay glances at John.

CLAY ALLISON

You sure?

John nods. No hesitation.

Clay steps back once-

-then drives his boot forward.

The door EXPLODES inward with a thunderous BOOM. The jamb splinters. The door slams against the wall.

INT. ROOM SEVEN - CONTINUOUS

Manuel and Francisco jump like startled prey. Cards scatter. A bottle tips and SHATTERS across the floor.

Clay is already inside, revolver leveled.

Monroe and John flood in behind him, guns drawn, sealing the room.

Clay crosses in two strides, grabs Manuel by the throat, and SLAMS him onto the bed. The frame CREAKS under the impact.

Clay jams the revolver hard into Manuel's forehead.

CLAY ALLISON

You know who I am?

Manuel nods, eyes wide, breath shaking.

MANUEL

S-sí, señor... I know.

CLAY ALLISON

Then you know what happens if I don't get what I want.

Another frantic nod.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

Start talking about Mills.

Manuel flicks his eyes toward Francisco - pinned between Monroe's shotgun and John's revolver.

MANUEL

He said next time we tell it different. That we never saw Kennedy.

Francisco blurts out, desperate.

FRANCISCO

He said the law already knows what to believe! Better if we forget.

CLAY ALLISON

Forget what that bastard did?

MANUEL

That lawyer said we'd be safe. He would protect us.

Clay straightens, decision made.

CLAY ALLISON

We're going to see Henry. You're spillin' every word of this.

Manuel nods fast. Francisco crosses himself.

Clay lowers his gun.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

On your feet.

Manuel scrambles up.

Monroe and John shift positions - guns never wavering.

Clay jerks his chin toward the door.

John grips Manuel's arm.

Monroe steers Francisco forward.

Clay follows last, gun ready - just in case.

EXT. HENRY'S HOUSE - LATER

BAM! BAM! BAM!

Clay pounds the door hard enough to rattle the frame.

CLAY ALLISON

Henry!

(beat)

Henry, open up!

After a moment, a light flickers behind the window.

The door CREAKS open just enough for Henry to peer out - robe half-tied, lantern in hand.

HENRY

Clay? It's near midnight. What are you doing here?

Clay steps aside.

Manuel and Francisco stand behind him - shaken, pale, eyes fixed on the ground.

Monroe and John flank them. Silent. Armed.

Henry's expression shifts instantly.

HENRY (CONT'D)

What's this?

CLAY ALLISON

These men have something to tell you.

Henry studies the traders, reading the fear. The guilt. The inevitability.

INT. HENRY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The home is modest - more library than living room. Legal books stacked with care.

Henry opens the door wider.

HENRY

Come inside.

Manuel and Francisco step in, nervous, and turn into the parlor.

Clay and his brothers remain outside.

Henry pauses, looks back at Clay.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Thank you, Clay. I'll take it from here.

Clay nods once.

Henry closes the door and locks it. The house settles.

Henry exhales, rubs his face. Exhaustion finally catches up to him.

He turns and joins the men in the parlor.

HENRY (O.S.)  
Alright, gentlemen. Who wants to start?

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN MAIN STREET - MIDNIGHT

The town winds down. Lanterns dim one by one. Windows go dark as midnight settles in.

Henry walks alone - tired, focused. A lantern bobs ahead of him, satchel slung over his shoulder.

HENRY  
(grumbling)  
I'll make sure he never practices law again.

He turns onto Main Street.

Ahead, the Magistrate's Office looms - one dim window still lit.

INT. MAGISTRATE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Lantern light barely holds back the dark.

Outside the bars, William slumps in a chair, rifle across his knees. Eyes heavy. Fighting sleep.

Inside the cell, Kennedy lies in shadow. SNORING.

William's eyes flutter. His head dips.

The snoring stops.

Silence.

FOOTSTEPS echo along the boardwalk. A key SCRAPES in the lock.

William jolts awake, rifle snapping up.

The door opens - Henry steps in, lantern and satchel in hand.

WILLIAM  
Magistrate. Everything alright?

Henry sets the lantern on the desk.

HENRY  
(grumbling)  
Damn lawyer, stirring mud.

He pulls papers from the satchel - affidavits, warrants.  
Creased. Angry.

