

E-Towne

When a quiet New Mexico town is shaken by a series of murders, a ruthless gunfighter with a violent past uncovers the truth and wrestles with trusting the law or delivering the justice no one else dares to seek.

DOUGLAS WILKINSON

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

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FADE IN

EXT. NEW MEXICO - EVENING

The sun blazes over a cold New Mexico day. It's the in-between season where snow falls in the peaks, while the valleys below stay warm.

A soft breeze WHISPERS through the tall pines, swaying branches in a tranquil rhythm.

Snow glistens, untouched, as a creek winds down the mountainside.

Crows CAW overhead, echoing in the stillness.

CLAY ALLISON (VO)

When I was young man, Maw used to sit us kids down in the evenin's... read from a book by some fella named Thoreau. Yankee writer, I reckon. There was one line that always stuck with me. Can't rightly say why. He wrote: *"The hero is most often the simplest and obscurest of men."* I reckon there's some truth in that.

A deer stares out across the ridge. Still. Watchful. Majestic.

CLAY ALLISON (VO) (CONT'D)

I am a simple man. An obscure one too. I ain't no hero. Never aimed to be. But, if doin' what *needs* doin' makes you a hero... well, maybe heroes ain't all they cracked up to be.

Peace. Stillness. Then -

SPLAT - Blood spatters the pristine snow.

A battered foot slams down, breaking the snow and calm with a sickening THUD.

FADE TO BLACK

CLAY ALLISON (VO) (CONT'D)

Sometimes, when the law fails you, you have to get your own hands dirty. That's all I did.

FADE IN

A woman stumbles into frame bleeding, bruised, barely upright. BREATHS are heavy. Every step is a struggle.

A walking stick wedged under her arm is close to snapping as it trembles under her weight.

FADE TO BLACK

CLAY ALLISON (VO) (CONT'D)
A good deed... maybe. A hero? No...
no.

FADE IN

She MOANS softly, every inch forward, a battle. Her face is swollen, blood matting her hair. The miles behind her were pure hell. The few still ahead may kill her.

FADE TO BLACK

CLAY ALLISON (VO) (CONT'D)
One would think, what's legal and
what's right... ought to be the same
thing.

FADE IN

EXT. NEW MEXICO - NIGHT

She breaks through the tree line into a wide-open meadow.

She freezes. Her swollen eyes lock on a distant sight.

ELIZABETHTOWN.

A full moon rises over the rooftops, casting a silver glow on the scattered buildings nestled in the valley.

She finds the strength to keep moving. Some call it a second wind. Her pace quickens.

This town always felt small to her. Now it looks like hope, salvation, maybe even... justice.

TITLE CARD: E-Towne

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN - MORNING

Title card: Elizabethtown, NM - September 1870

The leaves shift colors, yet the valley grass remains green. Under a crisp late fall sky, the town hums.

From the far end of the main street, a lone rider appears, kicking up dust with every step of his horse.

CLAY ALLISON - 30 y/o. Soft-spoken, good with a knife, faster with a gun. Oddly shy around women and has no mercy for a man who raises a hand to them. Folks both respect and fear him.

He passes the livery. Horses rear and spin inside the corral, dust hanging in the air like smoke.

Two men appear from an alley; a massive crossbeam balanced on their shoulders. They grunt under the weight, shuffling toward the rising frame of a new building.

Near the well, a woman works the pump in a steady rhythm. Water SPLASHES bright in the sun, trickling into a bucket at her feet.

Up ahead, a young Ute woman crosses the rutted road, her long black hair flowing in the breeze.

Clay slows his horse as she steps up onto the boardwalk and disappears into the general store. His gaze lingers on the doorway until the shadows swallow her.

The main street opens wide. Clay rides into the center of town and reins up in front of the timbered bank. He swings down from the saddle, dusts his coat, and ties off his horse to the hitch rail.

Clay turns to the bank and steps up onto the wooden boardwalk. Scanning the street; left, then right. Townsfolk slow, keep silent.

He pushes open the door. A bell RINGS overhead as he steps inside.

INT. BANK - CONTINUOUS

As the bell's echo fades, the sounds of the town muffle into a dull hum.

Clay strides up to the desk of Patrick Whitehall, the local banker. He halts, lifts his chin just enough. Eyes sharp, watching from under the shadow of his brim.

CLAY ALLISON
Mornin', Pat.

Patrick slowly sits back in his chair, eyes locked on Allison.

PATRICK
Mr. Allison, what brings you by today?

Clay pulls his right boot up onto a chair in front of Patrick's desk. Leans into his knee, resting both arms across it.

CLAY ALLISON
Word is you're refusin' my brother's loan. Now why'd you go and do a thing like that?

Patrick clears his throat. Eyes quicky glance down.

A shotgun positioned under his desk. His eyes then shoot up, right back to Clay.

PATRICK
It ain't personal, Mr. Allison. It's a simple matter of proper collateral.

CLAY ALLISON
Now see here, Pat. How d'you expect us to post our cattle as collateral when I'm fixin' to sell 'em before winter?

Patrick shifts in his chair, struggling to keep his voice steady.

PATRICK
Clay, be reasonable. We at New Mexico Bank & Trust need proper surety on a loan of that size. No exceptions.

Clay doesn't budge.

CLAY ALLISON
Word reached me you gave old man Stone his loan, no questions asked.

Patrick launches his eyes away for a tick.

PATRICK

I... I'm not at liberty to speak on
the affairs of other gentlemen who
bank here.

Long pause. Clay just stares. Pat swallows hard.

Clay eases his boot down off the chair, leans onto the desk.
He's close now, real close. Meets Patrick's eyes and holds
'em.

CLAY ALLISON

Now you listen here, you gutless,
soft-steppin' excuse of a man. I want
that loan. Or maybe, I come back and
fetch it myself. We both know... you
don't want that.

Patrick rises, stepping back against the door behind him,
terrified. His voice shakes.

PATRICK

Mr. Allison... I... I can assure
you...

Clay draws a long Bowie knife from the sheath at his side. He
stands still, slowly twirling the blade in his palm.

Patrick's eyes go wide with fear, his body stiff.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

Please... please, Mr. Allison... there
is no... no need for any...

Suddenly, Clay hurls the knife. It whistles past Patrick,
piercing his coat and THUNKING into the door behind him.

Patrick freezes, breath caught, eyes locked on the blade
inches from his ribs.

Clay stands steady, satisfied.

He steps around the desk, slow and deliberate, until he's
face to face with Patrick.

CLAY ALLISON

I'll be back come mornin'. Best you
have our papers ready for signin'.

Clay yanks the knife from the door with a sharp pull, then
slides it back into the sheath at his side. He looks up, eyes

steady, throwing Patrick a cold stare.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

Good day, Pat.

He tips his hat and turns, walking out of the bank. No word, no glance back.

BELL RING echoes.

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

Clay steps out onto the boardwalk outside the bank, the light catching in his eyes as they sweep the street.

At the hitch rail, two ranch hands lean casual until his gaze finds them. Their voices drop to a murmur.

Across the street, a young boy chases a hoop along the boardwalk. His mother's tone sharpens, calling him back the moment she spots Clay.

Two women stroll past, mid-conversation. Their chatter dips as they near him, eyes flicking up and down before passing.

WOMAN 1

Another man from Maxwell never made it down the pass.

WOMAN 2

How horrible.

Clay gives a polite step aside to let them pass, his expression unreadable. Then he moves down off the boardwalk into the street.

Up ahead, his brothers — MONROE and JOHN — make their way toward him.

MONROE ALLISON, late 20s - Sharp-minded and dressed, A shrewd operator. More bark than brawl but always calculating.

JOHN ALLISON, mid-20s - Wide-eyed and well-meaning, naïve, loyal to a fault. Never far when fists start flying.

MONROE ALLISON

He get the message?

CLAY ALLISON

He got a little more than that. Money
will be ready come mornin'.

MONROE ALLISON

That's what I like to hear. Reckon we
earned ourselves a drink. What d'you
say, boys. My treat.

Monroe claps his brothers on the back, and the three of them
cross the dusty street toward the saloon.

Clay spots a striking young Ute woman carrying bags of
sundries. She catches a rut in the road and stumbles, two
bags slip from her hands, contents scattering.

Clay and Monroe move quick, rushing to help as she bends down
to collect the goods. John hangs back laughing.

MONROE ALLISON (CONT'D)

Here now, miss, let us give you a
hand.

ROSA KENNEDY, 26y/o – Ute woman, long flowing coal-black
hair, quiet and soft-spoken. Carry's a gentle fragility to
her.

ROSA

Thank you. Thank you kindly.

The brothers help Rosa gather her scattered sundries.

As Clay reaches for a fallen item, his eyes catch a dark
bruise on her upper left arm.

Rosa notices his gaze. Quickly, she tugs her sleeve down,
hiding it without a word.

Clay hesitates. Not sure what he saw, or if he should say
anything. That sure looked like the kind of mark his father
used to leave.

Instead, he extends a hand. Steady. Gentle. She takes it.

As she rises, she brushes a stray lock of coal black hair
behind her ear. Clay's heart stirs, but he can't bring
himself to meet her gaze.

MONROE ALLISON

Are you alright, miss?

ROSA
Yes... yes, thank you.

The men hand her the bags.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Good day.

She collects them and moves on without a backward glance.

Clay stands rooted in the street, watching her disappear into the dust.

CLAY ALLISON
You see that?

MONROE ALLISON
See what, Brother?

CLAY ALLISON
Her arm. Looks just like Maw's back in the day.

JOHN ALLISON
Why you gotta bring that up?

Clay doesn't answer right away. His eyes stay fixed on the road as the distance between them grows.

CLAY ALLISON
I never saw how Maw could take it.

MONROE ALLISON
I hear that's Kennedy's wife. Rumor has it, he's worse than Paw was.

Clay's eyes lower. He's heard the talk. Rumblings and whispers mostly. If even half the things he's heard are true, she may be in danger.

Monroe and John head toward the saloon.

Clay lingers, his gaze following Rosa as she disappears down the street. The wind kicks up a swirl of dust in her wake, carrying it west, toward the mountains.

EXT. TAOS PASS - LATER

Snow drifts whip across the slope. An ox treads through the

snowpack, its breath steaming in the frigid air. Harnessed to a small cart stacked with fur pelts and barrels of whiskey, it drags the load up the treacherous pass.

Two men trudge alongside, huffing in the cold, prodding the animal with sticks to keep it moving at a steady pace.

FRANCISCO PADILLA - Late 20's Mexican heritage. Trader and small goods merchant.

MANUEL HERRERA - Late 20's Mexican heritage. Small-scale hunter and fur trader.

FRANCISCO

Reckon we stop for the night? I can't feel much past my knees.

MANUEL

Still a stretch yet to go. But this wind's turning mean. A fire, even a poor one would be a mercy.

Francisco draws his coat tighter, glancing up at the dull sky.

FRANCISCO

You got Kennedy's place in mind?

MANUEL

Why not? We've holed up there before. It ain't Mutz's place in E-Towne, but it'll serve well enough in a cold spell like this.

FRANCISCO

Long as Kennedy ain't there himself. Man gives the cold a mean streak.

GUNSHOT (O.S.) - DISTANCE

The men freeze, pull the ox to a lurching halt, hooves plunging into the snow. The cart groans, its wooden frame creaking under the sudden stop. Barrels and iron tools rattle and CLANK inside, a harsh metallic chorus.

The men look to the distance toward the shot.

FRANCISCO (CONT'D)

That shot... reckon it's Kennedy out huntin'?

A beat. Manuel shifts uneasily, hand tightening on his walking stick.

MANUEL

Let's keep movin'. Best not find
ourselves tangled with that man. He's
got a bad way when he's riled.

The men tap the ox's flanks with their sticks. With a GROAN and a GRUNT, the ox moves forward. The cart CREAKS to life, wheels biting low into the snow.

Breath steaming in the cold, the men walk in silence as the trail levels beneath them.

Up ahead, the land opens into a narrow clearing. Not thirty yards away, lies a figure face down in the road, motionless.

From the pines at the edge, a colossal man lumbers into view, broad-shouldered, hairy with a coat patched with hide and shadow. He crouches beside the body, hands moving fast, pulling at pockets.

The men hold up once more, squinting through the haze. Difficult to see details. Tension settles like frost on their shoulders. They don't speak. They don't move.

The stranger abruptly turns. It's CHARLES KENNEDY. His eyes find them immediately.

CHARLES KENNEDY, 30y/o - An intimidating, towering and grizzled man built like a bear. Keeps to himself, speaks when he must. There's something off in him... something dangerous.

The men suspend all movement, not a twitch. They glance at each other with worry in their eyes. The steam from their breath hangs in the air between them. It's clear Kennedy has sighted them; knows them.

Francisco gives Manuel a slow nod. His way of saying: "It's your turn."

MANUEL (CONT'D)

He dead?

Kennedy turns his attention back toward the body.

A long beat of silence.

KENNEDY

Yup.

The men trade another glance, the kind that speaks more than words. Fear flickers behind their eyes. The ox lets out a sharp SNORT, both men flinch. Their nerves wound tight.

MANUEL

You knew him?

Kennedy continues rifling through the man's pockets.

KENNEDY

Injun. Slipped out the trees. Came at me.

The travelers trade suspicious glances.

FRANCISCO

You know his tribe?

KENNEDY

Don't reckon.

The two men slowly step back. Put the cart between them and Kennedy. Their eyes never leaving him. The weight of silence hangs in the cold air.

FRANCISCO

Ain't no good in this. I'm not gettin' any closer.

MANUEL

Nor me, compadre.

Manuel slowly glances back toward Kennedy. He shakes his head, slow, like a man cursing his luck. He doesn't want to, but he knows he has to speak to him again.

MANUEL (CONT'D)

When we reach Taos, you want us to say anything? Folks his kind will want to see him buried right.

Kennedy rises slow, eyes still pinned to the body. A GRUNT and a shake of his head.

KENNEDY

Best not draw attention.

For a moment, Kennedy tilts his head, just slightly, like he's listening to someone no one else can hear. Then, just as quick, it's gone.

A heavy silence.

Francisco and Manuel understand the hint perfectly. They don't wait. They FLICK their sticks, tapping the ox hard. The cart lurches forward, wheels GROANING over frozen ruts.

As they pass above him, Kennedy turns to them again. His gaze follows them slowly, heavy and unblinking.

Neither man meets his eyes. They let the cart roll down the slope. CREAKING wood. CLINKING harness. A farewell in sound only.

Soon enough, the trees swallow them, and Kennedy is lost from sight.

FRANCISCO

You ever know Injuns to jump a man like that? I sure ain't.

MANUEL

Not 'round these parts, no.

Walking along a small ridge, Francisco's eyes drift downslope. He spots a half-covered wagon, barely visible through the trees.

He points it out to Manuel as they continue walking.

FRANCISCO

Makes ya ponder.

Manuel looks.

They both know. That man weren't no Indian.

FRANCISCO (CONT'D)

Reckon we oughta find ourselves a new trail to Cimarron. This one's turned mean.

MANUEL

Was thinkin' the same, amigo.

FRANCISCO

Come on. Cold don't bite so hard when you're movin'.

The men press on, quick pace and silent. They don't know, they don't want to know. Behind them, the memory of Kennedy lingers like a shadow.

EXT. SLOPE ABOVE THE PASS - CONTINUOUS

Wind snakes through the tall grass. Distant pines shudder under a sky gone grey.

A crow cuts across the clouds, gliding low over the trail where the cart once rolled. The wagon tracks bend out of sight. Now empty, silent and forgotten.

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN - DAY

HAMMERS echo from new wooden frames going up. Townsfolk cross the rutted dirt road getin' and goin'.

The blacksmith lifts his head from his work, soot on his brow.

Across the street, MRS. WILSON walks briskly with a basket in hand.

BLACKSMITH
Mornin' Mrs. Wilson.

MRS. WILSON
Good mornin' to you as well.

BLACKSMITH
Tell your husband I will have his new
spurs ready tomorrow.

MRS. WILSON
I will. Have a great day!

She raises a hand in a friendly wave and disappears around the corner.

Across the street, a group of miners shuffle out of Mutz's Hotel, slingin' pickaxes over their shoulders. Dust clings to their boots and faces. They pile into a wagon hitched to a pair of worn mules, bound for the dig site on Baldy Mountain.

A Wells Fargo stagecoach SCREAMS past. Reins cracking. Wheels rattling like gunfire. The driver fights the reins. Beside him, a shotgun guard scans the street. His eyes narrow on a pair of children in the road.

A sharp WHISTLE cuts through the noise.

Dust billows up in the coach's wake, swallowing the boy and girl. As the cloud clears, they sprint across the road, giggling.

