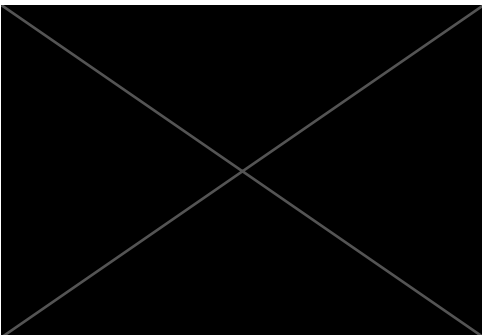


CROATOAN

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. THE NORTH CAROLINA COAST - MORNING

Facing North, the sky has begun to wake up. The orange sun paints the clouds and atmosphere in a shades of light blue and pink as it rises from the East.

Inland, beyond the sand dunes and tall grass, is a heavily beaten dirt road.

Rushing by with no warning charges a line of horse drawn carriages, one after another, rushing to get to Northern horizon. All shapes and styles; everything from bare wagons with untreated wood, to the most luxurious and expensive buggy that a white man could buy.

The number of carts is never ending, with another always appearing a few seconds after the previous.

Charging faster than all of these carriages is a beaten, worn, four-horse-drawn carriage heading in the opposite direction. The farther the renegade carriage travels, the more apparent it becomes why everyone else is leaving.

Dark, ominous clouds are blowing in from somewhere beyond the southern horizon; the same place all the other carriages are evacuating from.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE RENEGADE CARRIAGE

The four horses breathe heavily as they charge toward the humid, dark destination.

JACK, the heavy man pulling the reins, has a face of panic and stress. He glances down to the horses on occasion before shifting his eyes back to the cloudy skies ahead.

Allowing himself to hold the reins with one hand, Jack uses his other to dig into deep pocket. His hand returns to holding a pocket watch. The time: A little past 7:30. The minute hand shakes with the rocking of the carriage, but you can see the general area it's pointing to; between the 6 and the 7.

From inside, a hacking cough followed by a question.

CLAYTON
(raspy)
How long?

JACK
(yelling louder to
compensate for the other
wagons passing by)
NOT TOO LONG! WE'RE MAKING GOOD
TIME!

Jack's facial expression doesn't improve. If anything, it's actually worse now.

JACK (CONT'D)
(to himself)
But not enough of it.

CUT TO:

INT. THE RENEGADE CARRIAGE

A wooden gun case is held with the off-colored hands of CLAYTON; a man in his late 20's and already on Death's door. In one of his hands is a dark red stained white handkerchief. If the edges of the handkerchief weren't visible, you'd think it's original color was the dark red.

Using said handkerchief, Clayton lets go of the gun case with the hand that was also holding the rag. Hacks again into it. Removing the cloth from his mouth, a little blood around the edges of lips.

Clayton instinctively wipes his mouth, but the rag is so saturated already that it's more of a smearing of the blood than it is cleaning.

Resting his head the padded seat behind him, Clayton shifts his gaze to the left. The sunlight hits his face in brief moments between each passing carriage traveling in the opposite direction.

The look on Clayton's face is a blend of pain and fear, yet his eyes read of determination.

Sweat is dripping down his sickly, flushed face. The humidity isn't the only thing getting to him.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE REAR OF THE RENEGADE CARRIAGE

The back of Clayton's transport is barren, the opposite of what lies in the back of all the carriages heading North.

CUT TO:

EXT. FARTHER DOWN THE NORTH CAROLINA COAST - SWANSBORO CITY DOCKS

Dozens of wood docks stretch into choppy waters away from the elegant homes and buildings of Swansboro; a developing, modern Southern port town. Multiple large sail and steam ships flee from the area, leaving the docks barren. Workmen run and shout to each other throughout the town, preparing their homes and businesses for the storm nearly upon them.

Overcast covers the sky, with the shades of the clouds becoming darker as they roll in.

Looking directly up to the sky is ESTER, a fierce-looking woman in her early 40s, donning a duster coat. Her forehead sweats slightly, the humid heat of the South beginning form condensation against her cold demeanor.

She stands at the end of a dock. The water spiking upwards, but not far enough to reach over the wooden planks.

