

THE REB

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INT. WOODS NEAR COLD HARBOR - DAY

Distant and sporadic MUSKET FIRE echoes from all directions. The sounds of nature are silent.

SUPER: COLD HARBOR.

Followed by --

SUPER: 10 MILES FROM RICHMOND, VIRGINIA.

Followed by --

SUPER: JUNE 12, 1864.

A blur SWOOSHES past with a loud SNAP of twigs and RUSTLE of dead leaves.

Racing through the woods, the loud, heavy, LABORED BREATHING of a boy cuts into the air as he dodges thin trees and brush.

He sees his bloodied hand swipe away at low branches as they wait to cut his face. The land shakes as if struck by an earthquake as he runs from the distant rifles.

A STUMBLE! His hand jolts forward to break his fall. He continues to charge forward.

A tall TREE with a thick trunk is ahead. He veers towards it. The tree grows closer... and closer...

EXT. A THICK TREE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

BAM!

He SLAMS into the trunk.

The boy turns around, his back to the tree.

For the first time we see NOAH (15), in the uniform of the Union Army. An innocent face, his rosy cheeks are smeared with blood.

Noah winches in pain. He slides to the ground and sees a hole in his blood-soaked trousers below the knee.

His eyes roll back into his head as he passes out.

Distant MUSKET FIRE continues.

The RUSTLE and CRINKLE of leaves waft into the air as MATSON (50s), peeks around the other side of the same tree with caution..

Gaunt, with dark beard stubble on his hollow face, his weary eyes narrow under a tattered hat.

Matson rises. He wears a Confederate uniform. With a hunting knife clutched in his hand, he takes measured steps - ready to fight.

He sees the bloody leg. Another quiet step reveals the unconscious soldier. He lifts the boy's rifle and tosses it out of reach.

Matson studies Noah's face.

Noah stirs in his sleep - his brow furrows. He has grown ashen. He is slipping away as blood puddles at his leg.

The surrounding sound becomes thick and heavy. It dissipates into utter silence.

A faint HEARTBEAT briefly THUMP-THUMPS and fades.

The far away LAUGHTER of a young girl echoes.

She HUMS a sing-song tune - the haunting melody reverberates as if in a cavernous concert hall.

Noah's closed eyes are all that can be seen.

As if shouting directly into his ear, the young girl SQUEALS with delight!

EXT. THE BACKYARD OF A HOME - DAY

Noah's eyes open wide!

He sits up with a loud GASP to find himself under a different tree, dressed in his nice church clothes.

LAUGHING at his side, is RACHEL (15), very pretty with braided hair, freckles, and wearing her Sunday best.

RACHEL
You fell asleep!

NOAH
What?

RACHEL
I said you fell asleep!

NOAH

Oh. Oh... I'm sorry.

RACHEL

Just be thankful you didn't fall
asleep in church.

NOAH

I usually do, but I've learned to
do it with my eyes open.

She giggles at his joke. She jumps to her feet and climbs
onto a swing that hangs from a low branch.

RACHEL

Push me!

Noah rises, goes to her, and gives her light pushes. His
mind is elsewhere as she swings gently to the soft CREAK
of the branch and the SQUEAK of the rope.

EXT. A POND - DAY

Rachel, in a plain dress, sits at the bow of a rowboat
and faces Noah, in his every-day clothes, as he mans the
oars on a leisurely outing.

NOAH

Rachel?

RACHEL

Did you hear that Mavis Pruitt bet
Olive Franklin a dime that she'll
win first prize this year at the
fair?

NOAH

First prize for what?

RACHEL

Her blueberry crumb cake, what
else? It's the only thing she can
make. She'll never get herself a
husband unless she finds one who
lives on a diet of blueberries!

NOAH

She's the same age as us. She's
got time to learn.

RACHEL

And how is she so high and mighty
that she can bet a whole dime!?

NOAH

Her father's got an inheritance.

RACHEL

That's the rumor, but no one knows for sure.

NOAH

My ma said it's true.

RACHEL

So did mine, but I still have my doubts. She only has that one Sunday dress. If they had money, she would have more.

