

The Killing Waters

By

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**FADE IN:**

**EXT. RAILWAY STATION - DAY**

A sign reads 'PORTLAND STATION'. The platform a mix of military uniforms and civilians with luggage.

SUPER - OREGON USA JULY 1945

A lone sailor MICHAEL(27), tall, handsome, waits with a kit bag. A train approaches from the north. As it pulls up, the destination reads 'LOS ANGELES'. The sailor gets on.

**INT. TRAIN COMPARTMENT - DAY**

The sailor walks along the narrow aisle at the side past compartments. He pauses to let other travelers slide by. Eventually he stops at one, opens the door. An OLD WOMAN is the only occupant, asleep at the window.

The sailor smiles, sits on the bench opposite. The air horn SOUNDS twice and the train rolls out of Portland.

The sailor rummages in his kit bag, takes out a thick envelope. Written on the front is:

FOR MICHAEL

DO NOT OPEN UNTIL AFTER MY FUNERAL.

He stows the bag above then opens the envelope. It contains several pages written in the same neat but shaky hand. The sailor leans back. He starts to read...

OLD MAN(V.O)

My dearest grandson Michael...I'm writing this on July the second, while I still have the strength. Your mother told me you're on your way here but I may be with your gramma before then...

The sailor looks out the window. The old woman still sleeps. The sailor takes a deep breath, continues to read.

OLD MAN(V.O)

I have no regrets. Hell, ninety two is a great age to make! I've been blessed with a fine wife, wonderful children and grandchildren, even a couple of great grandkids. Yes, it's been a truly nice life. But before I leave this earth, I wanted you, Mikey, my secret favorite

OLD MAN(V.O)  
 grandson, the only one who was interested in hearing my old stories...well, now I'm telling you about something that happened back in the Civil War. I tried to tell your daddy about it once but he didn't want a bar of it. So, looks like you're stuck with the tale, so to speak...

(beat)

But that's fine by me as I know you'll keep reading this long missive. Now, where to start?

(beat)

Ah yes, before the battle...it all began in eighteen sixty three at a fort in Texas on the Gulf...

FADE TO:

**EXT. FORT GRIFFIN - BATTLEMENT - DAY**

A Confederate fort, an earthen works bastion on the Sabine River. Downstream, the river runs into the Gulf of Mexico; upriver is the Sabine Lake, with the town of Sabine nestled on its shores.

SUPER - TEXAS/LOUISIANA BORDER SEPTEMBER 7 1863

A line of cannons poke out from fortified walls, overlooking the river. Out in the water, two wide channels flow either side of exposed oyster reefs.

Out where the river hits the ocean, a flotilla of Union ships wait, ready to attack the fort.

On the ramparts, the fort commander LIEUTENANT DOWLING(25) leads his men through final preparations with precision.

The soldiers work together well as a team, full of the confidence of youth and exuberance. Again and again, Dowling times their routine of loading the guns.

He moves among the troops, patting their backs, nodding, always geeing them up. The majority of the men are Irish so there's a lilt of the Emerald Isle in the air.

SERGEANT GARDNER(23) watches the Union fleet with a spyglass. He's tall, lean, a good second - in - command.

GARDNER

No movement, sir. They're just sitting there. Biding their time.

DOWLING

Very good, Sergeant.

GARDNER

Two steamers did come up earlier.  
They were trying to sound the  
channels, get a feel for it.

DOWLING

Their charts won't show how  
treacherous the area is.

He raises his spyglass. Peers through, nods.

GARDNER

They'll attack at first light, I  
can feel it, sir. But the men are  
ready to fight them off.

Dowling closes his 'scope, claps Gardner on the shoulder.  
He leaps onto the battlements, faces the men. Behind him,  
the water sparkles in the sun. Further in the distance,  
the Union fleet looms ominously.

DOWLING

Men, soon, maybe as early as  
tomorrow, we face a vast Union  
force. Their ironclads will  
attempt to blow our guns - and us  
- to Kingdom Come.

MURMURS amongst the men.

MCKERNAN

Let them try, sir! We can repel  
any attack with this company.

CHEERS from the soldiers.

DOWLING

Thank you. Please hear me out. We  
have a decision to make.

(beat)

While there is no doubting the  
fighting qualities of the Jeff  
Davis Guards, I would not hold  
myself responsible if the battle  
goes harsh against us.

He points to the shore to the south of the fort.

DOWLING

If our guns are silenced, the  
Yankees will be free to disembark  
five hundred soldiers here on  
Texas soil. Even if we are  
unharmed earlier, I fear we shall

DOWLING  
 face death or, perhaps worse,  
 become prisoners for the duration  
 of the conflict.

The men are silent, hanging on each word.

DOWLING  
 Now, Captain Odlum has left a  
 major choice to me. He has  
 suggested we abandon the fort,  
 and pull back to Sabine City...

The MURMURS again...some growls of NO...

DOWLING  
 However the important word here  
 is 'suggested'. He is leaving the  
 final decision to me. But while I  
 would instantly order this fine  
 band of soldiers to stay and  
 fight, I would not have the  
 deaths of any on my conscience,  
 if the battle turned ill.

A BUZZ in the ranks...

DOWLING  
 And so...I make this decision with  
 all of you. Shall we retreat?  
 (beat)  
 Or stay to face an uncertain end?

Silence. The men look to each other, searching for  
 support, each to daring to speak their mind. Until...

DRUMMOND  
 Aw, hell, Lieutenant, it's too  
 damn hot to march to Sabine City.  
 I'd rather stay and fight!

A moment of quiet then the men erupt in cheers, hats flung  
 into the air. CHANTS of 'victory or death'...

Dowling looks on, smiling, full of pride.

DOWLING  
 That settles it then. We'll stay  
 and fight. Thank you.

He jumps down, as the men continue to cheer. Gardener  
 shakes his hand, everyone fired up by the moment.

GARDNER  
 Alright, men. Those on watch duty  
 remain at your stations. The  
 others tend to normal chores.

The men disperse to their various positions.

DOWLING

Get some rest, Sergeant. That's an order! A big day looms tomorrow.

GARDNER

I will, sir. But I don't want\_\_

A soldier, LANGFORD appears, salutes the two officers.

LANGFORD

Sir?. Miss Reynolds from Sabine is at the gate, asking to see the Sergeant. The townsfolk have been kind enough to send us food. And coffee, sir. Real coffee.

Dowling smiles, notices Gardner blush slightly.

DOWLING

Excellent, Private. Sergeant, I must attend to the defenses but you may see your friend. Please give her my deepest thanks.

He strolls off, Langford in tow. Gardner watches them go, fusses with his jacket. Straightens his hat. Walks tall down to the main gate of the fort.

A tall brunette, SARAH(27) chats to a Reb guard. She carries a basket covered with cloth. Next to her is a boy, JEREMIAH(10). He peers around at the fort with wide eyes.

Gardner savors the smile on Sarah's face as she sees his approach. The boy grins at him too.

JEREMIAH

Sergeant Gardner! Aunt Sarah says you won't be allowed to show me the cannons? Please, sir? I promise I won't touch anything.

The three adults laugh; the guard tips his hat to Sarah before resuming his watch at the gate. Gardner nods to her, shakes Jeremiah's hand.

SARAH

Now, Jeremiah, I'm sure the Sergeant is far too busy.

GARDNER

Well, ma'am, we are busy preparing for battle. But I can spare a few minutes. The men won't mind at all.

JEREMIAH

Oh, jiminy, Sergeant, you're the best soldier in the world.

SARAH

Are you sure, Sergeant?

GARDNER

Positive, ma'am. Jeremiah, why don't you go up that ramp there to the cannons. Tell Private McKernan I'll be up directly.

Jeremiah hoots with joy, races up the ramp. Sarah and Gardner watch him go.

SARAH

Thank you again.

GARDNER

He's a good lad. I gather it's been hard for him since he lost his parents. This war...

SARAH

Yes. My sister and her husband, god bless their souls, both taken far too early.

She sighs, eyes pained. He waits, saddened by her melancholy. At last, she composes herself. She smiles again, looking him directly in the eyes. There's a moment between them - an acknowledgment.

Sarah hands him the basket. He pulls back the cloth to reveal cakes, tins of coffee and biscuits.

SARAH

A token of thanks for you brave men. The women of Sabine are baking more as we speak.

GARDNER

I...your gesture is most welcome. The men will be very happy. Hardtack does become tiresome.

They stand close before walking towards the battlements.

SARAH

Sergeant, should the townsfolk be worried? Is there a chance the fort may...may fall into Union hands? Please, we need to know...

She clutches his arm. He stops. Their faces are near.

GARDNER  
Our company here will do  
everything to stop the Yankees.

SARAH  
I know that. But we need to be  
ready if the battle goes bad.

Gardner muses on this, nods.

GARDNER  
I won't tiptoe around the truth,  
Miss Reynolds...

SARAH  
Sarah...please call me Sarah.

GARDNER  
I...Sarah then...if our cannons  
are knocked out by the Union  
ships then I fear Sabine will be  
vulnerable. You should prepare to  
evacuate your homes.

Sarah stares into his eyes, nods.

SARAH  
That's what I was expecting.

GARDNER  
We will endeavor to send word if  
the worst happens.

She nods again, reaches out a hand to touch his cheek.  
Gardner close his eyes, embracing her presence. Then  
Jeremiah's head pops up above.

JEREMIAH  
Aunt Sarah! Wait till you see the  
cannons. And I can see the Yankee  
boats through Mister McKernan's  
spyglass. They look so close.

The spell is broken somewhat. Sarah and Gardner LAUGH.

**EXT. USS SACHEM - BRIDGE - AFTERNOON**

On board one of the biggest UNION gunboats, the ship's  
commander LIEUTENANT JOHNSON(30) watches the activity at  
the fort through his spyglass.

The Sachem sits amid a fleet of twenty Union vessels: more  
ironclads, steamers, and sloops converted to gunboats.

The ship's OFFICERS are in an expansive mood - soon they  
will unleash the invasion force that may change the course  
of the war.



Further along the railing, MIDSHIPMAN TUCKER(25) and ENSIGN MOORE(23) don't share the optimism of their fellow Yankees. They scan the fort with spyglasses.

LIEUTENANT JOHNSON  
Gentlemen, all preparations for unloading the men south of the fort have been made. All that remains is to silence the guns.

The SHIP'S MASTER PITTS(35) snorts with laughter.

SHIP'S MASTER PITTS  
It will be a rout, sir. The tiny cannons of the fort will be no match for our gunboats.

LIEUTENANT JOHNSON  
I admire your confidence, Mr Pitts. Now, the order of battle will be thus: the Clifton will make the first approach at dawn. Then we shall bring the Sachem in to mop up.

SHIP'S MASTER PITTS  
Let's hope a few targets are left for us. The boys will be wild if they see no action.

More LAUGHTER. Tucker and Moore look at each other.

TUCKER  
I fear we may be taking the fort defences far too lightly.

MOORE  
Absolutely. The maps we have are outdated. No sounding charts, no tidal information. And we have no idea of the size of the fort's company or their cannon capacity.

TUCKER  
I pointed that out to the Lieutenant. He acknowledged the risk but Pitts and his cronies have convinced him the fort will be destroyed easily.

He sighs, shakes his head.

LIEUTENANT JOHNSON  
Sleep well, gentlemen. Tomorrow we change the very shape of this war. Victory will be ours.

The officers disperse. Tucker and Moore linger. Johnson has a last look at the distant fort, turns.

LIEUTENANT JOHNSON  
I'm sure you have adequate duties  
Mister Tucker. You are dismissed.

TUCKER  
If you don't mind, sir, we'd like  
permission to send scouts onto  
the shore. I feel the fort needs  
to be reconnoitered up close.

Johnson frowns. Folds his arms across his jacket.

LIEUTENANT JOHNSON  
I see. So you don't trust the  
valued advice of my officers?

TUCKER  
I...no, sir. I don't.

LIEUTENANT JOHNSON  
Hmm. Ensign Moore?

MOORE  
I agree, sir. There's too many  
unknown factors here. It won't  
hurt to be sure.

Johnson muses on this. Stares long and hard at both men.

LIEUTENANT JOHNSON  
You're good sailors, trusted men.  
Still young, full of piss and  
wind but...  
(beat)  
Alright. What is your plan?

TUCKER  
Thank you, sir. Well, I'll send  
out two of the strongest swimmers  
in a life boat, say, at three am.  
They will land on the beach south  
of the fort and make their way  
overland, get as close as they  
can. If they approach across the  
lagoon behind the fort, they  
should not be seen. At dawn they  
can reconnoiter the fort then  
make their way back.

Johnson nods, walks to the stairs.

LIEUTENANT JOHNSON  
Very good. Report to me as soon  
as the men return.

He heads up to the bridge.

TUCKER

I will, sir. Thank you again.

MOORE

Well, you were right. I was sure he'd say no. I guess deep down he isn't confident in the officers.

TUCKER

Peer pressure. They all want to look good for the hierarchy.

MOORE

Who are you sending then?

TUCKER

Watkins and Kintner. The two best swimmers onboard. Both good men.

MOORE

I'll inform them now, sir.

He salutes, a grin on his face. Tucker returns both. He turns back to the rail, as Moore hurries off.

**EXT. BEACH - NIGHT**

A small rowboat rides the swell into shore, grates on the sand. two figures in black, WATKINS (21) and KINTNER(23) step out and drag the boat up further. They pause to take in the area. Cloud cover blocks the moon.

SUPER - SEPTEMBER 8 1863

WATKINS

Tell me again why we volunteered?

KINTNER

We didn't. Mister Tucker chose us because we can swim.

They move off quietly, into the scrub behind the sand.

KINTNER

You ok? You seem edgy.

WATKINS

Can't shake the feeling that we're being followed.

Kintner looks up and down the empty beach.

KINTNER

They wouldn't have guards here.  
They can see our ships and they  
know we're attacking today.

WATKINS

I don't mean on land.  
(beat)  
In the boat...it felt like...

Kintner grins, claps him on the shoulder.

KINTNER

Probably a tuna. The gulf is full  
of all sorts of fish.

WATKINS

Yeah, true.

They continue on through the scrub. Overhead, the clouds  
part suddenly. The full moon casts a glow on the land.  
Ahead, the silent fort looms.

KINTNER

The creek should be...ah, yes.

They come to the edge of a creek which runs into the  
nearby Sabine River from a lagoon further to the west.

KINTNER

Time to earn our keep.

WATKINS

Do we really have to swim to the  
lagoon? Why can't we cross here  
and go overland?

KINTNER

Because we don't know what  
defenses they have south of the  
fort. And there's more cover if  
we approach from the lagoon.

A splash from the river where the creek enters.

WATKINS

I don't like this.

KINTNER

Jesus! What the hell has got into  
you? I've seen you calmly load a  
cannon under fire and blow the  
shit of a Reb ironclad. Now  
you're worried about a swim?

Watkins stares at the water.

WATKINS  
I was safer then.

POV - UNDERWATER

Blurred vision of the two men before sinking down...

KINTNER  
Stop worrying about nothing.  
Look, we'll be heroes if the fort  
is taken. Our mission is vital.  
Could even get medals.

WATKINS  
You think so?

KINTNER  
Of course. Old Abe himself will  
pin it on your chest.  
Imagine...high tea at the White  
House then heavy carousing with  
the girls of DC. It'll happen.

He wades into the creek, looks back at his comrade.  
Beckons. Kintner finally nods. Follows him in.

WATKINS  
Just don't get too far ahead.

**EXT. SOUTH OF FORT GRIFFIN - NIGHT**

Slowly, the two swim up the creek, making minimal noise.  
Soon, they enter the lagoon, which is an oval shape, sixty  
by fifty feet. They pause, treading water, whisper.

KINTNER  
Feels good to be off that damn  
boat. Fresh air, nice warm water.

WATKINS  
Well...yes, I suppose so. How do  
you think the battle will go?

KINTNER  
I'm confident our guns can blow  
this shitty fort to pieces.

Suddenly, they rise as something displaces the water  
beneath them. The moon disappears again...blackness.

WATKINS  
What the fuck? Was that you?

KINTNER  
No. I felt it too.  
(beat)

KINTNER  
Probably a rip. That creek is  
tidal. All sorts of currents. Or  
maybe that tuna found us.

He strokes off towards the north end of the lagoon.

WATKINS  
That's not funny at all.

He follows Kintner warily. Ahead, the fort is just visible  
about a hundred yards away. Closer is a small jetty on the  
edge of the lagoon.

KINTNER  
We'll wait till its light enough  
to see into the fort. You're  
doing well. Just keep thinking of  
those Washington ladies.

He continues on. A loud splash behind him.

KINTNER  
Jesus, keep it quiet. You want to  
them to hear us?

He treads water, turns to look at Watkins. There's no sign  
of him, just a circle of ripples.

KINTNER  
Watkins? You ok? Come on now, no  
fooling around.

The clouds part once more. The lagoon is empty. Kintner  
feels a panic rising in him as he searches back and forth.

KINTNER  
Watkins?

Then he's gripped around the waist with immense pressure,  
pushed through the water at high speed. He struggles to  
keep his head above the surface.

Surging...powering towards the jetty. Watkins manages a  
strangled cry. In the eastern sky, the first hint of dawn.

**EXT. FORT GRIFFIN - BATTLEMENT - NIGHT**

Drummond and McKernan stand watch. One yawns...they both  
yawn. A faint sound reaches them from the lagoon.

DRUMMOND  
You hear something?

McKernan walks to the end of the parapet. Peers down,  
listens. Hears a splashing sound. Shrugs, comes back.

MCKERNAN

Fish jumping. Probably a blue gill. Can't see shit anyway. If it was the Yankees attacking early, we'd know about it.

DRUMMOND

Yeah, I guess.  
(beat)  
Hopefully, they oversleep.

McKernan laughs at this.

MCKERNAN

Lucky bastards.

**EXT. LAGOON - NIGHT**

Kintner can only flail his arms as he's carried through the water. The jetty approaches abruptly. He smacks into a post. The pressure is released.

KINTNER

Oh, Jesus, oh lord...

He reaches down under the water, whimpers as he feels...

KINTNER

Oh fuck, my legs.

Now the dim light of pre-dawn shows the water darkened with blood around him. He tries to grab the edge of the jetty. The water bubbles as he's whisked away again.

KINTNER

Have mercy...please have m\_\_

He's yanked under, gone. More blood boils up. The lagoon is silent and empty.

**EXT. FORT GRIFFIN - BATTLEMENTS - DAWN**

The fort is quiet, early mist hanging over the water. The Confederates maintain a vigil. As the first rays of the sun light the sky, the Clifton anchors in the far channel. Gardner and Dowling watch through their spyglasses.

Suddenly the guns of the Clifton open up. The BOOM of thirty two pounder cannons shatters the quiet. The first shot flies harmlessly over the fort.

