

The Giant Elk

by
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FADE IN:

EXT. EASTERN MONTANA - THE GREAT PLAINS - DAY

AN ARIAL SHOT

Blue mountains rise like an island in a yellow sea... And then the Montana landscape falls away from the prairies, disintegrating into sandstone ridges.

And there is the Missouri River with it's crystal clear water, cutting through the long Pine Trees.

This is a scene from the late 19th century, where Man and Nature were still one.

And in the distance rides a HORSEMAN.

HAWKEYE is an INDIAN in his late thirties, wears a yellow headband and a Calico shirt.

EXT. A CATHEDRAL OF MATURE FOREST - DAY

With fast, light moves, Hawkeye dismounts and slips through young trees, rifle in hand.

HAWKEYE'S POV

About thirty feet away, through the gun sight... A large brown object is moving slowly.

A SHOT IS FIRED

It's a LARGE ELK that leaps at the moment of impact.

EXT. FOLIAGE - DAY

HAWKEYE approaches the fallen Elk, ready to fire another round but suddenly... Something very large plows ahead through the foliage.

The trees are shaking and we get a glimpse of that something... VERY LARGE ANTLERS, about twenty feet away coming right at Hawkeye.

He turns and starts to shoot. The movement stops for seconds... And then continues... Click, click, his rifle is empty and no time to reload. He turns and starts to run.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Hawkeye is running fast through the foliage, not looking behind.

The ROAR OF THE RIVER in the near distance echoes through.

He slows a bit, looks behind, finds nothing but keeps running anyway.

Breathless, he leans on a tree, looks around again in all directions but all he sees is FOREST.

He quickly reloads his rifle and starts to climb a small cliff behind, reaches the top and finds a small water stream that ends in a puddle. He lies down to catch his breath.

Moments later he leans over the water and dips his head in... And as he takes his head out he notices something in the reflection of the water.

AN ELK'S HEAD.

Antlers, so large they extend beyond the puddle.

Hawkeye freezes as the Beast breaths down his neck. He then turns quickly trying to reach for his weapon.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

A horrible scream... Then seconds later, Hawkeye comes flying down a thirty foot cliff and into the bushes near the river bank.

EXT. THE MISSOURI RIVER - SAME TIME

A canoe drifts slowly down stream, two MEN are on board.

One of them seems to have heard Hawkeye's scream. He scans the woods and the mountains beyond.

JIM JOHNSON is in his mid 50's, long gray hair and beard. He wears a raccoon hat.

His buckskin shirt is tied at the waist with a belt holding a TOMAHAWK. This man is a true hunter. A true frontiersman hacked right out of the wilderness.

His son, NATHAN is 17, long blond hair. Dressed exactly like his father... And tries to be like him in every aspect.

As father and son paddle slowly down stream;

JIM
(listening intently)
Did you hear something?

NATHAN
No, father... What is it?

JIM
I could swear I heard a man
screaming out there somewhere.

His sharp eyes scans the woods as he listens carefully.

JIM
Maybe it was a bird or something.

Nathan tries to act like his father. He carelessly scans around.

NATHAN
I don't see anything, except for
the mountains... what are they
called, father?

JIM
(points at a high cliff)
Those pale formations there are the
White Cliffs... You'll have to
climb up there one of those days,
son. A true hunter must know how to
climb.

NATHAN
(smiling)
I didn't know I should break my
neck before I become a true hunter.
But if you want me to, I'd do it, I
think I could.

JIM
Sure you could.

NATHAN
Have you? Father?

JIM
Not in a million years.

They look at each other and laugh.

Nathan then points at yellowish trees along the river bank.

NATHAN

What about those trees?

JIM

Those are cottonwood trees. There were many more of 'em some years ago but were cut down for steam boat fuel. Cottonwoods are the best shade trees in the west.

NATHAN

That's not good to be cuttin' trees like that, right father?

JIM

Well, there are some good things and bad things out there. Cutting up those trees for sure was NOT a good thing, many animals left because of that, and we might never see them again.

NATHAN

This is really bad.

JIM

It sure is... You know, I never really cared for the steam boats. Railroads sounds much better to me... They take you everywhere.

NATHAN

Not me, trains scare the hell out of me... They're too big and too noisy.

JIM

Things change, son, and we have to get used to that... You never know, someday they might make trains that could fly like birds.

They both look at each other and laugh at this silly idea.

Jim scans around and finds a couple of big rocks in the water near the river bank. He points at them.

JIM (cont'd)

Bet you we'll find some big salmon near those rocks... Lets take it up.

They start paddling towards the river bank.

EXT. THE RIVER BANK - DAY

They land the canoe and jump out. Nathan carries a pair of long fishing rods. He sits on the rocky shore and starts hooking the baits.

Jim unloads a couple of rifles.

JIM

Nathan, you go ahead, I'll just go take a look around... I'll leave your rifle here.

NATHAN

(smiling)

Bet you I'll have me three or four salmon by the time you come back.

JIM

Sounds good. Your mother would love you for that.

He places one of the rifles near the canoe as he climbs a small cliff which leads to the woods.

Nathan walks about ten feet in the river then climb one of the smooth rocks. He swings both rods into the water, then sits and waits.

EXT. FOREST - LATER

Jim climbs another small hillside then walks through a foliage. It seems peaceful out here... The green forest... The rolling yellow-green hills beyond... And then the White Cliff Mountains as they stand high with a ring of some dark clouds near the top.

Something OR someone is coming from behind the trees.

JIM DRAWS HIS RIFLE.

Two HORSEMEN emerge. They are the DAVIS BROTHERS, FRANK and DAN. They are in their late thirties... A couple of cowboys.

JIM

Hey folks, how's it goin'?

DAN

Hello Jim, how's the catch today?

JIM

I don't know yet, Danny... Nathan is down there. We had a late start this morning, how about you boys?

FRANK

We gotta a couple of rabbits, almost no animals out there, so strange. Last night we ran into some men, out by that old steam boat landing up the river. They too, complained.

JIM

Ya I know... Seems it's gonna be one of those long winters this year. Lots of boiled wheat.

The men laugh.

FRANK

I just can't see JIM JOHNSON eating boiled wheat, not in any season.

His brother Dan approves.

DAN

I'd have to see it to believe it.

Another laugh.

DAN (cont'd)

Anyway, how's Kathrine, Jim... Still makin' those famous apple pies?

JIM

Oh yes, as good as always. You boys better come and bring the family over one of these days.

FRANK

We sure will, Jim... You take care now and god bless ya.

They rein their horses, disappearing quickly under a cliff.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Leaves crack under Jim's feet as he crosses over a small stream... His eyes scans the forest.

Soft wind blows. It carries with it a certain scent. Jim stops dead... He knows this smell.

He is suddenly alert as he looks around trying to pinpoint the source of the smell, then;

JIM
OH GOD... NATHAN.

Jim cocks his rifle as he blasts his way back to the river.

EXT. THE RIVER BANK - SAME TIME

One of the rods shakes. Nathan is excited. He pulls it out quickly, it resists. He pulls harder as he gets up on his feet... It's coming out now.

A trees leaf is hooked... Nathan shakes his head.

He then hears something behind him, turns quickly.

A small Grizzly Bear cub stands few feet behind him in the water, confused, trying to figure out whether Nathan is a friend or foe... It's about five feet away.

Nathan is also confused. Looks like he had never been that close to a wild animal before.

NATHAN
Hello.

The small cub lets out a soft roar as it tries to stand up on it's back feet, but losses balance in the water and falls on it's back.

Nathan laughs.

But suddenly a real, loud roar sounds, coming from the right side of Nathan. It's the GRIZZLY BEAR MOTHER... Big, strong, and seems to have already decided Nathan is a foe.

It roars loud as it approaches the water slowly, quickly joined by it's cub.

Nathan's heart seems to have stopped. He stares motionless at the large animal as it stands less than ten feet away from him. His eyes moves slowly toward the rifle.

But he knows he stands no chance.

JIM (O.S.)
(almost whispering)
Son, stay where you are, don't make
a move.

Jim is on the left side, standing about twenty feet away...
Rifle in hand and pointed at the Grizzly.

THIS IS A STANDOFF.

The Bear pays no attention to Jim at first, and takes another
step toward Nathan.

Nathan is barely keeping his balance on the smooth rock as
his body shivers from fear.

JIM
Son... If you stood still she'll go
away. Don't worry, just relax.

NATHAN
I... I can't father.

His voice is shivering as well... And the Grizzly is becoming
more aggressive now.

Jim realizes the danger his son is in.

HE SCREAM LOUD;

JIM
HEY!... HEY LOOK AT ME!

The Grizzly now shifts it's attention to Jim. It shoots a
glare at him as it roars loud and takes few steps in his
direction, then stands high on it's back feet, reaching
almost fifteen feet of height.

It looks enormous, majestic... And damn scary as it sounds
another deafening roar.

Jim takes few steps back, cocks his rifle.

JIM (cont'd)
NATHAN GET OUT OF THE WATER... Run
for the woods... NOW!

Nathan hesitates.

JIM
GO!

NATHAN

Father, shoot it... I'm not going anywhere.

Jim is about to pull the trigger when the Bear suddenly calms down. It wants to end the standoff as it senses no real danger. It turns slowly and walks toward it's cub.

JIM

Nathan, walk to me... Very slowly.

Nathan is motionless for a second, then slowly lowers his shivering foot into the water, takes few steps toward his father, then makes a run for it.

The Grizzly simply walks toward the woods, followed by it's cub.

JIM

Hurry, son, lets go.

Jim and Nathan push off their canoe back in the water and paddle away. Nathan is still in shock.

NATHAN

Father, I was very scared.

JIM

That's OK. I was scared too.

NATHAN

Thank god you came back in time. I didn't know what to do, my brain stopped.

JIM

You were suppose to run into the woods when I told you to, Nathan... You MUST listen to me.

NATHAN

Sorry, I do listen to you. But I just couldn't leave you alone.

JIM

Nathan, I been alone in these woods many times in my life. I know how to handle situations like this. But you, son... You're still young, you have alot to learn, and if you do as I say you'll learn alot faster.

NATHAN
I'm sorry again, father. I promise
I'll listen to every word you say.

JIM
That's good.

A long pause, then;

NATHAN
Father... How were you when you
were my age? You never really talk
much about your younger days.

For some reason, Jim doesn't like this question.

JIM
I was like anybody else. Forget the
past and lets think of today.

NATHAN
I just...

Jim suddenly holds out his hand, turns and looks at the river
bank.

JIM
Did you hear something?

NATHAN
Again? What is it?

Jim starts paddling towards the river bank.

JIM
I know I heard something.

NATHAN
But what if the Grizzly came back?

JIM
I don't care. I have to know what's
up there.

EXT. FOLIAGE - DAY

Jim jumps out of the canoe in a hurry, points to his son to
stay behind. His rifle is drawn. Nathan is surprised with his
father's action.

Now we can hear a soft moan coming from the bushes. Jim is
alert. He moves slowly through the foliage.

His hunter's skills are all at work now. He pinpoints where the sound is coming from, and carefully moves forward, pushes some long leaves aside and...

SPOTS HAWKEYE.

