

THE LEGEND OF WILLIE TELBERG AND SON

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FADE IN:

KANSAS - FALL 1865

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY - DAY

Two rabbits fornicate.

Elsewhere, a kitten hops playfully.

EXT. WOOD CABIN - DAY

A basic but well built wood cabin nestled in a glade 'midst some gently rolling hills.

Out front, an 1860's Union Flag on a slender log pole barely manages a flutter.

Wispy smoke from the adobe chimney at one end of the cabin.

Ordered domesticity.

WILLIE (V.O.)

Remember now. Take him on the first shot, while he has other things on his mind.

The autumn air is punctuated by the FAINT SOUND of a GUNSHOT.

A nanny goat, bloated udder, tethered beneath a small tree near out back of cabin, BLEATS, looks up, alert.

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY - DAY

Lying prone, camouflaged amidst some low brush, Black American WILLIE TELBERG (late 30s), a giant in all respects, ruffles the wispy hair of his twelve-year-old son WALDO lying beside him.

WILLIE

Get his friend another time.

Willie stands, cradles his Spencer lever action Repeater rifle, and gives his Down Syndrome son a helping hand up.

He nods to his son's older model Springfield Muzzle loader which is almost as long as the lad is tall.

Waldo removes the percussion cap from the nipple, blows any dust clear of the Muzzle, shoulders the strap.

His distinctive eyes observe Willie who expertly:

- removes the tube magazine from the Repeater rifle butt-stock;
- removes any remaining cartridges;
- places them in a small leather sack attached to his belt;
- re-inserts the empty tube into the butt-stock.

Willie bends down and picks up two brace of rabbits lying alongside.

Waldo likewise bends down, scoops up a small guinea pig and tucks it inside his shirt.

Beaming mile-wide smiles, father and son head off to collect their latest bounty.

WILLIE

Do us for the day, give these
little critters here a chance to
make up their numbers.

Waldo nods his acknowledgement of the strategy.

EXT. LAURAVILLE MAIN STREET - DAY

A neat and tidy pioneering town: hotel, blacksmith, livery, church, bakery, a few cottages ... but not much more.

Townsfolk, mainly older women, go about their business.

GENERAL STORE

On the facade above the veranda, a sign reads:

"LAURAVILLE GENERAL STORE: EST 1860
H & H. JOHANNSEN PROPRIETORS"

Below on the timber boardwalk, two Old-Timers -- gray-bearded CHESTER and his wife GABBY sit in rocking chairs fashioned from small branches and saplings.

Surrounded by timber shavings, it's hard to tell one from the other as they whittle away.

Gabby consults a fob watch from her pinafore she wears.

GABBY

So what would you be wanting to do
today, hon'?

CHESTER

Nothing, my sweet.

GABBY

But we did that yesterday.

CHESTER

Did we finish?

INT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

Womenfolk go about the business of purchasing supplies.

On a stool behind the counter, teenager HARRIET JOHANNSEN, in a world of her own, puts her mind to needlework on what could pass as an infant's Christening gown.

Some customers check a display of fabrics, others check crockery.

Storekeeper HOWARD JOHANNSEN (40s) sporting a red apron emblazoned with a yellow letter "H" logo, attends to a line of women at a barrel of salted pork.

He fawns over KATIE (late 30s), one of the younger, more attractive customers with a bit of the Celtic wench about her. Some others in line are not impressed.

Storekeeper HANNAH JOHANNSEN (40s) shoots daggers at Howard while she has to contend with a grumpy Older Woman who scrutinizes her weigh up a supply of flour.

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY - DAY

Willie and Waldo, weapons over shoulders, casually trudge across the golden plain with their haul of rabbits.

WALDO

We did good today, eh Pa?

WILLIE

"Well" son. We did "well".

Waldo mouths "well".

WILLIE

We surely did.

Waldo beams, proud as Punch.

WILLIE

Best get our wares cleaned up.
Those white ladies like their meat
fresh. And there's not much of that
around these parts since the war.

WALDO

Why that Pa?

WILLIE

Well they lost a lot of their
menfolk from all the fighting
during that time.

WALDO

And they was giving the white
ladies their meat, fresh, as they
liked it, is what you sayin' Pa?

WILLIE

Put it that way, son, you'd be
telling the truth.

WALDO

So now us black menfolk --

WILLIE

"We", son. We black menfolk.

WALDO

We gotta give it 'em, is what you
saying, Pa?

WILLIE

In a manner of speaking, son, in a
manner of speaking. It's what they
call "the market".

Waldo mouths "meat market" to himself.

WALDO

Better give those white ladies what
they hangin' out for, then.

WILLIE

I can see you have a fine future
here in Kansas, young man.

EXT. GENERAL STORE - VERANDA - DAY

Gabby stops her whittling, blows away the shavings, holds up her stick to check its shape.

She squints off into the distance.

Chester follows her gaze, squints.

EXT. BARN - DAY

Against a wall, a rack, over which a number of rabbit pelts have been slung. A huge tub of water alongside.

Waldo helps Willie as they finish skinning the bunnies.

WALDO

You give Mama her fresh meat when
she wanted it, Pa?

Willie's eyes start, caught off-guard.

WILLIE

I guess I did young man. Yessir, I
guess I did. If there's a lesson to
be learned, sometimes mamas need
special attention.

Willie observes his son digest this.

WILLIE

Now better finish up those
cottontails if you're to get any
money for your reading books. One
day, your school teaching Mama be
very proud of you.

INT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

Katie is treated to an extra large portion of salted pork.
She gives Howard a seductive smile.

The other women in line tut-tut their disapproval and frustration.

GUNS FIRING, WHOOPING AND HOLLERING O.S.

Consternation among all those within the store.

EXT. LAURAVILLE MAIN STREET - DAY

Four horsemen, Rebels in remnants of Confederate Army uniforms, run riot.

Their leader, ALBERT GREESER (40s), wearing a Hardee hat, and his 'lieutenant', HECTOR (40s), oral hygiene wanting, in battered black Derby, front up to the General Store, dismount, grab their saddle bags.

Greeser addresses the two other riders, a hatless, weedy looking JEROME (late 20s) and the strapping ISAAC (late teens), barely able to grow some bum-fluff on his chin.

GREESER

That ride done made me thirsty. See what the town has to offer.

The innocent Isaac lifts his tattered straw hat, vacantly scratches his head, not comprehending.

GREESER

(to Jerome)

Educate the lad, will ya?

Greeser and Hector enter the store.

INT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

Greeser and Hector stomp to the counter, skittling the older woman lined up.

GREESER

Salted pork.

Howard turns from Katie, puts on an unconvincing brave front.

HOWARD

Well, now sir, you might be out of luck ... considering there's been a bit of a run on --

Hector waves his pistol at Howard, approaches Katie with lascivious intent.

HECTOR

And whatever else you ladies might oblige us with.

But Katie will have none of his advances and squares her shoulders and chest to him, dislodging his black derby.

Hector thinks twice, adjusts his hat and goes to the barrel and takes what salted pork remains.

Greeser throws his saddle bag to some of the other women who reluctantly deposit their supplies in them.

Greeser turns his attention to Harriet.

GEEESER
And maybe something for desert.

He grabs Harriet's hand. She drops her needlework. He beckons her outside amidst the usual PLEAS from the women-folk.

Hannah tries to grab her daughter's other hand but to no avail. She turns to her husband.

HANNAH
Well don't just stand there.

But Howard does just that.

Hannah lunges for something behind the counter but stops on the SOUND of a pistol being cocked.

Greeser holds his pistol at Harriet's head.

Hannah slowly produces ... a parasol.

Greeser smiles, amused.

GEEESER
Bad luck to use that inside.

Hector secures the saddle bags.

Greeser drags Harriet by the wrist.

Katie brazenly grabs her other hand.

A tug-o-war ...

Greeser wins...

... and the three tumble out the door ...

...leaving Hannah to lay into the less than heroic Howard with the parasol.

EXT. COUNTRY TRAIL - DAY

On the trail leading into Lauraville.

Willie, cleaned up and in laundered shirt, a bright red kerchief neatly tied around his neck, drives a rickety 2-wheeled market cart pulled by a large work horse, MACDUFF.

Alongside, Waldo, also spruced up, guinea pig on his shoulder, rides bare-back on ABE, a small, aging pony with a slight impediment ...

... a rear hoof tends to drag more than lift, and leaves a slight scar in the dirt.

The SOUND of GUNFIRE and SHOUTING alerts them.

WILLIE
Stay close by, son.
(to the workhorse)
In your hands, MacDuff.

They trot on ... and Lauraville comes into view.

Willie stops the cart.

WILLIE
Might be a good idea to hop aboard,
son.

But Waldo looks eagerly toward the gunfire, tries to assert his independence.

WALDO
Aw, pa. Can't I --?

WILLIE
Know what you're wanting, son. But
on this occasion.

Reluctantly, Waldo sidles up to the cart.

WALDO
And tie Abe to the siding. Put your
trust in MacDuff. He be a veteran
of gunfire. Just another day for
him.

EXT. LAURAVILLE MAIN STREET - DAY

SALOON

Jerome and Isaac outside the saloon, arms laden with bottles of whiskey, firing shots randomly in the air.

A wailing publican, HARVEY JOHANNSON (Howard's twin brother, a Yellow apron with Red "H" logo) runs out after them and watches, helpless, as they stack up their saddle bags.

GENERAL STORE - VERANDA

Chester, unperturbed by the mayhem, stops his whittling, shuffles to the edge of the veranda.

Greeser man-handles Harriet across the veranda, the young teenager pleading for help from Katie and Hannah following with outstretched hands.

Chester looks beyond the unrest.

Greeser follows his gaze. His eyes light up.

Willie and Waldo approach in the very near distance.

MAIN STREET

Hector finishes securing his saddle bags over his horse, looks up at the new arrivals as ...

Greeser drags Harriet into the middle of the street.

The whole town gravitates to the street.

The Rebels all squint their eyes, trying to comprehend the sight of Waldo.

HECTOR

Well, lookie here. We got ourselves
a new breed.

Willie's cart pulls up before the mob.

GREESER

Bin coupling with the Indians. One
of the privileges of freedom, I
suppose.

