

LOST

ON A BLACK SCREEN:

A piercing cry of a baby.

BABY (O.S.)
Waa! Waa! Whoa! Whoa!

FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST - SWAMP - DAY

SUPER: Maine, 1968.

A baby wrapped in a worn out, grey wool blanket lies in the snow crying. Her homemade cloth pacifier resting on her tiny chin.

Five feet away from the baby, KIRK LECROIX, 62, is waist-deep in a bog. He is a SENIOR WARDEN for the State of Maine Fish Game Department. Holding a hunting knife, he attempts to reach for a small tree stump.

Marked by deep wrinkles, he wears a haggard yet resolute expression. Deep-set eyes accentuate his chiseled, weathered face as he thrusts his blade into the stump, pulling himself closer.

The knife snaps from the stub and Kirk gets sucked back into the bog. Determined, he reaches for the piece of wood once again, plunging the knife with all his strength. The baby continues whaling.

KIRK
(snarling at baby)
Shut up already! I'm sick and tired
of you!

The blade finally lodges in place. Kirk pulls himself closer to the decaying wood, clinging to his last hope of salvation. To Kirk's relief the infant stops crying.

KIRK (CONT'D)
Thank heaven! Finally!

At that moment, the baby's cry resumes, escalating into hysterics. An anguished expression clouds Kirk's face.

KIRK (CONT'D)
(growls, wheezing)
If I ever get out of this damn
swamp... I swear...

He casts an angry look at the infant.

Then Kirk secures a firm grip on the stump, breathing heavily as he takes a moment to rest. His head slumps wearily, but after a brief pause, he groans and pulls himself up until his chest finds stable ground.

Crawling away from the swamp, he drags the baby along.

EXT. BOOTHBAY HARBOR - EARLY MORNING

SUPER: Three days earlier. Maine, USA.

Thick morning fog envelops the harbor, gradually dissipating. The mid-sized port is almost full of moored vessels. FISHERMEN work enthusiastically by the docks, unloading boxes with the early morning fish and lobster catch.

EXT. BOOTHBAY HARBOR TOWN - FOOTHILL STREET - EARLY MORNING

The dawn darkness gives way to a pale-grey daylight that highlights the town street with its businesses and stores .

The post office, the bank, the saloon, the provisions shop with a gas station and a bakery still stand in the same original buildings dating back to late 1800's.

Some of the structures have canopies and are connected by a warn-out wooden boardwalk. BUSINESS OWNERS are bustling, preparing their stores for another busy day.

A few morning SHOPPERS begin running from store to store.

EXT. EDGE OF THE BAY - KIRK'S CABIN - EARLY MORNING

Closing in through the fog, which drapes the city's shoreline, an OLD LOG CABIN slowly comes into view. It stands enveloped by towering trees and surrounded by few scattered bushes.

A beat-up truck is parked on a gravel driveway next to the cabin.

INT. KIRK'S CABIN - KITCHEN/DINING AREA - EARLY MORNING

The kitchen/dining area with small, dirty windows that are dimly lit by single bulb hanging from a ceiling wire. The aged, rugged wood floors contribute to the uninviting atmosphere.

The potbelly wood stove is cheerfully crackling with fire, its warmth creating the only source of comfort in the room. A handmade wooden table stands at the center, adorned with a bench on one side and two unmatched chairs on the other.

Sitting at the table, Kirk awaits for his breakfast. He stares out the window, his gaze fixed on the bay. An unsettling sense of unease is washing over him, as if something is waiting for him out there.

Behind Kirk, his WIFE, MAUDE LECROIX, 53, is silently preparing breakfast. She wears an apron over her wool dress and a cotton kerchief tied at the neck. Her wrinkled face betrays weariness and unspoken discontent.

Once a beautiful woman with a slender figure, Maude now carries the weight of her age. Her grey hair pulled tightly into a bun, highlights her aging features.

She stands at the counter hunched, frying a breakfast sausage

Maude's determined chin emphasizes her strong character. Her eyes reflect a long residing bitterness within.

Maude silently puts food out on the table and walks back to the stove. Neither one of them is interested in conversation.

Kirk eats alone, chewing his food with thoughtful deliberation. A steaming mug of strong black tea awaits beside him.

Gulping the last of his tea, Kirk heads to a tiny sanctum adjacent to the mudroom. Maude packs his lunch, wrapping a couple of large smoked meat and cheese sandwiches. Then she clears the table and washes the dishes.

INT. KIRK'S HOME - MUDROOM - SANCTUM - CONTINUOUS

The sanctum is separated from the mudroom by a bedsheet curtain hanging from a string. Inside, the walls hold a few faded framed pictures of Kirk with two other men. All three dressed in military uniforms.

In the center, hangs an aged framed photo dated 1947. It depicts a dashing man with his arm around the waist of a beautiful young woman holding a baby. It's young Kirk with Maude and their baby daughter, LAURA.

Kirk sits on a stool at a small table methodically cleaning the bore of his rifle with a ramrod. He carefully wipes its metal parts with an oiled rag, loads it, and places it against the wall.

Kirk retrieves an extra clip and a pack of cigarettes from his drawer, tossing them into his backpack. He grabs a box of matches from his pocket, shakes it, and shoves it inside a small tarp bag hanging on his chest.

He gazes thoughtfully at the drawer's contents - boxes of .45 pistol ammo, gun tools, a tiny oil can and a whetstone.

Kirk puts on his warm uniformed jacket with a badge when an ENVELOPE in the back of the drawer catches his eye. Intrigued, he pulls it out and opens it.

THE LETTER READS:

LAURA

Dear Mom, I am in my ninth month. I feel alright, but I'm all alone and a bit scared. The father of the baby bailed. Let God be his judge. Do you think you could visit me? I miss you, and your presence would help a lot. Love you, Laura.

Kirk clenches his fists, crumpling the letter.

KIRK

(hissing)
Dammit.

He is startled by a LOUD CLATTER of a broken dish.

INT. KIRK'S HOME - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

At the sound of Kirk's swearing, a porcelain mug slips from Maude's grasp. She stands, lost for words, staring at the shattered pieces. Tears well up in her eyes. Kirk walks out from the mudroom carrying his backpack.

KIRK

What are you staring at, you klutz?
Sweep it up.

Maude's face flushes with anger and frustration. Kirk walks up to the table, stepping on the broken pieces. Maude shoots him a hateful stare. She swiftly sweeps up the fragments into the dustpan, tossing them into the trash.

Kirk shoves his lunch into the backpack.

KIRK (CONT'D)

Why didn't you tell me?

MAUDE
Tell you what?

KIRK
The letter.

Maude shrugs her shoulders.

MAUDE
(accusatory)
You said she's not your daughter
anymore and you don't want to know
her. So, why bother?

KIRK
(angrily)
'Cause I have the right to know.
I'm still the head of this
household.

MAUDE
You can be whoever you want, but
Laura is my daughter, and I will be
helping her no matter what.

Maude angrily throws the broom into the corner. Kirk snatches his backpack and storms out of the kitchen, tossing a comment over his shoulder.

KIRK
Damn you, old hag.

MAUDE
Why don't you go to work and never
come back.

Helplessly she sinks down to the bench, hands covering her face in despair.

I/E. MUDROOM/YARD - EARLY MORNING

Kirk grabs his rifle, slamming the door behind him, pacing steadily out to his truck. He throws his backpack and the rifle onto the front seat, hops in and starts the engine.

Frozen overnight, the engine stutters briefly before roaring to life. Kirk revs it a few times. Leaving the truck running, he steps out to scrape the ice off the windshield. Hopping back in, tires screeching as he takes off.

FADE TO:

EXT. STATE OF MAINE FISH GAME DEPARTMENT BUILDING - MORNING

SUPER: Local Coastal Warden Service Branch.

Kirk exits the truck and makes his way into the building.

INT. COASTAL WARDEN SERVICE - MAIN ROOM - MORNING

He walks into the room, and signs in. THREE YOUNGER WARDENS drink coffee, talking. As soon as they notice Kirk, they fall silent.

WARDEN 1

Morning, Sir.

Kirk nods and heads over to his mail slot. He takes out a sheet of paper and leaves the room.

INT. MAJOR'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

He walks in into the office.

KIRK

May I, Major?

CHIEF OF THE BRANCH - MAJOR CLARK, 63, bald, robust man with a bulldog-like face, peers inquisitively at Kirk from behind his desk.

MAJOR CLARK

Why ask? You're already here. Take a seat. What's happening?

Kirk slips a sheet of paper to Major Clark who casually scans it with a brief glance.

KIRK

How did this goddamn Maison get off the hook this time? I witnessed him getting rid of fish net and described that in my report. Isn't a sworn officer's written statement enough?

The Major slides the paper over the desk back to Kirk.

MAJOR

You should have showed up at the hearing and testified.

KIRK
(with disappointment)
I did that last time, and he got
off with only a ten-dollar fine.

The major nods in agreement, pursing his lips.

MAJOR
Ten-dollar fine is a good result.
You brought him to justice, you did
your job.

KIRK
(point-blank)
Maison Calvin is a commercial level
poacher. People like him must be in
jail.

MAJOR
(fatherly)
Sometimes, you are too harsh on
people, don't you think?

KIRK
The law is the law and I stand by
it.

A brief silence hangs between them. Major Clark is the first
to break it.

MAJOR
How long have you been on the
force, thirty years?

KIRK
Twenty nine.

MAJOR
Hell! Twenty nine years, and you
still take violations too
personally. Can't do that. It's bad
for your health. Sometimes, you
have to cut people a little bit of
slack. At the end of the day, IT'S
ONLY FISH.

KIRK
Yeah, it's only fish.

Kirk leaves without uttering another word. Major watches him
go with a somber expression.

INT. BOOTHBAY HARBOR - SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Kirk, walks into the Sheriff's office, and takes a seat. SHERIFF HIGGINS, 30, with a neat 1930s haircut, is at his desk.

SHERIFF HIGGINS
Heard about your adventures, Mister
Lecroix.

Kirk pays no attention to Higgins' words.

KIRK
Will the sheriff be here today?

Higgins' smile quickly fades, replaced by a vengeful stare. Yet, after a moment, he manages to smile once more.

SHERIFF HIGGINS
The Sheriff's right in front of
you.

Higgins, proud of his new position, sounds like a sales representative, pitching as if promoting a fresh product. Kirk stares at Higgins in disbelief.

KIRK
What about Sheriff..?

Higgins immediately interrupts:

SHERIFF HIGGINS
Sheriff Childress retired four days
ago.

Kirk uncomfortably moves in his chair, visibly unsettled. Young sheriff creates a repulsive impression with his fake friendliness and a forced smile.

KIRK (V.O.)
(thinks)
What a circus, eh?

SHERIFF HIGGINS
What brings you here, Mr. Lecroix?

Kirk reluctantly places a document on the desk.

KIRK
I've got the appeal to the regional
court against Mr. Maison Calvin
right here.

Higgins reads the document.

SHERIFF HIGGINS

Well, you didn't show up to court to testify. Don't you know the procedure?

KIRK

I Know the procedure. I was too busy in the field that day.

SHERIFF HIGGINS

Looks like you ignore your duties.

KIRK

I don't need you to teach me how to do my job. Just register my appeal and that's all.

Kirk, tense with nerves, swiftly exits the office. Sheriff Higgins watches him leave with evident anger.

EXT. BOOTHBAY HARBOR - SHIPYARD - MORNING

Kirk descends the slope and makes his way to the DOCKS along a WAREHOUSE-FILLED STREET that leads to HARBOR SQUARE. Here and there, WORKERS are unloading boxes of fish, bringing them inside.

Along the road, TRADE BUYERS are engaged in fresh seafood purchases. Most townspeople recognize one another, and exchange greetings as they stroll by. Yet Kirk is largely ignored.

EXT. HARBOR SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

Kirk moves through Harbor Square, navigating a town that seems to hold him at a distance. The atmosphere is tense, and Kirk remains an outsider despite the familiarity among the townspeople.

Very few PASSERS-BY, meet Kirk's gaze and nod their heads. TWO WOMEN are talking near the fish store. Seeing Kirk walking in their direction, they step aside and turn away. WOMAN 1 unfriendly spits to the ground.

WOMAN 1

Why the earth gives birth to such beasts?

WOMAN 2

Did you hear about Big Mike's brother? His body hasn't been found yet.

WOMAN 1

Poor Mike. They say he started drinking.

Kirk strides by the two women, who shoot him a disdainful glare.

CUT TO:

EXT. BOOTHBAY HARBOR - PIER - MORNING

Kirk walks along the pier towards his motorboat. MIKE DESJARDINS (BIG MIKE), 38, tall, powerful, red-haired, freckled-faced man, moves in his direction. He is carrying a large wooden box full of fish. Their eyes lock.

Big Mike heads straight towards Kirk, an angry glare in his eyes. Kirk tries to maneuver around him, but Big Mike blocks his path. They face each other locked in a tense stare. Big Mike's gaze is filled with hatred.

Finally, he angrily grits through his teeth.

BIG MIKE

You wretched bastard. Everywhere you go, misery and grief trail behind. You'll pay for my brothers death!

Kirk resumes walking, bumping into Big Mike's shoulder with intentional force, but paying no mind to his accusation.

Suddenly, Kirk stops midstep and utters:

KIRK

If your brother wasn't so greedy, he would still be alive.

Kirk continues towards the boat. Pausing, he lights a cigarette and inhales deeply a few times. Recent memories weigh heavy on his mind as he gazes into the distance, reminiscing.

FADE TO:

KIRK'S FLASHBACK:

EXT. BAY - KIRK'S BOAT - NIGHT

SUPER: Two weeks ago.

In the dark of the night, with a full moon shining, strong wind rages through the storm. Kirk works a graveyard shift. With waves crashing violently around him, he navigates his rocking boat into the night.

It seems only a fool would set sail in such weather. Nevertheless, danger is Kirk's passion.

Kirk's lone boat braves the storm maintaining its course half a mile from the shore. Wrapped in his parka, Kirk holds the steering wheel with one hand and smokes a cigarette with the other.

Kirk flicks away the cigarette, lifts his binoculars. He spots a TRAWLER boat seemingly in close proximity. A dense FISHNET, teeming with catch, dangles from the hoisting arm of the ship. Kirk grabs the radio mic.

KIRK
Hunter-1 to Dispatch, over.

DISPATCH (V.O.)
Go, Hunter-1.

KIRK
Trawler 1782 in sector 14, with a full net of fish on the side derrick. Going to intercept, over.

DISPATCH (V.O.)
Intercept confirmed. Careful out there, Hunter-1.

Kirk steps on the gas and makes his way to the trawler at full speed. He slows down a bit once he gets close, and turns on his SPOTLIGHT, announcing over a loudspeaker:

KIRK
Attention board 1782, stop all operations. Shut off your engine. Your boat is under arrest.

Kirk boat's spotlight ILLUMINATES Big Mike and his brother PATRICK, 28, stout and tall, with fiery red hair and beard. By the industrial net stands another FISHERMAN in his mid-forties. The HELMSMAN, 40, looms in the steering compartment.

Caught by surprise the crew panics. The helmsman frantically adjusts the controls trying to steer the boat away. Patrick armed with a fishing knife, jumps from the trawler onto the net full of fish.

With a swift cut, Patrick releases the evidence.

Under the cut, the mesh rapidly begins to break, and Patrick, still gripping the net, plunges into the murky waters between the two vessels. Kirk extends his hand toward Patrick.

KIRK (CONT'D)
Grab my hand! Grab now, dammit!

In the sudden turn of events, the helmsman abruptly steers the trawler, and it violently collides with the side of Kirk's boat. The impact is brutal, crushing Patrick amid the chaos.

Patrick's head quickly disappears beneath the water. Big Mike, witnessing his brother go under howls in anguish and desperation:

BIG MIKE
No! Patrick, no!

