

THE MAN WHO SLEPT ON HIS BREATH

by

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INT. JP MORGAN LIBRARY - DAY (NEW YORK CITY, 1906)

The nervous tick under the eye of a BUSINESSMAN. Sweat drips down his forehead. He wipes it with his palm.

A gruff voice cuts through the thick air.

MORGAN (O.S.)

I cannot fund your endeavor. Not today, not ever. Good day.

The Businessman shoots to his feet. He extends his hand, then withdraws it, wipes his damp palm on his jacket, and all but sprints towards a marble doorway.

The dress of a tall slim WOMAN billows as he dashes past.

BELLE DA COSTA GREENE (20's, Black passing as white) flattens her dress. Eyes distant, cold - unaffected by yet another rejection by the house of Morgan.

The footsteps of the Businessman echo weakly off the corridors of the Morgan library and then - silence.

BELLE

Next.

The tall stature and wide frame of EDWARD CURTIS fills the doorway. Morgan's desk grows larger as Belle leads him across the marble floor tiles.

The click click click of Belle's heels echo off the vaulted ceiling. An empty leather chair. She gestures to it.

She's gone, and there he is. JP Morgan. He's hideous. Like some sort of a monster. No hand is extended. Morgan growls:

MORGAN

Sit.

Edward, as vigorous in his mid-30's as most are at 20, sits.

EDWARD

Good morning and thank you for seeing--

MORGAN

How many tribes do you intend to photograph?

Edward carefully places his folio down by his chair.

EDWARD

All of them.

MORGAN
And how long will this take?

EDWARD
Five years.

Edward stares into the eyes of the titan. His nose - grotesquely huge - the gateway to his steel pupils.

MORGAN
What did the Smithsonian say?

EDWARD
They said it was impossible.
(beat)
But I'm a connoisseur of the impossible. As are you.

MORGAN
Go on.

EDWARD
I will record every remaining Indian tribe in North America. Not as they are now, but as they were, before contact with Europeans.

Edward beams with enthusiasm.

EDWARD (cont'd)
I will produce texts, audio recordings, still, and even moving pictures, cataloging their customs, their languages, their music, their folklore, their dances...
(leaning in close)
Even the illegal ones.

MORGAN
I hear the savages are promiscuous.

EDWARD
No more promiscuous than Manhattan's current inhabitants.

Belle's distant chuckle echoes lightly off the walls. Edward cocks his head. Morgan gives Edward a long cold stare.

MORGAN
How much do you want?

EDWARD
Seventy-five thousand.

MORGAN
Mr. Curtis, I cannot fund your
project. Good day.

The click click click of Belle's heels grows louder as Morgan holds his gaze. Edward stares back.

Belle's hand falls on Edward's shoulder. Time to go.

Edward stands, whisks his folio onto Morgan's desk, and snaps open a clasp. The sound echoes off white stone.

A photograph slides right under Morgan's gargantuan, grotesque, hideous bulbous nose. Morgan stares.

Pillars of light pour from the skylight. The photograph seems to come to life. A sepia-toned image of a Native American girl, dressed in traditional skins, stares back.

She is stoic. Solemn. So detailed she seems to be breathing.

Edward slides another image towards Morgan. A profile of a warrior gazing into the distance.

A pause.

Then another image. An outdoor shot of men on horseback.

Then another. A group of men in a canoe among ice flows.

Photographs fill the desk. Morgan sits back.

The light dances over the images. The pictures seem to glow, almost as if they're alive.

EDWARD
And this...
(dramatic pause)
...is princess Angeline.

At the sound of the word "princess," Morgan's face noticeably perks up. Belle, a small figure in the distance, cranes her neck to try to get a glimpse.

JP's eyes widen as Edward puts a print on the desk - an old toothless hag, more like a mummy than a living creature, stares off into oblivion from the paper.

EDWARD (cont'd)
 All the porters, guides,
 interpreters and ethnographers
 must be paid.

Morgan frowns and sits back.

EDWARD (cont'd)
 And the printing will be paid for
 from sales of the book. Not from
 your coffers.

Edward slides another photo towards him. A young Native American girl - in New York City she'd be a model. She stares back at Morgan. He clenches his jaw and takes it in.

Her skin - soft. Her eyes - innocent. Belle lifts her chin, hoping to glimpse what has caught her boss's attention.

Morgan stands, transfixed by the image, then lifts it gingerly with both hands as if it were a child.

MORGAN
 More. More like this.

A smile overtakes JP Morgan's face. He places the photo back on the desk. One hand shoots into Edward's. A helluva grip.

MORGAN (cont'd)
 I will buy your book, Mr. Curtis.
 But you must write it.

EDWARD
 It's not my book. It's your book.
 And, you're not buying it. You're
 making it.
 (beat)
 You're making history.

INT. MORGAN LIBRARY - DAY

Belle's silk dress brushes against Edward's tweed suit as they walk side by side. Books and tapestries a blur.

Edward glances down at her profile, then bare shoulder.

EDWARD
 What's next?

Belle does not look at him.

BELLE

A more detailed business plan. A contract with the printers. A sales office for subscriptions.

EDWARD

When do I see Mr. Morgan again?

BELLE

Never.

Massive bronze doors. A light snow outside. She turns to look at him and says flatly:

BELLE (cont'd)

(coldly)

I want weekly progress reports. You need something, you come to me.

EDWARD

Even better.

She cocks her head, pretending to be offended but clearly used to being flirted with and hit on.

BELLE

How's that, Mr. Curtis?

Edward slides his wide-brimmed hat to his head, using the opportunity to lean in close to the green-eyed Belle.

EDWARD

If I had to spend one more second with that hobgoblin I think I'd fall into a gopher hole and die.

Belle throws her head back and laughs, a loud laugh, from deep within her soul.

EDWARD (cont'd)

Where can I find you?

She touches his arm to steady herself, an accidental touch.

BELLE

Where a librarian is supposed to be. In the library.

EDWARD

I mean tonight.

Belle sashay's away, throwing her last comment over her shoulder like a hand grenade as she disappears.

BELLE

The reporters always seem to find
me. I'm sure a man of your
stalwart fortitude can do just as
well.

Alone. Edward looks out at the windy street, back to the
empty lobby, then braces for the blast of cold and is gone.

INT. TROLLEY CAR - DAY

Belle's face, her chin high. Sunset, reflected off the
city's massive stone buildings, warms her face.

She looks into distance - into nowhere.

EXT. NYC STREET - DAY

Belle, a foot taller than the hunched over workers who
shuffle past, glides down a busy sidewalk. Her high heels,
slim figure, and regal posture cast a permanent glow on her.

A goddess among mortals.

Gas street lamps spark to life and cast a blue hue.

MEN and WOMEN of all races. She looks at no one, speaks to
no one, as the day fades to night.

African American music reverberates off brick and stone.
Blues. Belle stops. She turns her head towards the music.

Down an alley, on narrow steps, THREE BLACK MUSICIANS.

She slowly turns away and keeps walking.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

A wall of books and newspapers stacked around Edward.

EDWARD

(to self)

Who are you, Ms. Greene?

The setting sun casts a red orange hue. Edward scans a
paper, tosses it, then scans another more closely.

EDWARD (cont'd)

(to self)

Where did you come from?

A newspaper article. Belle da Costa Greene stares back at Edward. He holds up the paper to the fading light.

EDWARD (cont'd)
 (to himself)
 Portuguese ancestry? Royal
 heritage?

With a loud thump, a stack of books slam onto the table.

Edward looks up into the eyes of a grumpy LIBRARIAN.

LIBRARIAN
 Anything else, Mr. Curtis?

Edward grins, a smile that can part a woman's legs.

EDWARD
 I won't be but five more minutes.

LIBRARIAN
 You said that five minutes ago.

EDWARD
 You must know something about her.

Edward stands halfway. The Librarian sits on the table.

EDWARD (cont'd)
 Ms. Greene's one of you.

LIBRARIAN
 She's nothing like us, Mr. Curtis.

She stands and struts away, more jealous than angry.

LIBRARIAN (cont'd)
 I can't fly so close to the sun
 and not get burned.

Edward turns back to his work. Newspaper articles about Belle fill the table. A hand-drawn image of Belle - with pale skin and rosy cheeks - she looks distinctly white.

- INSERT ON SCRATCHPAD: "Age ?"

The tip of a dull pencil. Question marks appear. The question marks get larger and larger as he writes more.

QUICK CUTS:

- SCRATCHPAD: "Mother - Genevieve da Costa Greene"

- SCRATCHPAD: "Father ?"

- SCRATCHPAD: "Heritage - Portuguese???"
- SCRATCHPAD: "Education - Barnard? Columbia? City College?"
- SCRATCHPAD: "Haunts - Roxy, Starlight, Campbell, Keens"
- A BOOK SPINE: "Portuguese Origins in the United States: A Guide to Local History & Genealogy"

Edward grabs the book, pages flash by in a blur. He furls his brow. He turns to his scratchpad.

- SCRATCHPAD: "Father ?"

INT. U.S. CONSULATE - VLADIVOSTOK RUSSIA - DAY

RICHARD GREENER (50's, Black) stands in what used to be his office. Wooden crates line the bare walls. The desk - empty.

The CONSUL, (60's, white) lights a cigar as he steps over a rolled up rug. The pale Russian sun pierces the dim room.

RICHARD
Overseas, I hope.
(beat)
Please. Can you imagine what my
life would be back in the States
after this disgrace?

The Consul plops himself down on a crate.

CONSUL
I'll pull all the strings the
pudgy fingers of mine can pull,
Richard.

Richard - a refined Black American intellectual and diplomat could pass as white if he wanted to.

RICHARD
I never hid my African heritage.

Richard's Harvard-honed speech and aristocratic demeanor do not reveal any particular race. He's firmly upper class.

CONSUL
Well, we certainly didn't
advertise it to the Russians.

RICHARD

I engaged in public debate with
Booker T. Washington, Frederick
Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois...

Richard whips off his hat - a bushy black hairdo bursts from it. Richard gestures to his fro, African hair to match his black skin. The Consul sighs.

RICHARD (cont'd)

How much more Black can I get?

INT. BARBERSHOP - MONTANA - DAY

A comb glides through smooth black hair, parting one side, then the other.

A BARBER steps back from his work as UPSHAW (30s), a Native American man educated at a white Catholic school, views his reflection. His brown cheeks - marked with acne scars.

His haircut conforms to white society. But his pockmarked skin is many shades too dark - he'll never be accepted.

He stares at his reflection. Behind his eyes, deep down, there is another man trying to be free.

The barber's gown is a blur as the Barber pulls it away. He slaps Upshaw on the back as Upshaw stands.

BARBER

See you next month.

EXT. STREET - SMALL MONTANA TOWN - DAY

A forgotten street in a forgotten town. Upshaw, in the doorway, buttons the top button of his crisply ironed shirt. He adjusts the sleeves and smooths his pants.

MARY (O.S.)

Over here!

MARY (30s) a tender white mother and devoted wife, walks side by side with Upshaw. He takes her grocery basket as she takes his arm. She doesn't look at his haircut but says:

MARY

Looks nice.

A GROUP OF MEN take up the whole sidewalk. They show no sign of giving way. Upshaw draws Mary aside. The Men pass, bumping his basket - on purpose - vegetables tumble.

MAN

That's right, you'd better get the hell out of my way, Redskin.

Upshaw's hands ball into fists, and the Men are suddenly all around them. Mary's hand takes Upshaw's arm.

MARY

(to Upshaw)

Remember the Lord's teachings.

One Man looms over Upshaw and barks into his face.

MAN

Jesus was nailed to a cross, Mary, so don't get to preachy on me.

The Man's spittle hits Upshaw's face. The Man grabs Upshaw by the hair.

MAN (cont'd)

I bet I could still get five dollars for this scalp in Denver.

Upshaw lunges at the three men.

Bam, bam, bam.

Mary shrieks as they pummel him.

Thump.

Upshaw, on the ground, bloody.

Mary's knees crash to the ground beside him. Upshaw's bloody form writhes in the dust.

Mary's jaw stays clenched as she hisses at the Men.

MARY

God have pity on your feeble souls.

She stands to face them.

MARY (cont'd)

I bet when the bullets were flying on the battle field, you were the ones anemic in the mud and mire, peeing your pants, praying for salvation.

The grizzled beard of one Man just inches from Mary's face.

MARY (cont'd)
 A day of reckoning will come. And
 on that day, my man will be in
 heaven, and you flaccid wretches
 will on your knees before Satan.

MAN
 Man? You call that a man?

He grabs her chin.

MAN (cont'd)
 He ain't no man, Mary, he's an
 Indian, no matter where he been
 taught. He's infected...
 (looking at Mary)
 The farrow should be culled before
 the whole sounder falls ill.

Mary pulls away. The man sneers:

MAN (cont'd)
 You should've stayed with your own
 kind, Mary.

MARY
 You, specifically?

MAN
 I'd have bore you proper babies
 raised in a warm cabin, not a damn
 wigwam by the swamp.

MARY
 And I'd have the life-long agony
 of waking up to your horrific,
 whiskey-stained canker every
 morning.

She spits. Direct hit on the Man's face.

The Man doesn't wipe it off. He stomps his black boot into
 Upshaw's face, saying:

MAN
 See you in hell!

Mary drops to her knees and cradles Upshaw.

INT. GREENE RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Belle's coat slides from her shoulders. She turns to a
 tarnished mirror. Her reflection stares back at her.

She breathes out, as if she's been holding it in all day.

A person of color passing for white in New York high society - always one breath away from being discovered.

Her shoulders relax, her purse falls to the floor in the entryway. Her apartment on 112th street - small but luxurious. Belle's mother GENEVIEVE (50's, Black passing as white) looks up from her wicker reclining chair.

GENEVIEVE

I didn't hear you come in.

BELLE

I must be a ghost.

INT. BELVEDERE HOTEL - EDWARD'S ROOM - NIGHT

Candle holders on the hotel wall. Water mixed with shave foam runs down Edward's bare chest. A straight razor to the chin, he carefully scrapes off stubble.

EDWARD

(to self, slowly as he
shaves)

Belle. da Costa. Greene.

He raises his chin and takes a look at his handiwork.

EDWARD (cont'd)

(to self)

You can't hide from me, Ms. da
Costa Greene. Not forever.

He wipes his face, then starts to shave again.

EDWARD (cont'd)

Da Costa Greene? What kind of
absurd name is-- owch!

He nicks himself and grabs a towel.

INT. GREENE RESIDENCE - NIGHT

A shimmering dress, held high in the air, falls down over Belle's slim form. Her mother's hands adjust it from behind as Belle looks in the mirror. Her mother gives an approving look.

GENEVIEVE

Be careful.

Be careful not to reveal your Blackness. Be careful not to fall in love with a white man. With any man.

Belle gives her mother a quick kiss.

BELLE

I will.

INT. BELVEDERE HOTEL - LOBBY - NIGHT

Edward's hand slaps down on the concierge desk. His body half over the desk as a short BELLBOY points to the street.

BELLBOY

Then turn left. Can't miss it.

Edward's back is already to him, but the Bellboy's hand grabs his arm. In his hand, a thin strip of paper.

BELLBOY (cont'd)

Telegram for you, Mr. Curtis. From a Clara Curtis.

Curtis reels back, as if poisoned.

BELLBOY (cont'd)

Is that your wife?

EXT. NYC STREET - NIGHT

Edward's gloved hand holds the ribbon-like telegram. A strong wind - the telegram flies from his hand - gone.

EDWARD

Fuck.

Edward pauses, turns back to the hotel, then looks down at the scratchpad paper in his other hand:

- INSERT: "ROXY, STARLIGHT, CAMPBELL, KEENS"

INT. BAR - NIGHT

A BARTENDER shakes his head 'no' and keeps working. Edward frowns, turns his coat collar up, and is gone.

INT. CLUB - NIGHT

Edward scans the club. Delighted dinner guests. No Belle. A WAITER pulls Edward's sleeve and whispers something in his ear. Edward smiles and nods.

EXT. KEENS CLUB - NIGHT

Snow crystals sparkle off the sign: "KEENS". Edward pushes the heavy door open. Music and laughter pour out as Edward vanishes inside.

INT. KEENS CLUB - NIGHT

Edward slips his wide-brimmed hat from his head - and there she is.

Belle da Costa Greene, legs crossed, perching on the backrest of a sofa, high above everyone else, while others - JOURNALISTS, POETS, MUSICIANS, ARTISTS - gaze up at her in adoration. Her brilliant face turns to Edward.