Waldo secures his pet guinea pig inside his shirt. But it won't comply and pops its head out.

Willie nods towards Harriet's wrist straining under Greeser's grip.

WILLIE

You aiming to snap that off?

Greeser aims his pistol at Willie, gob-smacked by the comment.

GREESER

Now tell me. You look like you be a God-fearing boy.

WILLIE

I am indeed, mister.

GREESER

Mister? Mister who?

WILLIE

I don't rightly know, sir, having never made your acquaintance.

GREESER

Name of Albert Greeser. Captain Albert Greeser. Confederate Engineers Corps. Ring a bell in that ol' head of yours?

Willie shakes his head.

Greeser beckons Isaac nearer. He releases Harriet's wrist, intimates that the young rebel keep guard over her.

Their youthful eyes meet. Isaac blushes fleetingly, but straightens himself and acts the hardened rebel.

Greeser delves inside his shirt, pulls out a sheet of paper.

GREESER

You never seen one of them before?

He waves a crude "Wanted" poster for Willie to see.

HAND-DRAWN PORTRAIT VAGUELY RESEMBLING GREESER.

WILLIE

Wanted? For what?

GREESER

Robbery and mayhem.

WILLIE

Nasty, nasty. But you wouldn't want to add "Murder" to that list, now, would you?

Greeser thinks about this.

GREESER

You just might have a point there,
boy. You sound pretty clever for a
colored boy.

He crudely shoves the poster back inside his shirt and grabs
Harriet's hand again, training his gun on her.

GREESER

What's your name, boy?

Chester proclaims proudly:

CHESTER

That there be Mister Willie
Telberg. An indispensable man in
these here parts.

Greeser scans the gathered population - a severe paucity of
males.

GREESER

(addresses Willie)

That so?

Willie shrugs, *not for me to say.*

GREESER

You be who he says you be?

Willie nods and in turn indicates Waldo.

WILLIE

And my son Waldo.

CHESTER

Might not look it, but he be the
sharpest shooter in the whole state
of Kansas. Shoot a rabbit clean
through the head at fifty paces.

GREESER

(Looks at Waldo)

Don't look like he know one end of
a gun from the other.

Chester shakes his head in disbelief, returns to his rocking
chair and Gabby, and resumes whittling away.

Willie, eyes always on Greeser, reaches down toward his feet
on the floor of the cart.

Greeser swings his weapon back at Willie.

Willie gingerly gathers up the rabbits and displays them.

WILLIE

We sell them to the lady folk. They like their meat nice and fresh, you know.

GEEESER

Do tell, now?

Hector walks over to Willie, takes a brace of rabbits, hind legs tied, examines them.

HECTOR

Clean as a whistle, no bullet holes.

GEEESER

Clean through the head, like you say?

(to Waldo)

Where you learn to shoot like that, boy?

Willie intercedes soberly.

WILLIE

Union Army. 1st Kansas Volunteers.
And later the 79th United States
Colored Infantry.

Hector, consternation on face, whispers in Greeser's ear.

GEEESER

You one of those black boys in blue coats fighting in the green lands of Missouri? That skirmish at Island Mound?

Willie nods indifferently.

GEEESER

Some fine young Southern boys met their maker that day. Maybe you responsible.

Jerome, moves around to Waldo, tries to take the guinea pig.

Willie goes to intervene but Jerome brandishes his pistol, takes possession of the animal, freaks out Waldo.

Greeser issues a sordid smile, holds up Harriet's hand.

GREESER

Think we can have us some fun here,
boys. Let's make us a little deal,
why don't we? Tell you what, Mr
William Tel --

WILLIE

Willie. Willie Telberg.

GREESER

"Telberg". Got a ring to it, that,
eh boys?

The other Rebels chortle.

GREESER

Let's see how good a shot you are,
Mr Tell - Berg, of the 79th United
States Colored Infantry. You gonna
shoot that little ol' rat off that
young man's head ... and I let go
this young lady and leave the town
in peace.

General murmurs of protest from the populace.

WILLIE

Hardly seems fair, now, does it?

GREESER

Can always get yourself a new rat.
But if I take this young lady ...
Seems fair to me.

Willie digests this a moment.

WILLIE

But I don't have a musket.

GREESER

Oh, we can accommodate that.

He drags Harriet over to Hector.

Hector thrusts the rabbits upon Harriet and waves his pistol
near her head.

Greeser goes to his horse and takes his beaten up 1853
Pattern Enfield musket rifle from the saddle holster.

He proffers the weapon to Willie.

Willie looks around at the townsfolk -- consternation on
their faces.

Willie alights the cart, takes the rifle, assesses its weight and balance. Places it to his shoulder, checks the sights. Waves it from one Rebel to the next who all emphasize the weapons they are holding.

He lowers the rifle, turns to Greeser.

Greeser smirks, turns to Jerome, gestures down the street.

GREESER
Thirty paces.

Jerome drags Waldo down from the cart and down the street.

Fortunately, Jerome being of short stature, his thirty paces don't take them very far.

Jerome whips Waldo's hat off and tries unsuccessfully to settle the guinea pig on Waldo's head.

The Townsfolk watch with trepidation.

GREESER
(exasperated)
Try some gentle persuasion.

Jerome flips his pistol in his hand, about to use the butt as a pacifier.

THE TOWNSFOLK IN UNISON PROTEST: IT'S INHUMANE.

Greeser cringes at their pathetic muttering.

GREESER
Okay, okay. Someone get me a fuckin' apple.

STILL THEY PROTEST - TOO SMALL - WHAT IF WILLIE MISSES?

GREESER
Oh, for the love of Pete. A cabbage then. Anybody here got a goddam cabbage?

The crowd all turn their attention to Howard.

Greeser stares Howard down.

GREESER
Methinks you're one man well acquainted with your vegetables.

Short of genuflecting, Howard cowardly backs off, retreats to the general store.

Greeser gestures to Isaac to follow Howard.

As Isaac passes by Harriet, their eyes meet, teenage chemistry.

GREESER
(to Jerome, re - Waldo)
He try to run --

WILLIE
Spare the boy.

HECTOR
Or what?

Hector chuckles at the Muzzle loader Willie holds.

HECTOR
Not gonna do much with that.

WILLIE
More than one way to skin a rodent.

GENERAL STORE:

Howard timidly appears at the door and reluctantly presents a very small cabbage to Isaac.

Isaac relieves him of it, shakes his head, castigating him for the pitiful size of the vegetable.

Leaving Howard in the doorway, Isaac goes back to ...

THE STREET:

...and takes the cabbage to Jerome, who eagerly snatches it.

Waldo secures the guinea pig back inside his shirt as Jerome settles the small cabbage upon his head...

GREESER
If they're all correct in their assessment of your shootin' prowess, then one shot oughta do it. One way or another.

He turns to his comrades.

GREESER
Could be the stuff of legends, eh boys?

A bit like that Swiss rebel with
the bow, if my grasp of history's
up to scratch.

Willie takes his stance, rifle musket safely in the elbow
carry position.

He makes eye contact with Waldo about twenty yards away,
gives a re-assuring nod, declares:

WILLIE
Ready.

He places the rifle upright between his legs, puts a hand
out.

WILLIE
Load.

From a small leather pouch slung over his shoulder, Greeser
removes a paper cartridge and Minié ball.

Willie goes through the regimental 9-step procedure for
loading.

He tears the end of the cartridge with his teeth, pours the
powder, shoves the paper in his pants pocket.

He rams the Minié ball down the barrel, returns the ram-rod,
puts his hand out again.

WILLIE
Prime.

No response is immediately forthcoming.

Willie snaps his fingers.

A sweat appears on Greeser's forehead.

GREESER
Goddam it. The boy's serious.

He fumbles in the leather pouch, hands over a percussion cap.

Willie half cocks the weapon, attaches the cap to the nipple
and returns the weapon to the 'Shoulder Arms' position ...

and waits.

The sweat on Greeser's forehead intensifies.

The other Rebels wait on his command.

Hector has a cynical grin.

Jerome enthusiastic, like a kid at a circus.

Isaac apprehensive, catches Harriet's stare, tries every which way to avert it.

GREESER

Ready!

Willie places the rifle to his shoulder.

GREESER

Aim.

Willie fully cocks the weapon and takes aim. Waits for the command. It's not immediately forthcoming.

WILLIE

Your call, Captain.

Greeser looks from Willie to Waldo and back again. He wipes a sleeve across his forehead.

The other Rebels stare him down, waiting for the word.

The Townsfolk are in two minds whether to look.

Willie casually peers over to see Greeser close his eyes.

He re-focuses on his target.

Greeser finally issues the command.

GREESER

Fire!

Without hesitation Willie fires the weapon.

On the CRACK of the rifle, Greeser grimaces, body shudders. A FART is heard.

The cabbage is safely dislodged from Waldo's head.

Willie turns to Greeser whose eyes are half shut.

WILLIE

If only I had my Spencer.

He tosses the rifle back to Greeser who's ill-prepared to catch it cleanly.

WILLIE

You might be wanting to check your
long-johns maybe, Captain.

Greeser averts Willie's steely glare and gestures to Jerome to bring in Waldo.

GREESER

Deal's a deal, boys, and I'm a man
of my word. This colored Yankee
just saved himself a town.

He nods to Hector who releases Harriet's hand.

She takes the brace of rabbits and runs to Hannah, passing Katie who, displaying an innate maternal urge, moves in to comfort them both.

Waldo runs to Willie. They embrace.

WALDO

You did well, Pa. Like shooting
rabbits, huh? Clear through the
head.

Greeser turns to the relieved crowd.

GREESER

Guess it's time to leave you good
folks in peace ... for the time
being. But just in case some of
you've a mind to come after us, we
gonna take ourselves some
insurance.

He turns and stares at Waldo, prompting Willie to tighten his embrace of his son.

GREESER

So looks like it's you, Mister
Telberg, and that little ol' pony.
What you might call a P.O.Dubya.

The others give a WTF look. Greeser spells it out for them.

GREESER

Prisoner Of War.
(to Jerome)
Tie his hands.

Jerome, scratches his head, gathers some leather thong from a saddle-bag, bustles Waldo aside and, after a fashion, ties Willie's hands in front.

