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SWORDLAND

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EXT. LAKE - DARK EVENING

Shrouded in mist, the still, deathly quiet water carries the sound of low mumbling distant prayers on its surface.

The gentle voice of a man in his sixties narrates in Irish.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

When I was a boy my mother
convinced me my nightmares were
not real.

The water becomes disturbed by the moving oars of a boat.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Then I met a man...

And, as the boat draws closer, the prayers grows louder.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

...who proved her wrong.

EXT. LAKE - DARK EVENING

Under the water a pole digs into the riverbed, throwing up dirt as it catches hold, while, above, the boat glides across the surface.

EXT. FERRYBOAT ON LAKE - DARK EVENING

The weathered boatman puts his full weight behind the stroke, his hardened hands gripping the pole as it sinks into the water to push the boat forward, the thud of the pole an accompaniment to the praying as it hits the side of the boat.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Nobody knows where the truth of
him ended and the lie began.

The FERRYMAN looks out into the dark mist.

The passengers behind the Ferryman, a group of Italian pilgrims, seated on benches, their hands clasping beads and candles, continue praying.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Nobody knows if there was a
precise moment when reality
collided with fantasy, and myth
was born.

The Ferryman squints as he sees a lamp moving through the mist -

- then it vanishes again.

The Ferryman glances at the Pilgrims and decides against alarming them.

But, when the lamp appears again, this time closer to the boat, he takes the pole from the water and allows the boat to glide to a stop.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Nobody knows where he came from,
though, some claim he was born
the day the wars started.

The Ferryman watches in quiet fear as the lamp stops too and, as he calls out, he speaks in Irish.

FERRYMAN

Who goes there?

The Pilgrims instantly stop praying and look out at the glowing lamp in the darkness.

PASSENGER

We are already running late.
We'll miss our coachman if we
don't proceed with pace.

FERRYMAN

He'll wait.

The frightened Pilgrims speak to the Ferryman in English with heavy Italian accents.

PILGRIM

How much further to the shrine?

The Ferryman ignores him and calls out to the darkness.

FERRYMAN

Who goes there?

PILGRIM

Is it bandits?

FERRYMAN

Country's peaceful now. All
bandits are taking the pardon.

SECOND FERRYMAN

Except one.

FERRYMAN

Don't frighten them.

The Pilgrims speak to each other in Italian.

PILGRIM

Is it him?

SECOND PILGRIM

How can we know? Nobody knows
what he looks like.

PILGRIM

He looks like Satan.

SECOND PILGRIM

Protect us Lord.

The lamp blows out - no Lord's protection today.

FERRYMAN

Who goes there?

As they stare out into the darkness one of the passengers
secretly takes out a bag of gold coins tucked under his
tunic.

As he continues praying the Passenger begins slipping the
coins down the inside of his boot.

The lamp reappears but now it is on the other side of the
boat.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Some say fear was his power. And
knowing there was no greater
power than myth.

The Ferryman struggles to control the tremble in his voice
as he calls out to the darkness.

FERRYMAN

Who goes there?

A quiet gentle voice drifts in over the water and
identifies itself from the darkness.

VOICE FROM THE DARKNESS (O.C.)

Ned of the Hills.

Instant panic descends among the pilgrims as the Ferryman
tries to soothe them.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

To some he brought release.

The Ferryman glances back into the darkness.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

To others, death.

A hatchet comes flying through the darkness.

And embeds itself into his forehead with a horrifying crack.

Blood sprays around the boat onto the pilgrims.

The Ferryman falls backwards and disappears into the water.

The pilgrims stop praying and there is a deathly silence.

The silence is broken by a whirring sound whistling through the mist as a rope lassoes round the tiller.

The boat is towed back out into the lake.

The Passenger scrambles to the front of the boat and tries to grab the drowning Ferryman's hand.

As he reaches into the water, the ferryman's fingers lock around the beads which are wrapped round the Passenger's wrist.

As the pilgrims begin to scream, the Passenger is pulled overboard.

Upside down underwater the Passenger hears the muffled screams above.

Then he sees one of his gold coins leak out of his boot.

As he reaches to grab the coin the other coins spill out of his boot.

As he watches them sink below him they float past the dead ferryman.

Struggling for air the Passenger manages to break his beads and free himself.

As he struggles to get to the surface, he manages to at last get his head above the water.

Sucking in the life giving breath the Passenger sees the Ferryboat being towed back out to the middle of the lake.

As the boat disappears into the mist he can still hear the distant screams.

EXT. MOUNTAIN FORESTS - DAY

A pigeon nervously approaches a small pile of seed spread in a line on the forest floor.

The bird checks all around it and sees nothing except the deep foliage of the surrounding bushes.

It ventures closer to the seeds, observing the trail that leads into the dark bushes.

The bird makes to peck at one of the seeds but a slight flicker from one of the leaves causes it to hesitate.

The bird nervously lifts its head and stares into the darkness of the foliage, but, as the leaf stops flickering, all that remains is the silent still shadows of the bushes.

The bird hesitates, makes to return to the seed but then it abruptly stops again and stares back into the foliage.

It tries to make out some detail within the dark shadows, sensing something might be in there, but can still see nothing.

The bird looks down at the trail of seeds then nervously and quickly picks one up with its beak and waits.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Some even claim he never existed
at all...

But when nothing happens, the nervous bird chews on the seed.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

But I know they are the liars...

As the bird's confidence grows, it continues to eat along the seed trail, its head down, making its way into the shadows

As it draws closer it is unaware that a pair of eyelids are slowly opening in the darkness of the foliage as human eyes calmly stare back at it.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Because I was nine years old when
I first met Ned of the Hills.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - DUSK/NIGHT

As dusk's sky draws close to darkness, a faint wisp of smoke emanates from the mountainside.

EXT. TEMPORARY CAMPSITE, MOUNTAINSIDE FOREST - NIGHT

A silent, bearded man, sits alone, chewing on the last piece of cooked bird meat - this is NED - late thirties, powerful, charismatic and quietly dangerous.

He drinks from a container and cleans his fingers.

He pours the remaining water over the small fire, quenching its already struggling flame, then he scatters the embers removing all trace of the fire.

He meticulously gathers up the feather and bone remains of the pigeon and dumps them into the small, freshly dug hole.

As he's about to fill in the hole, he hesitates.

He takes out his handgun, and stares at it.

He drops the gun into the hole with the pigeon carcass and quickly fills it in.

EXT. MOUNTAIN STREAM, MOUNTAINSIDE - NIGHT

Ned stands by the stream that flows from the spring down the mountain.

He washes the muck off his hands and fingers, then fills his drink container.

EXT. TEMPORARY CAMPSITE, MOUNTAINSIDE FOREST - NIGHT

Ned glances over at the scattered embers of the fire and lies down.

He stares up at the night sky, then closes his eyes.

But after only a brief time he opens his eyes again and looks at the area where he buried the pigeon.

He turns on his side away from the area, calmly breathes out and closes his eyes again.

But immediately he opens them again.

He goes over to the hole where he buried the gun and the pigeon carcass and stands above it.

He drops to his knees and drags at it with his fingers, until he reveals the handle of the gun.

He stares at the half buried handle of the gun then pulls it out of the ground.

He cleans the gun against his water container and dries it.

He moves back to where he was attempting to sleep, and contentedly lies back down.

He slides his gun in under his coat, keeping his finger firmly on the trigger, then, absorbing the silence, he readies himself for sleep.

He closes his eyes, the stillness around him ideal for unimpeded sleep, breathes deeply, calmly exhales the long entire breath and becomes completely relaxed.

Then he quietly sighs, calmly opens his eyes again, and stares blankly ahead of him.

And as the numbing loneliness creeps back into a man forced to be alone for too long, Ned knows he'll sleep badly again tonight.

EXT. OONAGH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

At the back of her house a woman stands in front of an old homemade wooden cross stuck into the ground above a simple grave.

This is OONAGH - mid thirties, beautiful but broken, yet there is a rare fire in her.

The farm horse snorts in the background, as it feeds on the grass, it disturbs her reverie.

She picks fresh herbs from the grave and carries them into her home.

INT. OONAGH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

As her children sleep, Oonagh sits at the table, ties the herbs into little bundles and puts them in a basket.

She moves into the bedroom, checks the money in the small tin container which also contains a few shotgun cartridges.

She takes out some change, she puts the rest back into the shelf beside the single barrel shotgun.

She stops for a moment, looks across, through the open door at her nine year old son SEAN, asleep in the bedroom.

She sits at the table, shakes off the sadness and rests her head in her arms.

But her rest is interrupted by Sean's voice.

She looks up and her son is standing in the middle of the floor, bleary eyed and whispering in Irish.

SEAN

I'm scared.

Oonagh puts everything aside, scoops up her son in her arms, and gently whispers.

OONAGH
Mama's here...Mama's here.

As she puts Sean back in bed and lies beside him, her other sixteen year old son, THOMAS, grumpily moans.

THOMAS
Tell him to be quiet.

Oonagh gently scolds Thomas as Sean slips back into sleep.

OONAGH
Go back to sleep.

As Thomas turns around and goes back to sleep, Oonagh lies awake, staring at the ceiling.

INT. TOWN - EARLY MORNING

The arrogant PRIEST, in his religious garb, followed by two altar boys carrying an incense burner and a golden cross on a pole, move quickly through the main street.

The street is little more than a series of muddy tracks, footprints and hooves.

However, though the main street might look shoddy, it's obvious by the unfinished building and construction work that new money has recently come into the town.

As he passes the court building he sees the officious COURT CLERK setting up a table at the top of the steps outside the court.

The priest stops and takes up the documents on the table.

They are written in both Irish and English, with the heading -

OFFICIAL BANDITS' PARDON

- followed by a series of questions.

The Priest scans through the signatures then drops the forms back down on the table, and he and the Court Clerk speak in Irish.

PRIEST
Deadline is tonight?

COURT CLERK
Midnight.

PRIEST
How many so far?

COURT CLERK
Most of them. Some of them.

The Court Clerk indicates a few suspicious looking men hanging around various corners.

COURT CLERK
But there's more here already.

PRIEST
Him?

The Court Clerk knows precisely who the Priest is talking about and silently shakes his head, no.

PRIEST
I received another papal communication. Threatening to stop the pilgrimages.

The politically motivated JUDGE steps out through the doors of the court and looks out onto the town.

JUDGE
He hasn't done anything in two years. Why would he start again now? We don't even know if he's alive anymore.

PRIEST
I hope you know what you're doing; if they stop the funding...

JUDGE
You take care of the shrine and I'll take care the pardons.

EXT. MOUNTAIN RIVER - DAY

Ned is asleep but movement makes him suddenly bolt upright.

He instinctively aims his gun directly at the person standing in front of him - the boy, Sean.

As Ned maintains the gun's dangerous trajectory, he quickly scans the area looking for other possible threats.

When he sees there is nobody else, he looks back at Sean and is slightly confounded by how completely unfazed this nine year old boy seems to be by the gun as he speaks to Ned in Irish.

SEAN
Is that your gun?

Ned looks at the gun then, realizing he is still pointing it at Sean, he lowers it and tries to ignore him.

SEAN
Mister...?

Ned looks at Sean with irritation.

SEAN
Can I shoot it?

Ned dismisses Sean and he gets his gear ready to move on.

But Sean still stares at him with uncomfortable calmness.

Then Sean holds up a long string with a hook and float attached.

SEAN
Do you know how to fish?

Ned looks at Sean again, makes to speak, then changes his mind and continues with his preparations to move on.

SEAN
Dad used to but then he got shot.

Ned stops for a moment and looks to Sean then continues wrapping up his blanket.

SEAN
Are you one of the bandits?

Ned ignores the kid.

SEAN
Did you ever kill a man?

Ned ties the blanket.

SEAN
Do you know Ned of the Hills?

Ned straps the blanket to his bag.

SEAN
Are you going into town?

Ned covers his tracks then moves away, still not a word spoken by him.

And as just before he vanishes into the forest he turns back to glance at the boy but Sean is gone.

EXT. FORESTS OUTSIDE TOWN - DAY

As Sean re-joins Oonagh and Thomas, Oonagh guides the horse as it carries a multitude of herbs and various healing remedies.

OONAGH
Where did you get off to?

SEAN
When can I shoot the gun?

OONAGH
Don't start again.

They continue to walk in silence and Sean bites his lip then he can't help himself blurting out again.

SEAN
But when?

EXT. TOWN - MORNING

One of the shady looking bandits watches the Court Clerk at the top of the stairs.

As he tentatively approaches the court steps, the other men watch him with intense concentration.

The SHADY LOOKING BANDIT looks up the steps and, AS HE HESITATES, the Court Clerk arrogantly looks down at him and they speak in Irish.

COURT CLERK
Are you here for the pardons?

The Shady Looking Bandit hesitates, then nods.

COURT CLERK
You're a bandit?

The Shady Looking Bandit looks around at the others watching him then calls back to the Court Clerk.

SHADY LOOKING BANDIT
I'm a soldier.

Dismissively efficient, the Court Clerk grabs a Pardon Form.

COURT CLERK
Yes, yes, yes, can we move it along please?

The Shady Looking Man is still reluctant as he looks around then calls up.

SHADY LOOKING MAN
How do I know it's not a trap?

The Judge steps out of the court door and speaks in Irish.

JUDGE
We are the law sir; unlike you
bandits, we do not set traps.

EXT. RIVER AT THE BOTTOM OF THE MOUNTAIN - DAY

Gun in one hand and the fist of his other clenched, Ned stands, bare chested, at the side of the river staring into the deep waters.

The undercurrent beneath the water's calm surface almost beckons him in as he stares at his reflection.

He extends his clenched fist outwards, opens it, and looks at the unused bullets on his upward palm.

He allows the unused bullets to roll, one by one, out of his open hand to plunge into the water below.

He checks the barrel of his gun and looks at the single round of live ammunition.

He looks around the forest, fully absorbing its silence, aims the gun at the water, and calmly squeezes on the trigger.

As the bullet explodes into the water the deafening sound reverberates throughout the forest.

Ned looks up at the multitude of ravens bolting from the tree tops, screaming with terror and agitation upwards into the sky.

