

FADE IN:

EXT. CALIFORNIA COUNTRYSIDE - EARLY MORNING

The rolling hills of the California 'Gold Country' can be seen in the light of the brightening eastern sky. As the sun begins to peek over the horizon ...

CUT TO:

EXT. BRANT'S BRIDGE - EARLY MORNING

A long covered bridge over a swiftly flowing river. Nearby are the remains of a ruined mill.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRANT'S BRIDGE - MILL - EARLY MORNING

At a camp fire against a protected wall of the mill building three men wait, warming themselves by the flames. They are; COLLEY, DOC SAWYER, and DAN PEEPLES. Nearby their horses crop an occasional tuft of grass. Peeples paces nervously.

PEEPLES

... I say we go in. How do we know he'll be here?

DOC

He'll be here, keep your shirt on. Ben's having a last look around.

PEEPLES

How do you know? We ain't seen him in a week.

COLLEY

We know. All right? Doc an' me, we been doin' this a long time.

Beginning faintly, the sound of a horse's hooves echoing along the board floor of the covered bridge come on. Dan Peeples draws his pistol as they peer towards the opening of the bridge. He glances at the other men nervously. Doc & Colley appear unperturbed

DOC

That will be him now.

PEEPLES

Let's hope so. It could be anyone. It could be the *Sheriff*.

COLLEY

Dan, you simmer down, and put away that hog-leg.

DOC

If need be we're just travelers, resting our horses. Nobody is going to be after us *until* we've committed a crime.

BEN CURRY rides his horse out of the entrance of the bridge. Ben is a sandy haired block of a man, heavy but hard.

The men relax.

Ben checks his watch. It is six-fifteen. He indicates the way he has just come with a tilt of his head.

BEN

Gentlemen, we've five minutes ...
Mount up.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRANT'S CROSSING - SIDE STREET HOUSE - MORNING

It is a modest home with a rope swing hanging from a tree in the yard. On the front porch a boy of eight is sitting on the steps. He is MIGUEL or MIKE SANTOS. He jumps up as his father, JUAN, comes out of the house. Juan shrugs on his coat. Mike runs over and picks up a small crate full of empty bottles that is sitting on the porch.

JUAN

Ready?

YOUNG MIKE

Yep.

JUAN

You want me to carry that?

YOUNG MIKE

I can do it.

JUAN

Well, you be careful then ... that's glass.

Let's go.

They walk off toward Main Street side by side. Mike proudly carries the crate even though his knees bump it as he walks, clinking the glass.

TITLE: BRANT'S CROSSING, CALIFORNIA - 1870

CUT TO:

INT. BRANT'S BRIDGE - MORNING

Ben & his men ride through the bridge. They are silhouetted in the opening at the other end.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET - MORNING

As they walk down the street Mike and Juan pass MR. SPENCER, who is headed up the street.

SPENCER
(coming on)
'morning, Juan.

JUAN
Good morning.

YOUNG MIKE
Good morning, Mr. Spencer.

SPENCER
Hello, Michael. That's quite a load you've got there.

YOUNG MIKE
Yes, Sir.

Juan and his son continue on to their shop.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRANT'S CROSSING - SIDE STREET - MORNING

Four abreast, Ben & his men ride into town on a side street.

CUT TO:

INT. BRANT'S CROSSING - BASTAIN'S STORE - MORNING

Mike & Juan enter. Juan walks behind the counter.

JUAN
Here...

He takes the crate from Mike.

JUAN

Ooo, that's heavy.

YOUNG MIKE

Aww, Papa ...

JUAN

Okay, it's not that heavy. Let's see, two, four, eight ... ten. What's that come to?

YOUNG MIKE

It's twenty cents.

JUAN

Very good ... and a nickel for carrying it down.

YOUNG MIKE

Thanks!

JUAN

Hard work always pays off ... you're for better things than running a grocery, Miguelito ... God willing.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRANT'S CROSSING - BANK - MORNING

Ben, Doc, Colley & Peeples ride up. They stop alongside the bank. Ben and two of his men dismount.

BEN

There'll be no shooting ... unless you have to.

Doc Sawyer stays with the horses. Colley stops just outside the door, watching the street. Ben and Peeples go in.

CUT TO:

INT. BRANT'S CROSSING - BANK - MORNING

Mr. Spencer turns the last number on the combination lock. As he pulls the door open he hears the outside door open behind him. He turns ...

THE OUTLAWS (SPENCER'S POV) - Colley is standing in the door, facing out toward the street. Ben Curry and Dan Peeples have moved into the lobby. The light from the windows backlights them so that ...

Spencer, peering toward the door, can see only their outlines.

SPENCER

Sorry, Gentlemen, we're not open yet.

Peeples steps forward. The light from a side window now catches him, revealing the bandanna drawn up over his face. He raises his pistol and cocks it.

PEEPLS

Oh yes, you are.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. BRANT'S CROSSING - SANTOS'S STORE - MORNING

Juan is moving a display of merchandise out onto the walk in front of the store. Mike is sitting on a stool by the window, tilting a can to the light.

YOUNG MIKE

Papa ..?

Juan walks behind him picking up some goods. He looks over Mike's shoulder.

YOUNG MIKE

What's pur ... pur-red ...

JUAN

Pure-eed. That's mashed.

YOUNG MIKE

Yuk.

Juan chuckles as he heads back outside. He positions the display, then looks up the street.

JUAN

Que es eso?

Mike climbs down from his stool. He goes to join his father.

YOUNG MIKE

What's what?

JUAN

Somebody at the bank ...

A block up the street there are three riderless horses and one with a rider who's back is turned. This man, Doc Sawyer, turns and looks up the street, right into Mike's eyes. He has a bandanna drawn up over his face in classic outlaw style.

CUT TO:

INT. BRANT'S CROSSING - BANK - MORNING

PEEPLS

Come on! Come on! Move it along!

The last bag of money is snatched out of the safe. Spencer turns as Peeples's pistol cuts across his head, the blow driving him to his knees.

PEEPLS

You put one foot outside this door and I'll kill you.

Ben grabs Peeples from behind and hurls him towards the door.

BEN

Come on. Did you hear me tell you? No rough stuff.

Peeples turns on him ...

PEEPLS

Damn you, Ben!

Ben back-hands Peeples across the mouth, crowding him back across the wall.

BEN

And no names. Now move!

Ben pushes him out the door to the bank.

CUT TO:

INT. BRANT'S CROSSING - SANTOS'S STORE - MORNING

Juan pulls Mike back into the store.

JUAN

Miguell, I'm going to have to get the Marshal. You stay right here, understand? I'm going out the back.

YOUNG MIKE

Okay ...

JUAN

... and get down on the floor, there may be shooting!

Mike crawls behind a display case. Juan heads toward the back door.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRANT'S CROSSING - BANK - MORNING

Ben & Peeples mount up. The others cover the street, rifles ready.

CUT TO:

INT. BRANT'S CROSSING - BACK OF SANTOS'S STORE - MORNING

Juan opens the door and heads off along the backs of the buildings.

CUT TO:

INT. BRANT'S CROSSING - SANTOS'S STORE - MORNING

Mike crawls out from under the counter and peeks out the front door.

THE OUTLAWS (MIKE'S POV) - spur their horses down the street toward Mike.

Mike backs away, then realizing they are headed in the same direction as his father . . .

YOUNG MIKE

Pa ..?

He runs for the back door. Outside the store windows the outlaws gallop past as they head out of town.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRANT'S CROSSING - BACK OF SANTOS'S STORE - MORNING

Juan is headed down a small slope. Across a grassy area other buildings are visible.

The outlaws sweep around the corner of the building.

Mike runs along the backs of the buildings to warn his father ...

Juan slips going down the slope and falls. The outlaws rein in. Peeples's horse rears. Juan scrambles to get from under it's hooves. Peeples draws his gun and shoots Juan in the back.

Mike comes to a stop at the top of the slope, seeing ...

Juan dead on the ground in a confusion of horses and dust.

YOUNG MIKE

Papa ..? *Papa!*

Ben stops, reining around, taking in the situation. Colley moves to cover their backs. There is a motionless moment as the dust settles.

BEN

Daniel. You haven't been listening to me.

Peeples angrily turning to face Ben.

PEEPLS

He was in my way!

Ben raises his large Colt's Dragoon and shoots Peeples out of the saddle. Ben looks over at Mike, he reaches up and pulls his bandanna down.

BEN

Boy! You tell them what happened here, understand me?

Doc grabs the reins to Peeples's horse. The outlaws ride off in a clatter of hooves.

Mike stands over his fallen father. BOOM UP.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRANT'S BRIDGE - SOUTH END - MORNING

At the bridge entrance dust settles on the road as the pound of running hooves echoes inside the bridge ...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. WALL OF WANTED POSTERS - CREDITS OVER

Wanted posters that start in the 1850s and continue on to 1870s. Some tacked up over others. MOVE ACROSS to end on one of Ben Curry much as he has looked in the preceding scene.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BRANT'S CROSSING - CHURCH & CEMETERY - DAY

A small white church on a hillside. Around it is a scattering of graves, one newly excavated. Several rigs are pulled up and a solemn group of people stand singing "Gather at the River".

PREACHER

We gather to celebrate the life of Juan Santos. The presence of so many friends ...

CLOSER - the TOWNSPEOPLE stand silently. Mr. Spencer, his head wrapped in a bandage is in attendance. Mike and the PREACHER stand at the head of the freshly dug grave.

PREACHER

... and so, my friends, we commit the body of Juan Santos to the earth, and his soul to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Ben Curry , looking like a businessman, and ROUNDY, an older man dressed in the worn buckskins that, in an earlier period, were the trademark of a mountain man watch the ceremony from the back of the group of people.

Mike watches the THE PALLBEARERS step forward to lower the coffin into the grave with ropes.

Ben Curry steps up beside a WOMAN. She glances at him.

BEN

Ma'am ...

WOMAN

It's a terrible thing.

BEN

That it is. Where's the boy's mother?

WOMAN

I'm afraid Mr. Santos was a widower. Mr. Denslow will take him, he's done it before.

She nods toward MR. DENSLow, a beaten looking farmer with a mousey wife and six dirty children. They stand waiting like a white trash version of the painting, "American Gothic."

BEN

Is that the best home you can give him?

The woman turns to Ben, frowning.

WOMAN

He's an honest, God-fearing, man ... and being a farmer he has plenty of work for children.

BEN

Poor kid.

Ben walks toward the grave ...

A couple of Townspeople stop for a moment beside Mike and mumble some condolences. A wagon trundles away from the cemetery entrance. Only the Denslow family, and the men who are filling the grave remain

Ben bends down to Mike. The boy looks at him ...

BEN

Do you remember who I am?

YOUNG MIKE

You're the bank robber ... you shot that man ...

BEN

And are you afraid of me?

YOUNG MIKE

(he is, a little)

No.

BEN

Good boy. Now, what's your name?

YOUNG MIKE

Miguel.

BEN

What happened to your father is my fault. I'm very sorry ... do you understand that?

YOUNG MIKE

Yes.

BEN

Do you know who's going to take care of you now?

YOUNG MIKE

I'm going to live with Farmer Denslow.

BEN

And is that what you want?

YOUNG MIKE

(squinting up at Ben)

Do I have a choice?

Ben chuckles, pleased with the boy's response.

BEN

You always have a choice, if you have the courage to make it.

Ben gives him the punch-line

BEN

You could come with me.

Now, I don't know if you'd like it ... We don't get up early. There'd be no slopping the hogs or milking cows ...

I live a long way from here and if you came along I'd have to teach you to ride, and shoot ...

Mike looks over at Mr. Denslow

One of the DENSLOW CHILDREN starts to pick his nose with a dirty finger, Denslow glances over and cuffs the kid.

BEN

Doesn't look good, does it?

Mike looks up and somberly shakes his head.

BEN

Do you want to come along?

Mike nods.

With his hand on Mike's shoulder, Ben turns and leads him away from the grave. Roundy has moved up with the horses.

ROUNDY

You ready to dust out of here?

BEN

This here's Roundy. He's my oldest friend.

YOUNG MIKE

Hello Sir.

Roundy hands Ben his reins. Ben mounts up. He leans over to speak to Mike.

BEN

Now, shake my hand like we're saying good-bye. We don't want to alarm these good people ...

Ben reaches down as if to shake hands with the boy, and then lifts him up into the saddle.

BEN

... until the last moment.

MR. Denslow steps forward ...

DENSLOW

Hey, what are you doing? Micheal!

BEN

Hi-yhaa!

Ben turns his horse and gallops off.

DENSLOW

Michael?!

MRS. DENSLOW places a hand on his arm, holding him back.

Ben, Mike & Roundy leap the cemetery fence and head off toward the mountains.

The Denslow family stands there, only the youngest of Denslow's children waves good bye ...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FOOTHILL TRAIL - DAY

Ben, Mike, & Roundy are riding down the trail. Off in the distance the hills of central California give way to the Sierras.

BEN

Out there, is the Sierra Nevada.
Tomorrow we'll be at Robber's Roost.

YOUNG MIKE

What's that?

Roundy rides past them to go first down the trail.

ROUNDY

Robber's Roost? Why that's home,
young fellow.

BEN

It's in a secret canyon where no one
can find us.

YOUNG MIKE

A Secret Canyon?

BEN

That's right. Only my boys and the
Indians know where it is.

There won't be any other kids, but
there'll be the whole canyon to play
in.

YOUNG MIKE

Will I have to go to school?

BEN

Hell, no . . . Well, I guess we will
have to teach you . . .

I'll send for all the books. We can't
have you growing up ignorant.

What do you think, Roundy? We could get Tom Croydon to teach him to open safes, and I'll ask Burton to show him how to cheat at cards ...

Roundy riding up the trail ahead of them, starts to laugh.

BEN

What's so funny?

Roundy turning to look back.

ROUNDY

If you're not careful, he'll grow up to be just like you.

BEN

And what's wrong with that?

ROUNDY

Time will tell, Ben. Time will tell.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN LANDSCAPE - DAY

Ben, and Roundy, with Mike riding double travel through the foot hills toward the Sierra's forested slopes.