Henry removes his gun belt, sets it aside, drops into his  
chair. He spreads the papers, dips his pen, starts writing.

William steps back, peers into the cell.

Kennedy's SNORING resumes - different now. Measured.  
Intentional.

William relaxes, turns slightly away.

A quiet beat. Pen SCRATCHING. Snoring steady.

Then-

An arm SHOOTS through the bars, clamps around William's  
throat, and LIFTS HIM CLEAN OFF THE FLOOR.

WILLIAM  
(choking)  
Mag-!

The rifle CLATTERS. Boots kick air.

Henry's head snaps up. His chair FLIES BACK as he lunges.  
Papers scatter. The lantern WOBBLER.

HENRY  
Will!

Henry grabs Kennedy's forearm with both hands - scratching,  
tearing - useless.

HENRY (CONT'D)  
Let him go!

The grip doesn't budge. William's face purples. His hands  
claw weakly.

Henry reaches for his gun-

Empty air.

His eyes snap to the desk. There it sits.

Kennedy clocks it too.

In one fluid motion, Kennedy's other arm SHOTS OUT, clamps around Henry's throat, and LIFTS HIM OFF THE GROUND.

Both men dangle.

William goes still.

Kennedy releases him. William HITS THE FLOOR with a sickening THUD.

Kennedy pulls Henry closer to the bars. Their faces inches apart.

KENNEDY

Keys!

Henry can't speak. He kicks weakly, fingers digging into Kennedy's arm.

Kennedy yanks him back and SLAMS HIM INTO THE BARS - CLANG. Blood spills from Henry's brow.

William lies motionless on the floor.

KENNEDY (CONT'D)

KEYS!

Henry wheezes. Shakes his head. Refuses.

Kennedy tightens his grip, pressing Henry's face harder into the iron.

Henry locks eyes with him.

Kennedy squeezes.

A dry, horrible POP.

Henry goes slack.

Kennedy holds him a beat longer - then lets the body fall beside William.

Kennedy steps back, exhales. Rolls his shoulder once.

He kneels, searches Henry's pockets, finds the keys.

Rising, he unlocks the cell with ease and steps out.

The room dims into darkness as Kennedy lifts Henry's lantern and walks away.

INT. PEARSON'S SALOON - LATER

Clay sits alone at a small table, away from the noise. A full glass of whiskey in his hand. Untouched.

PLOP. Another whiskey lands on the table.

Clay lifts his eyes.

Mills sits down without asking. Suit sharp. Smile sharper.

MELVIN MILLS

Well, well. The infamous Clay Allison.  
I'm honored.

Clay doesn't answer. His stare is cold. Measuring.

MELVIN MILLS (CONT'D)

No hard feelings about the hearing.

(beat)

Despite you and your boys hauling my  
client in without so much as a badge  
between you... I commend you for  
bringing him in alive.

Mills raises his glass in mock salute. Drinks slow. Never breaking eye contact.

CLAY ALLISON

How in God's name can you cover for a  
man like that?

MELVIN MILLS

He pays *exceptionally* well.

Mills sets the glass down. Soft THUD.

CLAY ALLISON

Blood money.

INTERCUT:

INT. MUTZ HOTEL - STAIRS

Two MASKED MEN move up the stairs. Boots soft. Coats brushing the rail.

One checks a crumpled note. A room number scrawled in pencil: #4.

INT. PEARSON'S SALOON

MELVIN MILLS

Tell me something, Clay...

(beat)

What do you think happens when a man's past gets dragged into a courtroom? All those little episodes of yours. Gunfights. Tempers. Men buried with your name on their lips.

(beat)

Judges tend to find that sort of thing... instructive.

Clay's grip tightens on his glass.

MELVIN MILLS (CONT'D)

That's what we call impeachment of a witness. Once I'm finished, your word won't mean a damn thing.

CLAY ALLISON

We still have Rosa's testimony. That alone is enough to see him swing.

Mills tilts his head. Almost pitying.

MELVIN MILLS

Poor woman sure has a gift for tragedy.

(beat)

Shame what happens to people who keep talking when they shouldn't.

Clay goes still. Not confused. Calculating.