That done, he ushers Willie to the pony.

With extreme difficulty, he hoists Willie's right leg up and over the pony that stands but a mere fourteen hands.

Willie's legs almost touch the ground.

Greeser yells an order.

GREESER
All right. Tie 'em up.

The Rebels don't quite comprehend.

Frustrated, Greeser points to the towns-folk.

GREESER
Tie 'em all up! To the posts. You
never know.

Jerome, Hector and Isaac grab their lariats from their saddles and huddle the townsfolk into three groups around the veranda posts of the General Store, and secure them ... after a fashion.

They return to their mounts and await further instructions.

Waldo looks beseechingly toward Willie.

HECTOR
What about the boy?

GREESER
Wouldn't know one end of a rope
from another.

Jerome, bewildered by this comment, holds his two index fingers up close to each other, comparing them as if they were the two ends of a rope.

Greeser rolls his eyes.

GREESER
Leave them to worry about him.

He snaps his fingers at Hector and gestures toward Harriet.

GREESER
Like you ladies, we like our meat
nice and fresh, too.

Hector's face registers. He goes to Harriet and snatches back the brace of rabbits from her and slings them over Abe's withers.

Hannah, brandishing her parasol as best she can, yells abuse.

HANNAH
The war's over, don't you know?

GEESEER
Better tell those brave boys still
fightin' down in Texas. Don't mean
nothin' just 'cos Lee threw in the
towel.

Hector looks to the others, bewildered, mouths the phrase.

HECTOR
"Threw in the towel"?

The other two have no idea.

GEESEER
A manner of speakin'. Couldn't
stand the shit in the stable.

Gabby waves her fist.

GABBY
Yer nothing but a rebel what don't
have no cause!

GEESEER
Didn't know I needed one.

Hannah brandishes her parasol again but Jerome ambles over, snatches it and tries to snap it in two over a bent knee.

But the cane is stronger than he expected and all he does is inflict pain on his spindly knee.

Greeser mounts up, calls to the others.

GEESEER
Enough of this horse shit. Time to
skedaddle.

Red-faced, Jerome takes the parasol and leads his horse to the cart.

GEESEER
Nope. Leave that. We won't be
needin' no rickety ol' cart that's
gonna be an impendi ... imdepi ...
imp -- That's gonna slow us down to
wherever we going.

Jerome complies and he mounts up.

Willie gives a re-assuring nod to Waldo.

WILLIE
No need on fretting about little
old Abe, now, son.

Waldo returns the nod.

WILLIE
I'm just going to help these
poor men who seemed to have lost
their way. I'll be back with Abe
before the hens get to roosting. So
you best be getting back home. You
still have chores need doing.

Waldo offers a filial smile.

WILLIE
You'll be in good hands with
MacDuff. But don't stray too far
from home, you hear me?

Greeser contorts a good old fashion cringe at this banter.

GREESER
Oh mammy, mammy.

He fires a shot into the air to stop it all.

He turns to the townsfolk and offers a departing coda:

GREESER
Time you folks got yourself a
sheriff.
(he offers a mock salute)
Until our next visit.

They lope off, and escort Willie out of town.

As the dust clears, Howard runs from the refuge of the General Store, past the restrained townsfolk, into the street
...

and gathers up the remains of the cabbage -- a neat entry hole, exit not so neat -- ignoring the curses of the citizens voicing their contempt for the man.

EXT. LAURAVILLE - DAY

Waldo and the cart trek out of town.

His hat rides shotgun on the seat beside him.

Atop his head, "Cav" the pet guinea pig nibbles a remnant of cabbage lodged in his curly hair.

INT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

Harriet, lost in her own little world, sweeps up the mess left by the gang.

At a counter with crates of vegetables, Howard repatriates the remains of the shattered cabbage in with other, much larger heads.

Hannah, arms laden with tangled ropes, stomps up to him.

HANNAH

He's one lucky son-of-a, then,
ain't he, eh?

She shoves her burden upon him.

Unfazed, Howard expertly coils and binds the ropes, hangs them on a backboard with others for sale.

Hannah picks up a carrot from the floor where Harriet sweeps.

HANNAH

Reckon the town'd be in good hands
with a man like that in control.

Harriet stops sweeping, massages the tip of the broom handle.

HANNAH

No prizes for guessing what's on
your mind.

Harriet snaps out of her reverie, but remains idle.

HARRIET

We gotta do something about getting
that man back.

Hannah realizes she is fondling the carrot and quickly wipes it on her apron, replaces it in its crate.

Howard, finished with the ropes, relieves Harriet of the broom.

HOWARD

Don't you go worrying yourself too
much about men like that. If them
stories about their kind be true --

HARRIET

But what about the little one? He
surely needs his papa, don't he? Or
don't his life matter, just 'cos
he's diff --?

HOWARD

That boy be fine. The good Lord
will sort him out ... one way or
another.

He assumes the pose of a preacher man, holding the broom
handle as if it were Moses' staff.

HOWARD

Good Lord brought him into this
world in his own way, good Lord
take him out in his own way.

Harriet and Hannah both look at him in disbelief.

Howard thrusts the broom into Hannah's hands.

She glares daggers at this chauvinistic act.

HOWARD

'Til then, trust the good Lord'll
guide him along the way.

EXT. WOOD CABIN - DAY

MacDuff draws the cart toward the cabin ...

... Waldo gives a casual salute to the Union flag on its pole
out front as they slowly pass by ...

BARN

... and approach a rudimentary barn at the rear.

EXT. UNDULATING KANSAS PLAINS - DAY

The Rebels trot slowly. Every now and then they swig from a
whiskey bottle, Jerome shading himself under the parasol.

Willie scans the surrounding country.

WILLIE

You know, there's plenty of honorable work to be done in these parts. Seems to be the way after a war's end. Things need rebuilding.

GEEESER

No thank you. I done my share of building. No desire to do more, even if to save myself.

Willie regards Greeser, waiting for elaboration.

GEEESER

The South weren't the only ones, you know. Plenty of doodle dandies did the destructive deeds as well. Broke this man's heart seeing his handiwork wantonly reduced to scorched earth by them Yankees.

Willie mouths the words "*destructive deeds*", an empathetic nod.

They ride on silently, each ruminating on these memories.

GEEESER

Reason enough to make a man join the fight.

WILLIE

What about the cause?

GEEESER

Not my cause. Only cause I had was protecting my own interests.

WILLIE

So, it's the color of the uniform I wore is your grievance, I take it?

Geeser is uncomfortable with the challenge.

GEEESER

Any ways, like I says, they're still fighting down in Texas.

WILLIE

So why aren't you down there?

Geeser doesn't answer.

WILLIE
Or could it be you have a fondness
for Kansas after all?

Isaac, in earshot, looks earnestly at Willie.

INT. BARN - DAY

It's big enough for a market cart, two horse stalls, another for a smaller animal, a stack of hay ...

The market cart is parked, the shafts resting on the dirt floor.

Waldo feeds hay to MacDuff in his stall.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

An unruly meeting of about twenty citizens of Lauraville. The women outnumber the men three to one.

Even then, there's not a young man's face in sight, the place bordering on geriatric -- except for a few women like Katie.

A frail PASTOR tries unsuccessfully to maintain control.

PASTOR
Ah-ha. Brethren, Brethren, this is
unGodly.

There is no response. He pulls out a pistol, looks to the heavens, and fires off a SHOT.

With desired effect achieved, he convenes the meeting.

PASTOR
Ah-ha. The good Lord surely does
work in mysterious ways. Now,
gentle folk of Lauraville. We've
convened this special meeting of
our Progress Association --

Katie yells from a pew.

KATIE
(Irish accented)
Progress? What progress? Nigh on
six years my late fear and me came
here to Kansas, before we even
joined the Union ...

A CHORUS of "Hear, Hear", "The Union, The Union" ...

KATIE

...and we must be the only town in
the whole of the state that's still
without its own sheriff.

Roars of agreement from the women folk, mutterings from the handful of old men present, all seated together.

ISABELLA, a middle-aged, lusty Italian immigrant woman, stands and refers to these older men.

ISABELLA

And-a ain't it-a any wonder?

Various protests and excuses issue from the men... followed by derision from the women.

HOWARD

Ain't never had need of one before
today.

KATIE

And now we do. So which of us is
man enough to put their hand up?

HOWARD

I gotta run a business essential to
the town.

CHESTER

My eyesight ain't much good these
days.

VOICE #1

(old and croaky)

I haven't handled my weapon in
years.

A senile DOCTOR, frail and stooped, thick, bottle bottom spectacles, nursing his medicine bag, stands and addresses the gathering.

DOCTOR

Looks like it's down to me. You can
pin the star on my chest if --

But he is howled down by taunts like

VOICE #2

Might weigh you down, Doc.

He reluctantly resumes his seat.

Hannah stands and, ignoring her husband, addresses the women folk.

HANNAH

We gonna need some real action around here if we hope to get the sheriff we deserve. And that means a meeting of the Lauraville Women's Auxiliary.

Without further ado, all the women stand, and retreat toward the rear of the church.

INT. MEETING ROOM - DAY

The women settled into a circle of bentwood chairs. Hannah holds the floor.

HANNAH

The way I see it, we got only one course of action.

The other women wait with baited breath.

HANNAH

I'm proposing we send a delegation to Lucille Town and bring their Sheriff here to liberate Mister Telberg.

Isabella immediately shoots her hand into the air.

ISABELLA

Count-a me inna.

Immediately each and every one of the Women shoot their hand into the air.

EXT. LONE GRAVE SITE - DAY

Waldo uses a metal watering can to water flowers in a garden bed surrounding a lone grave site.

Carved in the wood headstone, the inscription:

CLARISSA ABRAHAM TELBERG, April 14, 1832 - June 15, 1865

EXT CHURCH LAURAVILLE - DAY

Hannah holds the reins of a two-horse, four-wheeled dray, Isabella on the seat beside her.

Improvised as a passenger carriage, Katie is seated in a cosy Victorian era lounge chair tied on the tray itself.

In Gabby's case, it's a rocking chair similarly secured.

Howard stands before the horses, a pathetic attempt to prevent any progress.