CUT TO:

EXT. RIVER CANYON - DAY

The three are heading uphill, below them the river gets ever narrower as they head higher into the mountains.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORREST - DAY

They wind their way through groves of huge trees and then ride alongside a small stream.

Where the stream disappears into a crack in the rocks Ben stops his horse and, pinching his fingers together, whistles.

Up in the rocks above a man's head appears.

OUTLAW 1

Come on in, Boss. I know it's you; I've had you in my sights for five hundred yards.

They ride up into the crack.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - LATE AFTERNOON

The hideout is in a high mountain meadow surrounded by spruce and pine and backed by rocky cliffs. There are several buildings. A saloon and four big plank walled tents. A large barn. Roundy's cabin; a much older log house, long and low, stands off to one side, and on a low rise overlooking this mini-town is Ben's house, a large cabin made of wood and stone. A stream runs along one side of the enclave.

Ben reaches up and lifts Mike down from Roundy's saddle.

BEN

This is it, Mike. Welcome home.

YOUNG MIKE

Wow!

BEN

You know, Roundy, I've always wanted a son ...

Mike yawns and rubs his eyes. Roundy & Ben laugh.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - SALOON - DAY

Doc and Colley are standing on the porch with Ben receiving last minute instructions on a job. YOUNG Mike appears, leading their horses.

YOUNG MIKE

Here you are, sir.

COLLEY

Sir! You hear that, I'm being treated like a real gent. If I can I'll return with my pockets full of gold and a *high hat*, if'n I can find one.

YOUNG MIKE

Good luck, Mr. Sawyer.

DOC

Colley's right, you are of formal bent this morning. Tell us to 'break a leg.'

YOUNG MIKE

But . . .

DOC

It's not what you're thinking. It's a bow, a bow to the audience. Robbery is a performance, like many other things in life.

Ben waves. They take the reins and after ruffling young Mike's hair, ride off.

BEN

He's right, Son.
(to the departing men)
Break a leg!
(to himself)
Break a leg, my Gentlemen of Opportunity.

YOUNG MIKE

I want to go with them.

BEN

No . . . no, Michael, I don't think so.

YOUNG MIKE

I want to go with them someday.

BEN

We'll see. All in good time.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN WATERFALL - DAY

In the pool at it's base, Mike and Roundy trying to fish with their hands. Mike straightens up, a fish wriggling out of his grasp. Behind him Roundy is laughing. Mike turns and splashes him, Roundy splashes back.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST CANYON - DAY

An old whiskey bottle explodes! Then one alongside it. Ben is drawing and firing his pistol. He hands a Navy model Colt to Mike. Mike lifts it and fires ... A can jumps from the log.

CUT TO:

INT. ROBBER'S ROOST - SALOON - NIGHT

Doc is shuffling cards he cuts the deck then hands it to Mike who deals them out to Ben and Doc, then turns up his cards.

Mike's cards are four kings and a two. Doc's cards are four twos and a six. Ben slowly smiles.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIERRA FORREST - DAY

A deer track pressed into the soft earth. TILT UP to see Mike and Roundy. Roundy is pointing through the brush at ...

A large buck is cropping grass in a clearing.

CUT TO:

INT. ROBBER'S ROOST - SALOON - NIGHT

CAMERA MOVES TO COVER drinks being poured, outlaws arm wrestling, laughing, whooping it up. Sitting hunched against the back wall, a SIXTEEN YEAR OLD MIKE is concentrating on reading a thick book. Ben is talking to several MEN at a table nearby.

END MONTAGE:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - CANYON RIM - AFTERNOON

Ben & Mike sit on a rock overlooking Robber's Roost Canyon, the sun is low on the the horizon. Below them the buildings of the hideout can be seen in the distance. After a moment Ben speaks.

BEN

You know, there's more to life than this.

He indicates the secluded canyon.

BEN

There's cities and there's lights and music and women. A lot of different places and different kinds of people.

Ben looks over.

BEN

You need to see that, Mike.

There's a world of experience out there and you're going to have to learn how to make your way in it sooner or later.

Mike as he realizes what Ben is saying.

MIKE

You want me to go?

BEN

Yes I do. Before the snow comes.

Roundy will take you down and he'll help you find a job somewhere. Then you'll be on your own.

MIKE

Pa? I ... I want to work with you. I want to ride out with the boys and help you.

Ben puts his arm around Mike pulling him close.

BEN

We can talk about that later. There's a lot to life I can't teach you.

MIKE

Do I have to go right away?

BEN

In a month. You'll be all right, it won't hurt you to work for a living.

Hell, even I did it once.

A flock of geese soaring high over the mountains, is heading south in a V formation.

FADE OUT:

EXT. ROUNDHOUSE - NIGHT

There is a crash of thunder, lightning arcs across the sky. Rain is falling in sheets. The doors of two of the engine bays are open, throwing shafts of light into the yard. An engine, puffing steam and smoke, is being backed onto the turnstile and turned so that it heads down the tracks.

TITLE: KLAMATH FALLS, OREGON -- 9 YEARS LATER (1886)

A HORSEMAN picks his way through the muddy rail yard, DOLLY BACK with him as he comes on. The buffalo hair collar on his oiled leather coat is buttoned close and his hat tucked low.

ENGINEER

Hey Buddy, get that nag outa here!

His mount is skittish around the lights and puffing engines. As he approaches the light of one of the open doors THE HORSEMAN becomes recognizable as an older, more grizzled Roundy. Several of the RAIL YARD WORKERS look up at him curiously.

YARD WORKER

Would you look at this? We got the great scout in from the woods.

Hey! You seen any *injuns* out there?

The other men laugh as Roundy dismounts.

ROUNDY

Tell me, son, have you ever seen a scalp taken?

YARD WORKER

No ...

ROUNDY

Well it's not a pretty sight.

Roundy reaches out, grabs a fore-lock of the Yard Worker's hair in one hand and draws his Bowie knife with the other.

YARD WORKER

Hey? Hey! Let me go!

ROUNDY

You start about *here* and kind of *work* your way back.

The other men watch, frozen.

ROUNDY

If you don't tell me where I can find Mike Santos I might take me a scalp right here ... just to *amuse* my self ... and to teach you and your friends here some respect for your elders.

YARD WORKER

He's ... (clears throat) He's in the pit.

ROUNDY

Best lead me to him, son. I wouldn't want to lose my way.

CUT TO:

INT/EXT. ROUNDHOUSE - MACHINE SHOP - NIGHT

Roundy follows the man between steaming engines, past a forge, and through a shop where machines run, powered by leather belts spun by a drive shaft in the rafters.

Beneath an enormous locomotive, in a pit where men struggle to move steel wheels five feet across with huge jacks and heavy wrenches, Roundy finds Mike.

YARD WORKER

Hey! Hey, Mike! There's someone here to see you ...

MIKE

Roundy!

It is a different Mike who looks up at him, face stained with oil and grime, heavy muscles bunched. He is twenty-one years old, bigger, harder, a man, or nearly one.

MIKE

Here, Paddy take my place.

Mike vaults out of the pit and grasps the old man in a fierce bear hug ...

MIKE

Roundy!

MIKE

It's good to see you.

ROUNDY

Likewise, son. You've been gone far too long.

Roundy seems ill at ease in the noisy shop.

ROUNDY

Let's go outside. Can you take a minute?

MIKE

Yeah ... sure.

They walk to the big doors of the roundhouse. The rain has stopped and Mike & Roundy stand outside to talk.

ROUNDY

Ben wants you to come home.

MIKE

Is there something wrong? Is Pa all right?

ROUNDY

He's fine but he wants to talk with you.

Ben's not getting any younger ... and things are changing.

MIKE

What do you mean?

ROUNDY

I'd rather you see that for yourself.

Back between the engines a ROUNDHOUSE BOSS is passing, he notices Mike and comes over.

ROUNDHOUSE BOSS

(coming on)

Hey!

What is this? Santos, get back to work!

MIKE

Sorry, Sir. This is my ... This is my uncle. He was just ...

ROUNDHOUSE BOSS

Not on company time! I want steam up on Number Three by the time Schiller comes in. Now move, mister!

MIKE

Yes, sir.

The Roundhouse Boss moves off into the darkness.

MIKE

There's a parlor car you can sack out in. I'll draw my time and we'll leave in the morning.

(Mike draws a deep
breath)

Right now, I've got a shift to finish.

Roundy watches as Mike moves off into the maze of equipment and engines.

CUT TO:

EXT. CALIFORNIA VALLEY - DAY

Mike & Roundy ride through a wide, flat valley.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE AND HILLS - DAY

Mike & Roundy water their horses at a small lake.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOOTHILL CAMP - NIGHT

Mike & Roundy crawl into their blankets after a long day. A camp fire crackles nearby.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOOTHILL LANDSCAPE - DAY

Mike & Roundy ride out of an oak shaded arroyo and turn onto a road. Behind them a steam tractor trundles along.

END MONTAGE:

EXT. CALIFORNIA HILLSIDE - MORNING

On a low hilltop crowned with an old oak tree Roundy sits silhouetted against the sky. Mike rides up and dismounts. Mike drops the reins and walks a couple of steps, stretching his legs. Mike's horse stands nearby, cropping grass.

ROUNDY

You've done a good job training that horse.

Mike sits beside him.

MIKE

Well, Ben always told me; "treat a horse like you treat a friend, because you never know when you'll need one or the other."

ROUNDY

Not bad advice.

Roundy glances at the sun to check the time.

ROUNDY

Let's picket these critters and take a walk. I've something to show you.

Mike looks up at him curiously.

CUT TO:

EXT. RAFTER R RANCH - MORNING

Viewed from the top of a hill, the house and out buildings are set in a stand of oaks. A small stream runs through the ranch yard.

Mike & Roundy crouch behind a mass of boulders at the base of a dead tree.

ROUNDY

(quietly)

Nice place, isn't it?

MIKE

So ...

Roundy puts his finger to his lips. Then he hands Mike a set of binoculars and points down toward the house. Mike looks.

CLOSER (BINOC MATT) - A man, (JACK CONEELY) leads a horse up to the front gate and then Ben Curry walks out to meet him.

Mike starts to get up from his position on the ground.

MIKE

That's Ben ...

Roundy pulls him back down.

ROUNDY

No, Mike ... We can't let him see us.

Mike settles back down looking at Roundy for an answer.

MIKE

Why not?

ROUNDY

That there's the Rafter R ranch, Ben owns it under the name Ben Regan.

MIKE

So Dad bought a ranch; it's a good front operation.

ROUNDY

The Rafter R isn't a front. Ben has owned it for seventeen years and besides me, you are the only other person that knows that Ben Curry and Ben Regan are the same.

MIKE

Seventeen years ..?

Roundy points again.

A young woman comes out to say 'good-bye' to Ben. After a moment she is joined by another. Ben kisses them both.

MIKE

There's a woman down there.

ROUNDY

Ben Regan has two daughters, Drusilla,
and Juliana.

Mike looks at Roundy.

MIKE

Daughters?

What about a wife?

Roundy turns away putting his back to the tree.

ROUNDY

Her name was Abigail. She died giving
birth to Julie. That was about a year
before Ben found you. Abigail's
brother, Jack, runs this place.

MIKE

You're the only one who knows?

ROUNDY

And now you. -- You can't ask Ben. If
he knew I brought you here he'd have
my hide.

Mike looks back through the glasses.

Ben mounts up and rides off. The girls wave. He
disappears into the trees, after a moment he reappears
following the road over a hill.

MIKE

Why did you show me this?

Roundy turns to look at him.

ROUNDY

Your father could walk away from
Robber's Roost and live comfortably
for the rest of his life. In fact,
one of these days he plans to do just
that.

Mike looks at him then back toward the house.

DRU is looking down the road after Ben. Mike's gaze
lingers on her.

CUT TO:

EXT. RIVER FORD - DAY

Mike & Roundy ride down to the river ford. They stop to rest their horses before swimming them across the river.

MIKE

Roundy? Why didn't he tell me?

ROUNDY

Ahh, Ben hoards secrets like some men hoard money.

MIKE

Well, if this is all some big secret, what happens if we run into Ben on the trail.

ROUNDY

He doesn't come this way.

MIKE

Huh? The only other place to cross is forty miles down river.

ROUNDY

Ben'll be at the Roost two hours before we are. He's got his own way across, but I don't know where it is.

MIKE

Roundy, you're making me nervous.

ROUNDY

Why's that?

MIKE

You're showing me this and that-- But you aren't telling me anything.

ROUNDY

People learn better when they figure things out for themselves. Telling the answers just makes them lazy.

Mike turns to him.

MIKE

Yeah? Well, I hope later on you don't wish you'd just come out and said it.

Roundy reflects for a moment.

ROUNDY

So do I, son ... so do I.

Gid-ap!

He turns away and rides his horse into the water.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBBERS ROOST APPROACH - EVENING

Roundy & Mike ride into the mouth of the canyon. They wave to a GUARD in the rocks.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - EVENING

Mike & Roundy ride in.

The place has changed, there are more tents and buildings but they are in bad condition. There is trash piled against the side of the saloon, and everywhere there are rough looking outlaws idling about, watching Mike and Roundy narrowly as they ride by.

MIKE

Jesus, Roundy ... Who are these guys?

ROUNDY

The gang has grown. There's twenty men here now.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - BEN'S PORCH - EVENING

Mike & Roundy ride up. The front door opens and Ben steps out. He is heavier and his hair is almost completely grey. He is dressed in a slightly sloppier manner compared to earlier times, like it's been years since he's been anywhere where it mattered what he looked like. He walks to the edge of the porch.

Mike slips off his horse and climbs the steps to the porch. He stops, looking at Ben close up. Ben sticks out his hand.

BEN

Ahh, Mike. Welcome home.

Mike goes along with it, takes his hand and shakes it. Then laughing, embraces Ben lifting him off the porch.

MIKE

Hi, Pa.

They separate but Ben keeps his arm around Mike's shoulders.

BEN

They've been putting some meat on your bones, haven't they?

