

Rev. 08/26/05 (Blue)
Rev. 11/03/05 (Pink)

THE ASSASSINATION OF JESSE JAMES BY THE COWARD ROBERT FORD

Screenplay by
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based on the novel by Ron Hansen

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FINAL WHITE

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FADE IN:

INT./EXT. WOODLAND AVE. COTTAGE - DUSK

NARRATOR (V.O.)

He was growing into middle age and was living then in a bungalow on Woodland Avenue.

Green weeds split the porch steps, a wasp nest clings to an attic gable, a rope swing loops down from a dying elm tree and the ground below it is scuffed soft as flour.

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

He installed himself in a rocking chair and smoked a cigar down in the evening as his wife wiped her pink hands on an apron and reported happily on their two children. His children knew his legs, the sting of his mustache against their cheeks. They didn't know how their father made his living, or why they so often moved. They didn't even know their father's name.

EXT. STREET (KANSAS CITY) - DAY

JESSE, from a distance, a dandy in his gentleman's clothes and cane. Everyone seems to know him.

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

He was listed in the city directory as Thomas Howard, and he went everywhere unrecognized and lunched with Kansas City shopkeepers and merchants, calling himself a cattleman or commodities investor, someone rich and leisured who had the common touch.

MONTAGE

JESSE'S scars and wounds:

NARRATOR (V.O.)

He had two incompletely healed
(MORE)

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 bullet holes in his chest and
 another in his thigh. He was
 missing the nub of his left middle
 finger and was cautious lest that
 mutilation be seen.

EXT. PRAIRIE WHEAT - AFTERNOON

JESSE looks out beyond the prairie wheat, to the dying sun.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 He also had a condition that was
 referred to as granulated eyelids
 and it caused him to blink more
 than usual, as if he found creation
 slightly more than he could accept.

Rooms seemed hotter when he was in
 them.

TIMELAPSE CLOUDS

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Rains fell straighter.

A ROCKING CHAIR

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

WHEAT BLOWING IN THE WIND

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Sounds were amplified.

ON JESSE

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 He considered himself a Southern
 loyalist and guerrilla in a Civil
 War that never ended. He
 regretted neither his robberies
 (MORE)

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 nor the seventeen murders that he
 laid claim to.

CLOSE ON JESSE

His eyes impossibly blue.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 He had seen another summer under
 in Kansas City, Missouri, and on
 September fifth, in the year 1881,
 he was thirty-four years old.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. BLUE CUT (AS SEEN FROM THE SOUTHERN RIDGE) - DAY

Thirty feet below is a cinder roadbed, the sickle curve
 of rails, the grade that is hard work for a locomotive.
 Beyond that is the northern ridge -- a lower elevation --
 rising ten feet above the cut.

SUPER:
 BLUE CUT, MISSOURI
 SEPTEMBER 7, 1881

EXT. SOUTHERN RIDGE - DAY

FRANK JAMES (stern, 38) stands back in the green
 darkness, studying the terrain. O.S. we hear the sound
 of some fool CRASHING THROUGH THE WEEDS to the rear of
 him. FRANK opens his coat and slides his hand over his
 revolver.

VOICE (O.S.)
 Excuse me, but I see I've traipsed
 right on in and interrupted you.

FRANK turns to see a boy in a stovepipe hat and an
 overlarge black coat that's cinched by a low-slung
 holster. His hands are overhead as if a gun is upon him.

FRANK
 Who are you then?

BOB

Bob Ford.

FRANK

Charley's brother?

BOB

Yeah.

BOB receives this as an invitation to lower his hands. He hunkers down next to FRANK and takes off his hat.

BOB (CONT'D)

I was lying when I said I just happened down here. I've been looking for you. I feel lousy that I didn't say so at the outset.

FRANK digs in his pockets and extracts cigarette makings. He's not inclined to converse.

BOB (CONT'D)

Folks sometimes take me for a nincompoop on account of the shabby first impression I make, whereas I've always thought of myself as being just a rung down from the James brothers. And I was hoping if I ran into you aside from those peckerwoods, I was hoping I could show you how special I am. I honestly believe I'm destined for great things, Mr. James. I've got qualities that don't come shining through right at the outset, but give me a chance and I'll get the job done - I can guarantee you that.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Dick, Charile, Wood, and Ed sit around a fire.

CHARLEY

Hey, Dick, you ever diddled a squaw?

DICK

Shhhhh...

CHARLEY

Come on, you can tell me. I've always wanted to lay down with a redskin.

DICK

Well, Charley, there's a feeling that comes over you gettin' inside a woman whose hands have scalped a congregation.

WOOD

There's a thunderous sound that comes from their cooch on account of the fact that they birth a child standing upright like a wild animal.

CHARLEY

What's it sound like?

WOOD

Whatever a thunderous cooch sounds like, Charley. I don't know.

DICK

No, they got a noisy quim on account of the fact that they use their cunnies as a saddlebag to carry tundries across the plains.

CHARLEY

Come on, what'd it really feel like? It feel good? Come on. Fess up, now.

DICK

I like you, Charley.

WOOD

I like you, too, Charley.

EXT. SOUTHERN RIDGE - DAY

FRANK slimes his cigarette and strikes a match off his boot sole.

FRANK

You're not so special, Mr. Ford. You're just like any other tyro who's prinked himself up for an escapade. You're hoping to be a gunslinger like those nickel books are about, but you may as well quench your mind of it. You don't have the ingredients, son.

BOB slaps a mosquito and looks at his blood-freckled palm.

BOB

I'm sorry to hear you feel that way since I put such stock in your opinions.

He stands and rehats himself.

BOB (CONT'D)

As for me being a gunslinger, I've just got this one granddaddy Patterson Colt and a borrowed belt to stick it in. But I've also got an appetite for greater things. I hoped joining up with you would put me that much closer to getting them.

FRANK

And what am I supposed to say to that?

BOB

Let me be your sidekick tonight.

FRANK examines his cigarette, sucks it once more, and flips it onto the roadbed.

FRANK

Sidekick?

BOB

So you can examine my grit and intelligence.

FRANK

I don't know what it is about you, but the more you talk, the more

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)
 you give me the willies. I don't
 even want you anywhere within
 earshot this evening. You
 understand?

BOB
 I'm sorry --

FRANK
 (interrupting)
 Why don't you just get now? Scat.

And, after a beat, BOB tramps up the hill, slapping weeds
 aside.

14 EXT. WOODS - MOVING WITH BOB TO THE GANG'S CAMP - DAY 14

BOB passes a number of horses reined to a piece of rope
 fixed between two trees. He passes MEN aged in their
 late teens and early twenties -- hooligans mainly, boys
 with vulgar features and sullen eyes. They cradle
 shotguns and wear patched coveralls and foul-looking suit
 coats. They are known collectively as THE CRACKERNECK
 BOYS and are just here to provide "atmosphere" at the
 robbery and easy prey for the sheriff afterwards. BOB
 clears this group and arrives to a view of JESSE
 surrounded by the inner gang; the current apostles:

ROBERT WOODSON HITE (WOOD) is JESSE'S cousin, sulking and
 mooning over some imagined slight.

CHARLEY FORD is BOB'S older brother, who chuckles and
 brays and hee-haws and who covers his left boot with a
 coat in order to conceal a clubfoot.

DICK LIDDIL and ED MILLER can be seen in the b.g.,
 working over a cast-iron pot:

ED MILLER is the anxious type; has a streak of spit where
 his spine ought to be.

DICK LIDDIL is a good-looking horse thief.

BOB eyes this group hungrily, coveting admission.

ED
 I was with a girl once. Wasn't a
 squaw, but she was purty. She had
 yellow hair, like uh... oh, like
 something.

DICK

Like hair bobbed from a ray of sunlight?

ED

Yeah, yeah. Like that. Boy, you talk good.

DICK

You can hide things in vocabulary.

ED

Maybe you and me could write her a note, send it by post?

DICK

See, all you gotta do, Ed, is predict her needs and beat her to the punch.

ED

Well, this girl, she had a real specific job.

DICK

Specific?

ED

We's only together once. She's afraid of lightning. She came up into the wagon and just cuddled right up to me. She gave me a kind price, too.

DICK

Well I be! That is specific.

ED

Yeah, sure, she been with other people. But the kind of things she said to me, people just don't say unless they really mean it.

DICK

"My love said she would marry only me and Job himself could not make her care, for what women say to lovers, you'll agree, one writes on running water or on air."

ED

My God that's good. Let's write her that.

DICK
Naw. Poetry don't work on whores.

EXT. WOODS - GANG CAMP - DAY

JESSE takes a heaped bowl from DICK LIDDIL in his gunnysack apron. He lowers himself onto a stump and BOB squats in the dirt at his feet.

BOB
Am I too late to wish you a happy birthday?

JESSE
How'd you know?

BOB
Oh, you'd be surprised at what I got stored away. I'm an authority on the James boys.

JESSE
Is you?

BOB
Your brother Frank and I just had a real nice visit, just chit-chattin' about this and that, right over there. Must've been a hundred subjects entertained --

JESSE
Good Lord. Do you know what this stew needs?

BOB is perplexed:

BOB
Dumplings?

JESSE
Noodles. You eat yourself some noodle stew and your clock will tick all night. You ever see that woman over in Fayette could suck noodles up her nose?

BOB
Don't believe I have.

JESSE
You never heard of her? You've got
canals in your head you
never dreamed of.

BOB is dumbfounded.

BOB
I don't like to harp on a subject
but --

JESSE
I don't care who comes with me.
Never have. That's why they call
gregarious.

FRANK JAMES is drinking coffee and scowling as he sits on
the far side of the fire. JESSE raises his voice:

JESSE (CONT'D)
I hear you and young Stovepipe
here had a real nice visit.

FRANK looks askance at BOB and flings the dregs of his
coffee onto the ground.

FRANK
(terse)
Your boys have got about an acre
of rock to haul, Dingus. You'd
better goose them down yonder.

EXT. BLUE CUT RAILBED - DAY

A cottonwood tree is skidded down the bank and heaved
over the polished steel rails. The CRACKERNECK BOYS
carry boulders of lime and sandstone which they fort
around the tree as SHOVELS SING and picks splinter.
JESSE supervises the rock piling, recommending land to be
mined for stone, chewing his green cigar black.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

The James gang committed over 25 bank, train, and stagecoach robberies from 1867 to 1881. But except for Frank and Jesse James, all of the original members were now either dead or in prison. So for their last robbery at Blue Cut, the brothers recruited a gang of petty thieves and country rubes, culled from the local hillsides.

Shadows grow long and die. Clouds brick overhead and brindle pink. Then crimson. Then violet. Then black.

EXT. BLUE CUT RAILBED - NIGHT

Jesse hops down the bank in three plunging steps, shakes out his trouser cuffs, and kneels to put his ear to the rails. The HUM of the LOCOMOTIVE is like insects in a jar.

JESSE

She's right on schedule, Buck!

EXT. SOUTHERN RIDGE - NIGHT

FRANK stubs out his cigarette.

FRANK

Snuff those lanterns. Look at those fools. They're going to trip and shoot each other into females.

DICK

I bet you I can find them husbands if they do.

EXT. BLUE CUT RAILBED - NIGHT

JESSE raises the blue bandana over his nose and places his right boot on the rail as DICK slides down the southern cliff. DICK ties a red bandana over his face and ambles over, shaking the dust from his shirt.

The LOCOMOTIVE'S CHUFFING is GROWING LOUD.

JESSE'S right foot tickles with rail vibrations.

The headlamp's aisle of white light fills the forest passage, streaks across scrub and bush, then bends and floods towards JESSE. He swings his red lantern in a yard master's signal to stop. The brakes are engaged with an ear-splitting scream. Couplings bang. Sparks slice off the rails as the ENGINE swiftly DECELERATES. And a great cloud of steam breaks over JESSE.

Then the GANG is running and bounding and skidding down the embankments.

BOB FORD slides down like a debutante in petticoats, his left hand snatching at roots while his right unveils his eyes long enough to peek around at the commotion:

MEN rush alongside the train levering their rifles in a manner they fancy is ghoulish and frightening.

JESSE hops out of the steam and up onto the cab step and cocks his revolver. The ENGINEER cringes down behind his hands.

EXT. BAGGAGE/EXPRESS CAR - NIGHT

The BAGGAGEMASTER and EXPRESS MESSENGER have their heads tilted out the door at radically different heights.

BAGGAGEMASTER

Do you think that lock will hold?

EXPRESS MESSENGER

No I don't.

The door slams.

INT. BAGGAGE/EXPRESS CAR - SAME TIME

The wood screams and folds inward from the blow.

JESSE socks the door open, heaves his chest onto the threshold and knees himself into the room. DICK LIDDIL, ED MILLER and the come-lately CHARLEY FORD follow him. A lantern is passed up as JESSE lifts packages and shakes them and guesses at their contents:

JESSE

You got anything good in here?

MESSENGER

Could be.

