

TRAIN DREAMS

Screenplay by
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Based on the book by Denis Johnson

OVER BLACK.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

There were once passageways to the old world.

BEGIN MONTAGE.

A forgotten train tunnel through a mountain.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Strange trails. Hidden paths. You turned a corner and suddenly find yourself face to face with The Great Mystery. The Foundation of All Things.

We see abandoned railroads. Broken and overgrown.

Old boots nailed to trees in forgotten forests.

Roads overcrowded with brambles.

Ruins of some logging mill left to rot.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

And even though that old world is gone now. Even though it's been rolled up like a scroll and put somewhere, you can still feel the echo of it.

EXT. PRIMEVAL FOREST - DAY

Camera is attached to a tree, looking up the length of it as the crown sways in the breeze.

Then the tree trembles, lists, and starts to fall.

The tree CRASHES spectacularly onto the forest floor. A giant fallen among tiny men.

The woodsmen climb onto the tree with axes to lop off the limbs. Others take to sawing the giant into sections. Men of all colors and persuasions.

ROBERT GRAINIER -- in his 30's now -- is among them. Bearded. Sweat-drenched. Covered in sap.

They work.

Grainier and another man yoke the sectioned trees to A HORSE TEAM to drag the logs down the mountainside.

LOGGER (O.C.)
LOOK OUT!

Another tree crashes down among them.

EXT. PRIMEVAL FOREST - NIGHT

The mountainside is dotted with small campfires -- each surrounded by a few loggers getting warm. The sky above them filled with too many stars to arrange into constellations.

Grainier sits at one of these fires, a little apart from the other loggers, all laughing and talking in at least three different languages.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
His name was Robert Grainier and he lived more than eighty years in and around the town of Bonners Ferry, Idaho. In his time he'd traveled west to within a few dozen miles of the Pacific, though he'd never seen the ocean itself, and as far east as the town of Libby, forty miles inside Montana.

Grainier watches the men talk, his eyes getting sleepy.

WE SEE MEMORIES OF HIS LIFE NOW, IN SNATCHES.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Grainier, as a young boy (7), riding a train with a note pinned to his chest that reads: FRY, IDAHO.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
When he was sent by himself to the town of Fry, Idaho, he was six, or possibly seven.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - DAY

A 9-FOOT STURGEON hangs from a pole. People gather around it in awe.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
He never knew for sure the year or day of his birth.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

As a boy, he watches as a TWO-HEADED CALF, standing in a stall, takes stock of this world it's come into.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
How he had lost his original
parents, nobody ever told him.

INT. GENERAL STORE / BONNERS FERRY - DAY

Still a boy, he stands next to his adopted mother at the counter. Commotion erupts outside on the street.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
One of his earliest memories was
that of observing the mass
deportation of a hundred or more
Chinese families from the town.

They scarcely mark it before TWO MEN with bats burst into the store, grab a CHINESE FAMILY and take them outside.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Grainier was baffled by the
casualness of the violence.

They line them up with two other Chinese families on the sidewalk -- guarded by men with guns and clubs -- to be expelled from town.

EXT. MOYEA RIVERSIDE - MORNING - YEARS LATER

Grainer -- NOW 17 -- is fishing along the Moyea River.

The quiet is broken by a strange sound. A GROANING in the trees.

Grainier stops. Listens. Then hears it again.

Grainier walks up the bank, carrying his pole. Gets closer to the sound and finally sees the source.

A FIGURE is laid up among some birches in a sloppy camp, nursing an injured leg. A BOOMER, as his sort was known in those times.

BOOMER
Come on up here. Please, young
feller.

Young Grainier drops his fishing pole at the sight. The Boomer sits against a tree -- his legs out straight, barefoot, his old shoes on either side of him.

He is bearded and streaked with dust. Bits of the woods cling to him everywhere. He gives the impression of a mouth hole moving in a stack of leaves and rags and matted brown hair.

Grainier is paralyzed.

BOOMER (CONT'D)

I been cut behind the knee by this feller they call Big-Ear Al.

His words come out labored.

BOOMER (CONT'D)

And I have to say, I know he's killed me.

We see the impact of this story on Grainier's face.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

There were other memories that he pushed from his mind any time they arose.

For a few minutes the dying Boomer stops talking. He puts his hands to the ground either side of him and seems to want to shift his posture, but has no strength. He can't seem to get a decent breath in his lungs, panting and wheezing.

He closes his eyes and stops struggling for air.

MOMENTS LATER.

Young Grainier gives the dying man a drink of water from his own boot.

The dying man finishes, nods and Grainier starts walking away through the woods.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

He quit attending school in his early teens, and the next two decades passed without much direction or purpose.

Young Grainier starts walking faster, now running.

The soft harmonies of a little church CHOIR seep into the space.

CUT TO:

INT. METHODIST CHURCH - YEARS LATER

Grainier is in his early 30's, looking like a stray animal. Singing along to the hymns. It's a small church. Not more than two dozen in the congregation.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

He felt that nothing much attracted his interest, until, that is, he met Gladys Olding.

He watches GLADYS, singing in the choir. Her voice stands apart to him.

But when she looks at him, he's too shy to hold her gaze. He looks down to his choir book.

OUTSIDE THE CHURCH - A LITTLE LATER

The congregation stands out on the grass, talking after the service. A horse is tied up, waiting to go home.

Grainier starts drifting away. But Gladys finds him.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Gladys introduced herself as if women did things like that every day.

GLADYS

Hello.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

And maybe they did.

GLADYS

I haven't seen you here before.

GRAINIER

No, I just, uh. Came with my cousin. He's uh... Well his wife, she uh...
I'm Robert.

GLADYS

Gladys. So nice to meet you.

GRAINIER

Nice to meet you.

She shakes his hand and, as they go on speaking, he notices the curve of her hand, the slope of her neck.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 He found he suddenly had more
 interest in church than he ever had
 before.

She notices his eyes, the drift of his shoulder.

EXT. GRAINIER'S ACRE - DAY

Grainier and Gladys lay on a blanket surrounded by tall
 daisies.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 Not three months later, they were
 inseparable.

She watches the buttercups nod in the breeze and the petals
 of the daisies tremble. He watches her hair tremble in the
 breeze.

GLADYS
 Right now I could just about
 understand everything there is.

Grainier is looking for his words.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
 What are you thinking about?

GRAINIER
 I'm thinking we ought to get
 married.

GLADYS
 We are married. All we need now is
 a ceremony to prove it.

He smiles to himself.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
 Our cabin should have a window
 looking out toward the water.

GRAINIER
 OK.

She looks around.

GLADYS
 And we'll need a dog. I always
 wanted a dog.

GRAINIER

OK.

They stare across the field a moment.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

Could I hear you say my name again?
I like the sound of it coming from
you.

She smiles.

GLADYS

Robert.

He smiles too.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

All of a sudden life made sense to
Grainier, as if he'd been pulling
hard the wrong way and was now
turned around and headed
downstream.

They spend the rest of the afternoon kissing among the
daisies. Listening to the water, the wind, their own movement
against each other.

SUNSET NOW.

As the light is fading, they walk around an area of the acre
where they've laid out STONES marking the outline of a cabin.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

The couple built a cabin on an acre
of land, and there alongside the
Moyea River, began a little life
together.

We see them from above, dreaming the rest of their years
together.

EXT. ROBINSON GORGE BRIDGE - DAY - SOME TIME LATER

Robert Grainier is working at a log beside a HALF-BUILT
BRIDGE, sectioning the log to make beams for the structure.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

In those years, Grainier's work
took him far from home. He worked
alongside men who came from faraway
lands he'd never even heard of.

(MORE)

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

Places like Shanghai and Chattanooga. It was a comfort to him how easily they all fell in with each other, became temporary families.

Now there is commotion below them on the roadway.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

But then, in the summer of 1917, he worked a job building the Robinson Gorge Bridge for the Spokane International Railroad. He'd never taken up with a railroad crew before, and he wished he'd never had.

THREE MEN are hauling a fellow logger -- A CHINESE LABORER -- up the road to the bridge.

The Laborer screams and curses, kicking and trying to fight them off.

Grainier drops his ax and runs to help.

He grabs one of The Laborer's feet and LOCKS EYES with the man a moment. Though the man pleads in Cantonese, Grainier knows what he wants.

Yet still they drag him on toward the bridge.

GRAINIER

I got him, Mr. Sears! What did he do?

MR. SEARS

Just hold on to him!

Another man, holding an arm, speaks.

TOOMIS

(winded)

He's a thief! Stole from-- ah shit--

Toomis loses the arm of the man, then grabs him again awkwardly.

TOOMIS (CONT'D)

Stole from the company store.

MR. SEARS

Boys, I'd be damned if we ever see the top of this heap!

LABORER
[Pleading in Cantonese]

A crowd is gathering to watch the spectacle.

They move farther up the bridge. The Laborer wheels and KICKS one of his captors in the stomach and that man doubles over into the dirt.

MAN IN THE DIRT
It was just for fun. Come on
Toomis, let's give it up.

Grainier looks at him, then to the Chinese Laborer. CONFUSION crosses his face.

Then Grainier is KICKED in the mouth and finds himself on the ground too.

The others press on with The Laborer, more urgently now.

MAN IN THE DIRT (CONT'D)
Just for fun...

GRAINIER
Wait!

But they're already to the top of the bridge. The Laborer kicks against the railing they're trying to push him over.

LABORER
[Cursing them now in Cantonese]

Then he loses. HE IS TOSSED OVER THE SIDE.

Grainier runs up to see his fate. But only finds the river below: raging over stones.

They all watch the water, looking for movement. Waiting for the man to surface. BUT HE NEVER DOES. The river just moves along.

As they talk, Grainier stares down at the water below. Shame crossing his face.

EXT. ROBINSON GORGE BRIDGE / 41 DAYS LATER - AFTERNOON

A little over a month later and the BRIDGE they threw the man from is NOW COMPLETE.

A SQUAT LOCOMOTIVE sits ready to test it.

The loggers and railroad gang are celebrating in the river below, hollering and laughing in the water. Shooting randomly in the air.

Grainier is among them, apart from the celebrations.

He looks down and there, beneath the surface of the water, lays the CHINESE LABORER, staring up at him.

They stare at each other a moment. Then Grainier brushes the surface and The Laborer is gone.

MR. SEARS (O.S.)
Alright boys, looks like it's
almost time.

Mr. Sears steps out onto a rock above them, but the loggers pay him little attention.

MR. SEARS (CONT'D)
Hey! Shut up!

The loggers hush each other as Mr. Sears shouts his speech over the river.

MR. SEARS (CONT'D)
You boys showed this old river
valley who's boss.
(laughter from the group)
You've helped save the Spokane
International eleven miles it used
to take to get around this gorge
and you've opened up a new part of
the country. I know it ain't the
Great Pyramids of Egypt, but I
think you boys have done something
pretty darn incredible.

As Mr. Sears continues his speech, WE JUMP FORWARD IN TIME.

Grainier -- an old man here -- rides a train. He looks out the window as they pass over a valley spanned by a bridge filled with cars of all colors.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Many years later a bridge made of
concrete and steel would be built
ten miles upstream, rendering this
one obsolete.

They pass it by.

BACK TO THE WOODEN BRIDGE.

MR. SEARS

Now. Let's see if she holds...

He RAISES HIS FOUR-SHOOTER, then looks up at the bridge. He FIRES the pistol to signal the commencement.

The small contraption starts to make its way across the expanse. The bridge groans.

No one breathes at first.

Then the men start to shout it on as it trudges slowly over the tracks.

Finally it makes it, disappearing into the woods on the other side of the river.

They all cheer.

Grainier looks across the river to the other bank group of CHINESE LABORERS sit by themselves, apart from the celebration.

Someone grabs Grainier's shoulder and he forces a smile. He cheers with them, though a current of sadness still crosses his face.

EXT. GRAINIER'S ACRE - DAY

Grainier walks down a little path off the main road. It winds around through some trees then opens up into a gentle glade.

And there is his home. A quiet, idyllic spot.

INT. GRAINIER'S CABIN - CONTINUOUS

He steps into the doorway of a little cabin. Leans on the threshold. And there is Gladys: at the bed, singing quietly to A BABY.

She turns and startles at seeing him.

She just stares a moment, as if he might just be a vision. Then she almost cries at the sight of him. She grabs him into a deep hug, kisses him.

GRAINIER

Oh Gladys, I--

GLADYS

Shh shh. I just got her to sleep.

He looks toward the bed.

GRAINIER

(whispers)

Is she...?

GLADYS

(nods)

Go see her. Just be quiet.

He moves tentatively to the crib where the little BABY KATE (6 months old) lays asleep.

Grainier wants to touch her, to hold her, but doesn't.

Grainier and Gladys whisper together.

GRAINIER

She's so big. She's starting to look like you.

GLADYS

At least she's starting to favor one of us.

Gladys is looking him over.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

Look at you. You're rail thin.

GRAINIER

We had a cook who hadn't done a job this big before. It was a mess.

She's feeling his arms, inspecting him. Looks at his hands.

GLADYS

No broken fingers this time?

GRAINIER

I don't think so.

GLADYS

I didn't think you'd be home this soon.

GRAINIER

Just couldn't stop walking until I got here. Look at this.

He pulls a thick roll of CASH from his boot. Shows her. She whistles.

GLADYS

I didn't expect that much after what you already sent.

GRAINIER

We hit a soft stand right there at the end. I brought something else for you too.

He pulls out two bottles of sarsaparilla from his bag.

She beams. Sets them on the table.

GLADYS

Let's have a big dinner tonight.

GRAINIER

You don't have to go to all that trouble.

GLADYS

Oh stop.

She joins him back at the door. Looks him over. Then they pull each other close, holding each other as if they might be able to make up for the months apart.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

Come on. Let me show you something.

