

ASPEN GROVE

Evil Roots Run Deep

Written by

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EXT. MONTANA RIVER - NIGHT

SUPER: SEPTEMBER 2005

Music: 'Run to the Hills' by Iron Maiden.

A Zodiac inflatable comes to rest on a riverbank near a stand of slim, white-barked trees. The pale trunks sway gently in the wind as the boat's pilot reaches down to turn off the music and ditch his headphones.

Dressed in dark tactical gear and wearing night-vision goggles, Two men leap from the raft and pull it onto the rocky shore. BILL and TED lift their visors and reach into the boat for their firearms. Preparing to lock and load, the shadowy figures begin a military-style weapons check.

BILL

Is this another National Park?

TED

Nah. It's weird. The Crow and Blackfeet own this strip of land, but they don't ever seem to use it.

BILL

Tribal land? Maybe there's nothing here worth shooting, like our infamous Bigfoot expedition.

TED

That's just it, this place is a certified honey-hole. I rode by on the boat last week, spotted a couple monster bucks. Trophy racks. Not to mention the wild boar. I'm telling you, that thing was HUGE.

BILL

Yeah, but is this legal? My elk and mule deer tags are already full.

TED

Well, not technically. That's why we brought these babies.

Raises the suppressed semi-automatic rifle.

TED (CONT'D)

Nice and quiet.

BILL

Oh, come on. Fish and Game will tear us a new asshole.

TED

No they won't. This place NEEDS population control. Those wild pigs aren't native to Montana, the settlers brought 'em here.

Ted finishes loading the magazine of his AR-15. He rams it home and racks a round.

TED (CONT'D)

These days they're considered a nuisance, so destructive that Wildlife Management PAYS people to take them out. Besides, you like bacon, don't you?

BILL

Naw, man. I don't eat pork.

TED

Are you Jewish?

BILL

I ain't Jewish, I just don't dig on swine, that's all.

TED

Whatever, more pork chops for me. Now if you don't mind, I've got a freezer to fill and an empty spot over the mantle.

BILL

Great. So now I'm a poacher?

TED

No. Right now, you're a pussy. We're not whacking rhinos. Come on and keep it down, Puss-in-Boots.

EXT. ASPEN GROVE - MOMENTS LATER

The armed men silently approach the edge of the aspen forest when Bill trips over something in the fallen leaves.

BILL

Ow. Dammit. Wait, what is that?

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a rabbit's foot keychain with a tiny flashlight. The weak beam flickers on.

BILL (CONT'D)

Oh wow. No shit. This is cool.

Bill leans his gun against a tree and picks up the object.

TED  
What'd you find?

BILL  
Looks like some kind of old  
flintlock rifle or something.

Bill hands his partner a crumbling stock holding a rusted gun barrel and firing mechanism, both crusted and fused with age. Ted puts down his weapon to examine the artifact.

TED  
Man, this thing's an antique. I  
mean ANCIENT. Like, pre-Civil War.

The keychain's light dims and blinks out. Ted is slightly irritated yet captivated by the unexpected find.

TED (CONT'D)  
Grab a light stick, I want to get a  
better look at this.

A pale blue illumination lights the immediate surroundings as Ted inspects the remains of the antique gun.

TED (CONT'D)  
That's better.

Bill finishes tying his shoe, stands and hikes up his pants.

BILL  
Huh? I didn't bring the light  
sticks. Left them back in the boat

In the inky darkness behind the men, two narrowed, glowing eyes blink fully open like a pair of blue-white coals, bathing the area in an eerie, ethereal light.

A deep, menacing growl paralyzes the men as the fiery orbs rise 10 feet into the air. As Bill wets himself, Ted moves to reclaim his gun. He whirls around and locates his target.

TED  
Oh shit.

Ted drops the gun and goes limp. His eyes roll back in his head and his skin shrivels tight to his skull as he is brutally eviscerated by a set of wicked, bearlike claws.

TITLE CARD - ASPEN GROVE

EXT. MONTANA WILDERNESS - TWILIGHT

SUPER: SEPTEMBER 1845

Fur trapper GEOFF (35, bearded, dirty) moves through the snowy, mountainous forest. A MUTT keeps pace at a distance. Desperate and exhausted, he takes cover behind a tree and studies his crude map, cursing. Evening descends into a chorus of wolf howls, one very close. Tail wagging, the scruffy dog barks and takes off.

GEOFF

Are you kidding? Good, get out of here, you mongrel! Hope that wolf fucks you in the ass.

The man spits tobacco juice at the departing Mutt.

GEOFF (CONT'D)

I should have killed you when I had the chance. When this is over, as God is my witness, I am going to skin you alive and eat you.

The darkness closes in and the cold intensifies. Wary of giving away his position, he employs a flint and striker to ignite a small fire. The spark illuminates two silhouetted figures who have been silently watching.

GEOFF (CONT'D)

Oh shit.

Bows at full draw, a pair of Crow warriors (late teens) step forward with arrows pointed at Geoff's chest. A powerful hand reaches from behind the tree trunk, wrapping around the trapper's face to cover his eyes while the other holds a Bowie knife tight to Geoff's throat. SPOTTED WOLF (40, grim, angular face) emerges from behind the tree and takes the trapper's rifle.

Teens LAUGHING BIRD and KICKING BIRD gather the captive's belongings and hand them to RED WOLF (60, weathered face, kind eyes). At his feet sits the Mutt, contentedly licking himself. The curious chief inspects Geoff's pistol before addressing his wary son in their native tongue.

RED WOLF

(Crow)

*You remember Kansas Man, yes?*

Blindfolded and hands tied, Geoff sits weeping in a puddle of urine, reciting the Lord's Prayer over and over.

SPOTTED WOLF

(Crow)

*Grandmother liked him.*

RED WOLF

(Crow)

*He spoke this language. Tried to teach us, before the bear. Your mother understands it better than I do, but I believe this unfortunate fellow is asking for help from the Man in the Sky.*

(sniffs)

*Probably for some clean britches.*

The teenaged Crow twins chuckle.

LAUGHING BIRD

(Crow)

*What should we do with him? He smells like a skunk.*

RED WOLF

(Crow)

*Like a skunk?*

KICKING BIRD

(Crow)

*Worse than a skunk.*

SPOTTED WOLF

(Crow)

*Smells like one of those pigs that digs up our fields. Far as I'm concerned, he's no better than the swine he feeds on.*

LAUGHING BIRD

(Crow)

*Yeah, they should go back where they came from, right father?*

KICKING BIRD

(Crow)

*And take your smelly pigs with you, this is OUR land!*

LAUGHING BIRD

(Crow)

*Did he really shit himself?*

KICKING BIRD

(Crow)

*Hahaha! Here, piggy, piggy.*

SPOTTED WOLF  
 (to boys in Crow)  
 Stop that.  
 (to Red Wolf)  
*I don't like this. He is a filthy  
 animal, and that is fresh blood.*

RED WOLF  
 (Crow)  
*He's injured, yes? Why is he alone?  
 Where is the rest of his party?*

SPOTTED WOLF  
 (Crow)  
*Double-crossed and dead, that's  
 where. You know how they are.*

RED WOLF  
 (Crow)  
*One thing's for sure, he isn't  
 equipped for hunting up here.*

Spotted Wolf takes the satchel from his father and rummages inside. He finds a beaver trap and throws it to the ground.

SPOTTED WOLF  
 (Crow)  
*Beaver? Up here? He's been hunting,  
 all right. We should cut his throat  
 and leave him for the wolves.*

Red Wolf gives his son a stern look.

SPOTTED WOLF (CONT'D)  
 (Crow)  
*And what's he doing with a  
 Blackfoot dog? We should stay out  
 of it and keep moving, Dad. Who  
 cares if he lives or dies? They are  
 all beasts, this one is no  
 different. He will end up dead, or  
 worse. Send him to join his  
 brothers in the White Woods.*

RED WOLF  
 (Crow)  
*If he's like the others we can give  
 him back to the wolves.*

SPOTTED WOLF  
 (Crow)  
*I would rather just gut him and  
 leave him for the Blackfeet.*

Red Wolf motions to three crouching figures huddled yards away, who dash over to gather around the Crow elder. One is lithe and five feet tall, the other two barely taller than her grandfather's waist, peeking out from fur and buckskin.

RED WOLF

(Crow)

*Is that what you're teaching my grandchildren? To kill strangers? The Great Spirit would not approve. Grandmother would be disappointed in you.*

(to children)

*Your father fears the white people's presence in our land. He would do violence to this man. My mother taught me that fear causes hatred, and hatred poisons the heart.*

The three younger CROW CHILDREN nod their heads.

RED WOLF (CONT'D)

(Crow)

*She would say: 'Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; For the anger of man does not please the Great Spirit'.*

SPOTTED WOLF

(Crow)

*Tell that to the Blackfeet.*

RED WOLF

(To son in Crow)

*We are Crow, not Blackfoot. Still, they are our brothers.*

SPOTTED WOLF

(Crow)

*Brothers? The Blackfeet wage war whenever they are able.*

RED WOLF

(Crow)

*The Great Spirit demands that we love and keep our brothers, even if they are quick to anger and especially when they are hungry for war.*

(to CROW CHILDREN)

*What did I teach you about war?*



TALLEST CROW CHILD  
 (uncertainly in Crow)  
*War is not the answer?*

RED WOLF  
 (Crow)  
*That's right. And what else?*

TALLEST CROW CHILD  
 (stammers in Crow)  
*Bless--*  
*I mean, Blessed are the*  
*peacemakers!*

RED WOLF  
 (Crow)  
*Very good.*  
 (To son)  
*No, killing wounded strangers is*  
*not the Crow way. Not MY way.*

LAUGHING BIRD waves his hand in front of his face.

LAUGHING BIRD  
 (Crow)  
*Even one that smells like a skunk?*

KICKING BIRD  
 (Crow)  
*Worse.*

RED WOLF  
 (Crow)  
*Grandmother would have spared him.*

SPOTTED WOLF  
 (bitterly in Crow)  
*Look where that got her.*

Concerned, Red Wolf pulls his son aside.

RED WOLF  
 (Crow)  
*I know your feelings about our*  
*white visitors, yes? We all feel*  
*your loss, the children's loss.*

The younger man sighs heavily as father and son embrace.

