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As for script abbreviations: INT. and EXT. refer to whether the scene is inside or outside and whether the lighting is natural or artificial. A SUPER is something printed on the screen. POV stands for "point of view." O.S. refers to dialogue spoken by someone who is "off stage." V.O., or "voice over," refers to dialogue spoken by someone who is not on the screen, or onscreen but not talking.

Now enjoy the story.

HOBBS AND THE KID

By

John Sharpe

FADE IN:

EXT. COBBLESTONE STREET - NIGHT (1876)

The street is deserted -- except for a lone horse-drawn wagon that CLOMPS past a foreboding, grimy brick building surrounded by a high fence.

A faded sign on the fence reads, "Boston Latin School For Boys."

INT. DORMITORY ROOM

A dark, barracks-like room. Filled with single bunk beds occupied by softly SNORING boys.

Near a window, J. WENTWORTH "MAC" McALLISTER III, about 10, in a knicker suit -- a tie around his high collar -- knots a sheet to his bed frame.

In the next bed, FATSO FLEMINGTON, about the same age but 30 pounds heavier, wakes up. He watches Mac for a moment, then

FATSO

What are you doing, McAllister?

Mac is caught off guard.

MAC

Shhhh. I'm going to see my Father.

His voice is cultured, proper Bostonian -- his tone superior.

FATSO

They don't let kids in the hospital.

MAC

Father says you can buy your way  
into anyplace.

FATSO

I'm gonna tell.

MAC

Please, Fatso -- I mean Harvey.  
He's very sick. I've just got to  
see him. I'll give you a dollar to  
keep quiet.

Mac throws the knotted sheet out the window. Fatso leers.

FATSO

Five dollars.

MAC

That's a lot of money.

FATSO

You're always sayin' how rich your  
old man is.

MAC

Well -- all right. But you've got  
to promise not to tell.

EXT. SCHOOL BUILDING

A knotted bed sheet hangs from an open window -- Mac climbs  
down it. He drops softly to the ground.

INT. DORMITORY ROOM

A few boys stir. But only Fatso is awake. SR. VERA, a hawk-  
faced nun, dressed in a habit, has a firm grip on Mac's ear  
and propels him toward his bed.

Fatso makes a face and grins at Mac behind Sr. Vera's back --  
and gleefully waves the five dollar hush money.

Mac glares.

INT. MILITARY OFFICE - DAY

A small room in an adobe and log building -- a desk littered  
with papers and a couple of rough chairs in front of it.  
Canteens and weapons hang from pegs across from a wall covered  
with maps.

CAPT. HORNER, white, in his 40s, wearing cavalry blues, points  
to a map with the stem of his pipe.

Two black men in enlisted blues look on. The taller one is  
SGT. DANIEL HOBBS. Husky. Maturely handsome. Serious. He  
could be 40 or 50, but his face and deep, intense eyes are  
ageless.

The other man is CPL. LEVI HAINES, younger, and with a mouth  
that obviously likes to smile.

HORNER

After Cochise died in '74, the U.S.  
Government forced about four thousand

Apache onto a reservation -- here,  
at San Carlos.

Horner taps the map with his pipe.

HORNER  
Some of them got homesick. Others  
wanted to keep raiding into Mexico.  
And none of them had enough to eat.

He goes to his desk and sits -- motions to Hobbs and Levi.  
They take seats near the desk.

HORNER  
So some of the young hotheads --  
like Sanchez -- started leading raids  
off the reservation. But now things  
have really gone sour.

HOBBS  
Geronimo?

Horner nods and goes to the map again. Hobbs and Levi stand.

HORNER  
(to Hobbs)  
I want you to take your squad and  
scout this area here -- near the  
Draagoon Mountains. See if you can  
locate his camp.

Hobbs and Levi exchange looks. Levi grins.

HORNER  
If you do, get word back to me as  
fast as you can.  
(a beat)  
But Sgt. Hobbs -- your job's to find  
Geronimo. Not to engage him.

Hobbs frowns. Levi's grin fades.

HOBBS  
But Cap'n...

Horner stops him with a hard look.

HORNER  
You men of the ninth cavalry are  
here as scouts. Is that clear?

HOBBS  
Yes, sir, but...

HORNER  
We've been over this before, Sergeant.

HOBBS  
Yes, sir, I was just hopin'...

HORNER  
That'll be all.

Hobbs stiffens slightly, squares his shoulders.

HOBBS

Yes, sir.

HORNER

Move your patrol out as soon as you can get them mounted.

The two men step back, salute, and leave.

EXT. MILITARY COMPOUND

Walls around the fort guard several squat buildings and a corral filled with horses. A pole stands in the center of the square; a U.S. flag hangs limply from it.

Soldiers, mostly white with a few black mixed in, mill about, ride by, do clean-up chores.

Hobbs and Levi come out of Horner's building onto the parade square. Make their way toward one of the low buildings.

LEVI

How come we don't git to fight?

HOBBS

You heard the cap'n. We're here as scouts.

LEVI

Bet if we was white he'd let us take on them Apaches.

HOBBS

Well, we ain't white. And they ain't about to let ya forget it. Besides, you'll git your chance to git killed soon enough.

Now Levi's concerned. They pause at a doorway.

LEVI

Who is this Geronimo anyway?

HOBBS

Chief of the Chiricahua Apaches. He took over after Cochise died.

LEVI

What's he like?

HOBBS

More guts than an Army mule -- and twice as ornery. The Mexicans killed his family a few years back so he don't have too good a outlook on things.

Levi is pensive for a moment, then

LEVI

Don't it bother you, sarge, that we don't git to fight?

HOBBS

That's why I put in for a transfer.

Levi gives him a surprised look.

LEVI  
Transfer? Where?

HOBBS  
An outfit up north.  
(a beat)  
Fall the men out. Field packs,  
weapons, and rations for ten days.

Hobbs turns and goes through a doorway -- leaves Levi perplexed.

EXT. PARADE SQUARE

Ten BLACK MEN, mounted and in formation, wait in front of the building. They're dressed in cavalry blue -- neat, clean, and sitting patiently astride their mounts.

One man carries a guidon -- with the insignia of the 9th Cavalry Regiment. Levi is at their head. He holds another horse by its reins.

Hobbs emerges, walks to the waiting horse, mounts. Looks to Levi.

HOBBS  
Ready?

Levi nods. He and Hobbs wheel their horses. Hobbs raises his hand -- signals the men.

HOBBS  
Column of twos! Forward -- ho!

The troop wheels into a column of twos. Heads for the gate. A few soldiers and civilians watch as they pass.

At the CO's building, Horner comes out on his stoop. Hobbs turns eyes right, renders a snappy salute. Horner returns it. The two men lock cool gazes for a moment.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE GATE

Over the gate, burned into a wooden plank, are the words: FORT HUACHUCA - ARIZONA TERR. Hobbs leads his men out of the fort. Turns toward the open desert.

With the SQUEAK of leather and the CLANK of equipment, the squad moves away from the fort. Their sounds quickly lost in the dust rising in their wake.

INT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR

FOOTSTEPS grow louder in the dim, empty hallway.

Sr. Vera and Mac wheel around a corner. She propels him along by means of a firm grip on his ear. Mac's hair is mussed. His jacket torn. Tie askew, one stocking down. Dried blood at his nose.

They disappear around another corner and there's the ECHOING SLAM of an unseen door. Then quiet.

INT. SCHOOL OFFICE

A small room, sparsely furnished. Everything looks musty, a little run-down.

SR. ELAINA sits behind a desk, her wrinkled face gentle -- but weary. Sr. Vera, eyes snapping, sits across from her.

Mac slouches in a corner, rubbing his ear and staring daggers at Sr. Vera.

SR. ELAINA

What are we going to do with you, Mac? This is your second fight this week -- and it's only Tuesday.

Mac sulks.

MAC

It was a matter of honor. Fatso Flemington said...

SR. ELAINA

I've asked you not to call him Fatso.

MAC

Then tell him not to say bad things about my father.

SR. ELAINA

I realize you're very concerned about your father's health, but we just can't put up with these disruptions any more. The fights. You bullying the smaller children. Your constant refusal to follow the rules.

Mac pouts while Sr. Vera nods vigorously.

MAC

Father says rules are for sheep.

SR. ELAINA

Your father doesn't have to run this school. Besides, he's counting on us to teach you right from wrong.

SR. VERA

Only the Lord works miracles.

She draws a sharp look from Sr. Elaina.

SR. ELAINA

I'm afraid we're near the end of our rope with you, Mac.

Sr. Vera crosses herself.

SR. VERA

Amen.

SR. ELAINA

Thank you, Sister. You may leave us now.

Petulant, Sr. Vera departs. The room falls awkwardly silent.

SR. ELAINA

This is your last chance, Mac. One more incident and I'm afraid I have no choice but to send you to live with your uncle.

MAC

But you can't. I want to be with my father.

SR. ELAINA

He's just too ill to...

MAC

But he gave you a lot of money to keep me here.

SR. ELAINA

Your father made a very generous gift to the school -- but there were no guarantees.

Mac hops up.

MAC

Please, I want to stay here! I hate Arizona.

SR. ELAINA

You've never been there.

MAC

I hate it anyway.

SR. ELAINA

Your uncle is the only other family you have.

MAC

I hate him too. My father hates him.

SR. ELAINA

We don't hate anyone.

MAC

I don't care. I want to stay in Boston -- near my father.

SR. ELAINA

You may stay here as long as you obey the rules. And no more fighting with Fatso -- er -- Harvey.

She's flustered. Mac hides a smile behind his hand.

SR. ELAINA

But remember, Mac, this is your last warning.

She means it.

EXT. RAILWAY STATION

A wooden station, with a sign, "Boston, Mass." A train chuffs patiently. The platform bustles with people.

A buckboard buggy appears at the curb, Sr. Vera at the reins. Mac, pouting in the seat beside her. She dismounts, goes to the back of the wagon. Struggles with two suitcases. Mac hops down and starts toward the train platform.

Sr. Vera drops the bags and catches him by the ear.

SR. VERA  
Not so fast, young man.

She drags him back. Forces him to pick up one of the bags.

MAC  
Why can't we get a porter?

SR. VERA  
Because I don't have money for a porter.

MAC  
Well I do.

SR. VERA  
Humph! I'm sure. Better save it.  
You've got a long ride ahead of you.

She prods Mac along -- keeps him moving briskly.

EXT. BENSON (ARIZONA) - DAY

A small dusty town. A few cowboy types in the street, and an occasional woman.

A truck wagon rumbles into town -- PHIL McALLISTER in the driver's seat. He's about 45. Plain looking. Dressed in the clothes of a working rancher.

He pulls up to the hitch rail in front of a building bearing the sign, "Benson General Store." He dismounts.

VOICE (O.S.)  
Phil! Phil McAllister!

EXT. TELEGRAPH OFFICE

A small building with an identifying sign. A young MAN stands in the doorway. Waves a telegram.

MAN  
Phil! There's a telegraph message here for ya.

Phil ambles into view, eyes the man expectantly.

MAN  
It come a few days ago. From back East. 'Fraid it's bad news.  
(a beat)  
Your brother, he -- he passed away.  
I'm sorry.

Phil shrugs his shoulders.

PHIL  
Don't be.

MAN

That ain't all. Looks like your nephew's comin' to live with ya. Be here in a week or two.

PHIL

Now that's what I call bad news.

The man gives him the telegram. Phil stares at it. Frowns. Then puts it in a shirt pocket.

PHIL

Thanks.

He turns to go.

MAN

Hope he don't have no trouble with the Apaches.

Phil stops, looks back, eyebrows raised in a question. His worry lines deepen.

MAN

I hear a bunch of 'em are off the reservation.

Phil's eyes narrow -- his face dark as a thunder cloud.

MAN

I wouldn't leave the missus alone too long if I was you.

Phil frowns, his eyes filled with concern.

EXT. RAILWAY STATION - AT THE TRAIN

Mac and Sr. Vera are met by JIM, a smiling black porter. He tips his cap, takes Sr. Vera's bag. Swings it easily up onto the train platform. Then takes Mac's.

Mac peers around unhappily while the nun digs an envelope out of her habit. Hands Jim a ticket.

SR. VERA

He's paid all the way.

Jim checks it and hands it back.

JIM

Yes'm. We'll see he gets there safe and sound. We ain't lost no passengers in -- ohhh -- two, maybe three weeks now.

He chuckles, while Sr. Vera smiles weakly and Mac scowls. Then a WHISTLE BLAST signals the train's departure.

CONDUCTOR (O.S.)

All aboard!

JIM

You best get aboard, sonny.

Mac glares at him.

MAC

My name's not sonny. I'm J. Wentworth  
McAllister the third. And I don't  
need any colored help telling me  
what to do.

Jim is hurt. Sr. Vera is shocked.

SR. VERA

Now see here, young...

MAC

My father owns this railroad -- or  
did -- and I'll get on board when  
I'm good and ready.

Jim shrugs.

JIM

Well, if you ain't good 'n ready in  
'bout two minutes, you gonna be left  
standin' here on the platform while  
the rest of us goes to Denver.

Jim disappears into the train -- leaves Mac looking pouty.  
Sr. Vera takes another paper out of her envelope and tucks  
it securely into his pocket.

SR. VERA

Just show that to the man at the  
stage coach office in Denver. It's  
your ticket to Arizona. Your uncle  
will meet you at Benson.

The nun and the boy exchange soulful looks. Sr. Vera takes  
Mac by the shoulders. Her stern face melts into unaccustomed  
softness.

SR. VERA

Goodbye, Mac. I -- I'm sorry  
things... Will you write? To Sister  
Elaina, I mean?

Mac shrugs. His lips begin to tremble and he turns away  
quickly to mount the steps. Then, as the train begins to  
move, he looks back, solemn and sad.

Sr. Vera bites her lip. Waves tentatively. Makes a hasty  
sign of the cross.

As the train gathers speed, Mac peers out of a window. His  
sorrowful, defiant look crumbles. Tears roll down his cheeks.

EXT. OPEN DESERT

Sgt. Hobbs and his squad look hot and dusty as they move  
slowly across a mesa above the desert floor.

LEVI

This's a waste of time, sarge. We  
ain't never gonna find no Apaches.

HOBBS

We already did.

He points to a rise -- to a line of a half dozen mounted

Apaches off in the distance. Levi's impressed.

LEVI  
How long they been out there?

HOBBS  
Half hour or so.

LEVI  
Think they seen us?

HOBBS  
Not likely.

He points in a different direction.

HOBBS  
They got other things on their mind.

Levi is wide-eyed. In the distance a wagon train crosses the valley floor. Before he can speak, the Apaches break into a gallop and, with blood-curdling yells, descend toward the wagon train.

LEVI  
Look, sarge!

HOBBS  
I got eyes.

He signals to the troop.

HOBBS  
Forward at the gallop...

LEVI  
But, sarge, Cap'n Horner said...

HOBBS  
You think I'm gonna just sit here  
and watch?  
(to the troop)  
Forward at the gallop -- ho!

The troop races off in a swirl of dust.

EXT. DESERT FLOOR

A line of Conestoga wagons lumbers into view. The lead wagon is driven by AARON WRY, mid 30s, husky, good-looking.

His wife CINDY is on the seat next to him. She's pretty, late 20's, and very pregnant. PEG, about 9, cute and pig-tailed, sits between them. She points.

PEG  
Look!

They all look toward the band of charging, screaming Apaches.

CINDY  
Good Lord!

AARON  
You and Peg get in the back. We  
gotta get outa here.

Peg and Cindy, big belly and all, scramble into the back of the wagon. Aaron whips his horses into a gallop. The other wagons follow suit. But the Apaches are closing fast.

IN THE DESERT - ANOTHER ANGLE The cavalry troop rides hell-bent for leather, weapons at the ready, on a course to intercept the charging Indians.

HOBBS

Fire at will.

Troops and Indians exchange a few ineffectual shots. Then the Apaches turn and retreat in the direction they came from.

The troops rein up.

HOBBS

Cease firin'.

One of the Apaches stops, turns. He's SANCHEZ, a wild-eyed young brave. He glares at Hobbs.

SANCHEZ

(in Apache dialect)

We'll meet again, black soldier.

Next time I will kill you.

Then he wheels his horse and races away.

LEVI

What'd he say, sarge?

HOBBS

Somethin' about he's gonna kill me  
next time he sees me.

Levi gives him a frightened look.

EXT. DESERT - AT THE WAGON TRAIN

Aaron reins up his wagon. There are yells of "whoa" as the others stop behind him. Hobbs rides in, halts his troop -- approaches Aaron's wagon.