They stomp up onto the boardwalk and burst into the general store, straight to the display of colorful candy jars. The perky merchant comes around the corner to greet them.

Down the block, a farmer wrestles with a crate of clucking chickens. One breaks free, wings FLAPPING. He chases it down the street as townsfolk cheer and laugh.

INT. MOE'S BARBER SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Shaving cream is WHIPPED in a mug. The brush TAPS the rim.

A man spins around in the chair. His face immediately slathered with cream.

MOE

You headin' to Taos for the festival?

CUSTOMER

Of course. Takin' the North Pass this time.

Moe places the mug aside, takes the straight razor, and slides it rhythmically across a leather strop.

MOE

That'll cost you two extra days goin' that way. Two more commin' back.

CUSTOMER

With all the trouble on Taos Pass lately. We can't risk it.

Moe pauses mid-strop. One eyebrow rises.

MOE

You don't really believe all that hooey, do you?

CUSTOMER

Even make-believe was truth once.

The bell above the door rattles softly in the wind. A lone rider's shadow drifts across the storefront... and lingers just a heartbeat too long.

EXT. KENNEDY PROPERTY - EARLY EVENING

WACK

Kennedy swings the axe with practiced force, each WACK echos sharp through the air.

WACK

The pine logs CRACK and split clean under his weight, a rough pile growing at his boots. With every stroke, his movements grow fiercer like he's chopping through more than wood.

His nine-year-old son, SAMMUEL, plays in the yard nearby, drawing shapes with a stick in the mud.

From the wooden log house, the door CREAKS open. Rosa steps out onto the stoop, shielding her eyes against the setting sun.

WACK

ROSA

Sammuel!

The splitting wood drowns out her call.

ROSA (CONT'D)

Sammuel! You come now. Time to be inside.

SAMMUEL

Ok Momma.

(beat)

Paw, you comin' in?

Kennedy ignores the boy, continues chopping.

WACK

ROSA

Leave your Paw be. Come now.

Sammuel runs toward the house.

As he reaches the stoop, he pauses and looks back. Kennedy has stopped swinging the axe. His father stands still; eyes locked on the road.

A lone rider is coming in slow on horseback.

SAMMUEL

Momma, here comes a man.

ROSA

I see, boy. Run on inside.

Sammuel steps inside slow, eyes still fixed on the stranger. He crosses the threshold, and Rosa eases the door shut behind him with a quiet THUD.

The man approaches closer onto the property. Kennedy drops the axe and walks to greet the man.

ROY eases his horse to a stop not more than ten yards from Kennedy.

ROY

Howdy. You'd be Charles Kennedy, I reckon? Sorry for steppin' onto your land uninvited.

(beat)

Word is you offer a warm meal and a place to bed down.

KENNEDY

Bed's twenty-five cents. Another if you want supper. Ten to feed your horse.

ROY

Sounds fair. I'll take the lot. If you got space.

Kennedy eyes the man, sizing him up.

KENNEDY

Don't recall your face. What's your name, stranger?

ROY

Beggin' your pardon, sir. Name's Roy Ellis. Got caught in that storm on the north trail. Figured I'd seek shelter for the night.

Kennedy gives a slow nod, not quite a welcome, not quite suspicion. He turns toward the house.

Roy dismounts, boots landing with a dull POOF in the dirt. He

PATS his horse, follows Kennedy's stride.

INT. KENNEDY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Rosa watches from the window, her face still, but worry flickers in her eyes. Shes quiet, cautious. Her worry is hard to miss.

EXT. KENNEDY PROPERTY - CONTINUOUS

KENNEDY

What's your business?

ROY

Truth be told, boss sent me down to Santa Fe to check cattle prices 'fore winter sets in.

Kennedy's points to the rifle strapped to Roy's saddle.

KENNEDY

Gun don't come in the house. That's my rule.

A flicker of hesitation crosses Roy's face. He shakes it off.

ROY

Fair enough. Don't reckon I'll be needin' it tonight.

Kennedy gives a curt nod and motions Roy toward the house.

Roy clicks his tongue, gives his horse a light nudge, and walks it forward at a slow, deliberate pace.

INT. KENNEDY HOME - CONTINUOUS

Rosa steps away from the window and returns to the black iron stove, quietly tending the evening meal. The scent of beans and woodsmoke hangs in the air.

A moment later, footsteps sound on the stoop. The door CREAKS open. Roy steps inside, hat in hand.

ROY
Evenin', Ma'am. Name's Roy Ellis.
Mighty obliged to be stayin' under
your roof tonight.

Rosa is welcoming. She's worried, but masks it well. With
Sammuel nearby, she figures Kennedy won't try anything.

ROSA
Welcome, Roy. I'm Rosa. That there's
our boy, Sammuel.

Roy turns, tips two fingers to his brow.

ROY
Evenin', son.

Sammuel offers a quiet smile, saying nothing. He's seen too
many men enter without leaving.

ROSA
Make yourself at home. Supper'll be
ready before long. Pump's out back if
you need washin' up.

ROY
Thank you, Ma'am.

Roy steps out, easing the door shut behind him.

EXT. KENNEDY PROPERTY - CONTINUOUS

He rounds the side of the house and catches sight of Kennedy,
reins in hand, settling his horse. Roy offers a quiet nod.

Kennedy acts like he doesn't see it. Latches the gate and
walks off.

EXT. KENNEDY WATER PUMP - CONTINUOUS

Roy SPLASHES water over his hands, scrubbing hard at the
grime.

Off a ways, Kennedy walks by with Roy's saddlebag and rifle.

Roy watches him stash the gear in the barn. Can't say why,
but something doesn't sit right. Separating a man's

belongings like that.

He shuts the pump, dries off on his shirt, and heads for the house.

INT. KENNEDY HOME - CONTINUOUS

Rosa's setting bowls on the table when the door SWINGS open and Roy steps inside.

He reaches to pull the door shut - BANG. A hand slams against it. Kennedy's. In his other hand: a half-empty bottle of whiskey.

The door shudders. Roy stiffens, turns-caught off guard.

ROY

My mistake, Sir. Didn't catch you
comin'.

Without a word, Kennedy brushes past Roy. Boots POUNDING hard with every step as he disappears into the back room.

ROSA

Mr. Ellis, there's a seat over yonder
near the corner. And do excuse my
husband, he puts in long days, and
weariness has a way of makin' him...
quiet.

Roy nods his head to Rosa, a flicker of concern in his eyes, then steps to his place without a word.

ROSA (CONT'D)

Sammuel, come eat now, boy.

Sammuel steps into the room and settles into his chair.

Rosa slips in beside him, quiet as a breath, taking the seat to his right. The chair at the head of the table stands empty, for now.

A series of heavy THUMPS echoes through the house. Each one sharper, closer.

From the shadowed back room, Kennedy steps into the light and drops into the empty chair at the head of the table - THUNK.

He SLAMS the whiskey bottle onto the table. For a beat,

Kennedy sits still. A faint twitch in his brow. Like he's trying to drown something out.

A beat, then he begins to eat. Slow, deliberate, the silence broken only by the soft CLANK of his spoon against the bowl. That's the signal.

Rosa and Sammuel begin. Roy catches on and begins himself. After a few quiet moments, he breaks the silence.

ROY

Tasty fixins tonight, Ma'am.

He glances at her with a faint smile, testing the temperature of the room.

ROSA

Thank you.

She keeps her eyes on her bowl. Her voice is polite, but careful.

ROY

Sammuel, you got yourself a horse yet, son?

Sammuel perks up just a bit. His voice quicker, eyes brighter.

SAMMUEL

Yes, sir. Call him Thunder.

Kennedy shifts slightly. One ear tilts toward the corner of the room. His spoon pauses mid-air, like he's listening. Then it clinks softly back into the bowl.

ROY

Thunder? That's a strong name for a horse. He got any speed to him?

SAMMUEL

Yes, sir. He'll outrun any horse, I swear it.

Roy chuckles softly, TAPS his spoon on the rim of the bowl.

ROY

Maybe you show me tomorrow 'fore I ride out. Little race, what do you say?

As if Sammuel had forgotten all the events before. His childlike demeanor breaks through.

SAMMUEL

Aw, Mama, can I? Please, can I?

Rosa casts a glance toward Kennedy. His eyes are already on her. Cold, hard and unblinking.

No words needed. She understands.

ROSA

Another time, boy. You'll be sleepin' when Mr. Ellis rides out.

Kennedy's stare lingers for a tick. His hand grips the table edge. His eyes blink slow and unfocused, like someone whispering in the back of his mind.

Roy senses the strain in the room.

They continue their meal until Sammuel just can't contain his childish ways.

SAMMUEL

Hey mister, I seen me an Injun just the other day. Come down from Palo Encebado mountain.

Kennedy interrupts with a COUGH, eyes shooting up at Sammuel from his bowl. He doesn't notice.

ROY

Speaking of Injuns, heard tell there's still some bands of Apache givin' trouble to settlers out this way. Yall had any run-ins lately?

SAMMUEL

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

Before Roy can respond, Kennedy stiffens. The room goes deathly still. His eyes flick to the wall, it's empty. Somewhere deep inside him, a voice starts to rise. Only he hears it.

Roy sees Rosa glance away, wincing. Holding her breath for what she fears comes next.

Sammuel sits wide-eyed, oblivious to the fire burning beside

him.

After a beat, Kennedy shudders. Settles back into his seat. Lets out an exhausted sigh.

The room breathes again. The tension softens, like warm butter on fresh biscuits.

Then — A twitch. A breath. SNAP.

Kennedy lunges upright, pistol drawn — BANG. One clean shot to Roy's chest.

Roy's body JERKS back violently into his chair, then lurches forward, CRASHING onto the table. His glowing blue eyes stay wide, locked on Kennedy. They slowly dim. He's gone.

Sammuel leaps from his wooden chair and rushes into the main room.

Kennedy surges to his feet, hot on Sammuel's heels.

Rosa, desperate to protect Sammuel, stands and clutches Kennedy's arm, her grip faltering.

Kennedy spins around like lightening. His fist CRACKING against Rosa's temple.

She crumples to the floor, dazed.

Kennedy storms into the main room after Sammuel.

The boy cowers behind a rough-hewn chair, trembling. Kennedy spots him and yanks him out by the hair.

Sammuel SHRIEKS in pain as Kennedy hauls him forward, dragging him out to face him.

KENNEDY

What'd I say about blabbin' our
affairs, boy?

Kennedy takes the boy's head and SLAMS it hard against the rough stone hearth. The CRACK of his skull sounds sharp and sudden, like the snap of dry timber.

Rosa rounds the corner just in time to see Sammuel's lifeless form slump slowly to the floor.

Kennedy's cold eyes track him every inch of the way down.

Rosa lets out a raw SCREAM. Half pain, half terror at the sight before her.

The sound stokes Kennedy's fury. In a heartbeat, he whirls on her, his giant hands swallowing her throat, hoisting her off the ground.

Gasping and choking, she thrashes wildly, kicking and clawing at the air, desperate to break free.

He slams her down onto the hard plank floor. Her body hitting with a sickening THUNK that echoes off the walls. Logs fall from the hearth pile from the force.

One hand stays locked around her throat; the other hammers her face, knuckles splitting skin with every savage blow. Her blood slings across the room with each rise of his fist.

She drives her knee up into his groin with everything she's got... he doesn't so much as flinch.

Her vision dims, the room spinning as her breath slips away. In a last, panicked burst, she scrabbles at the floor, fingers searching blind for a weapon, anything solid, anything sharp.

Her fingertips graze a log knocked loose when she hit the floor. She stretches, every muscle screaming, reaching with all she has left... until her fingers finally wrap around it.

With the last ounce of strength she could summon, she wrenched the log up and SLAMMED it into the side of Kennedy's skull.

His body stays upright, but his grip around her throat slackens. The punches stop. He sways, just barely, like a tree hit wrong with an axe.

Rosa stares up into his eyes. Wide open, glassy, and dead. At last, he tips forward and crumples to the floor beside her. Half his body weighing her down.

He's dazed, eyes unfocused, head lolling but he's not out.

Rosa GULPS in a ragged breath, chest heaving as she claws her way out from under his weight. Muscles trembling, strength scraped from the bottom of her soul. She's free.

Kennedy GROANS on the floor, blood seeping fast beneath his head, pooling dark into the wood.

Rosa stumbles to her feet, unsteady, gasping. The room spinning around her. It takes a moment to steady her breath... to force her mind clear enough to choose her next move.

Her eyes lock on Kennedy's revolver lying on the table. She makes a break for it.

Kennedy's hand shoots out and snatches her ankle. With a savage twist- SNAP -he rolls it over.

Rosa SCREAMS, pain ripping through her leg as she claws at the doorframe. She holds on, fingers white-knuckled against the wood, it's no use.

He yanks hard. She's torn from the doorway, dragged back into the room with him.

Kennedy staggers to his feet, delirious but eerily quick. Without warning, he yanks Rosa up by the leg and flings her across the room.

She SLAMS into the wall with a deafening THUNK, sliding down to rest just beside Samuel's lifeless form.

As she lies there, teetering on the edge of consciousness, he drops down on top of her. His legs pin her arms tight to the floor, his weight pressing down, trapping her legs beneath him.

His hands close around her throat once more. His squeeze is powerful but effortless for him.

She struggles, twisting and bending, desperate to break free. It's no use. Slowly, the fight drains out of her, and she accepts what's coming.

Meeting his gaze, his eyes stare back. Black and empty, with just a faint, distant flicker of the man he used to be.

Pressure tightens with every heartbeat, squeezing the last fighting breath from her. Blackness overcomes her as she fades.

Now... she's still.

After a beat, Kennedy rises, satisfied. He gives her lifeless body a long, emotionless gaze. Verifying the life has escaped her body.

He turns, crosses into the next room.

He rummages through a wooden crate. Bottles CLANK. He pulls out a half-full bottle of whiskey and settles into his chair at the table.

Quickly, the bottle runs dry. Kennedy stands, grabs another from the crate. He pulls the cork with his teeth, spitting it across the room. He takes a long, hard swig.

His head flicks toward the other room, Rosa and Sammuel still as stone.

He returns his head, glancing to Roy. His eyes still open.

He doesn't linger a moment longer. He rises and stumbles to the door, out into the evening.

EXT. KENNEDY PROPERTY - CONTINUOUS

Kennedy staggers onto the stoop. He looks left, then right, and takes another heavy pull from the bottle, nearly draining it.

He turns and locks the door from the outside.

Easing himself down, he settles on the edge of the wood planks. He leans forward, scoops a handful of snow, and presses it to the bleeding gash on his head.

The whiskey hits hard. After a moment, he slumps sideways, the bottle slipping from his fingers as he goes still.

INT. KENNEDY HOUSE - LATER

Rosa lies motionless on the floor.

Then, a breath. Shallow, but real. Her closed eyes twitch, fighting to open.

Her chest begins to stir, breath coming quicker now, slowly dragging her back toward life. Her eyes open, just enough to see she's alone.

Slowly, she turns her head toward Sammuel. A sob rises in her, but she swallows it back down, afraid even a whisper of grief might bring Kennedy back. She lingers on him for a while, fighting her raw emotions.

She slowly scans the room, eyes flicking across every shadow. She's alone, for now. Breathing steady, she gathers herself, her mind racing.

Her gaze lands on a blanket draped over the chair near Sammuell. Slowly, she reaches out, pulls it down.

Her eyes land next on the fireplace poker, resting near the hearth.

Moving slow and silent, she rolls onto her stomach, gritting through the pain. One trembling hand reaches out; she takes hold of the poker. She swallows every bit of the pain and plants the poker into the floor.

With a shaky breath, she uses it to push herself up, steadying her broken body inch by inch.

Little by little, she inches herself into the next room, each movement quiet, each step carved in pain with the injured foot. No sign of Kennedy. The house is still.

Her hand inches forward for the door, slow and wary, fingers brushing the iron handle. It groans under her grip, but the door holds fast. Locked from the outside. She's penned in.

Her mind scrambles, searching for a way, any way to survive.

She eases herself back into the main room, each step limping and shooting in pain.

Her eyes scan the walls and set on the window. She thinks fast. Escape? No. Kennedy nailed them shut a long time ago. She pictures breaking it. The shatter of glass, too loud, too risky.

Floor secured, no back door. Trapped. Her breath trembles. What now?

Then, a memory. A bat once got in the house. How? Her eyes lift slowly. The chimney.

Can she fit? Can she climb? The questions swirl, fast and panicked. But there's no time to wonder. No door. No way out. She has to try. What's left of her life depends on it.

Luckily, no fire's been lit. The hearth is cold. She crouches low, strikes a match with shaking fingers, and peers inside.