Hawkeye is almost unconscious, barely breathing. His lower waist is covered with blood.

JIM
Oh Jesus! Nathan, come, hurry.

Nathan runs to help. Jim tries to lift Hawkeye when Nathan suddenly stops and screams, pointing upward;

NATHAN
DAD! WATCH OUT!

JIM LOOKS UP.

A large rock is coming down at them. Jim pulls himself and Hawkeye away seconds before impact as the rock slams hard right on the spot where they were.

JIM
Something is not right! What the hell is going on here?

NATHAN
Father, I could swear someone pushed that rock down.

JIM
This is very strange... Anyway, we need to get this poor man out of here NOW!

They carry Hawkeye into the canoe. Jim gets back to the foliage and scans the area, finds nothing and hurries back to the canoe.

EXT. HILLTOP - DAY

About a hundred feet away from this high point, the canoe is crossing a bend in the river.

Someone OR something is following the path of the canoe through the heavily canopied forest.

It stops as the canoe comes to a stop on the other side of the river bank.

EXT. THE RIVER BANK

Jim and Nathan carry Hawkeye off the boat and into the bushes.

JIM
Son, go get the mule, hurry.

Nathan runs off quickly as Jim leans over Hawkeye.

JIM
Hey old friend, can you hear me?
What happened to you? Talk to me
HAWKEYE.

For some reason Jim is extremely worried. He walks back to the river bank, his eyes scans like a Hawk.

Hawkeye is moaning softly. His body is shaking. Jim takes off his shirt and covers him with it.

JIM
Hang on old buddy, you're safe now.

Nathan comes back, pulling the rein of a large mule. They carry Hawkeye and place him on top of it.

INT. JIM'S CABIN - EVENING

KATHRINE, Jim's wife, is kneading bread, she is 40. Long blond bony-tale, pretty green eyes.

The cabin has two primitive rooms, waxed paper windows, log walls.

The place is lit with kerosene lanterns. A heavy iron pot sits on a tibbet.

A dog barks sounds in the distance. Kathrine is alert.

EXT. JIM'S CABIN - EVENING

Jim & Nathan approaches the cabin. They appear warily. Hawkeye is laid face down on the mule. Kathrine opens the door and runs to greet them, notices Hawkeye.

KATHRINE
(hugging Jim)
I thought my men went fishing, not
hunting Indians!

NATHAN
(getting his share of
hugs)
Well, we tried to get some fish
too, mom.

INT. JIM'S CABIN - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Kathrine makes sure Hawkeye is OK, he's in bed, still unconscious, bandages on his forehead and lower waist. She closes the door gently as she leaves the room.

INT. JIM'S CABIN - NIGHT

Jim lights & smokes a clay pipe, seems lost in his thoughts. Nathan sits across from him while Kathrine prepares dinner.

She lifts the heavy iron pot off the tibbet. Nathan goes to help her but she shrugs his hand off and carries it herself to the table, they all gather around.

There's pan-baked bread. The pot has yellow cornmeal in a kind of stew. Everyone waits.

JIM
Thank you lord for rewardin' us
with your blessings. Amen.

As they start to eat;

NATHAN
Father who is this man... And what
happened to him?

Jim takes a long pause before he answers.

JIM
His name is Hawkeye... An old
friend. I'm not sure what happened
to him. His wounds are not from
Bear claws. Someone hurt that man
and pushed 'em down the cliff.
Looks like he'd been stabbed, not
with a knife, something alot
thicker, more like a horn.

Jim scratches his chin as he closes his eyes, as if to shake a bad thought off his head.

JIM

But I'm surprised, this man is a well trained hunter... Would take a very large animal to bring 'em down.

KATHRINE

You mean an Elk did this to him?

Jim takes a long, deep breath before he answers.

JIM

Maybe. Everything is possible

KATHRINE

Elks don't kill people... do they?

JIM

No. But I heard stories from old hunters about Elks, over grown bulls... Antlers, so big could take a Grizzly down. Come near their cows they turn to Beasts... Could be that.

NATHAN

Are there any animals like that out in the woods now? Father?

Another deep, long breath from Jim.

JIM

I don't know about now, but I know there used to be.

NATHAN

You seen 'em?

JIM

(abruptly)

NO!

KATHRINE

Maybe Hawkeye came across a jealous young bull, and the bull hit 'em.

Jim fakes a smile.

JIM

Maybe.

KATHRINE
(smiling)
Just like men. Right Jim?

Jim nods, smiling

NATHAN
What are you talking about, mom?

KATHRINE
(laughing)
Your father almost shot a man once
because he came up to me and told
me how pretty I am.

JIM
(winks at Nathan)
That was ten years ago dear.

Both men laugh...

KATHRINE
(angry)
OK you two big hunters, time for
bed... GOODNIGHT.

Jim laughs. He snatches her and seat her on his lap... As if
to change the subject.

JIM
You were... And still the most
beautiful girl that ever lived in
MONTANA.

KATHRINE
My god Jim, those were the exact
words you said to me almost twenty
years ago, remember?

JIM
Of course I do, honey.

NATHAN
OK mother, lets hear the story.

KATHRINE
Your father was the most handsome
Fur Trader in Garfield County.
Girls giggled when they saw him. He
used to pass through town once a
week, along with the ranchers...
For months he never missed a week.

KATHRINE(cont'd)

I'd pass by him and he'd smile at me.

She runs her fingers through Jim's hair.

KATHRINE

This would take me through the whole week and I'd come back for more the next week. And oneday he stopped coming. I felt the world had stopped. Week after week I'd go down and wait... And wait. He wouldn't show. Then I became sick, sick in my heart. People don't believe it when I tell them, but in those days I lived with half a heart... And that handsome Fur Trader had the other half.

NATHAN

Why did you stop coming, Dad?

Jim takes a long time, and a long sigh before he answers.

JIM

In those days I sold Fur in the trade post up in Fort Peck, and whatever's left I'd bring down to Garfield and sell it there. Oneday ... On my way down there, my horse slipped on something and we both fell, I broke my leg. That's why I stopped coming.

NATHAN

And then what happened?

Kathrine picks up the conversation.

KATHRINE

It was the first day of spring, after a long winter. I heard a knock on my door... It was your dad, my heart skipped a beat when I saw him. I didn't know what to say. Then I said: why did you come? He said I came for you, I want to build a home with you. I said: why me? Why did you pick me? He said: because you're the most beautiful girl that ever lived in MONTANA... And that was it, we were never apart since. Then your father picked this spot.

KATHRINE(cont'd)

I still remember asking him, why here Jim? Why not in Garfield? Don't you like people?

Jim is smiling and shaking his head.

KATHRINE

He said: I like people, but I like them on my own terms... So we came here, and the Indians came and helped us build this home... And that was it. Nine months to the day your father knocked on my door, I was holding you in my arms.

Nathan is very impressed with the story. His eyes glow as he looks at his father.

NATHAN

That was a very lovely story, mother.

KATHRINE

I'm sure oneday you'll have a story of your own to tell, about a pretty little young girl who stole your heart.

Jim & Kathrine look at each other and smile as if they know his secret. Nathan is embarrassed.

NATHAN

Ya, who knows.

Nathan gets up, kisses both of them and walks to his room. Kathrine is still sitting on Jim's lap, holding his arms.

KATHRINE

Twenty years, and you still love me. Who woulda thought.

JIM

You've given a fool like me twenty years of your life... how can I not love you for that?

She leans her head on his chest. Eyes closed.

KATHRINE

But now I'm older, not as attractive, not as pretty.

JIM

Oh Kathrine, how I wish I was that gentle, romantic type of a man, just so I can explain to you how much you mean to my life.

KATHRINE

(flirting)

Just tell me you love me.

JIM

I love you... I love you.

KATHRINE

And tell me you're not going out to the woods tomorrow.

JIM

Why not?

A pause.

KATHRINE

Jim, I'm kinda worried about you two. We still don't know what happened to this man, and so far it doesn't look good. Stay home tomorrow, please.

JIM

(kissing her gently)

Don't worry honey, it'll be alright. I've been huntin' all my life. It's like home out there. And I really wanna know what happened to Hawkeye. I don't want others to get hurt.

She just remembered something.

KATHRINE

Wait a minute, you can't go anywhere tomorrow. It's Nathan's birthday, Carl and Nadine are coming over.

JIM

Jesus, I forgot all about that.

KATHRINE

And you know how Nathan likes to spend time with Nadine... So you're NOT going anywhere.

They hear a cough inside.

JIM
Let me go check on him.

INT. THE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jim walks in. Hawkeye lies in bed, his eyes are open. Jim pulls a chair and sits besides the bed.

These two men seem to know each other very well. They know something that others don't... They whisper as they talk.

JIM
How you feelin' now?.

Hawkeye struggles to speak. He is in alot of pain.

HAWKEYE
ALIVE... Thanks to you... As
always.

Jim seems to be a different man now. His eyes does most of the talking.

JIM
... What was it?

Jim seems like he knows the answer but he just wants to see it in Hawkeye's eyes... And he does as Hawkeye stares at him... Then nods.

HAWKEYE
Jim... Maybe they were right after
all... HE IS BACK.

JIM
Are you sure... Have you seen it?

HAWKEYE
Yes... I have.

Jim rests his head between his palms for seconds then gets up.

JIM
Get some sleep, you need it.

Jim turns to leave.

HAWKEYE

That was a good story you told...
about your horse slipping. I heard
you.

Jim walks to the door, he answers without looking.

JIM

Impressive wasn't it...

HAWKEYE

Jim... Don't go out there... Those
woods are not the same. YOU are not
the same.

Jim is standing by the door, not looking at Hawkeye. He
pauses for a second then leaves.

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jim puts a smile on his face as he sits at the table next to
Kathrine.

KATHRINE

Is he OK?

JIM

Yes... Yes he'll be fine, just
needs to rest.

KATHRINE

Did he tell you what happened to
him?

JIM

NO... No he couldn't talk.

KATHRINE

Jim, you seem worried.

JIM

Do I?

KATHRINE

Yes you do... is anything wrong?

He wraps his arm around her shoulder as he pulls her closer.

JIM

No, honey, everything is OK... We
just had a long day.

She looks in his eyes, he smiles.

KATHRINE
So... What about tomorrow?

JIM
(nods)
That's fine. I'll play host
tomorrow.

KATHRINE
(flirting)
Tomorrow?

She runs her fingers through his long, white hair.

KATHRINE
So my hunter doesn't wanna play
tonight?

They kiss.

JIM
(whispering)
What do you have in mind?

KATHRINE
(whispering)
All kinds of games.

He carries her and heads to the bedroom.

KATHRINE
Oh no, Jim, wait, put me down.

He puts her down.

JIM
What is it, honey?

KATHRINE
We forgot about your Indian friend,
he's in the bedroom... We can't do
anything.

JIM
Nah, he's unconscious, can't hear
anything.

He carries her again and walks inside the bedroom, closing
the door behind with his foot. She pretends to resist.

KATHRINE (O.S.)
(giggling)
Oh no, Jim you're mad. You're
crazy.