HANNAH

We've thought long and hard on
this, Howard. We can't just abandon
Mister Telberg in our hour of need.

Lascivious murmurs of agreement from the others.

EXT. UNDULATING KANSAS PLAINS - CREEK - DAY

The Rebels, with Jerome sheltering his bare head under the parasol, come across a shallow but free flowing creek.

They stop mid-stream, dismount. While the horses drink, they fill their canteens.

WILLIE

You planning on going on all day?

GEESESER

Now that's for me to know and for
you to speculate on.

WILLIE

It's just that this little old
pony. Well he's little. And he's
old.

GEESESER

Meaning?

WILLIE

Meaning he might not make it much
further, what with him carrying me
all this way. He's not built for
it, as I'm sure you have an eye to
testify.

GEESESER

If he drops dead you'll just have
to carry them rabbits all the way
to wherever 'tis we're goin', won't
you now?

WILLIE

What I was thinking is that, seeing as how we don't seem to be in much of a hurry any more, maybe if I get off now and walk a little ways, old Abe here might get himself a new lease on life.

GEESEER

Why you care so much for that ol' pony.

WILLIE

He belongs to my son, see. And I promised I'd return him safe and sound ASAP.

The rabble are all bemused by the term "ASAP".

Ignoring them, Willie does a casual survey of surroundings.

WILLIE

And besides. If he was to drop dead on us, we'd soon have us some uninvited guests come fly in for a free meal.

HECTOR

Meaning? He ain't much use to us. We ain't gonna eat him. Leave him to the buzzards right now and be done with it.

Geeser addresses Hector directly in an educated tone.

GEESEER

What the gentleman is telling us is that, as a consequence, it might be a calling card for others.

Willie is impressed.

Geeser gestures for Willie to dismount.

GEESEER

Let's see if your walkin's as good as your talkin'.

Willie dismounts, manages to untie his kerchief from his neck, soaks it in the stream and refreshes his face.

WILLIE

Right mannerly of you Mister Geeser.

Willie looks briefly to a small hillock yonder.

GREESER
(pats his holstered pistol)
You been doin' a lot of
sightseeing, Mister Telberg, and I
know it's your duty, as a
P.O.Dubya, to try to escape ...

WILLIE
It's my duty as a father to escape.
In case you missed it back there, I
have a son who's in need of his Pa
to guide him on his way to manhood.

GREESER
Or perhaps it's a Pa in need of his
son?

WILLIE
All the same. First chance I get.

HECTOR
Take his boots Cap'n? In case he
does plan on running away.

Greeser thinks about it a moment ... Shakes his head.

GREESER
Can't deny a man his boots, I don't
suppose.

Willie looks again to the small hillock.

Isaac follows Willie's gaze ...

A HILLOCK

Kiowa Native Americans oversee proceedings below.

RESUME REBELS

ISAAC
Albert, we got company.

Greeser cringes at the turn of phrase used.

GREESER
"Albert"?

ISAAC
Beggin' ya pardon, Captain Sir, but
we --

Greeser looks toward the hillock, dismisses the concern.

GREESER
Ain't no concern for us. They be on
the Confederate side. They sure
ain't gonna help our Mister Telberg
escape his masters again.
(addresses Willie)
Eh, boy?

WILLIE
Masters? I say again. Like every
man born to God, I was born free.

GREESER
Then we must have different Gods,
boy, cos that's not what I learned
in the scriptures.

WILLIE
You learn them by reading them?

Greeser stares daggers. The others give a surly chuckle.

Greeser flings out a hand toward Hector.

Hector's a bit slow on the uptake.

Greeser snaps his fingers.

The light bulb goes on and Hector hands over the near empty
whiskey bottle. Greeser holds it up, reads the label.

GREESER
"Whiskey - Tennessee's Finest".
Now, you gonna tell me that's how
you done your learning?

Willie reaches up, requests the bottle.

Greeser, suspicious, hands it over.

WILLIE
(reads the label)
"Highest Quality Lincoln County".

Isaac listens intently to this conversation.

GREESER
(snatches back the bottle)
That so? And where've you been
doing all that reading?

WILLIE
A little school in a little town in
Massachusetts. And a pretty little
school ma'am by the name Clarissa.

Greeser scoffs, leads his horse away.

Isaac sidles up alongside Willie.

ISAAC
You really able to read real words,
in real books?

Willie smiles, nods his confirmation.

Isaac pulls from his shirt a small edition of the New Testament.

ISAAC
You think someone like me could do
that too?

WILLIE
Even you Isaac. Even you. Just need
the right type of soil to plant
your feet in.

Willie slings the dampened kerchief loosely around his neck
as best he can.

The others remount and amble off. With eyes still on the
Natives, Willie leads Abe by the reins, follows after them.

EXT. VEGETABLE GARDEN - AFTERNOON

Waldo uses a hoe to weed between the rows of vegetables.

The goat, tethered some yards away nibbles on the leafy
remnants of some carrot tops.

EXT. UNDULATING KANSAS PLAINS - AFTERNOON

Willie leads Abe by the reins, looks to the afternoon sun in
the western sky.

He wipes the perspiration from his forehead with his
kerchief.

WILLIE

Sure is hot for this time of the day.

GEEESER

You hinting at something, boy?

Willie looks to Jerome, under the protection of the parasol, sniggering back.

WILLIE

Just saying. Work up a thirst doing nothing much at all.

Geeser hands over the near empty whiskey bottle. Willie declines.

WILLIE

Prefer water myself.

JEROME

Well we ain't going back to no creek jus' for you. An' it's a scarce commodity 'round these parts. 'Less you led to believe it fall from the sky like dead birds in the desert or somethin'?

Isaac and Geeser shake their heads pathetically, the former about to correct his comrade. Geeser gestures 'NO!'

GEEESER

You'll get your ration Mister Telberg when we make camp.

A black snake, about five feet long, slithers beneath Abe's front legs. The pony shies.

Both Jerome and Hector draw pistols and blast away at the reptile. Their aim is not good -- but enough rounds soon find their mark.

WILLIE

He weren't planning on any harm.

GEEESER

What makes you so sure?

WILLIE

Color of his skin.

GEEESER

(sotto voce)

Color of his --

WILLIE

Just a common old black Kansas
pilot snake.

A compassionate Isaac looks down at the snake, writhing in its final death throes, and mutters some sort of prayer.

WILLIE

I'm sure he was just passing
through.

HECTOR

Passed right on, now.

They move off again. Willie wipes his forehead with his red kerchief. He surreptitiously scrunches it into a ball and clinches it tightly in his hand, hidden from view.

EXT. OPEN PLAINS - TRACK - DRAY - AFTERNOON

Howard's four-wheel dray bounces every which way as it races along the rarely used track.

Katie holds on for dear life, petrified.

KATIE

I thought we were on a mission to
save a life?

Gabby in her rocking chair has gone beyond fear, and HOWLS with delight.

EXT. UNDULATING KANSAS PLAINS - AFTERNOON

The inebriated Rebels meander at a snail's pace.

Greeser finishes the whiskey bottle, tosses it aside. It reflects the late afternoon sun as it lands.

He stops, looks about him, to his left, to his right.

Hector rides up next to him.

HECTOR

Over that ridge?

Isaac, looking uneasy, turns to Jerome riding behind Willie mounted on Abe.

ISAAC

They done got us lost. Again.

JEROME

What you worried about. The Captain got us this far. And picked us up a Yankee along the way, remember?

A state of confusion and disagreement ensues between Greeser and Hector.

Greeser trots off. Hector refuses to follow. Jerome and Isaac undecided.

Hector reluctantly concedes and sets off after Greeser.

Isaac and Jerome follow suit.

They stop in their tracks ... and double back to escort Willie and Abe.

Willie chances a quick glance at the discarded whiskey bottle. A glint of hope in his eye as they lope off.

EXT. BARN - LATE AFTERNOON

Waldo emerges from the barn, a small wood pail in one hand.

A goat BLEATS from within.

Waldo goes to the side of the building, to a protected chicken run.

Most of the chickens have already roosted.

Waldo lifts the wood lid of the protruding laying box, removes the eggs into the pail.

He looks up and yonder.

A wild dog of some sort retreats into some scrub.

He looks back at the run as the massive Brahma cockerel struts his stuff among his settling seraglio.

Waldo smiles, reassured of the birds' safety.

EXT. PLAINS - DRAY - LATE AFTERNOON

The dray is stationary. Unraveled rope upon its tray.

To one side, in the dirt, lies a shattered rocking chair.

Katie and Isabella assist a shaken Gabby aboard the seat at the front of the dray.

GABBY

Ain't been tossed like this since
Chester first had his way with me
in the hay wagon in our courtin'
days.

She settles in beside Hannah who fusses over her, much to the senior's annoyance.

GABBY

Never mind me, we got ourselves a
man needs savin'.

Katie and Isabella gather the remnants of Gabby's chair and toss them on the dray among the loosened ropes.

With a helping hand from Isabella, Katie hefts herself aboard the tray and tentatively resumes her place in her tied-down lounge chair.

Isabella climbs aboard alongside Gabby.

Hannah cracks the whip.

The horses bolt into action.

Everyone is jolted back and forth.

Gabby is as spirited as a pig in shit.

EXT. DALE IN HILLS - LATE AFTERNOON

The Rabble's tired horses walk their inebriated riders into a small dale, nestled between some low-lying dunes.

The remnants of a campfire lie not far from a trickling brook that makes its way lazily through a sparse copse of struggling trees and bushes.

They stumble off their mounts and after a fashion sling the reins over some bushes, and go behind them for a pee.

Willie remains mounted.

They return from the bushes, stare at Willie.

GREESER

Well?

Abe pisses on cue. It's a long, drawn out affair. Willie squints his eyes, trying to maintain self control.

GREESER
I'm supposing you think it's your
turn now, Mister Telberg?

WILLIE
(eagerly)
That I am.

GREESER
"That I am"?

No time for pride. Desperate times call for ...

WILLIE
That I am, please, massa.

Greeser nods to Jerome who fails to respond.

He repeats the gesture.

Still no response.

GREESER
His turn!

JEROME
But he's tied up.

WILLIE
Brighter than the average firefly
at noon.

GREESER
Then untie him.

JEROME
But what if he -- ?