JESSE smashes another box on a nail and snags it open, finding inside a photograph of a child in an oval frame, the cheek torn by a nail. He looks at it a moment and then glares at the frightened MESSENGER;

JESSE

Open that safe. Do it!

The MESSENGER looks to the BAGGAGEMASTER for council -- but the man's head is down. He looks back at JESSE with his nervous smile. CHARLEY FORD steps forward and strikes him over the skull with his pistol. The man drops to his knees, blood shoelacing his face. The BAGGAGEMASTER backs to wall in horror.

ED MILLER

You didn't have to bop him,
Charley.

JESSE

Yes, he did. They need the
convincing. They got their
company rules and I got my mean
streak and that's how we get
things done around here.

CHARLEY grins with accomplishment and JESSE clears some registers off the only safe he can see.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Get on over here and attend to this
thing.

We hear a wild and scrambled O.S. FUSILLADE and DICK leans outside to see what's going on.

INT. BAGGAGE/EXPRESS CAR - NIGHT

The EXPRESS MESSENGER jerks the company vault door open. CHARLEY FORD empties the contents of the safe into a grain sack which he hands to JESSE. JESSE puzzles over its contents.

JESSE (CONT'D)
Isn't no hundred thousand dollars
in here, Dick.

JESSE turns on the EXPRESS MESSENGER:

JESSE (CONT'D)
Get down on your knees.

MESSENGER
Why?

JESSE
You oughta pray; I'm going to kill
you. Get down!

MESSENGER
You'll have to make me.

JESSE
All right.

JESSE socks the man with his pistol and he drops like empty clothes. JESSE looks at him for a moment, then cocks his pistol and puts it against the unconscious man's head. ED MILLER reacts with horror:

ED MILLER
Don't shoot him! Don't... shoot
him.

JESSE grins, uncocks the pistol, and picks up the grain sack.

JESSE
Don't you tell me what I can and
can not do, Ed.

EXT. BLUE CUT RAILBED - NIGHT

The gang rides through the rain on horseback.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Chicago newspaper publishers made a great deal of the Blue Cut train robbery, alleging that in no state but Missouri would the James brothers be tolerated for twelve years.

INT. WOODLAND AVE BARN - NIGHT

Charlie and Wood sit in the corner, while Frank stands alone.

CHARLIE

Hey, can you keep a secret?

WOOD

Depends on what you're concealing.

CHARLIE

Are you afraid of the dark?

WOOD

No.

CHARLIE

Are you superstitious?

WOOD

Nuh uh.

Jesse stands just inside the sloshing eave, peering at his older brother with melancholy. It's a moment before he perceives that BOB FORD is standing to his right.

JESSE

You must've creeped up on cat's paws.

BOB

I'll wager that's the first and last time you'll ever be caught off guard.

JESSE

How old are you?

BOB

Twenty.

(beat)

Except I won't really be twenty until January.

(MORE)

BOB (CONT'D)
(scratches his sleeve
apologetically)
I'm nineteen.

JESSE
You feel older than that, though,
don't you?

BOB
Yes, I do.

JESSE
You enjoy yourself this evening?

BOB
I was strung too high for much
pleasure.

JESSE seems to think this an appropriate remark.

JESSE
Do you like tea?

INT./EXT. WOODLAND AVE. BARN - LATER

FRANK gathers two horse blankets and makes his way to an
empty stall.

CHARLEY
Hey Frank, do you think the
sheriff's out
already?

FRANK
More than likely.

CHARLEY slinks over to the stall and watches as the grim
man hangs his coat.

CHARLEY
I had a real fine time tonight.

FRANK
You think so?

CHARLEY

I wasn't just flapping my lips
about my kid brother and me. What
I figured was if you and Jesse
could gauge our courage and
daring, you just might make us
your regular sidekicks.

FRANK shoots him a look of umbrage as he spreads out a
wool blanket on the straw.

FRANK

Your courage and your daring. I
about heard all I want to about
sidekicks. You sound like your damn
brother.

CHARLEY

I'll be square with you: it was
Bob who put me up to it. He's got
plans for the James boys that I
can't even get the hang of,
they're that complicated.

FRANK settles into repose, wrapping another horse blanket
around him.

FRANK

You might as well forget
everything about that because after
tonight there'll be no more
shinanigans. You can
jot it down in your little diary:
September seventh, eighteen
eighty-one; the James gang robbed
one last train at Blue Cut and
gave up their nightriding for
good.

CHARLEY

How will you make your living?

FRANK is smoking a cigarette with his eyes shut.

FRANK

Maybe I'll sell shoes.

EXT. WOODLAND AVE. PORCH - NIGHT

JESSE and BOB come out onto the porch with a candle and two cigars. JESSE lowers into a rocker and BOB takes the mating chair. BOB bends forward over the flame and lights his cigar.

BOB

I can't believe I woke up this morning wondering if my Daddy would loan me his overcoat, and here it is just past midnight and I've already robbed a railroad train and I'm sitting in a rocking chair chatting with none other than Jesse James.

JESSE

Yeah, it's a wonderful world.

Bob reaches into his pocket.

BOB

Oh, what's this? I was real agitated this morning, wondering if I'd be able to tell you and Frank apart. So I had the clipping that described you both. You want me to read it?

JESSE

Go on.

BOB

Well, I gotta find... here. Jesse James, the youngest, has a face as smooth and innocent as a schoolgirl. They blue eyes, very clear and penetrating, are never at rest. He form is tall and graceful and capable of great endurance and great effort. Jesse is light-hearted, reckless, and devil-may-care. There is always a smile on his lips --

JESSE

All right, all right.

BOB

Well, yeah. Then it's "Frank, Frank, Frank..." You know what I've got right next to my bed? The Train Robbers, or a story of the James Boys, by R.W. Stevens. Many's the night I've stayed up with my mouth open and my eyes open, reading about your escapades in the Wide Awake Library.

JESSE

They're all lies, you know.

BOB

'Course they are.

JESSE

You don't have to keep smoking that if it's making you bungey.

BOB is relieved. He reaches over the banister and drops the cigar in a puddle.

EXT. WOODLAND AVE. - HOUSE - DAY

FRANK JAMES and family are assembled in traveling clothes around a PHAETON CARRIAGE. ZEE hugs ANNIE RALSTON JAMES and then grasps three-year-old ROB to her bosom. FRANK receives her kiss like medicine, and then turns to the backyard to see his younger brother angrily looking away.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Alexander Franklin James would be in Baltimore when he would read of the assassination of Jesse James. He had spurned his younger brother for being peculiar and temperamental, but once he perceived that he would never see Jesse again, Frank would be wrought up, perplexed, despondent.

INT. WOODLAND AVE. HOUSE - DAY

BOB watches from the kitchen window as the Phaeton pulls

away, then drops his cup in the sink and heads out to the backyard.

EXT. WOODLAND AVE. - BACKYARD - DAY

JESSE sits in a rocker that is submerged to its seat in grass and weeds. Beat.

JESSE

My brother and me are hardly
on speaking terms these days.

BOB

I wasn't going to mention it.

JESSE reaches into a tin under his chair and hauls up two writhing snakes. BOB flinches.

JESSE

You scared?

BOB (CONT'D)

Just surprised a little.

JESSE

They aren't as succulent as I like
and they're the devil to clean but
if a man skins them and fries them
in garlic and oil -- mercy, them
good eating.

BOB

Well, I've never been that hungry.

JESSE unfolds a four-inch knife and lifts the head of a snake on the blade.

JESSE

I give them names.

BOB

Such as?

JESSE

Such as enemies. I give them the
names of enemies.

He lays the snakes on the arm of his chair and carefully saws off their heads with his knife. The bodies curl and thrash. He flicks the heads into the grass.

JESSE (CONT'D)
Go tell Wood and Charley to get
their gatherings together.

BOB
Me too?

JESSE
You can stay.

INT./EXT. BARN (WOODLAND AVE.) - DAY

Charley and Wood are talking in the barn when Bob enters.

BOB
Hey

WOOD
What you want, peckerwood?

BOB
Nothing, except to tell you two
Jesse wants you to gather your
parts and get on your horses and
get out of town. And me to stick
around.

The dismissal hits WOOD hard:

WOOD
Well, I'm his cousin! My momma was
his daddy's sister!

BOB
Was that how they described it to
you, Wood?

WOOD
You better watch your tongue, young
sapling. So how come it's me who
has to
rattle his hocks out of town?

CHARLEY is already packing.

CHARLEY

If I know Jess, there's some real nasty sad-suzie work that's got to be done around here and Bob's the ninny that has to do it.

BOB

Oh yeah, I'm sure that's it, Charley.

CHARLEY

You only met him twelve hours ago. He doesn't even know your name.

EXT. WOODLAND AVE. - BACKYARD - DAY

When they exit JESSE is at the compost crib, drooling the snake bodies onto the mulch.

JESSE

Wood? You tell your daddy I'll be in Kentucky in October and maybe we can hunt some birds together.

WOOD

So how come it's Bob who gets to stay?

JESSE

Bob's going to move my gear to a house down the street.

CHARLEY winks at his brother.

CHARLEY

See.

BOB

I don't mind.
(though of course
he does)
Sounds like an adventure.

EXT. TROOST AVE. - HOUSE - NIGHT

NARRATOR (V.O.)

They moved to 1017 Troost Avenue at night so that the neighborhood couldn't get a good look at them or their belongings.

BOB does all the lifting, JESSE provides direction.

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

And then Bob thought Jesse would give him eight hours sleep and a daydreaming goodbye --

INT. TROOST AVE. HOUSE - DAY

The FAMILY are assembled around the dining table. BOB seems to be hoping his continued presence won't be noticed.

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

-- but with a second day in the Thomas Howard house, Bob thought he might never go but might be brought in as a good-natured cousin to the boy and a gentleman helper to Zee.

INT. TOPEKA EXCHANGE SALOON - DAY

Action as per V.O.:

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

He went everywhere with Jesse. They made trips to the Topeka Exchange saloon, where Jesse could spend nearly sixty minutes sipping one glass of beer and still complain about feeling tipsy.

ANGLE ON BOB

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Bob would rarely vouchsafe his
opinions as they talked. If
spoken to, he would fidget and
grin --

EXT. TOPEKA EXCHANGE SALOON - DAY

JESSE chats with a man in the street. MOVE IN ON BOB.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
-- if Jesse palavered with another
person, Bob secretaried their
dialogue, getting each inflection,
reading every gesture and tick, as
if he wanted to compose a biography
of the outlaw, or as if he were
preparing an impersonation.

INT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - KITCHEN - DAY

BOB, with bated breath, watches through the doorway.

JESSE stands naked in a laundry boiler wringing a
washcloth over his skull. He's wracked by a coughing
fit. He seems old, prematurely decrepit, the scars on
his body stand out red as slaughter.

After a long beat, JESSE says:

JESSE
Go away.

BOB
Used to be nobody could sneak up on
Jesse James.

JESSE
Now you think otherwise?

BOB
I ain't never seen you without your
guns, neither.

JESSE tows a towel off a chair and reveals, almost
incidentally, a twelve-inch Remington revolver on the

seat.

JESSE

Can't figure it out: Do you want to be like me, or do you want to be me?

BOB

I'm just making fun is all.

EXT. FRONT YARD - DAY

Bob is on horseback, while Jesse and Zee say goodbye.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Bob was sent away cordially the next day, with a goodbye from Jesse, but nothing from Zee beyond what good manners demanded. It was forty miles from his sister's farm to Kansas City, and it was well into the afternoon by the time he arrived there. Mrs. Martha Bolton rented the Harbison farm in 1879, just after becoming a widow, and she made a good income giving room and meals to her brothers Charley, Wilbur, and Bob, and the members of the James gang who would appear when they needed seclusion.

EXT. HARBISON FARM - YARD - DAY

DICK LIDDIL is at the yard swing with Bob's niece, IDA (12 years old), twisting the seat until the ropes are raveled. He releases her and she twirls, squealing, her auburn hair flying out.

WOOD HITE stands on the kitchen porch, stern as John the Baptist.

WOOD

You're gonna make her sick! She's gonna upchuck, you don't watch out!

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Wood had been spurned by Martha and her affections and his attempt to switch his pursuit to her daughter was currently being thwarted by Dick Liddil.

DICK cuffs the girl's dress so that it blooms and reveals her thighs.

DICK

Wait a second. You assured me that you were not ticklish. What's going on, now?

IDA

You're not supposed to peek, Dick!

DICK

But you're so pretty! I can't help myself!

BOB, approaching, calls:

BOB

Howdy!

But they ignore him. WOOD, jealous, slams the screen door shut.

INT. HARBISON HOMESTEAD - KITCHEN - DAY

BOB can be heard before he's seen:

BOB (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Howdy!

Neither CHARLEY nor MARTHA BOLTON (BOB AND CHARLEY'S SISTER) look up.

BOB (CONT'D)

Howdy!