BELLE
(to Edward)
Curtis, get over here!

Belle waves one hand wildly, a drink balanced in the other.

Belle's form - goddess-like and unattainable - grows larger as Edward zigzags through the crowd. The penetrating stares of Belle's entourage follow him.

BELLE (cont'd)
(to all)
I've run out of people to make fun
of.

The entourage of characters roars with laughter.

Edward strides towards her, removing his coat. Hands appear. His hat and coat are taken. Edward stands sheepishly, blocked by the bodies of the circle of onlookers.

EDWARD
My friends call me Eddy.

BELLE
We aren't friends yet, Mr. Curtis.
(beat)
I have to sleep with you a few
times, first!

The entourage roars with laughter - and all eyes turn to Edward. Their expression screams, "the ball is in your court, mister."

EDWARD

Tell me where and when.

The crowd bursts out laughing and turns to Belle.

BELLE

Unless you have a penthouse suite,
I'd rather get fucked in the
comfort of my very own bed, thank
you very much.

The crowd explodes. A drink is handed to Edward. The circle opens. He joins the party.

JOURNALIST

Say, Mr. Curtis, we hear that JP
Morgan is going to fund your
Indian project.

EDWARD

I wonder who you heard that from?

Muted laughter.

JOURNALIST

Recording the primitive ways
before they go extinct, that's a
noble thing JP is doing, wouldn't
you say?

EDWARD

JP is doing? He's paying for it,
I'm the one doing it.

Laughter again, a better reaction than before.

ARTIST

What's the best picture you've
ever taken, Mr. Curtis?

EDWARD

I say make a picture, not take a
picture.

All eyes turn back to Greene, confused.

BELLE

In the East we say take a picture,
my dear, take a picture.

EDWARD
 Other people take pictures, Ms.
 Greene. I make them.

He approaches Belle and repositions her arm, then her leg,
 posing her like a mannequin.

EDWARD (cont'd)
 You see, I choose the light, I
 choose the pose--

BELLE
 I get it, I get it. You decide if
 the clothes stay on or off.

The crowd howls.

EDWARD
 It's not my fault they come off so
 easily!

More laughter, even louder than before.

JOURNALIST
 What's Roosevelt like, I mean
 really, up close and personal,
 Edward? Give us a soup for
 tomorrow, will ya?

The crowd goes silent. Edward turns to the Journalist.

EDWARD
 He once told me that the what I'm
 doing is one of the most valuable
 works any American could now do.

A dozen eyes blink back at Edward. Belle's long legs slide
 down from the sofa back, her arm loops around his.

BELLE
 Let's go dancing, Eddy. Come on, I
 know a good place.

As if on cue, hands arrive with a green fur coat - the fur
 slips over Belle's slim shoulders.

Edward tips his drink back as hands pull his coat over his
 shoulders and take the empty glass in one smooth theater.

INT. MOTORCAR - CONTINUOUS

Belle sits shoulder to shoulder with Edward. She looks out
 the window of the pattering car.

BELLE

If they move around so much, how do you manage to catch them?

EDWARD

Some tribes move, yes, but most just go back and forth between two or three places. So I ask around for where the tribe I'm looking for does their summer grazing and winter breeding, and when I check all the main watering holes, sure enough, there they are.

Belle slips her arm through his.

BELLE

You do your homework.

EDWARD

But most are settled.

BELLE

Settled? How do you settle in a tent made of skin?

EDWARD

Only the hunters and warriors don't stay in one spot. But the richest ones - the ones that have the myths and rituals - are settled. And the houses...

He gestures with his hands, as if holding a brick.

EDWARD (cont'd)

Solid as medieval castles. Long houses bigger than grand central. Earthen domes that can hold a dozen families.

Blazing gas lamps zip past the window, a blur.

EDWARD (cont'd)

And some houses are even built into solid rock on the side of a cliff. But they're dying out. And the ones who still want to do their sacred dances have to move farther and farther up into the wilderness to get away from the Agents.

Belle turns to face him, a challenging look.

BELLE

And you push deeper and deeper to
root them out.

EDWARD

You make it sound like I'm hunting
grouse.

She turns away, thinking of other men who have hunted her.

BELLE

What's the difference?
(to the driver)
Driver, right here is fine.

INT. LANDMARK TAVERN - MOMENTS LATER

Belle's dress shimmers in the glow of a fireplace in a quiet
corner. Belle looks at the head of a buffalo on the wall.

BELLE

Does that world make more sense to
you that this one? I bet it's New
York that's got you turned upside
down.

EDWARD

When I'm out there with them, I
become someone else.

She looks at him, taunting him.

BELLE

A savage?

With a grin, he says:

EDWARD

From what I've seen so far, it's
the New Yorkers who are the
savages.

Edward steps to the other side of her. She turns away, sad.

BELLE

Then you'd better get back to your
people, Curtis. To your princess.

EDWARD

I'm not ready to leave, not just
yet.

Belle looks up to face him, looking in his eyes.

BELLE

No? I would have thought that
you'd be packing your bags to head
back West already.

Belle squeezes in between two tables and heads across the
room.

EDWARD

I've outrun a tsunami in kayak,
I've been initiated with venom and
hot coals by a half dozen warrior
clans. I think I can handle
Manhattan. And who knows...

Edward takes the long way around a table and catches up to
her.

EDWARD (cont'd)

A few more nights and even I may
even learn to like it here.

She takes a few steps up a staircase.

EDWARD (cont'd)

Don't be jealous.

Belle draws a long cigarette.

BELLE

Of who?

Edward lights a match.

EDWARD

The princess. Angeline. We were
never a thing.

He winks. She throws her head back and laughs, an authentic
laugh few seldom get, then looks up at Edward.

BELLE

Sure you were. You can't lie to
me, Eddy. I see it in your eyes.
You hate it here.

EDWARD

New York?

She spreads her arm over the dance hall.

BELLE

Civilization.

The music slows. He extends his hand. She takes it.

BELLE (cont'd)
Do you even know which fork to
use?

EDWARD
I'm a fast reader.

They dance. They just dance. The tune becomes somber. A
WAITER approaches.

WAITER
Your table is ready, Ms. Da Costa
Greene.

EDWARD
(to the waiter)
Give us a minute.

She buries her head in his chest.

BELLE
Do they dance like this out in the
wilds? Close together, in dim-lit
rooms and smoke-filled halls?

EDWARD
No.

She heads for the exit- alone. Edward rushes out after her.

EXT. NYC STREET - CONTINUOUS

Belle jumps into a waiting motorcar. Edward hops in before
she can close the door. She doesn't look at him.

EDWARD
They don't give a proper goodbye
in New York?

BELLE
When I want go to, I just go. No
need for a proper goodbye unless
you're fully planning on giving a
proper hello the next go around.

Edward sits back and looks out his window.

BELLE (cont'd)
A house in a cliff. Imagine that.
A wall of stone between you and
the outside world.
(MORE)

BELLE (cont'd)

They'd have to send in the siege towers and battering rams, scale the walls with ladders, to root me out.

EDWARD

I'd better get out the battering ram.

BELLE

There must be one or two tribes you'll never be able to flush out of hiding.

(to the driver)

This is as far as you go.

The car stops suddenly, and Belle jumps out.

EXT. RIVERSIDE PARK - NIGHT

Edward follows Belle. She turns and looks at him.

BELLE

You got what you wanted, right?

The lush park - empty. Except for two figures.

EDWARD

Did I?

BELLE

You got the funding. You'll have your expedition that will take you across thousands of miles of wilderness, to Oklahoma, Alaska, Kansas, Texas.

She continues to walk slowly.

BELLE (cont'd)

Places with no trolley cars, no street signs, no hospitals, no post offices.

Ice crystals cling to the bushes and trees. Rays of light emerge from between the newly-built skyscrapers.

EDWARD

That's not what I wanted. I want to know everything about them.

He takes her arm and she stops.

EDWARD (cont'd)
 What language they speak, what
 they believe in, where they're
 from.

Belle continues to walk, faster now.

BELLE
 Questions, so many questions.
 Just, just don't - I hate them,
 tearing at me - why do you need
 all these questions.

Edward catches up to her but she keeps her distance.

BELLE (cont'd)
 Call off the attack, Edward. My
 stone house is right up the
 street.

EDWARD
 I'll be off to Montana soon
 enough. But right now...

Music plays from a nearby bar. Edward takes her hand.

EDWARD (cont'd)
 Here we are, in New York, in the
 snow.

Edward moves closer to her, nuzzling her affectionately,
 trying to tease out a kiss.

EDWARD (cont'd)
 My friends call me Eddy.

She pulls back to look at him.

BELLE
 Hiya, Eddy. I'm Belle da Costa
 Greene.

EDWARD
 What's your real name?

She turns away.

BELLE
 I told you, don't ask too many
 questions.

EDWARD
 Just doing my homework.

She looks up into his eyes.

BELLE

Not all of us are like you, waving
a magic wand and a Roosevelt or a
Morgan or an Audubon appears to
refill our dinner plate.

She breaks his grip and strides through the park, arms wide,
calling out to no one.

BELLE (cont'd)

We mortals have a set menu in
front of us, and we have to choose
if we want a starter, a main, or
desert.

Edward catches up to her. Belle is out of breath.

EDWARD

I just want--

BELLE

You want the world, I know, and
maybe you can have it all, if you
dig deep enough. But people like
me, real people, we don't want it
all. We just want a simple thing.

INT. U.S. CONSULATE - VLADIVOSTOK RUSSIA - NIGHT

Richard's whiskey flask flashes high in the air as he takes
a long swig. It slams down onto a table.

BELLE (V.O.)

Four walls and a roof - walls of
paper and leather would be enough,
so I can read and find peace...

He grabs a fistful of clothes, bunches them up in his hands,
and shoves them into a suitcase.

BELLE (V.O.) (cont'd)

Instead of chasing some desperate
dream of becoming something I can
never be.

His hands fumble with the clasps, he gives up falls to his
knees. Curls into a ball on the floor.

EXT. RIVERSIDE PARK - NIGHT

Belle and Edward's faces are close now.

She pulls him and they walk.

BELLE

Who would win a war between the
Morgans, Roosevelts, the
Smithsonians and the Audobons
versus the Sioux, Apache,
Cherokee, and Lakota?

EXT. MONTANA HOMESTEAD - NIGHT

Upshaw's hands run along the wooden fence of his property.
He looks out towards open land. The stars illuminate the
forests and hills of his ancestors.

BELLE (V.O.)

And which side would you be on?
(beat)
How would you be paid, in dollars
or furs?

EXT. RIVERSIDE PARK - NIGHT

The two figures, so close together they seem as one.

EDWARD

I fight for myself. For what I
believe in. For the people I love.

She pulls away from him and looks him in the eye.

BELLE

Lie to yourself if you like, but
please don't lie to me, Eddy.

EDWARD

And what are you fighting for?

BELLE

My books. My freedom.

She relaxes and lets him take her arm.

EDWARD

Freedom from what?

A stone lion greets them. Belle stands before it.

BELLE

From the Morgans. And the
Rockefellers and the Carnegies,
all the rich arrogant pompous men
who keep women like me in cages to
cart around, oddities in a sick
circus we call life.

She turns her back to the lion and faces Edward.

BELLE (cont'd)

I want to build my own house, with
my own two hands.

She turns away from Edward and touches her gloved fingertips
to her lips.

BELLE (cont'd)

I just need enough marble, stone,
animal skins or wood, I don't
care.

EDWARD

I built a log cabin with my bare
hands. Me and my father, in
Washington territory.

She spins around, business-like.

BELLE

Weekly updates, Mr. Curtis. You
need a hundred subscriptions
before you can leave New York.

She puts her hand to her ear.

BELLE (cont'd)

You hear that. Someone's calling
for you. It's your princess.

Edward steps close to her.

EDWARD

There's only one princess in my
life.

She touches his face.

BELLE

Lie to me if you like, Eddy, but
please don't lie to yourself.

She crosses the street and vanishes. Edward is alone.

EXT. VLADIVOSTOK - NIGHT

Well below freezing with only a few lights illuminating the dark Russian streets.

A drunken FIGURE wrapped in a thick coat struggles to stay standing against a bitter wind. He vomits, then wipes the puke from his jacket with his sleeve.

An elegant home sits not far from the sidewalk.

He straightens his bow tie unsuccessfully, steadies himself, and puts one foot on the short steps.

Richard, looking worse than before somehow. Trashed.

RICHARD GREENER

(loudly)

I just want to say goodbye to the boys.

A light in the house illuminates MISHI (30s), an equally elegant Japanese woman. She stares at him through a window - no expression.

RICHARD GREENER (cont'd)

I never meant--

The light goes out.

EXT. VLADIVOSTOK - NIGHT

Richard on the sidewalk. He slips.

Two Russian MEN leap from a car, hoist him up, and shuffle him into the back seat.

INT./EXT. MOTORCAR - NIGHT

The muscular Men sandwich Richard, propping him up.

The doors slam shut and the car putters off.

Richard looks back at the house. It vanishes in the darkness.

MAN

Tell me, Richard, why did they send an Negro to be Consul? Why didn't they send an American? It's the American embassy, right?

RICHARD
 (weakly)
 I am American. I...

The DRIVER laughs as the Russian Man continues.

MAN
 When I visit you in America, will
 you go back to your first wife? Or
 will you have a third?

DRIVER
 For fourth?

MAN
 Or fifth?
 Will she be Indonesian? Mexican
 this time? What color, say me,
 Richard?

The Driver laughs again.

MAN (cont'd)
 He must try Russian wife, yes?

DRIVER
 Next time. Ha. No, no, no. Better
 he stick to his own race. Mr.
 Greener, remember that. Then you
 will not have so many problems.

The Men and the Driver chuckle. The car weaves between
 crates and boxes along the dark waterfront.

MAN
 Wake up, Richard, your ship is
 leaving.
 (beat)
 Wake up. Richard, wake up!

The sunrise illuminates large ships in the bay. The port is
 alive with activity.

The car disappears among the buildings.

INT. BELVEDERE HOTEL - DAY

Edward's eyes burst open. A pounding at the door.

BELLBOY (O.S.)
 Wake up call, Mr. Edward.

The clock on the wall ticks incessantly.

EDWARD

Fuck!

Edward leaps up from the hard wood, his hand swipes his folio, he's at the door. The Bellboy - holding up the New York Times.

BELLBOY

(reading)

Saving the vanishing race...

(to Edward)

This is you, ain't it, Mr. Curtis?

The Bellboy shoves a newspaper into Edward's face.

On the headline: "CURTIS TO SAVE THE VANISHING RACE"

EDWARD

That's me, all right. And I'm late.

EXT. NYC STREET - DAY

Edward's hand grips the leather folio case. His feet move restlessly. A grocery store. He stops. Baskets of fruits and vegetables overflow.

A GROCER wanders over. Edward picks up a bottle.

EDWARD

Fifteen cents? For milk?

GROCER

Welcome to New York.

INT. NEW YORK OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

A WEALTHY MAN with diplomas on the wall. The leather couch creaks as he leans back.

WEALTHY MAN

This is, I must say, impressive.

Edward leans back into his matching chair. Dozens of Native American pictures cover the immense coffee table.

EDWARD

You'll receive four volumes a year. Twenty volumes total.

WEALTHY MAN

How much is a subscription?

A light flashes as the Man lights a cigarette.

EDWARD

Three thousand dollars. For the basic edition. Now, for--

WEALTHY MAN

If Morgan is picking up the tab, why should I fork over three grand?

EDWARD

Morgan is only covering the expedition, you see? Not the printing. And not--

WEALTHY MAN

Very cute. Thank you for coming, Mr. Curtis. Maybe next time.

INT. OIL OFFICE - DAY

Edward's photographs cover a wide table. Faces stare out of the paper. An OIL MAN puffs on a pipe and views the images.

EDWARD

When you get that twentieth volume with the big XX on the side, you'll be so glad you made this investment.

OIL MAN

Where'd you go to college again, son?

EDWARD

I've not completed my education.

OIL MAN

Kidding aside.

(beat)

Where'd you go to school?

EDWARD

I'm self-taught.

OIL MAN

But you have a diploma at least, certainly, for Morgan consider such an enterprise?

Edward draws more photographs from the folio.

OIL MAN (cont'd)
 I'm not willing to make a purchase
 today, thank you, Mr. Curtis.

INT. STEEL OFFICE - DAY

A STEEL TYCOON cleans his fingernails.

