

WOODCHOPPER

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. CENTRAL OTAGO - DAY

It's 1863. A hot Nor-Wester is doing its best to bake the undulating tussock of Central Otago.

There's a small, one-bedroom pioneer shack in the distance and a sound.

A loud and methodical CRACK! CRACK! CRACK! echoes out across the landscape.

INT. FRONT OF THE SHACK - DAY

A man in a soiled and tatty suit lays unconscious on a horse.

He's in his mid-thirties, face down on the mount and drooling into its mane. There's a medical bag strapped to his saddle. He is the DOC.

ANGLE on a LITTLE GIRL'S face in the shack window.

INT. SHACK - DAY

It's a humble place. Apart from the sepia photograph of a woman hanging on the wall there's not much else in there. A few items of furniture, a table, a sideboard. The kitchen consists of a pot-belly stove and a water basin.

The little girl staring out the window is kneeling on a chair. She's seven-years-old, a real cutey and her name is CAPABILITY.

The novelty of seeing the comatose man on the horse keeps Capability riveted to the spot.

EXT. BEHIND THE SHACK - DAY

We follow the head of an axe as it swings and splits a log.

CRACK!

The axe blows are surprisingly accurate considering the age of the boy delivering them.

NOAH is twelve-years-old and barefoot. He swings the axe again and again. It's hot, hard work and one mistake could cost him a toe.

Noah picks up another log and places it on the chopping block. Before he swings he wipes his brow and looks at a distant snow-capped mountain range.

He licks his lips - what he wouldn't give for some of that frozen water right now.

I/E. FRONT OF THE SHACK - DAY

A fly lands on the Doc's nose and it's enough to tip the scales. Very slowly and somewhat gracefully the Doc slides off the horse and hits the ground with a thud.

Inside the shack Capability flinches.

EXT. BEHIND THE SHACK - DAY

Noah's still chopping wood when she appears at the door.

CAPABILITY

Noah.

He ignores her.

CAPABILITY

Noah!

NOAH

What?

CAPABILITY

There's a man.

Noah stops chopping.

CAPABILITY

There's a man on the ground.

NOAH

Where?

CAPABILITY

Out front.

NOAH

You better not be lying
Capability...

Capability crosses her heart.

CAPABILITY

Hope to die if I eat a pig's eye.

Noah swings the axe into the block one last time then walks around the side of the shack. Capability follows close behind.

EXT. FRONT OF THE SHACK - DAY

Noah peers around the corner and sees the Doc. Quickly, he ducks out of sight.

CAPABILITY

Told you so.

NOAH

Shoosh!

Noah thinks.

NOAH

Go get my axe.

Capability ignores him and instead, strides straight toward the Doc and his horse.

NOAH

What are you doing?

Noah's torn between running for his axe or following his sister. He looks both ways, his indecision palpable.

Capability reaches the Doc in the dirt. His foot is still caught in a stirrup and there's blood on his lapel. She hears Noah's footsteps. He stops a few metres behind her.

CAPABILITY

He's dead.

Noah's cranes his neck to get a better view.

NOAH

Sure?

Capability nudges the Doc with her foot.

CAPABILITY

He smells dead.

Now Noah walks over and joins her. He leans down and puts his ear to the Doc's face.

NOAH

No. He's alive.

The kids stare down at him for a while.

NOAH

Just leave him.

LATER - NIGHT

The Doc's still out there, on his back in the moonlight.

NOAH (O.S.)
What's he doing now?

CAPABILITY (O.S.)
Nothing.

INT. SHACK - NIGHT

Noah's stoking the fire in the pot belly.

Capability's on the chair staring out the window again.

CAPABILITY
What if he's nice?

NOAH
What if he's not?

Noah gazes into the fire for a bit. Slowly, his eyes wander up to the sepia photograph of the woman on the wall and then...

NOAH
Come on.

EXT. FRONT OF THE SHACK - NIGHT

The two kids drag the Doc across the front yard by his legs.

The back of his head whacks the step on the way in.

