

JEROME  
"THE WICKEDEST TOWN IN WEST"

Written by:

Address  
Phone Number

## 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'm bettin' 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 stiffs.  
(spits)

**END TEASER**

ACT ONE

EXT. CLEOPATRA HILL - NIGHT

Morris and Clyde are recklessly sliding down the loose rocks of the steep sloop. 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 bobbies 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 into 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. Comrender?

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' 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  
Whit 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.

Fritz 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**