As the ravens' squawks fade away into the distance and the forest becomes silent again Ned lowers himself to his hunkers on the edge of the river bank.

He holds the gun just above the surface of the water, the tiny surface current gently licking against the barrel.

Ned lowers the barrel of the gun further into the water.

He lets the gun go deeper into the water, his hand getting wet as the water laps around the handle.

He slowly opens his hand, palm up, and releases his finger from the trigger.

The gun balances precariously for a brief moment then vanishes into the endless dark below the water.

Ned looks at his open palm resting on the surface of the water.

He slips his other hand in beside it, cups both hands, and, filling them with water he pours it onto his face.

Then he pours some water onto a small but distinct lump on the back of his left shoulder.

As the water dribbles down his face onto his chest, Ned stares back at his shape-shifting reflection on the water's surface.

EXT. TOWN MARKET - DAY

As small stall holders set up for the day Oonagh, Thomas and Sean arrive.

Oonagh nods hello to the other stall holders and, as Thomas sullenly helps her set up her herbs and remedies on the stall, they speak in Irish.

Sean is not helping though, because he is distracted by the queue of shady looking men slowly forming outside the courthouse.

And he is not the only one interested in them as a large number of people in the town stare at them like they were oddities on display.

SEAN

Who are they?

OONAGH

Are you going stand there all day
staring at a bunch of broken
bandits or are you going to help?

Sean is thrilled at the word.

SEAN

Bandits?

OONAGH

Sean.

THOMAS

He never does anything.

Thomas looks across and sees a hungover AGNES THE WHORE - an aging opportunistic prostitute with a heart of copper - standing at the door of the bar.

When Agnes the Whore looks Thomas' way, he blushes with adolescent desire but Agnes the Whore is coldly indifferent to his yearnings.

As Sean moves to the stalls he shoots imaginary guns at the bandits.

Then he suddenly stops when he sees Ned in the distance.

He quietly calls to his mother.

SEAN

Mam...

But she is too busy with the stall to pay any attention to Sean's fantasies.

OONAGH

I'm not going to tell you again
Sean.

Sean reluctantly starts to arrange the herb and potions display on the stall but, as he does so, he keeps an attentive eye on the proceedings outside the courthouse.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Ned watches the courthouse queue from a discreet distance.

The LOCAL BOUNTY HUNTER watches a TOUGH SCARRED BANDIT who is reluctantly taking his place at the back of the queue.

Outside the court doors one of the shady looking bandits has signed his name on the pardon and his hand is on the Bible.

The Judge glances at it, then nods, and the Court Clerk hands the Bandit a document.

COURT CLERK

This entitles you to five acres.
But if you break the peace within
that time the land reverts back
to the courts.

As the Bandit moves away, another BANDIT takes his place in front of the desk.

Ned makes to move towards the queue but instinct tells him to stop, and he does, hanging back to continue watching.

Up the steps the Court Clerk extends the Bandit a quill to sign his name.

As the Bandit signs, the Court Clerk places the Bible in front of him.

COURT CLERK

You swear by Almighty God this is your real name and you have not been involved in any illegal activities for these two years?

The Bandit stares at the Bible, and nods.

JUDGE

Please put your hand on the Bible.

The Bandit puts his hand on the Bible.

BANDIT

I swear I have done nothing illegal for two years.

COURT CLERK

And that is your name.

BANDIT

Yes.

COURT CLERK

Say it.

BANDIT

I swear that is my name.

The Court Clerk slides the Pardon across to him.

As the Clerk continues talking, the Judge glances at the Bandit's signature.

COURT CLERK

This entitles you to five acres. But if you break the peace within that time...

A sudden scream attracts everyone's attention as the Passenger from the Ferry Boat stumbles in and collapses.

Sean, Oonagh and Thomas watch uneasily from the stall as the Local Bounty Hunter and others rush to help the Passenger up.

Ned watches too, but there is a calm distance in his eyes.

As the Local Bounty Hunter listens to the Passenger's whispers he relays the information in a shout to the Judge.

LOCAL BOUNTY HUNTER

The Ferry. Yesterday. Pilgrims dead. It was Ned of the Hills.

As a whisper of panic hits the people, the Judge exhales deep disappointment.

JUDGE

He had to do it one more before
the deadline.

The Judge picks up the documents and loudly calls out.

JUDGE

All pardons are cancelled for two
days.

The queue immediately splits as the bandits realize they have been exposed to danger.

JUDGE

And a bounty is offered for the
man who captures Ned of the
Hills.

As the bandits quickly slip away in different directions, the Local Bounty Hunter stares at the Tough Scarred Man as the Tough Scarred Man moves away towards the forest.

JUDGE

Alive or Dead.

INT. FORESTS OUTSIDE TOWN - EVENING

Ned is back to the area where he hid his belongings and as he readies to leave, he hears, through the trees, Sean unsuccessfully trying to fish.

Ned looks through the trees and sees Sean is alone.

As Sean keeps throwing the hook and line into the water, becoming more frustrated with each throw, Ned begins to share his frustration.

Ned approaches Sean, and, as Sean turns to see him, there is nothing but openness in Sean's face.

Ned looks at the hook and line and, taking it from Sean, he grabs a worm and slides it onto the hook.

As Sean watches, he talks to Ned in Irish.

SEAN

I saw you today.

Ned ignores Sean and casts the line into the water.

SEAN

What's a bandit?

Ned concentrates in the fishing line float and gently speaks in Irish.

NED

We need to be quiet.

They sit in silence.

Unknown to Sean, Ned looks at him, awkwardly attempts to speak, but words fail him and he looks away.

Unknown to Ned, Sean glances at him, but words also fail him and he too looks away.

There is a slight tug on the float in the water.

Ned turns to quietly tell Sean but he is interrupted by a sudden calling from a distance behind as, off camera, Oonagh calls for her son.

OONAGH (O.C.)

Sean?

Sean instantly stands up and whispers to avoid disturbing the fish.

SEAN

Thanks for your help.

Before Ned can react Sean runs up in the direction of his mother's house.

And, as Ned holds onto the wire, the fishing line float is pulled under the water.

EXT. OONAGH'S HOUSE - EVENING

Ned watches through the trees.

Oonagh stands by the grave, carefully pulling up various herbs.

She cups one of the herbs in her hands, holds it tight against her nose, and inhales its scent.

Ned is fascinated by her.

Oonagh looks out into the night sky above the forest, then lowers her eyes, and stares into the darkness of the forest - directly where Ned is perched.

Ned becomes slightly alarmed as he wonders if she can see him.

But when we go back to her point of view we see that the darkness makes it impossible to see Ned.

Oonagh slowly makes her way back into the house, closes the door behind her, and Ned is left alone.

As Ned watches her through the remaining light in the distant window, Oonagh blows out the candle.

And, as the front room becomes darkness, Ned stares back at the lonely handmade wooden cross on the grave.

EXT. FORESTS OUTSIDE TOWN - EVENING (SIMULTANEOUS)

Tough Scarred Bandit sits in front of his camp fire, stirring some food.

EXT. OONAGH'S HOUSE - EVENING

Ned gets down from the tree.

He picks up his bag and Sean's fishing wire and quietly approaches the house.

He bends down to leave the fishing wire on the doorstep and reaches into his bag.

EXT. FORESTS OUTSIDE TOWN - EVENING (SIMULTANEOUS)

As Tough Scarred Bandit looks up, a quiet voice comes from the darkness.

LOCAL BOUNTY HUNTER
Ned of the Hills?

But Tough Scarred Bandit has no time to answer as a shot rings out and a bullet slams into his chest.

INT. OONAGH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

As the shot reverberates through the forest Oonagh grabs the single barrel shotgun from the shelf in the bedroom and runs outside.

EXT. OUTSIDE OONAGH'S HOME - NIGHT

As Ned quickly moves away, the door opens behind him, and Oonagh steps out with the single barrel shotgun.

Oonagh aims the shotgun at Ned and speaks in Irish.

OONAGH
What do you want?

Ned stops and turns around as Oonagh holds the gun high.

OONAGH
Who are you?

Ned just stares at the fishing wire but Oonagh is standing on it so she can't see anything.

Ned stares at the barrel of the shotgun then Sean appears beside his mother, and she doesn't see that he is smiling at Ned.

Ned calmly looks at Sean.

OONAGH
Don't look at the boy. Fix your eyes on me.

Ned continues to stare at Sean, an unspoken affinity passing between them.

Oonagh stands in front of Sean and cocks the shotgun.

OONAGH
Don't test me, I'll put a hole in you.

Ned looks back at Oonagh but, rather than looking at the gun, he looks into her eyes.

Oonagh falters slightly at the power of his gaze.

Then she steadies herself by squeezing tightly on the trigger and speaking calmly to Ned.

OONAGH
Whoever you think I am, I'm not.

Ned looks at her body, nothing lascivious, just observing her.

And when his eyes meets her's again, she becomes quietly defiant.

OONAGH
And whatever you think you're taking, you're not.

Ned reaches towards his bag, causing Oonagh to shout.

OONAGH
Don't make me shoot you in front of my boy.

Ned stops, raises his hands slightly in compliance, then, demonstrating no threat, he slowly reaches into his bag.

He takes out the recently caught fish and Sean smiles wider.

Oonagh frowns with lack of comprehension.

Sean steps out from behind his mother and looks with relish at the fish.

OONAGH

What do you want me to do with that?

Ned says nothing but, as Sean tentatively makes his way towards the fish, she panics slightly.

She doesn't take her eyes off Ned but there is a slight faltering of fear in her voice as she calls to Sean.

OONAGH

Sean, stay where you are.

Sean hesitates, then, as hunger and curiosity compel him further, he moves closer towards the fish.

Oonagh tries to conceal her anxiety as she moves in a large semi-circle around Ned.

She tries to draw him away from the direction of Sean but, rather than follow her gaze, Ned just looks straight ahead.

OONAGH

Look at me, not at him.

Ned calmly turns and looks at Sean.

OONAGH

Don't you move.

Sean looks up at Ned. Fearless.

SEAN

My name is Sean, what's yours?

Ned extends his hand as an offer for a handshake.

The boy hesitates, then takes Ned's hand, and they shake.

Oonagh is losing control of the situation but Sean trusts the stranger and picks up the fish.

SEAN

Is this for me?

OONAGH

As God is my witness Sean, get inside now.

Ned feels the gun getting closer to the back of his neck but calmly nods yes to Sean.

Delighted, Sean takes the fish from Ned's hand.

Ned calmly walks away in the direction of the forest.

OONAGH

Don't you be coming back here.

As Ned vanishes into the forest Oonagh still holds the gun up, aimed at the area he exited through, and she calls out.

OONAGH

You hear me? No more.

But there is only silence coming back from the forest.

Oonagh slowly lowers the gun then turns to Sean.

OONAGH

Is that how you behave when I tell you not to do something?

SEAN

Look what we have for dinner?

OONAGH

We're not eating that.

SEAN

Mam?

OONAGH

Drop the fish now.

SEAN

I'm hungry.

OONAGH

What did I just tell you?

Sean reluctantly drops the fish.

Thomas appears from the direction of town.

THOMAS

What's going on?

OONAGH

Where were you?

THOMAS

Nowhere.

OONAGH

Get in that house now.

As Sean and Thomas make their way towards the house, Oonagh berates them as she follows behind him.

OONAGH

Are these the kind of sons I'm
raising? Sneaking off, and
ignoring me, and talking back?

As they enter the house and Oonagh slams the door behind her the fish is left lying in the grass.

After a very long beat the door opens.

Oonagh comes back out again and stands at the door.

Then she defiantly marches down, picks up the fish, marches back and, after a final glance into the forest, she slams the door behind her.

INT. OONAGH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ned watches from the trees admiring Oonagh dexterity as she lays the fish on the table:

- threads twine through a needle.
- attaches the string to a shallot in the form of a bow.
- dexterously slides the needle in through the fish's mouth.
- works the needle, twine and shallot under the skin.
- slides the needle out through the tail, but, as she holds the shallot, its bulbous protrusion remains in place under the skin.
- the bow tied string loosens when she pulls it and, as the shallot remains perfectly in place under the skin, the needle and thread freely exit from the fish's body, leaving neither an entry nor exit puncture.

Oonagh puts the fish on the pan and as that sizzles she cuts the freshly homemade bread and puts it on the table set for three.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Next morning, as the townsfolk watch, the body of Scarred Tough Bandit is dumped on the courthouse steps.

The Local Bounty Hunter looks up at the Judge.

LOCAL BOUNTY HUNTER

I claim the bounty.

As Oonagh and Sean and Thomas pass on their way to the stall, Oonagh covers Sean's eyes.

The Court Clerk looks at the corpse and react with excitement.

COURT CLERK

I saw him here yesterday.

As the townsfolk gather around the corpse, the Judge and the Priest can barely contain their delight.

EXT. OONAGH'S HOUSE - EVENING

Ned is watching the house, listening to the silence inside.

He moves to the door and leaves another large recently caught fish outside it.

But, as he walks away, the door slowly opens behind him.

Ned stops and turns around but there is nobody standing in the doorway.

He hesitates then makes his way towards the door and stands outside.

He hesitantly peers inside but can't see anything.

He steps inside and tentatively looks around.

He becomes immediately self-conscious as he sees Oonagh, Sean and Thomas seated at the table.

There is a simple but appetizing meal set for four spread on the table top; the empty seat an unspoken invitation to Ned.

Thomas barely conceals his contempt but Sean's beaming smile shows his delight.

SEAN

They caught Ned of the Hills. I saw his body. Mam tried to stop me but...

Oonagh's look hushes Sean and he grins in silence at Ned.

Ned takes off his hat but he doesn't move towards the untouched food on the table, as Oonagh speaks to him in Irish.

OONAGH

Are you going to stand there all evening?

Ned still doesn't move.

OONAGH

If you insist on bringing fish
the least we can do is feed you.

Ned hesitates then Sean giggles as Ned moves to the vacant chair.

But before Ned sits, he senses Thomas' contempt and remains standing.

NED

Are you sure you want my kind at
your table?

OONAGH

What kind is that?

Ned doesn't answer and as Oonagh looks to Thomas, then Sean, she hopes she's not going to regret this.