BOB enters, making a beeline for the staircase and his bedroom.

BOB (CONT'D)
I'm finally home!

MARTHA
I'm real glad, Bob.

CHARLEY
I'm in that room too, Bob. Don't
mess up my things.

BOB
Alright, grandpa!

HARBISON HOMESTEAD - 2ND FLOOR BEDROOM - DAY

BOB reaches under his bed and hooks out a shoebox. He opens the lid and lays it on the bed. From his pocket he removes a cigar butt and wraps it in the eye-holed white handkerchief. He tucks this little bundle into the box alongside lurid nickel books about the James gang, Civil War photographs, yellowed newspaper articles, and other James brothers' mementoes. Then he squirms his boots off and strips out of his month-old clothes.

EXT. HARBISON FARM - DAY

Two calves stare with worry as BOB takes a bath in the broad water tank. BOB bends over to rinse soap from his hair and then shakes water like a hound. Then he notices an amused DICK LIDDIL standing as close as a tailor.

BOB (CONT'D)
How long you been there?

DICK
Just now arrived. Did I miss
much?

BOB
Not unless you've never seen a man
wash his dirty carcass before.

DICK
You've got a big old pecker for
being
such a little squirrel.

BOB

Is that what you come over here to see?

DICK bends for the towel and some of the good nature slides from his face.

DICK

No. Your brother said Jesse kept you in Kansas City some extra days. What was the reason?

Bob rubs his hair wild.

BOB

Well, I'm not at liberty to say exactly.

BOB straddles the tank and surrounds himself with the towel.

DICK

Let me ask you this: did Jesse mention that me and Cummins were in cahoots?

BOB

Is that so?

DICK

Oh dear. I've went on and said too much, have I?

BOB

Who else is partners with you two?

DICK

See, he'll cut our throats if he finds out. You don't know him like I do. You do Jesse dirt, you connive behind his back, he'll come after you with a cleaver.

BOB

So what are you three cahoots cooking up?

DICK

Don't know that I should say.

BOB

I don't want to wheedle the dang
news from you, Dick.

DICK

Then how about let's leave it a
mystery and we won't neither one
of us regret our little chat.

BOB rolls his eyes in exasperation.

DICK (CONT'D)

Can you hand me that six-gun,
Bob.

Dick cocks the gun and presses it against Bob's head.

DICK (CONT'D)

You so much as mention
my name to Jesse; I'll find out
about it, you better believe that.
And I'll look you up, I'll
knock on your door, and I will be
as mad as a hornet, I will be hot.

BOB

You be careful with that iron,
Dick.

Dick lowers the gun.

DICK

You know where I stand on these
matters and that's all there is to
it. We can be friendly as pigs
from now on.

INT. HARBISON HOMESTEAD - MARTHA'S BEDROOM - DAY

BOB dresses in his new clothes, selected according to
Jesse's sartorial preferences. But while these clothes
might suit Jesse James, they do not particularly suit
ROBERT FORD.

62 INT. HARBISON HOMESTEAD - 2ND FLOOR BEDROOM - DAY

BOB enters to find CHARLEY and WOOD rooting through his
mementoes:

BOB

You two have some nerve!

BOB elbows them aside and begins repacking the shoebox. Charley holds up a photograph.

CHARLEY

We were just reading about the James boys among the Mexicans. This ain't Jesse.

BOB

You don't know that.

CHARLEY

Never wore no mustache; never was anywheres near a cannon.

WOOD

I can't even calculate what I'm lookin' at.

CHARLEY

Ever since he was a child, Bob's collected whatsoever he could find about the James brothers. Got himself a little museum in this room.

BOB rams the night-stand's door closed. He's humiliated, angry, close to tears:

BOB

Next time you snoop around up here you better strap on a shootin' iron.

CHARLEY

Ooh, You can see how scared I am.

BOB

You too, Wood Hite. You cross me again and I'll put a bullet through your head.

WOOD pokes BOB onto the bed.

WOOD

(sneers)

Son, you better recollect who my cousin is.

(MORE)

WOOD (CONT'D)

You seem to've misremembered that Jesse loves me like the Good Book. You may play like you're a dangerous person at the grocery store, but don't you misremember who you'll be accounting to if I so much as get my feelings hurt.

MARTHA (O.S.)

Do I have to yell suwee?

CHARLEY

Why don't everyone make up and be pleasant for once? Why don't we pass the evening like pleasant human beings?

EXT. JESSE'S LAND - DAY

Jesse and his son are digging in the dirt together.

JESSE

You see something?

SON

Just a bird.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY

Jesse slowly walks though town.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

The month of October came, and Jesse began seeing Pinkerton operatives in every floor walker, street sweeper, and common man poking about in a store. On the morning of the 11th, he would wake his wife with scripture pertaining to the Holy family's flight into Egypt. Overnight, the Thomas Howard clan vanished from Kansas City. Shortly thereafter, four of the Blue Cut train robbers were arrested in shacks near Glendale. How Jesse could have known remains a mystery.

INT. HARBISON HOMESTEAD - KITCHEN - DAY

DICK enters with his coat and bags. MARTHA kisses him on

the lips and whispers in his ear.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 There was a wandering existence.
 Men who choose to be outlaws cannot
 afford to be in one place for very
 long.

DICK
 Oh, goodness! Maybe I'll change
 my mind.

But then WOOD is behind him, jealously bumping him
 towards the door.

WOOD
 Come on.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE (SOUTHWEST KENTUCKY) - DAY

They ride sullenly. WOOD reads a penny newspaper four
 inches from his nose. DICK watches the geography sail
 by.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 Wood and Dick bicker across the
 entire state of Kentucky, until
 they made Russelville, home of
 Major George Hite, Wood's father,
 and uncle to Frank and Jesse James.

EXT. HITE PROPERTY (KENTUCKY) - AFTERNOON

DICK and WOOD approach the HITE family home. Two EX-
 SLAVES thresh corn in a field. A BLACK WOMAN pins
 laundry on a clothesline.

MRS. SARAH HITE stands up from her weeding and excitedly
 waves. She's pert and pretty.

WOOD
 You stay away from this one.
 She's my daddy's wife. You got it?

INT. HITE HOMESTEAD - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Dinner in silence: SARAH sits next to her ancient and
 emaciated HUSBAND. The atmosphere is becoming strained,
 so DICK leans over his pot roast:

DICK
 You cook this, ma'am?

She shakes her head:

SARAH

I've got a nigger woman.

MAJOR GEORGE HITE raises an ear trumpet and inclines it towards his wife:

MAJOR GEORGE HITE

How's that?

SARAH

Dick asked if I cooked this.

MAJOR GEORGE HITE

Did you?

SARAH

No.

WOOD

She knew what he was like when she married him.

EXT. HITE HOMESTEAD - PORCH - NIGHT

MRS. SARAH HITE sits in a rocking chair with her needlework. DICK comes out and leans on the porch rail. Finally, he says:

DICK

I guess we're the night owls, you and I.

She simpers but does not look up.

SARAH

I'm glad.

DICK

Oh? How come?

SARAH

You're interesting to look at; You have a real pleasant disposition and, I don't know, you sort of make me warm all over.

DICK

I'm what they call a Enamoratu.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Well, I knew there had to be a name for it.

DICK

You and the Hite family don't get along, if I'm to trust Wood and his version of the situation.

SARAH

We hate each other like poison, if you want to know the truth. Most of the Hites wouldn't spit on me if I was on fire.

DICK grins:

DICK

They say when a woman's on fire you're supposed to roll her around on the ground and cover her with your body.

Sarah laughs and clamps her mouth.

SARAH

You are a naughty tease!

WOOD appears at the screen door, scowling, in his nightshirt.

WOOD

Isn't it about bedtime?

DICK

I'll just kiss those dainty nubbins.

And, as he does so, SARAH giggles.

WOOD

Good night.

INT. HITE HOMESTEAD - NIGHT

DICK follows WOOD up to the second floor bedroom.

INT. HITE HOMESTEAD - BEDROOM - LATER

DICK is tucked under the bed sheet. He whacks his pillow. He rustles and stirs.

WOOD (CONT'D)
Would you stop?

DICK
I drank too much coffee.

He sits up to see WOOD glaring at him from the bunk opposite.

DICK (CONT'D)
I need to visit the privy
something terrible.

EXT. HITE HOMESTEAD - PORCH - NIGHT

DICK exits, careful not to let the screen door clap behind him.

EXT. HITE HOMESTEAD - LAWN - NIGHT

He crosses the lawn to the outhouse in back: An interior candlelight can be seen through each severance and crack. DICK looks around him and then slips inside.

INT. HITE HOMESTEAD - OUTHOUSE - NIGHT

SARAH sits with her dress hiked up and collected like laundry. Her eyes are downcast, but she seems less shocked than amused.

SARAH
This is embarrassing.

DICK
You go ahead and do your duty; I don't mind.

SARAH
I've sort of got stage fright with a strange man in the commode with me.

DICK
I ain't strange. I'm built just like the rest of them. You look awful pretty.

SARAH
Do I?

DICK
I've never in my life seen such
well-shaped limbs.

She glances fleetingly at the bent pronouncement at his
crotch.

SARAH
Is Wood awake?

DICK
Just me.

She considers her knees for a moment and then blows out
the candle.

SARAH
And I bet you thought I was a lady.

EXT. ED MILLER'S CABIN - DUSK

ED MILLER at the screen door with a gun in his hand and
fright in his eyes. Jesse James is riding down the trail
towards his house.

78 INT. ED MILLER'S CABIN - CONTINUOUS ACTION

JESSE enters. The room is a mess: Mold-crusted dishes
stacked on the kitchen table; newspapers shucked like
corn against the couch; a chair tipped over; a cat on the
kitchen cutting board licking something from the sink.

JESSE
You aren't much of a housekeeper,
are you?

ED MILLER
You didn't just happen by.

JESSE
Why not?

JESSE looks at the gun and MILLER puts it on the kitchen
table.

JESSE sits himself down on the ringed rug. He nods
toward the sagging couch:

JESSE (CONT'D)
Go ahead and take a load off your
feet.

MILLER does as instructed. His clothes are wrinkled as crumpled paper, his fingernails are outlined with filth, a corner of his mouth is stained with tobacco juice.

JESSE (CONT'D)

You ought to get yourself a wife.

ED MILLER

I was going to ask Martha -- Charley's sister? I was going to ask her if she could imagine it, but I guess Wood has plans of his own, and there's always Dick Liddil getting in the way. I've give it some thought, though.

MILLER can't seem to put his eyes on JESSE. His right foot rapidly taps the floor.

JESSE

Your crops in?

ED MILLER

I don't got much. A garden patch and pasture. I was sick at planting time.

JESSE

Ed, how you feeling now?

A fleeting glance at JESSE:

ED MILLER

Why?

JESSE

You're acting queer.

ED MILLER

Well, you and me, we ain't been just real good friends lately. It's not your fault, you understand. You hear talk though.

JESSE

Talk?

ED MILLER

People tell you things.

JESSE

Why don't you give me an example.

ED MILLER

Jim Cummins come by. Oh and Jim says -- you know those boys got caught for the Blue Cut deal? -- Jim says he got word that you're planning to kill them.

JESSE

Why would I do that?

MILLER shoots a glance at JESSE'S gun hand and then re-establishes his gaze on the yard.

ED MILLER

It's just talk probably.

JESSE

To shut 'em up?

ED MILLER

Just talk.

JESSE

Cummins say anything else?

ED MILLER

Nope. That was it basically.

JESSE

It still don't explain why you're scared.

MILLER looks at him with watery eyes and spit on his mouth, light glinting off the oils on his skin.

ED MILLER

I'm in the same situation, you see? I was petrified when I saw you ride up!

JESSE

I just happened by, Ed.

ED MILLER

Suppose you heard gossip though. Suppose you heard Jim Cummins come by here. You might've thought we were planning to capture you and get that reward. Isn't true, but you might've suspected it.

JESSE gets up and jiggles a pants leg over his boot.

JESSE
Haven't heard a lick of gossip
lately.

JESSE looks out at the road and at the sky which is pink
with sunset. The road he looks down seems never-ending.

ED MILLER (O.S.)
I've got six hundred dollars
stashed away; I don't need any
governor's reward.

JESSE
It's the principle, too.
I'm glad I happened by.

ED MILLER (O.S.)
Me too.

JESSE
I want to put your mind at rest.

MILLER pulls himself to his feet and sweeps his hand over
a plate to shoo away flies.

JESSE (CONT'D)
How about if we go for a ride? We
go into town and I buy you dinner?
And I'll be on my way.

ED
Okay.

INT. DICK'S BEDROOM (KANSAS CITY) - NIGHT

DICK doesn't know what wakes him. He looks from his
sleeping wife (MATTIE) to the light spilling through the
bedroom doorway. He seems transfixed by it. A SOUND
begins to BUILD. Hairs stand up on the back of his neck.
He retrieves his Navy Colt from under his pillow and
slides quietly out of bed.