BACK TO SCENE:

EXT. PIER - KIRK'S BOAT - CONTINUOUS

Kirk climbs down into his boat, tosses his backpack beside him, carefully lays down his rifle. Turning on the boat's radio, it comes alive with static noise as Kirk picks up the mic.

KIRK
(on radio)
Dispatch, this is Hunter 1, radio check.

DISPATCH (V.O.)
Hunter 1, you are loud and clear.

Kirk swiftly unmoors his vessel, sits back down at the helm, and continues on the radio:

KIRK
Moving out to sector 31, over.

DISPATCH
Roger that.

Kirk revs up his engine, picking up speed. The sun is barely visible through the clouds.

Bundling up he pops up the collar of his jacket. Beyond the harbor, waves swell and crash against the bow, scattering splashes in all directions.

Kirk gazes ahead at a distant coastline across the water. With the exception of a narrow pebble strip near the water, stands on a mound, behind which forested hills begin.

As he nears the shoreline, tall pines and deciduous trees come into view. About a quarter of a mile to his right, a lone small rowboat is making its way in the opposite direction towards town.

KIRK

Who in their right mind would
navigate so far in this weather?
Only an old crazy man, like me.

Kirk chuckles to himself and peers through his binoculars.

IN THE EYEPiece: is a YOUNG, SLENDER WOMAN MARTHA, around 18, with LONG BRUNETTE HAIR. Her lightly dressed figure is seemingly unprepared for the chilly late autumn weather.

KIRK (CONT'D)

Is she out of her mind? Does she
have a death wish? Out here in this
weather.

Shaking his head, Kirk focuses on the approaching shore. He steers his boat towards a small natural lagoon. His attention is drawn to TWO FISHING BOATS.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEAVER LAGOON - SHORELINE - DAY

The prow of Kirk's boat is wedged on a shore bank. Two other fishing boats, tethered to a dried tree stump, sway in the shallow waters along the rocky beach. With his backpack and rifle Kirk steps out onto the shore.

He walks up to the moored boats, removes the tarp, sniffing and rummaging around. Both boats are empty.

EXT. BEAVER LAGOON - FIRE PIT - CONTINUOUS

FOUR MEN sitting by the fire watch Kirk closely with disdain. The youngest of them, JOHN, 35, a fair-haired, short, stocky man with an angular face clenches his enormously big fists saying:

JOHN

This arrogant old asshole thinks he
can fumble around anywhere without
no good reason?

He jumps up, ready to run and throw himself into the fray when an older man, MATHEW, 50, strongly grips and holds John's arm.

MATHEW

Knock it off, son and sit the fuck down. Can't teach old dog new tricks.

John's face turns red with anger and impotence, but he submits to Mathew's brute force and goes back to his place on the thick log.

EXT. BEAVER LAGOON - SHORE LINE - CONTINUOUS

Within easy reach, a FIRE SMOKE rises into the air. Kirk catches the delicious smell of fish and spices. He walks towards the fire, approaching four men with a heavy, audacious stride.

EXT. BEAVER LAGOON - FIRE PIT - CONTINUOUS

Kirk looks everyone in the eye, asking:

KIRK

What's cooking, boys?

All four men, looking uncomfortably, silently stare at him. A small, puny man, PAUL, 48 - 50, with tousled thinning hair, gets up from his seat with a meek smile.

PAUL

Fish soup, warden. You want some? We're glad to share.

Paul grabs an aluminum bowl and holds it out to Kirk. Ignoring the bowl, Kirk asks:

KIRK

What kind of fish is in it?

Paul looks inquiringly at his neighbor, aged 65 - 67, DON, with long grey hair tied in a ponytail at the back of his head.

DON

What grabs a hook, swims in the pot.

KIRK

You're in charge here, right?

DON
Well, I am, so what?

KIRK
Don't give me the "what grabs the hook" bullshit, Don. You've known how to catch the fish you want for sixty years.

Kirk takes a stick and tucks the lid under the handle to open the pot. The lid drops onto the ground. Aromatic smoke bursts out of the pot, causing everyone salivate. Kirk visually examines the soup contents.

KIRK (CONT'D)
Salmon and whitefish.

DON
(irritated)
Like I said, whatever got on the hook... We were hungry.

Kirk takes a clipboard with fine tickets from his backpack and, standing in front of the seated men, fills it out, and hands it to Don.

KIRK
Sign here.

Don stares at the ticket then reluctantly signs it and forcefully sticks the clipboard back into Kirk's hands. Ignoring Don's attitude, Kirk hands him a copy.

DON
Damn you, Kirk. It's probably the highlight of your career to issue a fine for three fishes.

Kirk remains unperturbed, pretending he doesn't hear Don's cursing and confidently tucks the clip board back into his backpack.

KIRK
Not a season for catching salmon.

DON
Go fuck yourself. We got a right to eat.

KIRK
The audacity to break the law and be pissed off when cited.
(MORE)

KIRK (CONT'D)

Just so you know, you didn't insult me, you cursed the law and that will count in court too.

Sitting on the log John sharpens the tip of a thick branch. Without getting up, he throws the stick to the ground and points his knife at Kirk, saying:

JOHN

You think you're the law, but you're actually one sick bastard.

John stares at Kirk with a challenging look. Kirk casts a short vicious glance at John, subconsciously grabbing the butt of his rifle.

KIRK

Want to join your brother in the slammer?

After an intense pause, John forces a wicked smile, slowly hiding the knife in his pocket.

JOHN

No problem, you got it, Warden.

Angry at John's outburst, Kirk continues:

KIRK

It's not a season for eating this fish either.

He resolutely steps towards the fire pit and kicks the pot with his boot. Caught in surprise, men jump to the sides, afraid of getting scalded. The soup spills over the fire, making a HISSING NOISE.

A CLOUD OF WHITE STEAM rises into the air. A few fishes sizzle in the fading flames.

The pot rolls between the boulders down to the shore loosing another fish on its way. Kirk turns and, having adjusted the rifle on his shoulder, silently wends his way back to the boat.

Behind Kirk, John's face suddenly twists into a brutal grimace. He jumps up, grabs an oar and in a leap, catching up with Kirk, hits him on the back of his head. Kirk drops to the ground unconscious.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. BEAVER LAGOON - SHORELINE - LATER

Black screen slowly fades into a grey washed up and unclear water line. Gradually, there is a growing SOFT SOUND of the surf. Kirk lifts his head with an effort and stares at the water. Then pulls himself up into a sitting position.

He cautiously touches the back of his head then looks at his palm. There's a bit of blood on it. Kirk pulls out his handkerchief, crawls towards the water and moistening the handkerchief, applies it to the wound, hissing in pain.

KIRK

Ouch! Damn!

A familiar voice comes from the fire pit area.

FAMILIAR VOICE (O.S.)

That's right. You're DAMN lucky they didn't kill you.

Kirk stands up unsteadily and sways around as he looks at the blurry fire pit area.

The picture slowly comes into focus, and there sits an AMERICAN INDIAN MAN, known as JACK SHARP-SIGHTED OWL, in his late 50-s, dark skinned, round faced with deep folds on his cheeks, long grey hair woven into two braides on the sides.

Jack sits on the log by the smoldering fire, hugging his hunting rifle, puffing his bent pipe. Jack's shapeless beaver hat looks funny on him especially in combination with his tribal RANGER BADGE.

Kirk looks around, picks up his hat, backpack and rifle and wobbles towards the log. He checks time on his watch to find out that his watch face is smashed.

EXT. BEAVER LAGOON - FIRE PIT - DAY

He sits down next to Jack and takes out a cigarette. Jack gives him light and Kirk takes a deep drag on it. Jack pulls a small flask out of his pocket.

JACK

Here, drink some, but not too much.

Kirk looks at the flask in disbelief.

KIRK

What is it?

JACK
Medicine. Will give you energy.
Drink. You'll need it tonight.

Kirk takes a sip, twists his face, shudders.

KIRK
Ouph, it's bitter!

JACK
You thought I would give you a fire-
water?

Jack puts the flask back into his pocket. They sit in silence for a while smoking, gazing at the bay.

KIRK
What's tonight?

JACK
Looks like you're walking around
the bay.

KIRK
What?

JACK
Your boat is gone.

Kirk looks at the shoreline. It's empty. He nervously reaches for his binoculars in the backpack and examines the bay.

THROUGH BINOCULARS: Double eyepiece slides over empty waters, no boats in sight.

KIRK
Fucking scoundrels! They'll pay for
it. At least, one of them will go
to jail.

Jack is confused.

JACK
Who they? Wanna tell me what
happened?

Kirk looks thoughtfully into Jack's eyes.

KIRK
Are you trying to say you didn't
see anything?

Jack bursts with indignation.

JACK
Are you suspecting me of something?
Shame on you. Not trusting an
Indian man is a sin.

KIRK
No. I just thought that maybe...

JACK
(cutting Kirk short)
You can't help it, can you? Always
suspicious of anybody who is
around. No wonder, people don't
like you.

KIRK
To be liked by others is not the
fringe benefits in my line of work.
They are just waiting for me to
falter and turn away. Then they
will immediately pilfer the
national treasures into their
holes.

JACK
See? To you, everybody is guilty
until proven otherwise, even your
fellow officers. How can you live
like this? Why do you hate people?

KIRK
The law is the law and right is
right.

Jack waves his hand in frustration. A uneasy pause hangs in
the air.

JACK
(pensively)
Probably there was no need to
destroy their food. They worked
hard for it.

KIRK
I was upholding the law.

JACK
(getting irritated)
Whose law?

Jack questioningly stares at Kirk waiting for
acknowledgement, but Kirk responds with a stubborn question:

KIRK
Then, what laws do you live by?

JACK
Here, in the wild, the laws of nature and survival come first along with common sense.

Kirk looks tired, depressed and hopeless. He checks the time on his watch having forgotten that it is broken.

KIRK
Shit!
(beat)
Could I borrow your boat till tomorrow?

JACK
I don't have one.

KIRK
I've seen you sailing in a boat to town.

JACK
It belongs to the tribe. Two hours walk from here.

KIRK
Can we go there now?

Jack stands up, shouldering his duffel bag and hunting rifle.

JACK
We can't. It will be dark in an hour. Looks like you'll be sleeping in my barn tonight. Follow me.

Jack walks energetically down the path without looking back. Kirk gets up hesitantly, catches up with Jack and trails behind.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORREST - JACK'S HOUSE - EVENING

Ascending the hillside path, Jack and Kirk traverse the forest, arriving at a modest clearing. As evening descends, the subtle outlines of a log house enclosed by a wooden fence come into view.

Adjacent to it, stands a rustic barn, weathered planks bearing the marks of time.

JACK
I'll be right back.

He disappears behind the door of the house. Outside the barn, Kirk trembling slightly from the chill and weariness, waits patiently. The sound of OF A HORSE SNORTING comes from within.

Jack reemerges, shouldering two deerskins and carrying a stuffed sack. Accompanying him is KYLE, a fourteen-year old boy, holding a kerosene lamp.

JACK (CONT'D)
Come in.

INT. JACK'S BARN - NIGHT

The three men walk into the barn. Inside, a lamp casts a warm glow across the spacious room with a high ceiling. In the far right corner, a single horse stall comes into view. Jack strides towards it to feed the horse.

On the far left, a chicken coop stands. The middle of the back wall is stacked with hay. Adjacent to it, is a goat paddock. The left wall displays an array of agricultural and carpentry tools. On the side, there is a cast-iron stove.

Kyle sets the lantern on the floor. A wide stump near the trestle bed serves as a table. Jack tosses the skins and sack onto the bed. Kirk places his belongings next to it.

JACK
Son, meet warden Kirk.

Kyle looks at Kirk from beneath his brow.

KYLE
Call me Lone Wolf.

Kyle refrains from offering a handshake, hiding his right hand behind his back. A mixed feeling of surprise and rejection cross Kirk's face. Nevertheless, Kirk utters.

KIRK
Warden Lecroix or, simply, Kirk.

Kyle nods, swiftly tending to the stove. The fire flares up and dances inside the furnace, casting peculiar shapes on the floor and wall.

JACK
Go make your bed. I'll be back shortly.

Jack and Kyle walk out of the barn.

INT. JACK'S BARN - CONTINUOUS

Jack returns with a cast iron pot and bowls. His WIFE, 50, a slender dark haired woman, in a homespun dress, adorned with embroidered patterns and a hare skin vest, brings dining accessories.

She nods in greeting to Kirk, and heads back to the house. Jack serves bean stew with meat into the bowls, and takes a bottle of clear liquid out of his pocket. Kirk watches Jack filling up the glasses.

KIRK
(teasing)
Fire water?

Jack shoots a sly glance at Kirk.

JACK
Oh, sure, only "pale faced"
Americans would generously provide
firewater to Indians. This, my
friend, is the epitome of pure
Homemade Moonshine.

They share a laugh.

KIRK
Kyle doesn't strike me a very
talkative kid.

JACK
Indians hold strong superstitions.
They say, a white man in an Indian
house is not a good omen.

KIRK
Why invite me then?

JACK
My common sense told me that if I
didn't, you might freeze to death.

They eat in silence.

KIRK
Thanks, Jack.

Kirk struggles to voice his gratitude, almost choking on the words. His eyes reveal a quest to recall the last time he genuinely expressed it.

JACK

Rest. Tomorrow, I wake you at dawn.

Jack walks out of the barn. Kirk throws a few logs into the fire, settles down, covers himself with deer skin, and gradually slips into sleep, softly muttering to himself:

KIRK

Where did the Injun get two deer skins? I should check him out.

A contented horse in the stall snorts in the dark.

EXT. BEAVER LAGOON - EARLY MORNING

Kirk and Jack reach at the lagoon. Jack settles on a log, lighting his pipe, glancing at the sky. Meanwhile, Kirk climbs a boulder and surveys the bay through his binoculars. The cove stretches empty as far as the eye can see.

The sea in the bay is rough. White crests on the waves indicate that the storm is at least four points.

KIRK

Dammit! Can you take me to the tribal Chief? I want to ask for a boat?

JACK

I can't do that. It's a futile effort, he won't give it to you. A tribal boat is reserved only for communal needs of the tribe.

Jack stares at the stormy bay.

KIRK

Is it that he won't give it, or you just don't want to ask?

JACK

We Indians may appear like barbarians to you, but we have our own ethics. Trust me, he won't. It's a waste of time. Besides, the storm is getting stronger. You'd better head out if you wanna get there before dark. It's almost a ten-hour walk to the hunting hut.

They exchange a lingering look. Disappointment is etched across Kirk's face. Kirk walks away, and Jack trails him with a gaze filled with pity and concern.

JACK (CONT'D)
 Wait. I almost forgot.

From his bag, Jack pulls out a bundle and offers to Kirk.

KIRK
 What is it?

JACK
 Some food to go. You'll need it.

KIRK
 Thanks.

Kirk forces a smile and continues on his path.

FADE TO:

EXT. BOOTHBAY - HUNTERS' HUT - EARLY MORNING

A flame burns brightly in a stone-built pit. Martha, a fatigued young woman with dark, matted hair, sits on a wooden bed covered by an old, thin blanket. Shivering slightly, she clutches a Bible, uttering prayers aloud.

MARTHA
 Dear Lord, in humble reverence, I
 come before you, laying bare my
 sins. I admit to choosing the path
 of wrongdoing, falling short in
 doing good. I recognize my
 transgressions against You, whom I
 should love above all things.
 Bestow upon me the strength to
 evolve into a better woman. Amen.

Gently placing the Bible beside her, Martha bows her head, shielding her face with her hands, finding a moment of stillness. Regaining composure, she lifts her gaze, unbuttons her blouse, and softly massages her breasts.