RED WOLF (CONT'D)  
 (Crow)  
*I know you miss her. We all do.*  
 (MORE)

RED WOLF (CONT'D)

*You still mourn, yes? Your family  
mourns with you, Son. I also know  
you take after your mother.*

SPOTTED WOLF

(Crow)

*Yes. You should listen to her.*

RED WOLF

(Crow)

*And YOU should honor your father  
and be slow to speak. Now, no more  
talk of the White Woods around the  
children, yes? It will give them  
nightmares.*

SPOTTED WOLF

(Crow)

*Yes, Father. As you wish.*

RED WOLF

(Crow)

*Let's get home and talk to Mother.*

The pair rejoins the group as the twins help their captive to his feet. Bound and blindfolded, Geoff suddenly takes off and runs away in an instinctual act of self-preservation. He runs headfirst into the closest tree and thuds heavily to the ground. The teenaged warriors double over in laughter. Dazed, Geoff sits up with a lump rising on his forehead. He raises his bound hands and pleads in broken Crow dialect:

GEOFF

(sobs in Crow)

*Please spare my life, oh noble  
Crow! Take my belongings, but spare  
my life! I only wish to return to  
civilization and never come back to  
this godless wilderness.*

The dog ambles over, lifts a leg and pees on the begging trapper. The surprised hunting party laughs, except for Spotted Wolf, who gives his father a knowing look.

SPOTTED WOLF

(Crow)

*Mother is NOT going to like this.  
You know how she feels about you  
bringing home white people.*

## EXT. CROW ENCAMPMENT - THE NEXT DAY

Colorful teepees line the bank of a flowing river. Canoes rest on shore, horses graze in a nearby meadow. A young woman scrapes deer hides as children play fight with sticks.

A teenaged Crow girl carries a basket of black currants. She is greeted by her aunt who pops one into her mouth. LITTLE OWL (50, sharp features) sits teaching 2 of her young granddaughters the art of drying fish as the tribe prepares for the return of the hunting party.

LITTLE OWL

(Crow)

*I taught this to your brothers too,  
when they were your age.*

The older woman calls to the teen girl carrying berries.

LITTLE OWL (CONT'D)

(Crow)

*Well done! Now run and fetch some  
water, dear. Your brothers and  
sister should be back any minute  
now. They will be thirsty.*

The Crow grandmother returns to her pupils.

CROW GIRL 1

(Crow)

*Next time, can I go hunting with  
Papa and grandfather?*

LITTLE OWL

(Crow)

*We'll see.*

CROW GIRL 2

(Crow)

*When can we go with them?*

LITTLE OWL

(Crow)

*You must be patient, little ones.*

CROW GIRL 1

(Crow)

*Papa will never take us.*

LITTLE OWL

(Crow)

*When it is time and you are old  
enough, I will take you myself.*

Little Owl leans in and speaks warmly to her granddaughters.

LITTLE OWL (CONT'D)

(Crow)

*You two are lucky. My father was not like yours. When I was a child, girls were not permitted to accompany the men on a hunt. We stayed at camp, no exceptions.*

The Crow woman adjusts the blade in the child's hand, flipping her own knife nimbly to help her granddaughter remove the fins from a fish.

LITTLE OWL (CONT'D)

(Crow)

*It didn't matter that I was faster than my brothers, or a better shot. That's the way things used to be. That didn't stop me, though.*

With a bittersweet smile, Little Owl pauses her work to address the youngsters.

LITTLE OWL (CONT'D)

(Crow)

*It didn't stop your mother, either. If you're strong and brave like her, nothing can stop you.*

Looking up, Little Owl asks the teenaged girl:

LITTLE OWL (CONT'D)

(Crow)

*You remember YOUR first time, yes?*

CROW TEENAGER

(Crow)

*I do. A ram. Papa was so proud.*

LITTLE OWL

(Crow)

*We all were, your Grandfather and I. Especially your mother.*

CROW GIRL 2

(Crow)

*When is she coming back?*

Grandmother strokes the child's concerned face.

LITTLE OWL

(Crow)

*I don't know child, hopefully soon.*

CROW GIRL 1

(Crow)

*Daddy cries after he puts us to bed. He misses her.*

LITTLE OWL

(Crow)

*We all do. I cry too, don't you?*

CROW GIRL 1

(Crow)

*Sometimes.*

LITTLE OWL

(Crow)

*It's okay to cry, little one. I know how it feels.*

CROW GIRL 2

(Crow)

*Grandfather says she could come back any day now, so don't cry.*

EXT. CROW ENCAMPMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Spotted Wolf emerges from the underbrush carrying the trapper's rifle and satchel. He is followed by his twin sons, who are guiding a stumbling, blindfolded Geoff.

Three Crow children (two boys and a girl) exit the forest carrying a butchered animal. Each of them proudly sports a ceremonial streak of dried blood across the nose.

Red Wolf brings up the rear, wearing the white fleece and black-horned skull of a mountain goat like a cape. Mutt keeps pace. A whoop goes up from the camp as everyone hurries to greet the returning family members.

RED WOLF

(Crow)

*Honey, I'm home!*

Shaking her head, his wife approaches and looks at Geoff.

LITTLE OWL

(Crow)

*Don't 'Honey' me. Another one? He smells worse than the last!*

RED WOLF

(Crow)

*Yes, he is a wretched thing. He speaks like Kansas Man.*

LAUGHING BIRD  
(Smirking in Crow)  
*Yeah, before the bear.*

KICKING BIRD  
(Laughing in Crow)  
*Before the bear!*

SPOTTED WOLF  
(Crow)  
*Quiet, you two.*

Spotted Wolf whispers to Little Owl.

SPOTTED WOLF (CONT'D)  
(Crow)  
*I think he understands our words.*

The Crow woman instructs her teenaged grandsons.

LITTLE OWL  
(Crow)  
*You boys get him cleaned up, but  
keep his hands tied.*

Little Owl turns and calmly instructs her son:

LITTLE OWL (CONT'D)  
(Crow)  
*Feed him to the bears.*

SPOTTED WOLF  
(Crow)  
*Right away, Mother.*

GEOFF  
(Crow)  
*No! Please don't feed me to the  
bears! I am harmless. Show mercy.*

LITTLE OWL  
(Crow)  
*So, you understand me.*  
(English)  
*Do you speak English?*

GEOFF  
*Yes! I am a trapper and friend of  
the Crow. I am wounded and hungry.  
Please, let me stay the night and I  
will be on my way in the morning.*

Geoff bursts into sobs, his pleading unintelligible. The Crow woman rolls her eyes and pulls down his blindfold.

LITTLE OWL  
*Enough, enough. You may stay for  
 one night. Do you understand?*

The pathetic Geoff nods and wipes his tears.

GEOFF  
 (Sniffle)  
 God bless you, sister.

Little Owl waves her hand in front of her face, indicating his terrible smell. She points him to the river.

LITTLE OWL  
 Now go wash yourself before your  
 stink makes *ME* cry as well.

Spotted Wolf smiles.

SPOTTED WOLF  
 (To boys in Crow)  
*Take the piggy to wash itself.*

Grinning, Laughing Bird and Kicking Bird take Geoff by the elbows and lead him to the river as Spotted Wolf embraces his mother.

SPOTTED WOLF (CONT'D)  
 (Crow)  
*I told him not to.*

LITTLE OWL  
 (Crow)  
*He can't help it. He keeps hoping.*

SPOTTED WOLF  
 (Crow)  
*I love you Mom, but I can't hope  
 anymore. She's gone, and I can't  
 lie to the children forever.*

LITTLE OWL  
 (Crow)  
*I know. They will understand in  
 time. Until then, let them believe.  
 That reminds me, I need you to do  
 your 'Mean Old Mom' a favor, okay?*

SPOTTED WOLF  
 (Tenderly in Crow)  
*Anything, you know that.*

LITTLE OWL

(Crow)

*Something the babies said. We can talk about it later, though.*

SPOTTED WOLF

(Crow)

*Of course. Let me get unpacked. The boys can watch Piggy Man.*

The warrior kisses his mother's cheek and turns to leave.

SPOTTED WOLF (CONT'D)

(To Red Wolf in Crow)

*What do you want to do with that dog, Dad? I think he likes you.*

The patriarch kneels to give Mutt a playful scratch.

RED WOLF

(Crow)

*I don't know.*

*What do you think, Mother?*

(To Mutt in English)

*White man should be grateful, yes?*

*Your barking saved his life.*

*Brave. Good tracker.*

(Stands up)

*Had a good teacher, yes? You are a most welcome guest, my Blackfoot brother. Besides, you smell better than your Master. I think I'll call you-- Lifesaver.*

LITTLE OWL

*Now we have 2 extra mouths to feed.*

RED WOLF

(Crow)

*Good thing we brought home plenty of meat. We'll get settled, and let our guest prepare for supper.*

Little Owl nods, embracing her husband.

LITTLE OWL

(Crow)

*The babies want to hunt.*

RED WOLF

(Crow)

*It is almost time. Soon.*



LITTLE OWL

(Crow)

*Can we take them next time?*

RED WOLF

(Crow)

*Take them. Why not? It's your turn.*

LITTLE OWL

(Crow)

*Wonderful.*

Lifesaver scampers off with a yelp toward a cluster of children. The Crow chief wraps the goatskin around his wife's shoulders.

RED WOLF

(Crow)

*If your son agrees. Which he will.*

LITTLE OWL

(Crow)

*Let me go find him.*

RED WOLF

(Crow)

*You two always had better luck with elk, anyway.*

His wife smiles before walking off.

EXT. CROW ENCAMPMENT - CONTINUOUS

As the stranger awkwardly washes, Red Wolf waits by the shoreline, inspecting him. His twin grandsons stand guard as he scans Geoff for any signs of disease or injury.

RED WOLF

(quietly to himself)

*I still have hope, Mother. I must believe they are not all wicked.*

The white man's body sports superficial wounds. Most are partially healed. None serious enough to explain the fresh blood that coated his leggings and jerkin.

RED WOLF (CONT'D)

*What are you hiding, my friend?*

*Come on, show me. Prove them wrong.*

Geoff wipes the gore from his buckskins, revealing two large purple bruises in the middle of his back. The chief raises an eyebrow at the odd, semicircular shape of the marks.

The trapper turns to meet the old man's stare and nods. Red Wolf returns the gesture when he suddenly spots 4 parallel scratches dug into Geoff's cheek.

RED WOLF (CONT'D)  
(bitterly)  
Not again. I have seen enough.

EXT. CROW ENCAMPMENT - EVENING

Food is prepared and the tribe eats. Red Wolf has Geoff's restraints removed, deeming him harmless while in custody. During the meal, the youngest stare at the white man, who smiles politely but remains silent.

The older youths joke amongst themselves about the newcomer's bout of incontinence. Laughing Bird pours a bowl of water into his brother's lap and runs off, roaring with laughter.

EXT. CROW ENCAMPMENT - LATER

As the tribe cleans up, the 10 year-old huntress tosses a scrap of fish to Lifesaver, who snatches it in midair to the child's delight.

Lifesaver saunters through the center of camp, a strip of salmon skin dangling from his mouth. As he spots Geoff sitting by the fire, the dog issues a low growl, hackles raised as he passes.