EXT. OUTSIDE JIM'S CABIN - THROUGH TREE LEAVES - NIGHT

It's drizzling. Rain drops punishes a shaky leaf in a steady rhythm, then forms hundreds of tiny silver and blue streams of water...

SUDDENLY THE LEAVES ARE SPLIT APART.

INT. JIM'S CABIN - NIGHT

Everyone is asleep. Jim lies on his back, arms around Kathrine. A dog barks in the distance, others pick it up.

EXT. JIM'S CABIN - NIGHT

The door opens, Jim walks out slowly, rifle in hand, a kerosene lantern in the other. He looks around, sees nothing, takes few steps forward then walks around the house.

There is a wooden enclosure standing about ten feet in height and five feet wide, looks like some kind of a storage. Jim walks up to it, his hand reaches slowly for the door handle, turns it carefully...

... The door cranks as Jim opens it in a very slow motion. He looks inside.

Suddenly something BURSTS out, right in Jim's face... It's a CHICKEN, scaring him, and us, to death.

IT'S NOT OVER YET.

CAMERA IS POV

It's approaching him, fast, it's behind him now. He suddenly turns fast, ready to shoot...

IT'S KATHRINE.

KATHRINE
Jim, what's wrong?

JIM

Nothing... Nothing, I thought I
heard something... Lets go back
inside, it's cold.

He leads her back into the house and stands outside the door for a second, eyes darting the place. He knows there was someone OR something out there.

He walks in and shuts the door, we hear the lock.

EXT. THE RIVER BANK - DAWN

The rain had stopped, leaving all but tiny drops of water hanging on the cottonwood leaves, like tiny crystal chandeliers.

The small Grizzly cub chases a fish in the water. It jumps from side to side trying to catch the slippery salmon.

The cub suddenly stops and looks at us, backs up slowly and heads out of the water.

It's sensing danger... It suddenly turns and starts to run. It's being chased. CAMERA IS POV... and closing in fast on the cub.

Suddenly, it's mother, the large brown Grizzly Bear we saw earlier shows up, rocketing through the trees, roaring.

It passes us with lightning speed, clearly heading for battle.

It's still kind of dark, we don't see clearly but we get a glimpse of the TWO LARGE ANIMALS COLLIDING, the Elk and the Grizzly Bear.

EXT. THE RIVER BANK - DAWN

The horrified eyes of the young cub and the roaring sound behind us tells us this fight is for life or death...

Suddenly everything stops, seconds of deadly silence. Then the mother Bear passes through...

... All bloodied, dragging itself away from the scene, followed by it's cub, slowly disappearing in the woods.

EXT. JIM'S CABIN - MORNING

Jim's cabin sits on a small farm, built between the banks of the river and the rolling green hills.

This is a good, fertile land. The field looks perfectly tended, ripe with barley and wheat.

The log-wood house is perfectly maintained, hacked out of the wilderness. It has a small front porch.

Jim plows the field as Nathan leads the plow-mule. It's hard work. They stop to catch their breath as soft wind blows.

Something catches their attention.

A MAN negotiates a single-horse carriage through the dirt road leading up to Jim's cabin. Seated next to him is a beautiful young WOMAN.

They are CARL and his daughter NADINE.

Carl is in his late forties, thick, black moustache and beard.

Nadine is 16, pretty blue eyes on an innocent baby face. Long, straight, black hair down to her mid back.

They are greeted warmly by Jim as Kathrine runs out the door to meet them.

The carriage comes to a stop. Nathan lingers behind, his eyes all over Nadine. They exchange smiles as he wipes the sweat and dust from his forehead.

INT. JIM'S CABIN - LATER

The place is buzzing. There is talk and laughter. Jim and Carl sit at the large dinner table talking. Kathrine and Nadine hustle back and forth bringing plates to the table, giggling from time to time.

Nathan walks in from the front door.

CARL

(smiling)

Look at Nathan, he's getting bigger and bigger every time I see him.

What have you been feeding him Kath?

They laugh. His mother gives him a big hug which embarrasses him.

KATHRINE
He comes from a good stock...

JIM
(interrupting)
... On his father's side, of course.

Another laugh.

JIM
Well, Carl, you been doin' a good job on Nadine, too. She's prettier than ever.

KATHRINE
Oh yes.

This embarrasses Nadine. Her face is all red as she lowers her eyes to the floor.

KATHRINE
Looks just like her...

Kathrine stops, they all do. There is along silence now. Whatever she was going to say had brought a deep, sad look on everyone's eyes. Carl breaks the silence. His voice is shivering.

CARL
Anne would've loved this... God I miss her so much.

Nadine gently hugs her father, a tear runs down her cheek.

NADINE
We all miss mom, father.

CARL
I can't believe it's been nearly a year.

A warm moment between Carl and his daughter. Only to be broken by Nathan.

NATHAN
Nadine... Do you wanna go for a ride?

NADINE

Sure.

She leads the way out the door as she wipes her tears.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Dan & Frank ride along trees and thick bushes. They cross a dirt road and start up a hillside that leads into the woods.

Frank is leading the way. He sees something, tries to point it to Dan, but Dan is far behind.

Suddenly the Elk pop it's head through the trees, looking down at Frank. Standing on the higher ground, it looks large and majestic... And scary.

Frank's horse staggers and loses balance for a second. The horse tries to find tracing with it's hind-feet but slips on the sloppy sandstone. Dan arrives.

DAN

FRANK, JUMP! Leave the horse.

Frank, caught off balance, throws himself to the side as his horse starts to slide quickly backwards down the incline.

Dan, directly behind frank's horse, tries to turn his horse to avoid being hit by the errant, falling animal, but it's too late... They both get bulldozed.

Both horses careen down the sandy slope. Dan's leg helplessly tangled in the stirrup. He is dragged, his head bouncing on the ground.

They slide all the way back to the dirt road they started from. Frank's horse was able to find it's legs. It stands up and heads slowly into the bushes.

Dan and his horse lie on the ground, motionless.

FRANK

DAN!... DAN!

Frank slides down the incline quickly to help his fallen brother, but he stops when he hears loud thumps coming from the other side of the road... Sounds like something VERY LARGE AND VERY FAST.

IT'S THE ELK.

It blasts through the bushes with such power and speed, even the ground shakes.

We still can't get a very clear view of this Beast as it BLASTS it's way through the bushes.

Suddenly it Slams it's large, powerful antlers into Frank's horse, sending it flying few feet off the ground and landing hard on the dirt road with blood spattering in all directions...

... As the assault on the helpless horse continues, Frank is extremely frightened and shocked. He quickly turns and starts up the hill.

EXT. NEAR THE RIVER BANK - DAY

Nathan and Nadine ride in an easy pacing, talking and laughing all the time.

Nadine is an elegant rider, quite self assured for a 16 year old. They ride down along a stand of hickories to the river. They stop the horses and the conversations to listen to the sound of the water.

Nathan dismounts then helps Nadine off her horse. They start to walk...

NADINE

... So you had a big brown Grizzly Bear attack you?

NATHAN

(proud)

Yes. That's right.

She smiles as she shakes her head in disbelief.

NADINE

So what did you exactly do?

NATHAN

Well... I just stared at her, right in the eye, she just turned and walked away.

He looks in her eyes as he smiles to see her reaction.

NADINE

Aha, I see, so instead of eating you she was charmed by you. How romantic, Nathan.

NATHAN

Yup. You can say that.

NADINE

So that's what you do with the ladies? Charm them with your eyes so they'd fall for you?

NATHAN

No, I only do it with lady Grizzlies.

They laugh.

He slowly reaches for her hand and holds it gently.

NATHAN

Nadine, there's only one pretty girl that I like to charm.

NADINE

Well, there are lots of pretty girls in town.

He stops and turns her gently to face him.

NATHAN

But my heart chooses only one.

NADINE

And who could that one be?

He is looking right into her pretty blue eyes.

NATHAN

The most beautiful girl that ever lived in MONTANA... You.

Now she is really charmed.

NADINE

(whispering)

Nathan, that is so sweet of you to say that.

She takes a step forward, closer to him, closes her eyes and waits for a kiss. He tries, but he's too shy. His lips stop less than an inch away from hers.

She notices and tries to save him from the embarrassment.

NADINE
So you'd pick me over the lady
Grizzly... I really appreciate that
mister Nathan.

She gets a smile out of him.

NATHAN
Anytime miss Nadine.

NADINE
I think we should go back now
before your lady friend comes back
looking for you.

NATHAN
OK, lets go.

They mount the horses and ride off.

INT. JIM'S CABIN - NIGHT

A match flaring. A small candle comes to life. It's mounted
in a fresh-baked apple pie. Nathan blows it off as he gets a
hug and a HAPPY BIRTHDAY NATHAN from everyone.

KATHRINE
Nathan, did you make a wish?

He glances quickly at Nadine. Kathrine notices as Nadine's
eyes drop to the floor.

NATHAN
Yes mother, I have.

They sit at the table, Jim and Carl on one side, Nathan on
the other side, while Kathrine and Nadine serve the pie, pour
coffee and exchange whispers and giggles. Nadine teases
Nathan with occasional smiles.

Jim lights his clay pipe.

CARL
How's Hawkeye doin' now, Jim?

JIM
Still very weak. He talked alittle
bit this morning then went back to
sleep.

Nathan enters the conversation.

NATHAN

We think a Giant Elk struck 'em.

Carl is surprised.

CARL

You think so too, Jim? A Giant Elk struck 'em?

JIM

That's what it looks like.

CARL

There's no such thing. It's a myth. I've heard some stories myself... But I mean, we lived here for many, many years... How come we didn't see it?

NATHAN

So what do you think happened to Hawkeye, mister Carl?

CARL

I don't know son, maybe fell on a thick branch or somethin'... But an Elk, larger than a horse and carries antlers more than ten feet wide like they used to say. I find that hard to believe.

(to Jim)

They did say ten feet... right? Jim?

Jim nods.

KATHRINE

I think we should take this very seriously. This poor man is hurt bad. What if there really WAS a Beast out there hurting people?

CARL

Oh come on. You are making a big deal out of nothing. We are hunters... We know what's out there. It's only a bunch of Grizzlies and some Mountain Lions... and we know how to deal with those, don't we, Jim...

It's very clear Jim does not agree with Carl... But he nods anyway.

JIM

Anyhow, we are hunters, and that forest is our bread 'n butter. Whatever goes on out there should concern all of us... That's why I think we should go take a look around, right Nathan?

NATHAN

Yes father...

Nathan liked this. His father just made him an important part of an important hunt, and Nadine was right there to hear it. He adjusts his posture and sits up straight as he sees a glow in her eyes.

NATHAN

We...

But his mother takes this glory moment right out of his hand as she interrupts;

KATHRINE

... Jim I think you should call up other men from town.

Nathan tries again...

NATHAN

Well, mother...

Another blow from Carl.

CARL

... Kathrine's right, Jim, although I'm sure there's no monsters out there... But if you need help I'm ready.

Nathan is desperate now.

NATHAN

I think...

But it's his father's turn now to deliver the final blow to his integrity... Jim interrupts;

JIM

No...

Nadine rolls her eyes and shakes her head as she picks up some dishes off the table and walks by Nathan, teasing him with a smile.