EDWARD
 Twenty volumes. Not just
 photographs, but also written
 records of their language.

Edward slides a photograph towards him.

EDWARD (cont'd)
 It's a living monument to their
 history and--

STEEL TYCOON
 Living monument?

His leather chair squeaks as he adjusts himself in his seat.

STEEL TYCOON (cont'd)
 You mean like what P.T. Barnum
 does, like with the Orientals and
 Negroes he has in his circus that
 you can touch and whatnot?
 Oddities?

EDWARD
 (talking over him)
 No, no, no, not at all like that.

EXT. NYC STREET - DAY

Edward on the city street. He walks a few feet, then kicks a
 tin can. It bounces in front of the grocery store.

The GROCER gravitates to him.

EDWARD
 (muttering)
 Cheap sonovabitch.

A row of fresh loaves of bread. Edward's hand digs deep into
 his pocket.

Finding nothing, he walks off empty-handed.

INT. MORGAN LIBRARY - DAY

JP Mortan's fat fingers run over the spine of a leather tome. He looks up, and Belle steps to his side.

BELLE
It's all cataloged.

Morgan scans the room. Open crates and unimaginable riches spread across the stone floor. Books, statues, lamps - worth hundreds of thousands.

MORGAN
Did they put up a fight?

BELLE
There were some theatrics, but I think they were just saving face.

Morgan picks up a necklace and holds it to the light.

MORGAN
And the Book of Hours?

BELLE
They say they won't part with it.

Belle steps closer to him.

BELLE (cont'd)
But I haven't give up. I'll go there personally, drive off the competition, and see to it that they agree to your price.

Morgan puts the necklace down and lumbers over to Belle.

MORGAN
Intoxicating, isn't it? To see something you want, see it in your mind, and reach out your hand - and no matter where it is, in England, France, Germany -

He closes his eyes and stretches out his hand to where Europe would be.

MORGAN (cont'd)
All the way across the Atlantic, to grab hold of the thing in your mind so tight that in one instant it becomes real, it becomes mine.

He opens his eyes. Belle is right in front of him.

BELLE

For me it's like a dance.

MORGAN

With sharks, perhaps.

BELLE

A dance at a medieval court, the kind where the jester is trotted out and commanded to put on a show. And so he puts on one hell'ova bait and switch, winning the crowd and drawing dukes and princes onto the floor. Soon, princesses and duchesses and the whole court join the fray. Eventually, the king and queen step down and revel with the drunken horde, not noticing that the jester is now on the throne.

MORGAN

The Book of Hours. I must have it. At any cost.

BELLE

It will be yours.

INT. MORGAN LIBRARY - DAY

A minimalist desk covered in papers. Belle packs her belongings. A secretary steps over and stops abruptly.

SECRETARY

There's a Mr. Curtis here to see you. Shall I bring him in? He says he has a progress report.

EXT. MORGAN LIBRARY - DAY

Edward paces. The doors to Morgan's library open hastily, then slam shut, then open again, as EMPLOYEES exit.

Finally - Belle's high heels. Edward looks up - his shoulders relax and exhales. She's stunning, as usual.

EXT. WASHINGTON SQUARE PARK - DAY

Edward and Belle - side by side. She takes his arm as if they were old lovers.

EDWARD

The high subscription price is turning them away, it's exorbitant, I know, but I want to use the best paper. And anyway, once a few of them get volume one in their hands, the others will cave.

BELLE

Straight to business I see.

EDWARD

I can stay another month, maybe two, and I think I can hit the target--

Belle slips her arm out from his.

BELLE

Don't be silly. How can you finish volume one if you're here in New York? Will it be an urban edition?

EDWARD

I'll be back to sell more subscriptions.
(beat)
In six months.

BELLE

Is that a proposition or a promise?

EDWARD

Both I guess.

She looks up at him briefly. The setting sun turns the park orange and red.

BELLE

Is six months enough? Once you get there, you won't want to leave.

EDWARD

I have to hit my target, remember?

BELLE

Your business is out there. The primitives have always been your people.

EDWARD

The primitive people as you call them, are actually quite sophisticated.

He looks at the sky, then back at Belle.

EDWARD (cont'd)

Refined. Complex. Each tribe has its own customs, its own traditions, its own myths and legends. It's own language--

BELLE

Written language?

EDWARD

That's just it. 500 languages and not one of them is written down. That's what my team will do. We'll make an alphabet and write down as much as we can.

(beat)

If they'd have written their stories down in books, those tomes would be richer than all the manuscripts that you bought for Morgan combined.

She stops and looks at him.

BELLE

Well, he's not done yet.

EDWARD

You've got, what, England, France, Germany, Italy, Greek gods, Roman gods, some Viking runes. I've got, let's see...

He puts his arms out and counts on his fingers.

EDWARD (cont'd)

Sioux, Blackfoot, Mohawk, Dakota, Cherokee, Navajo, Apache, Crow, Cheyenne, Nez Perce, and five hundred more.

He looks up at the sky, as if looking for their gods.

EDWARD (cont'd)

Each with a history and culture
and tradition going back ten
thousand years, and as many
creation stories to fill a hundred
books of Genesis.

(beat)

If I can just capture those animal
spirits before they vanish into
mist. Save it all.

(looking at Belle)

Before it's gone.

They walk again.

EDWARD (cont'd)

And what is it that excites you
about those old books.

Belle throws her head back and laughs.

BELLE

Books don't get one excited.

She holds him closer.

BELLE (cont'd)

They are for me are like a
conversation with someone from the
past, someone wiser and older,
someone who had something so
important to tell me that they
bound it between covers and sealed
it just for me.

(beat)

And I open the pages and sit,
alone, with the silence. I like
the silence. I control when I turn
the page. I choose what story I
want told to me. I choose where
and when. I like to sit under the
trees in the park with Chekhov. Or
Shakespeare. Or Pinter.

(beat)

My father left us, my sisters are
gone, but not my books. My books
are something solid. Books I can
depend on. Books and trees will
never betray me.

EDWARD

What did your father do?

Belle pulls away from him.

BELLE

Thank you for the progress report,
Mr. Curtis.

EDWARD

Wait--

Belle turns and looks at him, taking him in as the red setting sun bathes over him.

BELLE

Books and trees, Mr. Curtis.

Belle turns and flees from him, not looking back again, and in a moment she's gone among a crowd of people.

Edward stands alone in the square as the light fades.

EXT. STEAMSHIP - DAY

Richard Greener's hand grips the handrail. He squints, the Pacific wind battering his face.

Richard sways as the boat rolls and heaves. His hand digs into his coat pocket. From it - a photograph. Mishi, in a kimono, and his kids stare back at him.

The ship's massive horn blows a long sad tone.

He tosses the photograph into the ocean. More papers follow.

He turns and looks forward as the fog-swept coastline advances.

INT. COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY - DAY

Prints of Native Americans cover a classroom board. An image of an old woman projected on the wall with a lantern slide projector fades out as Edward turns off the light.

A group of ACADEMICS and GRAD STUDENTS beam intently.

EDWARD

It's not just about the pictures.
My team, my professional team of
linguists and anthropologists are
doing so much more than I am. My
images are just the calling card,
the icing on the cake so to speak.

(MORE)

EDWARD (cont'd)
 (pause as they chuckle)
 The real treasure is the languages
 we'll record, the myths, folklore,
 alphabets, and much more.
 Excellent question though. Thank
 you all for coming.

The Academics and Students stand. One PROFESSOR makes eye contact with Edward.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Edward and the Professor eye each other, a wide table separating them.

EDWARD
 The Smithsonian is not yet, I
 guess you'd say, in full approval
 of my work. They vetted the team,
 but have cold feet about a public
 endorsement.

He chuckles causally.

EDWARD (cont'd)
 But they'll, they'll come around.

A young Grad Student enters hastily and hands a book - a leather-bound yearbook - to the Professor.

PROFESSOR
 I'm sure they will, if your
 methods are sound.

Edward's eyes track the book. The Professor's hand grips it and looks at Edward with suspicion.

PROFESSOR (cont'd)
 What is your interest in this?

EDWARD
 Just some genealogy research.

The professor thumbs the book open, the words: Princeton University on the spine.

PROFESSOR
 I can assure you there's no
 Indians at Princeton. I would have
 remembered.

Edward shuffles awkwardly. He pulls out a chair and sits.

EDWARD

To be honest, I'm quite infatuated with a young lady of Ivy League pedigree, but can't seem to, well, can't seem to find out anything about her.

The Professor gingerly lowers into a chair, the book firmly in his hands.

PROFESSOR

You should have simply told me that this was about a woman.

Edward grins.

EDWARD

It's a sensitive matter, as I work for JP Morgan, well, I don't want--

The Professor's face is stone cold serious.

PROFESSOR

You are a married man. Chasing after a young lady of good moral standing, a graduate of my alma mater no less, is reprehensible, Mr. Curtis.

Edward leans his body forward, one arm sliding across the table.

EDWARD

I promise you, I had no such intentions--

EXT. COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY - NIGHT

Curtis shuffles down the steps of the university, pauses as he considers going back in, then turns to the exit gate.

INT. GREENE RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Genevieve tunes a violin, focused on sheet music. Belle paces the living room.

GENEVIEVE

To thine own self be true.

Belle's hands wring together.

BELLE

That's not from the bible, you know. I had been true to myself all these years, do you know where I'd be?

Genevieve's bow lowers.

BELLE (cont'd)

Morgan would have fired me. And Curtis - he's married.

GENEVIEVE

In name only.

BELLE

His career would be over.

(beat)

I can see it on the front page of the paper now - librarian to JP Morgan, world's richest banker, secretly Black.

Genevieve's hands are on Belle's shoulders now.

GENEVIEVE

You're in the newspaper every day and haven't been found out. Go to him. Tell him who you are, who your father is, tell him to stop digging.

Belle pulls away, unsure. She looks at herself in the mirror, then slowly takes her green fur coat from the coatrack.

She wraps the coat around her slowly, tying the leather cords at her neck that form an elaborate knot just above her chest.

INT. BELVEDERE HOTEL - BAR - NIGHT

The city at night. Millions of dim lights create a sea of stars.

Belle in the doorway of the balcony in her green fur coat, chin high, ignoring the WAITSTAFF and GUESTS.

MEN eye her up and down, but dare not approach.

A trio of BLACK MUSICIANS plays a light ragtime tune.

Curtis appears behind her.

BELLE
I'm ready for your progress
report.

EDWARD
Our table's ready.

BELLE
I'm not hungry.

She turns to him.

EDWARD
I'm starving.

BELLE
Let's stay here a while.

They hold each other. A silence. Then.

EDWARD
I'm going to see the President.

BELLE
Which one?

EDWARD
Just a day trip to the island.

BELLE
Tell Teddy I said hi.

EDWARD
That'll scare up a few
subscriptions.

BELLE
Is that what you wanted to tell
me?

Belle is motionless.

EDWARD
Maybe I'll hit my target by the
end of the night.

Cymbals CRASH. Edward and Belle turn.

A WHITE MANAGER grabs one of the Musicians by the collar.

MANAGER
(a scream whisper)
Your breath reeks of hooch!

He drags the Musician off the small stage, trying to talk in a hushed voice but drawing everyone's attention.

MANAGER (cont'd)
Goddamn filth is what you are.

Waiters grab the Musician.

BELLE
I'm going to Europe.

Edward pulls her closer. Belle pulls away.

EDWARD
Sightseeing?

BELLE
Shopping.

BELLE (cont'd)
I just wanted to say a proper
goodbye.

They almost kiss. Almost. They are interrupted by moans.

Waiters pummel the Black musician. The musician curls into a ball as men kick him.

MANAGER
You Black's can't hold your booze.
What do I have to do to get it
through your thick skulls. I'd be
better off hiring monkeys. Get him
out of here.

Edward looks down the hall for a moment.

Belle slips out of his arms and vanishes, leaving Edward alone on the balcony. Edward scans the room, races towards the stairs.

EXT. BELVEDERE HOTEL - NIGHT

The green fur coat disappears into a carriage. Edward runs forward a few steps, but the carriage is gone.

EXT. FERRY BOAT - DAY

The Manhattan skyline fades as a ferry glides over the East River. The boat slips under the half-built Manhattan Bridge. Edward looks down at the water.

The wind batters his face, and Edward turns away.

A long wooden pier looms larger as the ferry approaches.

The white dock comes into crisp focus, lined with flowers and bunting, BODYGUARDS and HANDLERS.

INT. ROOSEVELT'S SUMMER HOME - LONG ISLAND - DAY

A shiny porcelain plate reflects Edward's gaze. Forks, spoons, and knives of all sizes frame the plate on the sides and top.

A salad appears on his plate. Edward looks at a GUEST. The Guest takes a salad fork. Edward takes note and takes the analogous utensil in front of him.

The long table is decked out in flower arrangements and silver candlesticks. At the center, ALICE ROOSEVELT and her fiancé NICHOLAS hold hands.

Wedding day. Guests grin ear to ear. Edward, passing for high society, smiles a wide, empty, false smile.

TEDDY ROOSEVELT raises a glass and stands. Alice turns and gives Edward a hopeful look.

INT. MONTANA HOME - DAY

Upshaw, his wife Mary, and their three CHILDREN at the table. A tiny hand reaches for a dinner roll.

UPSHAW
Let's pray first.

Hands join. A wooden Jesus, on the cross above the mantle, stares down at them.

INT. GREENE RESIDENCE - DAY

Belle and her mother at a small elegant table holding hands.

GENEVIEVE AND BELLE TOGETHER
Your kingdom come, your will be
done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Amen.

Genevieve picks up her fork and begins to eat.

GENEVIEVE
He hasn't found out anything.

BELLE

Yet.

Belle takes her fork but doesn't eat.

BELLE (cont'd)

But he will. He's a digger. A needler. A picker. He'll push and pry and tear and open and keep pulling back layers until he gets what he wants.

GENEVIEVE

So what if he does?

The food stares back at Belle.

BELLE

I've got to get back to work.

INT. SUMMER HOME - STUDY - DAY

A small study. Alice and Edward alone together. A large accordion-type camera stands on a wooden tripod.

ALICE

What can I do to convince you to come to Africa with us? They've got native tribes there you can shoot.

EDWARD

With my camera, I hope.

Nicholas pushes his way into the room. The warmth leaves Alice's face. He shimmies up next to her and puts his arm around his waist. Edward pulls back to the camera.

NICHOLAS

Are we ready?

EXT. FERRY BOAT - DAY

Edward at the rear of the boat, water racing just below him. He gazes into into the river. The Manhattan skyline looms in the distance. Edward turns his head to look back at island.

The president's villa shrinks, then disappears into the fog.

EXT. MINNESOTA COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

SUPERIMPOSE: Minnesota, 1885

Fog. Then. A wide river cuts through frost-covered hills.

Young Edward Curtis, only in his teens, in a canoe with another FIGURE, his father JOHNSON CURTIS (50s) - a preacher who survived the war physically and spiritually by shooting pictures instead of bullets - looks back to his boy.

ALICE (V.O.)

What's calling you back to the
wilderlands of Montana, Eddy?

Teenage Edward is confident and at ease in the canoe, paddling with as much strength as his father, or more.

EDWARD

Dad?

JOHNSON

Yes, son?

They are illuminated by starlight.

EDWARD

They're watching us. From the
trees.

JOHNSON

You've got a good eye. I hope I
have enough bibles.

EXT. MINNESOTA RIVERBANK - NIGHT

Two sleeping bags on the bank of the river. Edward and his father lay side by side.

Johnson takes something from his pocket and holds it out.

JOHNSON

You know, this saved me during the
war.

A camera lens in Johnson's hand glimmers in the starlight.

JOHNSON (cont'd)

Saved me from having to kill.

He flips it over in his hand.

JOHNSON (cont'd)
 I carry it to remind me that we
 can use whatever skills we have to
 do good.

He hands it to Edward.

JOHNSON (cont'd)
 Now it's yours, so that it might
 also save you.

Young Edward holds it to his eye and looks up at the stars.

EXT. JOHNSON FARMHOUSE - WASHINGTON STATE - 1887 - DAY -
 FLASHBACK CONTINUES

A few thick tree trunks barely visible through the fog. The
 forest, still virgin.

A tiny hand-built farmhouse. A horse and cart, loaded with
 belongings, lurches to a stop by the front porch.

SUPERIMPOSE: Washington Territory, 1887

Several FIGURES tumble from the cart.