Reaching for a carefully wrapped bundle, she reveals a FACE OF A BABY GIRL. With deep affection and tenderness, Martha cradles and nurses the infant. Tears stream down her face as she beholds the baby's unspoiled innocence.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
 My sweet love, I can't take you
 with me, but I'll be back for you
 in two hours. Just a short visit to
 my mom, and I'll return.

Martha swiftly puts on her sweater, layering it with a jacket. She steals one last glance at her baby as she departs.

EXT. BAY SHORE - MORNING

Martha quickly gets on the boat, using an oar she propels it away from the shore. The waters, turbulent in the pre-storm unrest, surge beneath her vessel.

MARTHA

Lord, help me to reach my
destination unharmed so I may
quickly return to my baby.

Tears well up in Martha's eyes again. She stops paddling, covering her face with her hands. The boat turns and water violently crashes against the side dousing Martha from head to toe.

Struggling to stay upright, Martha grabs the oars and resumes rowing with fierce determination.

FADE OUT:

EXT. BOOTHBAY HARBOR - PIER - LATE MORNING

Marta rows with all her might. Her hands tire, and she rubs them against her knees. The pier is already within reach when the sky darkens, and the waters begin to churn more violently in anticipation of the coming storm.

In a stroke of luck, Martha reaches the shore. After securing her boat she anxiously glances at the darkening sky and hurries towards her mother's house.

INT. MARTHA MOTHER'S HOUSE - DAY

Martha storms into the house and enters her mother's bedroom. A SLENDER, middle-aged WOMAN lies in bed LIFELESS, her eyes closed. Her face is frozen with an expression of unbearable pain.

MARTHA

Mama? Mom? I got the medicine.
Please say something. I need you,
Mama. Wake up!
(beat)
This can't be happening.

She gently takes her mother's hand and presses it to her cheek.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
I'm so sorry I'm late.

Suddenly, heart-wrenching sobs rip out of her chest, echoing through the walls of the house. But a quick realization that she may now lose her baby too, has Martha jumping up and rushing headlong out of the house.

EXT. BOOTHBAY HARBOR - PIER - DAY

The water in the bay is stormy and turbulent. A sudden gusty wind from the Atlantic throws moored boats around, smashing them against the pier. Martha struggles to get into her boat, but waves make it impossible.

The waters in the bay toss her boat to the very edge of the pier, only to plunge it deep beneath. With a frantic gaze, Martha runs back and forth along the pier, desperately searching for a way to get back to her baby.

Martha's eyes lock on a grey-haired MAN, BOB, 55, who is actively rummaging through the control room of his trawler.

MARTHA
Hey there! Excuse me, sir!
Please, help me! I need help,
please!

Bob comes out of the control room and inviting Martha to come on board, asks:

BOB
How can I help you, sister?

MARTHA
Could you take me to the opposite
bank? It's an emergency.

BOB
What kind of emergency?

MARTHA
My infant is at the opposite bank
alone.

Bob is momentarily taken aback by that statement. A pause hangs in the air as Bob contemplates the sanity of Martha's request.

BOB

No one in their right mind will sail in this weather lady. Unless you want to die, I'm sorry!

MARTHA

You've got a big sturdy boat. The storm ain't a problem for her. Please.

(beat)

I'll pay whatever money you want.

BOB

Every local knows that a big boat can't come closer than three hundred feet to that bank. What are you gonna do, swim?...

Marta, realizing the storm won't allow her passage, lowers her head in defeat. Tears streaming, she steps off the boat drowning in helplessness. She wanders along the pier consumed by the weight of her desperate situation.

EXT. BOOTHBAY - GENERAL VIEW - EARLY MORNING

From a bird's eye view, the forest forms a seamless green tapestry that envelops the bay, reaching beyond the mountains. Ribbons of streams and narrow rivers weave through the landscape.

The mainland of the bay features occasional lagoons, adding to its scenic charm. Notorious for its swamps, this forest has been the final frontier for quite a few prospectors and hunters.

EXT. BOOTHBAY - SHORELINE - EARLY MORNING

From a high vintage point, a moving figure comes into focus - Kirk. Initiating with brisk strides, Kirk progressively slows down as he strolls along the shore.

The sun sporadically breaks through the thickening clouds, eventually disappearing entirely. Kirk gazes skyward, expressing concern, and hastens his pace.

KIRK (V.O.)

(thinking)

Damn Injun. What a cunning dog. He thinks he's got his ETHICS... I'll find a chance, put salt on your tail, you old fox...

(MORE)

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

Settled into a state-owned house, converting it to a farm, and not without a sin. He's snagging salmon, relishing caviar, poaching deer in the off season... One of these days, I'll catch you by the sleeve and pen a proper report. Then, off to the district executive committee you go. Did you think I missed the apiary tucked behind the barn at the end of your lot?...

Kirk, wrapped up in his thoughts, doesn't notice that the coastal path ends and turns into the forest. He trips over a rock and ends up ankle-deep in water.

KIRK

Dammit!

Turning towards the forest, Kirk follows the path. The woods, shadowed and dark before the first frost, appear like an abyss. Absorbed in his thoughts, Kirk continues his journey.

KIRK (CONT'D)

(murmuring)

People don't like me, because I am who I am - an equitable officer. And what's Jack's problem? I haven't done anything bad to him... That look on his face, "If you don't disappear, it's okay, if you do disappear in a dense thicket, it's not a pity either, but I won't ask for a boat for you." Bastard.

Sometimes the path squeezes into a thicket of spruce - it is damp, dark and deaf, like in a dungeon. Kirk stops and checks around to make sure he's headed in the right direction.

The spruce forest and moss hollows end. The pine forest begins. Even at this time of tedious dampness, colorlessness and dusk, the pine forest retains its solemnity. Kirk drives himself to get to the hunters' hut before dark.

Uncomplicatedly winding, moving the sedge, a twenty foot wide stream flows to the bay. Kirk walks up the stream towards the thicket and away from the bay.

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

(thinking)

According to Jack, there must be a bridge somewhere close.

It's getting darker in the forest. Greyness envelops the thicket. Patches of sky, barely visible behind the high crowns of trees, give way to a bridge. Kirk gleefully quickens his pace. However, his joy turns into annoyance.

The banks washed out by autumn rains slid into the river, pulling down a tall tree that has fallen onto the old wooden bridge and it has collapsed into the raging stream below. Kirk walks briskly on along the stream and breaks into a run.

EXT. FOREST - DUSK - LATER

Kirk stops, breathing heavily.

KIRK
Finally! Must have been about two miles.

Two thick pine logs are thrown across the stream. Kirk carefully crosses to the opposite bank, holding onto the rough branches sticking out of the log. Now Kirk is walking downstream, his only landmark back towards the bay.

There's a path along the shore. Kirk walks down it, peering out into the falling darkness.

KIRK (CONT'D)
It shouldn't be far from here.

He picks up his pace.

FADE TO:

EXT. FOREST - EVENING - LATER

Not far from the bay shore, there is a hut with a shed roof. Kirk spots the broken path and the log wall. He fumbles for the door, pushes it, and the stench of grime stinks like a bathhouse.

INT. HUNTERS' HUT - NIGHT

Kirk strikes a match, illuminating neatly stacked firewood, a stone fire pit and a small table. Dim embers from recent fire faintly glow. The match goes out, burning Kirk's fingers, causing him to drop his backpack on the table.

Suddenly, a WHIMPER-LIKE SOUND echoes from somewhere within, evolving into a quiet, STIFLED CRY. Kirk startles in surprise, grabbing his rifle and stepping back towards the door.

KIRK
Who's there?

With no response, Kirk ignites another match, bringing it to a small pile of wood chips, placing a few thicker pieces on top. Listening closely, he traces the sound to a bundle, wrapped in a grey blanket, on the trestle bed.

Kirk approaches, lighting another match. Close-up on the bundle, reveals the FACE OF A BABY, causing Kirk to freeze.

KIRK (CONT'D)
What the hell? Who would leave a baby alone in the wilderness? Where are your parents, Kiddo? Looks like they left a while ago.

The match burns his finger again. He drops it with a hiss of pain and hurries out of the hut.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Kirk peers into the darkness, turning in all directions, searching for signs of the infant's parents.

KIRK
Hey! Hey! Is anyone out there?

He waits for a few moments, listening. The forest responds with a gentle gust of wind.

KIRK (CONT'D)
That's weird. They should be somewhere around.

INT. HUNTERS' HUT - CONTINUED

Kirk enters the hut, firmly closing the door behind him. The Baby's cries grow louder. Kirk hastily adds wood to the fire and, after a moment's hesitation, unrolls the bundle.

KIRK
Oh, you're a girl.

A small wooden cross on a cord around the Baby's neck catches his eye. The diaper underneath her is soaking wet. Grimacing with disgust, Kirk awkwardly removes it.

KIRK (CONT'D)
I shouldn't be doing this. That's your mother's job. Where the hell is she anyway?

Kirk looks lost for a moment.

Beside the infant lie a few baby blankets and some clean rags, along with an old Bible. Kirk rips the blanket into a few sheets, arranging one of them into a diaper.

He clumsily swaddles the Baby sniveling:

KIRK (CONT'D)
I'm really frustrated with your
mother. I don't think I can handle
this.

The Baby continues crying. Kirk warms up some water, gets a piece of bread and dips it in. Wrapping soaked bread in a damp cloth, he creates a pacifier dummy.

KIRK (CONT'D)
I can't believe this is happening
to me.

He delicately places the pacifier into the Baby's mouth, watching intently. The infant stops crying, preoccupied with sucking the pacifier. Kirk exhales deeply and steps outside again.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Kirk stops twenty feet away from the hut. Slowly looking around, he peers into the darkness, listening.

KIRK
Hey! Is anyone out there? Hey!
(beat)
Answer me, dammit!

INT. HUNTERS' HUT - NIGHT

Kirk wearily enters the hut, and slumps into a chair. He sits motionless for a while, staring into space with horror on his face. Finally, he snaps out of his shock.

KIRK (V.O.)
Two parents wouldn't leave their
baby. Must be the mother. Calm
down, Kirk. She will show up soon,
but in the meantime it is what it
is.

He sets the aluminum mug on the fire to boil some tea for himself. Only now does he realize the hunger gnawing at him. Kirk grabs a sandwich from his backpack and devours it.

FADE TO BLACK:

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - ROOM - NIGHT.

Jack puts on a deerskin jacket, fastening a wide belt around his waist. He packs his bag with paraphernalia for ritual. Kyle enters the room, curious.

KYLE

Papa, where are you going?

Jack, adjusting his owl hat, responds:

JACK

I need to pray for our new friend Kirk. He is an unfortunate man. I want to help him.

KYLE

Take me with you?

Jack carefully looks into his son's eyes, as if considering what to answer.

JACK

Okay, dress warm.

At the door, Jack turns around, casting a glance at Kyle, as if ensuring his son is in the mood for prayer.

EXT. JACK'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - FIRE - NIGHT

The fire crackles peacefully in the backyard. Jack throws a handful of pebbles into a tambourine nearby. He is the essence of a true Indian man, known as Sharp-Sighted Owl.

His face adorned with painted stripes, a homage to age-old tribal traditions. Jack is playing the jaw harp which reflects a deep connection to cultural rituals.

The metallic vibrating sound of the music stirs the trees nearby, their thin branches trembling to the beat of a bizarre melody. As the frozen autumn nature wakes up, SNOWFLAKES BEGIN SWIRLING in the air.

Jack sits in front of the fire, his gaze lost in a distance, A primal sound emanates from his mouth, transitioning into indigenous singing.

INTERCUT:

INT. HUNTERS' HUT - NIGHT

Kirk takes his time with the sandwich and tea while the baby is sound asleep. Abruptly, Kirk chokes and starts coughing, covering his mouth with his sleeve. Suddenly, the surrounding walls of the hut seem to twist and shift around him.

A surge of heat induces BEADS OF SWEAT on his forehead. Setting the half-full mug aside, Kirk staggers out of the hut.

INTERCUT:

EXT. JACK'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - FIRE - NIGHT

Initially steady, the hum intensifies, adopting tones of menace. Jack's body sways back and forth to the tone of the sound.

Persisting with his melodic chant, Jack clutches pebbles in his hands, setting off a rhythmic shake that resonates with the entrancing sound. He takes a tambourine and begins to move measuredly around the fire.

His movement gradually accelerates, evolving into a dance. Jack shakes the tambourine and strikes it from time to time. The dance is getting wilder. Jack goes into a trance. The fire blazes brightly with powerful flames.

INTERCUT:

EXT. FOREST - HUNTER'S HUT - NIGHT

Leaning against a tree, Kirk wipes off his sweat. The world around him slightly resumes its normal shape. Kirk lights a cigarette.

KIRK

Darn it! What the hell was that? Am
I getting sick?

He takes a few deep breaths. At this moment his head gets clouded again.

CUT TO:

INT. HUNTERS' HUT - NIGHT

In a haze, Kirk finds himself back in the hut, his head is still foggy. Laying down next to the Baby he falls asleep.

INTERCUT:

EXT. JACK'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - FIRE - NIGHT

Kyle is captivated by Jack's mesmerizing indigenous ritual. Dancing around the fire, he enters into a trance. His vision begins to blur. Trees spin and dance around him. Finally with the last remnants of his energy Jack plops to the ground.

He lowers his head, closing his eyes.

BLACK SCREEN. A DISTANT WOLF HOWL IS HEARD.

BACK TO SCENE:

EXT. JACK'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - FIRE - SAME TIME

Jack sits by the fire, weakly shaking the pebbles. He casts them into his tambourine - a shamanic ritual for divination.

The pebbles arrange themselves in a pattern: five in a circle and two in the center. Jack lights his pipe, gaze fixed on the flickering flame.

KYLE

Father, take me with you. I'm grown now.

JACK

How did you know that I'd be leaving?

KYLE

I heard wolves' howl.

JACK

Did you?

He proudly gazes into his son's eyes. Thick snowflakes swirl around them.

FADE TO:

INT. HUNTERS' HUT - EARLY MORNING

Soft morning light gently pierces through the thin opening of the window. Kirk wakes up, wrapped in a blanket and stares at the dark, sooty ceiling, shivering slightly from the cold.

KIRK (V.O.)
(thinking)
What a dream. Was it?

Kirk jumps up in bed. The Baby tosses quietly nearby. Kirk hastily adds more logs to the still glowing fire. The Baby begins crying. The cry quickly elevates to a shrill. Kirk turns, staring at the bed.

KIRK
Oh, my God! It's real.

He covers his face with his hands for a moment and turns to the baby.

KIRK (CONT'D)
(angrily)
Your mother never showed up. Why didn't she strangle you? Now I have to baby-sit you! Shush if you don't want me to feed you to wild animals.

Seized by a sudden fit of helpless rage, stumbling over his rifle that is leaned against the wall, Kirk kicks the door open. He is immediately blinded by a brilliant whiteness.

EXT. FOREST - EARLY MORNING

Yesterday beggarly dark earth, now is dazzlingly white and festive.

Young aspens, seem to dance on the undisturbed snow. Their logs appear more yellow than yesterday, as if warm to the touch. And from a distance, at the end of the clearing, a spruce forest frowns.

The forest that Kirk has to go through. Kirk runs to a narrow creek, falling into the snowdrifts and refills his flask. Even faster, shivering from the cold, he runs back.

INT. HUNTERS' HUT - CONTINUOUS

Kirk holds out his arms for warmth. The crying of the Baby brings him back to a gloomy reality. He pours some water into a mug and puts it on the fire.

Dipping the bread wrapped in a rag, he carefully puts it into the baby's mouth. The baby is silent for a few moments and starts crying again, spitting out the pacifier.

KIRK

Jesus, what else do you want?