INT. DICK'S KITCHEN (KANSAS CITY) - NIGHT

DICK enters and almost screams:

JESSE JAMES sits like an apparition at his kitchen table.

JESSE
You ready to go for a ride?

EXT. ROAD (OUTSIDE KANSAS CITY) - DAWN

They head their horses through the cold. DICK is suspicious and unnerved.

DICK
Are we going to your place?

JESSE puts his finger inside his cheek and flicks out the last of his tobacco chew.

JESSE
You seen Ed Miller lately?

DICK
Nobody has.

JESSE
Must've gone off to California.

DICK looks at him with perplexity.

DICK
I'd still like to know where we're going.

JESSE
If you were going to see Jim Cummins, wouldn't you follow this road?

DICK
I guess so.

EXT. BILL FORD'S FARM - ESTABLISHING - DAY

JESSE and DICK approach the farmhouse.

INT. BILL FORD'S FARMHOUSE - DAY

A 12-year-old boy (ALBERT FORD) stands at the sitting room window and watches the two men climb down from their saddles.

EXT. BILL FORD'S FARMHOUSE - PORCH - DAY

The boy CREAKS open the DOOR and comes outside:

ALBERT
Howdy.

But he's ignored as JESSE reconnoiters the yard and then gravely ascends the steps. DICK can see past the nervous ALBERT to the kitchen where TWO WOMEN stir clothes in a laundry boiler. JESSE peers into the other rooms.

ALBERT (CONT'D)
Are you friends of my Pa's?

JESSE
We're friends of Jim Cummins.

ALBERT
Oh.

ALBERT gains thirty years -- becomes sullen.

ALBERT (CONT'D)
Well, it so happens he's been gone since August and never said where he gone to.

DICK
I'm Matt Collins.

DICK shakes the boy's hand.

ALBERT
Very happy to meet you.

JESSE clenches the boy's hand and introduces himself.

JESSE
Dick Turpin.

ALBERT
Pleased to make your acquaintance.

JESSE smiles around the cigar but stalls the shake and crushes ALBERT'S hand until the boy winces. ALBERT is about to cry out when JESSE clamps his hand over the boy's mouth and yanks him into the yard. DICK softly shuts the mahogany door.

EXT. BILL FORD'S FARM - YARD - DAY

JESSE manhandles the boy toward a red barn stopping to slam ALBERT into a cottonwood tree so that he loses his wind. DICK shambles after them, looking apprehensive and ashamed, checking the road.

INT. BILL FORD'S FARM - BARN - DAY

JESSE throws the boy to the ground and steps a boot onto his throat.

DICK

Jesus, Jesse! He's just a kid.

JESSE glowers at DICK for letting his name slip, then returns his attention to the choking boy.

JESSE

He knows where his Uncle Jim is
and that's gonna make him old
pretty soon.

ALBERT brawls and kicks at JESSE.

DICK

Maybe he doesn't know.

JESSE

He knows.

JESSE falls to his knees on the boy's biceps. ALBERT cries out. JESSE clamps the boy's mouth shut.

JESSE (CONT'D)

You need to ask and ask sometimes.
Sometimes a child won't remember
much at first and then it'll all
come back.

He twists the boy's ear like a clock wind-up and ALBERT'S body racks wildly, his BOOTS THUD the earth. JESSE leans over to examine the injury.

JESSE (CONT'D)

My gosh, I believe it's about to
tear, sweetie. Just a little more
to get her started, then I can rip
your ear off like a page from a
book.

DICK

Let the kid go.

JESSE

He's lying.

DICK
 Jesus; he can't even talk!

JESSE
 Where's Jim?
 (beat)
 Where's Jim? Where's Jim?
 Where's Jim?

DICK
 (slapping JESSE'S
 hat off his head)
 Quit it!

JESSE sits back and rubs his hands on his thighs. ALBERT weeps but can't make words. He wipes his nose and eyes and shudders with sobs as he gasps for air. When at last he speaks his voice is scaled like a child's:

ALBERT
 You bastard! I don't know where
 he is and you won't believe me and
 you never even gave me a chance.
 You kept my mouth shut! I never
 know where Jim is or when he comes
 so leave me alone, get off me, you
 son of a bitch!
 (grunts and bucks
 under JESSE and
 shouts)
 Get off!

JESSE rises and ALBERT rolls over crying. DICK walks out in disgust.

EXT. BILL FORD'S FARM - YARD - DAY

DICK walks around the barn to the road, his face splotched crimson with fury. He climbs onto his mount.

When JESSE comes forward, DICK looks away; squints down the road in order to talk.

DICK
 I'm worn out. I can't --
 My mind's all tangled anyway.
 Little deals like this just make
 me feel dirty.

DICK turns to gauge JESSE'S reaction to this and is astonished to see him caved forward into his bay horse, his face flattened into its mane in a grimace of affliction, noiselessly crying.

DICK (CONT'D)
You all right, Jesse?

JESSE nuzzles into the horse's hide and mutters words we can't make out.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Jesse was sick with wounds and aches, and lung congestions. Insomnia stained his eye sockets like soot. He read auguries in the snarled intestines of chickens, or the blow of cat hair released to the wind. And the omens promised bad luck, which moated and dungeoned him.

FADE IN:

EXT. HARBISON FARM - MORNING

WOOD HITE approaches through the arctic wind. His moustache is jeweled with ice. Snow has made boards of his trousers and sleeves.

He sees ELIAS FORD (BOB AND CHARLEY'S ELDER BROTHER) in the distance; throwing up his arm in greeting and pointing him toward the stables.

INT. HARBISON FARM - BARN - MORNING

WOOD walks his horse inside a stall and throws a moth-eaten blanket over it.

EXT. HARBISON FARM - YARD - MORNING

WOOD walks to the kitchen with WILBUR, who's teetering with a milk can. (WILBUR is another FORD BROTHER, in between BOB and CHARLEY.)

WOOD
How come it's always you who does the chores?

WILBUR
Charley and Bob pay extra to
Martha so's they don't have to.

WOOD
Still don't seem fair.

WILBUR
Well.

WILBUR opens the storm door for the man and bangs the
milk can inside.

WILBUR (CONT'D)
I'd take a rag to my nose if I
were you; it's unsightly.

INT. HARBISON HOMESTEAD - KITCHEN - MORNING

MARTHA kneads bread dough on a floured board. IDA stirs
a kettle, yawning. WILBUR straddles a chair and MARTHA
turns to see WOOD thawing his right ear over the coal
lamp's glass chimney.

MARTHA
Look what the cat dragged in.

He rotates his ear to thaw the left ear.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
You come from Kentucky?

WOOD squints at her:

WOOD
You have your head in a hole,
Martha?

WILBUR
Wood and Dick had a shooting
scrape a few months ago.

INT. HARBISON HOMESTEAD - 2ND FLOOR BEDROOM - MORNING

BOB is awake upstairs. The North window is raised and
the room is so cold spirits leave him with each
exhalation. The sounds of BREAKFAST being prepared
below:

MARTHA (O.S.)
Cover the kettle, Ida.

Then he hears his sister say:

MARTHA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
What on earth did you and Dick get
into a fracas about?

And he bolts out of bed. He scoots his hand under DICK'S
pillow and shakes him:

BOB
Dick!

LIDDIL automatically reaches for the Colt revolver but
finds it trapped. He looks at BOB'S worried face.

BOB (CONT'D)
Wood Hite's downstairs.

INT. HARBISON HOMESTEAD - KITCHEN - MORNING

MARTHA
I-da! Don't stick your thumb in
the cream when you skim it!
Goodness sakes!

WILBUR
Dick told me a complete other
version of that affray.

WOOD
You mean he's here?

WILBUR
Came in late last night.

WOOD'S CHAIR SCREECHES on the floor as he stands up.

WILBUR (CONT'D)
Simmer down.

INT. HARBISON HOMESTEAD - 2ND FLOOR BEDROOM - MORNING

DICK cocks his Navy Colt and points it at the closed
door. BOB extracts a loaded revolver from CHARLEY'S
holster.

MARTHA (O.S.)
Don't you boys get into a fracas
up there. I've almost got
breakfast cooked.

They listen as WOOD makes a RACKET on the STAIRS.

WOOD slams the bedroom door with his boot so that it
bashes the wall and CHARLEY jolts up.

DICK FIRES a SHOT, missing WOOD and smashing a hole in
the doorjamb.

WOOD FIRES at DICK, strewing pillow feathers, and FIRES a
second time as DICK rolls off the mattress.

A terrified BOB cowers next to his bed and clicks back
the hammer of his revolver.

WOOD FIRES a SHOT through DICK'S thigh; swatting the
floorboards and bed sheets with blood.

DICK triggers a SHOT that snags WOOD'S right arm.

CHARLEY gets out of bed and dives for the windowsill,
squirming under the sash.

WOOD SHOOTS at CHARLEY but misses.

98 EXT. HARBISON HOMESTEAD - ROOF - MORNING

CHARLEY slips on the eave and slides off the roof and
whumps into a snowbank twelve feet below.

99 INT. HARBISON HOMESTEAD - 2ND FLOOR BEDROOM - MORNING

DICK, in agony, raises his Navy Colt again but the hammer
snaps against an empty chamber.

WOOD then switches his pistol to his left hand, steps
forward, and takes slow and careful aim at DICK.

It is then that BOB FORD SHOOTS ROBERT WOODSON HITE: The
round goes in just next to his eyebrow and makes a small
button of red carnage that shuts WOOD'S motor off. WOOD
collapses to his knees, his brown eyes jelly and reason
vanishes, and then he falls to the left with a concussion
that jostles the room.

DICK looks at BOB with consternation.

BOB walks around to WOOD with sickness in his stomach, an apricot in his throat.

BOB is deafened by the gunfire

WOOD'S chest swells and relaxes. Blood pools wide as a birdbath under his skull.

BOB
He's still sucking air, but I
think he's a goner.

INT. HARBISON HOMESTEAD - 2ND FLOOR CORRIDOR - MORNING

BOB steps shakily out into the corridor and looks down at MARTHA and ELIAS at the bottom of the stairs.

BOB (CONT'D)
(holding it together)
Maybe you oughta come up and wish
him well on his journey.

Blood creeps away from WOOD and drools into board cracks. BOB stares at it as the STAIRS CREAK.

INT. HARBISON HOMESTEAD - 2ND FLOOR BEDROOM - MORNING

MARTHA bumps past BOB, removes her apron, and carefully wads it under the exit wound. ELIAS squats next to her.

ELIAS
You were a good fellow, Wood.

MARTHA
I hope the pain isn't frightful,
Wood. I'd fetch something for you
to drink but I'm afraid it'd just
make you choke.
(beat)
Little Ida's going to miss you.
So is the rest of the family.

DICK collars his thigh with his hands.

INT. HARBISON HOMESTEAD - KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

CHARLEY sits with his foot propped up on a chair, his sprained ankle as round as a melon.

CHARLEY
One thing's settled: can't take
him into Richmond.

WILBUR

How come?

CHARLEY

One: the sheriff will put Bob in jail. And two: Jesse will find out his cousin Wood's been shot in our house and that'll be the end for each and every one of us.

INT. HARBISON HOMESTEAD - 2ND FLOOR BEDROOM - DUSK

WOOD'S corpse, now naked, is laid out on BOB'S twin bed. DICK'S lips move as he reads a yellow book. BOB enters. DICK doesn't raise his eyes.

DICK

He ain't disappeared if that's what you were hoping.

BOB

What chapter are you on?

DICK

She's seen some young swell and got herself all agitated.

BOB

How's that leg?

DICK

Full of torment, Bob. Thanks for asking.

EXT. HARBISON FARM - DUSK

Snow falls around BOB and ELIAS as they struggle with their cumbersome load.

EXT. HARBISON FARM - RAVINE - DUSK 107

WOOD'S naked body is rolled into a snow-filled ravine. The brothers begin kicking clods of earth down onto the body.

ELIAS (V.O.)

Blessed are the poor in spirit:
for theirs is the kingdom of
heaven. Blessed are them that
(MORE)

ELIAS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
mourn: for they shall be
comforted. Blessed are the --

EXT. HARBISON FARM - SLOPE ABOVE RAVINE - LATER

ELIAS stands with hat at his chest, petitioning BOB with his eyes.

BOB
Meek.

ELIAS
Blessed are the meek...

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. HARBISON HOMESTEAD - DUSK

BOB sits, spooked, in the living room. The CLOCK CLUNKS. A candle blows out.

BOB turns to look eyes with an apparition at the window glass: It's JESSE receding back into the darkness.

And then suddenly JESSE is filling up the kitchen, as large and as loud as a beer wagon: Rowdily swatting shoulders and biceps, receiving the other FORD BROTHERS' handshakes.

BOB scuttles up the stairs.

INT. HARBISON HOMESTEAD - 2ND FLOOR BEDROOM - DUSK

DICK is already hopping one-leggedly toward the closet.