The chimney walls are lined with rough, uneven stones jutting out like crooked steps. Maybe, just maybe, enough to climb.

She finds a candle, lights it from the match, and sets it near the hearth. She pulls the blanket from her shoulders, wraps it tight around her waist, cinching it like armor.

One deep breath. She lifts her good foot and steps into the fireplace. She glances up into the dark shaft, gripping the candle between her teeth.

One big breath. With a grunt of effort, she reaches up and seizes the first jutting stone, her fingers digging in tight.

She reaches up with her other arm, fingers locking around cold stone. Gritting her teeth into the candle, she hauls herself upward, inch by inch, muffling every sound.

Her good foot finds a ledge. She braces; arms spread wide against the chimney walls and holds still.

Just a moment to breathe. A moment to gather strength for the next move.

EXT. KENNEDY HOUSE ROOF - CONTINUOUS

At the top of the chimney, a soot-covered arm breaks into the open air. Fingers clawing desperately for something to hold. Her grip scrapes along the rough edge, searching for anything to secure her freedom.

She finds a hold.

Her other arm rises from the soot and dark, joining the first. An anchor on each side.

With a final, trembling push, she hauls herself over the edge. Arms shaking, lungs burning, black from soot, she collapses onto the roof.

For a long moment, she lies still, catching her breath, the cold evening air biting at her skin. But she's out of that dungeon.

She crawls to the edge of the roof and peers down. Kennedy lies sprawled on the stoop, still out cold. But for how long?

Her heart pounds. She knows she has to move fast. He could wake any second. Her eyes catch a narrow gap between the chimney and the roofline.

Thinking fast, she uncinches the blanket from her waist and

jams one end into the crack, stuffing it tight. A makeshift rope, just maybe enough.

She inches toward the roof's edge and lowers her legs over the side, careful, slow. Her good foot searches, scraping against the wall until it finds the smallest hold.

It's just enough as she leans out, hands white-knuckled on the blanket. All her weight, all her pain, all her hope for freedom, hanging by worn fabric stuffed into a crack.

One last breath. Deep. Steady. A final leap of faith. She lets go. Lowers herself down, suspended by nothing but a blanket, willpower, and the promise of freedom.

EXT. KENNEDY PROPERTY - CONTINUOUS

She hits the ground. Filthy, shaking, but free. A breath. Then another.

With a final upward jerk, she rips the blanket loose from the chimney. Wraps it tight around her shoulders.

Without looking back, she slowly limps, inches at a time, away from the house. Away from her demon.

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN - LATER

A silver moon hangs over Elizabethtown, casting pale light on the dirt streets. The town lies still, eerily quiet. Most folks turned in after sundown.

Only Pearson's Saloon shows signs of life. Lanterns flickering and distant LAUGHTER spilling into the night.

Rosa emerges from the trees, limping into town, drawn by the faint sounds of activity that echo through the silence.

INT. PEARSON'S SALOON - CONTINUOUS

The saloon is lively tonight. Card games are in full swing, and animated VOICES trade stories over CLINKING glasses.

A handful of local businessmen nurse drinks over ledgers, and a few landowners grumble about free grazers taking liberties.

RANCHER 1

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

RANCHER 2

Here, here!

The two men CLANK their glasses and take a drink. The third
man doesn't join in. His eyes stay fixed on the table.

RANCHER 3

Loosin' cattle is one thing. One of my
best hands never made it back from
Chimayó last month.

Rancher 1 shifts in his chair, eyes narrowing.

RANCHER 1

You recollect that mess in January?
That uppity feller outta Taos gone
missin'?

(beat)

Law never did figure that one out.

RANCHER 2

What in the blazes is goin' on up
there? Earl Stillman said he lost two
men this summer.

RANCHER 3

Folks are sayin' wolves. I ain't known
no wolves to pick a man clean of all
his belongin's.

RANCHER 1

If it ain't wolves, what the hell is
taking em'?

The saloon doors SWING open. Clay Allison steps inside,
flanked by Davy. The chatter dips a notch.

Clay surveys the room with quiet calculation. No threat, but
no invitation either.

Davy tips his hat toward the ranchers. They wave back,
casual, friendly. But their eyes slide past Davy to Clay,
tracking his every step.

RANCHER 3

That Davy's all right. Nice young
(MORE)

RANCHER 3 (CONT'D)
fella. But something ain't square with
Clay.

RANCHER 1
You had trouble with him?

Clay and Davy step up to the bar. Clay nods to Mr. Pearson.
They share a warm greeting.

RANCHER 3
Me? No. I worked with him once on ML
Dalton's outfit. I seen him carve a
man open in Ft. Sumner just for
trippin' on his foot while dancin'.
Clay didn't move. Didn't even raise
his voice. Steel flashed, and it was
all over.

Glasses CLINK somewhere in the background.

RANCHER 2
You pullin' my leg. Ain't no way that
hokey tale is true.

RANCHER 3
Hell... with a man like Clay Allison,
it's them stories you keep hearing
that make you watch where you step.

He lifts his glass, sips slow. His eyes never leaving Clay.

Behind them, Mr. Pearson slides two drinks down the bar. Clay
and Davy swiftly collect them. Move to their usual table in
the back.

RANCHER 3 (CONT'D)
I'm tellin' you both right now, I ever
get twisted with Clay, I ain't
hesitatin'. Pop! Right in his damn
head.

Pause. Tension settles in like smoke.

RANCHER 2
He's behind you.

Rancher 3 jumps in his chair, hand flying to his gun.

The other two nearly spill their drinks, laughing so hard
they wheeze.

RANCHER 3

Real damn funny, you sons'a bitches.

Their laughter still echoes across the saloon.

Suddenly - CRASH (O.S.)

The saloon doors fly open. Conversation halts. The room goes instantly quiet. All eyes fixed on Rosa.

Her dress is torn. Her face battered. One eye swollen nearly shut. Blood streaks her temple. She clutches the frame with one shaking hand.

ROSA

Help.

She stumbles forward two steps, crumples to the floor with a sickening THUD.

Gasps ripple through the room.

Saloon owner, John Pearson, hustles over, concern etched deep on his face.

JOHN PEARSON

Joseph, fetch me a wet rag and some water. Quick now.

John swiftly turns his attention back to Rosa.

JOHN PEARSON (CONT'D)

Miss, are you alright?

Rosa opens her mouth, but only faint, slurred murmurs escape.

Joseph arrives with haste.

JOHN PEARSON (CONT'D)

Come on, help me set her down.

The men ease Rosa up and settle her into an empty chair.

Quiet curiosity stirs among the other patrons, who've gathered in a small crowd around her.

Settling her into the chair, John leans close, studying her eyes and the bruises on her face. His voice tightens with concern.

JOHN PEARSON (CONT'D)
Son, I'm gonna need you to fetch the
Doc. Make it quick. She's in a bad
way.

Joseph hands the glass of water to a bystander and shoots out
of the saloon.

ROSA
My son... my son.

Tears start to drip from her swollen eyes.

JOHN PEARSON
Your son, Ma'am? Where is he?

ROSA
Ho-House... Fireplace...

Rosa struggles to speak, but only mumbled sounds escape.

John moves gently to tend her wounds with the wet rag.

JOHN PEARSON
Don't try speakin' just yet, Ma'am.
You sit here and rest a spell.

Across the room, Clay instantly knows it's Rosa. He remains
seated, uncharacteristically calm.

His gaze fixed on John as he tends to Rosa, a quiet fire
burning in his eyes. He's seen this kind of violence before.

Clay's mind flips through memories like a flipbook. Memories
of his father's treatment of his mother.

Intercut memory fragments:

- Clay's Father slams a fist down on a table.
- Clay's Mother flinches, eyes wide with fear.
- Young Clay watches from a shadowed doorway, trembling.

INT. PEARSON'S SALOON - PRESENT

Clay's body shakes slightly, eyes narrowing, brow furrowing.
A mix of fear and rage. He couldn't protect his mother, but
maybe, he can protect Rosa.

The bystander steps forward with the glass of water. John takes it carefully, then holds it to Rosa's lips as she sips, slow and delicate.

JOHN PEARSON

Sweet girl, what kind of devil would
do this to you?

ROSA

Husband.

JOHN PEARSON

She said her husband did this!

With a slow dip, Clay lowers his head. The truth sits heavy. He'd been right all along.

ROSA

Killed Roy Ellis...

The name hits like a gunshot. Clay's eyes snap open. Davy freezes. They look at each other. Wide-eyed and stunned.

ROSA (CONT'D)

My son... others.

Clay leans in, voice low, sharp.

CLAY ALLISON

Fetch my brothers, will ya?

(beat)

Tell'em to bring some of the boys.

Davy doesn't hesitate. He bolts for the door with purpose.

John brushes off her words. Soothes her.

JOHN PEARSON

You just rest now, dear. No need to go
into this until the law gets here.

ROSA

No... No! you must get him!

JOHN PEARSON

Me? I'm just a barkeep, what can I do?

ROSA

Anyone... someone. He must be stopped.

The sudden spike in energy quickly fades, as does Rosa. She

delicately slumps back into her chair. Unconscious.

The saloon falls quiet for a beat. Then murmurs begin to flutter through the room like butterflies in spring.

Clay stands and makes his way over. Men step aside out of respect, or fear. He lowers himself gently by her side, eyes scanning. He studies her wounds, brushes hair from her face revealing the blood and bruises hidden beneath.

John rises, uncertain, scans the room.

JOHN PEARSON

I need a volunteer to ride to Cimmaron
and fetch the Sheriff.

A hush falls. No one steps forward.

CUSTOMER

That's a day's ride... another back.
She'll be dead by then.

A heavy silence.

JOHN PEARSON

We can't just sit here waiting.
Someone has to do something.

CLAY ALLISON

I will.

A hush suddenly falls over the crowd. John glances down at Clay.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

I'll take care of her.

Clay kneels, sliding his arms beneath her battered frame. He lifts her with careful strength, the room parting for him as if some unspoken line had just been drawn.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

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

The crowd watches, stunned, not by the violence she's endured, but by the tenderness in his hands. It's a side of Clay Allison few imagined existed.

INT. MUTZ HOTEL ROOM - LATER

Rosa lays still on the bed, unconscious. Fragile, but alive.

The doctor rounds the bed and approaches clay, wiping blood from his hands with a cloth.

DOC SIMMS

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

CLAY ALLISON

Will she be okay, Doc?

DOC SIMMS

That's up to her. If she made it from the pass, to here... in *that* condition... her will is strong.

Clay joins Doc's look of quiet admiration to Rosa.

DOC SIMMS (CONT'D)

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

CLAY ALLISON

I've got that covered.

Clay extends his hand. As the Doctor takes it, Clay leaves a silver coin in his palm.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

Thank you, Doc. For coming so quick.

DOC SIMMS

My pleasure, Mr. Allison.

Doc collects his bag, moves to the door, then pauses, troubled.

DOC SIMMS (CONT'D)

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

He doesn't look back at Clay, the meaning is clear. Clay holds still, eyes locked on Rosa, listening closely.

DOC SIMMS (CONT'D)

(softly)

I'm worried she won't survive the next one.

Doc opens the door, hesitates just a breath longer, then leaves, closing it gently behind him.

Clay stares down at Rosa, bruised and still, bathed in moonlight. His jaw tightens.

CLAY ALLISON

There won't be a next one.

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN - LATER

The town sleeps beneath a silver moon.

Wooden storefronts cast long shadows. Empty hitching posts. A rocking chair CREAKS gently in the breeze, though no one sits in it. The faint glow of lanterns spill from behind drawn curtains. Somewhere, a dog BARKS, then falls silent. Not a soul stirs.

Peace, for now. But the stillness feels borrowed. Like the town is holding its breath.

INT. ROSA'S ROOM - MUTZ HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

Clay sits near the bed, boots off, rifle across his lap, watching.

Rosa thrashes lightly, breath quickening, the nightmare has her in its grip.

FLASH - The dark cellar. Rosa on the dirt floor, wrists bound. Kennedy's boots descend the steps. He hums a tune, off-key, bending sour.

Rosa suddenly jerks awake GASPING, eyes wide, chest heaving with pain and fear.

Clay rises to his feet, sets the rifle aside, and steps toward the bed. Slow, careful, like not to spook a wounded animal.

CLAY ALLISON
Easy. You're safe now.

She tries to sit. She winces. Her eyes darting around, searching.

ROSA
Charles?

CLAY ALLISON
He ain't here.

She exhales shakily, some tension slipping from her shoulders. She sinks back down. Her eyes fix on Clay, cautious, still halfway in the dark.

ROSA
Who are you?

CLAY ALLISON
Clay. We met a few days back.

She studies him, fragile and unsure.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)
Didn't think you'd make it.

Rosa sinks back into the bed. Lets out an exhaustive sigh.

ROSA
Me either.

CLAY ALLISON
You got grit. I seen men break for less.

Rosa gives a faint, tired smile. The kind that knows better.

Her eyes drop to her hands, fingers absently tracing the worn edge of her blanket. Her breath slows. That small glimmer of resolve dims, replaced by the weight she's carried too long.

ROSA
He'll come for me. Always said he would if I ever ran.

CLAY ALLISON
Let him.
(beat)
He'll answer for what he's done.

A long, heavy pause.

ROSA
I used to know the man he was.
(beat)
Somewhere along the way something
darker took hold.

Clay says nothing. He listens. He knows that story too well.

ROSA(V.O.)
There were signs. His eyes twitched.
Like he was listening to people who
weren't there.

FLASH — A dim kitchen. Rosa stirs a pot. Behind her, Kennedy sits at the table, laughing at an empty chair. She freezes, spoon hovering.

A beat.

ROSA(V.O.) (CONT'D)
And the missing travelers that never
left the pass.

FLASH — Lantern light in the yard. Rosa's breath clouds in the cold. Half-buried in snow; the tip of a boot. Kennedy's shadow stretches over her.

Thick silence. The weight presses on Clay. He shifts, thinking of the badge he doesn't wear.

CLAY ALLISON
Do you trust the law to settle him?

She doesn't answer right away.

ROSA
No. But I'll speak it plain. Not just
for me. For the others.
(beat)
Before he tries to bury that too.

Clay stands firm, fist clinched and jaw tight.

CLAY ALLISON
Then I'll make sure you live long
enough to testify.

She nods. Just once. That's all she can give. But in her eyes, trust. For the first time in a long time.

EXT. KENNEDY PROPERTY - EARLY THE NEXT MORNING

The sun breaks over the eastern peaks of the cold Sangre De Cristo mountains. The air hangs still, thin and quiet. A lone squirrel paws at the hard earth, searching for what little's left before winter settles in for good.

Off in the distance, the Kennedy place sits silent. Charles Kennedy lies slumped on the stoop, unmoved.

A twitch runs through his shoulder. Breath quickens, sharp in the cold. His eyes snap open. Slowly, he pushes himself upright, dried blood crusted like rust across his face. He touches it, stares at his hand.

He scans the property, quiet and empty. Not a soul in sight.

He rises to his feet, unsteady, boot catching a near-empty whiskey bottle at his side. The glass clanks against the stoop, drawing his attention.

He lowers himself, picks it up, and drains what's left in one hard swig. The bottle slips from his hand, landing with a dull CLUNK.

Without pause, he moves to the door, finds it locked. Confusion flickers in his eyes. He starts working the lock. It CLICKS, unlatching.

Without hesitation, he enters, leaving the door open behind him.

INT. KENNEDY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Kennedy is startled to see the mess before him. His eyes dart around the wreckage of the night before. Roy's body lies on the kitchen table, still and cold.

He shakes his head, trying to grasp fading memories. Faint, indistinct WHISPERING VOICES fill the room. They are overlapping, urgent and haunting. All around him. Kennedy flinches as if stung.

Suddenly, a sharp, authoritative voice cuts through the whispers.

VOICE (O.S.)
Clean up this mess. Who leaves dead
bodies lying around the house?

Kennedy flinches and swiftly moves into action.

He shoves the kitchen table, scraping it across the floor with a harsh SCREECH. He hoists Roy's body over his shoulder effortlessly, muscles tense.

He pauses at the door, eyes scanning shadows as the whispers swell again. His breath quickens, a flicker of doubt or fear crossing his face.

Then, steel returns to his gaze. Without a word, he strides out, carrying the weight of his fractured mind along with the body.

EXT. KENNEDY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Kennedy steps out onto the stoop, then moves around the side of the house. Roy's body hangs limp over his shoulder, like a sack of rags, bouncing with each step.

On the side of the house, the cellar door waits. Kennedy grabs the handle with his free hand and yanks it open. The hinges GROANING in protest.

He shifts his weight, gives a sharp heave. Roy's body tumbles down into the dark below.