DOWLING

Hold! No firing. Have the men leave their posts and head down to the bombproofs, sergeant.

GARDNER

We're sticking to your plan, sir?

DOWLING

Aye. The boat are out of our range for now. We'll sit it out under cover. Let them waste their ammunition in the heat.

More shots pass overhead as the soldiers file down the ramp to the underground bunker. Quite a few look back at their cannons, eager to get in the battle. A shell hits one corner of the fort, sending dirt into the air.

GARDNER

Will the fort hold, sir?

DOWLING

Oh, definitely. Look, that shell did no damage at all.

Gardner nods but he's not a hundred percent sure. He disappears into the bombproof. Dowling has a last look at the battlements before closing the doors behind him.

**INT. FORT GRIFFIN - BOMBPROOFS - MORNING**

The men of the Jeff Davis are scattered about the bunker. They sit at tables and plank benches. Some eat, drink water; one plays a banjo softly. At one table a noisy poker game is already in progress.

DRUMMOND

Sir? I think McKernan is cheating. He's three dollars up. It's not right, he never wins.

The other players LAUGH except for the 'accused' man.

MCKERNAN

Don't listen to them, sir. Drummond is just jealous of my skills. They all are!

Dowling examines Drummond's cards.

DRUMMOND

Any advice, sir?

Dowling claps him on the shoulder.

DOWLING

Get good, Private. That's all I can offer. Just...get good.



He moves on to chat to another group of his men amongst LAUGHTER. The noise of the salvos outside are faint. Pretty soon the soldiers almost forget about it.

**INT. USS SACHEM - MAIN CABIN - MORNING**

Tucker and Moore stand at the Lieutenant's door. Tucker knocks. Johnson opens it, continues to do up his jacket. The BOOM of the Clifton's guns in the background.

LIEUTENANT JOHNSON  
Ah, good morning, gentlemen. Have the scouts made their reports?

TUCKER  
I'm afraid they didn't return, sir. We waited till six for them, but...nothing.

JOHNSON  
Pity. Perhaps they were captured?  
(shrugs)  
Or deserted. It happens a lot.

MOORE  
I don't think so, sir. They were both loyal sailors.

Johnson nods, puts his hat at a jaunty angle.

LIEUTENANT JOHNSON  
We can search for them after the battle. But now...It doesn't really matter if we know the fort has forty men or four hundred! Our fleet is more than capable of destroying it.  
(beat)  
Let's go up see what the Clifton's barrage has revealed.

**EXT. THE USS SACHEM - BRIDGE - MORNING**

On the bridge, Pitts and the other senior officers watch the fort with spyglasses. Johnson, Tucker and Moore join them. They too scan the fort.

LIEUTENANT JOHNSON  
Report, Mister Pitts?

SHIP'S MASTER PITTS  
No sign of movement, sir. No return fire, no soldiers on the battlements. Perhaps they have abandoned the fort, in anticipation of defeat?

LAUGHTER from the officers.

TUCKER

I doubt it, sir. I think they're hiding in a safe place under the fort, waiting out our fire. They know we aren't close enough yet.

Pitts LAUGHS, shakes his head.

SHIP'S MASTER PITTS

You're giving the Rebs far too much credit. When we bring our boats closer, they'll soon be flushed out of their rat hole.

LIEUTENANT JOHNSON

Mister Pitts is right, gentlemen. Sheer quantity of arms will overwhelm any fort no matter how many are defending it.

He checks his watch: seven o'clock on the dot.

LIEUTENANT JOHNSON

She'll fire for another half hour then we'll decide the next move.

The guns of the Clifton continue their incessant pounding.

A FEW HOURS LATER

**EXT. SABINE CITY - DAY**

All is quiet now. The Union boats wait for new orders. the fort is desolate. Upriver at Sabine City, the townsfolk are indoors, unsure what will happen in coming hours.

However, in the yard of one house, a young girl REBECCA(15) saddles a fine black horse. Her long blonde hair contrasts with the boyish trousers and shirt she wears. The steed snickers in anticipation of exercise.

REBECCA

Did the cannons scare you, Samson? Never mind...let's go for a ride and a swim, ok?

The horse nuzzles her cheek. She LAUGHS then leaps up into the saddle lithely. Feet in the stirrups and they're away.

**EXT. SABINE RIVER - DAY**

Rebecca gallops Samson north of the town close to where the river runs from Sabine Lake. Grassy banks lead to the water. Rebecca eases the horse to a trot. The sun climbs higher in the vividly blue sky. Sweat forms on her brow.

REBECCA

Sure is a warm one. I think we'll take that swim now, boy.

She guides Samson down to the water's edge. The surface is calm, no breeze at all. Samson WHINNIES, steps into the water. Rebecca LAUGHS, as the steed seems to hold up.

REBECCA

Oh, you big baby. It isn't cold.

She nudges the flanks, pushing the horse in further. The bottom drops away and Samson is swimming. Rebecca embraces the cool water over her legs.

REBECCA

See? It's so lovely.

POV - UNDERWATER: moving up from the depths...the horse's legs visible...thrashing...

As they do deeper, Rebecca slides off, holding the saddle. She swims near Samson's head, tickling his ears. Suddenly, the steed WHINNIES, swings his head. It hits the girl in the face, bloodying her nose. She shakes her head.

REBECCA

Hey, that's not funny, Samson.

She gets back in the saddle, wiping the blood off. Some drips into the water. Samson lurches around, heads back to the bank. Rebecca tries to calm him.

REBECCA

Whatever is the matter with today?

Now the horse is churning the water. The girl hangs on.

POV - UNDERWATER: closing in on the swirling water as the horse kicks frantically...tendrils of blood...

REBECCA

Samson, slow down.

She hauls on the reins. Hears a splash behind her. Turns to look. Eyes widen as...

**EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY**

One minute a girl is on a horse swimming to shore...the next she's ripped from the saddle by something huge. Glimpses of a fin rolling and she's gone. The horse SCREAMS in terror, continues it's flight to the bank.

An eruption of blood where she vanished, a widening bubble of crimson, shockingly bright on the water.

Samson gets to shore, kicks through the shallows, up to safety. Turns to look. The bloody ripples soon dissipate, and it's like nothing ever happened.

The horse WHINNIES, a sad noise now. It can only watch as a huge gray fin emerges. It circles once then heads downriver towards the town and beyond.

Samson WHINNIES again then crops grass at it's feet. It lifts it's head periodically to see if his master appears. No sign of anyone. After a time, the horse wanders back in the direction of Sabine City...

**INT. FORT GRIFFIN - BOMBPROOFS - DAY**

Dowling checks his watch; it reads three pm. Some of the men sit up from napping, look up from their books.

The poker game continues. McKernan now has a huge pile of coins and bills in front of him, as well as paper chits.

The doors open, sunlight fills the bunker. Gardner enters.

GARDNER

Four gunboats moving up, sir. Two in each channel. No damage to the walls or the cannons.

Dowling nods, moves to the centre of the room.

DOWLING

Men, its time to earn our keep. The Yankees think they have softened our defences. We know otherwise. They will begin their full assault soon.

(beat)

Now we show them the sting in the Confederate tail!

The men are on their feet, There is no cheering but an energy and fervour sweeps the bunker. McKernan hurriedly gathers his money but some spills to the floor. In his haste to retrieve it, he knocks over the table. The soldiers LAUGH even as they prepare to fight.

DOWLING

Fear not, Private! Your winnings  
will be mere trifles compared to  
capturing a gunboat or two.  
Men...to the guns.

**EXT. FORT GRIFFIN - BATTLEMENT - DAY**

Like ants boiling out of a wrecked anthill, the Confederate soldiers emerge onto the battlements. The blue sky sun beats like a hammer. Out on the river, the Union gunboats steam within range:

The Sachem and Arizona in the far channel; the Clifton in the near one, with the Granite City lurking behind ready to unload five hundred storm troopers.

Dowling oversees the men as they surge to their cannons.

DOWLING

On my signal, three cannon at the  
far boat, The others fire upon  
this near channel.

Gardner looks through his spyglass. He scans the ships on the river. A flicker of movement further upstream catches his eye. He turns the 'glass onto it. Smiles.

GARDNER

Lieutenant! The Uncle Ben has  
arrived from Beaumont. She's hove  
to in the lake.

DOWLING

Excellent. If need be, signal her  
to come in firing. Fate is  
smiling down on us, men.

The sound of hooves has them all turning to look at the fort entrance. A COURIER arrives, holds out a package to Dowling, who examines it.

COURIER

From Captain Odlum, sir. He said  
you'd been waiting for weeks for  
a new one.

Before anyone can reply, he salutes and rides off again. Dowling opens the package. The men cluster around.

MCKERNAN

What is it, sir? Fresh orders?

DOWLING

No, something better than that.

He flings the paper away, holds up a Confederate flag. The men gasp and CHEER anew. Some wipe away tears. Drummond searches the battlements, grabs a staff leaning against a wall. He holds it out to Dowling.

DOWLING

Good man!

He attaches the flag, leaps onto the parapet, holds the staff aloft. A breeze from nowhere - a sign perhaps - ruffles the material, and the Stars and Bars unfurl.

As the Rebs CHEER, he plants the staff in the earthen wall of the fort. Behind him the Union fleet looks suddenly mortal. Sunlight frames the flag and the Lieutenant.

DOWLING

For this flag to come down...I  
will have to be dead.

Wild YELLS. Dowling looks upon his men. Gardner salutes, gives him a proud nod. Dowling returns both.

**EXT. USS SACHEM - BRIDGE - DAY**

On the bridge, the officers watch the flag go up.

JOHNSON

Mr. Tucker? Fire at will please.  
Lets knock over this fort and  
these tiresome Rebs.

TUCKER

Yes, sir.

He hurries down the stairs. Johnson waits. Soon, the BOOM of guns sends shells at the fort. The boat edges closer to a series of white stakes in the middle of the channel.

**EXT. FORT GRIFFIN - BATTLEMENT - DAY**

The Sachem's cannonballs whiz overhead. Then one flies into a wall, flinging up dirt. The men wait at the cannons, anxious.

DOWLING

Hold...hold...wait till they  
reach the markers.

**EXT. USS SACHEM - BRIDGE - DAY**

The Union officers watch as their barrage has little impact. Tucker reappears on the bridge.

LIEUTENANT JOHNSON  
Our gunners are off target today.

SHIP'S MASTER PITTS  
A slight inconvenience, sir.

LIEUTENANT JOHNSON  
What are these white posts?

SHIP'S MASTER PITTS  
Some kind of fishing net? Can't say I don't blame the Rebs for getting sick of hardtack.

The officers laugh. Incredibly, some of them drink from hip flasks in their anticipation of victory.

TUCKER  
Ah, sir? I think you'll find they're range markers? For the fort guns.

LIEUTENANT JOHNSON  
What of it, Midshipman? You seem overly optimistic about the skill of the fort gunners.

MOORE  
We've seen them practicing for hours, sir. They look exceptionally sharp and well\_\_\_

SHIP'S MASTER PITTS  
Nonsense.

The fort cannons open up. All the shots either land well short or go over the boat. Much laughter on the bridge.

SHIP'S MASTER PITTS  
I rest my case. I'll wager my father -in - law's farm this vessel takes no hits.

**EXT. FORT GRIFFIN - BATTLEMENT - DAY**

McKernan shakes his head, adjusts the direction of his cannon, checks the range of the markers. Along the line, the other gunners do the same. They prepare to fire again.

MCKERNAN'S POV:the Sachem drifts into his sights...

MCKERNAN  
 (whispers)  
 Oh yes, my lovely...

BOOM. The cannon roars, a split second before the other guns. The projectile flies across the water.

**EXT. USS SACHEM - BRIDGE - DAY**

Tucker and Moore see the cannonball arcing towards them.

TUCKER  
 Damnation! Everybody watch out!

The officers look up from their merriment. Johnson and Pitts look stunned. The cannonball passes beneath their line of sight. A massive THUD as it strikes the boat...

**INT. USS SACHEM - ENGINE ROOM - DAY**

The red hot ball smashes through the iron plating of the engine room. It takes off the legs of a Union stoker, blowing him against the bulkhead. It narrowly misses the other men tending the huge steam boiler...

And crashes into the huge boiler itself. WHOOMP...

**INT. SABINE RIVER - DAY**

POV moving through the water. The shapes of the gunboats above, the muffled echo of cannon. The louder thump of the SACHEM's boiler exploding. A glimpse of a pitch black eye as the water swirls, rising up to the carnage above...

**INT. USS SACHEM - ENGINE ROOM - DAY**

As the boiler erupts, a deluge of hot water and steam envelopes the room. Union sailors are scalded, burned or torn apart by the blast. The gunboat grinds to a halt. More cannonballs power into the boat, killing more men.

**EXT. USS SACHEM - BRIDGE - DAY**

Johnson and the officers lurch as the boat stops suddenly. Clouds of steam rise from below deck. Faint cheers from the fort across the water.

LIEUTENANT JOHNSON  
 Lord, we are crippled with the  
 second shot.



TUCKER  
We must check the damage, sir.

MOORE  
And attend the wounded.

LIEUTENANT JOHNSON  
I...shall we surrender?

He turns to the officers who are suddenly mute. Tucker turns as he heads to the stairs.

TUCKER  
That would be wise, sir. The vessel is done.

He nods to Moore and they vanish into the steam. Johnson watches as the Clifton opens fire on the fort.

JOHNSON  
Mister Pitts?

SHIP'S MASTER PITTS  
Sir?

Everyone is still stunned at the Sachem's early demise.

LIEUTENANT JOHNSON  
Signal flags as you will. Raise the white one.

SHIP'S MASTER PITTS  
I...yes, sir.

He races into the cabin.

**EXT. FORT GRIFFIN - BATTLEMENT - DAY**

The heat and smoke from the six cannons is overpowering, as The Confederate soldiers load and fire with precision.

GARDNER  
Sir, the Sachem has raised the white flag. It's surrendering.

DOWLING  
Excellent. Men, cease fire on the far boat. Concentrate on the Clifton and the others.

As they watch, the Clifton creeps closer in the near channel. Her guns boom out. The shells fly wide.

DOWLING

Keep up the fire! McKernan, can you double your bets? Can you hit another ship?

MCKERNAN

Aye, Lieutenant. I'm aiming for a full house! Just watch me.

The men laugh amidst their hard work. McKernan makes adjustments but before he can fire, cannons down the line crash metal carnage into the Clifton. Dowling watches through his spyglass.

DOWLING

She's hit too! Well done, boys. Looks like a tiller rope is cut.

Gardner peers through his spyglass.

GARDNER

You're right, sir. She's spinning out of control.

DOWLING

Who got her? I know it wasn't you, Mckernan...too slow I'm afraid.

The men laugh again. They're enjoying this immensely.

DRUMMOND

Me and my crew, sir!

Wild cheers all around. McKernan looks peeved but some back slaps bring the smile back. Out on the river, the Clifton continues to spin wildly, before running up on the shore. A white flag is raised almost immediately.

DOWLING

Two from two, gentlemen.

GARDNER

The Arizona and Granite City are retreating, sir. They don't want the same medicine.

DOWLING

Cease all fire, men. But be watchful. They may return.

He turns his gaze back to the stricken Sachem.

DOWLING

Sergeant, please signal the Uncle Ben to come down and tow the Clifton in.

GARDNER

Yes, sir.

He heads off. Dowling winces as he views the Sachem.

DOWLING

Doctor Bailey? If I may...?

One of the men helping the nearest cannon crew looks up. He is DR BAILEY(38), a quiet but reassuring figure.

DOWLING

If you could help with the wounded when they arrive - even though they be the enemy - I would be appreciative.

Bailey straightens, looks long at the stricken Sachem.

BAILEY

It seems I will be busy the next few hours. I imagine its like hell on that boat.

**INT. USS SACHEM - BELOW DECKS - DAY**

Tucker and Moore race down the stairs into the bowels of the boat. Another explosion rocks them and they tumble the rest of the way. The boat grinds and creaks.

TUCKER

Lord, our ammunition is hit.

MOORE

She's breaking in half! We have to get everyone off, sir.

They enter the boiler room. The steam still hisses. Bodies litter the floor, most boiled alive. Those still with a pulse scream until mercifully they pass out.

TUCKER

We have to help these men.

MOORE

No, sir. There's nothing we can do. We must save ourselves now.

As he speaks, the firing from the fort stops. The weakened hull of the boat gives way. Water pours in as the boat slowly sinks.

TUCKER

Damnation, its a slaughter. Our military experts are fools.

He kicks out in frustration, nearly falls into the rising water. Suddenly, the floor opens, a large crack opening across the room.

MOORE

She's splitting apart. Time to get off. Should we try and swim to the Louisiana shore, sir. Avoid capture if possible?

TUCKER

I doubt I have the energy.

He leans over a burnt sailor. Grimaces at the sight. He stares at men floundering in the water, torn at leaving them to their doom. Moore is moving back up the stairs.

Suddenly, Tucker sees something huge move under the water, a grey bulk glimpsed. A man abruptly vanishes.

MOORE

Sir, we have to go.

Tucker wipes his face, smearing sweat and grime. The water is still now, bodies floating.

MOORE

SIR!

Tucker takes a last look at the carnage, nods and follows Moore up the stairs.

LATER

**EXT. FORT GRIFFIN - WHARF - DAY**

The river in front of the fort is filled with the debris of battle - bodies, goods, blackened timber. The Uncle Ben carefully tows the Clifton back to the wharf. Once both vessels are secured, the fort soldiers begin transferring prisoners to the Roebuck.

Out in the water, Tucker, Moore and several other survivors from the Sachem, make their way to the shore next to the wharf. Among them is PETTY OFFICER HUDSON(21) an African American sailor.

**EXT. CSS UNCLE BEN - MAIN DECK - DAY**

The contingent of Confederate soldiers stand on the main deck surveying the aftermath of battle. Sergeant RATCLIFFE(28) commands them, flanked by Privates CARVELL and WINBANKS(both 24).

These are all hardened men, not fussy with decorum and respect for their superiors, the result of guarding prisoners in the POW camps. A dangerous brew indeed...

RATCLIFFE

Well, boys, time for some well earned fun. To the victor go the spoils I think the phrase is.

CARVELL

I heard there's a lot of pretty ladies in Sabine, boss.

They swagger down onto the wharf. The Union men get to the shore, stagger through the water to collapse onto the sand. Tucker coughs out filthy water. Ratcliffe turns his head, see the forlorn group of exhausted sailors.

RATCLIFFE

Lordy, look what the tide washed in. The pride and joy of the Union Navy. Not so cocky now are you, with your boats sunk.

His acolytes laugh. Tucker opens his eyes, peers up.

WINBANKS

Boss, I see a nigger in there. Damn, no wonder we winning this war. Keep sending niggers to fight us ain't no way we lose.

Moore gets to his feet, stares defiantly back.