GEOFF  
Yeah, yeah. You gonna bark or you gonna bite, huh? Go on and growl. You're lucky I've already eaten.  
(To himself)  
If you can call that food. How do they eat that shit?

The man picks his teeth and rises to relieve himself. He mutters under his breath as he walks into the forest.

GEOFF (CONT'D)  
What's for dessert?

Hidden in the treetop canopy a short distance away, watchful eyes peer out through the branches, spying on the newcomer.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF CROW ENCAMPMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Finding a spot behind a tree, the trapper watches the camp from the darkness as he urinates, hidden from view. His gaze lingers on the 10 year old girl helping her teenage sibling.

GEOFF

(French)

*My oh my. Well, hello there my  
delicate flower. I bet your blossom  
tastes very sweet. Will you permit  
me a lick, little rose?*

Sinewy arms emerge from behind Geoff, looping a length of braided rope around his neck.

GEOFF (CONT'D)

Perhaps I take your sister instead?

Spotted Wolf tightens his vise-like grip. Geoff claws at his throat as he is choked. The muscular Crow bears down and wrenches the white man off his feet.

A wraith-like form materializes from the shadows. Grabbing a fistful of Geoff's hair, Little Owl faces him.

LITTLE OWL

(French)

*My oh my. Seems our guest fancies  
the pretty flowers, does he?*

With practiced lethality, Little Owl flips a knife around in her hand and presses its blade to the trapper's groin.

LITTLE OWL (CONT'D)

You don't look like a bee. Shall I  
cut off your stinger, little bee?  
Look, it shrivels before our eyes,  
too small to sting anyone.

Red Wolf and his grandsons join the group. Geoff's eyes bulge and his flailing arms fall limp as he strangles.

LITTLE OWL (CONT'D)

Do you make honey, little bee? Does  
it taste as bad as you smell?

The chief takes the Bowie knife from his wife's grasp as the trapper blacks out and is dumped to the ground in a heap.

LITTLE OWL (CONT'D)

No, you are not a bee. Bees are  
noble creatures. You are a wasp.  
You prey on others, on our  
children. There is nothing noble  
about you. You are just a savage.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF CROW ENCAMPMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Geoff comes to his senses lying hogtied in the dirt. He coughs and spits as Red Wolf crouches down to address him.

RED WOLF

Quite the spot you've found  
yourself in, yes? While I have your  
attention, I will tell you a story.

Eyes wide and pleading, Geoff slowly comes to grips with his predicament and settles down to listen.

RED WOLF (CONT'D)

I will speak in your tongue as best  
I can so you understand every word,  
yes? Yes. Very good. Let me begin  
by saying that my mother lived with  
joy and kindness in her heart. She  
raised me to respect life and care  
for others, even strangers.

GEOFF

Your Mother's beliefs and my own  
are one and the same. Don't you  
see? We are brothers! I am a God  
fearing follower of Our Lord Jesus  
Christ. My mother is kind and  
saintly like yours. Please, I am  
her only son!

(praying)

Protect me, O Lord. Forgive my  
lustful thoughts and sinful  
compulsions! Deliver me from these  
brutes who would take my life! If I  
am to die, let me be martyred as  
Jesus upon the hills of Calvary!

Geoff sobs and recites the Lord's Prayer repeatedly, his tearful eyes squeezed shut in religious fervor.

KICKING BIRD

(Crow)

*Grandmother, what is he saying to  
the Man in the Sky?*

LITTLE OWL

(Crow)

*He is lying. Over and over.*

With a yank, Spotted Wolf hauls the trapper upright and delivers a ferocious open-handed slap flush to Geoff's face, which silences his mewling cries.

RED WOLF

As I was saying. My mother. It was her way to welcome strangers and assist those in need. I have honored her wishes, for better or worse. Why do I tell you this?

FLASHBACK

EXT. MONTANA WILDERNESS - DAWN

Six emaciated figures are camped against a rocky outcropping. They wear the tattered remnants of clergy.

RED WOLF (V.O.)

*Some years ago, A group of white Holy Men made camp not far from where we found you. Fools brought ducks and pigs, yet had no guns or weapons to speak of. Half of them had already died along the way. When the Blackfeet attacked, they were defenseless. The survivors fled with their wounded.*

3 of them are huddled against the cave wall, eyes distant and glassy. One of the trio is wracked by a chest-rattling cough. A tall grey-bearded priest straggles into camp, dumping some twigs and branches to the dirt floor.

RED WOLF (V.O.) (CONT'D)

*They were starving when we found them, raving like madmen and gnawing on the bones of a horse. But that wasn't the worst of it.*

The last survivor crouches by a meager fire. He tosses a bible in and uses a buck knife to stoke the flames with his hollow eyes fixed anxiously on the body of his dead comrade.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF CROW ENCAMPMENT - CONTINUOUS

RED WOLF

Perhaps Mother was naïve, and to be sure, our people had not met many outsiders. The ones we *had* met would *claim* to be hunters, just passing through, but they were not. In truth, they were wicked beasts, running from their evil deeds.

LITTLE OWL  
*Filthy animals.*

INT. CROW ENCAMPMENT - EVENING

FLASHBACK

RED WOLF (V.O.)  
*But not this group. They were  
different. Not cruel or  
treacherous. We brought them to  
camp. Mother insisted we tend to  
those we could save. We gave them  
food, shelter, even healed them in  
our fashion. One was too far gone  
and never woke up.*

Four bedraggled white men sit beside their Crow hosts,  
eating as the fire warms them. Three have the far away look  
of the traumatized.

RED WOLF (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
*Mother took a liking to one of  
them. We called him Kansas Man. He  
taught us your language, and about  
your Man in the Sky.*

A Catholic priest (mid 60's, thinning hair, grey beard)  
speaks with an older Crow woman (70's and petite), whose  
role is clearly Matriarch of this family. She smiles  
placidly as Kansas Man expresses his gratitude, waving his  
arms excitedly as he converses with her.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF CROW ENCAMPMENT - CONTINUOUS

Geoff sits listening attentively as the old man continues.

RED WOLF  
*A few weeks after they arrived, our  
people started getting sick. It was  
a disease none of us had seen  
before. Red bumps appeared all over  
their skin. My brothers and sisters  
grew weak, unable to stand or feed  
themselves. Soon they were coughing  
blood and struggling to breathe.  
Scores of Crow died. Blame fell on  
the white Holy Men. I joined my  
brothers in favor of killing them  
on the spot.*

EXT. CROW ENCAMPMENT - MORNING

FLASHBACK

Two canoes rest on the river bank, both stocked with supplies. The three priests are shoved along at spearpoint by a group of Crow, including a younger Red Wolf.

RED WOLF (V.O.)

*Mother insisted on showing them  
mercy, to honor the Son of the Man  
in the Sky. The white men were  
provided canoes, food and supplies,  
and all but Kansas Man were sent  
away downriver to meet their fate.*

The trio of men board the canoes and are pushed away from the shore and into the current. A short distance away, Kansas Man stands next to the elder Crow woman, waving as the exiles depart.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF CROW ENCAMPMENT - CONTINUOUS

The helpless Geoff senses a possible avenue of escape.

GEOFF

*Yes please, send me down the river!*

RED WOLF

*(suspiciously)*

*Are you wanted by the law?*

GEOFF

*I have renounced my wicked ways. I  
am reformed and renewed in Christ!  
I just need to get back to Bannack.*

SPOTTED WOLF

*(Crow)*

*He is lying. They all lie.*

GEOFF

*No! Only the Blackfeet would see me  
harmed. I beg you to treat me  
fairly. I will tell all who will  
listen of your mercy. Please, in  
the name of our saintly mothers!*

The hysterical trapper starts bawling. Little Owl open-hand slaps him viciously on the opposite cheek and he quiets.

LITTLE OWL  
That will do.

She notices the set of deep scratches on his face and her eyes harden with knowing certainty. Suspicions confirmed, she leans in nose to nose with the white man.

LITTLE OWL (CONT'D)  
PIG.

The formidable woman releases his face and stalks away. Spotted Wolf comforts his wrathful mother. Red Wolf pivots to face Geoff, puts his hand on the man's shoulder and continues his monologue.

RED WOLF  
Be quiet and listen, yes?

INT. CROW ENCAMPMENT - EVENING

FLASHBACK

Kansas Man stands inside the teepee of the Crow matron, who coughs and writhes under a pile of skins. A worried young Red Wolf enters, his face full of grief and anguish.

RED WOLF (V.O.)  
*Soon after we sent the Holy Men  
away, Mother got sick as well.*

Kansas Man kneels beside the old woman, rocking back and forth as he prays. Red Wolf approaches to join him by her side. As he silently weeps, his tears leave dark spots on the yellow, dog-eared pages of the priest's small bible.

RED WOLF (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
*Kansas Man would sit at Mother's  
side, speaking his verses again and  
again. Pleading with the Man in the  
Sky to heal her, offering to trade  
places with the woman who had saved  
his life, saved him from living  
death, from becoming a skin-walker.*

The Crow mother reaches up weakly to stroke her son's cheek. Looking to the heavens, Red Wolf breaks down in sobs and buries his head in his hands. The mournful priest reaches over to rest a comforting hand on Red Wolf's shoulder.

RED WOLF (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
*He sat with her for days reading  
from his book. He was foolish, I  
think. Begging the Man in the Sky.*



END FLASHBACK

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF CROW ENCAMPMENT - CONTINUOUS

Red Wolf's demeanor gives away the slightest hint of anger.

RED WOLF

I know he meant well. But for all his words, his tears, his devotion, Mother still died. The Man in the Sky did nothing. Nothing. 3 days after Mother died, Kansas Man was killed and eaten by a bear. The Man in the Sky let him die as well. And yet, every white man I encounter:

The Crow elder raises the Bowie, and with the tip of the large knife, traces each of the four scratches on the man's cheek. He emphasizes each word.

RED WOLF (CONT'D)

Holy Man. Poacher. Rapist.

(pause)

MURDERER.

He lowers the blade, his voice measured but slightly shaky.

RED WOLF (CONT'D)

You all claim a covenant with the Man in the Sky, yes? This Heavenly Father, the Father of All Things. Abandoned his only Son to die, yes?

(scoffs)

That is no Father. Tell me, what use is a God who listens without answering? Sees everything, but stops nothing. Is your Sky Man weak? His Holy Spirit holds all of you in divine judgement. Yet his children are cruel, wicked beasts. Is he wicked as well? Does the Man in the Sky care at all?

Clearly upset, Red Wolf composes himself and continues:

RED WOLF (CONT'D)

Your impotent fable does not give you white men license to claim our land and game as your own. Your kind is infected with greed. You can not hide behind your Man in the Sky or his Black Book. Or conceal your wicked nature from the Great Spirit.

(MORE)

RED WOLF (CONT'D)

Your soul is corrupt, and you will answer to the Great Spirit for your crimes.