OONAGH

We can't eat until you sit.

EXT. TOWN - EVENING

The townsfolk watch in quiet culpability as the corpse of Tough Scarred Bandit is hoisted up above the town.

The Priest calls out to his parishioners.

PRIEST

He is dead so we can live.

The crowd allow themselves the guilty pleasure of a collective smile.

The Judge hands the Local Bounty Hunter a small bag of coins.

JUDGE

He will hang here for three days,
as a warning to all future
bandits.

The Priest looks up at the suspended body and he pulls his coat around himself as a cold shiver runs up his spine.

INT. OONAGH'S HOUSE - EVENING

The meal is finished and, as Ned brings the plates to Oonagh at the wash bowl, Thomas watches him.

OONAGH

I'll do that.

Ned stands back and his feelings of awkwardness make him want to leave.

He nods to Sean and picks up his hat, and gesturing in appreciation, he makes his way to the door.

Oonagh hesitates then speaks in Irish.

OONAGH
Can you work land as good as you
catch fish?

Thomas shoots his mother a look of shock, and, as Ned hesitates at the door, Oonagh tries to appear indifferent.

OONAGH
Well?

Ned looks at Sean and Sean grins back, as Ned nods.

OONAGH
You will be paid with food and
shelter. Nothing else.

Ned still doesn't speak.

OONAGH
And you sleep outside.

Ned acknowledges this, puts on his hat and moves outside.

As Oonagh moves to the window and watches to see if he will walk away, Thomas speaks in Irish.

THOMAS
What are you doing Mam?

But when Ned looks up at the night sky outside, he stops.

Inside Oonagh turns to Thomas and speaks in Irish.

OONAGH
Your father's been gone seven
years Thomas, are you going to
work the land?

When Oonagh looks back out the window she sees Ned looking at her and she quickly pulls away from the window.

Thomas moves into the bedroom in disgust as Sean grins with delight.

Oonagh looks back out the window but Ned is gone.

EXT. TOWN GRAVEYARD - DAY

Many people from the town watch as the coffin of Tough Scarred Bandit is lowered into the grave.

The PRIEST sprinkles the blessed water onto the coffin.

The Town Officials and the Local Bounty Hunter watch with the smug knowledge of a job well done.

The Priest stops halfway through the blessing and, as he looks up, displeasure and fear registers on his face.

The others turn to find out what has caused this response and see a group of four men strolling towards the funeral.

The leader is REUBEN LEE - a well dressed, powerfully built, loquaciously articulate bounty hunter with a penchant for whiskey, bare-knuckle fighting and Machiavellian manipulation.

Reuben's accent is Irish but he deliberately speaks English.

REUBEN LEE

Please, don't let me interrupt.

Beside him stands his brother CREEDENCE, and what he lacks of Reuben's verbosity, he makes up for in degeneracy.

JUDGE

Reuben Lee?

REUBEN LEE

You know my brother Creedence.

The crowd bristle as they look at Creedence Lee but he clearly enjoys the shiver he sends up their collective spine.

The other two men are ARCHIE and SULLIVAN, two squalid lowlifes, the former not worthy of a surname, and the later not worthy of a forename.

JUDGE

(In Irish)

What can we do for you Mister Lee?

REUBEN LEE

You're burying Ned of the Hills?

PRIEST

(In Irish)

Evil doers deserve a funeral too.

Though spoken to in Irish, Reuben Lee insists on answering in his indulgently prosaic form of English, however, it's clear he understands everything that is being said to him.

REUBEN LEE
Who was it caught him?

The Local Bounty Hunter tries to conceal his nervousness as he answers Reuben.

LOCAL BOUNTY HUNTER
(In Irish)
Me. What's it to you?

REUBEN LEE
You talked to him before he died?

LOCAL BOUNTY HUNTER
(In Irish)
Asked his name.

REUBEN LEE
Did he answer you?

The Local Bounty Hunter becomes more uneasy.

LOCAL BOUNTY HUNTER
(In Irish)
Eyes told me everything.

Reuben Lee approaches the grave and looks down into it.

REUBEN LEE
So he didn't confess?

Sensing the Local Bounty Hunter may have lied to him, the Judge immediately goes into cover up mode.

JUDGE
(In Irish)
Nobody is going to confess to
being Ned of the Hills.

Everyone stands back as Creedence jumps into the grave.

Creedence pulls a small axe from under his tunic and pounds at the thin wooden coffin.

PRIEST
(In Irish)
In the name of God, what are you
doing?

Creedence pulls off the lid and stares at the corpse of Tough Scarred Bandit.

REUBEN LEE

Your God demands truth, does he not?

Creedence grabs the corpse of Tough Scarred Bandit and hoists it up onto the side of the grave, leaving it slumped, face down, half in and half out of the grave.

Everyone is horrified except Reuben Lee and his men.

As the rest of them cover their mouths and noses to repel the rancid scent of early decomposition, Creedence and Reuben Lee breathe freely.

Reuben Lee cuts the corpses' shirt with the sharp end of the hatchet and exposes the dead man's back.

REUBEN LEE

It's not him.

LOCAL BOUNTY HUNTER

(In Irish)

You haven't even seen his face.

The REBEL TOWN FATHER - an elderly man who possesses greater dignity than the rest - watches in quiet anger as Creedence, still standing in the grave, laughs at the Local Bounty Hunter.

CREEDENCE

Nobody knows his face. Who the fool now?

REUBEN LEE

Forgive my brother's impetuosity; he is eager to right the wrongs done to this town-to-be is all.

A BUSINESS MAN moves forward and address Reuben in English.

BUSINESS MAN

If nobody knows how to identify him how do you know it's not him?

REUBEN LEE

You'll know that in due course my well spoke friend.

JUDGE

(In Irish)

Why not now?

REUBEN LEE

If Ned be the myth maker then old Reuben Lee be the myth destroyer.

(MORE)

REUBEN LEE (cont'd)
 But for a bounty less paltry than
 the one you were proffering.

BUSINESS MAN
 That was a substantial amount
 Mister Lee.

REUBEN LEE
 To buy new laws to suit the few,
 perhaps, but to put one's life in
 danger in pursuit of that most
 vicious of men? The amount, sir,
 is an offence.

The Rebel Town Father can contain himself no more.

REBEL TOWN FATHER
 (In Irish)
 The offence sir is your return to
 these shores.

As the crowd react, Creedence deftly climbs out of the
 grave.

CREEDENCE
 What did he say?

REUBEN LEE
 Calm, Creedence. The gentleman is
 compelled to have his say and,
 unlike the bandits, we, the
 civilised few, must listen to
 every voice.

REBEL TOWN FATHER
 (In Irish)
 And why the refusal to speak your
 native language?

Ignoring the Rebel Town Father, Reuben Lee continues to
 mockingly placate his brother with politely delivered
 insult directed at the Rebel Town Father.

REUBEN LEE
 Even the ignorant dogs among us
 deserve an opinion.

REBEL TOWN FATHER
 (In Irish)
 What about the mercenary pigs
 among us who feasted on shillings
 from the Queen's purse?

As the crowd look on in shock at the insult and await an
 outburst, Reuben Lee instead simply grins.

REUBEN LEE
 And a fine hog trough it was too.

Then Reuben disarmingly ignores the Rebel Town Father's provocations and addresses the wider group.

REUBEN LEE
 But now that her war is
 temporarily over I hear you have
 battles of your own.

But the Rebel Town Father won't give up.

REBEL TOWN FATHER
 (In Irish)
 We speak Irish here.

REUBEN LEE
 You're welcome to your skin and
 bone utterances but I prefer a
 little flesh on my language.

As the Rebel Town Father is about to respond, the Business Man steps in and sways the balance in Ned's favour as he casually dismisses the Rebel Town Father.

BUSINESS MAN
 (In Irish)
 Can we hear without further
 interruption please?

The Rebel Town Father looks to the Priest, seeking alliance, but as the Priest looks away, the Rebel Town Father realizes he is alone in his protestations.

REUBEN LEE
 Gratitude to you sir; courtesy is
 courtesy in any language.

As Reuben addresses the gathering, appealing to their inherent greed, he demonstrates a shrewd politician's ability to work a crowd.

REUBEN LEE
 Whispering pilgrims telling the
 world of this sacred shrine of
 yours has attracted new
 possibilities, new enterprises
 and substantial profit-to-be made
 to this about-to-be born town of
 yours.

PRIEST
 (In Irish)
 We are not here for profit Mister
 Lee, we are here to serve the
 Lord.

REUBEN LEE

Aren't we all my friend? Yet nothing seems to inspire more hatred than the love of God. This Ned of the Hills that puts such a strangle on your purse seems also intent on serving that other angel your unforgiving Lord evicted from the above place of light and joy.

The offended Priest speaks in English.

PRIEST

It is not, 'my' Lord mister Lee, it is the Lord God of all of us.

REUBEN LEE

That we would share profit as willingly as we share piety.

PRIEST

I beg your pardon?

REUBEN LEE

No need to beg priest, you can have it for free. But I cannot be so generous with the head of Ned of the Hills. I'm worth what I cost gentlemen, and I cost what I'm worth.

The Judge looks to the Business Man and the Priest and sees their disapproving glances then he turns to the Local Bounty Hunter, nods, and addresses Reuben in English.

JUDGE

Mister Lee, we have our man, and we have no need of your services.

Reuben stands in silence then pushes the corpse back into the grave with his foot.

REUBEN LEE

You continue believing whatever it is you believe. Meantime you'll find us quenching our thirst in pursuit of clarity.

As Reuben makes to exit he stops when he passes Rebel Town Father.

REUBEN LEE

A bullet speaks every tongue.

And then Reuben speaks for the first time in Irish.

REUBEN LEE

Disease has tasted your language
my learned Irish friend. A rank
infected leper crawling to its
grave. Let the dying rest in
peace.

Reuben spits into the grave then, as he, Creedence, Archie and Sullivan make their way across the street towards the bar, everyone watch them in silence.

INT/EXT. SHRINE - NIGHT

A gathering of Italian Pilgrims pray at the shrine.

They become nervous when they hear sounds.

One of the Pilgrims opens one eye and sees moving shadows.

The Pilgrim closes his eye and continues praying.

Then he opens it again as he hears a thud.

And as he opens both eyes he sees the decapitated head of one of the other pilgrim's on the ground.

INT. OONAGH'S HOUSE - DAY

As Oonagh prepares food she looks out the window into the forest, the hint of anticipation in her gaze, but Ned isn't there.

Sean watches Thomas cleaning their mother's single barrel shotgun and they speak in Irish.

SEAN

Just let me hold it?

THOMAS

It's too dangerous.

SEAN

It's not even loaded.

OONAGH

Stop it you two and put that back
in the bedroom where it belongs.

SEAN

Why won't you show me how to
shoot it?

THOMAS

You're too young.

SEAN
Mam?

OONAGH
He's right.

SEAN
Nobody lets me do anything.

OONAGH
Put that thing away.

SEAN
When can I shoot it?

OONAGH
It's not for that, I only keep it
because...

She trails off, hurt in her silence.

Sensitive to the shift in mood, Sean tries to quickly change the subject by tipping Thomas' shoulder.

SEAN
Play hide and seek.

THOMAS
It's a children's game.

SEAN
Mam?

OONAGH
I'm busy Sean.

SEAN
A little game?

OONAGH
I have to make food. Thomas...

THOMAS
I don't play those.

Frustrated, but wanting to please Sean, Oonagh wipes her hands and heads for the door.

OONAGH
I'm going to count to twenty.

Thrilled, Sean runs out after her.

EXT. OONAGH'S HOUSE - DAY

Oonagh covers her eyes and loudly starts counting to twenty.

Sean excitedly runs around to the back of the house but he can still hear his mother counting at the front of the house.

He pulls the large bark of a tree over him as he continues to hear, off camera, his mother counting.

But as his mother suddenly prematurely stops counting at the number thirteen, Sean frowns.

He hesitates, then decides to remain in excited hiding.

Sean barely breathes as he listens to the silence, then, as he hears footsteps coming towards him he closes his eyes and giggles.

As the footsteps draw closer and the tree bark is lifted up Sean bursts out laughing but the laughter stops halfway up his throat.

It is not his mother who has found him.

Instead, he sees the lanky degenerate lowlife Creedence Lee.

Creedence eyes Sean with initial surprise then unashamed desire.

Sean attempts to call out for his mother but the lightening fast long boned filthy fingers of Creedence's hand grips him Sean the throat and all sound is strangled as Creedence speaks to him in English.

CREEDENCE

You hiding from your mama or from me?

Creedence hesitates, and as he looks around, and little beads of sweat form on his forehead.

Creedence gently, almost tenderly, hushes Sean, then attempts to forcefully slip his hand down the front of Sean's trousers.

As Sean's eyes widen in a silent scream Creedence gets his fingertips into the boy's trousers but suddenly a call from the front of the house interrupts his probing fingers.

ARCHIE (O.C.)

Creedence!

Creedence curses the intrusion and grabs Sean by the hair.

Sean screams out as Creedence carries him like a rag doll to the front of the house.

Creedence stops when he sees Archie and Sullivan holding Oonagh and pointing their guns at a terrified Thomas who is standing in the doorway awkwardly holding his mother's shotgun.

Oonagh pleads with Creedence in Irish.

OONAGH

Don't hurt him, it's not even loaded.

Creedence drags Sean to the middle of the open space.

CREEDENCE

You expect us to take your word for that lady?

Creedence looks up at Thomas and addresses him in English.

CREEDENCE

Boy, we have powers granted us to hunt Ned of the Hills; is you Ned by chance?

Archie and Sullivan laugh at the obvious absurdity of the question as Oonagh speaks in English.

OONAGH

But you already caught him. His body is hanging outside the town.

CREEDENCE

There's disputing going on about that. And a lady should know better than interrupt a man when he talks.

Creedence looks back at Thomas.

CREEDENCE

Powers granted by law folks and the like. Powers that mean you pointing that gun allows our killing you not to be murder. You know how to count to three boy?

Thomas is terrified but still doesn't lower the shotgun.

CREEDENCE

One...

Thomas tries not cry as his mother shouts at him.

OONAGH

Thomas, put it down now!