BOB
Why'd he come by, Dick? Does he
know about Wood, do you think?

DICK
I can't figure it, Bob. I only
know that he doesn't miss very
much.

BOB
What should I say about you if he
asks?

DICK
Just tell him I'm in K.C. with
Mattie.

Dick swaddles himself in yanked-down petticoats and crinolines as BOB closes the closet door.

INT. HARBISON HOMESTEAD - KITCHEN - SOON AFTER

BOB shies into the kitchen.

JESSE
Why, it's the kid!

BOB
How's everything?

JESSE ignores question and takes off his hat and coat. No one talks as JESSE moves -- it's as if his acts are miracles of invention wondrous to behold.

JESSE
I never take off my gun belts.

WILBUR
Good thinking.

JESSE walks back to his coffee and CHARLEY hitches aside.

JESSE
Well, Charlie. Hurt your leg?

CHARLEY
I slipped off the roof and smacked down into a snowbank like a ton of stupidity. One second I'm screaming, 'Whoa, Nelly!' and the next second, poof! I'm neck-deep in snow.

JESSE
Whatever possessed you to climb the roof in December?

CHARLEY loses his smile and sees the criticism in BOB'S expression.

CHARLEY
(stammering)
There was a kite -- what am I saying? There was a cat. A cat was on the roof and I went after
(MORE)

CHARLEY (CONT'D)
him. A tom cat. Yowling and
whataall; and I slipped.

CHARLEY rubs his eye and coughs into his fist.

JESSE
I thought maybe your clubfoot was
gaining on ya.

WILBUR and CHARLEY guffaw as if this is funny. MARTHA
carries a bowl of ham hocks to the table.

BOB
Dick went to Kansas City to be with
his wife. He was here for a little
bit.

JESSE gives BOB a look and then pretends he hasn't heard.
He begins to tickle IDA's side and stomach, saying
"Kootchy Kootch" until the girl is sore with giggles, and
the fun is over.

MARTHA
Oh, quit it, you two.

CHARLEY casts about anxiously for something to say.

CHARLEY
Here's a cute story, Jess. Bobby
was -- what -- eleven or twelve?
And you were by far his most
admired personage. He couldn't
get enough. It was Jesse this,
Jesse that, from sunrise to sunset.

JESSE
Fascinating.

CHARLEY
No; there's more. This is cute.
We're at supper and Bob asks, 'You
know what size boot Jesse wears?'

BOB
Charley, Jesse doesn't want to hear
this.

CHARLEY
Shush now, Bob. Let me tell it.
Bob says, he says, 'You know what
size boot Jesse wears? Six and a
half.' He says, 'Ain't that a
dinky little boot for a man five
(MORE)

CHARLEY (CONT'D)
feet eight inches tall?' Well, I
decide to josh him a little, you
know, so I said, 'He doesn't have
toes, is why.'

BOB
That's a really stupid story.

CHARLEY
'He was dangling his feet
off a culvert and a catfish
nibbled his toes off.' Well, Bob
taxed himself trying to picture it.

BOB
That'd be a good story. If it was
funny.

CHARLEY laughs and claps his hands.

CHARLEY
Isn't that a cute story, Jess?

JESSE suppresses his opinion. He regards BOB in a way
that implies the sight is disappointing. He skewers a
cigar with the tine of his fork.

JESSE
Give me some more conversations,
Bob.

CHARLEY
I got one. This one's about as
crackerjack.

JESSE
Let Bob tell it.

BOB
I don't even know what you're
talking about.

CHARLEY
About how much you and Jesse have
in common.

JESSE
Go on, Bob.

CHARLIE
Tell a story.

BOB

Nope. Nope.

CHARLEY

Entertain Jesse. He's here.

BOB

Well, if you'll pardon my saying so, I guess it is interesting, the many ways you and I overlap and whatnot. You begin with our Daddies. Your daddy was a pastor of the New Hope Baptist Church; my daddy was pastor of a church at Excelsior Springs. Um. You're the youngest of the three James boys; I'm the youngest of the five Ford boys. Between Charley and me, is another brother, Wilbur here (with six letters in his name); between Frank and you was a brother, Robert, also with six letters. Robert is my Christian name. You have blue eyes; I have blue eyes. You're five feet eight inches tall. I'm five feet eight inches tall. Oh me, I must've had a list as long as your nightshirt when I was twelve, but I've lost some curiosities over the years.

JESSE is as still as a photograph. Smoke spirals from his cigar in a line and then squiggles above him like sloppy handwriting; but his eyes are active, cagey, calculating. He comes carefully to life and taps ashes into his coffee cup.

JESSE

Ain't he something?

WILBUR sniggers.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Did I ever mention that scalawag George Shepherd? George was one of Quantrill's lieutenants and he gave me a story like Bob's, is why I thought of him, giving me everything we had in common and so on, just so he could join the gang. How could I know he had a grudge against me and was lying to

(MORE)

JESSE (CONT'D)
get on my good side? I said,
'Come aboard, George. Glad to
have ya,' George thought he was
smart. 'Cept he wasn't. He rode
into camp one morning and about
twenty guns opened up on him. But
he only had one eye --
and you need two eyes to get
Jesse.

BOB and WILBUR laugh for a suitable period of time, and
JESSE laughs until tears come out of his eyes.

BOB
You oughtn't think of me like you
do George Shepherd.

JESSE
You brought him to mind.

BOB
It's not very flattering.

MARTHA waitresses around them collecting cups and
saucers.

JESSE
Sure is good eating, Martha.

MARTHA
Well, I'm so glad you enjoyed it.

BOB
How come George had a grudge
against you?

JESSE
Hmmm?

BOB
I said "How come George had a
grudge against you?"

JESSE
Oh. George asked me to protect
this nephew of his during the war
and it so happens the kid had five
thousand dollars on him. The kid
winds up killed, and all the money
swiped from him, and when George
was in prison someone whispers to
him it was Jesse James slit the
boy's throat.

CHARLEY
Just mean gossip, was it?

JESSE
Bob's the expert; let's put it to him.

BOB rises from the table like a stamping boy in a snit.

JESSE (CONT'D)
Oh dear, I've made him cranky.

WILBUR snickers.

BOB
I'm not cranky. I've been through this before, is all. Once people get around to making fun of me, they just don't ever let up.

MARTHA
Someone's speaking awful fresh over there!

BOB
Woman, shut your face for once.

BOB is forced to walk past JESSE to get to the main room. JESSE kicks a leg across BOB'S path, clouting the floorboards with his boot. BOB glances down at his bogus grin -- the suggestion of malice beneath his antics.

JESSE
I don't want you to skip off to your room and pout without knowing why I dropped by for this visit.

BOB
I suppose you're going to tell us how sorry you are that you had to slap my cousin Albert around.

Such great heat seems to come then from JESSE'S eyes that BOB glances away as if from sunlight, but in a second the man cools and says:

JESSE
I come by to ask one of you two Fords to ride with me on a journey or two. I guess we've both agreed it ought to be Charley; you've been acting sort of testy.

BOB stands pale and silent. Then he steps around JESSE'S boot and calmly climbs the stairs to the upper room.

113 EXT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - ESTABLISHING - Day

JESSE and CHARLEY approach on horseback.

JESSE (CONT'D)
Have you seen Wood Hite lately?

CHARLEY
No, not at all.

SUPER: St. Joseph, Missouri

EXT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - PORCH - DAY

ZEE is in the doorway waiting for them.

ZEE
You're Charley Ford.

CHARLEY
Yes, ma'am, you've seen me once or twice before.

ZEE
I got a letter from George Hite.
Hasn't seen hide nor hair of him.

JESSE squints at CHARLEY.

JESSE
And you say you haven't seen Wood?

CHARLEY
Can't imagine where he could be.

115 EXT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

CHARLEY is woken by JESSE:

JESSE
You finished with your sleeping?

CHARLEY
I could use a couple more hours if it's no trouble.

CHARLEY sits up from his bedroll:

JESSE

I've been holding a discussion with myself over if I ought to tell you this or no. My good side won out and, well, I'd like to make a clean breast of things.

CHARLEY

My mind is a little cobwebby yet, is the only drawback. I could use a little more sleep.

JESSE crosses close.

JESSE

You knew I went to Kentucky?

CHARLEY

Yeah.

JESSE

I come back through Saline County and thought to myself, 'Why not stop by and see Ed Miller?' So I do and things aren't to my satisfaction. Ed's got himself all worked up over something and I can see he's lying like a rug and I say to myself, 'Enough's enough!' and I say to Ed, 'Come on, Ed, let's go for a ride.' Do you understand what I'm saying?

CHARLEY

Going for a ride is like giving him what-for.

JESSE

Exactly. Ed and Jesse, they argued on the road...

EXT. COUNTRY TRAIL - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Ed rides his mare down the road with Jesse following behind.

JESSE

You ever count the stars I can't ever get the same number. They keep changing on me.

ED

I don't even know what a star is,
exactly.

JESSE

Well, your body knows. It's your
mind that forgot. You go on ahead,
partner. I'll catch up with you.

Ed, terrified, rides ahead. Jesse aims his gun and shoots him
through the chest. Ed falls off his horse and struggles on
the ground for a moment before Jess shoots him again in the
head.

EXT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

Jesse continues his story.

JESSE

And when push came to shove, Jesse
shot and killed him

CHARLEY

Jesse did.

JESSE

You got it.

CHARLEY

You.

JESSE pats CHARLEY'S knee.

JESSE

So you see? Your cousin, he got
off easy. I was just playing with
Albert.

CHARLEY

I've made him squeal once or twice
myself. I'm just not as thorough
as you are.

JESSE

You want to swap a tale with me
now?

CHARLEY

(sudden fright)
I don't get your meaning.

JESSE

It seems to me, If you've got something to confess in exchange, it'd only be right for you to spit it out now.

CHARLEY

Can't think of a single thing.

JESSE

About Wood Hite, for example.

CHARLEY

I've been saying over and over again I can't figure out where he's gone. I'm not going to change my story just to have something to spit.

JESSE

Why was your brother so agitated?

CHARLEY

Which?

JESSE

Bob.

CHARLEY

It's just his way. He's antsy.

JESSE retreats. Sits in a chair.

JESSE

You can go on back to sleep now.

CHARLEY

You got me agitated now: you see?

JESSE

Yeah, just ain't no peace with old Jesse around. You ought to pity my poor wife.

CHARLEY

Ed Miller was a good friend of mine. He introduced me to you at that one poker game. I'm a little angry with you, if you want the God's honest truth.

JESSE crosses his ankles and shuts his eyes. He pushes his hands deep into his pockets.

JESSE
You ought to pity me too.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. COMMERCIAL DISTRICT (KANSAS CITY) - DAY

BOB stands in a street of mud and slush and manure. He watches a stern man in his 40s (HENRY CRAIG) cut between two surreys and enter the Times Building. BOB waits for an agonizing moment -- crippled with indecision. And then he follows, grim-faced. As he enters the building we come upon a window sign: "HENRY CRAIG, ATTORNEY AT LAW."

EXT. WOODS SURROUNDING HARBISON HOMESTEAD - DAWN

An ARMED POSSE crunches through the snow on foot, approaching the Harbison farm. They are led by HENRY CRAIG and SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE.

INT. HARBISON HOMESTEAD - 2ND FLOOR BEDROOM - DAWN 119

THROUGH the window, BOB sees 12 ARMED MEN coming out of the woods, as rounded over as hedgehogs.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
As proof of his confederacy with the James Gang, Bob told the authorities that Dick Liddil was sleeping over at the farmhouse while his ruined leg mended. And then he created a map of the Harbison property, leading to the creek where Wood Hite's remains now mouldered.

EXT. HARBISON HOMESTEAD - DAWN

SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE has his mouth bracketed with his mittens. He's surrounded by CRAIG and the DEPUTIES.

SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE
You boys are cornered! If you
know what's good for you, you'll
come out peaceably and no one will
get shot up!

The kitchen door is pushed open and the MEN all crouch
down. BOB calls out:

BOB (O.S.)
Don't shoot!

SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE
Come on out and show yourself!

BOB steps out with a smirk.

BOB
If this isn't a surprise!

SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE
That's how we intended it.

121 INT. HARBISON HOMESTEAD - 2ND FLOOR BEDROOM - SOON
AFTER

The POSSE are gathered in the room. BOB and MARTHA watch
as TIMBERLAKE whams the ceiling cover and points his
revolver into the crawl space.

SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE (CONT'D)
You there! Give yourself up!

DICK climbs down. He is handcuffed.

HENRY CRAIG
Andrew James Liddil, this is a
warrant for your arrest for the
murder of William Westfall and
participation in the Winston train
robbery on the 15th of July, 1881.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Snow storms would move over Missouri that Sunday, February 19, shutting down commerce for more than two days. And yet this wouldn't prevent Robert Ford from presenting himself to Governor Crittenden at the Craig Rifles Ball on Wednesday.