INT. MUTZ HOTEL - HALLWAY

The masked men creep down the narrow hall. Pistols raised. Silent.

They stop at room four. Test the knob. Locked.

MASKED MAN  
(whispers)  
On three.

INT. PEARSON'S SALOON

Clay sets the glass down slowly.

CLAY ALLISON  
You breathe her name again-  
(leans in)  
-I'll show you what color your blood  
really is.

Mills' smile flickers. Then returns. Polite.

MELVIN MILLS  
You've made your position clear.

He reaches into his coat. Pulls out a folded document.

SLAP. A NOTICE OF BALLOON PAYMENT hits the table.

MELVIN MILLS (CONT'D)  
I bought your paper from the bank this  
morning. Miss one sunrise and that  
creek of yours turns company land.

CLICK. Clay's pistol is suddenly leveled between Mills' eyes.

The saloon goes dead quiet.

MELVIN MILLS (CONT'D)  
Wow! That was impressive.  
(beat)  
Your reputation certainly earns its  
keep.

CLAY ALLISON  
You think I can be bought?

MELVIN MILLS  
Anyone can be bought, Clay. Just a  
matter of price.

Clay SLAMS his fist on the table. The glass jumps. Heads  
turn.

CLAY ALLISON  
 You're barking up the wrong damn tree.

INT. MUTZ HOTEL - HALLWAY

The masked men brace.

One finger raised.

Two-

INT. PEARSON'S SALOON

MELVIN MILLS  
 Alright, no deal. Can't say I didn't  
 try.

He rises smoothly, pockets the notice, adjusts his coat.

MELVIN MILLS (CONT'D)  
 Good night, Mr. Allison. And do pass  
 along my regards to Rosa-  
 (to himself as he turns)  
 -while you still can.

INT. MUTZ HOTEL - HALLWAY

BOOM! The door EXPLODES inward.

Gunfire ERUPTS. Muzzle flashes strobe the hall. Plaster  
 shreds. Glass SHATTERS.

Across the hall, another door flies open.

Rosa steps out. The FORK GLINTS in her hand.

She drives it into the nearest man's neck.

He SCREAMS, flailing. His revolver bucks - BANG!

The stray shot takes his partner square in the back.

The second man collapses.

The stabbed man drops, choking. Hands clawing at his throat.

Rosa crouches over the wounded shooter. Grabs his hair.  
 Wrenches his head back.

A thin burn scar rides his jaw.

She presses the fork into his neck.

ROSA

Mills?

He coughs. Blood bubbles. She presses harder.

MASKED MAN

(hoarse)

He said... finish you.

Rosa eases the fork back. Releases him.

She picks up the fallen revolver. Checks it. Levels it at him. Cocks the hammer - CLICK.

ROSA

Tell him... I'm the one he should  
fear.

She disengages the hammer - CLICK.

Slips the pistol into her satchel.

Steps over the bodies.

Disappears down the hall not waiting to see if he dies.

EXT. PEARSON'S SALOON - NIGHT - LATER

The saloon doors CREAK open. Clay steps into the cold.

Mills' words cling to him like smoke. He pauses on the boardwalk.

A SCREAM rips through the night.

TOWNSMAN (O.S.)

Oh, God! Someone help him!

Clay turns toward the sound - coming from the direction of the magistrate's office.

Another voice-

WOMAN (O.S.)

Dear Lord, it's Henry.

Clay starts walking. Slow. Uneasy.

Then faster.

He breaks into a run.

EXT. MAGISTRATES OFFICE - A FEW MOMENTS LATER

A crowd gathers beneath the cottonwood out front. Torches sway. Shadows stretch and twist.

Henry hangs from a rope.

His body sways gently in the night breeze. His spectacles dangle from one ear, catching the firelight. One boot toe brushes the bark with each sway.

A woman SOBS. Someone retches.

Clay pushes through the crowd. A hand reaches for him - he shrugs it off.

He stops beneath Henry.

For a long moment, nothing exists but the CREAK of rope and the low cries around him.

Monroe and John arrive behind him, breathless. Their faces collapse when they see it.

MONROE ALLISON  
God damn it.

Clay's hand trembles at his side.

JOHN  
Who would do this?