NOAH

No sense in making a dress that she'll outgrow by September.

RACHEL

Outgrow!? She's not going to get any taller than she is right now.

NOAH

I didn't mean up. I meant "out."

RACHEL

Noah Chambers! How can you say a thing like that!?

NOAH

Because it's true.

RACHEL

Gentlemen don't speak of such things!

NOAH

You're just jealous.

RACHEL

If I weren't a lady, I would slap you, right across your cheek!

NOAH

What's stopping you? You slapped me three years ago!

RACHEL

Yes, but I... back... I wasn't a lady then. Like I am now.

NOAH
That's true.

RACHEL
What did I slap you for, anyway?

NOAH
I put a worm in your lunch pail.

RACHEL
That's right! You were a horrid
boy! Pleasant to look at, but
horrid just the same.

A fond smile appears on Noah's lips.

His face grows serious.

NOAH
Rachel...

She knows what is coming. She doesn't want to hear it.

RACHEL
I'll catch up to Mavis Pruitt by
October, at the latest.

Their eyes lock. Sadness washes over her face.

EXT. A MEADOW - DAY

A blanket is spread on the ground, weighted down with a
large wicker basket, and plates with half-eaten food.

Rachel and Noah walk a distance away.

NOAH
Rachel... I need to tell you
something.

She is nervous.

RACHEL
No. Don't you dare, Noah Chambers.

NOAH
Rachel --

RACHEL
I said don't you dare!

NOAH
I'm signing up. I'm enlisting.

Tears welling up in her eyes.

NOAH (CONT'D)
Eleventh Connecticut Infantry.

She whispers, in an attempt to hold in her emotion.

RACHEL
You're too young.

NOAH
I'll be sixteen next year. I'll
just change the five to a six.
Lying about one number ain't no
big deal.

RACHEL
You'll get yourself killed.

He doesn't respond.

The KA-BANG of a musket! The WHISTLE of a bullet! The
sickening THUD smashing into flesh!

Noah SCREAMS in agony! He looks at his leg - blood gushes
from a hole in his trousers!

EXT. A THICK TREE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

His face is once again smeared with blood as he sees
MATSON, knife in hand, extract the bullet from his leg.

Noah SCREAMS with pain!

MATSON
It's all right, boy! It's all
right! I got the little bastard
right here!

Matson's blood-soaked fingers clasp a flattened musket
ball.

MATSON (CONT'D)
I'm gonna have to stitch this up,
and it's gonna hurt like hell.
Want me to fetch ya some wood to
clamp your teeth into?

Noah stares at Matson for a moment, and passes out.

EXT. THE WOODS - DAY - LATER

Well-worn boots covered by tattered gray pants STOMP over dead leaves, twigs and rocks.

They continue to march in a tired dirge as Noah comes into view ahead, asleep under the tree.

Closer, and closer... CRUNCH - CRUNCH.

They stop before the young man.

Noah lifts his heavy eyelids. He sees Matson, and sits up with a start and a GASP!

His eyes scan all over.

MATSON

Your rifle is safe, don't worry.
And ya won't be needing it.

Matson carries a branch he has fashioned into a crutch.

Noah tries to stand but recoils and grabs his leg as his face contorts in pain.

MATSON (CONT'D)

Had to stich you up. The ball
wasn't easy to find, so had to cut
a longer path in.

Matson leans the crutch against the tree.

MATSON (CONT'D)

This will help.

NOAH

Who are you?

MATSON

Call it Matson.

NOAH

You're... a reb?

MATSON

I'm a Baptist.

NOAH

But...

MATSON

Yeah... I could have been the guy
that shot that ball into ya.

Confused, Noah furrows his brow.

MATSON (CONT'D)
Be thankful I ain't the world's
best shot. I was most likely
aimin' for your head.

Matson smiles.

MATSON (CONT'D)
Put you out of your misery real
quick-like. Know what I mean?

Noah gives a slow nod of understanding.

MATSON (CONT'D)
But, I ain't in the habit of
shootin' youngsters. Even Union
youngsters.