Kirk unswaddles the Baby. The diaper is completely wet and cool. He tears off a piece of a dry cloth, makes it a diaper and puts it on the baby. The crying stops. The water boils in the mug.

Kirk makes tea, unwraps the rest of the sandwich, and eats hungrily, drinking his steaming tea in small sips.

KIRK (CONT'D)

Through the woods with a Baby. The path isn't short and it's rough as hell. Can't run through that bush with a baby in my arms, can't sling her in a bag either. In the long run, who is she to me - just a mere sprite driven by a bad wind. The forest is not a cradle, and I am not a nurse, she could die here or on the road. What's the point in messing around then? If she dies in my arms, and then I take a burden for the sin of some lack hearted mother? What if I get lost, spin through the forest ...

(beat)

The hell with it. I'm leaving alone.

The Baby has a strained red face. Tiny eyelids are closed, lips are drawn out. Wetting a new pacifier, Kirk touches it to her small lips. They eagerly accept the rag without opening her eyes. Kirk breathes a sigh of relief.

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

(thinking)

A nipple made of a chewed bread that'll stall death maybe two, three hours, maybe a day if she doesn't freeze to death first. Maybe not to leave the pacifier in her mouth at all?

(beat)

Some damn thing needs to be done. I'll be damned if I take the blame.

Kirk sticks the pacifier into the baby's mouth, stands up resolutely, stuffs the mug, leftover food and the Bible into his backpack, and puts on his jacket.

KIRK (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Baby, but our paths part here.

He hangs his backpack on his shoulder, takes his rifle and, without looking back, leaves the hut.

EXT. FOREST - LATE MORNING

A hot-black creek tightly twists around the dense thicket of fir-trees and willow bushes. Kirk, laying the first tracks, hurriedly goes to the forest as though diving into it will help him forget everything.

Kirk enters the forest, but peace does not come. With every step, anxiety grows.

KIRK

Shit! I didn't plug the windows with hay - in half an hour the hut will be as cold as the open air.

A slight chill runs through Kirk's back. Yesterday's, dark and desolate, forest is dressed up in festive white. In the dark gaps between the logs there is an intricate lace of snow-covered branches.

KIRK (CONT'D)

(muttering)

What a scum - mother! I'll find her, take her to court. She'll be shamed... in front of people. And I'll find that bastard - father who probably knocked her up... Uh! Those animals deserve to swing by a rope.

Along the way, another creek appears. Kneeling down, Kirk scoops up water with his hands and drinks. His unshaven face, tormented by thoughts, is reflected in the creek, his tired eyes are full of inexplicable anxiety.

Kirk twitches like he's been scalded with boiling water.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

He slows down his pace.

KIRK

No mother, no father. Mother, at least, might have got her reasons. She must have been rather desperate to abandon her own child to die. But what's my excuse?

Kirk takes off, breaking through the thickets, rushing back along his trail. He runs, wheezing, gasping, hiding his eyes from the branches, swearing when the gun clings to a bough.

INT. HUNTERS' HUT - CONTINUOUS

In the hut, Kirk throws off his parka, padded jacket, tears off his long shirt and undershirt over his head, and with his outstretched arms, tries to figure out how to strip it more economically. He rips his undershirt into two pieces.

Half of the undershirt and rags on the bunk Kirk stuffs into his backpack. The baby makes some soft crying sounds.

BABY

Ugh, ugh. Waa, waa...

Kirk rushes towards the wooden bed. Baby stops crying as she looks up at him, eyes wide open. She, seems, to smile at him. Kirk carefully lifts her up.

KIRK

What? You thought I was gonna leave you? No, no here I am, here I am.

Now, when Kirk sees that the pacifier has fallen out of the baby's mouth onto the Baby's chin, he groans. And his groan is clumsy, like the whining of a hungry dog. Kirk wraps the Baby into his jacket and walks out the hut.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

From the black stream, his traces, already pressed in the snow, lead into the forest.

KIRK

We'll go back towards Jack's house - there is no closer human habitation.

Kirk walks through the bushes, his large footprints written in the snow. By noon the snow has partially melted.

EXT. BOOTHBAY HARBOR - TOWN - MORNING

In a small town like Booth Bay Harbor, no one is in a hurry. Life is boring and measured. Therefore, the attention of passers-by is riveted by a young thin woman in tweed pea coat who runs to the fishing docks, crying.

TWO MIDDLE AGED WOMEN at the fish market stare at her running.

WOMAN 1

Someone must have drowned again.

WOMAN 2

Most probably. Look, she's all in tears.

As soon as Martha is out of sight, the women return to their business as if she never existed.

EXT. HUNTERS' LAGOON - SHORELINE - EVENING

Martha rows with all her might. As soon as the boat beaches against the shore, she jumps out and runs into the forest to the Hunters' hut.

I/E. HUNTERS' HUT - CONTINUOUS

Martha breaks into the hut and rushes to the bunk. It's empty. She looks underneath then around. With a crazy look, she runs out.

MARTHA

Hey! Oh, dear God... Hey! Where is my baby? Give me my baby back! Hey! Where are you?

The forest stands silent in reply, exhausted by heavy, bad weather that hangs like a deathly pall. No answer, no echo. Dreadful emptiness.

Martha falls to her knees in the snow and cries. From the treetops and higher, her body gets smaller until it turns into a pitiful little dot.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Kirk can't adapt to bearing the baby, constantly shifting the precious burden from one arm to the other. Stumbling at a ravine's edge he nearly drops the bundle into the stream.

The Baby cries. Kirk seeks out a seat, where he can sit comfortably to "fashion" a new pacifier. He holds a piece of bread in his bosom, together with rags so that they do not get wet.

The girl throws out the pacifier, screaming thinly and hoarsely. Kirk swears in despair:

KIRK
God knows what you want!

In response, the baby cries even louder:

BABY
Waa, waa...

Kirk sits down on a stump and makes a new pacifier. He puts the bundle on his knees and, lowering his hands, shakes them in the air, giving them rest. Kirk then takes the Baby in his arms and lulls her to sleep.

Kirk's face looks tired and sleepy. He closes his eyes for a moment.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - DUSK

Kirk opens his eyes. The Baby peacefully sleeps on his lap.

KIRK
Oh, shit! Jackass! Doze off in this cold and never wake up.

He carefully puts the Baby on his parka . Frantically cuts the branches of a young spruce. The forest is dripping with moisture, clumsy brush against a branch is rewarded with a drenching of water, as if poured from a ladle.

Kirk shakes water off his jacket. He hastily makes a bed of young spruce branches for the Baby.

The forest floor is littered with fallen branches. Kirk quickly gathers and puts a supply of firewood at his head so that they are easy at hand.

He kindles two long fires. They slowly smolder to a flame, but when they flare up, the world outside the circle of light disappears in darkness - no fir trees, no sky propped up by thorny peaks, only a Baby wrapped in a blanket and Kirk.

On both sides the flames dance in careless gaiety.

Kirk takes the Baby in his arms and holds her to his chest. As he warms the baby with his breath, a soft, paternal smile unwittingly appears on his face. The baby starts whimpering and wriggling as if trying to get rid of her sheets.

Kirk sniffs the air and makes a face of distaste.

KIRK (CONT'D)
Faugh! You stinker!

He collects water from the stream, and puts his mug on the fire. As steam begins to rise, Kirk wraps his hand in his sleeve and removes the mug, touching the water with his finger.

Satisfied with the temperature, Kirk unrolls the blanket and the diapers. The diaper is stained with poop.

KIRK (CONT'D)
Jesus, the stench. No wonder, your
mother and father abandoned you.

Kirk rolls up and discards the dirty homemade diaper. He takes a clean rag and, moistening it with warm water wipes the Baby's bottom. Baby is screaming hysterically.

Kirk quickly wraps the Baby up. Pressing the small bundle to his chest, with one hand he wets a new pacifier and sticks to Baby's mouth. The Baby calms down.

Kirk drives four stakes in the hard soil and throws his parka over them, makeshift tent heated by fire on each side.

Satisfied with his invention, he heats up more water. Kirk rummages in his backpack. He greedily looks at a piece of smoked pork belly with bread and puts it in back the backpack.

For food Kirk takes a cracker and a few strips of beef jerky. He lights a cigarette and inhales deeply.

KIRK (V.O.)
(thinking)
What a joy to have a good smoke and
not hear this Baby pooper.

He lies, embracing the girl in a quilted jacket, pressing her to him. Sometimes, through the thick blanket, he feels her faint movement, a sign of life which has become the most important thing to him.

Kirk, fatefully thrown together with this infant condemned to death, feels an unfamiliar warmth of spirit tentatively entering what has been otherwise a life of cold, harsh isolation.

FLASHBACK:

INT. BOOTHBAY HARBOR - MUNICIPAL COURT - DAY

The courtroom is half full. The plaintiffs and defendants, dressed in suits, are scurrying back and forth across the hall.

Fourteen-year-old Kirk, still recovering from the death of his mother, sits on a bench next to his UNCLE, PHILLIP LECROIX, 42, PHIL for short, a fat man with a disgruntled, shiny, round face, and waits for his turn.

The JUDGE, a woman in her fifties, announces the decision:

JUDGE

It is the decision of this court that Kirk Lecroix's guardian shall be PHILLIP LECROIX, UNCLE of the ward...

INT. YOUNG KIRK'S HOUSE - DAY

Kirk enters the house and heads to his room on the second floor.

UNCLE PHIL

Where are you going? Forget about your room. It's gonna be my office. You will sleep in the living room in the corner.

Uncle Phil walks into Kirk's room and immediately returns with the boy's mattress and leaves it on the stairs.

KIRK

I don't want to sleep in a walk-through room. I want - mine.

Uncle Phil comes down to Kirk and gives him a resounding slap in the face.

UNCLE PHIL
Bring your belongings and books
into that corner.

BACK TO SCENE:

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Kirk looks dazed. His eyelids closing involuntarily as if they are made of lead. He quietly lies under his parka, gently nesting himself closer to a small warm breathing bundle of joy, as he falls asleep...

Baby's cries jolt him awake. Kirk reluctantly opens his eyes.

He crawls out from under his parka and walks to the stream to get water. Kirk adds fresh wood into the fire, puts the mug on top, and immediately tenses up. His hand reaches for the rifle, subconsciously cocking the bolt.

A primal, frightening feeling of the presence of evil tingles his senses. From the thicket comes more than one hoarse breathing. Stepping over the fire and crouching with his back to it, Kirk peers into the darkness.

Several pairs of luminous eyes are clearly visible in the dark. They watch Kirk motionlessly, as if hypnotizing him. Intuitively, he catches a sudden movement from the corner of his eye.

He instantly turns and fires into the darkness. From there, the body of a wolf appears mid leap and whining, as it falls dead on the snow. Still in motion, the carcass slides across the snow and nuzzles Kirk's boot.

He barely has time to turn around when four other wolves emerge from the darkness, circling him. Leaping back behind the fire, Kirk pulls the trigger twice and misses. The wolves are ready to lunge, but TWO SHOTS startle them for a moment.

In a wild gamble, Kirk takes aim and fires again. Another wolf, howling, falls into the snow and writhes in pain. The remaining members of the pack run away and dissolve into the darkness of the night.

Only now Kirk and the entire forest hears the Baby's hysterical crying.

Ignoring the Baby's tantrum, Kirk cautiously approaches the animal. The wolf is no longer writhing. He whines piteously as he looks at Kirk. Their eyes meet.

CLOSE-UP: the eyes of the wolf fixate on Kirk, revealing a profound sense of loneliness and despair.

Kirk draws his weapon, takes aim, but freezes as he realizes that he cannot shoot this defenseless beast that has lost in a worthy fight.

He stands motionless, his gaze locked with the eyes of the beast as the last faint glimmer of life fades away.

KIRK

Sorry fella, I realize you're just as lonely and pitiful as me.

A PICTURE OF A LYING AND DYING WOLF FLASHBACKS TO:

INT. YOUNG KIRK'S HOUSE - BARN - DAY

YOUNG KIRK, 15, pale-faced, huddled in the spilled hay, clutching his stomach. Entering the barn is his uncle Phil.

UNCLE PHIL

Why are you lying there? I said wash the horse.

Young Kirk lies writhing in pain.

KIRK

I have a stomach ache.

UNCLE PHIL

Growing up and learning to come up with excuses? I'll teach you a lesson now that you won't forget.

He removes his belt and whips Kirk across the torso. Young Kirk yelps and spins where he lies, hoping to dodge the blow.

KIRK

Don't hit me, please. Call the doctor.

The second blow with the belt lands again across Kirk's torso. Kirk faints from pain.

END FLASHBACK

CUT TO BLACK

EXT. FOREST - FIRE - NIGHT

Kirk hurries over to the Baby. Unfolds blanket and diaper. The Baby's bottom is scarlet red. Kirk digs through his backpack and pulls out a treasured piece of pork belly.

Having chewed a piece, spreads it on reddened areas. He makes a fresh pacifier. After Baby calms down, Kirk puts a new clip in his rifle and peers into the darkness, listening.

Apart from the occasional swaying of the tops of the pines, there are no other signs of life around.

KIRK (V.O.)

(thinks)

Old-timers say the pack does not abandon its own. But they won't come back as long as they sense I'm here. So, no need to worry, for now. For now... Then wolves wait and watch to take revenge. They definitely will. But when? Would be nice to know. So... we've got to get across the stream, to be safe... One way or another, it's better to get to Jack's house by tomorrow evening.

Kirk puts more wood on the fires, constructs himself a seat and settles down with his rifle between his knees, lighting a cigarette.

After the fight with the wolves, Kirk is exhausted. He feels sleepy and his heavy eyelids close on their own. His head falls to his chest, but Kirk immediately shakes himself and wakes up.

KIRK

(murmuring)

Just don't sleep. Don't sleep in the cold.

Kirk struggles to his feet, numb from cold. Propping his rifle on his backpack, squats and flails his arms to bring sensation back. Rubbing his face with snow, he refreshes himself.

KIRK (CONT'D)

I'm hungry.

Kirk catches himself casting glances at the dead wolf from time to time, or rather at the wolf's hind leg.

KIRK (V.O.)
 How about cutting off the back leg
 and roasting it at the stake?
 Probably there were hunters who did
 that.

Kirk hesitantly approaches the wolf, pulls out his hunting knife and tries on the best way to cut a piece. Slight nausea comes up to his throat. Still in indecision Kirk slowly hides his knife in its sheath.

KIRK (V.O.)
 I can't. I'm not a scavenger.

He goes back to his seat, takes out a coveted piece of smoked pork belly from his backpack, cuts off a small piece from it hiding the rest. He eats slowly, stretching out the pleasure, recalling:

FLASHBACK:

I/E. YOUNG KIRK HOUSE - BARN - WINTER - DAY

Kirk peeks through the crack into the barn and sees his uncle and two other men skinning a doe.

INT. YOUNG KIRK'S HOUSE - WINTER - DAY

Sixteen-year old Kirk sits on his mattress and tries to focus on reading a book. He can't concentrate, because the fragrant aroma of meat stewing in a large cauldron fills the entire room.

Kirk, from time to time, goes to the kitchen to see if the meat will be put out soon. He lustfully looks at the boiling pieces.

His AUNT, ROSELYN, 40, a fat woman with a fleshy face, makes salads with pickles and grumbles at Kirk.

AUNT ROSELYN
 Stop sniffing around like a dog.
 Get back to your place. I'll call
 you when it's ready.

Uncle Phil and two men descend from the second floor, talking and laughing loudly.

UNCLE PHIL
 Rose, get the moonshine, we'll be
 celebrating.

Uncle Phil fills the shot glasses.

UNCLE PHIL (CONT'D)
To our prosperous enterprise.

Kirk is dizzy with hunger. He can't stand it and goes to the table.

KIRK
Aunt Roselyn, please give me something to eat.