GREESER
I'm sure his pony's too tired for
any escaping.

Jerome unties Willie.

Willie heads behind the bushes. Jerome starts to follow.

GREESER
You plannin' on seein' if'n it's
true what they say?

Jerome stops, baffled by the innuendo.

Hector and Isaac remove the saddles from their horses.

Jerome follows suit.

Greeser gestures toward the rabbits slung over Abe's withers.

GREESER
Besides, like he say, there's
chores need doing. Of the culinary
kind.

LATER THAT DAY - DUSK

INT. WOOD CABIN - DUSK

Calico curtains in a small window glow faint orange with the last of the day's light.

A lighted oil lamp on a small kitchen table, another on a crockery dresser, illuminate the room and other rudimentary furniture in the neat and tidy room.

At a pot belly stove set back in a stone fireplace, Waldo attends a pot of stew as it simmers.

The place is a celebration of good husbandry.

EXT. CAMP SITE - DUSK - SAME

Willie, hands no longer shackled, slowly turns an improvised spit with four rabbits, skewered on a long sapling, sizzling over glowing coals.

He stares warily at the sniggering Rebels.

EXT. LUCILLE TOWN - DUSK - SAME

Another town, larger and busier than Lauraville.

A number of COWBOYS roam Main Street.

SHERIFF'S OFFICE - SAME

A 'CLOSED' sign hung on the inside of the glass panel of the front door.

Hannah and her colleagues bang on the door regardless, to no avail.

KATIE

Gardai that keeps office hours?
What's the world coming to?

GABBY

Maybe gone to his mama's for a home
cooked meal.

A cowboy, VITTORIO (40s) passes by. He speaks with a Latino
accent.

VITTORIO

Sheriff ain'ta got no mamma. Eatta
inna saloon.

Isabella is duly impressed with Vittorio's 'Rudy Valentino'
attributes.

VITTORIO

I show.

He ushers the eager women along the timber sidewalk.

INT. LUCILLE HOTEL - SALOON - DUSK

Something straight out of the Marx Bros film "Go West".

The Cowboys stop chatting up the gaily clad gals as our Women
enter and approach the bar.

Gabby fights off unwanted attention from a few scruffy
cowboys who obviously haven't had much social interaction in
quite a while.

The BARTENDER approaches. Above the mirror behind, a sign:

"FAST FOOD SOLD HERE"

BARTENDER

We got all the dancing girls we
need, and we don't allow working --

Gabby slaps an open palm on the bar.

GABBY

Just give us a well-earned drink,
Mister!

ISABELLA

And-a mange.

The Bartender doesn't comprehend.

Isabella mimics hand to mouth.

GABBY
Whatta you got?

BARTENDER
We're a cattle town.

KATIE
Beefsteaks all round.

HANNAH
And then point us in the direction
of the Sheriff.

A handsome, better dressed gentleman, SHERIFF WYLON THORPE (40-ish) approaches the women.

THORPE
Ladies.

He pulls back the lapel of his coat, reveals a Sheriff's badge upon his chest.

THORPE
Sheriff Wylon Thorpe at your service.

The women are captivated, Katie is smitten.

Hannah brushes Katie aside. Takes Thorpe's elbow.

Isabella takes Thorpe's other elbow.

ISABELLA
We-a all-a need-a man like-a you
righta now.

Thorpe puffs his chest like a strutting peacock.

THORPE
Of course, I'll have to check my diary.

Gabby joins the others, girding him. His panache wilts.

THORPE
Which I think is pretty much booked out, come to think of it.

HANNAH
Sheriff, we've come all the way from Lauraville to secure your services.

THORPE

Like I said, pretty much booked --

HANNAH

We represent the Lauraville
Progress Association Women's
Auxiliary. And we are victims of a
Confederate attack.

THORPE

Confederate? Attack?

HANNAH

Albert Greeser and his gang.

Thorpe nods his recognition of the name.

THORPE

Came by here 'bout a week back.
(expands his chest)
Soon drove 'em out of town. Why
don't your own sheriff take care of
him?

HANNAH

On account of we don't have one.
'Cos of the war, we ain't got no
eligible men folk.

KATIE

Excepting one.

HANNAH

And that is our mission.

Katie muscles her way in front of Gabby, grabs Thorpe by his badge as a way of emphasis.

KATIE

So if you could find it in your
heart to gather together a wee
posse of brave deputies.

Thorpe looks around at the scruffy patrons.

THORPE

And leave this town in their hands?

GABBY

We'll make it worth your while.

Thorpe cringes at the sight of Gabby's lascivious look.

THORPE
Unfortunately, my contract forbids
payola.

The Bartender slops four plates of charred steaks, claret
juices oozing, alongside four mugs of beer on the counter.

Gabby consults a fob watch from her pinafore pocket.

GABBY
Wanna join me, ladies?

They each grab a steak and beer and go to a vacant table.

The four women remain standing.

Thorpe clears his throat, pulls out the chairs and assists
the women be seated.

THORPE
Why don't you ladies eat up
...drink up ...
(gestures to the stairs)
...then head up, freshen up, and
head down for the evening's
entertainment.

Katie ogles him with puppy dog eyes.

KATIE
Or we could just eat up, head up
and just settle down for a bould
night.

Hannah glares at Katie. Addresses Thorpe.

HANNAH
Sheriff. We came here because we
are lacking something in our lives.
We trust you'll find a way to give
us satisfaction in this regard.

Thorpe looks around despairingly at the motley crew of
cowboys.

HANNAH
By sunup tomorrow?

Thorpe vacillates.

HANNAH
A man's welfare is on the line
here.

THORPE
I'll sleep on it.

Placated, the women hoe into their rarest of steaks.

INT WOOD CABIN - SAME

At the table, with the oil lamp glowing, Waldo finishes a plate of stew, mopping up with a drop scone biscuit.

He stares with concern at a second, clean plate opposite him.

EXT. CAMPSITE - EVENING

Willie gnaws what flesh he can from leftover bones piled high on a tin plate. Hunger is hunger.

Around the campfire, the Rebels, reclined against their saddles, share a whiskey bottle.

GREESER
Looks like you a boy used to gnawing on bones. Do a bit of cooking for your old master, back in Massachusetts, did we?

WILLIE
Like I already told you. Born a free man, die a free man.

GREESER
Well, now that's a matter open to a bit of disputing.

Greeser gets confirmation from the others.

GREESER
More coffee, boy.

Willie stands, grudgingly picks up a pot from the coals at the edge of the camp fire, hovers before Greeser in a threatening manner.

Greeser pulls his pistol from its holster nestled next to his saddle, cocks it. Willie obligingly pours the coffee.

The others in turn hold out their pannikins, as if he really was their slave.

Willie obliges.

INTERCUT

EXT. WOOD CABIN - EVENING

An oil lamp, on a crude wood table just outside the back door, illuminates a metal bowl with steaming water from a kettle alongside. Adjacent the table, a water barrel.

GEEESER blows over his coffee, cooling it before he sips.

GEEESER
That son of yours. Tell me he's not
natural born.

Willie stands tall, chest out.

WALDO places his soiled plate into the bowl, ladles in some water from the barrel.

HECTOR (V.O.)
Heck, maybe it's mother ain't
natural born, neither.

Waldo tests the temperature -- just right.

JEROME (V.O.)
Goddam it!

JEROME brushes away spilt coffee from his shirt.

JEROME
He done burn my mouth.

Greeser looks at Willie, raises his eyes to the heavens.

Jerome tosses the coffee away ...

JEROME
Tastes like coyote piss anyway.

... and swigs from a whiskey bottle.

GEEESER
Where were we?

HECTOR
The boy's mother. Musta been a poor
run-down sla --

Pride swells within Willie. He holds the coffee pot like it was a royal scepter.

WILLIE

That boy's mother was free born!
And clever. Taught the young
chil'en to read 'n' write in a
little school house.

ISAAC

She the one maybe learn me to read
and write?

WILLIE

Not any more, son. Since she's
recently departed.

(reminisces)

No other woman like her. Stole my
heart --

(snaps his fingers)

-- like that.

The others try unsuccessfully to emulate his finger snapping.

WILLIE

Made me the happiest man when she
obliged me with a child... And just
as soon as I'm able, I intend re-
uniting with him.

He replaces the coffee pot over the coals, resumes sitting,
reminisces.

WILLIE

A father don't disown his
responsibilities to his own son,
now, just because he's a little
different.

Forget the finger snapping -- forget the coffee -- the
whiskey bottle passes around.

WILLIE

Sometimes things don't go the way
our Maker planned them.
...Sometimes, well, there's just no
explaining, his mother being so
pretty and so smart.

JEROME

Pretty? Smart! I ain't never seen
no pretty and smart slave girl.

WILLIE

Oh, yessir.
 (addresses Jerome)
 A whole lot smarter and prettier
 than the coyotes and grizzlies with
 which you are no doubt familiar.

Riled, Jerome confronts Willie.

Willie jumps to his feet, anticipating ...

Jerome goes for the throat but Willie evades him, helping him on his way with a rabbit chop to his neck.

Hector and Greeser train their pistols on Willie.

Greeser gestures to the reluctant Isaac to assist Hector pin the huge man's arms back.

JEROME

(appeals to Greeser)
 Y'all witness that?

Greeser shakes his head slowly, exasperated, as if chastening a naughty child.

GEESEER

Tsk tsk. You erred there, mister.
 Must know there ain't been a
 grizzly in Kansas for nigh on fifty
 years.

The others can't believe what Greeser is on about.

A petulant Jerome appeals to Greeser.

JEROME

He attacked me. Ain't no boy do
 that and get away with it?

GEESEER

Gotta agree with the lad. Went a
 little too far there, attacking a
 soldier under my command. Gonna
 have to mete out some martial law
 punishment.

He nods to Jerome.

Jerome slams a fist into Willie's ribs.

Willie slumps, winded.

GREESER
Seems like some people never learn
their place.

On regaining composure, Willie addresses Greeser.

WILLIE
So, it's not the color of my old
uniform you despise, after all.

Greeser gets agitated by the comment but can't commit to a reply.

HECTOR
Calls for a lynching in my book.
Just like me and some gentlemen
friends did to that sonofabitch
over in Atchison.