EXT. MILES FROM THE SHACK - NIGHT

Elsewhere, out there in the darkness an UNKNOWN RIDER makes his way over the tussock.

The Rider reigns in his horse and dismounts. He kneels, picks at the ground for a moment then stands and lights a cheroot.

The light from the match is sudden and bright. It reveals the Rider's unholy eye - clouded, ugly and blind.

His other eye, the good one, is almost as cold. It stares menacingly into the distance.

The flame from the match dies down...

CUT TO:

And becomes the soft flicker of the flame in an oil lamp.

INT. SHACK - THE ONLY BEDROOM - NIGHT

The lamp is sitting on a stool next to a double bed.

If the kids were huddled any closer to the edge of the bed they'd fall off. Capability's on the outside snuggled up next to Noah. She's sound asleep but he's awake, sitting up and keeping a watchful eye on...

The Doc, fully clothed, on the other side of the bed - they're top-and-tail with him!

Noah fights sleep but it's a losing battle. His eyelids grow heavy, droop and he's almost out when...

DOC
(in his sleep)
NO!

Noah jumps a mile and for a moment the stress of the situation is visible on the young kid's face.

BEDROOM - MORNING

Capability's smiling face slowly comes into focus.

The Doc's waking. He stares up at her.

DOC
Hello.

Capability holds out a hip flask.

CAPABILITY
Your medicine.

The Doc recognizes the flask.

CAPABILITY
It was in your bag.

The Doc tries to sit up but is suddenly wracked by pain. He grimaces.

Capability helps him and, now sitting, the Doc peels his jacket and shirt off his shoulder revealing the bloody wound underneath.

He holds out his hand half expecting Capability to hand him the flask but she's frozen - she's never seen so much blood!

The Doc gently prizes the flask from her and pours the contents onto his shoulder.

DOC
(through gritted teeth)
Bastard!

CAPABILITY
You swore.

DOC

No. That's just the name of the man who shot me. Bastard Bum that's his name.

Capability giggles with delight.

NOAH (O.S.)

You can't stay here.

Noah's standing in the doorway.

DOC

Go get your father.

The kids don't move they just stare at the Doc. It's an awkward moment and then, the penny drops.

DOC

(to Capability)

You're alone?

CAPABILITY

Noah's here.

NOAH

We don't need anyone. We don't need you.

The Doc smiles at Noah's bravado.

DOC

Well, you must need to eat.

KITCHEN - LATER

A rabbit carcass, stewed and in the pot.

Noah's at the head of the table, Capability sits opposite the Doc who has his arm in a sling - she serves. Both kids look as if they've washed and put on clean clothes.

When everyone has a plate the Doc picks up his fork and takes a mouthful.

Neither kid has begun to eat yet, they bow their heads.

NOAH & CAPABILITY

God bless the food which now we take to do us good for Jesus sake.
Amen.

The Doc looks puzzled, he's had meals with adults less grown up than these two.

Grace finished, the children eat.

NOAH
You can't stay.

DOC
(with a mouthful)
So you said. Can I at least finish
my plate?

Capability looks at Noah disappointed.

DOC
(to Capability)
Good rabbit.

CAPABILITY
Noah trapped it.

They chew in silence. The Doc puts his fork down for a moment.

DOC
What happened to them?

NOAH
None of your business. Mr...

DOC
They call me the...

UNKNOWN RIDER (O.S.)
DOC!

BANG! A gun goes off outside. The bullet shatters the nearest window, narrowly misses Capability and hits the sepia photo of the woman hanging on the wall.

Doc hits the deck but the kids are confused. He grabs Capability and pulls her under the table.

DOC
Noah. Get down!

Noah clambers under the table as well.

DOC
Do you have a gun?

NOAH
No.

EXT. SHACK - DAY

The Unknown Rider is holding a gun and pointing it directly at the shack. He's enjoying himself.

He casually unloads another four shots into the place, smashes more windows, splinters timber.

The Doc and kids flinch with each shot.

UNKNOWN RIDER

Don't make me waste anymore bullets
than I have to Doc. I know you're
in there. I can smell you.