MOORE

Brave men died here today. You've taken a lot of prisoners. We're surrendering. No need for\_\_

RATCLIFFE

Shut the fuck up, Yankee. You got no rights now. Whatever prisoners we can't fit on the Roebuck will be coming on the Uncle Ben to Beaumont. In fact, you sorry lot can get on there now.

Beside him, Carvell and Winbanks straighten. Dowling and Gardner appear on the wharf.

DOWLING

Everything alright here? These men are surrendering?

RATCLIFFE

Yes, Lieutenant. Sergeant Ratcliffe from the Uncle Ben.

He gives a lazy salute. His cronies do the same, smirk at Gardner. Dowling studies Tucker and his men.

DOWLING  
Are any of you injured?

TUCKER  
No, Lieutenant.

DOWLING  
Very good. You are now prisoners but you'll be treated fairly and fed. You'll stay here overnight then board one of our boats for Houston or Beaumont.

Tucker nods. He leads his men up the bank to the fort walls. Carvell covers them with his rifle.

RATCLIFFE  
I'll load them on our gunboat now, sir. Head off tomorrow.

DOWLING  
Thank you. Sergeant Gardner here will assist you, and organize food and water for the prisoners.

Salutes all around and Dowling heads off. Ratcliffe watches him go then turns to the Yankees.

RATCLIFFE  
Ok, you sons of bitches...war is over for you now. And soon you'll be guests at Camp Beaumont.

The Rebs all laugh as Tucker leads his men across the wharf. Carvell prods Hudson with his rifle.

CARVELL  
Get a move on, nigger.

GARDNER  
Steady on, Private. The man has surrendered. No need for\_\_

Ratcliffe spins around so Gardner almost bumps in to him.

RATCLIFFE  
Let's make one thing clear. I'm in charge of these prisoners now. And we ain't gonna be mollycoddling them all the way back up the Neches.

He waits, an evil grin on his face. Gardner stares back at him. Tucker stops, keen to see how this plays out. Gardner finally drops his eyes, points to the wharf they stand on.

GARDNER

Prisoners are still in the fort.  
I direct them according to the  
orders given by the Lieutenant.  
And I say they go on the Roebuck.

RATCLIFFE

Is that so?

Gardner nods. Ratcliffe nods back, muses on this.

RATCLIFFE

Private Winbanks. Can you check  
with the guards on the Roebuck?  
Ask them if they have room for  
these filth?

He turns his body slightly to address Winbanks, signals  
with his eyes, slips him a bank note. Winbanks grins a big  
shit eating grin, palms the money and saunters over to the  
gangplank of the Roebuck.

The others watch as he passes Union prisoners trudging up.  
He gets to the Reb guards at the top, chats to them,  
quietly passes the cash to them. Shrugs his shoulders and  
heads back down.

WINBANKS

The boys said they already  
crammed in too many. Looks we're  
stuck with this sorry shower.

RATCLIFFE

Damn. I was hoping for an easy  
boat ride home after a long day.

GARDNER

You have a nerve. You and your  
men saw no action. The victory  
was secured by the fort company.

CARVELL

We was itching to fight...sir.

RATCLIFFE

Yes. Wasn't our fault we weren't  
needed. Guess you boys got a few  
lucky shots, hey?

More LAUGHTER.

RATCLIFFE

Well, we better get these scum on  
board our boat. You're free to  
run off now, Sergeant.

He turns, leads the way to the Uncle Ben. Gardner watches  
silently. Tucker passes him, nods, sighs.

GARDNER

Make sure they're fed, Sergeant.  
The Lieutenant will want to know.

RATCLIFFE

Oh, sure, don't worry. They'll be  
well cared for. Right, boys?

The Rebs LAUGH again. Winbanks sidles up to Ratcliffe, as they approach the Uncle Ben.

WINBANKS

The Roebuck guards were more than  
happy to oblige, boss.

RATCLIFFE

Easy money for them. More fun for  
us. Hey nigger?

Hudson keeps his head down. Moore and another Yankee move closer to him in protective mode.

RATCLIFFE

That's it...keep quiet and you  
won't get hurt...

(beat)

Maybe...

LAUGHTER again. As Carvell leads them up the gangplank of the cotton clad, Ratcliffe turns to smirk at Gardner. Doffs his hat before boarding. Gardner remains still.

#### **INT.FORT GRIFFIN - BOMBPROOFS - DAY**

A makeshift emergency room. Bailey works on the wounded prisoners. Uninjured Union sailors are pressed into bearing the stretchers of their comrades. The doctor can only do so much with the medical supplies at hand.

BAILEY

He's gone.

He pulls a grimy sheet over the body on the table in front of him. Two soldiers lift the dead man onto a stretcher and cart him away.

Almost immediately, another patient is placed on the table. Terrible burns on his face and hands. His hair is just charred stubble. Bailey gives him pain relief, starts binding his face gently.

BAILEY

Sweet Christ, this is futile.



He wipes his brow free of blood and sweat, looks helplessly around the room. Yankee sailors are lined up along the wall, dying on the filthy stretchers as he watches. His current patient joins them. Bailey closes his eyes, leans on the table, overwhelmed.

DRUMMOND(O.S)

You ok, Doc? Need some water?

Bailey opens his eyes to see the concerned Drummond offering a mug of water.

BAILEY

God bless you, Private.

He takes the mug, sips gratefully. Takes some deep breaths and readies for the next in the conveyor belt of victims.

NOLAN(O.S)

Something was in the water, Doc.  
I saw it rip into my friend...it  
tore lots of our boys into  
shreds. You have to help him,  
please...

A frantic hand clutches Bailey's arm, and he turns to see NOLAN, a 22 year old Union soldier. His eyes are full of panic and hysteria.

At the same time, a new stretcher is placed on the table. A WOUNDED PRISONER, moaning softly, lower body covered by a bloody blanket.

Drummond moves in to lead Nolan away but Bailey gestures 'its ok'. Nolan tenderly holds the hand of his friend.

BAILEY

I'll do my best to help him, I  
promise. But what is this talk  
about something in the water?

NOLAN

I don't know what it was...some  
type of creature...huge. With  
teeth like bayonets.

BAILEY

I fear you are in battle shock,  
lad. Cannonballs and explosions  
were more than enough for this  
sort of damage.

He pulls the blanket back to reveal a sight from hell itself. Both the man's legs are gone, cleanly taken below the knees.

BAILEY

Dear god.

Drummond turns to vomit in the bucket of drinking water. The man's stumps are cleanly cut, almost sheared off. Two nubs of femur poke from tattered trousers.

BAILEY

There's little I can do. He's lost too much blood. But his wounds seem too precise for cannon fire. Was he trapped between the boats?

He gently wraps fresh bandages around the stumps. Mercifully the soldier is now unconscious.

NOLAN

No, Doc, I told you. There was a beast in the water, a huge fish, a dark shape under the surface. It was attacking lots of men, both dead and alive.

Drummond takes his place again, averts his eyes.

BAILEY

I see. Well, no one else saw any type of creature in the water.

NOLAN

That's because they're all dead.

BAILEY

We have snapping turtles here. And the odd small shark but...

HOOPER(O.S)

This was no snapping turtle. It was indeed a shark. These wounds are from a shark bite.

Bailey signals for the legless man to be removed. Nolan follows the stretcher to its place with the others. HOOPER(21) another Union soldier, approaches the doctor. Drummond says nothing but is wary.

BAILEY

You saw him attacked?

HOOPER

No. But I've seen wounds like these before. In my home town.

Nolan is listening in, comes back to the table. The line of patients has stopped it seems.

NOLAN

I told you so. I wasn't lying.

BAILEY

No one said you were, son. Its  
just that\_ \_

Hooper gets close to Nolan, a manic gleam in his eye.

HOOPER

What colour was it? The thing you  
saw in the water?

NOLAN

Grey on top like the Rebs  
uniform. White on the bottom.

Hooper nods as if he was expecting this. He waves a dirty  
hand towards the legless soldier who is now deathly still.

HOOPER

It was a Great White Shark. The  
meanest son of a bitch in the  
whole ocean.

BAILEY

Look, I think we should\_\_

NOLAN

Do they normally attack people?

HOOPER

Yes. A few years back, four men  
from my village that were taken.  
We found their boats destroyed.  
Their bodies washed ashore later.  
All of them with bite marks.

BAILEY

The people of Sabine have never  
spoke of any problem with sharks.  
Why would one appear now?

HOOPER

Because of the war. Because of  
the blood, the fighting, the  
trail of rubbish and shit from  
the boats. I'll wager this one  
followed our fleet all the way  
from New Orleans.

Dowling appears. Another patient is put in front of  
Bailey. He examines the man, sighs.

DOWLING

I know you're ill equipped to  
perform any major surgery,

DOWLING  
 Doctor. But, god bless your  
 efforts here. Is there anything  
 you need?

BAILEY  
 We need to keep watch on the very  
 water itself, Lieutenant. We may  
 have a shark lurking.

DOWLING  
 I...a shark? Lord, I've heard  
 talk of them in the past but  
 never...right, I'll warn the men  
 to stay alert near the river.

BAILEY  
 And the townspeople. They should  
 be warned too.

Dowling nods. Drummond is already at his side.

DRUMMOND  
 Sir, I'll let Sergeant Gardner  
 know about this.

DOWLING  
 Thank you, Private.

He watches in silence as Bailey lifts the blanket on more  
 horrific wounds. He looks about the room, sees Hooper  
 staring back at him.

DOWLING  
 Again, don't hesitate to summon  
 me if there's anything you need.

BAILEY  
 This war needs to end soon. Or I  
 fear we all may be swept away in  
 a tide of blood.

Dowling clasps his shoulder then heads up to the fort.

LATER

**EXT.FORT GRIFFIN - BATTLEMENTS - DUSK**

Dowling stands looking over the river as the light fades  
 Drummond approaches him.

DRUMMOND  
 Sir, Captain Odlum has arrived.

DOWLING

Ah, excellent.

Both men salute as Captain ODLUM(40) a big, no-nonsense man strides onto the battlement. Odlum nods at Drummond who hurries off.

ODLUM

Lieutenant Dowling! I'm glad to see you unharmed. The news of your victory was inspirational. Mark my words, the people of Texas will soon learn of your stand here. Even General Lee has heard of your exploits.

DOWLING

Well, sir, if I may say...my men and I were merely doing our duty as soldiers of the Confederacy. And these forty four men under my command were simply magnificent.

Odlum claps him on the shoulder, gazes down river. Dowling passes him his eyeglass.

ODLUM

As they should be when their commander has trained them so well.

(beat)

The Union fleet have gone?

DOWLING

Apparently so, sir. They lingered for a few hours after the battle's aftermath but made no further attempts on the fort.

ODLUM

I see one ship on the river.

DOWLING

Our very own Roebuck, sir. Transporting the bulk of the prisoners along the coast to Houston. I, ah, hurried the prisoners aboard the Roebuck. If those three hundred Yankees realised they were bested by only forty four of us then...

ODLUM

Then they may have tried to rise up and overwhelm your men with sheer numbers. Wise move, Lieutenant. But you said the bulk of the prisoners?

DOWLING

Yes, sir, as many could fit on board safely and humanely. The remainder are on board the Uncle Ben, ready to sail up the Neches to Beaumont in the early morning.

ODLUM

Excellent. Did you suffer many casualties amongst your men?

DOWLING

No, sir, nary a scratch. It was the enemy who sustained much loss of life despite the efforts of Doctor Bailey and my men.

Odlum's face is grim as he hands back the eyeglass. He turns to watch the activity on the Uncle Ben.

ODLUM

War is a fearful and harsh thing. We can only hope the next battles we face bring similar results.

(beat)

Your men can rest tonight as I've brought fresh troops to relieve them. Just in case the Yankees decide to come back.

DOWLING

Thank you, sir. My men are prepared for a possible counterattack. But I feel we have dealt them a savage blow that has shocked them.

ODLUM

That you have, Lieutenant. Now, I must see to my men.

They head off down into the fort. Out on the water, unseen by anyone, something disturbs the surface, a brief flicker before subsiding.

LATER

**INT.FORT GRIFFIN - BOMBPROOFS - NIGHT**

Dowling sits on his bunk, writing reports, using a wooden crate as a desk. He look up as Gardner approaches.

GARDNER

Ah, Sergeant. The end of a long and memorable day is nearly upon us. The men are all fed?

GARDNER

Yes, sir. The guards are set on the walls. Hopefully the night is uneventful. I'll take last watch at four. But, I wanted to ask...

Dowling puts his quill down, blows on the fresh ink on the papers. Gestures to the bunk. Gardner sits.

GARDNER

Well, sir...I think I should accompany the prisoners on the Uncle Ben. To Beaumont.

DOWLING

I see. May I ask why?

GARDNER

I don't...sir, I don't trust Sergeant Ratcliffe to treat them well. He's... he's trouble, sir. Him and his men.

Dowling nods, frowns.

DOWLING

Yes, he is. His reputation precedes him. I've heard a number of stories involving his abuse of prisoners in the camps. Unfortunately, he has blood kin in high rank, so his behavior is overlooked far too often.

GARDNER

That's a disgrace, sir. Though we be fighting a brutal war, we still must have some scruples.

DOWLING

Aye, truer words have never been spoken. But, in these trying times, men forget about morality.

GARDNER

Will you allow me to go, sir? Surely, Ratcliffe won't continue his bad ways with me present?

Dowling sighs, takes up his quill again.

DOWLING

He may not. Who knows with ones of his ilk? But I see you're concerned for your fellow man be they the enemy. Go then but be wary, Sergeant.

GARDNER

Thank you, sir. I will.

He stands, salutes. Strides off to the doors. Dowling watches him go. Sighs again, starts writing.

DOWLING

Stay safe. And watch your back...

**EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE - FRONT YARD - DAWN**

Gardner lifts his hand to knock on the front door. It opens before he can. Sarah stands there, Jeremiah peeking out from behind her.

GARDNER

'Morning, Sarah...Jeremiah. I just wanted to\_\_

SARAH

Praise the lord you're safe, Sergeant. We heard the battle went well but...I was worried.

GARDNER

I'm sorry I didn't come see you last night but there was a lot going on.

SARAH

I can imagine. The main thing is that you and your brave fellow soldiers suffered no harm.

Jeremiah moves in front of his aunt, looks up at Gardner.

JEREMIAH

You kill any Yankees, Sergeant?

GARDNER

I...well, not directly. The boys on the cannons, well, they\_\_

JEREMIAH

I seen some bodies in the river yesterday afternoon. Down below the fort. Current was taking them right to sea. They was all swole up and\_\_

SARAH

Jeremiah, you hush up now. The dead aren't a subject you should be talking about. And what have I told you about wandering near the river by yourself?



JEREMIAH

I ain't got many friends here.  
Except for Nathaniel.

Sarah sighs, looks at Gardner.

SARAH

Boy is growing too fast. It isn't  
right for him to be seeing all  
the killing and fighting.

GARDNER

You can't keep him wrapped up,  
Sarah. The war is a terrible  
thing. But it's here in our times  
and we have to deal with it.

JEREMIAH

I'm sorry, Aunt Sarah. I didn't  
mean to upset you.

He hugs her waist. She ruffles his mop of hair.

GARDNER

Anyway, I came to tell you I'll  
be away for a few days. I'm  
escorting the remainder of the  
prisoners upriver to Beaumont.

Sarah's lips drop, quiver for a moment. Gardner reassures  
her with a quick smile.

JEREMIAH

Oh, gosh, that's so exciting.  
Aunt Sarah, can I go on the boat  
too? I'll behave, I promise.  
Sergeant? Please, I can help you.

Sarah opens her mouth to protest but stays quiet as  
Gardner holds up a hand. He crouches down to eye level  
with the boy.

GARDNER

Say, Jeremiah that's a real good  
offer by you and I'd love for you  
to accompany me. But don't you  
think it's more important for you  
to stay and look after your Aunt?  
If them Yankees are foolish  
enough to come back, well, the  
fort will need extra hands to  
pitch in. And that means you.

Jeremiah takes this in carefully then looks back at Sarah.

JEREMIAH

I guess so, Sergeant.

SARAH

Do you have time for a coffee  
before you go? I've a fresh pot.

GARDNER

Well, I really should get\_\_

He sees the look on her face, smiles.

GARDNER

But I have time. That would be  
nice, thank you...Sarah.

He removes his hat, goes inside. The door closes.

LATER

Sarah and Jeremiah stand at the door, watch Gardner walk  
down the road. He gets to the corner, looks back, waves,  
before disappearing. Sarah sighs. Jeremiah takes her hand.

JEREMIAH

Don't worry, Aunt Sarah. He'll be  
fine. He's a brave soldier.

SARAH

I know. Now, what have you got  
planned for today? Didn't you  
mention fishing with Nathaniel?

JEREMIAH

Yes! That's right. He said he'd  
be at the dock at seven.

SARAH

It's six thirty now. Why don't  
you get your fishing gear ready?

JEREMIAH

Yes, ma'am, I will.

He still gazes in the direction of the fort, a dreamy look  
on his face. Sarah smiles, goes in to the house. Jeremiah  
heads down the side of the house to the back yard. The  
sun's rays peek out on a cloudless blue sky.

**EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE - BACK YARD - MORNING**

Jeremiah collects his pole, hangs the fishing basket over  
his shoulder. He pauses, as if musing on something, makes  
a decision. Sarah comes out the back door holding a tin.

SARAH

Oh, I meant to give the Sergeant this coffee to take on the boat. Could you be a dear and run it down to the fort?

JEREMIAH

I sure will. I got time. Then I'll go straight to the dock.

SARAH

Don't drop it! And no swimming.

He nods, races off through the back gate, balancing the pole and tin. Sarah LAUGHS, shakes her head.

LATER

**EXT.CSS UNCLE BEN - MAIN DECK - MORNING**

The gunboat is ready to leave. The crew prepare to cast off. Jeremiah appears, running with the coffee.

JEREMIAH

Wait, wait! Sergeant Gardner?

A Reb sailor watches in amusement as the boy comes over the gangplank. The SOUND of raised voices ahead...

In the doorway that leads upstairs to the wheelhouse, Ratcliffe and Gardner face each other.

RATCLIFFE

You got no right coming on this boat. Ain't your business. These prisoners are mine.

GARDNER

Go and talk to the Lieutenant then. He gave me the\_\_

He notices Jeremiah, smiles.

RATCLIFFE

The hell? What's this brat doing here? Get off now.

Jeremiah gives him a dirty look, hands the tin to Gardner. He opens it, inhales the coffee aroma.

JEREMIAH

Aunt Sarah forgot to give it to you earlier.

GARDNER

Why thank you, Jeremiah. Tell  
your Aunt its much appreciated.

RATCLIFFE

Aw, isn't this cosy and sweet in  
the middle of a war.

Jeremiah frowns at him, shakes his head.

JEREMIAH

You aren't a nice man at all.