AARON

Howdy. I'm Aaron Wry. Am I glad to  
see you.

HOBBS

I'm Sergeant Hobbs, ninth cavalry.  
Attached to Fort Huachuca. You in  
charge?

AARON

Sort of. Just till we get to the  
fort. I'm the new Sutler Store  
keeper.

Peg and Cindy squirm back up onto the seat.

HOBBS

I didn't really take ya for a wagon  
master.

Aaron shrugs.

AARON

I can understand why. I ain't had much experience with Indians tryin' to kill us.

HOBBS

Ah, they were probably just hungry. Or lookin' to steal some horses. I doubt they'll bother ya now they know we're around. But ya better head outa here soon as ya can.

AARON

Will you ride with us a ways?

HOBBS

We got orders to keep movin'.

He gets some worried looks.

HOBBS

We'll check on ya from time to time.

EXT. OPEN PLAINS

A train rolls through the gently rising foothills of the Great Divide.

INT. TRAIN - DINING CAR

There are only a few diners.

Mac is alone at a nicely decorated table, a napkin at his neck. He finishes a piece of cake -- motions to a black WAITER.

MAC

I'll have another.

WAITER

You sure your eyes ain't bigger'n your belly?

MAC

That's none of your affair.

WAITER

Yes, sir. But that's a lotta cake for one small boy.

MAC

I'm sick of people like you telling me what I can do.

Mac throws his napkin down -- stalks off.

EXT. TRAIN - OBSERVATION PLATFORM

The RUMBLE of the train and cry of its WHISTLE is mixed with GUNSHOTS.

Two MEN, late middle age and expensively dressed, fire rifles at something O.S.

EXT. OPEN PRAIRIE

A herd of buffalo THUNDERS headlong over the plains in the same direction as the train.

EXT. TRAIN - ON THE PLATFORM

The men continue to fire, slowly, randomly. They laugh. Whiskey sways in the glasses and bottles set on a small table.

MAN #1

Great shot, Clyde! I think you hit a prairie dog.

Hoots and laughter.

MAN #2

Can't get a steady shot. It's the train.

MAN #1

Or the sour mash!

More laughter.

MAN #2

I haven't seen you hit anything.

MAN #1

Watch.

He raises a gleaming, Winchester repeating rifle. Takes careful aim. Fires. He scowls disgustedly, and his companion laughs and claps him on the back.

MAC (O.S.)

You led him too far -- didn't allow for the speed of the train.

The men turn to see Mac standing by the table. Their smiles turn to quizzical looks.

MAN #1

Well, well. If it isn't Buffalo Bill himself. Beat it, kid, this area's for grownups.

Mac's old arrogance is back.

MAC

I'm J. Wentworth McAllister the...

MAN #1

McAllister?

MAN #2

You any relation to old Wentworth McAllister from Boston?

MAC

He was my father.

MAN #1

That explains your smart mouth.

MAN #2

I didn't know old Mac had any kids --

or even a wife.

MAN #1  
I'm not sure he did. Everybody said  
he was married to his work.

The men chuckle. Mac looks hurt.

MAN #1  
Run along, Sonny, can't you see we're  
shooting here?

MAC  
That rifle you're using is too light  
for buffalo.

Man #1 sputters. His companion enjoys his discomfort.

MAN #1  
Listen to that, will ya.

MAC  
My father always told me...

MAN #1  
Your old man never hunted in his  
life. He was too busy making money.

MAC  
Well, he hired a shooting teacher  
for me and...

MAN #1  
I suppose that makes you an expert.  
For your information this is a...

MAC  
A Winchester '73. Lever action.  
Holds twelve rounds. With an extended  
barrel for greater accuracy.

The man fumes. His friend grins broadly.

MAC  
But it would still take a perfect  
shot to bring down a buffalo with  
it.

MAN #1  
OK, you're so good, let's see you  
drop one.

He tosses Mac the rifle. Mac handles the weapon easily,  
expertly.

MAC  
My father always said you should  
only shoot an animal for food...

He angles the rifle toward the man. Takes a bead.

MAC  
...or a man in self-defense.

Man #1 recoils in fear -- recovers. Mac offers the rifle  
back. The man refuses to take it.

MAN #1

All talk -- like your old man.

MAC

I just don't believe in killing animals without a good reason.

Man #2 picks up a whiskey bottle, goes to the railing.

MAN #2

Here, kid. Try this.

MAN #1

Hey! That's my good bourbon!

Man #2 tosses the bottle high in the air off the end of the train.

Mac swings the rifle to his shoulder, tracks the bottle, pulls the trigger. The bottle explodes in mid-air.

He casually levers the empty shell out of the chamber and hands the rifle back. Man #2 hoots and hollers. Mac turns and swaggers to the doorway. Stops, glances back. Man #1 is red-faced, angry.

MAC

It pulls a hair to the left.

He disappears into the train. Man #1 scowls as his friend howls in laughter.

EXT. ADOBE RANCH HOUSE

Wild SHOUTS and GUNFIRE fill the air around the small ranch house. From behind a stone wall, corral fence, a watering trough, several Apaches pepper the house with rifle fire.

One gives a blood-curdling YELL -- runs to a new vantage point. It's Sanchez; his bronze face snarling. He directs the attack.

At the house, rifles pop up in the windows. Unseen shooters return fire, disappear, then pop up again.

Sanchez motions his men forward. They advance and fire. Creep closer to the building.

INT. RANCH HOUSE

Hazy light. Swirling dust and smoke all but obscure the man and woman at the open windows with rifles.

The door BURSTS open. A HAIR-RAISING YELL and there stands

SANCHEZ

His face a mask of hate. A WOMAN SCREAMS (O.S), and he fires two quick shots. Then all is still.

EXT. RANCH HOUSE

A lone rider charges up in a cloud of dust.

He skids his mount to a halt amid the Indians at the front

door -- slides gracefully off his horse. Quiet falls over the Apaches. A man rushes to take the horse's reins.

The rider is GERONIMO. His fierce, dark eyes burn out of his broad-nosed, wrinkled, coppery face. Every eye follows him as he strides to the house.

INT. RANCH HOUSE

Geronimo enters, stares at the man and woman lifeless on the floor. He glares at Sanchez.

(THEY SPEAK IN APACHE DIALECT - ENGLISH TITLES.)

GERONIMO  
Why did you do this?

SANCHEZ  
This is our land. And we need food --  
and horses.

GERONIMO  
This will only bring more soldiers.

SANCHEZ  
Ha! Let them come.

EXT. RANCH HOUSE

Geronimo and Sanchez come out. Geronimo swings up onto his horse.

GERONIMO  
You are young and foolish, Sanchez.

SANCHEZ  
And you are old, Geronimo. What  
about the horses?

GERONIMO  
Another time.

He turns to the men, signals for them to mount up. Sanchez looks petulant. He goes slowly to his horse -- points to the corral.

SANCHEZ  
I say take them now. The white  
soldiers will never be able to follow  
us.

Geronimo wheels his horse, points to the empty horizon.

GERONIMO  
The ones who follow you are not white.  
They're even more fierce. They track  
like the Apache and are brothers to  
the desert.

With a WHOOP, Geronimo leads the band away from the ranch house, riding hard. Sanchez follows reluctantly.

EXT. RAILROAD STATION

More rustic than the one in Boston. A sign on the clapboard building says, "Denver, Colo. - El. 5280 Ft." A train PUFFS;

its bell RINGS. People step down onto the station platform. Some are met by friends.

Mac appears at the train steps, bags in hand. Jim, the black porter, sees him struggle and, without speaking, helps him down onto the platform.

Mac looks at Jim -- a little bewildered.

MAC

I... I'm... Thanks.

Jim just nods. Leaves Mac gazing around, unsure of where to turn. He spots the

EXT. OVERLAND STAGE OFFICE

A sign over a lone ticket window establishes.

A stage coach and team of six horses stand next to the small building. Mac, minus his bags, goes to the window and hands a paper to a MAN behind the counter.

MAC

My fare is paid all the way to Benson.

The man looks it over, stamps it -- hands it back.

MAN

You travellin' alone, young fella?

MAC

Of course. See that my luggage is taken care of, will you? It's back there by the train.

MAN

Then you better tramp right back and get it. There ain't nobody here to tote your stuff -- and the stage leaves in twenty minutes.

MAC

But I can pay, I...

MAN

Twenty minutes.

He grins at Mac and slowly pulls down a wooden shutter. The ticket window clicks shut. Mac kicks at the building. Then slouches back toward the train and his bags.

EXT. AT THE STAGE COACH

Mac, sweating and angry, half drags, half carries his bags to the waiting coach.

He draws a few odd looks from the PEOPLE milling around. GUS MILNER, a grizzled bear of a man in battered Stetson and buckskin jacket, pushes his way into the group.

He's followed by MUSHY. Tall, black -- in well-worn jeans held up by suspenders. He carries a slicker and a double-barreled shotgun.

GUS

Howdy, folks. I'm Gus Milner and  
I'm your driver. This here's Mushy.  
He'll be ridin' shotgun once we git  
out a ways.

He collects baggage.

GUS  
Soon's y'all climb aboard, Mushy and  
me'll load your things and we can  
git started.

MR. AMBROSE, fat, 50-ish; a WOMAN; and two other MEN move  
toward the coach. Gus and Mushy throw bags up onto the roof.

Mac hangs back, looking sour. He goes to Gus.

MAC  
I want to ride on top.

Gus burns Mac with a stare -- turns back to the luggage.

GUS  
Against the rules.

Everyone's on board except Mac. Gus and Mushy finish with  
the bags. Gus pulls out a pocket watch, checks the time.  
Eyes Mac.

GUS  
Let's go, sonny.

MAC  
My name's not sonny. And I don't  
want to ride in that stuffy old coach.

Mac pulls out a fancy wallet. Takes out some bills, offers  
them to Gus.

MAC  
I want to ride on top.

Gus ignores the money.

GUS  
Look, sonny, either you git aboard  
now or we go without ya. And I don't  
much care either way.

He wheels -- climbs up onto the driver's seat.

Mushy scoops up a surprised Mac. Swings him into the coach  
in a seat next to a window. Mac scowls as Mushy closes the  
door and grins up at him.

MUSHY  
It ain't so bad, kid. Wait'll we  
hit the desert in a couple days.  
You'll be glad you're inside.

Mushy climbs up next to Gus. With the SNAP of reins,  
WHISTLES, and SHOUTS, the team moves into action. The  
CREAKING coach starts to roll.

Mac peers out defiantly as the coach gathers speed.

EXT. OPEN RANGE - VARIOUS

The trail winds through ever changing scenes of mountain majesty. The stage coach bounces and squeals along.

Gradually the landscape flattens into the endless brown of

EXT. DESERT

The sun blazes. Gus SLAPS the reins over the horses. Urges them on with a WHISTLE or a YELL. Mushy dozes in the seat next to him.

INT. COACH

The passengers slouch. Hot. Sticky. Clothing loose. Everyone dozes except Mac. He stares blankly out the window. Bored by the interminable landscape.

He eyes the other passengers contemptuously. Their heads loll to the coach's bouncing rhythm. Mr. Ambrose, the fat man next to him, SNORES.

Ambrose slides against Mac -- jams him against the side of the coach. Mac jabs him in the ribs. Ambrose rouses, snorts. Then slides the other way and resumes SNORING.

Mac perks up. Eyes the passengers warily. He reaches over and carefully unties Ambrose's high shoes. Then reties them -- together.

EXT. STAGE COACH STOP

The stage CLATTERS to a stop at a small house. A lone, dusty oasis in the dry, barren landscape.

INT. COACH

The passengers awaken. Yawn. Stretch. Ambrose grunts and snorts -- mops his forehead with a handkerchief.

AMBROSE

I don't know how much more of this I can take.

The woman smiles at him as she moves to get out.

WOMAN

Just a couple of days, Mr. Ambrose.

The other passengers squeeze out the door -- Mac among them. Ambrose continues to grumble.

AMBROSE

Might as well be years.

EXT. STAGE COACH

The passengers start woodenly toward the house. Gus and Mushy climb down. Mac hangs back, eyeing the coach expectantly.

Ambrose appears in the small doorway, attempts to step out. With a YELL he falls on his face in the dust. Gus and Mushy run to his aid.

Mac hides a quick giggle behind his hand. Then, with a smug look on his face, cuts rudely in front of the people moving into the house.

INT. HOUSE

The passengers are seated around a wooden table eating. Mr. Ambrose eyes Mac evilly. Mac ignores him and waves for MRS. BURNS, the plump, smiley woman serving them.

MAC  
More cake.

MRS. BURNS  
Now dearie, you've already had two big pieces.

MAC  
I can count, thank you. Besides, if it's the money you're worried about.

He reaches for his wallet. Mrs. Burns looks hurt.

MRS. BURNS  
Goodness, gracious, it ain't that, child.

Gus glares at Mac.

GUS  
She don't want ya bouncin' around in that coach gittin' sick. And neither do I.

Mac's hot. He pushes away from the table and stomps out the door. The other passengers just shake their heads. Gus looks like he could chew nails.

EXT. HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

The passengers file out of the house and go to the stage coach. Gus and Mushy follow. Gus stops short as he looks to the coach.

Mac is up on top.

GUS  
All right, sonny. Down.

MAC  
It's too hot to ride inside.

MUSHY  
Hot! You ain't seen hot.

GUS  
Hot. Cold. Don't matter. You ride inside like everyone else.

He climbs up and roughly swings Mac to the ground. Mushy sees that he gets into the coach.

EXT. COACH - DRIVER'S SEAT - NEAR DARK

Mushy and Gus climb up as THUNDER RUMBLES and lightning STREAKS across the sky. Gus scans the horizon -- his look

as dark as the clouds.

GUS

Bad sign -- thunder storm this time  
'a year.

MUSHY

Horse feathers. You're gettin'  
superstitious as an old woman.

GUS

You just get that scatter gun out  
and keep your eyes open.

Gus coaxes the team into a jerky start. Mushy reaches under the seat for his shotgun.

GUS

I got a bad feelin' about tonight.

EXT. OPEN DESERT - NIGHT

Lit by FLASHES of lightning, the stage coach rocks along in a downpour of rain.

Mushy has his neck drawn down into the collar of his slicker. Gus fights to see into the rain and darkness.

INT. STAGE COACH

Side curtains flap at the windows. Rain seeps in. Occasional FLASHES of lightning show everybody asleep -- except Mac.

He's crowded into a corner, a pained look on his face, arms folded across his belly. He rocks back and forth. He stops -- checks the sleeping passengers. Pokes his head out the window.

EXT. DESERT - ON THE COACH

Mac hangs his head out in the slashing rain. He rubs the water over his face with obvious relish.

He works his way out of the window. Reaches up the side of the bouncing coach. Claws for a grip on the top.

He grasps the baggage rail on the roof. Struggles for a foot-hold. Lightning FLASHES. He loses his grip -- hangs on for a fleeting moment. Eyes wide in terror. Mouth open in a scream that's lost in a CLAP OF THUNDER.

LIGHTNING lights the coach again. Mac is gone.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DESERT FOOTHILLS - LATE AFTERNOON

The sun sinks toward the horizon and the shadows grow long. Hobbs, field glasses to his eyes watches a WISP OF SMOKE in the distance.

LEVI (O.S.)

Geronimo?

The patrol of black soldiers sit astride their mounts watching Hobbs survey the situation. He shakes his head, hands the

glasses to Levi.

HOBBS  
More'n likely Sanchez. Near as I  
can tell it's a signal to meet  
someplace.

Levi looks, hands the glasses back. Gets an impish look on  
his face.

LEVI  
Near as you can tell? I thought you  
could read smoke, Sergeant.

HOBBS  
Smoke ain't the only thing I can  
read.

Levi pouts. Hobbs puts the glasses away, checks the setting  
sun.

HOBBS  
We'll hold up here for tonight. Put  
out a couple of guards. Have the  
men make a cold camp.

GROANS from the men. They slowly begin to dismount.

LEVI  
No fires? C'mon, sarge, we ain't  
had a hot meal for three days.

HOBBS  
What'd ya rather have, cold food in  
your belly or an Apache arrow?

Levi smiles weakly.

HOBBS  
We'll pick up their trail first thing  
in the mornin'.

He starts to unsaddle his horse.

EXT. ON THE TRAIL

The wagon train CREAKS along. Heads directly into the desert  
sun that rides low in the west.

In the lead wagon, Aaron hands Cindy the reins -- swings  
down out of the driver's seat. He looks back along the train.  
Waves his hat.

AARON  
Circle the wagons. We'll stop here  
for the night.