BEN

Come on inside, Roundy. I'll have Shan Bao fix up some supper.

Ben turns toward the house.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - BEN'S PORCH - NIGHT

Ben & Mike are leaning on the railing looking out over Robbers Roost. Inside, through a set of doors, SHAN BAO, a Chinese, is cleaning off the dinner table.

MIKE

Pa, did you ever want a family? More than just me, I mean.

BEN

I was married once ... she died before you came along.

MIKE

Did you have any children?

Ben looks at Mike then away.

BEN

That's old history, Mike. If I had it to do over ... I don't know what I'd do.

Come on, let's go get a drink.

Ben pushes away from the rail and turns to walk down to the saloon. Mike moves after him.

MIKE

This place has changed ...

You've got a lot of new men here.

BEN

We're doing more jobs. Last year my cut alone was over a hundred thousand dollars.

MIKE

It's not like the old days though, is it?

BEN

What do you mean?

MIKE

Do you really know all these men? I didn't recognize anybody down there. How do you trust them?

BEN

Trust them? They're thieves!

... they know what happens if they hold out on me.

MIKE

So, who's left ... from the old gang?

BEN

Colley, and Doc ... and Roundy, but he just likes living up here ... away from "civilized" men.

MIKE

I worry about you ...

BEN

You afraid I can't take care of myself?

MIKE

No, but you're not getting any younger.

BEN

Ahh? Well, the older I get ... the *meaner* I get.

Ben stops a moment outside the door to the saloon building.

BEN

Go on. I'll see if Colley's around, he'll want to see you.

MIKE

Okay.

BEN

Pour me one, I'll be right in.

Ben heads further down the street.

CUT TO:

INT. ROBBER'S ROOST - SALOON - NIGHT

Mike steps in and looks around. It is a plain room, raw planks and simple furniture. Four or five men sit around drinking and playing cards. A couple of them glance up at Mike.

Mike walks to the bar, gets down a couple of mugs, and pours himself a beer from a keg with a tap in it.

PERRIN, MOLINA, and DUCROW, are sitting at a card table. Molina looks up and notices Mike.

MOLINA

Hey, Kirb ... who's that?

Perrin looks up, Molina nods to indicate Mike.

PERRIN

Hell if I know.

MOLINA

Well, someone brought him up here.

DUCROW

I never seen him before. Give me a card.

Perrin puts down his cards and walks over to the bar. Mike starts to take a drink but Perrin holds his hand down.

PERRIN

I don't know you.

MIKE

I'm Mike Santos.
(hardening)
I don't know you either.

PERRIN

I'm Perrin. And if you're new around here it's best you check in with me first.

MIKE

I was just visiting Ben ... and I'm not new.

Molina and Ducrow come over and stop behind Mike, who warily assesses the situation. He is used to being instantly accepted here but he hasn't been back in a long time.

MOLINA

You know the name, but nobody "just visits" Ben.

DUCROW

How the hell'd you get in here?

PERRIN

Kid, I've never seen you before, and if you haven't got it figured, we don't exactly hang out the string for strangers around here.

MIKE

I don't want any trouble.

PERRIN

Yeah? Well that's good. I'll tell you the secret.

He reaches out and taps Mike on the nose, looking around at the others for their approval.

PERRIN

You find me in the morning and we'll see what Ben says. If you're okay with him, I'll let you have a drink. If you're not, I'll kill you.

Mike looks back at him.

PERRIN

Comprende?

MIKE

(simmering, but careful)

Jesus ...

PERRIN

Now, get out of here.

Mike turns and goes out the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - SALOON PORCH - NIGHT

Mike steps out and stops. Ben stands on the porch looking out into the night, he has been watching all of this from the shadows beyond the door. He eyes Mike narrowly.

BEN

You know son, the rules are different up here.

Mike realizing that this is a test. Ben looks evenly at Mike challenging him to go back inside.

CUT TO:

INT. ROBBER'S ROOST - SALOON - NIGHT

Mike comes back in. Perrin looks over his shoulder at Mike, smirking ...

PERRIN

Uh-oh, we've made it mad ...

Mike crosses the room towards them. Perrin starts to get up. Without missing a step Mike scoops up a chair and swinging it over his head sends it crashing down on Perrin.

Perrin throws the wreckage of the chair aside and get up off the floor. Mike lets him get up.

PERRIN

You are one STUPID kid!

DUCROW

Get him Kirb!

Perrin rushes Mike. Mike turns slightly away and slams Perrin in the kidney. Perrin comes around and Mike blocks several blows, then finding an opening knocks Perrin against the wall. Mike puts several punches into Perrin's belly then steps aside, Perrin falls gasping.

MIKE

This is my home. And I don't like being pushed around!

The saloon doors bang open and Ben enters -- intentionally late to stop any part of the fight. He puts himself between Mike & Perrin. Mike stands by, he's not going after Perrin any more, but Ben plays it to the hilt.

BEN

That's enough, Mike. That's enough, it's over.

Ben dusts Perrin off, shaking his head.

BEN

Kirby, you just got to be more careful who you fool with.

He turns to the others.

BEN

Gentlemen, It's my pleasure to introduce you to my son, Mike.

The outlaws just stare at him. Molina steps forward ...

MOLINA

El hijo del jefe.
(to Mike)
Me llamo Joaquin Molina.

He offers his hand ... they shake.

MIKE

Hola, Joaquin. Como estas?

Molina shrugs.

BEN

He's been working up north, but now
he's going to stay with us for awhile.

That's Ducrow.

Ducrow throws Mike a slight wave, giving away as little
as possible.

BEN

And your dancing partner, here is
Kirby Perrin...

Perrin spits blood on the floor.

BEN

Don't hold this against him, Kirb.
Come on ...

Ben reaches out and jostles Perrin in a friendly way but
a bit too roughly for someone who has just been in a
fight. Perrin winces. Mike steps up to Ben & Perrin and
offers his hand. Perrin, getting it over with, quickly
reaches out without looking directly at him.

BEN

Kirb brought in a lot of these new
men. He's a good man even if he is
getting too big for his britches.

BEN

Shall we have that drink?

MIKE

No, I'm going to get some sleep.

Mike walks to the door and goes out.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - SALOON - NIGHT

Mike takes a few deep breaths gazing out at the moon lit night, taking a moment to regain his composure. Then he laughs to himself and heads off to bed.

CUT TO:

INT. ROBBER'S ROOST - BEN'S HOUSE - MIKE'S ROOM - MORNING

Mike is in bed. Morning sunlight is coming through the windows. Mike stars up at the ceiling. There are footsteps at the bottom of the stairs and through the door Mike hears ...

BEN (O.S.)
Michael? Michael?

Ben starts up the stairs.

MIKE
Yeah ..?
(louder)
Yeah!

Ben opens the door to the room, sticks his head in.

BEN
Get up. Let's go, we're burning daylight.

He immediately heads back downstairs leaving the door open.

MIKE
Go?
(calling to Ben)
Go where?

BEN (O.S.)
Come on! I've got something to show you.

MIKE
(grumbling to himself)
What? What is it?

Sighing, he pulls himself out of bed.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - BEN'S PORCH - MORNING

Mike comes out on the porch, he is tucking in his shirt and obviously hurrying to keep up with Ben. He stops suddenly ...

Ben is grinning up at Mike from the bottom of the porch steps. He is holding the lead of a beautiful horse. The horse's ears prick forward.

BEN

When I saw her I couldn't help thinking of you.

Mike throws Ben an appreciative look, he steps off the porch and carefully examines the horse. Ben watches him, pleased.

MIKE

She's beautiful ...

Ben mounts another horse.

BEN

Come on. You try her out.

Mike mounts up. Ben tugs his hat firmly on his head, then spurs his horse out of the area in front of the house and down the street of the town.

BEN

Yeaaa!

Mike watches him go, shaking his head. Then he gives the new horse her head and runs to catch him.

MIKE

Get up. *Ha!*

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - CANYON RIM - MORNING

Ben & Mike lead their horses along the rim of the canyon overlooking Robber's Roost. Ben makes his way to an old and familiar rock ...

BEN

You know, you got me thinking last night. There are some things I should have told you about long ago.

MIKE

About your family?

BEN

No. My life ... and you're part in it.

When I was just a boy, I worked in the mines in Pennsylvania. From when I was eight until I ran away at sixteen I never saw the sun.

Roundy and I were part of the rabble that General Scott turned out of the army in Mexico City. But when gold was discovered here in California we decided to get some for ourselves.

Roundy disappeared into the mountains and I took to robbing stages. I thought I was 'Brennan on the Moor' or perhaps Robin Hood. Only I gave mine to the poor saloon keepers and the ladies of ... Well, let's just say the ladies. I took a lot of risks and I spent freely. Needless to say, I never had any money.

One night I was put in jail. Nothing serious, they locked me up for fighting. So, I was sitting there on the floor and I started to sober up ... You can't get away with this forever, I thought ... But then I realized-- *I could!* *If* I was careful and *if* I was smart.

Now, I'll be getting around to the point here in just a minute.

MIKE

No ... no. Go ahead.

BEN

I'm getting older and I've got to think about all that I've built here.

I'm going to retire, Mike. In my business when you start thinking about it, you'd best do it ... because you're losing your edge.

MIKE

Well, what are you planning to do, where are you going to live?

BEN

I haven't made up my mind yet.

There's something more important. I'm concerned about the boys.

They've been very successful, but they need a strong leader.

So Mike, I'm going to give it to you.

MIKE

To me?

BEN

It's everything I've built. I have to leave it in good hands -- and you're the only person I trust.

MIKE

Whow. When you sent me away I figured that was the end of it.

BEN

I had to wait for the right time. I've thought about this for years, but you had to be ready.

MIKE

Ben, I'm honored. But I always thought more of working *with* you. Running this operation ..? I don't know if I could live up to everything ...

BEN

Of course you can. You've been trained by Old Tom, Burton, and even Roundy. How many times have I taken you with me when I went to scout a job?

MIKE

I don't know ... often enough.

BEN

You have all the training but no record. You'll be a mystery. The law will never find you, and if they do they'll have the devil's own time proving anything.

MIKE

What are the others going to think of this?

BEN

I'm going to let you plan a job, then lead it. It'll be something big. You have to impress them, let them know you're the boss.

Ben takes a look at his watch.

BEN

I have to be getting back.

Ben gets up.

MIKE

Pa? What if impressing them isn't enough?

BEN

Well, that's why I had you practice with that six-gun. There won't be more than one or two of them that give you trouble.

Ben mounts and turns the horse away.

BEN

There'll be a get-together tonight. Join us, it'll be like old times.

Mike, his head spinning from the honor of this responsibility and shock of being so calmly told to kill, watches Ben ride off.

FADE OUT:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - ROUNDY'S CABIN - LATE MORNING

MIKE

Whoa ... Whoa!

Mike swings down off his new horse and strides quickly to the door. He pounds on it.

MIKE

Roundy!

ROUNDY

I heard you coming, you don't have to pound down the door.

Roundy opens the door to the small house.

MIKE

Roundy, you knew. Why didn't you tell me?

ROUNDY

Simmer down, son. I know a lot of things, but you haven't let on to what your trouble is.

MIKE

Ben wants me to take over the gang.

ROUNDY

Uh-huh...

MIKE

And why wouldn't he tell me about his family? He wants to put me in charge, but he still doesn't trust me.

ROUNDY

Ahh. He doesn't trust anybody, probably doesn't trust himself.

So what are you going to do?

MIKE

I don't know. I was always afraid he didn't want me in it.

ROUNDY

You'd best figure it out. What did you tell him?

MIKE

Nothing really. He thinks I'll do it, no questions asked.

ROUNDY

That sounds like Ben.

How well have you thought about this, Mike?

MIKE

He only told me just now -- You don't think I should?

Roundy stands.

ROUNDY

Just remember, Mike, Ben's getting out. He has somewhere to go.

Roundy goes back inside. Mike frowns after him. The wind blows dust around the cabin.

CUT TO:

EXT. CALIFORNIA HILLSIDE - NOON

Mike is sitting in the spot where he and Roundy had observed the Rafter R Ranch.

RANCH AREA (MIKE'S POV) - All quiet, nothing moves in the midday heat.

CUT TO:

EXT. RAFTER R RANCH - HILLSIDE/DRAW - NOON

Mike climbs down the steep slope and then along a draw near by the corral, he uses some brush for cover as he creeps closer to the house. The ranch house is still quiet ... then somewhere a door closes. Mike hears distant voices.

Mike shifts his position to get a better view. He hears a slight noise in the brush and glances around. There is a low and menacing growl. His eyes drift right ... A grey colored, wolf-like dog crouches, poised, about three feet away. It's teeth are bared and it is growling deep in it's throat. Mike backs up a bit.

MIKE

Uh-oh.

From behind there comes the sound of someone walking softly up to him.

DRU (O.S.)

What are you doing?

Drucilla Regen is standing ten feet away, frowning at him. Dressed in a simple skirt and blouse, she is a tall young woman of about twenty-two. She's not wearing any shoes and as she steps forward she moves with a grace and caution that seems feral. Another dog stands at her side.

MIKE

Um ... I just wanted to see who lived here.

DRU

Well, you shouldn't be spying on us. Why didn't you ride up to the front?

MIKE

I was being careful. I don't mean any harm.

Dru snaps her fingers. The dogs sit, still fixated on Mike.

DRU

You'd better get up. You look stupid down there on the ground like that.

Mike starts to get up ...

DRU

Um ... take your gun off first.

Mike moves but the dogs growl. He hesitates.

DRU

Go on. They won't come after you
unless you make me mad.

Mike gets up and drops the gun belt.

DRU

Now, what were you doing, creeping
around here ...

MIKE

I'm *not*. I'd never been over this way
so I thought I'd take a look.

Mike brushes off his clothes, carefully, because of the
dogs.

DRU

Do you have a name?

MIKE

Mike ... Santos.

DRU

All right, Mr. Santos. Follow me.

MIKE

Maybe it's better if I got on my way.

She shakes her head.