GARDNER

You best run along now, lad.  
You're going fishing, I see.

He shakes the boy's hand. Jeremiah grins, pokes his tongue  
out at Ratcliffe, walks away slowly.

GARDNER

As I was saying, I can fetch the  
Lieutenant to confirm my orders.

RATCLIFFE

We ain't go time for that and you  
know it. Now, best you go stow  
your gear with the Yankees seeing  
how you love them so much.

(beat)

Don't get in my fucking way.

He storms up the steps. Gardner watches him, then grabs a  
canvas bag at his feet. Hefting it and plate, he follows.

Jeremiah goes down the gangplank. Looks around. For the  
moment, he's alone. He stares at the huge bales of cotton  
along one side of the boat. Quickly shucks off the basket.

There's a piles of empty wooden crates nearby; he stows  
his gear amongst it. Then he hurries back onto the boat.  
He worms his way in between two bales just as a crewman  
comes down to haul in the plank and cast off.

Soon, the Uncle Ben's engine fires up and she moves up  
river. The paddle wheels churn the river into foam.

LATER

**INT. CSS UNCLE BEN - WHEELHOUSE - MORNING**

The gunboat's pilot CAPTAIN MAXWELL(50) stands at the  
wheel. He's a sturdy chap with a thick grey beard. The  
boat churns slowly up the middle of the river.

SUPER - NECHES RIVER, SABINE COUNTY TEXAS

Open pastures lies on one side of the river, the odd cabin and farm visible. The opposite side is swampy forest.

Gardner comes up from below deck, hands Maxwell a tin cup of coffee. Sips his own brew.

MAXWELL

Ah thank you, Sergeant. Our cooking equipment on board is limited of course. But old King does his best down there.

GARDNER

The men are grateful for any victuals. This coffee is actually quite good.

Gardner watches a group of cows grazing on the west bank. Overhead, the cloudless sky promises another warm day.

MAXWELL

We can purchase more provisions up river. An old river man sells goods to passing vessels. Even has his own still.

He laughs, turns the wheel slightly before sipping his coffee. Gardner waits for him to continue.

MAXWELL

But you call my vessel 'fine'? Aye, she was once was. Many years ago. But time and the ravages of war have taken their toll on her.

GARDNER

She seems fine to me.

MAXWELL

Oh, she may look pretty and the engines are smooth. But this old rig is in need of decent repair. I'll be nursing her to Beaumont. The paddle wheels won't take the strain of any great speed.

Gardner takes this in, finishes his coffee.

GARDNER

Should we be concerned? I had no idea of the boat's condition.

MAXWELL

No need to worry, Sergeant. The journey may take longer than thought. But we'll arrive safely with all of us intact.

Gardner nods, claps him on the shoulder.

GARDNER

I have full trust in you and your crew. In fact, I'll take a closer look around your vessel before I check on the prisoners.

He turns to leave.

MAXWELL

Sergeant?

GARDNER

Yes?

MAXWELL

The other sergeant? Ratcliffe?

GARDNER

Aye? What about him?

MAXWELL

He's a bad egg that one. Made me feel right uncomfortable on the trip down river. I hope he doesn't cause any trouble.

GARDNER

So do I, Captain. So do I.

He's gone down the stairs leaving Maxwell alone.

**INT. CSS UNCLE BEN - BELOW DECKS -DAY**

The Union prisoners are crammed into a corner. Piles of dirty straw serve as bedding; ropes tied waist high serve as 'a locked area'. The men sit quietly, with only muted conversation. The room is hot and stuffy.

Carvell and Winbanks sit at a wooden table playing cards. Pistols by their side, rifles lean against a wall, ready if needed. Periodically, they eye the prisoners.

CARVELL

Damn, this boat is so slow.

WINBANKS

Yup. Though not as slow as your card skills.

He lays his hand down...a royal flush.

WINBANKS

Read 'em and weep.

Carvell throws his cards down in disgust - a sad looking two pair - examines Winbank's hand.

CARVELL

Ah shit, you are one lucky son of a bitch, you know that? Sure you ain't cheating? That's ten hands in a row now...

Winbanks sweeps the pot to join his already large pile of coins and scrip.

WINBANKS

Hell, no, need to cheat with the cards I've been getting.

He stands, stretches. Glances at the prisoners.

WINBANKS

Ask the Yankee fucks if I've been playing straight. They been watching us all morning.

CARVELL

I will...hey Yankee scum? Tell me ol' Winbanks here has been fooling with the deal? I beg ya.

He and Winbanks both LAUGH evilly. Tucker stares back at them, before rising to his feet. The two guards tense, reach for their weapons.

TUCKER

No need to point your guns every time we move. Its not like we're going anywhere.

WINBANKS

Well, just as long as we both understand that, sailor man. This is a long journey. Might as well sit back and enjoy it.

CARVELL

You got that right. This will seem like a fucking Charleston hotel once you get to Houston.

Some of the Union men look uneasily at each other. Moore gets up, stands next to Tucker.

TUCKER

Any chance of us going up on deck for some fresh air? We've been down here since yesterday.

MOORE

And we need more water. There's  
all kind of filth in the barrel.

He gestures to it just a rat claws its way over the rim.  
It leaps to the floor, runs into the straw to the disgust  
of the Yankees. Carvell and Winbanks roar with LAUGHTER.

CARVELL

Water must be dandy if a Reb rat  
is drinking it.

He and his partner collapse into more LAUGHTER.

TUCKER

Goddamn you. We're all soldiers  
here. We have rights as prisoners  
of war so\_ \_

Carvell is up and over to the rope, pistol cocked. Tucker  
doesn't flinch, though several Yankees cry out in alarm.

CARVELL

Now listen up, you no account  
deadbeats. You ain't got no  
fuckin' rights. You surrendered  
like yellow dogs as soon as you  
saw the elephant. Come sailing up  
the river liking to blow the fort  
but them cannons blew your fleet  
away. Call yourselves soldiers?

He spits into the roped zone, onto Tucker's boots.

CARVELL

There's your fresh water, Yankee.

Tucker says nothing but his hands clench. Carvell waits to  
see if there is any action going to happen. Winbanks  
LAUGHS. Then the sound of footsteps on the stairs.  
Ratcliffe appears. He's in good spirits.

RATCLIFFE

Head up for a breather, boys.  
I'll keep an eye on this lot.

He notices the tension in the room.

RATCLIFFE

Everything alright here?

CARVELL

Sure, boss. Just making sure the  
Yankees know their place here.



WINBANKS

That's it, Sergeant. Reading them the rule book. A couple were getting feisty.

RATCLIFFE

Is that so? Can't have any prisoners shooting their mouth off. Especially the niggers.

He steps to the rope, draws his pistol, Stares down the Negro soldiers in the group, eyes inflamed with insanity. Only Hudson returns his gaze.

TUCKER

May I remind you Sergeant, that we are legitimate prisoners of war and protected by rules and\_\_

Ratcliffe moves forward into his face, pistol cocked pointed down. His voice is soft but filled with venom.

RATCLIFFE

Don't lecture me about rules and regulations, you fuck. My brother died in one of your hellholes. Starved to death in Camp Chase up in Ohio. Hundreds died of dysentery. But you Yankees didn't care. A cousin of mine escaped from there, made it back to Houston. Told us all about it. So shut up about 'protection'.

A silence before Moore speaks up.

MOORE

Your camps are as bad as ours. I was on Belle Isle in Virginia. I escaped with ten others. I was the only one who got home.

(beat)

I saw fellow soldiers be crucified by the camp commander. Nailed to posts in the name of God. So both sides have their bad men. In the end we're all soldiers, aren't we?

The unholy trinity of Ratcliffe, Carvell and Winbanks LAUGH as one. Its an unnerving sound and most of the prisoners can't look at them.

RATCLIFFE

When you give niggers a uniform and a gun, then you ain't fucking soldiers in my eyes. You're

RATCLIFFE  
 criminals. And you must be dealt  
 with according to Confederate  
 'regulations'. Understand?

Tucker and Moore look at each other, shrug. Their silence  
 seems to placate Ratcliffe.

RATCLIFFE  
 Now, if I hear word of any more  
 complaining or bad behavior, I  
 will not hesitate to hogtie all  
 of you and toss you overboard.

The sound of boots again on the stairs. Gardner appears.

GARDNER  
 Everything alright, Sergeant? I  
 could hear raised voices.

RATCLIFFE  
 Just laying down the law to the  
 Yankees. They were getting  
 somewhat uppity.

CARVELL  
 Yeah, crying for their mommas.

He and Winbanks LAUGH, head to the stairs. Carvell brushes  
 past Gardner, slightly bumping him.

CARVELL  
 Excuse me. Mighty cramped here.

The pair LAUGH as they ascend the stairs. Gardner's lips  
 form a hard line. He turns to the prisoners.

GARDNER  
 Who is your commanding officer?

TUCKER  
 I am. Midshipman Tucker.

GARDNER  
 I'm Sergeant Gardner. Now, you  
 men are under my jurisdiction as  
 prisoners of war and if\_\_

RATCLIFFE  
 Whoa there, sonny jim! You don't  
 outrank me on this boat. You  
 chose to come along.

Gardner turns, fixes steely eyes on Ratcliffe.

GARDNER

These are prisoners taken at Fort Griffin where I am Sergeant. Perhaps we can turn the boat around and you can complain to Captain Odlum?

Ratcliffe starts to argue but thinks better of it.

RATCLIFFE

You can't give these nigger loving bastards an arm chair ride to Beaumont. Its weak.

GARDNER

I'm in charge. I call the shots.

RATCLIFFE

Maybe for now. But when we unload these scum at Beaumont and ship them to the camp, well, you'll be hightailing it back to your shitty fort. And I promise you the gloves will be off then.

His eyes smoulder as he heads up the stairs.

TUCKER

We appreciate you looking out for us, Sergeant.

GARDNER

I'm guessing you'd do the same. You men have caused no trouble since the battle.

MOORE

Thank you...sir. Its good to meet an adversary who is honorable.

Gardner shrugs.

GARDNER

Way I see it...we're all Americans, fighting for a cause. Though sometimes I wonder why.

(beat)

Now, Mr Tucker, make sure your men maintain their good behavior. And maybe it would be good to keep your black soldiers out of sight. Ratcliffe and his cronies will be after them. And they won't care if I'm in the way.

TUCKER

Surely it won't come to that?

GARDNER

Just heed my advice, ok?

He turns to head upstairs.

TUCKER

Sergeant Gardner? We weren't whining earlier to the other guards. We just wanted more water. And to go on deck for some fresh air.

Gardner muses on this, nods.

GARDNER

I'll send a fresh water barrel down. And your other request sounds fair. We'll be stopping soon to take on some goods. I'll run it by Captain Maxwell.

He goes up the stairs. The Union men watch him leave then suddenly realize...they are unguarded for the moment. A few stir, look to Tucker. He touches the rope, lifts it, weighing his options.

MOORE

Sir, shall we...

TUCKER

Escape? I've been thinking of it. Initially I thought not, as this old boat is in bad shape. Hear that noise? One paddle wheel is almost shot. That's why we're going so slow. Captain is easing her to Beaumont.

He lets go of the rope, turns to his men. They listen as one, waiting for his decision.

TUCKER

But I'm worried about Ratcliffe and his men. Even Gardner knows they are big trouble. So now I'm leaning towards taking over this boat. We got twice as many men than their crew. But I'll put it to you brave fellows: shall we escape or die trying?

Moore and the other prisoners look at each other. All nod and raise their hands.

MOORE

We're with you, sir. As one.

Tucker nods, proud of his men and relieved too.

TUCKER

I have a plan. If we are allowed to go upstairs, there is a pile of ropes that will hide a small man. He will stay hidden after we come back down here.

EMERY(22) steps forward; barely five four, quiet but full of action when provoked.

EMERY

I'm your man, sir.

TUCKER

Good. We'll need you to get to the bridge. Take control of the wheel. The captain will have a pistol close by too.

Emery nods. The other men huddle closer to Tucker.

TUCKER

Once Emery has control, he'll start turning the boat. That will be our signal to rush the guards down here. We'll need a diversion of some kind so they put their weapons down even if only for a few minutes. If all goes well, we wait till dark, then sail back down past the fort.

A silence as they muse on it.

EMERY

Sir? The Rebs and the crew? Do we kill them?

He has an innocent look on his face but his eyes dance with an unnerving glee. Tucker and Moore glance at each other. Murmurs of 'yes, kill the greybacks'...

TUCKER

No. I want no bloodshed if we can avoid it. That's an order. We'll tie the Rebs up and leave them on the riverbank.

EMERY

Of course, sir. Just checking.

He nods, fades back into the rear of the men.

HUDSON  
I have an idea for that  
diversion, sir.

The sound of boots at the top of the stairs. The Union men huddle as Hudson whispers softly. Tucker and Moore listen carefully, nod with enthusiasm.

Carvell and Winbanks appear.

CARVELL  
Hey, you sad legion of cowards.  
Did you miss us?

WINBANKS  
Typical Yankees. No one guarding  
them and they just stand around  
playing with each other.

They sit at the table. Carvell shuffles the cards.

CARVELL  
Better get used to it. None of  
you will be getting close to any  
womenfolk for a long time.

He and Winbanks break into LAUGHTER. Tucker and his men watch on in silence. Banking these insults...

**EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE - DAY**

The front door opens. Sarah emerges, carrying a picnic basket. She looks up at the sun, adjusts her bonnet. Opens the gate and sets off down the road.

**EXT. SABINE PIER - DAY**

A young boy, NATHANIEL(10) sits on the end of the wooden structure, feet dangling over the water. He whistles as he baits a hook on his pole, casts it in. A bucket next to him is empty. Sarah appears behind him.

SARAH  
Nathaniel? Where's Jeremiah? I've  
brought you some food.

Nathaniel looks around. He squints up at her, sun in his eyes. Stands up after lying his pole down.

NATHANIEL  
Oh, hello Miss Reynolds. Ah,  
Jeremiah? He's not here just now,  
he went to...he went home to use  
the bathroom. Yes, that's it.

Sarah smiles at the boy's evasiveness.

SARAH

Well, that's odd. I just came from home and I didn't see him.

NATHANIEL

Oh...oh wait, that's right...he went to my house. Should be back anytime soon.

(beat)

Have you got cake in there, ma'am? Jeremeiah says you make the best cake.

SARAH

I do have cake. But I want the truth, Nathaniel. Where is he?

Nathaniel sighs, hangs his head. He gazes out over the river. Points north.

NATHANIEL

He's on the boat. The gunboat with the prisoners. I saw him hiding in the bales as it went past. He waved to me. He signaled to me to keep quiet too.

Sarah frowns. Nathaniel peeks an eye at her.

SARAH

That boy. He's in big trouble now. I'll have to follow by road in the cart and get him off the boat. It might be dangerous with those Yankees on board.

NATHANIEL

Yes ma'am. Uh, before you go, could I have some of that cake, please? Don't want to waste it.

Sarah smiles despite her anger. places the basket down. She looks past him to the water as if trying to see the Uncle Ben way up river. Notices something in the water.

SARAH

Nathaniel, do you see that? In the middle of the lake.

The boy looks up from reaching for the basket. Produces a spyglass from his pocket. Raises it to his eye.

NATHANIEL

My brother's. I, uh, borrowed it.

SARAH

There's something moving out there. A small sail?

Nathaniel focuses on the object.

POV - a huge grey fin slicing through the water.

He gasps, hands Sarah the 'glass. She searches, sees the fin too. Looks again.

NATHANIEL

It's a shark. A big one. Maybe it took Becky Wilson?

Sarah hands him the 'glass.

SARAH

It's head up the Neches. Following the Uncle Ben. I must tell the Lieutenant of this.

She races off, leaving Nathaniel staring at the basket.

LATER

**EXT. FORT GRIFFIN - MAIN GATE - DAY**

Sarah rides out on a cart with two horses in the trace. She's accompanied by Drummond and McKernan on their horses. They head along the road towards Sabine...

**EXT. NECHES RIVER - DAY**

Upriver ahead of the Uncle Ben. An old log cabin on the water, all sorts of junk around it. A small weathered dock out front, an ancient rowboat tied up to it.

On the dock is a wiry, white bearded man, GABRIEL. Has to be pushing 80 but he's still in fine fettle. All sinew and lean muscle like a gnarled swamp cypress.

Gabriel carries a string of fish. As he puts it in the boat, one fish breaks off, hits the edge of the boat, falls into the water with a plop.

GABRIEL

Shit. Prince...fetch that sucker.

A young hound of mixed breed trots over to the dock, tail wagging. It barks, stands, ready to jump in. Suddenly, the animal is still, whines. Looks at the river, whines again.



GABRIEL

Christ on a bicycle! It ain't cold, you dumb dog. Get in there and get that fish, ya hear me?

The dog gives him a mournful look, whimpers.

GABRIEL

What the hell is wrong with you? First, we got to deal with this war on our doorstep, then the fish are hardly biting. Now you letting one float off. How's a man 'sposed to make a living?

He shakes his head, takes a ladle off a post, dips it in the water, drinks deep.

The fish floats off downstream. Prince has a final look, retreats to the cabin. Gabriel shrugs, follows the dog.

He grabs a crate of sealed bottles, lugs it to the boat. Also some dried venison and a few apples.

GABRIEL

Now, what else can I sell? Ah yes, some 'baccy.

He rummages in a pile of timber, pulls out a leather bag.

GABRIEL

That'll do it. Damn shame I can't provide more fish though. Never seen 'em hiding like this.

A sound from downriver...he peers through weary eyes. The churning of a paddle wheel. Then he sees the bulky shape of the Uncle Ben rounding a bend.

GABRIEL

My clientèle awaits.

He tosses the tobacco into the boat, climbs in. Unties, pushes off. He puts two oars in their slots, begins to row out to the middle of the river, with practiced ease.

He gets to the centre, lets the boat drift towards the approaching cottonclad. He uncorks one of the bottles, takes a swig. Shudders as pure alcohol hits his system.

GABRIEL

Daddy's secret recipe...mother's milk. Bless 'em both.

**INT. CSS UNCLE BEN - WHEELHOUSE - DAY**

Maxwell sees Gabriel ahead. He slows the boat, the paddle wheel barely moving, keeping it steady. Gardner appears.

GARDNER  
Anything wrong?

MAXWELL  
The river man is ahead with goods to sell. I'll instruct my crew to keep the boiler running.

Gardner gazes down as the old trader deftly guides the boat next to the Uncle Ben.

GARDNER  
That's a tough looking old timer. I wager he's seen a lot in life.

MAXWELL  
That he has. He told me once he fought in the war against the British when he was just a boy. Claimed he saw General Washington himself one time.

GARDNER  
You believe him?

MAXWELL  
It's possible. Mind you, the man is crazier than a cut snake.

Gardner laughs, claps him on the back.

MAXWELL  
We can go down and see what Gabriel has to offer.