Geoff defiantly smiles a black-toothed grin.

GEOFF

You are wrong, Old Crow. So very wrong. It is God's will for the white man to assert his rightful dominion over the Earth and bring the Heathens into God's light. Are you blind, Old Crow? It's already begun. Progress. You can't stop it. Can't stop what's coming. There are more of us arriving in Bannack every day. We are the true descendants of Adam, and Eden is our inheritance. It is our God given right to do as we please with this land! Our destiny has been preordained! We will seize this land by force and cleanse the Earth of all you savages!

(chuckling)

Do you hear me, Old Crow? Do You?

Growling his displeasure, Lifesaver trots into the group and lifts his leg, peeing on the raving man's midsection. The trapper cries out in protest.

GEOFF (CONT'D)

You little *shithead*! I swear to God I will skin you alive and eat you--

Frustrated, Red Wolf stuffs a rag in Geoff's mouth and shakes his head.

RED WOLF

(Crow)

*What if Mother was wrong?*

(heavy sigh)

*Maybe we should have killed them when we had the chance.*

INT. CROW CHIEFTAN'S TEEPEE - DAWN

A blindfolded Geoff snaps awake on a dirt floor lying face down, gagged, and hogtied in the center of a teepee.

Strewn around the tent's perimeter is an assortment of gear: long guns, knives, sidearms, powder horns, traps, liquor flasks, and bibles. Nearby sits an impressive pile of furs, pelts and skins.

Sensing he is alone, the trapper squirms and drags his head along the ground. He fails to spit out the gag, but succeeds in dislodging his blindfold.

The weathered Crow leader sits cross-legged less than six feet from the trapper, eyes fixed intently on the bound man. With a snort of surprise, Geoff scoots back and fights to sit upright.

RED WOLF

Awake, yes? Time we had a talk,  
don't you think?

In one smooth motion, Red Wolf rises, Bowie knife in hand, and approaches Geoff, who winces and shifts his body weight, looking nervously for an escape route.

RED WOLF (CONT'D)

Take it easy, you'll hurt yourself.  
If I wished you dead you would be  
wolf bait by now. Turn around, yes?

The white man rolls over onto his belly in compliance. With deft precision, Red Wolf neatly cuts the rope connecting the man's ankles to his wrists.

Geoff cries out in relief as his gag is removed and he assumes a somewhat normal seated position, albeit with hands and feet still bound.

RED WOLF (CONT'D)

My wife and son would prefer I put  
this knife in your chest. Offered  
to do it themselves, in fact.

Geoff raises his voice to protest but is cut off by the older man, whose face grows deadly serious as he raises the razor-sharp blade. Maintaining eye contact, Red Wolf smoothly shaves off a bit of the trapper's beard, leaving a bare patch on his reddened, still-smarting jawline.

RED WOLF (CONT'D)

(solemn)

I meant what I said.

Lowering the knife, his voice brightens.

RED WOLF (CONT'D)

I was raised to value every life.  
(MORE)

RED WOLF (CONT'D)  
Even yours. I still do. Raised my  
children the same way.

Red Wolf takes a seat and settles in as he elaborates.

RED WOLF (CONT'D)  
Now, whether you leave here with  
yours is entirely up to you. Speak  
the truth, you may live to rejoin  
your Mother. But if you lie to me,  
you will be stripped naked, staked  
to the ground, covered with fish  
guts and left for the wolves.

Dead silence reinforces the seriousness of the threat.

RED WOLF (CONT'D)  
Don't worry, the ravens will pluck  
out your eyes so you don't have to  
watch. That is, if the bears don't  
find you first, of course.

Geoff swallows hard, realizing that his very life may depend  
on his next words. The chieftain leans in and raises the  
Bowie under the trapper's chin.

RED WOLF (CONT'D)  
You have a tale to tell, yes?  
Why were you in the mountains  
without gear, and covered in blood?  
Nothing lives there but goat and  
cougars. Where were you going?  
Did you lose your way? And you are  
travelling with a Blackfoot dog?  
Excellent trackers. Very loyal and  
protective. For some reason, he  
doesn't seem too fond of you.

GEOFF  
Good. I don't like that damn hound,  
either. Belonged to my partner.  
Told me he got him in trade from  
the Piegans. Guess he just follows  
me around out of habit. Never did  
like me, the little prick.

Lifesaver pokes his head into the teepee. The chief shoos  
him away and the furry scout retreats.

GEOFF (CONT'D)  
Let me apologize for what I said  
last night.  
(MORE)

GEOFF (CONT'D)

My words were those of a man  
certain that his end was near. I  
was half-crazed. Terrified.

Adopting a respectful tone, the white man continues.

GEOFF (CONT'D)

Recent events have bid me to forget  
myself. To behave contrary to my  
civilized nature. I am genuinely  
sorry for what happened to your  
Mother. She sounds like she was a  
true Child of God.

RED WOLF

You are kind to say. I forgive you  
for last night. We will 'turn the  
other cheek', yes? Please continue.

The trapper raises his bound hands and rubs his face, prints  
still visible from last night's reprimands.

GEOFF

Very well, Old Crow. Allow me to  
impart to you the harrowing ordeal  
I endured, and how you came to find  
me in such wretched condition.

EXT. MONTANA WILDERNESS - AFTERNOON

FLASHBACK

Geoff and his partner Hervé (40's paunchy, bald) ride horses  
along a pastoral stretch of grassland, looking up to see the  
high mountains in the distance. A loaded pack mule is  
tethered to Geoff's saddle.

GEOFF (V.O.)

*My partner and I started out from  
Bannack 2 months ago. We followed  
the game trails and hoped to make  
it up to Salish Lake before the  
first frost. Following the path of  
Mr. Lewis and Mr. Clark, we reached  
Clearwater a fortnight ago.*

Hervé pulls in an empty beaver trap from the edge of a pond.  
Geoff checks a snare, to find only the chewed-off rear leg  
of a rabbit remaining. He pulls the rabbit's foot out and  
tucks it in his trouser pocket.

GEOFF (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
*Trapping was poor, so we headed  
North and made camp no more than  
three days travel from here.*

END FLASHBACK

INT. CROW CHIEFTAN'S TEEPEE - CONTINUOUS

Red Wolf nods as the trapper continues.

GEOFF  
Five nights ago, as we slept, we  
were ambushed by a Blackfoot  
raiding party.

RED WOLF  
The Blackfeet are protective of  
their land. They do not welcome  
strangers and kill poachers on  
sight. How did you escape?  
If you were caught trespassing,  
likely you would not be speaking  
with me now. My brothers leave none  
alive, yet here you are.

GEOFF  
The good Lord was watching over me  
that awful night.

EXT. TRAPPER'S CAMP - NIGHT

FLASHBACK

The two white men lie wrapped in blankets on the ground near  
their fire. A pair of horses and a mule are tied to adjacent  
trees. Shifting uncomfortably, Geoff rises in exasperation  
and trots out of camp while Hervé remains sleeping.

GEOFF (V.O.)  
*I was awakened from my slumber by a  
rumbling in my bowels. As I was  
shitting in the dark, I watched  
four of the murderous savages enter  
our camp.*

Crouching in the darkness, the trapper sees four shadowy  
figures silently enter the ring of glowing firelight.

One swiftly unties the mounts and leads them off. Another  
brandishes a wicked-looking knife as a third gathers the  
drying skins. The fourth points to Geoff's empty bedding and  
darts into the woods.

Blade in hand, the Blackfoot warrior pounces on the sleeping man. He sits atop the trapper's partner, pinning the struggling Hervé to the ground in his blanket.

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

*My partner was held down as those  
bloodthirsty demons tore his scalp  
from his skull.*

The forests echo with a bloodcurdling shriek as the Blackfoot savagely drags his blade across the white man's forehead.

Blood streams down his face as Hervé spies Geoff hiding in the underbrush. Their terrified eyes meet for a split-second as the doomed trapper's screams reach a crescendo before ending abruptly.

END FLASHBACK

INT. CROW CHIEFTAN'S TEEPEE - CONTINUOUS

GEOFF

His screams are still fresh in my ears. The bastards slit his throat. Left him to die.

(angry)

They took everything, horses, mule, skins. It was a miracle from God they didn't see me. When I was sure they were gone, I emerged from cover. Rushed in to try and aid my partner. It was too late.

(sobs)

Hervé died in my arms. It was his blood on my buckskins.

The Crow patriarch nods, seeming to accept the man's account and urging him to continue.

RED WOLF

And the bruises on your back?

GEOFF

What? Those? Aw hell--

(sad laugh)

Kicked by my own horse. God only knows what happened to him.

RED WOLF

Go on.

EXT. TRAPPER'S CAMP - NIGHT

FLASHBACK

At the now empty campsite, Geoff stands covered in blood. Faint gurgling sounds emanate from Hervé's slashed throat, blood trickling down his now bare skull. Listening intently, Geoff darts into the darkness of the bushes and hides.

GEOFF (V.O.)

*Blackfeet always come back. Flush out survivors, finish off the wounded. I figured they still wanted my scalp, so I hid. Hoping I could get my horse back, maybe make them pay for what they did to my partner. One of them did come back, with Hervé's satchel, pistol, and that rifle over there. He emptied my partner's pockets and started pulling off his boots.*

A teenage Blackfoot warrior re-enters the deserted campsite leading one of the horses. In his other hand is a long gun. He walks over to Hervé's corpse and searches his clothes, tucking some coins into the satchel before grabbing a heel and yanking.

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

*I saw my opportunity. Crept up behind him to dash his brains in.*

The trapper sneaks up on the Blackfoot, preparing to smash him in the head with a rock. At the edge of the firelight, a scruffy Mutt watches the scene, tail wagging.

END FLASHBACK

INT. CROW CHIEFTAN'S TEEPEE - CONTINUOUS

GEOFF

*For some reason, whether out of spite or just to see me dead, that furry little prick decided to bark. The scout saw me and instantly I was fighting for my life. You can see by these scratches, he almost took my eye out. We fell to the ground and he went for that pistol.*

Geoff points to the weapon.



EXT. TRAPPER'S CAMP - NIGHT

FLASHBACK

The larger white man shoves the slim Blackfoot, who stumbles backward and trips. Geoff rushes to mount the fallen teen.

GEOFF (V.O.)

*By the grace of God, I gained the  
upper hand. Cracked him good with  
my rock just as the gun went off.*

The youth grasps the handgun, bringing his arm around to fire. The older man deflects the boy's limb with one hand and brings his rock down with the other.

As his stone weapon impacts bone, the gun discharges and Geoff's body is suddenly thrown violently forward.

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

*That's when he kicked me. Both  
hooves, right in the back. Bastard  
shot my horse! Couldn't believe it.*

The trapper lies dazed, gasping for breath and moaning in pain. He rolls around on the ground as his wounded horse gallops off into the gloom.