CREEDENCE

Two...

A dark wet patch forms in the middle of Thomas' trousers and Creedence stops counting.

As the patch gets bigger and Thomas starts to cry, the bounty hunters realize that he is uncontrollably urinating in his trousers and they laugh in disgusting delight.

CREEDENCE

Is there anything sadder than a boy trying to be a man?

Thomas pulls the trigger on the gun and as the trigger clicks its empty impotent barrel the pathetic sound makes the bounty hunters stop laughing and there is silence.

CREEDENCE

Three...

Creedence moves fast towards Thomas.

Not wanting to see what happens next, Sean buries his face into his mother.

Creedence raises his fist to smash it into Thomas' face but a quiet voice interrupts him from behind.

NED (O.C.)

Don't.

Sullivan and Archie spin around with their rifles high, stunned that they hadn't been aware of anyone arriving.

Ned is standing in the opening, holding a fish.

Creedence, slightly panicked, aims his gun at Ned and speaks in Irish.

CREEDENCE

Who are you?

Ned surveys the situation and Creedence runs at him with the gun aimed at his face.

CREEDENCE

Answer me.

Ned doesn't answer.

Sean peers out from behind his mother.

Creedence cocks his gun but Ned doesn't flinch.

Thomas notices Ned's quiet defiance and looks at him with a new respect in his eyes.

As Creedence moves closer he addresses Ned in English.

CREEDENCE

I asked you a question fisherman.

Ned looks over and sees the excited hope in Thomas's eyes and answers in English.

NED

I'm nobody.

Thomas is confused as Creedence steps closer to Ned.

CREEDENCE

You're a dead man is what you are.

NED

Yes.

This response surprises Creedence.

CREEDENCE

Say that again?

Ned answers in Irish.

NED

I don't want to fight.

Still wary but growing in confidence Creedence steps back and gestures towards the open space.

CREEDENCE

Then walk on by.

Ned looks at Sean as he huddles into his mother and answers in English.

NED

I can't do that.

Thomas becomes excited and Creedence becomes a little less sure of himself again.

CREEDENCE

Hear that? The fisherman has no quarrel with us. Aren't we the lucky ones?

Creedence hesitates and moves closer, his gun raised.

Creedence hits Ned a stinging slap across the face - not a punch but an open handed slap designed to provoke and humiliate - then he quickly stands back, waiting for Ned's reaction.

Ned stares at Creedence, and slowly clenches his fist by his side.

The bloodlust among the posse is palpable as, weapons raised, they look to each other, waiting to see the measure of Ned.

Ready to strike, Ned prepares himself, but just before he does, he sees Thomas' excited eyes willing him to get to war with these men.

Creedence spits into Ned's face and Ned flinches then stares back at Creedence as Creedence speaks in Irish.

CREEDENCE

You going to hurt me fisherman?

Creedence smashes his head into Ned's face but Ned doesn't even flinch.

A small amount of blood forms on Ned's mouth, but, expecting to have knocked him out, Creedence falters slightly as he sees the lack of damage his head-but has caused.

Ned calmly drops the fish and stares at Creedence.

As the tension rises Ned sees the feverish excitement in Thomas' eyes.

And the fear in Sean's.

Ned slowly unclenches his fists, lowers his eyes and speaks in English.

NED

If I've offended you, I apologize.

Creedence tries to conceal his confusion.

CREEDENCE

What?

Ned looks at the disappointment on Thomas' face then looks back down at the ground with further humility.

NED

I'm sorry for any offence caused.

Creedence looks to his men and, knowing by now that this man could not be Ned, he enjoys repeating the same question.

CREEDENCE

Is it by chance you who is Ned of
the Hills?

Archie and Sullivan laugh.

CREEDENCE

I think he be a she and she be
Edwina of the Hills.

As Ned glances at Oonagh she looks at him without judgement.

But Thomas now stares at him with undisguised contempt.

Creedence slowly raises the butt of his rifle, shows it to Ned and speaks in Irish.

CREEDENCE

See that, fisherman?

Ned doesn't raise his eyes so Creedence looks to his men.

CREEDENCE

(In Irish)

Never answers the question first
time around, this one.

Creedence slams the butt of the rifle into the side of Ned's knee, causing Ned to collapse down onto one knee.

CREEDENCE

(In Irish)

I said, see that?

Without looking up Ned nods.

Creedence slams the butt of his gun into Ned's other leg and Ned goes down on both knees as Creedence speaks in English.

CREEDENCE

You think they'll give us a
bounty for you Edwina?

Creedence slams the butt of the rifle into Ned's face and Ned falls forward, face first into the wet mud.

And as Creedence looks to Oonagh and casually rests his boot on the side of Ned's face, muck and dirt etching it's way across Ned's mouth and eyes, Ned seems surprisingly stoic as, yielding to Creedence, he simply stares ahead.

CREEDENCE

Powers granted by the town
 fathers' lady. Powerful powers.
 (In Irish)
 You tell us if you see anything.

Oonagh just stares at Creedence as he takes his foot off Ned, strolls towards his horse.

As Creedence mounts his horse he looks at Ned then at Oonagh and addresses her in Irish.

CREEDENCE

Woman like you deserves better.
 Maybe you be needing a new man.

Creedence, Sullivan and Archie pull away and, as the sound of their horses fade into the distance, Oonagh and her sons just stand where they are staring at Ned slumped in the dirt, the silence saying what they cannot.

Sean slowly moves towards Ned and, as he gets closer, Thomas calls out in rage fuelled disgust and self-loathing.

THOMAS

Leave him be.

Sean falters, hesitates, then continues toward Ned.

Oonagh watches Sean then also starts to make her way towards Ned.

Thomas, completely unaware that Ned has just sacrificed himself to save him from a beating, roars at them.

THOMAS

Leave him alone. He's not a man.
 He's a coward.

As Oonagh and Sean help Ned up, Oonagh looks back and scolds Thomas in Irish.

OONAGH

Not all men are born to be
 heroes. Help him.

But Thomas just contemptuously walks back into the house.

As Ned watches him, there is no hurt in Ned's eyes; if anything he looks strangely contented.

Sean picks up the fish and Oonagh puts her arm around Ned to guide him towards the house and, because she can't think of anything else, she says:

OONAGH

Thanks for the fish.

Moving towards the house Oonagh guides Ned with Sean beside them.

Sean, with beautiful non-judgemental innocence, tries to make Ned feel better.

SEAN

It's okay to be scared. I was scared too.

Then he pauses to think about what he's just said.

SEAN

But don't tell Thomas, will you?

INT. OONAGH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ned sits in silence, his shirt bloodied and stained, as Oonagh prepares the herbs, crushing them in a bowl with a liquid paste.

Sean and Thomas look on from the bedroom, Sean in fascinated delight, and Thomas in complete contempt.

Oonagh pours warm water into a bowl and picks up the cloth.

Ned looks at Sean through the bedroom door and, as Sean giggles, Oonagh moves over and closes the bedroom door.

Oonagh looks at Ned, thanking him in her own way as they speak in Irish.

OONAGH

My eldest son might not know what you did for him out there but I do. He shouldn't have called you that.

Ned looks at his fists as they shake with unused adrenaline.

NED

Maybe he's right.

The only blood on them, his own.

NED

Maybe I am a coward.

She places the cloth in the warm water, hesitates, and indicates his shirt.

OONAGH

You'll have to take that off.

Now it's Ned's turn to hesitate.

NED

I'm okay.

OONAGH

I can't clean you.

Ned slowly takes off his shirt, revealing his bruised and bloodied torso.

Looking away, Oonagh takes the cloth out of the warm water and squeezes out the excess water.

She tentatively reaches forward and carefully cleans the blood on Ned's chest.

Ned stares straight ahead, avoiding eye contact as Oonagh cleans his wounds in silence.

Oonagh dips the cloth back in the bowl, blood infusing with water, squeezes it again, then moves around to Ned's back.

As she cleans the bruising and blood on his back, Oonagh stops when she sees the small but distinct lump under the skin on the back of Ned's shoulder.

She cleans around it, then gently touches it with the cloth, making Ned slightly flinch.

OONAGH

What is that?

Ned doesn't answer and, as she touches it again with the cloth, he winces.

OONAGH

It causes you pain?

Ned tries to ignore her as he stares out through the small window at the wooden cross outside.

OONAGH

You should have a doctor look at that.

NED

I did.

OONAGH

And?

Ned just stares at the wooden cross on the grave.

NED

Why do you grow herbs on his grave?

Oonagh picks up the bowl with the herb paste and begins to apply it to Ned's body.

OONAGH

Death should have meaning.

She continues to apply the paste then she stops as she looks out the window and sees the bodies of the pilgrims being brought through the forest into town.

The townsfolk quietly carry the mutilated Pilgrims corpses on horse drawn carts.

Ned Oonagh open the door and stand silent as the procession of death passes by.

INT. COURTHOUSE - EVENING

The entire town watch as the bodies of the murdered pilgrims are spread out on the floor of the court.

As the crowd listens to the Judge's and Town Fathers, and Business Men arguing among themselves in Irish, Ned slips in among the crowd; just another face among many.

JUDGE

How can one man have done all this?

BUSINESS MAN

Our shrine will be nothing more than memory and our town a tomb.

Everyone hushes as Reuben enters, carrying a long object covered in canvas and steps in the space among the corpses.

REUBEN LEE

You want to now how one man, acting alone, can cause such solo carnage?

Ned watches intently from the collective anonymity of the crowd as Reuben carefully places the canvas wrapped object on the table.

REUBEN LEE

You don't know your enemy. His secret or his weakness.

Even the Judge seems humbled by Reuben's power as he casually addresses the court.

REUBEN LEE

But fear not, if the teacher fees are golden, old Reuben Lee here will elucidate and educate.

Reuben approaches the Local Bounty Hunter who claimed to have caught Ned of Hills earlier.

REUBEN LEE

May I be so bold as to request
the temporary loan of your
powerful handgun sir?

The Local Bounty Hunter hesitates as he looks at the onlookers.

The crowd look at Reuben and sense a performance about to unfold from this consummate show-man.

The Judge nods to the Local Bounty Hunter who reluctantly hands over his weapon and, as Reuben moves to the raised bar, he opens the Local Bounty Hunter's gun.

REUBEN LEE

Me and Ned fought on opposite
sides in the war. Never had the
displeasure of meeting him but
everyone talked of his exquisite
savagery. Even the doctor.

Reuben empties the single bullet out of the Local Bounty Hunter's gun.

He holds the bullet up to show everyone, then demonstrates to them that the gun is empty.

REUBEN LEE

A single bullet. Maximum.

Reuben holds up the bullet and carefully places it, upright, on the raised bar.

REUBEN LEE

Leaves a small hole, but can be
lethal nonetheless. A single
shot, only, per each re-load, but
nothing's perfect.

From under his tunic Reuben slides out a long powerful looking bullet and holds it up for the crowd to see.

He places the long bullet on the bar beside the much smaller one from the Local Bounty Hunter's handgun.

REUBEN LEE

That is, until now.

The onlookers stare at the obvious difference between the two upright bullets on the bar.

REUBEN LEE

Imagine, if you will, the untold damage a bullet of this size could do to the cranium? But unfortunately this bullet has the same limitations as it's midget cousin; only one shot per re-load. Or has it?

Reuben unravels the canvas to reveal a long rifle and, as he holds it up, the onlookers watch with impressed curiosity.

REUBEN LEE

If we're going to bite back at this animal we'll need to grow similar teeth.

Reuben holds up the powerful looking rifle.

REUBEN LEE

Lay your hungry eyes upon Ned of the Hills' secret weapon. This is what he is using to terrorize this beautiful town-to-be of yours.

Reuben opens the weapon, reaches under his tunic, theatrically pulls out another long bullet, holds it in the air for maximum effect, then loads it into the rifle.

Reuben makes to snap shut the rifle but stops and smiles at the onlookers.

Then he reaches into his tunic and pulls out another long bullet.

And, as everyone watches with increasing excitement, he dramatically loads the second bullet into the rifle.

REUBEN LEE

A revolution in warfare my friends. No more single shot re-load limitation. And now Ned's not the only man with one.

Reuben slams the rifle shut and rests it against his shoulder.

REUBEN LEE

The stakes have been raised, the weapons equalled, and our teeth fully sharpened.

As Reuben grabs the rifle and blasts a hole in the wall, the deafening power of the rifle makes the onlookers jump for cover.

Then, as they all slowly resurface and see the damage done to the wall, they look to Reuben in shock and awe.

REUBEN LEE

Only obstacle now is the
painfully meagre bounty.

Reuben quickly re-cocks the rifle and blasts another hole in the wall as everyone jumps for cover again.

The Bar Owner rushes forward and stares at the two large side by side holes in the wall then stands in front of them, refusing to allow further shots.

The onlookers come out of hiding again as Reuben stares at the Judge and holds up the rifle for all to see.

REUBEN LEE

Got it across the water. Queen's
purse paid. Half dozen shots in
all. A six shooter so to speak.
And no man is faster. Including
Ned of the Hills. This is the
instrument to prove Ned is less
exquisite savage, and more mere
mortal. One of these bullets hits
him, it won't be lodging in his
body; it will be tearing flesh
and bone apart and it won't stop
until it drags Ned to that place
where all mortals must descend.

Up until now Ned has just been watching but he is troubled by what Reuben said about a bullet 'lodging in the body.'

The Judge looks to the Local Bounty Hunter then speaks.

JUDGE

(In Irish)

You spoke of his weakness...?

REUBEN LEE

Raise the bounty and you'll know.

The Judge and Town Leaders consult among themselves.

JUDGE

(In Irish)

The bounty stands as it is.

REUBEN LEE

Then let the terror continue.
Good day gentlemen.

As they squabble among themselves Reuben ritualistically rolls the weapon back in the canvas.

BUSINESS MAN
We'll meet your bounty Mister
Lee.

Ned watches closely as Reuben turns to the Business Man.

REUBEN LEE
At last, a sane man who'll stop
the insanity. Half up front, half
on delivery of Ned.

The Business Man places a large bag of bounty on the court table, nods to the Judge and addresses Reuben in Irish.

