

JEROME
"THE WICKEDEST TOWN IN WEST"

Written by:

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TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. TOP OF THE LUMBER CHUTE - DAY

Subtitle: Verde Valley, Arizona Territory 1880s

A disheveled prospector, DUDLEY (30s), steps to the brink of a raised platform and surveys the rickety lumber chute that stretches down the mountainside. He SPITS into a rusted tin can and the extra tobacco juice dribbles down his bristly beard.

Behind him, an instigator steps forward from the half-dozen other filthy, half-in-the-bag miners and waves a fist full of bills.

Staged near the bottom of the chute on a manmade terrace that supports the smelting furnace, is a cameraman, AMBROSE STEELE (30s), capturing the moment on an early kinetograph that takes moving video on a 35mm wide celluloid strip.

INSTIGATOR

Remember, you gotta make it all the way to the cut-out.

Staring at the smelter far below, Dudley scoops out his remaining clump of chew and tosses it aside. Then he drops the can down the chute, watching it TUMBLE toward the bottom.

Two other prospectors wheel a wobbly mining cart onto the platform and then help Dudley climb in. Once he's settled, they ease both to the rim of the chute.

EXT. TERRACE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE LUMBER CHUTE - DAY

Below, Ambrose launches into his practice of narrating the shoot even though the addition of voice recording is still decades away. As he begins filming, the picture turns to a grainy black and white which skips every few seconds.

REPORTER (V.O.)

This is Ambrose Steele on Cleopatra Hill near the pioneer town of Jerome, Arizona. People in these parts work hard. And they play hard too.

(MORE)

REPORTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Two hundred feet above me, one of
them, a young prospector named
Dudley, will attempt riding a
mining cart down this here lumber
chute for an ante of only a few
dollars. What could possibly go
wrong?

EXT. TOP OF THE LUMBER CHUTE - DAY

CROWD
(chanting together)
Three, two, one!

They release the cart, let out a loud WHOOP, and then watch
as it ricochets back and forth between retainer walls.

Halfway down a mountainside littered with tree stumps, Dudley
finally opens his watery eyes. He lets out a loud YELP just
before the cart's cast-iron wheels catch on a protruding deck
plank, launching both cart and passenger into the air right
at the camera.

The black and white picture suddenly goes dark.

EXT. TERRACE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE LUMBER CHUTE - DAY

Picture returns in color as Dudley shakes off the fall atop
the collapsed camera stand. As he turns up toward the top of
the chute, grinning, the still tumbling cart flattens him and
Ambrose who is looking on in disbelief.

Moments later, Dudley's spirit comes to its feet beside the
cameraman who's staring at the crushed cart wrapped around
the thick trunk of a tree below.

DUDLEY
Wow. That was a close one.

Ambrose looks down at the crumpled flesh between his feet
then points at the similarly mangled body at Dudley's.

AMBROSE
A lot closer than you think.

DUDLEY
Guess I won't be collecting that
ante after all.
(spits)

The pair examine one another. Dudley reaches up and touches his cheek. Then he pulls his chin down to his chest. When he lets it go, it pops back in place.

DUDLEY (CONT'D)
That might have been helpful before
the crash.

Dudley steps free of his body. Then when he flaps his arms, he rises into the air.

DUDLEY (CONT'D)
Maybe we're angels.

AMBROSE
That seems pretty unlikely.

Dudley stops flapping but remains suspended.

Ambrose floats up and joins him.

DUDLEY
How'd YOU do it?

AMBROSE
Just thought it in my head.

He floats back down and picks up his camera that is lying on the ground a few feet away. When he points it at Dudley, the prospector GRINS displaying two missing teeth.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)
What do you know. It still works.

Dudley floats down beside him.

DUDLEY
Can I see that thing?

Ambrose holds it out but Dudley's hand goes right through it.

AMBROSE
It would appear that it only works
for me.

DUDLEY
I'm gonna be less fond of whatever
this is, if-in my pick-axe is the
only thing that works for me.

Ambrose lowers the camera.

AMBROSE

I once read this story on the Hindu
in India. They believe that when a
person dies, their spirit is free
to inhabit another body.

Dudley looks down at his.

DUDLEY

Certainly wouldn't object to
tradin' in that bag of bones for a
handsomer model.

AMBROSE

You don't necessarily come back as
a man, or a human.

DUDLEY

You mean to say I could come back
as a knockout with great big...

Ambrose clears his throat.

DUDLEY (CONT'D)

I was gonna say dimples.
(grins and spits)

AMBROSE

I don't think it works quite that
way. It's based on your karma.
Whether you lived a good or bad
life.

DUDLEY

Well if I DO come back as an
animal, I hope it's a over-fed
buzzard so I can take target
practice on those fellas that
pushed me down the chute.

AMBROSE

Before coming here, I spent some
time with a tribe of Indians that
believe a person's spirit remains
here on earth until its ready to
move on to the after world.

DUDLEY

What makes a spirit ready?

AMBROSE

Maybe they want to resolve some
conflict. Or need some sort of
closure.

DUDLEY

There's this young lady in town
that I been meanin' to get closure
with.

AMBROSE

I think it's usually something
deeper than that.

DUDLEY

That's about as deep as I get. What
about you?

AMBROSE

I'm not sure. I came out here to
make a name for myself. To break
some big story. It's silly, really.
But I'd like to make a difference
somehow.

DUDLEY

With a camera?

Ambrose shrugs.

DUDLEY (CONT'D)

Well, I don't know about you, but I
sure could use a drink. What say I
introduce you to Jerome.

AMBROSE

How do we get there?

DUDLEY

I'mbettin' that if we can float,
then we can...

He shoots up into the air.

DUDLEY (CONT'D)

Fly-y.

Ambrose grabs his camera and begins filming again in black
and white as Dudley first flies up to the top of the chute.

EXT. TOP OF THE LUMBER CHUTE - DAY

They pause while looking down on the guilt-ridden men on the
platform with their hats over their hearts. One reaches down
and scratches his butt while another picks his nose. The
instigator covertly counts the ante at his side away from the
others then stuffs the bills into his pocket.

DUDLEY (V.O.)

Hard to believe that them fine
fellas who just conspired to see me
squished was my closest friends.
You know what they say? You can't
soar with the eagles if you're down
gobblin' with the turkeys.

(spits)

Truth be told, other than them two
brothers, MORRIS and CLYDE (30s),
that I followed down from North
Dakota, I don't much know them
others. Just desperate greenhorns
searchin' for their fortunes in the
same pile of rocks.

They continue up to the peak then the camera follows Dudley's
nostalgic scan of the valley below.

EXT. TOP OF CLEOPATRA HILL - DAY

DUDLEY (V.O.)

Not much to see, right?

AMBROSE (V.O.)

I read an article that described
the Verde Valley as an immense
landscape of desolate mountains,
rising one above another, chains of
brown hills, sterile valleys,
stupendous crags and a measureless
area of dun and yellow desert
waste.

DUDLEY (V.O.)

Sounds 'bout right from what I done
seen. Why is it that the most
precious metals are always buried
in the most god-forsaken places?

They descent until they're following a mule train that's
snaking its way along a pitted logging road blasted into the
side of the mountain.

EXT. WAGON ROAD TO JEROME - DAY

DUDLEY (V.O.)

The first time I took that road was
in a ramshackle prairie schooner
with a loose wheel and a horse that
had serious digestive issues.

(MORE)

DUDLEY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I hurled so much that I had to
tighten my suspenders to keep my
britches from fallin'.

Continuing up the road, the wagon passes a camp of scattered canvass tents and makeshift wooden shacks. Further ahead, a row of simple wooden buildings are stacked close together on either side of the main road through town.

Dudley pauses.

EXT. MAIN STREET, JEROME - DAY

DUDLEY (V.O.)
That there is Jerome. I know it
don't look like much. But it's
home.

Parlor piano and accompaniment plays "Dead Man's Party."

DUDLEY
You better hold on tight to that
camera. 'Cuz the party's just
gettin' started...

MONTAGE - JAUNT THROUGH JEROME

-- MAIN STREET -- Dudley swoops down the center of town.

-- MUSIAL HOTEL -- Passes through the wall and into the lobby where several of the town's characters play poker around a table recreating Coolidge's "Dogs Playing Poker."

-- TESSA'S DRESS SHOP -- Pops up through a clothing display as hysterical women tussle over dresses.

-- JEROME CHRONICLES -- Slips between the rolling drum and the table top of the flatbed print machine. Wipes away the fresh ink from his forehead that reads GROVER'S LOVE CHILD.

-- MADAM LOTTIE'S BORDELLO -- Flies down the stairs to the parlor where scantily dressed working girls are engaged in a pillow fight.