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

*Well, the horse run off, and that's  
the last I seen of him.*

Recovering, the white man looks down at the teen Blackfoot, who stirs weakly, a trickle of blood running down his cheek.

A scowling and furious Geoff approaches and kneels down. Raising the rock in both hands, he prepares to end the boy's life, his face twisted in a deranged grin of sadistic glee.

END FLASHBACK

INT. CROW CHIEFTAN'S TEEPEE - CONTINUOUS

GEOFF

*Bashed that Blackfoot with my rock  
till he stopped moving. It was then  
and there I resolved to skin and  
eat that goddamn dog. Heard a  
commotion and saw that the  
Blackfeet were nearly upon me.  
So, I left my partner's body,  
gathered what I could and ran.*

EXT. MONTANA WILDERNESS - SUNDOWN

FLASHBACK

Wearing a satchel and carrying a rifle, Geoff heads into the foothills of the mountains. His buckskins smeared with blood, he looks back nervously every few hundred yards.

GEOFF (V.O.)  
*I knew the Blackfeet wouldn't lead  
 their horses into snow, so I made  
 my way to the mountains.*

As he reaches the snow and begins hiking the steep incline, the Mutt pokes his head around a tree and trots along at a distance.

GEOFF (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
*And that is where you found me,  
 frozen half to death, fixing to eat  
 that asshole dog.*

END FLASHBACK

INT. CROW CHIEFTAN'S TEEPEE - CONTINUOUS

GEOFF  
 I am convinced that, if it was not  
 for my profound and abiding faith  
 in the Good Lord above, I would not  
 have had the strength or fortitude  
 to prevail. Amen?

RED WOLF  
 Amen. Quite a story. Yes it was.  
 One thing. It wasn't the Man in the  
 Sky who saved your life. It was  
 that asshole dog, yes?  
 Had he not led us to you, the  
 wolves would have finished you  
 before dawn. You should show some  
 gratitude, yes?

The white man shrugs. Red Wolf lowers the knife, rubbing his chin while Geoff's anxiety rises.

GEOFF  
 Please! You must believe me. I am  
 speaking the truth, I swear before  
 Almighty God! You are not like the  
 Blackfeet! They are ruthless  
 animals who kill for pleasure.  
 (MORE)

GEOFF (CONT'D)

The Crow are merciful and just.  
Please, I beg you to spare me and  
allow me to repay your kindness!  
Keep my traps, my gun, whatever I  
have is yours! Let me live and I  
can return and shower your family  
with modern comforts befitting a  
king. Let me reward your people for  
saving my life. For your  
hospitality. For our Mothers! For  
not feeding me to the bloody bears!  
Surely there is something I can  
offer in exchange for my freedom?

Red Wolf casually gestures to the rows of weapons, stacks of gold coins, Native silver bracelets and precious furs.

He retrieves a small watch from his loot and winds it before putting a hand on Geoff's shoulder to make a proposal.

RED WOLF

There is a small canoe outside. The children use it to fish. Light and maneuverable. Strong enough to take you far from this place, yes? Fill it with gear, traps, and weapons. All you will need. Depart from here immediately and forever. You must swear never to return. Tell not a single person of us or our camp's location. Do as I say, yes? If you are a skilled navigator, you may yet live to tell your own grandchildren of your adventure.

The trapper agrees but gives the older man a puzzled look.

GEOFF

So that's it? You ask nothing of me? You will simply release me and send me downriver?

He motions to the gear and weapons.

GEOFF (CONT'D)

And I can take as much of this as I want? There's a small fortune here.

RED WOLF

All that you see, I offer freely.  
But you must go and never return.

GEOFF

Forgive me Old Crow, but I don't believe you. What's the catch? If there's one thing civilization has taught me, it's that no one gives away something for nothing. Not Ever.

RED WOLF

I am offering you Grace. That is the Christian way, yes?

GEOFF

Whatever happened to those Holy Men, anyway?

RED WOLF

Just leave us and never return.

GEOFF

How do I know that this current won't send me right back to the Blackfeet?

RED WOLF

I guess you will have to have faith.

GEOFF

Look, Old Crow. Let me borrow one of those ponies out there? I promise to bring it back.

RED WOLF

No chance. In my old age, I have become less trusting. Wiser as well. My wife would disagree, yes? I trusted a white man much like yourself once and soon came to regret it. His words were lies. I should not have trusted them. That lapse in judgement brought great sadness upon my home, great suffering. Anger. Loss. No, only the Great Spirit can see the truth of a man. I cannot, I see only his deeds. Let me explain another way. Do I believe you will honor your promise? Not so much.

Head shaking, the Crow elder claps Geoff on his bruised back. The man gasps in pain.

RED WOLF (CONT'D)

It is likely that you would get along with Crow horses no better than you get along with Blackfoot dogs. Better stick to the water, yes? Less chance of another raiding party, yes? Besides, my wife would not be pleased. Those horses belong to the tribe. We need them to move our camp, to follow the herds. No, we simply have none we can spare. The canoe is all I have to offer. Take it or leave it.

Grimacing, the trapper nods his agreement.

RED WOLF (CONT'D)

Alright then. Give me your word that you will do exactly as I have instructed, yes? Do you swear to the Man in the Sky?

Geoff nods again.

GEOFF

You have my word. As a civilized white man, forgiven through the blood of Christ, I swear it.

RED WOLF

Your hands.

Red Wolf cuts the trapper's bindings, leaving him rubbing his wrists as he unties his ankles. Rising to stand, Geoff's feet refuse to hold his weight. Red Wolf reaches out to steady him before turning to exit the teepee. In his free hand, he holds a silver pocket watch, open and ticking.

RED WOLF (CONT'D)

You have five minutes. Gather what you need. One minute late, it's fish guts and wolves. Understand?

GEOFF

Absolutely. Hey, I answered your questions Old Crow. I have a question for you.

Red Wolf nods.

GEOFF (CONT'D)

You and the missus speak pretty good American. Better than most.

RED WOLF

She understands French as well. But you already knew that, yes?

GEOFF

Now, there is no way some priest taught you all that in a few weeks. How did you learn English?

The aged Crow flips a thumb at the dozen or so bibles. Many are missing whole sections and torn out pages lay in piles.

RED WOLF

I read those. Many times. As did my wife. The Holy Men left them when they were sent away. They abandoned the Man in the Sky. As the Sky Man abandoned them to die starving in the cold, yes? It was enjoyable to read stories to the little ones of The Jesus and his teachings. In the end, we grew tired of the white man's fables. We found another use for their Holy books, yes?

Red Wolf comically mimes wiping his butt while the distracted trapper scans the room for useful items.

GEOFF

Five minutes. Got it.

The unbound Geoff limps over to retrieve his rifle and looks down the breech. It's empty.

RED WOLF

Unloaded. Your pistol, too. Actually, none of those are loaded. Guns are too dangerous to leave lying around, yes? Someone could get hurt. So we keep them here, away from the children. Can't be too careful, yes? Yes.

Pleased, he checks the watch as Geoff rummages for supplies.

RED WOLF (CONT'D)

All right. I'll leave you to it. You have three minutes left.  
(stops and grins)  
Just kidding. Four and a half.

To illustrate his point, Red Wolf lifts his fingers to his head like ears, tilts his head back and howls.

RED WOLF (CONT'D)

Arooooo--

He pauses mid-howl, looking a bit ashamed.

RED WOLF (CONT'D)

I apologize. The Great Spirit would not approve.

Pausing his frantic scavenging, Geoff engages finger guns at Red Wolf and feigns amusement.

GEOFF

Ahhh, it's okay. That was a good one, Old Crow. Ya got me.

As he departs, Red Wolf makes an announcement to the tribe.

RED WOLF

(Crow)

*He has agreed. Fetch the canoe.*

The trapper scowls and gimps over to the hides. He flips over a grizzly bear skin. Snatching any weapons he can find, Geoff scoops double handfuls of lead ammunition, gold coins and silver, tossing them in a pile on the bear hide.

After drinking it dry, he empties all the smaller flasks into one large one. He similarly pours black powder sloppily from other powder horns into a large one.

While tossing some furs into his plunder, he spies something familiar.

GEOFF

Oh, shit.

Reaching over, he palms a lookalike of the oversized Bowie used to threaten him earlier.

GEOFF (CONT'D)

Now *THAT'S* a knife!

(muttering)

Let me save this little beauty for when I return.

Red Wolf abruptly reenters the teepee holding the watch. Geoff looks up innocently, eyes wide, Bowie in hand. He grins, sheaths the heavy blade and tosses it into the pile.

RED WOLF

Sorry. You've had a rough morning. Take an extra minute. I will send my grandsons to help, yes?

(MORE)

RED WOLF (CONT'D)  
 (serious tone)  
 We have given this much thought,  
 and my people have one request--

EXT. CROW ENCAMPMENT - LATER

Kicking Bird and his brother are handing rifles, various trapping equipment, and assorted camping gear to Geoff, who is seated in the small, lightweight canoe as it rests at the water's edge.

Red Wolf, Spotted Wolf, and Little Owl stand nearby watching the proceedings.

GEOFF  
 So, it's what, five days travel by  
 water to Clearwater Lake?  
 And another six on foot from there  
 back to Bannack?

RED WOLF  
 Sounds about right.

The chieftain leans to confer with his stone-faced son.

RED WOLF (CONT'D)  
 (Crow)  
*That went well, don't you think?*

SPOTTED WOLF  
 (Crow)  
*The sooner he leaves, the better.*

RED WOLF  
 (Crow)  
*That's the idea.*

LITTLE OWL  
 (Crow)  
*He answered your questions?*

SPOTTED WOLF  
 (Crow)  
*I doubt it.*

RED WOLF  
 (Crow)  
*He did not disappoint. I was  
 surprised he could speak so well  
 with that forked tongue.*



SPOTTED WOLF

(Crow)

*He is taking too long.*

RED WOLF

(Crow)

*White people are always late, son.  
Everyone knows that.*

The heavily laden canoe wobbles as Geoff wipes the sweat from his brow, adjusts his grip on the paddle and prepares to push away from the bank. The twins hand over the last of the gear and join their relatives.

Looking at the absurd amount of items the trapper has selected, the assembled Crow talk softly amongst themselves.

LAUGHING BIRD

(Crow)

*He took WAY too much stuff. Look  
how low he's sitting in the water.*

KICKING BIRD

(Crow)

*What's he doing? He has no use for  
half of that. How many guns do you  
need anyway?*

LAUGHING BIRD

(Crow)

*Papa, how far do you think he gets?*

SPOTTED WOLF

(Crow)

*He will be lucky to survive the  
shallows. Half a day before he  
turtles and we're fishing his body  
out of the river.*

The young brothers nod in agreement.