JIM
 ... This will not be necessary.
 We're just gonna go take a look
 around and get this thing over with
 in no time... Isn't that so,
 Nathan?

Nathan takes no chances this time. He looks around as all eyes look at him.

JIM
 Nathan?

NATHAN
 Oh YES... Yes, father that's right.

Carl gets up, getting ready to leave.

CARL
 Well, ladies and gentlemen, it was
 a pleasure as always.

Gives Kathrine a warm hug.

CARL
 Thank you, Kathrine, you still make
 the best apple pie in the world. I
 could never have enough of it, but
 We better get goin' now.

KATHRINE
 You are more than welcome, Carl,
 thank YOU for coming.

Shakes Jim's & Nathan's hands.

CARL
 And good luck to you boys tomorrow.

JIM
 Thank you, Carl.

Nadine gets a big hug from Kathrine. She lingers as Jim & Kathrine walk her father out the door. She walks up to Nathan and kisses him gently on the cheek.

NADINE
 Thank you for the nice ride today,
 I loved it.

NATHAN
 It was you who made it lovely.

She smiles.

NADINE

You ARE going to take care of yourself tomorrow, right mister charmer?

NATHAN

Only if you want me to.

CARL (O.S.)

Come on Nadine, lets go, honey.

NADINE

I do.

NATHAN

Then I will.

They hold eyes until she's out the door.

EXT. JIM'S CABIN - NEXT MORNING

Jim is packed and ready with his hunting gear, wearing his raccoon hat as he leans forward. Noticing something on the ground, he traces it to the back of the house.

It's the shape of hooves, still embedded on the muddy ground.

He walks to his horse. Nathan is also packed and ready. He's intercepted by his mother as he walks to his horse, gets a warm hug from her.

KATHRINE

Nathan, you be careful son, please.

NATHAN

I sure will, mother.

KATHRINE

(as she hugs Jim)

Take care of him please, Jimmy...
And you be careful, too.

JIM

Don't worry, honey, we'll be alright.

KATHRINE

And please don't try to be a hero.

JIM

I won't.

They mount their horse and ride off.

KATHRINE

(loud)

You boys don't be late.

They ride through the open plains towards the forest.
Kathrine walks back slowly to the house.

INT. JIM'S CABIN - BEDROOM - DAY

Hawkeye lies in bed. His eyes are open as Kathrine walks in with fresh bandages.

HAWKEYE

Tell him to come back. I told him not to go. The Beast will hurt them, hurt them bad.

KATHRINE

Who will?

HAWKEYE

The ELK... He's evil. I saw it in his eyes, I saw it... He wants revenge... He wants blood.

KATHRINE

Hawkeye why are you talking like that? It's just an animal. Don't scare me please.

HAWKEYE

Now I believe it, I believe the stories my grandfathers told me.

KATHRINE

What stories?

Hawkeye takes a long pause as he collects himself.

KATHRINE

Hawkeye, what stories? What are you talking about?

HAWKEYE

Long time ago, many, many years before the white man...

HAWKEYE(cont'd)

This was buffalo country, the beef of the Plains Indians as they would call us. Beef was the main source of food, not wheat or corn. Meat. All we did is hunt. Not herd as the cowboys did in the later years... Only hunt, not only buffalo. But we also hunted the Elk. There was some very big ones in those days, they called them the Giant Elks... They were bigger than horses and had antlers more than ten feet wide... Can kill a man in one stroke...

Kathrine is listening intently.

HAWKEYE

... The wise men in the tribe ordered the hunters not to kill those big ones... They said if we kill them, their spirits will forever roam the forest. It will climb the hills, and cross the rivers until it gets it's revenge. But some of the young hunters never listened. They wanted those big antlers as trophies, as a sign of manhood. So they hunted them down. One after the other. This went on for years and years until there was only very few left. And oneday, some twenty years ago, they killed the biggest one of them, the biggest bull ever. The leader. The only Giant Elk left alive.

Hawkeye pauses. He is still in alot of pain...

KATHRINE

Are you OK?

He nods as he continues...

HAWKEYE

It was a young hunter who killed him. A white man. A ruthless young man, but he was the best hunter ever...

FLASH BACK

CAMERA IS POV as it walks the forest... Passes trees and makes a sharp turn to the left then climbs down a cliff... FAST BREATHING is heard and there is a glimpse of a TOMAHAWK.

HAWKEYE (V.O.)

... The best to ever roam the land. He didn't do it for the trophy, he did it for the money. Men from the Fort hired him because that Bull killed many of their men and horses.

A COWBOY on a horseback being ambushed by a Giant Elk.

The horse staggers as it sees Giant Antlers rocketing through the bushes... Coming right at it.... The attack is spectacular, and the moment of impact is horrifying as the horse gets knocked off it's feet and goes flying down a hillside... Taking the screaming cowboy with it.

END OF FLASHBACK

Kathrine is sitting silent... Paying full attention to every words he is saying.

HAWKEYE

So they hired him to kill the Bull... They knew of him, everyone knew of him, they knew it would take a MAN like this, to kill a BEAST like that... And he did. It was a vicious battle, between ANIMAL and MAN... A battle only that young man can come out of it as a winner... And he did.

FLASH BACK

Bushes split open and A YOUNG HAWKEYE comes to view. A long knife in his hand as he listens carefully.

The whisper of wind is joined by another sound and mixes with it... A Distant rustling.

Hawkeye follows the sound as it gets closer and louder.

Suddenly Hawkeye splits some bushes open to find himself witnessing A VICIOUS BATTLE.

A tall, muscled young man... We can only see his long blond hair as he faces the Giant Elk... A Tomahawk in one hand and a long Knife in the other.

The man charges the Elk as it rises on it's back feet, then swings it's large antlers at him... But he dives and charges again, delivering a spectacular blow with his tomahawk at the Elk's neck.

Hawkeye's eyes go wide as he watches the young man delivering a blow after blow at the Elk's body...

END OF FLASH BACK

HAWKEYE

People say after that day, that hunter went into a long seclusion. His life was never the same after that, no one knows why...

A long pause, then;

HAWKEYE

... But now the spirit of the Beast is BACK, just like the wise men said... HE IS BACK TO KILL.

Hawkeye tries to get up but he is unable to.

KATHRINE

Kill who? Hawkeye?

Hawkeye hesitates and looks away as he answers;

HAWKEYE

Kill the hunter who killed him.

Kathrine is really frightened now and angry.

KATHRINE

Hawkeye this is very scary... WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL THIS TO MY HUSBAND?

Hawkeye speaks softly, as if whispering;

HAWKEYE

Your husband knows.

This sends chills down Kathrine's spine. She shrugs as she speaks;

KATHRINE

My husband knows what?

Hawkeye ignores her as he tries to get up.

HAWKEYE

I have to go after them.

KATHRINE

If my husband knew there was a real Beast out there, he wouldn't go, he wouldn't put his or his son's life in danger...

She wipes a tear.

KATHRINE (cont'd)

It's all my fault. I shouldn't let them go.

HAWKEYE

He wouldn't listen to you even if you tried.

KATHRINE

Why not?

HAWKEYE

Because he is doing it to protect you. He wanted to keep the Beast away from his home and family... That's why he went to him instead.

Kathrine is shivering.

KATHRINE

And WHY would the Beast come to us?

HAWKEYE

Because that ruthless young hunter I told you about is YOUR HUSBAND.

FLASH BACK

The Giant Elk is down, blood covers it's body. The young hunter is kneeling above it, he then slowly gets up... And turns to look at us.

IT'S JIM.

A twenty years younger, vicious looking, bloody faced Jim stares at us...

END OF FLASHBACK

This throws kathrine completely off... Her body shivers as she shrugs the words.

KATHRINE

WHAT?

HAWKEYE

I was awake when you told your story last night, when you said he was gone for that month... Your husband never fell off his horse, he was too good of a rider... He lied... He was in the woods chasing that Giant Elk.

Kathrine is in shock and disbelief.

KATHRINE

This is impossible, how can you be so sure?

HAWKEYE

Because I was there with him. Your husband taught me how to become a hunter...

He stops to catch his breath.

HAWKEYE

Back in those days he bought his fur from us, and sold it up in the Fort. That's how we became friends. Your husband was a different man then, young, ruthless, didn't know how to use his head. But he was strong and respected... And feared. The wise men told him not to go after that Bull, they told him about the dangers, they told him this will come back and haunt him oneday. But he laughed at them and called them old fools. But I liked him, because he had the heart of a Bear, he had no fear in him. I wanted to be so much like him. That's why I went along on that damn hunting trip...

He stops to take a breath.

HAWKEYE

... Your husband still don't know what's out there, kathrine... But he didn't want to take any chances, that's why he went.

Kathrine is shaking. Her face covered with tears, unable to talk as she bursts out of the room.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Jim and Nathan ride off through the forest. The sun finds it's way through the long trees, casting warmth and tranquility for Man and Animal alike.

NATHAN

What happened last night dad?

JIM

He was there. The Elk.

NATHAN

(shrugs)

That's impossible.

JIM

No it's not. He knows who we are and where we are... He's probably watching us now.

NATHAN

But why is he after us? Is it because we saved Hawkeye?

Jim takes a long pause before he answers.

JIM

Who knows, son... Who knows.

Jim spots something in the bushes about a hundred feet away, a medium size Deer, grazing. He points it to Nathan.

They dismount quickly. Jim gestures a split. Each take a different direction heading for their target.

JIM (cont'd)

(whispering)

Remember son, never aim straight at a target... Stay close.

Nathan nods as his eyes dart the grazing brown target.

Jim slips through the bushes, rifle in hand and ready. He is closing the distance on the deer..

HE SUDDENLY STOPS.

Shouldering his rifle, he cocks the lock, elevates the rifle about half an inch and shifts it left, off target.

A leaf cracks under his foot. The deer is alert. It freezes for a second then slips quickly through the bushes.

JIM

Damn!

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Nathan loses sight of the target as it disappears in the bushes... He follows.

His eyes scans;

Thick brown trees furnishes the forest floor. It's shadows crisscross, illuminating the brown sandstone with long gray lines.

LEAVES CRACK.

He follows... Then spots the Deer as the deer spots him. They both freeze. Nathan slowly lifts his rifle, cocks it, aims.

The deer makes no move.

Nathan's finger is on the trigger... It's pulling slowly as the pretty brown eyes of the deer stares.

He stops, lowers the rifle. A surprised look in his eyes as the Deer leaps and disappears quickly in the forest.

JIM (O.S.)

Why didn't you shoot it?

Jim comes from behind, still holding his rifle.

NATHAN

I couldn't... I would shoot it if it was running away, but not like this. This is too hard... Sorry.

Jim pats him on the back as they walk away.

JIM

That's OK, son... It takes time. You'd need to put feelings aside, and think of it as food.

NATHAN

I just never realized food had such pretty eyes.

JIM

Well, I've heard of a good recipe for those things, too.

They both laugh.

Suddenly, a movement behind some trees, scares Nathan to death thinking it was the ELK... It's JACK.

Jack is 60. A grizzled, black-toothed MOUNTAIN MAN. He wears a sheepskin jacket and a cowboy hat. A flint musket in hand and has a thick rope wrapped around his shoulder.