INT. KENNEDY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Kennedy steps back into the house and moves straight toward the main room. He halts abruptly.

Sammuel's lifeless body lies by the fireplace. His son, his own flesh and blood.

The WHISPERING VOICES return, swirling around him.

VOICE (O.S.)
He was a horrid child. Gettin' into
things that weren't his.

Kennedy slaps the side of his own head, trying to silence the voices, to drown them out. His face goes blank, void of shame

or sorrow.

He grips Sammuel's body by the back of the trousers, lifting it with cold, mechanical detachment, like hauling a sack of feed.

The voices linger faintly as he carries the weight of his shattered reality.

EXT. KENNEDY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The cellar door gapes open, waiting.

Kennedy appears at the edge and heaves Sammuel down into the dark, landing hard beside Roy.

Without pause, he kicks the door shut - SLAM - The sound echoing across the cold morning.

His figure fades from view, swallowed by the cracks between the weathered boards.

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN MAIN STREET - MORNING

Clay kicks up dust on Main Street while Doc tends to Rosa. His mind churns. Her story haunting him. He looks up and spots HENRY LOWERY, the town magistrate.

HENRY LOWREY - 40's. A fixture in E-Towne for years. A trusted lawman, but no stomach for hard decisions. Plays things too safe.

Clay hustles toward him.

EXT. BOARDWALK OUTSIDE THE MAGISTRATE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Henry fumbles with his office key.

CLAY ALLISON

Henry. A word?

Henry turns, startled. His hand stiffens on the key.

HENRY

Mr. Allison! What can I do for ya?

Clay doesn't smile back. He tips his hat, calm.

CLAY ALLISON
Got a legal matter needs your ear.

Henry swallows, covers the shift in his posture.

HENRY
I can spare a few. Come on in.

He unlocks the door with a soft CLICK. They step inside. The door swings shut behind them with a THUD.

INT. MAGISTRAITES OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Henry rounds the desk, pulls out his chair. The legs SCRAPE across the floor. He sits.

Clay stands, hands resting on his gun belt.

HENRY
What kind of trouble are you in this time Clay?

CLAY ALLISON
Not me. Charles Kennedy.

Henry hangs his head. Shoulders heavy. The weight of bad news already sunk in.

HENRY
Heard what he did to that poor girl.
And her boy. Breaks your heart knowing
a man could do something like that.

The TICKING of the wall clock fills the silence. Clay stands motionless, his jaw tight.

CLAY ALLISON
Henry, I need to know.

A pause. Clay looks him square, voice low and steady.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)
If you get him, will the law do right
by her? She deserves that.

Henry lifts his gaze. Meets Clay's.

HENRY

I take my oath serious.

CLAY ALLISON

No one's disputin' that. You always
shot me square, but I gotta know the
truth.

Henry studies him. There is weight behind his words. He
senses something else hanging in the air.

HENRY

You got somethin' on your mind,
friend?

Clay paces, wrestling with his distrust in the law. Henry
watches him, reading the conflict.

HENRY (CONT'D)

You thinking about going after him,
aren't you?

Clay stops pacing, looks Henry square in the eye.

CLAY ALLISON

I need to see your eyes.

Henry leans in, meeting his gaze. Neither blink. The room
goes still.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

I got word Kennedy has lawmen bought.
(beat)
You one of 'em?

Henry stiffens.

HENRY

I'm insulted, Clay.

CLAY ALLISON

I mean no disrespect. But, I gotta
know.

Henry exhales slowly. His voice lowers.

HENRY

Clay, listen to me carefully.

A heavy beat hangs in the air. Clay sits down, breathes deep.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Roy was one of yours. I'm sorry for
that.

The name drops like lead. Clay's gaze hardens, his jaw sets. He cuts his eyes away for a breath, then pins Henry with a stare.

HENRY (CONT'D)
That doesn't change what I have to do.
I can't tolerate vigilantes in my
town.

Clay holds Henry's stare, searching for a crack in the conviction.

CLAY ALLISON
And if the law don't hold?

Henry studies him a beat. He sees the flicker of violence in Clay's eyes, the itch in his fingers.

HENRY
Then... I guess you'll do what you're
already thinkin'.

A long, tense silence. Clay doesn't deny it.

Henry leans forward, voice firm, almost daring him.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Bring him in *alive*, Clay. I'll make
sure the law handles the rest.

Clay nods once, slowly. His eyes stay locked on Henry, calculating.

HENRY (CONT'D)
I'm serious. No slip-ups. You hand him
to me breathing or you'll answer for
it yourself.
(beat)
Do it right, Clay.

Clay exhales and stands. No words left. It's time to move.

He reaches the door, pauses, one hand on the frame. Henry's eyes are still on him.

Clay glances back, not a smile, not a nod. Just that steady, unreadable stare.

Then he steps out, the door closing behind him with a soft CLICK.

INT. KENNEDY BARN - DAY

The grindstone SCREECHES as an axe bites into it. A slow, steady rhythm. Kennedy turns the wheel with one hand, the other guiding the blade.

Dried blood stains the steel, worked deep into the grain of the handle.

The WHISPERING VOICES return. Swirling, circling, crowding his head.

VOICE (O.S.)

That man was huntin' on your land. Got what he deserved.

Kennedy's head twitches, just a flicker, before going still again. His face stays blank. Breathing slow. Eyes fixed ahead, unblinking.

Sparks spit as steel meets stone. That steady grind, over and over, like he could do it until the end of time.

Outside, a horse NAYS. Kennedy doesn't even look up.

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN MAIN STREET - AFTERNOON

Clay drifts down the dusty street, boots scuffing the hardpack. His mind's still back in Henry's office, the words gnawing at him.

Shadows from the awnings stripe his face as he passes, eyes clouded, jaw tight, a man carrying something he can't yet set down.

EXT. OUTSIDE PEARSON'S SALOON - CONTINUOUS

John and Monroe exit the saloon, squinting against the blazing afternoon sun. They pause when they spot Clay across the street, his haunted expression clear even from afar.

JOHN ALLISON
The hell's eatin' him?

MONROE ALLISON
I got this.

Monroe steps off the boardwalk, heading across the street toward Clay.

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

Clay stares toward the distant mountains, lost deep inside himself. Monroe approaches slowly.

MONROE ALLISON
(muted)
Clay.

Clay doesn't hear him, eyes fixed somewhere beyond the horizon. Monroe gently grabs Clay's shoulder—

MONROE ALLISON (CONT'D)
Clay!

Clay jolts, startled back to reality. His eyes snap to him.

CLAY ALLISON
What?

MONROE ALLISON
You alright?
(beat)
You were... somewhere else just now.

CLAY ALLISON
Just wrestlin' some demons, is all.

MONROE ALLISON
Then I got the perfect distraction.
(beat)
We're bein' rustled. I know where the bastards holed up.

Clay's eyes sharpen instantly, his darkness replaced by focus.

MONROE ALLISON (CONT'D)
You wanna come?

CLAY ALLISON

Damn right.

They share a nod, and Clay follows. His worries momentarily forgotten.

EXT. CIMMARON CANYON - NIGHT

A campfire CRACKLES in the dark, casting a warm glow across the trees. A nearby river RUSHES steadily through the canyon, peaceful and low. Distant MOOS echo from cattle bedded down nearby.

Two rustlers sit around the fire, worn from a long day of stealing. The third rustler limps up with a new bottle of whiskey. GROANS as he sits down. Their guard is down. Guns lie scattered on the ground.

Through the darkness, the Allison bunch approaches silent, methodical. Guns drawn. Eyes locked. Ready.

A GUN COCKS - O.S.

MONROE (O.S.)

Hands up! Don't move!

The rustlers freeze.

They know the sound of a man who means business.

Slowly, they raise their hands.

MONROE ALLISON

We got you surrounded so don't try anythin'.

MAIN RUSTLER

We're just passin' through. Don't mean nobody trouble.

A tense pause. Wind rustles through the canyon scrub.

MONROE ALLISON (O.S.)

You got trouble if you move for those pistols. You hear me?

MAIN RUSTLER

Yes, sir. We understand.

FOOTSTEPS grow louder. CRUNCHING gravel, they are closing in.

From the darkness, the three men emerge. The firelight catches their faces. Lights them with an amber glow.

MONROE ALLISON
Evening fellas.

MAIN RUSTLER
What's the trouble? We ain't
trespassin'.

Clay eyes the main rustler, suddenly alert.

MONROE ALLISON
You ain't trespassin', huh? Must make
you kin to Garrett Stone.

MAIN RUSTLER
Stone? Uh... yeah. He's my uncle.

Monroe steps closer, smiling warmly, but his eyes are cold.

MONROE ALLISON
Well, ain't that somethin'. Garrett
and I go way back. Worked with him for
years.

MAIN RUSTLER
Hell you say.

Monroe chuckles. Warm, but thin. A smile that don't reach the eyes.

MONROE ALLISON
Sure do. So tell me, friend, where'd
you get them cattle?

The rustlers shift uneasily. Clay tenses, recognizing something in him.

MAIN RUSTLER
We drive 'em for Mr. Stone.

MONROE ALLISON
Garrett Stone ain't had cattle for
five years.

Dead silence. Monroe's eyes narrow.

MONROE ALLISON (CONT'D)
Those my cattle you been rustlin'.

The jig is up. Arms flinch from all three rustlers. Clay's pistol WHIPS from its holster, clears leather in a blink.

POP POP

Two heads snap back, lifeless before they hit the ground. They didn't stand a chance.

Monroe stands beside him, gun in hand. Didn't have time to fire a shot. John hadn't even cleared his holster.

The main rustler in the middle freezes in shock, trembling, and halfway to his belt.

Clay approaches him, smoke still billowing from his barrel.

CLAY ALLISON
I know you.

Trembling, his head snaps up from his fallen mates.

MAIN RUSTLER
You... do?

CLAY ALLISON
Your name's Jimmy.

Jimmy eyes Clay inquisitively, can't quite place him.

JIMMY
How... how do you know?

CLAY ALLISON
Pecos.

Jimmy's eyes narrow with confusion.

JIMMY
Pecos?

CLAY ALLISON
I caught you rustling our outfits
cattle four years back.
(beat)
I gave you that limp. You were lucky I
missed.

Clay steps in closer. His jaw clenches. His eyes burn. Not at

Jimmy, but something deeper. Something still waiting back in Elizabethtown.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)
Not this time.

Jimmy's hands drop, desperately pleading.

JIMMY
NO, NO, NO...

Clay flicks his arm - POP - Jimmy's head snaps back like a whip, body crumples to the ground.

JOHN ALLISON
Dammit, how come I *never* get to shoot
nobody?

Casually holstering his pistol.

MONROE ALLISON
Cause you talk too much.

Clay lingers, staring at Jimmy's body longer than he should. He's still, silent. Monroe clocks it. Quiet for a beat.

MONROE ALLISON (CONT'D)
(leans in, quiet)
Who'd you really just kill?

Clay doesn't answer. Just holsters his pistol and turns away. His eyes... they say plenty.

INT. MUTZ HOTEL - ROSA'S ROOM - MORNING

Sunlight filters in through threadbare curtains. ROSA lies propped up in bed, weak but alert. A shallow bowl of broth sits untouched nearby.

Rosa sits in the quiet, head bent over her worn leather sketchbook. The faint scratch of charcoal on paper is the only sound. She pauses now and then, studying the page, then keeps drawing.

A soft KNOCK breaks the silence. The door CREAKS open. CLAY peeks around the frame.

CLAY ALLISON
You're awake.

ROSA
Hard to sleep with all this pain.

Clay doesn't reply. He steps inside and stands quietly at the foot of her bed.

Rosa closes the sketchbook with care and sets it on the nightstand, her hand resting on the cover a beat before letting go.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Doc came by earlier. Brought me some soup.

Clay nods in silent approval.

ROSA (CONT'D)
He said I'm already looking stronger.
Told me not to push it.

She watches him carefully. Even through swollen eyes, she sees it. Something weighing on him.

ROSA (CONT'D)
You're going after him, aren't you?

Clay lowers his gaze.

Rosa sinks into the pillow. Worry creeps across her face, not just for Clay, but for the men with him.

Clay shoots his head up. Steps toward her.

CLAY ALLISON
I want justice... for you. Not revenge.

ROSA
Why?

A beat. Her voice cracks, just a little.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Why me?

Clay stops. Shame rolls across his features. He steps back, uneasy. Paces to the chair in the corner. He sits, exhales.

CLAY ALLISON
I couldn't protect my mother.
(beat)
(MORE)

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)
I saw what he did. Hid from it. So did
my brothers. We were just boys.
(beat)
Didn't lift a finger.

He stares at the floor. The silence swells.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)
It wasn't till the war when I learned
to kill. By the time I knew how to
fight, he was already gone.
(beat)
I never got the chance to stand up to
him.

Rosa watches him. Quiet. Soft but direct:

ROSA
You think... standing up to Charles
will fix that?

CLAY ALLISON
No... it won't.

He looks up. Eyes clear.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)
But someone has to.

The words land. Rosa looks away. Shes not dismissing him,
just absorbing the truth.

ROSA
Will law hold this time?

CLAY ALLISON
Not sure. But I'm lettin' it try.

ROSA
If it doesn't?

Clay rises. Crosses to her. Their eyes lock.

CLAY ALLISON
Then I finish it.

Clay pauses. A heavy beat.

CLAY
Roy Ellis was one of mine. Green, but
(MORE)

CLAY (CONT'D)
honest. I sent him to Santa Fe on
business.
(beat)
He's comin' back in a pine box. That's
on me.

A long silence. Rosa turns her face back to the window. Her expression unreadable but her hand clutches the blanket tighter.

Clay watches her a beat longer. Then turns and walks to the door, his boots soft on the floorboards.

Behind him, her voice is steady.

ROSA
When you get there... look in the
cellar.

Clay freezes.

ROSA (CONT'D)
The garden, too.

A breath. Her voice thins but stays firm.

ROSA (CONT'D)
And the fireplace.

Clay turns halfway, eyes on her again. She meets his gaze.

ROSA (CONT'D)
You'll find enough to hang him.

Clay nods, understanding deeper than words. A flicker of something crosses his face, not just determination, but pride, in her.

CLAY ALLISON
We will.
(beat)
Thank you, Rosa.

He turns again, steps toward the door.

ROSA
Promise me one thing, Mr. Allison.

He pauses, turns back. Slower this time. Their eyes lock.

CLAY ALLISON

Yes, Ma'am?

ROSA

If the law fails...

Her jaw locks. Eyes glint. Not from fear, but fire.

ROSA (CONT'D)

Don't be merciful.

Clay offers a subtle nod. Just once. He leaves without a word. The door closes behind him softly. One final CLICK.

Her breath trembles. She shakes. Not from fear, but from release. A quiet storm breaking after too long held in. The end might finally be near.

INT. PEARSON'S SALOON BACK ROOM - EVENING

A narrow storeroom lit by a single oil lamp. Barrels line the walls. Dust hangs in the still air.

Around a makeshift table, Clay, Monroe, John, and three other men sit in tight silence.

CLAY ALLISON

Boys! We're going after Charles Kennedy.

Silence hangs. A twitch here, a glance there. Confirmation of their fear.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

All the stories you been hearin' about Taos Pass, they're true. Kennedys responsible.

The air shifts. Some nod, like they'd known all along. Others shrink from the words.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

Rosa survived and she's not safe. No one in this valley is. Not while Kennedy still breathes.

MONROE ALLISON

So... what are we talkin'? We go up there and string him up?

Clay shakes his head.

CLAY ALLISON
No. We bring him in.
(beat)
Alive.

Every jaw hits the floor, eyes wide open. A long pause.

MONROE ALLISON
You serious?

Clay nods, steady.

CLAY ALLISON
I am. He faces Henry. I got his word.

Davy leans forward, elbows on his knees.

DAVY
If we're trustin' the law on this one,
why not let the sheriff in Cimarrón
bring him in?

Clay takes a slow breath, voice low.

CLAY ALLISON
I suspect Kennedy's got him in his
pocket.

He lets that sink in. Then:

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)
And Roy...

Beat. Clay clenches a fist.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)
He never made it home. That blood's on
Kennedy. But the mistake, that's on
me.

Clay looks around the room, reading each face. A few men
shift, uncomfortable. Davy stares at the floor.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)
It has to be us. We're the only ones
who can do it.

JOHN ALLISON
Just throwin' this out there, what if
(MORE)

JOHN ALLISON (CONT'D)
the law don't work?

Clay doesn't answer right away. He thinks on it, the weight of the question sinking in. Then:

CLAY ALLISON
Then we do it, our way.
(beat)
Law or no law, this ends now.

John gives a slow nod.

Monroe chuckles dry, half in disbelief.