-- OWEN DOYLE'S SALOON -- Drifts through swinging doors that don't move, and then past ruffians playing beer pong. A sundry band, back up the piano player, YORAN (62), who all but disappears beneath a white ten-gallon hat that's wider than his shoulders.

Up and out through the roof and ever higher, Dudley eventually stops above the town.

MUSIC stops.

Filming stops.

DUDLEY (CONT'D)
How 'bout that drink now?

AMBROSE
Something stiff.

DUDLEY
For the stiffness.
(spits)

END TEASER

ACT ONE

EXT. CLEOPATRA HILL - NIGHT

Morris and Clyde are recklessly sliding down the loose rocks of the steep slope. They briefly stop when they get to the dusty road, hands on hips and GASPING for air.

Once they catch their breath, they make a beeline toward the gas lights from the rowdy saloons and bustling brothels along Main Street.

INT. MADAM LOTTIE'S - NIGHT

An agitated businessman in a dark ditto suit, EDWARD (40s), yanks an intractable, olive-skinned painted lady, JOSIE (30s), through the crowd and out the front entrance. PIANO plays "Love is a Battlefield" with video shimmy dance scene visible in the background.

EXT. MAIN STREET BOARDWALK - NIGHT

Edward drags the exotic Josie down the boardwalk and into the nearest unlit alley.

Josie spins to face him.

JOSIE
(light Spanish accent)
Let me go!

EDWARD
You'll calm down if you know what's
good for you.

He pins her against the wall. When she's unable to squirm free, she attempts to knee him in the groin.

Turning to the side in time to take the knee to his thigh instead, he instinctively slaps her across the face.

She sweeps back the dark matted hair from her eyes and shoots him an icy glare.

JOSIE
Why are you here?

EDWARD
I could ask the same of you. What
happened to Tombstone?

JOSIE

I needed a change of scenery.

EDWARD

You expect me to believe that you winding up here is just a coincidence?

JOSIE

I've been here for years. Maybe you're following me.

He buttons the top of his jacket and then turns the "P" pin on his lapel upright.

EDWARD

My family has business here.

JOSIE

As do I.

He homes in on the sterling locket squeezed out of her low-cut dress by a tight-fitting corset, which partially vanishes into her cleavage with every incensed exhale.

EDWARD

I can see that.

(sighs)

Really Josefina. Couldn't you have learned to be a seamstress or something?

JOSIE

At least my clients are honest about what they want. And not one has dared strike me.

EDWARD

I'm sorry about that.

JOSIE

That's the least of what you should be sorry for. Christ Edward, I was seventeen. I was in love.

EDWARD

We both know it would've never worked out.

JOSIE

I know that you're nothing but a weak-willed panderer who'll never stand up to his father.

He pulls a monogrammed handkerchief from his jacket pocket and wipes the sweat from his forehead. Before tucking it away, he dabs a spot blood from her fat lip, then stares at the stained cloth like it's a dirty diaper.

She snatches it out of his hand.

JOSIE (CONT'D)
I don't know what I ever saw in
you.

EDWARD
Same thing they all see.
Opportunity.

JOSIE
Well, I'm making my own
opportunities now.

EDWARD
By prostituting yourself.

JOSIE
I guess we have that in common.

She turns for the boardwalk, but then pauses.

JOSIE (CONT'D)
I really did love you, you know.

EDWARD
I know.

INT. OWEN DOYLE'S SALOON - NIGHT

From beneath his cowboy hat, Yoran's fingers tickle the ivories to "Build Me Up Buttercup," as boisterous, uncouth miners sing the chorus.

Dudley and Ambrose are sitting at a table next to the parlor piano. A server sets another drink next to the ten empty shot glasses.

AMBROSE
Give it up.

DUDLEY
Eleventh time is the charm.

Dudley downs the shot.

AMBROSE
Well?

Dudley throws up his hands.

DUDLEY
Nothin'.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

As Josie vanishes back inside the bordello, Morris and Clyde stumble past a skinny young lad in loose fitting cavalry clothes toward Owen Doyle's Saloon.

The swinging doors fly open, and the two filthy prospectors burst inside.

Dudley immediately looks up.

AMBROSE
What is it?

DUDLEY
'Member how I mentioned that I followed them brothers down from North Dakota, Clyde and Morris Grossweiner?
(laughs then spits)
I know what you're thinkin'. But I swear, I didn't make that up.
Anyway, they just came barrelin' through the front doors.

Ambrose turns and watches them shoving their way through the crowd. Then he lifts his camera from his lap and begins to film.

AMBROSE (V.O.)
We're here at a packed Owen Doyle's Saloon enjoying some interesting music...

DUDLEY (V.O.)
What are you doing?

AMBROSE (V.O.)
It how a practice. I want, wanted to be a journalist.
(beat)
Some habits are hard to break, I guess.

The ill-tempered, one-armed bartender, LEFTY (40s), pulls a tap with his good arm as the pair plant themselves at the bar.

CLYDE
Two shots-a-whiskey!

Lefty looks them over, his wooden left hand made into an ANGRY FIST. But then he recognizes the hapless prospectors and his scowl softens.

He grabs a bottle and pours two tall shots. Arms lift out of the way, one after the other, as the drinks slide down the bar.

Morris and Clyde down the shots.

LEFTY
You boys look like you seen a ghost.

DUDLEY (V.O.)
Hey, I resemble that remark.

Lefty reloads their glasses.

Morris scans the room and then startles at his own wide-eyed reflection in the silvered-glass mirror behind the bar. Down goes the second shot.

CLYDE
How much for the bottle?

LEFTY
Silver dollar for what you done had already, plus what's left.

Clyde ponies up, his leathery hand shaking.

Lefty SLAMS the bottle down.

The two miners exchange slugs, cheap whiskey dripping down their shaggy chins.

LEFTY (CONT'D)
You two been workin' the Eureka claim on Cleopatra Hill?

CLYDE
That's right.

LEFTY
Don't tell me you finally found somethin' in all them rocks?

MUSIC and CONVERSATIONS QUIET.

Finishing what's left in the bottle, Morris nudges it over the bar-top with his filthy forefinger.

Lefty sticks out his foot, kicks the bottle up and catches it with his GRIP-SHAPED wood hand. He then flips it into the last open slot in a bottle crate.

The two miners exchange looks. Clyde nods.

After Morris wipes his face on his shirt, he rolls up his sleeve and reveals three deep gashes across his forearm.

MORRIS
More like somethin' found us.

Ambrose stops filming.

EXT. MADAM LOTTIE'S BORDELLO - DAY

Wearing only a camisole and bloomers, Josie steps outside onto the narrow balcony. She folds her arms beneath her chest and watches the activity across the street.

EXT. NEARBY ROOFTOP - DAY

Ambrose and Dudley are staring down at the balcony.

AMBROSE
Is she the one?

Dudley nods.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)
If she's a working girl, why didn't you ever...

DUDLEY
Cuz that's not how I see her.

AMBROSE
You love her.

DUDLEY
Nimwits like me don't deserve love.
Especially from a woman as
beautiful as her. I'd just settle
for gettin' her away from that
place.

AMBROSE
Maybe that's the closure you need
before moving on.

DUDLEY

Maybe so.

Ambrose begins filming a man draped in a long black frock coat as he exits the Musial Hotel where a gilded, horse-drawn carriage awaits. Just before boarding, Edward glances up. Seeing Josie, he smiles, tipping his stiff-crowned hat.

On impulse, Dudley descends next to the carriage. He nudges over a pile of horse droppings then returns up to the rooftop.

DUDLEY (V.O.)

Figures things would work on horse dung and not booze.

Edward unknowingly steps in the dung while boarding the carriage.

Dudley SNICKERS.

JOSIE'S TRICK

(from inside)

Where are you dear?

JOSIE

(deadpan)

Spending the night already cost you extra.

The carriage starts down Main Street. She rubs her LOCKET as her eyes follow the transport until it disappears.

When Ambrose sees Dudley frown, he turns the camera off.

AMBROSE

I could use a cup of brown gargle.

How about you?

DUDLEY

Sure. Let's go.

INT. JOSIE'S ROOM - DAY

As she enters, her trick is leaning over the side of a tousled bed, digging through his trousers. He retrieves a worn leather pouch, pulls out a gold Eagle coin and SLAPS it down on the bedside table.

JOSIE

Shouldn't you be getting on to the mine?

TRICK
I like this way of bustin' rocks
better.

After a longing look back toward the balcony, Josie slips out of her undergarments. She sits on the side of her cotton-stuffed mattress and her trick buries his face in her chest. Once he's distracted, she grabs the coin and slips it beneath the mattress with all the others.

INT. MUSIAL HOTEL - DAY

Dudley and Ambrose pass through the incongruous imported mahogany double-doors and into the lobby where they take a seat at a table next to two stern-faced businessmen.