JACK

How the hell is old Jimmy? Any luck yet?

JIM

Not while you're around Jack. You SCARE the damn animals off.

JACK

(laughs loud)

Only the ones that don't make a good steak, of which we have plenty of tonight... And you boys are welcome to join me for dinner.

JIM

Sounds good.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

The stars come out and lit the forest. A small camp fire. A small animal roasts on a stick. The three men are eyeing it with hungry eyes. Jim & Jack are walking down memory lane;

JIM

... One year we got snowed in for two months... All we had was boiled wheat...

I still remember the first day the sun came out after that. Kathrine said it was god's eye looking down at us. Those were rough days, on Man and on Animal.

Jack slowly cuts pieces of meat with a large knife and hands it to them, then cuts a large one for himself. We hear the wood cracking as it burns slowly.

NATHAN

So, Jack, what about the Elk story you said you'll tell us about?

JACK

Oh, that... Well, in the fall, during mating season like it is now, this forest is a dangerous place...

He takes a small bite from his steak.

JACK

... Old hunters tell many stories... Many years ago I sold sheepskin on the upper river at the trading post at Fort Benton... It was Autumn. Hunters there told me about a man who was killed by a Giant ELK. Here's how the story goes; They said the man was riding a large black horse, could really go... An Elk, female, was running on the next ridge over. He shot and killed it... He then dropped down fast and rode up to the other side of the cliff to get it. It was all sandstone, animals could go almost anywhere, the man never heard or seen anything...

Nathan and Jim are listening intently.

JACK

...The first thing he felt is a large, very large bull breathing down his neck. People claim to have seen that Elk in the forest, wandering, with the man hung over his antlers for two full days. Some say it's the ghost of a Giant Elk the Indians had killed many years ago. No one knows for sure.

NATHAN

Do you believe this story?

Jack lies down and gets ready to sleep.

JACK

I dunno, son. But I seen many strange things in my life, nothin' surprises me no more. I wouldn't worry about it if I were you, there's nothing here except for Deer and Rabbits... Oh and some Grizzlies.

NATHAN

What about Hawkeye then?

JACK

Hawkeye is a crazy fool, don't believe anything he says. There are no Giant Elks in these woods, or Giant Rabbits, the only big Elk I know of is the one I told you about, his head's been hung over by Fort Peck for years and years until someone stole it.

JIM

They know who took it?

JACK

No they don't.

NATHAN

What a strange story.

Jack closes his eyes. Jim & Nathan lie down close to each other.

JIM

Get some sleep, son... We have a long day ahead of us tomorrow...
GOODNIGHT.

NATHAN

GOODNIGHT father.

EXT. FOREST - MORNING

First light. The morning mist lies low over the forest. It's quiet.

Nathan opens his eyes slowly, looks around, sees no one. Suddenly there is a sound.

DRY LEAVES CRACKING.

Nathan finds Jim, few feet away behind some bushes, rifle is drawn and pointed where the sound is. He motions to him to sit still. Nathan is very alert.

Something is moving forward towards them, suddenly the bushes are split apart...

IT'S A DEER.

It leaps and quickly disappears into the forest. Jim shakes his head.

JIM

Damn animals... they're either getting faster or I AM getting older.

Jim has ropes wrapped around his shoulder.

NATHAN

Where's Jack?

JIM

Gone. He wakes up before the flies. We'll be seeing him again. He forgot to take his ropes, I'm sure he'll be back for them.

NATHAN

That was a wild story he told us last night, about the Elk.

JIM

It sure was, son, sure was. I've heard it too actually.

NATHAN

So it did happen!

JIM

Hunters tell many stories. hard to tell what's right and what's not. But I know of big Giant Elks. Been here many years ago, some say even before man.

NATHAN

So you think one of those Giant Elks tried to kill Hawkeye?

JIM

Yes. I think so. Sooner or later We'll find out.

EXT. HILLTOP - DAY

A breathtaking view of the Missouri river. Long trees run along the edges, stretching toward green rolling hills beyond.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

And the hunting trip continues.

A dirt road runs along the edge of the river. Jim runs up to the crest of a wood hill. Slows. Nathan is almost twenty feet away behind some bushes, on the other side of the road. Rifles are drawn.

On the other side of the wood hill is a path that runs through a glen, about thirty feet below.

Jim hears something, his eyes DART... Absorbing the terrain below.

Nathan grips his rifle. A frightened look in his eyes as he scans the woods.

THERE IS A DEAD SILENCE ALL OF A SUDDEN.

Nathan takes few steps back and glues himself to a tree, still keeping his father in sight.

Jim motions to him to sit still. There is something in the air and Jim feels it. He is on full alert.

SUDDENLY THE ATTACK COMES.

Not from below, but from behind.

CLOSE ON Jim's face.

The small trees are shaking behind him... we see it. He doesn't... Nathan sees the movement and tries to warn his father.

Jim suddenly hears the movement behind him and turns quickly.

The very large ELK is charging him... No time to fire. He takes few steps backwards.

JIM
NATHAN RUN!!

... And throws himself down the cliff, losing his rifle in the process.

NATHAN POV

The Elk is about to charge down the cliff after Jim. Nathan points his rifle, hands are shaking...

HE TAKES A SHOT.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Jim slides fast down the incline and reaches the bushes, then runs over a water stream, through tress and foliage... Takes a quick look behind him... Nothing.

HE STOPS.

EXT. FOREST - SAME TIME

Not far behind, Nathan stayed in the same spot, hiding behind the tree, fully alert, still holds his rifle... His heart is beating fast.

He checks for bullets but finds none. Suddenly Jim's voice comes from a near distance.

JIM (O.S.)

NATHAN!

Nathan can't pinpoint his father's voice.

NATHAN

FATHER! Are you alright!

JIM

Don't move, I'm coming to you.

Seconds later, Nathan hear leaves cracking few feet away behind the tree, swings his body away from the tree to see his father.

Instead, HE IS FACE TO FACE WITH THE ELK... Standing less than ten feet away. This ELK is as large as a big horse. Majestic. Antlers more than ten feet wide... And ready to kill.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Jim blasts up the cliff again and reaches the top.

JIM'S POV

Jim is almost thirty feet away. From his advantage point up on the cliff he sees the STANDOFF...

Nathan is stuck to the tree, shaking as a leaf as the Elk stands few feet away from him and getting ready to charge.

Jim lets out a loud scream to get the ELK's attention from his son.

The elk shoots a deadly glare at Jim but doesn't move.

Nathan takes advantage. He gathers all his strength and leaps away from the tree into the woods in the opposite direction of his father.

THE ELK GIVES CHASE.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Nathan is running for his life through trees and bushes.

Jumps high over a fallen tree... Bends to avoid a thick branch... Leaps over a bush but suddenly runs out of ground... Feet in the air... He comes stumbling down a hillside on the grass below.

And loses concious.

EXT. FOREST - HILLSIDE

Nathan regains concious slowly, shakes his head. Everything is blurry. He hears leaves cracking behind him. His eyes are wide open, frightened.

He turns quickly to find;

JIM... His tomahawk is drawn. He leans quickly over Nathan while his eyes dart the woods.

JIM
Are you OK?

NATHAN
Yes, I think so. Where is he?

JIM
I'm not sure, very close I suppose.
We have to get out of here fast.

JIM(cont'd)

We don't have weapons, and I can't find the damn horses. Come, son, I'll carry you.

NATHAN

Did you see how large this thing was?

JIM

Yes, I saw.

He helps Nathan to his feet.

NATHAN

I'm OK, father, I can walk.

JIM

No, you have to run.

They run fast towards the woods and disappear.

INT. JIM'S CABIN - BEDROOM - EVENING

Hawkeye is dressed and ready to leave. Kathrine is sitting at the table, lost in her thoughts.

KATHRINE

Where do you go now?

HAWKEYE

Back... Back to the woods where I belong.

She wipes a tear as she tries to collect herself.

KATHRINE

You are still weak, you must stay in bed.

HAWKEYE

Hawkeye is as strong as a buffalo ma'am... Thanks to you and your family.

She bursts crying.

KATHRINE

But where is my family? Where is my husband and son? I feel so lost.

HAWKEYE

Do not worry. Your man is strong. He has the courage of a Bear.

HAWKEYE(cont'd)

He is doing what he has to do... He will be back to you soon. Do not worry.

KATHRINE

I AM worried, Hawkeye, I AM... I know how stubborn my husband is. He will not be back unless he kills that animal... OR get killed. This is so unfair... UNFAIR.

Hawkeye pats her shoulder gently. He knows how she feels. He then walks slowly to the door.

KATHRINE

I told them not to go. I knew something was very wrong. I saw it in the dream last night, I saw the Beast looking right at me from the window. His eyes had fire and anger in 'em. I was so scared.

HAWKEYE

It was not a dream. I saw it too.

Kathrine is stone-faced now, even the tear froze on her cheek.

KATHRINE

So everything you said was true... It IS evil.

He nods as he walks to the door.

HAWKEYE

I will go now. I have unfinished business out there, too.

Hawkeye leaves.

EXT. FOREST - EVENING

Jim & Nathan are still running hard, over boulders, fallen trees and water streams. Finally Jim holds up his hand, a sign to stop.

Both exhausted and sweating. They stop next to a thick, long tree.

JIM

(breathless)

We'll stop here for the night, lets climb this tree.

NATHAN

OK father.

Jim helps his son with a strong push and follows him with fast moves up to a thick branch, high enough from the ELK's long antlers.

They settle down. Jim eases back against the wide girth of the tree.

JIM

Well, son, you always wanted to experience the hunter's life... Here you are.

NATHAN

(a bit sarcastic)

Yes, father, the hunter's life, not the hunted.

Jim pats him on the head.

JIM

It's OK. You did great. I'm proud of you. You will make a great hunter oneday.

NATHAN

Father I was really scared when it was looking at me, it just stood there. It's eyes were like human. It wasn't just looking at me, it was looking right through me, reading my mind, like, it knew I was scared to death, and it stood there, enjoying it.

JIM

Nathan I feel bad for putting you through this, I should've not brought you here.

NATHAN

No. Please don't say that. I wanted to be here.

JIM

This is different... This is real danger. This animal is out for blood, our blood. He waited years for this moment... And now it's time for payback.

NATHAN

Father what are you talking about,
payback for what?

JIM

Payback for what a young fool did a
long time ago, almost twenty years
ago.

Nathan looks surprised as Jim gazes at the woods beyond.

JIM

For him, it's time for payback,
it's his final battle and he picked
the time and place for it, on his
own terms, his own territory, but
he knows this is my ground, too...
He knows me so well, we have an
old, unfinished business to
settle...

Nathan looks confused.

JIM

... This is an eye for an eye. This
is an old language that both me and
him understand so well... We both
roamed these woods and these
mountains for years.
I'm an old hunter now, old guard.
But he knows I still make a worthy
foe. That's why he picked me for
his final fight after he waited all
these years.

He closes his eyes.

JIM

You know, son, in time, after years
up on these mountains, these
forests... The hunters and the
hunted get to know each other very
well, understand each other, almost
become old friends. That's why it
gets confusing sometimes, who is
the hunter and who is the hunted.

