

# **LODDON MALLEE**

"Pilot"  
Written by  
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Genre:  
Western Drama

Logline:  
In 1864, Colonial Victoria is in conflict; squatter barons contest new settlers, gold seeking immigrants flood in and a confederate deserter returns to a divided town besieged by a mob of bushrangers.

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LODDON MALLEE

"PILOT"

TEASER

FADE IN:

**EXT. LODDON MALLEE REGION - DAY**

A ragged landscape extends out toward the horizon.

SUPER: **Squatter**, *noun*. Free settlers and ex-convicts legally occupying Crown Land in the Australian Colonies. Their only claim... They were the first Europeans.

Sharp, craggy hills. The plains between them overflow with hardy grasses.

SUPER: **Selector**, *noun*. Opportunists and 'relocators' buying a claim to a Squatters land. **Directly from the Colony.**

Gumtrees crowd mountains and rivers, surrounded by stripped farmland.

SUPER: They didn't like each other.

Away from the mountains, dense pockets of bush pack low hills.

In that dense bush--

**EXT. ELISE'S FARMLAND - CREEK - DAY**

--ELISE MAYFAIR(34) moves confidently up a hill covered in scrub. A lone figure on foot in riding leathers and a broad hat. A long rifle dangling from her back.

SUPER: **Australia. June 1865.**

SUPER: **Loddon-Mallee Highlands, The Colony of Victoria.**

Elise settles on a small outcrop. A voice carries up from the valley below.

TOMMY MORGAN (O.S.)

Quick now boys!

**BELOW - IN THE VALLEY**

Six men halt at the creek skirting the hill, ED'S GANG. Two men lead: ED MORGAN(30) a grim South Sea Islander, hair cropped and brow furrowed; and TOMMY MORGAN(35) Caucasian, grimy, and all lean muscle. Every man is armed to the teeth.

Ed signals for them to dismount. Tommy wanders towards the creek with his horse.

ED MORGAN

Last one's north, a few miles up  
the creek.

A sunburnt gang member, BOBBY(28) wades into the creek. Tommy spits into the blue-black water, and turns back to Ed.

TOMMY MORGAN

We do this before sunset. Make sure  
they lose us in the dark.

Bobby douses his face with water.

**ABOVE - ON THE HILL**

Lying flat, Elise draws the rifle to her cheek. Watching.

**BELOW**

Bobby strips his arse bare and releases a long held stream of piss, sighing with relief.

**ABOVE**

Elise takes a sharp breath.

And FIRES.

**BELOW**

Bobby drops into the river. The others scramble to their horses. A bullet skims the water by Tommy. His horse bolts.

ED MORGAN

The hill! Pull the horses back!

TOMMY MORGAN

Fuck the horses!

Tommy unloads his pistol into the outcrop. ELISE shoves herself back, skidding down and scoring her hands. Bullets PUMMEL the rock beneath her.

The gang mounts; still wetting the hill with gunfire. Slowly, they draw backward into the bush.

ED MORGAN

Get into the trees! Tommy!

Tommy remains. He pulls a rifle from his saddle, aiming at the cliff. Waiting.

Elise pops over the edge. Her own rifle at her cheek.

CRACK. Two shots. ELISE is hit, toppling backwards. Tommy's horse goes down, SLAMMING him into the earth.

ACT ONE**EXT. MELBOURNE DOCKS - MORNING**

**SUPER: Melbourne, The Colony of Victoria.**

Melbourne's port is full to bursting, freshly built docks surrounded by tall ships and towering masts.

HANDLERS whip their whinnying horses forward, raising cargo from the creaking hulls.

A man in a DUSTER coat steps down onto the dock, his STETSON pulled low. This is BEN WEAVER(30). In the distance--

RECRUITER

Only hours to Bendigo! Fastest way  
to your fortune!

Ben's saddlebags are dumped unceremoniously to the ground by a nearby SAILOR. He hoists them over his shoulder, and strides away through the crowd; consciously avoiding the looks of passersby.

The RECRUITER grabs Ben as he passes, pressing a pamphlet into his hands. Above a crude sketch of a train are the words -- *A new home! Join us in Bendigo. Select your own gold rich land!*

By the time Ben looks up, the Recruiter's moved on to another hopeful. Ben hesitates, pockets the pamphlet, and fades back into the crowd.

**EXT. MELBOURNE TERMINUS - MORNING**

The train pulls in alongside the stations single platform, steam shrouding the platform around Ben. A clutch of well dressed LANDOWNERS board first, followed by a stream of GOLD SEEKERS, men (and some women) carrying panning tools.

**INT. TRAIN - MORNING**

Ben steps into the carriage and shakes off his Duster, revealing the MILITARY JACKET underneath. As he moves to his seat, one GENTLEMAN turns away to his WIFE, muttering.

Sewn to the breast of Ben's jacket, is a CONFEDERATE FLAG PATCH.

He drops into his seat and pulls the Stetson down over his eyes. Outside, Melbourne drifts away in spurts of steam.

**INT. TRAIN - LATER**

Ben's asleep.

Sitting across from him is SARAH CARROW(30's), in long buttoned up dress trying to restrain her fidgety son, PETER(5), by his dirty coat as he tugs on Ben's jacket.

The brakes SCREECH. Ben jerks awake, and Sarah finally wrestles her son back into his seat.

Ben pushes back his hat, scanning the signs outside.

SARAH CARROW

Peter!

Peter flops into the seat next to him, grabbing for the Stetson. Ben laughs.

BEN

It's okay.

Ben turns it over to Peter, who immediately buries his head inside it. The Gentleman from earlier directs a baleful stare at Ben. He glances down at his clothes, he's filthy.

BEN (cont'd)

Forgive the dirt ma'am.

He extends his hand to Sarah.

BEN (cont'd)

Ben Weaver.

SARAH CARROW

Sarah Carrow. This--  
 (grabbing Peter again)  
 --is Peter.  
 You're heading for Bendigo?  
 Sorry, the pamphlet--

The Recruiters pamphlet, which is now being torn up by Peter.

BEN

Near there.

Ben looks back to the window, signs for Kyneton scroll past.

SARAH CARROW

You aren't the first one back. The papers say that last month a dozen men came back from the navy.

The train stops, PASSENGERS start to shuffle off.

SARAH CARROW (cont'd)  
 We're heading home. To Avon Hill.  
 Peter and I were visiting my  
 family.

Ben tries to shift out of the Gentleman's continued glare.

BEN  
 What's it like now?

SARAH CARROW  
 Oh, if you're thinking of selecting  
 land, it's a fine place. Do you  
 know the town?

BEN  
 I grew up there on a farm.

Ben glances away from the Gentleman.

SARAH CARROW  
 We only recently settled. Though  
 it's more peaceful than Bendigo.  
 We've avoided the riots. *The*  
*Chinese*. Hopefully we'll be far  
 enough away to avoid any more  
 uproar.  
 (curious)  
 Is your family there? Would we know  
 them?

BEN  
 Just a house. They're gone. I'll  
 pick up where they left off. Keep  
 quiet.

SARAH CARROW  
 Oh. Their land... A lot has  
 changed--

She's cut off by a shout.

GENTLEMAN (O.S.)  
 (to his wife)  
 --Lincoln dead less than six  
 months!

Sarah leans towards Ben.

SARAH CARROW  
 He keeps staring.

Ben glances over her shoulder, the Gentleman is already on  
 his feet. He stops next to Ben.

GENTLEMAN  
*Bastard.*

BEN

Sir?

He spits on Ben.

GENTLEMAN

(to Sarah)

Any self respecting woman--

Ben stands, his back to Sarah and Peter.

A quiet CLICK announces the COLT 1851 NAVY REVOLVER at his hip.

BEN

You'll miss the station.

The Gentleman reaches for Ben. His wife grabs his arm, and drags him off the train. Ben watches them leave, and re-fastens his holster strap.

SARAH CARROW

Ben.

He looks around at the other passengers, they watch him cautiously. He strips off his jacket.

BEN

I'm sorry ma'am.

With that, he stuffs the jacket above their seats. The train starts off again.

**EXT. AVON HILL TOWN HALL - AFTERNOON**

SUPER: Avon Hill, Loddon Mallee Region

On the townships only real street sits the two story TOWN HALL. It's bluestone facade stark among the timber storefronts and homes.

Elise, now plainly dressed, ties her horse to the halls wrought iron fence. She opens the door and steps inside, rifle still slung across her back.

**INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON**

WILLIAM REID (40's), far too grey haired for his age, hunches over his desk examining maps of the regions landholders. Clean blocks mix with rough bulging shapes coloured to note ownership, some stretching a hundred kilometers from the town at the centre to the maps edge.

STOMPING BOOTS, followed by a not-so gentle knock at the door.

WILLIAM

Yes?

Elise enters, William sighs.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

Elise--

ELISE

Ed and his men came through my land again. Four days ago.

William piles the maps together.

WILLIAM

And you left them alone?

Elise pulls a map away from William. It's dotted with abnormal, jagged blocks denoting ownership.

ELISE

They've been watering their horses on my land William. Here--

Elise pinpoints her farmland, an evenly, squared off block marked - *Mayfair, selected from Crown.*

WILLIAM

(exasperated)

Did you shoot at them?

She ignores him, searching. She traces the edge of the creek.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

Elise did you kill anyone!

ELISE

If this was your land--

WILLIAM

Elise!

Elise strips back her sleeve, revealing a bloody bandage.

ELISE

One in the river... And another bastards poor horse.

WILLIAM

Christ! You're making yourself their target!

ELISE

How many times have I gone after Ed William?

(sarcastic)

And I'm not already a target?

Elise leans over the desk towards him.

ELISE (cont'd)  
They killed Charlie Loughrie  
yesterday. In his home.

WILLIAM  
I know Elise.

ELISE  
They crossed my land, freely, and  
they cut him down.

WILLIAM  
Elise--

William signals for peace, sits, and pulls a bottle from  
underneath his desk.

WILLIAM (cont'd)  
Please. Just sit.

She leans her rifle against the wall and joins him.

ELISE  
I'm sorry William, I don't blame  
you. Ask for men from the  
goldfields, Daniel can't handle  
this. I don't know what else to do.

WILLIAM  
Sergeant Daniel is waiting for the  
next riot. The Squatter council and  
I are meeting this afternoon--

Elise scoffs.

WILLIAM (cont'd)  
Elise if you pursue this away from  
your land. Daniel will have every  
right to jail you.

ELISE  
And what would you do then William?  
Celebrate a problem solved?

Silence. William sighs.

WILLIAM  
Elise--

She pulls a map from the pile, grabs Williams pen, and  
slashes a long line in across the *LOUGHRIE* block.

ELISE  
If only.

She leaves.

**INT/EXT. BENDIGO TRAIN STATION - DAY**

Ben exits the station, duster and saddlebags draped over his shoulder. Between him and Bendigo proper is an impenetrable tent-city and a stream of dusty OCCUPANTS.

Nearby a bellowing, Caucasian FOREMAN drives a group of SOUTH SEA ISLANDERS from horseback atop a short, muscular WALER HORSE. His whip cracks above their heads.

FOREMAN

Move *Kanaka!*

Ben steps down from the platform, watching. His hand resting on his revolver.

**EXT. BENDIGO TRAIN STATION - LATER**

The street is clear, most people have moved on. Except for Ben.

Instead, he's seated alongside a hotel, saddlebags now stuffed with supplies. Watching the Foreman and the Islanders unload new cargo.

One ISLANDER breaks away, making for a water barrel.

FOREMAN

What did I say!

The Foreman is already behind him, whip gouging into the Islanders back.

FOREMAN (cont'd)

All of you, stop!  
(to the breakaway)  
On your feet.

The Islander struggles to stand.

The WHIP scores his back again. The Foreman dismounts.

Ben's moving, saddlebags left behind.

FOREMAN (cont'd)

Move!

The Islander groans. The Foreman raises his whip.

Ben's behind him, revolver pressing into the base of his skull.

BEN

(to the Islander)  
You need to leave.

The Islander turns and flee's.

FOREMAN

What do you think you've done.

Ben nudges the Foreman with the barrel.

BEN

They yours, or the company's?

The Foreman twists, grabbing for Ben's gun. Ben shoves him from behind, forcing him to the ground. He struggles--

CLICK. The revolver nestles against the Foreman's ear.

FOREMAN

Company! The company owns their contract.

BEN

He's free, you understand?

Ben FIRES one shot right next to the Foreman's ear.

The Foreman nods, eyes wild, locked on the gun. Ben looks up, the Foreman's horse is still there, unconcerned.

BEN (cont'd)

That yours?

**EXT. BENDIGO STREETS - AFTERNOON**

In the dimming sunlight, Ben rides the Waler out through Bendigo's thinning tent slums. He's named the horse TRAVELLER, though we won't hear it said or learn why until later.

END OF ACT 1

ACT 2**INT. ED'S HIDEOUT - NIGHT**

A wide, rounded cavern, large enough to fit twenty standing inside. The remaining half of Ed's Gang speak in a hush around a fire. Among them is RYAN(25) neatly dressed & scowling, and LUKE(22) one of many Irish in the gang.

Something moves in the entryway, Luke cocks his pistol--

It's Ed. He crouches next to Ryan.

ED MORGAN

Tommy fell from his horse, go tend  
to him.

Ryan slides back from the fire and rushes outside. The gang has gone quiet, waiting for what they know is coming.

ED MORGAN (cont'd)

Bobby's gone boys.

Ed picks up a bottle. He drinks.

ED MORGAN (cont'd)

A drink! To Bobby!

The others follow suit. Luke glances at PAUL (28), one of the older members, a long scar under his chin. He nods, and they leave.

One by one the Gang follows Luke and Paul. Ed takes another swing and spits it into the fire.

**EXT. ED'S HIDEOUT - NIGHT**

A fleeting burst of firelight peaks through a gap in tumbled together rock. The light skirts the hilltop, revealing a cluster of massive boulders tilted against the hill, forming the hideout's entrance.

**INT. ED'S HIDEOUT - NIGHT**

Tommy, head wrapped in bandages, ducks inside. Ed's sitting against the cave wall, his sleeves pulled up. Long, puffy scars run up his arms towards his back.

ED MORGAN

Are we any better off? How many men  
have we lost here Tommy?

He extends the bottle to Tommy. Tommy shrugs

ED MORGAN (cont'd)  
The other boys... They okay?

TOMMY MORGAN  
Not a scratch-- Aside from Bobby.

He drinks.

ED MORGAN  
We're stagnating.

TOMMY MORGAN  
So what do we do?

ED MORGAN  
Stir the pot, and see what rises.

**EXT. BEN'S LAND - AFTERNOON**

Ben guides Traveller along a narrow trail, copper red dust swirling in his wake. Everything around him tinder-dry, long overrun by bush.

He looks up through the canopy of trees, glimpsing scattered clouds above, a bird calls nearby.

Ben breaks through the treeline into a broad, grassy clearing. In the distance it drops down into a valley, and ahead--

A ruin of ash and broken timber. The WEAVER FARMHOUSE.

BEN  
No.

Ben stops. Lets go of the reins.

Starts walking.

Faster.

He steps onto the groaning porch, staring at the scorched doorframe. The walls around it long collapsed inwards.

BEN (cont'd)  
No.

He tugs at the frame. Slivers of burnt timber break free.

His fist SLAMS into it, a disfigured hinge gouging his hand.

BEN (cont'd)  
Ahhhhhh!

Ben sinks to the ground, blood welling in the wound.

He turns to look out into the trees, at Traveller still waiting.

*Nothing left.*

BETH'S WEDDING RING twisting in his bloody fingers. A cold laugh is all that escapes him.

He stands up, and pulls off his jacket.

**EXT. BEN'S LAND - MORNING**

Sunrise.

Dripping sweat, Ben drags a chunk of timber toward a swelling pile.

Piece by piece, veins popping, he drags burnt chunks of the wreck away.

Ben heaves another fallen beam from it's place against the rear wall. Something crunches as he pulls it away. He pushes it aside, and dusts away the ash beneath.

Pressed against the wall is a small, silver framed PHOTOGRAPH. Ben shakes off the ash--

CRACK.

A BULLET whips over his head. Ben throws himself to the ground, searching for the source.

Another shot PUNCTURES the wall behind him. Ben sprints out of the house and into cover behind the wood pile.

BEN

HEY!

Silence.

Ben peaks around the edge.

A shot SPLITS the air where his head was a moment earlier.

ELISE (O.S.)

Who are you?

BEN

Can I come out?

He waves a hand outside the wood pile. Another SHOT.

ON Elise. She lowers her rifle, ejects a cartridge and loads another.

BEN (cont'd)

Now?

Silence.