ISAAC
(finding courage)
Never been a lynchin' in Atchison.
You ain't never lynched no-one.

HECTOR
Have too!

ISAAC
Not!

HECTOR
Have too!

ISAAC
Not!

They leave a bewildered Willie and start pushing and shoving each other.

As they bicker, Willie starts backing away into the bushes.

A SHOT is fired, ending the fracas, stalling Willie's retreat.

The others look toward Greeser who indicates Willie's position.

GREESER
Don't care shit about Atchison. Tie
him up again. Hands behind. And
take off his boots and do his feet.

He eyeballs Willie.

GREESER
You know the penalty, boy.

Willie stares him down in disdain, spits to the ground.

GREESER
We gonna have a real life lynching
come sun up tomorrow.

Hector and Jerome give each other a high five -- their action a source of consternation for both Willie and Isaac.

INT. WOOD CABIN - NIGHT

With the aid of the oil lamp, Waldo, guinea pig on his shoulder, sits in a rocking chair draped with a crocheted blanket, reads a copy of '*Aunt Lely's Picture Alphabet*' book.

Concentrating on a page, he reads aloud, articulating his "R" as best can.

WALDO
"R is for Rabbit, that hops to and fro, and likes to eat carrots and all things we grow."

He closes the book, recites *sotto* what he has just read, pleased with himself.

Eyes weary, he takes the book to the dresser, stretches on tip-toe and places it on a shelf with a handful of other volumes, such as '*An American Dictionary*', '*The Anti-Slavery Alphabet*', and a Bible.

He douses the lamp there and puts his guinea pig in its cage, hand-crafted from timber slats, with "CAV" carved into part of the frame.

He strips down to his long-johns, takes the lamp from the table, goes outside a moment.

The guinea pig nestles itself into its bed of straw.

Waldo re-enters, notices the unused bowl still on the table, toys with it a moment.

He takes the lamp and goes to a doorway to another room, peaks inside:

SMALL BEDROOM

A brass and iron double bed. A chair and a small chest of drawers. No room for much else.

Atop the chest of drawers, a framed sepia photo portrait of a beautiful black woman in her 20s.

MAIN ROOM

Waldo steps back from the doorway. Stands beside the fireplace and the pot belly stove.

He places a hand on the barrel of his musket rifle leaning against it. A smile appears.

He settles the lamp on the mantle-piece, reaches on tip-toes and takes down Willie's Repeater rifle resting upon it.

... fondles it, assesses its weight and balance, sights the bead into the rear notch, a broader smile.

... tests out the lever. The chamber is empty.

He replaces the rifle.

He closes the vent in the pot belly, takes the lamp to a simple side-table beside a small bunk in a corner of the room, adorned with a bedspread fashioned from rabbit furs.

He kneels beside his bunk, brings his palms together and SILENTLY prays ever so briefly.

He gets himself into bed, douses the oil lamp.

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

The dead of night. Willie, ankles tied and hands tied behind his back, pretends to sleep. His eyes squint at the others.

Greeser, Hector and Jerome snore loudly.

Isaac, fully dressed in the remnants of his uniform, stands watch -- or rather, he's slumped on his haunches, musket rifle across his knees, drifting in and out of somnolence.

Willie contorts himself every which way to free himself, trying to bring his hands from behind, under his buttocks but to no avail.

Greeser stirs, takes a vacant look toward Willie but doesn't register ... just a restless sleeper.

Willie eases himself toward a small rocky outcrop; rubs the thong on his hands against rocks.

The occasional stirring from Isaac interrupts his efforts.

None of the rocks are sharp enough.

Frustrated, he shuffles over to the dying embers of the camp fire.

Saying a silent prayer, he positions the thong on his bare ankles over an isolated coal.

No go, too hot! He YELPS.

Isaac wakes, sees Willie by the fire, wincing in discomfort.

He aims his rifle.

Willie subtly shakes his head and mouths something inaudible.

Isaac edges nearer and Willie, a pleading look in his eyes, whispers in Isaac's ear.

Caught between a rock and a hard place, Isaac looks at the sleeping comrades.

Still more pleading and a nod (you can do it).

Isaac relents, lays down his rifle, assists Willie to stand. He kneels and removes the thonging from his ankles.

Willie closes his eyes in anticipation as Isaac, face in front of Willie's crotch, about to untie his pants belt --

A bootless foot kicks Isaac away.

GREESER
Coyotes and ugly grizzlies I can understand.

ISAAC
Coyotes and --?

He looks to Willie who hikes his shoulders.

ISAAC
You don't think --?

Another pleading look toward Willie who shakes his head vehemently.

Hector and Jerome stir from their drunken slumbers.

GREESER

Fraternizing with the enemy. That's
one helluva crime.

ISAAC

He was just wanting to take a piss.

GREESER

Damn fool, Next thing he want you
to untie his hands so's he can
wander off and take a shit. And
then what?

Isaac looks a little wary as to how to respond.

HECTOR

He gonna stink the place out! We'll
never get any sleep.

Greeser stares at Hector.

GREESER

He escape ... and we all end up in
the shit!

Hector thinks about this.

ISAAC

But he just wanna take a leak.

GREESER

Then he'll just have to hold on
'til morning when I'm pretty sure
he gonna do enough pissin' an'
shittin' to last a lifetime.

EXT. KANSAS PLAINS - NIGHT

The SOUNDS of wildlife in the silhouetted low lying distant
hills herald in the pending new day.

A cockerel CROWS somewhere

INT. TELBERG CABIN - DAWN

In the soft glow of the oil lamp, Waldo at the table, wearing
a coat for the cool morning. He scoops the last of his
oatmeal from the bowl.

He sits a moment, gathers his thoughts, looks over to the
Spencer repeater rifle set up on the fireplace mantle-piece.

He stands and exits the back door with his bowl.

Cav scratches the slats of its cage, agitated.

Waldo returns with his clean bowl and places it on the dresser.

He takes the rifle down and fondles it, assesses its weight and balance, sights the bead into the rear notch, smiles.

He tests out the lever. The chamber is empty.

He goes to the dresser, rummages through at the back of the bottom cabinet, withdraws a cardboard box of cartridges.

INT. LUCILLE HOTEL - DAWN

A brass and iron bed shared by Isabella and Hannah with Gabby in between, her head at the foot end of the bed. All dead to the world.

INT. BARN - DAWN

Waldo, in his warm coat, enters the barn with the oil lamp, the Spencer repeater rifle strapped over one shoulder, his old Muzzle loader over the other.

He carefully places the oil lamp on a hook suspended over a part of the floor laid with a large, smooth flagstone.

Fixes a bridal over MacDuff's massive cranium and expertly attaches the reins.

Drags some timber mounting steps over to the side of MacDuff, all 16.5 hands.

He places his cheek against the animal, soothes it.

Using the steps, he attempts to mount the work horse bare back but the two crisscross rifles are too cumbersome.

Frustrated, he removes them, rests them against the stall.

He mounts MacDuff bareback ... sees the weapons ... shows frustration ... dismounts ...

Spies Willie's huge saddle, incorporating Willie's rifle holster, resting on a log peg mounted on the wall.

He removes the saddle, lugs it over to the horse, and with gargantuan effort, mounts the steps, heaves the saddle upon MacDuff's back.

Exhausted, he leans his head against the horse's flank, gets his breath and expertly cinches the saddle.

He takes a set of saddle bags from a peg and secures them behind the saddle.

EXT. CAMPSITE - DAWN

The camp-fire well and truly snuffed out.

Willie, in the fetal position, piss stains around his crotch, stirs, eyes blink open.

Isaac, reclined on a large boulder, snoozes with head bowed, chin resting on hands cupped over the Muzzle rifle between his knees. Greeser, Jerome and Hector SNORE their heads off.

EXT. UNDULATING KANSAS PLAINS - DAWN

Wary but determined, Waldo, with the Repeater rifle in the saddle holster and the Muzzle loader slung across his stout torso, meanders upon MacDuff in the half-light.

His feet don't quite reach the stirrups.

Maintaining a firm grip on the saddle horn, he leans forward and rests his face against the neck of the work horse.

The animal lets out a gentle SNORT, and of its own volition, changes direction slightly.

Waldo doesn't object as the animal carries him for a short distance and stops, bows its neck to the ground.

WALDO
No time for feeding, old boy.

He tries the reins but the horse remains stationary.

Waldo looks to where the horse's muzzle rests on the ground.

In the partial light, evidence of Abe's lazy hoof dragging in the dirt.

Waldo is at a loss. He urges MacDuff onwards but the animal veers off in another direction, disquieting Waldo.

WALDO
Remember what Pa say about straying
too far.

But the horse persists.

EXT. CAMPSITE - DAWN

Willie stretches away his aches and pains as best he can.

Satisfied the Rebels are zonked, he resumes the fetal position and strains his huge body like never before ... slides his wrists over his buttocks and manages to bring his hands close to the thong binding his ankles.

Slowly he unties the knot.

He stands and steals away, careful of his footfalls.

He approaches Abe, tethered with the other horses to nearby bushes. With hands tied behind his back he undoes the reins.

He ponders mounting the pony. Tries lifting one long leg over. Loses balance.

The other horses stir.

Too risky to continue.

He looks to the sky and the last remaining stars, gets his bearings and slips off bare-foot into the bushes.

EXT. UNDULATING KANSAS PLAINS - CREEK - SUNRISE

MacDuff and Waldo come across the creek.

Waldo nibbling on a drop scone biscuit, surveys the scene.

Horse and rider slowly pass across.

On the opposite side, MacDuff lowers his head to the ground.

WALDO
No time for -

Waldo's eyes brighten.

Bootprints alongside Abe's dragging hoof mark, clearly visible in the strengthening light.

Waldo does a final survey of the landscape. He pats MacDuff and they head off slowly, following the trail of prints.

WALDO
Lay on McDuff.

MacDuff SNORTS.

EXT. CAMPSITE - SUNRISE

The sun shines in Greeser's eyes.

He wakes, sees the length of leather thong where Willie once laid.

He kicks over Isaac's rifle. He wakes with a start, the commotion rouses the other rebels.

Bootless, and still in their long-johns in which they slept overnight, they search the immediate surrounds for evidence of Willie's whereabouts.