Camera remains in the cabin as she leads him across their acre. Their voices trail away.

GRAINIER

Where's Willy?

GLADYS

Wolves got him. They've had a taste for goats this summer. The Martins have lost five so far.

They pass some chickens browsing in the grass.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

(to the chickens)

One of you girls is dinner tonight, you can decide who.

EXT. GRAINIER'S ACRE - LATER

They stand in the GARDEN PLOT she's made. Overflowing with vegetables.

GRAINIER

Well this really took off.

GLADYS

It's good soil. The chickens have helped.

GRAINIER

Should I pull some of these carrots?

GLADYS

Just a few. No, not those. The bigger ones.

They start pulling vegetables for dinner as music starts.

INT. GRAINIER'S CABIN - NIGHT

Over a BIG DINNER, Kate sits on Gladys' lap. The baby stares at this strange man in their home.

Gladys drinks the sarsaparilla, smiles. She puts some on her finger, gives it to Kate. Kate makes a face and they laugh.

INT. GRAINIER'S CABIN - LATER

LATER THAT NIGHT, Kate is sleeping on a pallet on the floor while Gladys and Grainier quietly make love, a little awkward, still getting used to the rhythm of each other's bodies.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. FOREST RAILROAD - NIGHT

A BLACK LOCOMOTIVE hurtles through the dark night. We experience it as if strapped to the front of the train, only seeing what the train's light can reach. The forest spins past in a blur.

EXT. GRAINIER'S CABIN - NIGHT

The cabin sits quietly in the night, smoke pouring out of it as the world stands undisturbed around it.

EXT. SPOKANE INTERNATIONAL - NIGHT

The train barrels ahead. Fire burns in the belly of the machine. The tracks ripple. The wheels rattle. As if the speed is too much for the track.

EXT. GRAINIER'S CABIN - NIGHT

As more and more smoke issues from the cabin, an eerie light, almost that of a train, cuts past in the night.

EXT. FOREST RAILROAD - NIGHT

The train turns a corner and there's A YOUNG BOY ahead -- standing in the middle of the tracks. Familiar to us. A paper pinned to his chest reading Fry, Idaho.

The tracks tremble at his feet. The train barrels on toward him and just before it hits him--

INT. GRAINIER'S CABIN - MIDNIGHT

Grainier WAKES UP from the dream. Alone in bed. He can hear the distant call of the Spokane International in the dark.

Gladys sits across the room by the stove, holding Kate. She scrapes cold boiled oats off the sides of a pot and the baby suckles this porridge from the end of her finger.

The light of the stove barely illuminates them.

GRAINIER

I didn't even hear y'all get up.
(sits up in bed)
Was she crying bad?

GLADYS

Not too bad. She just woke up hungry. I think my milk is drying up.

Grainier speaks groggily.

GRAINIER

You know what all her cries mean?

GLADYS

Most of them, I guess.

GRAINIER

How much does she know, do you suppose?

GLADYS

I don't know...

GRAINIER

As much as a dog-pup?

GLADYS

A dog-pup can live by its own after its mama weans it away.

He waits for her to explain what this means.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

A baby couldn't just go off and live after it was weaned. A dog knows more than a baby until the babe knows its words. But not just a few words. A dog raised around the house knows some words, too -- as many as a baby at least.

Grainier is nodding off again.

GRAINIER

What words, Gladys?

GLADYS

You know. The ones for its tricks and the things you tell it to do.

GRAINIER

Just say some of the words, Glad. I want to hear your voice.

GLADYS

Well, fetch. And come. And sit. Lay. And roll over. Whatever it knows to do, it knows the words.

GRAINIER

Do you think it knows the words first? Or the thing?

GLADYS

The word and the thing are the same. They're stitched together. Like your name. You're Robert. Even alone without anybody, you're still Robert.

(MORE)

GLADYS (CONT'D)

If you had been named something else you'd've turned out to be a wholly different person. But you weren't. And you never could have been.

GRAINIER

(laughs)

I don't think I even know what you're saying.

Then he's quiet a moment.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

Do you think she knows I'm her daddy?

GLADYS

Of course she does. Deep down she knows it. Even if she doesn't know she knows it yet.

Kate fusses and Gladys turns her over onto her shoulder.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

Don't worry. You'll have plenty of time to be her daddy.

She starts to softly sing Row, Row, Row Your Boat to her as Grainier falls back asleep listening to her voice.

EXT. GRAINIER'S ACRE - LATE MORNING

Gladys is SKINNING A GOAT that hangs from the porch by its hind legs. Working closely with a knife, pulling down the hide.

Grainier returns carrying a bundle of cut BIRCH. He walks past the cabin. Then stops, turns back.

GRAINIER

Where's the firewood?

GLADYS

It's over here. The green wood stacks on the left.

GRAINIER

Over where?

GLADYS

Over here. Just come look.

They start speaking over each other, both growing more agitated.

GRAINIER

Well... Why'd you move it over there?

GLADYS

So now we don't have to walk so far for it. I was--

GRAINIER

It can't be up against the cabin. It'll rot the wood if it's--

GLADYS

I don't have it up against the cabin. Just go look.

He starts to say more, but the wood is heavy.

He goes out back, drops the birch in a pile, then comes back.

GRAINIER

What else got moved around?

GLADYS

Robert...

GRAINIER

Well none of my tools are where I left them.

GLADYS

It was just the shovel.

GRAINIER

And the rake. And my--

GLADYS

And they're not your tools.

GRAINIER

I didn't mean it like that, but the last time--

GLADYS (CONT'D)

I told you you didn't have to cut wood. I'd rather you just--

-

Kate starts crying inside the cabin. Grainier steps inside as Gladys washes her hands in a bucket of water.

He comes back out holding the baby.

She's calm, accepting of him at first. But then starts crying worse.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)
Shh, shh. It's ok.

Now she's screaming.

GLADYS
Here, let me--

GRAINIER
No it's ok. I got her.

But he doesn't.

Kate reaches her arms out to Gladys, wailing. He hands her over. She quiets in her mother's arms.

Gladys watches Grainier.

GLADYS
Don't worry. She just needs a little time to get used to it all. She doesn't do good with changes either.

She smiles. Grainier looks up and cracks a smile too.

GLADYS (CONT'D)
Come on. Let's clean up.

EXT. RIVER - AFTERNOON

The Grainier family spends an afternoon at the side of a little river together. Splashing in the cold water. Washing dishes. Throwing sticks in the water for Kate to watch them slide downstream.

Gladys has an OLD LADLE, full of holes in it. They sprinkle down water for Kate as she hold out her hands.

EXT. FIELD - LATER

They're laying on a sheet in the sun, all a little sleepy from being in the cold water. Grainier is holding Gladys' scarf above Kate and she grabs at it.

Gladys lays with her eyes closed.

GRAINIER
Should we move her out of the sun a little?

Gladys cracks an eye and looks at her.

GLADYS
No. She's alright.

Grainier shakes the branch a little more for her.

GRAINIER
I'm sorry.

GLADYS
What?

GRAINIER
I don't want to bicker.

GLADYS
Well me neither.

GRAINIER
I just...

She waits. Nothing more comes.

GLADYS
I know.

Kate gets fussy. Gladys pulls her over and breastfeeds her.

GRAINIER
Do you suppose she can taste the
sarsaparilla from you?

She smiles.

GLADYS
Where do you come up with these
questions?

INT. GRAINIER'S CABIN - FIRST LIGHT

Gladys lays awake in the soft morning light. Grainier is still asleep, his back turned to her.

The sheets have left an IMPRINT on his skin. Like a map of some forgotten land on his back.

She watches it a while, watches the light play across the room. Then she runs a finger along the ridges of the imprint. He shifts a little then settles back to sleep.

EXT. RIVER - AFTERNOON

Gladys is finishing lashing together long, stripped branches, hooking them together with hemp string and vine.

Grainier watches from the bank with Kate.

Gladys finally finishes. She's made a FISH TRAP. She holds it up.

GLADYS
What do you think?

GRAINIER
I think it's a pretty funny looking
bassinet.

He laughs at his own joke. She smiles.

GLADYS
I'll put you in it, you think
you're so funny.

She ties a rope to the end, drops a piece of chicken meat in it, and tosses the trap out into the river.

Grainier claps Kate's hands.

GRAINIER
Good job, Mama.

There's a long look between them.

INT. GRAINIER'S CABIN - NIGHT

They make love again. Without shyness now. Moving together like the river and the moon.

EXT. BONNERS FERRY - ANOTHER DAY

They're walking toward town together -- the little family. Kate lets Grainier carry her now.

As they pass the church, a LADY is stepping out and she calls Gladys over to talk. Grainier and Kate walk along, still playing.

Gladys watches them as she talks.

INT. PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO - DAY

Grainier and Gladys sit with Kate for a family portrait, a painted backdrop behind them.

They're waiting while the photographer finishes setting up the camera. Grainier's mind is already preoccupied with thoughts of leaving.

GLADYS

Hey.

He looks up. Knows what she means.

GRAINIER

It's hard leaving y'all.

GLADYS

Hard staying behind.

They share a look.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

You'll be back before you know it.

Grainier looks up at her.

Then the photographer is finally ready and snaps their portrait.

EXT. TRAIN FLATCAR - ANOTHER DAY

Grainier sits on a FLATCAR among a small group of travelers: LOGGERS like him, KOOTENAI PEOPLE riding to another town.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

It seemed that as soon as Grainier felt used to being at home, logging season would come back around and it was time to leave again.

Grainier stares at the family photo a moment longer, then tucks it into his bag and settles in. Watches home recede away from him.

Camera moves off Grainier, focuses on the loggers. The creases on their faces and scars on their hands tell the stories of the lives they've led.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

That work was populated with itinerate men -- most without homes, without families.

(MORE)

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

They moved from job to job, state to state as the work dictated. Though little note was made of them in this world, they left a lasting impression on Grainier.

EXT. THE CUT - PRE-DAWN

Grainier and some other loggers are hiking into the forest to work for the day. The world is still at this hour, quiet.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

He once worked alongside a man two full months without exchanging a single word.

Their tools speak in their place. The bite of an ax. The shushing of saws.

ANOTHER DAY

The SILENT MAN finishes putting on CLIMBING IRONS and TIES INTRICATE KNOTS into a rope.

Then -- a saw hanging from his belt -- CLIMBS a hundred feet into the crown of a tree to top it. All without a word.

Grainier and the others watch him rise into the canopy.

ANOTHER DAY

A group of loggers sitting around eating a little lunch. One finishes telling a story. The others laugh.

Except The Silent Man. He just stares at the ground.

CURIOUS LOGGER

(to the Silent Man)

How about you, Mister? You ever been down to California?

Everyone goes quiet. Turns to The Silent Man.

But he just sucks his lip. Shakes his head and spits.

SILENT MAN

Ain't there no place in this world
a man can find some peace?

Then he gets up from the group and walks away. Grainier watches him disappear into the forest.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 Those were the only words Grainier
 ever heard the man say. They
 remained with him always.

EXT. THE CUT - DAY

An OLD MAN stands before a tall tree trunk that has been hollowed out. He finishes hanging a door on it.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 He knew Hank Heeley, who made his
 home in the trunk of a tree.

Hank turns to the camera and poses and smiles as if he's posing for a photo. Which he is.

EXT. THE CUT - DAY

THREE LOGGERS are cutting the notch out of a gigantic tree.

LATER, they pose for a photo from some unseen photographer -- two on the springboards, one in the notch.

EXT. THE CUT - DAY

Grainier works cutting a tree down with another logger who's talking incessantly: APOSTLE FRANK.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 There was Apostle Frank, a faller
 who spoke about God and The Bible
 with such familiarity as to suggest
 he had been there when it was all
 written down.

APOSTLE FRANK
 And he comforts me, you get what
 I'm saying? I have a problem that
 no man in this world could figure
 out. Not John D. Rockefeller
 hisself could figure it. But then I
 know all I gotta do is pray.

GRAINIER
 Mm-hmm.

APOSTLE FRANK
 Now that don't mean the answer's
 always clear to me, what with my
 limited earthly understanding.

(MORE)

APOSTLE FRANK (CONT'D)

It's like that old boy, Balaam, in the Bible. Sometimes God has to find strange ways to tell you what you need to hear. Sometimes it's a donkey talking to you, sometimes, who knows. Like this one time, I was in Nebraska...

EXT. THE CUT - ANOTHER DAY

Grainier is repairing A BUSTED WHEEL ON A WAGON while a few other loggers stand around watching.

APOSTLE FRANK

...and so Jacob wrestled him all night long, thinking it was an angel he met out there in the woods. But when the light broke in the morning, it turned out to be God. God himself. So he...

As they're talking, A MAN IN A LONG BLACK TRENCH COAT comes trudging up the hill. He looks completely out of place here.

They all stop to look at him. He leans on his knees, catching his breath.

MAN IN TRENCH COAT

Excuse me, gentlemen. I'm sorry to interrupt you.

(he stands now)

Is one among you called Sam Loving?
From New Mexico.

They all stare at the man.

MAN IN TRENCH COAT (CONT'D)

Alternatively known as Buckskin Sam in Southern Arizona and parts of California. I've been trying to find this man for a very long time to deliver a message to him.

Grainier and the other loggers look between each other.

Apostle Frank TAKES OFF RUNNING.

The Man in the Trench Coat unfurls his coat, produces a pistol and SHOTS Apostle Frank in the back.

Apostle Frank skitters across the ground.

He tries to climb back to his feet but The Man in the Trench Coat steps to him and SHOOTS HIM IN THE HEAD.

Apostle Frank goes still. The Man in the Trench Coat waits a moment, staring at the body.

Then he steps back to the others at the wagon.

MAN IN TRENCH COAT (CONT'D)
 (reloading his pistol)
 That man shot my brother, Martin
 Brown, in cold blood in Gallup, New
 Mexico. August fifth, ninety-three.
 He killed him only because the
 color of his skin.

