

WHIPLASH

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based on a true story

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FADE IN:

EXT. PARKHURST FAMILY FARM - DAY

SUPER: New Hampshire, 1861

Townspeople mill around the yard of a hardscrabble farmstead, examining furniture, tools, livestock, and household goods.

A sign announces "Bank Auction TODAY."

The top-hatted AUCTIONEER holds a newspaper with the headline "Union Troops Capture Alexandria."

On the porch stand two teenagers wearing black armbands:

JOHN PARKHURST, 17, trying to look nonchalant...

...and his sister CHARLOTTE "CHARLIE" PARKHURST, 14 and gangly, with untidy braids and cold fury in her eyes.

A little girl finds a rag doll in an old trunk and holds it up to show her mother.

Charlie can't take it any more. She bolts down the porch steps and heads for the barn.

John watches her go, sympathetically.

INT. BARN - DAY

Charlie bursts into the barn.

A mare whickers and looks out of its stall. Charlie goes to stroke it and her eyes soften. The horse nuzzles her.

YOUNG CHARLIE

I'm gonna miss you, too...

MR. FINCH, 50s, appears in the doorway. He's a big, grizzled, nasty-looking character.

The horse flares its nostrils and backs away.

YOUNG CHARLIE

She's shy with strangers.

Finch snorts.

MR. FINCH

Hand me a halter.

Charlie hesitates.

Finch points at the halter.

MR. FINCH

You deaf or feeble-minded?

She hands it to him. He opens the stall door; the mare backs to the corner, swishing its tail and shaking its head.

MR. FINCH

Gimme a whip.

YOUNG CHARLIE

I'll put it on. Step out where she can't see you.

Finch shoves the halter at her and stomps out.

Charlie soothes the mare, then slips on the halter and leads the horse out of the stall.

Finch roughly twists the mare's lip to examine its teeth.

Charlie winces.

YOUNG CHARLIE

She's got a tender mouth...

MR. FINCH

Then she better learn to mind, right fast.

He takes a lead shank and runs the stud chain through the mare's mouth, making a "war bridle." He yanks on the chain. The horse squeals and tosses its head. Finch yanks harder.

YOUNG CHARLIE

You're hurting her!

MR. FINCH

That ain't your business any more, is it?

He leads the mare out of the barn.

Charlie charges after him. But when she gets to the barn door she freezes:

The crowd's still there, pawing through her family's things.

She stays inside the shelter of the barn.

EXT. PARKHURST FAMILY FARM - DAY

The townspeople roll away in their laden wagons.

Charlie sees the little girl clutching her old doll and the mare tied up behind Finch's wagon.

The auctioneer counts out the money and hands it to John.

AUCTIONEER

Fourteen dollars and fifty-eight cents. Can I give you a lift someplace?

EXT. NEW HAMPSHIRE ROAD - DAY

The auctioneer's buggy drives off, leaving John and Charlie in front of wooden sign:

"Nashua Orphans' Home."

EXT. NASHUA ORPHANAGE - DAY

John and Charlie trudge toward the well-tended house. She carries a worn carpetbag; he has a leather satchel.

John sees that his sister's face is stony and stubborn.

JOHN PARKHURST

It'll be good for you. You'll learn cookin', and sewin', and keepin' house -- all the things Ma woulda taught you if she'd --

He breaks off, his voice cracking.

Charlie stares grimly at the house, where MRS. FLETCHER, 50's, has come out onto the porch.

JOHN PARKHURST

You mind Miz Fletcher, now, and don' get any ideas 'bout runnin' away. I need to be able to find you, once the war's done.

CHARLIE

Wish I could join up. I shoot better'n you anyhow.

He smiles at her.

JOHN PARKHURST

Won't be so long now, they say. Could be home by Christmas. Get my hundred dollar bounty, and we'll be set up proper.

Mrs. Fletcher gazes down at them from the porch. She's imposing in a black silk dress and a mourning brooch.

MRS. FLETCHER

Mr. Parkhurst. And this must be your sister Charlotte.

YOUNG CHARLIE

I prefer "Charlie."

MRS. FLETCHER
That's no name for a young lady.
We shall call you "Charlotte" here.

She turns to John.

MRS. FLETCHER
You've arranged for the allotment?

JOHN PARKHURST
Yes, ma'am. The army'll send five
dollars a month from my pay, for
her keep.

MRS. FLETCHER
You may say your farewells, then.

Charlie and John look at each other, then she throws herself
into his arms.

JOHN PARKHURST
I'll write when I can.

Charlie clings to him.

MRS. FLETCHER
I'm sure your brother is eager to
join his regiment, Charlotte.

Charlie pulls herself away.

MRS. FLETCHER
I'll show you to your room.

Charlie follows her into the house, reluctantly, and turns
back to watch as John heads down the drive with a final wave.