GREESER

Spread out. And I want him alive.
We got a show to put on and he's
the main attraction.

Isaac, in the remnants of his uniform, looks at Greeser with disdain.

GREESER

That's an order.

They look about the camp, unsure which direction to head.

JEROME

Could be long gone. Most likely
never find him.

GREESER

Then we'll all be outta here and
our ceremony, goes begin'.

They all digest this a moment.

Jerome and Hector jump into action and each heads off in opposite directions.

Piqued by Greeser's menacing glare, Isaac heads in a third direction.

The SHRIEK of a bird of prey Off Screen.

EXT. UNDULATING KANSAS PLAINS - SUNRISE

Waldo atop MacDuff looks skyward, swiveling 360 degrees, shading his eyes when they meet with the early rising sun.

High Overhead a bird of prey searches for thermals.

Ahead lies the remains of the snake, head dispatched, flies making gluttons of themselves.

WALDO

Them bad ... those bad men do that?

The horse issues a SNORT or two.

WALDO

We better find Pa, quick.

MacDuff proceeds on a mission, and Waldo is content to be carried to wherever.

EXT. CAMPSITE AREA - SUNRISE

A ROCKY RISE - NEARBY

Willie, desperate, tries to cut his hands free, rubs the thong on a sharp rocky outcrop.

Sweat fills the furrows of his brow.

EXT. UNDULATING KANSAS PLAINS - SUNRISE

MacDuff, head bowed, carries Waldo through undulating land.

Waldo constantly scans his surrounds.

The horse perks up his head and slowly increases the pace.

But Waldo reins the horse back, looks warily all about, unsettled.

Undeterred, the horse WHINNIES and continues on its own way.

Waldo lacks control over the animal. His eyes squint, trying to focus. They quickly brighten.

Ahead, caught in a bush, Willie's red kerchief.

Waldo dismounts, pats MacDuff's cheeks. He takes the kerchief, smells it, ties it around his neck.

He walks a few paces, stops, eyes registering ...

There is the print peculiar to his pony, Abe, in the soft soil.

Pleased, Waldo returns to MacDuff.

He looks at the gigantic horse -- a dilemma!

He tries to position his left boot in the stirrup but it is too high for him, and burdened with the musket rifle slung over his torso, he remains on terra firma.

He stamps a foot, annoyed with himself. He muffles a curse, grabs the reins and starts to lead MacDuff away.

WALDO

Come on, we gotta find Pa.

But MacDuff resists and, as if part of a vaudeville slapstick routine, the taut reins almost pull Waldo back off balance.

Waldo persists but still the animal resists.

Frustration overcomes the diminutive lad as he pulls harder on the reins.

MacDuff drops his hind legs, resting on its haunches, like a stubborn mule.

The stirrup now dangle low and Waldo's eyes brighten.

He adjusts the rifle and manages to slip his left foot in the stirrup and haul himself awkwardly up on the animal.

With rider safely in the saddle, the horse rights itself, poor young Waldo jolted back and forth like he was on a camel.

With a huge grin set on his chubby face, Waldo pats MacDuff.

They set off again. Waldo's eyes glean. His guinea pig sits on the pommel, front paws on the horn, enjoying the ride.

MacDuff stops in his tracks, Waldo squints up ahead.

The Guinea Pig looks ahead in the same direction, turns and tries to nuzzle into Waldo's coat. With assistance from Waldo, it's soon safe and sound.

UP AHEAD

A band of Kiowa Native Americans, with a mustang colt in tow, slowly approach.

Waldo remains stoic, inanimate as they approach.

The Kiowa pull up about twenty yards away. Their LEADER slowly approaches alone, raises his right hand and utters,

KIOWA LEADER
(in Yiddish accent)
How?

Waldo places a hand on the butt of the Spencer Repeater in the saddle holster and in turn replies:

WALDO
Take him on the first shot while he has other things on his mind.

The Leader raises his eyes to the heavens, looks back at Waldo.

Their eyes lock on to one another.

The Leader points to markings in the soil.

KIOWA LEADER
You read?

WALDO
Uh-huh. My Ma taught me. Not now though. She's gone to heaven.

The Leader again points to the markings.

KIOWA LEADER
Signs?

Waldo looks at him, expressionless.

The Kiowa Leader makes a hand gesture for the concept "Signs", points again to the markings in the soil.

KIOWA LEADER
Signs?

WALDO
Only words. In Books.

After a Beat the frustrated Kiowa Leader gives up.

WALDO
You seen my Pa?

Kiowa Leader takes Waldo's hand, checks his skin.

And points in the direction the Rebels have taken.

KIOWA LEADER
Thatta way.

WALDO
Thatta way?

The Kiowa Leader gives Waldo a "thumbs up" sign.

Waldo returns the "thumbs up" sign.

The Kiowa Leader chuckles, turns and rejoins the rest of the party.

KIOWA LEADER
Smart kid. Special tribe, that one.

The Kiowas watch Waldo head off in the direction indicated.

EXT. CAMPSITE AREA - SUNRISE

PATCH OF THICK BRUSH

Isaac, pistol drawn, wanders aimlessly, fretful, totally lost.

ANOTHER PATCH OF THICK BRUSH

Jerome, long-johns, bootless, pistol drawn, wanders aimlessly, gleeful ... but totally lost.

AND YET ANOTHER PATCH ...

Hector, long-johns, bootless, pistol drawn, wanders aimlessly, pissed off ... totally lost.

THE ROCKY RISE

Willie's endeavor to sever the thong ceases on hearing the SCHRIEK of an animal.

Willie's eyes agog.

A mountain lion settles on its haunches on a boulder above.

EXT. UNDULATING KANSAS PLAINS - SUNRISE

Waldo comes across the whiskey bottle. Stops a moment, squints his eyes and stares at it, screws up his nose.

RESUME THE ROCKY RISE

The mountain lion prepares to leap.

THICK BRUSH

Isaac, Jerome and Hector back into each other out of the thick foliage, scaring the crap out of each other.

A GUNSHOT nearby. All three scramble in the direction of the sound.

THE ROCKY RISE

Greeser, bootless and in long-johns, hovers over Willie, flat on his back on the ground looking up at his savior.

Willie turns his shoulder to see the mountain lion scrambling back up the rocky hillside.

He attempts to stand but freezes. He's staring right into the barrel of Greeser's pistol.

A quick glance back at the retreating animal and back again to Greeser's weapon. Caught between a rock and a hard place.

He weighs his options.

WILLIE

I suppose I should be grateful.

GREESER

Don't know why.

WILLIE

He looked pretty hungry to me. And
the likes of him don't care two
hoots who he eats. Far as he be
concerned, we're all pink on the
inside.

Greeser digests this truism but is not swayed.

WILLIE

A lesson to be learned, maybe?

Greeser cogitates, squints his eyes at Willie, shakes his head dismissively.

GREESER

You did a foolish thing, boy,
absconding like that.

WILLIE
I'm a prisoner of war, am I not?
It's my duty.

Another truism for Greeser to digest.

The others arrive.

On seeing Willie still alive

HECTOR
Should stay off that liquor, Cap'n.
Aiming ain't so good under the
influence.

Greeser swings the pistol toward Hector who backs off a step.

He motions toward the Rocky Rise above the boulder.

The mountain lion drools over what might have been.

HECTOR
Maybe shoulda let the animal have
its way.

GREESER
Was in two minds. But then I
remembered. You're all on a
promise.

This causes much merriment among Hector and Jerome, both salivating like Pavlov's dog.

Young Isaac is reticent to join the celebrations.

Willie is hoisted on to his feet.

JEROME
Gonna have ourselves a lynchin'.

Jerome looks about every which way, totally disoriented.

Greeser leads them off, Willie's hands still tied behind his back.

On the Rocky Rise above the boulder, the mountain lion eyes off activity below, salivates.

EXT. UNDULATING KANSAS PLAINS - SUNRISE

Waldo and MacDuff meander. A mountain lion SHRIEKS.

MacDuff stops in his tracks, shimmies.

WALDO
Think he's hungry, old boy?

Waldo soothes the horse, removes the Spencer repeater rifle from its saddle holster and cocks it.

WALDO
Spencer here will look after us.

THICK BRUSH

The rabble quarrel among themselves which direction to take.

THE ROCKY RISE

MacDuff and Waldo come across the site of Willie's encounter with the mountain lion.

Waldo, nursing the Spencer rifle, sits uneasily in the saddle, confused by all the scuff marks; some from bare feet, others from boots.

The Mountain Lion SHRIEKS.

Waldo turns to the source.

The mountain lion lurks on the boulder, assessing.

The massive MacDuff faces off, hoofs the ground.

Waldo regains his presence of mind, takes aim with the Spencer.

The animal hangs its head as if dejected and retreats.

Waldo remains staring a moment where the mountain lion previously stood.

MacDuff hoofs the ground and issues a SNORT.

Satisfied he won't be bothered by the cat, Waldo re-holsters the rifle, leans forward and pats MacDuff's neck.

He looks again at the various foot marks, unsure how to proceed.

But MacDuff takes the initiative and heads off away from the boulder.

Waldo chances one final glance back.

EXT. CAMPSITE - MORNING

Hector, left foot shod with a boot, the right bare, hunts around, cussing.

Jerome, also with left foot shod, is seated, examining a hole in the sole of the other.

Hector approaches and grabs the right boot from Jerome. A tussle ensues.

Isaac, both feet shod, sits against his saddle, well away from the scene.

Greeser, still in long-johns, whiskey bottle in hand, parades before Willie slunk on the ground.

In his other hand, he waves his pistol.

GREESER

What're we gonna do with you,
Mister Telberg?

WILLIE

Thought you'd already made up your mind.

GREESER

I know, I know! Just goin' through the motions. Like the rules require.

WILLIE

Apart from the one that says you're not allowed to do it, you telling me there are rules on lynching?

Greeser turns back to the bickering duo.

GREESER

Shut the fuck up, you two! When we're done with these legal proceedings, we'll head back into town and buy you all new boots.

HECTOR

Buy?

GREESER

A manner of speakin'. Now git yourselves over here and help me tie up the loose ends.

Hector and Jerome do as commanded.

