

DEVIL'S GATE

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FADE IN:

EXT. MORMON PIONEER CAMPSITE - DAY

In extreme close up: an eyeball. Lifeless.

A FLY lands on the pupil.

JOSIAH (O.S.)
Another one gone.

Pulling out, we see the eye belongs to an ox, dead on the ground. More flies buzz around it. The poor beast of burden looks like it spent its last moments in diseased agony.

JOSIAH BROWN (American, 50s, kind with weary eyes), in a duster and cowboy hat, squats beside the ox, petting it.

It's a gray, windy day. Cold but not quite freezing.

As we continue to pull out, we see others in western garb-- men with hats and beards and women in dresses and bonnets. It's a whole crowd-- a company-- of MORMON PIONEERS.

SUPERIMPOSE: THE MORMON TRAIL, WYOMING, 1857

JOSIAH (cont'd)
Poor thing.

Josiah sighs and stands up. He looks over the company. They look back with scared, uncertain eyes.

Josiah masks his own fear with feigned confidence.

JOSIAH (cont'd)
The rescue party is on its way. We must have faith.

DUTCH COMPANY MEMBER
We sent out for the rescue party weeks ago!

IRISH COMPANY MEMBER
We've lost half our oxen already!
The rest are sick, and we have no food for them, let alone ourselves!

The company starts MURMURING, some in agreement, some doubting Josiah's leadership. As they talk over each other, we push in on a FAMILY of FOUR in the center of the crowd.

The mother, ELIZA HATCH (mid-30s) is faithful and resilient. MORGAN HATCH (late 30s), the father, seems more uncertain.

Their daughter, PHOEBE (15, growing independent), and son, NOAH (10, gentle-hearted) look for their reactions.

ELIZA

It's going to be alright, children.
God always keeps His promises.

The Hatches speak with working-class English accents. Eliza looks to Morgan for support.

MORGAN

Right he does.

Phoebe sees right through Morgan's doubt.

JOSIAH

Everyone, everyone!

Beat. Josiah sticks his pinky fingers in his mouth and blows a piercing WHISTLE through the company. They all HUSH.

JOSIAH (cont'd)

I will put it to you straight, brothers and sisters. We've lost our oxen. Our handcarts are in disrepair. And you know our rations get smaller and smaller. As captain of the company, I regret allowing us to travel ahead this late in the season. But let us not forget what God has said: "I will not forget thee, O house of Israel."

Eliza squeezes her children close.

JOSIAH (cont'd)

"Behold I have engraven thee upon the palms of my hands." You've all come so far. From Ireland, Finland, Denmark, you name it. God has blessed you with the restored gospel, and He will bless you that you will make it to Zion. The rescue party will come. We just need to hold on a little longer.

NATHAN (PRE-LAP)

Next.

EXT. MORMON PIONEER CAMPSITE - EVENING

The Hatches reach the front of the line for the FOOD WAGON. They each hold a tin dish.

Noah hands his to Morgan, who extends it to NATHAN BRADSHAW (Josiah's right-hand man, one eye).

Nathan scoops a small spoonful of flour into the dish. Morgan waits for more.

NATHAN
(apologetically)
Next.

Eliza takes the dish from Morgan and hands it back to Noah.

NOAH
This is it?

ELIZA
We are grateful for what the Lord gives, Noah.

Eliza holds out her dish to receive her portion.

ELIZA (cont'd)
Thank you, Brother Bradshaw.

Phoebe appears unsatisfied with her portion, and Morgan is plain miserable. The Hatches make their way to one of the several campfires burning throughout the site.

NOAH
Flour, always flour. Why didn't they ration any sugar?

ELIZA
We receive what the Lord gives, Noah, and we are grateful.

PHOEBE
Noah, if you're sick of flour, I'll eat your portion.

MORGAN
How about we split it, Phoebe?

NOAH
Maaaaaa!

ELIZA
They're teasing you, sweetheart.

The Hatches sit on a log by the fire. Noah devours his flour in one swift bite, then plops his head on Eliza's lap. She takes tiny bites, savoring each bit.

Morgan spoons up a bit of flour when he sees--

A HUSBAND across the fire pit giving his portion to his WIFE. She thanks her husband in Dutch.