The wagons bunch up. LORNE PIKE, mean-looking, leaves his  
wife, LIZ -- a faded beauty -- to manage his team. He strides  
to Aaron, fire in his eyes.

PIKE  
Why're we stoppin', Wry? Last night  
it was the rain. What's your excuse  
now? There's another good hour of  
daylight left.

AARON

That's right. And we'll need just about all of it to secure the wagons.

PIKE

What're ya talkin' about?

Aaron points to the distant hills. A wisp of white smoke rises in the gathering dusk.

PIKE

You worried about a little smoke?

AARON

I'm worried about who might be sendin' it. I told ya what that Army sergeant said.

Pike looks suddenly concerned. Aaron signals for the other wagons to tighten their formation. Then he starts to unhitch his team.

AARON

(to wagons)

Close up. Then get your animals fed and watered quick as possible.

(to Pike)

You better see to your stock.

Pike ignores the comment. Follows Aaron as he draws a bucket of water from the barrel lashed to his wagon.

PIKE

Look, Wry, I got business in California that won't keep.

Cindy and Peg dig a fire put -- set up a tripod and cook pot. Aaron takes them water.

AARON

(to Pike)

I'm more concerned about the business we got right here.

He looks toward Pike's wagon where Liz struggles to unhitch the horses.

AARON

She could use a hand.

PIKE

That's my affair. Besides, I ain't about to start spoilin' her now.

Aaron's look reveals his contempt. He turns his back on Pike and finishes unhitching his horses. In the b.g., Liz still struggles with her team. Pike stays close to Aaron, looks toward the mountains.

PIKE

You really think that's Indian smoke?

AARON

What I think is, the sooner we all get settled for the night, the better

off we'll be.

Aaron leaves Pike with a worried look on his face -- joins Cindy and Peg. They've got a small fire going; a pot dangles above the flames. Peg sets out tin plates.

CINDY  
What were you and Pike talking about so long?

Aaron looks playful.

AARON  
I was just tellin' him how happy you'd be to have him join us for supper, but...

Cindy stirs the pot viciously.

CINDY  
I'd throw it on the ground first.

AARON  
Don't I recall the good book sayin' somethin' about your neighbors?

CINDY  
Pike makes it hard to remember.

Aaron chuckles -- then looks toward the mountains. His smile fades. Cindy's gaze follows his. She glances quickly at Peg then turns back to Aaron.

CINDY  
I saw it earlier. Do you think it's the same ones who...?

Aaron shrugs. He doesn't know -- but he's worried.

AARON  
We just better sleep with one eye open tonight.

EXT. OPEN DESERT - DAY

A bright sun boils the barren, arid landscape.

CREAKS and CLANGS. Hobbs and his troop ride into view. Suddenly Levi pulls alongside Hobbs. Points.

LEVI  
Look! By those rocks. There's someone out there!

AT THE ROCKS  
Mac lies partially hidden. Still. His clothes torn, disheveled. Hobbs and Levi ride up. Dismount.

HOBBS  
Good Lord, he's just a boy.

LEVI  
Pretty fancy duds. What's he doin' out here all alone?

HOBBS

He might just tell us that, Corporal --  
if it ain't too Late.

He bends over Mac, examines his cuts and bruises. Gently  
lifts him in his arms.

HOBBS

Let's git him over to the horses.  
Looks like he could use some water.

AT THE HORSES

Levi shades Mac with his hat and  
Hobbs puts a canteen to his lips.  
Mac doesn't respond.

LEVI

He looks pretty bad, sarge.

HOBBS

He's gonna look a lot worse if we  
don't find some way to git him outa  
this sun.

LEVI

We ain't exactly blessed with a lotta  
shade.

Hobbs thinks. Then he picks Mac up, moves to his horse.

HOBBS

If the mountain won't come to  
Mohammed...

LEVI

What?

HOBBS

I know where there's shade.

He mounts up, Mac in his arms. Prods his horse into motion.  
A perplexed Levi climbs into the saddle and signals the squad  
to follow.

EXT. ON THE TRAIL - AT THE WAGON TRAIN

The wagons are stopped for a rest.

Hobbs, his squad following, rides up. He dismounts -- with  
Mac in his arms. Aaron and several men and women, plus a  
few children, MURMUR and crowd around.

They all move to the back of Aaron's wagon. Cindy and Peg  
meet them.

CINDY

Where on earth...?

HOBBS

We found him a few miles back.

Aaron opens the canvas flap on the wagon.

AARON

Where do you want him?

CINDY

On those blankets. Next to where  
Peg sleeps.

PEG

Ma!

CINDY

Hush. Just for now.  
(to Hobbs)  
How bad is he?

HOBBS

'Less I miss my guess, he's dried  
out pretty good.

He lays Mac in the wagon. Then climbs up beside him -- makes  
room for himself amid the pieces of furniture, tools, and  
chests.

HOBBS

His shoes are all scuffed and tore.  
Looks like he's hiked quite a ways.

Aaron gives Hobbs a canteen of water. He holds it to Mac's  
lips. Water runs down his chin.

HOBBS

But I don't think he's been out here  
too long. Nobody'd last more'n two  
or three days without water.

AARON

Where do ya think he came from?

HOBBS

From the bumps and bruises I'd say  
he fell off a horse, or a wagon maybe.

CINDY

Way out here? Dressed like that?

HOBBS

You got a point.

Mac stirs -- licks the water off his lips. Hobbs offers him  
some more. Mac groans.

HOBBS

Maybe we'll find out here in a minute  
or two.

Mac opens his eyes, looks blankly at the faces peering in at  
him. Then he bolts upright, eyes searching.

MAC

Who are you? Where's the stage coach?  
Where's Gus? And Mushy?

Aaron chuckles. Glances at Cindy, then back to Mac.

AARON

So that's how ya got here. Well, I  
can answer one of those questions.  
I'm Aaron Wry 'n this is my wife.

Then he motions to Hobbs.

AARON  
And this is Sergeant Hobbs. He's  
the one that found ya.

Hobbs hands Mac the canteen. He takes a big mouthful then  
spits it over the back of the wagon.

MAC  
Ahhhgh! That tastes awful!

Hobbs bristles.

HOBBS  
I know it don't taste like  
sarsaparilla, kid, but out here it's  
too precious to spit in the dirt.

He gets out of the wagon. Mac gives him a defiant look,  
then climbs over the tailgate after him and slides unsteadily  
to the ground.

The CROWD forms a semicircle around him. Gape as if they  
were watching a sideshow.

MAC  
(to Aaron)  
I've got to get to Denver -- get the  
train for Boston.

Some chuckles from the crowd. Peg eyes Mac suspiciously and  
squeezes close to her mother. Aaron pats Mac's head.

AARON  
'Fraid your compass is broke, son.  
Denver's back that way. We're headin'  
west. Fort Huachuca. Some folks  
goin' on to California.

Pike steps out of the crowd.

PIKE  
And we're wastin' time, Wry. We got  
three hours of daylight. Let's make  
the most of it.

AARON  
Takin' a few minutes to help this  
young fella ain't exactly what I'd  
call wastin' time.

PIKE  
We voted you to lead the wagons, not  
play nursemaid to every stray you  
find along the trail.

MAC  
You've got to take me back! I'll  
pay you.

Pike's attitude changes. He eyes Mac with interest.

MAC  
I will! I've got money.

He reaches to his pocket. Nothing. Near panic, he searches the other pockets of his clothes. Comes up empty handed.

Pike is scornful, mocking.

PIKE

Sure ya do.

Mac is near tears.

MAC

I've got money, I tell you! My father was rich!

Pike cackles. Mac runs to him -- tries to beat on him.

MAC

I insist you take me back, do you hear? I'm rich! I can pay you!

Pike snarls. He draws back as if to hit Mac.

PIKE

I'll pay ya, ya little brat!

Hobbs steps between them. He glares at Pike but says nothing. Pike glares back, hatred in his eyes.

AARON

Take it easy, Pike. He's just a child -- and lost at that.

Pike glowers at Aaron, then Mac.

PIKE

He can stay lost for all I care. My concern is gettin' to California. The quicker the better.

Hobbs burns Pike with another threatening look and Pike skulks away. Mac turns to Aaron.

MAC

But you've got to take me back. Please. I can pay.

He suddenly wavers. His eyes roll up. He crumples. Aaron catches Mac before he hits the ground, carries him back to his wagon -- puts him inside. Cindy tends to him.

Hobbs takes Aaron aside.

HOBBS

I gotta git goin'.

AARON

What about the boy?

HOBBS

Can ya look after him till ya get to the fort?

Aaron is hesitant.

AARON

I -- I don't know. My wife's been

havin' a pretty hard time.

HOBBS  
Just till Capt. Horner finds out who  
he is, or where his folks are.

Aaron's still doubtful.

AARON  
I'm not sure she up to takin' care  
of another young'n right now.  
Besides, that Indian attack scared  
her pretty bad. I'm afraid...

HOBBS  
I'll tell ya what. You take the boy  
and we'll ride with ya until we're  
sure you're outa danger.

Aaron shrugs, nods. Heads for his wagon. Hobbs gets mounted,  
turns to Levi.

HOBBS  
We're gonna ride with 'em for a ways.

LEVI  
I thought we was supposed to be  
lookin' for Geronimo.

HOBBS  
He'll keep.

He moves the troop out along with the wagon train.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. WAGON BED - MOVING

Mac is out like a light.

With each bounce of the wagon, his head rolls from side to  
side on the folded blanket that serves as a pillow.

Peg sits nearby -- watches him. She's skeptical.

Mac's eyelids flutter -- and open. He stares blankly as Peg  
shrinks back.

PEG  
Ma!

Mac squints at Peg, no hint of recognition in his eyes. He  
takes in his surroundings. Looks back at Peg.

MAC  
Who are you?

Peg is leery.

PEG  
Ma! He's awake.

Mac sits up, still unsure of his whereabouts.

MAC  
Are we going to Denver?

Cindy, moving awkwardly behind her huge belly, squirms back into the wagon from the driver's seat.

CINDY  
Well, look who's sitting up to take notice. How're you feeling? I expect you're a little hungry right about now.

She digs some hardtack biscuits out of a chest, hands them to Mac. He takes them without comment -- chews one eagerly. Cindy gives him a quizzical look.

CINDY  
You're welcome.

MAC  
How long before we get to Denver?

Cindy looks incredulous.

CINDY  
You may not have any manners but I'll say this for you, once you set your mind to something, you stick to it.

She digs out tin plates and eating utensils.

CINDY  
(to Peg)  
Help me with these dishes, sweetie, we'll be stopping to eat soon.

She turns back to Mac.

CINDY  
As for Denver, I'm afraid you better forget about it for a while. We'll try to get word to your family when we get to the fort.

MAC  
I don't have any family.

CINDY  
Then what are you doing out here in the desert all alone?

MAC  
I was going to Benson to...

He looks suddenly wary.

MAC  
But I changed my mind.

CINDY  
What's in Benson?

MAC  
Nothing. Ah -- I was just going there to -- to see someone.

CINDY

A relative?

MAC  
Just someone.

He concentrates on his hardtack.

CINDY  
You might as well tell me. Benson's  
pretty small, I'll find out anyway.

MAC  
I was going to -- to see my uncle.  
But I changed my mind.

CINDY  
Well, you'll just have to change it  
back again. Meanwhile, it might  
help if we knew your name.

Mac glares at Cindy.

MAC  
I'm J. Wentworth McAllister the third.  
And I demand that you...

Peg giggles.

PEG  
The third what?

CINDY  
Now, Peg, be nice.

But Cindy can't resist a smile. Mac fumes.

CINDY  
Well, J. Wentworth McAllister the  
third, we could use some help with  
the noon meal.

She struggles back toward the front of the wagon.

CINDY  
As you can see, I'm a little slow  
getting around these days.

Mac stews. Peg grins.

EXT. TRAIL - LEAD WAGON

Aaron walks alongside the team -- the reins in his hands.  
Hobbs and his men are outriders in the b.g..

Aaron takes off his hat. Wipes at his brow as Cindy wiggles  
her way back into the driver's seat.

CINDY  
Are you ready to eat?

Aaron squints into the sun.

AARON  
Any time now.

Hobbs rides up.

HOBBS  
How's our young millionaire doin'?

CINDY  
Awake and ornery. I think he's  
hungry.

HOBBS  
He must be feelin' better.

Aaron hands the reins up to Cindy. Signals to the wagons.

AARON  
We'll stop here. Be ready to move  
on in half an hour.

Cindy reins in the team and sets the brake. Aaron helps her  
down.

Peg pokes her head out of the wagon.

PEG  
Ma, he won't help.

AARON  
Tell him if he don't help, he don't  
eat.

Hobbs nods in agreement.

PEG  
Can't you tell him? He acts like --  
like he's boss of the wagon.

CINDY  
Wait'll we get settled, we'll see to  
Mr. McAllister.

Hobbs frowns. Nods again, says nothing.

THE WAGONS  
stop. Families climb down -- stretch,  
and rub sore backsides. The women  
prepare a cold meal while the men  
tend to their horses.

EXT. AARON'S WAGON

Hobbs helps Aaron with water for the horses, while Cindy  
goes to the tailgate just as Peg emerges -- scowling.

PEG  
I told you he wouldn't help.

Hobbs and Aaron join Cindy and Peg at the back of the wagon.

INT. WAGON

Mac sits on a trunk -- his back against a barrel. Legs  
stretched out. Arms folded across his chest. And a defiant  
pout on his face.

Aaron looks in.

AARON

Time to eat, young fella.

MAC  
Fine. I'll have my lunch in here,  
please.

Aaron shakes his head. Chuckles.

AARON  
You're a piece of work, I'll say  
that for ya.

Hobbs gently crowds Aaron to the side.

HOBBS  
I found him. He's my problem.

He glares at Mac.

HOBBS  
You got about two minutes to get  
your tail down here.

Mac broods for a beat. Then he climbs out of the wagon.

EXT. TRAIL - AT AARON'S WAGON

At a makeshift table, Cindy cuts thick slices of bread from a loaf. Peg sets out tin plates and cups. Aaron unwraps an oilcloth package of beef jerky -- then goes to the side of the wagon to draw water.

Mac stands aloof from the group -- eyes the slices of bread hungrily.

MAC  
Where do I wash?

HOBBS  
Wash? What for? You ain't done  
nothin' yet to git dirty.

Peg grins as Hobbs guides Mac by the arm to the side of the wagon. Aaron, with a pail of water, stops to watch, an amused look on his face. Hobbs takes a knife from his belt, hands it to Mac, and points to the oilcloth package.

HOBBS  
Here, cut us some of that jerky.  
And be careful ya don't slice off a  
finger.

Mac opens the package. Stares. Sniffs. Screws up his face and holds his nose.

MAC  
What's that?

HOBBS  
Ain't you ever seen beef jerky before?

MAC  
It stinks.

HOBBS  
Ya don't smell it, ya eat it.

Mac makes a face -- sticks out his tongue.

MAC

Yuchhhh.

HOBBS

I grant ya, it don't exactly smell  
like fried chicken, but...

Mac puts the knife down and steps back. Glares at Hobbs.

MAC

I'm not touching it.

Hobbs starts to unbuckle his belt.

HOBBS

We'll see about that.

Cindy puts a hand on his arm.

CINDY

Let me.

She goes to Mac, holds him gently by the shoulders.

CINDY

I want to explain something to you --  
ah -- Mac.

MAC

My name is...

CINDY

I know. But I haven't got time to  
go around calling you J. Wentworth  
the third or whatever it is, so let's  
just settle for Mac.

(a beat)

Look, I'm sorry you got separated  
from the folks on the stage. We'll  
do our best to contact your uncle  
soon as we get to Fort Huachuca.  
But meanwhile you can make things a  
whole lot easier if you just follow  
a few simple rules.

MAC

My father said rules were for sheep.

CINDY

Then you better learn to grow wool.

Peg snickers, hides a giggle behind her hand. Hobbs nods,  
suppresses a smile.

CINDY

Ordinarily, I like little boys.

Mac bristles, stretches to full height. Peg gags -- makes a  
face. Cindy pats her swollen belly.

CINDY

Lord willing, I might even have one  
of my own before long. But right

now, you do your share in this family  
or you're going to wish this man  
here had left you out there where he  
found you.

She guides Mac back to the wagon -- forces him to take the  
knife again. He glares at her.

MAC  
Preparing food is women's work.

He throws the knife down. Stomps off to the other side of  
the wagon, out of sight.

Cindy, Hobbs, and Aaron exchange angry looks. Peg picks up  
the knife and starts to cut strips of jerky.