Ester's hair blows a little with the light breeze rolling in with the tide below her. Her eyes watch the grey clouds, rolling in faster than how they seemed further North.

SIGMAN

(Not too far away)

If you're try'n to get a sense of direction, you're supposed to be looking for the sun. An' it isn't that way.

Ester's head doesn't move, nor do the muscles of her face. She simply responds.

ESTER

I'm not looking for East, I'm looking for where all these clouds are coming from... South.

SIGMAN, a young man just barely past the legal drinking age, wearing brand new, clean cowboy clothes, stands about 10 paces from her right shoulder.

SIGMAN
How do you know that's South?

ESTER
That's where those kinds of clouds
come from.

Sigman's face scrunches with confusion.

SIGMAN
So... what does that mean? The
South clouds.

ESTER
That's where those kinds of clouds
come from. And what's following
them.

SIGMAN
(still confused)
And... what's that?

Ester takes a moment to think of an answer. Her head stays tilted up, but she blinks and lets her eyes look down for a moment, then up again.

ESTER
Hell.

Ester finally tilts her head away from the sky to look at the young man talking to her. Her eyebrows scowl together for a moment as she mentally processes him.

Sigman reaches out his right hand.

SIGMAN
Sigman Betta.

Ester returns the favor, gripping Sigman's hand firmly.

ESTER
Ester.

Sigman makes a forced grin, trying not to wince as Ester shakes his hand with a strong grasp.

Echoing boots on the wood dock approach from the entrance. Ester and Sigman turn to the sound's origin, letting go of the other's hand. Sigman shakes his hand a little bit.

Approaching the duo is an intimidating-looking MAN in a heavily used police marshal coat.

A rifle rests in his hands as his ten gallon hat obscures his face as his head is tilted down. The sound of spurs slowly becomes louder as the man steps closer.

He's only a dozen feet away now, he hasn't looked up yet.

SIGMAN

You alright, mister?

The man finally stops and looks up, only a few feet from walking into Sigman and Ester. This is MARSHAL MAUTHRAMUN (pronounced like Maw-Throw-Moon), a man in his late 60s with white hair long enough to hang past his ears. Overgrown stubble runs across his lower face and under his chin, just above a gnarly old scar across his neck.

MARSHAL

(tired)

Yes, son, I'm okay. Thank you.

SIGMAN

You a lawman or somethin'? Sure do look like you-

The old man's eyebrows become lower.

SIGMAN (CONT'D)

Or at least, was, one. I just, - I don't see a badge-

MARSHAL

I don't need a badge, boy.

SIGMAN

Well y'es, I - I agree. I'm only in... feeling the honor of being in the presence of a...

The old man isn't moving. His slightly squinted eyes still staring into Sigman's.

SIGMAN (CONT'D)

- a mighty, aged man of the law. Like yourself... Truly, I -

MARSHAL

Kid,

Sigman shuts up, his mouth hangs open from being mid-sentence.

MARSHAL (CONT'D)

Best you don't ask too many questions if you can't decide what to say; word of advice. Keep 'em to yourself, and wait for an answer.

The old man turns his head to look at Ester, she maintains her cold expression, but now it has a shade of light concern.

MARSHAL (CONT'D)

Ma'am, you alright?

ESTER

Yes... I'm quite fine.

MARSHAL

You waiting for your husband?

He shifts his eyes to the stunned Sigman, and back to Ester.

MARSHAL (CONT'D)

This boy bothering you at all?

ESTER

No, and I'm afraid my husband's been dead for a few months now.

Her emotion doesn't change, it remains stand-offish.

MARSHAL

(sympathetic)

Well, in that case, miss, I am sorry. May I ask for your name?

ESTER

It's really alright, mister, you don't-

SIGMAN

(excited to participate)

Her name is Ester!

Ester and Marshal's eyes stay locked. She exhales passive aggressively. Her eyes become shake-y, looking around the man's face instead of his eyes.

The old man smiles slightly.

MARSHAL

Is that true, ma'am?

ESTER

Yes, the boy tells the truth.

Neither of them talk. Sigman's eyes jump back and forth between his two superiors.