MONROE ALLISON
What's Rosa think about all this?

CLAY ALLISON
She didn't ask me to act.
(beat)
But she made sure I could see if
through.

Monroe and John exchange a glance. They both know what that promise costs.

Clay rises from the table, his quiet authority settling over the room like dust.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)
We do this clean. No grandstandin'. No blood, 'less Kennedy gives us no other choice.
(beat)
If the law won't hang him... I will.

INT. PEARSON'S SALOON - CONTINUOUS

The back-room door swings open. Monroe exits first, lingers by the wall, lighting a cigarette. Men file out with eager steps.

As Clay steps out - SOFT WHISTLE - Clay's attention snaps.

MONROE ALLISON
A word?

Clay nods. No hesitation. They step aside, out of earshot.

MONROE ALLISON (CONT'D)
You, me, John... been through hell
together.

A beat. The weight of shared history hangs in the air.

MONROE ALLISON (CONT'D)
Why this one?

Clay looks off. He doesn't answer at first. Just watches the room.

A long beat, then-

CLAY ALLISON
I know the kind of man he is and what
he's done.

MONROE ALLISON
The law, Clay. Why we trustin' it now?

CLAY ALLISON
We ain't.
(beat)
It's Henry's word I give weight.

Monroe stiffens, exhales smoke through his nose, not sold.

MONROE ALLISON
Then tell me straight. What's this
really about? I get Roy... but why
Rosa?

Clay steps in closer now. His voice lowers. Measured. Final.

CLAY ALLISON
There's lines... even men like us
don't cross. Kennedy... he's miles
past 'em.

Monroe watches him, listening. Clay's eyes stay locked ahead.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)
This town's got kids. Families. He'll
take more if no one stops him.
(beat)
These people can't fight. It's us...
or no one.

A long silence hangs. Monroe watches him. Sees something raw there.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

I should've stood up to Paw. I can't
make that mistake twice.

Monroe takes a long drag. Flicks the cigarette to the floor.

A slow nod. He places a firm hand on Clay's shoulder, holds
it there a moment. No words. Just weight and understanding.
They turn and walk off together.

EXT. HILLTOP OVERLOOKING TOWN - DUSK

The sun dips behind the western peaks, painting the sky in
deep strokes of orange and purple.

CLAY sits alone on a hilltop. E-Towne glows below him,
Wheeler Peak towers above. Silent and watchful, he ponders.
He lights a cigarette with unshaken hands. Steady, too used
to violence.

Nearby, his saddle rests against a tree. Rifle propped. Hat
in the dirt. His horse grazes peacefully as tall grass sways
in the breeze.

Clay closes his eyes. Inhales deep. Exhales slow. The weight
of tomorrow settles in.

He looks out across the valley. Smoke rises from chimneys.
Lamps flicker to life. Voices echo faintly from saloons,
porches and supper tables. He thinks of the townsfolk.
Families, friends, all good people.

Visions drift through his mind: smiling faces, laughter in
the street, children chasing dogs through dust.

This town gave him peace. And maybe, just maybe, this is how
he can pay it back.

Another breath. Held. Released. He rises. Flicks his
cigarette into the wind.

His hat rises into the air and rest perfectly on his head. He
lifts the saddle and rifle. Walks toward his horse, down the
hill.

Tomorrow, justice will be served.

EXT. TAOS PASS - DAWN

Footsteps CRUNCH low along the trail. Slow, steady, one after the other. Then more feet, and more.

Six men break off, slipping down the hillside toward the Kennedy place. Guns drawn, eyes sharp, breath held tight.

One man raises a clenched fist. They all freeze. Not a word. Not a sound.

Clay stands at the center of the group, lowers his fist slow and steady.

He turns to face the others, eyes scanning each one. Silently, instructions are handed out. He points at his brothers, "You take the left." Another two "You swing right."

Then to the last, "Davy... you're with me. We go straight down the middle."

The men split into their assigned groups, slowly moving down the hill with quiet caution. Eyes sharp, every shadow watched and studied like a hawk. They all knew Kennedy was a deadly hunter. Any moment now, that devil could leap from the trees.

EXT. KENNEDY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Clay and Davy creep toward the front of the house, low and steady, just like tigers stalking their prey.

The brothers slip silently on the left side of the home, two more skulk on the right.

Clay reaches the stoop and carefully lifts his boot onto the worn boards. He leans in, pressing his ear to the door, straining to catch any sound from within.

Davy slips behind the wall on Clay's left, staying just out of sight from the window.

Clay presses close to the door, hears nothing. He lowers his head, disappointment heavy.

Rapid motion catches his eye, Davy shaking a finger beside him, quiet but urgent. Clay glances right to see one of his men waving wildly. When he catches Clay's eye, the man points toward the barn at the back of the property.

EXT. KENNEDY PROPERTY - CONTINUOUS

The men all move swift and silent behind the main house.
There, not far off, stands the barn.

Soft shuffling and faint banging echo from within its worn boards.

Clay signals the men to form a loose semicircle, closing in around the source of the noise inside the barn.

A deep inhale with a quick release.

CLAY ALLISON
Charles Kennedy!

The noises from inside the barn fall silent, as if cut off in mid-sentence.

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

After a long, tense pause, a shadowy figure steps into the barn's doorway. Silent, unmoving, cloaked in the dark. He just stands there, watching. Sensing the heavy tension, Clay speaks steady.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)
We got six guns on you, each one with six bullets lookin' for a reason. You don't come quiet... you ain't walkin' out of here alive.

Kennedy steps out into the morning sun. His head turns slow, eyes drifting from one man to the next. Measuring, weighing, sizing each of them up. A faint twitch at his temple. His gaze tilts, just slightly, like he's listening to someone standing right beside him. No one's there.

KENNEDY
Ain't your fight.

CLAY ALLISON
It is now...
(beat)
You crossed lines no man comes back from. Rosa's under my care now. And Roy, was one of mine.

Kennedy sees it plain, he ain't talkin' his way out this time. Slow and bitter, he lifts his hands and sinks to his knees.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

(to John)

Tie'em.

John and Monroe move in, slow and cautious. Kennedy doesn't flinch, just stares them down, eyes cold as stone as they draw closer.

Monroe extends his pistol. Steady, barrel nearly touching Kennedy's forehead.

MONROE ALLISON

You so much as blink, and I'll unload
every round I've got into you. You
hear me?

Kennedy gives a slow, beaten nod. No fight left in him.

John pulls a length of rope from his belt and moves in, binding Kennedy's hands behind his back with practiced rhythm.

Clay looks to Jack and William on his right -

CLAY ALLISON

Fetch the horses.

The men rush off as instructed.

Kennedy, bound tight and secure, lifts his head and locks eyes with Clay. He softly smiles and throws a look that says clear as day: *You got me... for now.*

EXT. KENNEDY PROPERTY - LATER

Across the property, the rest of the posse fans out hunting for any sign that ties Kennedy to his alleged crimes.

Kennedy sits on a tree stump, the same he used for splitting pine, hands still bound behind his back, a revolver leveled at his chest by Monroe.

Clay stands beside Monroe, eyes tracking the men as they sweep across the homestead.

One of them hauls open the cellar door. He immediately staggers back, cursing, as the shadows below reveal something they expected to find.

WHISTLE (O.S.)

Clay's attention is drawn towards the sound.

JACK
Over here boss!

Clay moves toward the house, boots crunching over the patchy snow. As he nears the cellar, the stench of rotting flesh hits him like a whiskey bottle to the skull. He winces, his nostrils twitching.

He squints down into the dark as he comes to a stop at the open hatch. There they lie. Two fresh bodies. A man, a small child. All the reason he needs to press on.

CLAY ALLISON
John!

John perks his head up and advances toward Clay.

Clay pulls his bandana up over his nose.

By the time John reaches the doorway, the stench hits him hard. He flinches, pinching his nose and gags.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)
Let's go.

John huffs and cocks his head as if to say, "Why me?"

The men descend into the cellar, each step groaning under their weight.

Sammuel's body is the first they bring up. Small. Fragile. They lay him gently beside the house, and a posse member covers him with a blanket collected from inside.

John gags again, the stench overwhelming. He yanks up his bandana, desperate to block the rot.

Clay puts a hand on John's back, steadying him. Then they go back in.

Moments later, they emerge again. This time carrying Roy. You can see it in Clay's face, something breaks.

They lay Roy down beside Sammuel. Clay doesn't move right away. He just stares.

Across the yard, Kennedy watches. Blank. Hollow. Like he's staring at nothing at all.

Clay lifts his gaze to him and its fire. A slow burn that promises there'll be a reckoning.

All the boys lower their heads.

Clay crouches. Brushes dirt from Roy's shoulder with a slow, shaking hand.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

He was good. Too good for us. Always
said "yes, sir" even when he didn't
have to.

A long silence. The men say nothing. Nothing they can say.

Clay stands. His face hardens. A second blanket is pulled over him.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

He deserved better than this.

Clay lingers a moment longer. His eyes drift between the two bodies. The boy, the man. Both taken too young.

The wind kicks up. A soft flap of the blankets. Dust rolls by like a whisper of judgment.

Behind Clay, no one moves.

After a beat, he turns, steps back toward the cellar.

The men exchange a look. Eyes wide with dread. They don't want to go back down. But they know they must. The search ain't over yet.

John adjusts his hat. Tightens his bandana. Then follows Clay down.

INT. CELLAR - CONTINUOUS

The men reach the cellar floor, boots crunching on the dirt. They scan the dark, musty room. Stench of death still thick in the air. Hard to see with the minimal light coming from

the entrance.

They can just make out a bundle in the far corner, but not well enough to tell what it is.

Clay collects a lantern hanging from the wall near the door. He lifts the glass shield as John STRIKES a match against the rough stone wall lining the cellar.

The flame flickers, casting long, unsteady shadows. He lights the wick. The lantern flares to life, casting an ominous glow across the cellar walls. Light finally exposing what the shadows hid so well.

They begin to slowly travers the cellar floor. The earth beneath their boots feels soft, fresh.

As they step, loose earth, raw and unsettled graves, some sinking with age, others still holding the sharp edge of the shovel all glow into view. All too fresh.

The bundle in the corner reveals a dark secret. An Indian man, half-rotted, lies beside a half-dug grave. His worn garments speak of who he once was.

Clay and John lock eyes both knowing they've struck gold.

EXT. KENNEDY PROPERTY - LATER

Work goes on at the Kennedy place. It's a somber event.

Clay stands on a small rise, eyes sweeping over what's been found.

Three bodies, wrapped in worn blankets, lie stacked in the back of a wooden cart, ready to be hauled away.

Monroe and John approach Clay eagerly with news.

MONROE ALLISON

Looks like we've found maybe three
more graves over yonder in the garden.
Some of the boys came across bones in
the fireplace.

He holds up Kennedy's axe. The handle splintered, the blade caked in dried blood.

MONROE ALLISON (CONT'D)

This axe? Got blood dried thick on the blade.

CLAY ALLISON

With them six graves down in the cellar, we're sittin' damn near a dozen. And Lord only knows how many more got hacked up and fed to the fire. Ashes don't leave no tale behind.

John nods, adrenaline still running.

JOHN ALLISON

We got 'em. He'll be swinging before winter.

Clay eyes the axe, then Kennedy.

CLAY ALLISON

Don't count your eggs yet. We still gotta haul him to town and in front of the magistrate.

Across the clearing, Charles Kennedy sits bound, upright and silent. Eyes locked on Clay. Unblinking and emotionless. Something about him is wrong. He's too calm, too still.

Clay shifts his stance, unsettled. An uneasy feeling creeps up his spine. Something ain't adding up.

EXT. TAOS PASS - LATER

Three horses wind through the narrow mountain pass. Clay rides point, reins loose in his hand.

Behind him, Kennedy walks with hands bound behind his back, a rope looped around his neck and tied off to Clay's saddle horn.

John and Davy follow at the rear, rifles leveled and eyes sharp, ready for trouble should Charles make a move.

The rest of the boys are still pokin' around Kennedy's place, gatherin' up whatever they can find. Every scrap helps to make sure he swings before winter sets in.

Kennedy stays quiet, unnervingly calm, like a man with

nothing left to lose. That kind of peace don't sit right with Clay; it starts to gnaw at him.

CLAY ALLISON
What's your play, Charles? I
figure'... a man with your reputation
wouldn't go down so quiet.

Kennedy doesn't speak. Doesn't glance. Just keeps walking.
Steady and calm. Like the noose don't bother him none.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)
Killin' your own blood. Even to a man
like me, that don't sit right.

No flinch. No blink. Like Clay hadn't said a damn thing.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)
You know... it's almost funny you
wern't able to kill your wife. Turns
out, she's the one who's gonna put the
rope 'round your neck.

John and Davy chuckle behind him. Kennedy doesn't.

KENNEDY
How many necks this rope of yours
seen?

Clay pulls his horse to a hard stop. He swings down in one fluid motion. His boots SLAM into dirt. He walks straight for Kennedy. Stops just short. Eyes locked like he's staring down the devil himself.

DAVY
Easy, Clay. Easy.

CLAY ALLISON
Now you got somethin' to say?
(beat)
Well go on. Say it!

Kennedy tilts forward, his gaze frozen on Clay.

KENNEDY
You... Me... we ain't so different.

CLAY ALLISON
Different? I wouldn't dare beat my
wife. And I damn sure wouldn't kill my
own son.

Clay steps in closer, eyes locked on Kennedy's. His voice shakes now. Not with fear, but fury barely held in check.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

Roy Ellis was one of mine. Worked hard. Polite as they come. And you shot him like a dog at your feet.

Clay's stare hardens. His hand twitches near his pistol, every muscle begging him to draw. He holds it, forcing Kennedy to live with the weight of his words.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

There's a special place in hell for a man like you Charles... and I aim to deliver you to the devil himself.

KENNEDY

How many young boys father's you kill in your time?

Clay's eyes flicker. A crack shows. Jaw tightens. The question lands harder than a bullet.

CLAY ALLISON

I gun down only them that's got it comin'.

KENNEDY

I got it comin'. Kill me.

Clay's hand still twitches at his side, riding the edge. Fingers near his pistol.

John and Davy go still in their saddles. Wide-eyed, not daring to speak.

Clay turns just enough to catch Davy's eyes. Davy gives a slow shake of his head. Quiet and meaningful.

After a tense beat-

KENNEDY (CONT'D)

Killin'... is killin'. Don't matter the reason.

Clay steps back, exhales. Slowly drags control back inside him like a man reeling in a wild horse. He climbs back into the saddle. One hand white-knuckled on the reins.

Kennedy throws one last dagger.

KENNEDY (CONT'D)

There is a room for me in hell. That I
have no doubt.

(beat)

But you, Clay... you'll be right next
door.

Clay clicks his tongue sharply. Drives his spurs in with a sudden KICK. His horse surges forward.

They ride on. But Clay's still burning. No reply. Just silence and the sound of hooves on rock. But the words land very heavy.

They ride on through the pass and Clay carries the weight of that truth like a stone in his chest.

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN - EVENING

The group rides slow into E-Towne.

The dusty street goes still. Townsfolk freeze mid-step, doors creak open, faces leaning out to see. Eyes watch from behind curtains and cracked windows as the grim parade passes by. One by one, folks step out onto the street, murmuring to each other.

Then the clapping starts. Softly at first, then stronger. Rosa's story has certainly spread through town before they arrived.

As the group approaches the magistrate's office, the crowd swells and cheers louder. Voices rising in a mix of relief and excitement. The killer of Taos Pass, finally reined in.

The rumors were true. And now the town's got proof, tied to the saddle and walking to justice.

Clay doesn't meet the crowd's eyes. Keeps his gaze fixed straight ahead, locked on the task at hand. The cheers crawl under his skin like the wool socks he can't stand come winter. Warm, but all wrong.

John and Davy soak in the attention, grinning wide as they tip their hats and wave to the crowd like returning heroes. The cheers fuel them, pride written all over their faces.

Clay, on the other hand, is all business. No smile, no wave. Just eyes locked on the goal ahead. His mind fixed on

finishing what they started.

The group pulls up in front of the magistrate's office, reins tightening as the horses slow to a stop.

Clay swings down from the saddle. He uncoils the rope from his saddle horn, then draws his pistol. Cold and steady aiming it square at Kennedy's head.

With a sharp glance, he motions for John and Davy to dismount.

CLAY ALLISON
John, fetch Henry.

John slips into the crowd, grinning like a fool. He slaps hands and has his back clapped, soaking up every cheer like it was owed to him.

Davy points his pistol to Kennedy's head. Smiles escape his face.

Clay lowers himself onto the steps of the magistrate's office, elbows on his knees, eyes fixed on nothing in particular. He sits in silence, holding the rope. Waiting and hoping the crowd will thin out soon.