GARDNER  
If its alright by you, Captain, I was going to let the prisoners out on deck for a bit? While we do business with your friend?

They head to the stairs.

MAXWELL.  
Yes, its fine by me, Sergeant, and I thank you for seeking my opinion. Too many army fellas would just do what they want. Like that Ratcliffe, I guess.

A crew member, KING appears, shirtless, upper body dirty and covered in sweat.

KING  
Sir, the wheel is disengaged.

MAXWELL  
Good. How is the axle holding up?

KING  
Just barely, sir. But we can manage till we get to Beaumont.

MAXWELL  
Excellent. Please keep the boiler going as we'll only be stopping briefly. And we'll have some victuals for you to prepare. Fresh fish. I'll have them brought down to you.

KING  
Very good, sir.

He grins before heading downstairs. Gardner is quizzical.

MAXWELL  
King is our resident cook as well as a fine man in the engine room. He has an oven set up to run from the boiler furnace itself.

GARDNER  
I'm impressed. I'll bring the Yankees up on deck then. Ratcliffe won't be happy but I have your backing.

MAXWELL  
Aye, the man will be grieved, I'm certain. I don't envy you the task, Sergeant.

They make their way down the stairs.

**INT. CSS UNCLE BEN - BELOW DECKS - DAY**

Carvell sits alone, dozing, feet on the table, gun cradled on his lap. The Union men sit quietly in their area. The sound of footsteps...Gardner appears. Carvell stirs.

GARDNER  
I'm taking the prisoners on deck while the boat is stopped.

CARVELL  
I...Sergeant Ratcliffe ain't gonna like that.

He gets to his feet slowly. Tucker and Moore watch on keenly. Whispers among the Yankees.

GARDNER

Sir.

CARVELL

I...what?

GARDNER

You forgot to call me 'sir'. I'm your superior officer. And you didn't salute me either.

Carvell licks his lips, frowns. He sees the prisoners taking this in, puffs up his chest.

CARVELL

I answer only to Sergeant Ratcliffe. We ain't no fort rats. And the Yankee fucks ain't going anywhere but straight to\_ \_

He's cut off as Gardner moves with frightening speed, grabs him by the throat, gets in his face.

CARVELL

Jesus, I can't breathe.

He coughs painfully, tries to draw in air. Gardner's eyes bore into his. The Union men are all on their feet now.

GARDNER

I don't care if you choke to death, you piece of river shit. You're having a nice, easy war, aren't you? Picking on helpless prisoners who can't fight back.

The reply is a tortured gargle. Gardner eases his grip for a moment, letting Carvell suck in a breath. Then he swings the man around to face the prisoners.

GARDNER

These men may be the enemy but at least they're brave soldiers. Unlike you and your Sergeant, and the rest of your filth. And as for calling me a 'fort rat', well if it wasn't for me and the men of the Jeff Davis in that fort, you would be now up to your festered ass in Yankees. Then YOU would be the fucking prisoner.

(beat)

Understand me?

Carvell manages to nod. Gardner releases him. Carvell steps back, taking deep breaths, coughs again. He glares at the prisoners before stumbling upstairs.

GARDNER

Now thats settled, you men are going on deck. Enjoy it, but I want no trouble, Mr Tucker.

TUCKER

I...yes, Sergeant. Thank you.

GARDNER

I wager Ratcliffe will be furious when Carvell runs to him.

(beat)

Give him no reason to spend that anger on you up there. There will still be guns trained on you.

TUCKER

I can assure you the men will be of no concern. Thank you again.

Gardner nods, unties the ropes. He draws his pistol but keeps it pointed to the floor. Then he moves up the stairs. Tucker and Moore usher the men forward and follow the Sergeant. Emery brings up the rear, face blank.

**EXT. CSS UNCLE BEN - MAIN DECK - DAY**

Gabriel passes his goods from his boat up to the waiting group of Ratcliffe, Winbanks and Captain Maxwell. Carvell hovers, still holding his tender throat.

CARVELL

Ah, Sergeant?

RATCLIFFE

Why aren't you guarding the prisoners? Is anyone down ther\_ \_

He does a double take as Gardner appears with the Union men behind him. He drops some deer meat, which hits the edge and bounces into the water.

GABRIEL

Damnation, soldier. Can't you be more careful with my livelihood?

He pauses, the crate of booze in mid air near the waiting Winbanks, watching as Ratcliffe hauls out his pistol.

RATCLIFFE

What the hell you think you're doing, Gardner? Take these dogs back down now!

GARDNER

I told you these men are under my authority . And the captain here had no objection.

RATCLIFFE

Why you...Maxwell, is this true?

MAXWELL

Aye, Sergeant. I see no harm in it. It isn't like they have anywhere to go if they escape.

Gabriel cackles, opens a fresh bottle of 'shine, guzzles. The alcohol splashes down his chin.

GABRIEL

I heard tell about the battle. Boys at the fort blew fucking holes in them Yankee ships. Wish I had've seen it.

He drinks long and deep, tosses the empty bottle into the river. It floats off in the current.

GABRIEL

Damn thats good. Anyways, these Yankee prisoners look like the saddest bunch of Sunday soldiers I've ever seen.

RATCLIFFE

Hell yes. They deserved all the hurt they got from the cannons. And there's more to come once they reach Houston. Yessir.

He watches as Tucker herds his men to a section against a cotton bale. The pile of ropes is nearby. Emery eyes it. As the Yankees sit, Hooper is near the edge, staring at Gabriel and downriver.

RATCLIFFE

My men will shoot anyone who attempts to escape.

GARDNER

I've told them that.

GABRIEL

Times a wasting, boys. You gonna unload the rest of my goods?

Winbanks takes the crate of bottles from him. Lifts one up for closer examination. Opens it and sniffs. Drinks.

WINBANKS

Lawd, thats some nice booze.

He passes the bottle to Ratcliffe, who swills.

RATCLIFFE

Shoot, thats wild bark juice.

Gabriel laughs, continues to pass his wares onto the gunboat. Gardner watches, frowns as the grog flows freely.

HOOPER

Excuse me, sir?

CARVELL

Keep your mouth shut.

GABRIEL

Its ok, Private. The boy wants some of my 'shine. I'll take Yankee scrip if you got some hidden. I ain't fussy, no sir.

Everyone laughs at this, even the other Union men. Except Hooper. He just stares at the old timer.

HOOPER

You've lived on the river a long time, I guess?

GABRIEL

Hell yes. I got the river and swamp in my blood.

The last of the goods is now on the gunboat. Amongst the Union men, Tucker nudges Emery, nods his head towards the ropes slightly. Emery say nothing, just starts to work his way quietly through his fellow prisoners. They move strategically to cover his path.

All eyes are on Gabriel anyway. The Rebs have cracked open more bottles. Gardner isn't happy but says nothing.

HOOPER

You see many sharks?

Gabriel squints up at this odd fellow.

GABRIEL

Of course. Lots of them swim upriver. Bull sharks mainly. Those suckers love the fresh water. Sometimes see a small tiger. Why? You wanna go swimming? Jump the fuck in then!

More laughter.

TUCKER

Hooper. Give it a rest, ok?

Hooper doesn't respond. He looks downriver then back at Gabriel who prepares to leave.

HOOPER

Its following us. It killed a lot of men during the battle. It will kill us too.

GABRIEL

He's done got a sickness in the head. What's following us, fool?

TUCKER

Hooper! No more. Thats an order.

HOOPER

A huge Great White shark is following us. Your trail of rubbish and blood is drawing him closer. Why do you think the fish aren't biting? They're hiding...

He points a finger at Gabriel. The rest of the men are a bit spooked by this. A chill breeze flits over the water, making them shiver.

RATCLIFFE

Yankee, if you don't shut the fuck up I will shoot you dead. Then you'll be fish food.

HOOPER

You're next, Gabriel. You can't run. The beast will\_ \_

Gardner takes him by the arm, leads him back with the others. Hooper sits quietly, stares at Gabriel.

GABRIEL

I best be off, Mr Maxwell. There's a high tide rolling in this afternoon and the currents will be tricky. Hopefully that brings the fish out.

MAXWELL

Thank you, Gabriel. We'll be sure to let other boats know of your place so they can stop by. How much do we owe you?

GABRIEL

Five dollars even, Captain. I gave you a discount too.



MAXWELL

More than reasonable.

He takes out money from his jacket pocket, counts out the cash. Hands it down to the old man.

GABRIEL

Thank you, good sir. Good luck on the rest of your trip.

He laughs as he pushes off from the cottonclad, heads upriver. The Rebs and Union men watch him go. Maxwell gathers the fish and venison.

MAXWELL

I'll take these down to King. Sergeant Gardner, I'll give these Yankees fifteen more minutes then down they go again. We'll be moving off shortly.

He heads downstairs. Ratcliffe opens his mouth to speak but holds it. He opens a fresh bottle.

GARDNER

Go easy on the liquor, Ratcliffe. There's still a war going on.

RATCLIFFE

Don't push it. My men have earned some good cheer. Come on, boys, lets take the party elsewhere.

He and his cronies head upstairs, laden with Gabriel's goods. Hudson whispers into Tucker's ear. The latter nods, raises his voice.

TUCKER

Sergeant Ratcliffe?

Ratcliffe stops, looks down at Tucker. Digs a finger into his ear. Examines the contents.

RATCLIFFE

What is it now, Yankee?

TUCKER

We have a proposition for you. A challenge, so to speak.

(beat)

A boxing match. Union versus Confederate. One on one.

A silence, all eyes on Ratcliffe. Behind the cover of his fellow prisoners, Emery worms his way deep into the ropes. Finally, Ratcliffe smirks.

RATCLIFFE

I may be interested. Love to teach you Yankees a damn lesson. But what do I get out of it, apart from the satisfaction of beating one of you to a pulp?

GARDNER

Tucker, I doubt this is a good idea. That goes for you too, Ratcliffe. We aren't here to\_ \_

CARVELL

Hell, sir, the men need some entertainment. What better fun than to see a lily livered Yankee get his ass whipped?

Cheers from the Reb crew. Ratcliffe's smile grows wider.

TUCKER

The loser keeps quiet for the rest of the journey. If our man wins, you stay off our back. If you win, we'll cause no trouble.

GARDNER

Sounds more than fair, Ratcliffe.

RATCLIFFE

I thought you was against it?

GARDNER

I was. But the chance of seeing your face get punched has brought me round to liking it.

Some quiet laughter amongst the prisoners. Ratcliffe looks set to seek out the culprits but Gardner holds up a hand.

GARDNER

Hear me out. If you lose, then there will be no retribution or backing out of the deal. I will hold you to your word on this.

Ratcliffe muses on this, grins, nods.

RATCLIFFE

Ain't no way I'll lose but I'll agree to that.

(beat)

We'll fight below decks. Don't want anyone falling overboard in all the excitement.

He laughs, shoulders his way past Gardner to the stairs. His sidekicks tail him, although Carvell steps warily around Gardner. They head below deck.

GARDNER

Mr Tucker, send your men down but I'd like a word with you before the fight starts.

TUCKER

Of course. Ensign Moore? Take the men below. I'll be there shortly.

Moore nods, leads the Union men downstairs.

GARDNER

I just hope it doesn't get ugly. You know Ratcliffe is bound to cheat somehow.

TUCKER

I know that. But the bout will do the men's morale good.

(beat)

Is that all you wanted to discuss, Sergeant?

Gardner looks out at the river. Upriver, Gabriel steers his boat to his cabin.

GARDNER

This shark that your man speaks of? Did you see it yourself?

TUCKER

I...I'm not sure. It was chaos on the Sachem after the boiler blew. But I thought I saw something in the water as she sunk. Something...big.

His eyes drift off involuntarily to the pile of ropes. Gardner turns his head, sees Tucker's line of sight. He glances at the ropes. Tucker's attention flits back to the Reb then he looks at the water.

TUCKER

I come from the same town as Hooper in Massachusetts. I've seen sharks before and the wounds on bodies. He may be battle crazy but he saw the corpses of our sailors at the fort. And if he thinks a shark was involved, then I wouldn't ignore it.

Gardner takes this in, shrugs.

GARDNER

Maybe there was a shark but its  
gone back out to sea. Lawd knows  
there was enough bodies taken out  
by the currents.

He gestures to the stairs and follows Tucker.

**EXT. NECHES RIVER - UNDERWATER**

Moving through the water, the surface glimmers above. A  
trail of blood, excreta, the odd dead bird...the Great  
White tracks along it, maw raking in anything.

Rising to the surface, the huge fin glides past a herd of  
cows. One looks up from grazing, watches the beast pass...

**EXT. NECHES RIVER - DAY**

Gabriel hears the cheers from the boat as he rows home.

GABRIEL

Damn fools the lot of them.  
Fighting and killing each other  
for what? Some slaves?

He continues to mumble as he heads towards his cabin. As  
he nears the dock, Prince scampers out, barking.

GABRIEL

Whoa there, boy. Haven't you  
calmed down yet? Christ almighty.

Prince stands at the edge as Gabriel guides the boat in.  
His hackles rise, he growls at the water downstream.

GABRIEL

Whole fucking world is gone to  
hell lately. Crazy dumb animal.

The boat bumps into the decrepit dock. Gabriel steps  
forward to steady it, slips a rope over a post.

Out on the river, the Uncle Ben is passing. Captain  
Maxwell pumps out three loud WHISTLES on the steam horn.  
Gabriel waves back, watches as the cottonclad makes it's  
way upriver. It disappears around a bend of the Neches.

GABRIEL

That ol' steamer is laboring,  
yessir. Boys are gonna need my  
'shine to plow that hard road.

He laughs, steadies himself to step onto the dock. Suddenly, out in the water, the grey fin rises. Prince howls, runs back and forth madly. The fin abruptly vanishes but a small wave runs to the bank.

The boat rocks slightly. Prince runs off the dock, back to the safety of the cabin. Gabriel nearly falls in, grabs the post. He turns to scan the water.

GABRIEL

What the hell...

The Great White attacks from below, smashing through the boat. Gabriel yells in surprise. He's hurled through the air out past the end of the dock, surfaces. The water is chest deep. The boat submerges, totally destroyed by the massive jaws. A few timbers pop up amongst the bubbles.

Gabriel is stunned, shakes his head. Then he sees the shape below the water angling in on him.

GABRIEL

Oh lord no. Oh sweet jesus...

He swims towards the dock, adrenalin and fear surging in his old body. No chance...he is taken around the waist, moving, pushed out into the river. One last SCREAM and he's jerked under. Blood wells up in a cloud. Prince appears on the dock, howling again.

More remnants of the boat emerge in the water. Prince is silent now, staring out at the bloodied water which is dispersing now. The fin appears, circles the crimson water before heading upriver. Prince whines.

**INT. CSS UNCLE BEN - BELOW DECKS - DAY**

There's a feeling of excitement as the boxing match is prepared. The Yankees are back behind the ropes. The Rebs drink and slap each other on the back.

For now, their rifles lean against the wall, but they all have pistols. Ratcliffe and Gardner stand in the 'ring'.

RATCLIFFE

Tucker! Who is your boxer? We're all dying to see him. Not that he's worth a pinch of shit.

Laughter from the Rebs. Ratcliffe soaks up the adulation as he limbers up. He removes his jacket and shirt. His physique is all bulk padded with fat. But its all solid muscle beneath that oozes power.

TUCKER

Looks may be deceiving, Sergeant.

He beckons. Hudson steps forward, face blank.

TUCKER

Hudson, you ready to fight?

HUDSON

Yes sir, I surely am.

RATCLIFFE

The hell? You sending out a nigger to fight a white man?

He spits on the floor.

TUCKER

He volunteered.

CARVELL

Sergeant Ratcliffe? I was gonna take bets on this bout but no one will bet against you now.

GARDNER

I'll wager on the Yankee.

He rummages in his pocket, pulls out some notes. Hands it to Carvell. Murmurs among the Union men.

GARDNER

Two dollars on Hudson! What odds are you calling, Carvell?

CARVELL

I...ah, two to one, I guess.

RATCLIFFE

Make it three to one.

He hasn't taken his eyes off Hudson, who coolly returns the stare. Carvell looks at the money in his palm, grins.

CARVELL

Alright. Easy winnings, hey boys?

Cheers from the Rebs though some are looking nervous.

RATCLIFFE

Damn, Gardner. You are one stubborn son of a bitch.

GARDNER

I'll bet against you anytime. You're a disgrace to the grey.

Hudson ducks under the rope and into the ring. He slowly removes his jacket. Takes off his shirt. A gasp from the spectators...his upper body is rock hard. muscle ripples beneath his skin like pythons. Gardner smiles.

GARDNER

Good luck, Ratcliffe.

Hudson turns to give his clothes to Tucker. Another gasp...his back is covered in the scars of old whippings. He holds his stance for effect then turns to Ratcliffe.

Theres a hush over the area. The Yankee men start saying 'Hudson...Hudson'. Softly at first but building in volume.

WINBANKS

You men shut the fuck up now.

TUCKER

No restrictions. That was the deal. Right, Sergeant Gardner?

Gardner nods but he has an uneasy feeling. He sees Tucker and Moore whispering to each other and some of their men.

RATCLIFFE

Let them cheer all they want.  
It'll all end in tears and pain.

The Rebs start cheering too so there's a real buzz in the stifling air. Gardner puts his concern aside as Hudson and Ratcliffe approach each other.

GARDNER

No rest, no rounds. First man down for a ten count loses. Touch fists please and good luck.

Ratcliffe reaches as Hudson does the same.

RATCLIFFE

One more condition...  
(beat)  
No rules.

He lunges forward, right fist swinging. Hudson sees it coming but can only absorb the punch as it hits his chin. Loud cheers/boos from the crowd. Hudson sinks to one knee.

GARDNER

You cheating bastard.

RATCLIFFE

My boat. My rules.

He turns to his acolytes, bows before spinning around to launch a boot at Hudson's head. The Negro soldier manages to raise an arm to block most of the impact. The side of the boot strikes Hudson's nose, drawing blood. He sways.

MOORE

Shit, sir. Our man is getting hammered by this thug.

TUCKER

Have patience, Ensign. Hudson isn't done by a long shot.

RATCLIFFE

You want some more medicine, nigger? I bet you wish you never signed up for this war now.

CARVELL

Hell, looks you lost your money already, Sergeant.

Hudson is on one knee, head down. Ratcliffe circles.

GARDNER

One...two...three...four...

TUCKER

Hudson. Remember the whippings.

Hudson glances at Tucker, a slight nod. Staggered to his feet shaking the fog out. He tracks Ratcliffe, raises his fists in a fighting stance.

GARDNER

...five...continue.

RATCLIFFE

You shoulda stayed down while you had the chance, slave. Now you gonna get hurt real bad.

Hudson focuses, no expression. Suddenly, he dances forward with the speed of a copperhead. He feints to the left.