NATHAN

It looks like WE the hunted.

JIM

You think so?

NATHAN

It looks like it... What do you think, father?

JIM

I think we're only getting started.

Nathan looks worried as he leans back on the tree branch.

NATHAN

I don't think I wanna be old friends with this Elk... I don't think it wants it either.

JIM

That's OK, son... Lets try to get some sleep now. I wanna tie you up to the tree, I don't want you fallin' down.

Jim takes off his long belt, lays Nathan on the thick branch and wraps it around his stomach.

He makes a knot instead of using the buckle to tie it. The buckle hangs from the tree.

NATHAN

(smiling)

Mom should see me now, I always complained about that bed you built for me because it's too hard, she'll have a laugh.

Jim leans back on the branch, closes his eye.

JIM

I miss your Mom.

EXT. TREE TOP - NIGHT

It's dark. The milky way appears, almost tactile, as if someone had mixed particles of light with blue-black paint and brushed it against the sky.

CLOSE ON THE BUCKLE.

It dangles as a misty wind plays with it.

SOMETHING IS APPROACHING IT.

LARGE ANTLERS are in view now, trying to HOOK the buckle. That's all we see, everything else is dark... The buckle is hooked, and is suddenly BEING PULLED.

EXT. TREE TOP - NIGHT

Nathan is fast asleep. His body is suddenly jerked from the pulling of the buckle. He wakes up but can't move as the belt tightens around his waist.

He tries to free himself but can't get a grip on the belt as his body is being pulled down harder and harder.

The branch itself is about to give way as it's being pulled, we can hear it cracking.

He tries to call Jim but the words are not coming out. He is barely breathing now.

Suddenly the branch breaks and Nathan is starting to fall. He lets out a loud, horrible scream... Only to be awakened by a gentle slap from his father...

JIM

Wake up, son! Wake up!

NATHAN

Oh god... Oh god what a nightmare.

JIM

It's alright, everything is alright. Go back to sleep, you need your rest.

They go back to sleep. Nathan closes his eyes, he extends his hand under and reaches for that loose side of the belt and wraps it around himself...

Another CLOSE UP;

ON THE BUCKLE... It's broken in half.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Shafts of light illuminate motes of dust and turn leaves emerald as the sun breaks through.

EXT. TREE TOP - DAY

Nathan wakes up, Jim still sleeping.

Nathan releases himself from the belt and stretches his muscles and legs. He hears a sound. About a hundred feet away, coming from the bushes.

Something or someone is moving.

NATHAN IS ON FULL ALERT.

The moving object is now starting to take shape as it draws closer... THE SHAPE OF A MAN... And this man is DAN DAVIS.

Soft wind plays with Dan's hair as he stands motionless in the distance. We are still not getting a very clear view of him as he stands in the bushes, only his upper body is showing.

Nathan recognizes him;

NATHAN
DAN? Is that you?

Dan takes few steps closer. His body is moving awkwardly.

Nathan climbs down quickly as Dan moves forward. Nathan takes few steps as he hears;

JIM (O.S.)
NATHAN! Freeze!

Nathan stops, looks at his father, confused.

NATHAN
Father, it's DAN DAVIS.

JIM
Get back over here.

Nathan senses danger in Jim's voice and quickly backs away toward the tree.

As Dan keeps moving forward, we notice his lifeless eyes as his body SUDDENLY RISES.

A GRUESOME SCENE IS REVEALED;

As Dan is BEING LIFTED, we can clearly see the Elk's ANTLERS THROUGH HIS BLOODY LOWER BODY.

Dan had been killed by the Elk down by the dirt road and is being CARRIED and DISPLAYED for NATHAN & JIM.

Dan's lifeless body is suddenly yanked from the antlers and thrown on the bushes. The Elk retreats into the foliage.

Jim loses control.

JIM
I will kill you, you son of a
bitch. I will kill you with my own
hands.

He jumps out of the tree.. His tomahawk is drawn. A savage look in his eyes. He disappears quickly into the forest, leaving Nathan behind. Shocked and scared.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Hundreds of birds sing as shafts of light pierce the canopy, cutting through the hanging moss, falling onto the trees.

Jim navigates his way through, on full alert, his tomahawk still drawn.

He sees something, stops dead, holding out his tomahawk... No sound. He then slips through young trees, and stops again.

A SUDDEN MOVEMENT TO HIS RIGHT.

A very large Grizzly Bear, an adult male, barely ten feet away, suddenly rises through the foliage. So large it almost blocks the sun... It roars so loud sending chills through Jim's spine.

JIM
(to himself)
That was a trick! The son of a
bitch set me up!

The Grizzly shoots Jim with a glare and suddenly CHARGES HIM.

Jim knows his tomahawk is a no match to this Beast, he turns and runs... And the Bear follows.

EXT. FOREST - HILLSIDE - DAY

Jim is running down a hillside, through trees and bushes. The Grizzly is faster and is closing on him fast.

Now Jim is within inches of the Bear's claws and about to be struck, but he suddenly holds on to a tree and swings around it, seconds before the strike.

Jim BLASTS his way up a hillside.

The move caught the Grizzly by surprise and gave Jim an extra ten feet of head start.

Up the hill, over a water stream and through trees... Jim is running for his life, and the relentless Bear is back within few feet and is ready to strike again...

... AND IT STRIKES

The large claw brushes against Jim's shirt, tearing it. Jim loses balance and is going down.

His eyes get a glimpse of a large falling tree with branches extending over the forest floor, only few feet away.

HE MAKES A FINAL DASH.

He plunges under it, barely a claw away from a certain death.

The furious Grizzly is in no mood to let this pray go. It JUMPS over the large tree trying to find an opening.

Jim feels the weight of the Bear as branches crack around him, but they hold under the VERY HEAVY MONSTER.

The Grizzly is furious as it tries another angle. It's face to face now with Jim, but still can't reach him. It lets out a very loud and angry roar almost heard throughout the forest.

The Grizzly takes few steps back, eyeing Jim...

THEN IT WALKS AWAY.

Jim is tired, breathless. Still lies under the tree not moving a muscle... Moments later he slowly pushes himself out.

Jim is on his feet, hands bloodied, clothes torn. He scans the forest and the hillside but can't see the Grizzly.

EXT. DIFFERENT PART OF THE FOREST - DAY

The sun finds a spot for itself in the middle of the blue sky... And we find Nathan.

NATHAN
FATHER!! ... FATHER!!

His call echoes through the long trees and bushes, alerts a small brown rabbit.

Nathan stops and waits for a response, but all he hears is the forest.

Tired, he leans against a wide tree, sits and wipes he sweaty forehead... His eyes closes.

A FLASH of something, just passed through the bushes.

Nathan rests his head over his knees.

Another flash, we get a better view of it now. A piece of brown fur just passed through the bushes again, this time we get a glimpse of AN ANTLER.

SOMETHING IS CLOSING IN ON NATHAN.

Stalking him skillfully, stops, changes direction... It's circling the tree now, coming from behind to surprise Nathan.

We are behind Nathan's tree, still in the predator's POV.

Then, A SUDDEN CHARGE... But Nathan is not there.

ELK'S POV

The sharp eyes scans the trees and the bushes, stops on something. Nathan suddenly jumps out of the bushes and starts to run toward a hillside.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Bushes split open, Nathan rockets through them heading right into us, leaves crack under his feet. He runs to the top of the hillside. The river roar echoes through.

Nathan runs down to the bottom of the hillside, into a small green meadow and keeps pushing forward until he suddenly RUNS OUT OF GROUND.

Another step would plunge Nathan down a hundred feet cliff into the river. He looks behind and the MAJESTIC ELK IS RIGHT THERE.

EXT. TOP OF A CLIFF

Nathan and the Beast are again less than ten feet apart.

Nathan's heart had almost stopped beating.

He looks behind. The river down below looks like a big blue snake.

An old, dry, tree branch extends few feet in the air. Nathan needs to climb down about three feet to reach it. He takes a step backwards.

THE ELK CHARGES

But Nathan suddenly plunges in the air and hugs the tree branch.

EXT. TREE BRANCH

Nathan hangs in the air. His arms hugging the thick tree branch, while his feet are loose in the air with nothing to hold on to.

NATHAN'S POV

Suddenly the long, thick antlers come to view, fiery eyes glaring down on Nathan, shooting him with DEATH.

Nathan is holding on tight to the branch with his arms and shoulders.

The Elk lowers it's body slowly and suddenly surprises Nathan with a quick swing of it's enormous antlers, they brush against his hair.

Nathan almost loses balance as he plunges down further. His whole body now is under the branch, hanging only by the power of his arms and the strong will to survive.

The Elk SWINGS it's antlers again but strikes air only.

THE BRANCH SUDDENLY CRACKS.

NATHAN
HELP!! ... FATHER!!

Nathan is losing grip. His feet are looking for something to hang on to... Finally finding a tiny branch extending from the cliff wall, enough to support his right foot.

And then a loud thump from above. The old branch shakes hard.

The Elk rises on it's hind feet and comes down hard on the side of the cliff to try and bring it down.

A CRACK... Another thumb, the branch holds but Nathan's nerves don't.

NATHAN
HELP!! ... HELP MEEEE!!

Suddenly the thumbing stops. All is quiet now.

Nathan finds another extended tiny branch above the other one. He moves his foot up slowly and places it on it, and lifts himself up, but not enough. He still has almost two feet to the top.

He lifts himself up again. His right foot is supported by the branch, his left hand hangs to the long, thick branch while his right arm extends to the top...

... And holds on to the edge. He moves up his left arm, then with a spectacular, strong push he's able to lift his body up... And throws himself on the grass while scanning the area for the Elk.

The distance from the cliff edge to the nearest tree is about thirty feet... Nathan spots a long, thick tree and aims for it.

NATHAN
I have to climb this tree... I have to.

He gets up and runs as fast as he can to the tree.

SUDDENLY THE ELK IS IN VIEW.

Charging him from the left side, but Nathan keeps running... And running.

The Elk is now few feet away from Nathan and Nathan is few feet away from the tree.

But suddenly Nathan disappears from view... He falls in a hole in the ground, landing hard. HE SCREAMS.

INT. HOLE - CONTINUOUS

Nathan lands hard in the hole. It's ten feet deep, ten feet wide of soft sandstone surface.

The Elk circles the hole, striking the ground hard around the edges with it's hooves and antlers, sending dirt and sand flying on Nathan.

Looks like it's waging a nerve war on him.

Nathan strikes back... He throws a rock at the Elk, hitting it's neck, then finds a long thick branch, waits for the right moment as the Elk circles the hole, then suddenly jumps up on his feet and strikes the Elk hard on it's face then ducks down.

THE ELK IS FURIOUS.

It jumps high, striking the ground again with it's strong hooves... Then backs off.

No sound. Nathan gets up slowly, armed with the branch. He is not tall enough to see beyond the edge. He then climbs up a foot or two and raises his head high to take a look.

THE ANTLERS ARE RIGHT THERE WAITING FOR THAT MOMENT.

The Elk takes a spectacular, deadly, SWING at Nathan's head.