ESTER (CONT'D)

I'm just not comfortable telling my name to strange men I just met.

MARSHAL

Though... you told the boy your name.

ESTER

The boy is a boy, and he isn't holding a gun in front of me.

Sigman stutters and jitters.

SIGMAN

Sh-... Sh-should I? I can-

Sigman reaches at his sides and pulls out the overly-large pistols hanging from the over-sized holsters at his hip, attached to a belt that is visibly too loose.

He draws but his pistols and points them in the air, arms bent in front of him.

SIGMAN (CONT'D)

Is this better, Marshal? I- I saw the man at the store hold them like this once, he was a cold son of a you-know-what if you know what I-

Sigman's hands and arms are already shaking from the weight of the pistols. From hilt to the end of the barrel, they're both larger than his head.

MARSHAL

Kid, put those guns down before you scalp yourself with them.

Sigman nods and struggles to align the guns into their holsters. It takes him longer than it should to figure it out.

MARSHAL (CONT'D)

I pray to God you have the safety on.

Sigman's eyebrows dart up and his jaw drops. His head looks down and bobs left to right trying to tell if the guns's safety is on without taking them out of their holsters.

The Marshal and Ester regain eye contact.

MARSHAL (CONT'D)

All do respect, madam, I don't believe I'm the one you need to be concerned with.

Ester's eyes focus in on the old man as the rest of her facial expression changes; she's not concerned for her safety, she's irritated.

MARSHAL (CONT'D)

So, you're going to the island too, then. What does a widow like you want with a man like Felix Alberta.

Ester takes a step closer to the old Marshal.

ESTER

(agitated)

Word of advice, Marshal, take your own medicine.

Echoing from the nearby cobblestone road at the end of the dock is the sound of near-distant horses, running.

Behind Ester, a steam paddle ship approaches toward the dock. The sound of it's loud motor makes Sigman turn to look.

SIGMAN

Is that thuh' boat?

Ester and the Marshal don't turn. The Marshal isn't happy with Ester's disrespect.

The horse clatter becomes louder and clear, followed by the rickety sound of wooden wheels.

SIGMAN (CONT'D)

Yeah, that's it. Or, - least I think it is.

The sound of splashing water begins increase as the far-out steam paddle ship trudges through the water, throwing it behind the ship's massive paddle wheel on the side.

The Marshal, still looking slightly down to Ester, widens his eyes and raises his eyebrows with the look of realization.

MARSHAL

(with a foggy memory)

Waaaaait... I've seen you before
... somewhere

ESTER

(smooth, snarky)

No, I don't reckon you did,
Marshal. - Or - I guess I shouldn't
use that term. Since, you know, you
don't have a badge. Why is that?

The Renegade Carriage arrives at the end of the dock. JACK, the horse driver, quickly loops the reins to the carriage to secure them, and pulls the break lever to the locked position. He hops down and runs to open the side door of the carriage, revealing CLAYTON inside.

Clayton coughs loudly and painfully into his bloody hand rag. In his left hand hangs his wooden gun case. Jack grabs the case and sets it down on the ground.

The coughing causes Sigman, Ester, and Marshal to all switch their attention to Clayton.

CUT TO:

EXT. DOCK ROAD

Jack reaches up trying to aid Clayton down. His hand grips Clayton's forearm and sleeve. Clayton immediately barks back.

CLAYTON

GET YOUR HAND OFF ME!

Blood droplets fly from Clayton's mouth and spatter Jack's face, causing Jack to stumble back and lean up against the carriage, wiping his face with his hands.

Clayton manages to get down on his own and close the door behind him. Jack looks at him, disgusted. Clayton pulls out a coin from jacket pocket and hands it Jack. After nodding, Clayton turns around, picks up his gun case, and begins walking down the dock with a slow, pained step.

Jack looks down to his hand and jumps, letting the coin fall on the cobble stone. Looking around for a surface, Jack rubs his hand on one of the four horses that's closest to him; a pale horse. Jack removes his hand after a few small wipes, leaving a blurred, red handprint on the horse's white hair.

CUT TO:

EXT. END OF DOCK

SIGMAN
(quietly)
Oh my... a white horse...

(aloud)
I ain't never seen one before,
heard they're expensive.