Ratcliffe takes the bait, moves his head to the right quickly. A split second later, Hudson's fist perfectly intersects the angle and rocks Ratcliffe's jaw.

The big man is stunned, stopped from falling only by Carvell and Winbanks behind him. The Yankees erupt.

WINBANKS

Jesus, sir, watch that hook.



RATCLIFFE

I...he got lucky, is all.

The pair push him back out. Hudson continues to dance. Ratcliffe wipes sweat from his brow before moving in. He pummels at the black soldier, using his bulk as a battering ram. Hudson can't keep up with the flurry of blows and retreats.

Ratcliffe doesn't let up, follows him to end it. He unloads a huge swing. Hudson drops prone to the floor, it flies over his head. He jumps back up, delivers double blows to the Reb's open torso.

The air expels from Ratcliffe's lungs in a mighty 'oomph'. He sinks to one knee and can only feebly block as Hudson sinks the boot into his chest. Ratcliffe topples backwards at the feet of his men.

GARDNER

One...two...three...

CARVELL

Jesus, boss. Get up!

Ratcliffe sits up but he's struggling.

GARDNER

Four...five...six...

WINBANKS

You can do it, sir. Come on...

GARDNER

Seven...eight...nine...

With a supreme effort, Ratcliffe gets to his feet like a drunken giraffe. He sways, blinks. Hudson waits.

GARDNER

Continue...

Carvell moves next to Ratcliffe, easing something into his right hand. Ratcliffe reacts with a bloodied smile.

CARVELL

Close that fist up, boss. And give that nigger hell.

He and Winbanks push their sergeant out again. He swings his right fist, savoring the cold heavy steel in it.

TUCKER

Ah shit. They slipped something into his hand.

MOORE  
Damn cheating Rebs.

Both fighters stand ready for a final go.

**EXT. CSS UNCLE BEN - MAIN DECK - DAY**

The cottonclad moves along the river, which has widened at this point. Thick forest lines the banks, hinting at marshland behind. To the right, a small lake.

The pile of ropes move slightly. An arm pops out. Then the face of Emery. He peers around. Emerges and stretches.

The sounds of the boxing match below echo up the stairs. Emery creeps to the stairs leading up to the...

**INT. CSS UNCLE BEN - WHEELHOUSE - DAY**

Captain Maxwell whistles as he steers the boat. He checks his charts. He too can hear the sounds of the fight.

MAXWELL  
Damn crazy soldiers.

He hears a faint closer noise, a creak of timber behind him. Turns to see Emery a few steps away. The Yankee smiles, eyes flit to the pistol next to Maxwell.

MAXWELL  
Hello? Did you get left on deck?  
You shouldn't be up h\_ \_

Emery leaps forward, grabs the pistol, steps back.

MAXWELL  
What the devil?

EMERY  
We're getting off this boat. Move away from the wheel...

MAXWELL  
Damn it, man, this is a treacherous part of the river. There's small rocky islands that are hard to see. I need to concentrate on\_\_

EMERY  
Captain, my fellow prisoners and myself are veteran sailors. I'm sure we're more than capable of piloting this heap of shit. Besides, we will be turning the boat around. No need for charts.

MAXWELL

You don't understand. As I explained to Sergeant Gardner, the Uncle Ben is due for a major overhaul when we get to Beaumont. She cannot be turned around. The left paddle wheel is highly unstable. The hull won't stand the strain of it.

Emery sighs, stares out at the river ahead.

EMERY

Tucker wanted to take the ship with no bloodshed. I can see that won't be happening.

He spins the pistol to grasp the barrel, moves in and smashes it across Maxwell's face, breaking his nose. The skipper stumbles back, falls to the floor, moaning. Emery jams the gun in his belt, steps up to the wheel.

EMERY

Time to start the mutiny.

**EXT. CSS THE UNCLE BEN - DAY**

At the rear of the gunboat, King emerges from a door, whistling. He carries two buckets one filled with Gabriel's fish. Trees covered in vines line the bank.

King kneels near the side, takes a knife, guts the fish, using the planks as a cutting board. Tosses the detritus into the water, then the fillets into the spare bucket.

KING

Fried fish coming up.

He continues to whistle. Soon, there's a trail of blood and guts behind the boat.

POV - UNDERWATER: moving towards the Uncle Ben...the blurred shape of King...the plop of fish entrails...

In the wall of cotton bales behind King, a movement. A leg forces its way out of the gap. Then two hands on either side. Jeremiah pops his head out.

He squeezes out onto the deck, brushing dirt from his clothes. He looks up to see the cook. King senses something, turns. His hand hovers over the water, clutching a bleeding fish. He relaxes, grins.

KING

Well now, whats this? A stowaway?

JEREMIAH

Yes sir. Well, kind of. I'm a friend of Sergeant Gardner.

KING

Wait, you're the lad who brought the coffee on at the fort. I guess you stayed on, right?

JEREMIAH

Yes, sir. I only wanted some adventure. I won't get in\_ \_

He breaks off, eyes widen as the Great White sweeps up alongside, takes King's arm, drags him into the water. Not even time for a scream. Jeremiah stands frozen in shock, watching as a huge bubble of red sullies the water.

Trembling, the boy finally turns and runs to the door.

**INT. CSS UNCLE BEN - BELOW DECKS - DAY**

Hudson dances in, gives a couple of jabs to Ratcliffe's chest. The Reb ignores it, bids his time.

TUCKER

Watch that right, Hudson.

Hudson nods, circles. The cheering of the onlookers dies down, an expectant hush now. Hudson suddenly darts in, sweeps his left at Ratcliffe's face. The Reb blocks it, pain shooting through his forearm. He lunges at Hudson, pushing him back. Then swings his loaded right.

Hudson whips his head back but the shot connects hard. He sways on his feet, blinks, tries to focus. He stares at Ratcliffe's right fist, sees the lead move as it resettles. His eyes burn with a quiet fury.

HUDSON

That was your only chance.

He's about to spring into a punching frenzy when, from above, a SHOT. At the same time, the Uncle Ben begins a long turn to the left, timbers creaking in protest.

RATCLIFFE

The fuck...?

GARDNER

Who the hell...

He runs to the stairs. Everyone in the crowded room waits, unsure whats happening. Gardner yells up the stairs.

GARDNER

Captain? Is everything ok?

He turns to see the Union prisoners tensed, ready.

GARDNER

oh shit.

TUCKER

Take them, boys.

SCREAMING like madmen, the Yankees swarm over the rope, crash into their captors. Its over in seconds. The Rebs find themselves staring down the barrels of their own weapons. Gardner can only watch in disbelief.

WINBANKS

Stinking Northerners...all a diversion. Boxing match my father's scrotum.

TUCKER

No one makes a move and no one gets hurt. Nice and easy.

LANGFORD

What about Ratcliffe and his two blow hards, sir? Any chance we can rough them up? Lord knows they deserve it.

Murmurs of assent from the Union men. Some move towards the now Reb captives.

TUCKER

No, boys, its not the time for it, more's the pity. I will not stoop to their level.

RATCLIFFE

How grand of you, Yankee.

TUCKER

Shut your mouth, grayback. You're a disgrace to any man who wears a uniform, both North or South.

(beat)

Ensign Moore...check the wheelhouse and see what that shot was. Be careful.

Moore nods, heads upstairs. Hudson confronts Ratcliffe.

HUDSON

Lucky for you the fight stopped.

RATCLIFFE

I'll meet you again one day,  
nigger. You can bet on that.

He spits at Hudson's feet, the fire back in his eyes.

RATCLIFFE

You all got no chance of getting  
back to your fleet.

The gunboat continues its torturous arc. The creaking  
becomes a loud banging.

GARDNER

He's right, Tucker. Even if you  
can keep this boat afloat, then  
what? Sail past the fort?

TUCKER

If we have to.

The banging gets worse. The entire frame shudders.

CARVELL

She's tearing herself apart.

**INT. CSS UNCLE BEN - WHEELHOUSE - DAY**

Moore comes up the stairs. Emery stands over the body of  
Maxwell. Blood pours from the man's chest but he still  
breathes. Moore checks him then grabs the wheel.

MOORE

Jesus, Emery...Mister Tucker  
wanted no violence

EMERY

He attacked me at the wheel.. It  
was self defense.

Moore looks out over the river - the gunboat is locked in  
a permanent left turn so it slowly spins on an axis. He  
tries to straighten the wheel but it won't budge.

MOORE

Its not responding. Hear that  
noise? One of the paddle wheels  
is jarred loose. If it cracks,  
then we're in big trouble.

Suddenly, Jeremiah appears at the other doorway. Totally  
lost and in shock.

JEREMIAH

Sergeant Gardner? I need to find  
him? Wait...you are the  
prisoners...why are you\_ \_

EMERY

Who the hell are you, kid?

Moore glances over his shoulder as he wrestles with the wheel. Shakes his head.

MOORE

Damn, crazy day. Boy, just stay out of the way. Emery, go down and tell Mister Tucker the boat is out of control. We'll have to abandon it and swim to shore. And send up Hudson to see to Maxwell. He's had medical training.

Jeremiah stands, dazed. Emery points the gun at him, pretends to shoot him, before walking to the stairs.

JEREMIAH

The boat is gonna sink? But...we can't go in the water.

EMERY

Why not, kid? Can't you swim?

JEREMIAH

Sure I can. But...

(beat)

But there's a shark in the water.

Emery stops. Moore looks around too.

MOORE

A shark? How do you know?

JEREMIAH

The cook was cutting up fish at the back. I was hiding in the cotton bales. Next minute...

He takes a deep breath, holds back tears.

JEREMIAH

This big old shark just took him.

Emery and Moore look at each other.

MOORE

Seems like Hooper was right. We'll worry about that later. Get the men up from below.

EMERY

The kid can do it. I ain't going down there to be trapped.

MOORE

Damn you, Emery. Kid, you heard  
him. Tell the sergeant.

Jeremiah nods, trembling. He walks to the stairs, starts to descend. Moore keeps fighting to ease the wheel. The banging from below gets louder. The boat starts to shake.

**INT. CSS UNCLE BEN - BOILER ROOM -DAY**

A STOKER sweats as he tends the furnace. His crew mate checks the boiler pressure. They both look up in concern as the 'roof' of the boat groans.

STOKER ONE

We'll have to shut down. Dammit,  
the captain knows the wheel is  
damaged. Why is he turning?

STOKER TWO

You shut her down. I'll\_\_

Suddenly, a resounding THUD. A giant beam of wood penetrates the wall. The two men don't even have time to scream before both are crushed instantly. The beam drives across the room into the boiler and furnace. Steam and hot coals explode everywhere. Soon, the walls are aflame...

**EXT. NECHES RIVER -DAY**

The whole gunboat tilts to port as the giant left paddle wheel snaps off. It lists dangerously close to the surface of the river. The huge fin appears close to the rocky island before sinking under the stricken vessel.

**INT. CSS UNCLE BEN - BELOW DECKS - DAY**

Pandemonium in the cramped 'boxing arena'. Everyone is thrown off their feet as the gunboat rolls. Rifles tumble to the floor; Rebs and Yankees in haphazard heaps.

TUCKER

The boat is done for.

RATCLIFFE

Get off me, stinking Blue coats.  
You scum did this. Bastards.

The side wall ruptures, water pours in. Footsteps on the stairs, a young voice YELLING. Gardner picks himself up, staggers to the door which is now on a crazy angle.



GARDNER

I...Jeremiah? How in God's name?

The boy appears, rushes to him. Grips his waist.

JEREMIAH

I'm sorry, Sergeant. I hid on the boat. I only wanted an adventure.

GARDNER

Well, you're getting that...does your Aunt know about this?

Jeremiah shakes his head. He peers around the room, taking in the chaos as men take stock of the situation.

GARDNER

We'll talk about it later. But for now...Ratcliffe, Tucker? Lets get the men up on deck.

An explosion rocks the boat, causing them to lose footing.

CARVELL

Now what?

**INT. CSS UNCLE BEN - WHEELHOUSE - DAY**

Moore grapples with the wheel. Flames billow up from the side of the boat. More explosions.

MOORE

Its no good. I can't steer towards the bank. We'll have to swim for it.

He lets go of the wheel, examines the captain. Emery looks out over the river, sees the fin. He's eerily calm despite the chaos.

EMERY

Seems the kid wasn't making up stories...there is a shark out there. And its a big fucker.

Moore joins him, gazes out. The fin heads for the stricken boat, before dropping under the surface.

MOORE

Oh shit.

He scans the river. Points at the exposed rocks.

MOORE

There. Its closer than the bank. Help me with the captain. I'm not leaving him here to die.

EMERY

Sorry, it's every man for himself now. He's a dead man anyway.

Emery heads to the main deck stairs. Moore watches him, shakes his head. Checks the captain's pulse.

MOORE

Hang in there, skip.

**INT. CSS UNCLE BEN - BELOW DECKS - DAY**

Water continues to pour in.

GARDNER

Everyone to the wheel house. We'll be trapped down here.

Tucker nods, shepherds his men towards the stairs. Ratcliffe watches, unsure now of his command in the doomed room. One wall blisters with heat as fire eats through.

Suddenly a YELL from Winbanks. He picks up a rifle, checks the load. Points it at the prisoners.

WINBANKS.

This is horse shit. Ain't just letting you all escape.

Ratcliffe and Carvell smirk from the stairs. Some of the Yankees stop. Tucker curses at this new threat.

GARDNER

There's no time for this. We are all getting off this boat now.

WINBANKS

Goddamn prisoners caused this and you made it easier for them, Gardner. I should shoot you.

(beat)

In fact I fucking will.

Winbanks steps back, raises the gun to his shoulder, aims at Gardner. Everyone freezes for a moment.

RATCLIFFE

(hisses)

Do it.

JEREMIAH

No!

Winbank's finger tightens on the trigger. Suddenly, the bottom of the boat explodes up behind him. Planks of wood splinter as the Great White rises. Winbanks sees the horror in the eyes of the others. Turns...

WINBANKS

Huh?

He SCREAMS, pulls the trigger. Loses his footing, falls onto his back. The bullet hits the shark's left eye, drawing blood. The beast lunges, jaws opening. Timber shatters as Winbanks slips easily into the huge mouth.

The others can only look on in horror. Winbanks SCREAMS again as the shark bites down. He manages to hit the shark's head with the rifle before both disappear back into the water.

The bubbles of blood are hellish in the flames that now fill the room.

TUCKER

Alright, keep moving!

Gardner comforts Jeremiah, pushes him up the stairs ahead of him. Hudson next. Ratcliffe and Carvell follow along with Langford and Hooper.

The rest of the men, mostly Union with a couple of Rebs are still at the foot of the stairs when...

An explosion in the next room sends fragments of the boiler through the wall. The men have no chance as red hot metal pierces their bodies.

Steam and SCREAMS fill the room. The survivors on the stairs can only watch in horror before making good their escape.

**INT. CSS UNCLE BEN - WHEELHOUSE - DAY**

Moore looks up anxiously as Tucker is the first to appear from below. The others gather in the doorway.

TUCKER

We got about a minute.

MOORE

Help me with the captain. I'm not leaving him.

GARDNER

I'll help.

MOORE

I take it this is all that's left?

Tucker nods grimly. He crouches down to grasp the captain's legs. Looks up at Gardner.

TUCKER

You lead the men off. Get to the rocks. We'll try and float the captain across on some timber.

More muffled thuds from under their feet. Jeremiah is at the side window. The gunboat slowly rights itself.

JEREMIAH

The paddle wheel broke off.

Gardner peers out the port window.

GARDNER

Its about fifty feet or so to the rocks. Ready, Jeremiah?

JEREMIAH

Yes sir. I'm a good swimmer.

Gardner smiles in reassurance, takes the boy's hand. Heads to the stairs. The Union men follow him. Ratcliffe and Carvell close behind.

LANGFORD

I got your back, Sergeant.

MOORE

Good luck soldiers.

He lifts Maxwell carefully around the shoulders as Tucker lifts his legs. Gardner nods, leads the others out.

TUCKER

Seems like every boat we sail on lately gets sunk, Ensign.

MOORE

Lord yes, sir.. Remind me not to board a third one too soon.

They shuffle towards the door, Maxwell between them. A loud EXPLOSION from below. The boat drops suddenly in the water. The floor suddenly opens up beneath Moore's feet.

He plummets as if through a gallows trapdoor, into a fiery pit that below decks has become. Maxwell's upper body hits the edge as Tucker struggles to hold his feet. He lurches backwards, drags the captain to safety.

TUCKER

Goddamn...how many more must die?

He kneels for a moment, overwhelmed...close to tears. Then with a SCREAM of rage, he lifts the captain up, arms under knees and back. A deep breath and he moves to the stairs.

**EXT. CSS UNCLE BEN - MAIN DECK - DAY**

The water between the stricken boat and the rocks is filled with debris and men trying to survive. Some have already reached the island. Tucker emerges from the cabin with Maxwell. Langford is waiting.

LANGFORD

No sign of the shark, sir.

TUCKER

It will be lurking, don't worry.

More explosions from within the boat. Gardner and Jeremiah reach safety first. They look anxiously back. Tucker and Langford manage to get over the side with the captain. They balance him on a piece of timber, start to paddle. The rest of the survivors are almost there.

Suddenly the fin rises near the back of the Uncle Ben.

GARDNER

Tucker...Langford...hurry!

The two men thrash at the water, pushing the timber ahead of them. The fin drops.

POV - UNDERWATER - the men's legs kicking, honing in on them. Suddenly, a last explosion from the boat, swirling the water, the view turning away, heading to the bottom...

**EXT. NECHES RIVER - ISLAND - DAY**

Ratcliffe swims frantically towards refuge. His foot strikes bottom and he pushes forward. He stumbles, face goes under; he emerges, whimpers like a day old kitten. Something touches his arm and he SCREAMS. Carvell stumbles up beside him.

A hand grips his, yanks him to safety. Ratcliffe opens his eyes, looks up to see his savior is Hudson. Tucker and Langford stagger past, bearing the captain.

HUDSON

Its ok. You're safe.

RATCLIFFE

I don't need your help, nigger.

Ratcliffe pushes Hudson away, surveys the island. Its roughly thirty feet long, ten feet wide and is just exposed rock. Exhausted men lie about.

Hudson goes back to where Captain Maxwell lies. Tucker kneels next to him.

TUCKER

He's lost a lot of blood.

HUDSON

I'll sit with him, sir.

Gardner tends to Jeremiah who is vomiting up water. The entire group numbers fifteen. Out on the river, the giant fin surfaces at leisure, waiting...

The wreckage of the Uncle Ben is fifty feet from the island, the west bank thirty feet on the other side. On the eastern side is fifty feet of water between the island and river bank.

The stern of the gunboat is just above the surface, the covered twin twelve pounders pointing lazily to the sky. For the moment, all parties rest up, tired and in shock. Then, men begin to stir. Tucker stands up.