DRU

I can't let you go wandering around
out here ... the dogs might eat you.

CUT TO:

EXT. RAFTER R RANCH HOUSE - PORCH - NOON

Dru leads Mike up to the front porch. JULIANA, Dru's
younger sister sits up in surprise as Dru and the dogs
lead Mike up to the house.

JULIANA

Drucilla! Who's this?

DRU

Just a minute ...
(she calls inside)
Uncle Jack ... Come out here.

Jack Coneely comes out. He is about fifty, with a
balding head and the beginnings of a paunch. He looks
quizzically at the scene on his porch. Dru walks over to
stand beside him.

DRU

I caught him spying on us.

JACK

What were you doing out there, young man?

DRU

You're lucky it wasn't Jack that found you in the bushes, he'd of shot you in your tracks.

MIKE

I was just looking over the house, sir. I sure went about it the wrong way.

JACK

I should say you did. My name's John Coneely, that youngster who's wisely keeping her mouth shut is my niece Juliana.

JACK

You met Dru.

MIKE

Yes, Sir.

JACK

Now I'm not as bad as she says, but being so far from everything we've got to be careful. What's your name?

MIKE

Um ... it's Mike Santos, Sir ...
Ma'am.

The name registers ... but Jack will have to be careful of what Mike may or may not know.

JACK

You girls go on inside for a moment ... we need to talk alone.

Dru hesitates a moment then turns, looking over at Juliana.

DRU

Come on, Julie. Come on ...

Juliana reluctantly follows and they close the front door. Jack waits until they are gone then leads Mike away from the house a bit.

JACK

Now, I'd *like* to believe you're up from Brant's or Jackson ...

MIKE

Yes, Sir.

JACK

... and someone told you that along this way there's a place where two pretty young ladies are livin'.

He looks at Mike narrowly.

We have to be careful; there's a gang of outlaws somewhere over on the other side of the river. I imagine you might have heard that too.

MIKE

No sir, I'm afraid not.

JACK

Well, I have an understanding with the head man over there. If any of his men come poking around here I'm to tell them that this place is under his protection and to clear out.

Now, we go into Brant's Crossing or Jackson most Sundays. So if you see Dru or Julie, and one or the other invites you out proper ... fine. Otherwise, I will shoot you dead as a stump.

MIKE

I'm sorry , sir. It was a bad way to introduce myself.

JACK

You move along now. I'll make sure the dogs are inside.

Jack turns and goes back into the house, Mike heads over toward where he left his gun.

CUT TO:

EXT. RAFTER R RANCH - HILLSIDE/DRAW - NOON

Mike is searching for his gun belt.

MIKE

Great, just great! I'm a double idiot.

DRU (O.S.)

Is this what you're looking for?

Mike turns to see Dru holding up his gun belt.

MIKE

Yes.

DRU

Where's your *horse*?

MIKE

Up there.

She hands him the gun.

DRU

Living out here we don't see many people ... maybe we'll see you in town.

MIKE

I know I made a fool out of myself. I wouldn't want your parents to know about that. It's bad enough your uncle was here.

DRU

Well, Pa travels a lot, so he doesn't have to know. He might even like you.

MIKE

Yeah?

DRU

Of course it depends on whether he found you crawling around in the dirt or not.

MIKE

I didn't mean anybody any harm.

He buckles the gun on, she looks him over carefully.

DRU

Tell me, what do you do for a living, Mr. Santos?

MIKE

I used to work for the railroad. Now there's another job ... I guess I'm figuring out what kind of life I'm going to have.

DRU

Well, that's the first thing I've heard you say where I didn't think you were hiding something.

She turns and walks away through the brush. Mike thoughtfully watches her go.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - SALOON - EARLY EVENING

Mike rides up in the waning light. From inside there is the sound of a crowd.

CUT TO:

INT. ROBBER'S ROOST - SALOON - EARLY EVENING

A GROUP OF OUTLAWS is gathered around drinking, smoking and relaxing. Several of them have just come in from a job. Two men are working on a small free-standing safe that has been laid on it's back. FRANK & Colley are working on the safe. Frank is slaving away with a brace and bit trying to drill a hole over the lock, Colley has just finished dripping oil on the bit. He looks up and sees Mike, he taps the other man on the shoulder.

COLLEY

Mike! Hey, Mike!

MIKE

Hey, Colley!

COLLEY

It's sure good to see you! Ben's been asking for you but come over here first.

(to Frank)

Here, hold up. We'll see if Mike can do it.

FRANK

What?

COLLEY

Mike Santos, he can do it... with just his fingers.

FRANK

Crap.

Colley waves him over.

FRANK

I'm almost through.

Mike walks up and looks over Frank's shoulder.

COLLEY

You think you could ... ahhh.

Colley makes a dial-twisting motion with his fingers.

FRANK

Leave me be, I don't need anybody's help.

COLLEY

You're going to take all night and use up my good bits. Mike'll have it open in a minute.

FRANK

Ahh, don't give me that.

COLLEY

Here's twenty dollars, Frank ... can you match it?

Mike here's the only one Tom Croydon ever taught. He can pick, blast, or peel, any safe there is.

Frank suddenly gives up on the drilling, he slaps the brace and bit down and steps back.

FRANK

Okay. Go ahead, see if you can do it.

MIKE

I'm a bit rusty.

Mike spins the combination dial back and forth.

MIKE

It's got to be quiet.

Colley nodding to Mike then turning ...

COLLEY

Right.
(then yelling)
Shut up! Shut up!

Nobody shuts up but they do look at Colley

COLLEY

Hey ... I SAID SHUT UP!!! We got work to do here.

Mike bends back to the box ... He turns the knob until he hears a faint click, then turns in the other direction - obviously going more by feel than sound - slows, carefully finds the next number, then back tracks to the third. Mike pulls away and shakes his head ...

Everyone looks on intently.

Then Mike grabs the latch handle and jerks it down and out, pulling the safe door open. Ben moves forward to stand beside Mike.

BEN

Good work, son.

We're having a meeting ... I want you to join in.

CUT TO:

INT. ROBBER'S ROOST - SALOON - BACK ROOM - EVENING

Mike & Ben enter, walk behind several of those seated to a pair of chairs. Present are Doc, Perrin, Molina, and Ducrow.

BEN
Gentlemen, we've all met.

DOC
The prodigal son returns from lands beyond.

MIKE
Hey, Doc. Long time.

The two shake hands. Mike passes behind Perrin.

PERRIN
Hi, kid. Sorry about the other night.

MIKE
Yeah, me too.

PERRIN
Maybe while you're here we can get you out on a job. Who knows, you might like working for your old man ...

Ben & Mike sit down.

BEN
Kirb was just filling me in on a little something he spotted. Go ahead, Kirb. Go back over it again for Mike.

PERRIN
It's the payroll for the Garnet-Union Mining Company. They're working three holes and a mill. Now, at the end of the month they pay off about four hundred workers and about twenty guys who are bosses and such.

Now, the money comes from Stockton to Brant's Crossing on the Consolidated Spur mail car the last Thursday each month.

DUCROW

We heard it is more than twenty thousand dollars!

PERRIN

I figure we stop the train. Unhook the passenger cars, pull ahead a mile or two and use dynamite to pop the box.

BEN

How many guards would there be?

PERRIN

... don't worry, I can take care of them.

BEN

How many guards?

PERRIN

There's four.

Ben starts to laugh, shaking his head ...

MOLINA

But we got a plan.

BEN

I would hope so ... A Mexican stand off is not my style.

PERRIN

We dynamite the whole car. Blow off the walls, roof, everything. All that'll be left is the trucks, the frame, and the box. We use a smaller charge for that and we're out of there.

BEN

All right. You did good scouting this up ... but I want to get some other ideas. I'm going to turn it over to Mike.

Mike looks over to Ben, he isn't quite ready for this.

PERRIN

You're gonna do what?

BEN

I want the boy to get his feet wet ... see what he can do.

What do you say, Mike?

If you leave in the morning you can get to Brant's in time to look over the set up yourself.

MIKE

Uh, yeah ... I guess I could.

BEN

Well get started, this is your shot.

PERRIN

We don't have the time! This payroll is coming in day after tomorrow.

BEN

It comes in every month, doesn't it Kirb?

PERRIN

God damn...

Ben shoots a look at Mike.

BEN

It is a *payroll*...

PERRIN

Yes.

Ben sits back in his chair.

BEN

So we've got the time to do this right.

PERRIN

It's mine, Ben. I scouted it, I came up with the plan, and I'm gonna pull it off. If you want the kid to come along, fine, he can come.

BEN

Your "plan" needs some more work. I'm not going to blow up those payroll guards, and I'm sure as hell not going to be railroaded into doing it this Thursday.

PERRIN

I know it'll work!

BEN

Don't get all riled up over this. We haven't done a job in Brant's Crossing in six or seven years, taking it there might be better than the train. I'm going to let Mike decide.

Perrin turning to glare at Mike.

PERRIN

This... God Damn it!

BEN

Kirb, I've given you jobs that other men scouted and planned.

PERRIN

This is different!

BEN

Yes? How would that be?

PERRIN

Because everyone knows I'm *segundo* around here.

Suddenly Perrin stops, embarrassed and realizing that it's neither the time or place to say what he's thinking. Mike looks from Perrin to Ben.

PERRIN

Aaah..!

Perrin jerks away from the table and slams out of the room. Confused, Molina and Ducrow follow.

Mike whistles in amazement ... Ben shakes his head.

BEN

Everybody has their place, Mike.

MIKE

And you just put him in his.

BEN

Yes, I did. Those guards he wanted to blow up are probably from American Express. If we take this payroll they'll surely investigate. But if he killed four of them they'd never stop looking. With that kind of attention I wouldn't be able to use anybody who went on that job for a long time.

MIKE

You really threw me in his face.

Ben sighs. He turns to Doc and flicks his eyes toward the door.

Doc nods, gets up.

DOC

Good night, Gentlemen.

BEN

It was good for him. Perrin's had a swelled head for the last year; I've been looking to cool him down.

MIKE

Is he going to be a problem?

BEN

Kirb's the best man here if it comes to pulling you out of a tight spot or watching your back, but he's just not any good at planning.

MIKE

So I should find him a piece of this job that'll show that I respect him
...

BEN

You're catching on ... I've waited a long time for this. Damn, it's good to have you back!

Now, who are you planning to take when you scout this job.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - LIVERY - NIGHT

Perrin & Molina are in the shadow of one of the buildings. Perrin is stalking back and forth, brimming with frustration.

PERRIN

Goddamn Ben! I've made that old man more money ... I could get that payroll right now! Ben's too old, he's lost it ... sitting up here on his FAT ASS playing General. Can't stand to let anything happen that he hasn't put his fingers into and MESSED IT UP!

Molina forces Perrin up against the side of the barn.

PERRIN

Hey! What's wrong with you?

MOLINA

You better start thinking my friend ... because that kid is his son.

The kid is his *son*! Comprende?

PERRIN

Yeah. Ben's going to let him go out and get my payroll!

MOLINA

No. He's going to get the whole thing.

PERRIN

Yeah.

MOLINA

Think about it. All you said is true. Ben is a big man, he's proud. He's like a king ...

PERRIN

... and he's setting the kid up to take over.

PERRIN

Goddamn Ben! I put in the time ... If he wants to get out, I run this gang. I put in the time, I'm owed.

I got to find out what's going on.

The kid went somewhere today, back track him and find out where it was. I'll have Ducrow keep an eye on him when he goes down to The Crossing.

MOLINA

He wasn't away more than six or eight hours, he could not have gone too far.

PERRIN

Well you find out. I'm gonna show that old man just who he's been pushing around.

FADE OUT:

EXT. RAFTER R RANCH HOUSE - PORCH - NIGHT

Dru is standing at the porch railing leaning out to look up at the night sky. Juliana comes out to join her. Bright moonlight streams across the yard, the barn is a black mass outlined against the sky.

JULIANA

What's wrong with you? You didn't say two words during dinner.

DRU

Just thinking.

JULIANA

... about that Mike. I think you like him ...

DRU

Yeah? Well, there was something ... It bothered me.

JULIANA

I still think you like him.

DRU

Be quiet, you.

She puts an arm around Juliana and hugs her close.

I wish Pa would come home.

JULIANA

He's going to be spending more time with us ... he said that.

DRU

I still worry.

Juliana turns to go inside, then turns back.

JULIANA

Was it Pa?

DRU

What?

JULIANA

Mike Santos. That's who he reminded me of.

Dru turns frowning.

JULIANA

Not looks. Just some ... mannerisms.

She goes inside. In the distance coyotes begin to howl.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - ROUNDY'S CABIN - MORNING

Mike rides up to speak to Roundy who is sitting out front working a pedal grinder, he is putting an edge on a double bladed axe. Doc & Colley wait across the river they can be seen sitting on their horses in front of Ben's house.

MIKE

Morning.

ROUNDY

Yes, Sir. It is at that.

MIKE

Ben gave me a job last night ...

Roundy works on the axe.

MIKE

We're going down to look over the
Garnet-Union payroll. I'd like it if
you'd come along.

Roundy takes the axe from the wheel, gets up and, walking
over, puts a hand on Mike's horse's neck.

ROUNDY

You know Mike, I don't think I could.

MIKE

I've never had to plan a job I was
going to pull myself before.

You taught me most everything I know.

ROUNDY

I never taught you to be a thief.
That was him.

Mike, I may live up here, and I love
Ben like a brother and you like a son
... but when I want money I trap furs
or pan some gold.

(giving up on him)

You go on. You've made your choices,
you'll be better than most when it
comes to living with them.

Mike nods and quietly rides off. Roundy watches him go.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRANT'S BRIDGE - SOUTH END - LATE MORNING

Mike, Doc, & Colley ride through the old covered bridge,
they emerge into the light and pull up.

MIKE

The train comes in at twelve-twenty.
You two cut around to the east. We
don't want to be seen together.

DOC

(grinning)

Right.

MIKE

Hell, you guys know what to do.