Elise emerges from the trees on horseback, rifle trained on the woodpile. Ben steps out. Hands raised, revolver still in his grip.

ELISE  
Where are the others?

BEN  
The others?

Slowing inching towards Elise.

ELISE  
The gang. What are you doing with the house?

BEN  
Put the rifle down.

She aims for his head. Ben tenses. He nods back towards the house.

BEN (cont'd)  
Who did this?

ELISE  
You bastards did it. Where are they?

As Elise twists towards the ruin, Ben fires a shot into the ground and Elise's horse panics, throwing her from the saddle.

He's standing over her before she can reach her feet. Revolver leveled at her head.

BEN  
It's my land. Who are you here for?

ELISE  
This is *mine*. I selected it.

Elise grabs for the rifle and Ben kicks it away. The two grapple and Elise staggers to her feet. But Ben is already standing, revolver on her again. This time he takes the rifle as well.

ELISE (cont'd)  
You aren't with them?

BEN  
I'm not.

ELISE  
Who are you?

BEN

This is my inheritance...

He shoulders the rifle, extending his hand. Elise takes it, and in the moment Ben lowers his guard, darts forward tipping the rifle off Ben's shoulder and back into her hands. Ben pulls backwards at the same time bringing the revolver level with Elise's stomach.

BEN (cont'd)

Good job.

Elise sighs, lowering the rifle.

ELISE

It was abandoned. Whoever lived here before. In the eyes of the Colony it's mine.

(Beat)

And you aren't here to kill me for it.

He doesn't answer. The two watch each other carefully.

BEN

Ben Weaver. Can I trust you not to shoot me?

ELISE

Do you intend to stay here?

BEN

I do.

She extends her hand and he helps her up.

ELISE

I'm Elise.

BEN

Elise. Your horse bolted up that creek bed.

Elise doesn't move. Ben collects his jacket and the photograph. A hazy black and white image of himself and BETH. Both fresh faced, Beth with tight curls cut at her shoulder; wearing a plain, dark dress and a drivers hat.

ELISE

You don't care who did this to your inheritance then?

Ben begins rhythmically unloading her rifle.

BEN

Whatever fight you've got, isn't mine.

ELISE  
 (on the patch)  
 That fight wasn't yours either.

BEN  
 Yours doesn't pay as well.

He tosses her the unloaded gun, and scatters the shells.

ELISE  
 You can't stay here.

BEN  
 Why?

ELISE  
 See the mayor. If he says this  
 would've been yours. Maybe we can  
 talk about the land.

BEN  
 It's already mine.

ELISE  
 The gang *will* just come after you  
 instead.

Elise pulls out a few spare cartridges from her coat, starts loading her rifle again.

BEN  
 Good luck to them.

ELISE  
 I could report to this to the local  
 police instead?

Ben pauses, his back to Elise.

BEN  
 Fine.

**EXT. TOWN HALL - AFTERNOON**

A cluster of well dressed, middle aged SQUATTERS step out of the two-storey, brick fronted hall, followed by William. They mill about outside the hall. JONATHAN GREEN (40's) a wiry, thin skinned man, pulls William aside.

JONATHAN GREENE  
 I've turned away another individual  
 claiming to have selected my  
 grazing land.

JAMES LUCAS (40), red cheeked, long greasy hair, shoves his way over to them.

JAMES LUCAS  
That land's mine to claim John!

WILLIAM  
Jonathan--

JONATHAN GREENE  
(louder for James to hear)  
In *addition* to another twelve acre  
he just selected!

JAMES LUCAS  
You can't keep cutting us out of  
this William. The crown gave me the  
right to claim it.

JONATHAN GREENE  
My family has kept that land for 30  
years! William this is harassment  
surely!

WILLIAM  
This is a matter for the colony! I  
am not the one giving away your  
land.  
(beat)  
You have neighbours Jonathan, who  
are dying in their-- (homes)

JONATHAN GREENE  
Deservedly!

James scoffs.

WILLIAM  
Enough! Enough. Get out of here  
both of you.

Jonathan charges away with James close behind him, leaving  
William with the others.

CUT TO:

**EXT. AVON HILL - AFTERNOON**

Elise and Ben ride towards the hall, the town spread out  
around them.

**EXT. AVON HILL TOWN HALL - AFTERNOON**

William is deep in conversation with BRYCE RYAN (50's), a  
burly, but well-dressed gentleman. A few departing Squatters  
greet Elise as she approaches. Ben hangs back.

WILLIAM

Excuse me Bryce. Elise, I have some news.

William pulls her away.

BRYCE RYAN

(recognising Ben)

Ben Weaver!

BEN

Bryce!

Bryce shakes Ben's hand enthusiastically.

BRYCE RYAN

I'm sorry about your parents. I've missed Thomas dearly, he always wondered when you'd both come home.

Bryce pauses, taking Ben in.

BEN

Beth isn't here Bryce.

BRYCE RYAN

Oh--

BEN

I've already seen the house.

BRYCE RYAN

I would've liked to--

Bryce glances over to Elise.

BRYCE RYAN (cont'd)

Ben. If you need help with anything. Anything.

Bryce nods *remember the offer*, and leaves. The other Squatters trickle out of sight.

Ben watches William and Elise speaking for a moment, and strides towards them.

ELISE

William, this is Ben Weaver.

WILLIAM

William Reid. Good to see someone remembers you.

Before Ben can respond, William takes him aside.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

I'm sorry, I didn't know your family. But Elise--

BEN

She's squatting on my families  
claim.

WILLIAM

Yes. The land. It was unoccupied  
for years. Elise selected it. The  
colony made it hers.

BEN

It was paid for--

WILLIAM

And you weren't to be found.

(exasperated)

Ben. She believes you could help us  
with the Morgans. If...

He leaves the question hanging in the air.

BEN

No.

WILLIAM

Legally, the land belongs to Elise.  
She is making you an offer, if you  
won't consider it, there's nothing  
I can do.

With that he strides away, shaking his head to Elise.

ELISE

I'll give you a few days. Then you  
should leave.

She throws herself onto her horse, and gallops away.

END OF ACT 2

ACT THREE**EXT. BUSHLAND - MORNING**

REDDING (20's), a thickset redhead, waits atop his horse in a small clearing. He smooths his jacket, fiddling with his CONSTABLES BADGE.

HOOFBEATS.

Tommy Morgan charges out through the trees. Pulling up in front of him.

TOMMY MORGAN  
Afternoon Redding.

REDDING  
Tommy.

Luke walks his horse into view, joined by a SCARRED GANG MEMBER.

TOMMY MORGAN  
What have you heard?

REDDING  
William's pulling people in. Met  
with the squatters again.  
(beat)  
Tommy. There's a soldier in town.

Tommy's circling him.

REDDING (cont'd)  
The other boys said he left a few  
years ago. That he's come back for  
land.

TOMMY MORGAN  
And that's all we're here for?

Redding hesitates. Tommy reigns in painfully close to him.

TOMMY MORGAN (cont'd)  
Redding.

He leans back into his saddle, grabs his pistol by the barrel and cracks Redding across the face.

Redding spits blood.

REDDING  
William spoke to him. I think he  
sent him over with Elise. To look  
around.  
(beat)  
That's it Tommy.

TOMMY MORGAN

I believe you.

A bag of coins clinks to the ground at the feet of Redding's horse. Tommy rides off. The others linger, watching Redding.

Redding swings down from his saddle, thumps to the ground and snatches up the bag.

The others finally ride away.

**EXT. LODDON MALLEE - MORNING**

Flanked by Luke and the Scarred Gang Member, Tommy lopes toward a nest of tumbled rock beneath the horn of a mountain. Ed's hideout comes into full view for the first time.

**EXT. ED'S HIDEOUT - MORNING**

Tommy reins in next to Ed, who's waiting outside the hideout.

ED MORGAN

What did he say?

TOMMY MORGAN

Mayors the same. But there's a soldier in Avon Hill.

The others stop behind Tommy, waiting. He dismounts and hands his reins to Luke, while the others hitch their horses.

ED MORGAN

(to the others)

We're fine boys.

They head inside.

TOMMY MORGAN

He sent him out with Elise.

Ed watches them leave, and pulls Tommy away.

ED MORGAN

Anything else?

TOMMY MORGAN

That's all he knew.

Tommy wavers slightly. Ed yanks his pistol away from him. Blood's caked on the stock.

ED MORGAN

This is Redding's. Isn't it?

TOMMY MORGAN  
He was holding out Ed.