TUCKER

Damn, the west bank is so close.  
If we had've swam that way...

HUDSON

There wasn't time, sir. It was every man for himself once that boiler blew.

(beat)

I'm sorry about Ensign Moore, sir. He was a good sailor.

TUCKER

No one deserves to die like that.

HUDSON

The captain's pulse is fading. He hasn't got long.

EMERY

We can use him as bait, distract the shark, swim to shore.

He points to the grey fin lazily patrolling the water.

LANGFORD

Jesus, Emery, have you no shame?  
You shot the poor man.

Emery shrugs. Gardner and Jeremiah come over to check on Maxwell. Ratcliffe and his crew watch proceedings.

EMERY

We're at war. He was taking us to a POW camp where some of us - maybe all of us - will die. Besides, he wouldn't give up the wheel. And he attacked me first.

TUCKER

Enough! Whats done is done. In the meantime we have to just sit tight, wait for a boat to pass.

Hudson sighs, wipes Maxwell's brow tenderly. The captain moans, eyes flutter.

HUDSON

Did we gain anything from taking over the boat, sir? Seems like we're in a bigger mess now.

No one answers. Emery wanders to the edge of the water, examines the wreckage of the Uncle Ben.

JEREMIAH

Is the captain going to die?

GARDNER

I...I don't know, son.

Ratcliffe's voice rings out from the far end.

RATCLIFFE

Of course he's going to die. Look at him. Can't hardly breathe.

(beat)

This situation is all on you, Gardner. Mollycoddling the prisoners. Letting them have the run of the boat.

CARVELL

Dang right, sir. He's responsible for our men dying. Hell, when we get back to Beaumont, I'll sign up as witness. For your court martial. And I'll watch you hang.

Jeremiah walks towards them, waving a small fist.

JEREMIAH

Shut up! You are both bad man. I heard you whipping the prisoners.

He turns to Gardner, almost tearful.

JEREMIAH

They are wrong, Mr Gardner. You was just being kind.

Gardner says nothing. He looks out at the water. Suddenly, Maxwell coughs, tries to sit up.

HUDSON  
Easy there, captain.

Maxwell looks wildly around. Tries to focus on the river.  
As if on cue, the huge fin rises.

MAXWELL  
Can't...stay here. Not safe.

TUCKER  
Its ok, skipper. We aren't  
planning on swimming out.

MAXWELL  
No...you don't understand...

A spasm racks his body. His breathing becomes hard and  
wheezy. Bubbles of blood on his lips.

HUDSON  
You must rest, captain. Don't  
exert yourself.

MAXWELL  
Tide...high tide...today.  
(coughs)  
Gabriel...Gabriel told me...on  
journey down...

EMERY  
What the hell is he saying?

TUCKER  
Shut up. Captain, are you sure?  
What time is the tide due? How  
high is it?

MAXWELL  
King...tide. It will...cover  
this...island.

Hudson looks up in worry at the now circle of men and boy  
around the dying skipper.

GARDNER  
Jesus. Thats all we need.

TUCKER  
What time, Captain? When?

Maxwell clutches Hudson's arm, as his body clenches in  
pain. He opens his eyes, stares at Tucker, fading fast.

MAXWELL  
One pm. Gabriel said...one...pm.

He seems to relax, settles back on the sand. One last  
exhalation of blood and he's gone. Hudson makes the sign  
of the cross.



Ratcliffe senses something is up, walks closer. Gardner frowns, rummages in his jacket pocket. He takes out a pocket watch, opens it. Looks up at the sun.

GARDNER

Its twelve forty now.

A silence. Hooper walks to the water's edge. Points to the shark. The fin does figure of eights around the gunboat.

HOOPER

The beast knows. It knows the tide is fast approaching.

EMERY

You son of a bitch. Do us all a favor and jump in the water.

RATCLIFFE

Gardner? Whats happening? I heard talk of a high tide?

GARDNER

Yes. Captain said the island will be covered in twenty minutes.

Jeremiah tugs his sleeve, scared. Gardner crouches.

JEREMIAH

Are we going to be eaten, Mr Gardner? I saw the cook get eaten. It was real bad.

GARDNER

I promise you won't get hurt. We'll make sure you're safe.

CARVELL

So what the hell do we do now?

TUCKER

How about you walk straight ahead? Distract the shark while we swim for it? Fool...

CARVELL

Why you fucking Yankee dog...

He rushes at Tucker but Langford steps in, neatly trips him. Ratcliffe and the others follow suit and soon its Reb v Yankee, North v South on the rocky ground.

GARDNER

Christ...stop it, all of you.

JEREMIAH

Why are they fighting, Mr Gardner? We should be working together to get off this island.

EMERY

Because none of them have any horse sense, boy.

He undoes a jacket button, reaches inside and pulls out...a pistol. He cocks it, points it in the air. Pulls the trigger. The grunt and curse of wrestling men falls silent as the two groups break apart.

TUCKER

What the hell?

RATCLIFFE

Who has a gun? Is it one of our boys, Carvell?

CARVELL

I'm afraid not.

He points at Emery who backs up to the water, flourishing the pistol.

HUDSON

Its the captain's gun. Emery shot the captain and hid the gun. No telling what he'll do now.

EMERY

Ain't murder in war time. That right, Ratcliffe?

He aims the pistol at the Reb sergeant, who, to his credit, doesn't flinch.

TUCKER

Put the gun down, Emery. Thats an order. Sergeant Gardner, you have any ideas or a plan at all?

EMERY

Wait? An *order*? Look around you, Tucker. There's no discipline here anymore, from either side. Its survival of the fittest now.

JEREMIAH

Hey mister? Why don't you shoot the shark with that gun? Then we can all swim to safety.

A few smile at the young boy's innocence. Hooper wanders back, still staring at the shark.

HOOPER

You won't get those bullets  
through the beast's thick skin.  
We all need to accept our fate  
when the water rises.

He kneels on the ground. Gazes around at the men.

HOOPER

Pray with me as we prepare to  
face the lord for final judgment.

LANGFORD

Hooper, stop this nonsense. If we  
work together...

EMERY

I'm tired of this fool.

He swings his arm, pulls the trigger. The heavy slug hits  
Hooper in the chest, driving him onto his back. Some of  
the Union men yell in dismay. Jeremiah hides his eyes.

EMERY

Give my regards to God. But tell  
him the rest of us ain't fixing  
to meet him anytime today.

TUCKER

Emery, you son of a bitch.

Ratcliffe has a smirk on his face as he watches Hooper  
somehow get to his feet. Blood pours from the wound. He  
makes the sign of the cross, staggers to the water.

HOOPER

I forgive you, Emery. We were all  
dead men a long time ago.

GARDNER

Hooper, stay still. We can\_ \_

Hooper splashes into the water. The fin rises near the  
gunboat, sensing new prey. Emery checks the load, cocks  
the revolver. Fires into Hooper's back. The doomed soldier  
falls into the water. A swirl of bloody bubbles and his  
body is dragged under.

EMERY

You heard the man. He's dead.

TUCKER

You're insane, Emery.

EMERY

Maybe. This whole war is insane.

RATCLIFFE

Its all well and good, Yankee.  
But you're stuck on here with us.  
What you gonna do, shoot us all?  
You ain't got many bullets left.

Emery just grins. Takes out some spare ammo from his jacket. Loads the gun. Cocks it. Aims it at Ratcliffe.

EMERY

Start swimming to the east bank.  
You and you Reb scum. That means  
you too, Gardner. And the boy.

JEREMIAH

You're a real bad man, mister.

RATCLIFFE

Ah, so we're the bait, right? And  
you plan to swim to the west bank  
while the shark is attacking us?  
Not a bad plan. But how fast can  
you swim, Emery? Maybe the shark  
will chase you instead, you fuck.

EMERY

Shut up.

TUCKER

We can rush you, Emery. You can't  
shoot all of us. We got nothing  
to lose, have we, boys?

He and Langford tense, ready to move. Emery swings the pistol at several targets before zoning in on Jeremiah.

EMERY

Try it. The boy will be dead.

HUDSON

This is total madness.

He points to the Uncle Ben.

HUDSON

The cannons look serviceable  
still. They're covered so maybe  
there's a chance we can fire  
them. We may be able to kill it.

RATCLIFFE

Be my guest to swim out, nigger.

HUDSON

I will. Like Mr Tucker, said, we  
got nothing to lose.

He gestures to the ground. The river level has risen visibly. Shocked, the soldiers feel the water at their ankles. Tucker and Gardner look at each other, shrug.

HUDSON

Someone needs to distract the shark so I have time to swim out.

Even Emery seems interested in this plan. He still holds the gun on Jeremiah, watches Hudson take his jacket off.

GARDNER

We'll go into the water on the east side, try and draw it to us.

Tucker nods. The two men splash across the now diminishing island and carefully enter the water. The great fin rises near the gunboat, cruises to the far end of the island. Hudson steps into the river proper, watching. He gauges the distance to the boat then looks back at the fin.

Tucker and Gardner splash and make a racket in the knee deep water. The fin wavers, rounds the island.

LANGFORD

Its working. Good luck, Hudson.

The black soldier nods, wades out further. Just as he readies to dive in, the fin vanishes. Tucker and Gardner edge back to land, scanning the water.

RATCLIFFE

Sneaky son of a bitch.

HUDSON

I'm going in! There's no time.

He dives in, starts pounding towards the Uncle Ben.

JEREMIAH

Hudson, no!!

Now all eyes are on Hudson. Suddenly the fin rises, forty feet from him.

JEREMIAH

Hudson, come back! You won't make it. The shark\_\_\_\_

Hudson somehow hears the boy, pauses, looks around to see the fin homing in on him. He checks the distances and surges back to the island. Langford rushes into the water, watching the fin. It slips under the surface but the great bulk of the shark is visible.

TUCKER

Hurry, Hudson, you can do it.

Hudson doubles his efforts and gets to the shallows, the beast hot on his hammer. Langford wades out, reaches out a hand. Hudson's feet hit bottom, he lunges for Langford's arm. Grabs it, uses the momentum to scramble the last few feet. Langford turns to follow but...

Something shoots from the swirl of water produced by the pursuing shark...Hooper's torn and tattered corpse, eyes staring into Hell. It tangles around Langford's knees, making him stumble and slip back into the water.

TUCKER

Oh, jesus, no...

Too late. Langford has time for one chilling SCREAM before his body jolts, and he's gone. Hooper's body bobs as if to mock the horrified soldiers, before it floats off.

Even Ratcliffe and Carvell are shaken. The water near the gunboat bubbles crimson before being dissipated by the current. Hudson lies on the rocky ground, punches the rising water in frustration.

GARDNER

Emery? Redeem yourself. Shoot the beast. Do something.

TUCKER

No, Hooper was right. The pistol won't harm it.

RATCLIFFE

What if you get the fucker in the eye? Emery, give me the gun.

EMERY

All of you...shut up.

He stands away from them, staring at the water lapping at his feet. Suddenly a YELL from Jeremiah. He's pointing up river, jumping in what have become the shallows.

JEREMIAH

Its a boat! We're gonna be saved. Look. Hey...over here!

Everyone turns. Sure enough, like a miracle, a long flat raft loaded with barrels and other goods, is being poled downriver by a tall bearded BOAT MAN in his thirties.

RATCLIFFE

Well, now. Salvation has arrived.

He catches Carvell's eye, nods slightly. Carvell grins. The long raft slows, the boat man sizing up the situation, working the rudder. He scans the Uncle Ben then the band of men on the island now close to submerged.

Holding the rudder steady so the raft is stationary, he takes a pistol from his belt. On the island, Emery keeps his gun hidden at his side.

BOAT MAN

Don't anybody try and swim out until I see what kind of trouble we got here. Rebs and Yankees stuck on the river with the tide rising. Could be bandits for all I know. Who\_\_

EMERY

Hey mister, we need rescuing. We're soldiers not bandits. There's no time to jaw.

BOAT MAN

Shut the hell up, Yankee. Who is in command there?

GARDNER

I am. Sergeant Gardner out of Fort Griffin down river. We were taking Union prisoners to Beaumont but, as you can see, our gunboat sank.

JEREMIAH

Please mister, we have to get on your raft... there's a shark...

He pauses as, out on the water behind the raft, the grey fin rises like doom itself. Jeremiah points.

BOAT MAN

A what? A shark you say? Ain't no big fish up in these parts. And I wasn't born yesterday...I ain't looking behind me, no sir.

TUCKER

You don't understand, you fool. Why do you think we're on this island? We couldn't swim to shore because there's a damn shark. And its coming for you NOW.

The fin cruises towards the raft then vanishes.

RATCLIFFE

He's telling the truth, god damn you. You have to move or you die.

BOAT MAN

Look at you all. Niggers, a kid...be damned if you ain't deserters. Disgrace to all soldiers. My granddaddy fought the British in seventeen seventy eight. He'd spit on you fucks.

(beat)

I'm heading on. Taking these goods to the fort you claim to be from. I'll be sure to tell them you're here. Hopefully they'll come back and hang you all.

He angles the rudder, the raft moves to take the current. Suddenly the fin is up again, only feet from the boatman.

GARDNER

Look out, jesus, man...

EMERY

I can't let you go.

He raises the Colt, aims at the boatman, who sees the weapon. He raises his pistol, even as the great head of the shark rises behind him. The boatman hears the splash, turns his head quickly to look. The shark hits the raft.

BOAT MAN

Oh, sweet mother mary, what?

Emery fires. The raft is shunted forward. The shot flies over the boat man's head as he stumbles onto his knees. The pistol falls from his hand. Everyone seems frozen into a tableaux of unreality.

The great fish sinks below the surface, sensing the shallow danger as it scrapes the submerged rocks. A flip of the scythe-like tail and its gone to the deep.

TUCKER

Someone grab the raft!

Ratcliffe is the first to move. He splashes to the raft, steps onto it. It wavers, one end tips before settling onto the hidden island. The boat man struggles to get up.

Ratcliffe deftly takes the gun, cocks it, turns and fires at Emery. The bullet smashes into his face before he can react. He drops like an unstrung puppet.



GARDNER  
Damn you, Ratcliffe.

Carvell has tracked his boss onto the raft. He savagely kicks the boat man in the face. The man groans, collapses in a heap. Carvell hurries to the rudder, takes it before the raft moves away. Ratcliffe grins as he covers the approaching Gardner and Tucker.

RATCLIFFE  
Well now. The situation has changed for the better.

Jeremiah is close to the raft, staring at the corpse of Emery. Out on the river, the grey triangle appears.

TUCKER  
How? The shark will rip that raft to pieces if you head to shore. You got zero chance. Like us.

Ratcliffe shakes his head, darts forward, grabs Jeremiah. Drags him onto the raft before anyone can move. Holds the gun to his head.

JEREMIAH  
Hey, let me go. You a bad man, mister. God will punish you soon.

CARVELL  
Do you ever shut up, kid?

JEREMIAH  
You're a dead man too.

Ratcliffe cuffs Jeremiah's head. Stares with venom at the band of men on the rapidly shrinking island.

RATCLIFFE  
Now listen up. You will do what I say or the boy dies.

GARDNER  
Christ's sake, Ratcliffe. How many more have to die today? Take the raft and leave us, sure. But no need to take Jeremiah.

RATCLIFFE  
Shut up. He won't be harmed if you follow orders.

CARVELL  
Boss? We got rope here.

Ratcliffe checks the shark. The fin wavers, leisurely plying the water near the gunboat.

RATCLIFFE

Good man.

(beat)

Hey nigger. Hudson or whatever  
your name is. On the raft. Now.

Tucker and Gardner look at each other. Hudson steps forward. Carvell locks the rudder, gathers a coil of rope.

JEREMIAH

No, Hudson, no. They gonna pain  
you real bad, I just know it.

HUDSON

Its alright, little man. Stay  
strong. I won't have you hurt.

He walks onto the raft. Carvell comes over with the rope. Ties it around Hudson's waist, then the other end to the rudder strut, leaving eight foot of loose rope in between.

A moan from Jeremiah as he realizes whats happening. The soldiers on the island gasp too.

RATCLIFFE

Right, now we're getting off this  
shit hole. And we got us some  
nice fresh nigger bait.

GARDNER

You're barely human, Ratcliffe.  
Just a sick animal. I swear I'll  
survive this and hunt you down.

RATCLIFFE

Ha! Good luck with that. Private  
Carvell...prepare to leave.

They both laugh. Tucker lunges towards the raft but Gardner grabs his arm.

GARDNER

No, he'll shoot the boy.

RATCLIFFE

Damn right I will.

He drags the boy to the middle of the raft. Carvell unlocks the rudder and poles out into the river. Hudson stands next to him, gazes at the water. No sign of a fin.

The stranded soldiers look on helplessly. The water laps at their feet now.

TUCKER

Fifteen minutes and that fish can  
get to us. Then what? Even if we

TUCKER  
made it to the gunboat, its gonna  
be low in the water too.

GARDNER  
I was hoping the folks from  
Sabine would be here, looking for  
Jeremiah. But I guess now its  
every man for himself.

The raft moves past the Uncle Ben.

RATCLIFFE  
Ok, I'll take the rudder. Throw  
the nigger in before that fucking  
shark attacks us. And cut him  
good. I want to see blood.

He throws Jeremiah down, hurries to the rudder, steers the  
raft. Holds the gun at his side. Carvell takes out his  
knife. Grins at the lad. Turns to Hudson.

CARVELL  
Oh, don't worry, boss. You will.

JEREMIAH  
Mister Gardner was right. You men  
are a disgrace to the uniform.

RATCLIFFE  
Shut up, kid. If you're lucky,  
we'll leave you alive when we get  
to the bank.

JEREMIAH  
I don't care if I die. As long as  
you die with me.

Suddenly, the great fin rises, twenty feet away.

CARVELL  
Lord, thats a big fish.

He's terrified now, feeling the vulnerability of the raft.  
He grabs Hudson's arm, pushes his sleeve up. The black  
soldier watches impassively as Carvell's knife slices a  
deep wound in his forearm. Blood wells out in thick drops.

Hudson doesn't react, just stares at Ratcliffe.

HUDSON  
I'll come back and haunt you  
both. I promise you that much.

JEREMIAH  
Hudson, no.

He bursts into tears, tries to crawl over to him. Ratcliffe kicks him in the side.

GARDNER  
Goddam you.

HUDSON  
Be brave, Jeremiah. You will survive this, I know.

CARVELL  
Shut up and swim, nigger.

He pushes Hudson to the edge. The fin moves closer as blood drips into the water. At the last minute, Hudson leans close and spits in Carvell's eye.

HUDSON  
Enjoy hell, cracker.

Carvell yells in fury, pushes Hudson into the river. The rope pays out behind him. Jeremiah sits up, sobs.

TUCKER  
I'm going in! Hudson! Hold on.

The fin vanishes. Tucker splashes into deeper water. Hudson comes to the surface, treads water.