TOM (50s) and MURRAY (50s), sip coffee at a table while glaring at a stack of official-looking papers. Their stupor is broken when their server, GILBERT (17), approaches with a pot of coffee.

GILBERT
Care for a refill, gentlemen?

MURRAY
Just water.

As Gilbert turns toward the kitchen, Murray SLAPS his rolled newspaper down on the table and then rubs his tired eyes.

MURRAY (CONT'D)
Well?

TOM
Well, what?

MURRAY
C'mon Tom. You know the narrow-gauge railroad to Prescott won't be finished for another few years. That means operating costs will remain sky-high. And with copper stuck at ten cents a pound, we won't be seeing a profit anytime soon.

TOM
(shaking his head)
There's more red metal in these hills than the rest of the Arizona territory combined.

MURRAY

Doesn't do us any good if we can't
get it to market.

TOM

(eying the papers)

How does this offer compare to the
one from Rankin Gunderson?

MURRAY

More upfront money and it's ours as
soon as we sign.

Gilbert drops off the glasses of water.

TOM

I don't know. I've heard things
about Thurston Parish.

MURRAY

What kind of things?

TOM

He's greedy. Ruthless. Deceitful.

MURRAY

He's also filthy rich. And we need
cash, fast. Besides, his son,
Edward, didn't seem so bad.

TOM

He's not the one callin' the shots.
Did you see his soft hands? He's
nothin' more than a well-kept
courier.

MURRAY

So we take less because you don't
like the guy writing the check?

TOM

Let me think on it.

Murray sips his water. He then loops a pair of wire
spectacles behind his ears and lowers them onto the tip of
his nose.

MURRAY

We're bleeding ourselves dry, you
know.

TOM

I know. I just really wanted to see
this through.

(MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)
I'm tellin' you, someone's gonna
make a fortune off what's in that
mountain.

MURRAY
It won't be us. Frankly, at this
point, I'd be satisfied if it
doesn't completely ruin us.

As he leans closer to listen in, Dudley knocks his napkin
onto the floor beneath the adjacent table. When he comes back
up from grabbing it, he bumps the table and the folded
newspaper opens.

Tom's attention is drawn to the headline.

TOM
(reads)
Silver King of Colorado loses his
shirt, and his pants.

He empties the sludge from the bottom of his coffee cup and
SMACKS it hard on the table, like a judge striking a gavel.

TOM (CONT'D)
Where do I sign?

MURRAY
You sure?

TOM
I ain't sure of NOTHIN' no more.

Murray slides over the last page from the stack along with a
fountain pen.

Tom signs.

After signing as well, Murray drops the fountain pen into his
glass of water. Both men stare as the INK SPREADS and turns
the liquid black.

TOM (CONT'D)
What now?

Murray collects up the papers and stands.

MURRAY
I'm heading back east. You?

Standing as well, Tom tugs his bowler hat down until it folds
over his large ears.

TOM

I don't think I can be here when
things take off. Or when they come
crashin' back down.

They shake hands as if they'll never see each other again.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. JEROME CHRONICLE - DAY

Dudley follows Ambrose along Main Street until he stops in front of an unadorned one-story building that used to be horse stables. It is now home to the town's first and only newspaper, the *Jerome Chronicle*.

DUDLEY
What are we doing here?

AMBROSE
Well since you now know what YOUR purpose is, I figured it's time I figured out mine.

DUDLEY
Newspapers 'round these parts are 'bout as useful as bubbles on a bull.

AMBROSE
I was supposed to meet the editor when I got to town. Maybe there's some other clue nearby.

The lanky editor-in-chief of the *Jerome Chronicle*, HENRY BLACKMON (35), passes between them then opens the front door.

DUDLEY
Why not make yourself visible then?

AMBROSE
Just a feeling I have that we're mostly supposed to observe.

DUDLEY
Until when?.

AMBROSE
I think we'll know when.

They follow him through an outer office with a single desk and chair, into his poorly lit print shop where several long drying tables have replaced the horse stalls from its previous life.

ANNIE (21), Henry's withdrawn but fearless apprentice is replacing the paper drum on the cylinder flatbed press machine.

Moving past her, Henry continues to a back door that's open to the alley. He tilts back his head, nostrils flaring.

HENRY
Fried wantons.

ANNIE
It's better than Chop Suey. The smell of cabbage makes my stomach turn.

While pulling herself up by one of the room's repurposed mine timber supports, her father's Calvary hat gets knocked off her head, freeing her long, curly red locks.

HENRY
(jokingly)
If you insist on keeping all that hair, perhaps you should consider a hairnet.

Gathering up her hair, she stuffs it back under the hat.

ANNIE
The hair stays. It's good luck.

HENRY
We sure could use some. Because if we don't sell more papers, they'll be back to shouting the news at the bandstand.

ANNIE
We sold seventeen yesterday.

He sniffs the air again.

HENRY
Might as well enjoy the smell since I won't be able to eat if things don't pick up.

ANNIE
We need more than recordin' property deeds and reportin' that the smelter smoke is chokin' the crops down in the valley. We need somethin' to grab people's attention.

HENRY
Got any ideas?

ANNIE
(expression brightens)
Actually, I do. Last night--

HENRY
Oh Annie. You know I don't like you out after dark.

ANNIE
I can take care of myself.

HENRY
I have no doubt about that. But some of these roughnecks around here can be rather uncivilized.

ANNIE
Do you want to hear what I saw or not?

He nods.

ANNIE (CONT'D)
Yesterday was payday. So, I was watchin' the saloons. Nearin' midnight, these two fellas that looked like they'd come straight from the tunnels--

HENRY
(interrupting)
Remember to think descriptively. What if these prospectors looked like they'd been spit-up from the bowels of the earth?

ANNIE
That IS better. So these two prospectors that looked like they'd been spit-up from the bowels of the earth-- appeared from nowhere...

HENRY
Perhaps they could appear instead out of the darkness. That might set a foreboding tone. I assume that's appropriate for the story?

ANNIE
It is.

HENRY
Go on then.

ANNIE

At first, I figured they was in a hurry to make up for losin' track of time. But then I seen the look in their eyes. They wasn't hurryin' gettin' somewhere. They was hurryin' gettin' away from somewhere, or some THING.

HENRY

That's good. Just remember to use "was" when the subject is singular, and "were" when the subject is plural.

She frowns.

HENRY (CONT'D)

You're doing fine. Continue.

ANNIE

I followed them to Owen Doyle's Saloon. After downin' a whole bottle of whiskey, the tall one named Clyde, said somethin' happened up on the mountain. That's when the whole place got re-eeeal quiet.

HENRY

Okay. You've captured my attention.

FLASHBACK

The bar scene Ambrose had taped replays with ANNIE'S VOICE in place of Clyde's.

CLYDE

We was twenty meters down a branch shaft in Eureka when we finally busted through a thick layer of gangue. That's when we hear this loud screechin' like a crazed animal caught in a snare. Morris peaks through the crack and sees these feral yellow eyes gettin' bigger, and bigger. Suddenly, we're both flattened by a blast of hot air that blows out our lantern.

Clyde staggers backwards.

CLYDE (CONT'D)
Once I get it relit, I look over at
Morris. His eyes is as big as
dinner plates, and he's got these
three slashes across his forearm.
Only there ain't one drop of blood.

END FLASHBACK

HENRY
Wait. How's that possible?

ANNIE
I'm just tellin' you what they
said.

HENRY
Did you see the wounds?

She nods, and then drags three fingers across her arm.

ANNIE
Like from sharp claws. No blood.

HENRY
And you're sure they weren't drunk?

ANNIE
Not yet. I'm tellin' you, they was-
were scared. Like they seen--

HENRY
Please don't say a ghost.

Dudley SNORTS.

HENRY (CONT'D)
C'mon Annie. You know we don't
write stuff like that.

ANNIE
You don't have to. I'll track down
them miners and write the story
myself. I'm ready.

HENRY
You may be. But I can't print it.
No one would ever take us seriously
again.

ANNIE
No one takes us seriously now.
Besides, them fellas believed what
they was sayin'.

HENRY

People believe all kinds of strange things after smoking that black tar.

ANNIE

Maybe. But it's still the kinda story that'll sell papers.

HENRY

That's not how we're going to sell papers. Now run on over to the mercantile and pick up a case of ink that just came in.

Annie's jaws flare as she rubs on a RAISED SCAR at her hairline.

ANNIE

I'm tellin' you, Henry. There's somethin' to this story.

HENRY

When it can be told without ghosts and giggling, we'll print it.

INT. C. T. FINDLAY'S MERCANTILE COMPANY - DAY

Annie looks defeated as she enters.

The owner is a thickly bearded Scotsman, CONOR (38). He is facing away, stocking dry goods as she quietly approaches.