Morgan looks down at his scant meal. He musters his strength and offers it to Eliza.

ELIZA (cont'd)
No thank you, I have plenty.

With relief, Morgan spoons his entire portion into his mouth just in time for Noah to pipe in:

NOAH
Can I have some more, Pa?

With guilt, Morgan swallows.

Meanwhile at the SUPPLY WAGON-- Nathan scrapes a bit of flour from the bottom of the bag to serve to another hungry person. Josiah approaches from behind.

JOSIAH (O.C.)
How are the rations, Brother Bradshaw?

NATHAN
Ah. One moment, Brother Brown.

Nathan takes one last scoop from the bag and serves it to the FINAL PERSON in line. He forces a smile and nod to them.

The person walks away. Once Nathan is sure they're out of earshot, he turns to Josiah.

Nathan flips the bag of flour over and shakes it. Only a bit of dust comes out. Josiah can't bear to look. He paces away from the wagon and looks up to the heavens, exasperated. Stars glimmer against the black sky.

JOSIAH
I could go up ahead and get supplies from Fort Bridger.

NATHAN
It's a week's round-trip. And with what money?

JOSIAH
Why don't we try hunting?

NATHAN
Probably our best bet. 'Course, you risk the wrath of the Indians.
(MORE)

NATHAN (cont'd)
You'll have to find someone to go
with you. I'll be no help to ya
without my good eye.

Josiah scans the camp. Hungry families huddle up around the
fires. Josiah's eyes land on the Hatches.

NATHAN (cont'd)
Good luck convincing his wife.

EXT. CAMPSITE - FIRESIDE - NIGHT

Josiah sits down next to the Hatches.

JOSIAH
Evenin', Hatches.

ELIZA
Hello, Brother Brown.

JOSIAH
Phoebe, right? And.. I know it's a
prophet's name... Obadiah?

NOAH
Noah!!

JOSIAH
Ohh, that's right. Of course.

NOAH
(whiny)
How much longer til we reach Zion?

ELIZA
Noah! I'm sorry, Brother Brown.
I've told them what God told the
prophet Joseph Smith when he was
jailed for restoring the gospel.
"Thine adversity and thine
afflictions shall be but a small
moment."

JOSIAH
"And then, if thou endure it well,
God shall exalt thee on high."
That's right.

MORGAN
Did you know Brother Joseph?

JOSIAH
Did I? Why, he baptized me.

Morgan and Eliza share a wowed look.

MORGAN

What's it like? To know a prophet?

JOSIAH

Like a fire burning in my soul. I imagine it's not too far off from meeting Christ Himself. I get the same feeling every time I speak to Brother Brigham.

(beat)

Brigham Young personally called me to lead this company. He said, "Brother Brown, it won't be easy, but if you follow the Lord's guidance, the company will arrive safely in Zion." I don't know how much longer it will be, Noah, but we will get there.

Josiah picks up a stick off the ground and prods the fire.

JOSIAH (cont'd)

But I could use your father's help.

Morgan straightens himself.

JOSIAH (cont'd)

I hear you're something of a hunter, Morgan.

MORGAN

Well, um...

Morgan shifts around on the log and looks to Eliza. She places an arm around Morgan's lower back.

ELIZA

Morgan hasn't hunted in years.

JOSIAH

My apologies. Word spreads around camp. I was under the impression that you were an expert game hunter in England.

ELIZA

Perhaps there was a time when that was true.

JOSIAH

We could really use a good shot, Morgan.

(MORE)

JOSIAH (cont'd)

We just need something to tide the company over until the rescue party arrives.

ELIZA

Morgan sold his guns to buy our ship passage.

JOSIAH

You can use mine or Brother Bradshaw's. Hell, take both.

ELIZA

He--

JOSIAH

(frustrated)

Thank you, Sister Hatch. I'd like to hear Morgan's answer himself.

Morgan looks at Eliza. They seem to have a whole conversation with their eyes. In the end, Eliza wins.

MORGAN

No, Josiah. I'm sorry.

Josiah sighs.

JOSIAH

Remember... the sooner you get to Zion, the sooner you can be sealed as a family in the temple.

Josiah walks away.