INT. JOHNSON'S FARMHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The one-room farmhouse is lit only by a few rays of pale
 sunlight that stream in through shabby curtains. Edward, now
 19, pulls away from the window.

EDWARD
 Dad, they're here.

Johnson, just a mass under a pile of blankets, lies on a
 narrow cot, motionless, moaning.

ELLEN CURTIS (50s), weary from a life of poverty rather than
 the trip from the Midwest, in the center of the room.

She sees Johnson's sickly form.

Johnson moans weakly. She frowns but does not move.

ELLEN
 How long has he been like this?

EDWARD
 Couple a weeks.

Ellen looms over Johnson. Her eyes quiver as she stares down at his body.

ELLEN
 Don't you dare die on me.
 (beat)
 No, no, no, no no, don't you even
 fucking dare.

Johnson rolls away to face the wall, moans louder, then lies still.

Ellen frowns. Johnson does not move.

Edward cowers against the wall. Ellen slams her fist on the body.

ELLEN (cont'd)
 We just got here! You sonovabitch.
 You goddamn sonovabitch!

EXT. JOHNSON FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Edward backs out of the house. The sounds of breaking furniture and glass echo off the trees. A horse whinnies. Edward looks back. The horse and cart and three figures.

RAY (20s), holds the reins of the horse.

EVA (teens) grips Ray's arm, eyes closed.

ASAHEL (early teens) cowers among their belongings.

Then silence.

INT. JOHNSON'S FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Edward creeps back in. Ellen, on her knees by the body.

EDWARD
 Mom?

ELLEN
 (to the corpse)
 We leap from from one mud hole to
 the next.

Ellen holds a small object - the camera lens.

Ellen pounds Johnson's body with the lens in her fist.

ELLEN (cont'd)
 (to the corpse)
 You come back from the war and all
 you have for me is this damn lens!

Edward's hand grips her arm. He yanks her to standing, spins her around, and grips his mother's wrist.

Ellen slaps him hard across the face - Edward does not flinch.

He wrenches the lens from her hand.

Ellen pulls away and turns back to the body.

ELLEN (cont'd)
 You left us for Seattle, and now
 you left us again to heaven's
 gates, leaving us here in hell.
 The martyrs make everyone else
 hammer him to the cross.

She kicks the cot, the body rocks to the side.

ELLEN (cont'd)
 This isn't even Seattle.
 (beat)
 Rolled over and croaked, and all
 you leave me with is this
 dilapidated log cabin...

Her shoulders drop.

ELLEN (cont'd)
 And four beautiful children.

Edward, face red, glares at her.

EDWARD
 The foundation is solid.

A tear rolls down his cheek. He pulls his mother in and they hug.

ELLEN
 Sickness, betrayal - fool's gold
 and sermons - debt and more debt.
 That god-damn lens.

Ellen pulls away and composes herself.

ELLEN (cont'd)
 (to Edward)
 That lens brought us nothing but
 ruin. It's a curse. You want to be
 cursed? Then keep it. It's your
 family's legacy now, not mine.
 (beat)
 Get your brothers and sister.

Edward's face reflects in the camera lens.

EXT. SEATTLE FERRY - DAY

A low fog on a wide bay.

A small but bustling town emerges from the mist. Edward,
 Ray, and Asahel sit among a few other PASSENGERS.

The boat grinds against the dock. Edward, full of mid-20s
 energy, jumps from the boat.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - DAY - END FLASHBACK

The mid-30s Edward steps from the ferry onto the New York
 City pier with the same intensity.

INT. MORGAN LIBRARY - DAY

JP Morgan coughs incessantly. A NURSE runs to him and wipes
 his spittle. He pushes her away as if she were a stray dog.

LAWYERS and ADVISORS circle like vultures over a carcass.

Belle sits patiently in a corner, waiting for him to die.

MORGAN
 If I say I'm going to Europe, I'm
 going to Europe.

He begins coughing again. The Nurse tries to get close but
 he swats her away again.

MORGAN (cont'd)
 Belle, I can't make it to Germany.
 You go, get what I need--

He begins coughing again. The Nurse and the Lawyer both
 swarm him. He brushes past them and looms over Belle.

MORGAN (cont'd)
Get me the Book. The Book of
Hours.

The Nurses drag him off.

An aging Advisor takes Belle by the elbow and leads her to the doorway. He whispers:

ADVISOR
You might want to wait until this
fever passes before you pack your
bags.

He looks over at Morgan, sitting now, surrounded by Nurses.

ADVISOR (cont'd)
When he recovers, I'll make
arrangements for your trip.

BELLE
If he recovers.

The Advisor gives her a knowing look but does not answer.

BELLE
Can I ask a sensitive question--

ADVISOR
If you're going to ask about his
will, I know nothing of it.

He pulls her deeper into an alcove.

ADVISOR (cont'd)
You're not the first person to
ask, and you won't be the last.
No, we haven't seen it, we've not
heard a peep, no one has. Even his
closest--

He pauses as someone walks past, then resumes.

ADVISOR (cont'd)
Relatives. Nothing. He's being
tight lipped about it. Thinks he's
immortal.

Belle looks concerned. He looks up at her warmly.

ADVISOR (cont'd)
But I shouldn't think you'd have
to worry.

(MORE)

ADVISOR (cont'd)

After all you've done for him, I mean, he trusts you more than his own the backstabbing kin. He owes you the world. I mean, of all things, you've been honest, which is more than I can say for anyone else in this room.

BELLE

Thank you.

The Advisor gives her a fatherly smile. Belle turns to leave, but the Advisor stops her.

ADVISOR

Wait, ah, one more thing. I have a good friend and Columbia University who brought to my attention something that might be of interest to you regarding one of your clients.

Belle looks down as the Advisor produces a parcel wrapped in brown paper. He hands in to Belle.

ADVISOR (cont'd)

Someone has taken an extremely keen interest in you.

INT. BELVEDERE HOTEL - LOBBY - NIGHT

Belle stands like royalty in the lobby of the hotel. Her chin held high. She talks to no one. No one talks to her.

Edward's breath is visible on the glass door - the entrance to the hotel. He pushes his way in. The wind from the open door blows Belle's green rabbit-fur dress. She turns.

She holds a book.

On the spine: "Princeton University Yearbook"

BELLE

Did you manage to bamboozle any more subscribers?

Edward tries to get close.

EDWARD

Not the ones I was aiming for.

She gently pushes him back, using the book to block him.

BELLE
Why don't you stay in the picture
business and leave the book
business to me?

Backing away - a standoff.

EDWARD
Sounds like a partnership.

She pushes past him out onto the street.

EXT. NYC STREET - CONTINUOUS

Belle on the dark street with Edward trying to catch up.
She walks on, not turning back.

BELLE
It's a division of labor.

EDWARD
One last drink. Business partner
to business partner?
(beat)
Tomorrow, I'll be on a train to
Montana.

Belle edges closer to the street and eyes him.

BELLE
I'm not thirsty.

EDWARD
Neither am I.

A horse and carriage rumbles past her.

The yearbook flies from her hand into the back - the
carriage moves off with the book in the back seat, Belle
walking down the sidewalk the other way.

Edward pauses - follow the book or the girl? He follows
Belle. The carriage - gone.

She turns to him. He holds her, and she lets him.

BELLE
Then let's eat.

Belle looks him up and down and smiles.

BELLE (cont'd)
 Partners? Honestly.
 (winking at him)
 We both know that female is the
 superior sex.

INT. TAVERN - MOMENTS LATER

JOURNALISTS and ONLOOKERS stand as Belle enters the tavern.

BELLE
 Let the party begin, boys.

Edward trails behind her as a camera flash flares on and dies.

JOURNALIST
 Miss da Costa Greene, you're all
 over the papers again today.

ONLOOKER
 And you've brought Mr. Curtis with
 you all the way from Seattle.

BELLE
 My other circus freaks were
 unavailable.

Edward pulls Belle's arm and whispers in her ear.

EDWARD
 Does everyone know you?

BELLE
 Everyone that matters.

WAITERS appear with champagne glasses.

JOURNALIST
 Let's toast to Ms. Greene's latest
 acquisition.

She gestures to Edward.

BELLE
 You mean him?

Again, laughter surrounds her. Waiters pour bubbly.

JOURNALIST
 I heard Mr. Curtis met the
 President for a second time. How's
 old Teddy these days?

EDWARD

I was there to make a picture of
his daughter.

The crowd ooohs.

BELLE

So, tell us?

(dramatic pause)

Were the clothes on or off?

The crowd howls with laughter. Edward blushes.

EDWARD

It was her wedding...

The Journalist, bored, turns back to Belle.

ONLOOKER

Do you think you'll ever settle
down with a fella, Belle? Get
married like Alice Roosevelt?

BELLE

Wait, you mean to say I'm not
settled?

Laughter.

BELLE (cont'd)

Sorry boys, This is as close to
settled as I get.

Belle, sitting on railing, higher than everyone else. The
Onlookers look up at her in pure awe.

BELLE (cont'd)

This city is my home. I lay my
head in Harlem use Wall Street as
my footstool.

(beat)

That puts my bum right about at
Times Square.

Laughter.

BELLE (cont'd)

And a fella? I've got lot's of
'em. It was JP Morgan's nephew who
scoped me up when I was at the
tender age of...

(beat)

...well now, I can't reveal all my
secrets, can I?

Laughter.

BELLE (cont'd)
 And now JP himself takes care of
 me.

She spreads her legs at the worlds "takes care of me" then
 closes them again. Everyone laughs except Edward.

BELLE (cont'd)
 After him, well, I guess JP Junior
 will take care of me too.

Another gesture at the words "takes care of me" and the
 crowd roars.

BELLE (cont'd)
 You see, it's a family affair, the
 hole Morgan family tree gives me
 shade, I eat the apples as they
 fall.

She stands and spreads her arms as if she were a singer on a
 stage. All eyes follow her.

BELLE (cont'd)
 They all seem to want to take care
 of me, so why settle for just one
 man when you can have a whole
 family?

The crowd laughs. She struts ahead, turning to them
 occasionally.

BELLE (cont'd)
 And who would I take as a fella,
 tell me? To be with another man
 would be like cheating on JP,
 wouldn't it? But I guess if he was
 a Rockefeller, or Carnegie, I'd at
 least have a look in his wallet
 before deciding for sure.

They laugh as she walks behind them.

BELLE (cont'd)
 No question about it, he'd have to
 be a New Yorker.

She sips her drink for dramatic effect and then continues.

BELLE (cont'd)
 Even if Mary of Teck kicked the
 bucket, I wouldn't go for for his
 majesty King George the five
 unless he up and moved Buckingham
 to Broadway.

Edward backs out of the tavern and Belle continues to talk.

EXT. NYC STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Edward stands in the dark. He rubs his hands together. A
 moment passes. Belle creeps out and finds him.

EDWARD
 Now I see why you don't like
 questions. That's all they feed
 you. Questions, questions,
 questions.

BELLE
 Questions are all right as long as
 no one cares about the answers.

EDWARD
 I'm coming back inside, I just
 needed some-

BELLE
 This place is dreadful, let's find
 another watering hole.

EDWARD
 The nomads are restless tonight,
 aren't they?

BELLE
 Says Mr. Edward Sharif Curtis.

They stop and look at one another. A trolley car clanks by.
 Belle grabs Edward's hand and they run towards it.

INT. TROLLEY CAR - CONTINUOUS

Edward and Belle squeezed into the trolley, bodies pressed
 to one another.

EDWARD
 It's all a show to you, isn't it?

BELLE

Of course it is. This whole city's
a vaudeville act, and if you're
not a Ringling Brother or a
Barnum, then you're just one of
the freaks.

Motorcars, fancy couples, marble and brick whiz by. A blur
of light and color.

BELLE (cont'd)

It's all a hustle, all a game.
Your photographs too - an act, a
facade, an image of a prairie
that's been slashed and burned,
and image that you sell to the
very people who lit the Indian's
funeral pyre.

Belle puts her head out the window and spreads her arms out.
She shouts, her voice echoes off the stone and brick.

BELLE (cont'd)

What a grand show it is -
America - to be alive!

She slides into Edward's arms.

BELLE (cont'd)

And the most important thing--

They are pressed close to one another. They almost kiss.

BELLE (cont'd)

...never look behind the curtain.

She pushes Edward away as the trolley lurches at a stop.

BELLE (cont'd)

You of all people should know
that. Right, Eddy?

The trolley sways. They fall into each other.

BELLE (cont'd)

What happens when the world finds
out who you really are, Eddy? A
savage in a fancy suit.

EDWARD

I have nothing to hide.

BELLE

What did I tell you about lying to yourself, Eddy?

The trolley slows. Belle looks outside.

BELLE (cont'd)

This could be my stop. I just don't know. I never know.

She leaps from the moving trolley, lands on her feet like a cat, and runs off.

EXT. NYC STREET - CONTINUOUS

Edward runs after her.

EDWARD

Where are you going?

Belle turns and faces Edward.

BELLE

Go back to Seattle, Eddy. Go back to your wife and your kids.

(beat)

Or go back to your Indian princess. I don't care.

Belle walks away. Edward follows her.

EDWARD

I'm not finished here.

A light from a bar illuminates her face. Each breath, a puff of condensation floats in the air, then vanishes.

BELLE

Moving's what you're good at. Maybe you're afraid to live anywhere, so you just keep moving from place to place so you don't have to think about who you are.

She leaves, seemingly for good. Edward watches her walk down the street alone.

EDWARD

I know exactly who I am.

A hint of sadness appears behind Belle's eyes. She frowns and touches her lips with her fingertips. She stops.

Edward walks up behind her. She let's him get close.

BELLE

You like punishment. Must be all those initiations.

She turns to face Edward. He stops her and looks her in the eye. She can't look away.

EDWARD

I'm out of questions. You've beaten me. I turned over every rock, shook every tree, and nothing, not a thing, even Sherlock Holmes couldn't solve this one. I don't care where you're from or how you got that name.

She gives a weak smile. Not yet convinced, but not ready to run.

BELLE

You may be beaten, but you're not done. Nobody beats Edward Curtis. You won't stand for it. You're just taking a break between rounds.

EDWARD

You did your homework.

He steps back and shows off his suit and hat.

EDWARD (cont'd)

But honestly, look at me, if you're from nowhere, then I'm from south of that. Me, I was born on a blanket under the stars while my father handed out free bibles to Indian tribes.

Belle chuckles, and Edward saunters up next to her.

EDWARD (cont'd)

And I don't know which fork to use.

BELLE

The truth, for once.

EDWARD

But I have to leave soon, and was hoping for a proper goodbye.

Another bar. This one - Big band music, a romantic slow dance. Belle turns her head. The warm door seems to invite her in. She moves to enter. Edward holds her tight.

EDWARD (cont'd)
We can't go in there.

Belle pauses. The HOST, an elegant Black man, smiles at the pair and ushers them in.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Edward and Belle dance to a slow tune. As they spin, the all African American ensemble tracks them. The GUESTS - all Black - nod their heads to the music.

The tune changes. More lively. The Guests begin to clap their hands and stomp their feet.

Edward and Belle step away from each other. It's a different kind of dance. Edward doesn't know this one - an urban trend he's missed during his time in the wild. African-American rhythms infused Bluegrass and local melodies.

Belle knows it - from deep inside her being she know it - but stands still as a board.

The Guests look to Belle. They smile.

The tune becomes infectious.

The stomping, bam bam bam, echoes off the walls.

The rhythm. Clap clap, clap clap clap.

The whole bar shakes, boom boom boom, with each stomp of their feet.

A GUEST makes eye contact with Belle and cries out:

GUEST
Come on, sist'a, show us what you
got.

Belle covers her mouth and runs. Edward is left alone.

INT. GREENE RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Belle's bedroom. Belle, on her knees, peeks through the curtains. Outside, through the curtains, below on the street - Edward paces back and forth.

EDWARD
Belle! Belle!

He puts one foot on her front step and calls up again.

EDWARD (cont'd)
Belle! Belle!

Belle turns her back to the wall, curls up in a ball, and sobs.

INT. BELVEDERE HOTEL - EDWARD'S ROOM - DAY

Suitcases by the door.

The room is emptied out. A few empty whiskey bottles half-hidden, but still obvious. The Bellboy holds the door open, holding one of Edward's small bags.

BELLBOY
Mr. Curtis, will you be paying
your bill before you leave, or
shall we add it to your line of
credit--

Snoring. Edward, bare chested, sleeping on the hard floor instead of the bed.