INT. NASHUA ORPHANAGE - DAY

Mrs. Fletcher sets Charlie's carpetbag on one of ten narrow
iron beds in the attic dormitory.

MRS. FLETCHER
You will wake at six, wash, make
the bed and tidy the room. Then
chores, breakfast at eight, and
lessons until noon. You can read?

Charlie nods.

MRS. FLETCHER
You will say, "yes, ma'am."

YOUNG CHARLIE
"Yes, ma'am."

MRS. FLETCHER

Dinner is at one. In the afternoon
you will do housework and sewing.
Supper is at six, bedtime at eight.
There is to be no talking in bed,
nor at meals. Do you understand?

YOUNG CHARLIE

Yes, ma'am.

MRS. FLETCHER

Very well, then. You may unpack
your things and come downstairs.

She leaves.

Charlie goes to the window and looks at the road.

Her brother had already vanished.

INT. NASHUA ORPHANAGE - NIGHT

Charlie sits at the attic window, wearing a night-dress. She
looks up at the moon.

EXT. LAWRENCE - NIGHT

On the edge of town, the moon shines down on a field dotted
with army tents. Candlelight glows from inside one of them.

SUPER: "Two years later. Lawrence, Kansas, 1863."

INT. TENT - NIGHT

John Parkhurst, now 19 and with the start of a beard, writes
a letter, using his Bible for a desk.

JOHN PARKHURST (V.O.)

Dear Charlie, I'm havin' trouble
sleepin' again, so I thought I'd
write....

A horse whinnies. John peers into the darkness.

JOHN PARKHURST (V.O.)

I read my Bible when I can. I like
that part in Isaiah 'bout beatin'
swords into plowshares... though I
doubt my bayonet'd be much use in
those rocky fields back home....

EXT. KANSAS - NIGHT

The empty prairie in the moonlight...

JOHN PARKHURST (V.O.)

I'm thinkin' after the war you
should come out west.

JOHN PARKHURST (V.O.) (cont'd)

Land's cheap here, an' I been
savin' most of my pay. That and
the bounty should be enough to buy
us a place. So I hope you've
learned to cook by now....

A faint rumble, like distant thunder, grows until it drowns
out John's voice...

The rumble grows louder and louder -- the earth shakes -- and
hundreds of riders gallop into view.

The hoofbeats slow as two groups converge:

A hundred regular Confederate troops uniformed in grey...

...and two hundred Bushwhackers in ragtag civilian attire,
their long hair streaming past their shoulders.

Strings of scalps hang from the Bushwhackers' saddle horns;
silver candlesticks and other loot jangle behind.

COL. WILLIAM QUANTRILL, 25, and CAPT. RUFUS INGRAM, 28, with
long red hair and side-whiskers, share a hip flask.

COL. JOHN HOLT addresses the regular Confederate officers.

COL. HOLT

Gentlemen, our objective is
Lawrence, Kansas. Our spies report
only a few dozen green recruits,
perhaps a score of colored
volunteers.

LT. FRANK WOODWARD, 20s, murmurs to the man at his side.

FRANK

Seems like Quantrill's Bushwhackers
could manage that without our
help...

Quantrill rides forward and brandishes a piece of paper.

COL. QUANTRILL

I have here a list of forty Yankees
who will be dead by daybreak!

His men cheer.

COL. QUANTRILL

You are to kill every man and boy
big enough to lift a gun, and set
the town to fire!

A bigger cheer.

Frank looks to Col. Holt, troubled. The commander's
impassive.

COL. QUANTRILL
Ride like the devil, boys, and beat
the dawn!

He gallops off into the night. His men, whooping and hollering, follow.

Col. Holt signals to his own troops.

COL. HOLT
Move out!

Again, the hoofbeats thunder in the night...

EXT. HILL OUTSIDE LAWRENCE - NIGHT

Three hundred men on horseback overlook the sleeping town.

WOOOOOOOOO-AYYYYYYYYYY!

Hundreds of voices take up the rebel yell as the horses charge.

EXT. LAWRENCE - NIGHT

The pounding hoofbeats grow louder...

INT./EXT. TENT - NIGHT

John Parkhurst's asleep.

His eyes snap open -- he hears the hoofbeats.

He grabs his pistol, stumbles out of the tent, and fires into the air.

JOHN PARKHURST
REBELS!

EXT. LAWRENCE - NIGHT

The Bushwhackers pour into the streets, firing wildly. Glass shatters; women scream.

Men and boys, some still in their nightshirts, run out of their houses. A few carry rifles; most are unarmed.

The Bushwhackers shoot them down.

ELSEWHERE IN TOWN...

BLAM!

A man's body CRASHES through an upper window and falls into the street.

A FIELD

An old man runs through the corn in his nightshirt. A half dozen mounted Bushwhackers run him down.

One raises his saber...

ARMORY

In front of the Armory doors, a dozen black and white soldiers lie dead or dying.