RED WOLF

(Crow)

*Come on now, Son.*

(English)

*He is a civilized white man, yes?  
His people have crossed vast  
oceans. Navigated the mighty  
rivers, like Mister Lewis and  
Mister Clark. Came all this way  
just to bring us civilization. We  
should thank him, yes?*

SPOTTED WOLF  
 (bitterly in Crow)  
*They took her away from me.*

LITTLE OWL  
 (Crow)  
*They stole her from all of us. But  
 we are still here, son.*

KICKING BIRD  
 (Crow)  
*The water's freezing. He'd better  
 be a good swimmer.*

LAUGHING BIRD  
 (Crow)  
*Pigs know how to swim?*

KICKING BIRD  
 (Crow)  
*Who cares? The Man in the Sky will  
 protect him.*

The group laughs, except for Spotted Wolf and Little Owl.

LITTLE OWL  
*Two days. Unless he ends up in the  
 White Woods.*

Red Wolf takes his leave and walks to the river's edge to bid farewell to their guest. He holds something small and black in his hand.

RED WOLF  
*Take this with you, yes?  
 It belonged to Kansas Man.  
 He gave it to me before the bear.*

He hands the bible to Geoff.

RED WOLF (CONT'D)  
*We still have a few copies.  
 Who knows, maybe one day the Man in  
 the Sky will answer, yes?*

GEOFF  
*Yes. Thanks. I'll take all the help  
 I can get, Old Crow. Sure you  
 didn't wipe your ass with it?*

RED WOLF  
*Pretty sure. Have all you will  
 need? Enough food, yes? This gear,  
 you have enough, yes? Enough guns?*

Geoff leans and reaches out to grasp Red Wolf's forearm in a farewell gesture.

GEOFF

You can never have enough guns.

RED WOLF

We shall see, my white brother.

The Crow chieftain crouches, holding the side of the canoe. His voice adopts a stern, authoritative tone.

RED WOLF (CONT'D)

Now, stick to the route I outlined, yes? Pay attention to the current and stay close to the shore. If you must stop, return to the water quickly. The Blackfeet are not the only danger you may encounter downstream. *Far from it.* During your second day's travel, you will pass through a valley of aspens. *Do not stop there.* Not for any reason. Not to eat, not to sleep, not to shit. Do not make camp, hunt, or take any game. If it grows dark, and you seek a place to sleep, *continue downstream* until you emerge from the valley and the aspens are well behind you, yes?

(deadly certainty)

Hear my words, yes? Hear them well. If you set foot on its shores, *especially after sunset*, you will never leave the White Woods again.

The trapper is momentarily taken aback, processing this new information. His quizzical look is replaced with bemusement.

GEOFF

Why must I avoid these--  
*White Woods*, exactly?

RED WOLF

It is a *sacred* place. The home of the Great Spirit. The fiercest Blackfoot warrior would not *dare* to hunt there.

GEOFF

Well, what do you know? Old Crow has a few fables of his own.

He raises the diminutive bible and wags it playfully.

GEOFF (CONT'D)

Don't worry about me, my brother.  
This will protect me. The Lord God  
Almighty is my shield. What can  
evil do if the Lord is my friend?  
Yea, I shall not be sacrificed  
until my time comes, then I shall  
be offered freely to join the choir  
of angels in Heaven.

Red Wolf knits his brow.

RED WOLF

Do as I say and *do not enter the*  
*White Wood*, or that time you speak  
of may arrive sooner than you  
bargained for.

The skeptical trapper considers the odd request and defers.

GEOFF

*Okay* Old Crow, You done me a solid  
turn, so I'll honor your wishes.  
I will avoid your haunted forest.  
And hey, if all else fails, I still  
have *these*.

Powder horn around his neck, Geoff motions to the small  
arsenal of firearms he has brought. Red Wolf rolls his eyes.

RED WOLF

Very well. There is nothing more I  
can do to prepare you. I will bid  
you farewell, yes? May the Man in  
the Sky guide and protect you.

GEOFF

*Amen to that*, Old Crow. *Amen to*  
*that*. Thank you. You saved my life.  
I owe you a debt that I can never  
repay. My regards to your family.  
God bless them all. You'll-- uh,  
forgive me if I keep my distance  
from your wife and son.

Geoff rubs his swollen cheek as Red Wolf glances over to  
Little Owl and Spotted Wolf, who stand silently with arms  
crossed, expressions equal parts stoic and intimidating.

RED WOLF

They will understand.  
Found an *anchor* there, yes?

Resting between Geoff's feet on the floor of the canoe, is a massive iron bear trap with it's links of bulky chain.

GEOFF

What can I say? Can't be too careful. Bear can't eat you if you eat him first. Besides--

The trapper rocks the canoe for emphasis.

GEOFF (CONT'D)

--These things tip too easy. The weight will help steady the boat. *Trust me*, I know what I'm doing, Old Crow. Maybe I'll see you again sometime, yes?

Red Wolf releases the boat and gives it a solid push.

RED WOLF

Not if I see you first.

Geoffry steadies the overloaded craft, and starts off downstream. The canoe is instantly picked up by the current and glides smoothly away from the camp.

The chief walks along the bank and rejoins his family.

RED WOLF (CONT'D)

Heed my words and do exactly as I have instructed! Your eternal spirit is in great jeopardy!

A furry blur bounces across the meadow, coming to rest at his master's feet.

RED WOLF (CONT'D)

Oh, and thanks for the dog!

Tail wagging, Lifesaver lets out a steady stream of aggressive barks at the departing fur trapper.

GEOFF

Yeah? Well, fuck you too!

EXT. MONTANA RIVER - CONTINUOUS

Moving swiftly in the flowing water, Geoff lifts a hand and waves to the Crow onlookers while mumbling to himself.

GEOFF

Oh yes, I will most definitely be seeing you all again very soon.

(MORE)

GEOFF (CONT'D)

And when I do, I will bring the militia with me and we'll put a bullet into each one of your pointy, savage heads. Maybe I'll save the girls for my soldier friends to enjoy. Would you like that, Old Crow? When I return, you will know that the Wrath of Almighty God has come with me, and you will beg the Man in the Sky for death. I have a promise to keep with that furry little prick, too. Your day will come.

EXT. CROW ENCAMPMENT - MOMENTS LATER

The Crow Family watches the canoe plow through the water, squinting as it rounds a bend and disappears from view. Little Owl turns to her husband and son.

LITTLE OWL

Will we see this one again?

SPOTTED WOLF

(Crow)

*Sure we will. Roaming the forest with guts hanging from his mouth.*

RED WOLF

(Crow)

*We'll wait a bit, and see how far he gets, yes? In a few days, the boys and I will head downstream in the big canoes. Same as last time.*

The woman walks over to Spotted Wolf and tenderly wraps her arm in his, leaning in to her son.

LITTLE OWL

(Crow)

*You stay home, Papa. We'll go.*

SPOTTED WOLF

(Crow)

*We're thinking about taking the girls out with us.*

RED WOLF

(Crow)

*Dangerous journey for their first time, yes?*

LITTLE OWL

(Crow)

*They have nothing to worry about  
out there. They are fearless, like  
their mother.*

Little Owl hugs her son around the waist.

RED WOLF

(Crow)

*She had a good teacher, yes?*

SPOTTED WOLF

(emotional in Crow)

*The best. I miss her so much, Mom.*

LITTLE OWL

(Crow)

*I know. We all do.*

Little Owl kisses the tears on her son's cheek. She offers Spotted Wolf a wan smile and nods downriver.

LITTLE OWL (CONT'D)

(Crow)

*What do you think?*

SPOTTED WOLF

(Crow)

*He's as good as dead.  
Or worse. I say good riddance.*

Red Wolf walks over to join them, putting an arm around his son. The family's newest member scampers happily at their feet, tail wagging.

RED WOLF

(Crow)

*I am inclined to agree, son. He'll  
never make it back to Bannack.*

LITTLE OWL

(Crow)

*Let his Man in the Sky protect him.*

SPOTTED WOLF

(Crow)

*Like he protected Kansas Man?*

LITTLE OWL

*What do you think, Papa?*

RED WOLF

*He is going to need a bigger boat.*

EXT. MONTANA RIVER - NEXT DAY - AFTERNOON

Exhausted from hours of nonstop paddling, Geoff dozes off while sitting upright.

The canoe travels on for untold miles, seemingly on autopilot. Dumping precious cargo with every bump, the boat is propelled ever faster by the current.

EXT. MONTANA RIVER - LATER

Head tilted to the side, Geoff's snoring mouth is agape as he sleeps. A horsefly flies directly into his festering gob, snapping him awake. He chokes, then coughs up and chews his unexpected morsel, swallowing as he attempts to retake control of the boat.

The wayward craft strikes a large boulder, dumping more gear. Geoff is launched sideways, smashing his forehead with the paddle as it tumbles out and floats away.

GEOFF

Oh, shit!

The lightweight boat corrects, faceplanting Geoff into the rocks dotting the turbulent river. He pops back upright, nose bleeding, as the canoe loses still more provisions.

A distraught Geoff issues a steady stream of profanity as he continues to pinball out of control. He enters a patch of intense whitewater and struggles to keep the craft afloat.

Hitting an eddy wall, the unstable canoe smashes into some debris, damaging and nearly overturning it. The bear trap tumbles out as the metal links loop around Geoff's calf.

The iron trap sinks immediately, wrenching Geoff leg-first from his perch on the disintegrating boat and dragging him underwater. Beneath the torrent, he pulls frantically at his ensnared leg before finally uncoiling the chain.

Geoff's face breaks the surface in calmer water. He gains a lucky handhold on the boat as it careens into the shoreline, leaving him soaked on the bank. Thanking his Creator, he pulls the vessel onto dry land and collapses, chest heaving.

After taking a moment to catch his breath, Geoff rises wearily and ventures inland, wandering into a grassy clearing near a dense forest of slender trees with golden, oval-shaped leaves and bone-white bark.

GEOFF (CONT'D)

Oh shit.



## EXT. ASPEN GROVE - SUNSET

The trapper quickly establishes a makeshift campsite and sparks a modest fire. He busies himself by organizing his inventory, seeking to repair the damaged boat.

Shivering in sopping wet clothing, Geoff checks the contents of the powder horn and empties the dripping satchel, dumping out its waterlogged contents to sort through his meager supply of bullets and lead shot.

Geoff's empty stomach grumbles, so he ransacks his provisions for sustenance. Most of the remaining food is soaked and inedible, and that which remains dry is distinctly unpalatable.

GEOFF

(sniffs)

Let's see, stinky dried elk with berries and twigs.

He pulls the Bowie knife from its sheath, meaning to cut his pemmican. Sawing into the meat, his brow furrows as the Bowie fails to cut.