ED MORGAN  
Tell me. What happens without the  
coppers keeping the state off us?

TOMMY MORGAN  
He can take it. They're paid well--

ED MORGAN  
Do you honestly think William isn't  
looking at them? Not again. I mean  
it.

He thrusts the pistol into Tommy's chest.

TOMMY MORGAN  
Done?

Tommy turns to leave. Ed grabs him by the shoulder.

ED MORGAN  
Tommy--

TOMMY MORGAN  
Leave it Ed.

Tommy breaks away, heading back to the hideout.  
Frustrated, Ed catches him just before he enters.

ED MORGAN  
Some of the boys have gone missing.  
The others found new tracks at the  
creek. I told them it was us--

TOMMY MORGAN  
I'll find 'em. If Elise did this--

ED MORGAN  
They left Tommy.

Tommy shakes him off.

TOMMY MORGAN  
Then after I find them, I won't  
bring them back.

ED MORGAN  
No. We tell the others it was Elise  
and leave it.

TOMMY MORGAN  
What then Ed? Sit and drink?

ED MORGAN  
You know that's not what I want.  
(MORE)

ED MORGAN (cont'd)  
We know the soldier's trouble, what  
if others are coming?

TOMMY MORGAN  
He's alone.

ED MORGAN  
Only by Redding's account.

TOMMY MORGAN  
I trust what I got out of him.

ED MORGAN  
I don't. Keep clear of him. We've  
still got work to do. We put the  
fear of god into this next one, and  
see what our soldier does.

Ed drops a huge BAG OF STERLING into Tommy's hands.

ED MORGAN (cont'd)  
Get them ready.

Tommy ducks back into the cave.

**EXT. BEN'S LAND - CLIFFTOP - DAY**

Overlooking the valley below, Ben presses a detailed LODDON MALLEE map onto a worn, boxy travelling desk. He pins it in one corner with a gold wedding band. BETH'S WEDDING BAND.

He dips a pen into a clinking series of inkwell's, and sketches in a new road. Slowly, colourful notes flow over the map, marking out a changed world.

Lost in work, it's a while before Ben notices the black smoke in the distance.

**EXT. CARROW FARM - DAY**

The Carrow's timber farmhouse squats in a thin clearing, the usual quiet consumed by a low roar. Just beyond the treeline, their barn burns. Ed's Gang feeds the fire, tossing a stream of torches inside.

**INT. CARROW FARM - DAY**

Standing, Ed and Tommy face the CARROW FAMILY across their dinner table. A couple of NEW GANG MEMBERS lurk behind them. Ed sits, spilling the bag of sterling towards the Carrows.

ED MORGAN  
I'll give another one of these. To  
whichever son wants to take it.

He looks over to the eldest boy COLIN(15).

JOHN CARROW  
Colin. Say nothing.

ED MORGAN  
John, I know that this will be very important to the family over the coming months.

Gunshots cough in the distance. JOHN CARROW, wiry and grey, pulls Colin behind him.

JOHN CARROW  
Leave the boys Ed, I'll come with you.

TOMMY MORGAN  
I think we'd prefer one of the boys John. Fresher than you are. Better men.

John stands to face him. Ed waves the others back.

SARAH CARROW  
John don't--

JOHN CARROW  
They're staying with their family. We've got cattle still needs tending.

Screeching timber announces the collapse of the barn. Peter cries.

ED MORGAN  
I think you misunderstood John. This money is for the cattle.

GUNFIRE and SCREAMING CATTLE in the distance.

TOMMY MORGAN  
We're giving you the choice boys--

Tommy drops a PISTOL onto the table and HENRY(13), curious, makes the mistake of looking.

ED MORGAN  
--help us make this easy on your father.

Ed watches Henry. The gunfire slows.

ED MORGAN (cont'd)  
No grain, and no cattle. This--

He nudges the bag forward.

ED MORGAN (cont'd)  
 --could go a very, very long way.

Ed pushes back his chair, joining his brother. Henry steps toward the table.

JOHN CARROW  
 Henry.

Henry has the pistol in his hand. Shaking, he takes the clinking bag from the table.

JOHN CARROW (cont'd)  
 Put it down!

John stands, Tommy's gun is up before he can blink. Sarah weeps, clutching her skirt.

ED MORGAN  
 Come on son, protect your family.

Henry lowers the pistol, hands the bag to his father. And joins Ed.

HENRY CARROW  
 It's ok papa, take it.

ED MORGAN  
 Good boy!

SARAH CARROW  
 Henry!

John's frozen under Tommy's watchful gaze.

TOMMY MORGAN  
 We'll see you soon John.

Ed takes Henry by the shoulder and leads him out.

**EXT. CARROW FARM - DAY**

Elise drags her horse to a halt as she clears the bush above the farmhouse. She's too late.

The barn's already been devoured by the flame. And at the base of the low hill, the fire leaps outwards into the Carrow's fields. Sparks scatter in the wind, careening into mounds of hay and distant gum tree's.

Ben appears on Traveller from the tree's behind her. He's been watching this for some time.

BEN  
 They're already moving.  
 Whose farm is it?

Ed's men shout as they catch sight of the two.

**AT THE FARMHOUSE**

Tommy picks out their silhouettes against the horizon.

TOMMY MORGAN

That's him, with Elise. Do we go  
for him?

ED MORGAN

Let's see what he's about.  
(to the others)  
Stay here!

Luke pulls Henry up onto his horse. Tommy takes the lead, rifle in one hand, reins in the other, shielding Ed as they ride towards--

**ELISE AND BEN.**

They reach for their guns, saddles creaking.

ELISE

Ed's the dark one, you see him?

Ed and Tommy pick up speed, galloping up the hill.

BEN

I see him.

They're close.

Elise draws a bead on Ed. Tommy COCKS his rifle, still riding.

ED MORGAN

Whoa!

Ed skids to a stop, raising his hands. Tommy splits away to his left, slowing.

ELISE

I don't care about your men Ed.  
I'll kill you. Right here.

ED MORGAN

Tommy.

Tommy stops, focussed on Elise.

ELISE

What are you doing with Henry?

TOMMY MORGAN

He's seeking his fortune.

Ben is fixed on Ed, hand on his gun, and Ed stares back at him. Something passing between them.

ED MORGAN

I'd heard you bought yourself a soldier Elise. I wager he's quick.

(to Ben)

But I think he knows he should stay out of this.

ELISE

I'm the one with the rifle.

Elise pulls back the hammer. Tommy twists towards her, gun still on his hip.

ELISE (cont'd)

Where are John and Sarah?

CLOSE on Ben, watching Ed. Waiting for him to move.

ED MORGAN

The Carrows will be living quietly for a while.

Elise grips her trigger, ready to punch a hole in Ed. He glances at her. Smiles.

ED MORGAN (cont'd)

I thought you knew better Elise.

Ben reaches over and pulls her gun down.

BEN

We'll see each other soon.

ED MORGAN

I know we will.

Ed guides his horse away, leaving Tommy watching them. Ben watches him slowly turn and gallop away.

ELISE

I don't care if this costs me my life.

BEN

I'm not letting you kill us both.

He lets her go and Elise pushes him back, firing a shot towards the distant Morgans, screeching--

ELISE

Bastards!

Elise turns to Ben, gives him a crushing look, and rides away. Ben remains, watching the fire.

He gathers his reins and makes for the Carrow farmhouse.

**EXT. BEN'S LAND - DAY - FOLLOWING DAY**

Sunrise.

Elise sits at the edge of the bushland above the Weaver house. Ben has erected a bulky canvas tent nearby, Traveller's hitched to a tree alongside it.

She pauses, unnoticed, watching Ben roll a log over, dragging the fresh timber to the ruined house. He drops it inside with a thump that echoes out into the clearing.

Elise's horse nickers. Loudly.

Ben leaves the timber and heads back into the forest. He sweeps up his revolver as he passes the tent.

Elise turns back to the house, and guides her horse down the hill, unable to pick Ben out in the ruin. She draws her rifle from the saddle, resting it across her legs. Down, but ready.

As she reaches the house, Ben emerges from the bush. With his revolver. Just like Elise, down but ready.

BEN

I'm surprised you didn't bring anyone with you.

ELISE

For what?

BEN

Removing me.

Ben lifts up his pack. Elise looks back to the work Ben's done at the house.

ELISE

I wanted to talk.

BEN

I know where this is going.

Elise, dismounts, and rips a folded poster from her saddle. She pushes it into Ben's hands.