HOBBS  
His belly ain't empty enough yet.  
He'll feel different come supper  
time.

Aaron takes his bucket of water and heads for the horses.  
Hobbs follows him.

HOBBS  
Look, we're gonna hafta be movin'  
on. I -- I'm sorry that kid is such  
a... Well, I'm just sorry, that's  
all.

AARON  
What about the Indians?

HOBBS  
Looks like they cleared out. At  
least for now. Besides, we'll pick  
up their trail pretty quick. If  
they head back this way we'll be  
right behind 'em.

He and Aaron shake hands, and Hobbs starts to where Levi and  
some of the troopers are talking.

Mac peers cautiously around the side of the wagon. His eyes  
follow Hobbs. If looks could kill, Hobbs is a dead man.

Peg, looking curiously sad, glances at Mac.

PEG  
Don't you want something to eat?

Mac just scowls at her, disappears behind the wagon.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DESERT - AT THE WAGON TRAIN - NIGHT

Cook fires burn in the center of the circled wagons. Families  
gather around -- cook, eat.

Pike, holding a rifle, talks to Aaron. Cindy looks on, her  
gaze inhospitable. Peg is by her side.

PIKE  
This is crazy, Wry. We shoulda put

these fires out before it got dark.

He glances around nervously, fondles his rifle.

AARON  
Those Apaches are long gone, Pike.  
Otherwise we'd have seen some sign  
of 'em before now.

PIKE  
Whatta you know about Indians?

AARON  
I never claimed to be an expert.  
I'm just goin' by what that sergeant  
said.

PIKE  
All the same, I think we're takin' a  
big chance, settin' here like candles  
in a shootin' gallery.

He's worried. He starts back toward his cook fire. Mumbles to himself.

PIKE  
I'm puttin' mine out.

Aaron watches as Pike goes to his wagon and orders Liz to put out the fire -- then turns to Cindy.

AARON  
You seen anything of Mac?

CINDY  
He's in the wagon. Where he's been  
all day.

PEG  
Good.

Aaron goes to the back of his wagon.

INT. WAGON

Mac leans on a keg. Hands behind his head. Legs stretched out. Aaron's face appears at the tailgate.

Man and boy regard each other solemnly. Then Aaron smiles warmly.

AARON  
Ain't you gettin' a little hungry?

MAC  
I've gone lots longer than this  
without eating.

AARON  
Well, that may be, but this time  
there's no need for it. All you  
gotta do is help out a little.

MAC  
I told you, I don't do women's work.

Aaron shrugs.

AARON  
Suit yourself. No work, no food.

EXT. WAGON AREA

Aaron starts away. Mac's head pops out of the wagon.

MAC  
Wait! Maybe I could...

Suddenly Peg appears, in a near panic.

PEG  
Pa, come quick! It's Mamma! She's  
real bad!

Aaron dashes off with Peg. Mac gazes after them, a soulful,  
sad look on his face.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Hobbs and his men ride at a trot. Their blue uniforms are  
covered with dust. Their horses lathered.

Hobbs studies the ground ahead. He signals the squad to  
halt -- points to a set of tracks leading toward the valley  
below.

LEVI  
Think those belong to Geronimo, sarge?

HOBBS  
Could be.

LEVI  
Then what're we waitin' for?

HOBBS  
Even if it was Geronimo, we ain't  
gonna catch up with him if he don't  
want to be caught up with. Besides,  
our horses are near dead.

LEVI  
Yeah, but... What if he gets away?

HOBBS  
Our job's to follow him, remember?  
Not catch him.

He points to a small ranch house in the valley.

HOBBS  
Let's just see if that rancher'll  
let us water our horses and rest 'em  
up a bit.

EXT. RANCH HOUSE - AFTERNOON

It's the house Sanchez and the Apaches attacked. Cavalry  
horses are tied up outside.

INT. RANCH HOUSE

Hobbs is at a table looking through books and assorted effects. He thumbs through an old ledger stuffed with papers. Levi comes in.

LEVI  
The men are buryin' 'em out back.  
(a beat)  
Find out who they were?

Hobbs hands him a paper. Levi glances at it -- hands it back. Hobbs gives him a stern look.

HOBBS  
Can't ya read?

LEVI  
Slaves wasn't allowed, remember?

HOBBS  
We ain't been slaves for ten years.  
Time ya learned.

He folds up the paper, tucks it in a pocket. Starts for the door and motions Levi to follow.

HOBBS  
C'mon. Get the men mounted. I want  
to git back to that wagon train right  
away.

EXT. WAGON AREA - PIKE'S WAGON - DAY

The wagons are stopped for the noon meal. Pike checks the load in his rifle. Liz cleans up dirty dishes and utensils. She draws water into a bucket.

LIZ  
Can't you give me a hand instead of  
messing with that gun?

PIKE  
I don't trust Wry to know what he's  
talkin' about. I wanna be ready if  
them sneakin' Indians come back.  
(leering)  
Besides, I'll hire a maid for ya  
when we get to California.

LIZ  
What're you going to use for money?

Pike gives her a hateful look.

PIKE  
Now don't start that again. We're  
man and wife remember?

LIZ  
Don't remind me.

PIKE  
What's yours is mine. I can get a  
pretty penny for that land your uncle  
left ya.

LIZ

I'll settle for just getting to  
California.

Pike gives her a dirty look, starts to clean his rifle.  
Aaron approaches. He's upset. Clearly worried.

PIKE  
Well, look who's here. What's eatin'  
you, store keeper?

AARON  
My wife took a bad turn last night  
and I'm lookin' for someone to take  
the McAllister boy off my hands till  
we get to Fort Huachuca.

PIKE  
Keep lookin'.

AARON  
But you're the only family that's  
got room.

PIKE  
Forget it.

Aaron sizzles -- turns to leave. Liz hisses to Pike.

LIZ  
Don't be a fool. I can use the help.  
And if it turns out the boy really  
does have money...

Pike's eyes light up. He leers evilly, nods.

LIZ  
Aaron, wait!

Aaron returns -- suddenly suspicious.

PIKE  
Maybe I been a little hard on the  
kid, Wry. He can ride with us.  
Besides, you said the missus here  
could use a hand.

AARON  
Now hold on. I'm not sellin' a bonded  
servant. I just want someone to  
keep an eye on him for a few days.

Liz cozies up to Aaron. Forces a sweet smile.

LIZ  
We'll treat him like family.

AARON  
I don't know. Maybe we better leave  
things just the way they...

PIKE  
C'mon, Wry. A deal's a deal.

EXT. WAGON AREA - AARON'S WAGON - NIGHT

The cook fire burns low. Peg puts a cloth over several small

loaves of soda bread. Cindy and Aaron huddle and talk in hushed voices. Cindy's clearly upset.

CINDY

How could you?

AARON

Because you ain't up to takin' care of another youngster right now. Specially one like Mac.

CINDY

I just had a few pains that's all.

AARON

Yeah, but it's too early. And this ain't the first time.

CINDY

I'll be worried sick. Even if he is a pest.

Peg listens to her parents. Pretends she doesn't hear.

AARON

Maybe Pike's just what Mac needs to cure his stubborn streak. Besides, we can check on him every day.

He gets his rifle from the wagon. Turns to Cindy.

AARON

I got first lookout. You better get some sleep pretty soon.

Peg covers the last loaf of bread just as Aaron reaches for it. Cindy slaps his hand.

CINDY

Wait till it cools.

Aaron looks sheepish. Heads for guard duty.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WAGON AREA - AARON'S WAGON - LATER

The cook fire is a dull glow. All is still. A shadow moves in the darkness by the wagon.

It's Peg, in her night dress. She goes to the bread, slips a loaf from under the cloth. Fades back into the night.

INT. PIKE'S WAGON

Pike SNORES loudly -- Liz asleep beside him. Mac lies on a blanket, arms folded behind his head. He stares up at the dark.

A white blur appears at the wagon opening.

PEG

Psst!

Mac leans up on an elbow.

MAC

Who is it?

PEG

Shhhh. Come here.

Mac sneaks to the tailgate, surprised at what he sees. Peg backs off -- motions him to come outside.

EXT. WAGON AREA - PIKE'S WAGON

Mac joins Peg a few feet away from the wagon.

MAC

What are you...?

PEG

Shhhh. Whisper. I brought you something to eat.

She holds out the bread.

MAC

I don't need anything to eat.  
Especially from a girl.

PEG

Don't be dumb.

Mac catches a whiff of the bread. Sniffs a few times, then decides to take it.

MAC

I thought you didn't like me.

PEG

I don't. I feel sorry for you.

MAC

You don't feel sorry for people you don't like.

PEG

I'd feel sorry for anybody who had to ride with Mr. Pike.

Peg turns suddenly and dashes into the night -- leaves Mac perplexed. He tears off a chunk of bread and wolfs it down as he peers into the dark after her.

EXT. WAGON TRAIN AREA - NEAR DAWN

Cook fires are cold. The horses doze standing up. In the dimness of first light, MUFFLED SNORES break the stillness.

A lone guard walks slowly in the shadows just beyond the wagons. Then a THUD, a MOAN, and the guard slumps to the ground.

EXT. WAGON AREA - AARON'S WAGON - DAWN

The bread still sits out. A man's bare arm reaches toward it. His hand lifts the cloth.

It's Geronimo, squatting by the bread. He takes the loaves and tosses them to the braves who wait behind him holding

their horses -- Sanchez among them.

Geronimo takes a loaf for himself. The Indians squat --  
tear eagerly at their meal. Sanchez moves to Geronimo.

(THEY SPEAK IN APACHE DIALECT - ENGLISH TITLES)

SANCHEZ

This time we take the horses.

GERONIMO

Those are work horses.

They exchange fiery looks.

SANCHEZ

Then we eat them!

Geronimo motions for quiet. Points.

GERONIMO

We must leave.

EXT. OPEN DESERT - EARLY LIGHT

In the spreading daylight, a distant dust cloud marks the  
swift approach of riders.

EXT. WAGON AREA - AARON'S WAGON

Geronimo motions for his men to mount up. In his haste,  
Sanchez bumps the cook pot. It CLATTERS to the ground.

A sleepy Aaron pokes his head out of his wagon. His eyes  
threaten to leave their sockets. He's too shocked to speak.  
He and Geronimo lock gazes.

Sanchez cocks his rifle -- aims at Aaron. Geronimo knocks  
it away. The SHOT goes in the air.

Other heads poke out of other wagons. A woman SCREAMS. The  
Apaches brandish their weapons -- threaten to fire.

GERONIMO

No! We came only for food.

INT. PIKE'S WAGON

Pike jerks awake and peeks outside.

PIKE

Apaches! I knew Wry didn't know  
nothin' about Indians.

He reaches for his rifle. Liz, terrified, clings to him.  
He pushes her away. Mac is bug-eyed.

LIZ

They'll kill us all.

Concealed by the wagon cover, Pike cocks his rifle.

PIKE

Not hardly. A few thievin' Apaches  
ain't gonna keep me from gettin' to  
California.

Mac peeks out to see Geronimo order Sanchez to put down his weapon and leave. Pike takes aim.

MAC  
No! They're leaving!

PIKE  
Shut yer mouth.

Mac grabs for Pike's arm just as he FIRES.

EXT. WAGON TRAIN AREA

The brave next to Sanchez slumps over his horse's neck. Blood oozes from his head. Geronimo catches him and keeps him from falling.

Apache eyes, burning with anger, turn toward the Pike wagon. With an ear-piercing SCREAM, Sanchez bolts his horse to

PIKE'S WAGON  
Where Pike cowers in fear. Liz sobs  
and clings to him. Mac looks  
terrified.

Sanchez snarls. Aims his rifle. Pike quivers, holds his hands in a futile gesture of defense. Geronimo rides up, points to the approaching riders, motions the Apaches to leave.

They ride off just as several wagon train MEN, rifles in hand, venture out of their wagons. Then Sanchez wheels his horse abruptly and, with another YELL, races back.

He reaches into Pike's wagon, pulls Liz out. Throws her across his horse. She's terrified, SCREAMS. The gathering crowd -- as well as Mac and Pike -- is paralyzed by fear.

SANCHEZ  
(dialect)  
If Apache dies, she dies.

Then, with another horrible SHRIEK, he wheels his horse in quick pursuit of his retreating companions.

PIKE  
What'd he say? Anyone here understand  
that devil?

A MAN in the crowd steps forward.

MAN  
Somethin' about them killin' her if  
that Indian dies.

Clearly shaken, Pike climbs down just as Aaron runs up. Mac watches from the wagon, dumfounded.

PIKE  
(to Aaron)  
About time you showed up. I suppose  
you been hidin' in your wagon.

More men and women press closer to Pike's wagon.

AARON

Pike, you're an idiot! What on earth possessed you to shoot that Indian?

MAN

Yeah, you coulda got us all killed.

Pike's eyes shift from face to face. He points to Mac.

PIKE

He's the one that done it. I never intended to shoot. He hit my arm and...

MAN

He oughta get whipped good.

AARON

Now hold on.

PIKE

What about my wife? Don't anyone care about my wife? I can't go to California without her!

MAN

We're just lucky them Indians run off.

AARON

Luck had nothin' to do with it.

He points beyond the wagons.

EXT. DESERT - BEYOND THE WAGONS

Sgt. Hobbs and his men bear down on the wagons at a full gallop -- their weapons at the ready.

EXT. WAGON AREA

The patrol skids to a dusty stop. Hobbs turns to Levi.

HOBBS

Take a few men and keep those Apaches in sight. I'll catch up with ya once I see what's goin' on here.

Levi selects his men and rides out of the area. Hobbs dismounts, motions to the remaining troops.

HOBBS

Spread out. Keep your eyes open.

The men disperse and Hobbs goes to Pike's wagon. The crowd looks on expectantly. Pike scowls. Aaron smiles.

AARON

I like your timing, Sergeant.

HOBBS

A little too close to suit me.

PIKE

They got my wife. What're ya gonna do about it?

HOBBS  
Everything we can.  
(to Aaron)  
Anyone hurt? We heard shots.

Pike points at his wagon -- and Mac.

PIKE  
That was his fault. Ya shoulda left  
him in the desert where ya found  
him.

He pulls Mac roughly from the wagon. Hobbs intervenes, frees Mac from his grip and gives Pike a sharp look.

HOBBS  
If I knew he be ridin' with you, I  
just might have.

Mac gives Hobbs a curious, grateful look. Cindy and Peg move out of the crowd and go to Mac's side. Cindy puts her arms around the children.

HOBBS  
You folks better get movin'. Fast  
as ya can.

PIKE  
I don't need your kind tellin' me  
what to do. What about my wife?

Hobbs stares a hole in Pike.

HOBBS  
My kind is out there right now  
followin' her.

AARON  
What'll become of her, Sergeant?

HOBBS  
Lord only knows. But ya can't do  
her no good waitin' around here.  
Git to Fort Huachuca and tell Cap'n  
Horner what happened.

He motions for Aaron to follow him to his horse. He takes a paper out of his jacket, hands it to Aaron.

HOBBS  
I didn't think your women and kids  
needed to hear this. This same bunch  
of Apaches killed a rancher and his  
wife a day or so back. Their name's  
in that telegraph. See Cap'n Horner  
gits it, will ya?

Aaron nods. Hobbs mounts up, signals to his men, and they head out in the same direction Levi took.

Aaron studies the telegram. His eyes go wide. He stares at Cindy, a pained look on his face. Then goes to her.

AARON  
(to the crowd)

All right, everybody, back to your wagons. We've got to get goin' soon as we can.

The people move away. All but Pike.

PIKE  
You can't go without my wife, Wry!

AARON  
You heard the sergeant. They're doin' everything they can. I've got the rest of these people to worry about.

Pike storms off, grumbling. Cindy sends Peg and Mac toward her wagon.

CINDY  
I'm sorry Aaron, we can't let that boy stay with Pike. We'll just have to put up with him a while longer.

Aaron's face is dark as he hands Cindy the telegraph message.

AARON  
Maybe longer than you think.

EXT. DESERT

Rocky terrain. Desolate. High mesas and craggy stone spires. Hobbs and his men ride into a shallow ravine. Suddenly Hobbs signals them to halt.

His face screws up in pain at what he sees.

A few yards ahead are the bodies of Levi and his men. Bloodied and lying at grotesque angles. Their horses are missing.

HOBBS  
Looks like Levi finally got the fight he was lookin' for.

Hobbs' eyes are alert now. Suspicious. Searching. The faces of his men reflect their worry. They eye the walls of the ravine anxiously.

Suddenly SCREAMS! A band of Apaches, Sanchez at their head, THUNDER toward the soldiers.

