

THE BUSHWHACKER

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Inspired by a true story

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FADE IN:

EXT. NEW HAMPSHIRE WOODS - DAY

CHARLOTTE "CHARLEY" PARKHURST, 14 and gangly, rides an old mare.

Untidy braids hang down the back of her faded calico dress. On one arm, she wears a black armband.

She takes it all in -- sunlight slanting through the trees, bird-song and wildflowers -- as if for the last time.

She emerges from the woods into a meadow and urges the horse to a trot, then a gallop.

She slowly smiles as they pick up speed...

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 stands JOHN PARKHURST, 17, wearing a black armband, trying to look nonchalant as he surveys the crowd.

He sees a little girl find a rag doll in an old trunk and show it to her mother.

With a pang, he glances toward the open door of the barn.

INT. BARN - DAY

Charley's grooming the mare. The horse nuzzles her.

YOUNG CHARLEY  
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 CHARLEY  
She's shy with strangers.

Finch snorts.

MR. FINCH  
Hand me a halter.

Charley hesitates.

Finch points at the halter on its hook.

MR. FINCH  
You deaf or feeble-minded?

The mare backs away, swishing its tail and shaking its head.

YOUNG CHARLEY  
(taking the halter)  
I'll put it on.

She soothes the mare, then slips on the halter and holds the lead shank.

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

YOUNG CHARLEY  
(wincing)  
She's got a tender mouth...

MR. FINCH  
Then she better learn to mind,  
right fast.

He grabs the lead shank and runs the stud chain through the mare's mouth, making a "war bridle." He yanks on the chain.

The mare squeals and tosses its head. Finch yanks harder.

YOUNG CHARLEY  
You're hurting her!

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

He leads the struggling mare out of the barn.

Charley charges after him. But when she gets to the barn doorway she stops:

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

She seethes as she watches Finch walk the mare around to check its gait -- but she stays inside the barn.

EXT. PARKHURST FAMILY FARM - DAY

The townspeople roll away in their laden wagons.

Crossing the yard from the barn, Charley sees the little girl clutching her old doll -- and the mare tied up behind Finch's wagon. She fights back tears -- she's not about to let these people see her cry.

The auctioneer counts out 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 Charley in front of a wooden sign:

"Nashua Orphans' Home"

EXT. NASHUA ORPHANAGE - DAY

John and Charley 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.

Charley stares grimly at the house, where MRS. FLETCHER, 50's, has come out onto the porch. She's imposing in a black silk dress and a mourning brooch.

JOHN PARKHURST

You mind Miz Fletcher, now, and don't get any ideas 'bout runnin' off. I need to be able to find you, once the war's done.

YOUNG CHARLEY

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

JOHN PARKHURST

And I cook better'n you -- which ain't sayin' much.

He smiles at her as they approach the porch.

JOHN PARKHURST

Won't be so long now, they say.  
 Could be home by Christmas. Get my  
 hundred dollar bounty, and we'll  
 get a place of our own -- be set up  
 proper.

Mrs. Fletcher gazes down at them.

MRS. FLETCHER

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

YOUNG CHARLEY

I go by "Charley."

Mrs. Fletcher registers the impertinence, then 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.

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

JOHN PARKHURST

I'll write when I can.

Charley clings to him, looking like she'll never let go.

MRS. FLETCHER

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

Charley pulls herself away from John.

MRS. FLETCHER

I'll show you to your room.

Charley reluctantly follows her into the house, then turns  
 back to watch John head down the drive with a final wave --  
 just before Mrs. Fletcher closes the door to block her view.

EXT. LAWRENCE - NIGHT

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.)  
Sometimes I read my Bible when I  
can't sleep...

A horse whinnies. John peers into the darkness.

JOHN PARKHURST (V.O.)  
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...

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

JOHN PARKHURST (V.O.)  
I'm thinkin' after the war you  
should come out west. 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....

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

The hoofbeats slow as two groups converge:

Regular Confederate troops uniformed in grey...

...and 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, rakish, with long red hair and side-whiskers, share a flask.

COL. JOHN HOLT, 40s, 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, early 20s, murmurs to another officer.

FRANK  
 (indicating Quantrill)  
 Seems like Quantrill's Bushwhackers  
 could manage that without us...

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!

A bigger cheer from the Bushwhackers.

Frank looks to Col. Holt, troubled by this order. The  
 commander's face is 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

Men on horseback overlook the sleeping town.

WOOOOOOOO-AYYYYYYYYYY!

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

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, many 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 wagon barricade, exchanging fire with the 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 young 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 trade 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 Union 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 Confederate 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!

The Bushwhackers eye Frank, their hands on their weapons.

INGRAM  
Your name, Lieutenant?

FRANK  
Woodward. Frank Woodward. Sir.

INGRAM  
I shall have to speak to Colonel  
Holt about your manner of address  
to a superior officer. Now you go  
clean out the Yankee camp.

(MORE)

INGRAM (cont'd)  
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.

INGRAM  
(to the Bearded  
Bushwhacker)  
You may dispatch the rest of them.

He looks at the black corporal.

INGRAM  
Make sure the nigras die slow.

The Bearded Bushwhacker smiles.

UNION CAMP

Frank walks among the tents and peers inside, 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 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."