Praise never sat right with him. He's more used to whispers behind his back than cheers in the street.

After a few long, dragging moments, Henry steps up with John. His eyes narrowing as he sees the gift standing at his door.

HENRY
Mr. Allison. What in God's name have you brought me here?

Clay doesn't answer right away. His jaw tightens. He gives Kennedy a slight shove forward.

CLAY ALLISON
Time to keep your word, Henry.

Henry eyes the prisoner. His stare doesn't blink.

HENRY
I see that. You expect me to hold him?
Right here in the calaboose?

Clay wipes his brow with the back of his glove, eyes never leaving Kennedy.

CLAY ALLISON

I'll leave some of my boys with you,
keep a close eye on him.

Henry glances at John and Davy. Their guns still slung low but ready.

HENRY

We can hold the pre-trial early next week, but he's gonna have to sit tight a spell. The judge ain't due back till next month.

Clay takes a deep breath, bracing. He nods once.

CLAY ALLISON

My boys'll watch him around the clock. I'll rotate 'em every four hours if I gotta.

Henry rubs the back of his neck, considering. Then locks eyes with Kennedy. The killer doesn't blink. Doesn't smirk. Just watches.

HENRY

Alright then. Bring him inside.

Henry unlocks the office door with a rusty CLICK. The hinges GROAN as it creaks open.

Clay and Davy flank Kennedy. They lead him forward, boots scuffing wood. Kennedy never resists. He walks like a man already underground.

They disappear inside. The door shuts behind them.

INT. MAGISTRAITES OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The crowd's cheers fade to a hush as the heavy door closes softly behind them.

Henry unlocks the door to the calaboose and steps aside.

Clay slips the rope from Kennedy's neck and shoves him in.

Henry shuts the heavy gate with a CLANG, the lock CLICKING tight.

CLAY ALLISON

Turn 'round. I'm gonna take that rope
off your hands.

Kennedy turns and shuffles back toward the gate.

Clay cuts the rope loose, freeing his arms. Slowly, Kennedy makes his way to the cot and drops down with a heavy sigh.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

Sleep tight. Don't even dream about
makin' a run. My boys'll be on you all
night.

(turns, tips his hat)

Henry.

HENRY

You kept your word. Brought him in
breathing. Good job, Clay.

Clay studies Henry for a moment, weighing the words. A faint nod. Not quite gratitude, not quite agreement. He turns away.

At the door, the distant roar of the celebration still drifts through the air. Clay drops his head, draws a deep breath, and pulls it open.

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN - CONTINUOUS

The door closes behind Clay.

Outside, the townsfolk gather. Cautiously at first, then with purpose. One by one, they step forward. Hands extended. Grateful eyes. A woman clasps his arm. A rancher slaps his back. Someone says his name like a prayer.

WOMAN

Thank you, Mr. Allison. God bless you.

Clay nods stiffly, eyes never meeting theirs. Each gesture: a handshake, a pat, a murmur of thanks, makes his jaw tighten. His shoulders square as if bracing against rain. He pushes forward; eyes locked on Davy and John waiting ahead.

CLAY ALLISON

Fellas. I want yall to stay here, keep
a close eye on him.

JOHN ALLISON
All night?

CLAY ALLISON
Yeah, all night. I'll send some relief
come mornin'.

Davy lights a cigarette, leans casually on the hitch post.

DAVY
Get some rest. Now the real work
starts.

Clay gives a tight nod.

CLAY ALLISON
Indeed. Night, boys.

He turns, shouldering past the crowd once more. Heads nod. Voices murmur praise. Clay keeps his head down, boots moving quick. The gratitude clings to him like a nest of fire ants crawling under his skin.

He disappears into the dark, leaving behind cheers he can't hold and a justice that still don't feel finished.

INT. MUTZ HOTEL - ROSA'S ROOM - LATER

Rosa sits upright in bed, propped against pillows. She keeps her head down; eyes fixed on the intricate lines taking shape in her sketchbook.

KNOCK KNOCK

ROSA
Come in.

The door CREAKS open. Clay steps in, hat in hand, eyes soft when they land on her.

She doesn't look up. Her attention stays on the charcoal moving in small, precise strokes. Whatever she's capturing, it holds her completely.

CLAY ALLISON
How are you feeling?

Rosa glances over, managing a faint smile. She softly closes her sketchbook, letting it rest in her lap.

ROSA
Better. Now that I see you.

Clay smirks, steps closer.

CLAY ALLISON
You had doubts?

Rosa shrugs, but her eyes linger on him longer this time. She did, she just won't say it aloud.

Clay sits at the edge of the bed, rolling the hat between his hands.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)
He came easy. Too easy. It don't sit right.

Rosa sighs, resting her hand gently over her stomach, protective, reflexive.

ROSA
When he knows he can't wind by hand, he shifts to games. This is where all the favors he's bought come due. All the pockets he's lined.

Clay nods, jaw tightening.

CLAY ALLISON
I'll be ready.
(beat)
Henry said he'll hold his hearing next week.

ROSA
I will be there. Even if I have to crawl on my belly.

Clay meets her gaze, concern deep in his eyes.

CLAY ALLISON
Are you sure?

Rosa stares straight through him, unflinching.

ROSA
I'm tired of hiding. I will be the one who puts him away for all the evil he done.

Silence stretches between them. Then Clay smiles, small but proud.

CLAY ALLISON

When I told you, you got grit...

He shakes his head, just a little.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

There it is.

They sit in quiet understanding. The storm still ahead, but no one's backing down.

INT. MAGISTRATES OFFICE - A FEW DAYS LATER

The room falls instantly quiet as Clay marches Kennedy inside. Boots echo off the floorboards. No one speaks. No one dares to.

Kennedy slumps into the wooden chair with a heavy THUNK. He leans back, relaxed, smug even. Like he's settling in for a long meal, not a murder hearing.

MELVIN MILLS, Kennedy's lawyer is neatly dressed and stone-faced, sits beside him, pen already poised.

Behind the desk, Henry adjusts his spectacles. Shuffles a stack of loose, creased papers.

HENRY

This preliminary hearing is now called to order. I am Henry Lowery, acting Magistrate of Colfax County, appointed under the authority of the Territory of New Mexico and affirmed by Governor William A. Pile.

He clears his throat. Not for attention, but for resolve.

HENRY (CONT'D)

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

A few quiet scribbles from Melvin's pen. Clay stands still, arms folded, eyes locked on Kennedy.

Henry glances down at the top sheet in his hand.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Charles Kennedy, you stand accused of the following: twelve counts of murder, three attempted, and one assault.

(beat)

No plea is required today. We're just here to examine the evidence.

Melvin rises, voice measured but firm.

MELVIN MILLS

My client does wish to enter a plea of not guilty at this time.

Henry doesn't look up.

HENRY

That's noted, though not required.

MELVIN MILLS

We want it on record. Mr. Kennedy maintains his innocence.

Kennedy says nothing. Just sits there still and vacant, staring at Henry like he's somewhere else entirely.

The silence stretches long. Rosa shifts uncomfortably in her seat near the back. Her hands tremble in her lap.

Outside, sounds of shifting gravel. Townsfolk have gathered at the windows; noses pressed to glass. Justice or gossip, they're here for blood.

Henry continues, flipping to the next page.

HENRY

Six written witness statements have been submitted and entered into the record.

He taps the page lightly.

HENRY (CONT'D)

These will be reviewed at trial, should one proceed.

He glances toward Melvin.

HENRY (CONT'D)
You'll receive copies following this hearing.

MELVIN MILLS
Thank you, sir. I look forward to reviewing them.

Henry sits back, eyes sweeping the room.

HENRY
Is there anyone present here today that wishes to speak against this man?

No response yet. But tension pulses like a second heartbeat in the walls.

Clay's jaw tightens. Rosa lowers her gaze, swallowing hard.

A murmuring voice outside. A baby cries. The room holds its breath.

Rosa sits near the back, trembling. Her worn leather sketchbook is clutched tight to her chest, her knuckles white against its dark cover. Across the room, Kennedy sits stone-still. It's the first time she's seen him since that night, and the fear still coils in her eyes.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Anyone at all?
(beat)
Last chance, folks.

A soft, fragile, almost whisper rises from the back.

ROSA
I... I do.

Melvin shoots around in his seat, glares at Rosa.

She lowers the sketchbook slightly, tucks it into the fold of her dress. Almost like she doesn't want him to see what's inside.

HENRY
Mrs. Kennedy. Did you say you wish to speak?

Rosa glances toward Kennedy, fear still lingering in her eyes.

Kennedy subtly tilts his head her way. Just a flicker. A quiet reminder. She sees it. And something in her shifts.

That small ember of justice inside her flares to life, now a fire. She rises. Steady. Confident. Ready to speak.

ROSA

Yes. I wish to speak.

HENRY

Very well, ma'am. The floor is yours.

ROSA

Thank you, sir.

The room sits tense. Breaths held. All eyes on Rosa.

A deep breath steadies her. No rage. No tears yet. Just resolve. She exhales deeply and begins-

ROSA (CONT'D)

I started noticing things a few years back. Charles would come home from hunting with more than just meat. Belongings... sometimes blood. Always a story.

She glances down at her hands, twisting them tight.

ROSA (CONT'D)

He'd say it was rustlers. Or Injuns. But his stories... they changed. Got shorter. Much quieter.

Her eyes flick toward Kennedy, quick and afraid. Then back down.

ROSA (CONT'D)

One night, I found a man's ring in his coat. He said it was nothin'. I knew it wasn't.

Her voice trembles.

ROSA (CONT'D)

Folks went missin' on the pass. I tried to warn visitors off. Some listened. Some didn't.

She takes a moment. She swallows hard. Eyes close, bracing herself.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Then one night... he killed a man in
our home.

She lifts her head. Stronger now.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Told him I was going to speak up.

She looks up. Her voice barely holding.

A pause.

ROSA (CONT'D)
He... he beat me.

Her voice trembles, hands shake. Not from fear now but the
memories.

ROSA (CONT'D)
He said if I so much as breathed a
word...
(beat)
He'd do to me what he done to all the
rest.

Her gaze scans the room now. Voice soft but sure. She exhales
shakily.

ROSA (CONT'D)
But Charles... he's got a way with
words. 'Specially with certain men.
Knows how to make things go away.

Her words catch, body trembles.

ROSA (CONT'D)
I didn't recognize him anymore. And I
didn't think it could get worse.
(beat)
Then, that night...

Rosa breaks. Her shoulders shake, sobs wrack her frame. Years
of silence and pain swallowed and buried, now tearing loose.

For a long moment, the room is utterly still. Not a sound,
except her grief.

Across the room, Melvin Mills glances around. Calm, scanning,
until his eyes land on Clay. A subtle nod. Just enough to
say: "I'm here."

Henry reaches across the bench quietly and offers Rosa a folded handkerchief.

She takes it with a trembling hand. Presses it to her face. The cloth soaks immediately with tears.

Clay sits trembling nearby. Fury ripples under his skin. His hand twitches near his belt, barely holding back from ending Kennedy right there.

Clay rises slowly. Walks to her side. Doesn't say a word. He doesn't have to. He just stands there. Solid. Present. A wall between her and everything else.

A long silence. Painful. Heavy. Human.

Finally, Rosa steadies her breath. Slow. Measured. She's spent but not broken.

ROSA (CONT'D)

I can't do this right now. I'm sorry.

HENRY

It's alright Ma'am. I have Doc Simms written testimony specifying your injuries and the final condition of Sammuel. You do not have go through that here today.

Rosa nods faintly. Still weeping.

ROSA

I reckon I'm only breathin' today
'cause the Great Spirit willed it so.

(beat)

But I'm still here. And now, so's the truth.

She lifts her eyes. The fear still there, but now, defiance. She turns. Eyes find Kennedy. Lock on him. Hard. He doesn't flinch. Doesn't blink.

ROSA (CONT'D)

You don't get to hide behind my
silence anymore.

The room remains heavy with her words. Even some of the men, the ones who've seen blood and loss, discreetly dab their eyes with cloth or sleeves.

Rosa exhales. One last breath. Then she turns. She grabs her

cane, joints stiff, body aching, begins to leave. Not fast, but with purpose. Each step stiff with pain, but steady.

Whispers rise in her wake. Murmurs of respect, disbelief, sorrow. No one tries to stop her. No one speaks. She's said what needed sayin'.

Clay doesn't follow Rosa out the door, but to the window. He watches as she lowers herself slowly onto the boardwalk outside.

And then, finally free of the weight, she breaks again. Shoulders shaking, arms cradling her ribs. A private collapse, this time in the open air.

Clay stays still. Just watching. The glass between them is thin. The pain between them is not.

Inside, Henry folds his hands on the desk, fingers tight. He lets the silence settle.

Though he's not supposed to show bias, it's written all over his face. He swallows hard, collects himself, then speaks.

HENRY

Unless anyone else would like to offer testimony or witness, now's the time to bring today's matter to a close.

He scans the room. Once. Firm, searching. No one rises.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Having heard the testimony presented here today and after due consideration of the facts and witness on record.

(beat)

I do find sufficient cause to believe that, Mr. Charles Kennedy, did commit the offenses as charged.

Kennedy's head snaps towards Melvin. Melvin calmly places a hand on his arm, a quiet reassurance.

Henry leans into the desk. Elbows down. Hands clasped just under his chin.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Therefore, it is the judgment of this office that the defendant be bound over for trial before the District Court of Colfax County, to answer to

(MORE)

HENRY (CONT'D)
the charges at a later date.

MELVIN MILLS
I request that Mr. Kennedy be
immediately released into my custody
so we may prepare for trial.

Henry's lips press into a thin line. He slowly sits back,
voice calm but resolute.

HENRY
So noted, Mr. Mills. Request denied.
Based on the severity of the crimes
your client is accused of; I simply
cannot allow him free roam of Colfax
County.

He closes the record book with a quiet THUMP, then turns his
full gaze to Kennedy.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Mr. Kennedy, you will be held here
until your trial early next month when
the judge is back round this way.
(beat)
This hearing is adjourned.

A gavel isn't needed. The room understands the finality.

Kennedy leans toward Melvin, whispering something low. Melvin
nods once, unreadable.

Clay and Davy step forward, hands resting near their
holsters, just in case.

Kennedy rises. Calm. No protest. They flank him. Escort him
through the door.

EXT. MAGISTRATES OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The door to the magistrate's office opens. Clay and Davy
exit.

A group of towns folk gathered on the boardwalk begin
cheering and celebrating, crowding them.

TOWNSFOLK (O.S.)
The haunting of Taos Pass is over!

A few men approach and offer their hand to Clay and Davy. Clay reluctantly accepts but shakes off the praise. Davy however, relishes in the spotlight.

Clay weaves through the crowd, the din of celebration continues around him.

He spots Rosa, still slumped against a post, eyes distant and hollow. He approaches cautiously, bending to one knee beside her. His hand rests lightly on her shoulder. It's steady, grounding.

Rosa startles, eyes darting wildly. But Clay's warm smile and calm presence slowly still the tremor.

In that quiet moment, an unspoken understanding passes between them. The town may be free, but the healing has only just begun.

CLAY ALLISON

Are you alright?

ROSA

Yes... a little better, every day.

CLAY ALLISON

May we escort you back to Mutz's place?

ROSA

I'd be grateful.

Clay rises and spots Davy, still basking in the praise, tipping his hat, grinning at every pat on the back.

Clay WHISTLES.

CLAY ALLISON

Davy!

Davy snaps to attention. Clay gives a quick head nod to the right; "Let's go." Without a word, Davy breaks from the crowd.

INT. MUTZ HOTEL - LATER

The men escort Rosa up the stairs toward her room, careful as her splint slows each step.

At the top, they turn the corner. Davy lingers behind. Clay walks slowly beside Rosa, her arm looped through his. No words. Just quiet effort.

They reach her door. She slips her arm free and turns to face him.

ROSA

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

CLAY ALLISON

It wasn't a hard choice.

She smiles softly. Turns. Slides the key into the lock.

Halfway through the door, she pauses. Glances back.

ROSA

You're not like they say. There's more to you than the stories they tell.

(beat)

Maybe just a man trying to do right... when it counts.

Clay looks down briefly, exhales, then meets her eyes.

CLAY ALLISON

I've crossed lines I ain't proud of.

(beat)

But some things... some things you don't walk past.

Rosa studies him, seeing something few do.

ROSA

If I may... I think, your mother would be proud.

That lands. Clay stiffens slightly. A flicker of something long buried passes through his eyes. He nods. Barely.

CLAY ALLISON

You take care now.