CUT TO:

EXT. DOCK ROAD

Jack climbs on top of his carriage and begins to untangle the horse reigns he tied. Clayton continues to painfully cough as he moves forward one slow step at a time.

CUT TO:

EXT. END OF DOCK

ESTER
(demeaningly)
Why don't you go ask him for his
name then, mister *bounty hunter*.

MARSHAL
(pitiful)
Oh... I already know. I've seen and
heard it many times on many people
in many forms.

SIGMAN
And... what does that mean? What it
it?

MARSHAL
(low toned, for only
Sigman and Ester to hear)
Death; you don't cough that much
blood unless your death is near,
one way or another.

Marshal watches as Jack gains hold of the reigns in one hand and checks his pocket watch with the other. Then he looks to the sky, then back to his watch. At the other end of the dock, the Marshal does too. **10 a.m.**

Clayton is almost to the end of the dock, his breathing is vary labored.

CUT TO:

EXT. DOCK ROAD

Jack releases the break lever and snaps the horse rains, making a cracking sound followed by the thunderous roll of the carriage wheels pulled forward, as real thunder rumbles in the distance. In a moment, the carriage rounds the nearest corner, and is gone.

CUT TO:

EXT. END OF DOCK

MARSHAL

He sure did leave in hurry.

Sigman looks up to the sky, pressing his lips together.

SIGMAN

(trying to sound smart)

I sure can see why. Driving a carriage and horses in rain isn't easy, thah's for sure. But, where ever he's going, he'll have some story about how, as Ester put it, this Hell was following him.

Clayton catches up to the others at the opposite end of the dock. As the sound of horses is leaves in the air, the sound of layered footsteps begins to grow. Walking around a building, from the direction the storm is coming from, comes two new strangers; A silhouette in a LARGE PONCHO fluttering in the wind and firm, motionless wide brimmed hat, and another in an other-worldly design: A SAMURAI.

Clayton turns to look at the new comers as well.

ESTER

No. **Hell** followed with *them*.

CUT TO:

ESTER

INT. GOVERNOR'S HOME - DAY - A LONG TIME AGO

The front door leading into a wide, open front room is blown inward. In the smoke walks in a blurry silhouette, ESTER. But right now, she is LIZ LEE, a gang leader.

Liz walks to the center of the room between two staircases, both curve upward to the second floor balcony-style landing. Behind her pour in two dozen gang members. They fan out; splitting in half so that six men go up each stair case, and the other 12 spread out through the first floor. They all have their pistols drawn as they go room by room. The breaking sound of walls, doors, and glass ricochet throughout the home.

Another man enters the home, someone larger than anyone else in the gang. He meets Liz in the center of the room. This is GENE, Liz Lee's husband.

GENE

Did you see anyone?

LIZ LEE

I told them to check the second floor, I saw a curtain move when we came to the door.

The sound of an elder man screaming suddenly booms from the second floor.

Gene smirks and walks to the right staircase. Liz follows him to the second floor.

CUT TO:

INT. GOVERNOR'S HOME OFFICE

Two gangers aim their pistols at the GOVERNOR, an elderly old man, who is sitting in his office chair in a way that looks like he was thrown into it.

Gene's entrance causes a reaction from everyone, his towering height causes his head to be taller than the office's doorframe.

The kerosene light on the Governor's desk illuminates his Gene's face. His glossy, sunken eyes make the kerosene light reflect like the eyes of a wild animal.

GENE

Glad you could make some time for us to finally meet.

(MORE)

GENE (CONT'D)

I was beginning to think you were
ignoring our messages.

One of the gangsters rushes a chair across the room for Gene
to sit across from the old man.

GOVERNOR

(terrified)

I don't know what you were
expecting! I can't just grant
access to whoever I want into a the
state's treasury! I alone could be
hanged for conspiracy before
anything even happens!

GENE

I know.

The Governor is dumbfounded by that response.

The loud, cracking sound of a kicked-in door is followed by
young child screaming "No," somewhere outside the office.

GOVERNOR

(pleading)

Please... Don't involve him,-

A gang member enters the office, dragging a resisting young
boy by his shirt collar. He's old enough to know what's
happening, but not old enough to be able to do anything about
it.