Clay doesn't answer.

He senses someone beside him.

Rosa stands there - still, silent. Her face emptied of everything.

She steps closer. Carefully. Reaches out and touches Henry's sleeve just once. A quiet farewell.

Clay turns to her now. Really sees her. He approaches like he's stepping onto sacred ground.



BANG.

The henchman's head snaps back. He crumples mid-smile - dead before he hits the dirt.

SCREAMS erupt.

Clay and Rosa turn.

John stands beside them, revolver still raised. Smoke curls from the barrel.

For half a second, he wears a crooked, almost boyish grin.

It fades when he sees Rosa watching him.

She meets his eyes - grateful. Quiet.

CLAY ALLISON

Good shot.

JOHN ALLISON

Hope he got paid up front.

Around them, the crowd has gone still. Not relieved. Not grateful. Just watching.

A woman clutches her shawl tighter. A man edges backward.

A whisper drifts-

TOWNSWOMAN (O.S.)

Jesus... what has this town become?

Clay clocks it all. The fear. The doubt.

John glances back down at the body. The grin creeps back - wider now.

A sudden CRASH jolts the crowd again.

SCREAMS.

Heads turn toward the magistrate's office.

TOWNSMAN (O.S.)

What now?

William stumbles out onto the porch. He collapses to his knees, clutching his throat, coughing violently.

Clay is there instantly.

CLAY ALLISON  
William!

William sucks air, eyes wild.

WILLIAM  
(hoarse, panicked)  
Kenn-

He coughs again. Blood flecks his lips. Clay grips his shoulders.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)  
Kennedy.  
(beat)  
Kennedy escaped.

The words land like a gunshot.

Clay's head snaps up - to Henry's body. To the open office door.

Everything clicks.

Clay straightens and storms toward the office.

Monroe and John fall in behind him without a word.

INT. MAGISTRATE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The cell door hangs open, swinging slightly. Henry's key still sits in the lock.

No Kennedy.

Clay crosses the room in three strides and grips the iron bars. They CREAK under his hand.

CLAY ALLISON  
KENNEDY!

He rips the key from the lock and hurls it across the room - CLANG. It skitters beneath the desk.

Clay goes still.

Clay looks down at the scuff marks near the desk. At the

overturned chair. At the smear of blood on the iron. He sees Henry fought.

Clay grips the bars - hands tight.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)  
I'm done playin' by the rules.

Clay turns for the door storming out into the night.

EXT. MAGISTRATES OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Torches sway in the cold air.

Clay pushes into the crowd. He goes straight to Rosa.

CLAY ALLISON  
We're getting you outta here. Now.

Behind them, in the background, Henry's body is being lowered from the cottonwood.

ROSA  
He will come for me.

Clay grabs her arm, already pulling her toward the horses.

CLAY ALLISON  
Exactly why you can't be-

She yanks her arm free.

ROSA  
Let him come.

That stops him cold.

CLAY ALLISON  
Hell no!

Behind them-

-a sheet is gently pulled up over Henry's face.

She looks past Clay - at Henry.

ROSA  
I'm done hiding.  
(beat)

(MORE)

ROSA (CONT'D)

Look around you.

(beat)

This is what hiding has brought.

She gestures - the shaken faces, the fear still hanging in the air.

ROSA (CONT'D)

It's *me* he wants.

Clay's eyes move - Henry's covered body.

William struggling for breath.

The watching townsfolk.

CLAY ALLISON

If I do this... there aint no line  
left between me and him.

Rosa steps closer. Calm now. Certain.

ROSA

That line didn't save Henry.

(beat)

This line has been waiting for you.

Clay studies her. Exhales hard.

He looks once more at Henry's body.

Then - He nods. Firm.

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN MAIN STREET - ALMOST DAWN

A soft blue glow bleeds over the eastern peaks.

The town sleeps. Shutters closed. Streets empty. Only the  
SQUEAK of a loose bank sign breaks the stillness.

Rosa walks alone. Limping. Slow and exposed.

A lantern swings at her side - raised just enough to be seen.

She reaches the mouth of an alley.

At the far end - a large shadow stands. Still. Watching.

Rosa slows. Just a fraction.

The shadow shifts.