INT. GREENE RESIDENCE - DAY

Belle's apartment - trunks and suitcases sit next to the front door. The sound of a German sonata, played on violins, carries through the room.

Genevieve reads a newspaper.

-INSERT: Edward Curtis Begins Great Indian Expedition

The click of a bag clasp draws Genevieve's attention. Belle closes another clasp.

Genevieve turns back to three WHITE FEMALE STUDENTS playing violin.

Belle turns the bag upright.

BELLE
(to herself)
Goodbye, Mr. Curtis.

The song ends.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

The train whistle screams. Dry prairie reflects in the window, racing past, a blur, as Edward gazes off into space.

EXT. STEAMSHIP - DAY

The Atlantic reflects in Belle's sunglasses. She turns away from the ocean, folds her parasol umbrella, and joins a group of MEN and WOMEN on the deck of a luxury liner.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Edward paces the aisle. The train lurches and sways, then eases into a station and stops. The doors open.

The small pale form of CLARA CURTIS (late 20s), framed by the open door. Clara is still blessed with pale skin and thick curly black hair lifted straight from a Renaissance painting.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - MONTANA - CONTINUOUS

Edward and Clara rub noses. Young BETH (age 12) appears from behind her mother. Beth is more rugged than her mother, the bold temperament from her father shining through.

Edward crouches to hug her, looking up at Clara.

EDWARD
Where's Hal?

CLARA
At the camp. How's your back?

EDWARD
It's fine.

Edward stands.

CLARA
Are you tired?

EDWARD
I'm not tired.

CLARA
You must be exhausted.

EDWARD
I'm not tired.

The walk down the platform.

BETH

So, are you going to tell me or do I have to ask? What was he like?

EDWARD

I'll tell you at the camp.

CLARA

I can't stand it, tell me now, tell me, tell me.

They stop.

CLARA (cont'd)

You met face to face with Mr. Morgan? And he agreed to everything?

EDWARD

Yes, I met him. And yes, he agreed.

BETH

What? Really?

EDWARD

His face is really ugly, by the way.

Clara grabs him. They hug. Edward lifts her and spins her.

CLARA

You did it.

EDWARD

We did it.

CLARA

This is your dream, Eddy. You made it happen.

EDWARD

Come on, let's go.

PORTERS - Black and Native American - help move luggage down the platform. The three walk through the station towards.

CLARA

So, what's your salary?

EDWARD

What?

CLARA

Salary. Benefits. What'd he give you?

EDWARD

Let's talk at home.

Clara stops him cold. Horses snort and stomp their feet.

CLARA

You mean the camp? Because we don't have a home. We're bankrupt. You mortgaged the studio and the house for those fucking Indians. We have nothing.

(beat)

Tell me we're gonna get some money out of this. Tell me JP Morgan is backing this whole thing and we can finally have our lives back.

(beat)

No. No, Eddy, don't tell me he fucked us over.

INT./EXT. CAMPSITE - DAY

Clara storms past dozens of PORTERS, COOKS, TRANSLATORS, and GUIDES. She ducks into a large tent. Edward follows. She grabs a plate off a folding table and hurls it at Edward.

Edward ducks. It hits a tree and shatters. Beth cowers behind a stool, spying on the fight.

Clara grabs an ax, knuckles white.

CLARA

How could you do this, Eddy?

She reels back to throw it, eyes on fire.

CLARA (cont'd)

What the fuck were you thinking? Were you even thinking?

Edward speaks softly and approaches her as a zookeeper approaches a hungry lion.

EDWARD

Clara, it's all going to be fine, everything's going to be fine.

CLARA

Fine? How is it going to be fine?

The ax quivers above her head.

EDWARD

Calm down, let me explain. Please.

She lowers the ax, but still holds it. Edward inches closer.

EDWARD (cont'd)

JP pays for the expedition--

CLARA

You're on a first-name basis?

EDWARD

Mr. Morgan pays for the expeditions. He pays the salaries of the translators, guides, carriers, cooks--

CLARA

Except yours.

EDWARD

Except mine. And except for printing. But, but--

CLARA

How are you going to print it, Edward, how the fuck are you going to print it?

She raises the ax again.

EDWARD

Subscriptions. I'm selling subscriptions. That's my salary-- our salary.

Clara lowers the ax.

EDWARD (cont'd)

People buy a subscription, and every time I finish a volume, they get a copy.

Edward takes her wife's shoulders and looks her in the eye.

EDWARD (cont'd)

We keep the rights to the work. It's ours, forever, to sell prints and books.

(MORE)

EDWARD (cont'd)
 (beat)
 We'll be OK. I promise.

Clara drops the ax, falls into his arms, and sobs.

CLARA
 What was I thinking, marrying you?

EDWARD
 You were thinking, what a
 charming, handsome, charismatic--

CLARA
 Cripple, unable to get off the bed
 for a whole year! Wow, I get to
 spoon-feed him and clean out
 buckets of shit and piss because
 he can't even walk to the
 outhouse. How lucky a girl I am.

Edward laughs nervously.

EDWARD
 Am I still making all the Seattle
 papers?

CLARA
 Every day. You and Roosevelt.

BETH
 They're milking the story for all
 it's worth.

EDWARD
 (to Clara)
 See? You married a celebrity.

Clara laughs through tears.

Beth begins to laugh and runs to join them in a group hug. A
 tiny voice enters the tent.

HAL (O.S.)
 Dad?

Edward turns. His son HAL (15), a spitting image of Edward
 as a boy - and just as handsome - runs to his father.

EDWARD
 Whoah, a giant in the camp! Call
 the police!

They hug. Hal is almost Edward's height. From the camp, the
 voice of an educated MAN calls out:

UPSHAW (O.S.)
Mr. Curtis? There's someone here
to see you.

Edward's head pops out of the flap of the tent. Outside -
the chaos of a busy expedition.

MEN take down tents and back supplies.

Before him, in spit-shined black shoes, straight leg
trousers, a superbly ironed shirt, and sporting short hair
parted in the middle, stands Upshaw.

EDWARD
Dudley?

Upshaw nods. Edward walks past him and approaches a fat man
on horseback, DUDLEY (50s), the U.S. government-appointed
"Indian Agent" as they used to be called, the reservation's
moral police.

DUDLEY
Mr. Curtis, there's this thing I
gotta talk to you about.

Edward shields his eyes to look up at Dudley.

EDWARD
What's that, Mr. Dudley?

DUDLEY
Progress. Civilization. Things of
that nature that I have the duty
to impose upon the Indians by the
United States government.

EDWARD
I'm not here to disrupt progress,
Mr. Dudley. I'm here to preserve
history before it fades away.

Dudley spins his horse so that if the horse were to kick by
accident, Edward's head would be flattened.

DUDLEY
I'm not talking about the savages
out there. I'm talking about
Upshaw here.

EDWARD
What about him?

DUDLEY

We've made a man out of him. Don't you ruin that by making him revert back to his primitive ways.

Edward looks back at Upshaw. Upshaw hangs his head in shame.

EDWARD

Listen here. In all the days he's worked for me, he's never stepped out of line. Hasn't touched a drop, neither.

DUDLEY

He's a good Indian. See to it that he stays that way.

Dudley spins his horse a few more times, then trots off.

EXT. CAMPSITE - DAY

The bags - packed. The camp now a procession of a few dozen horses and wagons. Upshaw spits on the ground and mounts his horse.

Clara, Beth, Hal, and Edward, on horseback, push forward.

Edward looks over his shoulder. Dudley follows them, looking down at Upshaw from a ridge.

Edward rides up to Upshaw.

UPSHAW

Please don't ask me to--

EDWARD

I need you to speak to them. That's all. Just translate.

They ride in silence for a moment, then Upshaw speaks:

UPSHAW

How's your friend Teddy?

Edward does not look at him.

EDWARD

He's not my friend.

UPSHAW

How's Alice?

Edward looks at Upshaw. Upshaw raises his eyebrows up and down quickly in a knowing manner.

EDWARD

Married.

UPSHAW

That's not what I asked.

Upshaw does it again. Eyebrows up and down, up and down, as if to say, "that would never stop you."

Edward does not break a smile.

Eyebrows up and down again. Then again.

It works.

Edward smirks. Upshaw breaks into a grin as well.

Edward punches his arm in a friendly manner. Upshaw punches him back. Edward punches him harder. Upshaw punches him back - harder.

On horseback, side by side, they begin to wrestle. Shirt buttons fly. Edward digs his fingers into Upshaw's ribs, and Upshaw howls with laughter - it tickles!

Beth shakes her head as their horses veer away from the procession and they tussle in the dust like two kids.

EXT. MONTANA COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

A line of horses and carts snakes across the Montana wilds. Upshaw slips one shoe off his foot and puts it in a saddlebag, then the other.

Then he removes his socks and rides barefoot.

EXT. LONDON HOTEL - NIGHT

An elegant high heel emerges from a 1908 Rolls Royce Silver Ghost. Belle da Costa Belle's long legs follow. She slides from the car, the brightly-lit entrance of an upscale hotel greets her gorgeous green-fur coat and glittering jewelry.

A group of MEN at the entrance, several white and two Black, argue with several HOTEL MANAGERS.

MANAGER

They'll have to lodge somewhere
else. We don't allow Negroes under
any circumstances.

The two BLACK MEN, heads low, scoot their luggage aside.
Belle passes them. Their eyes connect, but Belle looks away.

The DOORMAN opens the doors and Belle strides in.

INT. LONDON HOTEL - NIGHT

A small metal elevator door slides open. An ELEVATOR
OPERATOR smiles as Belle steps out. He calls out:

OPERATOR

Have a wonderful evening, madame.

BELLE

I assure you, I will.

The elevator gate squeaks behind her as she stands before a
door. She knocks.

SOTHEBY'S AGENT (O.S.)

Who is it?

BELLE

Belle. Da Costa. Greene.

The door opens immediately, and a surprised SOTHEBY'S AGENT
peeks his head out from behind the door.

SOTHEBY'S AGENT

Ms. Greene?

GREENE

May I come in?

She steps forward, not waiting for an answer.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Half a dozen pairs of greedy eyes gaze - pipes and whiskey
glasses fall from the open mouths of six SOTHEBY'S MEN.

An old clock ticks as Belle scans the room.

Two bronze statues, a painting, and a two-hundred-year-old
leather-bound tome grace a table.

SOTHEBY'S AGENT

Is he... here?

BELLE

No, of course not. He wouldn't know a Manet from a Monet if it bit him in the bum. Darling, I do all his buying for him. And I'm much funnier... and much prettier. So, shall we begin?

SOTHEBY'S AGENT

Ms. Greene, the auction is not until tomorrow.

BELLE

And that's why I'm here...

Belle's gloved hand runs over the tome.

BELLE (cont'd)

...tonight.

Silence.

SOTHEBY'S AGENT

Well, it is simply not possible to make a sale before the auction.

Belle - at the liquor table - pours herself a double.

BELLE

Anything's possible, that's my motto.

SOTHEBY'S AGENT

The pieces have already been listed--

An OLD MAN stands from a leather chair in the corner.

OLD MAN

Ms. Greene, which piece in particular are you interested in?

She takes a sip, scans the items, and says:

BELLE

All of them.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - LATER

Belle, seated on a couch with a drink in one hand and a long cigar in the other, joins the Men in laughter.

BELLE

I was told you English were stuffy
and uptight.

The bronze statues, painting, and book are gone. In their place - wooden crates.

BELLE (cont'd)

Turns out you get a few drinks in
you, and just you're as deplorable
as the rest of us.

They laugh. Belle is standing before they can rise.

OLD MAN

Ms. Greene, won't you stay for
another a little longer? I have a
few questions--

BELLE

I'm sorry, dear, I have to run
along to Paris and then Rome to
snatch up everything I can...

She screws the cigar into an ashtray with intention as she says:

BELLE (cont'd)

Before you Sotheby's lot screw me
over.

OLD MAN

...about your genealogy.

Belle's bolts upright. Her face remains vivid and expressive, her tense body reveals fear. The door opens for her as she takes her coat..

BELLE

It was a pleasure doing business
with you.

Belle gives him a European kiss on each cheek.

OLD MAN

The pleasure was all mine!

PRE-LAP: lively European music.

EXT. MUNICH - NIGHT

A cobblestone street, alive with color and music. Belle, one arm around a RUSSIAN ARTIST, takes in the sights.

The music changes.

African-American music.

Belle is drawn to a glowing doorway.

The light from the doorway illuminates her face.

A BLACK MAN at the entrance looks her up and down. A huge smile crosses his face.

MAN

Welcome.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Belle's high heels bounce from heel to toe with the music, dangerously close to knocking over a wine glass. Her long legs extend up from the table, her hands almost touching the chandelier as she dances on a table, surrounded by a dozen BLACK MEN.

She looks happy - free.

The Russian artist, sitting next to BLACK MUSICIANS, looks up at her with adoration. He's at home as well.

But.

He fidgets unconsciously with his wedding ring.

INT. STEAMSHIP - DAY

A pounding sound - a hammer hitting a nail - echoes.

A huge wooden crate.

Another crate. Then another. Then. Dozens of them.

A WORKER taps in one last nail. The echoes fade.

The crates - aligned neatly in the cavernous hold of a massive ship.

Each crate has one word. MORGAN.

Belle inspects the final crate, then nods to some WORKMEN.
The Workmen nod back and trod out of the hold.

Belle's green rabbit-fur coat falls onto onto a large crate.
She crawls on top and lays down on it like a queen-size bed.

The cool electric lights emit a dim glow and faint buzz.

For a moment - bliss. She's alone, happy. A genuine smile
overcomes her as she runs her hands over the box beneath
her.

But then - frown from deep within contours her face.

She sobs uncontrollably.

EXT. MONTANA COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

A long line of horses and wagons kick up clouds of dust.

The slim figure of Hal rides tall, then suddenly hunches
over in the saddle. Then.

He slides halfway off and hangs sideways on his horse.

CLARA

Hal!

Clara cradles the limp form. Edward whips his horse around,
rides alongside, and jumps down.

Clara touches his forehead.

CLARA (cont'd)

Oh my god, he's burning up.

EDWARD

We'll make camp here.

CLARA

We have to go back.

EDWARD

He can't ride like this.

INT./EXT. MONTANA COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

The tent. Hal on the cot, moaning. Clara smacks away a wet
towel Clara tries to dab on his forehead. Edward stands
afar.

CLARA
 Soup isn't working. Wet towels
 aren't working. We need a
 hospital.

Beth's worried face appears from behind a flap in the tent.
 Clara stands and glares at Edward.

CLARA (cont'd)
 We have to go back.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - DAY

Porters carry the emaciated form of Hal onto the train.
 Clara hovers behind her boy's body.

CLARA
 (to the porters)
 Careful, be gentle.

Hal vanishes inside the train car. Clara turns. Edward
 reaches for her, but she pulls away.

EDWARD
 He's strong.

CLARA
 I know.

EDWARD
 He'll be--

CLARA
 Don't say he'll be fine. You don't
 know that. The nearest hospital is
 days away. Days! And you're just
 going to stand there and say he'll
 be fine.

(beat)
 What's wrong with you? Do you even
 have a soul? Why aren't you
 getting on this train? Why aren't
 you going to be with your son in
 his final hours?

EDWARD
 He's not going to die.

CLARA
 How can you just let us go like
 this? Why can't you come back to
 Seattle?

(MORE)

CLARA (cont'd)
 Why can't someone else take your
 god-damn Indian pictures?

Clara gets close to his face and speaks in a low voice?

CLARA (cont'd)
 Why, why, why? Is it because
 you're that good? Or because
 Roosevelt told you how special you
 are? Or do you think you're God's
 messenger, and only you can save
 them? That there's no one else who
 can do what you do? Not one person
 more important in this world than
 Edward Curtis?

Edward does not move. Clara steps back.

CLARA (cont'd)
 You're in love with someone else.

EDWARD
 No.

CLARA
 I know you are, I knew from the
 first moment I saw you together.
 That fucking clam-digging hag. The
 princess, that damn princess
 Angeline.

She takes a step back and screams over the train whistle.

CLARA (cont'd)
 Ever since she died you've been
 obsessed with making sure you
 snatch every last image and
 scribble down every last word of
 every last Indian so that not one
 of them would have to suffer the
 indignity of not having met by
 Edward S. Curtis.

Edward stands, unmoved. The train begins to move, slowly at
 first, then faster as Clara speaks.