FADE OUT.

INT. ST. JAMES HOTEL - GRAND BALLROOM - NIGHT

GOVERNOR CRITTENDEN speaks to a large crowd of GENTLEMEN in tails and LADIES in satin gowns.

CRITTENDEN

I deem it a great privilege on this glorious occasion to recognize publicly the intelligent and efficient assistance that Captain Henry Craig has thus far provided the State of Missouri and myself in our joint quest to extirpate the James band from Jackson County. The task Henry Craig has assumed requires fearless courage, extraordinary vigilance, and an unerring selection of instrumentalities.

BOB lingers against a pillar on the fringes.

CRITTENDEN (CONT'D)

My wife has just signaled that enough is enough. But before I sit, I'll ask you to join me in a toast to the great son of the state of Missouri, my friend, Henry Craig.

INT. ST. JAMES HOTEL - NIGHT

BOB jostles through the crowd, insinuating himself closer to CRITTENDEN. He raises his hand in a juvenile wave and is about to give his name when he's grasped by two POLICEMEN. They clamp his mouth shut and sock him in the groin. He collapses in agony.

INT. ST. JAMES HOTEL - CORRIDOR - SOON AFTER

The POLICEMEN shove BOB against a mahogany pillar. CRAIG is with them.

HENRY CRAIG

You're more goddamned trouble than you're worth, Bob.

BOB

I was just going to say hello.

HENRY CRAIG

You weren't going to do that, Bob. You think you're the goddamned bell of the ball. That isn't why you're here, you sill little bastard. The governor will see you in good time. Take him upstairs, boys.

INT. ST. JAMES HOTEL - HENRY CRAIG'S SUITE - SOON AFTER

BOB enters, looking disheveled. DICK, guarded by TWO KANSAS CITY POLICEMEN, looks over the top of his paper and smiles.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Bob would later be cross-examined repeatedly about the exact nature of the deal he had made with the authorities. And he was never consistent with his recollections.

INT. ST. JAMES HOTEL - CRITTENDEN'S SUITE - NIGHT 129

CRITTENDEN receives them in a red silk robe and directs them towards wingback chairs:

CRITTENDEN

My wife's asleep in the next room, so let's speak as quietly as we can.

CRITTENDEN settles himself into a settee and his eyes glitter as he regards the two strangers:

CRITTENDEN (CONT'D)
You're Dick little.

DICK
Liddil.

CRITTENDEN
I beg your pardon?

DICK
I spell it with two d's.

HENRY CRAIG
He's given us a confession,
Governor, but so far the newspapers
haven't caught onto it. You've
guaranteed him a conditional pardon
and amnesty for all the robberies
he's committed.

CRITTENDEN
You're Robert Ford?

BOB grins, but can't think of anything to say.

CRITTENDEN (CONT'D)
How old are you?

BOB
Twenty.

CRITTENDEN
Did you surrender to Sheriff
Timberlake as well?

HENRY CRAIG
No, no, govenor. It was his brother
Charley who was in the James Gang.
We couldn't find anything on Bob.
He's acting in the capacity of a
private detective.

CRITTENDEN

Jesse James sent me a telegram last month, saying he was going to kill me if he had to wreck a train to do it. He said that once I was in his hands he was going to cut my heart out and eat it in strips like it was bacon.

(beat)

I'm going to wreck his train first.

BOB emits a scoffing laugh. CRITTENDEN glares at him.

BOB

I'm sorry, Your Excellency. I was thinking of something else.

CRITTENDEN

Jesse James is nothing more than a public outlaw who's made his reputation by stealing whatever he could and by killing whoever got in his way. You'll hear some fools say he's getting back at Republicans and Union men for wrongs his family suffered during the war, but his victims have scarcely ever been selected with reference to their political views. I'm saying his sins will soon find him out. I'm saying his cup of iniquity is full. I'm saying Jesse James is a desperate case and may require a desperate remedy.

DICK looks to BOB to respond -- but sees that the boy is overpowered by the situation, so he responds for him:

DICK

You've got the right man for the job.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. FROZEN LAKE (SOMEWHERE IN NEBRASKA) - DAY

JESSE walks like Jesus out onto the frozen water.

JESSE

You ever consider suicide?

CHARLEY

Can't say that I have. There was always something else I wanted to do. Or my predicaments changed or I saw my hardships from a different slant; you know all what can happen. It never seemed respectable.

JESSE squats and brushes snow from the ice: The dark shapes of fish can be seen moving below.

JESSE

I'll tell you one thing that's certain; you won't fight dying once you've peeked over to the other side; you'll no more want to go back to your body than you'd want to spoon up your own puke.

CHARLEY'S motor works in the silence:

CHARLEY

Since we're looking to rob banks, I was wondering if I could go as far as to recommend we add another feller to the gang and sort of see if we couldn't come out of our next job alive.

JESSE seems transfixed by a stain on his glove.

CHARLEY (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Bob wanted to know could he ride with us next time we took on a savings bank or --

Jesse fires his gun into the ice below his feet. The shot's echo hangs in the air.

CHARLEY (CONT'D)

A saving's bank or --

Jesse fires again.

CHARLEY (CONT'D)

A railroad.

Jesse fires a final shot.

CHARLEY continues hopefully:

CHARLEY (CONT'D)

Bob isn't much more than a boy to most appearances, but there's about two tons of sand in him and he'll stand with his shooter when that's what's called for. And he's smart too -- he's about as intricate as they come.

JESSE

You're forgetting that I've already met the kid.

CHARLEY

He surely thinks highly of you.

JESSE

All America thinks highly of me.

CHARLEY

Still. It's not like you've got two million names you can snatch out of a sock whenever you need a third man.

JESSE sighs, gets up, and mounts his horse:

JESSE

I can see you're trying to wear me down on this.

CHARLEY

(smiles)

That was my main intention.

Jesse walks away, leaving Charley alone by the edge of the lake.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Robberies would be conceived, but never carried out in Nebraska, Colorado, and Missouri. During this time, Henry Craig had enjoined Robert Ford in returning to Elias' Grocery Store in Richmond and await instructions from Sheriff James Timberlake.

INT. ELIAS' GROCERY STORE (RICHMOND) - DAY

BOB is busy with CUSTOMERS, SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE enters, prowls the store once, and then slips into the storeroom.

INT. ELIAS' GROCERY STORE (RICHMOND) - STOREROOM - DAY

TIMBERLAKE smokes. BOB enters.

BOB

Haven't seen any sign of him.

SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE

Do you know where he's living?

BOB

No.

TIMBERLAKE sighs.

SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE

I can't guess how he does it, but he's always knowledgeable about what's going on. He'll know you've been with me. You ought to take that for granted. And he'll kill you if he gets the chance.

BOB scratches at his neck and looks away.

SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE (CONT'D)

You willing to risk that?

BOB

Yes I am.

BOB fastens his eyes on TIMBERLAKE and all the ingratiating is gone from his face; only longing and misery remain:

BOB (CONT'D)

I've been a nobody all my life. I was the baby; I was the one they made the promises to that they never kept. And ever since I can recall it, Jesse James has been as big as a tree. I'm prepared for this, Jim. And I'm going to accomplish it. I know I won't get but this one opportunity and you can bet your life I'm not going to spoil it.

TIMBERLAKE stands and grinds out his cigarette.

SHERIFF TIMBERLAKE

Wait for your chance. Don't allow yourself to be found alone with him. And don't let him get behind you.

TIMBERLAKE exits through the loading door.

BOB remains standing there.

133 INT. ELIAS' GROCERY STORE (RICHMOND) - ANOTHER DAY

BOB stands on a wooden stool, stacking ketchup bottles, in his clerk's apron. The afternoon sun blazes behind JESSE like a halo:

JESSE

You've been chosen.

BOB swivels and nearly slips. The color has leached from his face.

BOB

What do you mean?

JESSE

Your brother said that you wanted to join us. But maybe you like

(MORE)

JESSE (CONT'D)
 this grocery store more than you
 said you did.

He takes off his apron by way of illustration. JESSE
 smiles.

JESSE (CONT'D)
 So you missed me?

BOB
 I've been crying myself to sleep
 every night.

EXT. ELIAS' GROCERY STORE (RICHMOND) - DAY

BOB comes outside with carrots for the horses. CHARLEY
 is already in the saddle:

CHARLEY
 Don't let him see us so much as
 wink at each other. He's
 suspicious as a danged coyote, and
 he don't trust you one iota.

BOB
 I guess that makes us even.

CHARLEY
 He's already put way Ed Miller.
 Said so like it was something
 piddly he'd done.

The talk ceases when JESSE comes out. JESSE corrects the
 crease in his black fedora and slips his boot into the
 stirrup. HE climbs into the saddle and hooks his horse
 around:

EXT. ROAD TO ST. JOSEPH - NIGHT

They ride through a cold rain. In the distance they spot
 a church and head towards it.

INT. LUTHERAN CHURCH - NIGHT

JESSE throws his greatcoat on a pew and lights an altar
 candle that he carries into the sanctuary.

BOB kicks his bedroll flat on the floor and says to CHARLEY:

BOB
If we're ever alone for more than a minute, I'd like a chance to speak to you further.

EXT. LUTHERAN CHURCH - CEMETERY - DAY

CHARLEY sits in the long grass smoking. BOB ambles up to him with his palms cupping his elbows.

BOB (CONT'D)
They gave me ten days.

CHARLEY
For what?

BOB
Arresting him.

CHARLEY
You and me, huh?

BOB
It's going to happen one way or another. It's going to happen, Charley; and it might as well be us who get rich on it.

CHARLEY looks at him disparagingly.

CHARLEY
Bob, he's our friend.

BOB
He murdered Ed Miller. He's going to murder Liddil and Cummins if the chance ever comes. Seems to me Jesse's riding from man to man, saying goodbye to the gang. Your
(MORE)

BOB (CONT'D)
friendship could put you under the
pansies.

CHARLEY looks away.

CHARLEY
I'll grind it fine in my mind,
Bob. I can't go any further than
that, right now.

BOB
You'll come around.

CHARLEY
You think it's all made up, don't
you. You think it's all yarns and
newspaper stories.

It's BOB'S turn to look away.

BOB
He's just a human being.

EXT. LUTHERAN CHURCH - DAY

They approach the church and discover a furious JESSE.

JESSE
From now on, you two won't go
anywhere without me! From now on
you'll ask for permission; you'll
ask to be excused!

EXT. LAFAYETTE STREET (ST. JOSEPH) - DAY 139

They approach the roller coaster of Confusion Hill. BOB
looks up the steep ascent to a high skull of land upon
which rests the white cottage.

EXT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - YARD - DAY

JESSE climbs off his saddle and accepts his son in his
arms.

INT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - KITCHEN - DAY

BOB and JESSE enter. ZEE JAMES backs from the stove, sees BOB, and winces.

ZEE
You never mentioned Bob would be here.

BOB
Maybe he was saving it as a pleasant surprise.

MARY is submerged in the woman's skirt, glowering at BOB. ZEE combs the girl's hair.

ZEE
You've got two cousins for company now.

INT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

JESSE, on the sofa, weds his fingers over his stomach and closes his eyes.

JESSE
How it will be is we'll leave here next Monday afternoon and ride down to Platte City.

BOB
How far is that from Kansas City?

Something in BOB'S enquiry makes JESSE resistant and he answers around the question:

JESSE
Platte City's thirty miles south. You and me and Charley will sleep in the woods overnight and strike the Wells Bank sometime before the court recesses.

BOB
(a little too insistent)
(MORE)

BOB (CONT'D)
What time will that be exactly?

JESSE
You don't need to know that.

BOB scrawls on the floorboards with his finger and JESSE arises to a sit.

JESSE (CONT'D)
You know I'm real comfortable with your brother. Hell, he's ugly as sin and he smells like a skunk and he's so ignorant he couldn't drive nails in the snow, but he's sort of easy to be around. I can't say the same for you, Bob.

BOB
I'm sorry to hear you say that.

JESSE is silent a moment.

JESSE
You know how it is when you're with your girlfriend and the moon is out and you know she wants to be kissed even though she never said so?

BOB
Yeah.

JESSE
You're giving me signs that grieve my soul and make me wonder if maybe your mind's been changed about me.

BOB
What do you want me to do? Swear my good faith on the Bible?

CHARLEY enters with the firewood to see JESSE glowering at BOB with great heat in his eyes.

CHARLEY

You two having a spat?

JESSE

I was getting ready to be angry.

JESSE smiles and reaches out to coddle BOB'S neck.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Sit over here closer, Kid.

BOB vacillates a little, then scooches over, smirking at his brother with shyness. JESSE massages BOB'S neck and shoulders, communicating that all is forgiven.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Charley, You'll stay with the animals. Me and The Kid will walk into the bank just before noon. Bob will move the cashier away from the shotgun that's under the counter and I'll creep up behind that cashier and cock his chin back like so...