The loggers just stare at the man.

MAN IN TRENCH COAT (CONT'D)
 If anyone present takes offense to
 what I have just done here, then
 let us have it out before I leave
 this place. I do not intend to
 spend the rest of my days looking
 over my shoulder.

They look at each other. Confer silently. Then look back to the man.

LOGGER AT WAGON
 You sure it was him kilt your
 brother?

MAN IN TRENCH COAT
 I am certain of it.

One of them shrugs, shakes his head no, seeming to answer for the whole group.

MAN IN TRENCH COAT (CONT'D)
 Very good then. I'm sorry to have
 interrupted your work.

The Man in the Trench Coat looks around.

MAN IN TRENCH COAT (CONT'D)
 Big trees. I never knew trees could
 get this big.

They just stare at him. He seems a little sad. He tips his hat and walks back down the hill the same way he came.

Grainier stands from the wagon wheel, looks to Apostle Frank laying dead in the pine needles.

GRAINIER
 Guess we ought to bury him.

EXT. THE CUT / TUNNEL OPENING - DAY

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 But at the very heart of The Cut
 was a man named Arn Peeples. A
 frail and shrunken gadabout whose
 real use was occasional but
 specific.

Many loggers stand around as a little old man is walking back
 from A GAPING HOLE IN THE GROUND, unspooling a LONG METAL
 WIRE behind him. This is ARN PEEPLES.

Arn walks back to where all the loggers are gathered. He
 crouches at a stump where lays a metal box. He hooks the wire
 around a screw atop the box. He looks around at the others:
 all watching him.

ARN PEEPLES
 You Minnesota fellers might want to
 close up your ears.

Some do. All eyes turn to the opening in the ground.

Arn tightens the screw and everyone waits for the blast but
 NOTHING HAPPENS. The forest stays silent -- feels even more
 so now.

Arn lets out a long sigh.

Arn empties his pockets of his belongings -- a brass watch, a
 tin comb, and a silver toothpick -- and lays them on the
 stump.

Everyone watches him as he starts toward the hole in the
 ground but stops, returns to the igniter box and unscrews the
 wire from the ignition screw.

ARN PEEPLES (CONT'D)
 (to them all)
 Don't touch that. Don't even look
 at it crossways.

He walks slowly away and disappears down into the hole.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 He was the oldest man in the woods,
 always yammering, staying out of
 the way of hard work.

BEGIN MONTAGE OF ARN PEEPLES.**EXT. THE CUT - DAY**

Several loggers, Grainier among them, are working at sectioning a log, while Arn sits on a stump to the side.

ARN PEEPLES

Just let me at that hatchet when one of yous needs a break. When I get to chopping, you'll come to work in the morning and the chips won't yet be settled from yesterday. I'm made for this summer logging. I don't get my gears turning smooth till it's over a hundred.

EXT. THE CUT - ANOTHER DAY

RAIN is pouring down. Grainier and other loggers crouched under trees like animals, trying to find what shelter they can.

ARN PEEPLES

All this over a little rain. In my day we worked around the whole clock, not just the part that suited us. Back then, we'd riddle a bole with auger holes. Sometimes we had to wait a week for a good wind to topple those behemoths. Then they all came tumbling down at once. Trees twice as big as any of these we're cutting out here. And we didn't have no crosscut saw. Didn't even have a word for it.

EXT. THE CUT - ANOTHER DAY

Arn stands talking while another man is SHOEING AN OX. Grainier calms the beast as it hangs suspended in a sling that runs under its chest.

ARN PEEPLES

I worked on a peak outside Bisbee, Arizona where we was only eleven or twelve miles from the sun.

(MORE)

ARN PEEPLES (CONT'D)

It was a hundred and sixteen degrees on the thermometer, and every degree was a foot long. And that was in the shade. And there weren't no shade.

BACK TO THE HOLE IN THE GROUND.

Arn REEMERGES from the opening in the earth, walking carefully, glancing once behind him as if he might be followed.

He returns to the igniter box. The others take a step back. He looks around at them and they all cover their ears.

He tightens the screw again. This time the ground EXPLODES.

All the men cheer as a cloud of dust and powdered rock rains down on them.

EXT. THE CUT / CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

Grainier sits by a fire with several others, cleaning the last of his food from his plate with his finger.

After a while, Arn arrives at the fire with his plate. He scoops the dregs from their pot onto his plate.

ARN PEEPLES

Woo. You Minnesota fellers must've been hungry tonight.

GRAINIER

How many different fires are you gonna sit down at before you decide you're full?

Arn stares at him a long time.

ARN PEEPLES

Did I ever tell you I met the Earp Brothers? Wyatt Earp.

Grainier just laughs.

ARN PEEPLES (CONT'D)

They were crazy trash. The whole lot of them. You'd only find less honest men at the bottom of a well.

(MORE)

ARN PEEPLES (CONT'D)

I was passing through Arizona in
eighty-two, not a dollar to my
name, but I had a bag full of old
dynamite that I got half-price...

Arn eats their food and starts into another story about
blowing open silver mines in Arizona.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Grainier crawls into his tent, collapses onto his stomach,
exhausted. Arn Peeples is SINGING in the next tent over.

A logger yells from another tent.

TIRED LOGGER (O.S.)
Shut up that singing! Trying to
sleep!

Arn shuts up.

The forest is quiet but for the sound of the wind high in the
trees, voices murmuring somewhere off in the woods.

Grainier turns over on his back. He looks up at the canvas of
the tent hanging above him. At an OLD BLOODSTAIN.

GRAINIER
Hey Arn.

ARN PEEPLES (O.S.)
Don't worry. I won't sing no more.

GRAINIER
You told Adrien these tents were
from the Civil War?

ARN PEEPLES (O.S.)
That's right. Union infantry. They
went to the U.S. Cavalry after
that, for the Indian Campaigns.

Then something else catches Grainier's eye. By his feet,
crouched: the CHINESE LABORER, staring at him.

ARN PEEPLES (O.S.) (CONT'D)
These old things have served longer
than the people they sheltered.
Only rough canvas and yet they'll
probably still be here after we're
gone.

Still, the Laborer stares at Grainier.

ARN PEEPLES (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 What's keeping you awake over
 there?

GRAINIER
 Oh...
 (how to say it?)
 Do you think the bad things we do
 follow us through life?

ARN PEEPLES (O.S.)
 I don't know. I've seen bad men
 raised up and good men brought to
 their knees. If I could make any
 sense of it, I reckon I'd be
 sleeping next to someone much
 better looking than you fellers.

That doesn't settle Grainier.

GRAINIER
 What's that song you were singing?

ARN PEEPLES (O.S.)
 Don't have a name. It just come to
 me.

GRAINIER
 Maybe you could sing some more of
 it.

Arn sings quietly in his tent so Grainier can just barely
 hear him as he drifts off.

EXT. THE CUT - MORNING

Grainier is walking up the hillside carrying an ax. RAIN is
 turning the ground to slush. He passes a man standing with a
 TEAM OF HORSES waiting to drag logs down.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 The crews began to move deeper into
 the forest with each job. There
 seemed to be no end to the world's
 appetite for lumber. So they worked
 from sunrise until supertime,
 felling spruce, cedar, and
 tamarack, Doug fir, and white pine,
 utterly changing the face of the
 mountainside in the process.
 (MORE)

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

And while a good sawyer might
correctly judge ninety-nine times
how a fall would go, the hundredth
might take its toll.

GRAINIER

Morning, Freddy.

The man says hi as Grainier passes.

But then the quiet morning is shattered by SCREAMING from up
the mountain and a great cracking of timber.

A FIVE-TON LOG comes tumbling end-over-end toward them.

Grainier jumps out of the way and ducks behind a nearby tree
as the great log ROLLS OVER THE HORSES AND CART on its way
down.

The sound of the destruction is awful.

Grainier and the others yell after it, warning others below.

As the log CRASHES down the mountainside, SCREAMS of loggers
below fill the forest.

Grainier looks to the horse team. All SIX HORSES and their
pilot lay tangled together: DEAD.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Grainier began to feel a dread he
could not name. He felt Death was
following him. Seeking after him.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CUT - EVENING

Grainier and Arn Peeples are nailing three BOOTS to three
different trees: one for each man killed. Arn holds the nails
as Grainier hammers.

ARN PEEPLES

There. Now they won't just pass out
of the world without nothing to
show that they was here.

THREE FRESH GRAVES lie behind them. A dozen workers around
them, silent.

The Boss is holding his hat.

BOSS

Well hell. I guess I didn't know
Ruggieri too good, or uh...

MOURNING LOGGER

Shin.

BOSS

Right. Shin. But Wilkes, he was a
good man and I reckon the others
must've been too. Anyway, they
didn't deserve to go like that.

No one really knows what to say.

BOSS (CONT'D)

I wish I could let us all lay off a
day. But it's the Company. And the
War don't stop needing spruce just
on account of a bad day for us.

The Boss dons his hat and leaves them all there at the graves
of their friends.

EXT. / INT. GRAINIER'S ACRE - DAY

Grainier, tired, steps up to his home. The cabin is different
than the last time we saw it. A clothesline has moved. Some
plants have been added, others removed.

GRAINIER

Guess who!

Grainier walks through the doorway with two sarsaparillas and
a box of chocolates.

But no one is there.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

Hello?

He sets the gifts on the table. Listens for his family.

He steps back outside. Looks out across the acre until his
eyes settle on a little bonnet that seems to be floating
across the tall grass. And then Kate -- almost two now --
breaks into the open, wearing that little bonnet, running
ahead as Gladys chases after.

They both stop, looking across the field to Grainier standing
on the porch.

Grainier runs over to them, Kate grabs his leg and they fall into the grass -- the child breaking into a fit of giggles.

Then Gladys jumps on top of him and they all wrestle, laughing.

INT. GRAINIER'S CABIN - DAY

Gladys and Grainier sit at the dining table while Kate plays underneath. Gladys inspects his hands, trimming his nails over a cloth.

She studies a HALF-HEALED SCAR on his hand.

GLADYS

What happened here?

GRAINIER

Oh... We were bucking a larch and it twisted up on me. Grabbed hold of my ax like it was a man. Thought it was gonna rip my hand clean off.

She runs her finger over it. He notices a bump on the bone of her finger. She winces.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

What's this?

GLADYS

I broke it.

GRAINIER

On what?

GLADYS

One of Cooper's mules. I rented one for a day to pull stumps and I guess he gave me a crazy one. Got my hand twisted up in his halter.

GRAINIER

Rented it to you?

GLADYS

It's fine. We don't need to ask for favors.

GRAINIER

All the favors we've done for him. We didn't charge him when his road washed out and--

GLADYS

Robert.

He stops.

She kisses his hand.

EXT. GRAINIER'S ACRE - DAY

Gladys sits in the bath outside with her head laying over the edge while Grainier gently washes her hair. She's in heaven.

He starts to rinse it with a ladle and a bucket of river water.

Kate plays on the ground around them.

INT. GRAINIER'S CABIN - DAY

Grainier and Gladys in bed together in the long part of the afternoon. She lays behind him with her arms around his chest while he watches Kate nap on a pallet on the floor, curled on her side like a little animal.

GLADYS

(whispers)

Hey. Are you alright?

Grainier watches their daughter.

GRAINIER

She's a different little person every time I see her. I'm missing her whole life.

GLADYS

It just feels that way right now because she's growing so fast. It won't always be that way.

He watches Kate sleep. He knows Gladys is just trying to make him feel better.

GRAINIER

I want to be here more. Maybe I can find some work closer to home. For a time.

She turns him over to her and kisses him. Gives him space to say more.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

I'm just-- What if... What if I die? And then I've missed all this time. With you and her. And for what?

GLADYS

You're home. Get some rest. We can worry about all that tomorrow.

She kisses him again. They close their eyes and drift off.

EXT. GRAINIER'S ACRE - DAY

Grainier and Kate are playing in the tall grass. Grainier is crawling on his hands and knees, pretending to be some wild animal. Kate giggles and runs around.

As they're playing, he HOWLS like a wolf. She stops at this. Watches him curiously. He howls again, his voice echoing off the mountains. But she doesn't howl along with him.

GRAINIER

Ah. Maybe another time.

INT. / EXT. GRAINIER'S CABIN - DAY

Grainier stands in the doorway of the cabin. He watches Gladys as she tucks Kate into the pallet on the floor for a nap. Kate snuggles in with a little stuffed animal.

Gladys grabs a rifle from the rack on the wall and she and Grainier step out onto the porch.

They sit to put on their boots.

GRAINIER

Did she go down alright?

GLADYS

She was a little fussy, but she's asleep.

They pull their boots on. Start to lace them.

GRAINIER

Did she...?

(listens)

Was that her?

GLADYS

No. I think you're hearing things.
One too many knocks to the head.

He smiles. Cuffs his pants.

They lace up their boots in similar fashion, like an old married couple.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

I was thinking about what you said.

GRAINIER

About what?

GLADYS

About Kate.

GRAINIER

Oh that wasn't--

GLADYS

No, I feel it too. Every time you
come home it's like... The years go
by quicker and quicker.

Gladys takes up the rifle. Checks the chamber. Feeds
cartridges into the gun as she speaks.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

I was thinking. Maybe we could turn
our acre into a little farm. I
could grow twice as much as I do
now without much more work. If we
did that and if we saved up enough
for you to start a little sawmill,
maybe we could... Maybe you'd be
home more. We could be together
more.

GRAINIER

Yeah...

GLADYS

What?

GRAINIER

It's just... It's a lot.

GLADYS

Well I know.

GRAINIER

We'd need a horse. Or a mule. On credit.

GLADYS

On credit for sure.

GRAINIER

And a sawmill's not cheap.

GLADYS

I didn't say that it would be--

GRAINIER

No, no, I think it's a good idea.