The child is thrown into a corner of the room where the
Governor can see. The gangster that dragged him in draws a
revolver, aims it at the boy, and pulls the hammer back.

GOVERNOR (CONT'D)

(panicing)

Alright, okay, I'll figure
something out - PLEASE give me some
time I'll get you anything you
want!-

GENE

(slow, relaxed voice)

Governor, put yourself in my shoes.
Say you're leading the charge on a
criminal manhunt, and you give said
criminal a time frame to surrender
themselves. And then they don't. Do
you then, and all the sheriff's
deputies, give the criminal more
time to surrender themselves?

A long pause. The Governor is too scared to form a single word.

GENE (CONT'D)

That's what I thought too.

A longer pause as Gene smirks while staring into the Governor's eyes. The old man's eyes switch between Gene and the young boy.

GOVERNOR

(unstable)

I -

GENE

Do it.

The gangster aiming the pistol at the child pulls the trigger multiple times, the child drops to the floor. The old man screams, before also being shot repeatedly in the chest by the two men aiming at him.

Gene turns to look out the office doorway, Liz is horrified.

GENE (CONT'D)

(shrugging)

He left us with no option.

LIZ LEE

That was NEVER what we agreed on!

GENE

Our message, apparently, wasn't clear enough with this one. Wasted a lot of valuable time on him.

LIZ LEE

Why involve the kid!?

GENE

Actions speak louder than words ever could. I want everyone to know not just what I'm willing to do, but what I *will* do.

GENE (CONT'D)

And... I want them to know... that
I want them to know.

Gene points to the hallway behind Liz. She turns to look and see one of the gangster slamming the butt of a rifle across her eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. GOVERNOR'S HOUSE - SUNSET

Liz wakes up, laying down on a grass lawn, to the sound of men talking. A white sheet lays over her, with an edge ending at her forehead. Her head is covered in blood from her beatings, there was obviously more strikes to her face after the first.

It's hard to keep open her eyes, as her eyelids are now purple and swollen. She peeks out from the sheet and sees POLICE MEN walking back and forth, from inside the house to outside, comparing notes with one another. She's able to see two more masses with blood-stained white sheets over them.

Liz looks the other direction, away from the house, where the tree line for a dense forest begins.

The sun has just gone over the horizon, it'll be completely dark in a matter of minutes.

LAWMEN (O.S.)

Hey, there's another body over
here! House slave.

The rest of the cops that lingered outside begin to walk into the home, calm and curious, not at all acting like another human being was dead.

When the last cop gets inside the blown-open doorway of the house, Liz stumbles to get off the ground, throwing the white sheet off her in a messy pile. She struggles to get the wood line, falling to her knees multiple times, and holding her head as if it were in terrible pain.

Liz turns around to look back at the house, seeing no one is outside yet. She musters up all the strength she has, forcing her stiff body off the ground, and stumble-runs into the woods.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WOODS

Liz runs farther into the woods, barely able to hear the chatter of the police. Until,-

LAWMEN 2 (O.S.)

(echoing from the
distance)

FIND HER, NOW!

A new jolt of adrenaline courses through Liz's body as she forces her legs to keep going; barely able to run, but faster than she was before.

The pain in her body causes her to breathe heavily, all the movement making her headache worse, barely able to keep a single eye open. She falls with a spin, disorienting herself, forgetting what direction she was going in.

She looks in all directions before picking herself back up and running again.

Tears from the pain also begin to impair her vision, she might as well just be blind. She panics, hyperventilating.

The sound of footsteps race toward her, loudly crunching twigs and leaves on the ground. Liz looks to see what the sound is coming from, afraid of the police.

Shockingly, standing before Liz is another woman. A NATIVE AMERICAN WOMAN, though she wears a modern set of mens clothing; A stained button-down shirt tucked under baggy pants, held up by crossed suspender straps.

The woman puts her hand over Liz's mouth, stopping her from screaming in fear.

CUT TO:

BLACK.

The sounds of Ester's muffled screams transitions into the warped, metallic moans of a creaking ship.

EXT. END OF DOCK - PRESENT

The sounds of