He turns to leave but stops at the threshold. Glances back. Like there's something more. Something he wants to say. But he doesn't.

Instead, he just meets her gaze, holds it, then walks away.

Rosa lingers in the doorway, then eases inside. Closes it behind her.

INT. PEARSON'S SALOON - EVENING

Pearson's is hopping tonight.

A celebratory mood floats amongst E-Towne. A piano plays upbeat tunes; ladies are dancing in the center square while card games take place around the edges.

Clay, his brothers and most of the boys are drinking the night away. Hold up at their usual table in the back. Telling stories and ribbing on each other like friends do.

DAVY

We ridin' this trail with the
Goodnight outfit on the plains of
Colorado. John here, all of a sudden
has to squat bad, I mean *real bad*.
Never mind we just broke camp thirty
minutes ago. He jumps off his horse
and runs behind this bush. He barely
gets his pants down to his knees and I
swear... that boy jumped 10 foot in
the air.

Davy has a hard time containing his laughter.

DAVY (CONT'D)

Started screaming like a sissy girl.
He almost shit on a rattler.

The whole table bursts out in riotous laughter.

Davy laughing so hard, he almost spills his drink.

DAVY (CONT'D)

He's hoppin' like a jackrabbit,
stompin' through the brush. Finally,
with all his trashing about, his pants
fall down to his ankles, he trips flat
on his face, right into an ant bed.

The laughter increases, Monroe almost falls out of his chair.

JOHN ALLISON

Hell, it weren't *that* funny.

MONROE ALLISON

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

DAVY

So, he flies up off the ground,
swatting at ants, his britches still
down, butt ass naked from the waist
down. Old man Loving comes over and
dumps a canteen on him. Then scolds
him; not for flailing naked in an ant
bed, but for wasting water and holdin'
up the drive.

The group still roaring with laughter. John smiles
reluctantly being the butt of the joke. He knows it's all in
good fun.

JOHN ALLISON

Old man docked me for it, y'know.

(beat)

I still got scars. From the ants...
and the shame.

The group continues their laughter.

The saloon doors open and William walks in, straight to the
group. He leans down beside Clay right into his ear.

WILLIAM

I need to talk to you, Boss.

Clay waves him off.

CLAY ALLISON

Not now.

WILLIAM

Boss, you gotta hear this.

Clay's eyes shoot right at William.

CLAY ALLISON

I said not now!

WILLIAM

Boss...

Clay ignores him, doesn't even shoot an eye his direction.

William hesitates, jaw tight. He stands straight, looks down at Clay, then to the others, still recovering from laughter.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

You outta' know... Kennedy's goin' to walk.

The whole table goes quiet instantly. Laughs are over, drinks placed down on the table. Clay's face goes white.

A beat. Then he rises. Motions William to follow him.

CLAY ALLISON

Boys!

All the chairs CREAK as they slide from under the table. It empties faster than a mustang in the rodeo chute. The whole lot of them follow Clay into the backroom at Pearson's Saloon.

INT. PEARSON'S SALOON BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

John shuts the door behind them, silencing the party in the other room.

Clay pulls out a chair, the legs THUD heavy on the wooden floor. He motions William to sit.

Everyone gathers around William, his nerves tight and raw.

CLAY ALLISON

Start talkin', Will. Why the hell's Kennedy about to walk?

William shifts uncomfortably, glancing over his shoulder.

WILLIAM

Him and his lawyer, schemin'. Heard it myself.

CLAY ALLISON

You sure?

William swallows hard, nodding.

WILLIAM

Me and Jack both. Ain't no guessin'. They're plannin' somethin'.

MONROE ALLISON
Who's the lawyer?

CLAY ALLISON
(to Monroe)
Melvin Mills. You know him?

Monroe scratches his chin, eyes narrowing.

MONROE ALLISON
(To Clay)
Yeah... one crooked son of a bitch.
Man don't walk into a courtroom 'less
the judge already owes him somethin'.

WILLIAM
Mills told Kennedy he put in a request
for Judge Benedict to try the case.
Says they go way back.

MONROE ALLISON
Benedict? That crooked bastard's the
worst in the territory.

Monroe spits on the floor, disgusted.

CLAY ALLISON
Kennedy thinks he can buy his freedom.
(beat)
What else?

William glances toward the window, lowering his voice.

WILLIAM
Lawyer kicked us outta the room. Said
somethin' about client rights.
(beat)
Reckon he didn't notice the window was
cracked.

EXT. MAGISTRATE'S OFFICE — FLASHBACK

Jack and William lean by a cracked window, smoking silently,
eyes sharp.

INT. CALABOOSE — FLASHBACK

Mills circles Kennedy like a shark. His hands flail as he talks. Kennedy remains stone, unmoved, unblinking.

WILLIAM (V.O.)

Mills said he's gettin' Kennedy free
on bond. Gonna get a writ or somethin'
from a judge he knows in Santa Fe.
Present it to Henry, have him set
free.

Mills stops in front of Kennedy, pats him on the shoulder
with a sly smile.

CLAY ALLISON (V.O.)

Over my dead body.

(beat)

Anything else?

INT. PEARSON'S SALOON - BACK ROOM — PRESENT

WILLIAM

Heard somethin' 'bout Rosa's pa
testifying for Kennedy. Sayin' he was
at his place the night Goerge Niles
died.

INT. CALABOOSE — FLASHBACK

Mills paces, circling Kennedy again. Kennedy stays calm,
almost smug.

CLAY ALLISON (V.O.)

Rosa's father? Helpin' that monster?

MONROE ALLISON (V.O.)

Threatened, maybe. Paid, most likely.
They're playin' dirty.

Kennedy nods just slightly.

Mills plants both hands onto Kennedy's shoulders. Kennedy
glances down at them, smiling.

INT. PEARSON'S SALOON - BACK ROOM - PRESENT

CLAY ALLISON

Rosa's testimony still stands. He
can't escape that.

WILLIAM

There's one more thing, Boss.
(beat)
They're goin' to kill Rosa.

Clay freezes, eyes wide, breath caught high in his chest. His
men all stare at him. The weight of it settling on everyone.

EXT. HENRY'S HOUSE - LATER

BAM! BAM! BAM!

Clay violently bangs on Henry's door.

CLAY ALLISON

Henry!
(beat)
Henry!

From the window, a soft glow emerges.

The door SQUEEKS open, Henry peers out from the crack.

HENRY

Clay? What are you doing here?

CLAY ALLISON

Tell me it ain't true Henry. You best
tell me right now.

Henry opens the door fully, steps out on the porch. Lantern
in hand. An amber glow flickers between them.

HENRY

What's this about?

With fury, Clay stars pacing the porch.

CLAY ALLISON

Kennedy! You told me I could trust the
law.

HENRY

I said you could trust me.

CLAY ALLISON

Kennedy's goin' free. That damn lawyer of his is bribin' people, payin' judges, the whole lot.

HENRY

Where did you get this?

CLAY ALLISON

My boys. Heard it all from Mills. That crooked Judge Benedict, a release writ. This better not be true.

Henry steps closer, his face grave.

HENRY

Clay, sit down.

Clay stops pacing but shakes his head, refusing.

HENRY (CONT'D)

We just had the hearing today. Nothing has been set. And you let me handle Mills.

CLAY ALLISON

You can't let him out Henry. You just can't.

HENRY

Clay, it's not up to me. You have got to let the legal system play out.

Clay's fists clench at his sides, rage and despair warring in his eyes.

CLAY ALLISON

This... Henry, is why I don't trust the law. It failed my me, it failed my mother, over and over again.

Clay's eyes glisten, voice trembling on the edge of breaking.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

Now... it's failing Rosa. I can't let this happen again. Not when I can stop it.

Henry's expression softens. He gestures toward a nearby bench.

HENRY

Clay, please sit down. Let's talk.

Clay exhales deeply, nods reluctantly, and sinks onto the bench. He runs a hand through his hair, trying to calm himself.

Henry sits beside him, placing a comforting hand on Clay's shoulder.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I know this cuts deep. Maybe deeper for you than anyone. And I get why you don't trust the process. But if you lose your head now, you lose the one thing that can truly help Rosa.

Clay stares straight ahead. Muscles tight, jaw clenched.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Justice by the law ain't quick. Ain't easy. It's slow. But it's real. And it lasts.

(beat)

Don't let rage bury what we're trying to build here.

He gives Clay's shoulder one last squeeze, then rises. Grabs his lantern from the post.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Go home. Get some rest. If anything happens with Kennedy's situation, I will let you know. Fair enough?

Clay doesn't speak. Just nods once. A quiet, heavy understanding. He stands. Pauses. Then walks off into the night.

Henry watches him go, standing in the doorway. The lamplight flickers behind him. The weight of what's ahead already forming in his eyes.

INT. PEARSON'S SALOON - LATER

Clay sits alone, away from everyone else. A full glass of

whiskey fills his hand. He hasn't touched it. He wrestles with his conflict of legal justice vs. personal justice.

Memories flood his mind once again.

Intercut memory fragments:

— Clay's MOTHER cowering in fear. A shadow of a hand raised on a wall, shooting downward fast.

— Clay's FATHER shaking hands with lawmen, his mother crying on the porch.

— Young Clay and his brothers watching their mother, on her knees, begging a sheriff.

INT. PEARSON'S SALOON - CURRENT

PLOP - A whiskey glass lands on the table in front of him. Clay lifts his eyes toward the man who placed it there.

It's Melvin Mills. Suit sharp, smile sharper. Melvin slides a chair out with a CREAK and takes a seat without asking.

MELVIN MILLS

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

Clay says nothing. Eyes narrowing, his suspicion setting in. His expression shifts from unease to quiet disgust.

MELVIN MILLS (CONT'D)

Look here, no hard feelings about the hearing.

(beat)

Despite you, and your men, arresting my client *without* being deputized representees of the law, I thank you for bringing him in alive.

He raises his glass in mock salute, he drinks slow, deliberate. Never breaking eye contact.

CLAY ALLISON

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

MELVIN MILLS

He pays exceptionally well.

Mills downs his drink and sets the glass on the table with a soft THUD.

CLAY ALLISON
Blood money.

MELVIN MILLS
Speaking of money...

Leans in, like a backroom offer.

MELVIN MILLS (CONT'D)
What do you say to Five-hundred
dollars to recant your statement.
Don't testify?

Clay's eyes flash. A quiet fury boiling just beneath.

CLAY ALLISON
You think I can be bought? Like you're
buying everyone else.

MELVIN MILLS
Anyone can be bought. It's just a
matter of price.

Clay SLAMS his fist on the table. The whiskey glass jumps. A
few heads turn.

CLAY ALLISON
You're barking up the wrong tree.

MELVIN MILLS
Am I? Well... let's see here.
(beat)
What do you think the judge is going
to think about your testimony
regarding my client's actions once he
hears of your own violent tendencies?

Clay's stare hardens, the grip on his glass tightening.

MELVIN MILLS (CONT'D)
You see, that's what we call...
impeachment of a witness. Your words
won't mean scatt when I'm done with
you.

CLAY ALLISON
We still have Rosa's testimony. That
itself is enough to see him swing.

He plants one arm on the table. Controlled, but coiled.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

And I will make damn sure you don't
lay one finger on her.

Melvin raises an eyebrow, amused. Like he's poking a caged dog just to feel alive.

MELVIN MILLS

Your compassion for Rosa baffles even
me.

(beat)

None the less, shall we make it seven
hundred? Just leave town.

Clay leans back, insulted, lets out a bitter laugh. Low and dark.

MELVIN MILLS (CONT'D)

Charles even said he's got no quarrel
with you. He'll leave you be. Just
take the money.

Clay's hand moves fast. A flash of steel. The pistol clears leather, aimed square between Mills's eyes.

CLICK - Hammer cocked with surgical calm. Clay's eyes narrow, steady down the barrel.

The entire saloon freezes. Breaths held. Cards dropped. Chairs stilled.

Clay's breathing slows. His message carved in silence.

Mills doesn't flinch. But his pupils dilate, a flicker of real respect crossing his face.

MELVIN MILLS (CONT'D)

Wow! That was impressive. Your
reputation certainly precedes you.

(beat)

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

He stands, collects his glass, faintly tips his hat.

MELVIN MILLS (CONT'D)

Good night, Mr. Allison.

Clay tracks him with the barrel until he's gone. Then, slowly

lowers the gun.

Around the room, noise cautiously resumes. Glasses CLINK, whispers rise, poker hands resume.

Clay grabs his whiskey, downs it in one brutal gulp, then SLAMS the glass into the table - SHATTER!

Fragments scatter across the floor. The echo hangs in the hush that follows. Clay doesn't move. Just stews. Boiling.

After a pause, he bolts upright. A piercing WHISTLE cuts the saloon dead again. Heads turn.

CLAY ALLISON

Allison boys, over here!

Boots SCRAPE. Chairs shift. His men gather, forming a half-circle around him. Clay scans each face, one by one. Sharp. Calculated. Measured.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

Boys. No more talk. No more waiting.

(beat)

We're the law now. Tonight, Charles Kennedy pays for what he done.

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN MAIN STREET - NIGHT - LATER

The posse storms down main street. Heavy footed, in a rush and determination. Dust flies from behind them as if there was stiff breeze.

Townsfolk step aside in fear and respect, knowing something is about to get started.

CLAY ALLISON

John! You fetch Henry. Get his ass to his office.

JOHN ALLISON

Got it!

John darts off down a side street, swallowed by the wooden buildings.

CLAY ALLISON

Davy! You get over to Mutz's and stand guard by Rosa's door.

Davy turns around and rushes off in the opposite direction. No words needed. He knows exactly what's on his friend's mind.

INT. MAGISTRATES OFFICE - A FEW MOMENTS LATER

Kennedy lies still on a cot against the wall, dreaming, no doubt, of the freedom his lawyer will buy.

Jack, standing guard in the corner, spots movement in the window. His body tenses. Sweat beads on his brow. He lifts his rifle from low ready.

SMASH - The door flies open with a violent crack. Clay's boot having done the honors.

Jack flinches, nearly fumbling his weapon.

Kennedy jolts upright in bed, wide-eyed.

The posse pours in behind Clay, full of purpose and fury.

CLAY ALLISON

Rise and shine you worthless sack of
shit. Your ride to Hell's arrived.

JACK

Boss, what are you doing?

CLAY ALLISON

Relax my boy, you and Will did great
work. We'll take it from here.

Clay strolls over to Kennedy with a musical sway like he's got nowhere else to be and all the time in the world.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

Charles... Charles... Charles.

Kennedy, breathing heavy from the sudden loss of peace catches eyes with Clay.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

You thought you had this all planned
out. You thought you could escape
justice... again.

He arrives at the bars, lowers his head slightly, eyes rising into a dark glare so wicked even he seems to savor it.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)
You thought of everything... except
for me.

Clay leans in just a touch closer, lowers head a little more.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)
I told you... I aim to deliver you to
the Devil himself. Today... is...
that... day.

True to form, Kennedy stands still and emotionless. Just
stares Clay down.

He reaches out, silent, taps the bars of the calaboose. His
eyes never leaving Clay. Taunting him. He knows Clay can't
get to him while he's in here.

Stepping in through the door is Henry, gun pointed at his
back by John.

Clay turns, sees Henry in tow. He walks straight up to him,
eyes locked.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)
Give me the keys?

HENRY
You know I can't do that Clay. And
what the hell is this? Gun point?
Really, John?

John shrugs his shoulders. Looks over at Clay.

JOHN ALLISON
He wouldn't come. Took a little
convincing.

Clay inches closer. The space between him and Henry razor-
thin now.

CLAY ALLISON
Henry, I don't have time to lay it out
for you, just give me the damn keys
and leave.

HENRY
Clay, be reasonable here. We talked
about this. You can't do this.

Clay's stare burns right through him.

CLAY ALLISON

Don't tell me what I can't do. This must be done and I'm the only one who can.

Henry's shoulders sag, frustration giving way to resignation.

HENRY

Just go, Clay. Take your boys and go. I'm willing to forget all this happened.

Beat. Henry's voice lowers, almost a plea.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Please don't make me choose between you and the law.

Clay contemplates Henry's words for a moment. His demeanor quickly fades. He takes a deep breath and lowers his tone. Henry can see the calm taking over his fiery eyes.

CLAY ALLISON

Boys, he's right. Stand down.

All the boys calm down; some take a seat. A peace envelops the whole room.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Henry. I really don't know what I was thinkin'.

Relief washes over Henry like a storm cloud passing, leaving still air in its place. He just talked Clay Allison off the ledge, and both men know it.

HENRY

Hey, I get it. The law says he gets his day in court. It's my duty to make sure that happens.

Clay nods, eyes cast low, voice heavy with the weight of it.