BUSINESS MAN
This will be locked in the court
safe. Full payment will only be
made on delivery of his
identifiable corpse and the
complete cessation of all
banditry.

Reuben considers this, looks at the onlookers, then watches as the Court Clerk carries the bounty to the safe.

REUBEN LEE
Admirable ambition mister
business man.

As the Court Clerk locks the money in the safe and hands the key back to the Judge, Reuben approaches the Local Bounty Hunter again and gestures for him to join him in the open space.

But, this time, when the Local Bounty Hunter hesitates, Creedence appears behind him and gently but powerfully nudges him out into the open space beside Reuben among the bodies.

REUBEN LEE
Our premature hunter with his
penchant for mistaken identity
has taught us a powerful lesson.

Watching from the crowd, Ned becomes increasingly uneasy as he watches Reuben turn the Local Bounty Hunter around.

As Creedence hands Reuben his sharp knife, the crowd hush.

REUBEN LEE
When a man cannot be identified
by facial distinction we must
find other means.

Reuben turns to the Judges as he holds the knife up to the back of the Local Bounty Hunter's shirt.

REUBEN LEE

I hope the bounty you paid this
hunter covered the cost of a
shirt.

The Local Bounty Hunter tries to pull away but Creedence holds him in place as Reuben slides the tip of the knife into the top of the Bounty Hunter's shirt.

Reuben cuts the shirt in half, exposing the Bounty Hunter's bare back.

Ned realizes it's time to get out as Reuben gently slides the knife along the Local Bounty Hunter's left shoulder.

Reuben doesn't draw blood but the knife leaves a red track along the Local Bounty Hunter's skin.

REUBEN LEE

Ned of the Hills has a bullet
lodged in his left shoulder, its
date and origin unmistakable.

Ned slowly makes his way to the back of the crowd.

REUBEN LEE

Doctor said he'd likely die if it
was extracted.

Reuben pushes the knife slightly into the skin of the Local Bounty Hunter and the tip of the knife draws a spot of blood.

The Local Bounty Hunter wants to pull away but Creedence's stare causes him to remain still.

REUBEN LEE

Methinks Ned is in need of a
second opinion. Mine.

The men in the crowd, half serious and half joking, begin checking each others shoulders through their clothes as Ned slowly moves towards the exit.

Reuben pulls the knife away from the Local Bounty Hunter and moves to the bar.

REUBEN LEE

Tomorrow we will formally begin
the hunt, and old Reuben Lee will
return to you the bullet removed
from the shoulder, and the head
removed from the neck, of Ned of
the Hills.

Unnoticed, Ned slips out through the back entrance as Reuben slams the blade of the knife into the wood of the counter beside the small and long bullet on the bar.

As the knife stands upright beside the bullets, Reuben picks up the short bullet, disdainfully flicks it at the Local Bounty Hunter, then looks to the Judge.

REUBEN LEE

Then you will give me, my
brother, and my men due financial
recourse. And we will leave you
to your shrine, your town, and
your God, all of you warm in the
knowledge that the devil dances
here no more.

INT. OONAGH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

An enraged Oonagh speaks in Irish as she absorbs what Ned has just confessed to her.

OONAGH

Say that again?

Ned doesn't answer.

OONAGH

You couldn't be him.

Unused to emotion or explanations, Ned's doesn't react.

OONAGH

You brought this into my home?

Ned wants to apologize but he knows it's pointless.

NED

I have to go.

Ned moves to the door.

OONAGH

You killed all those men?

Ned stops at the door.

OONAGH

Answer me.

Ned doesn't turn around but he still tries to answer her.

NED

I'm not him. Not anymore.

OONAGH
Then who are you?

Ned doesn't know the answer to that question anymore.

NED
I have to go.

OONAGH
Go. Nobody's stopping you. Get
out.

Ned opens the door, steps halfway out, stops, turns slightly around, and struggles to find the words to explain.

NED
You made me...a better man.

As Ned exits, Oonagh listens to his footfalls outside.

She follows him to the doorway and, as she watches him walk towards the forest away from town, she calls out.

OONAGH
Have they started the hunt?

Ned stops but doesn't turn round.

NED
First light.

OONAGH
The bullet. Let me help you.

Unaware that Thomas is watching them through a slit in the opening of the bedroom curtains, Ned turns and looks at Oonagh.

OONAGH
They'll hunt you all your life.

NED
Doctor said I might die if it's
taken out.

OONAGH
You're dead if it isn't.

INT. OONAGH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

As Sean sleeps, Thomas moves from the window and peers through the tiny opening in the bedroom door.

He watches Ned re-enter the house and absorbs the unspoken frisson between his mother and Ned.

Ned stops and Oonagh closes the door behind him then moves towards him from behind.

She slowly reaches out to touch his left shoulder but stops short of contact.

Thomas is compelled to watch his mother's intimacy from the doorway but he is disgusted by it too.

Oonagh stands in front of Ned, reaches across and slowly unbuttons one of the buttons on his shirt.

Thomas can watch no more.

INT. BEDROOM, OONAGH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Thomas takes the money from his mother's tin jar on the shelf beside the shotgun.

As he places it back on the shelf, the jar falls to one side and a couple of the shotgun cartridges spill out.

Thomas grabs the jar to stop it rolling and holds it in place, silent and waiting, as he watches to ensure Sean remains asleep.

He slowly takes his hands off the tin and leaves it lying on its side with the lid off.

He quietly opens the window and climbs out into the raining night.

EXT. OONAGH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

As Thomas approaches the horse he hushes it, but when he glances through the window, he stops.

As he watches his mother taking Ned's shirt off, he grabs the rope, and angrily climbs onto the horse.

He makes the horse walk at a slow and discreet pace in the direction of town, looks back at the house then, when he's far enough from the house, he brings the horse to a gallop and vanishes into the forest.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Music and laughter and the type of intoxicating pre-battle anticipation that lets men and women taste life in the uninhibited moment surges through the bar.

But too much alcohol doesn't suit Reuben Lee and he's in a mean mood.

Reuben is addressing the Business Man but watching his brother Creedence dragging a way too young prostitute into one of the rooms upstairs and closing the door behind him.

REUBEN LEE

The price has gone up.

The Business Man looks at Reuben in shock as Thomas slips, unnoticed, in through the side door.

Intoxicated by the sounds and smells Thomas makes himself as unobtrusive as possible in a corner.

REUBEN LEE

Considerable pause expenditure has been accrued awaiting this town-to-be to recognize the severity of its predicament. Hence, the southerly direction of my purse needs to be sharply turned north.

When Thomas sees an unattended half full tanker of drink, he looks around, hesitates, then grabs it and takes a long slug from it.

BUSINESS MAN

(In Irish)

I think you'll agree that most of that expenditure was exercised in this bar.

REUBEN LEE

Which segues sublimely into my second condition. The whiskey.

BUSINESS MAN

What about it?

As Thomas reaches into his pocket and pulls out the money, the astutely observant Agnes the Whore's glances at the coins.

Thomas quickly steps aside as a man rushes out to vomit then he sees Reuben Lee standing against the counter talking to the Business Man.

REUBEN LEE

Tomorrow we ride to hunt Ned of the Hills, so for the rest of the night I expect our humble selves will be shown the exquisite hospitality we're sure this place is capable of?

The Business Man looks at the sweating Bar Owner on the other side of the counter and the Bar Owner shakes his head - no way.

Reuben looks at the Bar Owner in mock hurt, then jumps over the bar counter and lands on the other side.

Thomas watches as Reuben pulls out a bottle of whiskey and stares at the Bar Owner.

REUBEN LEE

You wouldn't be begrudging the
saviours of this little town-to-
be now would you?

The Bar Owner moves forward to stop him but Reuben smashes the bottle off the bar counter.

As Reuben calmly holds the outstretched jagged neck of the bottle, the Bar Owner stops, as does the music, and everyone is quiet, none more so than Thomas, watching with fascinated excitement.

Reuben turns to the Bar Man with mock apologetic humility.

REUBEN LEE

Now look what you made me do.

Reuben looks out to the rest of the silent faces staring back at him.

REUBEN LEE

Methinks it's time to get this
party started.

Reuben throws several full bottles out into the air.

Archie and Sullivan are the first to catch one each but, as the bottles keep coming, others rush forward to catch them and the party does indeed get started.

One of the bottles rolls in Thomas' direction.

Thomas hesitates then, realizing everyone is ignoring the bottle and him, he quickly picks it up and moves back into the corner.

Thomas pulls the cork out of the bottle and almost chokes when he takes the first large mouthful.

But he fights against the choking and swallows back another mouthful.

He feels the burning pleasure run down his throat that makes a man want to howl at the moon.

But before he can take a third mouthful he sees Agnes the Whore staring back at him.

Agnes indifferently moves towards him, cold, lascivious business on her mind; while Thomas stares dumbfounded back at her, warm, lustful yearning on his.

INT. OONAGH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ned is sitting backwards, with his hands wrapped round the chair and his back exposed.

Spread out in front of him are the knife, an array of different herbs and pastes, and the prepared needle and thread.

Oonagh speaks in Irish as she applies the herb paste from the bowl around the protrusion on Ned's shoulder.

OONAGH

This one will freeze it.

Oonagh picks up the sharp knife and cleans it.

OONAGH

Ready?

Ned nods and closes his eyes.

Oonagh touches the tip of the knife against the protrusion and, as we stay on Ned, she breaks the skin.

Ned is in intense pain but he remains silent.

As he hears the sound of the extracted bullet hitting the tin bowl he grimaces with painful relief.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Reuben and his men are becoming increasingly drunk as the Bar Owner is pushed out of the bar by Archie and Sullivan.

INT. ROOM UPSTAIRS, BAR - NIGHT

The music and laughter continues outside as Agnes the Whore speaks in Irish while slipping the money into her stocking.

AGNES THE WHORE

What age are you?

THOMAS

Old enough.

AGNES THE WHORE
Take off your clothes then.

Thomas becomes self-conscious and Agnes the Whore observes his hesitation.

AGNES THE WHORE
Have I got me a shy one?

Thomas defiantly takes off his shirt.

Then his trousers.

And as he stands by the bed in his underwear Agnes surveys his skinny adolescent body.

AGNES THE WHORE
Well now, aren't I the lucky one.

Thomas begins to tremble but he fights against it.

AGNES THE WHORE
So, what do you want?

Thomas struggles to appear confident but words fail him as Agnes undoes her blouse.

AGNES THE WHORE
What are your tastes?

Thomas looks at her breasts and becomes more nervous as she slowly advances towards him.

AGNES THE WHORE
I know many ways.

She stands closer to him.

AGNES THE WHORE
Tricks to make you weep.

Her fingertips softly touch his chest and he emits an embarrassment whimper as he spontaneously climaxes in his underwear.

AGNES THE WHORE
Already?

Thomas looks away in humiliation as Agnes casually opens his underwear and looks down then she moves away; job done, party over.

AGNES THE WHORE
Get dressed.

But as she cleans up, Thomas doesn't move.

AGNES THE WHORE
 Don't worry, next one will be
 better, but now it's time to go.

Thomas still doesn't move and Agnes becomes impatient.

AGNES THE WHORE
 You going to cause trouble?

Thomas peers through the opening of her clothes at her
 body.

AGNES THE WHORE
 You want more?

Thomas nods, yes.

AGNES THE WHORE
 Then you pay more.

Thomas picks up his trousers and checks the pockets;
 nothing left.

AGNES THE WHORE
 Come back when you get more.

Thomas hesitates.

THOMAS
 The bounty.

AGNES THE WHORE
 What about it?

THOMAS
 I know where he is.

AGNES THE WHORE
 And I'm a virgin.

Thomas becomes instantly embarrassed at the word, 'virgin'
 and Agnes understands.

AGNES THE WHORE
 I am your first?

Thomas nods and Agnes becomes surprisingly soft.

AGNES THE WHORE
 That's beautiful. I never had a
 first timer before.

She moves to Thomas and kisses him on the mouth, no tongue,
 but still it's intimate.

AGNES THE WHORE

That's for my favorites. You get some more and I'll get you some more.

THOMAS

I've seen the bullet under his skin.

Though she hides it, something in Thomas' tone makes Agnes listen.

THOMAS

I know where he stays.

AGNES THE WHORE

Where?

THOMAS

We can get the bounty together.

Agnes softens further and touches Thomas' stomach then raises her hand to his mouth.

He kisses her hand and she slides a finger into his mouth.

Trembling with nerves and excitement, Thomas gently sucks on her finger.

AGNES THE WHORE

What a sweet boy you are.

She slips her finger out of his mouth and kisses him again.

AGNES THE WHORE

You're telling the truth...

Thomas nods and hungrily moves to kiss her but she holds his face at a slight distance.

She slips the same finger into her own mouth then, as she removes her finger and touches his mouth with it, she whispers -

AGNES THE WHORE

What's your name?

Thomas almost forgets his name.

THOMAS

Thomas.

She moves to kiss him, opens her mouth, but as he reaches for her mouth with his, she holds him back again.

AGNES THE WHORE
 Let's make it special this time
 Thomas.

As Thomas nods with desire she lowers him onto the bed.

AGNES THE WHORE
 Slide under the covers. I'll get
 us some drinks.

Thomas tries to kiss her again but she seductively pulls
 back.

AGNES THE WHORE
 I want to be clean for you. Take
 away the taste of the others with
 some whiskey.

Thomas hesitates but becomes bashful when she looks down at
 the beginning of a new stirring in his underwear.

AGNES THE WHORE
 Is that for me?

Thomas nods, with pride.

AGNES THE WHORE
 Let me get the drinks. I'll be
 right back.

As Agnes exits Thomas lies back on the bed, puts his hands
 behind his head and relaxes with the newfound cocksure calm
 of a boy become man.

INT. OONAGH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Oonagh speaks in Irish as she stitches the wound on Ned's
 shoulder with the needle and thread.

OONAGH
 I promise this is the last one.

She puts in the final stitch, ties it, then cuts the thread
 with the knife.

She pours warm water on the wound.

As it spills, Oonagh watches the water take the clotted
 blood with it on its trail down his back.

Oonagh applies another of the herb pastes.

OONAGH
 That will stop infection.