HOBBS  
Dismount! Dismount! Take cover!  
Hold onto your horses!

Hobbs and his men scramble for whatever protection they can find. Force their horses to the ground. Some of the troopers fire wildly.

HOBBS  
Hold your fire till they git closer!

Slugs ZIP and ZING around the soldiers, dig into the rocks and dirt. The Apaches, YELLING wildly, ride in. Fire at will. Hobbs waits for the right moment.

HOBBS

Now!

His men open fire. The Apaches sweep past -- control their horses with their knees. Fire at the gallop.

An Apache falls, mortally wounded. A trooper does likewise. Another soldier slumps at his post -- and the riders are past.

The soldiers reload. Exchange frightened looks. Hobbs peers around his protection -- surveys the scene.

HOBBS

You're firin' wild. Take your time.  
Hit what ya aim at.

The Apaches attack again -- the air filled with SCREECHING and RIFLE FIRE. Another Indian goes down. And another soldier falls in his tracks.

Hobbs takes a grazing slug to the forehead. Falls. Rises again. Resumes firing until the Apaches are past.

Hobbs checks his depleted force. Then, through eyes that no longer stay focused, he sees the Apaches begin another assault. The ravine ECHOES WITH DEAFENING SOUND.

Hobbs slumps to the ground.

EXT. TOP OF THE RAVINE

On a ridge, a mounted Apache watches the carnage below. He holds Liz Pike -- bound and gagged. Her face fills with horror as the last soldier falls.

EXT. RAVINE - DUSK

Deathly stillness. Soldiers, some stripped half naked, lie helter skelter among the rocks. Sightless eyes stare into the fading light.

Bodies of horses lie amid the human remains. Flies BUZZ. A wounded animal WHINNIES and struggles to its feet. Wobbly. Unsure of what to do.

Near the stunned horse, Hobbs, his face crusted with blood and dirt, lies motionless. Then his eyebrows twitch. His eyes move under their lids. They open.

EXT. FORT HUACHUCA - DAY

A sign on an adobe and frame building just off the parade square reads "Sutler Store."

INT. STORE

A typical period general store. Cindy and Peg fold blankets. Cindy stops, winces. Clutches her belly. Then she heaves a sigh and continues folding. Peg watches -- worry lines on her face.

PEG

When's Pa comin' back?

CINDY

Soon as he talks to Captain Horner  
about someone to take care of Mac.

Peg thinks hard about something.

PEG  
What if no one wants him?

CINDY  
Poor Mac. If he'd only try to get  
along.

PEG  
They wouldn't make him stay with  
that old Mr. Pike again, would they?

Cindy stops folding; smiles quizzically at her daughter.

CINDY  
My, my. What's this, now?

Peg is embarrassed.

PEG  
Nothing. I just...

The door bursts open, Aaron and Mac come in. Aaron Looks  
like a ghost. Cindy questions him with a look.

AARON  
It's Hobbs. That colored sergeant?  
He just rode in -- half dead. His  
men are all...

CINDY  
Liz Pike?

AARON  
No word.

MAC  
The Indians probably killed her.

AARON  
Now we don't know that.

MAC  
They killed my uncle didn't they?

Suddenly Cindy's gripped by pain. She clenches her fists.  
Gasps. Staggeres against the counter. Aaron goes to her --  
Peg follows. Mac is frozen on the spot.

AARON  
The baby?

Cindy grimaces, nods. She hangs onto the counter.

AARON  
(to Mac)  
Find the doctor. Quick!

Peg helps Cindy. Mac hesitates.

AARON  
Hurry, boy! Hurry!

Mac runs out. Peg and Aaron help Cindy to the next room.

INT. CAPT. HORNER'S OFFICE

Hobbs, his head bandaged, stands by the desk facing Pike and Capt. Horner.

PIKE  
Funny you're the only one left alive,  
ain't it, Hobbs?

Hobbs glowers, doesn't answer.

HORNER  
What are you suggesting, Pike?

PIKE  
I ain't suggestin' nothin'. I'm  
sayin' it right out. I think this  
colored boy here run off. And left  
my wife to them red devils. Not to  
mention his own men.

Hobbs lunges. Pike stumbles backward.

HORNER  
Sergeant!

Too late. Hobbs lands a solid right to Pike's jaw and he goes down. Horner restrains Hobbs.

HORNER  
That's enough Hobbs!

Pike staggers to his feet -- points at Hobbs.

PIKE  
I want that man arrested.

Hobbs lunges again. Horner intervenes. Pike cowers.

HORNER  
Hobbs! That'll do!

PIKE  
I demand you prefer charges against  
this dirty black...

Hobbs grabs for Pike again. He ducks behind the desk.

HORNER  
I said that'll do, Sergeant!

HOBBS  
No, sir. It won't do. It won't do  
at all.

Horner glares at Hobbs. Pike smirks from behind the desk. Hobbs burns, breathing hard.

HOBBS  
Would it do if I was white, Cap'n?  
Would I have to stand here and let  
him call me names?

HORNER  
That's insubordination, Sergeant.

HOBBS  
Call it what ya want, but...

HORNER  
As of right now, you're relieved of  
duty and confined to the post.

Pike gloats. Horner ponders the situation while Hobbs tries to cool off.

HOBBS  
Sir, what about my transfer?

HORNER  
Learn to control that temper or you'll  
be transferred all right -- to the  
territorial prison.

PIKE  
That's more like it.

HORNER  
Perhaps I can find something to keep  
you occupied until your orders get  
here.

INT. SUTLER STORE

Mac and Aaron are toe to toe -- nearly nose to nose.

MAC  
You just want to get rid of me.

AARON  
That ain't true.

MAC  
Then why do I have to room with that  
old colored sergeant?

AARON  
Because Mrs. Wry is very sick and  
I'm too busy to take care of ya.

MAC  
Then send me back to Boston.

AARON  
You're goin' soon as the relief troop  
gets here.

MAC  
What's wrong with the stage?

AARON  
It ain't due for weeks.

MAC  
Then I'll run away.

AARON  
I'll help ya pack.

Mac adopts his customary pout. Goes to a box -- sits. Folds his arms across his chest.

HOBBS (O.S.)  
Speakin' of packin'...

Mac and Aaron look up. Hobbs, head still bandaged, stands in the doorway. He scowls.

HOBBS  
You all set to go, kid?

MAC  
No!

AARON  
Yes!

Mac's pout gets poutier. Aaron seems relieved.

HOBBS  
(to Mac)  
Look, I don't like this any more'n you do. But more'n that I don't like waitin'. So git your duds and let's go, or...

Aaron gets Mac's jacket. Gives it to Hobbs.

AARON  
That's all he's got. Just what he had on when you found him.

Hobbs seems to soften for a moment.

HOBBS  
And they're about wore out.

Aaron steers Mac toward the door. Hobbs guides him outside as Aaron looks on.

AARON  
Bring him back sometime and I'll see if we can find some clothes around here that fit.

EXT. SUTLER STORE

Hobbs and Mac come out -- glaring at each other.

Aaron stands in the doorway. Mac looks back and, for a flash, his eyes show hurt. Then he pouts defiantly again.

Peg appears in the doorway and squeezes in beside her father -- clings tightly to his arm. He looks down at her. Sees her sadness.

INT. HOBBS' QUARTERS

A small, tidy room. Two neat bunks, a pot-bellied stove, a desk and chair, a wash stand, a trunk. Some uniform parts hang from pegs in the walls.

The door opens. Hobbs steers Mac inside.

HOBBS

Look, kid, I know what it's like.  
My daddy died when I was just about  
your age.

Mac ignores him, tosses his jacket on a bunk. Hobbs scowls,  
picks up the jacket and throws it at Mac.

HOBBS  
Lesson number one.

Mac tries to turn on some charm.

MAC  
See here, Hobbs, I've got money --  
back in Boston, that is. I can make  
this worth your while.

HOBBS  
Lesson number two. Far's you're  
concerned, my name is Mr. Hobbs, or  
Sergeant. You ain't got no other  
choices. Understand?

MAC  
Whatever you say, Hobbs -- er --  
Sergeant. But we both might as well  
try to make the most out of what is  
less than an ideal situation.

HOBBS  
Let's get somethin' straight. I'm  
only takin' care a you because I  
been told to. But I'm gonna do it  
right because I don't want nothin'  
messin' up my transfer. Understand?

MAC  
That suits me. As I said, I've got  
money -- or will have soon -- so why  
don't you just act as my valet and  
I'll pay you...

Hobbs has all he can do to keep from choking. He feels for  
his bandage.

HOBBS  
That Apache bullet musta done more  
damage that I thought. I'm hearin'  
things.

MAC  
I don't require much. Just take  
care of my clothes -- when I get new  
ones -- prepare my meals, make my  
bed. That sort of thing.

Hobbs can't believe it. Mac surveys the room -- oblivious  
to Hobbs' mounting anger.

MAC  
You seem to do a halfway decent job  
of keeping things neat -- such as  
they are.

Hobbs seems to have trouble breathing, let alone speaking.  
Mac tosses his coat on the bunk again.

MAC

What do you say, Hobbs?

Hobbs is steely-eyed. His jaws work. Nostrils flare.

He unbuttons his jacket -- takes it off. Slowly, deliberately folds it. Lays it on his bed. He's serene as he takes off his stout leather belt.

Mac's smug look dissolves into one of doubt. Then his eyes fill with fear.

Hobbs slaps his belt rhythmically into an open palm.

MAC

Wha...? What...? What are you...?

EXT. HOBBS QUARTERS

Everything is quiet -- even tense.

HOBBS (V.O.)

Lesson number three.

The SHARP CRACK of leather against backside. Followed immediately by YELLS.

MAC (V.O.)

No, Hobbs! Sergeant! Sergeant Hobbs!  
No, Mr. Hobbs! No!

A few feet away, Peg stands alone. Then WHACK! WHACK! She gets a pained look on her face and shudders as she listens.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SUTLER STORE - DUSK

Aaron hands Hobbs an armful of clothes.

AARON

These could be a mite large.

HOBBS

Just what he needs. Lord knows he's too big for the britches he's got now.

AARON

Know what ya mean.

(a beat)

Funny though, in spite of his uppity ways he -- he kinda grows on ya.

HOBBS

So does a boil.

Aaron chuckles. Hobbs joins him.

AARON

By the way, where is J. Wentworth the third tonight?

Hobbs' look is a question mark. Aaron smiles.

AARON

Mac.

HOBBS LEADS AARON TO

EXT. SUTLER STORE

And points to the corral.

Mac lugs a bucket of water. Pours it into a trough for the horses crowding around. He trudges slowly back to a pump and refills the bucket. His tail is dragging.

Aaron chuckles, shakes his head, amazed.

AARON

How'd you do it?

HOBBS

Somethin' my daddy called hard way love.

Aaron gives him a quizzical look.

HOBBS

And somehow I get the feelin' love's somethin' Mac ain't had much of.

AARON

To hear him tell it, his daddy had all the money in the world. Gave him everything he wanted.

HOBBS

That ain't the same thing.

The two men exchange a long look. Then Hobbs, carrying Mac's clothes, starts for his quarters.

AARON

(softly)

Good night, Sergeant.

He watches for a moment then turns to go back into the store. He stops. Peg stands in the doorway. She looks forlorn as she eyes Mac laboring away.

Aaron caresses her hair and they both watch Mac.

PEG

Does he get to eat now that he's working, Pa?

AARON

I have a feeling Sergeant Hobbs'll see he's well fed.

Peg doesn't seem convinced. Aaron gets a kindly gleam in his eye.

AARON

Is there any of that pie left we had for supper?

Peg brightens, smiles. Her eyes flash.

PEG  
You mean...?

Aaron nods and Peg dashes into the store.

EXT. CORRAL - NIGHT

Mac finishes watering the horses. Peg appears carrying a big piece of pie on a tin plate. Mac eyes her skeptically as she offers it to him.

MAC  
Who said I wanted that?

PEG  
Well -- don't eat it then.

She turns away.

MAC  
Wait. Since you brought it.

He takes the pie, wolfs down a big bite. Peg stares in wonder.

PEG  
I'm sorry you don't like it.

MAC  
Your mother's a good cook.

PEG  
It so happens I made that pie.  
(a beat)  
Mama's real sick.

MAC  
I'm sorry. She's not going to...?  
Is she going to get better?

Peg's worried, but tries to be brave.

PEG  
Don't be dumb. The doctor says she'll  
be fine soon as the baby's born.

Mac is pensive. A little sad.

MAC  
Doctors don't always know. They  
said my father... Forget it.

He concentrates on his pie as he turns and walks toward the corral. Peg follows.

They both sit on a bottom rail -- but Mac pops up like he's been stuck. Winces in agony. Rubs his bottom gingerly.

PEG  
Did Sergeant Hobbs...?

MAC  
I hate him.

PEG  
Mamma says you're not supposed to

hate anyone.

Mac pauses between bites of pie.

MAC  
Why do people keep saying that?

He sets his jaw and stares into the plate. When he looks up, there's a sly, crafty smile on his face.

MAC  
You're a very good cook, Peg.

Peg doesn't know what to make of the compliment.

MAC  
Can you make -- you know -- other things besides pie?

Peg is wary. She eyes Mac suspiciously.

PEG  
Yes -- why?

MAC  
I need a favor.

He takes the last bite. Thrusts the plate back at Peg and steers her toward the store.

EXT. OUTER WALL OF THE FORT - DAWN

A guard passes by in the early light.

Once he's out of sight, a rope of knotted sheets drops silently over the wall. Followed by Mac -- a small knapsack on his back.

He makes his way to the ground. Takes a quick look around and heads into the desert at a brisk walk.

INT. CAPT. HORNER'S OFFICE - DAY

Horner's behind his desk. Not happy. Hobbs stands at attention in front of the desk. Less happy.

HORNER  
Why on earth would he pull a trick like this?

HOBBS  
I guess he figgered things was so bad he'd just run away.

HORNER  
Nonsense. He's only a child.

HOBBS  
Beggin' your pardon, sir, but I seen runaways lots younger'n him.

HORNER  
Hmmm -- maybe. Where would he go?

HOBBS  
Boston -- if he had his druthers.

But I'd guess he's probably headed  
for Benson right now.

HORNER  
Benson's thirty miles from here!

HOBBS  
Respectfully, sir, I reckon he knows  
that. He's stubborn and spoiled but  
he ain't dumb. If I git started now  
I can probably track him...

HORNER  
You're still confined to the post,  
remember?

HOBBS  
By your leave Cap'n, much as I don't  
like it, sir, that kid's my  
responsibility.

HORNER  
I'm afraid you came to that  
realization a little late, Sergeant.

Hobbs struggles to maintain control.

HOBBS  
Yes, sir -- but with the Apaches off  
the reservation...

HORNER  
You should have thought of that.

HOBBS  
But, Cap'n, there's no tellin'...

HORNER  
You're dismissed, Hobbs.

HOBBS  
But, sir, if somethin' happens to  
him...

HORNER  
I'll handle it, Sergeant!

Hobbs burns silently. Salutes. Wheels and exits.

EXT. DESERT

The sun is a white, glowing ball above a desolate expanse of  
desert. Mac emerges from the whiteness. Trudges along  
laboring from the heat and the weight of his knapsack.

A giant boulder affords some shade. Mac plops down. Digs a  
sandwich and a container of water out of his knapsack. He  
eats like there's no tomorrow. Then his eyes droop.

Flashes of light come from the nearby hills. Answering  
flashes come from another direction.

AT THE BOULDER - LATER Mac is sound asleep.

Over his head, on the boulder, stand a pair of legs encased  
in moccasins. The legs belong to an

APACHE  
in headband, loincloth, and a cavalry  
jacket. He turns and signals to a

COMPANION  
in the distance who holds a pair of  
horses.

EXT. FORT HUACHUCA - DAY

From the lookout tower, a GUARD sees two horses approaching.  
Each carries an Apache. One with Mac mounted in front of  
him.

GUARD  
Scouts comin' in!

EXT. FORT PARADE GROUND

Hobbs watches the scouts and Mac dismount. Mac, looking  
dusty and tired, broods while the Apaches talk to Hobbs.

(SOME APACHE DIALECT - ENGLISH TITLES AS NEEDED)

HOBBS  
(dialect)  
Where did you find him?

APACHE #1  
(dialect)  
About fifteen miles.

Hobbs seems impressed. Glances at Mac.

HOBBS  
Not bad for a kid.

APACHE #2  
White kid maybe.

Everybody laughs but Mac. The Indians leave, and Hobbs puts  
a hand on Mac's shoulder.