GLADYS

It is a good idea. I know it would be hard. But so is this.

GRAINIER

I know. And I'm not trying to...
I'd do anything to make you happy,
Glad.

GLADYS

I am happy, it's not...

She looks at him a moment. Then looks away.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

Mama was miserable her whole life.
Her mama was too. And I promised
myself I wouldn't be that way. That
I wouldn't pass that down to Kate.
But sometimes I...

(she stops a moment)

We're so lucky to have each other
and I just...

GRAINIER

I know. Me too.

He pulls her in under his arm.

EXT. WOODS - A LITTLE LATER

Grainier and Gladys walk softly through a stand of trees,
hunting, her carrying the rifle. Not a word between them.

EXT. WOODS - LATER

They are tucked in against a tree. Gladys watches the clearing. Grainier leans back on the tree, his eyes closed.

She sees something. She gets up onto one knee. She taps Grainier and he opens his eyes, looks around, sees what she's looking at.

He keeps still as she slowly raises the rifle to her shoulder and sights it in.

Then she squeezes the trigger and the rifle bucks with a blast of smoke.

They watch.

GRAINIER

Good shot.

INT. GRAINIER'S CABIN - ANOTHER DAY

Grainier sits at the table, tightening up the legs of a chair.

Sunlight and the breeze play through the lacy curtains, casting shapes on the floor. Grainier listens to Gladys and Kate playing outside.

He steps outside to join them, leaving the chair upside down and the shadows playing across the floor.

EXT. WOODS - ANOTHER EVENING

Grainier is walking with Kate on his shoulders in the early morning light. They're foraging for Meadow Salsify, pulling the plant up by its big edible roots.

Then A WOLF HOWLS in the distance. Grainier stops, listens. Kate is listening too.

Another long howl. Then silence.

Then Kate answers.

KATE

awoooooo.

Grainier waits until she finishes, then bursts into laughter. They walk on.

EXT. BONNERS FERRY / FEED BARN - DAY

Another day: Grainier loads feed sacks onto a horse cart. The work is backbreaking and monotonous.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Grainier tried to find work closer to home, picking up odd jobs where he could. But the war was over and good-paying work was hard to come by.

He hears a TRAIN WHISTLE -- the Spokane International passing in the distance -- and he stops. He listens to it and his mind goes off and follows it until it disappears on the wind.

Then he goes back to work.

INT. GENERAL STORE, 1920'S - LATER

At the END OF THE DAY, Grainier stands at the counter. A Kootenai man we'll later come to know as IGNATIUS JACK hands him a dollar and a few coins for the day's work. Grainier thanks him and leaves.

INT. GRAINIER'S CABIN - NIGHT

Grainier and Gladys sit at the table finishing dinner. Kate sits on the floor playing with her little wooden toys.

Grainier is quiet, pensive. Stares at his plate.

Gladys watches him.

GLADYS

What if we came with you?

GRAINIER

Hm?

GLADYS

Out to the cut.

GRAINIER

What do you-- Glad, we can't--

GLADYS

I'd be helpful.

GRAINIER

I know you would, you'd be great, but--

GLADYS

I could make some money washing clothes. And now she's not as much to keep up with.

GRAINIER

Glad--

GLADYS

You told me some of the others have had their wives out there.

GRAINIER

Not some of the others. Just that one old man. But he was just--

GLADYS

And that young couple from California.

GRAINIER

They quit and disappeared after a week. Besides, they didn't have a little one.

She's quiet.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

It's just too dangerous. I told you about--

GLADYS

(quickly)

I know.

He watches her but she's looking off.

GRAINIER

What about our house? What about the plot?

GLADYS

The house isn't going anywhere. And I can ask Jane to check in on it.

They're both quiet.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

I'm just trying to find a way is all.

She gets up and takes her dish to the sink. Stands there.

GRAINIER

Please don't be mad at me.

GLADYS

I'm not mad. But I'm gonna start going off and leaving you here. See how you like it.

GRAINIER

Can you just tell me where everything is before you take off?

She smiles.

He goes to the sink to stand with her.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

I wouldn't know what to do with myself.

GLADYS

Oh you'd get on fine.

They stand there a moment holding each other.

Kate starts fussing on the ground.

Gladys picks her up, sits with her.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

It's alright, babygirl. We'll get on fine too, won't we?

Grainier sits back at the table with her. Watches them.

GRAINIER

Maybe y'all should come.

GLADYS

No, you're right. Let's give her another year.

Grainier nods, not quite convinced. Gladys nudges him.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

You want me to cry and tell you how I'll miss you every day?

Grainier smiles.

GRAINIER

Maybe.

GLADYS

(to Kate)

What will we do with ourselves,
baby? How will we make it on our
own without your daddy?

Gladys pretends to cry to the baby. Kate laughs. Grainier smiles.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

Here.

She pulls A BOX OF CHOCOLATES down from the shelf. Takes out one for each of them. Counts how many are left.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

We'll have one every week while
you're gone. When the box is empty,
you'll be home.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

The family is together at the river again. Gladys and Grainier are talking together offscreen while Kate plays with the OLD LADLE at the waterside.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Money was tighter for them than it
ever had been. And though he didn't
know it then, he would always look
back on this time in his life as
his happiest.

After a few moments watching the water run through it, she loses hold of the ladle and it floats away. There's a sadness in seeing it drift away down the river.

INT. / EXT. GRAINIER'S CABIN - MORNING

Grainier is dressed to leave for the cut. Kate plays on the floor of the cabin with a little wooden toy.

He hugs and kisses her goodbye. She doesn't understand it and so isn't bothered, just says bye bye.

Gladys and Grainier hide their melancholy. They hold each other a long time, whispering goodbyes and I love you's, as if saying things too delicate to speak loudly.

He steps out of the cabin, slings his bag over his shoulder.

GLADYS
 (to Kate)
 Tell Daddy bye-bye.

Kate blows a kiss. Grainier blows a kiss back. Kate repeats it, as a child does.

He steps out of view, then leans back in and says bye-bye and she blows a kiss. He steps back out, then leans back in, repeating the action several times, each time Kate responds back. Then he just stands there in the cabin a moment.

He smiles to Gladys. She blows him a kiss too. They linger, staring at each other a while.

And then he leaves.

Gladys and Kate watch the door, expecting him to step back into it.

But only emptiness hangs there.

CUT TO:

THE FOREST. FROM ABOVE.

Looking down from the sky, the Washington forests are thick as a carpet. We move across the land, they seem endless.

But then the trees START TO THIN. The green gives way to brown land, EMPTY OF TREES, as we approach--

EXT. THE CUT - NIGHT

Grainier sits around a little fire with a few other loggers as the evening turns to night. The mountainside is cut clean, shorn close, all the big trees gone.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 He earned four dollars a day on most jobs, minus expenses for what the company provided. He and Gladys figured that after one more long stint in the woods, they'd have enough money to start building a sawmill back home.

They roll smokes and eat biscuits and dried deer meat. Arn Peeples is among the group. Along with a man just as old but twice as quiet: BILLY.

YOUNG LOGGER

Yall going on to another job? Or
you quitting for the season?

BILLY

(looking into the fire)
I can't decide. I'm never happy
when a job ends, for some reason. I
just feel itchy inside.

ARN PEEPLES

Because it's rough work, gentlemen.
Not just on the body but on the
soul. We just took down trees that
have been here five hundred years.
It upsets a man's soul to have done
it. Whether he recognizes it or
not.

YOUNG LOGGER

I'll have two hundred dollars in my
pocket tomorrow morning. It don't
bother my soul. Not one damn bit.

ARN PEEPLES

Well that's cause you Minnesota
fellers don't know nothing about
history.

GRAINIER

(maybe a bit bothered)
These trees were that old?

ARN PEEPLES

Some was older even. I seen trees
in the State of Washington that was
saplings when Jesus was walking the
earth. Saplings when Buddha was
preaching.

BILLY

Buddha?

ARN PEEPLES

A Chinese Jesus feller. This world
is intricately stitched together,
boys. Every thread that we pull, we
know not how it affects the design
of things. We are children on this
earth, pulling bolts out of a
ferris wheel, thinking ourselves to
be gods.

YOUNG LOGGER

That's horseshit. I've been to Washington too. Cut all up through Canada and back down again. There's enough logs for us to cut for a thousand years. And then when the last one is cut, the first will be growed up as big as anything around today.

But even he seems a little bothered, despite his words.

ARN PEEPLES

I remember thinking the same thing as a young man. The very same thing.

Grainier watches Arn Peeples stare into the fire, seeming as old in the firelight as the trees he described.

CUT TO:

LATER THAT NIGHT.

The fire now is just coals. Arn Peeples and Grainier are still staring into it. Billy sleeps on the ground.

ARN PEEPLES

You moving on, Robert? Or packing up for home?

GRAINIER

I think I'll do one more. Just a short one. I'm trying to save up some money. Maybe start a little sawmill back home.

ARN PEEPLES

They're paying good over at Salmo-Priest. Good crew, from what I hear. The wood's soft over there right now. Three swipes'll bring em down.

GRAINIER

They say that about every job.

They laugh.

Grainier watches the dying fire hiss and glow.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

I don't know where the years go,
Arn.

ARN PEEPLES

If you figure it out, let me know.
I'd like to ask for a few back.

They laugh at that. It grows quiet again.

GRAINIER

I miss my wife. Miss my little one.

ARN PEEPLES

What's her name? Your missus.

GRAINIER

Gladys.

ARN PEEPLES

Mmm. Welsh. A highborn name.

GRAINIER

(smiles)

That makes sense. If you knew her.

ARN PEEPLES

Those old names have power. The
ones who have them are blessed.

Grainier smiles at the thought.

GRAINIER

You got a family somewhere?

ARN PEEPLES

My family is everywhere there's a
smiling face. I've never been
somewhere I didn't find some family
there. Except for Kansas. That
state is a collection of savage
lunatics.

Grainier laughs.

ARN PEEPLES (CONT'D)

It's good having you around. Not a
lot of people I cross paths with
more than once in this life. I see
it as a blessing when they're
brought back around.

EXT. THE CUT / ANOTHER MOUNTAIN - ANOTHER DAY

A THICK DEAD BRANCH hangs high in a Larch. A SNAG, dangling from the canopy.

Beneath the tree and all over this mountainside, loggers are making short work of the trees here.

A little man passes underneath the tree.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

It looked certain Arn Peeples would exit this world in a puff of smoke with a monstrous noise, but he went out quite differently...

The wind moves and the tree LETS LOOSE THE LIMB, dropping it silently through the air.

The little man below yelps like a cat.

CUT TO:

DOWN ON THE GROUND - SIMULTANEOUS

Grainier turns at the noise to see Arn Peeples pinned to the ground.

He runs to him, yelling for others to help. Grainier and another logger pull the branch off him.

Grainier turns Arn Peeples over.

YOUNG LOGGER

Careful with him. Careful.
(looks up into the trees)
Widowmaker got him.

Arn Peeples is knocked silly. He's blinking a lot and staring toward some other reality.

ARN PEEPLES

(faraway)
Right reverend rising rockies.

GRAINIER

Arn. Can you hear me? Arn.

His eyes finally find them.

ARN PEEPLES

Oooo. Ooo. I'm alright. Just sit me up.

They help him sit up.

YOUNG LOGGER
Get him a little water.

ARN PEEPLES
I saw my sister. And her husband.
They was just here. Did you see
which way they walked to?

GRAINIER
Why don't we carry you down the
mountain a little, Arn?

ARN PEEPLES
No, no. I can walk. I don't need
folks seeing me carried around like
an old woman. Just help me stand
up.

They do. Arn Peeples takes a couple tenuous steps off to the side.

GRAINIER
You ok?

ARN PEEPLES
My spine feels all knotty amongst
the knuckles.

GRAINIER
Why don't we get a horse to take
you down?

ARN PEEPLES
No no. I ain't crippled. I'm just
walking a little suchways -- a
little crooked.

Grainier watches him walk away from them. Just as he described.

SOME TIME LATER.

Grainier is sitting with Arn. The old man watches the wind through the trees, his mind somewhere above the crown of spruce and fir.

ARN PEEPLES
You hear that? Beautiful, ain't it?
Just beautiful.

Grainier looks up into the trees.

GRAINIER

What is?

ARN PEEPLES

All of it. Every bit of it.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

He had a number of dizzy spells and grew dreamy and forgetful over the course of the next few days. Forgetting even his own name before it was all done.

We sit with Arn a little while longer. Just watching the world.

EXT. THE CUT - NIGHT

TWO DAYS LATER. Arn Peeples now lays DEAD on a bed out in the open under the trees, sheets pulled up under his chin as if he's just sleeping.

Grainier and the rest of the crew stand around him. No one sure what to say or how to say it.

Billy is moving his mouth like he's trying to get words to come out.

BILLY

Arn Peeples was my friend. He... he said that a tree was a friend, if you let it alone. But the second the blade bit in, you had yourself a war and the tree was a killer. But he wasn't messing with that tree, it was just a snag, so I don't know what meaning to take from that.

The loggers with hats take them off, realizing this is some kind of eulogy.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Arn never cheated a man in his life. He never stole, not even a stick of candy when he was a small small boy, and he lived to be pretty old. I guess there's a lesson in there for all of us to be square, and we can all get along. In Jesus' name. Amen.

OTHERS
 (all together)
 Amen.

They all stand around a moment staring at Arn Peeples.

Soon they drift away from the corpse, but Grainier stands there a moment longer with him.

All of Arn's possessions sit in an open handkerchief on his chest: the tin comb, the silver toothpick and his brass watch, still ticking.

BILLY
 A whole life. And it all fits in a handkerchief.