She takes the bullet out of the small tin bowl, and, looking at it, she tries to lighten the mood slightly.

OONAGH

I'll keep it. A memory of you.

But as she slips the bullet into her apron and looks back at him from behind...

- the animal slope of his shoulders

- the roughness of his hands

- the blood trails down his back

...her lightness doesn't last, and, almost as if the words were slipping out of their own accord, she can't stop herself quietly asking:

OONAGH

Did you really kill all those men?

Ned doesn't want to answer.

OONAGH

Tell me.

Ned still doesn't want to discuss it, but, feeling Oonagh's gaze on his back, he is compelled to say something.

NED

That was war.

Oonagh stares at him, no judgement in her eyes, just wanting him to continue and, as he speaks, there is a quiet regret.

NED

Only thing I've ever been half good at.

OONAGH

Killing...?

Ned nods in silent quiescence.

Oonagh tentatively reaches out to touch him then stops just short of contact.

OONAGH

No, it's not.

She touches the side of his face then pulls back as he flinches slightly.

NED
I don't want anyone else to die
because of me.

She slowly reaches forward to touch him again and he doesn't flinch this time.

NED
Shot my final bullet into the
river.

Oonagh slowly moves her hand closer to the back of his neck and, though the pleasure is exquisite, Ned quietly whispers.

NED
I have to go.

As he makes to get up, she gently stops him and moves to face him.

As Ned looks away, Oonagh looks down at him and nervously asks -

OONAGH
Am I not the kind of woman you
want at your table?

Ned looks at her and raises his hand to touch her face but Sean enters and their tentative intimacy is broken.

SEAN
I'm scared.

Oonagh smiles and goes to comfort him.

OONAGH
It's okay, Mama's here.

As Oonagh holds Sean, he looks across at Ned.

NED
What's wrong kid?

Sean hesitates then tells them.

SEAN
Thomas...is gone.

Oonagh moves into the bedroom and sees Thomas' bed is empty.

SEAN
He was watching you at the door.

Oonagh checks the window, discovers it is open, then sees the lid is off the container and the money gone.

SEAN
What's wrong Mama?

She looks outside and sees the horse is not there, and, realizing Thomas has gone into town, she turns to Ned and brings her hands to her mouth in horror.

INT. ROOM UPSTAIRS, BAR - NIGHT

Agnes the Whore re-enters with two glasses of whiskey and stands at the door, leaving it and her slip partly open as they speak in Irish.

AGNES THE WHORE
There are boys and there are men.

Thomas confidently pulls back the bed sheets to reveal himself and invite her in.

Agnes knocks back one of the glasses of whiskey, approaches the bed, and extends the other glass to Thomas.

Thomas shakes his head, no thanks.

AGNES THE WHORE
Drink. It helps.

Thomas pulls the covers further back to proudly reveal his full self.

THOMAS
I don't need help.

AGNES THE WHORE
Not with that, it'll help with the pain.

Thomas is confused and Agnes gently touches his face.

AGNES THE WHORE
You'll thank me later Thomas.
Drink.

As Agnes offers him the glass, the door slowly opens to reveal Reuben Lee standing there.

EXT. FORESTS OUTSIDE TOWN - NIGHT

Oonagh and Sean watch from the doorway as Ned sprints into the forest towards town and vanishes into the darkness.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Reuben is in full mean spirited flow as he drags the semi-naked Thomas down the stairs.

As the drunken crowd look on with gleeful curiosity, Reuben speaks in English as he plays to their appetite for cruelty.

REUBEN LEE

Look what we got ourselves here folks. Look what your good Lord in all his kindness has bestowed upon us, his humble servants. Tell them son, tell them what you told the whore.

Agnes takes offence and shouts from upstairs.

AGNES

What did you call me?

REUBEN LEE

No shame in being a whore Agnes. Look at me; I'm a bounty hunter. You only have to hump them for money, I have to kill the bastards. Biggest whore of all.

Everyone laughs in admiration, and, pacified, Agnes gradually joins in the laughter, but Reuben notices someone isn't laughing.

REUBEN LEE

(In Irish)

Everyone finds comic in my witticisms except you boy? You don't think I'm humorous?

Thomas doesn't speak.

REUBEN LEE

Speak up son, old Agnes couldn't shut you up when you were hungry to crawl inside her.

Scared, and having no idea what to do, Thomas remains quiet.

REUBEN LEE

Sincere as a whore's kiss son. Dealing in fantasy and lies is her job so nobody's better equipped to separate liars from truth tellers.

(MORE)

REUBEN LEE (cont'd)

And Agnes tells me you're
spitting out some truths
upstairs.

Thomas makes a run for it but he is immediately thrown back into the open space by the laughing onlookers.

REUBEN LEE

Are you intent on making a liar
out of Agnes? And old Reuben too?
Humble Reuben, never hurt a man a
day in his life, didn't deserve
it? You going to embarrass me
here in front of all these fine
folk? Drinkers, whores and gunmen
and all them other fine
professions? You intent on doing
that to me son? Tell them what
you told the whore and you can
have her again.

Agnes nods at Reuben while Thomas is terrified but struggles to conceal it.

REUBEN LEE

I know a way or two of loosening
a boy's tongue. Bring me whiskey.

One of the lackeys grabs a bottle of whiskey and, as others hold Thomas, Reuben grabs Thomas' nose.

Thomas struggles to shake Reuben's hand free but he can't and, as he is forced to open his mouth to breathe, Reuben empties the bottle down Thomas' throat.

Thomas has to swallow and, as he struggles to breathe, he panics, but Reuben still won't pull the bottle away.

REUBEN LEE

(In Irish)

Greatest thing there is in this
broken nation, its whiskey.

Reuben removes the whiskey bottle and Thomas violently projectile vomits whiskey out onto the floor.

Some of the crowd cheer while others grimace in disgust.

REUBEN LEE

That's it son, reminds me of
Agnes on her first time.

Agnes and the other whores laugh and, as Thomas looks up to see Agnes' laughter, she feels slightly guilty as he vomits up more.

REUBEN LEE

That's my boy. Let it all out.
Just ensure words follow bile.

Eventually Thomas gets everything up and, as the men hold him, Reuben lifts Thomas' slouched head up by the hair.

REUBEN LEE

(In Irish)

You going to tell them what you
told the whore?

As Thomas shakes his head, no, Reuben is momentarily surprised but surprise doesn't last long with a man like Reuben Lee and as he casually slides out his hunting knife the joyous laughter of the crowd becomes a nervous one.

REUBEN LEE

Always found, if loosening tongue
doesn't work, threaten removal of
it, and every boy finds renewed
need to make sudden use of it.

Reuben reaches his large filthy fingers into Thomas' mouth, grips onto Thomas' slippery tongue and, as Thomas screams, Reuben stretches the tongue out of Thomas' mouth.

Some of the crowd are uneasy about this new level of brutality.

Reuben holds the hunting knife against the side of Thomas' Tongue.

Unaware he is losing the crowd, Reuben draws a tiny amount of blood as the blade pierces the purple flesh of Thomas' tongue.

REUBEN LEE

Where is he?

Thomas scream out in inarticulate pain as Reuben pushes the knife deeper into his tongue, the blood flowing more freely as the incision growing wider.

Disturbed by what she has caused Agnes tries to conceal her guilt by dressing it up as pragmatic interjection.

AGNES

He won't be able to say much with
a cut out tongue, will he?

Reuben hesitates and realizes he is losing the crowd as they silently stare back at him.

Ruben pulls the knife away and plays to the crowd again.

REUBEN LEE

You want to know what's really
happening in the world, ask a
whore, isn't that right Agnes?

The other whores cheer with pride and the mood lightens
again as others laugh.

Thomas spits out the blood from his tongue and looks at
Reuben in terror.

Reuben deliberately misinterprets Thomas' look.

REUBEN LEE

Are you giving me the bloodlust
eye son? Are you actually staring
at old Reuben Lee?

Reuben steps away from Thomas and, as he starts to unbutton
his shirt, some of the crowd cheer.

REUBEN LEE

You're an unruly student in need
of a life's lesson.

As he unbuttons his shirt Reuben addresses the crowd.

REUBEN LEE

(In Irish)

What do you think folks? Is this
dangerous, powerfully built,
young man a measure of old
Reuben?

Then he winks as he addresses Agnes in English.

REUBEN LEE

What do you think Agnes? You had
him; was he an animal?

Agnes feels slightly ashamed as she speaks quietly.

AGNES

(In Irish)

He was a virgin.

Reuben and the crowd delight in this revelation and, as the
crowd cheer and laugh, Reuben continues unbuttoning his
shirt and moves closer to Thomas.

REUBEN LEE

Is that true son? You've never
slid it in? And remember, your
mother doesn't count.

Thomas shoots Reuben a threatening look.

REUBEN LEE
 Again with the bloodlust eye.
 What do you think folks? Is it
 about that time?

The crowd cheer as Reuben takes off his shirt to reveal his massive and frightening bulk; a total contrast to Thomas' underdeveloped teenage frame.

REUBEN LEE
 (In Irish)
 All that rage, all that anger...

Reuben points to his own chin.

REUBEN LEE
 ...put it right here son.

The crowd go quiet in anticipation as Reuben gestures to the men holding Thomas to let him go.

Thomas is released but he doesn't rush at Reuben, instead he hangs back, still scared and unsure what to do.

Everyone steps back to make room for him and Reuben, and, in the exposed space, Thomas' slight frame looks even more vulnerable.

REUBEN LEE
 (In Irish)
 Didn't Ned of the Hills teach you
 how to fight? Put your hands up.

Reuben demonstrates how to stand and the crowd cheer.

Reuben moves towards Thomas and, as Thomas instinctively takes the stance, the crowd laugh and cheer louder.

Reuben raises his hand to hush the crowd, calmly walks towards Thomas and ceremoniously announces:

REUBEN LEE
 I'm going to allow you one
 answered punch son. Make it
 count.

Reuben lowers his guard and stands, chin exposed, in front of Thomas, but Thomas has no idea what to do.

REUBEN LEE
 Come on virgin boy, knock old
 Reuben out.

As the crowd laugh Thomas looks down at his own hand then slowly makes a fist.

Reuben sees Thomas' fist, grins with delight and calls to the crowd.

REUBEN LEE
 (In Irish)
 He's making a fist; this could
 prove to be an eventful evening
 after all.

But Thomas can't throw the punch and, as his hands go limp, the copious tears of a boy flow down his face.

The crowd stop cheering, some of them disgusted, some sympathetic.

Reuben steps closer to Thomas, becoming almost gentle.

REUBEN LEE
 Just tell me where he is and none
 of this has to happen.

Terrified, Thomas makes to speak but can't find words.

REUBEN LEE
 Come on son, it's okay, believe
 me, you will talk, so you might
 as well do it now instead of
 enduring the unimaginable.

Thomas hesitates, looks Reuben straight in the face, holds his gaze for a long time.

REUBEN LEE
 (In Irish)
 That's it son, say it, say it
 like a man. You think he'd
 protect you like this? No. Tell
 me where he is.

Reuben leans in close to hear the words and, as he looks into Thomas eyes, Thomas hesitates, then defiantly spits blood into Reuben's face.

The crowd are reduced to stunned silence, as is Reuben.

Then the crowd begin to laugh in thrilled anticipation.

But Reuben does not.

Reuben calmly wipes the blood and spit mixture off his face and looks at Thomas with the merest hint of respect.

Then he unleashes a powerful punch to Thomas' face and, as Thomas slumps to the ground, the crowd cheer Reuben along.

But as Reuben sits astride Thomas' chest and increases the severity and speed of the calculated violence, pummelling Thomas' young face, the crowd gradually stop cheering as they become unsettled by the severity of Reuben's savagery.

As the crowd go completely quiet, Reuben sends Thomas into unconsciousness, and Agnes shouts out in disgust and fear.

AGNES

Stop. Reuben. Stop.

Reuben looks up, and like a man recovering from a trance, he refocuses on the silent faces staring at him.

Reuben looks back down at Thomas and spits into Thomas' face.

Reuben climbs off Thomas, and, as a Lackey hands him his shirt and he puts it on, he looks at the crowd in disgust.

REUBEN LEE

(In Irish)

Is this what civilization has
done to us?

Reuben calmly begins pouring a bottle of whiskey over Thomas as he looks at the crowd.

REUBEN LEE

Forgot what it takes to make a
man talk? No stomach enough for
the good stuff anymore?

As Thomas coughs and regains semi-consciousness, Reuben looks down at him, then back at the crowd.

REUBEN LEE

See? I pulled my punches.

Reuben gently slaps Thomas' face to wake him and the crowd watch in quiet shock and fascination as Reuben looks to Agnes.

REUBEN LEE

And you? Whore. You dare to judge
me?

Agnes looks apologetic but Reuben ignores her then, as Thomas regains a semblance of consciousness, Reuben gives orders to the Lackeys.

REUBEN LEE

Break his legs first.

Reuben makes his way to the bar and, as the Lackeys grab Thomas in the background, Thomas whimpers.

THOMAS

Please...no...

Reuben picks up his rifle and calmly loads a bullet into it as the Lackeys hold Thomas down and spread out his legs.

Upstairs, Creedence appears on the stairwell, buckling his trousers.

Behind him the Too Young Prostitute, weeping, her nightgown bloodied, runs across the landing and disappears into one of the other rooms.

On his way to join his brother at the bar Creedence indifferently glances over at the lackeys raising a heavy table and struggling to turn it on its side.

Agnes the Whore cries out to Thomas.

AGNES THE WHORE

Just tell them where he is.

Reuben loads the second bullet into the rifle as Creedence pours a drink for both of them and glances over at the Lackeys again.

REUBEN LEE

Knows where Ned of the Hills is.

The Lackeys hold the table up, precariously balancing its heavy edge about two feet in height above the floor.

As the others continue to hold the table, one of the Lackeys drags Thomas' exposed leg in under the space between the table and the floor.

Reuben loads the third bullet into his rifle as Creedence spots a thin film of blood on his fingers and, as he looks back up the stairs in the direction where the Too Young Prostitute ran away from him, he grins with obscene memory.