NOAH
I'm eighteen.

Matson's smile goes crooked.

MATSON
Now, I saved your life, boy. Don't
repay me with a tall tale.

Noah thinks on this.

NOAH
Sixteen.

MATSON
Fifteen.

NOAH
And a half.

Matson's smile relaxes as he sits across from Noah.

MATSON
I could tell. My boy was fifteen.

NOAH
Was?

MATSON
Sixth Tennessee Infantry. He was
killed at Shiloh. The place of
peace.

NOAH

I'm sorry. I wasn't at Shiloh.

Matson reaches into his haversack. He hands Noah a piece of bread and an apple.

Noah accepts the gift.

NOAH (CONT'D)

Thank you.

Noah takes a bite of the apple.

MATSON

I didn't want him to join. Thought he was at home with his ma. But... he enlisted.

NOAH

Were you at Shiloh?

Matson becomes lost in a memory.

MATSON

Yeah. But I didn't know he was. Didn't find out for almost a year. His Captain wrote his ma, and his ma wrote me. Took four months for the letter to find where I was. Pretty torn when I got it... but the message was... message was clear.

Noah is stoic as he gazes at Matson.

MATSON (CONT'D)

He was probably one of the hundreds we shoved in a ditch and covered with dirt. And I didn't know.

NOAH

I'm real sorry to hear that, Matson. Truly.

Matson returns from the past.

NOAH (CONT'D)

My name is Noah.

MATSON

Fine biblical name. Who's Rachel?

Noah is caught off guard.

MATSON (CONT'D)
You were callin' her name when you
were delirious.

NOAH
I was?

MATSON
Yep. Your sweetheart?

NOAH
She's just a girl back home.

MATSON
Must be special.

Noah shows the hint of a smile.

NOAH
Maybe. I guess she is.

MATSON
Where's home?

NOAH
Bridgeport, Connecticut.

MATSON
Chattanooga, here.

NOAH
You weren't in the same company as
your son?

MATSON
I was in the Fourteenth Infantry -
Heth's Division.

Noah thinks on this.

NOAH
Am I your prisoner now?

MATSON
Turn you over to the command...
you get sent to a prison camp to
die in the mud of dysentery. I
ain't got no interest in doin'
that.

Noah doesn't respond though his face shows relief.

MATSON (CONT'D)

Can't leave ya on your own,
neither.

NOAH

Why not?

MATSON

You went around the flank somehow.
There's more of us than you in
these parts.

NOAH

Oh.

MATSON

There's a report of a Union Camp,
'bout twelve miles east.

NOAH

I can make it.

MATSON

Maybe you can. Maybe you can't.

NOAH

I can't sit out the war under this
tree.

Matson chuckles.

MATSON

That's a fact. I'll walk with ya a
spell - until you're close enough
to the camp to get in on your own.

NOAH

That'd be dangerous to you!

MATSON

Yeah, I'll get by. You just
promise that you won't turn *me* in
as a prisoner.

NOAH

I won't.

MATSON

Listen.

They listen to the light sounds of woodland birds.

MATSON (CONT'D)

Shootin's over.

NOAH

Wonder who won?

Matson

Couldn't tell ya. If I had to
venture a guess, I would say
Robert E. Lee had the upper hand
today.

NOAH

Maybe.

He looks at his leg.

NOAH (CONT'D)

I'd say I had the lower hand.

The stitch on the wound is red and hideous.

MATSON

I ain't no doctor. Did the best I
could.

NOAH

I'm grateful to ya.

MATSON

When you get to the camp see if
there's a real doctor who can tend
to it.

Noah nods in agreement with another bite of the apple.

MATSON (CONT'D)

Did you find what you was lookin'
fer?

A puzzled look on Noah's face.

MATSON (CONT'D)

Glory. That's why you joined,
weren't it?

NOAH

No... not really.

MATSON

Then why?

NOAH

To kill Johnny Rebs.

MATSON

Oh. I see. How many you kill?

NOAH

None. I shot, but didn't hit anyone - that I could see.

(quietly)

This was my first battle. Are they all like this?