ELISE

Read it. I need you to understand.

He unfolds the coarse paper. *The Land Act of 1862.*

ELISE (cont'd)

I was practically a spinster, and I had to take something while I could. The house was abandoned for years.

BEN

"The Victorian governor declares all remaining *unselected* land in Loddon Mallee, and surrounding the Grampians mountains"--

ELISE

--"to be open for selection."

BEN

How much?

ELISE

Three hundred acres. A pound an acre.

BEN

Come with me.

He pulls the pack over his shoulder and tramps off into the bush. Elise cautiously follows.

**EXT. BEN'S LAND - CLIFFTOP - DAY - CONTINUOUS**

They stop at the lip of a cliff overlooking the valley below, the same spot where Ben sat yesterday. A thin haze of smoke still lingers at the foot of the MALLEE MOUNTAINS, blanketing the Carrow's farm.

BEN

This is what I could remember. With some corrections. There's a lot... more.

He removes the map from his coat, pressing it flat. The first time Elise has seen this.

He opens his travel desk, laying the map atop it.

BEN (cont'd)

It's not finished.

ELISE

It's almost perfect. Next door, that was Charlie Loughrie's farm. It's being taken over now. The east fence line is wrong.

Ben selects a lone pencil. Twisting it, Ben scratches in a line. Following her.

ELISE (cont'd)

The river cuts off there, and John  
and Sarah's land boundary starts  
here. Or did.

Ben's tracing outlines the same squared off block we saw  
earlier.

And trapped inside it, marked in red, tracing gullies and  
hills alike, is a jagged rectangle. Elise recognizes the  
house.

BEN

I want this to settle Elise.  
Without knowing you or someone else  
could come for me.

ELISE

You had years to claim it yourself.  
And I offered--

BEN

To sell? To let me buy what should  
already be mine?

ELISE

So I should let you take it for  
nothing?

Ben stands, knocking over the desk.

BEN

I have nothing!

He's taken aback by his own outburst.

ELISE

I paid, just like the others did.

BEN

And unlike them, I didn't see a  
shilling.

Ben packs down the desk, dropping it back into his pack.

ELISE

Help me get rid of Ed.

BEN

No.

Elise grabs him.

ELISE

I would have died happily yesterday  
to end him.

Ben shrugs her off, and stuffs everything into his pack.

BEN

If you'd killed him, what would they have done to the others?

ELISE

They'd already taken Henry--

BEN

They'd do worse than torch the farm. I want no part of it.

ELISE

Then leave. I won't let you stay.

BEN

Then go for the police.

Leaving Elise at a loss, Ben hoists the pack onto his shoulder.

ON Elise as she watches him leave, something dawning on her--

ELISE

What did you think you were coming back to?

Ben stops. But he doesn't answer.

ELISE (cont'd)

Your parents passed. You had five years to claim it. Where were you?

BEN

I only found out when I left the Army. A letter after Beth died. I was hoping for some peace.

She snorts, rising to her feet.

ELISE

Me too.

BEN

Then why this Elise?

ELISE

When Ed came. No one fought back. Then he killed the sergeant before Daniel. Started picking people off. William panicked.

Ben's stoic expression weakens. Elise keeps going, strangely calm.

ELISE (cont'd)

Cassie Riley found her livestock slaughtered, piled together and burned. And then he killed her. In her own home. Cassie wasn't the only one Ben.

BEN

I'll do it for the land. All of it, exactly as marked. That's my offer. But I won't be an executioner.

ELISE

Then it won't be enough.

BEN

How much blood would be enough Elise? If I help you find him, someone else can end this right.

She hesitates, still dissatisfied, but fully believing this may be the only help she'll ever have.

ELISE

Fine.

**EXT. ELISE'S FARMLAND - CREEK - AFTERNOON**

Ben and Elise follow a rough trail through the thin bush, emerging into a low valley. The reverse of Elise's first encounter with Ed's Gang.

ELISE

Tommy was in the creek, Ed and the others were on the bank. I shot one pissing in the creek from there

She points up towards the outcrop that had sheltered her. Ben looks a little impressed.

Ben steps into the creek. Spotting the ragged edge where Tommy scrambled out of the water.

BEN

They'd have to climb out on foot. What about the horses?

ELISE

Tommy's horse went down, and Ed dragged him off down that trail.

Elise dismounts and walks towards where Ed was standing.

ELISE (cont'd)

I feel sorry for the horse.

BEN

How long have they been coming through?

ELISE

Months. But you're asking why they haven't been caught. William's the only one interested in helping.

BEN

I'm wondering--

ELISE

I'm not leaving the land.

She watches him turn back to the river.

BEN

They aren't walking everywhere.

ELISE

They don't leave the horses behind somewhere either.

Ben looks past her, down the trail. *Maybe they're just clever.* Ben trudges out of the river and pulls himself back onto Traveller. The horse grumbles as it's soaked. He turns back to the trail.

BEN

They found a way out.

Ben rides away, following the trail deeper into the valley. Elise gallops after him.

**EXT. ELISE'S FARMLAND - CONTINUOUS**

Ben stops alongside a narrow point in the creek, peering up at the cliff face above. Elise reigns in hard behind him.

ELISE

There aren't any tracks.

BEN

The water's shallow.

He urges Traveller into the creek. It's slow moving, clear enough to see debris littering the bed.

From the middle of the creek, Ben scans the cliff face. Elise watching.

ELISE

What do you think is here?

Something strange in the pattern of the rock--

BEN

Look.

Elise joins him as he guides Traveller to the other bank.

BEN (cont'd)

The rock twists around into the cliff.

On the other side, the cliff face is almost *pinched* outward. And a cluster of boulders conceal a hollow spot; barely wider than a horse.

BEN (cont'd)

There's water running back down, they knew it'd lead somewhere.

ELISE

You knew it was here?

BEN

(on her look.)

I ran off a lot when I was a boy. They never had to come by you to leave. There's a path, going back up the cliff.

He turns Traveller around, and disappears behind the rock. Elise follows, and the two trace a steady path upwards into the cliffs.

**EXT. ELISE'S FARMLAND - CLIFFTOP - DUSK**

Ben leads Traveller out onto the clifftop and dismounts. Elise emerges as he's examining a patch of churned up earth just shy of the path.

BEN

Now you know the direction they're coming from.

He traces a stream of hoofprints fading away into a narrow line clear of scrub.

Elise joins him.

BEN (cont'd)

They're not hiding their trail.

ELISE

No one would know it's them. How close are they..

Ben reaches up and pulls her reins away.

ELISE (cont'd)

What are you doing?

BEN

We had an agreement, we go to the police.

ELISE

They won't help.

BEN

Maybe it's who's asking.

(frustrated)

If not the police, then William. They can have tonight, but they aren't seeing another day out up there.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR**EXT. POLICE STATION - MORNING**

The morning sun glints off the Police Stations barred windows. All pointed down the barrel of the towns main street.

The slow clop of hooves approaching.

Elise watches Ben dismount and tie Traveller to the stations railing. Ben notices she hasn't moved.

ELISE

I'll go see William.

She rides off towards the hall. Ben checks his revolver and steps up to the door.

**INT. POLICE STATION - MORNING - CONTINUOUS**

Inside, DEPUTY JAMES (20) is 'on guard', his head buried in the drawers behind his desk. The door thumps open.

DEPUTY JAMES

If this is about the Carrow fire,  
the Sergeant is taking care of it.

BEN

I have some information.

DEPUTY JAMES

He may not want to--

James extricates himself from a drawer. It dawns on him.

BEN

I'd never have picked you for a  
copper James.

DEPUTY JAMES

Ben! I'd heard--

Behind them, the door swings open. Ben turns.

Redding & SERGEANT DANIEL ABBOTT (32) enter. Daniel's the poster boy for police recruitment, blonde, clean cut and functional. Redding's nose is vividly purple.

REDDING

So this is the soldier?

DEPUTY JAMES

Sergeant, Redding--

Redding steps in front of Ben, cutting James off.

REDDING

We don't usually allow armed men  
inside.

Ben clocks the pistol at Redding's side, and his deference to Daniel.

BEN

You were with Sarah and John?

DANIEL

I spoke to John. He was shaken by  
the accident, but otherwise  
everyone seems quite well.

Redding seats himself on his desk nearby, watching Ben closely.

REDDING

Something caught in the barn.

BEN

The Morgan's were there. Elise is  
with William--

Daniel stands, cutting him off.