They spur their horses forward.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRANT'S CROSSING - MAIN STREET - NOON

Mike rides up the street slowly. As he passes the entrance to a narrow side street he glances down it and sees something that brings him up short.

On the next street over is his old house.

Mike turns his horse in that direction.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRANT'S CROSSING - SIDE STREET HOUSE - NOON

The rope swing still hangs in the yard. A SMALL BOY comes running around the side of the house and grabs the swing rope, and swings back and forth. He then jumps up a little to sit on the swing seat. The Boy sees Mike. He stops.

BOY

(shyly)

Hi ...

MIKE

Hi.

The Boy stares at Mike for a moment then breaks off and runs inside. Mike takes in the empty yard, in the distance a train whistle blows.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRANT'S CROSSING - TRAIN STATION - NOON

In the distance the train can be seen approaching. The STATION AGENT opens the doors and steps out onto the platform and looks off toward the oncoming train.

Mike watching closely, he looks over to ...

Colley, standing with his back to a boxcar, blending in with a group of men waiting for the train. He nods slightly to Mike. Mike walks down the track and then just past Colley. Without otherwise acknowledging his presence, he speaks in a low voice.

MIKE

After they've unloaded see if you can get a look inside the car.

COLLEY

Right.

Mike crosses the tracks. The train is getting closer. He walks slowly down along the platform. The engine goes by him blowing smoke and steam. As the train comes to a stop the door to the baggage car slides open and two EXPRESS AGENTS jump down and survey the crowd. Two more Express Agents stand in the door of the car. They are tough looking men in city clothes, two with rifles, two with shotguns, all with pistols.

Mike heads off the platform and away from the station. He looks over, seeing ...

Doc lounging against the station building. They lock eyes for a moment.

Mike moves on.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRANT'S CROSSING - MAIN STREET - NOON

Mike walks down the street toward the AMERICAN EXPRESS office. A WAGON is coming down the street behind him. On the seat are Drucilla, and Jack Coneely, riding in back is Juliana. The wagon pulls up.

JACK

Ho-whoa.

DRU

Well, good afternoon Mr. Santos.

Mike looks over in surprise.

MIKE

Good afternoon.

(to Jack)

Sir.

(to Juliana)

Ma'am ...

Juliana stifles a giggle, this is a bit formal for her.

MIKE

So, what brings you to town?

DRU

Well, we do come in occasionally. Juliana and I are going to shop, and Uncle Jack has business to attend to.

JULIANA

First we're going to find some buttons
...

Mike nervously glances back toward the train station.

The Express Agents start up the street. Two men in the center of the group carry a large express box with a heavy lock.

JULIANA

... then we're going to buy some cloth and patterns ... Dru said she'd help me make a dress, right?

Mike turning his attention back to the girls.

MIKE

I'm sorry, what?

DRU

Is something the matter?

MIKE

Could you excuse me, I have to do ... something.

Mike is already moving away toward the mining company office.

DRU

Well. That was strange ...

JACK

Girls, lets go. Plenty of other young men. More polite, too. *Git!*

The wagon starts off.

CUT TO:

INT. BRANT'S CROSSING - AMERICAN EXPRESS OFFICE - DAY

Mike enters, looking around. It is a long room with a high ceiling and a vault in the back wall. Two ACCOUNTANT types are working at desks. They look up.

ACCOUNTANT

Yes, can I help you?

MIKE

I want to get a job ... work as an Express Messenger.

ACCOUNTANT

If you want to *apply* you'll have to send a letter to the office in Sacramento.

Mike hears are footsteps on the boardwalk.

MIKE

Thanks ... But can't I talk to somebody here?

Mike turns, the Express Agents from the train come through the door. One steps up to Mike.

EXPRESSMAN

Pardon me, Sir ... you'll have to step outside while we make our delivery.

There is the sound of the vault door opening and Mike turns to look. The OTHER ACCOUNTANT is opening the vault. The two Agents carry the express box to the back of the room.

EXPRESSMAN

Come on, then.

The Express Agent escorts Mike out. The other Agents take up positions around the room.

ACCOUNTANT

Have a seat, gentlemen. It will take awhile to count this.

The door to the office closes behind Mike.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRANT'S CROSSING - AMERICAN EXPRESS OFFICE - DAY

Mike reaches the end of the building and stops to glance down at a man seated on a bench. The man looks up, it is Doc.

MIKE

Keep them in sight, I'll meet you at the saloon on Beal Street in a couple of hours.

Doc nods. Mike continues on his way.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRANT'S CROSSING - CHURCH & CEMETERY - AFTERNOON

The entire graveyard seems disused, as if the people in town are now being buried somewhere else.

Weeds have grown up and leaves fallen from the few surrounding trees cover the graves. Mike stops by a pair of graves: "Juan Santos 1836-1870, Iona Santos, 1843-1867."

After a moment Mike sits, leaning back against his father's stone. There is a noise, footsteps. Mike turns and looks down a line of headstones.

Drucilla Regen is placing a small handful of flowers on a grave. She looks over, and then noticing him, straightens.

Mike gets up and takes off his hat. He walks over to her.

MIKE

Hi.

DRU

Hello.

MIKE

I'm sorry. ... about the way I acted back there. There were people I had to meet. I wanted to talk to you, but I was late.

DRU

That's alright.

Mike glances down at the grave she has put flowers on. "Abigail Regan 1844-1868"

MIKE

This is your mother?

DRU

Yes.

MIKE

She was the same age ...

DRU

What?

MIKE

As mine ... my mother. My parents are buried right over there.

DRU

Oh.

MIKE

That's nice ... the flowers. I didn't think of that.

DRU

They're just wild flowers, I picked them on the way out.

MIKE

Do you remember her? I've forgotten so much.

DRU

Mom used to sing to me ... It's been so long. I wish Julie had known her.

MIKE

When she died, your Pa must have been sad for a long time.

DRU

I don't know. He rented us a room here in town a couple of weeks before Julie was due, and then he went off.

She died and he didn't get back until three days after.

MIKE

Oh ...

You didn't ever ask him, a lot of things can happen.

DRU

No, I didn't. He would have been there if he could, but he never should have gone off in the first place.

My father is as good a man as he knows how to be, but there's something out there that's important to him ... more important than my mother was.

It's getting hot. Will you walk me back?

Mike collects his horse and they leave the cemetery, walking back into town.

CUT TO:

EXT./INT. BRANT'S CROSSING - LIVERY - AFTERNOON

Mike & Dru walk down a road past a corral and turn into the livery.

Mike leads his horse into the Livery Stable. He looks around ...

MIKE

Hello ..? *Hello ...*

DRU

Mr. Doonan's never here in the afternoons. You just put your horse up and pay when you leave.

MIKE

Oh ... I haven't been back for ... well, since I was a boy.

Mike ties his horse to a rail and starts stripping off the saddle.

DRU

Mr. Santos, you are becoming more of a mystery all the time. I thought you lived here.

MIKE

No. No, I live in the mountains up past your ranch.

DRU

My Uncle says there is a gang of outlaws up there. I hope you're not one of them.

Mike pulls off the saddle and sets it on top of one of the stall dividers.

MIKE

No. I'm not. I've been ... trapping.

DRU

What about that job you told me about?

MIKE

My job?

DRU

You told me you were going to decide about a job.

Mike picks up a curry comb and turns back to the horse.

MIKE

Yeah.

DRU

You don't know if you want it?

He starts brushing it down and after a moment she picks up another brush and helps him.

MIKE

It's what I always wanted. It's *more* than what I always wanted. And I owe him an awful lot. But once I'm in ... I'm in forever.

DRU

Forever? You can't owe anyone your life, that's not right. That's like slavery.

MIKE

Yeah ... I guess it is.

Mike & Dru stand side by side combing the dust and burrs out of the horse's coat. He glances over at her and she looks up, smiling a bit shyly, unsure of what she sees in him. After a moment Mike goes around the horse's head and begins work on the other side. There is a moment when they both have a hand on the horse's back to brace the strokes of their brushes.

Their hands unintentionally touch and they look up into each other's eyes. Mike takes a hold of her fingers. Dru touches his hand for a moment but can't maintain the eye contact. Mike lets go of her hand and goes back to work. Dru on the other side of horse, she bites her lower lip to keep from smiling.

Mike looks across the horse's neck at her. She looks at him in mock seriousness. He takes his hat off and wipes his forehead and before he can get it back on she reaches across and takes a swipe at his hair with the curry comb. He looks startled and she starts to laugh.

MIKE

Hey!

Mike laughs too and they finish up.

DRU

There. My father said that you should always treat a horse like a friend.

MIKE

Really? Mine too.

Only Mike's eyes reflect the irony in his last comment. Mike leads the horse into a stall and closes the gate.

DRU

I should go. My sister will be waiting for me.

She turns away but pauses a moment.

DRU

You know, I think you could be trouble
... but I think I like you anyway.

She turns to go but his voice stops her briefly in the door.

MIKE

Is that the formal invitation that
your Uncle was talking about?

DRU

Yes, I guess it is.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRANT'S CROSSING - BACK OF SANTOS'S STORE -
AFTERNOON

Mike is cutting across the low area behind the main street stores. He slows and stops as he reaches the small slope where his father was killed so long ago. He turns swiftly to look at ...

THE DOOR - in the back of what was once his father's store, THE CORNER OF THE BUILDING - that the outlaws swept around when they made their get away, and THE SMALL SLOPE - where Juan slipped when he was killed. COME AROUND TO MIKE - looking down from the same spot where he saw his father killed eighteen years before.

All sound goes away but the wind.

CUT TO:

INT. BRANT'S CROSSING - SALOON - LATE AFTERNOON

Mike comes in through the doors, he pauses a moment, looking around.

Colley & Doc are in one corner playing cards. Their eyes meet. The men go back to their game. Mike goes over to the table where Colley and Doc are playing.

DOC

(speaking up for
others to hear)

Evening...

MIKE

Hey ...

(then same as above)

Hello, Gents. What's the game?

Mike sits and speaks in a lower voice.

DOC

Are you doing alright?

MIKE

Yeah. I don't know. So what about it.

DOC

(to Colley)

You go first, my friend.

COLLEY

Well, it's nothin' but a baggage van with a safe bolted to the frame. Burns & Smith; it's a blast job.

MIKE

Alright. Was there much freight?

COLLEY

No, but that could change.

MIKE

Right.

(he looks at Doc)

What did you get?

DOC

They waited until all the money was locked up. Then they came here for one drink a piece, then to the hotel. They've all have tickets on the 12:45 stage tomorrow. So what do you think?

MIKE

I wonder if they'll take turns watching the office tonight? If I was paying them that's what I'd have them do.

COLLEY

Maybe ... but you know they're gonna get robbed.

There is movement at the door and Doc looks over...

DOC

Wait ... Interesting characters this place attracts, eh?

Mike looks over.

Ducrow & Frank have just entered. They are looking around the room. Where Mike, Doc, and Colley are dressed in clothes that are both neat and subdued, these two look like they have just come off the warpath. Ducrow & Frank head toward the card table.

DUCROW

Well, howdy. You don't mind if we
join your game?

No one says anything.

DUCROW

All right then, we'll sit in for a
awhile.

Ducrow & Frank pull up chairs and sit. Mike leans across
the table.

MIKE

What the hell are you two doing here?

DUCROW

Just came by to give you a hand ...

(to Doc)

The Kid's *new* ... you guys are over
the hill ... Figured we'd show you
how it's done.

DOC

Now look here!

FRANK

Look at what, old man?

Doc starts to get up, Mike grabs his arm holding him
where he is.

MIKE

Hold on ...

(to Ducrow)

We know what we're doing, and I don't
want you drawing attention ...

COLLEY

Mike's planned more of these jobs with
Ben than you've even dreamed of.

FRANK

(snorts)

We'd have that payroll right now if it
wasn't for this pup ...

DUCROW

... and Ben's weak stomach.

MIKE

Enough of this! You two clear out of
here *right now*.

Ducrow leans across the table, getting in Mike's face.

DUCROW

Or what? You'll call Daddy? Go ahead, Ben's through!

Mike grabs a handful of Ducrow's hair and slams his face down into the table. Ducrow as he reels back.

Frank reaches for Mike but Doc throws him back into the wall. Mike kicks the table out from in between himself and Ducrow. Ducrow pulls his gun. Mike gets a hold of the pistol turning it away from him as it goes off. He hooks a punch into Ducrow's stomach and jerks the gun away.

Frank turns Doc around and holding him against the wall punches him over and over. Colley pulls him off.

Ducrow comes after Mike who smashes him alongside the head with the gun, sending him to the floor.

Frank turns on Colley and pulls a long Arkansas Toothpick from his belt.

Mike steps in, flipping the gun around and cocking it.

MIKE

No! Put it away.

Frank drops the knife. Doc picks himself up. Ducrow lays groaning on the floor.

MIKE

You two get out of here and ride!

Ducrow gets up, holding on to a chair.

DUCROW

Gimme my gun.

MIKE

Get out of here! You'll be lucky if I don't shoot you with it!

MARSHALL BACA

(o.s.)

There will be no shooting.

Behind him appears MARSHAL BACA; a sophisticated looking Mexican-American about forty years old. He is carrying a sawed-off shotgun.

MARSHALL BACA

Please, do not do anything stupid.

Marshal Baca motions to Mike.

MARSHALL BACA

You may drop that gun to the floor.

Mike slowly turns and tosses the gun over near Baca's feet. Baca now aims his shotgun at Frank.

MARSHALL BACA

Good, now you.

Frank unbuckles his gun belt.

MARSHALL BACA

Gentlemen -- this way to the jail.

CUT TO:

INT. BRANT'S CROSSING - JAIL - NIGHT

The cells are bolted sheets of metal with strap iron gratings, cold and none too clean. From the next cell the mumbling of the other two prisoners can be heard.

Mike stares out the barred window. Outside he can see the trail past the river.

DOC

Mike, are you all right?

MIKE

No. No I don't think I am.

FADE OUT:

INT. BRANT'S CROSSING - JAIL - MID-MORNING

Marshal Baca opens the door to the cells.

MARSHALL BACA

Good morning. Sorry we didn't have beds for all of you.