INT. SHACK - DAY

The three of them still huddled under the table.

NOAH

Who is he?

CAPABILITY

Bastard Bum.

NOAH

Capability!

DOC

You have to get out of here.

NOAH

This is our house!

The Doc puts his hands over Capability's ears.

DOC

I don't have time to argue Noah so
I'll make this real simple. This
man will shoot me then come in here
and slit you and your sister's
throats.

He lifts his hands off Capability's ears.

DOC

I'm going out there and when I do
you two head for the back door. Run
as fast as you can and don't look
back.

CAPABILITY

Is he going to hurt you again?

DOC

Don't worry about me. I can take
care of myself.

The Doc clambers out from under the table and heads for the
front door. Before he opens it he looks back at the children
cowering under the table. Capability's crying.

DOC

Clear out you two. You hear me!

And with that he steps outside.

I/E. SHACK - DAY

Over the Rider's shoulder. The Doc's standing by the shack, his good arm raised.

DOC
I'm unarmed.

Although the kids are scared their immediate reaction, rather than to do what they're told, is to crawl over and sneak a peek out the window.

It's the first time they've glimpsed the Rider and he's truly a filthy and imposing beast. Like a lamb to the slaughter the Doc walks slowly toward him.

CAPABILITY
We have to run Noah. We have to do like he said.

NOAH
Go on. I'm right behind you.

CAPABILITY
Noah.

NOAH
Go!

Capability runs out the back but Noah keeps looking out the window, watching as the scene unfolds.

EXT. SHACK - DAY

The Unknown Rider walks over to Doc. He has a ridiculously large gun.

UNKNOWN RIDER
Anyone else in there?

DOC
No. Just get it over with.

The Rider walks over and pistol whips the Doc to the ground then stands over him.

UNKNOWN RIDER
Don't tell me what to do Doc. I've been following you for days I intend to enjoy myself.

And with that he kicks the Doc in the guts, hard and more than once. It's a brutal attack and seems to go on forever.

The Doc's doubled over. He spits blood into the dirt.

Now the Rider straddles the Doc and grinds the barrel of his gun into his shoulder. The Doc cries out in pain.

INT. SHACK - DAY

Noah's seen enough. He backs away from the window, turns and sprints out the back door.

WE CUT BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN A CLOSE UP OF NOAH'S SPRINTING LEGS AND THE TWO MEN OUTSIDE.

DOC
You sick bastard.

The Rider grins, an evil toothless smile. He slowly raises his gun...

Noah's legs churn...

..and cocks it.

Noah keeps running.

The Rider takes aim.

Noah's really sprinting now. The background's a blur.

UNKNOWN RIDER
It's been a pleasure killing you
Doc.

The Rider's finger is around the trigger and begins to squeeze.

The Doc shuts his eyes and prepares for the inevitable.

Suddenly, Noah's legs stop.

The shot never comes. The Doc opens his eyes just in time to see the big man gently sway and topple forward.

Noah's standing behind him!

The Doc looks up at the boy and then at the Unknown Rider face down in the dirt.

The axe is imbedded in the fallen brute's back - his good eye now as lifeless as his bad.

The Doc's shocked, speechless. Noah looks down at him.

NOAH
I'm good with an axe.

EXT. A HILL - DAY

The sun sets and Capability looks on as Noah and the Doc, with his one good arm, pat the dirt on a freshly filled grave.

They finish up and for a moment all three look down at the mound of earth. Noah and Capability cross themselves.

As they walk back toward the shack...

DOC

That was a very brave thing you did
Noah.

Noah doesn't answer.

DOC

I should get going soon.

CAPABILITY

No. Stay. Please. Noah..?

Noah thinks about it. Finally he pipes up.

NOAH

I could catch another rabbit.

DOC

I'd like that.

Capability reaches over and holds the Doc's arm.

We cut to a close up of the cross planted at the head of the grave.

Carved into the timber are the words. **R.I.P. BASTARD BUM.**

THE END