Grainier looks over at Billy, staring down at his friend.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 Though he couldn't put words to it, Grainier felt the snag had been meant for him. That again, Death was seeking him. For the rest of his life he would regret having gone to that mountain.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Grainier opens his eyes from this dream. His head against the window on a passenger train. He's been sleeping. He's coming back from The Cut.

Everyone on the train car is agitated. Most are pressed up against the window facing east, staring and murmuring.

Grainier looks out. In the distance: a PILLAR OF BLACK SMOKE billowing between the mountains. It's the biggest fire anyone on the train has ever seen.

GRAINIER
 (stunned)
 What is that?

LARGE MAN
 It's the end of the world. Just as the Bible foretold it.

EXT. BONNERS FERRY TRAIN STATION - DAY

The train is still slowing and Grainier is already fighting to push the door open and get off.

The station is chaos. The air is thick with smoke. To the north, the sky is a furious orange.

People are crowded onto the station. Many trying to force their way onto the train. Some carry their only belongings.

A Station Master is yelling, trying to get some order back.

Grainier searches for Gladys and Kate among everyone there. He moves through the crowd, searching every face, questioning them.

GRAINIER

Have you seen a woman with a little girl? Her name is Gladys. The child is two.

He sees someone he recognizes.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

Alice! Have you seen Gladys? Did she come to town?

Alice's face is covered in soot, ash in her hair. She just shakes her head with a faraway look.

Grainier looks up at the PILLAR OF SMOKE filling the sky.

EXT. BURNED FOREST - NIGHT

The Fire has moved farther north.

Grainier walks along the Moyea River toward his home -- a HANDKERCHIEF tied over his nose and mouth to strain the smoke.

He stops to wet it often in the river.

The ground is still smoking.

Blackened trees burn from the inside, glowing. The world is covered in silvery ash. The air thick with smoke.

Grainier stumbles ahead, calling out for his wife and daughter.

An ember lights on his shoulder, sparking to a small flame on his shirt. He smacks it out and walks on ahead.

He climbs a hill and finally sees THE FIRE, far ahead: as high as a mountain -- hanging like a black and red curtain down the sky.

Even this far back from the fire, the air pressure folds upon itself, creating a storm of smoke and wind.

He shields his face from the heat and retreats back down the hill.

Then he collapses to his knees, coughing in the warm ash through which he's been wading. He can barely breathe the air here. He looks like a lost ghost in a ruined world.

INT. GENERAL STORE - SOME OTHER DAY

Grainier lays on a pallet, paralyzed with grief. His face still red, his lips cracked and peeling from the heat of the fire.

Someone steps into the store room, grabs a few things from a shelf, returns to work.

Grainier's face is blank as he watches dust fall through the air.

INT. GENERAL STORE - ANOTHER DAY

Grainier steps up to the counter with an armful of tools, a bag of nails, canvas. He struggles with the amount of supplies.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

For nearly two weeks, he searched every town in the region looking for Gladys and Kate. Finding them nowhere, he went back to his acre to await their return.

Behind the cash register is Ignatius Jack, owner of this store. He tallies up Grainier's purchase.

IGNATIUS JACK

Four-fifty.

Grainier counts some money onto the counter.

Two men stand at the doorway, gossiping about the fire.

DOORWAY WOMAN

I was talking to Ricky Welch, he's up by Deer Ridge, or was. His herd of cows, gone. Ever one of em. Ain't nothing left. That's how hot they burnt. No bones, no nothing.

(MORE)

DOORWAY WOMAN (CONT'D)

Found a couple bells, all twisted
up, and that was it.

Grainier stares at his things on the counter, bottling down
his emotions at hearing them speak.

Ignatius Jack looks like he wants to say something, but
doesn't.

EXT. GRAINIER'S ACRE - AFTERNOON

Grainier stands in the place where his cabin once was -- now
only a patch of dark ground surrounded by the black spikes of
spruce.

His mind is far away.

Grainier begins to dig around in the ashes of the cabin with
a stick. Looking for any remnant of his family.

Only the WOODSTOVE lies exposed in the ash, lying on its side
with its legs curled up under it like a beetle's.

He rights it and pries at the handle. Finally the hinges
break away and the door comes off.

Inside lays a CHUNK OF BIRCH WOOD, barely charred.

GRAINIER

Gladys!

He pulls it to his chest.

Everything he's ever loved lying in ashes around him, but
here this thing she touched and held.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

Gladys.

He searches around through the ash for anything else that
might have been spared.

SOME TIME LATER. ANOTHER DAY PERHAPS.

Grainier is laying in the ashes of his homestead. He WAKES to
the soft patter of RAINFALL.

It soon soaks him, washing the ash away, revealing again the
STONE FOUNDATION of the cabin. He opens his mouth and lets
the rain fall on his tongue.

Slowly he sits up as the rain falls down. He holds out his hands, washes them in the rain falling down on him.

Then in the distance, A BEAR -- black against the ashen gray world -- stares at him, looks around, as if wondering where to go, then trudges away into the forest.

NIGHT.

The rain is gone now. Grainier sits shivering on the ground. No fire. No blanket. His clothes matted to his body.

The birch sits next to him. He looks down at it. The only thing unburned in this ruined place.

LATER THAT NIGHT.

The birch is NOW BURNING. A small, weak fire. Grainier watches it burn from somewhere deep inside himself. Like he just lost another precious thing.

Then, there, across the fire from him, sits the Chinese Laborer. Crouched like him. Watching the fire too.

Finally, The Laborer looks up at Grainier. They just stare at each other a long moment.

GRAINIER

You cursed me.

But The Laborer just stares at him.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

I'm sorry... but--

(his throat catches)

This is too much. They didn't deserve this.

But The Laborer doesn't respond.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

Please...

Grainier puts his head in his hands.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

Please.

The Laborer watches him a moment. Then stands and walks from the fire, disappearing into the night.

And again, Grainier is alone.

From talking out loud, he is answered by WOLVES on the peaks in the distance.

The sky above him is filled with stars. Cold and unconcerned with the scorched world below.

EXT. THE BURNT ACRE - MORNING

In first light, Grainier lays on his side, staring out. As if he didn't sleep all night.

Something in the sky catches his eye. He looks up to see it come into view. A SCARF. Gladys' scarf. Just sailing past. He watches it disappear over the ruined forest.

It feels like a blessing. He sits up.

ANOTHER DAY.

Grainier has busted down some skinny trees and is building a rude LEAN-TO with the blackened trees where his cabin once stood.

SUNSET.

The sun is dipping below the scorched mountains. The moon already high up in the sky.

ANOTHER MORNING.

Grainier wakes on the cold ground. His fire has burnt to nothing. He stretches. Then crouches to the fire to bring it back to life.

All around him the ground is covered in the WHITE PAPER CUPS that held the chocolates. They flutter like fallen leaves in the wind, but they disappear whenever he looks directly at them.

He sees birds flitting through the air. Not foraging, maybe, but lighting to rest briefly as they head across the burn.

Then a melody comes echoing through the forest. A FIGURE approaches, singing to himself. A towering presence in a thick fur coat. Rifle on his shoulder.

The Figure makes his way toward Grainier and Grainier just waits for him.

He stops when he gets close to Grainier, standing over him. It's Ignatius Jack. He holds a satchel and four squirrel carcasses slung together on a cord.

IGNATIUS JACK
Hello Robert.

A LITTLE LATER.

The fire has been stoked back to life. A squirrel is roasting over the flames.

Ignatius Jack sits on the other side of the fire. Grainier is wrapped in a blanket Jack brought him.

Ignatius Jack hands a cooked squirrel over to Grainier, who tries not to devour it.

IGNATIUS JACK
I didn't know what I'd find out here. You wouldn't believe the stories they're telling about you in town.

Grainier considers the blanket. The food.

GRAINIER
I'll pay you back for all this. I promise.

IGNATIUS JACK
I didn't ask you to.

GRAINIER
I appreciate you checking on me.

Ignatius Jack watches him as he stares at the fire.

IGNATIUS JACK
You can lose yourself out in these woods. I mean up here.
(taps his head)
Being around other folks keeps the strange things of the world away.

Ignatius Jack takes up his rifle, stands.

IGNATIUS JACK (CONT'D)
Let's take a walk. See what has returned to the woods.

EXT. THE BURNT FOREST - A LITTLE LATER

Grainier follows Ignatius Jack as they track through the burned forest. Green is starting to show across the ground.

Ignatius Jack carries his rifle. They don't speak as they walk.

Ahead of them, they see MOVEMENT in the trees. They cut around to get the wind on their faces and step toward it.

A lone BULL ELK is licking ash from the bark of a tree. A rack of antlers as intricate as a map. Clouds of steam issue from each breath.

Grainier watches in wonder.

Then a SHOT rings out like thunder. The Elk shivers and stumbles away from them.

Ignatius Jack moves ahead and Grainier follows him.

A LITTLE LATER, they find the Elk laying on its side. Blood pooled around it -- steam rising from the animal.

Grainier kneels to the Elk. Touches its fur. He pets it, without knowing why. And this sends him into weeping, crying at the animal, shameless as a child.

It's the first time he's cried since losing his family.

GRAINIER

They aren't coming back, are they?

Ignatius Jack just waits.

Finally Grainier stops crying, wipes his eyes.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

Sorry. Don't know what came over me.

IGNATIUS JACK

Let's clean him.

Ignatius Jack turns over the Elk to gut it.

BACK AT THE BURNT ACRE. EVENING.

The Elk is split in half now. The back half lays on the ground by Grainier. Ignatius Jack has the front half tied on his back, the antlers sticking out.

IGNATIUS JACK (CONT'D)

OK. I have to get back to town.

GRAINIER

I appreciate you. I hope to see you again soon.

IGNATIUS JACK
Until next time, Robert.

Ignatius Jack walks back into the forest. With the Elk on his back, he looks like some shape-shifting being from an ancient story.

Grainier watches until he disappears. Then kneels to skin his half of the Elk.

EXT. RIVER - ANOTHER DAY

Grainier kneels to the river, washing his hands in the water.

In the distance, he hears A WOMAN'S VOICE talking softly. Gladys' voice. He listens. Until slowly it fades away on the wind.

EXT. THE BURNT ACRE - MOMENTS LATER

Grainier walks across his acre. The forest is still charred but the GROUND IS HEALING. Fireweed and jack pine have sprouted and stand about thigh high.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Grainier raised a lean-to at his homesite, and there he lived through the rest of the summer, fishing for speckled trout and hunting for a rare and flavorful mushroom the Canadians called morel, which sprang up on ground disturbed by fire. Though he confessed it to no one, he held some faint hope that Gladys and Kate might somehow return, and he wanted to be ready for them if they did.

His lean-to has been improved, now covered in CANVAS, enough to shelter from the wind and rain at least.

A RED DOG waits for him near the lean-to, wagging her tail. She has FOUR PUPPIES crowded around her.

The dog is a rough sight. Like she's been fending for herself in the woods a long time.

GRAINIER
Well hello. What are you doing here?

He kneels down to her and she instantly takes to him, welcoming his affection. The puppies are more wary.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

You're skinny as anything. Here.

Grainier digs around for something in his lean-to. The dog watches his every move.

He tosses her a piece of dried elk meat and she devours it.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

Oh is that good? Didn't have much salt.

The dog whines for more so he gives her some more by hand.

A LITTLE LATER.

Grainier has a small bucket of river water. He rinses the dog's fur, matted with dried blood. He pulls burrs and nettles.

Then he cleans each wiggling pup, which run off as soon as he sets them down.

NIGHT.

He folds up his jacket and lays it on the ground, near enough the fire to be warm.

GRAINIER

Here you go. Come here and get those puppies warm.

Red Dog curls up on the jacket and the puppies join her.

Grainier sits on the ground next to her and pets her. He watches the fire, some measure of peace back in his life.

EXT. THE BURNT FOREST - ANOTHER DAY

Grainier is cutting down a small tree with an ax, making logs.

He senses something and stops cold. He turns. Behind him, in a clearing, an ELK stares at him. With wide antlers and shag hair like moss.

It tilts its head back, opens its mouth and cries out, long and mournful.

As it does, its ANTLERS BURST INTO FLAMES.

EXT. THE BURNT ACRE - LATER

Grainier returns to his cabin site, dragging two logs, a strange look on his face.

Ignatius Jack is there, helping him with what is shaping to be A NEW CABIN.

Together they notch the logs and stack them into the foundation while the pups play around them.

THE BURNT ACRE - ANOTHER NIGHT

They sit around a low fire, talking easily. Ignatius Jack studies one of the pups. Red Dog lays nearby.

IGNATIUS JACK

They appear quite wolfish.

GRAINIER

Don't they? I reckon she must've got with a wolf out there somewhere on her own.

IGNATIUS JACK

No. That's impossible.

GRAINIER

Why's that?

IGNATIUS JACK

Only one he-wolf ever mates. And that's the chief of the wolf pack. And the she-wolf he chooses to bear his litters is the only one ever comes in heat.

GRAINIER

Yes, but if--

IGNATIUS JACK

He chooses only one.

GRAINIER

But what if she'd encountered the chief wolf just at the right moment? You know what I mean? Might he not have taken her then, just for the newness of the experience?

IGNATIUS JACK
 (smiles)
 The newness of the experience...

GRAINIER
 Wouldn't be the strangest thing
 I've seen.

IGNATIUS JACK
 Well. Then perhaps. Might be you've
 got yourself some dog-of-wolf.
 Might be you've started your own
 pack, Robert.

GRAINIER
 Ah. It's Red Dog's pack. I'm just
 here to get food for them.

Ignatius Jack laughs.

IGNATIUS JACK
 (to Red Dog)
 So that's your name then? Red Dog?

GRAINIER
 Suits her, I think.

They both laugh.

IGNATIUS JACK
 Suits her well.
 (grabs two puppies)
 And what are your names?

GRAINIER
 They're all just Pup for now.
 (Ignatius Jack laughs)
 Watch this.