Running his thumb along its length, he finds the edge to be rolled and dull, chipped and rife with cracks. The handle is loose as well, causing the blade to spin freely on its tang.

GEOFF (CONT'D)

Ah, Old Crow, you son of a bitch!  
You knew about this, didn't you?

Frustrated, he throws down the broken knife.

Foraging in the canoe, Geoff finds a small hatchet. He raises it to chop up his paltry meal and the axe head flies off it's handle, somersaulting into the stand of nearby aspen trees. Stymied, he tosses the handle into the fire.

Taking a close look at the handful of knives still in his possession, he finds all the edged weapons to be dull, warped, fractured, or lacking a decent handle. Sensing he has been hoodwinked by Red Wolf, his blood boils.

GEOFF (CONT'D)

You have got to be kidding!

Utterly famished, he raises the slab of elk pemmican and takes a tentative bite. Unsuccessful at first, Geoff uses his back teeth to gnaw at the dry-aged jerky.

Finding the flavor repellent, he chews vigorously and forces himself to swallow, pulling a sprig of wild herb wedged between his stained teeth.

GEOFF (CONT'D)  
(gagging)  
Okay, it could be worse.

Fracturing another splinter of the preserved elk loin, he fights the urge to vomit as he chews.

GEOFF (CONT'D)  
At this point, as God is my  
witness, I really would eat that  
asshole dog.

Geoff resumes checking his gear, carefully looking over the remaining weapons he was able to salvage.

Raising the first rifle to his shoulder, Geoff looks down the muzzle. As he aims, he realizes that the barrel is bent.

The trapper soon finds that every donated gun has been sabotaged and rendered useless, leaving his original deer rifle and pistol as the only firearms in working order. Realizing he has been outsmarted, Geoff rages at the sky.

GEOFF (CONT'D)  
Heavenly Father, I hated them  
before, but now I despise these  
godless savages even more. Worse  
than the filthy Negroes, at least  
those stupid animals know their  
place! Oh Lord, please find it in  
your infinite wisdom to send each  
and every one of those red devils  
straight back to Hell, with their  
haunted forests and shitty food.  
May your fiery sword of vengeance  
cut down all these vile heathens  
and cast them into the everlasting  
lake of fire. In Jesus' name, Amen.

His sermon over, Geoff inserts a fresh wad of chewing tobacco and sets off to explore his immediate surroundings.

EXT. ASPEN GROVE - CONTINUOUS

By the light of the rising moon, Geoff observes a herd of mule deer browsing. A beaver splashes into the river, pulling a branch. Everywhere he looks, wildlife frolics and feeds, unperturbed by his presence.

Suddenly energized, he dashes back to camp and excitedly searches through his collection of trapping supplies.

GEOFF

Here we are. Hallelujah!

Geoff gathers two wire loops from his gear, walks to the water's edge and rigs the snares outside a muskrat lodge.

EXT. TRAPPER'S CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

Returning to the fireside, Geoff settles in for the night. He bunches up his satchel as a pillow and wraps himself in a horse blanket, cursing the smell.

No sooner has the trapper begun to doze off, when he is awakened by a grunting, snuffling noise from close by.

Geoff kicks off the blanket and reaches for his pistol.

Rising into a crouch, Geoff creeps silently into the forest. As the white trunks sway hypnotically, he squats motionless, scanning the surroundings for any sign of movement.

The grunting snort repeats. A blur of motion at the edge of his vision prompts Geoff to whirl and fire off a round from his trusty sidearm.

Geoff's ears ring from the gunshot as his intended target cries out in surprise and pain. The wild boar explodes from cover and flees deeper into the aspens, leaving a trail of crimson splashes in the dappled moonlight.

GEOFF

Praise the Lord! No more shitty  
Injun food. Haha! You hear that,  
Old Crow? Shove your twigs and  
berries up your ass, we're serving  
roast pork tonight!

Pistol in hand, Geoff pursues the mortally wounded swine, striding confidently into the diffused gloom of the forest.

The veteran trapper follows the pig's blood trail for several hundred yards before stopping. A guttural sound burbles from a nearby thicket. In response, Geoff raises the shooting iron to dispatch his cornered quarry.

GEOFF (CONT'D)

Here, piggy, piggy.  
Come out, come out--

A dark form shifts in the tangle of brambles. Geoff steadies his arm, cocks the hammer and takes careful aim.

GEOFF (CONT'D)

There you are, I see you. Hold still, this won't hurt.

The bear bursts from the undergrowth with a ferocious roar. Before he can react, the huge grizzly locks eyes with the shell-shocked Geoff and launches itself in his direction.

GEOFF (CONT'D)

Oh shit.

Geoff pulls the trigger repeatedly, firing wildly until the cylinder goes click.

The pistol slugs have no noticeable effect on the fifteen hundred pound omnivore. Geoff drops the gun and turns tail, shrieking in fear as he attempts to outrun the furious bear.

He makes a beeline for camp in a last-ditch effort to reach the more powerful deer rifle. Eyes focused on the flickering firelight, the tiring Geoff grits his teeth and presses on as the galloping bear closes the distance between them.

EXT. TRAPPER'S CAMP - CONTINUOUS

Emerging from the trees and entering the campsite at top speed, Geoff gathers himself to dive for the rifle.

As he plants his foot to leap, Geoff's heel makes contact with the metal trigger plate of the bear trap. The toothed hinges slam together with terrifying force, instantly shattering both leg bones in a sickening crunch.

Geoff's momentum carries him forward, depositing him mere feet from the waiting rifle. He claws maniacally at the dirt, straining with maximum effort to reach his gun. He cries out in despair as his fingers brush against the stock.

GEOFF

(shocked)

Don't let me die like this!

Just as his fingers curl around the rifle butt, Geoff's body is suddenly yanked backward, once again leaving his potential salvation a few tantalizing inches out of reach.

Consumed with agonizing pain, Geoff looks down in horror to see splintered bone poking out of his pulverized limb as it dangles from the trap at an unnatural angle.

Holding the chain in its slobbering maw, the bear pulls its prey closer to deliver the coup de grace. It gives the iron links another tug, bringing the man closer to certain death.

Reaching into the campfire, Geoff rolls over and smashes the grizzly in the head with a flaming log. The impact sends a cloud of embers aloft as the enormous bear bellows in rage.

The growling brute rears up and brings down it's massive paws on Geoff's chest with crushing force, snapping multiple ribs like matchsticks and pinning him to the spot.

With scorched bits of its matted fur still smoking, the angry giant lowers its drooling muzzle. Gravely injured and spitting blood, Geoff pleads with the Almighty:

GEOFF (CONT'D)  
(gasps painfully)  
No! Please God! Not a bear!

The massive ursine opens it's jaws, sporting yellow, three-inch canines. Turning it's head sideways, the grizzly puts Geoff's entire head in its mouth and bites down.

EXT. ASPEN GROVE - MORNING

Geoff bolts upright, the leather satchel still stuck to his face with dried saliva. Drenched in sweat, he frantically throws off the horse blanket, waking in a confused panic to the chirping of songbirds in the early morning sun.

GEOFF  
Jesus Christ! What was that?  
Did you poison that elk meat, Old  
Crow? Is that what you did?

A foul yet familiar smell wafts from his nether region.

GEOFF (CONT'D)  
Shit. Let's get that boat fixed.

Geoff gingerly tiptoes down to the river to wash off.

EXT. ASPEN GROVE - LATER

With two muskrat pelts drying nearby, Geoff inspects his work. Satisfied, he admires his newly-repaired craft.

GEOFF  
Hell, maybe I can make a little  
money before I leave? Just one more  
night, Old Crow, I promise.

EXT. ASPEN GROVE - AFTERNOON

Geoff gets down to business with his guns, traps, and snares. His deadly handiwork soon bears lethal fruit.

## MONTAGE:

A) At the riverside, Geoff pulls a dead beaver from a trap and resets it.

B) Carrying the beaver, he quickly pulls his pistol to shoot a goose as it leads it's goslings to the water.

C) A bobcat grooms its fur as it rests on a fallen log. The trapper aims his rifle and fires, killing it instantly.

D) On a trail, a mother fox sniffs at a small bone as her two little ones cavort around her. Taking it in her mouth, her leg gets caught in a snare and the kits scatter.

E) Geoff sits among a pile of dead animals. Using a sharp sliver of rock, he slices open the belly of a rabbit before brutally peeling off its skin and tossing the body aside.

F) Skinned carcasses lie discarded in a heap beneath a cloud of buzzing flies at the edge of the ivory forest.

## END MONTAGE

## EXT. ASPEN GROVE - EVENING

A veil of darkness envelops Aspen Grove, but on this moonless night, Eden is strangely silent. Filling the void are the whispering voices of the swaying trees, leaves and branches brushing together like a cicada's wings.

Geoff sits by the fire, finishing a goose's drumstick. He flicks the bone out of the campsite. His repaired boat rests nearby with a bounty of valuable furs stowed away inside. Burping, he chews tobacco and drinks from the flask.

As he takes a swig of booze, Geoff pulls the small bible from his jerkin and tears out a page from the Good Book. Using a goose feather dipped in charcoal ink, Geoff takes some visual cues and scribbles notes, planning to return.

Chuckling to himself and quite drunk, Geoff squints to make out the words as he thumbs through the psalms. With a snort, he tosses the bible onto the fire where it is consumed.

## GEOFF

Yeah, thanks but no thanks. I know  
you're right, Old Crow. We all  
know, we just pretend. Hell, even  
the Pope knows. There is no God.

He takes another pull of rotgut whiskey.

GEOFF (CONT'D)  
Who gives a damn? The Man in the  
Sky is bullshit. So what? Doesn't  
matter. I have faith in this--

Geoff caresses the pistol and lovingly strokes its cold,  
steel barrel. Raising the flask, he toasts:

GEOFF (CONT'D)  
Here's to you, Old Crow.  
You AND your Great Spirit.  
To hell with you both!

He stands, his balance a bit unsteady.

GEOFF (CONT'D)  
You wanna take my life?  
Poison me with that tainted meat?

The trapper grabs the deer rifle, holds it over his head and  
cries out in defiance to the universe.

GEOFF (CONT'D)  
You want my life? Come and take it!

EXT. ASPEN GROVE - HOURS LATER

As the trapper fitfully sleeps, he is awakened by the  
distinct rustling of footsteps. Geoff reaches for his long  
gun, scanning the perimeter.

GEOFF  
Who's there?

His query is met with empty silence. The footfalls repeat,  
this time much closer. He calls into the void:

GEOFF (CONT'D)  
Old Crow? That you? Show yourself!

The rustling footsteps continue, now just outside the  
glowing ring of firelight. Clearly rattled, Geoff aims in  
the direction of the mysterious intruder and makes a  
declaration in a loud but shaky tenor:

GEOFF (CONT'D)  
Whoever you are, I swear to  
Almighty God that I will shoot you  
dead right where you stand!