CLARA (cont'd)
 If you don't get on this train,
 you'll never see me or the
 children again.
 (beat)
 I swear to you.

EDWARD

I'll come on the next train.

Long pause. She composes herself.

CLARA

Your brother Asahel's turned out to be a damn good photographer, Edward. You'd see that if you came home.

EDWARD

The next train. I promise.

CLARA

He could have been your partner. A team, you understand that word?

(beat)

There are these beings out there, Edward, they're called people. Other people. People who are not you. People who have talents and thoughts and feelings. Some of them even care about you.

(beat)

Why bother.

The back of Clara's coat vanishes into the train. The engine roars. Edward does not move as the train cars slide by, becoming a blur.

Suddenly.

The thin form of young Beth slips from the open door of the moving train. Clara cries out:

CLARA (cont'd)

Beth!

She runs to Edward and gives him a hug, tears flowing.

CLARA (cont'd)

I love you, dad.

EDWARD

I love you too, princess.

(beat)

Now go.

Clara nimbly makes paces with the train and hops back aboard. She has the vigor of her father as well.

An empty station. Edward stands on the platform, watching the train disappear. The smoke clears. Upshaw stands afar, hat in hand, waiting for Edward.

UPSHAW
Time to go, boss?

EDWARD
Time to go.

EXT. MONTANA COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

The mountains are like walls on either side of the expedition.

Two small figures, Upshaw and a NATIVE AMERICAN, talk.

Dudley, afar, squints. Upshaw speaks to the stranger. The Native American nods his head, and Upshaw returns to Edward.

UPSHAW
He says they're all gone. Dead, probably.

EDWARD
They're here, we just need to go deeper.

EXT. MONTANA COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Edward and Upshaw with another NATIVE AMERICAN who points at a distant canyon. Edward shakes his hand.

EXT. MONTANA COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Edward, Upshaw, Dudley, and the rest of the expedition walk single file down a narrow canyon trail. A small river roars hundreds of feet below.

EXT. MONTANA COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Men's hands lift a small boat onto a dilapidated narrow-gauge railway. Edward grunts, the men groan.

Rapids splash foam on their faces.

But then - the boat wrenches free of their hands and slides down to the water.

Wood and metal fly as the boat smashes into the white water.

The men race to catch the runaway boat. The surging rapids carry the boat.

Edward jumps into the water, climbs on board, and throws a rope to shore. Upshaw secures the rope to a rock.

A COOK looks on in horror as the men pull the boat to shore.

EDWARD
(panting)
We got it. It's OK.

COOK
I'm not getting on that death trap.

EDWARD
You'll be fine.

COOK
No way, I'm going back. Sorry, Mr. Curtis, I can't do this.

The cook scurries back up the trail and vanishes in a cloud of dust.

EDWARD
There goes our cook.
(to Dudley)
Dudley, you coming?

Dudley grimaces as he removes backpack. The Men put their packs into the boat and climb in.

EXT. MONTANA RIVER

The boat pitches and heaves. Edward, Upshaw, Dudley, and the Men are thrown around, rag dolls in the surging rapids.

CRASH!

The boat dashes against a rock. The boat splits into pieces, the small engine steaming as the hot metal sinks into the river.

EXT. MONTANA COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

Edward and the Men huddle by a fire. Like a panther, Upshaw crawls to Edward, making no noise. He covers Edward's mouth, eyes ablaze.

UPSHAW
 (whispering)
 Someone's coming.

Edward and the others crouch, ready to pounce.

From the darkness, a CROW Indian, wearing a suede shirt and jeans, steps into the light. Upshaw walks to him and speaks:

UPSHAW (cont'd)
 (in Crow)
 Welcome, brother.

The man looks at Upshaw, puzzled. He steps back, but Upshaw takes his arm.

UPSHAW (cont'd)
 (in Crow)
 This is Edward. The Shadow
 Catcher.

CROW
 We do not know him. We do not know
 you. Leave our lands.

Upshaw takes off his button-down shirt, baring his chest to the man.

UPSHAW
 (in Crow)
 I am one of you. I am Upshaw of
 the Apsaroke.

The Crow man looks him up and down.

CROW
 (in Crow)
 You smell like a White man.

The Crow snorts at Dudley and turns to Upshaw.

UPSHAW
 (in Crow)
 You may come. The rest must stay.

Crow and Upshaw vanish into the night as Dudley watches nervously.

EXT. MONTANA COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

The morning sun hits Edward's eyes. He bolts up in his sleeping bag. Upshaw and a few other NATIVE AMERICANS are there.

UPSHAW
 (whispering)
 Take your things. We will leave
 the others here.

Edward slides from his sleeping bag, scanning the camp. On his hands and knees, the inflatable mattress inside makes a hissssss as he rolls it with both hands.

EXT. MONTANA COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Edward hauls his box camera. Upshaw carries a small pack. They sweat and grunt under the scorching sun.

In the distance, the voice of Dudley cries out:

DUDLEY (O.S.)
 Upshaw? Come back here! Come back!

A narrow cut in the rock appears before them.

The Crow vanishes through the crack.

Edward holds his breath, sucks in his belly, and squeezes through the crack into darkness.

EXT. MONTANA COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

The group walks along a sandy ridge. The Crow stops and points.

CROW
 There.

Edward squints. Below, hundreds of native homes nestle between a river and a canyon wall. NATIVE AMERICANS pull huge fish from the river.

EDWARD
 No churches, no cars, no telephone
 lines. Perfect.

UPSHAW
 Edward, I can't go any further.

Edward stops to look at him.

EDWARD
 Why not?

UPSHAW

You're here. You have your camera.
What else can I do?

EDWARD

Upshaw, I don't need pictures. I
need their stories, their
language, their dances.

UPSHAW

Dudley--

EDWARD

I need you to be their voice,
Upshaw.

Upshaw, visibly shaken, stares at Edward, then turns towards
the village.

INT. VILLAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Edward and the Crow sit and share a pipe - a European kind.
The Crow speaks to Upshaw, and Upshaw translates to Edward.

UPSHAW

(to Edward)

He says there were many more of
them. Now, less and less. So they
came here, to a place where they
can be free. The fish are plenty,
he says.

(listening)

He says, what more do we need?

EDWARD

Ask him if there are any
ceremonial headdresses left.

Upshaw translates, and the man nods, speaks, and Upshaw
continues.

CROW

(to Edward)

He says that once they had many.
His father and grandfather wore
them and many other things when
they performed the Sun Dance.

Edward smiles. The Crow continues to speak in Crow.

UPSHAW

(to Edward)

The Indian Agents came and destroyed them. Anyone who prayed to the Gods or to the Sun was taken away.

(beat)

But Which Way has one.

EDWARD

Which Way?

UPSHAW

The medicine man. That's his name. Which Way.

Edward stands.

EDWARD

We want to find him. Tell him we want to find Which Way.

Crow looks at Edward and speaks. Upshaw continues.

UPSHAW

(to Edward)

He is far from here. We must walk many days. You are strong to have come this far, he says. But in these canyons, it is easy to lose yourself. No amount of strength can guide you home. Only your Spirit can do that.

(beat)

He asks, what name have my people given you.

EDWARD

Tell him.

UPSHAW

I said we call you Shadow Catcher, but he says that is not your true name. When we find Which Way, he says that you will know your true name.

Edward sits back down on a log as the campfire fades.

EXT. MONTANA COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

The small figures of Crow, Upshaw, Edward, and a group of other Crow leaders walk single file across the Montana wilderness.

In the distance, Dudley's voice echoes off the mountains.

INT./EXT. MONTANA COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

A campfire illuminates the tiny tents of the expedition.

Three CROW BOYS, sitting just inside Edward's tent, laugh and point their fingers. Edward, kneeling over his sleeping bag, up looks from what he was doing and gives them a puzzled look.

They point and whisper. Edward turns back to his sleeping bag, puts his head down close to it, and starts to blow. He puffs and puffs, and a thin mattress inside inflates slowly.

EXT. MONTANA COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Crow raises his hand, and the group stops. He points. Afar, a small group of plains houses hide below a thin white line of smoke that soars high into the sky.

UPSHAW

He says that Which Way is there.
He says for us to wait here.

Crow goes forward.

At the door.

The distant tiny form of WHICH WAY emerges. The distant figures appear to discuss. Upshaw paces.

EDWARD

Upshaw, you've done a great thing for your people. Hundreds of years from now, we will be able to read about the folk tales, the legends, of so many tribes.

UPSHAW

You ask them to perform rituals, and sometimes I wonder, is it for the people hundreds of years from now, or is it for the Edward of today?

EDWARD

Do you see me getting rich?

Upshaw boldly faces him and looks deep into his eyes.

UPSHAW

They write about you in the papers. They praise you and liken you to a God.

Which Way and Crow trade places, stalking one another.

UPSHAW (cont'd)

But which God? The creator God? The destroyer God? The trickster God? You have one God. They have many.

EDWARD

How many Gods do you have, Upshaw?

UPSHAW

I have my family. That's enough. But you will never have enough. I don't think you can stop anything you've started.

EDWARD

Is that so bad?

UPSHAW

It has not made you rich. Rich men know when to look for oil elsewhere.

Which Way appears to beg and plead. Crow places a hand on the old man's shoulder. Upshaw turns to Edward.

UPSHAW (cont'd)

It need not be bad. But you simply must be careful what you set your eyes on, for once you have seen it, you cannot just turn around and go home.

Crow grows larger as he returns.

UPSHAW (cont'd)

And you drag us all behind you, whether we want to go or not.

Crow looms large as Upshaw retreats from Curtis. Crow speaks, and Upshaw listens.

UPSHAW (cont'd)
 (to Edward)
 He says that you can photograph
 the headdress and the Sun Dance.

EDWARD
 And what else?

UPSHAW
 He said nothing else.

EDWARD
 He said something else. Something
 about a turtle.

Upshaw is silent.

EXT. MONTANA COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

A patch of green grass near Which Way's hut.

A bearskin wrap is pulled aside. A feather headdress -
 perfectly preserved.

EDWARD
 Contraband. We're time travelers
 now, Upshaw.

The feather headdress slides onto Which Way's head. Upshaw
 guides him to a seated position. Edward appears from behind
 his camera.

EDWARD (cont'd)
 Tell him not to move.

UPSHAW
 I did.

Which Way looks directly into the camera. He holds still,
 looking proud.

Edward exposes the plate and nods.

Which Way nods and stands. Edward takes the headdress from
 Which Way and looks to Upshaw.

EDWARD
 You want to wear it?

UPSHAW
 Wear what?

EDWARD

These are your people.

Upshaw looks at Which Way, then looks at the headdress.

EDWARD (cont'd)

There's no one here. Dudley is miles away. And even if he did follow us, he'd be lost in that labyrinth.

Upshaw holds it nervously, sifting the feathered object back and forth in his hands.

EXT. MINNESOTA COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

Edward and Which Way pass an ancient Native American pipe back and forth. Edward writes frantically in his journal. Upshaw sits afar.

EDWARD

He's going too fast.

UPSHAW

He says you must write it all down so that his, our ancestors can remember all our tales. We must remember, he says, how the world pushed the water aside when the Old Man blew into the ball of mud.

EDWARD

And what about the turtles? Ask him about the sacred turtles.

Upshaw looks behind him to where Crow is sleeping. He snores. Upshaw turns back to Edward and Which Way.

UPSHAW

He says that if Crow and the others discover you he has shown you--

Edward gets on his knees in front of Which Way.

EDWARD

(in broken Crow)

Take me to see the sacred turtles.

INT. STEAMSHIP CABIN - NIGHT

Leather cords crisscross over Belle's chest, meeting at the breastbone, a knot hovering below her neck.

She unties the knot, her green fur coat slides off her shoulders, her bare neck glistening in the lights of the ship.

She looks in the mirror, the pale electric lights making her skin look white. She touches her collar bone, tracing it with her fingertip.

INT. LODGE - NIGHT

A bundle of green-dyed rabbit fur, tied with leather strings, lands on a low table. The strings crisscross and meet on top, similar to the way Belle's fur coat was tied. A knot stares back at Edward.

Which Way stands beside him, brow furled. Upshaw paces back and forth behind them.

UPSHAW

We should not be doing this.

Edward's hands hover above the crisscrossed leather cords.

EDWARD

Did he say that?

Edward's fingertips glide over the knot.

UPSHAW

Only sacred men may see it. This is wrong, Edward.

EDWARD

What makes a man sacred?

Upshaw runs from the lodge. The darkness swallows him.

EXT. MONTANA COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Edward and Dudley ride side by side. All but a few Native American boys have gone. Upshaw trails far behind.

DUDLEY

What did you see out there, Mr. Curtis?

EDWARD

The tattered remains of a dying culture.

DUDLEY

A changing culture. An improving culture. General Custer did all the dying.

EDWARD

Whatever you say.

Dudley looks back at Upshaw, who rides slowly, shoes on again.

DUDLEY

How much longer do you need the services of my boy Upshaw?

EDWARD

He's not a boy. He's a grown man with a wife and kids.

Dudley stops and grabs the reigns of Edward's horse.

DUDLEY

I think you've had enough with my boy, here. It's time he gets back to his people.

Edward whips his reigns back from Dudley, glances at Upshaw, and then gallops away. Dudley pats Upshaw on the back as Edward vanishes in white dust.

High above, Crow rides back and forth, dangerously close to the edge of a ridge line.

CROW

(shouting in Crow)

Upshaw! Upshaw! Who are you? Who are your people? Who have you betrayed?

EXT. STEAMSHIP - NIGHT

The deck of the magnificent ship.

PEOPLE of all types - BLACK, WHITE, ASIAN - drink, and dance.

They shout with joy, overcome with euphoria.

The screams of joy turn to screams of anguish.

PRE-LAP: Upshaw moaning.

EXT. MONTANA STREET - NIGHT

Upshaw, shirtless and drunk, stumbles down the main street of the small town he is forced to call home.

He throws a whiskey bottle and screams at a MAN who passes by. The Man flees.

INT. LODGE - NIGHT

Which Way's hands shake. A group of CROW MEN - angry - drag him out the door.

EXT. MONTANA COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

Which Way's hands wrapped tightly with vines. BOYS shove him into the center of a circle of CROW MEN.

Crow, illuminated by a large fire, draws an ax from his belt.

Which Way's eyes widen. He falls to his knees, puts his hands out, and begs for mercy.

The ax flickers in the firelight as it swings downward.

EXT. MONTANA STREET - NIGHT

Upshaw's face smashed by a fist, then an elbow, then boots. After a few moments, Upshaw falls. HUGE MEN kick him.

A POLICE OFFICER strolls past.

POLICE OFFICER
Get him off the street.

Upshaw is dragged off, his breathing guttural and bloody.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - MONTANA - DAY

A POSTAL WORKER looks up from behind the service window.

POSTAL WORKER
Train to Seattle will be here any
moment.

Edward pulls away from the window. He looks to the West. The setting sun.

POSTAL WORKER (cont'd)
Mr. Curtis, you have mail.

Edward comes back to reality. A few letters slide towards Edward. The Postal Worker clears his throat and hands him a telegram.

POSTAL WORKER (cont'd)
Read this one first, Mr. Curtis.

Edward reads it, turns the paper over, finds nothing, then takes off his hat.

EDWARD
(to himself)
He's gone.

He walks out onto the train platform, the harsh sun forming deep shadows.

A board on the tracks framed by the sunset.

Cities in white letters: Browning, MT, Whitefish, MT, Sandpoint, ID, Seattle, WA.

He looks East. Another board lists stops.

Cities in white letters: Chicago, Buffalo, New York.

INT. STEAMSHIP - DAY

Belle, on the deck of the ship. She stares into the distance, searching for the coast.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - MONTANA - DAY

Edward looks West, then East, then West again.

The words on the station board loom large: Seattle

EXT. SEATTLE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Edward, in his 20s, in downtown Seattle. A large and bustling city, the largest for hundreds of miles.

SUPERIMPOSE: Seattle, 1887

Ray eyes some passing ladies, pats him on the back, and is gone in the crowd.

EDWARD

That's not the kind of job I was talking about, Ray!

But Ray is gone.

A hunchback Native American woman, KIKOSOBLU (90s), a face so weathered she looks like a mummy, hobbles past.

Edward watches her walk towards the bustling city center.

PEOPLE of all races brush past.

NATIVE AMERICANS, wearing contemporary button-down shirts, wait in line for bread.

A JAPANESE FAMILY carries large bundles of clothes.