HUDSON  
No, sir, don't come for me.

TUCKER  
We all be dead soon anyway.

Ratcliffe steers the raft across to the west bank. Hudson is towed along, the current keeping the rope taut. The fin rises behind him. They pass near the wrecked Uncle Ben.

RATCLIFFE  
Working perfectly. Private, get ready to cut the rope when the shark takes him. Don't want to be dragged away from that old shore.

CARVELL  
I'm on it, boss.

He's cocky again now they are close to safety. He stands with knife ready near the edge, one hand on the rope.

JEREMIAH  
Hudson! No, you can't do this.

He gets to his feet, rushes at Carvell. Forces his small body at the man's legs. Carvell howls with fear, can't stop himself from toppling into the water.

RATCLIFFE

You little fuck.

He fires at the boy. The bullet hits the raft near his foot. Carvell surfaces, screaming, splashes towards the raft. The fin wavers, sinks below.

GARDNER

Good for you, Jeremiah.

Ratcliffe cocks the pistol again as Jeremiah looks over his shoulder at him. Carvell gets to the edge of the raft, tries to haul himself up.

CARVELL

Help me, boss, help me please...

In the water, Hudson has time to untie the rope as he treads water. On the island, the group watch on.

HUDSON

Jeremiah! Dive in. We can get to the gunboat.

Ratcliffe tries to steer and aim the pistol. Fires again but it goes wide. Behind Carvell, the great white rises.

CARVELL

Jesus christ, someone help me...

Jeremiah takes a run up. He sees the jaws of the beast beneath Carvell's legs. The soldier's waist rests on the raft as he frantically levers himself up.

CARVELL

Please boy, help me up. I'm sorry for what I did.

Jeremiah runs to him, stamps on his hand then dives off into the river. Carvell screams, slips back into the water. Doomed. He clambers back up but too late.

TUCKER

Sweet lord...

The shark surfaces, taking Carvell's legs fully into its maw. Jeremiah swims madly to Hudson and they both head for the Uncle Ben. Ratcliffe fires another shot at the shark but it hits Carvell in the shoulder.

The Reb private gives a blood curdling SCREAM as the Great White bites down then sinks underwater. Carvell clutches the raft edge, is pulled down for a moment. The raft rocks as he surfaces.

RATCLIFFE

Get off, Carvell. You'll sink us.

Carvell opens his mouth, blood pours from it. He crawls further on the wood to reveal his legs are gone from mid thigh. The blood gushes out around twin nubs of bone.

Somehow he manages to roll onto the raft away from the edge. He lies there, staring at the sky.

Hudson and Jeremiah continue their swim to the gunboat.

GARDNER

They're going to make it.

Suddenly the fin rises, zooming in on the swimmers. Hudson gets to the boat, waits for the boy.

HUDSON

Hurry, Jeremiah!

Jeremiah thrashes the last few strokes, turns to see the shark in pursuit. Hudson grabs him and with a supreme effort, pushes the boy up onto the exposed hull. Jeremiah claws his way higher, reaches down to Hudson.

JEREMIAH

Take my hand, Hudson.

The beast is too close. Hudson looks up at the boy.

HUDSON

Kill that fish, Jeremiah.

Then he's lost in a mass of bubbles and vanishes as the shark is upon him.

JEREMIAH

Hudson! No!

The great bulk hits the boat, sending a shudder through it. Jeremiah has to grab the edge to stop himself falling. He sobs as he searches the water.

TUCKER

Damn bravest thing I ever saw.

GARDNER

Lets hope it wasn't in vain...

(beat)

Jeremiah! The cannons. Can you get to them ok?

Jeremiah looks up from the water, face ashen, turns to look at the front of the boat. The whole gunboat creaks, sinks more into the water.

TUCKER

Jesus, it won't stay up much longer. Hurry, lad.

Meanwhile, on the raft, Ratcliffe makes good progress towards the west bank. He ignores the moans of Carvell. The blood from the mangled legs has stopped.

Without warning, the great white rises half out of the water, jaws agape like a tunnel to Hell. It clamps onto Carvell, slicing through wood and flesh. The impact pushes the raft closer to the bank.

The onlookers watch in horror as the shark turns its head as if to display the body of Carvell. Then its gone.

Ratcliffe laughs as the raft hits the bank. He locks the rudder, moves forward to step onto safety. At the last minute, he turns to wave at the group out in the river. The island is gone now. The water is mid shin.

RATCLIFFE

So long suckers. I'll see if I can rustle up some help. But...I wouldn't be holding my breath.

He laughs again, uproariously. Then...movement at his feet. The boatman on his knees. Swinging at him with a long sharp knife. He tries to jump back but it hacks into his right thigh. Ratcliffe yells in pain.

He raises the pistol, pulls the trigger, as blood from his leg pumps out onto the raft, into the water.

The bullet hits the boatman in the arm. He ignores it, advances, eyes rolling, knife raised again.

Ratcliffe turns, limps towards the freedom of the bank. On the Uncle Ben, Jeremiah has made it to the cannons. He removes the leather coverings, glances over at the raft.

Just as Ratcliffe steps onto dry land, the Great White emerges at the other end of the raft. The massive head slams down on the raft, tilting it up.

Ratcliffe screams as he tumbles to the wood then slides out of control towards the waiting cavern of teeth. Around him, roll the barrels of goods.

The boatman is below him, clutching a broken spar of wood, stopping his momentum. Ratcliffe tries to grab him, clutches his leg.

RATCLIFFE

Help me...jesus christ, help...

The boatman looks at him with dead eyes, stabs at him with the knife. It slices into Ratcliffe's hands, releases his grip. A long SCREAM of terror as Ratcliffe continues to slide down the raft.

The shark's jaws widen, teeth laden with old flesh. Ratcliffe turns his body, kicking at the beast with his feet, sobbing, blood from his thigh spraying into the maw.

TUCKER

We can swim to the gunboat while  
its distracted.

He wades into the river. Gardner follows.

They get to the Uncle Ben, cling to the wreckage, watch from afar the horror across the water.

Ratcliffe slides further into the shark's mouth. He tries to jab his fists into the black eyes. Screams as his lower body is engulfed.

The jaws bite down, the pressure enormous. Ratcliffe's breast bone and ribs crackle, shattering like fine glass.

Jeremiah examines the twin cannons, moves them up and down, checking the aim.

The shark flips its tail, driving it up, Ratcliffe moving deeper into the mouth. Another clench of the jaws...blood fountains from the doomed man's lips and he is still.

GARDNER

Jeremiah...yesterday, at the  
fort. I showed you the men on the  
guns.

JEREMIAH

Yes, sir.

GARDNER

Well, those guns up there are the  
same. You remember the way to  
fire them? Please, Jeremiah...

The boys looks across to the shark as it devours Ratcliffe, back down at Gardner and Tucker trying to stay out of the water. He frowns in thought before nodding.

GARDNER

Good lad. We can talk you through  
it but you're the one to shoot.

JEREMIAH

Can't...can't you come up here  
and do it, Mister Gardner?



On the raft, the shark lifts its head, slides under the surface with the corpse of Ratcliffe. The raft falls back level, pushed towards the bank. The boatman sits up, stares across at the men and boy on the gunboat. He gets to his feet, stumbles to land, sits down.

TUCKER

It has to be you, lad.

(beat)

We have to make sure the shark comes at us so you have a good shot at it.

He searches, breaks off a piece of wood from the shattered hull. Climbs along until he's below Jeremiah. He gestures to Gardner. He also finds some timber, crawls over.

TUCKER

Now to bring this fish out.

He whacks the wood against the hull, near the waterline. Gardner does the same. The THWACK echoes across the water.

POV UNDERWATER

The sound amplified by the water. The shark's head turns, hunting for the source.

Suddenly, the boatman is on his feet, calling out to them. Jeremiah has the cannons ready, firing line of the left one in his hand. He aims out at the water, waiting.

The lad nods. He scans the river, tenses. One hundred feet away, the fin rises, steaming towards the Uncle Ben.

JEREMIAH

Here he comes.

Tucker looks up from his pounding the hull. Gardner continues before glancing up.

GARDNER

Sweet lord, this is it.

He and Tucker lock eyes, whack some more, then wait.

TUCKER

Take your time, Jeremiah. You got two shots. Aim ahead of the fin, lead him onto it.

Jeremiah trembles slightly as he aims the first cannon.

UNDERWATER - the shark...rampaging, jaws agape, a barrel visible behind the teeth.

JEREMIAH

I can't see the head, I can't...

He's trying not to panic, heart beating...

GARDNER

Easy, lad. You'll know...

The fin is now fifty feet away and gathering pace.

BOOM

Jeremiah fires the first cannon. The lead ball speeds across the water. Tucker and Gardner watch, frozen.

A geyser of water erupts, engulfing the fin. Jeremiah raises a fist in triumph but...there's no explosion.

The fin disappears in the spray.

TUCKER

Jeremiah? Did it hit?

JEREMIAH

Maybe...I can't see if...

The fin rises at the edge of the swirl, higher, towering over the surface. The Uncle Ben creaks, lurches lower into the water. Thirty feet and closing now...

Jeremiah doesn't react, just readies the second cannon. He moves the striker to the firing position, takes the string. The two soldiers resume hitting the hull.

POV UNDERWATER - the Great White at kill speed, the noise urging it on. The massive bulk pushes up to break the surface. A blurred view of Jeremiah aiming at it.

TUCKER

(whispers)

Lord, guide his hand...

He and Gardner dive off as the shark looms, only feet away. The head lifts, the jaws start to open. Jeremiah is a statue, totally focussed, one eye closed.

He yanks the string, leaps over the rail into the water.

BOOM

At point blank range, the hot iron ball smashes into the maw, driving through the rows of razor sharp teeth. The ball exits out the top of the shark's head, even as the beast smashes into the boat. A moment of stillness...

Tucker and Gardner surface. The shark is wedged into the hull. Jeremiah pops up next to the two men.

TUCKER  
Jeremiah! You did it.

JEREMIAH  
Is it dead?

GARDNER  
Sure is...well done, lad, w\_\_

His face crumples. The Great White shudders, whips it's tail from side to side. The massive head lifts, starts thrashing at the hull. It's movements become more frantic and powerful. Each lunge brings it closer to freedom...

GARDNER  
It's still alive. Jesus, how do we kill this thing?

Tucker and Jeremiah watch in horror, clinging to timber.

TUCKER  
The ball. It missed the brain.

JEREMIAH  
Can we make it to the bank?

GARDNER  
We have to. Swim like you've never swam in your life.

The three stroke off towards the rear of the boat, away from the beast which is nearly free. Suddenly, a figure emerges from the water, climbs up onto the wrecked hull above the shark...

Hudson...alive and wielding a sharp piece of iron.

HUDSON  
Keep swimming. As fast as you can.

JEREMIAH  
Hudson! I knew you were alive.

HUDSON  
Just swim, son.

One last shake of the great head and the shark is free. Hudson scans the top of the head. He jumps down onto it, driving the make shift spear deep. The shark tosses it's head back even as it slides into the water. Hudson hangs on as they both submerge in a splatter of blood.

The three swimmers pause, treading water, waiting...

Then the shark rears from the water. Hudson holds the spear. As the beast levels, he pulls the steel free, then raises it above his head.

Before the shark can turn towards the swimmers, he pounds the spear in again, twisting it. The shark gives a final spasm before going limp in the water. Hudson holds the weapon in as he and the beast vanish under again.

TUCKER  
Surely it's dead?

The water is bloody but still. Suddenly, Hudson surfaces. Swims wearily over to them.

JEREMIAH  
You did it, Mister Hudson.

HUDSON  
No. We did it, lad.  
(beat)  
I told you all to swim. None of you listened.

He breaks into a tired grin. Tucker and Gardner smile.

GARDNER  
Glad you're safe, Hudson. You're a brave man.  
(beat)  
We should see to the boat man.

JEREMIAH  
I can't swim anymore. I'm beat.

The three men grab a timber floating with the other debris. Drape the boy over it, kick towards shore.

They come to the west bank, splash into the shallows. The boat man lies in the grass, but he sits up slowly as they approach. His nose is swollen and drips blood.

BOAT MAN  
Damnedest thing I ever saw. Boy, you got nerves of steel.

He winces, touches his head.

TUCKER  
Easy there, mister. You been hurt bad. Hudson here is a doctor. He can examine you.

The boat man looks at the black sailor for a long moment.

BOAT MAN  
You a brave soul too, Yankee.

HUDSON  
Just lie back. Relax.

The boat man nods slowly, eases back onto the grass. Jeremiah has his spark back. He kneels on one side of the man, Hudson on the other side.

JEREMIAH

I'm Jeremiah, mister. This is Sergeant Gardner and the Union soldier is Mister Tucker.

Hudson gently feels the man's head. He opens each eye wide, has a close look.

HUDSON

You may have a mild concussion. And that nose is broken.

BOAT MAN

I'll live. Had worse.

(beat)

The name's Brody.

TUCKER

Well, Mister Brody, your arrival was good timing. We'd be\_\_well, you know...

BRODY

I lost my raft and all my goods. Those Rebs were crazy as hell.

He looks at Gardner, anger on his lips.

GARDNER

I'm sorry, sir, for the loss of your property. I'm sure we can arrange some compensation back at the fort.

JEREMIAH

Mister Brody? I can't do anything about your goods - and I'm sorry for blowing up your gunpowder - but I sure would like to help you build a new raft.

Brody frowns, looks at this boy, smiles.

BRODY

Well, I guess that would be nice, Jeremiah. You're a good lad.

Tucker and Hudson stand, watching this. They glance at each other then at Gardner.

TUCKER

So what happens now?

GARDNER  
I don't...I don't know.

TUCKER  
We aren't going to the camp.  
Right, Hudson?

Hudson nods. Jeremiah walks over, listens.

GARDNER  
I can understand that. You've  
been through enough. Ratcliffe  
and his men had no right to  
mistreat you.

HUDSON  
That shark? Maybe once in a  
lifetime it attacks people.  
(beat)  
But men like Ratcliffe will  
always be around.

TUCKER  
And Emery. Both sides got their  
share of bad ones.

Brody is silent. Jeremiah tugs Gardner's arm.

JEREMIAH  
You're going to let them go,  
Sergeant, aren't you? I won't say  
nothing. And Mister Brody won't  
either, I'm sure.

BRODY  
I didn't see nuthin'.

The faint sound of hooves down the road. Jeremiah runs to  
the nearest tree, scoots up like a monkey. Peers to the  
south. Yells in delight.

JEREMIAH  
Its Aunt Sarah! And some soldiers  
from the fort.

He climbs back down. Runs to Tucker and Hudson, embraces  
them. Brody steps forward to shake their hands as does  
Gardner. There's a moment of finality.

GARDNER  
Where will you go?

TUCKER  
We sent scouts the night before  
the battle. Never came back. I'm  
guessing the shark got them.  
(beat)

TUCKER

I'm hoping the boat they used is still on the beach near the fort.

GARDNER

You'll try and find the Union fleet? They could be back at Houston by now. A long row.

HUDSON

Any break from the war is good.

Jeremiah is close to tears. Down the road, the riders are visible in the trees.

JEREMIAH

Will we ever see you again? Maybe I can come visit you in your village and go fishing.

Tucker squats down, level with the boy's face.

TUCKER

If you come to Chatham on Cape Cod after the war, well, I sure would love to take you fishing.

JEREMIAH

I'd like that.

Tucker shakes the boy's hand, salutes Gardner.

TUCKER

Stay safe and...good luck.

GARDNER

You too.

Tucker and Hudson cross the road into the scrub. They jog off, heading west towards a line of trees. Halfway across, Hudson pauses to wave before they vanish into the foliage.

JEREMIAH(V.O)

And that was the last time I saw those two brave Union sailors. Yes sir, Mikey, that little boy was me. Lordy, what a time...

FADE TO:

**INT.TRAIN COMPARTMENT - DAWN**

Michael jolts awake. He's slumped on the seat, the letter on his chest. He sits up, yawns. Peers out the window - the sun has just risen. The train is moving through redwood forests.

The old woman has gone. Now, a YOUNG WOMAN with a BABY sits opposite. They smile, nod at each other. Michael rubs his eyes. Continues to read...

JEREMIAH(V.O)

Now, Mikey, I don't want to bore you with the rest of my life story after the shark episode. You know a lot of it anyway. Suffice to say that Sergeant Gardner survived the war. He married Aunt Sarah and they legally adopted me.

Michael smiles, sighs...

JEREMIAH(V.O)

We moved around a lot as I grew older, and somehow ended up in Oregon. The ocean was different to that in Texas - colder, darker, the beach rockier. But the salt air was in my veins so to speak, so I spent my last years here.

JEREMIAH(V.O)

Before we moved to Oregon, I set off across the country to see to visit Massachusetts, to try and find Mister Tucker. I got to his village of Chatham. Quiet little village on the Atlantic. Well, the townsfolk told me the sad news that a year earlier, in eighteen seventy two, Mister Tucker and Mister Hudson were lost at sea whilst out fishing. No trace of their bodies ever found. No headstones, no nothing as their families of which there was wives and children, had to leave the area to make some kind of a living. Just tragic, Mikey.

Michael's eyes well with tears. The compartment door slides open. An CONDUCTOR looks in.

CONDUCTOR

San Francisco in ten minutes.

Michael nods, folds the letter, gets his kit bag down.



**EXT. NAVY YARD - DAY**

Several large warships are docked. Gantry cranes surround two of them. It's a hive of activity with the SOUNDS of hammering and welding...

A taxi pulls up at the gate. Michael pays the driver, gets out. He shows his papers to an M.P., is waved through.

He approaches the gangplank of one of the ships, a heavy cruiser. The guns gleam in the sunlight, reflecting off the water. Michael walks up the gangplank. The CHIEF PETTY OFFICER salutes, checks his name off a clipboard.

A group of NEW SAILORS follow up the gangplank. Michael takes out the letter, continues to read:

JEREMIAH(V.O)

Well, I better wrap this up to give to your mother. I've been praying for you each day since you joined the Navy. We're so proud of you, Mikey. It's looking like this infernal war may be over soon. Seems like all through my lifetime man has just fighting with each other over all kinds of reasons. Think it's time for the world to see some peace for a bit. I pray you get through unharmed, Mikey...we love you  
(beat)

Your granddaddy Jeremiah Shaw.

Michael sighs, looks up at the sky. The new sailors get their names and service numbers checked off.

CHIEF PETTY OFFICER

Able Seaman Shaw? Could you take the recruits to their quarters? Get them settled in?

Michael turns. The new sailors are all ears, gazing at the ship with awe. Some look eager, some scared...

MICHAEL

Certainly, sir. Be a pleasure. Well, boys, you've landed on the finest ship in the American Navy, maybe even the world...  
(beat)

Welcome aboard the Indianapolis.

FADE OUT

THE END