I/E. CAMPSITE - TENT - NIGHT

WIND BELLOWS as the company members squeeze together inside their tent for warmth. The tent, designed for about 15, now houses at least two dozen. Lanterns are still lit as people settle in for a night's rest on the cold, hard ground.

Eliza holds Phoebe close on one side and Noah on the other. Morgan lies on the opposite side of Phoebe.

Eliza reads aloud from a brown *BOOK OF MORMON*.

ELIZA

"...if there be no faith among the children of men God can do no miracle among them; wherefore, he showed not himself until after their faith."

Noah can hardly keep his eyes open, and Phoebe half-listens. Morgan pays full attention as he stares at the tent's roof.

ELIZA (cont'd)
"Behold, it was the faith of Alma
and Amulek that caused the prison
to tumble to the--"

The lanterns are extinguished. Eliza puts the book down.

ELIZA (cont'd)
Goodnight, children. I love you.

PHOEBE
Goodnight.

Noah's already asleep. Morgan grabs Phoebe by the waist and rolls her over himself so that he can be next to Eliza.

PHOEBE (cont'd)
(laughing)
Pa...

MORGAN
Goodnight, Phoebe.

Phoebe settles in and closes her eyes. Morgan holds Eliza tight as they look into each other's eyes.

MORGAN (cont'd)
He may be right. The sooner we get
food, the sooner we get to Zion,
the sooner we're sealed for
eternity. That's what this is all
for, right?

ELIZA
Yes, but... it's not your
responsibility.

MORGAN
You're right.

ELIZA
Look at me, Morgan. It will be
fine. The rescue party will come.
Or Brother Brown can take... *anyone*
else.

Eliza closes her eyes as Morgan lies awake.

I/E. TENT - MORNING

Eliza stretches and opens her eyes. Morgan is no longer beside her. She sits up and nudges Noah.

NOAH

I'm too hungry to get up.

Noah rolls over on top of Phoebe.

PHOEBE

(sleepily)

Get off!

ELIZA

Children!

Beat.

The tent is quiet, but there's a commotion stirring outside.

ELIZA (cont'd)

C'mon, then.

EXT. CAMPSITE - MOMENTS LATER

Eliza glides through camp with Phoebe and Noah trailing behind her. She finds a crowd circled near the supply wagon. She can see Morgan standing near the center, so she pushes her way through until she reaches him.

In the center of the crowd, old, frail SISTER OLDHAM (elderly, malnourished) is held by JOSIAH and her HUSBAND.

Nathan makes his way through the crowd with the empty bag of flour. He scrapes anything he can from the bottom.

NATHAN

This is all we have left.

Nathan spoons a tiny amount of flour into Sister Oldham's mouth. Hardly any gets past her chapped lips before she coughs it up.

BROTHER OLDHAM

It's alright, dear.

SISTER OLDHAM

I'm... not going to see Zion.

Brother Oldham squeezes his wife's hand. She musters a faint smile, which turns into a frown, and then nothing as she passes away. Josiah closes her eyelids.

Josiah looks up and makes eye contact with Morgan.

EXT. CAMPSITE - DAY

THUD! A shovel hits the cold, hard ground, barely making a dent. Nathan raises the shovel again. THUD!

Nathan gives an apologetic look to Brother Oldham.

BROTHER OLDHAM
Best not waste your time.
(beat)
Put her in a tree. So the wolves
don't get her.

EXT. CAMPSITE - LATER

Sister Oldham's body, wrapped in blankets is hoisted into a tree by a Josiah, Nathan, and Morgan with a rope. Brother Oldham watches with sad eyes.

As they pull, Josiah leans into Morgan's ear.

JOSIAH
Sister Oldham could be the first of
many.

Eliza steps beside Brother Oldham and touches his arm. He pats her hand in gratitude. The men keep pulling.

JOSIAH (cont'd)
I need your help, Morgan. Even if
you just helped me hold the gun,
for heaven's sake. Can you imagine
how far one buffalo or elk would go
toward helping this company?

MORGAN
Eliza would kill me.

Sister Oldham's body is secured in the tree.

JOSIAH
Bring Eliza. Let her keep an eye on
you. Give the young'uns a change of
scenery.

Morgan starts to walk away. Josiah stops him.