One shop says PROSPECTING SUPPLIES. Another reads GOLD HUNTER OUTFITTERS. Another shop door is lined with photos of Native Americans.

Edward glances the other direction.

Mount Rainier fills his vision. He pauses and takes in the sight.

INT. JOHNSON FARMHOUSE - DAY

QUICK CUTS - EDWARD'S LIFE IN SIDNEY

- FOREST - Edward picking berries.
- RIVER - Edward up to his knees in water wrestling with a massive wild salmon.
- FARMHOUSE - Edward pounds a fence post with a mallet.
- PUGET SOUND - Edward pulling clams from the mud

EXT. FOREST - DAY

A GROUP OF MEN walking among massive tree stumps.

Edward and another MAN struggle to stand on a steep incline while using a two-man saw. The voop voop voop of the saw echoes across the canyon.

The trunk groans. The tree twists. Then - crack.

Edward slips. He slides down the hill on his side. He claws at the dirt to get traction, eyes wide with terror.

His spine slams against a tree stump. His back arches. His open mouth cannot scream.

Men run towards, calling for help.

INT. JOHNSON FARMHOUSE - DAY

Ellen looks down at the bed where her husband died. Now her son, prone on the same bed, looks close to death as well.

Eva sweeps the floor. Ellen walks to the cold fireplace. Asahel slinks out of the house.

A knock at the door.

Eva opens the door. It's a young Clara.

INT. JOHNSON FARMHOUSE - DAY

Edward lies on his side, his eyes half closed. Clara sits next to him, holding a spoon full of mashed potatoes.

Edward wheezes and falls into a fit of coughing. Clara puts another blanket on him.

Edward moans weakly.

EXT. JOHNSON FARMHOUSE - DAY

Edward sits on the porch, immobile, miserable. MEN and wagons pass before him. Then - something in one of the wagons catches his eye.

Edward's dead eyes ignite. With great difficulty, he stands. The wagons are gone. Edward screams.

EDWARD

Wait!

Edward forces himself down the front steps, then walks down the path as he yells.

EDWARD (cont'd)

Please.

Tears roll down Edward's face as he runs as best he can through the forest. The wagons appear through the dense wood before him.

EDWARD (cont'd)
You there, wait, wait, please.

The last wagon stops and a MAN turns to Edward. Edward gulps mouthfuls of air, points and speaks:

EDWARD (cont'd)
That, that. How much? How much do you want for that camera?

EXT. JOHNSON FARMHOUSE - DAY

The summer sun beats down on a small vegetable garden ripe with tomatoes and peppers.

Edward, wearing the back brace and using crutches, lurches forward with great difficulty. Clara picks bush beans nearby.

CLARA
What are you doing?

EDWARD
I can't stay cooped up in the house the rest of my life.

CLARA
I'll find someone else to wipe your ass.

EDWARD
I can't stand these fucking braces!

Edward gazes at Seattle across the bay, then back to Clara.

CLARA
I make you feel like a prisoner.

EDWARD
I am a prisoner!

She stands and turns away.

Clara brushes past Edward. Edward takes her arm and pulls her towards her.

EDWARD (cont'd)
I'm going to town to buy a house,
my my family, for you and me.

CLARA
All we've got in this world is a
basket of tomatoes and a bag of
bush beans.

She hands him the tomatoes.

CLARA (cont'd)
And you can't even walk ten steps
without falling.

Clara walks away. Edward drops his crutches and takes a
step, then another, then another.

He grabs Clara by the waist from behind. She squeals. Edward
spins her.

They kiss.

They fall to the ground among the vegetables.

EXT. FERRY - DAY

The Seattle shoreline grows bigger and bigger. Edward, in a
tattered suit, patient as the ferry reaches the dock.

A city where newcomers strike it rich or die trying. Edward
takes a deep breath and soaks it all in.

Edward leaps onto the dock and scans downtown Seattle.

HELPER
Hey mista, you left this.

The Helper holds up a small box - Edward's lens.

HELPER (cont'd)
Can I keep it? As a tip?

Edward jogs back, takes the box, opens it, then looks up at
the Helper.

EDWARD
Not a chance.

EXT. SEATTLE - DAY

Edward looks in wonder at the city.

At the water's edge, a small figure digs in the mud with her bare hands. Kikosoblu claws out a few clams and throws them into a basket.

BOYS dash out from an alley and laugh at her.

BOY

Hey, old hag, here's a clam for ya.

He throws a stone. It hits Kikosoblu. She winces.

Edward rushes towards the Boys.

Before he can reach them, Kikosoblu drops her basket and draws several rocks from the hem of her clothes. She flings them at the Boys. One hits, then another. The Boys howl and flee.

Edward stops. Kikosoblu looks him in the eye and smiles.

EDWARD

They tell me you're a princess. If we were to be married, that would make me a prince, wouldn't it?

Kikosoblu smiles - she understands - and goes back to digging clams.

Then. She falls into a fit of coughing. She collapses on the cobblestones.

INT. HOSPITAL - LATER

An upscale hospital on a hill overlooking downtown Seattle - white, sterile, where the rich go for treatment. The WOMEN eye Edward up and down, then turn to each other.

Edward gazes at Kikosoblu. A NURSE lifts Kikosoblu's putrid clothing. A DOCTOR puts a stethoscope to her back.

DOCTOR

(to Kikosoblu)

And no more digging clams.

Edward tips his hat to the Women as he walks out of the hospital.

INT. RASMUS ROTH STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Edward stands in front of a very grump Mr. ROTH (50s), bumbling and unkept. He frowns at Edward.

ROTH

If you're going to be my partner,
you'll have to call me Rasmuth.

He comes from around behind the counter, breathing with difficulty.

ROTH (cont'd)

And you'll have to have the cash.
You'd need a substantial
investment to match what I have
here. Just a camera's not enough.

EDWARD

How much?

EXT. SEATTLE STREET - DAY

Edward walks down Seattle's main street. The PROSPEROUS ELITE mix with poor BEGGARS and malnourished NATIVE AMERICANS.

Edward sees a sign that reads: BANK. He stiffens his back and enters.

INT. JOHNSON'S FARMHOUSE - DAY

The sky turns crimson over the Pacific. Clara and Edward hold one another by the door. Ellen sits in her rocker.

ELLEN

And if the studio doesn't make a
profit, and if the tenants don't
make the rent payments--

Edward comes closer to his mother.

EDWARD

With the rent on this place
combined with the profit from the
studio, we'll pay the mortgage and
have enough money to buy you and
Eva some nice dresses. Shoes.
Whatever you want.

ELLEN

You hear that Clara? The Curtis
boys love to make promises.

Clara frowns.

EDWARD

Even a necklace with your
birthstone on it.

ELLEN

They love war, adventure, trees
and hills and rivers more than
they love their families.

EDWARD

I built this place with my bare
hands. And with all the strength I
have I'll bring us to Seattle and
have us a real life.

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

The Doctor and Nurse talk hastily to one another in the
hall. Kikosoblu collects her tattered clothes around her,
grabs her cane and pipe, and slinks out.

QUICK CUTS - RASMUS ROTH STUDIO - DAY AND NIGHT

- The man and wife gulp down champagne. Another COUPLE dance
the jig. Two women dance beside Edward and shriek with glee.

- Edward taking a photo of a GROUP OF GOLD MINERS who just
struck it rich.

- A line of STATE LEGISLATORS all seated in the studio.

- A brigade of SOLDIERS fiddles with their medals as Edward
prepares the camera.

-- YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN dance and hoot in the corner of the
studio.

- A GIRL poses for Edward and flashes a nipple.

- FIVE WOMEN pose in naughty dresses as Edward smiles.

RASMUS ROTH STUDIO - NIGHT

Edward draws his head out from under a black Curtain.

The MAYOR OF SEATTLE strides towards Edward as everyone else
moves aside. He shakes with one hand slaps his back with the
other.

MAYOR

My old mug messed up your work, as
always, but the family portrait
you took, that's part of history
now.

The Mayor leans in close and shoves a packet of expensive
cigars into his chest pocket.

MAYOR (cont'd)

And this is for those other
pictures.

The Mayor slaps Edward on the back and lights a cigar.
Edward strikes a match but pauses. He looks out the window.

The hunched form of Kikosoblu limps past.

Edward dashes to the door.

EXT. RASMUS ROTH STUDIO - MOMENTS LATER

Edward bursts from the studio, the door slamming shut behind
him.

The old woman is already somehow just a tiny black form in
the distance.

The studio door opens. Laughter fills the street.

GIRLS (O.S.)

Eddy, come back!

Edward looks back at the warm glow of the studio, then back
down the dark street.

He pivots and heads back inside.

The door slams shut.

EXT. SEATTLE STREET - DAY

GUPTIL (30s) hoists a sign to the top of a large new
downtown building. The sign reads: "CURTIS AND GUPTIL,
PHOTOGRAPHERS"

Edward on his knees, looking up at Clara.

EDWARD

Will you marry me, Clara?

Clara looking down at him, bewildered.

CLARA

Is this really happening?

Edward pulls out a ring - a nice one, not the ring of an evangelist's son but the ring an urban socialite gives to his bride. Clara starts to sob and covers her mouth.

EDWARD

That's a yes, right?

Clara nods. Both hands jump to her waist, with ease he lifts here and spins her around.

EDWARD (cont'd)

(loudly)

That's a yes, everyone.

Clara claps her hands and squeals.

EDWARD (cont'd)

Come on, you all have real bedrooms of your own, now.

Edward pulls Clara into the new studio. Ellen, Eva, Asahel, and Clara's SISTER follow. The new sign sways in the wind.

Asahel and the women run inside. Edward, alone, looks down the street one way, then turns his head and searches in the other direction.

EDWARD (cont'd)

(to self)

Where are you?

INT. TRAIN - DAY - END FLASHBACK

The American countryside flies past at high speed. Edward stares out the window.

EDWARD (V.O.)

Where are you, my princess?

The voice of a TRAIN VENDOR on Edward's train.

VENDOR (O.S.)

The end of an era.

The Vendor passes, holding newspapers aloft.

INT. MONTANA JAIL - NIGHT

Blood droplets on Upshaw's lifeless face.

VENDOR (V.O.)
A great man - taken from us.

A cold jail cell. Dudley frowns down at the body.

DUDLEY
No matter what we do, we can't
take the Indian out of 'em.

A black blanket is thrown over Upshaw's corpse.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

The crowded train car rocks, and Edward rocks with it.

VENDOR (O.S.)
(aloud to all)
JP Morgan, dead in Europe.

He raises his hand and the VENDOR comes over. Edward digs for a coin and takes a paper. He flips it over.

The face of JP Morgan stares back at Edward.

The date on the paper: March 31, 1913

INT. STEAMSHIP - DAY

Belle, on the deck of the ship. The Manhattan skyline emerges from the fog.

VENDOR (V.O.)
Who will take over his fortunes
now?

Black PORTERS move bags across the deck.

A RICH WOMAN (white), adorned with large jewels, smiles at Belle. A bit tipsy, she puts an arm on Belle's.

RICH WOMAN
New York, New York! Back to
civilization! I'm not sure how
much more souffles and wiener
schnitzels I can choke down!

Belle smiles and raises her chin. A false smile.

A Porter drops one of the Rich Woman's bags. The Woman screams:

RICH WOMAN (cont'd)

Pick that up, boy! If any of my valuables are broken, you'll pay for it with your hide, I swear to you. I can still find a way to have you lynched in any state in the Union, you know that, boy?

Belle lifts a small case. Before she can take a step, a Porter appears at her arm.

PORTER

Ma'am, I can take that for you.

BELLE

I'll get it myself.

EXT. MONTANA GRAVEYARD - DAY

A casket slides into place. On a rack over an open grave that may not be quite six feet, the cheap pine box rocks in the wind as the workers trudge off.

Upshaw's wife Mary and their children are the only mourners. The youngest DAUGHTER (8) holds a bouquet of wildflowers.

Dudley lurks in the background, spits on the ground, and wanders off.

INT. GRAND PLAZA HOTEL - DAY

JP Morgan's nose, even in death, is still hideously deformed.

The lid of a coffin closes over the purple monstrosity and slams shut, the sound echoing off the stone walls of the cathedral.

INT. SEATTLE MORTUARY - DAY

The sides of a modest coffin surround Ellen's peaceful face as a lid slides over it.

Eva, 42 but still dependent and wistful, looks down at the coffin.

She looks to her brother Asahel in despair.

Asahel, arms crossed, waits for a sign from heaven that never comes. He stands there, stone faced, saying nothing.

Eva looks over to Clara.

Clara frowns and reaches to Beth, now 16 but with eyes that seem much older. Beth does not move, and Clara gives up and trudges away.

Beth stands silently for a long time. Then.

BETH
Where's dad?

EXT. NYC STREET - DAY (1913)

A procession of dozens of automobiles. Edward pushes ONLOOKERS aside and cranes his neck.

Then - the sound of horseshoes on cobblestones.

A horse-drawn hearse follows the cars. On the sidewalk, Edward trots to keep pace with the galloping hooves.

A CROWD blocks his path. The hearse stops in front of Morgan's Madison Avenue home. PALLBEARERS draw the coffin out.

Through the spokes of the wheel of the hearse and between the space between the coffin and the Pallbearers, the green eyes of Belle da Costa Greene reflect Edward's gaze.

She pulls her green rabbit-fur coat close to her neck.

Edward pushes into the crowd, but BODYGUARDS do not let him pass in front of the Morgan estate. Edward cranes his neck, but Belle is gone.

Edward crosses the street and follows a woman in a long coat.

He spins her around, but...

It's not her.

Across the street, Edward sees Belle, and their eyes meet. She crosses the street and slips into a museum.

Edward follows.

A well-dressed man follows them - Richard Greener - but stops on the museum steps and watches as Edward goes inside.

INT. MUSEUM - DAY

Belle's green figure blends with the Greek statues of gods and goddesses. Edward joins her among the sculptures.

They walk in silence. Then.

BELLE

Did you find what you were looking for?

EDWARD

I found something. Something I wasn't looking for.

She comes close to him.

BELLE

Those are called revelations. The Bible's full of 'em.

EDWARD

Montana was different than when I was a kid paddling around in a canoe with my pop.

Her green rabbit-fur coat glimmers in the sunlight, the crisscrossed leather cords quiver with her heartbeat.

BELLE

The wilds where the same. You were different.

Edward turns away, then turns to look at her again.

EDWARD

If you could go back in time, would you do anything differently?

BELLE

I wouldn't be standing here if I could.

EDWARD

When I was a teenager I built a camera from a few scraps of pine and my dad's old lens from the war. I built a log cabin with my bare hands...

Belle turns away.

BELLE

I know what you're capable of,
Eddy.

EDWARD

What am I capable of?

Edward takes her arm and spins her around. They hold each other. The leather cords of her green coat strain under the pressure of their embrace.

BELLE

Giving me hope. But that's all it
is. Hope. Nothing more.

EDWARD

Clara and I are finished.

BELLE

JP and I are finished.

He pulls away and takes both of her hands, reassuringly.

EDWARD

You'll get what you want. You
always do.

BELLE

You can't know that, no one can.
The will is sealed until tomorrow.

EDWARD

He didn't forget about you.

She turns away from him.

BELLE

Hope and hope and more hope. I
can't live off hope. I need roof
tiles, Spanish, walls, Italian
frescoes, floor tiles, Egyptian
gazed.

EDWARD

What about using the stars as a
blanket?

Belle turns away and laughs. A smile comes over her face.

BELLE

An armadillo for a pillow.

A MUSEUM GUARD strolls into the room. Edward instinctively lets her go, and she slips out the door.

EXT. MUSEUM - MOMENTS LATER

Belle skips down the front steps of the museum.

Edward stops at the top step and watches her go. Belle turns to Edward and calls out.

BELLE

Let the show go on, right Eddy?

Belle jumps onto a passing trolley. Edward watches it rumble away.

In the shadows, a man also watches the trolley. Richard tracks the trolley as it vanishes. He follows on foot and disappears among a crowd of people.

INT. MORGAN ESTATE - DAY

A stack of paper quivers in the hands of a aged LAWYER. He frowns as he reads, then tosses the paper aside.

LAWYER

That is the last will and
testament of John Pierpont Morgan.

He looks up. A dozen people sit in the living room - RELATIVES of the late JP. The fireplace crackles.

The ticking of the clock fills the room. Belle, at the back, slips away.