Aunt Roselyn stares at Kirk as if suddenly remembering that she has a nephew.

AUNT ROSELYN
When the meat is ready, I call you.

KIRK
I'm hungry. I haven't eaten today yet.

Suddenly, Uncle Phil lightly smacks Kirk on the back of the head.

UNCLE PHIL
Aunt Rose told you!

The two men stare at Uncle Phil surprised and embarrassed.

MAN 1
The boy's hungry. There's plenty here. Give him something.

Aunt Roselyn, annoyed, as if distracted from a serious matter, serves Kirk potatoes. Guests curiously watch her.

Under scrutiny of their looks, Aunt Roselyn adds assorted food to the plate and throws a piece of bread on top.

BACK TO SCENE:

EXT. FOREST - FIRE - NIGHT

Kirk recalls how unbelievably tasty that food was. Sitting between fires, chewing his piece of pork belly he recalls:

KIRK'S MEMORIES:

He is wolfing the food down from his plate.

BACK TO SCENE:

Ext. FOREST - FIRE - NIGHT

Kirk opens his eyes. He is still sitting on his makeshift seat with the rifle between his knees. The coals in both fires are smoldering. He jumps up and rushes to the "tent".

KIRK

Praise the Lord. She's here.

Kirk crawls quietly under his parka and touches Baby's cheek with two fingers. Then he brings his face close to the Baby's.

KIRK (CONT'D)

Thank God she's breathing.

He sighs heavily, checks the time, forgetting that his watch is broken. Raises his eyes to the sky. The black sky is just beginning to turn grey.

The light of dawn approaches, promising to bring safety from predators and hazards of passage.

Both fires are barely smoldering. Fresh falling snow gradually extinguishes the last glowing embers.

Kirk throws on some wood, stokes the fire, and hurries to the stream to fetch water. He puts the mug on the fire. The bonfires ignite and burn brightly again. Kirk unfolds the blanket. The girl is wet again.

He finds the last clean rag in his backpack.

KIRK (CONT'D)

Jeezum crow, you're just a damned bed-wetter. We'll get you warm and dry, now.

Warming up his hands over the fire, he applies them to the Baby's tummy. Kirk does this several times. Swaddling and wrapping the Baby, he finds yesterday's diaper in the snow and rinses it in the stream together with the freshly wet one.

Having stretched both diapers on makeshift pegs near the fire, he makes a new pacifier.

Fumbling to perform these simple tasks with hands frozen with cold while the Baby screams ungratefully, his paternal kindness towards the tiny girl abruptly turns to irritation and anger.

KIRK (CONT'D)
 Are you creating problems for me on
 purpose? Am I your baby-sitter?

After getting a fresh pacifier, the Baby calms down. Kirk carefully straightens the blanket and cuddles the infant to his chest, rocking her to sleep. Then he lights a cigarette, washing it down with hot water.

FADE TO:

EXT. FOREST - STREAM - DAY

Kirk slowly moves forward. Feet fall into the snow and each step is taken with great difficulty. He stares ahead with a wild-eyed gaze.

His face is gaunt, dark circles under his eyes in ghastly contrast to his pale cold complexion. The wrinkles on his face, deepened by the cold, transform his appearance to that of a wizened old man.

KIRK (V.O.)
 (thinking)
 Where are those damn logs across
 the stream?

The Baby is crying again.

BABY
 Waa! Waa!...

KIRK
 I'm beginning, to distinguish your
 cries of hunger from those of wet
 discomfort. Maybe in time I would
 make a good nanny?

Kirk stops to change her diaper. Right away, goes to the stream to wash the wet one.

Slipping on the snow on his back Kirk slides to the water, almost dropping his rifle in it.

Kirk barely manages to grab onto a low-hanging branch, with one hand, while clutching the gun with the other.

Snagged on a sharp bough sticking out of the ground, Kirk tears his pants, scratching his leg. He hisses with pain covering the wound with his saliva.

KIRK (CONT'D)
 Christ! That's just what I need. No
 good deed goes unpunished!

Lying down on the snow he rinses the diaper, barely reaching the water with one hand. The tiny girl continues crying.

Ignoring her cries, Kirk slowly walks along the stream, fighting snowdrifts. Annoyance is gradually replaced by desperate resolve to survive; there is no more strength for anger, no more energy for optimism.

Kirk takes the Baby wearily in his arms, wraps the quilted bundle around the sides of his jacket, pulling the Baby closer to his warm body and humming a simple tune under his breath. Soon he lulls the Baby to sleep.

KIRK (CONT'D)
 Well, that's it, my dear.

He immediately stops himself.

KIRK (CONT'D)
 You are neither mine, nor dear.
 Daughter of lost parents.

After placing the child on the parka, Kirk takes half of his shirt out of his backpack and cuts it into belts. He ties the bundle to his body with straps and gets under way.

The makeshift blanket sling keeps slipping and shifting, requiring constant adjustment to keep from discharging the precious bundle onto the snowy ground. Kirk looks up at the sky, recognizing with dread the sun beginning to set.

His eyes brighten with unexpected joy. In the distance, two logs are laying across the stream.

FADE TO:

EXT. FOREST - STREAM - DAY

Kirk's joy quickly turns to despair. Both logs have slid into the water from the opposite bank and are slightly turned sideways by the current.

The distance from the point, where the logs disappear into the stream to the safety is about six feet.

KIRK
 (mumbles)
 Safe to ford that?
 (MORE)

KIRK (CONT'D)

Maybe, I'd rather measure it. Too damn cold to risk a fall.

Kirk quickly finds a thin, long birch pole and, wrapping the Baby in the parka and jacket, carefully steps onto the twin log.

When he reaches the end, where the logs disappear under the water, Kirk measures the depth with the pole which keeps sinking down into the water not reaching the bottom.

As Kirk leans over forward to sound the depth, he loses his footing and nearly falls into the stream. Recovering himself, heart pounding with his near and potentially fatal slip.

KIRK (CONT'D)

Damn it!

With short, gliding steps, Kirk backtracks. He puts his coat and parka back on, takes the tiny creature and continues on his way.

FADE TO:

MONTAGE:

Kirk puts the Baby on his parka and measures the depth of the stream.

KIRK

Crap! Deep.

He gets dressed and goes on... Measures the depth again. The pole goes deep under water... Kirk moves on... The girl cries:

BABY

Waa, waa...

Kirk starts a small fire, heats water, makes a new pacifier... Smokes... Rocks the Baby to sleep... Moves on...

END OF MONTAGE

FADE TO:

EXT. FOREST - STREAM - DAY

Kirk trudges through the snowdrifts. Despair in his eyes. Suddenly, right in front of him is a thick long log with branches sticking out, ideally positioned to reach from bank to bank. He stares at the log in disbelief.

Kirk closes his eyes and shakes his head before opening them again. The log is still in place.

KIRK

Apparently there is God in the world, if not for my sake, then at least for the sake of an innocent child.

Throwing the pole aside and freeing the Baby from the straps, Kirk carefully steps onto the log, stomping on it with his foot testing its stability.

Slowly, sliding one foot before the other, Kirk moves forward, grasping branches protruding from the log for balance, keeping his eyes fixed on the stem.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - STREAM - SUNSET

VIDEO SEQUENCE WITH THE VOICE OF NARRATOR:

NARRATOR (O.S.)

The sun slowly but inexorably sets below the horizon. The spruce forest takes on the gloomy twilight colors of the passing day, when faint warmth and cheer of winter light fades into the unforgiving cold and darkness of night. Like two oncoming trains, light and darkness meet each other for mere moments and continue on in opposite directions. The sky above the forest begins to turn black. Native Americans and experienced hunters are wary of this meeting on the move as bizarre and unfamiliar silhouettes emerge in the landscape which moments earlier were simply forest. Old-timers say that this is the witching hour when GOBLINS begin their FIRST HUNT.

BACK TO SCENE:

With the departure of the sun, the frost covers the log with a slight hoarfrost. A few times Kirk's foot nearly slips off the log.

Kirk is three-quarters of the way across when his attention is drawn to the swift current. He tries not to look at the water, realizing that the current takes his attention along with it.

Circles in the form of small whirlpools rotate before his eyes. His face reflects a rising fear for the little defenseless Creature that instinctively trusts and depends on him, Kirk Lecroix.

Kirk closes his eyes for a second, shakes his head, opens them. He takes a deep breath, exhales and slowly continues moving.

The bank is less than four feet away when Kirk's backpack catches on a crooked branch preventing any further movement. Kirk yanks forward a couple of times, wary of losing his balance, but to no avail.

Holding the Baby alternately with each arm, in turns, Kirk wriggles free of the backpack.

As the backpack falls, it clings to the bolt of the rifle. Reflexively, trying to hold on to the rifle, Kirk loses his balance and falls into the water up to his waist. The rifle, along with the backpack, is torn off by the current.

Forced to choose between clutching at the rifle to catch or protecting the Baby, Kirk chooses the Baby.

The rifle disappears into the black waters of the stream with a splash, and the backpack is quickly carried away by the current.

Fighting the strong current, Kirk breaks through to the shore and pushes the sling with the bundle up the bank and away from the water.

He turns to the spot where the rifle fell and futilely searches it with his boot. No feel of the rifle.

KIRK
Jesus God, now what?!

Kirk shivers. Coming to his senses, he launches himself out of the water like a bullet. The Baby screams hysterically:

BABY
Waa! Waa!...

Ignoring the cry, Kirk grabs the Baby, runs away from the shore and convulsed with cold, trembling all over, collects brushwood, dried wood - everything that comes to hand. He automatically reaches into his pocket for matches.

Kirk throws the soaked box on the snow. His eyes are full of doom and depression. On his knees, he covers his face with his hands and begins to weep softly, wailing:

KIRK
I'm sorry, child. I'm sorry! I
can't save you, I didn't bring you
home warmth!

Kirk suddenly recovers himself from his lapse of strength and fumbles for the pouch around his neck. With chattering teeth, trembling, fingers leaden with cold, he takes out a match and strikes on the box. The match breaks.

He takes out the second one ... It also breaks.

Kirk gathers all his will and, trying not to shiver, strikes the third match igniting it. He applies it to a pile of thin branches. Time drags on for a seeming eternity ... Under the impotent hysterical cries of the Baby.

Kirk looks down at the pile of twigs, eyes pleading, trying not to tremble or twitch. The match flickers and fades, nearly burning out when the fire seizes on a branch, then on another ... In a moment, the whole handful burns.

Kirk holds his hand over the fire. His vision blurs for a moment. Eyes look like those of a man who has lost his mind.

KIRK (CONT'D)
What am I? What is this?...

His loss of mind instantly passes and turns into a desire to survive. He jumps up and quickly collects everything that burns, throws it into a heap under the hysterical cry of the Baby. The fire finally flares.

Crazy-eyed Kirk rips off his wet clothes... Stops... Runs...

Stabbing at the cold frozen ground with his knife he digs holes, plunges the stakes into them, hangs up his parka and jacket next to the fire.

Suddenly, Kirk convulses, falls into the snow, clutching his leg and spinning like a whirligig with a cramp gripping his leg. Kirk takes off his boot, pulls on the toe, but the pain doesn't let go.

KIRK (CONT'D)
(refers to pain)
Son of a bitch! Why now?! I don't
have time for it.

He resolutely takes out his knife and slightly dissects into the muscle below the knee. This is how soldiers get rid of cramps when they wade a cold river. After a few seconds, he sighs in relief, rushing to collect firewood.

Kirk drags a few broken logs, throws them into the fire. He takes off his clothes, hanging them on stakes. With the Baby in his arms, he sits with his back to the fire shaking.

Kirk presses his bare chest to the baby's blanket. In his jacket he finds bread and a cloth.

After chewing and moistening the bread with his saliva, he wraps it in a rag and sticks it in the mouth of the crying Baby. She accepts a new pacifier.

The warmth of the fire and the food do their job - the Baby calms down and falls asleep.

FADE TO:

EXT. FOREST - FIRE - NIGHT

Kirk sits cowering by the fire, shivering in the cold. He clings to a small living lump. His legs are wrapped in his parka. Pants, socks and boots are drying on fire. In the same place, next to the fire, a pack of cigarettes dries out.

Kirk opens the pack. There are two cigarettes left. He lights a cigarette and smokes with a trembling hand.

KIRK (V.O.)

If I don't die by morning, it'll be
a miracle. God, it's so damned
cold.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - FIRE - NIGHT - LATER

Kirk quickly dresses then leans against a tree trying to sleep. From time to time he shudders, wakes up, throws wood into the fire and again slumps into a heavy slumber.

Through his sleep, it seems to him that muffled sounds are heard in the forest. He lifts his heavy eyelids and listens.

It's quiet in the forest. Only the tops of the trees rustle and creak from a light wind.

KIRK (V.O.)
 Stop imagining things. Got to rest
 think of something pleasant and
 positive.

He closes his eyes.

FLASHBACK:

INT. YOUNG KIRK'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - WINTER - EVENING

SUPER: 1921.

Kirk sits on the mattress licking his plate. At the table at the other end of the room, The hosts and guests are still drinking, talking loudly. Kirk comes to the table with his plate. The hosts and guests are already tipsy.

KIRK
 Can I have a piece of meat now?

Aunt Roselyn, turning half sideways:

AUNT ROSELYN
 Enough of you. You've eaten too
 much.

One of the guests drunkenly beckons Kirk over and throws a bone with the remains of meat on it into Kirk's plate.

MAN 1
 (in a drunken voice)
 Eat, son.

He sends Young Kirk away with a drunken gesture. Kirk sits on the mattress sucking on the bone.

YOUNG KIRK (V.O.)
 So that's your "kindness." OK.
 Let's find out what you're
 celebrating there. What successful
 enterprise is that?

Lying on the mattress, angry and offended, Young Kirk turns to face the wall pretending to be asleep.

INT. YOUNG KIRK'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - WINTER - NIGHT

Tiptoeing, Young Kirk passes the guardians' bedroom, hearing loud snoring. Kirk quietly climbs the stairs to his former room.

INT. YOUNG KIRK'S HOUSE - UNCLE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Closing the door tightly behind him, Young Kirk turns on the lights. The room is filled with sacks. Kirk can see that some are full of silver fox pelts while others are filled to the brim with marten skins.

YOUNG KIRK

Oh, he is a stinking poacher. Is this his successful enterprise?

Young Kirk walks over to the desk with a large iron box on it that once belonged to him. In the box, Kirk finds money, IOUs, and a document. He reads it:

IN THE DOCUMENT:

CERTIFICATE OF OWNERSHIP in the name of Kirk Lecroix...

YOUNG KIRK (CONT'D)

(muttering)

What a bunch of pigs! Stinking thieves! They lied about buying the house from my mother.

Distracted by reading the documents, Kirk doesn't hear the door open. He gets up from the table ready to go downstairs and sees a completely sober Aunt Roselyn standing in the door.

AUNT ROSELYN

Are you going to turn your own uncle in? We took good care of you after your parents died, didn't we?

INT/EXT. YOUNG KIRK'S HOUSE - MORNING

On a chair in the middle of the room, not sober yet, sits Uncle Phil in handcuffs. On the opposite side of the table, the SHERIFF fills out paperwork. Two rangers carry sacks out of the house.

Aunt Roselyn is sitting in the corner of the room, crying.

Young Kirk places a certificate of ownership on the table in front of the sheriff.

YOUNG KIRK

I'm already of legal age. I don't want to see these people in my house.

The sheriff nods his head silently, giving Kirk a barely noticeable smile.

EXT. YOUNG KIRK'S HOUSE - COURTYARD - MORNING

Kirk stands in the doorway and watches as his uncle and aunt are loaded into the police van. Nearby are a few curious bystanders. The van pulls away and disappears around the corner.