Illuminated by the fire, Geoff can barely make out a pale,  
skeletal figure, swaying as it advances at an alarming rate.

Lowering the rifle, Geoff raises it again to see three more phantoms have joined the ghostly spectre. They sway in unison, trudging ever closer to his camp.

A ropy loop of small intestine protrudes from the mouth of the apparition as it chews, an armful of viscera in its shriveled hands. The malevolent fiend shuffles forward, dragging along the rest of its sticky grey innards.

GEOFF (CONT'D)

Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit--

His mind reeling in disbelief, Geoff swallows involuntarily and gags on his chewing tobacco. Retching, he pulls wet strands of chaw out of his teeth as he seethes.

GEOFF (CONT'D)

God damn you straight to hell, Old  
Crow! This is all your fault!

Geoff kneels and steadies the rifle. Aiming for the head of the closest ghoul, he recognizes his own face. He lowers the gun, then refocuses and squeezes the trigger.

The hammer falls and the primer sparks. Nothing happens.

Geoff drops the rifle, pulls his pistol and unloads. The bullets pass right through the shambling revenant, striking the trunks of the trees behind. Bright blood gushes forth in spurts from the holes, drenching the chalky bark in gore.

GEOFF (CONT'D)

Oh, shit.

Surrounded on three sides, Geoff spies an opening and sprints from camp. He looks to be in the clear when his foot comes down on something hard in the grass, turning an ankle. He stumbles and falls headfirst into the rotting pile of skinned carcasses.

Geoff crawls back to the trail, wiping away maggots stuck to his face. He gropes blindly for a weapon in the debris at his feet and finds the object that tripped him up.

GEOFF (CONT'D)

Of course...

Holding the wayward axe head in both hands, Geoff rolls over to face the music. The abominations descend on him, biting and tearing at his flesh. Geoff's eyeball is pulled from its socket and eaten by his undead doppelganger, his scream cut short when it tears out his tongue in a gush of blood.



EXT. ASPEN GROVE - NIGHT

SUPER: 3:33 AM

Geoff is jolted awake from his nightmare. Gasping and praising God, he laughs and wipes sweat from his forehead.

GEOFF

You were right, Old Crow.  
Time to leave.

A twig snap in the darkness activates his fight or flight response. He rises with his rifle and checks to see if it's loaded before he pulls the hammer back to firing position.

After a few tense moments, the trapper spies a huge rack of antlers moving among the branches. Relieved, he relaxes and chides himself. He rises and takes aim.

A deep, rumbling growl reverberates through the aspens. The daggerlike antlers rise high above the brush to reveal the Great Spirit. Fully ten feet tall, its hypnotic eyes smolder with an intense blue-white light.

The wolflike muzzle snarls, revealing sharp, glistening canine fangs. Paralyzed with fear, Geoff begins to mumble.

GEOFF (CONT'D)

Oh shit. Oh shit. *Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on Earth, as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive those that trespass against us. Lead me not into temptation, But deliver me from evil. For thine is the kingdom, The power, and the glory, For ever and ever. Amen.*

His shaking hand pulls the trigger. The rifle misfires. Geoff drops it and grabs his pistol. It's empty. He searches his pockets for bullets but finds only a rabbit's foot.

The impossible beast walks upright into the campsite on powerful hominid legs supported by a pair of broad hooves. It closes the distance in three strides.

Geoff stands transfixed and voices fill his head as he stands before the Great Spirit. His hand goes slack and he drops the good luck charm.

The Horned God seems to stare into Geoff's mind. He goes limp and begins to sway. Mouth wide open, eyes blank and unblinking, Geoff levitates several inches off the ground.

EXT. MONTANA WILDERNESS - MORNING

FLASHBACK

Mutt scampers along a stream bank. Nearby, Geoff stands hidden behind a tree, spying on a young Blackfoot girl as she picks blackberries.

He approaches silently from behind. A twig snaps. The dog barks. Startled, the youth pivots and sees Geoff's feral expression. He lunges at her and she inhales in surprise.

He covers the girl's mouth and with a brutal yank of her long braided hair, drags her into the forest. She fights back, reaching up to scratch his face. He bends her arm painfully backward, lifting her off her feet. Mutt barks furiously before running off.

EXT. TRAPPER'S CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

At his camp, Geoff and his partner Hervé tie the young woman to a tree, preparing to assault her. Mutt barks and the men's heads swivel around. A young Blackfoot boy has wandered into camp looking for his sister.

The villains panic and Hervé throws a hatchet at the boy, missing as the child scrambles away. He and the dog retreat, finding cover behind the trunk of a massive pine.

Realizing their evil deeds have been discovered, the trappers immediately begin to gather their belongings. Geoff secures the bound girl onto one of their mounts as they scramble to evacuate the camp before reinforcements arrive.

They leave the clearing and enter the forest. Other than the sound of the horses and the struggling girl, the woods are silent. The men look at one another, unnerved by the quiet.

A hiss cuts the air as an arrow embeds itself in the throat of Geoff's companion. Hervé falls sideways off the horse and hits the ground with a thud. His shotgun discharges into the belly of his unfortunate steed. It rears up and falls on top of Hervé, killing him and spilling supplies everywhere.

Geoff scans the surroundings and quickly dismounts, aiming his rifle. The young Blackfoot peers from behind the cover of his tree trunk and Geoff fires, hitting the boy's arm.

The kidnapped girl spits out her gag and bites the horses flank as hard as she can.

The mustang's legs piston backward, kicking the white man in the back, sending him flying and dumping the teen onto the forest floor. Unburdened, the horse snorts and trots off with a nicker, its tethered pack mule close behind.

The girl screams as Geoff gains his feet, attempting to reload his rifle and gather his mount. The girl screams again before Geoff rushes over and covers her mouth.

With an audible THWIP!, a Blackfoot arrow sinks itself in Geoff's horse. It whinnies as it trots off into the forest, dragging the pack mule against its will.

The bleeding boy stands his ground and bravely attempts to nock another arrow.

In a frenzy, Geoff pulls his knife and brutally stabs the struggling girl, leaving her to bleed. Turning to face the boy, Geoff dodges the child's weak shot. He hoists the rifle, flips it around and steps forward to strike the Blackfoot youth in the chest, knocking him to the ground.

A whooping cry is heard through the forest, and it becomes clear that the alarm has been sounded. Muttering racist curses, the trapper prepares to deliver a killing blow.

Mutt leaps in fearlessly to bite Geoff's calf, causing him to abandon the attack and make his escape instead. Hands slick with blood, Geoff grabs what he can and sets off.

The dog leaves the boy's side and hurries over to the motionless girl. Lifesaver licks her face before he charges off to track Geoff, shadowing him discretely at a distance.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. ASPEN GROVE - NIGHT

A stream of urine runs down the trapper's buckskin leggings, hissing as it reaches the embers of the campfire.

The sound breaks the creature's spell, releasing Geoff from his hypnotic trance. His body drops to the dirt. Gasping, he rises unsteadily, trying to rationalize what he is seeing. Dazed, he blurts one final question.

GEOFF

Wait, am I still dreaming?

The Wendigo lifts a huge, bear-like paw. In one vicious swipe, Geoff is disemboweled. His insides spill to the ground in a steaming pile of organs. Confused, he looks down, gawking at his exposed guts as they lie at his feet.

GEOFF (CONT'D)

Oh shit.

Geoff's body convulses and spasms. His skin bleaches and shrivels tight to his bones as his mist-like essence is consumed by the Great Spirit.

The cadaverous wight crouches to scoop up the body's eviscerated contents, stuffing loops of intestine into it's mouth, chewing in eternal, insatiable hunger.

Geoff's animated corpse tromps out of the campsite, lurching into the White Wood's aspen labyrinth. Its pale skin blending into the bark, it staggers into the forest, becoming more intangible until it disappears from sight.

EXT. ASPEN GROVE - MOMENTS LATER

At the empty campsite, the dwindling fire casts ghostly shadows on the surrounding forest. Falling leaves land on the trapper's deer rifle and cover it completely.

A drop of blood trickles down the ivory trunk of an aspen tree and finally reaches the roots, where it soaks into the soil. Under a dazzling sky full of countless stars, the mournful wail of the Wendigo echoes through the valley.

CUT TO BLACK - TITLE CARD - CREDITS

Music: 'Run to the Hills' by Roma Symphony Orchestra.

MID CREDITS SCENE - INT. HOSPITAL - EVENING

Bill lies heavily bandaged, reclined in his hospital bed. His eyes are wide open, unblinking and staring at nothing. Nurse TINA adjusts a pillow and gossips with Nurse AMY.

TINA

Life Flight guy said he's been like that since they picked him up.

AMY

He's lucky the Natives found him.

TINA

Damn poachers. Police are still looking for his buddy's body, but they think a grizzly got him.

AMY

Hey, bear's gotta eat too, right?

The nurses laugh and turn to leave.

TINA  
That is so wrong.

The overhead light is switched off and the door closes. Bill remains motionless under the dim halo of a desk lamp. An IV drips out its dose while a cardiac monitor blips steadily.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

A clock radio reads 3:33am. Bill's heart rate quickens, speeding up rapidly and triggering a flashing alarm. The motionless man's feet twitch beneath the blanket. He opens the clenched fist of his bandaged hand to reveal the rabbit's foot keychain held tightly in its grasp.

CUT TO: AN EXTREME CLOSEUP OF BILL'S FACE

Locked in a perpetual stare, the catatonic man's eyes suddenly blink, creating a wisp of misty, glowing blue aether that soon dissipates. The rapid beeps of the monitor smooth out, steadying as Bill awakens. Tears of joy form in his eyes as he raises the good luck charm.

BILL  
Holy shit.

CUT TO BLACK. RESUME CREDITS.

POST CREDITS SCENE - EXT. ASPEN GROVE - AFTERNOON

A pair of canoes come to a halt on the river's shore. Spotted Wolf leaps out and pulls the boats onto the gravelly beach. Little Owl instructs the two young Crow girls to jump out and they do, fearlessly.

Several yards further inland sits the small Native boat, crudely patched up. Geoff's camp is empty and deserted. As the family approaches to reclaim their property, something shifts inside the canoe. The protective father draws his bow as Little Owl shields the children from possible danger.

A woman's hand emerges over the side of the canoe. She sits upright, long black hair flowing in the breeze. Wordlessly, Spotted Wolf throws down his bow and races forward to tearfully embrace his wife. Screaming their delight, the two young girls run and throw themselves at their parents.

Standing in mute astonishment, Little Owl drops to her knees and silently weeps tears of unfathomable joy. The forest is once again alive with birds and animals, as the aspens wave in leafy unison.

FADE TO BLACK