JESSE snaps BOB'S skull back and slashes a skinning knife against his throat. BOB is incapacitated by panic. JESSE is terrifying:

JESSE (CONT'D)

I'll say, 'How come an off-scouring of creation like you is still sucking air when so many of mine are in coffins?'

BOB'S eye lolls to the blade.

JESSE (CONT'D)

I'll say, 'How'd you reach your twentieth birthday without leaking out all over your clothes?' And if I don't like his attitude, I'll slit that phildoodle so deep he'll flop on the floor like a fish.

Then JESSE retracts the blade and shoves BOB rudely forward. Then his temper abruptly alters and he slaps both knees gleefully, laughing at BOB:

JESSE (CONT'D)

My God, what just happened?
I could hear your gears grinding
rrr, rrr, rrr, and your little
motor wondering, 'My Gosh, what's
next, what's happening to me?'
You were precious to behold, Bob.
You were white as spit in a cotton
field.

BOB examines his neck with his hand.

BOB

You want to know how that feels?
Unpleasant. I honestly can't
recommend it.

JESSE

And Charley looked stricken!

CHARLEY

I was!

JESSE

'This is plumb unexpected!,' old
Charley was thinking, 'This is
done ruint my day!'

JESSE laughs and laughs, and when at last the two laugh
with him, JESSE adopts a scolding look and slams out of
the room.

INT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - CHILDREN'S ROOM - NIGHT

JESSE sleeps with BOB in the children's room, a revolver
clutched in his left hand. BOB listens to each in-suck
of air so he can tell when JESSE'S gone off.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Jesse slept with Bob in the
children's room that night and Bob
remained awake.

He could see that there was a gun
on the nightstand. He could
imagine its cold nickel inside his

(MORE)

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
grip, its two-pound weight reached
out and aimed.

Bob cautiously rolls to a sit and places his feet on the
boards. The REVOLVER is cocked with THREE CLICKS.

BOB
I need to go to the privy.

JESSE
You think you do but you don't.

BOB obediently returns to bed.

INT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - DINING ROOM - DAY

ZEE sets down a soup tureen and JESSE winks at BOB:

JESSE
Is this fit to eat or will it just
do?

As ZEE retreats into the kitchen, JESSE inches the soup
bowl under CHARLEY'S elbow and says to BOB:

JESSE (CONT'D)
That woman's cooking has always
been a scandal. Cut her meat and
the whole table moves.

JESSE laughs as CHARLEY stains his sleeve.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
And so it went, Jesse was
increasingly cavalier, merry,
moody, fay, unpredictable. He
camouflaged his depressions and
derangements with masquerades of
extreme cordiality, curtesy, and
goodwill towards others.

INT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - SITTING ROOM - ANOTHER DAY

JESSE hooks CHARLEY'S spurs together while he snores in
the sitting room and then screams the man off the couch,
so that CHARLEY farcically sprawls.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But even as he jested...

EXT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - PORCH - DAY 148

JESSE horses with TIM:

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
... or tickled his boy in the ribs, Jesse would look over at Bob with melancholy eyes, as if the two were meshed in an intimate communication that had little to do with anyone else.

ON BOB

Working at keeping his expression neutral.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Bob was certain that the man had unriddled him, had seen through his reasons for coming along, that Jesse could forecast each of Bob's possible moves and inclinations and was only acting the innocent in order to lull Bob into stupid tranquility and miscalculation.

INT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - CHILDREN'S ROOM - DAY

Sunshine is diagonal in the room and curtains flirt in the air. BOB isn't sure what woke him. He pivots in the child's bed and sees JESSE in a spindle chair.

BOB
How long've you been studying me?

JESSE
You're gonna break a lot of hearts.

BOB rolls to a sitting position.

BOB
How do you mean?

JESSE reveals a black box from behind his back and reaches it over to BOB.

JESSE
It's a present.

BOB hefts it.

BOB
It's Heavy.

JESSE
You going to look inside?

BOB crams a coin into the interstices and twists until the lid releases.

BOB
It's April Fools Day, you know.

JESSE
Ain't no joke.

Inside the box, nestled in red velvet, is a pearl-handled .44 caliber revolver. BOB beams at JESSE.

BOB
Such extravagance!

JESSE
Don't that nickel shine though!

BOB
It's more than I could hope for!

BOB clicks the chamber around, cocks and releases the hammer, cocks the hammer again and aims the revolver at a red ball on the floor. Squeezes the trigger.

JESSE
I figured that granddaddy Colt of
yours might blow into fragments
the next time you squeeze the
(MORE)

JESSE (CONT'D)
trigger.

BOB
You might have something there.

ZEE (O.S.)
Tom? Supper's ready.

JESSE
Pretty soon, sweetheart.

BOB
I might be too excited to eat.

Jesse smiles broadly and rises from the spindle chair.

JESSE
You know what John Newman Edwards once wrote about me? He said I didn't trust two men in ten thousand and was even cautious around them. The government's sort of run me ragged. I'm going the long way around the barn to say I've been feeling cornered and just plain ornery of late and I'd be pleased if you'd accept the gun as my way of apologizing.

BOB
Heaven knows I'd be ornerier if I were in your position.

JESSE
No. I haven't been acting correctly. I can't hardly recognize myself sometimes when I'm greased. I go on journeys out of my body and look at my red hands and my mean face and I wonder about that man who's gone so wrong: I've been becoming a problem to myself.

BOB looks at the man in bewilderment and can't find the words for an answer, so he says:

BOB
I need to wash my hands if
supper's on.

JESSE
Go ahead.

EXT. LAFAYETTE STREET - DAY

JESSE, ZEE, CHARLEY, TIM and MARY, seen from a distance,
walking down Confusion Hill.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
The day before he died was Palm
Sunday and Mr. And Mrs. Thomas
Howard, their two children, and
their cousin Charles Johnson
strolled to the Second Presbyterian
Church to attend the ten o'clock
service.

INT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - DAY

Action as per V.O.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Bob remained at the cottage and
slyly migrated from room to room.

INT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Action as per V.O.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
He walked into the master bedroom
and inventoried the clothes on the
hangers and hooks. He sipped from
the water glass on the vanity. He
smelled the talcum and lilacs on
Jesse's pillowcase. His fingers
skittered over his ribs to construe
the scars where Jesse was twice
shot.

He manufactured a middle finger
(MORE)

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
that was missing the top two
knuckles. He imagined himself at
thirty-four. He imagined himself
in a coffin. He considered
possibilities and everything
wonderful that could come true.

INT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - CHILDREN'S ROOM - NIGHT

CHARLEY is scrunched close to the wall in his sitting
room bed, a pillow muting his mouth.

BOB can just barely perceive that his older brother is
crying.

BOB
He isn't going to kill us.

CHARLEY
Yes he is.

BOB looks over his shoulder to check the room and then
murmurs in CHARLEY'S ear:

BOB
I'll stay awake so he can't.

CHARLEY rolls to his back and gazes at the ceiling and
then looks to his kid brother.

BOB (CONT'D)
You're imagining things.

CHARLEY covers his eyes with his arm, and respirates
himself with great calming breaths of air. Quiet comes
to the room again and then he says:

CHARLEY
Isn't going to be no Platte City.
That's Jesse fooling with us.

BOB slips out of bed and into his clothes.

BOB
Go to sleep, Charley.

BOB moves through the sitting room, dining room, kitchen,
and steps off the wooden porch into the night.

EXT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - MORNING

BOB pumps water into a bucket outside.

SUPER: APRIL 3RD, 1882

He flinches his eyes open and sees ZEE peering at him through the porch screen.

ZEE

How much do you want to eat?

BOB

I'm feeling sort of peculiar.

BOB moves over to the fence where he sees:

JESSE and TIM climbing the steep ascent of the sidewalk. The great man has his hand on the boy's shoulder. JESSE moves the cigar in his mouth and squints through the smoke.

JESSE

How come you're looking so interested?

BOB

Do you think it's intelligent to go outside like that, so all creation can see your guns?

JESSE ignores him and rushes his daughter, monsterring, catching MARY as she runs squealing to the screen door and swinging the girl around so wildly that her right foot loses its shoe.

INT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - SITTING ROOM - MORNING

MARY hugs her father's neck as he walks into the dining room. TIM tosses the papers carelessly onto the couch. BOB sees instantly the headlines of the Kansas City Times:

"The Arrest and confession of Dick Liddil."

Bob looks to the dining room: the family assembling around the table, CHARLEY slouching in. BOB slips the paper under a shawl and goes into his room.

INT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - CHILDREN'S ROOM - MORNING

BOB straps on the gun he has been given, tying the leather holster to his thigh with a string.

ZEE (O.S.)

Bob, everything is getting cold!

INT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - DINING ROOM - MORNING 175

BOB seats himself across from JESSE. JESSE regards his six-year-old son, who is staring blankly at the sunshine, woolgathering, his oatmeal spoon in his mouth.

JESSE

(to Charley)

What do you think goes on in that noggin of his?

CHARLEY

Nothing.

JESSE

(laughs)

I was referring to his mind, not yours.

JESSE stands from his chair and fetches the newspapers from the sofa. BOB watches as he almost misses and then retrieves the Kansas City Times from under the shawl. JESSE sits again and stirs a spoon in his cup.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Hello now! The Arrest and Confession of Dick Liddil.

CHARLEY

(too urgent)

You don't say so!

JESSE

It's very strange.

BOB sees the crease in his brow, the fret in his reading eyes, the nicotine stain on his finger moving down the page.

JESSE (CONT'D)
It says here Dick surrendered
three weeks ago.

He glances at BOB with misgivings.

JESSE (CONT'D)
You must've been right there in
the neighborhood.

BOB
Apparently they kept it secret.

JESSE slumps back in his chair and glares at BOB and CHARLEY.

BOB (CONT'D)
If I get to Kansas City soon, I'm
going to ask somebody about it.

INT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - SITTING ROOM - MORNING

BOB gets up and goes into the sitting room with his right hand on his gun and reacquaints himself with the rocking chair.

INT. HOUSE ON THE HILL - SITTING ROOM - MORNING

CHARLEY walks into the sitting room.

He sits on the mattress and loops his holster off the bedpost, looking significantly at BOB as he puts it on.

JESSE surprises them.

JESSE
You two ready?

BOB jumps up from the rocker and it rears and rows, clubbing the floor, until he can still it with his hand.

CHARLEY
I will be by noon.

JESSE looks out the window and sees:

His daughter's shoe on the grass.

JESSE

It's an awfully hot day.

JESSE removes his Prince Albert coat and six-button black vest.

CHARLEY shambles over to the screen door to scan Lafayette Street.

JESSE proclaims in a sentence that seems composed just for Bob:

JESSE (CONT'D)

I guess I'll take my guns off
for fear the neighbors might spot
them.

CHARLEY turns from the screen door with vexation on his face. BOB'S thumb twitches as he lowers his hand to his gun.

JESSE unbuckles his holsters and lays them on the bed as if creating an exhibit.

JESSE focuses on the picture of Skyrocket:

JESSE (CONT'D)

Ain't that picture look dusty.

He withdraws a furniture duster and climbs a rush-bottomed chair.

BOB slinks from the wall and stands between JESSE and his two revolvers.

He shakes his fingers like a gunfighter and instructs his brother with scared eyes.

CHARLEY steps further into the room and the two FORDS slip out their guns.

BOB extends his .44 and cocks it with THREE SOFT CLICKS.

JESSE swivels slightly, authentically surprised, reaching for a gun that isn't there.

Then BOB FORD'S .44 IGNITES and a red stamp seems to

paste itself just behind the outlaw's right ear. His face socks into the watercolor glass. GUNPOWDER AND GUN noise fills the room. JESSE drops from his knees and smacks onto the floor like a great animal, shaking the house with his fall.

ZEE rushes into a room that is still blue with smoke and screams.

BOB slowly retreats and straddles the windowsill.

ZEE
What have you done?

BOB looks stricken, as though he wants to apologize but can't.

JESSE looks at the ceiling, his fingers curl and uncurl, his mouth works at making words.

ZEE kneels and cradles his skull in her apron.

ZEE (CONT'D)
No! Oh Jesse! Jesse, Jesse, Jesse.

Her petticoats are quickly soaked red with his blood.

TIM is at the door; seeing everything.

ZEE (CONT'D)
Bob, have you done this?

BOB
I swear to God that I didn't.

JESSE sighs and grows heavy on her legs. His muscles slack; the blood is as wide as a table. He makes a syllable like "God" and then everything inside him stops. CHARLEY collects their hats and coats.

CHARLEY
It was an accident, Zee. The pistol went off accidentally.

The two FORDS make their way to the door.

EXT. LAFAYETTE STREET - MORNING

The brothers run down Confusion Hill, their coats flying.

EXT. COMMERCIAL DISTRICT (ST. JOSEPH) - MORNING

They cut through yards and down alleys until they attain the American Telegraph office.