DANIEL

No. We appreciate the concern, but  
the Squatters council is helping  
the Carrows. I left Mr Greene with  
them, I believe he'll take over  
care of the farm while they  
recover.

BEN

What about John's boy?

DANIEL

His boys are all accounted for.

BEN

And Ed?

DANIEL

We'll keep an eye out. Now, does  
Redding need to take your pistol?

Redding unclips his holster.

Ben hesitates, hand resting on his revolver.

BEN

No. I think I'll leave.

DANIEL

If you have any other concerns, the documentation is with the Mayor. I said hello to Elise.

Redding opens the door behind them. Ben lets go of the gun and nods to James.

BEN

Thank you.

He barrels past Daniel, and follows Redding through the door.

**EXT. POLICE STATION - MORNING - CONTINUOUS**

Ben thunders down the stairs and rips Travellers reins free of the rail. Redding blocks the doorway, watching Ben pull himself into the saddle.

Ben twists towards the town center. Considering.

He spares one last glance for Redding, and spurs Traveller away from the town.

**EXT. ELISE'S FARMLAND - CLIFFTOP - DAY**

Emerging onto the clifftop, Ben turns back and looks out at Elise's land.

Traveller nickers underneath him as Ben searches his saddlebags. Pulling out a fresh map, he marks Ed's trail.

Red dust rises as Ben gallops away.

**EXT. ED'S HIDEOUT - DAY**

Dismounted, Ben follows the faint path through the bush, approaching the hideout. Ahead of him, muffled FOOTSTEPS move through the tree's.

He quiets Traveller, cautiously leading him forward.

A branch SNAPS. PAUL (20's) steps up behind him, holding a gleaming SPENCER rifle.

PAUL

Drop the pistol.

Ben tries to turn, and Paul digs the barrel into his back. *Shit.*

PAUL (cont'd)

Ed would like a moment.

Ben offers Paul his revolver, holding it by the barrel behind him.

BEN  
I'll want it back.

Ben lets Paul lead him away. Pushed towards the cavern entrance.

**INT. ED'S HIDEOUT - DAY**

A half-dozen guns are drawn as Ben enters the dim hideout.

Paul urges Ben inside with the lowered tip of his rifle. Ben's revolver jammed into his belt.

Inside, Ed and Tommy sit behind the fire, surrounded by Ed's Gang.

BEN  
Ed.

Ed grins.

TOMMY MORGAN  
This'll be fun!

ED MORGAN  
Boys, out. Now.

TOMMY MORGAN  
(quietly)  
What?

ED MORGAN  
If I want to size him. That's my business.  
(to the gang)  
Out.

The other men leave, Paul waits next to Ben.

BEN  
We should talk.

ED MORGAN  
(to Paul)  
Bring us something to drink.

Paul leaves.

ED MORGAN (cont'd)  
I thought you'd be the one leading him at the end of a barrel. I don't believe he caught you, why didn't you shoot him?

BEN

You'd have heard the shot.

ED MORGAN

Or you want to talk as much as I do. And you don't think the fight's worth it.

BEN

You don't have to die.

Paul brings in a bottle and three tin cups. He hands two to Ed and Tommy, and leaves one at Ben's feet. Ed drinks.

ED MORGAN

Give him his gun.

Tommy shakes his head at Paul.

ED MORGAN (cont'd)

(sharply)

Tommy.

(to Paul)

Give it to him.

Ben freezes. Paul passes him the revolver and Ben rests the gun in his lap, one hand on the grip.

BEN

And now?

ED MORGAN

I'm unarmed. And they're leaving.

Ed nods at Paul, and he leaves.

TOMMY MORGAN

Ed--

ED MORGAN

We're fine.

Begrudgingly he leaves with Paul. Ed waits for him to exit.

ED MORGAN (cont'd)

They all think you're a deserter, or just a coward. Look at you wound up tight around yourself. Holding back. We're alone. How many times could you have put a bullet through me?

BEN

A few. I don't want your blood. Elise does.

Ben picks up the cup. The two drink.

ED MORGAN

Though you still went to the coppers about the Carrows. Didn't you? If they won't come after me, what's next?

BEN

I know you're staying for someone else's reasons.

ED MORGAN

I'm here, because I want to be.

BEN

How many bandits and bushrangers have you met living? You can't hold out. You're smart enough to know that. Send Henry home. And leave.

Ed pours another drink.

ED MORGAN

Or I'm a dead man? That's the offer?

Ed puts his cup down. Infuriated.

ED MORGAN (cont'd)

Don't pretend there's no reward waiting for you once I'm gone. *Bullshit* you're just here for some farmboy!

Ben pulls his revolver on Ed. Lining up the shot still seated.

BEN

Take what you have, leave. I'll take Henry home.

Ed laughs. Barely covering a change in the noise outside. The sound of a struggle.

ED MORGAN

And here I thought we might just talk.

Ben stands.

ED MORGAN (cont'd)

Come in Tommy.

Tommy drags Henry in. His face bloody, bruised and fixed to the floor.

Tommy draws his pistol.

BEN

Don't--

ED MORGAN

I think you should leave Soldier.

Ed takes in the revolver. Cocked. Ready.

Smirking, Tommy presses the pistol against Henry's head.

BEN

I've got my gun on your brother.

Ed's still unarmed. Tommy's finger half rests on the trigger of his pistol.

TOMMY MORGAN

You want the boy to die?

ED MORGAN

You shoot Tommy I'll kill the boy before you can get me.

Silence.

ED MORGAN (cont'd)

You should've just talked.

BEN

You fucking bastards.

And he leaves, holding Ed in his sights until he exits the cave.

**EXT. ED'S HIDEOUT - DAY**

Ben walks backwards out of the hideout, squinting back at the entrance.

He stops, checking his gun, considering rushing back in. Dropping Tommy before he could get to Henry--

Ben passes behind Traveller and hauls himself into the saddle one handed. And finally holsters his revolver.

He spurs Traveller away.

**INT. ED'S HIDEOUT - DAY - CONTINUOUS**

Ed watches from inside. Tommy still holding a wimpering Henry.

ED MORGAN

There's no one else coming.

**EXT. ELISE'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON**

Elise's small, unassuming home is sheltered in a low valley below Ben's former land. A flock of sheep laze in a paddock, fog drifting around them.

Ben bursts through the trees, shattering the fog, Traveler tossing clumps of dirt into the air. The sheep scatter as he passes.

Elise emerges from a barn not far from the house.

BEN

Elise!

ELISE

Come to beg forgiveness?

Ben pulls Traveller around. Elise's expression immediately darkens.

Ben swings down from Traveller.

ELISE (cont'd)

What did you do?

BEN

(panting)

The Morgans. I've been there Elise. Henry's not in good way.

She decks him. Ben hits the ground. Hard.

ELISE

I had Ed at the Carrows. You know I did!

BEN

Christ! Tommy would've killed us both and left. Alive.

ELISE

So you stopped me then, and then go after them alone!

BEN

I'll get nothing without you. You made that clear enough yourself.

Ben stands, trying to pass her. Elise pulls him back.

ELISE

If you know where they are we need to go to William.

BEN

I need a rifle. And I need you to go back there with me.

He pushes her aside and enters the barn.

**INT. ELISE'S BARN - AFTERNOON - CONTINUOUS**

Ben pulls Elise's saddle down from a post, throwing it onto her horse.

ELISE

What about the deputies? Daniel?

BEN

You already guessed it.

Ben stops buckling the saddle. Elise takes over.

ELISE

What?

BEN

They've been letting Ed do this. They'd been to the Carrows already. I don't know if it's all of them or just Daniel. *They* say it wasn't Ed. Rifle?

ELISE

William won't believe that.

Elise points him towards her rifle, leaning against a woodpile.

ELISE (cont'd)

You think Ed's moving, don't you?

BEN

If he's as keen as you think, he's gone already.

ELISE

If I come and he's there. I'll kill him. I won't let you stop me.

BEN

I won't.

Ben extends the rifle toward her.

BEN (cont'd)

But I want Tommy.

**EXT. ED'S HIDEOUT - NIGHT**

Ben and Elise tread quietly through the trees, watching for movement.

Ben touches her shoulder and they stop. The cavern appears ahead. He motions to her rifle.

BEN

If they're here, they'll be watching for me.

ELISE

I'll circle around.

Ben nods, and creeps up to the treeline. He steps out through the tree's.

No one.

Elise appears to his left, rifle at her shoulder.

Smoke drifts out from the cavern.