Her eyes flick down the alley.

The shadow is gone.

She exhales - measured, controlled - and keeps walking. She knows she's being hunted.

EXT. SIDE STREET - CONTINUOUS

Rosa turns toward the stables behind the livery.

The street narrows. Buildings press closer. The light thins.

Each limping step costs her. Pain climbs her leg, sharp and insistent. She swallows it down and keeps moving.

A step behind her -

FOOTSTEPS. Soft. Measured. Intentionally unhurried. They don't chase. They don't close in. They follow.

Rosa's grip tightens on the lantern. It trembles, just slightly.

Another step behind her. Then another.

Her breath shortens. She forces it slow again.

She does not look back. She just keeps walking.

EXT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

Rosa reaches the barn doors.

The hinges GROAN as she pulls them open.

Behind her - the FOOTSTEPS stop. Close. Too close.

Rosa stills. The lantern hangs frozen in her grip.

She turns - slowly.

Kennedy stands just beyond the fence. Not advancing. Not

retreating. Waiting. Like he's been there the whole time.

The lantern light finds his face. Calm. Patient. Certain.

Rosa freezes. Her breath comes shallow and fast. The lantern TREMBLES in her hand.

KENNEDY

What did I say about being in town  
without an escort?

The words land soft. Familiar. Worse than a shout.

Rosa doesn't answer. She backs through the doorway, eyes never leaving him.

She slips inside and SLAMS the doors shut.

INT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

Darkness. Dust. The sharp, sour smell of hay.

Horses shift in their stalls. A nervous SNORT. Leather CREAKS somewhere in the dark.

Rosa moves forward, unsure, breath shallow. The lantern throws jittery shadows across beams and posts.

Behind her, the barn door CREAKS open.

Rosa spins - GASPS, stumbles back, nearly losing her footing.

Kennedy stands just inside the doorway, framed by the pale blue dawn. Not silhouetted. Not hiding. Relaxed. Almost amused.

He steps inside.

Rosa backs away.

He moves another step.

She backs again.

Kennedy matches her exactly - never rushing, never gaining too fast. Letting the distance die on its own.

KENNEDY

You should've kept running.

KENNEDY (CONT'D)

(beat)

Or better yet... kept quiet.

Rosa glances behind her - frantic now - searching for anything. A latch. A door. A gap. Her hands scrape uselessly along rough wood.

Kennedy clocks it. A small smile curls at the edge of his mouth.

KENNEDY (CONT'D)

No place left to go.

(voice low)

Time you go home.

Rosa stumbles backward into a rear stall and SLAMS the partition door shut - BAM.

INT. BARN - REAR STALL - CONTINUOUS

The stall door SLIDES open.

Kennedy steps inside. Pitch black.

Rosa has extinguished the lantern.

A beat stretches.

Then - A MATCH FLARES.

The lantern ignites again, flooding the stall with unsteady light.

Rosa stands firm. No tremble. No retreat. Still and calm. Holding the lantern.

A faint, knowing smile touches her mouth.

Kennedy blinks. For the first time - uncertain.

KENNEDY

What is this?

A polite throat-clearing from the dark.

CLAY ALLISON (O.S.)

Ahem!

Kennedy's head snaps toward the sound.

Just outside the stall, Clay sits mounted on his horse - reins loose in one hand.

A rope runs from the saddle horn.

Kennedy's eyes follow it down the horse's flank.

Across the dirt floor-

-to the neat coil at his feet.

Kennedy looks up-

KENNEDY

No-

CLAY ALLISON

YAH!

Clay spurs the horse. The animal LUNGES forward.

The rope SNAPS TIGHT around Kennedy's ankles.

Kennedy is ripped off his feet - SLAMS onto the boards, breath blasting out of him.

He SCREAMS as he's dragged out of the stall, out of the barn-  
-and into the cold blue morning.

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN - MORNING

A hush hangs over Elizabethtown like fog. Lanterns still burn in the cold air.

Outside Henry's office, a small crowd lingers - sleepless, hollowed.

A distant CRACK of branches. A faint PATTERN of hooves on hard dirt. Leaves RUSTLE. Stones ROLL.

Something DRAGS.