INT. MORGAN LIBRARY - DAY

JP Morgan's massive mahogany desk, still in the same place it was before, glows in a pillar of light. A young man looks up from behind it - Morgan's son JACK.

He's good looking and smart, but he's no JP. Belle sits across from him. Jack slides a paper aside.

JACK

Congratulations! You're a wealthy
woman.

Belle smiles briefly, but it fades as soon as Jack turns away. He paces the room. Belle's slouched body language reveals utter defeat, but Jack rarely notices or cares about the needs of the hired help.

JACK (cont'd)
 You can go anywhere you want, do
 anything you want.

He lights a cigar.

JACK (cont'd)
 I'd be sad to lose you, but, I
 mean, why work when you have fifty
 thousand dollars up your skirt,
 right, I mean, that's a lot of
 dresses, right?

BELLE
 Sure.

Jack runs his hands over the books on the shelf. Books from
 every corner fo the world. Books Belle purchased.

JACK
 Pops really got off on this crap,
 didn't he?

Belle swallows hard. Jack turns his back to Belle, picks up
 a two-hundred-year-old leather-bound tome, and opens it.

JACK (cont'd)
 I mean, he got a stiffy off this
 but there's not one picture of a
 naked lady.

The hand-painted letters shimmer in the sunlight. He closes
 the book and drops it. The massive text slams on the desk.

Belle jumps in her seat. Jack spins around.

JACK (cont'd)
 What do I do with all this,
 this...stuff?

BELLE
 Keep it, sir. Definitely keep it.

JACK
 I told you to call me Jack.

Jack wanders to another table and sees one of Edward's
 prints.

JACK (cont'd)
 The only books I read are ledgers.
 And wow, worse than the Great Fire
 of 1910.

(MORE)

JACK (cont'd)

The Indian project has to go,
don't you think? I mean, bloated,
over budget, never gonna get done,
right?

BELLE

I saw to it that every penny
Edward was given was spent on the
project.

JACK

I'm not trying to blame you. I
apologize if I came across that
way.

He sits on the desk and looks Belle in the eye. His voice
able to convince anyone that he's actually sincere, even if
he isn't.

JACK (cont'd)

Thank you for everything you did
to move it along, but it's years
behind schedule, right? I mean,
this Curtis, what a character.
Decades behind schedule.

BELLE

No, you're quite right.

JACK

Yes, the pictures are beautiful.
Stunning. But these price tag...
yikes. That's a lot of dresses.
(beat)
I don't know.

Jack pours himself a short brandy and gulps it down.

JACK (cont'd)

Well, what do you think? Do we
keep pouring money into this hole?

Belle looks down at her hands. Jack stands and paces.

JACK (cont'd)

Well, if you want to continue the
project, it's up to you.

Jack slaps his hand on his head.

JACK (cont'd)

Sorry, I forgot you don't work
here anymore, you're retired at
age 25!

He really did forget. He assumes everyone works for him.

JACK (cont'd)
Does anyone else know the
difference between a Navajo and a
Cherokee?

Jack picks up a newspaper and heads towards the exit.

JACK (cont'd)
Listen, I assumed you'd be
retiring but I'm not firing you.
The job's yours, if you want it.

BELLE
What job?

Jack pauses. He has no idea. He blurts out something that sounds right.

JACK
Head librarian. Head of
collections. Just run the place,
make it go away.

At the doorway, an ATTENDANT puts on his coat. He turns to her.

JACK (cont'd)
If you want to keep working.

BELLE
And the Indian project?

JACK
Don't know, don't know, don't
care, don't care. Send Curtist
back to the Badlands for another
decade if you want. That's
probably how long it's going to
take. Or keep him here as your
little pet - I hear he's flat
broke and behind in his alimony.
I'd leave all those details to
you, Ms. da Costa Greene, if you
want the job.

BELLE
Alimony?

Jack throws her the paper. A Seattle newspaper - the headline reads: Curtis Divorce Final.

JACK

He owes her a couple grand, poor sap.

Belle reads it intently.

JACK (cont'd)

You buy books, he makes books. You two wouldn't have made for a bad couple, right. You've got cash for quite a honeymoon, if you want to scrape that bum off the sidewalk.

Belle unconsciously covers her left hand with her right. Jack flies from the room, leaving Belle alone.

INT. BELVEDERE HOTEL - NIGHT

Edward, bare-chested, sits on the floor with a bottle of whiskey. The telephone rings - a phone that wasn't there in 1906. Electric light switches now instead of candles, and a bucket of sand on the floor by the door.

Edward crawls to the desk and grabs the telephone.

EDWARD

Yes? Hello?

A long silence. And then.

BELLE (O.S.)

Progress report.

EXT. MORGAN LIBRARY - NIGHT

Belle opens the door and rushes out of the library, a smile on her face. A voice cuts through the air:

RICHARD GREENER

Belle?

Belle spins. Richard, in a smart suit and tie, stands on the sidewalk a few steps away. Belle freezes.

BELLE

Richard.

RICHARD GREENER

Richard?

Belle stiffens. Richard takes a step closer.

RICHARD GREENER (cont'd)
Da Costa Green? How ridiculous.

BELLE
What are you doing here?

RICHARD GREENER
What kind of a name is that?

BELLE
That's my name.

RICHARD GREENER
No it isn't.

BELLE
It is now. You can't be here.

RICHARD GREENER
Why not? I have a right to see
my--

BELLE
Stop. Don't, just go away.

RICHARD GREENER
I have a right to see my daughter.

Belle looks up at him.

BELLE
Am I still your daughter?

RICHARD GREENER
You'll always be my daughter.

BELLE
What about that Japanese whore?

RICHARD GREENER
That was another me, another time.

Richard walks closer to her.

RICHARD GREENER (cont'd)
I want to start over with you and
your mother.

People passing by give them odd glances - who is that Black man trying to grab Belle?

She backs around the corner. Richard gets close, holds her, and they hug. Tears flow from Belle's eyes.

RICHARD GREENER (cont'd)
Can we just go back in time and
start all over again?

Belle bursts into tears, turns, and runs back into the library. Richard paces back and forth outside, then tries the door.

A Morgan Bodyguard bursts from the building and a Police Officer comes from behind.

BODYGUARD
Hey you, boy, what're you thinking
touching Morgan property with your
filthy hands.

Richard backs away and runs into the Police Officer.

POLICE OFFICER
You get on out of her. The
library's closed to Negroes.

Richard bolts off into a crowd and is gone.

INT. BELVEDERE HOTEL - NIGHT

Electric lights crackle. Edward, dressed to see Belle, paces back and forth in his room, picks up the phone, then replaces it without calling.

He takes off his shirt and lies on the hard wooden floor.

He sips a whiskey and lights a cigarette. The lights outside dim.

INT. MORGAN LIBRARY - NIGHT

Belle runs her hands along the spines of old books. Her fingernails caress the hundreds of texts she has amassed for the titan over the years. She pulls one down, then another.

She arranges the large tomes into a rectangle. Green tucks a medieval tapestry under one corner, then another. A queen-sized bed made of thick volumes forms among the bookcases.

She places her fur coat over a leather book and lays her head on it. She pulls another ancient tapestry over herself and closes her eyes. The library goes dark.

EXT. BELVEDERE HOTEL - NIGHT

Edward stands on the balcony overlooking the city. Red sky fills the large window as the sun rises.

EXT. MORGAN LIBRARY - DAY

A well-dressed African-American paces to and fro - Richard Greener again.

He discretely glances at the huge doors of the Morgan Library.

The Police Man walks by, and Richard turns his face away.

INT. MORGAN LIBRARY - DAY

Belle puts away a book - the one she used as a pillow - then smooths her dress. She walks to her modest desk and slowly sits down in her seat.

She looks at the front entrance. People walk back and forth, going on with their ordinary lives. Her Assistant races in casually, sees Belle, and switches to a more professional demeanor.

ASSISTANT

Miss Belle, are you? I thought...

BELLE

We'll see, I, my mind isn't yet made up.

Her Assistant steps away.

Belle turns back to her desk. Belle places her hands flat on the desk, closes her eyes, and lets the warmth of the wood soothe her palms as the morning sun warms her face.

INTERCUT INT. BELVEDERE HOTEL/INT. MORGAN LIBRARY - DAY

Edward bolts upright off the floor phone rings. He crawls to the phone and takes the receiver but waits a few moments to catch his breath.

BELLE

What's it like to sleep under the stars?

Edward lays back down on the floor with the phone.

EDWARD

A roof, a house, sure is nice. But at the same time confining. I feel trapped sometimes when I wake up and see these walls. But to be outside in a sleeping bag, on the bank of a river looking up at those millions and millions of stars. It's something grand, something like being on God's doorstep. Glorious.

BELLE

You'll show me?

EDWARD

Where are you?

BELLE

At work, of course.

EDWARD

Work? I thought...

BELLE

I'm just doing my homework. Progress report, Mr. Curtis? Tell me - are you going to finish this? Finish what you started?

His brow furls. A long pause. Then.

EDWARD

I want to save them.
(beat)
I want to save them all.

Tears roll down her cheeks faster than she can wipe them.

BELLE

Of course.

EDWARD

It's something I've had to do since I first met Princess Angeline.

BELLE

What's so special about her?

EDWARD

Her father gave away the land where the city of Seattle now sits.

(MORE)

EDWARD (cont'd)

Thousands of acres of fertile land teeming with salmon and lush forests. A garden of Eden here on earth. He signed it away, and all his people left. All of them except her. Kikosoblu. She refused to leave the city. She refused to speak their language, the language of the whites. She refused to be something she was not. Until the day she died, she stayed true to who she was.

(beat)

That's what I admire about her.

(beat)

That's what I strive to become.

(beat)

That's what I see in you. Your strength. Your intelligence.

BELLE

No, no, no, no, no. That's not me.

She shakes her head and holds back tears.

EDWARD

You inspire me, you make me strong.

BELLE

The truth is that I'm like a child, reaching out for any shiny thing in front of me. It doesn't matter what's dangling there, I just reach for it. I don't always even know what I'm grabbing for, but it looks pretty, if it glitters and makes noise, I just have to have it. If there's some scroll from some tomb from some guy from some past era, I don't even have to know what it is - if the priest says it's sacred and holy, and everyone tells me it's the last one on earth, well, then, I grab my shovel, I uncover it, unwrap it, unearth it, expose it. If someone tells me that you can't have it, I want it twice as bad. And if anyone gets close to me - well, I'm the one holding the shovel.

The phone goes dead.

EXT. MORGAN LIBRARY - NIGHT

Belle races out of the library as the daylight sun sets through the skyscrapers. Richard is there, and Belle stops.

Under the streetlamp, the two pause and look at one another in silence. Richard holds out his hand. Belle covers her mouth with her gloved hand, turns, and runs the opposite direction.

EXT. MONTANA GRAVEYARD - DAY

Mary, a basket of groceries in one hand and her children in tow in the other, stands over a fresh burial plot. The youngest daughter drops a daisy on the soil.

Voices of Men jeering snap her back to reality.

MARY

Come on, that's enough.

INT. MORGAN LIBRARY - DAY

The hand of a young millionaire Jack swirls a fancy pen, and the signature of JP Morgan Jr. bleeds into the paper.

JACK

Just, don't buy any more god damn books Ms. Head Librarian.

Jack stands. Belle smiles at her new boss. He gives her a warm handshake and makes towards the exit.

JACK (cont'd)

Burn them, give them away, I don't know. It's your mess, now.

Jack looks down at his desk. A photograph lays in the light. Kikosoblu's stare is knowing and mournful.

INT. TRAIN TERMINAL - DAY

The sun streams in through the skylights. Belle and Edward in the center of the crowded station, walking in silence across the marble hall.

They turn down a corridor, a vaulted stone promenade linked by small arched chambers. She speaks without looking at him.

BELLE

Congratulations.

Edward turns to her and they stop.

EDWARD

That's it? Just, it's funded?

BELLE

Same terms as before. You finish the volumes and keep selling subscriptions.

EDWARD

Keep coming back to New York to scrounge for scraps you mean.

BELLE

Those are the terms.

He pulls her close.

EDWARD

His terms or yours?

She looks up at him.

BELLE

I just wanted a proper goodbye, Eddy.

They hold each other. They almost kiss. Millimeters from kissing.

EDWARD

You call this proper?

Edward let's Belle decide what to do next. Belle waits to see what Edward does. Hundreds of people pass by, not noticing the two standing there holding one another. Time passes. Then. Belle walks away.

She goes to the far wall. Edward lets her go.

Standing in the corner of the limestone chamber, Belle puts her gloved hand to the wall and puts her face to the stone.

Edward starts towards her, then looks up.

The stone arch that Belle stands next to curves up from where she's standing back down to the floor on the opposite side of the chamber.

Edward moves to the corner opposite Belle. He puts his ear to the stone pillar. Belle's voice - as if she were whispering into Edward's ear.

BELLE

I hope you find what you're
looking for out there, Eddy.

EDWARD

I hope you find what you're
looking for...

He turns. She looks at him from across the room. Edward touches his chest.

EDWARD (cont'd)

In here.

INT. CURTIS AND GUPTIL STUDIO - DAY - FLASHBACK

Edward, young and eager to prove himself to the world, holds the leathery hand of Kikosoblu - Princess Angeline.

The old woman sits, her scarf framing her face. She reaches up to untie it.

EDWARD

No.

Kikosoblu pauses.

EDWARD (cont'd)

You're perfect the way you are.

She settles into the chair, looks at the camera and holds a smile - a fake smile.

Edward stands next to his camera, motionless.

He waits. Her smile fades.

Kikosoblu, head turned away slightly, stares off into the distance, into the past, into eternity.

Edward vanishes behind his camera. We hear a faint click.

QUICK CUTS - ACTUAL IMAGES BY EDWARD CURTIS

- The image of Kikosoblu, warm tones and soft focus draw us to her narrow eyes and wrinkled mouth.

- A portrait of another Native American, then another, then another.

The images flash faster, then faster and faster.

Then, hundreds of images blast by, the eyes of thousands of Native Americans that Edward photographed on his 30-year expedition stare out into time.

INT. TRAIN TERMINAL - DAY

A CROWD OF PASSENGERS floods the corridor. Belle vanishes among the masses. Edward is alone.

INT. LA APARTMENT - DAY (1950)

A mail slot opens - a few letters slide through and tumble into the entryway of a modest but tidy 1950s studio apartment. A woman's hand scoops them up.

BETH (mid 50's) rifles through the letters, making her way into the apartment without looking up.

EDWARD CURTIS (in his 80's now), gray hair and slightly bald yet still devilishly charming, sits up from the couch. Now, all but the faintest glimmer of the fire that was once in his belly is gone.

Beth tosses the letters onto the coffee table, leaning in to kiss her father on the forehead. Edward stands and opens a letter, reads a newspaper clipping, then chokes.

EDWARD

She's gone.

BETH

Who?

EDWARD

A friend.

Beth picks up the clipping, scans it, and frowns.

BETH

She was pretty.

(beat)

Did you love her?

EDWARD

Belle?

BETH

Mother.

Edward's knees shake. His legs buckle. He collapses back on the couch. A small camera lens tumbles to the floor.

EDWARD
(weakly)
My princess.

BETH
Dad? Dad?

Beth's face, warped by the camera lens. Beth falls to her knees by his side. His hand releases the paper. It lays flat on the rag carpet.

A black and white image of a young woman in a long dress and elegant hat, Belle da Costa Greene, stares out from among the black borders of newspaper columns.

ON BLACK:

Belle da Costa Greene amassed one of the most impressive private book collections in the world, then made them available to the public after JP Morgan's death.

She ran the Morgan library for the rest of her life. She died alone and unmarried with no children, and burned all her papers shortly before she passed away in 1950.

No one knew she was passing as white until decades later.

INT. LA APARTMENT - DAY (1952)

Beth peels back a piece of 1950s wallpaper. She reaches in and withdraws a massive leather portfolio. It has the letters XX on the side in gold.

MOMENTS LATER: A pile of 20 huge matching leather-bound books on the floor. Beth cracks one, the first page blank except the words: "To Beth, my one and only princess. Edward S. Curtis"

ON BLACK:

Over the course of thirty years, Edward Curtis made more than ten thousand images of Native Americans, often while they were performing ceremonies illegal under U.S. law.

His team's written and audio records of songs, folktales, and languages are in many cases the only surviving documentation of many North American tribal cultures.

He died penniless in his daughter's apartment two years after Belle's death after going bankrupt and selling his project to JP Morgan Jr. for next to nothing.

THE END