HOBBS  
You almost got me in a mess a trouble.

Mac shrugs away from Hobbs' grip.

MAC  
Good.

HOBBS  
Look, kid, this is as hard on me as  
it is on you.

Mac just glares.

HOBBS  
But we're stuck with each other so  
We might as well try to git along.

MAC  
Why? You don't want me around.  
Nobody does.

HOBBS

It ain't a case of whether I want ya  
or not...

MAC

I'll just run away again. You don't  
own me, you know.

Hobbs stiffens. He and Mac stare at each other for a long  
beat. Hobbs' look softens and his eyes grow tender.

HOBBS

You're right. I don't own ya. No  
one can ever own another human bein'.  
Never.

Mac's defiance fades. Replaced by a quizzical look as Hobbs  
turns and walks away.

EXT. CORRAL

Mac pushes a wheelbarrow full of hay toward the corral.  
It's a big load for his size. The barrow wobbles.

Hobbs is in the corral -- twirling a lariat. He picks out a  
horse, deftly tosses his loop. It settles over the animal's  
neck. He steals a glance at Mac.

Mac's load finally topples. Frustration written all over  
his face, he struggles to right the wheelbarrow and pick up  
the scattered hay.

Hobbs sneaks another look and grins privately. Then leads  
his horse toward the fence as Mac approaches.

HOBBS

Want to try somethin' else for a  
while?

Mac, dirty and sweaty, is not impressed with the overture.  
He's full of self-pity.

MAC

What choice do I have? If I don't  
do what I'm told I'll probably just  
get beaten.

Hobbs can't hide a smile.

HOBBS

I just thought ya might like to try  
your hand at ropin'.

Mac stews for a moment.

MAC

It doesn't look too interesting,  
thank you.

HOBBS

Suit yourself.

He starts away. Mac reconsiders.

MAC

Wait. Maybe I will -- if you promise

not to make fun of me.

HOBBS

Make fun?

MAC

Well... Grownups make fun of you  
sometimes when you can't do something.

Hobbs slips the loop off the horse, halters it. Then ties  
it to the fence as Mac climbs into the corral.

Hobbs rewinds his rope -- gives Mac a skeptical look.

HOBBS

Why would they do that?

MAC

They might not mean to, but...

HOBBS

Do people make fun a you?

MAC

Well... Sometimes my father would  
get... Well, let's just say he got  
impatient once in a while if I  
couldn't do things right the first  
time.

(a beat)

He didn't mean to, you understand.  
It's just that he was awfully busy  
and didn't always have time for me  
if I didn't learn things right away.

HOBBS

There ain't many things we git right  
on the first try.

He hands Mac the rope.

HOBBS

Whether it's ropin' horses...

He takes Mac's hands in his. Shows him how to hold the loop.

HOBBS

...or tryin' to make friends.

Mac gives him a quick look but Hobbs ignores it, twirls the  
rope over their heads. He helps Mac throw the rope a few  
times. The last try gets a horse.

Hobbs retrieves the rope, hands it to Mac.

HOBBS

See what ya can do.

Mac makes a couple of awkward throws. Hobbs gives him more  
tips on how to hold his hands. Mac tosses the rope again.  
Lo and behold! It settles around a horse's neck.

Hobbs smiles. Mac beams, lets out a happy YELL that scares  
the horse. It bolts across the corral. Jerks Mac off his  
feet. Drags him through the dirt.

HOBBS  
Let go! Turn him loose!

Hobbs runs after Mac as he's dragged across the corral.

HOBBS  
Let go a the rope!

Mac finally complies -- and the horse runs free. As Hobbs reaches him, Mac grimaces. Clenches his fists.

HOBBS  
You all right? I told ya to let go!  
Why didn't ya do what I told ya? Ya  
coulda got killed!

Mac gives him a hurt look. Tears well up.

MAC  
So? You wouldn't care.

Hobbs looks pained, helps Mac to his feet.

HOBBS  
You all right?

Mac nods. Looks woebegone.

HOBBS  
Next time do what I...

MAC  
I knew you'd holler if I didn't do  
it right.

Fists still clenched, he strides away.

HOBBS  
Wait. I just meant...

Mac's not listening. He goes to the water trough, plunges his hands in. He's hurting. He withdraws his hands -- badly burned from the rope.

Without looking back, he heads for Hobbs' quarters.

HOBBS  
Hey, kid! Wait.

Mac keeps walking.

INT. HOBBS' QUARTERS - NIGHT

Mac's in bed, staring at the ceiling. He hears Hobbs at the door. He quickly rolls over, pretends to be asleep.

Hobbs comes in. Gets undressed in the dark.

HOBBS  
I'm sorry about your hands.  
(a beat)  
I know you ain't sleepin'.  
(several beats)  
How'd you like to ride into Benson  
with me tomorrow?

Mac continues to look at the wall.

MAC

No. I know when I'm not wanted.

Hobbs looks sad as he slips under his blankets.

INT. HOBBS' QUARTERS - DAWN

Somewhere a BUGLE blows reveille. Hobbs awakens, stretches. In just his underdrawers, no shirt, he goes to MAC's bunk.

HOBBS

Hey, kid. Let's go. Time to git up.

Mac covers his head.

MAC

Leave me alone, I want to sleep.

HOBBS

C'mon, the cap'n's sendin' us into town today.

He pulls Mac's covers off, gives him a pat on the rear.

HOBBS

Let's go.

Mac turns to scowl at Hobbs.

MAC

Do I have to?

HOBBS

If ya think I'm gonna leave ya here to run away again, ya got another think comin'.

MAC

I thought you were confined -- or whatever you call it.

HOBBS

I'm about all that's left. Everyone else's out lookin' for Pike's wife.

Mac struggles up. Has trouble getting dressed.

HOBBS

How's your hands?

MAC

Just fine, thank you.

HOBBS

Lemme take a look.

He examines Mac's raw hands. Then turns to a trunk in the corner. Hobbs' back is laced with scars. Mac's eye bug out at the sight.

MAC

What happened to your back?

Hobbs finds a tin of salve in the trunk, goes back to Mac.

HOBBS  
I was a slave. Sometimes slaves got  
whipped.

Mac grimaces.

MAC  
That must have hurt.

Hobbs nods, begins to rub some salve into Mac's palms. Mac looks forlornly into his face, then after a long beat...

MAC  
It hurt when you whipped me.

Hobbs stops. He looks shocked -- like this is something he never considered before. A long beat.

HOBBS  
That ain't the same thing.

MAC  
Oh? What's different about it? It  
still hurt.

Moments of silence. Hobbs is really thinking this over.

MAC  
May I ask you something?

HOBBS  
Ask away.

MAC  
I know I have to call you Sergeant --  
or Mr. Hobbs -- but do you have to  
call me kid? I've got a name too,  
you know.

Hobbs' look softens.

HOBBS  
Guess I can't argue with that. What  
would ya like me to call ya?

MAC  
Mac would be just fine, thank you.

HOBBS  
Fair enough -- Mac.

He puts the salve away -- starts to get dressed.

HOBBS  
You can call me Daniel -- if ya want.

Mac's eyebrows go up. Hobbs seems suddenly embarrassed.

HOBBS  
(gruffly)  
C'mon. It's gittin' late.

EXT. CORRAL

Hobbs tightens the cinch on his horse's saddle. Mac watches carefully then turns to his own -- pulls on a strap.

Hobbs goes to Mac's horse.

HOBBS  
He's holdin' his breath.

MAC  
Why would he do that?

HOBBS  
Ol' Buck here ain't as dumb as he looks. He takes a big gulp of air while you're pullin' up the cinch so it ain't so tight when he lets it out.

MAC  
Good for him.

HOBBS  
Yeah, but first thing ya know your saddle's hangin' under his belly and you with it.

He slaps Mac's horse on the rump. Buck whinnies and sighs, lets out a big breath. Mac smiles, impressed.

MAC  
Gee.

HOBBS  
OK, cinch him up.

Mac finishes cinching. They mount up, move across the parade ground, Hobbs loose in his saddle -- Mac rigid and "posting" in the formal British manner. Hobbs starts to grin. Then chuckle. Then he laughs outright.

Mac gives him a dark look.

MAC  
There you go, making fun. I fail to see what's so humorous.

Hobbs recovers his composure -- kind of.

HOBBS  
You seem bound and determined to git a sore backside one way or the other. Just sit back and try lettin' the horse do the work.

EXT. FORT COMPOUND

Hobbs and Mac, riding easily, pass Lorne Pike as he's about to enter Captain Horner's quarters.

Pike stares. His eyes filled with hatred.

INT. CAPT. HORNER'S OFFICE

Pike enters. Horner is at his desk.

PIKE

I just seen that darkie sergeant...

HORNER

I believe you mean Sergeant Hobbs.

PIKE

The one that attacked me. How come he's leavin' the fort?

HORNER

I'm not sure that's any of your business, Pike. Now, if there's nothing else...

PIKE

What's the hold-up in gettin' my wife back?

HORNER

You know I've got every available man out looking for her.

PIKE

I got business in California. Every day I spend in this sand pile you call a fort is costin' me money.

HORNER

Then I guess you have to decide which is more important -- money or your wife. So, if you don't mind...

Horner returns to the papers on his desk. Pike fumes for a moment then wheels and stalks off.

EXT. BENSON - EDGE OF TOWN

Mac and Hobbs ride out of town, toward the open desert.

EXT. DESERT

Mac and Hobbs squat by their horses, studying the ground.

MAC

How do you know Apaches made those tracks?

HOBBS

Apaches don't shoe their horses.

Mac's eyes are full of admiration, seeing Hobbs in a new light.

MAC

Where did you learn all this stuff? Like tracking, and reading smoke signals, and horses and all that?

HOBBS

From my daddy mostly.

MAC

It must be nice to have your father -- have him teach you things.

HOBBS

Yeah, but he learned me about more important things too. Things ya can't see. Like respect for one another. Bein' a man. And doin' what ya know is right, no matter what.

MAC

Even when no one's watching?

Hobbs chuckles.

HOBBS

The Lord's watchin'. He's always watchin'.

Mac thinks that over for a second.

MAC

Sergeant -- I mean Daniel -- do you have any children?

HOBBS

I ain't got no family but the army.

Mac seems pleased.

MAC

Is it fun being a soldier, Daniel?

Hobbs looks toward the nearby hills, suddenly concerned.

HOBBS

Some days are better than others.

(a beat)

C'mon. We better git these dispatches back to the fort.

They mount up. As they ride at a canter, Hobbs watches wisps of smoke rising from the hills. He says nothing to Mac.

EXT. CAPT. HORNER'S QUARTERS - DUSK

The captain, Hobbs, and Mac come out onto the porch.

HORNER

You don't think they'd attack the fort?

HOBBS

Hard to say, Cap'n. All I know is, that smoke wasn't from no peace pipe.

Mac eyes the men with concern. Horner brightens.

HORNER

By the way, Mrs. Wry had a baby girl.

Hobbs smiles. Puts an arm around Mac's shoulders and they move off the porch.

HOBBS

That's the only good news I heard all day.

Mac frowns as he and Hobbs head for their quarters.

EXT. FORT COMPOUND

Mac and Hobbs walk in silence, then

MAC  
Daniel?

HOBBS  
Yeah?

MAC  
If you had any children, what would  
you rather have, a girl or a boy?

Hobbs screws up his face in an exaggerated frown. His eyes  
twinkle.

HOBBS  
Hmmm. That's a tough one.

Mac looks solemn. Then his face brightens.

MAC  
Could I go see Mrs. Wry's new baby?

HOBBS  
I don't know. It's a little soon.

MAC  
Please. I'll only stay a minute.

HOBBS  
OK, but just a minute, hear?

INT. SUTLER STORE - NIGHT

Mac and Peg talk softly as they huddle in the light from a  
kerosine lamp.

PEG  
I think she's sleeping -- but you  
could wait till she wakes up.

MAC  
I told Daniel I wouldn't stay long.

PEG  
Daniel? Oh, you mean Sergeant Hobbs.  
(a beat)  
I thought you didn't like him.

MAC  
That was before. But he's... Well,  
he -- he's teaching me a lot. About  
horses, and following trails, all  
that kind of thing. And how to read  
smoke and mirror signals.

(a beat)  
I might even join the army when I  
grow up.

PEG  
I thought you wanted to go back to  
Boston.

MAC

I do. But I can always go back after  
I'm done being a soldier.

PEG

So you like him now.

MAC

Well -- yes, in fact.

PEG

Does he like you?

MAC

Well -- he's never said, but -- I  
think so.

Peg looks a little hesitant. Suddenly shy.

PEG

It must be nice when you like someone  
and they like you back.

Now Mac's a little flustered.

MAC

Well -- yes. I guess it is.

He starts toward the door.

MAC

I'd better go. It's getting late.

Aaron appears from the back room. Tries to look gruff.

AARON

I'm glad you noticed.  
(to Peg)  
How's your Ma and that new baby gonna  
rest with you two out here blabbin'  
away?

MAC

Sorry, Mr. Wry. I didn't mean to  
wear out my welcome.

AARON

You're welcome anytime, Mac. Just  
so long as it ain't so late.

They all move to the door. Mac steps outside.

AARON

If ya want to see the new baby, you  
and Sgt. Hobbs come to supper one of  
these days.

MAC

Goodnight, Mr. Wry.

Aaron waves as Mac walks away. Peg looks unhappy. Mac turns.

MAC

Goodnight -- Peg.

Peg smiles.

INT. HOBBS' QUARTERS

Mac is in his bunk, arms behind his head, staring at the dark ceiling. Hobbs is sleeping.

MAC  
Daniel?

HOBBS  
Umm -- yeah -- what...?

MAC  
Why are girls so hard to understand?

HOBBS  
You woke me up to ask me that? How do I know?

MAC  
Did you ever -- you know -- like a girl?

Hobbs gets a momentary far away look on his face.

HOBBS  
Once. A long time ago.

MAC  
I've never heard you talk about it.

HOBBS  
There ain't nothin' to talk about. She was a Mimbres Apache -- over in New Mexico. I found her hidin' in a burned-out village. I was wounded and we -- we kinda took care of each other for a while.

MAC  
Is that how you learned so much about Indians?

HOBBS  
Partly.

MAC  
Is it fun to like a girl?

HOBBS  
Take my advice, stick to horses. Now git to sleep. It'll be sun-up before ya know it.

A LONG BEAT, THEN

MAC  
Mr. Wry invited us to dinner.

Hobbs is SNORING.

EXT. FORT COMPOUND - DAWN

A few soldiers, more asleep than awake, patrol the inner perimeter of the walls. The quiet is shattered by a cry from the GUARD in the tower.

GUARD

Indians!

The soldiers snap awake -- run to the walls.

The door to Capt. Horner's quarters pops open. Horner, shirttail flying, races to the wall.

HORNER

Where? How many?

GUARD

Comin' out of the sun.

EXT. ON THE WALL - DAY

The guard points to the fiery ball on the desert rim. Apache riders approach slowly out of its red glow.

Hobbs joins the captain and guard.

HORNER

What do you make of it, Sergeant?

HOBBS

Whatever it is, Cap'n, they ain't on the attack.

EXT. DESERT

The Apaches stop, strung out in a line. A lone rider, a white flag on his war lance, proceeds toward the fort.

The rider is Sanchez. He's got Pike's wife in front of him, bound and gagged. He stops near the front gate. Looks up at the men on the wall.

INTERCUT DESERT AND FORT WALL

(SOME APACHE DIALECT - ENGLISH TITLES AS NEEDED)

SANCHEZ

(dialect)

Does any among you speak the Apache tongue?

HOBBS

(dialect)

Go ahead, speak.

SANCHEZ

(dialect)

An Apache warrior is dead. This woman says he was killed by the white boy in your fort.

Now Pike ventures cautiously up onto the wall.

HORNER

(to Hobbs)

What's he saying?

HOBBS

The brave that was shot at the wagon train's dead. Pike's wife told them

Mac did it.

PIKE

That's right! He did! He did!

Hobbs glares at Pike, then looks back to Sanchez.

SANCHEZ

(dialect)

I will trade the woman for the boy.

Hobbs' eyes go wide. He looks from Pike to Horner.

HORNER

Well?

HOBBS

He wants to make a trade.

PIKE

What kinda trade ?

Hobbs doesn't want to speak.

HORNER

Sergeant?

Hobbs swallows hard.

HOBBS

Her for the boy.

PIKE

(to Horner)

Well? What're ya waitin' for?

HOBBS

Cap'n Horner -- ya can't. Ya just can't...

PIKE

I gotta get to California, Horner.  
Don't listen to this black son...