Reuben sees the blood on his brother's fingers, glances up where the Too Young Prostitute ran, then shakes his head with a kind of mock disgust and twisted admiration.

Creedence watches as the Lackeys test the weight of the table, instructing each other to countdown from three.

Then, just as they are about to drop the heavy edge of the table onto Thomas' leg, Creedence shouts out -

CREEDENCE

Wait.

Everyone stops, even Reuben, as Creedence moves across to Thomas and examines his face.

CREEDENCE
I've seen him before.

Creedence looks down at Thomas' crotch.

CREEDENCE
(In Irish)
You're the one that pissed
yourself.

Reuben frowns, curious, as Creedence remembers where he knows Thomas from then quickly turns to Reuben.

CREEDENCE
I know where Ned of the Hill is.

Reuben loads the fourth bullet and looks with pride at Creedence.

REUBEN LEE
And they say my brother is
retarded?

Reuben gestures to Archie and Sullivan and, as they quickly push their drinks away and tie on their gun-belts, Creedence does the same.

The Lackeys holding the table, knowing that Reuben has now got the information he needs, don't know what to do.

Reuben loads the fifth bullet, looks to the Lackeys, indifferently gestures for them to go ahead, and as he turns back to the bar, we stay on him as he raises the whiskey his brother poured for him.

As Reuben slugs back the glass of whiskey he doesn't flinch as he hears...

- the thud of the table followed by

- a sickening scream

...as, off camera, the lackeys break Thomas' leg.

Reuben touches the remains of the blood infused spit left on his face from Thomas.

He examines it on the tips of his fingertips, then doesn't even bother look back around as he loads the sixth and final bullet, snaps closed the rifle, and calmly intones.

REUBEN LEE
I said both of them.

EXT. FORESTS OUTSIDE TOWN - NIGHT

Ned runs with incredible speed through the thick forest towards town.

EXT. TOWN - NIGHT

As Reuben, Creedence, Archie and Sullivan mount their horses Archie and Sullivan are drunk with the power of whiskey and pack mentality.

Yet Reuben is surprisingly clearheaded.

REUBEN LEE

Underestimate him at your peril gentlemen.

But Archie and Sullivan are too charged up on violent yearning to listen to Reuben's warning and they charge away on their horses.

Reuben briefly caresses his rifle, something almost intimate in his touch, then bolts after them.

EXT. FOREST OUTSIDE TOWN - NIGHT

Ned arrives at the edge of the forest that borders the outskirts of town and as he stops and watches through the remaining trees he breathes deeply, the effect of running and age catching up on him.

But he suddenly stops breathing when he hears the faint whimpering of somebody or something.

He scans the area then sees Thomas' semi-naked broken body, looking more animal than human, slumped in the mud; Thomas silently staring in wretched pain at his own broken limbs.

As Ned is about to make his way towards Thomas, one of the Lackeys who broke Thomas' leg stumbles out of the bar and Ned holds back in the darkness.

As the Lackey prepares to urinate, he sneers over at Thomas and speaks to him in Irish.

LACKEY

Now don't you be running nowhere.

The Lackey laughs at his own cruel joke.

Then, as he continues to urinate, the Lackey strolls over towards Thomas, the splashing urine drawing closer to Thomas' slumped form.

LACKEY

Thirsty?

As the urine is just about to splash onto Thomas the Lackey is suddenly distracted by the blur of fast and silent movement from behind.

But, before he can determine who or what it is, his neck is snapped, and, as he slumps to the murky ground, the last of the urine spills out onto his body as it twitches with too many nerve endings wondering where Death just came from.

Thomas is frightened when he peers at the twitching body of the lowlife but, when he looks up and sees Ned standing before him, he sobs, a boy in need of a father.

Ned quickly assess the multiple injuries to Thomas' body.

He picks up a small stump of branch, kneels down in front of him and, as Thomas tries to choke back his relief, Ned whispers in Irish.

NED

Nobody's going to hurt you
anymore.

Thomas tries to thank Ned but broken teeth and a crushed spirit render his words a quiet sob.

Ned raises the small stump of branch to Thomas' mouth but when he hears the horses he gestures to Thomas to wait.

Ned quietly moves over to the horses and unties one of them, but as he is about to move away, one of the other Lackeys who broke Thomas' legs comes out of the bar.

Ned conceals himself among the horses and the Lackey makes to go back inside but then the Lackey stops when he glances over at Thomas and sees there are two lifeless forms on the ground instead of one.

The Lackey squints to see better, then slowly draws his gun.

He takes a few nervous steps towards the two slumped forms.

When he sees who it is on the ground he spins around to warn the others but he is met by the horrifically powerful force of the stump of branch held tight in Ned's fist smashing with full velocity into the Lackey's face.

Thomas watches as the Lackey slumps to the ground and as the Lackey attempts to raise his gun, Ned is on top of him, ferociously pounding the stump of branch into his face, until there is no life left.

Ned sees the freed horse moving over to the grass at the edge of the forest.

He picks up the Lackey's gun and quickly moves towards Thomas, the bloody stump of branch in his other hand.

He takes the other dead Lackey's gun and slips both guns under his belt then calmly whispers to Thomas in Irish.

NED

Bite down hard.

He gently puts the wood against Thomas's mouth and Thomas clamps it in his teeth.

Ned nods and, Thomas, almost weeping with fear at the inevitable pain that is about to happen, nods back.

As Ned lifts him up, cradling him in his arms, the searing pain racks through Thomas' broken body and, as Thomas bites down hard on the wood and struggles not to scream out, Ned gently carries him through the rain to the horse at the edge of the forest.

EXT. OONAGH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

As the rain pours down Ned slowly approaches the house and sees the horses tied up outside.

But, rather than hiding, Ned walks his horse to the centre of the empty space outside Oonagh's house and dismounts.

He slides off the horse, then gently helps Thomas off and lets him sit on the wet ground.

Ned takes the guns he took from the dead Lackeys and, without hesitation, walks straight to the door and kicks it in.

INT. OONAGH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Sean wails out in terror as Ned steps inside, and with astonishing speed, coldly and efficiently extends the two guns, and, before anyone can react, puts a bullet in the forehead of both Archie and Sullivan.

Archie and Sullivan slump to the ground but as Ned stands, arms outstretched, crucifixion style, Reuben, coolly holds the powerful rifle gun against the front of Ned's throat.

REUBEN LEE

Imagine if you will the cranial
damage a weapon of this calibre
will do at such close quarters?

(MORE)

REUBEN LEE (cont'd)
Told the townsfolk you had one
too. Fear inspired willingness to
swallow every fallacy is a thing
of beauty don't you think?

Ned glances at the knife on the table.

REUBEN LEE
I know you're fast Ned but, even
by your standards, I think the
general outcome of this poker
game is a forgone conclusion.

Ned still holds out the guns, unwavering in the face of
death.

REUBEN LEE
Can't tell you how much I admire
that defiance. So much, in fact,
I think we might raise the bet.

A soft whimpering wafts through the pouring rain outside
and Reuben gestures for Ned to look around.

As Ned looks around, he sees in the open area outside,
Creedence holding Thomas upright, his hunting knife firmly
held against Thomas' throat, and, as the rain pours down
around them, Creedence shouts in at Ned.

CREEDENCE
Is it you by chance who be Ned of
the Hills?

Ned looks into Thomas' eyes as Thomas tries not to weep.

REUBEN LEE
Nice poker bluff Ned, convincing
Creedence you were the cowardly
kind. Still want to gamble, or
fold? I might let the broken
bodied boy live. He didn't give
you up by the way. Most men twice
his age couldn't take that pain,
but, your son; barely got ball
hair yet, and he still didn't
give you up.

NED
(In Irish)
He's not my son.

REUBEN LEE
He's more your son than you
think. I may also allow blood to
remain flowing in the woman and
other spawn too.

Ned stares at Reuben, calculating the possibility of death for all.

REUBEN LEE

You came with two single shot
pistols against a six shooter
Ned. You'll never make General
with such planning.

Reuben glances at Oonagh's knife on the table, drops the guns and, as they fall to the floor, Reuben keeps his rifle trained on Ned.

REUBEN LEE

Keep those hands raised high.

As Ned keeps his hands up, Reuben relaxes, growing in confidence and playfulness.

REUBEN LEE

I wonder which of us killed more
Ned of the Hills? You or me?

Ned doesn't respond.

REUBEN LEE

It was your doctor told me about
you. Right or left?

Still at extended arms length, Reuben slowly slides the barrel of the rifle from Ned's chin down to the centre of his chest.

REUBEN LEE

Which is it?

Reuben slides the barrel of the rifle across Ned's chest, making sure it never raises off the flesh, towards Ned's right shoulder and places the barrel firmly in the soft area where the shoulder joins the rest of the body.

REUBEN LEE

Far as I remember it's in the
left, isn't it?

Reuben slides the barrel of the rifle across to the same area on the left hand side.

REUBEN LEE

Or is it right?

Reuben playfully moves the gun back and forward from left to right, each time the weapon never losing contact with the flesh and the finger never less than firm on the trigger.

REUBEN LEE

Not going to tell me? Right or
left, left or right, right or
left...?

As he repeats this mantra he stops the gun on the right hand side and casually pulls the trigger.

Oonagh and Sean wail in horror, and bone and flesh shatter, as the close range powerful bullet explodes into Ned's shoulder.

Ned is stunned as he feels the pain tear through his body and hears Creedence cackle with laughter outside.

As Reuben brings the barrel of the gun back up to Ned's face, Oonagh screams out.

OONAGH

DON'T!!!

But Reuben just stares at Ned as Oonagh's scream reverberates around the house.

REUBEN LEE

I'm Reuben Lee. Reuben Lee. Yet folk don't mention my name the way they mention yours? Ned of the Hills. We fought in the same war. Did the same things. Yet they don't they have that quiver when they say my name? I'm Reuben Lee. Who are you?

Ned looks to Sean, calmly absorbing his fear, then back to Reuben.

NED

(In Irish)

Let them go.

REUBEN LEE

You're telling me what to do? You don't tell Reuben Lee what to do Ned of the Hills. He tells you.

Oonagh holds Sean close to her.

OONAGH

The war is over.

REUBEN LEE

War is never over lady, hate just lies in waiting.

OONAGH
 (In Irish)
 Don't do this.

REUBEN LEE
 Seems you have an admirer Ned.

Reuben calls out to Creedence, mockingly sentimental.

REUBEN LEE
 Ned has himself an admirer
 Creedence, what do you think of
 that?

Creedence glances at Sean and gently calls back to Reuben with the quietly unashamed pride of the committed pederast.

CREEDENCE
 I got some admiration in me too.

Ned looks out and sees Creedence staring at Sean.

Creedence winks at Ned then turns to Thomas, and as he forces Thomas' face around so Ned can see it, he gleefully whispers.

CREEDENCE
 Agnes do her finger trick to you?

Creedence makes sure Ned is watching in the distance as he slides his dirty finger into the side of Thomas' mouth.

As Thomas winces with pain, Creedence's slides his finger along the rim of Thomas' gums and pushes it inside the stretched skin of his cheek.

Thomas begins to choke and Ned makes to move towards the knife but Reuben cocks the rifle again.

REUBEN LEE
 The man's entitled to a little
 love.

Oonagh almost breaks as she watches Creedence abuse her son.

REUBEN LEE
 She your woman Ned?

Without taking his eyes off Ned, Reuben addresses Oonagh.

REUBEN LEE
 Raise that sizable shape of yours
 aloft and help this man remove
 his shirt lady; I fear it's in
 need of washing.

Oonagh hesitates, and looks at Ned.

REUBEN LEE

Shy? That's very touching. You got a good one here Ned.

Ned glances at the knife and nods at Oonagh to do as Reuben says.

Oonagh tries to take off Ned's shirt as gently as possible but the pain in his mangled right shoulder makes it very difficult.

Sean cries as Reuben calls out to Creedence.

REUBEN LEE

They're putting on a show for you Creedence.

Thomas watches from outside, the fear of his mother's intimacy with Ned now gone, and as she glances out at him with the knife at his throat, and Creedence's filthy finger in his mouth, she bites back rage and tears.

Reuben follows her glance and gleefully calls out to Creedence.

REUBEN LEE

This is how it ends Creedence. Herod brought the head of a mere John the Baptist, but old Reuben Lee, he's going to bring the severed crown of the mythical Ned of the Hills.

Creedence delights as he calls back to Reuben.

CREEDENCE

King Reuben Lee.

As Reuben laughs, Oonagh steals a quick glance at the knife, but Ned imperceptibly nods no - not yet.

REUBEN LEE

What think you lady? After the town dances around his head, we can do a little uninhibited dancing ourselves?

Reuben calls out to Creedence.

REUBEN LEE

Is not she in surprisingly robust condition for a body that's pushed out two bastards? What think you Creedence?

But Creedence is too busy watching his finger slide from one side of Thomas's mouth to the other to reply.

REUBEN LEE

Then again poor Creedence's taste
is for flesh a little younger.

Reuben glances at Sean and winks.

REUBEN LEE

A great deal younger.

Reuben gestures for Oonagh to stand back and, still holding the rifle at arms's length, he circles Ned.

Ned watches the knife, biding his time.

REUBEN LEE

No moving my friend, I need to
play doctor for a moment.

Reuben sees the fresh hole in the back of Ned's left shoulder where the bullet should be - but is not.

And for the first time Reuben becomes truly enraged and smacks the butt of the gun into the back of Ned's head.

Ned collapses to the ground.

Reuben stands above the semi-conscious Ned, puts the gun directly on the back of his head then angrily calls out to Creedence.

REUBEN LEE

Seems they're trying to deceive
old Reuben too, Creedence.

Creedence becomes uneasy and presses the knife deeper into Thomas' neck and calls back.

CREEDENCE

What's wrong?

REUBEN LEE

The black magic. The old
switcheroo. Now you see it, now
you don't.

Reuben forcefully pushes his thumb through the fresh stitches on the wound in Ned's left shoulder opening the hole anew and, as, Sean cries out in terror and runs into the darkness of the bedroom, Reuben calls out to him.

REUBEN LEE

You can't hide in there boy,
Creedence has your scent now.

Ned experiences excruciating pain, blood spurts out around Reuben's thumb as he roughly pokes about inside.