Mike looks up from where he is sitting on the floor.

MARSHALL BACA

Now ... Senor Maxwell Ducrow, I am going to hold you for arraignment with the circuit judge. I have a warrant charging you with the robbery on last June 24th of the Nevada City stage.

Ducrow resigned, shakes his head.

DUCROW

I didn't do it ... you got the wrong guy.

MARSHALL BACA

Of course.

The rest of you can go. I suggest
that you do not come back.

Mike relaxes.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRANDT'S CROSSING - STREET - MID MORNING

Mike, Doc, Colley, and Frank, ride out of town.

They pass a line of men waiting outside the express
company office. Their faces were streaked with dirt and
grease, but underneath the grime their skin is the pallor
of men who work underground from dawn to dusk.

Mike observes this in silence, taking a final glance at
his intended victims over his shoulder.

CUT TO:

EXT. CALIFORNIA HILLSIDE - RAFTER R RANCH - MORNING

Molina is watching the ranch from the place were Mike and
Roundy spied on Ben. Behind him his horse is cropping
grass.

CLOSER SHOT OF RANCH - Jack ties the dogs to a pair of
long ropes attached to a post near the vegetable garden.
He then throws them a couple of bones. He mounts his
horse and rides off.

Molina slips down toward the house.

CUT TO:

INT. RAFTER R RANCH - COOK HOUSE - MORNING

A large pot of water sits on the stove, steam has just
begun to curl up from the surface of the water. The cook
house is a semi-enclosed porch on one side of the house.
Two of the sides are canvas, one is lowered but not
secured, it is blowing lightly in the breeze. It
contains a large cooking stove, a food preparation table
and a high sided enameled steel bath tub. Juliana steps
in. Using two rags, she picks up the pot and carries it
to where Drucilla sits in the tub. Juliana pours the
water in near her feet.

DRU

Thanks.

JULIANA

Well don't take forever, I'm next.

Julie flicks water at Dru.

DRU

Hey!

Julie picks up the pot and leaves. Dru leans back and closes her eyes ...

CUT TO:

EXT. RAFTER R RANCH HOUSE - MOLINA - MORNING

Molina moves cautiously toward the house. He watches from behind one of the out buildings.

Juliana comes down from the house and carrying two pots out to the pump and begins filling them with water.

Molina, after he's sure she's busy, moves around the other side, closer to the house.

CUT TO:

INT. RAFTER R RANCH - COOK HOUSE - MORNING

Dru is relaxing in the tub. From where she is she can hear the sound of Juliana pumping the water. After a moment the sound of pumping stops. There is the sound of a footstep ...

DRU

Julie ..?

There is no answer, then Juliana steps up into the cook house.

JULIANA

What?

DRU

If you wait I'll help with that.

JULIANA

If I want a bath I figure I might as well get started. You're not washing or anything. I'll bet you're thinking about that Mike Santos.

DRU

You might be wrong.

JULIANA

I'm *not*.

Dru turns to look at Juliana, then she turns back, now serious.

DRU

I thought of how he's like Pa.

JULIANA

Yeah, how?

DRU

I think he lies ...

CUT TO:

EXT./INT. RAFTER R RANCH HOUSE - SIDE - MORNING

Molina climbs up onto the side porch

THE DOGS are laying in the dirt near vegetable garden. One turns and looks toward the house, then begins to growl.

Molina steps through the door into the room.

Through the partially open door he can see Dru's feet, part of Julie's back.

The dogs begin to bark. Molina pauses a moment, worried about the noise. He steps into the hall leading to the front room.

CUT TO:

INT. RAFTER R RANCH HOUSE - COOK HOUSE - MORNING

Juliana & Dru are still talking. Dogs barking in the distance.

JULIANA

You think Pa lies?

DRU

I don't know, it's just a feeling I get. He'll tell us about where he went and I just think that he's making it all up ... why are the dogs barking?

JULIANA

Maybe cause their tied up. Uncle Jack didn't want them following him. I guess I'd better let them loose.

She starts back to the pump, then turns.

JULIANA

You sure have got a suspicious mind Dru. Now I'm gonna worry about Pa.

She heads off.

CUT TO:

INT. RAFTER R RANCH HOUSE - COOK HOUSE - MORNING

Molina pauses in the hallway. He looks through to the porch ...

MOLINA

Jesus ...

Drucilla she picks up a towel and gets out of the tub. She pulls out the drain plug.

He turns back to the hall. Molina goes through to the front room. Glancing down at a table ... he stops ... and picks up a framed photograph.

PHOTO - The two girls and Ben. Molina flips it over and reads - "With love to my daughters, Ben."

Molina an almost silent whistle. He slips the photo in his pocket, then goes to the front door and carefully let's himself out.

CUT TO:

EXT. RAFTER R RANCH HOUSE - COOK HOUSE - MORNING

Dru steps out, now wearing a skirt and blouse.

DRU

Julie? I'm out.

Juliana is walking back toward the house with a puzzled look on her face.

JULIANA

Something's wrong. When I let the dogs go they just ran off around the barn.

DRU

They probably saw a rabbit. Come on I'll help you fill the tub.

CUT TO:

EXT. RAFTER R RANCH - BASE OF THE HILL - MORNING

Molina jumps on his horse and takes off, the two DOGS in hot pursuit.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - AFTERNOON

Mike, Colley, Doc, & Frank stop in front of the saloon. While the others dismount, Mike remains on his horse. He turns and rides toward Ben's house. Mike gets off and goes up the stairs to the porch.

CUT TO:

INT. ROBBER'S ROOST - BEN'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - AFTERNOON

Ben & Perrin look up from their seats as Mike enters.

PERRIN

Hey, Kid.

BEN

Well, how'd it go?

MIKE

(quietly)
Not good.

BEN

What happened?

Mike sitting on couch, he looks over at Perrin.

MIKE

Frank and Ducrow showed up in town and caused some trouble.

Perrin looks away.

BEN

What kind of trouble?

MIKE

We were trying to figure out the job. Ducrow came in and started a fight.

He's still in jail.

BEN

What were those men doing down there, Kirb?

PERRIN

Hell if I know.

BEN

That Ducrow's becoming a problem. I've a good mind to leave him there.

Now, what about the payroll? What did you find out?

MIKE

It's too risky a job, especially now the Marshal has seen us. I think we should drop the whole thing.

Perrin laughs, and shaking his head in disgust, stands up.

PERRIN

I can't believe we're still foolin' around on this. We oughta be counting that money right now!

MIKE

It's too well guarded, and that damned Ducrow got us thrown in jail.

PERRIN

So what? My idea to hit the train outside town is still the only way. You let me at it, I'll get it done!

MIKE

So go ahead, be my guest!

Ben getting up, this is not the response he wanted.

BEN

Now just hold on a minute ...

PERRIN

No! We've waited long enough, Ben!

BEN

Kirb, you haven't been listening to me. This is Mike's job. I'll discuss it with him, and if he wants to do it, he'll do it. If he decides it's too risky ... it's *off*, understand?

PERRIN

Yeah ... yeah, I do! He hasn't got the guts to pull it off and neither do you!

For an instant Ben looks at Perrin in a half amused, almost admiring way. Then Ben hooks a heavy fist into Perrin's stomach. Perrin bent double, wheezing and gasping.

BEN

Open the door, Mike.

Mike stares at him.

Open the door!

Mike silently turns and opens it. Ben picks up Perrin by his collar and belt and tosses him out.

BEN

Kirb, you be careful. I might have killed you for that.

Ben closes the door and turns to Mike.

BEN

Now, let's go over this. There's always a way. What about a night job, go in against the vault?

Mike stares out the window.

MIKE

Jesus, Ben ...

We think the guards take shifts inside the office until they open the building in the morning.

BEN

You *think*?

MIKE

(exasperated)

I don't know for sure, I was locked up all night!

BEN

There's always Perrin's way.

MIKE

You said yourself that you didn't want to kill the guards.

BEN

Right. What if we find a way around that.

MIKE

Ben, I'm tired ...

BEN

Come on boy-o, I know you've had a little scare, but don't let it get to you. We'll sit down, figure something out.

MIKE

No. I scouted it. I gave you my opinion. If you don't like it, get someone else. I didn't ask for this.

BEN

I gave you this job because I want the men to look to you as their leader.

MIKE

Well I don't want it.

BEN

(dawning suspicion)

What's that?

MIKE

Ben, I'm sorry... I'm not going to run your gang.

BEN

I thought that was what you wanted!

MIKE

No. It's what *you* wanted!

Mike turns away. Ben grabs him and jerks him back, bringing him nose to nose with him.

BEN

I brought you up to be the best, and now you're turning your back on me?

Mike shakes loose but stays close, in Ben's face.

MIKE

I don't owe you this. You took me in because you felt guilty about what happened to my father!

Ben steps back, he takes a ragged breath.

BEN

I never knew you held it against me.

MIKE

Well, I just started thinking about it!

Ben is gathering steam.

BEN

I've given you everything, now's a hell of a time to start worrying about why!

Mike, I'm warning you. There are only two kinds of people, some take what they want from life... the others get the scraps!

You could have anything you want.

MIKE

Well it doesn't look like much.
You're practically a prisoner up here,
I'd have to be crazy to want to live
like this ... spend my life waiting to
be thrown in jail ... I don't want to
be afraid every time I run into a
deputy on the street, or... or hear a
dog bark at night.

BEN

I never thought of you as a coward.

MIKE

Yeah? Well, maybe I am, but I
wouldn't have left my wife to die
while I went off on some damn fool
robbery!

BEN

(shocked)

You don't know anything about that!

MIKE

I know enough to see what a mess you
made.

BEN

Get out! Get the hell out, understand
me!

MIKE

Yes I do!

Mike goes slamming out the door leaving... Ben standing
there alone. After a moment his big shoulders sag.

BEN

Oh, God ... God Damn it!

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - STREET - AFTERNOON

Mike walks away from the house. He is pissed and walking
it off. As he gets down to the area around the tents and
the saloon Frank staggers up to him.

FRANK

Hey ... hey! You goin' come in 'n
have a drink?

MIKE

No.

FRANK

No?

Frank leans up against him and, as Mike pushes him away, Frank pulls Mike's pistol from it's holster.

MIKE

Get away!

Frank, now frighteningly sober, cocks the gun and pushes it in his face.

FRANK

You come with me.

Frank herds Mike toward the saloon.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - NEAR ROUNDY'S CABIN - AFTERNOON

Roundy is headed back to his cabin after running his trap line. He has several animal pelts hanging from a pole thrown over one shoulder, his buffalo gun over the other. He pauses, looking down into Robbers Roost.

Frank is leading Mike into the saloon at gunpoint. Perrin and another man come out of one of the tents holding guns on Colley and Doc. They too go into the saloon.

Roundy drops his pelts, unslings his rifle and cuts over to the river past his cabin toward Ben's house ...

CUT TO:

INT. ROBBER'S ROOST - SALOON - AFTERNOON

THE OUTLAW GANG are waiting inside. Mike has his hands tied. Perrin comes in leading Doc and Colley at gunpoint.

MIKE

Just what is it you think you're doing?

Perrin pushes Mike back into a chair, he laughs.

PERRIN

Think? It's what I *am* doing. -- I *am* sick and tired of Ben lording it over us.

I *am* through with his sitting up there on a third of the money that *we* rightfully stole, throwing away jobs worth *thousands* because he's too old to know what it's like anymore.

and ... I *am* going to stop him from handing this gang over to his STUPID, TIN-HORN, kid.

Perrin pauses, looking around at his audience.

PERRIN

Is this because of *me*?

... if it is you're making a mistake
... Ben's going to retire and I don't want anything to do with it!

PERRIN

That's not going to help. It's NOTHING!

FRANK

So ... how are you going to go about this, Kirb?

PERRIN

Easy, I'm going to walk up there and shoot the old bastard ...

MIKE

He just threw you out. You think you're just going to walk back in?

Perrin turns and back hands Mike in the face.

PERRIN

... then I'm going to split his money with whoever comes with me, equal shares!

CLATT

Yeah? How much you figger he's got?

PERRIN

Think about it, you ever see old Ben spend anything?

He's sitting up there on a third of the money we ever stole!

VIC

Jeeze ...

FRANK

Suppose he doesn't want to open up?

PERRIN

Ben'll do anything I want. Because if he doesn't, I'm going to fertilize the street with his kid's brains.

MIKE

I'm not even his real son. He's not going to get killed over me.

PERRIN

Then you'll die for nothing, and Ben'll come out anyway ...

The picture of Ben and his daughters lands on the floor in front of Mike.

MOLINA

You are not the only ace in the hole, my friend.

FADE OUT:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - BEN'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Perrin steps out into the open space in front of Ben's house. Behind him the other OUTLAWS take up positions.

PERRIN

Ben? Ben, come out here!

There is no movement from the house.

MONSON runs across the street and takes cover. Frank cocks his rifle.

PERRIN

Ben, damn you, open up!

Nothing. Perrin speaks over his shoulder.

Clatt ...

CLATT has a gun at Mike's head, he peels the hammer back and walks Mike forward. Mike's hands are tied in front of him.

Perrin looks up at the house ...

PERRIN

Get out here Ben. Or I'll kill him!

CUT TO:

INT. ROBBER'S ROOST - BEN'S HOUSE FRONT ROOM - AFTERNOON

Roundy looking out the window on Perrin and the others. He lifts his big rifle to his shoulder and adjusts the sight.

On the floor beside him lays a Winchester and a broken open box of .44s. Shan Bao is loading rifles over by the gun case. Ben is waiting just inside the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - BEN'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Perrin paces nervously back and forth.

PERRIN

All right! You asked for it!

The door opens and Ben steps out onto the porch. He stops halfway across the porch, he is not wearing his gun belt, his hands are raised to shoulder height.

BEN

I'm right here, Kirb.

Perrin stops pacing. Molina looks sharply at Perrin wondering if he's up to this. VIC glances nervously around.

BEN

Now Clatt, you let my boy go.