Horner freezes Pike with a stare.

HORNER

(to Hobbs)

The troop'll be back in two days.  
See if you can buy some time.

PIKE

Ya gotta save my wife!

HORNER

For the love of God, man, that's  
what I'm trying to do! Tell him  
something, Hobbs -- anything.

HOBBS

(dialect; to Sanchez)

We need to hold a council.

SANCHEZ

(dialect)

We will camp here. When the sun

rises again tomorrow we get the boy  
or the woman dies.

EXT. DESERT

Liz Pike's eyes are wide with terror. Sanchez wheels his horse and gallops back toward his men.

EXT. ON THE WALL

Pike is a wreck. He stares at Hobbs.

PIKE  
Don't just stand there! What'd he  
say?

Hobbs hesitates. Pike turns to Horner.

PIKE  
Do somethin', Horner!

He glares at Hobbs.

PIKE  
You! You're such a great Indian  
fighter, do somethin' before they  
kill her!

HORNER  
Sergeant?

HOBBS  
They said we got till sunup tomorrow.

PIKE  
Ya mean you're gonna take the word  
of them filthy Apaches?

HOBBS  
Their word's a lot better'n some I  
know.

He withers Pike with a stare.

INT. SUTLER STORE - LIVING QUARTERS - NIGHT

A small country kitchen. Hobbs and Aaron sit around a well-stocked table set for dinner.

Peg puts her baby sister in a crib and joins them.

Cindy and Mac are at the stove. She puts pieces of fried chicken on a platter and Mac brings it to the table. Cindy follows with the coffee pot.

CINDY  
Don't be shy. There's plenty more  
of everything.

She sits and folds her hands. All look to Aaron. He clasps his hands and they bow their heads.

AARON  
Dear Lord, we thank ya for this food,  
for Mac, and Sergeant Hobbs. And  
please, Lord, help Captain Horner

get Liz Pike back alive.

He sneaks a glance at Mac.

AARON  
And keep us all safe. Amen.

ALL  
Amen.

AARON  
(to Mac)  
Well, guess you'll be wantin' to get  
that stage to Denver pretty soon.

All eyes are on Mac. He squirms as though his chair is suddenly too hard. Peg looks worried.

MAC  
Actually, I've given that a great  
deal of consideration lately.

CINDY  
I bet you can't wait to get back to  
Boston.

Peg looks afraid to hear Mac's answer.

MAC  
I've come to the conclusion that  
Daniel -- Sergeant Hobbs -- probably  
needs me to help him around the fort.

HOBBS  
Ya don't say?

Hobbs sneaks a wink at Aaron and Cindy. All the grown-ups try to hide their smiles.

MAC  
That is...

HOBBS  
Well, I could use the help, but I  
know how anxious you been to git  
goin'.

Now Peg gets the idea -- grins behind her hand. Mac's brow is lined with concern.

MAC  
Oh, that's all right. I'm not in  
any rush. Really.

HOBBS  
Gee, I don't know, Mac...

MAC  
Please, Daniel. Sergeant.

Hobbs holds his arms open to Mac.

HOBBS  
What would I do without someone to  
holler at all the time?

Mac beams. Runs to Hobbs. They throw their arms around each other. The rest smile happily -- Peg most of all.

EXT. SUTLER STORE

To the sounds of gentle laughter, the door opens. Mac and Hobbs step out of the yellow light into the darkness -- leave Aaron, Cindy, and Peg in the doorway.

HOBBS  
I might not eat again for a month.  
Or at least a couple days.

CINDY  
That wouldn't be a hint now would  
it, Daniel?

HOBBS  
It just might be.

AARON  
You know you're welcome anytime.

Hobbs glances from Mac to Peg.

HOBBS  
(to Peg)  
Can I bring a friend?

Peg's embarrassed. Cindy smiles at Mac.

CINDY  
Now that he's learned that helping  
with supper isn't just women's work.

Smiles all around. Hobbs starts off, Mac hangs back.

MAC  
Er -- ah -- I'll be along in a few  
minutes, Daniel, all right?

Hobbs nods. Waves and turns away. Cindy and Aaron smile at Mac and Peg -- step back into the store.

CINDY  
Don't be long, you two. It's nearly  
bedtime.

She leaves Mac and Peg alone. They stand quietly, almost awkwardly, for a moment.

PEG  
Aren't you scared?

MAC  
Why should I be scared? Daniel would  
never let them trade me for Mrs.  
Pike.

Peg seems thoughtful.

PEG  
You really like him, don't you?

MAC  
More than anyone.

Peg's face darkens.

PEG  
More than anyone, ever?

Mac is a little flustered.

MAC  
Well -- except -- except maybe one  
other person.

Peg smiles a little expectant smile.

MAC  
Except for my father.

Peg bristles. Storms off in a huff -- stops in the doorway.

PEG  
I hate you -- you -- J. Wentworth  
McAllister the third!

She goes in, SLAMS the door. Mac stares at it blankly.

MAC  
I thought you weren't supposed to  
hate anyone.

EXT. FORT COMPOUND - NIGHT

Mac strolls toward Hobbs' quarters. Hums softly.

Suddenly a man leaps out of the shadows. Slips a hand over Mac's mouth, a hood over his head. Drags him kicking and struggling into the darkness.

EXT. APACHE CAMP

A small fire burns low. Horses are hobbled nearby. A few BRAVES squat in the soft glow. Sanchez among them. Some others are asleep.

Off by herself, Liz Pike sits bound and gagged. Her fearful gaze drawn to the dim firelight.

The quiet is broken by the sound of an APPROACHING HORSE.

PIKE (O.S.)  
I'm comin' in! I got the boy!

Pike, with a hooded Mac, rides slowly into the circle of light. They're immediately surrounded by Apaches. Pike licks his lips nervously. Sanchez approaches them warily.

SANCHEZ  
(dialect;English title)  
You are very brave or very foolish.

PIKE  
I don't speak no Apache.

He rips the hood off Mac's head.

PIKE  
But this speaks for itself.

He points from Mac to his wife. Liz's eyes are popping out of their sockets.

PIKE

The boy for the woman.

Sanchez grabs Mac, gives him to a waiting brave. Motions for Liz to be brought forward.

She's dragged to Pike's horse -- hoisted up in front of him. Her eyes show a mixture of fear and hope.

Pike is wary. But feels braver by the minute as they start out of the Indian camp. Liz struggles and moans behind her gag. Pike giggles at her discomfort.

PIKE

Them savages ain't so ignorant after all. I might just leave ya that way for a spell.

Liz's eyes burn. Pike laughs cruelly, then unties her hands, takes the gag out of her mouth.

LIZ

How come you're so brave all of a sudden?

PIKE

Ya can never tell what a man'll do for money.

LIZ

I don't know who's worse, you or the Indians. I can't stand the sight of you!

They ride slowly into the darkness.

AT THE INDIAN CAMPFIRE Sanchez signals and his men gather the horses. While one man stomps out the fire, Sanchez motions for another BRAVE to tie Mac's hands.

(APACHE DIALECT - ENGLISH TITLES)

SANCHEZ

Soon he dies.

BRAVE

What will Geronimo say?

SANCHEZ

I will deal with Geronimo.

Sanchez puts Mac on his horse, swings up behind him. Leads his men into the night.

INT. CAPT. HORNER'S OFFICE - DAY

Hobbs, Capt. Horner, Pike, and Liz crowd around the desk. Everybody's tense and irritable.

HORNER

I could charge you with kidnapping, Pike.

PIKE

For savin' my own wife?

HOBBS

Cap'n, please. There ain't time for this now. Ya gotta let me go after him.

PIKE

Don't do it, Horner! That'd be just enough excuse for them Apaches to come back here. Besides, this black coward's the one who run off and left my wife in the first place.

LIZ

Coward? This man fought like a hero. He could have been killed.

PIKE

How would you know?

LIZ

I was gagged, not blindfolded.

HOBBS

Cap'n Horner? Please let...

PIKE

I say he's a coward and I say he should be...

HORNER

That's enough, Pike!

(to Hobbs)

I'm lifting your restriction. When can you leave?

HOBBS

I just did.

He heads for the door, pauses, stares daggers at Pike.

HOBBS

You don't wanna be here when I git back.

EXT. OPEN DESERT - DAY

Hobbs, his face set hard, rides at an easy lope into the camp where Pike traded Mac for Liz.

He feels the ashes of the dead fire. Looks around for tracks. Mounts up and rides off.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

The TRAIL. Hobbs rides slowly, eyes searching.

The DESERT - NIGHT. Hobbs, his horse unsaddled, breaks out some hardtack and jerky. Rolls up in his blanket and is soon asleep.

A ROCKY MESA. The boiling sun is directly overhead. Hobbs tops a rise. Slides off his horse and digs a set of

binoculars out of his saddle bag.

Hat off, he advances cautiously to a ridge, drops to his belly, surveys the scene below through the glasses -- sees...

An APACHE CAMP. Cook fires burn. Men attend horses, see to their weapons. Mac, hands bound, sleeps in a spot of shade.

On the ROCKY MESA Hobbs squirms back from his vantage point. Returns to his horse, puts the glasses in his saddle bag. Leads his horse quietly away.

A SECLUDED DRAW. Hobbs finds some shade. He unsaddles his horse and ties him in some brush. Lies down, head on his saddle, hat over his face. In a few moments he's SNORING.

SECLUDED DRAW. NIGHT. Hobbs saddles his horse by the light of the moon. Mounts up and rides slowly out of the draw.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

EXT. DESERT - RIDGE OVERLOOKING APACHE CAMP - NIGHT

Hobbs leads his horse to the edge of the ridge. Peers cautiously down at the sleeping encampment. He slips his rifle out of its scabbard. Leaves his horse and disappears silently into the shadows.

EXT. APACHE CAMP

SNORES and sounds of CRICKETS. The camp is dotted with sleeping Apaches. Some rolled up in blankets, others just in their clothes.

The moon and the dying coals of a fire cast the only light. Hobbs appears out of the shadows -- as quiet as if he were walking on air.

He moves past the dead fire. Past one sleeping form after another. He searches each face. There's a SOFT GRUNT. He wheels to see Sanchez swing his rifle. Hobbs drops like a stone.

EXT. FORT HUACHUCA - DAY

The troop returns. Dusty and tired. The haggard men drag in through the main gate. Slowly and painfully dismount in front of their barracks.

INT. CAPT. HORNER'S OFFICE

A scraggly young LIEUTENANT and a grizzled SERGEANT stand limply in front of Horner's desk.

LIEUTENANT

So that's why we couldn't find a trace of the Pike woman.

HORNER

Of course. While you were scouting south, Sanchez was camped with her a half-mile outside our gate.

SERGEANT

But we seen signs of Geronimo, sir. We just never got close to him.

HORNER  
That's not the worst of it. They  
got the McAllister boy.

LIEUTENANT  
The Apaches? How?

HORNER  
It would take too long to explain.  
One other thing. Hobbs is out there.

LIEUTENANT  
He broke restriction?

HORNER  
I sent him to look for the boy.

SERGEANT  
If anyone can find the kid it'd be  
Hobbs.

HORNER  
We can't take that chance. You've  
got to go after them. And I hate to  
say this -- but right away.

SERGEANT  
Captain, the men are saddle sore  
clean up to their shoulders.

HORNER  
I'm sorry. Draw rations and fresh  
horses. And Lieutenant -- every  
minute counts.

INT. SUTLER STORE - EARLY MORNING

Cindy turns from tending her unseen baby in a cradle. Tidies  
up around the counter.

Peg is at the window, looking forlorn. She gazes out to the  
fort compound as the troop heads out the front gate. Cindy,  
eyes full of sympathy, goes to her.

CINDY  
They'll find him.

PEG  
Do you think Sergeant Hobbs is with  
him, Ma?

CINDY  
No way to tell.

Peg fills up. She fights to keep it together.

PEG  
I'm scared. I don't -- I don't want  
anything to happen to him.

Cindy gets teary.

CINDY  
Neither do I, sweetheart. Neither  
do I.

Aaron comes in through the back door. His face, too, reflects sadness and worry. He watches his wife and daughter for a moment. Peg turns to him.

PEG

Do you think Mac is...?

AARON

With Sergeant Hobbs out there?  
There's nothin' to worry about.

He forces a smile he obviously doesn't feel -- goes to the window.

EXT. APACHE ENCAMPMENT - MORNING

The camp comes to life. A few men prepare food over small fires. Others feed the horses. The Apaches don't pay much attention to their captives.

Hobbs, naked to the waist, hangs from a pole by his wrists. His face is dirty. Dried blood is crusted over the gash on his forehead.

Mac is on the ground next to him. Asleep. Hands bound in front of him.

Through heavy-lidded eyes, Hobbs surveys the camp, then

HOBBS

Mac! Psst! Mac, wake up!

Mac stirs -- sees Hobbs. He can't believe it.

MAC

Daniel! How...?

HOBBS

Shhhh. You OK?

MAC

I guess. But I'm awfully hungry.

HOBBS

Way things stand, that'll pass for good news.

MAC

What are they going to do to us?

HOBBS

That ain't nothin' you want to talk about on an empty stomach.

MAC

Can't you do something?

HOBBS

I been doin' it. It's called prayin'.

Suddenly there are SHOUTS. A group of Apaches ride into camp. Geronimo at their head. He's greeted with more SHOUTS and smiles -- by everyone except Sanchez.

Geronimo and Sanchez exchange cold greetings. They appear

to argue -- gesture toward Mac and Hobbs.

MAC  
What's going on?

HOBBS  
It may be the Good Lord answerin'  
back.

Mac doesn't get it.

HOBBS  
That's Geronimo.

MAC  
Is he a friend of yours?

HOBBS  
Not so you'd notice. But we met a  
time or two.  
(a beat)  
He might be just the chance we need.

Mac gives Hobbs a questioning look.

Sound and activity stop in the camp. All eyes are on Geronimo as he stares at Mac and Hobbs. Then, with Sanchez close behind, the Apache chief strides slowly to the soldier and the boy. Stops in front of Hobbs.

The other Apaches crowd around. Hobbs and Geronimo engage in a long stare-down. Mac is impatient.

MAC  
Now look here, Mr. Geronimo, my name  
is J. Wentworth McAllister the third.  
I demand that you let us go at once.

Hobbs rolls his eyes to the sky. Geronimo turns his gaze slowly in Mac's direction.

MAC  
My father was very rich, and I -- I  
can -- pay -- you...

Geronimo's stare can melt stone. Mac finally gets the idea that the chief doesn't understand him -- and that it wouldn't make any difference if he did. Geronimo turns to Sanchez.

(SOME APACHE DIALECT - ENGLISH TITLES AS NEEDED)

GERONIMO  
(dialect)  
We do not kill children.

SANCHEZ  
(dialect)  
My brother's death must be avenged.  
It is my tribal right.

Mac frowns. Looks to Hobbs.

MAC  
What are they saying?

HOBBS

It's kind of a family matter.

Geronimo turns to Hobbs again.

GERONIMO

(dialect)

Why does the black man ride with the white soldiers to hunt the Apache?

HOBBS

(dialect)

I'm a soldier too. Like you. It has nothing to do with the color of your skin or mine.

SANCHEZ

(dialect)

Enough talk! I say it is time to do what must be done!

Geronimo looks slowly from Sanchez to Mac -- then back to Sanchez. He gives a slight nod. Walks away.

Sanchez whips out his knife. Grabs Mac by the hair -- jerks him to his feet. Mac is terrified.

MAC

Daniel!

Sanchez threatens Mac with the knife. Holds it to his throat. Mac is panicked.

Hobbs strains. Twists and turns -- to no avail.

MAC

Daniel!

In one frightening motion, Sanchez slashes downward. Cuts the leather thongs binding Mac's wrists.

MAC

Daniel! What is he doing?

HOBBS

(dialect; to Sanchez)

Wait!

Geronimo turns to see what's happening. Sanchez freezes -- with a grip on Mac's hair and the knife at his throat. He glares hate at Hobbs.

HOBBS

(dialect)

I claim the warrior's right to challenge for his life.

Geronimo walks slowly back toward them. Sanchez scoffs.

SANCHEZ

(dialect)

That is law for Apache.

HOBBS

(dialect)

You once boasted you would kill me. Maybe you're afraid now.

Sanchez bristles.

SANCHEZ  
(dialect)  
You are not Apache.

HOBBS  
(dialect)  
Only a coward would refuse a warrior's  
challenge.

Sanchez's eyes are glazed. His face twisted.

SANCHEZ  
(dialect)  
You are not a warrior.