ANNIE

Good morning, Mr. Findlay.

He flinches, loses his balance, and knocks over a box of cleaning supplies onto the knotty wood floor.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Oh, I'm so sorry to have startled you.

She bends down to help clean up.

CONOR

Annie, yer like a will-o'-the-wisp sneakin' up on me like that.

ANNIE

Why? Are they invisible too?

CONOR
Quiet is what I meant.

ANNIE
Mr. Blackmon sent me for the ink.

CONOR
Ah, yes. It's at the register.

She heads in that direction, pausing at a delicate gingham dress on display, a stark contrast to her brown canvass duck trousers, cuffed at the bottom, and held up by a wide leather belt.

CONOR (CONT'D)
That dress sure would look fancy on
you.

She quickly turns and heads to the check-out counter.

Conor follows but then stops beside the dress.

CONOR (CONT'D)
Couldn't hurt ta try it on. I could
get Deidra ta help?

ANNIE
No thank you.

CONOR
I see ye lookin' at it each time ye
come in here.

ANNIE
I'm not really a fancy dress kinda
girl.

She cinches her hat down and then grabs the box of ink.

ANNIE (CONT'D)
Have a fine day, Mr. Findlay.

CONOR
Annie...

He rests his hand on the dress stand.

CONOR (CONT'D)
Yer da would sure be proud of the
fine woman ye've become.

She takes a deep breath and then holds open the door.

BAIN STOKELY (47), a bloated well-to-do landholder, enters without acknowledging her.

As Annie ducks out behind him, Bain yanks a bandana off a nearby display and then uses it to wipe the sweat from his pink neck. He eyes Conor at the dress stand.

BAIN

I'm not sure that one's your color.

Conor removes his apron as he continues behind the check-out counter.

Bain's expression has turned serious.

BAIN (CONT'D)

There's been an incident.

Conor unboxes a new bandana and then places it on display.

BAIN (CONT'D)

Indians grabbed an Anglo boy from the valley.

CONOR

Why would they do that?

BAIN

Remember that Army skirmish near the Snake River a few weeks back?

CONOR

Aye. They burned down the entire village.

BAIN

Some of the refugees are now being kept at Fort Whipple.

CONOR

Confined, ye mean.

BAIN

You know what a handful those redskins can be. Especially once they're all stirred up.

CONOR

I've found most of them ta be quite neighborly, until ye torch their homes, that is.

Bain ignores the comment.

BAIN
We're forming a posse.

Conor stops what he's doing.

CONOR
We?

BAIN
Lieutenant Irwin requested
help...my help.

CONOR
So yer puttin' together some local
hotspurs ta do whit exactly?

BAIN
It's a seven-year-old boy, Conor.

Conor stiffens.

BAIN (CONT'D)
Now you know as well as I do that
if we don't show these savages
who's boss, then we'll find
ourselves right back in the same
old mess. By the way, I'll be
needing some ammo.

CONOR
For the Winchester?

BAIN
And a box for the revolver.

Conor reaches into a locked cabinet behind the register and
brings out the two boxes of ammunition.

CONOR
Will that be all?

BAIN
I heard you got in some knives.

CONOR
Ten-inch Bowies.

BAIN
Perfect. Just in case things get up
close and personal.

Conor sets the blade beside the ammo.

CONOR
On yer tab?

Bain nods. After tossing his sweaty bandana on the countertop, he collects the items.

BAIN
So, you coming with us?

Ambrose swats the back side of a bob-tailed cat nearby which jumps up on the countertop, dashes between some boxes, and knocks one to the floor. The top opens and a pair of moccasins fall out.

When Dudley looks at him crossways, he whispers...

AMBROSE
When.

Without a word, Conor picks them up and places them carefully back in their box.

CONOR
A seven-year-old lad, ye say?

BAIN
That's right. Snatched off his parent's farm as a bargaining chip for their squaws.

CONOR
How many men ye got?

BAIN
A dozen. Another twenty will be riding with the Lieutenant. We'll be back before the weekend.

CONOR
Sounds like another raid.

BAIN
Just a negotiation, God willing.

CONOR
Too many people usin' God's will to excuse bad behavior these days.
Which tribe?

BAIN
Chiricahua. They think Kuruk was behind it. You and him still friendly?

CONOR

Haven' seen him since the fallout
from the Apache Wars. He's a
honorable man though.

BAIN

Maybe he used to be.

CONOR

When are ye headin' down the hill?

BAIN

We'll gather at the bandstand in an
hour.

CONOR

(sighs)

I'll give Deidra a heads-up then
get Nessie saddled.

EXT. MADAM LOTTIE'S BORDELLO - DAY

Josie joins her buxom, dressed-to-the-nines boss, MADAM LOTTIE (40s), on the second-floor balcony from where they watch the commotion at the bandstand. Madam Lottie lights a cigarette.

Dudley tries to inhale the spiraling stream of smoke from over her shoulder.

DUDLEY

'Nother bad habit, I recon. Not
like it's gonna kill me, though.

(spits)

JOSIE

What's going on down there?

MADAM LOTTIE

The injuns have nabbed a boy down
in the valley.

JOSIE

(shaking her head)

Oh, no.

MADAM LOTTIE

Just think, it wasn't so long ago
that they were regulars about town.

JOSIE

(surprised)

What about here?

MADAM LOTTIE
Every now and then--
(winks)

Josie begins to fidget with her waist belt, and then moves on to a hair clip.

MADAM LOTTIE (CONT'D)
Okay. I can see you're as nervous as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs.

JOSIE (blurts)
I got a letter from Wesley. He's coming HERE to visit.

Madam Lottie pulls Josie's hands away from her fiddling.

MADAM LOTTIE
Does he know?

JOSIE
Of course not. I told him I'm a secretary.

MADAM LOTTIE
When's the last time you saw him?

JOSIE
Years ago. When I dropped him at the boarding school.

MADAM LOTTIE
Listen, hun. I sure do admire how you've provided for that boy. But he's a proper young man now. You really think him comin' here--

JOSIE
I need to see him.

Madam Lottie brings the cigarette to her mouth but doesn't inhale.

MADAM LOTTIE
You know I ain't never had kids myself.

She swats at a bee, knocking it through the air.

MADAM LOTTIE (CONT'D)
And not for a lack of pollination,
if you know what I mean.
(laughs)
(MORE)

MADAM LOTTIE (CONT'D)
Just wasn't in the cards. Anyway, I
can only imagine what you're goin'
through.

JOSIE
I want him to be happy. I do. But I
can't pretend that I don't want to
be a bigger part of his life.

MADAM LOTTIE
You could always go to HIM. Take
all the time you need. I'll even
buy the ticket.

JOSIE
I offered. Don't you think I
offered? But he's insisting.

MADAM LOTTIE
Wonder where he gets his
stubbornness from.

JOSIE
I don't know what to do?

Madam Lottie drops the smoldering butt to the deck. With her high-top, lace-up shoe, she kicks it over the edge and watches it fall to the street. Then she notices Bain organizing the gaggle at the bandstand.

Ambrose starts filming the activity below.

MADAM LOTTIE (V.O.)
Maybe we could fake it.

JOSIE (V.O.)
What do you mean?

MADAM LOTTIE (V.O.)
Bain Stokely might be persuaded to
help.

JOSIE (V.O.)
Not if his busy-body wife has
anything to say about it.

A desert cardinal lands on the rail.

Dudley leans over and whispers in Ambrose's ear...

DUDLEY
When.

Ambrose stops filming and instead curiously watches as Dudley sneaks up from behind and plucks a red tail feather from the bird which he uses it to tickle Madam Lottie's cheek.

After slapping at the itch, she grabs her chin in pain.

MADAM LOTTIE
Holy Canyon Diablo!

JOSIE
What is it?

MADAM LOTTIE
Sore tooth. I been meanin' to get
it fixed. But it DID just give me
an idea. What about Doc Hampton?

JOSIE
What ABOUT Doc Hampton?

MADAM LOTTIE
He owes me a favor. And God knows
he needs someone to help him run
things.

The rowdy posse rides by below, WHOOPING and HOLLERING. Bain leads the way, while Conor brings up the rear.

Both women wave.

Madam Lottie leans forward against the rail.

MADAM LOTTIE (CONT'D)
I've made more money here than a
room full of crooked lawyers. But
other opportunities are openin' up
for women every day. Maybe it's
time you tried somethin' new.

JOSIE
I'll think about it.

MADAM LOTTIE
You do that. In the meantime, I'll
arrange things with Vern.

Josie steps forward and leans her head against Lottie's sturdy shoulder.

JOSIE
Thanks. For everything. I don't
know what I'd do without you.

Madam Lottie turns so they can hug. After a moment, she steps back and straightens her tight-fitting bodice.