MATSON

People blown up... body parts flyin' through the air... blood pourin' over the ground like rain water until it turns into red mud... yeah. They're all like this.

Noah listens in a sort of stunned silence.

MATSON (CONT'D)

How did you get hit?

NOAH

We attacked the southern end of the fortifications. I just heard splats... and thuds... musket balls slamming into men all around me. Seemed like forever. Our ranks broke and I headed for the trees to get away from the bullets - I could hear them whistling past my ears. All of a sudden, it felt like my leg snapped in two. I looked down and saw the blood... and I ran and I ran... I just kept running... and when I wanted to stop 'cause of the pain, I run some more... and that was all.

MATSON

The frontal assault against our works was suicide.

Noah speaks - barely above a whisper.

NOAH

That describes it. Guess that makes me a deserter.

MATSON

When a line falls apart and men scatter... that ain't desertin'. 'Sides... you're headed back to a Union camp. Deserters don't do that.

NOAH

Why are we fighting like this?
You're a nice man... why are we
killing each other?

MATSON

Why did you want to kill Johnny
Rebs?

NOAH

Because... because of the war. To
free the slaves.

MATSON

I don't own no slaves. Never owned
another person in my life.

NOAH

So why are you fighting?

MATSON

'Cause I don't think you Yankees
should tell us how to live. Simple
as that.

NOAH

But you don't live like that.

MATSON

But others do, and it's not up to
Abe Lincoln to decide.

NOAH

He's the President.

MATSON

And that's why we left the union.

He stands.

MATSON (CONT'D)

But we won't be changin' each
other's minds, so how's 'bout we
strike out for that camp?

He helps Noah to his feet, and places the crutch under
his arm.

MATSON (CONT'D)

Perfect fit.

Matson carries Noah's rifle, and they head towards the
deep woods.

EXT. A PATH - DAY

Tree tops arch and hover above to form a cathedral-like ceiling over a narrow path. Noah has mastered the crutch as Matson whistles a verse of "Dixie."

NOAH
Did you know that's President
Lincoln's favorite song?

MATSON
It is?

NOAH
Yep.

Matson mutters to himself.

MATSON
That's too bad.

They walk in silence for several moments.

Noah whistles a few bars of "Battle Cry of Freedom."

NOAH
(sings)
SHOUTING THE BATTLE CRY OF
FREEDOM.

He turns to Matson.

NOAH (CONT'D)
Know that one?

MATSON
Yeah, I've heard it.

Matson continues to WHISTLE "Dixie," which brings a smile to Noah's face.

Matson stops whistling, and motions to Noah to halt.

The woods are silent. No birds. Dead. Quiet.

A distant SNAP of a twig echoes.

MATSON (CONT'D)
We've got company.

NOAH
Should we hide!?

MATSON

Too late for that.

They see two Confederate soldiers in the distance.

Noah slumps his chin into his chest.

NOAH

Good for you, bad for me.

MATSON

You just follow along, hear?

NOAH

What are you going to do?

The soldiers draw closer. SGT. HARRELL (30), tough, stocky, and chomps on a cigar. He's a long time veteran, and his tattered uniform proves it.

He SHOUTS out as he and the soldier raise their rifles.

SGT. HARRELL

Who's there!?

Matson grumbles.

MATSON

Sumbitch.

He answers back.

MATSON (CONT'D)

Matson. Fourteenth Infantry.

A pensive Matson and Noah watch as the two men approach.

The other soldier, PRIVATE QUIGG (20s), has dried blood on his face and hands. His uniform is torn and stained with blood. He smiles.

QUIGG

Well, lookee here! We done got ourselves a Yank!

MATSON

We? This here's my prisoner.

SGT. HARRELL

And what you plannin' on doin' with him?

MATSON

Takin' him to camp. Turn him over
to the commanding officer.

SGT. HARRELL

That a fact?

Harrell stares into Matson's eyes, and speaks with an
eerie calmness.

SGT. HARRELL (CONT'D)

You're goin' the wrong way.

Matson isn't phased or intimidated.