REUBEN LEE
Stitching is new.

Despite the horrific pain, Ned concentrates on the knife.

Sweating, Reuben wipes his face with his fingers, smearing the blood over his face, then he stares at Oonagh.

REUBEN LEE
Bullet is one of a kind. Where is it?

As Ned stares at the knife, Oonagh doesn't answer Reuben.

REUBEN LEE
Don't make me ask you again lady.
After Creedence satiates himself
on the boy I'll set him on you.
Tear your progeny organ out with
his teeth, he will.

Oonagh notices something behind Reuben, becomes calm, and rolls the bullet across the floor.

As Reuben stops the rolling bullet with his boot, he leers at Oonagh.

REUBEN LEE
Sorry, I'll probably let him have
you anyway.

As Reuben picks up the bullet and examines it, there is an almost imperceptible hint of movement in the dark doorway of the bedroom behind him.

REUBEN LEE
That's the one.

Ned rushes for the knife but

- just as he gets his hand to it

- there is a deafening gunshot blast

- and Ned freezes in mid attack, the knife inches from Reuben's throat but it's journey incomplete

- as Reuben stands, stock still, a look of dumbstruck incomprehension on his face

A small trickle of blood slowly etches its way down from Reuben's nose into his mouth and he sways slightly.

Reuben turns to look over his shoulder and sees nothing then he looks down to see Sean holding his mother's smoking shotgun.

As death speeds its way through Reuben's insides, his knees buckle and Sean looks to Ned, no words necessary.

And, realizing that death has been brought to him by a nine year old boy, Reuben's final words sum up his incomprehension at his inglorious fate -

REUBEN LEE
I'm Reuben Lee...

Reuben slumps to the ground, dead.

Outside, Creedence wails a guttural primal scream of shock, terror, and heartbreak.

CREEDENCE
REUBEN!!!!!!

And as Ned stares out at him Creedence repeatedly wails his brother's name but when he sees the cold look of death in Ned's eye's Creedence suddenly stops.

EXT. OONAGH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

As panic takes over him Creedence grips the knife tighter against Thomas's throat and screams at Ned.

CREEDENCE
STOP NOW!

Ned picks up Reuben's rifle and walks out the door towards them.

CREEDENCE
I'LL SLICE HIS HEAD OFF!!!

But Ned ignores him and, while still walking towards Creedence, from a remarkably long distance, and using only one hand -

- Ned cocks Reuben's rifle, shotgun style, and, without even taking aim

- he releases a single shot

- and as Creedence's tries to wail his brother's name once more

CREEDENCE
REUB...!!!

- his voice is suddenly cut off by the bullet slamming into the side of his head, claiming a portion of his skull en-route.

Almost suspended in time and space Creedence remains open mouthed and semi-standing, his brother's unfinished name still on his tongue.

And as Thomas slips out of Creedence's lifeless arms onto the ground, Ned continues walking towards them.

He calmly re-cocks the rifle shotgun style again and, as another bullet slams into Creedence's chest, his breastplate shatters on impact.

- another bullet smashes into his open mouth, shattering teeth and flesh.

- another smashes through his throat, tearing off a large gash of muscle and bone.

- another rips off his cheekbone and ear.

- and though there are no bullets left Ned does not stop his barrage of re-cocking and shooting and empty rifle as he calmly traverses the distance between them while the long dead Creedence at last hits the mud.

And as Sean and Oonagh and Thomas watch, and even though Creedence is clearly dead, Ned stands over the corpse and continues calmly re-cocking the vacant rifle chambers and pulling the trigger, the empty barrels pushing nothing but air into Creedence's breathless corpse.

As he continues this reflex ritual of death Oonagh slowly approaches.

She tentatively reaches out to touch his hand.

As the tips of her fingers touch his trigger finger, Ned pauses.

Then slowly he removes his finger from the trigger.

They stand above Creedence's corpse in silence and Oonagh looks to Thomas and he stares back, everything forgiven.

Through the rain, Oonagh sees the minutest sliver of dawn light forming in the east, and she speaks softly to Ned in Irish.

OONAGH

There isn't much time.

Ned holds Reuben's rifle between his hands and stares at it then looks back at Sean in the doorway, man and boy silently and gratefully acknowledging each other.

Oonagh gently takes the gun from Ned and she watches as he moves to Thomas and, though the muscles in his right shoulder are badly damaged from the gunshot, Ned still lifts Thomas up, cradles him, and carries him into the house.

Oonagh heads towards the house then stops, goes back, picks up Creedence's knife, looks at his now unrecognizable face, then she moves back into the house.

INT. OONAGH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

As Ned lays Thomas down Oonagh enters, gently touches Thomas, kisses Sean, then the boys and Ned watch with curiosity as she reaches down to Reuben's hand.

Oonagh prizes open Reuben's dead fingers and picks the bullet out of his hand.

She places the bullet in her teeth, drags off Reuben's distinctive coat, then takes the knife, and cuts through Reuben's shirt, tearing it in half with a single dexterous slice of the knife.

Thomas and Sean look to her, confused, and as she takes the needle and twine from the table, she looks to them and they speak in Irish.

OONAGH

Does truth matter in a town
addicted to myth?

She threads the twine through the needle and looks to Sean.

OONAGH

Help me take his boots off.

Sean hesitates then quickly grabs Reuben's boot and as he starts pulling, Ned watches.

Oonagh brings the boots over to Ned and he stares at her, quietly curious.

OONAGH

Time to die Ned of the Hills.

Ned looks down at Reuben's corpse, takes the boots off Oonagh and, as she ties the twine around the bullet, Ned sits to put the boots on.

OONAGH

Help him Sean, good boy.

Sean puts the full force of his shoulder behind his endeavor as he excitedly pushes Reuben's boot onto Ned's foot while Ned continues to watch Oonagh as she ties the twine into a bow onto the extracted bullet.

Oonagh stands over Reuben's body and as she dexterously slides the needle and attached bullet in through Reuben's slack-jawed open mouth and vigorously works it through the skin, down his neck, towards his left shoulder, Thomas looks at Reuben's lifeless face and struggles to speak.

THOMAS

They'll know his face.

As the needle and twine exit Reuben's body, there is no bullet attached, and as, Oonagh puts her fingers to her lips to gently hush Thomas, she picks up Reuben's rifle.

OONAGH

Sean, wait outside.

The last place in the world Sean wants to be is outside but, as he attempts to speak, Oonagh cuts him off.

OONAGH

Now.

As Sean looks to Ned, Ned gently nods back, comforting him.

EXT. OONAGH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

As Sean exits, the door is closed behind him and he stands alone outside looking into the dark night.

Frightened, but compelled, Sean slowly walks in the direction of Creedence.

INT. OONAGH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Oonagh extends the rifle to Ned, but Ned just stares back at her.

OONAGH

You need to be buried once and for all.

Ned looks to Thomas, down at Reuben, then reaches out and slowly takes the rifle.

Oonagh holds Thomas as both of them watch Ned take a single bullet from Reuben's strap.

Ned stands over Reuben, places the gun above Reuben's face, but as he is about to load the bullet, Oonagh suddenly interrupts.

OONAGH

Wait.

Ned turns to Oonagh as she kisses Thomas on the head then she approaches Ned with her hand held out for the rifle.

Ned looks at the rifle and hesitates.

NED

You ever kill a man?

OONAGH

He's already dead.

Ned loads the rifle with the single bullet and holds it.

NED

You don't have to do this.

Oonagh looks to her son's broken body then back to Ned.

OONAGH

I do.

She touches the rifle but Ned doesn't let it go.

She softly lifts his hand off, no resistance in his powerful fingers as she slowly takes the gun from him.

Oonagh stands above the corpse, points the barrel of the gun into Reuben's dead face, tightens her finger on the trigger, but stops as Ned tenderly advises -

NED

Turn away.

Oonagh turns her head to the side, looks to Thomas, and, as he almost imperceptibly nods back to her, Oonagh's finger tightens on the trigger.

EXT. OONAGH'S HOUSE - NIGHT/DAWN

Fear grips tighter on Sean as he tentatively draws closer to the badly shot-up body of Creedence then he is startled by the sound of the gunshot blast from inside.

As he bolts back towards the house, the door opens, and when he sees his mother standing there, Sean jumps into her arms and curls into her.

Oonagh lifts him up, holds him tight, and whispers:

OONAGH

It's nearly over.

As they go back inside Ned is struggling to put Reuben's distinctive coat on over his own and, as Oonagh helps him, the pain sears through Ned's bullet wound, but he just focuses intensely on Oonagh's eyes and struggles to push that pain away.

As Oonagh buttons the coat, they are close, intimately close, yearning barely buried beneath facade.

Oonagh puts Reuben's hat on Ned, and, in the half light, Ned could pass for Reuben.

Oonagh stands back and, as she, Sean and Thomas look at Ned with the depth of feeling that can only be born in people who have confronted hell together, Oonagh whispers the same words as before but their meaning is very different now.

OONAGH

Not all men are born to be heroes.

As Ned moves to exit, he stands at the door, and as the rain pours down outside, he stops, with his back to them, hesitates, then turns around to look at this remarkable woman and her two brave sons, and, though Ned's eyes still appear cold, his words are not.

NED

I never had...family.

Ned pulls the cloth over the lower part of his face, his hat down over his eyes, and exits into the rain.

INT. JUDGE'S HOME - NIGHT/DAWN

As dawn threatens to break in the night sky the Priest bangs on the door of the Judge's house.

INT. JUDGE'S HOME - NIGHT/DAWN

The snoring Judge lies with Agnes the Whore and, as he nuzzles into her, she pushes him away in hungover disgust.

The pounding on the door awakens the Judge and, as he stumbles out of bed and answers it, he sees the Priest staring down the rain swept muddy street.

As the Judge squints to see through the teeming rain, he spies the form of Reuben Lee on his distinctive horse with another horse behind him, ambling their way towards the makeshift courthouse.

As the Judge strains his eyes further he sees there is a corpse slumped over the second horse.

Without pausing to get dressed the Judge grabs his long coat, and, as he and the Priest run towards the court, they see the silhouette of Reuben dismounting in the distance, then climbing the court steps, and blasting the lock off the door with his powerful rifle.

EXT. OUTSIDE COURTHOUSE - NIGHT/DAWN

As the Judge and Priest arrive outside the courthouse, the other townsfolk, awoken by the rifle blast, start to spill out onto the street only to hear a second rifle blast come from inside the courthouse.

As they look up the steps at the empty courthouse doorway, the silhouette form of Reuben Lee, holding the bounty bag, appears in the doorway.

He stands deathly still and strong in the pouring rain, the rifle propped against his shoulder, the hat tilted down, and the defiance of a killer in his eyes, and the cowed townsfolk look up at him as if he were the angel Lucifer himself.

The Judge bellows up at him through the rain in Irish with a mixture of fear and excitement.

JUDGE

Reuben, wait. He hasn't been identified yet.

The Judge grips the wet blood soaked hair of the corpse on the horse and pulls up the face.

As the Judge reveals the unidentifiable mess of bone, blood, and battered skull, some of the townsfolk recoil in horror.

The Judge drops the disfigured face and rips at the corpses' soaked shirt and, as the townsfolk see the protrusion on the left shoulder of the corpse they become excited with renewed bloodlust.

But, as a knife comes flying through the air from Reuben's direction and sticks in the ground beside the Judge, they step back in collective fear as they see Creedence Lee's distinctive knife standing upright in the muck.

The Judge hesitates, looks up as the unmoving form of Reuben on the courthouse steps, then he slowly picks up the knife, and as people back away, he hesitates, then slices into the flesh of the corpse and removes the bullet.

As he squints to focus on the bullet the townsfolk wait with bated breath, then he holds it up, and shouts:

JUDGE

It's the bullet. It's Ned of the Hills.

The townsfolk spontaneously respond in ecstatic cheer, but when they look back up to Reuben, he is gone.

As they look around, they see his distinctive horse and silhouetted form calmly ambling their way out of town.

PRIEST

They'll build statues to that man.

MAYOR

Monuments.

As Ned-dressed-as-Reuben slowly vanishes into the darkness the sun begins to rip through the rain behind the townsfolk.

As the downpour eases off and dies, the Narrator's voice returns:

NARRATOR (V.O.)

And thus was born the myth of Reuben Lee.

- The townsfolk watch as the headless body is hoisted on a rope above the town and a raven alights to pluck off a piece of flesh.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

The greatest bounty hunter of them all.

- Smiling Pilgrims flock to the now safe shrine.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Reuben Lee; the man who brought back the severed crown of...

- At the riverbed Ned helps an excited Sean as he catches his first fish.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Ned of the Hills...

- Sean runs into the house to his mother and shows her the fish he caught.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Whose body was hung for two weeks outside town.

As Oonagh congratulates Sean, Ned steps inside, and he and Thomas both watch Oonagh and Sean...

NARRATOR (V.O.)

A warning to all future bandits.

...and though nobody says it, they all feel it; they are family.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Reuben Lee was never seen in these parts again, but, whenever children asked about him...

- Attentive children around a campfire attentively listen to their elderly storyteller.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Some would claim they read he was in Spain, a mercenary in the war.

- Dressed in the Spanish farmer's apparel Reuben valiantly fights; his fellow freedom fighters by his side; and, as a bullet whizzes past his head, just missing its target, his men laugh with relief and pride at their leader.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Others claimed they heard he was in France, a confidant of the palace.

- At the palace ball the King looks on with a mixture of pride and jealousy as the Queen barely conceals her desire for Reuben when he leads her to the floor to dance.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

And some even claimed...

- The exquisite grandeur of the Grand Canyon looms in the background as a waistcoat clad photographer with one of the very first cameras looks through his viewfinder.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

...that old Reuben Lee might have made it...

- As we look through the viewfinder, the Grand Canyon is reduced to the small limitations of the camera lens.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

...as far as...

- As the photographer's out of focus subject, clad in traditional cowboy gear, steps in front of the lens, the photographer focuses.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

...America.

- And we see, dressed in full authentic cowboy regalia and standing against the backdrop of the Grand Canyon, handsome, debonair, and pointing a gun directly at the camera, Ned of the Hills.

FIN.