MADAM LOTTIE

Now get goin' before the other
girls get jealous and the men get
the wrong idea.

After the pair return inside, Dudley holds up his hand and watches as it slowly starts to dissolve.

DUDLEY

What do you know about that?

Ambrose looks over as Dudley's arms and legs slowly dissolve.

AMBROSE

You did it.

DUDLEY

I hope so. There's something real
special 'bout my Josie.

AMBROSE

You're not so bad yourself. See you
on the other side.

Dudley grins with a full set of teeth then disappears.

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. BACK ALLEY - MORNING

Ambrose tugs on the waddle of a sleeping rooster. As it springs up and CROWS, he passes through the back wall and into the printing room.

INT. JEROME CHRONICLE - DAY

Annie is sweeping the floor as Henry enters from the front office.

HENRY

Did you see all that clamor at the grandstand yesterday?

ANNIE

I was watchin'.

HENRY

Of course, you were. I suppose you know something about the boy who was kidnapped too?

ANNIE

Ralph Crosthwaite. It was three weeks before his eighth birthday.

HENRY

That's tragic.

ANNIE

The Chiricahua did it because the Army raided one of their villages, killed five warriors and interred seventeen women and children at Fort Whipple.

HENRY

(scratching his head)
Interned. The word is interned. It means--

ANNIE

(curtly)

I know what it means.

HENRY

Is that it?

ANNIE
No.

HENRY
Can I PLEASE hear the rest of what
you found out?

ANNIE
It was a rogue band. They turned
the boy over to Chief Kuruk hopin'
to bargain for their families.

HENRY
You rode down there? To the fort?

She doesn't answer.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Oh Annie. You're going to get
yourself--
(sighs)
You have to be more cautious. I'd
never forgive myself if something
happened to you.

ANNIE
I'm here, ain't I? Besides, I know
some of them. They would never harm
me.

He removes his eye glasses, wipes his eyes and then puts them
back on.

HENRY
Is the boy safe?

ANNIE
Funny how no one ever asks how the
Indians are.

She returns to sweeping the clean floor.

ANNIE (CONT'D)
Ralph is fine.

HENRY
Do you know where they're holding
him?

ANNIE
I thought it best not to ask.

Henry runs his thumb over a stack of print paper nearby.

HENRY

I don't like it. The firebrands
they rounded up for a posse are
itching for a fight.

ANNIE

Mr. Findlay went with them.

HENRY

That's good. Conor is as level-
headed as they come.

After hanging the broom, Annie slips out into the alley.

EXT. BACK ALLEY - DAY

Henry finds her stroking Midnight's neck.

HENRY

(from the doorway)

This thing is bigger than just a
boy being kidnapped, Annie. There's
people who would like the Indians
cleared from the Valley.

ANNIE

But they were here first?

HENRY

That doesn't matter. Not when
there's so much at stake.

ANNIE

What about the Homestead Act? Any
man can have 65 hectares if he
builds a home and farms it for 5
years. That's what YOU told ME.

HENRY

That legislation was put in place
for the settlers, not the Indians.

ANNIE

That's not right.

HENRY

What's right isn't going to get the
Indians out of the valley.

ANNIE

(mumbles)

Neither would tradin' for the boy.

Ambrose squats down.

AMBROSE
(mumbles)
When.

He triggers a rat trap against the back wall, which SNAPS right through his foot.

Midnight startles and SNORTS.

After calming her horse, Annie bends down to reset the empty trap.

HENRY
What was that?

ANNIE
A trap.
(beat)
It was a trap!

HENRY
What?

ANNIE
The Army's not interested in a trade at all. It's a trap.

She yanks off her apron and tosses it past Henry. Then she mounts Midnight.

HENRY
Where are you going?

ANNIE
I need to warn them.

HENRY
Annie, please. Think about what you're...

She whips the reins, and then horse and rider bolt down the alley.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

The feisty Chinese restaurant owner from next door, JIMMY CHEN (40s), wearing a fringed, suede-leather cowboy shirt, steps out his front door at the same time as Henry.

With a folded *Jerome Chronicle* held under his arm, Jimmy lights a rolled cigarette.

They watch Annie gallop down through Deception Gulch.

JIMMY
She a good rider for a miss.

HENRY
She's a good rider, period.

JIMMY
(jokingly)
Let me guess. She checking to see
if smoke from smelter choking out
crops again?

Henry chuckles.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
You worry about her.

HENRY
I do.

JIMMY
Like she your daughter.

HENRY
Only I could never take the place
of her father.

JIMMY
What happen to him?

HENRY
She once told me he was with the
Calvary. Red hair like hers. BIG
man. He was killed on an expedition
out west.

JIMMY
So sad. What about her mother?

HENRY
(shrugs)
She never talks about her.

JIMMY
No other family?

HENRY
Only that horse.

JIMMY
And you.

Jimmy unfolds the newspaper and reads the headline around the jiggling cigarette in his mouth.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
"United sold?"
(beat)
What is robber baron?

HENRY
A powerful businessman.

JIMMY
Ah, like Jimmy Chen?

Both men laugh.

HENRY
Jimmy Chen is nothing like Thurston Parish, thank goodness.

Jimmy fills his cheeks with air and then waddles around in a circle.

JIMMY
He puffed up like Mr. Stokely then?

HENRY
Men like Mr. Stokely muck stables for men like Mr. Parish.

JIMMY
Oh, boy. Rich?

HENRY
One of the richest there is.

JIMMY
Maybe he use some of his money to find where copper hiding?

HENRY
If money is what it takes, then he'll be the one.

JIMMY
More people come to Jerome. More read newspaper. More eat Jimmy Chen egg rolls.

HENRY
More of everything, that's for sure.

JIMMY
That good, right?

HENRY
Only time will tell.

Jimmy rolls up the paper. Then he pulls a hunter pocket watch from his tight-fitting trouser pocket and flips open the cover.

JIMMY
Dalia bought this for me. Only time
not tell me anything useful yet.

HENRY
Is that so?

JIMMY
There is saying from my country.
When winds of change come, some
build wall to block, others fly
kite.

HENRY
That's very good advice. Only I
don't have a kite.

Jimmy stuffs the watch back in his pocket. With a playful smile, he slaps the rolled newspaper against Henry's shoulder.

JIMMY
Fortunate you got so much leftover
paper to make one.

EXT. SOUTHEASTERN BRANCH OF THE RIO VERDE RIVER - DAY

Ambrose is standing beside the rushing water. After a deep nervous breath, he steps off onto a log floating by then unsteadily surfs it down a fast-moving section of the Rio Verde. He hops off when he sees the Calvary men and posse dismount and seek shade.

A buzzard makes a KEEY-YA sound overhead. Ambrose looks up just in time to take a stream of bird poop off his forehead.

AMBROSE
Damn you, Dudley.

Ambrose sits on a branch above the men, picks a pinion cone then rolls it between his fingers.

Conor rides up on Nessie from the rear of the column.

LIEUTENANT IRWIN

(to Conor)

Bain tells me you have some
experience with Kuruk?

CONOR

He used ta come inta the store for
a Snake Oil Liniment for
rheumatism. But that was years ago.

LIEUTENANT IRWIN

Still, it might be helpful having
you around. Kuruk doesn't trust men
in uniforms much these days.

Conor takes out his canteen and has a drink.

CONOR

What are the chances we'll get the
lad back, safe?

LIEUTENANT IRWIN

Hard to tell. They're pretty riled
up.

CONOR

People around town are on edge too.

BAIN

Nervous people reach for their
Bibles. But once they get scared,
they reach for their guns.

LIEUTENANT IRWIN

Well, for now at least, my orders
are to see that they remain on
settled reservation lands.

BAIN

At the rate they're dying from
smallpox, the only place they'll be
settling is into the ground.

From the other direction, their guide, MESTIZA (43), a
Mexican-Crow half-breed with short hair and deep set
suspicious eyes, crosses the Rio Verde at a narrow point.
Then he joins the men.

LIEUTENANT IRWIN

(to Mestiza)

Did you find Chief Kuruk?

MESTIZA
Near the far bend of Horseshoe
Lake.

LIEUTENANT IRWIN
Does he have the boy?

MESTIZA
He does.

LIEUTENANT IRWIN
Is he alright?

MESTIZA
Yes.

LIEUTENANT IRWIN
What are his terms?

MESTIZA
The boy for the prisoners at Fort
Whipple.

LIEUTENANT IRWIN
We don't have prisoners. What we DO
have are recently displaced women
and children for whom we are
graciously providing shelter.

Bain grins.

MESTIZA
(with sarcasm)
Then Kuruk would like to relieve
you of that burden.