MATSON

Well, Sergeant, that's right. We
was headed that way but ran into a
Union patrol. Decided the best
thing to do was circumvent and
double back.

SGT. HARRELL

That a fact?

Matson smiles.

MATSON

Sure as shootin'.

Harrell turns to Noah.

SGT. HARRELL

You at Cold Harbor?

NOAH

Yes.

SGT. HARRELL

You got one, dumb commanding
officer - order a full frontal
assault like he done.

NOAH

I'm inclined to agree. Got me
shot.

Harrell notices his wounded leg.

SGT. HARRELL

Mighty nice stitchin' there, boy.
You had time to get that fixed up
on the battlefield?

Noah doesn't respond. Harrell smiles at Matson.

SGT. HARRELL (CONT'D)
Now, who could'a done that?

MATSON
I did. I didn't want him to bleed
out 'afore I got him to camp.

SGT. HARRELL
A lot of trouble for one little
Yank, Fourteenth Tennessee.

Harrell turns his back to them, takes a few steps. Quigg
glares at a nervous Noah.

SGT. HARRELL (CONT'D)
We'll hang him.

He turns to Matson.

MATSON
What?

SGT. HARRELL
We're gonna hang the Yank. From
that tree.

MATSON
He's my prisoner. I'm taking him
to camp.

SGT. HARRELL
No. You're not. Quigg? You still
got that rope?

QUIGG
Yeah, but let's just cut his
throat and get goin'!

Harrell steps in... face to face with Noah.

SGT. HARRELL
No. I like to see 'em dance. Dance
on air.

Quigg pulls a rope from his haversack and ties one end
into a noose.

MATSON
You can't do this.

SGT. HARRELL

I outrank you. I can do whatever
the hell I want. We're here to
kill Yanks, Tennessee.

MATSON

Killin' in battle is one thing.
This here is murder.

Quigg puts the noose around Noah's neck. Noah drops his
crutch and stumbles as he is pulled to the tree. Quigg
tosses the rope over a branch.

Harrell slaps the side of Noah's face.

SGT. HARRELL

Dance nice 'n pretty for me, Yank.

Harrell and Quigg grab the rope.

BANG! A bullet hole erupts between Quigg's eyes. He
crumples - dead before he hits the ground.

Sgt. Harrell struggles for his pistol as Matson drops his
rifle and lift's Noah's from the ground! He FIRES - BANG!

Harrell drops dead with a hole in his forehead and his
wide eyes staring at heaven.

MATSON

I was prayin' that your rifle was
loaded.

Shaken, Noah tears the noose from his neck.

NOAH

I don't know as I ever fired a
shot in the battle. If I did, I
don't remember reloading.

Noah looks at the dead men.

MATSON

Let's get to that Union camp.

Matson and Noah continue on their way and leave the dead
behind with faces frozen in a final surprise.

EXT. NEAR THE UNION CAMP - DAY

The setting sun sits low in the sky and casts an orange
hue over the land. Noah leans against a tree as Matson,
crouched low, returns.

MATSON

We're closer than I thought.
Camp's just behind them trees. I
don't dare go no further. Think
you can make it?

NOAH

Yes. Matson... how can I thank
you?

MATSON

You just... stay alive. For your
Ma. Don't put her through the hell
of losin' a kid.

Noah reaches up and hugs his friend. Matson controls his
emotion as best he can.

MATSON (CONT'D)

If ya ever see me on a
battlefield... miss. Go on. Git
goin'.

Noah smiles through his tears, and limps towards the
camp. A quick glance over his shoulder and he sees Matson
walk away.

He turns towards the camp. BANG! A shot CRACKS the still
air! Noah turns to see a UNION SENTRY in the firing
position - smoke lingers from the barrel.

He turns to see Matson, blood pouring from his chest.

NOAH

Matson!

He rushes towards the fallen man and falls to his knees.

NOAH (CONT'D)

Oh, Jesus, no! Matson... Matson!

The sentry approaches.

UNION SENTRY

He almost had ya, boy. Damned Reb.

Noah looks up at the sentry as tears flow from his eyes.

FADE OUT.