END FLASHBACK

BACK TO SCENE:

EXT. FOREST - STREAM - FIRE - NIGHT

Kirk opens his eyes. He's shaking all over. His legs are cramped. He hardly makes it to lay the Baby down on a young spruce litter when another foot cramp causes him to fall down.

Kirk pulls off his half-dry boots, rubbing his feet with snow to ease the pain. His face is contorted from cold and discomfort, but he persistently keeps on rubbing.

Having reached a condition where the cramps have not gone away, but there is no more strength to endure the pain, Kirk, with the last of his strength, pulls himself up to the fire and touches the hot coal with his feet.

The skin on his feet begins to smoke. Digging through the pockets of his jacket, Kirk finds a small piece of bacon that he used to grease the Baby and rubs it between his toes.

Holding his boots over the fire first, he then puts on his socks and pulls his boots on with difficulty.

Having forgotten about the Baby, Kirk stands over the fire, as if absorbing all the warmth that a fire can give. Then, limping on both legs and bending with difficulty, he collects more brush and dried wood.

KIRK

God, what kind of sin have I
committed that I deserve this slow
torture? If I'm to die, take us
both quickly and honorably. Don't
bring me to my knees to beg for it
like a coward!

Kirk, head in hands, stares intensely at the fire as though the answer lays within the flames.

He stands up, staggers over to the Baby, pulls open the blanket. In the flickering, playful firelight tiny girl's face looks peaceful.

KIRK (V.O.)
 (thinks)
 I wonder if babies have dreams?
 (beat)
 Why isn't she crying?

Kirk puts his fingers to Baby's cheek to see if her face is warm. Then he touches it with his nose. Not being able to determine, he takes the girl in his arms and covers her with his jacket. The Baby makes a noise and falls back to sleep.

KIRK
 We're not going to die in this
 agony. We'll go on. We'll go ahead
 to Jack's house.

Kirk stares into the fire again, hypnotized by it, holding the baby girl to his chest and unconsciously rocking her to sleep. At some point, the world around him changes its appearance, as Kirk becomes DELIRIOUS.

CUT TO:

EXT. DARK FOREST - KIRK'S DELIRIUM - SAME TIME

Maude emerges from the darkness of the forest, holding a duvet in her hands. She stops at the border between the darkness and fire and reproachfully stares at Kirk.

KIRK
 I'm very cold. I'm freezing. Come
 quickly and cover me.

MAUDE
 Come and take it yourself. I can't
 bring it to you.

KIRK
 Why?

MAUDE
 I'm an old hag, remember?

Maude walks slowly towards the dark forest. Kirk tries to get up, but his limbs won't obey. Trembling from the cold, he falls on the ground and looks longingly at his departing wife.

Kirk just now notices his DAUGHTER Laura. Pregnant, she sits on a tree stump close by and looks at Kirk indifferently.

KIRK

Laura, darling could you please take the duvet from your mom and bring it to me? I'm dying of cold.

LAURA

I was always proud of you, and you ignored me. When I needed your help the most, you denounced me. You can't ask me for anything.

Before Kirk's eyes, Laura turns transparent and disappears.

END DELIRIUM

FADE TO:

EXT. FOREST - FIRE - DAWN

Kirk flinches and looks around in surprise, having difficulty remembering where he is. Forest and frost quickly take Kirk back to reality. Leaning on a tree trunk, he gets up with difficulty and begins his journey.

Falling into the snowdrifts, Kirk moves slowly through the forest in the predawn twilight. It starts snowing again.

FADE TO:

EXT. FOREST - DAWN

Dawn breaks. The sky assumes its raiment of grey, the dirty haze spreads. It huddles deep into the bushes, to the bottom of the ravine. The snow keeps falling, damp, heavy, and plentiful.

Despite the whiteness, the forest is gloomy, the sky is thick with snow clouds. With no sun, Kirk isn't sure if he's heading in the right direction. Little by little an indifference to everything comes over him.

KIRK (V.O.)

A scrap in my pocket, that is not enough for two souls to eat.

Kirk walks thinking about the bread. He takes out a tiny crushed piece, weighs it on his hand and curses weakly:

KIRK

Dammit! If I eat this piece and you die, then I can't live, knowing I did not save you. I would be nothing, but despicable weakness and greed.

With these thoughts, Kirk continues on his way, still limping on both legs.

FADE TO:

EXT. FOREST - RAVINE - SHRUBS - DAY

Kirk makes his way to a gentle ravine, overgrown with alder trees. Leaning against the tree trunk, Kirk sits down, gazing ahead and feeling doomed. The Baby is silent laying against his chest.

Kirk catches sight of a mountain ash bush nearby. He extends his leg, holding the Baby tighter as he struggles to get up. Limping and stumbling over bumps, Kirk heads for the bush.

Forgetting everything in the world, he picks berries and greedily eats them with small branches they are on. It's only after Kirk has satisfied his hunger he notices that the Baby is silent.

KIRK

Why is she so quiet? Oh, God, has she died? Hey there, hey kiddo! Wake up!

Kirk quickly attends to the tiny girl.

He carefully, lovingly looks under the covers with an anxious expression. The girl's face is strange - blue, somehow frozen.

KIRK (CONT'D)

Wake up! Wake up Baby!

He touches her cheek with his finger, but doesn't feel any signs of life.

He touches her lips, but still can't figure it out whether she's dead or alive?

Kirk shakes the tiny girl slightly, but she remains quiet. Blowing on his palms, Kirk rubs the Baby's cheeks and begins applying gentle chest compressions.

Pressing down with three fingers several times, he gently inhales the air into her mouth.

Coughing slightly a few times, the Baby begins crying softly.

KIRK (CONT'D)
Oh, thank God, she's back!

Her tiny chest heaves, taking in air, and a soft cry abruptly turns into a loud and continuous wailing.

BABY
Waa! Waa!

WHICH THROUGH BLACK SCREEN TRANSFORMS TO

INTERCUT:

INT. HOSPITAL - DELIVERY CHAMBER - DAY

There is a LOUD WAILING of a NEWBORN BABY.

Obstetrician holding a newborn BABY GIRL.

OBSTETRICIAN
Congratulations you have a girl.

BABY GIRL
Waa! Waa!

The exhausted YOUNG WOMAN, LAURA, 18 lies on the bed with a happy face and a faint smile. Nearby, in a white lab coat, helping the doctor wash the newborn, stands Laura's mother Maude.

She takes the baby girl, wrapped in a sheet, and places her next to Laura.

MAUDE
Congratulations, Dear.

Maude, Kirk's wife, kisses her daughter and the grandbaby.

FADE TO BLACK

BACK TO SCENE:

EXT. FOREST - RAVINE - SHRUBS - DAY

Kirk takes the Baby and presses her against his chest.

KIRK
 (looking at the baby)
 Why are you coughing? You must be
 cold.

Kirk barely finds the strength to get up, but finally gets it together. Picking up twigs and deadwood as fast as he can, he begins to build a fire. Kirk staggers to the bushes and plucks the mountain ash.

He then squashes it and soaks it in a rag with bread.

KIRK (CONT'D)
 It shouldn't harm the Baby.

Kirk sticks a new pacifier into the Baby's mouth. It seems to him the tiny girl is surprised, at first, but then she accepts it.

KIRK (CONT'D)
 Thank God, she's alive. What an
 experience! If she died then I
 wouldn't have a reason to live
 either.

Kirk wearily sits back against the tree and falls into a heavy slumber.

EXT. FOREST - JACK'S HOUSE - BARN - EARLY MORNING

SUPER: Same day.

Leaning over a trestle bed, Jack carefully greases the two old casings. Kyle stands by, watching.

JACK
 Have you brewed fresh tea for the
 journey?

KYLE
 Yes, father. The tea is already in
 the bag.

JACK
 Wear this jacket today.

KYLE
 Why, father? It's greasy and smells
 weird.

JACK
 It's bear fat, son. Wolves are
 afraid of this smell, like of fire.

KYLE

I wanted to try my new bow.

Jack stares ironically into his son's eyes.

JACK

When a pack attacks, you won't have
time to defend yourself with a bow,
Better take a shotgun.

Jack takes a long fork-spear with him. He and Kyle approach
the horse. It neighs desperately and bucks fearfully.

JACK (CONT'D)

Quiet, quiet, my dear. It's me.

Jack soothingly strokes the horse's neck. Fearfully sniffing,
it finally trusts his master. Kyle jumps on the horse first,
Jack follows suit.

EXT. FOREST - RAVINE - SHRUBS - DAY

Through his slumber, Kirk feels someone creeping nearby.
There is a distant sound of footsteps. It's actually coming
from somewhere within his mind. This sound lulls and excites
at the same time.

Sleepiness takes over him. His eyes close and he sees:

KIRK'S DREAM:

INT. HOUSE - ROOM - FIRE PLACE - DAY

The warm house feels heavenly. Flames dance in the
fireplace... Kirk's home flashes in memory in short
fragments, but does not seem to fit into the whole picture.

KIRK (V.O.)

(thinking in his dream)

My home?... More like a flophouse.
Supper - bed - breakfast - work.
Everything is the same as it was
last week, last month, a year ago,
there is nothing new to expect.

BACK TO SCENE:

EXT. FOREST - RAVINE - SHRUBS - DAY

Kirk opens his eyes. He doesn't want to get up, but the fire has almost burned out. Since the hollow is not blown through, this makes the air around the smoldering fire somehow rotten and unhealthy.

The smell of rot under the coals intensifies Kirk's depressive thoughts.

Kirk struggles to his feet, flexing his stiff legs.

Through Kirk's eyes, we look deep into the forest and see black shadows moving silently from tree to tree in a wild and chaotic dance. Kirk shakes his head, as if to shake off the obsessive hallucinations.

KIRK

Need to go. It's not far, now.
Soon, Baby, you and I will be in a
warm place.

He looks at the sky and, having decided on the direction, slowly moves forward, still limping in pain.

FADE TO:

EXT. FOREST - DAY - LATER

The snow crunches mournfully under Kirk's feet. It seems to him that he walks forever. To pass the time, he talks to the Baby.

KIRK

(mumbles)

Okay, I understand that all these grabbers have probably already cursed me more than once for being honest and principled. Maybe that's why I wander through the woods now. Don't get me wrong, they are to blame. They will be held responsible for this, sooner or later, because the law is the law. As long as I live, I will protect it. But why is fate punishing you? You have just entered this life. It's not fair.

Nature, as if responding to Kirk's complaint, gives an answer. Ahead, Kirk sees human footprints.

KIRK (CONT'D)
 You see, there are people around!

Forgetting that the Baby is asleep, he shouts:

KIRK (CONT'D)
 Hey somebody! Hey! Help!

From the shout, the Baby shudders, wakes up and begins to cry.

Ignoring the tiny girl's cry, Kirk follows the trail. He thoughtlessly and joyfully runs along, ignoring his pain.

Only by looking more closely Kirk recognizes his own footprints where his lame leg goes in deeper. In disbelief, he turns back and examines the snow. The trail wanders drunkenly among the bumps.

Kirk realizes - he had stumbled upon his own trail. He stops and, from helplessness and resentment, subsides into the snow.

KIRK (CONT'D)
 It turns out that all this time I
 was walking in circles! How much
 time I wasted? Two, three hours?
 Darn it!

Kirk once again builds a fire, spreads his parka under the Baby, and pulls out a wet diaper. With the remaining small piece of bacon, he lubricates the Baby's bottom and wraps it in swaddling clothes and a blanket.

KIRK (CONT'D)
 Don't even think about peeing on
 the sheet again. It's the last dry
 one.

He vigorously washes the diaper in the snow and hangs it on a branch. While the diaper dries, Kirk makes a new pacifier.

CUT TO:

Ext. FOREST - LATER

Limping, Kirk hurries forward like a possessed man. It seems to him that the forest landscape is changing faster.

KIRK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Just to be in time before dark.

He passes through a dense area of fir and comes to an aspen clearing, where green moss breaks out from under the snow in places. This part of the forest is lighter and more welcoming.

KIRK (CONT'D)

I think it's already close to Jack's house. Another three hours, maybe.

Kirk steps forward resolutely and suddenly SINKS ALMOST TO HIS WAIST. Still not realizing what happened, he tries with the last of his strength to turn around, but he can't. An unknown force holds his legs firmly.

With difficulty, Kirk turns around half way, lays the Baby on the snow and pushes her away from him. His face is filled with fear mixed with panic. His gaze is greedily riveted to where the Baby lies.

KIRK (CONT'D)

Augh! Augh!

He twitches like crazy and finally manages to turn his whole body around as he is sucked in the bog, beginning to slowly sink deeper and deeper.

Kirk's face is full of desperation. He's up to his waist in a swamp. Red water splashes from the snow-covered moss tussocks under his boots.

The world FREEZES for a few moments, THEN SLOWLY SPINS around. Kirk is frozen in the bog, as the Baby lies in the snow. Kirk breaks into a nervous laughter, turning into a cry and hysteria.

KIRK (CONT'D)

Ha-ha, ha-ha, ha-ha!

EXT. FOREST - SWAMP - DAY

The hysteria fades away. Kirk's soaked legs go numb from the cold. The Baby begins to cry, weakly coughing.

BABY

Waa! Waa!

The Baby's cry helps Kirk get up and fight for his and the Baby's life. He frantically looks to see if there's anything to cling onto. A narrow stump catches his eye.

KIRK

Aha! My great-grandfather did not
surrender to the Moscovites in
1812, and I'm not giving up either.

Kirk reaches out for the stump with all his might, but it's just barely enough. An idea comes to his mind.

Kirk, with a hunting knife in hand, makes another attempt to get out. Stretching his arm as far forward as possible, he plunges the knife into the stump and slowly pulls himself closer to it.

The knife snaps from the stub and Kirk gets sucked back into the bog. Determined, he reaches for the piece of wood once again, plunging the knife with all his strength. The baby continues whaling.

KIRK (CONT'D)

(snarling at baby)

Shut up already! I'm sick and tired
of you!

The blade finally lodges in place. Kirk pulls himself closer to the decaying wood, clinging to his last hope of salvation. To Kirk's relief the infant stops crying.

KIRK (CONT'D)

That's better. Finally.

At that moment, the baby's cry resumes, escalating into hysterics. An anguished expression clouds Kirk's face.

KIRK (CONT'D)

(growls, wheezing)

If I ever get out of this damn
swamp... I swear...

He casts an angry look at the infant.

Then Kirk secures a firm grip on the stump, breathing heavily as he takes a moment to rest. His head slumps wearily, but after a brief break, he groans and pulls himself up until his chest finds stable ground.

Kirk finally manages to grab onto the stump with both hands. After a short break, with a groan, he pulls himself up again until, gradually, his chest rests on solid ground.

Kirk breathes hard. His head slumps helplessly, but the hands hold on tightly to the saving stump.

Pulling himself up higher, Kirk slowly draws one leg out without a boot. He pulls out his other foot. Crawling away from the swamp, he drags the baby along.

Only now he realizes that can hardly feel his legs. With every second, his feet get colder. The Baby is wailing.

BABY

Waa, waa.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - CONTINUOUS

Kirk crawls towards the fir thicket. Having collected some branches and dried wood, he makes a fire and warms his feet.

Having cut his parka in two, he wraps his legs and ties them with the straps with which he earlier tied the Baby to himself.

Trembling all over, he moistens the pacifier with the remnants of mountain ash, and gives it to the Baby. But she continues to cry.

CUT TO:

INTERCUT:

EXT. FOREST - SAME TIME

Letting the horse loose, Jack and Kyle move briskly through the snow in their snow shoes.

KYLE

Father, I hear a baby crying.

Jack stops and listens.

JACK

It's strange. Let's hurry up.

They continue to walk through the fir forest. Fire smoke wafts up ahead.

CUT TO:

INTERCUT:

Busy with the Baby, Kirk only now notices that THREE WOLVES are running towards him.