LIEUTENANT IRWIN
Tell the chief I will meet him at
dusk. Where the river feeds into
the lake. No warriors. Just me and
him.

Mestiza steers his mare back toward the river.

LIEUTENANT IRWIN (CONT'D)
Oh, and Mestiza.

He pauses.

MESTIZA
Sir?

LIEUTENANT IRWIN

This needs to go precisely as
planned. Comprender?

Mestiza salutes with two-fingers to the brim of his vaquero sombrero, and then heads off back across the river.

LIEUTENANT IRWIN (CONT'D)

(to Bain and Conor)

I'm going to send some men back to
the fort so that they can be ready
with the prisoners.

CONOR

I thought ye said there WERE no
prisoners?

The lieutenant glares.

LIEUTENANT IRWIN

Refugees then.

He dismounts and begins leading his horse toward the river.

As he does, Ambrose drops the cone he's been holding down the back of the lieutenant's collar.

AMBROSE

(mumbles)

When.

Annoyed, the lieutenant picks it out, and then crumbles the cone between his fingers. Glancing over his shoulder.

LIEUTENANT IRWIN

By the way, I'm going to need you
two to take your men up to Piney
Point to ensure no reinforcements
come down through the western pass.

CONOR

Ye expectin' trouble?

LIEUTENANT IRWIN

Things don't always go as planned.

He continues to the river.

Bain grabs some dried meat from his saddlebag.

CONOR

Reinforcements? And all we've got
is a dozen miners, smelters and
gamblers on horses they barely know
how ta ride.

BAIN

The injuns don't know that.

CONOR

And the Lieutenant doesn't know
Kuruk. I should be there.

Bain shrugs.

CONOR (CONT'D)

What aren't ye tellin' me?

Bain takes a bite of jerky and slowly chews.

BAIN

We needed someone respectable with
us, so that people don't get the
wrong idea.

CONOR

We?

Bain swallows.

BAIN

Lieutenant Irwin.

CONOR

So, what HE wants is a witness.
Only, how am I suppose ta witness
anythin' from up on Piney Point?

BAIN

Don't overthink this. When we ride
back into town with that little boy
safe, we'll be heroes.

Bain can see that Conor is still unconvinced.

BAIN (CONT'D)

Listen Conor. It was bound to
happen. These savages don't belong
in a civilized world.

CONOR

Who gets ta decide whit's civilized
and whit isn't?

Bain unsheathes his new Bowie, which FLASHES in the fire light.

BAIN

Same as always. The guy with the biggest knife.

EXT. BACK ALLEY - NIGHT

Annie walks Midnight quietly through the darkness with Ambrose riding on the saddle.

Once behind the print shop, she ties off the horse and then opens the back door. When she peeks inside, she sees Henry sitting in an arm chair with his feet propped up on a drying table, smoking a wood-carved President Lincoln pipe.

She continues inside.

INT. JEROME CHRONICLE - NIGHT

Henry blows smoke out through his nose.

ANNIE

I thought you stopped?

HENRY

I thought I had, too. But it helps calm my nerves.

ANNIE

I'm sorry if I worried you.

HENRY

You DO worry me. Being out at all hours of the night. Sleeping in this drafty print shop.

ANNIE

I said I was sorry.

After putting out his pipe, he taps the charred tobacco onto the floor. He then slips the pipe back into his pocket.

HENRY

How were things at the fort?

ANNIE

They're makin' due.

She removes her hat and sets it on the table top.

ANNIE (CONT'D)
I been thinkin' about what you
said.

HENRY
I say a lot of things, most of them
not worth considering.

ANNIE
There's only two ways to get rid of
buffelgrass?

HENRY
Humph.

With the tip of his boot, he nudges the spent tobacco between
the floor planks.

ANNIE
Pluck each one of them up by their
roots. Or poison the entire patch.

HENRY
Only humans aren't buffelgrass.

ANNIE
And injuns ain't humans. Isn't that
right?

HENRY
When did you become so astute?

ANNIE
Only when I had to.

As Henry gets up from the chair, his knees crack.

HENRY
Starting tomorrow, I'll be paying
you an extra quarter a day.

ANNIE
That's too much.

HENRY
Not for a staff writer.

She smiles broadly, and then quickly covers her mouth.

ANNIE
When are we goin' to print?

HENRY

We need one more story. I'm
guessing you have something in
mind?

She nods.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I look forward to reading it.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DUSK

Ambrose is sitting on a rooftop filming the sun setting down over the Black Hills when suddenly, Dudley appears beside him.

DUDLEY

Thought I might find you here.

Ambrose lowers the camera.

AMBROSE

It's good to see you again. Truth is, things have been kinda boring without you.

(beat)

I surfed a log down the river.

DUDLEY

I saw that. We might make you into an honorary nitwit after all.

Dudley looks back out at the sun's glow just above the mountain ridge.

DUDLEY (CONT'D)

You need to get back out there.

AMBROSE

For what exactly? I mean, I've been doing these random things that my gut tells me to. But I don't see anything changing.

DUDLEY

The conflict you're fixin' is gonna take some time.

(beat)

You once told me you wanted to make a difference. Well you're gonna. Just protect my Josie. And that reporter girl, Annie. They're the keys to it all.

AMBROSE
I'm so confused.

DUDLEY
What did you expect from a message
delivered by a nitwit.
(beat)
When the time is right, you'll
figure it out.

After Dudley disappears again, Ambrose stands.

AMBROSE
Is there another option?

EXT. PINEY POINT - DUSK

Conor is sitting on a flat limestone rock away from the others, overlooking the western pass. Ambrose is lounging beside him as Bain approaches.

BAIN
All quiet?

CONOR
All quiet.

BAIN
You're not planning on staying up
all night, are you?

CONOR
I'll wake someone when I get tired.

Ambrose slides over before Bain sits on him.

BAIN
Did you ever think you'd be pulling
lookout duty at our age?

CONOR
Never in a month of Sundays.

BAIN
I'm glad you came. Truth is, I can
get a little feverish at times. And
this situation sure doesn't need
more heat.

CONOR
Why ARE ye here? Ye own more land
than anyone in the Valley.
(MORE)

CONOR (CONT'D)
Ye could be sippin' whiskey and
countin' deeds on your porch.

BAIN
I suppose so. But don't you ever
feel like there's something
missing?

CONOR
Does sleep count?

Bain stands up and looks out toward a small cluster of dim lights in the distance.

BAIN
You suppose that's Jerome?

CONOR
Fort Whipple would be my guess.

BAIN
Never was good with directions.
Say, you remember the day we first
met?

Conor laughs.

BAIN
Couple of tenderfoots trying to
squeeze blood from a turnip. I
guess we never know where life will
lead us.

CONOR
Certainly didn't figure on it bein'
some pioneer town like Jerome.

BAIN
Where WERE you figuring on?

Connor gazes up to the faint stars beginning to appear.

CONOR
We were part of a wagon train
headed west. Deidra has family in
the mercantile business in San
Francisco.

BAIN
We're a long way from San
Francisco.

CONOR

Our oldest son, Bradley was his name...

(briefly smiles)

I got him this pair of moccasins from an outpost in Santa Fe. He wore them everywhere.

(smile disappears)

He got sick on the trail, with a fever. Closest doctor was in Prescott. So that's where we headed.

(beat)

He passed away there.

(swallows)

There's been somethin missin' ever since.

BAIN

I'm sorry to hear that.

CONOR

Dee took it worse, of course. Couldn't get her outa bed for months. We were out of money and had two other mouths ta feed.

He rubs his cold hands together.

CONOR (CONT'D)

From the boardin' hoose window, I kept seein' these ox teams loaded with supplies headed toward the Black Hills. All I kept thinkin' was maybe there was a livin' ta be made locatin' them supplies a little closer ta the action.

BAIN

Cast down, but not destroyed.

Conor takes a drink from his canteen. Then he clears his throat.

CONOR

What about ye?

BAIN

I bounced around a few places. Tried my hand at a couple things.

CONOR

Like whit?

BAIN

Sold insurance for a while. Raised
camels in Texas.

CONOR

Camels?

BAIN

To sell to the Army to replace
their horses in the desert.

CONOR

Sounds risky.

BAIN

Crazy you mean. But that's not the
worst of it.

CONOR

Go on.

BAIN

I started up a circus.

CONOR

Like with elephants and clowns?

BAIN

Horses, elephants, tents AND
clowns. Even paid to bring a family
of acrobats up from Mexico.

CONOR

What happened?

BAIN

Tornado in Amarillo. Smashed my
wagons, blew away my tents, killed
most of the animals and scared the
others so much that they refused to
perform. So, I folded up shop and
headed further west.

CONOR

Was that when ye started buyin' up
land?

BAIN

I won a hundred rocky acres in
Haynes, playing poker. After
someone found gold nearby, I sold
it for a dollar an acre.

