

RUBE SIDES

EXT. CREEK - MOMENTS LATER

The three men sit around a new, lit fire where the fish cooks. The other two are RUBE, mustache, teeth, and chin stained with tobacco juice but he's not afraid to hide them with a big grin now and then. TIMMY is the youngest with a patchy, unformed beard. He talks loud and fast. Dolan, the leader, has a red beard, like dried blood speckled with ash. He is also the only one to keep his hat on, looking from underneath it with sharp eyes that follow every action of his surroundings. .

Coffee is passed around. Travers watches close too: they seem like most mountain men from these parts but he notices a tension as Sarah takes the coffee from Dolan.

SARAH

I'll catch another fish. This
isn't much to go around.

She doesn't want to be near.

DOLAN

No need for that.

She stops.

DOLAN

The boys and I already had our
breakfast. But much obliged for the
coffee.

She can't meet his eye but Travers isn't quite picking up on what's going on yet.

TIMMY

And it sure does taste good, ma'am.

RUBE

Delicious. Ya make it yourself?

Sarah moves off towards the water's edge. Travers checks the fish and sees it's done. He takes it off the fire and starts to divvy it out onto two plates.

DOLAN

She your misses?

A pain travels through Travers at this thought.

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DOLAN
Your wife?

He stomachs the lie.

TRAVERS
Yes.

Sarah is surprised to hear him say it. Dolan sees her reaction, a sly look in his eye. Rube chuckles.

Travers knows there is something in the air and he doesn't like these men. He takes a plate over to Sarah, sets it down beside her. She doesn't touch it. He returns to his and starts to eat.

TRAVERS
We'll be on our way soon.

DOLAN
Which way is that?

Travers, after a moment, points.

RUBE
Most people head West.

TIMMY
(with a mouthful of fish)
Rube, you ain't wrong about that.

DOLAN
The best way around the mountains
is that direction.

He nods his head to the other side of the creek.

TRAVERS
I know where we're going.

DOLAN
You been through these parts
before, huh?

TRAVERS
Plenty.

DOLAN
Funny. I never seen you.
(beat)
But I seen you a time or two
before.

He's talking about Sarah. The air gets extra heavy.

(CONTINUED)

DOLAN
Around Payson I'd say.

Travers is distracted from these men and their intrusion when he hears this, wondering why Sarah may have been at their next destination.

SARAH
I been through there.
(beat)
A couple nights past.

She says these last words directly to Travers. She is trying to tell him something.

TRAVERS
You boys trappers?

The question almost feels like an accusation.

DOLAN
We're lookin' for gold.

RUBE
But it ain't always the mountains
we're minin'.

This confession is almost too much. Dolan gives his older comrad a stern look that doesn't go unnoticed by Travers, though Timmy is oblivious.

TIMMY
That's right. Hey you gonna eat
that fish, missy?

DOLAN
Timmy. That isn't proper.

Timmy wipes some flakes of fish off his bottom lip.

DOLAN
Now. Ask her like she's a lady.

Timmy nods but Sarah has already brought the plate over. She drops it in front of the young one.

SARAH
I wasn't hungry anyhow.

DOLAN
There ain't no better eatin' than
what you catch with your own bare
hands.

(CONTINUED)

Sarah turns, abrupt, a shooting pain causes her to wince. Travers doesn't see it but Dolan does and smiles at her.

SARAH

Jack.

She can't say what she really wants to. Her eyes are full of tears but she won't let them fall.

SARAH

We should be going... shouldn't we?

Travers is not mistaken now: these are the ones who hurt her.

TRAVERS

You're right about that.

(to Dolan)

Much obliged for the conversation.

Travers gets up as Tim snatches what's left of his fish too.

DOLAN

I haven't been that way, not in a long time.

Tim, mouth full, waits in anticipation. Rube lowers his coffee can, showing more rotten teeth than usual.

DOLAN

We'll keep you company for a little while.

Travers knows it might be the death of them if they object.

DOLAN

That is, if you don't mind.

He sees Sarah's face and knows it for certain now: they don't have a choice.