**INT. ED'S HIDEOUT - NIGHT**

Elise lingers in the entryway, rifle ready, letting her eyes adjust. Inside, the firepit burns low, filling the room with low hanging smoke.

Ben enters behind her.

ELISE

How many of them?

BEN

Twelve maybe, with Ed and Tommy. I only saw the ones in here.

ELISE

Less than I thought.

BEN

Henry's gone...

Ben lifts a branch from the fire. He tosses it to the rear of the cavern, illuminating the stairs.

BEN (cont'd)

There's another chamber. Through there.

Elise leads with the rifle, slowing as she reaches the last steps. A figure crouches in the dark ahead.

Muffled groaning from inside.

BEN (cont'd)

Elise.

She stops. Ben tosses a BURNING brand into the dark. Sparks fly as it lands, lighting the cavern. Another groan.

ELISE

Jonathan?

At the center of the ransacked cavern, hog-tied and gagged, is Jonathan Greene. Loose bits of paper dot the cavern floor.

Elise steps towards him. And Ben grabs her.

BEN

Who is he?

ELISE

Jonathan Greene, he was at the meeting.

(pulling away)

I'm cutting him free.

Jonathan squirms, toppling over. Howling as he hits the ground. Ben circles the space, searching.

Elise saws through the rope, helping Jonathan up. His eyes wild. She pulls out the GAG, and tosses it away.

ELISE (cont'd)

Jonathan, where's Ed?

Jonathan coughs and retches, dribbling onto the ground.

JONATHAN GREENE

Ed! Gone. I need you to take me back to town.

BEN

Elise. Why is he here?

ELISE

Leave it, please. Jonathan, where did they go?

Jonathan ignores her.

ELISE (cont'd)

Are they leaving?

JONATHAN GREENE

I don't know.

BEN

Why would they leave you Jonathan?

JONATHAN GREENE

I don't know.

Ben nudges the gag with his foot, picks it up.

BEN

Elise.

Ben drops Jonathan's former gag into her hands. A sliver peels away in her hand, revealing a TWENTY POUND BANK NOTE. Another follows. The whole gag is a thick ball of sodden paper

ELISE

They're all bank notes.

Ben crouches behind Jonathan, examining the paper at his feet. Dozens of the same note, shredded.

BEN

This is *hundreds* of pounds.

ELISE

(to Jonathan)

What is this from? Why did they take you?

He won't look at her. Ben seizes his head, twisting him to face Elise. Jonathan cries in pain.

ELISE (cont'd)

Ben!

(he lets go)

What did you do Jonathan?

JONATHAN GREENE

Nothing woman!

Ben pulls Jonathan towards him.

BEN

Is this your money or Ed's?

JONATHAN GREENE

(straining)

Take me back to town.

Jonathan presses another note into Ben's hand. Scrawled on the front is--

*LEAVE*

Ben pulls away from him, dropping the note. Elise picks it up.

ELISE

We have to take him back.

BEN

Not yet. If we want anything from him, we need to get it now. Who knows how far gone Ed is.

Elise pulls him back towards the cavern entrance.

ELISE

The other squatters have gone to William, we can take him there.

BEN

And when he won't answer them, what will William do?

(Elise is silent)

Nothing. There's no sign of Henry. If he knows anything--

ELISE

You'll torture him for it? No.

BEN

And if we go back to William with him and nothing else. Who would say we didn't do this to him already. Ed knew we'd find him, what did he do to Ed to be left here?

ELISE

We're taking him to William.

BEN

After we find out what he knows.

Ben seizes Jonathan by his shirt, hauling him towards the fire. Jonathan groans as he's shoved back against the wall.

BEN (cont'd)

Where did they go?

He waits for a reaction. Jonathan stares.

BEN (cont'd)

There was a boy with them. Did you see him?

JONATHAN GREENE

You'll hang for this.

Jonathan tries to pull away, but Ben grabs him pressing him against the wall.

ELISE

Ben.

Ben tears a long strip from Jonathan's shirt and forces it into his mouth.

BEN  
I know what I'm doing.

Elise clutches her rifle.

Ben draws a smouldering branch from the fire. Jonathan's eyes bulge.

BEN (cont'd)  
Henry Carrow, the son of a man  
whose farm you stole. They took  
him, why'd they leave you?

Jonathan violently shakes his head no.

ELISE  
Ben, this has gone far enough.

BEN  
How else Elise?

She just looks at him, at a loss.

BEN (cont'd)  
I know what I'm doing.

He pins Jonathan's squirming arms to the rock, and presses the BURNING tip into his palm. Jonathan screams.

He rekindles the flame, then starts again, grinding the branch into Jonathan's palm.

BEN (cont'd)  
Henry! Where is he!

ELISE  
Stop!

Elise tears the branch away from Ben, tossing it back into the fire.

BEN  
No!

Elise grabs him.

ELISE  
What now Ben? The only way we don't  
hang is if William backs us. Or you  
shoot him here and now and never  
come back.

BEN  
I can't.

He sags into her and Elise releases him. Jonathan's still writhing in pain in the background.

ELISE

We have to go into town. It'll be morning by the time we get there.

BEN

Ok. We should take him. I'll talk to William, maybe he'll help. If not... I'm sorry.

He picks up Jonathan, his hands still bound, burnt and oozing, and carries him outside.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE**EXT. AVON HILL - MORNING**

Elise and Ben ride towards the town hall, Jonathan draped over Ben's saddle. Shouting echoes out of the buildings top floor.

**INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE - MORNING**

The same group of Squatters from the earlier Town Hall meeting is joined by several LOCAL SELECTORS. Notably the Selectors are represented by a few WOMEN, including MARY WALLANDER (44) wearing a long dark dress her face permanently creased into a grim expression. The Carrows are absent.

JAMES LUCAS

The Carrows lost their home  
William!

James turns on the Squatters.

JAMES LUCAS (cont'd)

And them and theirs have the nerve  
to tell us that it was an accident.

MARY WALLANDER

Where is John!

The selectors murmur in agreement. William tries to maintain a measured tone.

WILLIAM

(restrained)

I've been assured they are well.  
And Mr Greene is managing the land  
in the meantime.

MARY WALLANDER

Rot! He's jumped them.

Bryce erupts from the other side of the room.

BRYCE RYAN

Jonathan hasn't been seen in days!  
I wonder, James, if that has  
something do with your bile  
spewing.

JAMES LUCAS

That bastard took my run!

BRYCE RYAN

That was his to begin with!

The roar of voices grows.

MARY WALLANDER  
Ryan you're a godawful thief--

MATTHEW GOODWIN  
Don't you dare woman!

WILLIAM  
(restraint vanished)  
Gentlemen! Enough!

Silence. THUMPING BOOTS outside.

BRYCE RYAN  
William--

WILLIAM  
This is the colony's decree and yet  
solely my problem--

The door slams open. Ben and Elise drag Jonathan, still bound into the office. Blood oozes from his hands.

BRYCE RYAN  
Jonathan?! Lord--

WILLIAM  
Elise, what have you done?

Ben steps forward, but Elise stops him before he can speak.

ELISE  
We found the hideout. Ed and Tommy  
had their way with him.

Matthew and Bryce pull Jonathan away. The squatters fret over his injuries, lowering him into a chair.

ELISE (cont'd)  
William, he was left there.  
Intentionally. He knows something.

MATTHEW GOODWIN  
How dare you accuse him. William  
look at what she's done--

Elise drops the wad of bank notes onto William's desk.

ELISE  
There was more where we found him.  
Why William, why would the Carrows  
land pass to him?

The room falls silent, everyone looking to William.

WILLIAM

I need a moment with Elise and Benjamin.

Bryce looks up from checking Jonathan's injuries.

BRYCE RYAN

William you can't--

WILLIAM

Jonathan stays here.  
(to Elise and Ben)  
Outside.

**EXT. BEN'S LAND - SAME**

Redding and a group of CONSTABLES appear through the trees. Carrying torches, and headed for Ben's camp.

Daniel emerges behind them, watching them fan out into the campsite. Redding drops a torch into Ben's tent, and the others set theirs to his supplies, the fresh timber, everything.

Ben's tent collapses into flames.

In the distance Ed's Gang emerge from the valley, along with some NEW FACES. The gang's quiet, and heavily armed. The Constables draw together around Redding. Lamely trying to distance themselves from Ed's men.

Ed and Tommy split off, heading for Daniel, letting the gang ride ahead of out the clearing.

ED MORGAN

He wasn't here?