INT. AMERICAN TELEGRAPH OFFICE - MORNING

Bob writes out a message on a telegram card and hands it to the clerk:

"I HAVE KILLED JESSE JAMES. BOB FORD."

BOB

You might want to keep that.

INT. SEIDENFADEN UNDERTAKING - DAY

JESSE'S body is strapped to a board with ropes. The board is tilted nearly vertical and a camera lens uncapped. A room full of CORRESPONDENTS wait for the exposure.

EXT. ALEX LOZO PHOTOGRAPHIC STUDIO - DAY

REPORTERS follow the PHOTOGRAPHER as he carries the photographic dry-plate back to the studio.

INSERT - JESSE'S REQUIEM PHOTOGRAPH

DEVELOPING.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

The resulting prints sold for two dollars a piece -- and were the models for the lithographed covers on a number of magazines.

EXT. LAFAYETTE ST. - DAY 195

CROWDS make the journey up Confusion Hill.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Soon a thousand strangers were
 making spellbound pilgrimages to
 the cottage --

INT. SEIDENFADEN UNDERTAKING - DAY 196

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 -- or were venerating the iced
 remains in Seidenfaden's cooling
 room.

ZEE JAMES sits catatonically in a chair, unmindful of the
 other visitors, merely staring at the slain man.

MOVE IN ON JESSE.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 The man who offered thirty
 thousand dollars for the body of
 Charles Guiteau sent a telegram to
 City Marshal Enos Craig offering
 fifty thousand for the body of
 Jesse Woodson James so that he
 could go around the country with
 it, or at least sell it to P.T.
 Barnum for his 'Greatest Show on
 Earth.'

INT. SEIDENFADEN UNDERTAKING - DAY

Action as per V.O.:

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Another photograph was taken of
 the renowned American bandit
 Nestled in the bed of ice.
 And it was this shot that was most
 available in sundries stores and
 apothecaries to be viewed in a
 stereoscope alongside the Sphinx,
 the Taj Mahal, and the Catacombs
 of Rome.

INT. BROADWAY THEATRE - NIGHT 210

We are BEHIND an ACTOR silhouetted by footlights:

ACTOR

Hello, here! The Arrest and
Confession of Dick Liddil! Young
man, I thought you told me you
didn't know that Dick had
surrendered.

PAN to reveal BOB: He's groomed as a European Prince,
and sports a glued-on mustache:

BOB

You mean he did? I didn't know!
(to the audience)
But I knew I had not fooled him.
And he knew as well as I in that
moment that I intend to bring him
to justice. But he would not kill
me in the presence of his wife and
children. And so he was smiling to
throw me off guard.

FRONT ANGLE - BOB AND CHARLEY

are on a stage: The set behind them resembles the
sitting room of the cottage on Confusion Hill.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

It was widely felt that Bob
possessed some acting talent and
Charley not a jot:

CHARLEY takes off his revolvers and flings them onto the
bed -- his voice yells for the balcony:

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

Charley was only expected not to
slouch or mutter and to transport
his sicknesses to the alley before
letting them go.

CHARLEY fetches a feather duster and flags it towards an
implausible painting of the death of Julius Caesar:

CHARLEY

That picture's awful dusty!

BOB rises surreptitiously from his chair. CHARLEY flicks
the duster.

BOB raises his gun.

Some in the audience stir with anticipation.

BOB lets the hammer snap and a charge of GUNPOWDER EXPLODES with a great noise on the stage.

The audience gasps.

CHARLEY reels on the chair, claps his palms to his chest and crashes unauthentically to the floor.

A GIRL playing Mrs. James runs onto stage from the right and permits herself a blood-curdling scream.

The house lights dim to darkness. Then rise on a stage which contains only Robert Ford. He slings his gun and proclaims with gravity:

BOB
And that's how I killed Jesse
James.

The curtain rings down to magnanimous applause.

INT. BROADWAY THEATRE LOBBY - DAY

A CROWD of PEOPLE applaud BOB in the theatre lobby, wanting to shake his hand.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
By October of 1883, Bob Ford could
be identified correctly by more
citizens than could the President
of the United States.

INT. MANHATTAN RESTAURANT - NIGHT

BOB, dressed in fine clothes, eats in an elegant restaurant, fawned over by PRETTY TEENAGED dancing girls. They are a rowdy group.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
He was as renowned at twenty as
Jesse was after fourteen years of
Grand Larceny.

Charley was increasingly
superstitious, increasingly
(MORE)

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 subject to the advice of sooth
 sayers who promised to cure his
 miseries with pipe smoke,
 poultices.

BOB
 You've been spending too much time
 with gypsies, Charley.

INT. BROADWAY THEATRE - NIGHT

Details of the performance: CHARLEY'S walk, his mouth,
 his hand gestures.

CHARLEY
 Picture's awful dusty.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 Something began to change in
 Charley's stage portrayal of
 Jesse: his limp seemed more
 practiced, his high voice was
 spookily similar to the man's, his
 newly suggested dialogue was
 analogous to a script Jesse might
 have originated.

He began to look at his younger
 brother with spite, as if he
 suspected that in some future
 performance he might present
 himself to a live cartridge in
 Robert Ford's gun.

A voice comes from the dark beyond the footlights:

HECKLER (O.S.)
 Murderer! Cur!

BOB strides towards the insults.

HECKLER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

COWARD!

BOB shields his eyes from the glare, searching for his

antagonist in the large audience.

BOB
 You want to investigate my
 courage? Do you? Find out! Find
 Out! Nobody

Bob returns to his position on stage.

HECKLER
 Coward!

BOB leaps from the stage and springs himself at the HECKLER, swinging punches at his skull. Striking him a dozen times before others yank him off. BOB smashes into them as well, his fists striking blood from their lips and shattering their noses as the audience of three hundred stampedes from the theatre.

221 INT. THEATRE LOBBY - LATER

BOB'S clothes are shredded and he's covered in blood from head to toe as he's led through the lobby in shackles by POLICEMEN.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 By his own approximation, Bob assassinated Jesse James over eight hundred times; he suspected no one in history had ever so often or so publicly recapitulated an act of betrayal.

INT. CHARLEY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Charley sits alone on a wooden chair.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 Bob always challenged the allegations of cowardice, but Charley seemed to agree with them. He spoke of Mrs. Zee James the way certain priests might the Madonna, and composed long, soul-describing letters to her begging forgiveness. None of which he ever mailed.

Charley Ford enters the room and lies down on his bed. He takes his revolver from it's scabbard and shoots himself through the heart.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Charley Ford became all that his
countrymen wanted an assassin of
Jesse James to be.

INT. BOWERY SALOON - NIGHT

BOB is drunk, wrung out and disheveled. A SINGER tunes
his guitar and begins to play.

SINGER
Jesse James was a man who killed
many men/ He robbed the Glendale
train/ He stole from the rich and
he gave to the poor/ He'd a hand
and a heart and a brain.

The SINGER begins to stroll the room: coming so near BOB
that BOB has to pull back his legs to let him pass.

SINGER (CONT'D)
Oh Jesse had a wife to mourn for
his life/ Three children, they
were brave/ But that dirty little
coward that shot Mister Howard has
laid Jesse James in his grave.

BOB works at registering no change in expression.

SINGER (CONT'D)
It was Robert Ford, that dirty
little coward/ I wonder how does
he feel?/ For he ate of Jesse's
bread/ and he slept in Jesse's
bed/ Then he laid Jesse James in
his grave.

Finally BOB can stand it no longer. He takes out his GUN
and FIRES into the floor. The noise is deafening.
Everyone turns to BOB in the silence that follows. BOB
lurches slowly to his feet.

BOB
(swaying drunk)
I'm Robert Ford.

He flings his pistol at the SINGER and tilts slightly
from the alcohol.

BOB (CONT'D)
It was two children, not three

They look at him silently. Watch as he slips on peanut shells, and ends up on the floor, tears glinting in his eyes. He gets to his feet and sways for a moment.

SALOONKEEPER
Get on home now, son. Go on! Get yourself outta my place.

INT. TRAIN - MOVING - DAY 224

BOB watches PASSENGERS.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
He thought, at his angriest, about visiting the kin of Jesse's slaughtered victims: Mrs. William Westfall in Plattsburg, the Wymore family in Clay County, perhaps even Mrs. Joseph Heywood in Northfield, Minnesota.

EXT. TRAIN STATION (KANSAS CITY) - DAY 225

BOB steps off the train. He is going on 22. He's dapper, glamorous, physically strong, comparatively rich, and psychologically injured.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
He would go to their homes and give his name as Robert Ford, 'The man who killed Jesse James.' He imagined they would be grateful to him.

INT. EXCHANGE CLUB - NIGHT

DOROTHY sings "Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage" for a packed house.

SUPER: CREED, COLORADO 1892

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
It was only with Dorothy Evans that Bob spoke revealingly or
(MORE)

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
plainly, and it was with her that
he spoke of things he didn't know
he knew.

EXT. RIO GRANDE AVENUE - DAY

BOB and DOROTHY stroll the snowy streets of Creede. BOB is extraordinary in his dress; a dandy in his gentleman's clothes and cane. SHOPKEEPERS and CITIZENS greet him, defer to him. He is like a king in this town.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
He told her that he had no real
memory of the shooting and its
aftermath: He could remember
lifting the gun that Jesse had
given him and then it was Good
Friday and he was reading about
the funeral proceedings as if
they'd happened a long time ago.

DOROTHY
Why did you kill him?

BOB
He was going to kill me.

DOROTHY
So you were scared and that's the
only reason?

Beat.

BOB
Yeah. And the reward money.

DOROTHY
Do you want me to change the
subject?

He looks at her in a calculating way.

BOB

Do you know what I expected?
Applause. I was only twenty years
old then. I couldn't see how it
would look to people. I was
surprised by what happened. They
didn't applaud.

INT. TENT PHOTO STUDIO

Bob and DOROTHY are in a tent studio. A PHOTOGRAPHER is
at work:

NARRATOR (V.O.)

He was ashamed of his persiflage,
his boasting, his pretensions of
courage and ruthlessness; he was
sorry about his cold-bloodedness,
his dispassion, his inability to
express what he now believed was
the case.

That he truly regretted killing
Jesse, that he missed the man as
much as anybody and wished his
murder hadn't been necessary.

INT. EXCHANGE CLUB - NIGHT

Bob walks through his crowded bar.

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

Even as he circulated his saloon
he knew that the smiles
disappeared when he passed by.

FREEZE ON BOB

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

He received so many menacing
letters that he could read them
without any reaction except
curiosity.

INT. BOB'S APARTMENT - DAY

Bob sits alone at a table, flipping cards.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

He kept to his apartment all day,
flipping over playing cards,
looking at his destiny in every
King and Jack.

EXT. SNOWY HILL - DAY

A man dressed in black solemnly marches through the snow with
a look of determination on his face.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Edward O'Kelly came up from
Bachelor at One PM on the 8th. He
had no grand scheme. No strategy.
No agreement with higher
authorities. Nothing but a vague
longing for glory, and a
generalized wish for revenge
against Robert Ford.

INT. EXCHANGE CLUB - DAY

Bob stands at the bar of his empty club, checking mail.

EXT. OUTDOOR SHOP - DAY

Edward O'Kelly loads a musket with the help of a friend.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Edward O'Kelly would be ordered to
serve a life sentence in the
Colorado Penitentiary for second
degree murder. Over seven thousand
signatures would eventually be
gathered in a petition asking for
O'Kelly's release, and in 1902,
Governor James B. Ullman would
pardon the man.

FREEZE ON EDWARD O'KELLY

INT. EXCHANGE CLUB - DAY

ELLA MAE WATERSON pours jiggers of whisky to a group of
miners. BOB removes his suit coat and hangs it on a
nail. He then removes his cartridge belt, winds it
around his gun and snugs this against the cash register.

MINER

You shouldn't be wearing that stickpin again, Bob. Opals are unlucky.

BOB

My luck isn't very good as it is. I guess an opal couldn't change it much.

MINER

I hear you.

Bob removes his hat and opens the day's paper.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

There would be no eulogies for Bob, no photographs of his body would be sold in sundries stores, no people would crowd the streets in the rain to see his funeral cortege, no biographies would be written about him, no children named after him, no one would ever pay twenty-five cents to stand in the rooms he grew up in.

EXT. RIO GRANDE AVE./INT. OMAHA CLUB - DAY

We FOLLOW O'KELLY as he makes his way UP the street TO the Omaha Club.

INT. EXCHANGE CLUB - DAY

O'KELLY enters with his shotgun raised and catches the man who shot Jesse James laughing with ELLA MAE WATERSON and giving his back to the street.

O'KELLY

Hello, Bob!

BOB turns to the greeting and we FREEZE ON his face.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

The shotgun would ignite, and Ella May would scream, but Robert Ford would only lay on the floor and

(MORE)

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
look at the ceiling, the light
going out of his eyes before he
could find the right words.

FADE OUT.

THE END