Another dozen, including John Parkhurst, crouch behind a barricade, exchanging fire with the attacking Bushwhackers.

EXT. LAWRENCE - DAY

It's dawn...

Frank rides along the main street, pistol in hand -- but there's no one left to shoot.

The Bushwhackers search corpses -- shoving grieving women out of the way -- and loot stores.

Honky-tonk piano music comes from the saloon as the bartender CRASHES through the plate glass window.

In the street, a mother cradles the body of her 12-year-old son.

A BEARDED BUSHWHACKER rides past.

BEARDED BUSHWHACKER
There's a real fight down by the
Armory!

Frank spurs his horse and follows.

ARMORY

Dozens of Bushwhackers surround the Armory, trading shots with the defenders.

Frank arrives to find Captain Ingram in charge.

INGRAM
(to his men)
Hold your fire!

The shooting stops. Ingram calls to the defenders.

INGRAM
We have you outnumbered fifty to
one, gentlemen. I suggest you
surrender... and live to fight
another day.

No answer from behind the barricade.

INGRAM

Come out now, and you will be
exchanged for Southern prisoners at
Fort Leavenworth.

Still no answer.

INGRAM

Or stay and die, if you prefer. I
leave the choice to you.

BEHIND THE BARRICADE

John Parkhurst looks at the handful of remaining defenders,
then at a Black corporal, who nods.

JOHN PARKHURST

We're comin' out!

OUTSIDE THE ARMORY

John Parkhurst steps around the barricade, his hands raised.
The other Union soldiers follow suit.

INGRAM

Who's in charge here?

John Parkhurst looks around at the others.

JOHN PARKHURST

I guess that'd be me.

He makes an awkward salute, the other arm still in the air.

JOHN PARKHURST

Sergeant John William Parkhurst...
sir.

Ingram inclines his head, graciously.

INGRAM

Captain Rufus Henry Ingram, at your
service, Sergeant.

Ingram raises his pistol and BANG! --

-- he shoots John Parkhurst in the chest.

The Bushwhackers laugh uproariously.

Parkhurst stares at Ingram, then collapses to his knees. His
eyes meet Frank's before he crumples into the dust.

BANG!

Ingram picks off another white Union soldier while the other
Union men stand frozen.

FRANK

What the hell are you doin'?!
These men have surrendered!

INGRAM

Lieutenant! You are addressin' a
superior officer!

The Bushwhackers eye Frank, their hands on their weapons.

INGRAM

I shall have to speak to Colonel
Holt about your manners, sir.
Now you go clean out the Yankee
camp. See if they left behind any
yellow-backed lag-a-bed's.

Frank hesitates.

INGRAM

That IS an order, Lieutenant.

Frank glares at him, then rides off.

Ingram looks at the terrified Union prisoners, still with
their hands in the air, then turns to the Bearded
Bushwhacker.

INGRAM

You may dispatch the rest of them.

He looks at the Black corporal.

INGRAM

Make sure the nigras die slow.

The Bearded Bushwacker smiles.

UNION CAMP

Frank walks among the tents, pistol in hand.

He sees John's Bible, with the letter sticking out of it. He
picks up the Book and reads the initials on the cover:

"J.W.P."

A gang of Bushwhackers rides up to him.

BUSHWHACKER OFFICER

Find any Yanks?

Frank shakes his head.

BUSHWHACKER OFFICER

(to his men)

Take what you want boys. Burn the
rest.

The other Bushwhackers rummage through the tents, tossing things out, whooping and arguing over their finds.

Frank watches in disgust, then slips the letter out of the Bible and looks at the address:

"C. Parkhurst, Nashua Orphan's Home, New Hampshire."

INT. NASHUA ORPHANAGE - DAY

The same address is on another letter, in a different handwriting, addressed to "Miss Charlotte Parkhurst."

It's on top of a stack of letters on a silver tray carried by a LITTLE GIRL in a black dress with a white pinafore.

SEWING ROOM

Ten other girls, identically dressed, perch on stiff-backed chairs, sewing men's shirts and trousers.

Charlie, now 16, attacks the sewing with grim determination.

Mrs. Fletcher sits near the fire in a comfortable armchair and studies the fashion plates in the "Godey's Lady's Book."

The Little Girl appears in the doorway with the tray.

LITTLE GIRL

Mail's come, Miz Fletcher.

Several of the girls stare at the letters -- none more intent than Charlie.

MRS. FLETCHER

There's one here for you,
Charlotte.

Charlie puts down her sewing.

MRS. FLETCHER

Attend to your work! I'll read it
aloud, for everyone's enjoyment.

Charlie glowers at her and stabs the fabric with her needle.

MRS. FLETCHER

(reading)

"Dear Miss Parkhurst, I regret to
inform you that your brother John
has been kill--"

Charlie drops her work and runs from the room.

Mrs. Fletcher watches her go, tight-lipped.