HOBBS  
(dialect)  
I'm a soldier.

Sanchez and Hobbs stare holes through each other. Geronimo  
looks on thoughtfully.

MAC  
Daniel, what's...?

HOBBS  
Hush, boy.

Hobbs turns to Geronimo. They stare into each other's souls.  
Tension crackles. A beat and Geronimo takes out his knife --  
cuts Hobbs down. Sanchez seethes.

INT. SUTLER STORE

Aaron is at the counter, a sour look on his face. Pike,  
sneering as usual, checks a list against the supplies on the  
counter.

PIKE  
That'll do it, Wry. Git that stuff  
out to my wagon right away. I'm  
headin' out soon's that useless wife  
of mine shows up.

AARON  
This is a cash and carry store, Pike.  
And you do the carryin'.

PIKE  
Have it your way.

He heaves a bag of flour onto one shoulder.

PIKE  
I'll send the missus in for the rest.  
See she don't forget nothin'.

EXT. DESERT

The troop from the fort rides slowly along. Dusty and tired.

SERGEANT  
This is hopeless, Lieutenant. The

trail's cold.

LIEUTENANT  
Got any better ideas?

The sergeant shakes his head glumly.

LIEUTENANT  
Then let's keep looking. And hope  
we find them in time.

EXT. APACHE ENCAMPMENT

The Apaches form a human ring. Hobbs and Mac approach. An excited MURMUR goes up.

They stop outside the circle. Hobbs finds his jacket and side arms. Under watchful eyes, he takes his knife from its scabbard. Tucks it into the belt at his waist.

A few yards away, Geronimo and Sanchez confer. Geronimo carries a Winchester repeating rifle.

Sanchez tucks a knife in his belt. Chooses a lance and a skin shield from among several at his feet.

Somewhere in the circle of unfriendly Indian faces, an ominous, rhythmic DRUM BEAT starts. An aging Apache begins a monotonous CHANT -- shuffles around Hobbs and Mac. Makes threatening motions with a feathered wand.

Mac is scared. Hobbs is serious -- deadly serious.

MAC  
Will they let us go if you win,  
Daniel?

HOBBS  
That'll be up to Geronimo.

MAC  
You can beat him, can't you?

HOBBS  
We'll know that soon enough.

They walk to where Sanchez and Geronimo wait. Hobbs tests a couple of lances. Settles on one. Does the same with the shields.

The CHANTING continues.

MAC  
Daniel?

HOBBS  
Yeah?

MAC  
Does this have to be a -- you know,  
a fight to the... Does someone have  
to -- to get killed?

HOBBS  
That's the way it usually works.

Mac winces. Hobbs is ready. He stares at Sanchez. Sanchez's lips curl in a sneer and he turns to Geronimo. Mac looks woeful.

MAC  
Daniel -- I don't want you to get...  
I don't want anything to happen to  
you.

Hobbs forces a smile that barely makes it.

HOBBS  
That makes two of us.

He gazes around at the faces.

HOBBS  
From the looks of things, the only  
two.

Geronimo signals. Sanchez pushes his way into the circle. The CHANTING STOPS. Replaced by a frightening SILENCE.

Mac, near tears, wraps his arms around Hobbs. Hobbs hugs him quickly, pulls away and follows Sanchez into

THE CIRCLE  
Sanchez sneers. Struts arrogantly,  
his back to Hobbs.

Suddenly Hobbs leaps. Delivers a blow with his shield that knocks Sanchez to his knees. The Apaches GROAN.

Hobbs thrusts with his lance. Misses by inches as Sanchez throws himself to the side, leaps to his feet. His sneer is replaced by a hateful grimace.

The two men thrust and parry. First one has the advantage then the other. They sweat. Gasp for breath. They're soon caked with dirt from rolling on the ground.

The Apaches CHEER every move by Sanchez. GROAN when Hobbs responds well. Geronimo looks on impassively. Mac stands beside him, chews his knuckles.

Hobbs lunges at Sanchez. Misses badly with his lance, and it splinters on a boulder. Sanchez grins evilly, advances on Hobbs and thrusts with his lance. Hobbs uses his shield, but Sanchez draws blood.

Geronimo raises his rifle. Fires a single SHOT. All eyes turn in his direction. He signals for the fighting to stop. Puts down his rifle and goes to the pile of lances. Selects one, takes it to Hobbs.

He turns to Sanchez.

GERONIMO  
(dialect)  
There is no honor in winning an unfair  
fight.

Sanchez glares. Geronimo returns to his place near Mac, folds his arms. Nods for the fight to continue.

Both combatants are weary. They struggle to stay on their

feet. Suck in huge lungfuls of air.

Hobbs makes a desperate lunge. Misses badly and falls on his face. With the ROAR of the crowd, Sanchez is on him instantly. Throws his lance and shield aside. Jerks out his knife.

The circle of humanity goes wild. They SCREECH. YELL. Wave their weapons and press closer.

Sanchez grabs Hobbs by the hair. Raises his knife. The crowd is in a frenzy. A SHOT. The knife spins out of Sanchez's grasp.

He rolls off Hobbs' back. Holds his hand. Eyes wild, he scans the quiet crowd -- until he finds Mac.

Mac has Geronimo's rifle. He quickly levers another shell into the chamber -- points the weapon directly at Geronimo's heart.

MAC

Let him go.

Hobbs, on the ground, gazes at Mac in disbelief.

HOBBS

Mac!

MAC

Tell him I'll shoot if he doesn't let you go.

Tension crackles. Mac takes a couple of steps back. His eyes never leave Geronimo.

MAC

Tell him, Daniel.

Geronimo signals for Sanchez to back off.

HOBBS

He already figgered it out.

Under Sanchez's hateful glare, Hobbs gets to his feet.

HOBBS

(to Mac)

Now what're we gonna do?

MAC

You're leaving -- getting away. I'll keep Mr. Geronimo here until...

HOBBS

Until what?

MAC

Until you're safe.

HOBBS

Swell. Then what?

MAC

Then... Well -- it doesn't matter. I'm the one they want.

Hobbs starts slowly toward Geronimo and Mac.

HOBBS  
I didn't rassle around and git all  
cut up just to leave you behind.

Suddenly Sanchez attacks Hobbs from the rear. Wraps an arm around his neck. Holds his knife at Hobbs' throat.

Caught off guard, Mac is startled and confused -- not sure what to do. The circle of Apaches tightens. They make threatening motions to Hobbs. GRUMBLE among themselves.

Geronimo surveys the scene coolly.

SANCHEZ  
(dialect; to Hobbs)  
Tell him to put down the rifle. Or  
you die.

MAC  
Daniel! What should I do?

HOBBS  
Nothin'.

Geronimo holds up a hand. The Apaches grow quiet. He walks slowly to Hobbs. Then, with eyes steely, he takes the knife out of Sanchez's hand. Sanchez is furious.

GERONIMO  
(dialect; to Sanchez)  
Release him.

Sanchez releases Hobbs. Eyes blazing, he takes a couple of menacing steps toward Geronimo.

Geronimo stops him with a look. Very slowly he hands Sanchez his knife. Dares him to do something with it. After a beat, Sanchez slinks away.

Geronimo walks to Mac. Holds out his hand for the rifle. Now Mac's really confused.

MAC  
Daniel? Tell me what to do!

HOBBS  
Just don't pull that trigger. Let  
him have the rifle.

Mac hesitates. Lowers the rifle. Hands it to Geronimo.

GERONIMO  
(dialect)  
You have the courage of an Apache.  
(to Hobbs)  
You too, black soldier. You were  
ready to die for each other.

Hobbs and Mac exchange questioning looks.

GERONIMO  
(dialect)  
The fight is over. You are both

free to go.

Hobbs is not sure he believes it. Then a hint of a smile starts at the corners of his mouth. Mac has no idea what's happening.

MAC  
What did he say?

Hobbs grabs Mac's arm and half drags him to where he left his jacket and hat.

HOBBS  
He said this ain't no time for talkin'.

He pulls on his jacket. Takes his hat and gun belt and propels Mac through the crowd of GRUMBLING Apaches.

Hobbs pauses by Geronimo. The two men eye each other intently. Then Hobbs pushes Mac ahead of him out of the encampment.

EXT. DESERT

Mac and Hobbs trudge along in the blazing sun. Each step a monumental effort. Hobbs holds Mac by the hand.

MAC  
I still don't understand why Mr. Geronimo let us go.

HOBBS  
I ain't too sure myself. Somethin' to do with Apache ideas about courage.

MAC  
It certainly took courage for Mr. Geronimo to stand up to -- what was his name?

HOBBS  
Sanchez.  
(a beat)  
You didn't do too bad yourself. I guess courage comes in all sizes.

Mac grins, admires Hobbs with his eyes.

MAC  
And colors. You didn't do too badly either.

HOBBS  
Save your breath for walkin'.

MAC  
I wonder why the rest of the Apaches didn't make more of a fuss about letting us go.

HOBBS  
They probably figgered you'd talk us to death out here in the desert.

They stumble along for a few quiet moments. Hobbs scans the

sky and the horizon.

MAC  
Are we going to die, Daniel?

HOBBS  
Someday.

MAC  
I mean now, here?

Hobbs stops and stares off into the desert again.

HOBBS  
Not if that's what I think it is.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DESERT - DAY

The cavalry troop moves at a slow walk. Hobbs, Mac mounted behind him, rides at the head of the column with the young lieutenant and the sergeant.

SERGEANT  
When we found your horse, we just back-tracked to where ya left him.

HOBBS  
And not a minute too soon. We was just about all in.

SERGEANT  
We ain't exactly fresh as daisies ourselves. We been in the saddle for 'bout a week steady.

LIEUTENANT  
Soon as the new troop arrives maybe we'll all get some rest.

SERGEANT  
Them's the most beautiful words I ever heard, Lieutenant. Right, Hobbs?

He glances at Hobbs and Mac. They're both asleep.

EXT. PARADE SQUARE - MORNING

The new troop arrives. Smart in their blue uniforms, the men ride in through the gate, led by CAPT. WALSH.

From the Sutler store, Aaron, Cindy, and Peg look on.

The new men form up in front of Horner's quarters. Hobbs stands beside Capt. Horner as he takes the salute from the new troop commander.

HOBBS  
I was hopin' they'd have some replacements for the ninth.

HORNER  
Let's wait till we hear what the new C.O. has to say.

Capt. Walsh dismounts, turns the troop over to a lieutenant.  
Goes to the porch. Horner and Hobbs salute him.

WALSH  
I'm Captain Walsh.

HORNER  
I'm Horner. A pleasure to meet you,  
Captain. This is Sergeant Hobbs.  
In charge of the ninth cavalry scout  
detachment -- what's left of them.

WALSH  
Oh, you're Hobbs? Good. I've got  
some orders for you.

HORNER  
We can get to that later. Let's go  
inside.  
(to Hobbs)  
See that Captain Walsh's men are  
taken care of.

WALSH  
Let me show you something first.

He leads them to a horse -- a tarpaulin lashed to it. Peels  
back the tarp. Reveals the body of Lorne Pike.

WALSH  
We found him about twenty miles back.  
Beside a burned wagon.

HOBBS  
Guess Sanchez finally got his revenge.

Walsh gives him a quizzical look.

HOBBS  
A personal thing.

Walsh shrugs, disinterested for the moment. Horner takes  
his elbow as they start to his office.

HOBBS  
About them new orders, Cap'n?

HORNER  
Later. See to Pike's body first.

HOBBS  
Yes, sir.

INT. SUTLER STORE - LIVING QUARTERS - NIGHT

Hobbs, Cindy, and Aaron gather around the kitchen table.  
Aaron and Hobbs with coffee mugs. From their expressions,  
it is not a happy meeting.

In the b.g., Mac and Peg are at the baby's crib.

AARON  
Guess Pike decided he didn't need  
his wife's money after all.

HOBBS

What happened to her?

AARON  
Just up and left him.

HOBBS  
Speakin' of leavin'...

He goes to Mac and Peg.

HOBBS  
Why don't you two set out on the porch for a while? It's a real nice night -- and I want to talk to Mr. and Mrs. Wry.

Mac gives him a curious look. Peg smiles, takes Mac's hand and leads him toward the door. Hobbs watches them go then turns to the Wrys. He's troubled.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SUTLER STORE - LIVING QUARTERS - LATER

Hobbs, Cindy, and Aaron are around the table. It's cleared of coffee cups. The air is heavy with gloom.

AARON  
You mean you asked to get sent up north?

HOBBS  
It seemed important at the time.

AARON  
Will this be permanent?

HOBBS  
The army's gettin' ready for a big campaign against the Sioux. No tellin' how long it'll last.

CINDY  
Have you told Mac?

Hobbs shakes his head.

CINDY  
He'll be heart broken.

HOBBS  
I wanted to talk to you two first. Since you're the closest thing he's got to real folks I was thinkin'... Well, maybe you'd be willin' to, you know, look after him.

Aaron takes Cindy's hand. She looks near tears.

AARON  
You know we will.

CINDY  
We always -- we always wanted a brother for Peg.

HOBBS

You couldn't do better than Mac.

Cindy and Aaron nod. Hobbs sighs, pushes his chair back.

HOBBS

Well, it ain't gonna git no easier settin' here. I might as well go tell him.

Aaron and Cindy nod again. Hobbs, head hanging, drags toward the front door.

EXT. SUTLER STORE

Hobbs comes out. Finds Mac and Peg sitting side by side on the front steps.

HOBBS

Time to go.

MAC

Can't I stay a little longer, Daniel? It's still early.

HOBBS

Not tonight, Mac. I need to talk to ya about somethin'. And it can't wait.

MAC

Oh, all right.

He gets up and waves to Peg. Follows Hobbs.

INT. HOBBS' QUARTERS

Mac's face is filled with anguish. Hobbs is packing -- and looks like he just lost his best friend.

MAC

But Daniel...

HOBBS

There ain't no way you can go with me so there's no sense in talkin' about it.

MAC

Then why can't you stay here?

HOBBS

I told ya ten times. When a general says he wants ya for his personal scout, the army don't give ya no choices.

MAC

Then I'll join the army and go with you.

HOBBS

They don't take ten-year-old kids.

MAC

They did in the war.

HOBBS

They was drummers. Where I'm goin'  
they don't need drummers.

MAC

Oh, please, Daniel. Please. Take  
me with you.

Mac cries piteously, heart wrenchingly. Hobbs is beside  
himself.

HOBBS

I can't! Don't ya understand? I  
can't.

Mac throws his arms around Hobbs. Hobbs hugs him in return --  
his eyes cast to the heavens.

HOBBS

You'll always be with me. No matter  
where I go.

Mac sobs.

MAC

I love you, Daniel. I love you.

Now tears flow down Hobbs' cheeks.

HOBBS

I know, Mac, I know. I love you  
too.

EXT. SUTLER STORE - DAY

Hobbs makes adjustments to his horse's gear. Aaron and Cindy,  
Mac and Peg between them, look on -- sad faced.

Hobbs moves to the group and silently shakes hands with Aaron.  
Hugs Cindy. Hugs Peg. Then, hardly able to look him in the  
eye, stands in front of Mac.

HOBBS

I'll be seein' ya, kid.

Mac fights to keep control. His eyes are moist.

MAC

My name isn't kid.

Hobbs musses his hair.

HOBBS

You do what Mr. And Mrs. Wry tells  
ya now, hear?

Mac nods. Follows Hobbs to his horse.

HOBBS

(to Peg)  
And you make sure he helps with the  
dishes.

Peg nods, tries to smile. Hobbs hugs Mac -- turns away  
quickly, rubs a hand over his eyes. He mounts up. Salutes.

Wheels his horse and heads across the parade square toward the gate.

Aaron goes to Mac, puts an arm around his shoulders. Mac, filling up, takes his hand. Cindy and Peg hold back tears.

PEG  
Where's he going, Pa?

AARON  
Montana.

MAC  
He's going to join the seventh cavalry. General Custer asked for him personally because he knows so much about the Sioux and Chief Crazy Horse.

He dabs at his eyes, forces a little smile.

MAC  
Daniel's the best scout in the whole army.

At the gate Hobbs turns, waves. Mac's smile weakens. His lips tremble. Peg squeezes closer to Cindy.

PEG  
Will we ever see him again, Pa?

Mac looks up. Aaron hugs him closer, smiles.

AARON  
Someday. The Good Lord willin'.

They watch Hobbs ride out the gate. He turns and waves again. Mac waves back, wipes at the tears on his cheeks.

MAC  
(softly)  
Goodbye, Daniel.

He watches as Hobbs is swallowed up by the shimmering desert.

FADE OUT:

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