Kneeling, with his back to the tree and putting the tiny girl between his legs, Kirk draws his knife. She continues to cry.

BABY

Waa, waa!

The wolves growl. Kirk growls belligerently in response.

KIRK

Ur! Ur!

His face contours with a wild grimace. His eyes are bloodshot, expressing the determination to fight to the end.

The first wolf attacking from the front is stabbed by Kirk. The knife wounds the beast in the chest. At this moment, the other two wolves attack from opposite sides, biting into his arms and body.

On his knees, Kirk leans forward, shielding the Baby, as wolves violently tear pieces off him. Kirk passes out.

CUT TO:

INTERCUT:

Kyle FIRES in the air. Jack runs up to the wolves and presses one to the ground with his fork-spear. The wolf breaks out violently and lunges at Jack. Kyle raises his shotgun and takes aim.

JACK

No, son, no!

The wolf runs up to Jack, ready to attack, but stops a few feet away and with his tail between his legs, he rushes headlong into the forest. The second wolf, having stopped attacking Kirk, looks at Jack in fright and surprise, sniffing.

JACK (CONT'D)

(to the wolf)

Go in peace. Leave. This is not your prey.

Kyle, lowering his shotgun, watches as the wolf sniffs at Jack in confusion. Then, with the tail between his legs the wolf whines, backs away and quickly disappears from view.

FADE TO BLACK

ON A BLACK SCREEN:

Quiet first, slowly rising in volume, motor hum and wave noise sound.

FADE TO:

EXT. BAY - MOTOR BOAT - DAY

A close-up on Kirk's face. Coming to his senses he slowly opens his eyes. Grey clouds with blue gaps float in the sky.

KIRK (V.O.)
(thinking)
Did I die? Am I on my way to
heaven? Uh, what's the difference.

Kirk closes his eyes.

TWO YOUNG, STRONG INDIANS transport Kirk into town in a motorboat. One Indian sits in front and smokes a pipe. The other Indian is at the helm. They travel silently.

EXT. BOOTHBAY HARBOR - PIER - LATE MORNING

The boat slightly touches the pier. One of the Indians deftly jumps from the boat onto land and ties the end. Fishermen and onlookers approach from both sides. They stare at Kirk with curiosity.

MAJOR CLARK
Step aside folks.

Major Clark makes his way through the crowd, followed by two medics with a stretcher. They put Kirk on it. The bites show all over his body. Half-delirious, Kirk takes Clark's hand.

KIRK
The baby girl. Where is she? Save
the tiny girl.

Kirk's hand loosens. His eyes close.

VOICE - 1 IN THE CROWD
Looks like the wolves bit him.

Medics carry Kirk away. Major Clark hurries after them.

VOICE - 2 IN THE CROWD
Lived as a dog, will die as a dog
and that's where he belongs.

The crowd disperses. Fishermen get back to their boats.

FADE TO:

INT. BOOTHBAY HARBOR - TAVERN - EVENING

The local TAVERN, reminiscent of a classic Western saloon, is half filled with fishermen. Some have dinner, but most drink moonshine and beer with snacks.

Four fishermen, known for their boat-stealing escapade in Beaver Lagoon, sit at a corner table, drinking Moonshine with beer and have an emotional conversation.

PAUL

I'm telling you, I heard a conversation between two wardens that Lecroix carried an abandoned baby for two days until he was attacked by wolves.

JOHN

Come on, stop spreading gossip.

Paul puts his shot glass down on the table, as if to confirm that he means it.

PAUL

Why don't you believe me?

JOHN

For Kirk to save someone is a fairytale. He would rather arrest someone. He doesn't have the heart.

Mathew, after finishing his portion of moonshine;

MATHEW

I heard it too, that Lecroix really found an abandoned baby in a hunter's hut.

JOHN

Has anyone seen this infant? Maybe Kirk was delirious and that's it.

Don interrupts their conversation;

DON

They say the police identified a place near the swamp, but did not find traces of a child there.

JOHN
So, either Kirk made it all up, or
the wolves dragged the baby away.

After John's statement, the company falls silent for a few moments.

DON
What a life.

Don takes the bottle and silently pours Moonshine into glasses.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. BOOTHBAY HARBOR - HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING

SUPER: Two days later.

Kirk wakes up in a hospital room. Both his hands are bandaged. One cheek is covered with a band-aid. His rugged face displaying signs of pain from the wolf attack.

KIRK
(mumbles)
How did I get here? What happened
to the Baby?

Maude, visibly torn, sits beside him. She glances down, tears welling up in her eyes as she contemplates the unexpected turn of events. Kirk, seeing Maude, speaks in a weak voice:

KIRK (CONT'D)
I never thought I'd be lying in a
hospital bed.

Maude, fighting back tears, nods in acknowledgment, her hand gently touching Kirk's.

MAUDE
I am so sorry I told you not to
come back. I blurted this out
because I was upset by your
attitude towards Laura.

KIRK
I'm the one who should be sorry.
Wolf attack made me reevaluate my
perception of life: of Laura, of
you and I of my role in this town.
I was wrong about so many things.

Maude, struggling with her emotions, takes a deep breath.

MAUDE

It's been rough for all of us.
Laura, she needs her family.

Kirk, sensing a shift, reaches out to hold Maude's hand.

KIRK

We've said things we can't take
back. Maybe it's time we find a way
to mend fences.

Maude, looking down, wipes away a tear.

MAUDE

Yeah. Let's reconsider our choices.

Nodding in agreement Kirk gives Maude a reassuring squeeze.

FADE TO:

EXT. COASTAL WARDEN SERVICE BRANCH - MORNING

Kirk climbs out of his truck and, hopping on one foot, retrieves his cane from the cabin. He enters the building with the plate at the entrance that reads: STATE OF MAINE FISH and GAME DEPARTMENT.

INT. MAJOR'S OFFICE - MORNING

Kirk opens the door.

KIRK

May I, Major?

Leaning on his cane, limping, Kirk walks over and sits down with his injured leg outstretched.

Chief of the branch - Major Clark, sits at his desk staring inquisitively at Kirk.

MAJOR CLARK

Well, well, well. The hero is here.
Feeling better?

KIRK

Yes, thank you, Major.

MAJOR CLARK

Tell me in a few words about a baby
girl, I'd like to hear the story
from you.

INT. COASTAL WARDEN SERVICE BUILDING - HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Trembling nervously, Martha walks unsteadily along the hallway. She stops at the door of Kirk's office. She gathers her courage to knock, when through a narrow crack of the next door, she hears Kirk's voice:

INT. MAJOR'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

KIRK

Not much to tell: someone left their baby girl in the hunters' hut. I ran into her, and was carrying her to safety for two days until we were attacked by wolves.

MAJOR CLARK

And?

KIRK

I lost my consciousness.
(beat)
Speaking of... Has sheriff's department sent someone to look for traces of the Infant?

MAJOR CLARK

They haven't spotted a trace yet.

INT. COASTAL WARDEN SERVICE BUILDING - HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Shuddering at what she heard, Martha covers her mouth with her hand. Making a stifled sound she bursts into tears as she quickly backs away, and runs headlong out from the building.

INT. MAJOR'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

MAJOR CLARK

How did you lose your boat, by the way?

KIRK

I tripped and fell, hit my head on a rock, and when I came to, the boat was gone. Probably got off on a high wave.

Narrowing his eyes, the Major slyly looks at Kirk.

MAJOR CLARK

Really? I have other information.

KIRK

What information can you have when you weren't there?

MAJOR CLARK

You didn't fine Don either?

KIRK

Nope.

Major Clark and Kirk exchange disbelieving glances and Kirk, limping, heads towards the door. On the way out he says:

KIRK (CONT'D)

In the long run, IT WAS ONLY FISH.

He walks out of the office.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Martha walks down the road, in tears. She staggers and winds like a drunk, not paying attention to the world around her. At some point, she finds herself in the middle of the traffic lane.

A continuous honking comes from behind, but Martha evidently does not hear it and continues walking. The squeal of brakes comes from behind. She turns and comes face to face with the big truck's radiator.

DRIVER

Are you tired of living, stupid?

All in tears, Martha looks absently at the driver, either in nervous tick or really shaking her head in the affirmative.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Loose in the head, or what?

The driver slams his door and passes Martha in the oncoming lane, driving as quickly as if someone is after him.

INT. BOOTHBAY HARBOR - SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Leaning on a stick, Kirk walks into the office, takes a chair. Sheriff Higgins stares at Kirk.

SHERIFF HIGGINS

What brings you here today, Mr. Lecroix?

KIRK

I am looking for a young woman that has abandoned her baby.

SHERIFF HIGGINS

Captain, it's been only a week since I became a sheriff in this town, and I'm already weary of you. A tragic sequence of coincidences and a chain of unfortunate events unfold wherever you go: first, a fisherman mysteriously drowned, then a baby goes missing without a trace, and now the mother who abandoned it. Could this be your illegitimate child that you've chosen to cast aside?

Kirk's fists clench. The face contorts with anger.

KIRK

How dare you, scoundrel!

SHERIFF HIGGINS

Not scoundrel, Sheriff. And yes, I dare! You will be explaining, once again, in detail, the circumstances of the death of this fisherman from the trawler. And now, get out of my office!

Breathing raggedly with anger, Kirk jumps out of his chair and limping, leaves the sheriff's office.

EXT. BOOTHBAY HARBOR - STREET - DAY

After the conversation with the Sheriff, Kirk looks like a squeezed lemon. He wearily gets into the truck breathing heavily, trying to calm down.

KIRK

(growls angrily)

Where do such dickheads come from?

His thoughts are interrupted by a knock on the truck's window. Don and Matthew, poachers that attacked Kirk at Beaver Lagoon, smile graciously. Kirk rolls the window down.

MATHEW

Hey Kirk, glad we found you.

KIRK

What is it this time?

DON
Listen, please excuse us. Somehow
it turned out not humanly back
then.

KIRK
Never mind. Something else?

Don and Matthew somehow shyly avert their eyes, as if
searching for the right words.

DON
The guys and I thought that somehow
it turned out badly with your
watch.

Kirk furrows his brow, trying to figure out what Don is
talking about. Don nods to Matthew, hinting it's his turn to
speak. Mathew takes a small box out of his pocket.

MATHEW
We thought it would be only fair to
make up for the broken watch.

He opens the box and holds it out to Kirk.

DON
Please take this. Don't refuse.
It's our tiny token of
appreciation, not a bribe.

MATHEW
This one has compass on the strap.

Kirk looks sternly at the men, as they nervously shift from
foot to foot.

KIRK
Well, since this one is with a
compass, then of course.

He breaks into a wide happy smile.

INT. BOOTHBAY HARBOR - SHERIFF'S OFFICE - LATER

Standing at the window, Sheriff Higgins looks thoughtfully at
the bay.

SHERIFF HIGGINS
Sergeant, what do you think about
Lecroix's story.

SERGEANT, 45, a tall lean man with broad cheekbones on a masculine face, short hair with grey on the sides, comes out of the adjoining room.

SERGEANT

There's nothing to think about. I have known Warden Lecroix for many years. He may be a peculiar person, but not a liar. We should find the mother of the Baby. The town is small. Maybe someone knows.

SHERIFF HIGGINS

You're all so gullible here. Obviously - the Old School.

The sergeant throws a surprised look at Higgins.

SERGEANT

Why shouldn't I trust Warden Lecroix? The whole town already knows about what happened.

Grinning, the lieutenant sits down at the table and continues:

SHERIFF HIGGINS

Did it ever occur to you that Kirk Lecroix might have conspired with the baby's mother? Or Lecroix might have knocked this woman up and now he got rid of the Baby.

SERGEANT

Sorry, Lieutenant, but everybody knows Warden Lecroix as an honest and incorruptible person.

The sergeant is about to go to his office, but Higgins stops him.

SHERIFF HIGGINS

I don't care. The law is the law and right is right. Assign someone to keep a constant eye on Lecroix. When he finds the baby's mother, we'll interrogate both of them.

SERGEANT

Yes, Sir.

Grimacing with dislike for Higgins, the sergeant goes to his office mumbling:

SERGEANT (CONT'D)
Fucking psychopath.

EXT. BOOTHBAY HARBOR - DOCKS - MORNING

Kirk is talking to a small GROUP OF FISHERMEN.

KIRK
I'm looking for a woman that
recently had a baby. Folks, if you
hear anything, please let me know.

The fishermen nod their heads in the affirmative, bid goodbye and return to their jobs. Kirk puts up a sign on the board and walks off, leaning on his wand.

MONTAGE:

EXT. DOWNTOWN - DAY

Kirk goes from store to store and hangs his ads wherever there are bulletin boards.

E/I POSTAL BUILDING - DAY

Kirk sticks up his add and goes inside. Talks to postal workers.

KIRK
If you hear anything please let me
know.

END MONTAGE

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. KIRK'S HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Seated at a stark wooden table in his desolate kitchen, Kirk's face etched with stitches and bruises, his eyes hollowed by the unforgiving journey that seems to have stolen his very essence.

Fatigued and in pain from the grueling day's trip. Packs of medicine sprawl alongside a mug of water on the table.

The rhythmic hum of a sewing machine echoes from another room.

It pierces through the stillness, marking Maude's tireless efforts in sewing new curtains. Someone TIMIDLY SCRATCHES at the door.

KIRK

Who's there? Come in!

Shoulder forward, with face lowered, a woman appears at the doorway, her head adorned with a linen kerchief framing her head.

She wears a long bulky skirt, a testament to the relentless march of time, its fabric aged, shabby, and faded, she carries the history of wear and tear with a quiet resilience. Her blouse stained by whatever journey she made to get there.

A man's sagging padded jacket is draped over her top. Silent, she hides her face, gazing at the floor, her shoulders slumped. At first glance, her clothing might suggest age, but her young face tells a different story.

Standing in the doorway, she silently stares at her mud-stained boots. Suddenly Kirk is engulfed by a moment of staggering realization, abruptly altering the atmosphere.

KIRK (CONT'D)

If my instinct serves me right, you must be the child's mother.

Kirk's words carry a sense of certainty, as if he's unraveling a mystery.

MARTHA

I... I...

She stutters. Kirk grits his teeth, determined to stand up but as he attempts, the persistent pain in his leg forces him back into the seat.

Unbeknownst to him, he clutches the table's edge, and suddenly, a thunderous revelation shakes him. Kirk bellows;

KIRK

Speak up. Are you the mother?

The dramatic pause lingers as Kirk stares at the young woman in disbelief. Her weather-beaten face tells a tale of a life spent outdoors, living a village young woman's life.

Her big brown eyes full of sadness and a torrent of pain behind them. She is fidgeting with a button on her oversized jacket, the sleeves of which are engulfing her delicate arms.

She raises her head. With a hand from a too long sleeve of a padded jacket, convulsively entangled, she tousles the knot of the scarf. Finally she frees her throat, nodding in the affirmative, squeezing out;

MARTHA

(quietly)

Yes.

KIRK

Why did you do that?

His demanding voice cuts through the air. His exclamation reverberates through the room, laden with a storm of emotion and recognition.

Martha lets out a profound exhale, and a torrent of words spills out ceaselessly, as if a dam has finally burst, releasing pent-up emotions.

MARTHA

That day I had to procure medication for my sick mother and I couldn't take my baby with me because of the heavy sea. I was torn between my mother and my girl. I hoped to return the same day, but the storm intensified. I couldn't bring myself to tell my mom about the baby. She wouldn't be able to bear the truth. I had hoped the father of my child would stay, and we'd build a family, and I could tell my mom about us, but the man just used me.

Instead of anger, in Kirk's soul, there is now emptiness and bewilderment reflecting on his face. Martha doesn't cry, just stands meekly staring with fixed eyes, speaking.