Grainier whistles and the oldest puppy looks over at him.

Grainier throws his head back and HOWLS.

The pups just looks at him, then go back to playing.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)
 Oh come on, you were doing it the
 other night.

Grainier howls again. This time he is answered by WOLVES in
 the distance.

Everyone around the fire, dogs included, go still at the
 sound.

IGNATIUS JACK

Howling then, are you? There it is then.

GRAINIER

What?

IGNATIUS JACK

The old timers say there's not a wolf alive that can't tame a man.

Ignatius Jack grabs a puppy and falls on his back, the puppies crawling and playing all over him.

Grainier smiles at his friend.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Some years later, Ignatius Jack was drunk for the first time in his life. Some ranch hands fixed up a mixture of lemonade and beer, called a shandy, and as a joke they'd told him he could drink this with impunity, as the action of the lemon juice would nullify any effect of the beer. Ignatius Jack, having never drunk before, believed them.

A puppy nips at Ignatius Jack's ear. He pulls it to his chest and nips back at its ears.

CUT TO:

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - SUNSET

We see Ignatius Jack, staggering along some tracks.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Sometime after dark Ignatius Jack wandered off and managed to get himself a mile up the tracks, where he lay down unconscious across the ties and was run over by a succession of trains.

HARD CUT TO:

THE NEXT DAY.

A cloud of CROWS hangs over the tracks in the bright sun. A GROUP OF KOOTENAI PEOPLE walk along the tracks.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Over the next few days his people were seen plying along beside the rails, locating whatever little tokens of flesh and bone and cloth the crows had missed, collecting them in brightly painted leather pouches, which they must have taken off somewhere and buried with a fitting ceremony.

EXT. THE BURNT ACRE - NIGHT

Back at the fireside, Ignatius Jack is asleep in the waning firelight. Two puppies lay asleep curled up in the crook of his chest.

Red Dog is curled with her other pups nearby.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Grainier always wished he had had the words to tell Ignatius Jack how much he meant to him.

Grainier watches them all. Soon he lays down and drifts off to sleep himself.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - NIGHT

Soaring over train tracks, inches from the crossties and rails. A vision from the nose of a train. The headlight doesn't do much against the dark even as it rushes through the night.

INT. SECOND CABIN - ANOTHER NIGHT

Grainier wakes IN HIS CABIN to the long CRY of the SPOKANE INTERNATIONAL RAILWAY.

All four walls are built now. With a door and windows.

He reaches out to pet Red Dog, but she's gone. He sits up and looks around for her. The DOOR IS OPEN, just a crack.

GRAINIER

Red Dog?

No answer.

He whistles. But the wind is all that answers him. Sadness crosses his face.

He rolls over onto his back. There is no roof and so he can see the stars.

A COMET with a long tail hangs across the sky.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

In that year, a great comet appeared in the sky, which many said signaled the end of days. But after two weeks it faded away as quietly as it had come. Grainier decided to return to The Cut as soon as he finished the roof.

EXT. LOGGING VILLAGE - WEEKS LATER

Grainier follows a line of men through a LOGGER'S VILLAGE.

The place is filled with motorized engines, many still run by steam. Tractors. Chainsaws. The space buzzes, mechanical and angry.

A BLACK BEAR has been killed and is set out on display.

The area around them has been stripped of trees. More desolate than any cut Grainier has seen.

DEEP TRACKS from something unnatural and unknown to Grainier have been cut into the ground.

At the depot, Grainier and the others check out gear from a bespectacled man with a ledger.

Misery whip. Steel wedges. Wooden mauls. Single bit and double bit axes. Sledgehammers and dog hooks.

Others are being given instructions on how to operate mechanical chainsaws.

The Foreman yells at them as they wait.

FOREMAN

Get your asses up on that stand of white pine. I want every one of those trees down this mountain before I wake up on the Lord's Day. After that, I'm docking every one of you a dollar a day.

Grainier pulls on a pair of faded leather gloves, stiff with hardened pine sap, and follows the others out into the trees.

EXT. THE NEW CUT - LATER

Grainier is standing over a chainsaw. Trying to recall the instructions he was given. He looks around for help.

Finally a younger man shows up and pushes past him.

YOUNG LOGGER #1

Watch out old man, we gotta move.

The young man takes over the chain saw, starts it and pushes it to a tree. The tree is cut down and falls in a matter of seconds. Grainier scuttles out of the way.

Others pounce on it with mauls, axes and saws like wasps. Bucking it into eighteen-foot lengths. Pounding dog hooks into the ends with sledgehammers.

Grainier is trying to keep up with the work but constantly finds himself falling behind, in the way.

GRAINIER

I'll go get the bull lines.

YOUNG LOGGER #2

Bull lines? Where you been cutting, mister?

The logger puts his pinkies in his mouth and whistles.

Two men trot over with chains on their shoulder. Latch them to the dog hooks.

A STEAM WHISTLE cries in the distance. A STEAM TRACTOR drives in and is hooked to the tree. Then the driver drops it into gear and it whines, pulling away a section of the tree.

The engine groans while its vapors roar out like a falls. The horses nearby on the skid road move away from it in a skittish silence, their noises erased by the commotion of steam and machinery.

An engineer works the regulator. Men run out with the hooks to noose another felled tree.

NIGHT.

Grainier sits by a fire by himself. He mats his new blisters with pine sap.

The younger loggers are off laughing and drinking.

Then a man much older than Grainier comes to his fire. Grainier recognizes him: Billy -- Arn Peeples' friend.

BILLY
Mind if I warm up a minute?

GRAINIER
(excited)
Billy?! Is that you?

BILLY
Yes... Do I know you?

GRAINIER
We cut together at Salmo-Priest
some years back. I was Arn Peeples'
friend. I'm Robert.

BILLY
Oh yes. Hi Robert. Good to see you.
Say, how is Arn?

GRAINIER
How is...?

BILLY
I ain't seen him in, gosh, at least
a year. Maybe longer.

Grainier realizes the shape of his mind.

GRAINIER
I, uh... I haven't seen him either.

BILLY
Hm. Ain't that how it goes.

They sit quietly a moment.

GRAINIER
Can't believe you're still out
here. I'm barely able to keep up at
my age.

BILLY
Ah well. I just look after the
Steam Donkey, keep it watered and
greased. Not much else I can do.
But it's a living.

Grainier nods.

GRAINIER
Say. Billy. Is it different now?
Out here?

BILLY
Different?

GRAINIER
It just seems... meaner. Rougher. I
can't tell if it's different, or if
it was always like this and I was
just as rough as these boys and
just don't remember it.

Billy stares at the fire.

BILLY
Well that's the age-old question,
ain't it, friend? That's the
question.

Billy is struggling to tie one of his boots, but his hands
are too shaky, won't cooperate.

GRAINIER
Here. Let me help you.

Grainier ties the old man's boots for him and they stare into
the fire as the night deepens.

EXT. THE NEW CUT - MORNING

Grainier is walking into the woods in the early light with
some others. He notices some OLD BOOTS NAILED TO A TREE and
stops. They've been there so long they seem to be becoming
part of the tree.

YOUNG LOGGER #2
They ain't paying you to stand
around, mister.

Grainier sets to hacking the limbs off a felled Douglas Fir.

Others are already sectioning it. Grainier raises the ax up,
and the tree twists on the ground like a giant child.

A BRANCH SWINGS UP AND KNOCKS Grainier back onto the ground.

OTHER LOGGERS
(laughing)
Whoa shit!!

They help him sit up. Grainier is rubbing his jaw. Trying to
work it straight.

YOUNG LOGGER #1
You alright? Want me to kiss it?

The others laugh.

YOUNG LOGGER #2
You'd be all day kissing that
thing, crossways as it is.

Grainier is still getting his wits back about him as the others get back to work.

YOUNG LOGGER #3
Let us know if you need some water
there, bub.

Grainier sits there, trying to get his jaw working, watching them move on deeper into the woods without him.

EXT. SPRUCE LAKE - EVENING

Weeks later, Grainier is walking home from The Cut.

He stops for the night at SPRUCE LAKE, a high lake in the mountains, reflecting back up to the sky the forest that encircles it. He stares at the beauty of it.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
The place where he made his bed
that night had once lay under three-
thousand feet of ice. Later it had
been the hunting grounds for tribes
of people who lived so long ago
that no one knows what they called
themselves.

Grainier cuts some branches from a nearby spruce.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
In more recent years, a band of
Kootenai people had stopped here to
fish on their way north, having
been forced off the land that had
been their home for untold
generations.

He makes a bed for the night out of the spruce branches, staring out at the lake.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
But Robert Grainier knew none of
this as he lay down under spruce
branches.

The sound of the Spokane International wails softly in the distance.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

The last few years, he expected some great revelation about his life would descend upon him.

Grainier starts to drift off to sleep.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

But as of yet, none had. And he was beginning to doubt that one ever would.

EXT. GRAINIER'S ACRE - LATE SPRING

The land that was burned has almost fully recovered now. As Grainier walks, clusters of orange butterflies explode off the blackish purple piles of bear scat and flutter magically like leaves without trees.

Grainier arrives back at his homesite along the Moyea River.

The rebuilt cabin is complete now. Though it has laid empty while he was gone, he finds his door ajar.

GRAINIER

Hello?

No answer from within. He sets down his pack and holds his ax.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

This is my home. If you're in there, you can just leave. I don't want no trouble.

Movement inside. The door is pushed open more and Red Dog bursts out, wagging her tail.

Grainier drops to the ground and hugs her and pets her.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

The following April, he did not leave for Washington to cut timber. He knew he was finished as a logger.

He notices some VINES growing up at the base of his cabin and pulls them. Then moves off to clean up his homestead.

EXT. BONNERS FERRY, LUMBER YARD - ANOTHER DAY

Grainier shovels from an enormous pile of SAWDUST, filling up a wagon, working alongside two young Kootenai men.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

And so Grainier strung work together where he could. Work as fickle and disparate as the weather.

EXT. PINKHAM BARN - ANOTHER DAY

Grainier is loading sacks of cornmeal onto a wagon with a boy named AVERY, who is only 17 but dwarfs Grainier.

Avery loads another sack onto the wagon. He turns back and lifts a third, but IMMEDIATELY DROPS IT.

AVERY

I am dizzy as anything today.

Avery sits on the pile of sacks, removes his hat, flops over sideways and DIES.

Grainier watches him a moment, in shock.

GRAINIER

MR. PINKHAM! COME QUICK!

MR. PINKHAM, well into his 70's, hurries in and kneels to his son.

MR. PINKHAM

Oh. Oh. Oh. He's not gone is he?

GRAINIER

I don't know, sir. He just sat down and fell over.

MR. PINKHAM

Oh. Poor boy. It's his heart. His heart isn't strong.

GRAINIER

I don't even think he said anything to complain.

Mr. Pinkham stands up, looks around.

MR. PINKHAM

I've got to go get Mother.

Mr. Pinkham hurries out toward the house, leaving Grainier there with Avery. Grainier can't look at him while they're alone.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 Less than a month after burying
 their son, Mr. and Mrs. Pinkham
 would close down their feed store.

Mr. Pinkham comes back into the barn with Mrs. Pinkham, wailing sadness. She bends down to the boy, touching his face and arms.

EXT. ROAD / WAGON - MONTAGE - DAY

Grainier drives the wagon slowly down a road. The back is STACKED WITH FURNITURE while TWO CHILDREN run alongside.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 They sold Grainier their wagon and
 horses for three hundred dollars,
 paid in installments. They said it
 felt as if a part of Avery would
 still be out there on the road with
 him.

Grainier sits in the same spot, with the same look on his face, but the weather and THE CONTENTS OF THE WAGON CHANGE:

EXT. ROAD / WAGON - MONTAGE - NIGHT

A WEDDING PARTY rides in the back, laughing drunk.

EXT. ROAD / WAGON - MONTAGE - DAY

A WOMAN WITH FOUR LLAMAS.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 So began his career as a freighter.

EXT. ROAD / WAGON - MONTAGE - DAY

TWO SOLDIERS sit with A MAN IN CHAINS between them.

EXT. ROAD / WAGON - MONTAGE - DAY

A MAN SITS ATOP A PUMPKIN THE SIZE OF A BOULDER.

EXT. ROADSIDE - SUNSET

Grainier stands at the roadside with his horses, sharing bites of an apple with them.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Through this work, he spent more time with his neighbors of the region than he had in all his years prior. And yet with each passing year, he only felt more alone.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. GRAINIER'S FIRST CABIN - DREAM

The SOUND of the Spokane International.

The cabin looks as it did BEFORE THE FIRE. Filled with the belongings of the Grainier family.

The moan of the train grows closer. Through the windows, the world glows a strange orange.

The logs in the walls start SMOKING FAINTLY. They stress and creak. Then POP like large-bore cartridges going off.

On the table by the stove, a magazine curls, darkens, flames, and spirals upward, page by page taking light.

The train sounds closer.

Now the glass window SHATTERS and the curtains blacken at the hems. The wax melts off the jars of food on a shelf, candles melt onto themselves and the kitchen tub steams.

Suddenly a lamp on the table is lit and a metal-lidded jar of salt explodes.

The train sounds closer still, as if barreling toward this place.

Then the whole structure IGNITES like a match head.

INT. SECOND CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Grainier wakes from the dream, to the distant call of the train in this world.

Red Dog is asleep next to him on a pallet on the floor, whimpering softly in her own dream. He pets her and she calms.

He stares around the cabin in the dark. Somehow he is back in the cabin AS IT WAS BEFORE THE FIRE. Before he lost his family. Some aspects are different. Items from his new life stand on shelves next to things that were lost to the flames, while other things are simply misplaced.

Then A SHADOW cuts through the moonlight in the window. Bringing with it a stillness so severe it quiets even the running mind.

He can feel something moving through the cabin. A PRESENCE.