Clatt, while not removing the pistol, lowers the hammer. He shoots a glance at Perrin. Perrin pays no attention, he only has eyes for Ben.

PERRIN

Well now Ben, looks like I've got you.

Roundy squeezes off a shot.

Clatt shot, spinning back ... Ben whips two short barreled revolvers from his hip pockets ... Perrin draws and fires... Ben hit in the leg goes down. Rolling over he empties both guns at the OUTLAWS, covering as ... Mike runs for the house. Roundy fires. Perrin heads for cover ... Mike runs up the steps, grabs Ben and drags him inside as bullets ricochet around them.

CUT TO:

INT. ROBBER'S ROOST - BEN'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - AFTERNOON

Roundy emptying the Winchester. Shan Bao fires a Spencer from another window. Ben & Mike fall through the door. Mike kicks it shut. Roundy pulls a Bowie knife and tosses it into the floor near Mike.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - BEN'S HOUSE - FRONT - AFTERNOON

The outlaw gang breaks for cover. Perrin & Molina dive for a big rock that is slightly off to one side of their position. They return fire. Frank wounded, pulls himself under cover of a building.

CUT TO:

INT. ROBBERS ROOST - BEN'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - AFTERNOON

Ben pulls himself around and cuts the ropes binding Mike's hands. Roundy is reloading. Mike takes up a rifle laying under the window. Ben grimacing because of his leg, crawls over.

BEN

Give me that ... you get another and help Shan Bao have a look out back.

MIKE

Pa, you're hurt ...

BEN

I don't shoot with my feet, boy!

Ben snatches the gun away.

CUT TO:

INT. ROBBER'S ROOST - BEN'S HOUSE - BACK - AFTERNOON

Mike & Shan Bao come through the door. Mike looks out a back window. Shan Bao covers the side. Mike sees something ...

HERNANDEZ & JAKE run toward the house.

Mike opens up with a Henry rifle that he's gotten from the rack.

Hernandez goes down, Jake scrambles out of sight.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - BEN'S HOUSE - FRONT - AFTERNOON

Molina crawls up.

MOLINA

Kirb. Hernandez is down. Dead, as far as I can tell.

PERRIN

Damn! Send Owen to help Jake.

MOLINA

Owen! Come on!

PERRIN

No you stay here.

Monson comes up, running crouched over. He has two whiskey bottles in each hand with torn rags stuffed into the necks.

MONSON

Come on, we'll fire the house!

He motions Molina to follow him, Perrin reaches up and drags him down.

MONSON

Hey!

PERRIN

You idiot, you want to burn all the money?

Monson shakes his head, he didn't think of that.

PERRIN

There is a better way of doing this.

Perrin glances at Molina.

MOLINA

Yeah? You want me to go?

PERRIN

No reason to bang on the door when you've got the key. Take whoever you need and get going.

MOLINA

Morning. That's when I'll be back.

Perrin claps him on the shoulder as he runs off. Perrin takes one of the bottles and throws the rag away. Monson looks at him and Perrin shrugs ...

PERRIN

Might as well make ourselves comfortable.

He takes a long drink.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ROBBER'S ROOST - BEN'S HOUSE - BACK ROOM -
AFTERNOON

Mike is watching out the window. Flies buzz, and the day grows hotter. Outside nobody moves.

Mike crawls around the window area trying to get a better view ... he's becoming worried. Shan Bao looks at him puzzled.

CUT TO:

INT. ROBBER'S ROOST - BEN'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM -
AFTERNOON

Mike enters from the back. Roundy is working on Ben's leg.

BEN
Ungh! Damn it, Roundy. That hurts.
(to Mike)
What are you doing? Get on and watch
the back.

MIKE
Have you seen Molina out there?

Roundy & Ben glance at each other. Mike goes to the window near Roundy and cautiously looks out.

MIKE
I think he's gone to the Rafter R to
kidnap the girls.

Roundy & Ben both look up.

BEN
How do you know about that? That's
nonsense!

MIKE
Perrin said that's what he would do if
he had to kill me ... he has a
photograph of all of you.

Ben retreats for a moment, almost in shock. Then he starts to get to his feet. Roundy steps in to stop him.

ROUNDY
Now hold on Ben ...

BEN
I have to stop them!

Ben staggers and grabs the back of a chair.

ROUNDY

... you can't put your weight on that.

BEN

It's my family!

MIKE

I can go. If you tell me your short cut across the river, I can get there first.

Ben grabs Mike jerking him close.

BEN

Does Perrin know about that, too? You caused all this, I hope you're satisfied!

Mike pulls away.

MIKE

No, I didn't, Ben. It's been coming for years!

ROUNDY

I told him you had a way ...

BEN

Jesus! The two of you?

Ben limps to the window. SUDDENLY a bullet smashes through it. Ben jerks back but his bad leg gives out and he falls into a sitting position.

BEN

Damn it!

Enraged, Ben takes up his rifle again and fires back. He yells out the window.

BEN

You traitors better pull out or I'm gonna kill every last one of you!

A fusillade of shots batter the house ... Mike & Roundy hit the floor.

MIKE

You can cover me. My horse is still out there.

ROUNDY

No. You don't stand any better chance than Ben would ... we'll have to wait for dark ...

MIKE

I wasn't thinking of going out the door.

CUT TO:

INT. ROBBER'S ROOST - BEN'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - LATER AFTERNOON

Mike & Roundy are prying up the floor boards with Bowie knives. Ben is watching from the window.

BEN

... it's a big rock in the middle of a clearing, you'll find a game trail on the south-west side. You just follow it to the canyon.

MIKE

Then I cross the river.

BEN

Don't you go trying it after dark. You're no good to anyone if you get yourself killed.

Mike takes the Henry rifle and slings it across his back. He crawls down in the hole. Roundy clasps hands with Mike.

ROUNDY

Good luck, boy!

Mike looks at Ben.

BEN

Better get going.

Mike disappears under the house.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - BEN'S HOUSE - PORCH - AFTERNOON

Mike scrambles out from under the porch. The horse snorts and pulls back. Mike jerks the slip-knot the horse is tied with and pulls himself into the saddle, turning the horse as he does so. Mike spurs the animal away.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - PERRIN'S ROCK - AFTERNOON

Perrin still sitting there with Monson hears the horse's footsteps. He frowns and peers over the rock ...

BRADY (O.S.)

Hey!

Mike heading the horse toward them.

PERRIN

Get him! They're getting away!

Perrin grabs for his gun. Monson jumps out in the open aiming his pistol at Mike.

Roundy fires his big Sharps from an upstairs window. Monson goes down as Mike gallops past, leaping over part of a broken fence to get away behind the cover of the tents and buildings.

Perrin comes up with his rifle. Ben fires from the front room. Perrin is forced to take cover. Mike disappears into the distance as Ben and Roundy give him covering fire.

CUT TO:

INT. ROBBER'S ROOST - BEN'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - AFTERNOON

Roundy is loading one of the Winchesters. Ben is grumbling.

BEN

Polecats are breaking all my windows.

Damn it, Roundy! When I told you about my family, you swore it'd be a secret.

ROUNDY

He needed to know. I don't mind breakin' my word to do what's right. Stop whining.

BEN

I'm not whining!

ROUNDY

You are. What were you yellin' at Mike for?

BEN

Stay out of it.

ROUNDY

Tell me.

BEN

None of your business.

Ben waves him off.

ROUNDY

Okay, fine.

BEN

He wouldn't ...

ROUNDY

Forget it.

BEN

Roundy ...

ROUNDY

None of my business.

BEN

I offered to give him the gang ...

ROUNDY

And he finally had the sense to tell you no.

BEN

Had the sense ..?

ROUNDY

You stupid old goat. If he doesn't want it, it's not a gift, it's a curse.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIERRA COUNTRYSIDE - ROCK - AFTERNOON

Mike trots his horse up, riding in a semi-circle around a large boulder. Mike looks back at his shadow then lines himself up heading south-west and trots on ahead.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SIERRA COUNTRYSIDE - CANYON RIM - AFTERNOON

Mike rides along the rock edge of a deep canyon, in the bottom is a river.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIERRA COUNTRYSIDE - TREES - AFTERNOON

Mike threads his way through a grove of huge fur trees, just out of sight on one side is the canyon the water can be heard faintly.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOOTHILL RIVER CANYON - AFTERNOON

Mike rides beside a long stretch of the river where white water boils in the bottom of the canyon.

CUT TO:

EXT. CANYON RIM - CORRAL - AFTERNOON

Mike rides up a low rise and sees a corral with a trail leading away from it down toward the river. Going to it, he pulls the saddle from his horse and puts it into the corral.

CUT TO:

EXT. WIRE BRIDGE - DAY

Mike comes down the trail and suddenly stops ... the sound of the water is now deafening. He steps forward cautiously and we MOVE TO REVEAL ...

A deep gorge with nothing but a pair of wires, one above the other, spanning it. Anchored in a hole drilled into the rock is a rusting steel cable about an inch in thickness. It runs over a wooden bracing and out across the river, fifty feet above the raging torrent. On the other side, the cable loops around another set of wooden pilings and comes back, four feet lower, to pass over a protruding rim of rock and then into another hole.

MIKE

(under his breath)

Ben, you're a crazy man.

Mike climbs up onto the bottom cable. He takes the top wire in his hands, locks the heels of his boots over the bottom. Carefully he moves along the two wires, right hand, right foot, left hand, left foot, one movement at a time. In the middle of the span Mike's boot heel suddenly slides, and his hands clench, the motion making the wires wobble.

MIKE

Whoa!

The bottom cable is covered with a thin film of green -- moss. Carefully he pushes on and soon comes to the other end. Mike climbs upward to a small, fenced pasture where three horses are feeding. A tarp covers two saddles and some other tack. Mike pulls one of the saddles down...

CUT TO:

EXT. RIVER FORD - LATE AFTERNOON

Molina, JONNY & Vic plunge their horses into the river and swim for the other side.

CUT TO:

EXT. CALIFORNIA COUNTRYSIDE - SUNSET

Mike rides this new horse down to the main trail to the Rafter R.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. RAFTER R RANCH - BARN - NIGHT

The barn is lit by a couple of hurricane lanterns, Jack, Dru & Juliana are loading a last wagon load of hay into the barn.

Juliana guides the teeth of the hay-forks down into the loose hay, Jack pulls on the hoist lifting the hay up and then slides it down the track into the barn. Dru uses a pitch fork to pile the hay in the end of the barn. For this dirty job the girls are uncharacteristically dressed in trousers, Dru wears a bandanna over her nose and mouth to keep out the dust. Jack pulls the fork back for another load and finds Juliana sitting in the door looking off into the darkness.

JACK

Go on to bed, honey, We'll finish up the last of it.

JULIANA

The crickets, they've stopped...

The sound of a horse approaching comes to them.

JACK

It's late for someone to be coming by.

The dogs start to bark somewhere off in the night.

MOLINA

(O.S. FAINT)

Damn it!

Suddenly there is a gunshot. The dog yelps.

VIC
(O.S. FAINT)

Ha!

Horsemen appear silhouetted in the lamp light from the house. Jack grabs Julie.

JACK
Run! Run and hide!

He pushes her out the door and turns toward the house. Another gunshot and Jack falls to his knees with blood flowing from his shoulder.

Molina reins up in front of the barn and jacking another shell into his rifle.

MOLINA
Vic! Cover the back. Find the girl,
she ran off somewhere.

Behind him, Vic spurs his mount around the house.

Dru backs out of the circle of light, deeper into the barn.

Jack tries to crawl into the area under the barn. Jonny jumps off his horse and drags Jack out into the yard. There is an angry yell from the back of the barn.

VIC
(off)
Arghh!

MOLINA
Victor! Que pasa?

VIC
(off)
She stuck me with a pitch fork!

MOLINA
You get her?

VIC (O.S.)
No! ... it's too damn dark.

MOLINA
Well get her!

I'm going after the other one.

Molina his horse away in the direction that Julie took when she ran off.

JONNY

I'll take care of thi ...

Jonny draws his gun to shoot Jack, but a bullet from the darkness takes him in the leg. Mike appears, running his horse into the yard. Jonny turns toward him, firing ... Mike drops low on the opposite side of his horse and shoots beneath it's neck. Jonny falls dead. Mike and the horse flash past the front of the barn as Molina fires at him.

CUT TO:

EXT. RAFTER R RANCH - BACK OF BARN - NIGHT

Mike drops off the horse and moves against the back wall of the barn, reloading his spent shells.

MOLINA (O.S.)

He's in back! Vic, he's in back!

Mike moves to the back door, looks inside ...

The calving room is empty.

CUT TO:

INT. RAFTER R RANCH - CALVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mike he comes into the room. On the floor the pitch fork lays, it's handle broken. Mike moves forward ... The door to the hay room is hanging open and Mike peers into this lighted area.

Suddenly a door to his right jerks open and Dru steps out swinging the broken pitch-fork handle. Mike jerks back and they both struggle against the door frame.

MIKE

Stop! Stop!

He grabs her and holds her where she can see his face in the muted lamp light.

DRU

What're you doing here?

MIKE

I heard there was trouble ...

There is the sound of a cocking gun. Vic stands in the door to the tie stalls, his side is bloody and he moves stiffly.

VIC

How in Hell'd you get here?

Mike pushes Dru away and turns to face Vic, his gun held at arm's length.

MIKE
(hoarse and deadly)
I don't want to kill you.

VIC
W-What?

MIKE
I killed someone out front.

Mike holsters his gun then steps up and, before Vic is even sure what's happening takes the gun gently from Vic'S hand.

MIKE
Go.

GET OUT OF HERE!

Vic runs and a moment later hooves disappear into the night.

DRU
You're insane.

MIKE
No. I'm just not cut out for this.

Dru heads for the front of the barn but Mike grabs her and gives her a go slow gesture ...

MIKE
Molina is still here.

DRU
What?

MIKE
There's one more man.

CUT TO:

INT. RAFTER R RANCH - BARN - NIGHT

Jack is slumped in the doorway. Dru goes to him, Mike takes down the lamp inside the door, putting it out of sight so they won't be visible from the shadows of the ranch yard. Jack glances at him.