CLAY ALLISON

You're absolutely right. I trusted you and you held up your end.

HENRY

Thank you for seeing it that way.

Clay shifts his stance, shoulders loosening but eyes still

tired.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

I just... took things a little too far here. Overreacted.

HENRY

It's all right. As I said, nothing happened here tonight. Okay?

Clay squares up to Henry, his tone more grounded, sincere.

CLAY ALLISON

You always been square with me, Henry. I 'preciate that. That's more than I can say for most.

Henry gives a small, understanding nod.

HENRY

It's alright, Clay. We're square.

Clay studies him a beat longer. A flicker of regret crosses his eyes. Not just for tonight, but for all the roads that brought him here.

CLAY ALLISON

That's why I can't have you being a part of this.

Clay rears back and punches Henry right across the face - BAM!

The force knocks him out cold. His body flies back and lands on the floor like a dropped sack of potatoes.

Clay swiftly bends down and finds the calaboose keys in Henry's pockets. The keys lift high into the air from Clay's fingertips.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

Showtime boys!

The energy promptly returns. The posse members hoot and holler like children at the county fair.

Clay tosses the keys to Monroe.

Kennedy starts to limber up. Swinging his arms from side to side and ready for the fight.

The boys gather around the calaboose.

Monroe unlocks the gate, pulls it back in a swift motion like the gateman at a rodeo.

The boys charge forward. Kennedy explodes. Fast and silent.

The boys don't stop, neither does Kennedy. They collide like bulls in a storm.

START FIGHTING NOISE

The boys pile up on Kennedy. Doesn't faze him one bit. He keeps swinging.

John gains a hold on Kennedy's right arm.

Kennedy hurls his arm like a whip and John goes flying across the calaboose, crashing into the wall with a GRUNT.

Kennedy's backswing catches William across the jaw. He crumples to the ground with a THUD. He rises quickle.

Jack is a slippery devil, gets ahold of Kennedy from behind.

While taking punches to the face from John, Kennedy thrusts forward and tosses Jack off of him onto the other boys.

Jack hits the ground hard, the air leaving his lungs in a wheeze. The others stumble over him, trying to regroup.

Clay and Monroe watch the boys have their fun from the gate. Ready to step in once the beast has been tamed.

Jack regains his wind and rises ready to go. He charges Kennedy from the right.

Kennedy swings with his left and misses, punching the wall instead. He GRUNTS in pain.

William takes the advantage, grabs Kennedy's left arm and wrenches it up behind his back.

Jack seizes his right arm and shoves it back.

With his advantage slipping, Kennedy places his right foot on the cross bar and thrusts backward with the force of a sledgehammer on a railroad tie.

Kennedy drives them backward slamming them into the wall between himself and the bars. It's like he's squeezing juice

from lemons.

This force also unbalances Kennedy, he stumbles.

John takes advantage of his weakened stance and sweeps his left leg.

Kennedy collapses to the ground with a BOOM. He's face down. With Jack and William pinning his arms, John slips around and tackles his legs.

With the beast finally pinned, Clay and Monroe move in fast. No words, just muscle memory. All that experience cattle roping is paying dividends.

Clay ties his feet while Monroe wrangles his arms. Just like they work on the ranch every day. This animal, however, is more cunning.

Kennedy continues to thrash about making the process damn near impossible. The boys continue to hold their positions. Out of breath and exhausted, they find the strength to hold on a bit longer.

With his hands secured, Monroe moves to gag Kennedy's mouth with a bandana and tie it off behind his head.

He's tied down. The boys peel off him like spent riders after a long cattle drive.

Kennedy lies hogtied on the floor, hands bound tight behind his back, ankles cinched, mouth gagged. He squirms, but the fight's gone from his body. Kennedy is not going anywhere on his own.

The boys breathe hard, pausing to lick their wounds.

Kennedy continues to squirm on the floor, but he is subdued.

Clay and Monroe step back, surveying their work.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)
(to Monroe)
Be right back.

Clay leaves the calaboose, and the boys, behind.

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

Clay stomps down the dusty main street of Elizabethtown. Vengeance burning in his eyes. One more thing left to do.

A few townsfolk, drawn by the scuffle, watch in bewilderment. They whisper among themselves.

EXT. OUTSIDE PEARSON'S SALOON - CONTINUOUS

Clay unhitches his horse, yanks him back, and mounts with lightning speed.

He jerks the reins left;

CLAY ALLISON

YAH!

Clay shouts as he gives his horse a SWAT with the reins. The animal takes off with urgency.

EXT. MAGISTRATES OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Clay reins up in front of Henry's office. Dust billows as hooves dig into the dirt. He swings down, opens his saddlebag, and pulls out a long coil of rope.

Calm breath, yet focused, willpower dialed to eleven. Clay steps onto the boardwalk and strides inside.

INT. MAGISTRATES OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Henry is still out cold. William grabs him under the arms and drags him aside, ready for the next step. Henry's legs drag just clear of Clay's boots as he enters.

CLAY ALLISON

Tie him up. I don't want him waking to see this.

WILLIAM

Yea, Boss.

Clay begins twirling the rope in his hands as he enters the calaboose. A subtle, quiet threat.

From the floor, Kennedy eyes the rope and goes still. He knows.

Clay squats down in front of Kennedy, eyes locked together.

CLAY ALLISON

Seein' as how you're my gift to the
Devil, reckon I ought'a wrap you with
a bow.

Kennedy starts squirming again desperate to keep Clay from tying him up.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

Boys. Get his legs.

Jack and John dive onto Kennedy's back. The added weight of the boys and the rope slows Kennedy just enough for Clay to loop the rope around his bound feet.

Clay rises as John and Jack each collect a leg.

CLAY ALLISON (CONT'D)

Pull him out.

The boys heave and pull. Kennedy slowly slides out of the calaboose, scraping against the wooden floor. Rolling over onto his back in the process.

EXT. MAGISTRATE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Clay ties off the other end of the rope to his saddle horn.

The boys gather at the door.

Outside, a few townsfolk mill about, trying to piece together what is happening.

Clay mounts up, looks back over his shoulder.

CLAY ALLISON

Boys... what do we do when a tree
falls on the ranch?

BOYS

(in unison)

Tie it up and HAUL... IT... OFF!

SWAT!

Clay snaps the reins against his horse's flank. The animal bolts.

Kennedy is yanked from the office, dragged hard onto the dusty streets of Elizabethtown.

Some townsfolk nearby recoil. Startled by the sudden, brutal motion. A few wide-eyed with awe.

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

The boys burst onto the street, cheering and hollering as Clay rides off, Kennedy dragged behind. His horse snorts and heaves under the extra weight.

Townsfolk scramble off the street, diving for cover. Two men dive onto the boardwalk as Clay thunders past with Kennedy scraping against the dirt where they just stood. Other townsfolk peer from doorways and windows as Clay and Kennedy hurl down Mainstreet.

Clay's eyes grow wide as he spots a tree near the edge of town. He reins up hard, halting the animal with force.

Momentum slides Kennedy forward, sliding to a stop beside Clay in a cloud of dust.

Clay jerks the reins hard left and snaps them with force. His horse bolts again, thundering in the opposite direction.

Kennedy whips around 180 degrees in an instant. Dragging violently feet first.

The horse bolts down Main Street again, Kennedy flailing from side to side behind him. As Clay nears Henry's office again, the boys draw their pistols and FIRE into the air. WHOOPING in celebration. Clay charges past them, waving his hat high in the air.

Clay approaches the other end of town. He veers right, setting up for a wide turn left. As he rounds the turn, Kennedy rolls side to side, dust spraying with each brutal hit against the ground.

Clay completes the turn, thundering back through town. On the swing, Kennedy slams into a hitching post, splintering it in half.

Drawn by the noise, more townsfolk peer from doorways and

step outside to witness the carnage. A startled crowd gathers on the boardwalks lining Main street. Women shield the eyes of their children, men holler and cheer.

The Allison boys are still FIRING and WHOOPING as Clay charges past them again. Clay points and yells-

CLAY ALLISON

End of town! End of town!

Clay rushes past, Kennedys till in tow. Dust floats all up and down Main street. The boys chase after them, quickly swallowed by the trail of dust.

The streets now glow lit by candles and lanterns from folks watching the spectacle.

Clay reaches the edge of town again and reins up hard. Once again, Kennedy slides through in his wake. Dust flies as Kennedy skids to a stop beneath a lone tree.

The horse breathes heavy, chest pulses in and out. It's grateful for the rest.

The Allison boys arrive on scene with haste. Townsfolk edge closer. Cautious but drawn to the carnage.

Monroe drops to a crouch over Kennedy's dust and blood-covered body. Every inch soaked in red. He leans close to Kennedy's face and pauses.

MONROE ALLISON

(to Clay)

Son of a bitch. He's still alive.

The boys circle closer around to get a look at what's left of him.

JOHN ALLISON

You say he still alive?

MONROE ALLISON

Sure as hell is.

Shocked by the sight, gathering townsfolk GASP and GROAN. The glow of lanterns and candles spill over Kennedy's body. Putting him on full display. Murmurs and whispers of awe and disgust both are heard from all around.

Clay dismounts, standing tall over Kennedy. He glows with pride. He is satisfied and unshaken.

Mills appears out of the throng of townsfolk, stopping at Kennedy's feet. Clay's eyes lock on Mills. A satisfied grin stretches across his face. Mills shakes his head slowly, then turns and melts back into the shadows of the crowd.

The noise quickly starts to fade. The crowd parts. Clay turns toward the silence. Through the parted crowd, Davy approaches, gently guiding Rosa forward.

She stops at Kennedy's feet. Her eyes swell with tears. Her breath trembles. A lifetime of pain collapsing into this moment. She takes a deep breath and leans down toward Kennedy.

ROSA

You broke me. But not forever. You
don't win this time.

Rosa straightens. She looks to Clay. Their eyes lock. She says nothing, but he understands. She is safe. She is free. Just as he promised. Rosa turns slowly, takes Davy's arm, and limps away.

Clay stays behind. His eyes settle on Kennedy, barely breathing. Chest rising in slow, ragged heaves.

Kennedy shifts slightly. His lips twitch, a garbled sound leaks out.

Clay leans in close, his shadow falling over what's left of the man.

KENNEDY

Think you're a hero?

A pause. Clay shakes his head slow, then quietly, steadily:

CLAY ALLISON

No.

(beat)

Just a boy who finally stood up.

He rises. Turns away. Gives the nod.

SMASH CUT:

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN - END OF STREET - CONTINUOUS

A rope is pulled taut over a tree branch. SCRAPING and burning as it slides across the wood. With each heave, the branch bow lowers from the added weight.

Kennedy's body rises into the air. Inch by inch. Blood drips from the tips of his feet.

His face, swollen. Dragged raw and now cinched tight by the noose. Completely unrecognizable.

His body doesn't move. His chest doesn't rise. His eyes don't open. The nightmare is over.

A crudely painted sign rises with him.

It hangs against his broken chest. Rope dangling from his neck:

"THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS TO WOMEN BEATERS AND CHILD KILLERS HERE."

As Kennedy's ascension halts, most folks cheer.

Some folks turn in disgust. It's a bitter/sweet moment for the folks of Elizabethtown.

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN MAIN STREET - DAY

Clay steps outside the hotel. He checks his rifle, tightens the saddle cinch. His coat is clean but faded. The look of a man who's stayed too long and seen too much.

Monroe slings a pack onto his horse. John adjusts his belt, buckling a knife at his hip. Davy checks the cinch on his horse out of habit more than need.

Townsfolk gather quietly nearby. A few offer nods. A young boy hands Clay a canteen. Clay thanks him with a quiet touch to the shoulder. He doesn't need words.

The mood is solemn, heavy. No one speaks but they all feel the same thing.

E-Towne bustles like a normal day. Seems to shine just a little brighter. Folks tip their hats to the Allison boys as they walk down the street. Others look away in disgust.

INT. ROSA'S ROOM - MUTZ HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

Rosa watches from the window. Still bruised. Still healing, inside and out. Her eyes find Clay. He brushes off praise and

handshakes from passing townsfolk. A reluctant hero, already halfway gone.

He looks up to her window. Their eyes meet. A part of her will miss him. The other part is relieved. She's had enough violence for one lifetime. She lifts her hand in a soft wave.

He tips his hat. Offers the faintest smile. Nothing needs to be said.

She steps away. The curtain sways, then settles. She eases into the chair beside the bed. Opens her worn leather sketchbook. The pages crack softly as she begins to write, not draw.

ROSA (V.O.)
 Everyone called Clay Allison a killer.
 A vigilante.
 (beat)
 Maybe he was.

Outside, Clay mounts up. His men follow. No fanfare. Just saddle creaks and boot scuffs on wood.

Rosa's eyes lift again. The clouds drift slow and wide outside her window. A flicker of a smile. She returns to her writing.

ROSA(V.O.)
 But... he was the only man who stood
 between me and the devil. And that
 makes him more than a hero.
 (beat)
 That makes him something... legendary.

After a reflective beat, she closes the worn leather book and sets it on the nightstand. Her fingers rest on the cover, tracing the creases in the leather as if memorizing them. For a moment, she can't seem to let go.

Then she rises, slips a satchel over her shoulder, and heads for the door.

A gust rushes in as it swings open, catching the book's pages. They flutter wildly, fleeting glimpses of Clay in charcoal, each sketch sharper, more dignified than the one before, until the cover falls shut again, still and silent.

EXT. ELIZABETHTOWN - END OF STREET - CONTINUOUS

Clay rides at the head of the group, eyes forward, jaw set. The wind lifts the edge of his coat. He doesn't look back as they leave town.

At the edge of town, Kennedy's body still hangs from the tree, swaying slow in the breeze. The sign around his chest flops with the motion.

A stranger on horseback studies the scene. He leans forward, squinting to read the hand-painted words.

A beat. He shifts in the saddle.

Then, from the distance—

MAN

Damn right!

His voice carries on the wind, sharp as a bullet.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF TOWN - CONTINUOUS

The sun hangs high. The land stretches wide and still.

Clay and his posse ride single file, slow and steady. Dust trails behind them, curling into the air like smoke.

CLAY ALLISON (VO)

Folks round these parts still talk
about what we did to Charles Kennedy.

(beat)

Some reckon it wasn't right. Others
swear... it was the only thing that
was.

They pass through a field of tall grass. The blades ripple around them. A quiet sea of green.

Overhead, a lone crow circles. Its shadow skims across Clay's face, then disappears into the brush.

CLAY ALLISON (VO) (CONT'D)

Out here, the law don't always ride
fast enough to set things right.

(beat)

Some men cross lines they don't come
back from.

Intercut images:

- Kennedy lifting Sammuel's body.
- Rosa bursting into Pearson's Saloon.
- Kennedy's lifeless stare in the dirt.

EXT. MUTZ HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

A stagecoach waits at the edge of the dusty street.

Rosa steps out into the open air. Her cane in one hand, satchel in the other. And now a gun belt rides her hip. Worn leather but clean iron. It doesn't sparkle. It doesn't need to. A few townsfolk take notice. No one says a word.

CLAY ALLISON (VO)

Rosa limped into town bleeding,
bruised... damn near dead. Told
stories that froze men stiff.
Travelers gone missin'. Fresh-dug
holes in the yard. Even done in his
own boy.

The driver reaches to help her up. She doesn't take his hand. She climbs on her own. She pauses at the top step. Turns to look back.

Elizabethtown sprawls behind her. Battered, breathing, still standing.

A long breath and full smile.

CLAY ALLISON (VO) (CONT'D)

Me, my brothers, and a few men who
knew what had to be done... we did it.

She climbs inside. CLICK - The door closes. Wheels turn. Dust rises.

Rosa rides on.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF TOWN - CONTINUOUS

The riders crest a ridge; silhouettes cut against the sky.

Elizabethtown lies quiet in the valley below, still as a painting.

Clay pulls his horse to a stop. He sits there, watching. A moment of quiet reckoning.

The others ride on, their figures shrinking into the trail.

CLAY ALLISON (VO)

The town held us up as heroes. We
ain't heroes... not by a long shot.

(beat)

We didn't do it for pleasure. We
didn't do it out of anger. We did
it... because *someone* had to.

Clay turns his horse. Kicks gently, rides to catch up. The dust stirs behind him, swallowed by the stillness.

CLAY ALLISON (VO) (CONT'D)

I'll tell you plain and simple. I
don't regret it. Not one... *damn...*
bit.

The posse disappears into a line of tall trees. Their shapes swallowed by shadow. Their sound by silence.

CLAY ALLISON (VO) (CONT'D)

The law can be good when it works.

(beat)

But out here...

(beat)

What's legal and what's right, ain't
the same thing.

FADE TO BLACK

THE END