Red Dog feels it too. The hair on her back rises and stiffens as The Shadow begins to manifest itself visibly in the room.

At first only as a quavering image. A form coming into focus. But soon--

THE SHAPE OF A WOMAN. GLADYS.

Grainier's fear is replaced with longing. With cavernous sorrow.

Gladys walks around, quietly inspecting the place. Moving from piece to piece, putting things back in their rightful place as she always did. Her shadow stutters around her.

Then she looks to him. Directly at him.

He can't move. Can't speak. And he becomes a witness, experiencing her last moments.

The forest burns. Gladys frantically gathers what she can.

She takes up Kate, wraps her in her coat. She runs to the front door, opens it and is confronted with A WALL OF FLAMES. She turns back and escapes out the back door.

EXT. THE BURNING FOREST - NIGHT

She runs from the cabin carrying Kate as best she can, while the fire engulfs the world around them.

She can barely see.

Trees explode in flames before her.

Of what she's snatched up, less and less seems worthy. She tosses away clothes and valuables as the heat drives her toward the water.

She struggles to hold Kate, struggles to cover the child's face to protect her from the smoke. She pulls her up to get a better grip, coughing deeply.

Soon she holds only her BIBLE and her red box of CHOCOLATES, each pinned against her with an elbow. But now these are too much.

Needing a better grip to hold her child, she drops The Bible rather than the chocolates. And she runs ahead, struggling again through the smoke and ash.

She comes at last to a ROCK: a place to crawl down toward the water.

She starts to scabble down the stone face. Precariously. Then a stone comes loose and she falls off the embankment.

Leaving an emptiness in the smoke.

EXT. RIVER - MOMENTS LATER

Two heartbeats later, she's laying on the rocks in the shallow water below.

Her legs won't move. Her back broken.

She feebly plucks at the knot across her bodice until the child is free to crawl away and fend for herself, however briefly, along the shore.

The world burns around her, even as the water strokes gently at her side.

She speaks softly to her child.

GLADYS

Baby. Come here. Stay close. Stay close to Mama, ok? We're just going to stay here by the water and rest for a minute. Everything's going to be alright. We're safe now.

She softly closes her eyes as she speaks to the child.

INT. SECOND CABIN - NIGHT

WE'RE BACK WITH GRAINIER. HE IS ALONE AGAIN.

The cabin is dark. Red Dog no longer trembles.

GRAINIER
 (softly)
 Kate? Escaped?

But no one is there to answer.

EXT. ROAD / WAGON - ANOTHER DAY

Grainier rides along in his wagon, his mind on the visitation.

Ahead of him, walking along the road: A WOMAN ABOUT HIS AGE, carrying a large rucksack. She's dressed in green pants and shirt, her hair cut short.

CLAIRE THOMPSON.

Grainier stops the wagon when he catches up to her.

GRAINIER
 Ms. Thompson?

CLAIRE
 Claire. You must be Robert.

GRAINIER
 Yes ma'am.

CLAIRE
 Nice to meet you.

GRAINIER
 Nice to meet you. I was looking for you up at the train station.

CLAIRE
 Well, I waited a few minutes for you. Before I decided to just start walking.

GRAINIER
 I'm sorry about that. Had a little trouble getting these boys going this morning. You still want me to take you up to Hale Lookout?

CLAIRE
 If it's not too much trouble.

GRAINIER
 Here, I'll take your bag.

He starts to get down to take her rucksack, but she tosses it into the wagon and climbs onboard.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

Oh. Alright, well...

He settles back into his seat and they continue on.

A LITTLE LATER.

Grainier and Claire ride along the river road with the mountains rising on either side of them.

CLAIRE

It's beautiful country up here.

Grainier looks around like there might be something new to see.

GRAINIER

What parts are you from?

CLAIRE

I've been all over. But I lived a long time over in Montana. Noxon.

GRAINIER

I've never seen Montana.

CLAIRE

It's beautiful country. Worth the trip.

He nods as if considering it. She's quiet a moment. Like she's wondering if she should say what she's thinking. She decides to.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

They told me about you, you know.

GRAINIER

Who's they?

CLAIRE

The people who recommended you.

GRAINIER

What'd they say?

CLAIRE

That you were different.

GRAINIER
Ain't everybody different?

CLAIRE
No.

GRAINIER
Hmm.

CLAIRE
It's a good thing. Being different.
As far as I see it anyway.

He nods.

She looks around at the wooly mountains.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
I'm so happy to be here. This
valley is special. It used to all
be under a glacier. Three thousand
feet of ice. When it broke, it
flooded the whole region and...

Claire goes on talking of the ancient history of this place,
but the audio shifts.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
She had an ease about her. Somehow,
this person he had never met felt
like an old friend.

Camera moves to focus on Claire as she talks. She seems to be
cataloguing the trees even as she speaks.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Claire had worked in Europe as a
nurse in the Great War. Now she was
employed by the newly-created U.S.
Forest Service, as part of an
effort to manage timber cuts and
prevent forest fires.

Camera moves to now focus on Grainier as he turns down a side
road, trying to navigate to the smooth parts.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
It was the first time in weeks that
he had not been preoccupied with
thoughts of Kate.

EXT. MEADOW - DAY

At last they come to a SMALL MEADOW. On the other side is a granite escarpment at the foot of the mountains.

He stops the horses and he and Claire step down from the wagon. The horses browse in the tall grass.

Grainier looks up the mountain. A FIRE LOOKOUT sits at the top of the mountain, impossibly high, by Grainier's estimation.

GRAINIER

You're going all the way up there?

She looks up toward it.

CLAIRE

That's the plan.

GRAINIER

Well. Be careful.

CLAIRE

I'll be OK.

(remembering)

Ah. Here you are.

She hands him some money from her pocket, pre-counted.

GRAINIER

Oh. Thank you.

He stands there awkwardly. Not sure how to leave -- even less sure how to keep the conversation going.

CLAIRE

It was nice to meet you, Robert.

Thank you for the ride.

GRAINIER

Yep. OK. Nice to-- Take care now.

He walks back to his horses. He steals a glance back toward her when he gets to his wagon. But she's already at the foot of the mountain.

EXT. SECOND CABIN / ROOF - DAY

Grainier is back at his cabin. Repairing some shingles up on the roof.

The wind shifts, blows in COLD FROM THE NORTH. Grainier looks up to the sky. To the cirrostratus veil forming high above him.

He shivers. Pulls his collar tight. Then turns back to the shingles.

INT. SECOND CABIN - THAT NIGHT

Grainier is hunkered in his cabin with Red Dog. Outside, A STORM howls.

He's wrapped in a blanket but still shivering. Eating dried meat, dried cherries.

Then he sneezes.

GRAINIER
(to no one)
Bless you.

He looks to Red Dog.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)
How are you feeling?

Red Dog is snoozing.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)
Good.

He feeds another log into the fire. The little stove struggles to keep up against the cold.

THE NEXT MORNING.

The storm has passed. The world is still now.

Grainier lays in his bed, RACKED WITH FEVER. He leans up on his arm, sips a little water from a bowl. Then he immediately vomits into a bucket by his bed.

He lays back groaning.

ANOTHER DAY.

He wakes up to vomit again. He wretches, but nothing comes. He hangs over his bed a moment before slowly bringing himself back up.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

After three days of sickness he felt sure he would soon die. He welcomed whatever was to come.

Red Dog whines. Grainier struggles to stand. He shuffles to the door, opens it.

Red Dog runs out of the cabin. He leaves the door open and stumbles back to fall in bed.

EXT. BONNERS FERRY STREET - NIGHT - YEARS EARLIER

Grainier walks with Gladys one evening. He wears an ill-fitting button-down now. As they stroll along, he tentatively touches her hand. She returns the gesture and they hold hands as they walk. Drifting a little closer. Smiling to themselves.

Then the reveries fade to black, as if someone turned out the lights on the world.

INT. SECOND CABIN - MORNING

In the soft light of morning, Grainier lays still in his bed. Eyes closed. Mouth hanging open.

No movement at all.

Then his eyes softly flutter open and he takes a deep breath.

Red Dog is curled up next to him, shivering. He puts some of his blanket over her.

Grainier can finally stand again. He wraps himself in a blanket and steps out to the world.

Framed by the doorway, he stands outside in the fresh snow.

He lets out a long hollow howl. The wolves answer him from up in the mountains.

EXT. MEADOW - AFTERNOON

Grainier walks across the field where he dropped off Claire. He's thinner than the last time he was here.

He comes to the base of the lookout. Several stories of narrow ladders lead up to a wood cabin nested at the top. He calls up.

GRAINIER

Ms. Thompson? You up there?

The wood beams groan in the wind. No other answer comes.

He looks around. The woods are quiet.

He starts to drift back the way he came.

But then he sees Claire crossing the meadow toward him. She waves and he stops.

CLAIRE

Robert? What a surprise. How are you?

GRAINIER

Oh I'm good. I didn't mean to startle you.

CLAIRE

You didn't. I was just heading out for an afternoon survey when I heard you call.

GRAINIER

Oh yeah...

They both stand there awkwardly.

CLAIRE

Did you...

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

Well I was just passing through and I thought I'd check on you. Here.

He pulls some MUSHROOMS out of his coat pocket, offers them to her.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

I found a few extra of these.

CLAIRE

Oh wow. Morels.

GRAINIER

They're good. Especially if you have a little butter.

CLAIRE

Thank you.

They stand there awkwardly another moment.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Do you want to stay a minute?

GRAINIER
Oh no, I don't want to impose.

CLAIRE
Not at all. Come see the view from
up there. I'll make us some tea.

INT. / EXT. HALE FIRE LOOKOUT - A LITTLE LATER

Inside, the lookout tower is spare but comfortable. More books than clothes. More windows than walls. Maps of the forest spread across a table. A simple cot in the corner.

GRAINIER
It doesn't get spooky up this high?

CLAIRE
No, I think it's peaceful.

Below them, the Selkirk and Purcell Mountains stretch out beyond the horizon.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
I watch the clouds form and the
light change. And I get paid to do
it. It's a gift.

She takes a kettle off the stove and pours tea made from a plant she's harvested.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Fireweed.

She hands him a cup of tea.

GRAINIER
Thank you.

Grainier steps over to a strange contraption in the corner. A steel saucer with a map and two tall sights.

CLAIRE
It's a FireFinder. If you see
smoke, you just line up the hair in
the front sight. Take the
horizontal reading in degrees and
minutes. Then the vertical angle to
estimate the miles between the
tower and the fire.

(MORE)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Confirm it on the map and then
radio it in to the fire crews.

He leans over and looks through the sight out across the
country.

GRAINIER

How'd you come to this?

CLAIRE

Saw a flier for the job opening
just when I needed it. I had to get
a recommendation from a family
friend. In his words, Claire
Thompson is absolutely devoid of
the timidity normally associated
with her sex. She possesses more
than adequate work ethic and is
unafraid of anything that walks,
creeps, or flies.

Claire smiles at that.

Grainier sips from the tea, grimacing slightly at the
bitterness.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

How is it?

GRAINIER

Good. Thank you.

CLAIRE

Come see the view from out here.

They STEP OUT onto the BALCONY that encircles the lookout.
They sit with their tea and watch the light play across the
mountains.

GRAINIER

Everything down there seems so
small.

He watches the forest sway like a field of grass.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

(almost to himself)

You can barely tell that fire swept
through here. Like it didn't even
happen.

CLAIRE

Were you here when it came through?

GRAINIER

I wasn't. My wife and little baby
were. They, uh...
(hard to say out loud)
They didn't make it out.

CLAIRE

Oh Robert...

GRAINIER

Sometimes it feels like the sadness
is gonna eat me up. Sometimes it
feels like it happened to somebody
else. And uh... I...

He struggles with the thoughts, which seem to be coming of
their own accord.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

I wasn't there for their lives like
I should've been. And I wasn't
there when they needed me most. In
the end.

He seems to be thinking.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

Sometimes I hear them.

He glances at her to see her reaction. She seems to
understand.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

In the woods. Talking. Laughing. I
don't turn my head cause I'm scared
that will make it go away. So I
just listen. Until they fade off
somewhere else. Wherever those
things go. Never told nobody that.

Claire watches him, waits.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

Does that mean I'm crazy?

She thinks a moment on how to answer.

CLAIRE

My husband passed too. A little
over a year ago. It took him a long
time. When it was over it was like
there was a hole in the world. I
had more questions than answers.
Like no human had ever died before.

(MORE)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

When you go through that, nothing you do is crazy. You just go through what you go through.

She looks out across the forest.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

In the forest, every least thing is important. It's all threaded together so you can't tell where one thing ends and another begins. If you really look at it. The insects you can't even see play a role as vital as the river. The dead tree is as important as the living one. There must be something for us to learn from that.

Grainer considers all that.

GRAINIER

And what if you've got nothing left to give? What then?

CLAIRE

The Lord needs a hermit in the woods as much as a preacher in the pulpit, you know.

GRAINIER

Is that what I am? A hermit?

CLAIRE

I believe we both are. In our own ways. Just waiting to see what we've been left here for.

They sit in silence, watching the light turn from gold to blue.

EXT. BONNERS FERRY - MORNING

Grainier is walking out of town with some sundries he's bought that morning. He walks past the METHODIST CHURCH. Where he met Gladys.

He hears singing inside and stops. Watches the church a while.

INT. METHODIST CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER

Inside, Grainier finds a spot in the back pew. The congregation is standing, singing a hymn.

He looks very out of place here. He mats down his hair, but it doesn't help much.

The congregation finishes the hymn.

PASTOR

That was beautiful. Next, let's
turn to one-eighteen.

The old woman at the piano starts playing and the congregation sings.

Grainier looks for a hymn book, but can't find one close. Then they all start to sing. A familiar song. One Gladys used to sing in the choir.