Nathan hides his head behind his hands and ducks down quickly.

His branch is struck by the antlers and goes flying high in the air... Nathan realizes this could have been his head. He stays down.

EXT. FOREST - EVENING

Long trees stand majestic, like soldiers in a long forgotten war, waiting for a signal to roll down the rolling green hills beyond.

INT. HOLE - EVENING

Nathan lies down on his back. He hears something... THE SOUND OF STEPS... someone is running.

A minute later...

JIM (O.S.)

Nathan!

NATHAN

Father! Where are you?

JIM (O.S.)

I'm here, son, I can't see you.

Nathan finds a small branch, throws it out of the hole.

NATHAN
Did you see it?

JIM (O.S.)
Yes I saw it.

NATHAN
How did you find me?

JIM (O.S.)
I didn't. I found the Elk, I knew
it was stalking you.

NATHAN
Is it still there?

JIM (O.S.)
Yes, about twenty feet away in the
bushes... I came from the other
direction and climbed up a tree...
Son, are you OK? Are you injured?

NATHAN
I'm OK, father, just get me out of
here.

JIM (O.S.)
I need to get closer to you, hang
on. I'll get you out.

Seconds later, we hear steps, running... Nathan is trying to
make out where it's coming from.

NATHAN
Father, where are you?

JIM
I'm here, look up.

The tree Nathan was trying to get to earlier is only few feet
away from the hole. It's long, thick branches extends above
the hole. Jim is on top one of those branches, directly on
top of the hole.

He carries a rope.

JIM
And how the hell did you get
yourself down there?

NATHAN

Father, please don't ask. You shoulda seen me hangin' on the cliff earlier.

Nathan notices the rope.

NATHAN

Where did you get that from?

JIM

It's Jack's. He forgot it, remember? Now listen to me, son, can you climb up?

NATHAN

I don't think so, it's too soft around the edges, and I know he's gonna be all over me if I tried... Almost got me earlier.

JIM

OK, I'm gonna try and pull you up with the rope, hang on.

EXT. TREE TOP - EVENING

Jim sits on a long, thick branch, about fifteen feet from ground level, over looking the hole.

He starts by cutting the rope in half using his tomahawk. He lowers the end of the first half down to the hole.

JIM

Son, I want you to wrap it around your waist, make it tight.

Nathan is now doing exactly what he's told.

Jim wraps the other end around the branch and ties it very hard.

He takes the second half of the rope, wraps one end to the branch, ties it, then backs up slowly and start wrapping the other end around the girth of the tree until it becomes tighter and tighter.

The branch is taking the shape of a bow now because of the pulling.

Done. Jim tests the strength of the rope by pulling it. He's satisfied.

Nathan is watching curiously.

JIM
This should do it.

NATHAN
That looks good, father, I'm
impressed.

JIM
Well, only one thing left to do...
Ready?

NATHAN
I think so.

Jim holds up his tomahawk, pointing it at the end of the rope around the girth of the tree... And strikes.

THE ROPE IS CUT LOOSE, releasing the bow-shaped branch upwards. Nathan is suddenly yanked from the hole... But not high enough.

The trick worked but Jim's calculations was NOT exactly CORRECT.

Nathan did not lift to the top of the tree. He stands now at exactly ground level, rope wrapped around his waist. Nathan is shocked and frightened.

JIM
God damn it!

Then, a sudden movement in the bushes and the Elk comes out rocketing through the leaves, heading into a very easy, helpless target.

NATHAN
(screaming)
OH GOD!! FATHER HELP!!

Jim knows his son's life is about to be taken in few seconds. He lies down quickly, face down on the branch and extends his arm.

JIM
NATHAN GIVE ME YOUR HAND NOW!!

In a very quick move, Nathan lifts his arm up. The two hands CONNECT.

The Elk is already up in the air, ANTLERS POINTED... It seems like the earth is moving. But all the giant antlers strike is air.

Jim was able to yank his son just seconds away from a certain death.

Two things happen now;

The Elk was running so fast with only Nathan in sight... When it lost it's target it couldn't come to a stop so it went right into the wide girth of the tree and fell unconscious...

... And when Jim lifted his son, the weight became very heavy on the branch, it broke, sending them both flying down into the hole.

INT. HOLE

They lie next to each other, covered with dirt.

NATHAN

Welcome to the hole, father.

JIM

(manages a smile)

Glad to join you, son. Although I kinda prefer the tree.

Jim gets up, then helps Nathan to his feet. He draws his tomahawk.

JIM

Lets go finish this son of a bitch off before he regains concious...
Help me up.

Jim starts to climb while Nathan gives him a push.

Nathan sees his father taking few careful steps forward, then disappearing from his sight... Few seconds passes, then;

JIM (O.S.)

Oh Jesus.

NATHAN

Father... What's going on?

EXT. FOREST

Jim stands by the tree where the Elk had fallen earlier... there's nothing here but sandstone. Jim is in shock.

NATHAN (O.S.)

Father... Are you OK? Talk to me?

Jim walks back to the hole and gives a hand to Nathan, pulling him up. Nathan notices the Elk is gone.

NATHAN

What happened? Where did it go? It was sitting there dying just moments ago.

JIM

This is just unbelievable, even an elephant woulda not walked away if it took a hit like that. This animal is something else.

NATHAN

You think it's still around?

JIM

I'm not sure, but if it was around we woulda known by now. Anyway, lets not take chances. We should climb up this tree and spend the night here. I don't want us taking any chances walking in the dark. I know there's an old deserted steam boat landing not too far from here, we'll go to it in the morning. We might get lucky and find some hunters there.

Jim helps his son up the thick tree, then follows him. They settle on two thick branches, away from danger and away from home.

EXT. TREE TOP - NIGHT

A star shoots down from the high, dark sky and disappears behind the blue mountains.

NATHAN (V.O.)

(speaking softly)

Father, did you see that?

JIM (V.O.)
What is it, son?

NATHAN (V.O.)
A falling star... Where do they go?

JIM (V.O.)
My father once told me, when you see a falling star, this means someone out there is thinking of you, and when you see it, you should close your eyes and think of those you love, so they can see it too, and know that you're thinking of them as well.

NATHAN (V.O.)
Father... Thank you for everything. If not for you I woulda been lying next to Dan by now... Poor Dan.

JIM (V.O.)
Nathan you are my son, I will protect you with my life if I had to... I will not let this Beast take away my family from me...

A silent moment, only to be broken moments later by the sound of a distant bird.

EXT. FOREST - HILLSIDE - DAWN

A shadow of a MAN... Slides quickly down an incline and slips through the trees. It's Hawkeye.

One hand holds a rifle and the other covers his wound as his eyes dart the forest.

This man knows his way in these woods... He makes no sound, disturbs no leaves, no branches.

We hear distant birds. Their sound seems to reverberates as if in a cavern. It's mixed with another distant sound. It gets louder as Hawkeye approaches it.

HAWKEYE IS ALERT

The sound is very close now. It's behind a large tree. Hawkeye circles the tree slowly and finds the small Bear cub.

The Grizzly Bear mother lies on the ground, motionless, covered with blood as her cub licks her face trying to wake her up.

Hawkeye knows all too well how she died. He pats the cub gently.

Hawkeye whispers in it's ears;

HAWKEYE

You are alone now my young friend.
But don't be afraid... And don't
give up. Your mother died defending
you. Go make her proud.

Hawkeye walks away. The cub runs few steps after him, then stop and lets out a soft cry.

INT. JIM'S CABIN - DAWN

A loud knock on the door. Kathrine runs and opens. It's Carl.

Nadine on his side and about ten horsemen wait by the field.

Kathrine looks tired as if she has not been sleeping. And this scene frightens her to death. Her eyes go back and forth between him and the horsemen.

KATHRINE

OH GOD... What is it Carl? What's
going on?

Carl tries hard to sound calm. He is almost breathless.

CARL

Kathrine... Did you hear anything
from Jim or Nathan?

Her knees are barely holding her as she struggles to answer.

KATHRINE

NO! What is it?... please tell me.

CARL

They found Dan Davis last night,
out in the woods... Dead. And he's
brother Frank is missing.

Kathrine knees finally give way. Carl and Nadine hold her and take her inside. They seat her on a chair.

CARL

Kathrine, we are going to look for them now... Don't worry.

He pats her shoulder, hugs his daughter and heads for the door.

KATHRINE

Bring me back my family... I beg you.

Carl pauses for a second as he nods, then walks out quickly.

The sound of running hooves fill the room as Nadine wraps her arms around Kathrine's shoulders, both sobbing softly.

Nadine is as worried as Kathrine, but she tries to collect herself.

NADINE

Mrs. Johnson, please don't worry... Everything will be OK.

KATHRINE

(crying)

NO! Everything is not OK, Nadine, it's not. My husband and my son are out there alone... Alone with a monster who wants to kill them... I keep seeing my son's face, I see tears in his eyes... I feel his pain but I can't stop it, Nadine, I can't stop it.

Kathrine leans her head on Nadine's arm as we go back to the forest.

EXT. TREE BRANCH - MORNING

Gray-brown clouds lay low over the forest as a hazy, misty wind blows softly over a green tree leaf.

Nathan rubs his eyes. His father is still asleep, his raccoon hat covers his eyes.

Nathan stretches as he feels his back. It feels like a piece of stone. He leans back on the branch and let his eyes wander around the forest and the trees, and the bushes below...

SUDDENLY HIS JAWS DROP.

NATHAN
FATHER WAKE UP!

Jim is startled. He looks down...

IT'S THE ELK.

Standing directly under the tree.

JIM
Son of a bitch.

NATHAN
What do we do now?

The Elk moves. He circles the tree then slowly raises his head... And glares at Jim. Jim glares right back at him, there is fire here, hatred...

Jim looks like another man now... He looks like that young, ruthless hunter from twenty years ago... angry and thirsty for blood. He kneels down, looks like he's ready to jump

JIM
You want me you son of a bitch? You
wanna rip my heart out like I did
to you... Or was it your father
that I cut in half, as I will do to
you now...

Jim DRAWS his Tomahawk and is about to jump. Nathan is horrified.

NATHAN
FATHER WHAT ARE YOU DOING??

His own father is now scaring him as much as the Elk. He had never seen such a look on a man's face. Jim goes back to his senses and collects himself.

JIM
Sorry son... I just...

NATHAN
Look, he's leaving.

The Elk slowly turns and heads for the bushes.

NATHAN
What is he doing?

JIM
I'm not sure what he's up to.

The Elk stops at about a hundred feet away from the tree.

JIM

OK son, this is our only chance now. This Elk is after me, not you, so here's what I want you to do and you have to listen to me carefully... That old steam boat landing I told you about is almost two miles away north of here. When I give you the signal you jump and run as fast as you can, NO STOPPING. I want you to go there and wait for me.

NATHAN

What about you?

JIM

Don't worry about me. I'll be fine, I will meet you there soon. You just do as I told you and remember... NO STOPPING, do not stop no matter what, and run as fast as you can. Do you understand, Nathan?

Nathan hesitates... Then nods.

JIM (cont'd)

OK, son, just wait for my signal.