Heads turn. Curious eyes narrow.

The sound grows louder. Faster. Wrong for morning.

From the tree line at the edge of town - Clay bursts into view on horseback.

Dragging behind him - Kennedy.

His body bounces and scrapes violently across the dirt - rope cinched tight around his ankles, limbs flailing uselessly, flesh tearing against stone and wood.

CLAY ALLISON

Make way!

The shout cuts through the air.

The crowd GASPS. A woman SCREAMS.

Kennedy's body SLAMS into a hitching post - THUD - then tears free as the horse keeps charging.

People scatter. Two men dive onto the boardwalk. Curtains jerk open. Shutters fly wide. Faces crowd windows - stunned, disbelieving.

Someone crosses themselves. An old man removes his hat, holds it to his chest. A child steps forward - his mother yanks him back, covering his eyes.

From side streets and alleys, the Allison boys ride in, hard and fast - Monroe, John, the others - spreading instinctively to either side of Main Street.

Others follow. At a distance.

Whispers ripple through the growing crowd.

"Is that him?"

"The Ghost..."

"Sweet Jesus..."

Clay barrels down Main Street. Dust and frost curl in his wake.

At the far end of town, a massive COTTONWOOD waits. The same tree.

Clay fixes on it.

He yanks the reins hard.

The horse REARS, then skids to a halt - breath heaving.

Momentum carries Kennedy forward. His body slides across the dirt and comes to rest at the horse's feet in a choking cloud of dust.

Silence crashes in.

The Allison boys arrive first - dismounting quick, forming a loose ring around the body.

Then the town. There isn't a window left dark.

Lantern light tightens around Kennedy's ruined frame.

He twitches. A wet breath claws out of him.

Clay remains mounted - rope slack now - suspended between justice delivered and justice unfinished.

John crouches, listens close.

JOHN ALLISON

Son of a bitch. He's still alive.

A murmur ripples through the crowd.

Lantern light spills over Kennedy's broken frame - part spectacle, part reckoning.

Clay dismounts. He stands tall. Steady. Unflinching.

Through the shifting bodies, Melvin Mills appears.

For the first time, his composure slips.

His eyes dart - from Kennedy's ruined body, to Clay, to the watching town. Faces he once charmed. Now judging.

He swallows. Hard.

Clay's gaze locks on him. Cold. Unmoving.

Mills turns sharply, trying to disappear into the crowd-  
-and collides with Monroe.

No gun. No threat. Just a solid chest that does not move.

Mills staggers back a half step. His breath comes quick now. His voice does too. He slowly meets eyes with Monroe.

MELVIN MILLS

Whatever you want... we can work it out.

Monroe's expression says it all.

The crowd parts.

Rosa steps forward - limping, but unassisted. Lantern light catches in her eyes. She does not cry.

She stops at Kennedy's feet.

Behind her, Monroe grips Mills by the shoulders and turns him - not rough, not gentle. Inevitable.

MONROE ALLISON

You're gonna want to see this.

Mills's eyes drop.

Rosa kneels. Close enough to see what remains of the man who haunted her life.

ROSA

You broke everything you touched.

(beat)

Just not me.

She rises. Finished.

Clay hands her a coiled rope. She takes it without hesitation.

She fits the noose over Kennedy's head.

Kennedy exhales a bloody gurgle.

Clay kneels beside him.

KENNEDY

(weak, hoarse)

You think this makes you a hero?

Clay shakes his head, slow.

CLAY ALLISON

No. Just a boy who finally stood up.

Rosa steps back.

Clay rises. Gives a single nod.

The rope pulls taut - SCRAPES and BURNS through bark as it slides over the limb.

The branch bows.

Kennedy's body lifts - inch by inch. Blood drips from his feet, darkening the dirt below.

Then stillness.

A crude sign swings against his chest.

Black, uneven letters glare in the lantern light:

THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS TO WOMEN BEATERS AND CHILD KILLERS.

A murmur swells. Some cheer. Others turn away, pale.

Slowly, the sound fades.

One by one, the people of Elizabethtown drift off.

Not triumphant. Not ashamed. Just finished.

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN MAIN STREET - NEXT DAY

Clay steps out of the hotel. His coat is clean now - still faded, still worn.