SERGEANT DANIEL

He wasn't. Most of the Squatters and Selectors are with the Mayor.

Tommy checks one of the pistols on his hip.

TOMMY MORGAN

Your men?

SERGEANT DANIEL

They are either home or here with me.

ED MORGAN

How many aren't here?

SERGEANT DANIEL

Does it matter?

(MORE)

SERGEANT DANIEL (cont'd)  
 (studying Ed)  
 James and one or two others. They  
 won't take part.  
 ( )

ED MORGAN  
 Only if they're in the way.

Ed kicks his horse, riding away after the Gang. Tommy follows, leaving Daniel alone with the Constables.

**INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE - MORNING**

William shuts the door behind him, turning to Ben and Elise.

WILLIAM  
 You both need to leave, and  
 quickly.

ELISE  
 Do you believe us?

WILLIAM  
 I believe *you* Elise. But if  
 Jonathan won't admit to it, that  
 doesn't mean anything. I don't know  
 how he got Carrow to pass on the  
 land, and I don't know if I want  
 to.

BEN  
 Ed knew we'd find him there.

WILLIAM  
 I recall you refused to help, now  
 you've dragged a *respected* man  
 here, bloodied for the same cause?

ELISE  
 William--

WILLIAM  
 I need to speak to the others.  
 Don't do anything else.

William pushes through the office door. Ben and Elise linger outside.

MARY WALLANDER  
 Where did the money come from  
 William! Not one of us has that!

The echo of HOOFBEATS. Ben registers the sound.

WILLIAM (O.S.)  
 Everyone please!

BEN  
Elise... We have to leave.

**INT. AVON HILL TOWN HALL - DAY - CONTINUOUS**

The thunder of GALLOPING HOOVES.

Ben dashes down the stairs, Elise close behind him. He shoves open the door--

Ed's gang is encircling the building, more than a dozen men, a gun in every hand. Tommy's in the street with them.

Ben stays in the doorway, keeping Elise out of view.

Luke's holding Henry just outside the circle.

Slowly, Ben reaches on arm back inside. Elise passes him her rifle.

BEN  
(To Elise)  
They haven't seen you. Hide.

**EXT. AVON HILL TOWN HALL - DAY - CONTINUOUS**

Ben steps out.

In one precise movement, Elise's rifle comes to his shoulder, cocked, finger on the trigger.

TOMMY MORGAN  
Soldier!

BEN  
Give me the boy.

Tommy slowly draws a pistol, keeping it low. The gang watches him, waiting on the order.

TOMMY MORGAN  
Bring him here.

Luke shoves Henry forward, and Tommy pulls Henry in front of him. He cocks his gun.

TOMMY MORGAN (cont'd)  
Move soldier, or he dies.

Ben tenses on the trigger. Watching Tommy's pistol.

CRACK. Ben's right leg drops out from under him and the rifle clatters away. It's not from the Gang--

From the ground Ben twists towards the shot.

Ed walks towards the hall, holding a smoking rifle. Ben turns back, just as Tommy brings his revolver to Henry's head--

ED MORGAN

Don't!

TOMMY MORGAN

(to Ben)

I told you.

--and fires. Henry drops.

BEN

No!

For good measure, Tommy empties another round into his chest.

Tommy strides towards Ben, kicks him onto his back, and tosses Elise's rifle into the street.

TOMMY MORGAN

Inside boys!

**INT. AVON HILL TOWN HALL - DAY - CONTINUOUS**

ON ELISE as boots hit the porch outside. She scrambles backward underneath a long bench. Watching as one after the other, the boots of Ed's Gang thump past.

**EXT. AVON HILL TOWN HALL - DAY - CONTINUOUS**

Tommy follows the last man inside, leaving Ed alone with Ben. Henry's blood pooling in the dirt.

Ben twists, awkwardly trying to draw his revolver from the ground. Ed draws his own pistol, sights Ben and FIRES.

The pistol jams. The percussion cap stuck.

Ed drops it. Ben gives up, lunging toward Elise's rifle. But not before Ed BARRELS into him, forcing him to the ground.

Shots ring out inside the hall.

Ed pins him, knife to Ben's throat. Ben latches onto Ed's arm, barely keeping the blade at bay.

ED MORGAN

You ignored the message I left you--

He HEADBUTS Ben. Ben's grip slips.

ED MORGAN (cont'd)

I really thought you knew better.

Ben punches Ed in the stomach, pulling him down and managing to roll away. Ben struggles, trying to stand.

SCREAMING from inside the hall.

Ed stabs at Ben's leg, CUTTING a gash across the bullet wound. Ben scrambles forward. Ed stands and pins him to the ground with his boot.

Elise emerges from the hall, snatching up her rifle.

ELISE

ED!

Ed turns, a BULLET rips through his stomach.

He drops. Elise rushes to Ben.

BEN

Good shot... Good shot.

Blood wells from his leg. Elise crouches next to him, ripping off a length of her skirt, she tourniquets the wound.

SCREAMING from inside. STACCATO SHOTS.

Elise turns to go back. Ben grabs her.

BEN (cont'd)

We have to get out of the street.

Ed's on the ground next to them, not moving. Elise stares at Henry's body. More shots from inside.

BEN (cont'd)

Elise.

(struggling to stand)

They're dead Elise!

She snaps out of it and helps Ben stand. The two move into a narrow alley nearby. Elise drops Ben against a shops rear wall facing away from the street.

BEN (cont'd)

Christ.

Blood drips from Ben's leg. Elise tears strips of cloth from her skirt, pushing Ben's hands away from the wound.

ELISE

The bullets gone through. Just--

GUNFIRE, outside the hall. Elise yanks the strip of skirt tight around the wound. Ben groans.

TOMMY MORGAN (O.S.)  
Horses now! Get them out of here!

Elise peeks around the building as Tommy and his men back out of the hall. Bloodied, and a few men short.

A woman SCREAMS. Elise spots Mary and a score of others being bound and thrown onto horseback.

#### **OUTSIDE THE HALL**

Tommy rushes over to Ed. A SHOT zips overhead. He spins and fires back into the hall.

TOMMY MORGAN  
Get him up. Now! Keep shooting!

The other men fire back into the hall's upper floor. A few rushing to untie their horses.

#### **IN THE ALLEYWAY**

Ben drags Elise back into the alleyway. Her rifle smoking from the SHOT.

TOMMY MORGAN (O.S.)  
Get him onto a horse!

#### **OUTSIDE THE HALL**

Glass SHATTERS and GUNFIRE streams from the hall's upper floor. The Gang mills behind Tommy, still firing into the hall.

A hole sprouts in one man's chest. He crumples.

TOMMY MORGAN  
Leave him! Go!

Tommy charges away, followed by the gang and their captives. Tommy eyeing the alleyway where Ben and Elise are hiding as he rides.

Once they're out of sight, Elise runs over to the hall. Leaving Ben to limp out of the alleyway.

He stops next to Henry's body. Closes the boys eyes, and retrieves his REVOLVER. Gently he lifts Henry up, and carries him out of the street. Laying him down on the porch of a shop facing the hall.

Slowly, Squatter and Selector alike emerge, clutching a disparate array of weapons. Blood spattered from patched-up bullet wounds and grazes.

Ben gingerly sits alongside Henry, looking down at him.

Bryce appears, supporting Jonathan. He notices Ben and pauses, but another Squatter quickly helps him carry Jonathan away.

Ben watches Jonathan walk away.

**EXT. BEN'S LAND - DAY**

Ben and Elise ride into the burned out campsite, embers crackling as they pass.

ELISE

I'm sorry Ben. William wouldn't send anyone after them. Everyone's checking on their own land.

BEN

Tommy'll still be out for blood.

Ben swings down from Traveller. Elise watches him survey the wreck. Quiet.

BEN (cont'd)

Do Sarah and John...

ELISE

They'll know by now.

(dismounting)

Tommy would've killed him either way Ben.

BEN

I doubt that. I killed him, I know I did.

(considering)

After the Carrows, I was going to help regardless. When I went to Ed, he was unarmed. Alone. I wanted to convince him to leave. I pulled on him and--

Ben drops onto the house's charred porch.

BEN (cont'd)

I couldn't. And I can't even tell you why.

ELISE

You should've killed him. I would have. But, I know why you didn't.

She climbs back onto her horse, looking out at the clearing.

ELISE (cont'd)

If you still want it, take it. Just help me find them.

She leaves Ben, stuck, embers still crackling around him.