(MORE)

BAIN (CONT'D)

I kept buying and selling and that
was that. The old was gone and the
new was here.

Bain pulls his flask from his jacket pocket, takes a swig,
and then offers it up to Conor.

Conor declines.

Bain puts the flask away.

BAIN (CONT'D)

If something was going to happen,
it would have by now.

CONOR

Suits me.

Bain takes out his knife and twirls it between his fingers.

BAIN

I guess I'm not going to bloody
this blade after all.

A single SHOT rings out from valley below.

Both men duck as Ambrose tumbles over backwards. After a
cautious look around, they move to an open view through the
yucca and brittlebush.

Ambrose looks down to see a cactus poking up through his
crotch.

AMBROSE

I wonder what Dudley would say
right now?

(beat)

Ah yes. There's only one prick
that's allowed between my legs.

(spits)

Conor and Bain stare in the direction of Horseshoe Lake.

CONOR

You see anythin'?

BAIN

Nothing. Could have been an
accident.

CONOR

Misfires in the dark start wars.

They listen for a moment before Conor EXHALES.

When Bain goes to sheath his knife, he nicks his finger.

BAIN
Doggammit!

CONOR
(glancing over)
Looks like ye got yer war wound
after all.

Examining the cut, Bain smirks, and then licks his finger.

BAIN
Outside of high-stakes gambling, my
heart hasn't beat that fast in
years.

Conor resumes his scan of the valley below.

CONOR
Maybe that was it.

Suddenly, FLASHES pepper the valley. The sound follows--like
POPPING CORN.

The two men exchange uncertain looks.

BAIN
Should we head down to help?

CONOR
It would be over long before we got
there.

The shots gradually taper off. Then SILENCE.

One of the volunteers runs up, clad only in skivvies and
boots, his rifle waving around dangerously. He stops before
them.

VOLUNTEER #1
(out of breath)
We heard shots!

Ambrose eases the volunteer's finger off his trigger as more
men stumble up from behind.

BAIN
There was some commotion near the
lake.

VOLUNTEER #2
Should we saddle up?

BAIN
Our orders are to guard the pass.

GRUMBLING breaks out.

VOLUNTEER #1
Bugger me blind! I can't believe
they get to have all the fun.

CONOR
Gettin' shot at might not be as fun
as ye think.

Conor turns and examines the motley collection of would-be gunfighters.

CONOR (CONT'D)
(to Bain)
I think I'll try ta get some shut-eye after all.
(to the men)
Ye others draw straws for standing
watch the rest of the night. Wake
me if anythin' else happens.

As Conor heads back to the bivouac site, another volunteer approaches, high-stepping it over the rugged terrain while trying to fasten his holster.

VOLUNTEER #3
Did I miss all the action?

CONOR
Fortunately, we all did.

VOLUNTEER #3
Damn them campfire beans.

END ACT THREE

ACT 4

EXT. CALVARY BIVOUAC SITE - SUNRISE

Ambrose follows over the top of Bain, Conor, and the other volunteers as they gallop into the Calvary campsite.

Strapping his saddlebags onto his horse, Lieutenant Irwin looks over.

On the ground nearby, a body is rolled up in an army blanket. Long, dark hair hangs out of one end.

BAIN

(to Lieutenant Irwin)

What the hell happened last night?

The clean shaven and impeccably dressed Lieutenant glances toward the body.

LIEUTENANT IRWIN

Things didn't go as planned.

BAIN

One of ours?

Lieutenant Irwin shakes his head.

BAIN (CONT'D)

Thank God. So what DID happen?

LIEUTENANT IRWIN

(matter-of-factly)

I was right where we agreed to meet. It was getting dark. I see a horse approaching. I show him I'm unarmed.

He removes his Peacemaker from his holster, counts the bullets, and then gives the cylinder a spin.

LIEUTENANT IRWIN (CONT'D)

Chief Kuruk? I say. But there's no answer. He lifts his war-shirt and I'm thinking he's showing me that he's unarmed as well. Instead, he pulls out his Yellowboy and points it right at my chest.

Raising his .45 pistol, he aligns the front and rear sights and stares down the barrel.

With the gun now aimed at him, Ambrose scampers behind a tree. Remembering he's dead, he steps back out, grinning.

LIEUTENANT IRWIN (CONT'D)
That's when Mestiza shoots him.

Bain looks sideways toward Conor, and then back at the Lieutenant.

BAIN
I thought it was just supposed to
be you and the chief?

LIEUTENANT IRWIN
Cemeteries are filled with those
who trusted their enemies. Besides,
if Mestiza hadn't been there, I'd
be the one wrapped up in that
blanket.

BAIN
What about the other shots?

LIEUTENANT IRWIN
Kuruk must have brought company
too. Because all hell broke loose.
It's a miracle I escaped in one
piece.

CONOR
(skeptical)
A miracle indeed.

Bain clears his throat.

BAIN
So, how did you get the body?

LIEUTENANT IRWIN
Some of the men found it this
morning. Just brought it here.

BAIN
His warriors just left him?

LIEUTENANT IRWIN
Guess they couldn't find him in the
dark.

BAIN
You think it's Kuruk?

LIEUTENANT IRWIN
I was hoping Conor might tell us.

With both men looking to him, Conor dismounts, hands Bain the reins, and then approaches the body. He pulls back the blanket just enough to see the victim's smooth young face.

CONOR
It's not him.

LIEUTENANT IRWIN
You sure?

CONOR
Kuruk means bear. The chief is well over six-feet tall, hair coverin' most of his body.

The lieutenant stops himself before kicking the ground.

LIEUTENANT IRWIN
Who is it then?

CONOR
Likely some expendable young warrior.

LIEUTENANT IRWIN
Why would he have sent a stand-in?

CONOR
Like ye said, Oak Flat is filled with warriors that trusted their enemies.

Lieutenant Irwin bristles at the implication.

LIEUTENANT IRWIN
Alright then. We'll bring whomever this is back to his people for a proper burial. Bloody Nora!

He passes stiffly past Conor, who remains kneeling at the body.

BAIN
We're leaving, then?

LIEUTENANT IRWIN
Kuruk is still out there. And I've got half my men back at the fort.

In a single practiced move, he mounts his horse.

LIEUTENANT IRWIN (CONT'D)
(to his men)
Load up the body, put out those
fires and saddle up.

Soldiers nearby start collecting their things.

Conor steps back from the body as the Lieutenant rides off
toward a break in the pines.

CONOR
That story just don' add up.

Bain fidgets with his holster.

CONOR (CONT'D)
There was that one shot. The others
didn't come till later.

BAIN
Now Conor. I know you're not
thinking the Lieutenant is lying?

CONOR
It's not my place ta say. Things
CAN be disorientin' in the dark.
Maybe he was confused.

BAIN
Well, whatever happened, we got
another dead Indian on our hands.
So much for peace in the Valley.

CONOR
God help that little boy.

EXT. POST OFFICE - DAY

Ambrose waits with Josie just outside as the town postman,
FRITS (35), promptly unlocks then opens the front door.

FRITS
(startles)
Oh Josie. You surprised me.

JOSIE
Goedemorgen, Mr. Jansen.

The very tall man with ice blue eyes smiles.

FRITS
You remembered.

JOSIE
I have a knack for languages.

She suggestively looks around.

FRITS
Please. Come in.

INT. POST OFFICE - DAY

Fritz follows Josie inside then continues behind his counter where he places a dark blue shako hat with red piping upon his neatly groomed hair.

FRITS
Now what is it that I can do for you today?

JOSIE
I'd like to send a telegraph.

FRITS
Of course.

He moves over to a corner desk where he sits down in front of a telegraph machine.

FRITS (CONT'D)
The usual address, and addressee?

JOSIE
Yes.

Josie slips a small piece of paper from the waist pocket of her dress and then reaches it to him.

Frits unfolds the paper then silently reads the message. Then he begins tapping out the Morse Code with the telegraph key. When done, he leans back in the chair.

FRITS
So, Wesley's finally coming for a visit.

JOSIE
(smiles)
Yes.

FRITS
I really admire all you've done for him.

JOSIE

You don't think he should be embarrassed by me?

FRITS

By a mom who spends most of her hard-earned money making sure he has every opportunity available to him?

JOSIE

Still. Doing what I do.

Frits stands. Then he reaches over the counter and takes Josie's hands.

FRITS

Mothers ensure their children are safe, cared for, and loved. You've done that for him.

(releases her hands)

I look forward to meeting the younker.

JOSIE

(swallows)

Thank you, Mr. Jansen.

FRITS

Anytime, Miss Espinosa.

Josie turns for the door.

FRITS (CONT'D)

Wait. I think there was a letter for you.