JACK
I think he's gone ... The last one rode off.

DRU

Oh, Jack...

JACK

It's not bleeding much, but I'm going to have to go to town.

He tries to stand. She helps him to his feet.

DRU

Where's Juliana?

JACK

I told her to hide.

Dru turns away and goes to the door.

DRU

Julie? Juliana ..?

JACK

It's good you showed up when you did, son. Do you know what's happening here?

DRU

(heading off)

I'll go look in the corral.

MIKE

Ben's in trouble.

Jack examines him closely.

JACK

Ben?

MIKE

Curry.

Jack nodding to himself, putting it together.

MIKE

Perrin's trying to take over. Ben's forted up and they came looking for hostages.

DRU (O.S.)

Juliana ... you can come out now ...

Mike and Jack suddenly look at each other with growing horror.

MIKE

Oh Jesus!

Mike takes up the lamp and runs toward the corral where Dru has been calling.

JACK

Julie!

Mike comes running up to Dru.

MIKE

Drucilla!

Dru spins around, worried by the alarm in his voice.

MIKE

Where would she go?

DRU

Maybe the bridge.

MIKE

Come on!

CUT TO:

INT. RAFTER R RANCH - BRIDGE OVER CREEK - NIGHT

Light from the lamp has revealed a torn piece of cloth impaled in a broken board. On the ground nearby is Molina's hat. Mike, Dru & Jack stare at this frightening evidence.

MIKE

He got her ...

DRU

Who did? Do you know those men?

She swings the light around toward him.

MIKE

Yes ... they were Joaquin Molina and two others from Robber's Roost.

DRU

Mike, you tell me what's going on and it had better be the truth.

Mike glances at Jack ...

JACK

Go on, this has been a long time coming.

MIKE

You're father's not in the cattle business.

He's a criminal named Ben Curry and he's had a price on his head for twenty years.

He raised me too.

Dru is silent for a moment then ...

DRU

I don't know what you think you're doing ... You've lied to me every time I've talked to you!

JACK

It's the truth. He didn't want you girls to know.

DRU

Uncle Jack!

Jack steps in to hold her but she pushes away from him.

Get away! You all know this ... You all know ...

Dru walks away from them a few steps. Jack looks up at Mike.

MIKE

You need a doctor ...

DRU

What about Juliana?

MIKE

Molina will take her back to the hide out. You give me a fresh horse. I think I know how to stop him.

CUT TO:

INT. ROBBER'S ROOST - BEN'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

Ben and Roundy sit with their backs to the stone wall, listening to laughter drifting up the street from the saloon ...

BEN

None of this is going like I planned.

ROUNDY

... and how would've that been?

BEN

Is that some kind of a trick question?

ROUNDY

(laughs)

BEN

I wanted to spend time with my girls
... move into town, someplace where
they could have fun.

ROUNDY

... and Mike?

BEN

I wanted him to have everything I had.

ROUNDY

He has got it, Ben ... inside. He
doesn't need the rest.

Ben is quiet for a moment.

BEN

How many you think they left watching
the house?

ROUNDY

Just the two. They're taking shifts,
most of the others are down at the
saloon.

BEN

Mike's right, this place *is* a trap.

Ben gets up, steadying himself carefully.

BEN

They've betrayed me. If Mike's not
going to run this gang ... no one is.

EXT. RAFTER R RANCH - BARN - NIGHT

Mike brings up the Rafter R wagon. Tied to it is a
saddle horse ready to take him in pursuit of Molina.

MIKE

Whoa.

He sets the brake and gets down.

Mike

All right Mr. Coneely, let's get you
up there.

As Jack mounts the wagon Dru comes out of the barn
leading a black mare.

MIKE

What are you doing?

DRU

I'm going with you.

MIKE

You have to take your uncle to the doctor.

DRU

He can make it, those horses will go straight to the livery at The Crossing, it's like home to them.

MIKE

No. No!

He swings into the saddle. She comes over.

DRU

Mike, she's my sister!

MIKE

Dru, you couldn't make it, certainly not in the dark. I'll come and find you as soon as I can.

He rides off. Dru turns to where Jack is sitting in the wagon.

DRU

I have to go ... It's Julie and Dad, they need me.

JACK

I can make it. I'll be all right.

DRU

I'm sorry ...

JACK

Go on then, I'll be fine. Just you be careful, if you can't catch him, turn around and come back.

Dru turns back to saddle her horse.

JACK

Ha! Git up ...

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - BEN'S HOUSE/STREET - NIGHT

Roundy rolls out from under the edge of the porch in the same place Mike did. He slips off into the night.

Monson is watching Ben's house. He turns away, looking toward the saloon. Roundy appears behind him and knocks him out with his rifle butt.

CUT TO:

INT. ROBBER'S ROOST - BEN'S FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

Roundy comes in the front door. Ben is by the gun case, a pair of huge old Colt Dragoon pistols are hung from his hips, a short barreled shotgun slung loosely from his shoulder. He is loading a second shotgun. Roundy crosses to him and trades his Sharps for a Winchester.

ROUNDY

All right. Come on.

BEN

You're not going, old friend.

ROUNDY

Now, Ben that just doesn't make sense.

BEN

I built all this, so it's my responsibility ... alone.

If Molina comes back and he's got my girls ... well, one of us has to be in shape to take care of him.

Ben steps back, a slow smile pulls at one corner of his mouth.

Besides ... there's only six of them.

CUT TO:

EXT. WIRE BRIDGE - NIGHT

The two cables disappear into the darkness. Mike stands looking at it. Behind him there is a sound. He whirls around drawing his gun.

Dru has come up, leading her horse.

MIKE

What are you doing here?

DRU

I followed you ...

Mike gestures out at the cables.

MIKE

Yeah? Well, you see that, *that's* why I didn't want you to come.

Dru moves past him to look, the drop takes her breath away ...

DRU

I can make it. You can't stop me.

Mike holsters his gun, giving up.

MIKE

All right ... I have an idea.

CUT TO:

EXT. WIRE BRIDGE - MIKE & DRU - NIGHT

Mike has disassembled their saddles and is making a pair of harnesses out of the cinch straps and latigo leathers. He straps Dru into her harness.

Mike

You okay?

DRU

It's tight. I feel like a horse.

MIKE

Good. Breathe out.

CUT TO:

EXT. WIRE BRIDGE - NIGHT

Mike has tied a rope around her waist, the other end has a loop around the upper wire. Mike is connecting himself the same way.

MIKE

Get started. If you slip the rope will catch you and I'll be right along.

Dru edges out. The canyon is a black hole. The sound of the water roars in their ears. Then Mike starts out, now the wire is shifting and wobbling with every change in their balance, it is wet and slippery. Dru is about in the middle of the span when suddenly Mike slips.

MIKE

Ahhh!

The wire bucks and she holds on, looking around ... the rope has brought him up short, but he hangs there struggling to get back to the wire.

DRU

Mike? Mike ?

MIKE

Yeah! I'm okay. I think I'm okay.

DRU

Are you all right?

MIKE

Yeah. Just ... you got to help me get back on the wire. I can't get my feet back on the wire.

She edges back toward where he is hanging.

DRU

Can you pull yourself up?

MIKE

Yeah.

He grabs the upper wire and pulls himself up. Drucilla catches his pant leg and guides his foot toward the wire.

MIKE

Got it!

DRU

Go slower this time.

MIKE

I was trying to catch up to you.

They move off and, climbing down from the wire, collect themselves and head for Mike's horse.

CUT TO:

INT. ROBBER'S ROOST - SALOON - NIGHT

OWEN & Frank are unenthusiastically playing cards. Doc and Colley are tied up in a corner. TWO OTHER MEN are sitting around, dozing. Perrin stares into an empty shot glass. BRADY is sleeping. From outside there is a dull "whuff" sound, and then the sound of wood slowly breaking. Perrin looks up ...

A flickering light from the street is now coming through the front windows of the saloon. Perrin runs to the door.

One of the tents across from the saloon is a tower of flame and a second and third are catching.

OWEN

What is it?

BRADY

Kirb?

PERRIN

(to himself)

Ben! Damn it!

The others are on their feet looking at him, they rush to the windows and door. Perrin slams through the door and strides into the street, looking around.

The back door of the saloon almost jumps off it's hinges as Ben slams through it! The outlaws turn to face him, surprised ... Ben, his leg wound giving him trouble, careens into one wall then uses it to hold himself up. He raises his shotgun and fires! Brady goes down, Ben shoots again. The second shot misses and as Owen draws his gun. Frank ducks out the door. Owen starts shooting. Ben throws the empty shotgun away and flips the other one off his shoulder. His first shot cuts Owen down. THE TWO MEN run, one out the door the other jumps through the front window.

Ben limps forward. He pulls out a knife and tosses it over to Doc & Colley where they lay on the floor. Doc scoots over to it.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - SALOON - NIGHT

Ben pushes through the doors onto the porch. Firelight illuminates the street. A bullet notches the rail beside him, he turns ... Frank is firing a pistol at him from the corner of the building. Ben fires the shotgun but only a couple of the buckshot hit home. Frank is still shooting. Ben draws a pistol and steps off the porch. His bad leg collapses and he grabs the hitching rail for support, he shoots. Frank hit again, goes down.

Ben steps away from the rail and turns, a breeze parts the smoke, and ahead of him stands Perrin.

PERRIN

Don't make me do this!

BEN

I'm not makin' you do anything.

PERRIN

That whelp of yours ain't up to it and never will be.

BEN

What's mine I do with what I want, Kirb, you *know* that!

PERRIN

Ahhh!

Perrin throws his gun up and fires. His first shot notches Ben's ear and the second takes Ben in the left shoulder. Then Ben purposefully shoot Perrin in the chest.

Perrin hits the ground, his gun falling from his fingers. Ben limps toward him, then his leg gives way again and he sprawls in the dirt near Perrin's outstretched hand.

PERRIN

I thought ... Oh Lord ... (coughs)

BEN

I'm sorry, Kirb. I'm sorry.

CUT TO:

EXT. RIVERSIDE TRAIL - DAWN

Mike & Dru riding double, they are tearing down the trail that will take them to the river ford.

CUT TO:

EXT. RIVER FORD - DAWN

Molina rides up, Juliana in the saddle in front of him, his arm locked around her throat.

MOLINA

You be good now, nina. Don't give me no trouble.

He rides his horse into the river. As the horse gets it's footing in the shallow water on the other side, Molina and Juliana look up to see ...

JULIANA

Dru ..?

Mike & Dru ride their horse out onto the bank. Mike has his Henry rifle pointed at Molina's head.

MIKE

Let her go!

MOLINA

You be smart here. One of these young ladies could get hurt. I don't care about that ... but I think you do.

MIKE

You let her go and ride out of here.

MOLINA

I don't think so. It looks like we got us a stand off.

Dru slides the Smith & Wesson from Mike's holster. She drops to the ground and in two steps kneels into the partial cover of a boulder.

DRU

No it doesn't, mister. You put that gun away.

MOLINA

Hey ..!

MIKE

We're not backing off. And you're going no farther, understand?

MOLINA

Don't test me. You got to be crazy if you test me.

Juliana pulls her head back and bites deep into Molina's arm.

MOLINA

Arrgh!

Juliana throws herself sideways, squirming to get out of the saddle.

DRU

Julie!

Juliana falls into the water.

JULIANA

Dru!

Mike jumps his horse forward and the two horses collide, the men firing at point blank range. Mike swings the rifle barrel, hitting Molina in the chest. Trying to reach around and shoot Mike in the back of the head, Molina fires again, his pistol barrel flat across Mike's back. Mike's rifle muzzle snags in Molina's shirt and Mike pulls the trigger.

Molina hits the water and the current spins him away. Mike sags in the saddle.

DRU

Mike? Mike are you alright?

MIKE

Fine ...

DRU

You don't look fine.

There is a long tear in the skin across Mike's back.

DRU

Get off that horse. You're hurt.
Come on ...

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBBER'S ROOST - MORNING

Mike, Dru, and Juliana come up the trail from the ford.
Mike suddenly pulls up ...

MIKE

Oh my God ...

The tents are smoldering ruins, smoke still rising from them. Wreckage is strewn around.

Ben, a burned and bloody mess, is sitting in a large armchair in the middle of the street. A half-empty bottle of whiskey is at his side. Doc is working on Ben's wounded leg. Perrin lays dead nearby. Colley is sitting on the saloon porch, Roundy is pacing. They both look up.

JULIANA

Pa ..?

Roundy helps Juliana down and she runs to Ben.

BEN

Julie? I hope to God I'm not seeing things.

JULIANA

You're not ... you're not.

Dru looks sideways at Mike, they both hang back. Doc moves Ben's leg a bit and Ben winces.

BEN

I'll be all right sweetheart. If this damn horse doctor'll stop twisting my leg.

Doc throws up his hands in disgust and stands.

DOC

If you don't let me fix it today, I'll be cutting it off tomorrow.

Ben waves him away.

JULIANA

Oh Papa, what happened?

BEN

I got shot ... a couple of times.

Mike slips off the horse and helps Dru down.

BEN

Don't you two be looking at me like that.

DRU

Papa, you've got a lot of explaining to do.

BEN

(to Mike shaking his head)

Son, if you'd called the law down on me you couldn't have caused more trouble.

DRU

I made him bring me. They -- your men took Julie.

BEN

(to Mike)

Well, between the two of us we made a mess of things, that's for sure.

MIKE

I'm sorry I disappointed you.

BEN

Help me up.

Mike & Dru get on either side of Ben's chair and get him to his feet.

DRU

Here.

BEN

Come on Doc, you'll get your chance.

Ben puts an arm around Mike's shoulder.

BEN

You didn't disappoint me, boy.

... I've always had to respect anyone with guts enough to tell me to go to hell.

They turn and start up the street toward the house. Doc, Colley and Roundy follow. Ben's voice fades as they go up the street.

BEN

I fear a long convalescence where this Gentleman of Opportunity will have to repeatedly apologize for his wild and thieving nature.

PULL BACK AND
FADE OUT.