Jim climbs down the tree, making sure he is visible to the Elk... He takes few steps backwards, towards the woods while looking at the Elk.

THE ELK MOVES.

Jim runs about twenty feet toward the south, then stops. He sees the Elk moving in his direction.

Nathan looks worried as he watches his father playing that dangerous game... He waits.

Nathan looks around, the Elk had disappeared.

Suddenly Jim waves with his hand. Seeing the signal, Nathan climbs down quickly and starts running into the woods, heading north.

Jim sees his son running fast. He also turns and runs as fast as he can. He turns quickly and sees the ANTLERS at about fifty feet away from him... He speeds up.

EXT. FOREST - SOUTH SIDE - DAY

Jim is rocketing through the bushes. Leaves cracking under his feet... Takes a look behind, sees nothing... He slows to catch his breath.

The Elk is nowhere in sight.

Jim scans around but it's all quiet. Nothing but forest. He waits.

EXT. FOREST - NORTH SIDE - DAY

Nathan is running fast as well. He leaps over a fallen tree, ducks under a low branch.

EXT. FOREST - SOUTH SIDE - DAY

Jim is still waiting. His heart is beating faster now. He feels something had gone terribly wrong. He is starting to realize what just happened.

JIM

(to himself)

That was a trick. He wanted to separate us, all along he's been trying to do that... Now I know what you're up to you son of a bitch, now I know... You don't wanna kill me just yet, you wanna break me first by killing my... My.

He wants to get this thought out of head, but can't...

JIM

OH GOD... OH GOD... NATHAN...
NATHAN!

Jim is hysterical... His eyes and soul are looking towards the south... And he starts to run.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Nathan is doing exactly what he was told. He keeps running, slowing down just seconds to catch his breath then continues running.

He can see the rolling green hills at the end of the woods and he can hear the roar of the river beyond.

At the edge of the hill stands a series of old, log-wood structures, over looking the river. It's the STEAM BOAT LANDING... Three structures in total.

Only one of the structures still barely standing.

In the back of it there is an old wooden stairs that leads to a base, and then to the river where the steam boats used to dock. This place is a mere shadow of what it used to be.

The structures stands high above water. Supported from the back by few rotted wood beams... Otherwise it would fall into the river.

Nathan spots the structures and makes a FINAL DASH for them.

INT. STEAM BOAT LANDING - CONTINUOUS

Nathan walks in and closes the door behind. It's a single room with two windows on each side.

There is a small table, few broken chairs and a broken door on the other side which leads to the stairs and the river.

Nathan stops to catch his breath, then sits on the floor, scared and confused.

He buries his head between his hands as he closes his eyes... He then hears something and gets up quickly.

Nathan is very alert. He moves slowly against the wall towards the window and looks... Sees nothing. Looks to other side and sees a MAN coming. He runs and opens the door.

About twenty feet away he sees;

FRANK DAVIS.

Dragging his feet, clothes all torn up.

NATHAN
Frank? Is that you?

Frank looks at Nathan. He can barely speak.

FRANK
Help... Help me!

Nathan takes few steps outside but at that moment the GROUND SHAKES.

THE ELK

Comes out rocketing through the woods. Nathan freezes.

NATHAN

OH GOD... Frank, come here, RUN!

But Frank can't move a muscles. He turns and looks behind.

The Elk is charging him. Frank simply stands motionless, turns his head and catches eyes with Nathan... And that was the last thing he saw.

In a spectacular move, the Elk snatches Frank with it's antlers and blasts him toward the building.

Nathan is absolutely horrified. His legs freeze... His eyes wide open as the Elk, with Frank hanging from it's antlers, CHARGES toward him like a speeding train.

Nathan is finally able to collect himself. He takes few steps backwards then runs inside and slams the door shut.

Seconds later... It happens.

This is more like an explosion. Frank's body comes flying through the window, glass shattering all over the room, shrapnel piercing through Nathan's face and body.

Nathan is on the ground. His face covered with his bloody hands, screaming hysterically... Then it's all quiet.

Seconds pass... He looks around. Frank lies dead near him. Nathan has blood on his body and face from the shattered glass.

Suddenly he hears a LOUD THUMB as the whole room shakes. He tries to get up but another loud thumb brings him down as the room shakes harder, but this time he hears a loud cracking sound... Wood cracking.

EXT. BACK SIDE OF STEAM BOAT LANDING

The Elk is down at the base of the building. It backs up then charges fast on the rotted wood beam that supports the structure, hitting it very hard with it's large antlers. The whole structure is about to collapse down to the river.

INT. STEAM BOAT LANDING

The wood is cracking as the whole structure is about to collapse.

Nathan tries to hang on to something, but the Elk had STRUCK again and now the whole room is going down.

The back side where Nathan was sitting is collapsing slowly.

A VERY LOUD SOUND IS HEARD

The wood is cracking from all directions. All three structures are now going down into the river.

Nathan tries for a final dash to the front door, but it's too late, the structures are already on their way down, taking Nathan and the body of Frank with them.

EXT. BACK SIDE OF STEAM BOAT LANDING

The log-wood structures are breaking up to pieces as they drop down to the river. We don't see Nathan but we can hear his screams.

The structures were about twenty feet high above water, so when they came down, they made a huge splash with the tens of pieces of Log-wood that broke apart and came flying down.

EXT. THE RIVER - DAY

Pieces of log-wood drifting down stream, crossing a bend in the river, one after the other, then we see a BODY crossing the bend...

IT'S NATHAN.

He is concious. The current is gaining speed and power and Nathan can't find anything to hold on to as he drifts down stream, faster and faster.

There is a piece of Log-wood almost thirty feet ahead of Nathan near the river bank. It's stuck sideways between a rock in the water and a fallen thick tree branch on the edge, and came to a stop.

He makes a mad dash for it using all the strength and will power he has left in him... And is able to hold on to it.

He pulls himself slowly to the shore and collapses.

EXT. THE RIVER BANK

Nathan looks miserable as he lies face down on the river bank. His clothes are all torn, his hands and face are bloodied from the shattered window glass.

He lifts his head up slowly to scan his surroundings...

Everything is blurry. He leans on his elbows to rub his eyes and wipe the blood from his face... Now he is able to see... And he sees;

THE ELK... Standing on the right side... And behind him there is about five feet of sandstone shore that ends with a five foot edge which leads to a small hillside and into the woods.

To his left is the river... And in his face is a certain DEATH as the Elk stands on higher ground looking larger than life and MAD as hell...

For some reason Nathan does not make any moves. He just sits there motionless.

Maybe he ran out of will power... OR power... But he now has a certain look in his eyes, a determined, stubborn look... Maybe he knew this is the end and wanted to face it like a MAN.

He drags his knees and uses whatever is left in him to try and stand up... He does.

But now the strangest event takes place;

THE ELK SLOWLY APPROACHES NATHAN.

Nathan waits, doesn't move a muscle. He looks like an ant next to this monster.

The Elk suddenly stands up high and strikes Nathan with it's front feet. It's not a strong hit, but hard enough to bring Nathan down. He falls hard on his back.

The Elk back up slowly to it's old position above the higher ground... And stares at Nathan as if challenging him for a fight.

Nathan is shaking as he lay on his back, not from fear but from anger. He has fire in his eyes and in his heart.

NATHAN
I'M NOT SCARED OF YOU!

He pulls himself together and finds the power to pull his body up.

Nathan is on his feet again.

And the Elk does it again, but this time he strikes a little harder, sending Nathan flying few feet off the ground, landing hard on his face.

Nathan looks at the Elk with fiery eyes as he wipes the blood, mud, and tears off his eyes... And amazingly finds power, somewhere, to get up again...

NATHAN

I TOLD YOU I'M NOT SCARED! JUST DO
IT! KILL ME YOU SON OF A BITCH!

Nathan is barely able to move a muscle, but he takes few steps forward towards the Elk as if challenging him till the end.

AND THE ELK TAKES THE CHALLENGE.

The Elk stares at Nathan as Nathan stares right back at it, showing no fear.

The Elk seems to want to end this game now. It lowers it's antlers and gets ready for a FINAL CHARGE.

Nathan closes his eyes.

THE ELK CHARGES.

Suddenly a LOUD CRY is heard, sounds like a WAR CRY as JIM comes out of nowhere and pushes Nathan to the side and is about to take the hit instead of him... His Tomahawk is drawn as he faces certain death... Then, seconds before impact...

A SINGLE SHOT IS FIRED.

It hits the Elk in the neck and slows it down a bit, but not enough to stop it. Part of the antlers PIERCE through Jim's shoulder, sending him FLYING to the ground.

NATHAN

FATHER!

The shot came from HAWKEYE.

He came from the right side on top of the small hillside. Smoke still blows from the muzzle of his rifle.

Nathan looks on in horror as his father gets up quickly on his feet and CHARGES the Elk with his bare arms.

The ELK charges JIM as JIM charges it. But before any contact, HELL BREAKS LOOSE with SHOTS FIRED from all directions at the Elk.

This time it's Carl and his horsemen. They spread all over the hillside like soldiers on a target practice mission.

The Elk stays on it's feet, refusing to go down as blood covers it's body.

But finally the Beast IS DOWN on the ground... DEAD.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. JIM'S CABIN - EVENING

A knock on the door... Kathrine opens, Nadine is behind her.

THIS SCENE IS SILENT, ALMOST IN SLOW MOTION.

Carl is at door with his men.

Kathrine, face shed with tears, is looking... Wondering.

She pushes her way through the men and as the last two horsemen split apart... Jim & Nathan come to view.

Warily, bloodied and exhausted...

Her knees can't carry her the next few steps... She sits on the ground crying as Jim & Nathan lean over her.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. JIM'S CABIN - DAY - FEW AUTUMNS LATER

A MAN negotiates a single-horse carriage through the dirt road leading up to Jim's cabin. Seated next to him is a beautiful young WOMAN and a five-year-old boy.

Jim & kathrine opens the door and walk out to greet them.

It's Nathan and his wife Nadine.

The little boy runs into his grandfather's arms.

LITTLE JIM
Granpa! Granpa!

Hugs and kisses all around as they all walk into the house.

Jim and little Jimmy linger behind.

LITTLE JIM
Granpa I missed you much.

Jim holds his grandson gently as little Jim plays with his grandfather's long, white beard.

JIM
I missed you too, little Jimmy...
So much.

As they head to the door. Little Jimmy points at something;

LITTLE JIM
Granpa... what is that?

In the front of the house... Right on top of the front door hangs a large skeleton of an ELK'S HEAD... It's antlers stretch more than ten feet wide.

Jim pauses as he looks at it.

JIM
It's a long story, young man, old
story of two old friends. I'm sure
Oneday your father will tell you
all about it.

LITTLE JIM
Daddy says you're a great hunter,
Granpa, is it true?

JIM
But not as good as your Dad, little
Jimmy... HI IS THE BEST.

Jim lets Little Jimmy inside the house, he lingers behind as his eyes scans around the field, the mountains and the rolling green hills beyond, and finally landing on the Elk's head...

He then walks in and closes the door.

EXT. THE RIVER BANK - DAY

A small Grizzly Bear cub plays close to the river bank... A young Elk approaches... And they start to play.

THE END