Before long, emotions start to well up inside him. Things he's tamped down a long time. He closes his eyes, singing.

Then he starts WEEPING. Quietly at first, but soon it gets the better of him. People pretend not to notice.

Before the second verse is finished he has disappeared back out the door.

INT. / EXT. SECOND CABIN - NIGHT

The moon rises near midnight and hangs above Queen Mountain.

Grainier is alone in his cabin. He's mending some old pants, working a needle back and forth through the corduroy. Birch burns in the stove.

The night is clear and cold. It suddenly fills with raucous hysteria.

The whistle from the Great Northern gets the coyotes started, and then the wolves.

The chorus crescendoes. The wolves and coyotes howl without letup, sounding in the hundreds, more than Grainier has ever heard.

It all seems to be some vast pronouncement -- the alarms of the end of the world.

He feeds the stove and stands in the cabin's doorway half-dressed and watches the sky, as if something might come from there.

The night is cloudless and the moon burns white, erasing the stars and making gray silhouettes of the mountains.

A pack of howlers seems very near, and getting nearer, baying as they run.

He steps out his door and suddenly they flood into the clearing, many forms and shadows, voices screaming -- he can smell them as they pass, can hear their pads thudding on the earth.

Before his mind can process it, they are gone.

All but one. Laying on her side in the yard.

A creature in the shape of a human, but formed into the shape of a wolf.

A WOLF-GIRL.

Grainier believes he will faint. He grips the doorjamb to stay on his feet.

The creature doesn't move. It seems hurt.

She lays on her side panting, a clearly human creature with the delicate structure of a little girl.

In the dim form under the moonlight, he realizes she is bent in the arms and legs.

With the action of her lungs there comes a whistling, a squeak, like a frightened pup's.

Grainier turns convulsively and goes to the table looking for... he doesn't know what. He owns no gun.

He fumbles at the clutter on the table, locates the matches and lights a hurricane lamp. Then he grabs a piece of BIRCH KINDLING.

He goes out again in his long johns, barefoot, carrying this weapon.

OUTSIDE. MOMENTS LATER.

Grainier lifts the lantern high and, holding his club before him, is stalked by his own monstrous shadow, so huge it fills the whole clearing behind him.

The frost on the dead grass skirls beneath his feet with every step. The rest of the world is SILENT.

The whole valley seems to reflect his shock. He hears only his footsteps and the wolf-girl's panting complaint.

Her whimpering ceases as he gets closer. He approaches cautiously so as not to terrify either this creature or himself.

The wolf-girl waits.

Shot full of animal dread and perfectly still, moving nothing but her eyes. Following his every move but not meeting his gaze, her breath smoking before her nostrils.

He inches closer. Her face is that of a wolf, but hairless.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Though he knew it must be
impossible, the thought overwhelmed
him that his daughter had returned.

Then he recognizes it.

GRAINIER

Kate?

But it is.

THIS IS HIS DAUGHTER. He has to cover his mouth not to cry out.

She stays stock-still as he draws closer. He hopes that some sign of recognition might show itself and prove her to be Kate.

But her eyes only watch in flat terror, like a wolf's.

Kate she is, but Kate no longer.

He drops the club.

She lays on her side, her left leg akimbo. The skin protruding where the bone is broken beneath it.

She's just a child, exhausted from crawling on threes and having dragged the shattered leg behind her.

Her hair is matted and wild and filled with leaves and sticks.

Grainier comes within arm's reach. Kate-no-longer growls, barks, snaps as her father bends down toward her.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

Shhh.

And then her eyes glass and she so fades from herself he believes she's passed.

But she lives, and watches him.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

Kate. Oh my Kate. What's happened to you?

He gets his arms beneath her and lifts. Her breathing comes rapid, faint, and shallow.

She whimpers once in his ear and snaps her jaws but doesn't otherwise struggle.

Grainier turns with her in his embrace and makes for the cabin.

INT. SECOND CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Grainier lays her on his pallet on the floor.

He sets the lamp on the table, illuminating the room, and prepares to splint the broken leg with kindling.

He pulls off his undershirt and tears it into strips.

He gingerly grasps the child's ankle with one hand and puts his other on the thigh to pull. As soon as he does, she gives a terrible sigh, and then her breathing slows.

She's fainted.

Grainier straightens the leg as best he can and, feeling that he can take his time now, he whittles a stick of kindling so that it cups the shin.

GRAINIER

I'm not a doctor. I'm just the one that's here.

He pulls a bench beside the pallet and seats himself, resting her foot across his knee while he applies the splint and bounds it around.

And now he's finished.

He opens the window across the room to give her air.

She lays there asleep with the life driven half out of her.

Grainier moves the bench against the wall, sits back, and watches her sleep.

She is as leathery as an old man. Her hands are curled under, the back of her wrists calloused stumps, her feet misshapen, as hard and knotted as wooden burls.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

(whispers)

It's ok, sweet Kate. I'm here.
You're home now. We're together.

She whimpers in her sleep. He sings softly to her, just as her mother did. And she calms.

He leans his head back, exhausted from the adrenaline. He quietly dozes off.

A train going through the valley doesn't wake him, but enters his dream.

INT. SECOND CABIN - THE NEXT MORNING

Grainier opens his eyes near daylight, a much smaller sound bringing him awake.

Kate has stirred. She is leaving out the window.

GRAINIER

Wait!

Grainier rushes out to his porch and watches her in the dawn effulgence, crawling and pausing to twist sideways on herself and snap at the windings on her leg as would any wolf or dog.

She disappears into the woods and he runs out after her.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

Kate!

OUTSIDE - MOMENTS LATER

In the woods, he can see her again. Just a glimpse. But again she dips out of sight and he trots ahead.

When he comes into a clearing, she's just on the other side of it -- waiting for him. He stops.

She's looking back at him. They have a brief moment of recognition. As if she might wait for his approach.

GRAINIER

Kate...

But the look, all too human, is one of goodbye.

GRAINIER (CONT'D)

Please...

Then she hobbles off into the woods and is gone.

He runs across the clearing and crashes into the bushes on the other side, calling to her.

He wades through the brush, fighting through vines and nettles, desperate to find her.

Eventually he realizes. She's gone.

He stands there, as if lost.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

And so she returned to the place of myths and dreams.

INT. SECOND CABIN - A LITTLE LATER

Grainier's cabin feels even emptier now.

On the floor he finds A SMALL BIT OF FABRIC -- a piece of clothing left behind by his daughter.

He picks it up, holds it tenderly.

EXT. WOODS - ANOTHER EVENING

Grainier walks through the woods, searching, listening.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

He spent many days and evenings wandering the forests and fields of the region, looking for any sign of her.

EXT. SECOND CABIN - NIGHT

Grainier sits on his porch, listening to the wolves howl in the distance.

On his lap, his dinner is only half-eaten on his plate.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

And though he found none, he knew
he would spend the rest of his days
there, so that if she ever needed
him, she would know where to find
him.

He sets the plate down on the floor of the porch and looks
out one more time toward the darkness before going into his
cabin and closing the door on the night.

And the cabin sits there silently a long time.

INT. SECOND CABIN - ANOTHER DAY

Grainier sits down on the edge of his bed. Looks around at
his little cabin. Listens to the wind passing outside. And
sighs.

YEARS LATER.

Then, IN AN INSTANT, MANY YEARS PASS AND HE'S AN OLD MAN NOW.

Still sitting here in the same spot. A look on his face
similar to one he had as a child: full of wonder and
strangeness.

INT. TRAIN - DAY, 1962

Grainier rides a passenger train along the edge of a forest.
The trees open, revealing THE ROBINSON GORGE BRIDGE in the
valley below -- now a web of steel running across the canyon.
A highway stretching away from it toward cities unknown to
Grainier.

Grainier stares out at the bridge.

Everyone around him is dressed in attire we haven't seen
before, as if he's time-traveled two decades ahead.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

In his later years, Grainier rode
the Great Northern from time to
time into Spokane.

EXT. SPOKANE / STREET - EVENING

Grainier walks down the street.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

He wandered the city without much direction or purpose, as if looking for something he had misplaced a long time ago.

He comes to a STORE WINDOW FULL OF TV's. A few people are stopped watching.

On every TV: a man in what seems to be a silver diving suit is cramped in a little metal machine. It's JOHN GLENN'S SPACE FLIGHT.

GRAINIER

What's that feller doing?

BYSTANDER

He's in outer space.

Grainier looks up at the night sky, the faint few stars. Then back to the TV's.

The next image is a wide sea of white and blue.

GRAINIER

Is that...?

BYSTANDER

That's us. That's this whole world.

Grainier can scarcely understand what he's seeing, much less what he's feeling.

EXT. SPOKANE / STREET - AFTERNOON

Grainier walks down the street, his mind elsewhere. The Art Deco buildings tower around him. Not a tree in sight.

EXT. SPOKANE / THEATER - LATER THAT NIGHT

As he approaches a theater entrance, he passes a selection of carnival posters announcing oddities and magic.

CARNIVAL BARKER

...A camel that spits out gold from his teeth, gold! Witness Sanju The Holy Man from the far, far east. Sanju The Holy Man will read your dreams -- experience the world famous Bittler Sisters -- or better yet, pay you a dime to see a monster...

Grainier looks at the hand-painted sign, promising a performance by A WOLF-BOY. The drawing promises a horrible creature: half-man, half-wolf. Snarling in torn clothes, blood dripping from his fangs.

The CARNIVAL BARKER beckons to Grainier.

CARNIVAL BARKER (CONT'D)
 You! Come in, come in. Cast a stone aside. Inside this theater the mysteries of the world flit about like bats and insects. Here, the answers to everything...

INT. SPOKANE THEATER - MOMENTS LATER

The theater is small, shabby. A TRAVELING BACKDROP of some fanciful world has been erected on the stage.

Grainier finds a seat among the thin crowd.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 That night in the theater, he took in a curiosity show that promised a vision of a monster.

And now the Wolf-boy steps out. Hunched and feral. No circus music accompanies his entrance. Only the sound of a soft wind.

The crowd is hushed as he silently prowls the stage.

NARRATOR (V.O.)(CONT'D)
 But was only a boy in a costume.

He wears a mask of fur. A suit that looks like fur but is really something else, shining silver and blue in the electric light. He starts to frolic and gambol around the stage in such a way the watchers couldn't be sure if he meant to be laughed at.

INT. SPOKANE THEATER / BATHROOM - NIGHT

Grainier is washing his hands at a little sink. The walls are tiled in geometric patterns -- the room is lit electric.

He catches a glimpse of himself in the mirror there and he watches himself a while. Like a stranger from another time.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 He saw his face in a mirror for the first time in nearly a decade.
 (MORE)

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

He could see now the toll that the years had taken. He felt that he was only just beginning to have some faint understanding of his life, even though it was now slipping away from him.

EXT. SPOKANE COUNTY FAIR / FIELD - THE NEXT AFTERNOON

Grainier finds himself on a field near the fairgrounds. A sign on a truck advertises four dollar flights.

A little crowd has gathered around a BIPLANE parked on the field. A flimsy ordeal with wings that seem to be made of paper.

THE PILOT -- a young woman in a flight suit -- stands abreast of the craft, talking to people.

A MUSTACHED MAN who looks to be her father stands nearby trying to sell rides.

PILOT'S FATHER

Just four dollars and you'll see
the world as only the birds do.

Grainier takes stock of the strange machine.

INT. BIPLANE - MOMENTS LATER

Clouds roll by. The world below is very small now. Grainier is high in the sky in the biplane. He looks down at the fairgrounds as if from a cloud. It's glorious, though his stomach is somewhere else.

Then the earth's surface turns sideways and he loses any sense of up and down.

The craft rights itself and begins a slow, rickety ascent, winding upward like a wagon around a mountain. Grainier is holding on to whatever he can.

Just as he's getting accustomed to it all, The Pilot yells at him from the seat behind him, shouting over the wind -- resembling a raccoon in her cap and goggles.

PILOT

Hey, you'd better hold on to something.

GRAINIER

Huh?

Then the PLANE STARTS TO PLUMMET.

They fall out of the sky, steeper and steeper, the engine nearly silent. Grainier's organs push back against his spine and his eyes softly close.

Then all sound is swept away except for the sound of the ocean in a seashell.

He experiences a SERIES OF DREAMLETS AND MEMORIES FROM HIS LIFE:

A cabin he'd never remembered before -- the place of his hidden childhood.

Arms encircling him as a young boy, a woman's voice crooning.

The day he proposed to Gladys.

Kneeling on the cabin porch, offering a yellow flower to Kate -- the memory sweetened with time.

Other memories of Gladys and Kate jumble together.

He sees Ignatius Jack. Arn Peeples dying, taking in the world one last time.

Stray dogs in the ashes of his cabin. A curtain moved softly by the breeze.

A train passing in the night. The Chinese Laborer, alive still.

A giant tree falling in the forest.

A pair of old boots nailed to a tree.

BACK IN THE BIPLANE.

Grainier nearly passes out.

And all the mysteries of this life are answered.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

When Robert Grainier died in his sleep sometime in November of 1968, his life ended as quietly as it had begun.

We see his cabin, a few years from now. COVERED UP IN VINES AND WEEDS. Seemingly forgotten.

Inside, he is dead.

His body lays there in his bed. Vines and plants have overtaken his body such that he looks like a man mixed with a plant in the corner of the room.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

He'd never purchased a firearm or spoken into a telephone. He had no idea who his parents might have been, and he left no heirs behind him.

The ENGINE ROARS BACK TO LIFE and the present world materializes before his eyes again.

He takes a deep breath, relaxing now.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

But on that spring day, as he misplaced all sense of up and down, he felt, at last, connected to it all.

The plane levels off, circles the fairgrounds.

Grainier leans back his head, closes his eyes. And finds himself somewhere he has not been in a very long time.

At peace.

END.