As Frits walks toward the door to the back room where the mail is kept, Ambrose passes through the wall, and then opens the only window letting in a breeze that blows several neatly arranged letters off the tabletop.

FRITS (CONT'D)

Oh, jee!

He closes the window.

JOSIE

Is everything alright?

On his hands and knees, the postman collects up the scattered letters.

Ambrose spots the one he's looking for and kicks it under a nearby piece of furniture.

With the letters in hand, Frits appears back in the doorway.

FRITS

I could have sworn something arrived yesterday addressed to Josefina Espinoza from Wesley Espinoza.

JOSIE

I'm afraid your mistaken. My son started using Miss Espinoza in our correspondence the moment he became a self-conscious teenager.

FRITS

I see. Well, I'll check again just in case.

Frits rubs his chin as she departs.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE POST OFFICE - DAY

Josie passes the town bum whom the kids call Loony Clunes (60s) bundled beneath a thick wool blanket in the adjacent alley.

LOONY CLUNES

(mutters from under the blanket)

Wit geschilderde dame.

Josie pauses.

LOONY CLUNES (CONT'D)

(repeats)

Wit geschilderde dame.

She cautiously approaches.

JOSIE

Can I help you, sir?

The blanket flies free and the repulsive smell nearly makes Josie gag. A wild-eyed man, face mostly covered in scraggly, coarse copper hair that continues out his ears then completely disappears up to his crown, looks about suspiciously.

LOONY CLUNES
 (ranting)
 La liberté éclaire le monde. Krabba
 biter svensk näkterska. Polly
 ripped.

Suddenly, the man stops to carefully examine Josie.

LOONY CLUNES (CONT'D)
 Español?

JOSIE
 E inglés.

She removes a handkerchief from beneath her waist band,
 kneels and wipes the drool from the man's chin.

LOONY CLUNES
 White painted lady.

AMBROSE
 (mumbles to himself)
 The Indians I spent time with had a
 legend about a white painted lady?

The man looks right at Ambrose.

Josie stands, follows his glare, but sees nothing.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)
 You can see and hear me now?

LOONY CLUNES
 See and hear you. See and hear all.

AMBROSE
 (mumbles)
 There are others.

LOONY CLUNY
 Dozens of others.

AMBROSE
 Who are they?

LOONY CLUNES
 He will sing. He will play. We will
 dance.

Loony Clunes stands and drops his blanket. Then he lurches
 toward Josie with his arms outstretched.

Josie steps away.

LOONY CLUNES (CONT'D)
(louder)
We will dance. We will dance.

Josie continues backwards as the man begins to sway to his own humming.

Ambrose curiously approaches the dancing. He stops when he hears the approaching clippety-clop sound of horse hooves on the dry packed dirt. Turning, he sees the posse coming up Main Street making a spectacle of themselves.

DUDLEY
I'll deal with you later.

He brings up his camera and starts to film as he walks in that direction.

LOONY CLUNES
Th-th-th-that's all, folks!

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Most of the men, Bain included, tie off their horses at the hitching rails in front of the saloons.

Ambrose lowers the camera and follows Conor toward the mercantile instead.

EXT. OUTSIDE FINDLAY'S MERCANTILE - DAY

DEIDRA FINDLAY (35), Conor's fair-skinned wife, greets him with an affectionate hug. Instead of one of the simple prairie dresses that she usually wears around the store, she has on a colorful day dress with a bustle.

DEIDRA
I'm glad yer back safe.

CONOR
Ye needn' worry.

DEIDRA
Ye shouldn' give me reason ta.

CONOR
I'm sorry.

Conor kisses her on the top of the head.

DEIDRA

I locked up already. Thought we
might go home early.

CONOR

I like that idea.

She pulls her husband's arm around her shoulder as Henry
rushes up from behind.

HENRY

(calling out)

Hey Conor. You got a moment?

Deidra frowns as she steps aside to allow the men to shake
hands.

CONOR

I'm sorry Deidra. This'll only take
a second.

She bites her lower lip.

DEIDRA

I'll check that I secured the
register. Ye have until I return,
Henry.

As she steps off toward the mercantile, Henry gets straight
to the point.

HENRY

I'm hearing rumors that an Indian
was killed?

CONOR

Unfortunately, THAT rumor is true.

HENRY

Damn. I was hoping... Well, damn.
So, what happened?

CONOR

I'm not really sure. We were up on
Piney Point, watching the pass.
There was a shot. Then some time
later, all hell broke loose.

HENRY

But it wasn't Kuruk?

CONOR

No. Some unlucky young warrior.

HENRY
And only one shot at first?

CONOR
That's right.

Henry rubs his chin.

HENRY
I don't have to tell you, that
doesn't wash.

CONOR
The cavalry guide, Mestiza, was
there. You might want ta talk ta
him.

Deidra pokes her head outside the store and jingles her keys.

HENRY
Thanks, Conor.
(to Deidra)
Sorry for the inconvenience.

DEIDRA
Have a good day, Henry.

Rejoining her husband, she takes his hand, and they start
toward the narrow wooden stairs that lead up to Clark Street.

EXT. BACK ALLEY - DAY

Annie heaves her saddle onto Midnight's back as Henry looks
on.

HENRY
I don't know if this is such a good
idea, Annie. Who knows what Chief
Kuruk might be planning?

She loops the girth strap through the buckle and yanks it
tight.

ANNIE
I wouldn't be here if some of the
Chiricahua hadn't helped me.

HENRY
At least let me go with you.

ANNIE
Considerin' the circumstances, I
don't think you'd be welcome.

HENRY

None of us know what really
happened.

ANNIE

Someone knows.

HENRY

Please don't go stirring things up.

ANNIE

You were the one who told me that
occasionally stirrin' the pot is
the only way to keep it from
boilin' over.

She kisses Midnight on the faint star between his dark eyes
and then swings up onto the saddle.

HENRY

I was talking about stew.

ANNIE

You were talkin' about justice.
It's what I admire most about you.
You seek justice no matter what.

HENRY

Sometimes, I wish I were as
principled as you imagine I am. And
sometimes I wish you were less
principled than I know you are.
Unfortunately, bad people take
advantage of virtue like yours.

ANNIE

Maybe I'm not as virtuous as you
think.

She squeezes her legs and starts Midnight down the alley.

Before the dust can settle, Jimmy comes out the back door of
his restaurant, carrying a bowl full of kitchen scraps.

JIMMY

Where horse go?

HENRY

Annie took him down to the valley.

JIMMY

See Indians again?

He nods.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

We have saying. You can carry sweet
kitten to shore. But you wrestle
fierce cat into water.

HENRY

There's so much open land out here.
No sea in sight.

JIMMY

White man see plenty space. Red man
see plenty white men. Once dust
settle, yellow man have less mouths
to feed.

He dumps the scraps on the ground just as Ambrose rolls a
rusted tin can into the silver-plated tip of Jimmy's
snakeskin boot.

Jimmy bends down and reaches for the can just as a POWERFUL
BLAST up the mountainside SHAKES the ground. A baseball-sized
projectile zips right over his head, SMACKING into the wall
as loose dirt and rocks PEPPER the tin roofs.

The disturbance is over as quickly as it started.

Henry stares at the jagged rock that came to rest near the
wall.

HENRY

That was close.

Jimmy's eyes flash between rock and can.

JIMMY

They keep going deeper and one day
Dalia take tunnel to visit
relatives in China.

HENRY

What about you?

JIMMY

America my home now.

EXT. WAGON ROAD - NIGHT

Annie GALLOPS Midnight along the wagon road between the fort
and Jerome. Her hat dangles by the stampede strap, long red
hair whipping behind slapping Ambrose in the face.

Something ahead catches her attention, near where the road
splits toward Flagstaff.

Slowing to a QUIET WALK, she tucks her hair back beneath her hat and buttons up the top of her shirt.

Men are TALKING, their voices low, mood tense.

INDIANS.

HAMMERING.

Pulling back on the reigns, she leans forward and whispers into Midnight's ear.

ANNIE

Whoa, boy.

The Indians give no indication that they've noticed her. A final HAMMER BLOW. A collective GRUNT as something is lifted.

Ambrose goes ahead to make sure the Indians are gone. When he confirms they are, he raises his camera until the tall silhouette of a road marker appears in the center of the viewfinder.

AMBROSE (V.O.)

(whispers)

I'm so sorry Annie.

Then he films as Annie eases Midnight forward. The night is eerily still but for Annie's RACING HEARTBEAT and ANXIOUS BREATHING. As the wind picks up, the road marker begins to take on a more ominous shape. She forces herself forward. A coyote BARKS in the distance. The cloud that had been shrouding the full moon, moves on.

As the moonlight inches toward the intersection, the road marker transforms into a limp body, its scalped head still wet and glistening.

THE END