INT. KIRK'S HOUSE - ADJACENT ROOM - DAY

Hearing Martha's story from the kitchen, shock crosses Maude's face and she nervously puts her hand over her mouth.

MAUDE

(mumbles)

Poor thing. Maybe I should offer her some tea?

Maude gets up, but immediately sits down. She just waits for the conversation in the kitchen to end.

INT. KIRK'S HOME - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Martha's words echo in Kirk's ears, but his attention drifts into the haunting memory of that fateful day. The excuses Martha offers only intensify his inner turmoil.

As the mental dialogue unfolds, Kirk is surprised with the emotions he is feeling, navigating between empathy and the simmering resentment within him.

KIRK (V.O.)

(thinking)

I was afraid I would not stand it
at a meeting. I would lose myself,
grab her thin throat and choke her.

Martha's words cascade from her lips, laden with the weight of profound regret and sorrow.

MARTHA

Take me... to where they sentence
me to death, to life without... I
don't deserve to live.

KIRK (V.O.)

(thinking)

What a twist. I've been
accumulating fierce hatred, waited
I'd look into your eyes and see
fear - a prison ahead, a disgrace.
Here it is, retribution for
everything, you lecherous animal.

And now he looks into her eyes and sees the fear to be left unpunished, the fear that someone would pity and pardon her. Her eyes glare with the desire to end her life.

However Kirk's stern facial expression gives none of what he is feeling away as Kirk struggles to find words that could truly capture the depth of his frustration.

KIRK

If you came here for a confession,
you're in the wrong place. I'm not
a priest.

Martha's voice trembles with desperation as she utters;

MARTHA

I don't deserve to live.

Kirk - in a fit of sudden anger;

KIRK

There is no reason to hang your
sins on other people! Carry your
own cross to the end! Look at you,
"I don't deserve to live"! Better
go, take care of your mom.

Martha starts crying. Her crying is like the whining of a
stray dog asking for someone else's house.

MARTHA

Mom died on the same day.

There is a heavy pause in the kitchen. Kirk coughs softly.

KIRK

My condolences.
(beat)
What's your name?

MARTHA

Martha Roberts.

KIRK

My condolences, Martha. Where do
you live?

MARTHA

Fourth house on the right from the
old church.

Kirk is suddenly ashamed of himself, of Martha, and of the
whole situation. He tries not to make eye contact with her.

KIRK

Maybe you should go, then. It will
get dark soon.

Martha continues to stand at the door, cowering as if from
cold.

MARTHA

If I could take a look at the spot
where it happened. Maybe I'll find
something that could be buried.

Kirk, torn between anger and compassion, hesitates before
responding. He can see the torment etched across Martha's
face, a reflection of the tremendous guilt she feels.

KIRK

(in tired voice)
Look at me.
(MORE)

KIRK (CONT'D)

I'm all battered and I can hardly walk but you want me to get up and show you the spot.

Martha continues to whine softly through her tears:

MARTHA

If I don't bury her... Life is nothing to me since I've lost everything that was dear to me.

KIRK

Go home. When I get well, I'll find you. Please leave!

After standing still for a few more moments, Martha quietly exits the house.

FADE TO:

INT. KIRK'S HOME - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Maude walks into the kitchen. She gives pills to Kirk.

KIRK

What are those?

MAUDE

An Antibiotic and a painkiller.

Kirk reluctantly takes pills and drinks water. Maude puts a plate with food in front of him. Kirk moves the plate away.

KIRK

I'm not hungry.

MAUDE

Those pills will make you drowsy. Eat something.

Kirk takes out a cigarette and leaning on his cane, hobbles to the mudroom.

I/E. MUDROOM/YARD - EVENING

With the front door open, Kirk sits on a stool smoking, gazing thoughtfully at the bay.

KIRK (V.O.)

(thinks)

If only I would've taken a different route ... No!

(MORE)

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

I won't blame myself. I did everything I could! Feel sorry for the girl though. Who did she have to get help from?

Kirk inhales deeply. Not noticing that the cigarette has burned out, he burns his finger, licks it. Lights a new cigarette.

KIRK (V.O.)

It's easy to judge other people, but how many mistakes have I made in life... I've left my wife and my daughter out... I love my daughter only through the lens of my own selfish perspective, recognizing her as an inseparable part of who I am. What advice did I give her when she needed it most? She's going through tough times now and I'm not around to help her.

All these thoughts bring Kirk down. The lines on his face deepen. He looks like a very old, depressed and miserable man.

INT. KIRK'S HOME - ROOM - EVENING

Kirk struggles to get up and go back into the house. He walks up to Maude and gently takes her hand. She stops sewing and, taking Kirk's hand, gives him a reassuring look.

Kirk lets go of Maude's hand and walks out of the room.

Kirk looks pitiful and bitter.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. FOREST - MEADOW - DAY

SUPER: Summer, 1954.

Kirk and Maude sit on the blanket. They just finished their picnic meal and Maude packs up. LITTLE LAURA, 4, is picking flowers in the meadow.

MAUDE

Laura, sweet heart, it's time to go home.

LITTLE LAURA

Mom, dad, a little more. I want to pick up a bouquet and put it in a vase at home.

KIRK

You'll do that next time.

MAUDE

Well, let her collect the bouquet, and we will admire nature.

KIRK

I admire nature every day at work. Soon the sun will set, and we still have a distance to go.

MAUDE

You admire it every day, but she doesn't.

Kirk instantly gets stubborn.

KIRK

The issue isn't about nature. The child must obey, and you spoil her.

(turns to Laura)

That's it, Laura, let's go or Mom and I are leaving.

Fascinated by flower picking Laura:

LAURA

Almost finished.

Kirk stands up, folds the blanket in annoyance, takes Maude's hand.

KIRK

Let's go.

MAD

And Laura?

KIRK

She'll catch up with us.

He holds Maude firmly by the hand and leads her out of the clearing.

KIRK (CONT'D)

Laura, we're gone. You will be left alone in the forest.

Little Laura rushes about, literally torn between flowers and parents. Kirk stubbornly pulls Maude out of the forest. Laura is crying behind.

LITTLE LAURA
 Mommy, daddy, wait. I'm afraid.
 Wait for me, please.

KIRK
 (to Maude)
 Don't stop. Let her catch up.
 She'll listen next time.

Little Laura runs after mom and dad. She is afraid of losing sight of them. Maude snatches her hand away from Kirk.

MAUDE
 Go to hell, stupid teacher!

Behind, they hear the tearing cry of Little Laura. Maude and Kirk turn around, but don't see her. Maude runs back. Little Laura lies in the grass. Blood oozes from her leg below the knee.

LITTLE LAURA
 (weeping bitterly)
 I hit something.

MAUDE
 My girl, sweetie. I'm sorry.

Maude picks up her daughter and carries her towards Kirk. A bouquet of flowers is left to lie alone on the grass.

MAUDE (CONT'D)
 Are you just going to stand here?
 Take the child! It's hard for me.

Puffing away his pride but not admitting guilt, Kirk takes his daughter in his arms.

END FLASHBACK

INT. KIRK'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Kirk staggers into the bedroom. Through Kirk's gaze, the bedroom moves smoothly. Furniture changes its clear forms to vague ones. The air moves through the bedroom in transparent waves. The painkiller relaxes and puts Kirk to sleep.

Barely able to keep his balance, Kirk lays down on the bed, closing his eyes.

INT. KIRK'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Kirk lies on his back his eyes closed.

KIRK'S DREAM:

A vision of Martha sinking to her knees with tears streaming down her face. Gripping a hefty kitchen knife, she fixes her vacant gaze into a void.

It is then, with a deliberate determination she plunges it into her stomach, hands working in unison.

BACK TO SCENE:

INT. KIRK'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Kirk opens his eyes, glances at his watch.

KIRK
(grumbles)
I just closed my eyes and it's
already four a.m.

Maude sleeps with her back to him.

KIRK (CONT'D)
(grumbles)
Oh my God! Have I overslept. The
girl can really be in trouble. I
gotta go check her out!

Maude lies in the dark with her eyes open.

MAUDE
Let me help you to put on your
boots.

Still staggering, Kirk gets up.

INT. KIRK'S HOUSE - MUDROOM - NIGHT

Grunting and struggling, he fastens a knife to his belt, and with a habitual movement reaches for the rifle that is missing. Immediately remembering that his rifle fell into the river, he pulls out a drawer and takes a pistol with him.

EXT. COURTYARD - TRUCK - NIGHT

Fueled by mounting excitement, Kirk breathes rapidly, launching himself into the truck, driving away with a violent burst, wheels stirring the gravel. The truck lurches onto the main road, swaying before steadying.

E/I ROAD - TRUCK - NIGHT

Kirk revs the gas. The road appears enigmatic and unfamiliar under the headlights, its path blurring slightly shifting direction in Kirk's eyes.

With eyes locked on the windshield, Kirk strains to see, refusing to slow down as he tries to make out the direction and survey the roadside. The truck occasionally drifts to the side, and Kirk promptly steers it back onto the tarmac.

KIRK

Will she decide to commit suicide?
Maybe she's asleep, and I'm just
being dramatic here.

Kirk misses the turn, brakes hard and reverses. The bumpy dirt road jolts the truck from side to side, plunging it into a deep puddle.

The front bumper crashes into a clay pile. The motor stalls. Kirk turns the key frantically to start the engine. Finally, after spitting gas from the exhaust pipe, the truck roars again.

Kirk abruptly reverses and rolls out back onto the road. With each mile of the extended drive, Kirk finds his mind drifting, allowing his imagination to spin tales of the worst possible outcomes.

E/I. ROAD - NIGHT

Kirk forcefully shakes his head, as if trying to dislodge the haunting images out of his head. He takes a deep breath, attempting to cast away the horror that had momentarily gripped his thoughts.

KIRK

No way! She wouldn't go that far!

Kirk slows down, trying to figure out which house belongs to Martha.

KIRK (CONT'D)

Must be this one.

With a bit of clumsiness, Kirk steps out of the truck, steadying himself on his good leg as he surveys the area. A dim glow emanates from the house.

He moves quickly, hobbling to the door and knocking. On the first knock the door swings open.

INT. MARTHA'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Kirk lumbers into the hallway. At that moment, a CHAIR FALLS in the room. Pain forgotten, Kirk dashes into the room.

INT. ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Martha's limp figure hangs suspended by a rope, convulsing with the final throes of death. Kirk swiftly cuts her free, and they both crash on the floor. Urgently pushing her aside, he begins chest compressions.

Fear begins to grip him as they yield no result. In a desperate attempt, he spots a bottle of water, hastily pouring it over her face hoping for a spark of life. Martha remains motionless, an eerie stillness enveloping the scene.

KIRK

(in desperation)

No! You can't give up! You must live!

Kirk exclaims, delivering a resounding slap to Martha's face. She wheezes and coughs, her chest heaving as she gasps for air.

Kirk covers her with his jacket, pulls her close, tenderly stroking her hair. Martha, hiding her face in his chest, trembling. She begins to cry softly.

MARTHA

(weak voice)

Why did you save me? I wanted to die..

KIRK

Don't know. Call it destiny. Looks like some kind of higher power wanted me to do that. Plus our conversation is far from over.

Pulling away from Kirk, Martha stops crying. Now she is staring blankly at the floor in complete apathy, as if she has not quite returned from the other world.

MARTHA

What can we talk about? I lost everything. I have nothing to live for.

Rising to his feet, Kirk extends a glass of water to Martha. She startles at the unexpected gesture, hastily accepting the glass. With trembling hands, she drinks it down in long, desperate gulps, succumbing to occasional coughs.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

How did you even find me here at that very moment?

KIRK

In my arms, I held your daughter for three days, battling against the odds. I fed her, shielded her from the cold. Our connection grew, perhaps becoming spiritual. It's as if, in a curious way, I sensed that you were about to...

MARTHA

You returned me back to my misery!.

KIRK

You underestimate yourself. I gave you a second chance at life. Now, embrace it. Find happiness, get married, build a family. Mistakes cant be rectified in death. Perhaps, down the road, you can offer a lifeline to someone else.

Only now Kirk wisps of vapor escaping his mouth, realizing the house is unheated. He gets up and kindles the stove, pours water from a bucket into the kettle to be heated.

MARTHA

Please take me to the place where...

KIRK

I will, but with a cold soul you can't go on such a journey. Let's warm up and then go. Have any tea?

Martha nods silently, pulling a tin can out of the cabinet, places it on the table.

EXT. BOOTHBAY HARBOR - DOCKS - MORNING

The truck stops right by the pier. Kirk struggles out of the truck. Martha holds his arm, helping him. They head towards the boat.

EXT. BAY - BOAT - MORNING

Navigating the waves, the boat forges ahead. Martha wraps her coat tighter, silently reflecting as she stares at the water.

EXT. BEAVER LAGOON - MORNING

After tying the boat to a dried stump and rechecking the knot, Kirk limps up the path to the rocky hill. From there, he once again surveys the lagoon.

His gaze rests on a boat about four hundred yards away from the shore sailing towards the lagoon.

KIRK

We need to take the guide with us.
It's not safe to go there on our
own.

Kirk leads the way and Martha follows in tow. Her rapid breaths indicate her rising anxiety.

EXT. JACK'S HOUSE - MORNING

Kirk and Martha reach the house and Kirk gently knocks on the door. He suddenly hears a familiar voice behind:

LIEUTENANT HIGGINS (O.S.)

Mister Lecroix? You and your
partner are under arrest on charges
for a conspiracy of killing a baby.

At that moment the door opens, and Jack appears in the doorway. His eyes shift between Kirk and Lieutenant Higgins.

JACK

My apologies, Sheriff, but I'm
afraid you're beyond your
jurisdiction. This is Indian soil.

At the same moment, an AGONIZING CRY OF A BABY pierces the air, reverberating from the heart of the house. Martha's face contorts with a whirlwind of emotions—shock, disbelief, and a sudden surge of hope and profound happiness.

In an instant, she races inside, propelled by a relentless urgency to uncover the source, her heart pounding in anticipation.

FREEZE FRAME:

Martha RACES into the house WITH A HAPPY FACE FULL OF HOPE.

BACK TO SCENE:

Kirk turns abruptly, finding Lieutenant Higgins flanked by two other YOUNG OFFICERS.

With a surge of anger, Kirk staggers towards Higgins, landing a powerful punch to his face, the impact punctuated by words that cut through the charged air.

KIRK

That's for the tragic chain of coincidences and a series of unfortunate events.

Higgins stumbles backward, falling to the ground with blood streaming from his nose.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. BOOTHBAY HARBOR - STREET - MORNING

SUPER: a week later.

Kirk and Maude stroll arm in arm through the lively town street. Maude, slightly bashful, wears a barely noticeable smile.

Kirk, clad in a civilian jacket, dark grey pressed trousers, and new boots, feels a subtle unease without his familiar uniform.

Carrying a basket filled with groceries, Kirk intermittently adjusts his shoulders, almost as if correcting an invisible uniform under his coat. The vibrant street is filled with smiles as Kirk and Maude make their way.

Passing by their favorite bakery, the owner and his wife cheerfully wave in greeting. Maude reciprocates with a wave, and Kirk, offering a belated nod, acknowledges them. Leaving the counter, the shop owner walks towards the door.

STORE OWNER

Greetings, Mr. and Mrs. Lecroix.
It's truly a pleasure to see you
both looking so well. Is there a
special occasion?

MAUDE

Actually, yes. Our daughter, Laura,
just had a baby. She's moving in
with us, and we're here to support
her.

KIRK

(beaming with joy and
pride)

That's right. We are now proud
grandparents, and it's a wonderful
reason to celebrate.

The building of the bus station is visible ahead. Laura,
Kirk's and Maude's daughter exits the bus, holding her
infant.

THE END

FADE OUT