Monroe stands by the horses. He watches Clay a moment, then reaches into his saddlebag and hands him a folded paper.

Clay unfolds it. The Notice of Ballon Payment. Stamped hard and official across the face: PAID IN FULL. A county seal glints in the sun.

Below it, in tight, irritated handwriting: MELVIN MILLS

Clay studies it. A small smile tugs at one corner of his mouth. He folds the notice carefully and slips it into his breast pocket.

Monroe slings a pack onto his horse. John adjusts his belt, buckles a knife at his hip. Davy checks his cinch - habit more than need. William sits mounted, posture stiff. Deep bruises bloom beneath the medical wrap at his neck.



A faint smile touches her lips as she returns to the page.

ROSA (V.O.)

But... he was the only man who stood  
between me and the devil. And that was  
enough.

She closes the journal and sets it on the nightstand. Her fingers linger on the cracked leather, memorizing the feel.

Then she rises. Slips a satchel over her shoulder.

From the table, she lifts a stagecoach ticket. RACK FOCUS -  
DESTINATION: WHITEROCKS, UINTAH VALLEY, U.T.

As she opens the door, a gust of air catches the journal.  
Pages FLUTTER.

Fleeting glimpses of charcoal sketches - Clay. Again, and again. Each one steadier. Quieter. More dignified than the last.

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN - END OF STREET - CONTINUOUS

Clay rides at the head of the group. Eyes forward. Wind lifts the edges of his coat.

He does not look back.

At the edge of town, Kennedy's body still hangs from the cottonwood, swaying slowly.

The sign across his chest FLAPS in the breeze.

A lone stranger on horseback studies the scene. He leans forward, squints to read the words.

VOICE

Damn right!

The sound lingers.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF TOWN - CONTINUOUS

The sun hangs high. The land stretches wide and still.

Clay and his posse ride single file, slow and steady. Dust

trails behind them, curling into the air like smoke.

CLAY ALLISON (VO)  
 Folks round these parts still talk  
 about what we did to Charles Kennedy.  
 (beat)  
 Some reckon it wasn't right. Others  
 swear it was the only thing that was.

They pass through a field of tall grass. The blades ripple around them.

Overhead, a lone crow circles. Its shadow skims across Clay's face, then disappears into the brush.

EXT. MUTZ HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

A stagecoach waits at the edge of the dusty street.

Rosa steps out into the open air, no more cane, satchel over her shoulder. The taken pistol now holstered on a belt of rough hide.

A few townsfolk take notice. No one says a word.

She adjusts the belt, unfamiliar with its weight, then settles it.

CLAY ALLISON (VO)  
 Rosa limped into town bleeding,  
 bruised... damn near dead. Told  
 stories that froze men stiff.

The driver reaches to help her up. She doesn't take his hand. She climbs in on her own. She pauses at the top step. Turns to look back.

Elizabethtown sprawls behind her. Battered, breathing, still standing.

A long breath and full smile.

CLAY ALLISON (VO) (CONT'D)  
 The law don't always ride fast enough  
 to set things right. So, me, my  
 brothers, and a few men who knew what  
 had to be done... we did it.

She climbs inside. The door closes. Wheels turn and dust

rises as Rosa moves on.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF TOWN - CONTINUOUS

The riders crest a ridge; silhouettes cut against the sky.

Elizabethtown lies quiet in the valley below.

Clay pulls his horse to a stop. He sits there, watching over E-Town.

The others ride on, their figures shrinking into the trail.

CLAY ALLISON (VO)

The town held us up as heroes.

(beat)

We ain't heroes. We did what we did  
because *someone* had to.

Clay turns his horse. Kicks gently, rides to catch up.

The dust stirs behind him, swallowed by the stillness.

CLAY ALLISON (VO) (CONT'D)

I'll tell you plain and simple. I  
don't regret it. Not one *damn* bit.

The posse disappears into a line of tall trees. Their shapes  
swallowed by shadow. Their sound by silence.

CLAY ALLISON (VO) (CONT'D)

The law can be good when it works.

(beat)

But out here...

(beat)

What's legal and what's right, ain't  
the same thing.

FADE TO BLACK

THE END