GREESER
First off, we gonna need a rope.

HECTOR
(to Jerome)
We need a rope.

JEROME
(to Isaac)
We need a rope.

Isaac does not respond.

Jerome walks up to him and with his bootless right foot kicks Isaac in the boot -- winces.

JEROME
I said, we need a rope.

Isaac stares straight ahead, refusing eye contact.

Hector joins them.

HECTOR
You not hear the Captain's order?

Enough is enough. Isaac stands, defiant.

ISAAC
This is wrong!

HECTOR
Wrong? What you now thinking is
wrong?

Isaac chances a glance at Willie. There's an unspoken communion between the two.

ISAAC
Lynching. That's what's wrong. I
ain't never done nothin' like this
before.

Greeser walks up and confronts young Isaac.

GREESER
Like what?

ISAAC
Raidin' towns for supplies is one
thing, but I sure as hell don't
want "Murder" written on my wanted
sheet.

Greeser points his pistol at the young colt.

ISAAC
Do you?

HECTOR
Ain't it occurred to you that
this'un here might well've been the
sharp-shooter 'sponsible for the
loss of those southern boys in that
skirmish over at Island Mound?

ISAAC
Still don't make it right. Besides,
you lynch him, you don't have no
hostage no more.

WILLIE
"Any". You don't have a hostage any
more.

GREESER
Just get the fuckin' rope. That's
an order.

Isaac stands defiant, with new found courage and conviction.

GREESER
You disobey an order boy, an' you
be the one be swingin' from the end
of a rope. Them's the rules of war.

ISAAC
Weren't my war. I never owned no
slaves. Them Yankees never my
enemy. Only rode with you 'cos I
got no family no more.

His voice quavers. His eyes meet Willie's. Empathy.

ISAAC
Besides, war's over now and you
ain't no captain no more. So I
don't take --

Willie interrupts proceedings, speaking softly.

WILLIE
"Any more", Isaac, "You're not a
captain any more".

A huge WTF from the others.

ISAAC
Any more. So I don't take no --
 Any more orders from you no -- any
more, Mister Greeser.

He turns to Willie. They exchange smiles.

WILLIE
 You free now, boy. Free at last.
 You thank God Almighty, 'cos you
 are free at last.

Greeser gun-whips Isaac across the face. The Young man falls to the ground but raises his head high.

Humiliated, Greeser takes a swig of whiskey, turns to Jerome.

GEESEER
 Jerome, just get me a rope.

JEROME
 Yessir, Captain.

INTERCUT

EXT. RIDGE NEAR THE CAMPSITE - MORNING

MacDuff comes to a halt. Waldo tries to spur him on but the horse is adamant.

WALDO
 You telling me, we found what we're
 after, old boy?

He slides from the high up saddle, rubs his buttocks, sore from riding the massive MacDuff.

RESUME CAMPSITE

Jerome rushes a rope to Greeser.

JEROME
Your rope Captain.

But Hector snatches it from him, eager for a lynching.

GEESEER
 (indicates Isaac)
 Tie him to the trunk. We gonna give
 him the best seat in the house.
 Might change his mind about a few
 things.

Hector approaches Isaac but he's interrupted.

JEROME
Er, Captain. Begging your pardon,
Captain. That's not gonna work.

Greeser raises his eyes to the heavens.

GREESER
Problem?

JEROME
(cowering)
Well, sir. How we gonna hang the
Yankee?

GREESER
What?

JEROME
If'n we tie this one up.

Greeser shoots a palm up to Jerome - STOP

Hector intervenes.

HECTOR
I believe, what he's trying to say,
Captain, is that --

JEROME
We only got the one rope.

GREESER
One?! You tryin' to tell me --

HECTOR
We was just following orders back
in town, Captain.

Greeser weighs this up, turns to the jeering Isaac.

Notices the leather thong left behind by Willie earlier.
Picks it up, throws it to Jerome.

GREESER
Tie 'im.

Jerome does the honors as best he can, pushes Isaac to the
ground at the base of the tree's trunk.

GREESER

(to Isaac)

You so much as move, even to pick
the flecks off your shit hole, you
be the next to dangle.

He waves his pistol menacingly. Turns back to the others.

GREESER

All right then. Back to the orders
of the day.

Greeser tosses the rope to Hector.

GREESER

Time to re-live Atchison.

Hector stands dumb-founded.

GREESER

Tie the goddam noose.

ISAAC

He don't know how to. Never was no
lynchin' in Atchison.

Jerome sniggers at this confirmation.

Hector throws the rope Jerome's way.

HECTOR

You do it, sonbitch. Must be no
different to tyin' a lariat.

Jerome shrugs.

JEROME

I be a farmin' boy, not some lone
rangerin' cowboy ...

(gestures to Isaac)

...like him.

Greeser snatches the rope back, throws it at Isaac.

GREESER

Looks like it's you, then. Do it
right, you might save your own
skin.

All eyes turn back to Isaac.

Isaac gestures to the only tree in their midst that's a
likely candidate for a lynching. Only one decent branch.

ISAAC
And what if, instead of his neck
breakin', the branch itself goes
and breaks?

Jerome takes a swig of the whiskey bottle.

JEROME
He got a point there, Captain
Greaser. Then what we gonna do?

GEESEER
Then we don't have a lynchin', we
have us a good old fashioned exer-
cution.

HECTOR
Cain't just shoot the man in cold
blood, can we?

Greaser raises his eyes to the heavens.

HECTOR
(excitedly)
Unless of course, it were in self
defense?

This gets Jerome excited also, until ...

JEROME
But he ain't armed. Unless he was
plannin' on tearin' you apart with
his bare hands.

HECTOR
Coulda overpowered us and took all
our weapons.

ISAAC
Except the one.

The others are totally befuddled.

ISAAC
You gonna shoot someone in "self
defense" means you gotta have a
weapon.

Now they're all bemused.

ISAAC
Unless of course you gonna do it
with your bare hands?

Yeah, yeah, he's got a point there.

GREESER

Then we just gonna have to make
sure the branch holds.

ISAAC

But you still gonna kill him in
cold blood, and that's still
murder. And like the man said, you
don't want that on your wanted
poster.

HECTOR

It's lynching! That's different.
Don't count as murder.

All the time, Willie's focus is from one Rebel to the next,
trying to keep track of this inane banter.

Greeser snatches the rope back again from Isaac.

He retreats to his saddle, out of earshot, settles up against
it and tries to figure out how to tie a proper noose ... and
tries ... and tries ...

Willie turns to Isaac.

WILLIE

You think he's capable?

ISAAC

He's only trying to prove himself
in front of those two. Never killed
no-one before.

WILLIE

Anyone.

ISAAC

(nods, appreciative)

Anyone ... before. He's a
carpenter, not a soldier.

WILLIE

A noble trade, son, a noble trade
indeed. But that doesn't make him
any less an outlaw. And outlaws
always have someone chasing after
them. And you never know who that
might be.

Isaac digests this aphorism.

INT. LUCILLE HOTEL - MORNING

Isabella, Hannah, and Gabby dead to the world in the huge bed.

SNORING from one of them, maybe all.

Hannah's feet nudge into Gabby's face.

The old girl stirs, tries desperately, unsuccessfully to get her aged, seized-up body out of the bed.

She nudges Hannah's feet, to no avail.

GABBY
Ya gotta lend assistance.

But no assistance is forthcoming.

An extra effort sees Gabby virtually flop out of bed ...

... to the side where the night chamber-pot rests part way beneath the bed.

She hikes her under garments, squats and relieves herself.

Her ablutions are protracted ...

And the NOISE of the constant flow wakes the other two.

Gabby finishes the last drop, remains squatting.

HANNAH
You gonna let others have a go?

GABBY
Waiting to see if I get a sniff.

And she complements this with a sniff of the nose.

Relieved, she stands, steps over the chamber-pot, lets her dress flop down to her ankles again.

Katie rushes in, straightens her clothes, her hair. But Hannah blocks her and rushes to the chamber-pot and unabashed relieves herself.

It's a GUSHING torrent causing the half-awake Isabella to grimace.

HANNAH
Sorry, but it's a matter of
urgency.

Katie, unfazed puts a finger to the air to make a point.

KATIE

And I'm pleased to report that
Sheriff Thorpe agrees.

HANNAH

So, he slept on it, did he?

EXT. RIDGE NEAR THE CAMPSITE - MORNING - SAME

Lying behind a low ridge, Waldo squints his eyes, pleased at the sight before him.

A LONE RABBIT nibbles some grass.

Waldo slithers away from the ridge like a trained commando.

He removes the Spencer Repeater rifle from the saddle holster and, in the same fashion, resumes his position.

INTERCUT

EXT. CAMPSITE - MORNING

JEROME holds the reins of the four unsaddled horses as Hector and Greeser try to hoist Willie, hands tied behind his back, up on to Abe.

But the small pony will have none of it.

RIDGE

A SNAKE rears its head from seemingly nowhere, causing MacDuff to SNORT and WHINNY.

THE REBELS stall their undertaking with Willie, look all about them, concerned.

Isaac puts them at ease.

ISAAC

Them Kiowas again.

HECTOR

What fuck they want?

Greeser addresses Jerome, nods toward the horses.

GREESER

Keep them in hand. Unless you want
to be walkin' outta here. Don't
think this little ol' pony here can
carry any more'n me.

WALDO lies still, he and the reptile eyeing each other off.

THE SNAKE slithers off to safety.

Waldo resumes his reconnaissance.

THE RABBIT: nibbles away.

WILLIE mounted on Abe beneath the lone tree, an amateur's crude noose around his neck, the rope flung over the branch and loosely wrapped around the trunk ...

... Isaac watches, the others prance around in their long-johns, pissed out of their minds, their horses no longer tethered.

Exhausted, Greeser calls a halt to the pantomime.

GREESER

All play and no work, no way to run
a army.

He smiles at Willie, examines his handiwork with the noose around Willie's neck.

GREESER

Pity we only got the one rope.
Looks to me like that branch good
for swinging a duet.

Hector and Jerome, chortle and kick dirt in the face of Isaac, slunk at the base of the tree trunk.

Isaac wipes the dirt from his eyes, looks up apologetically to Willie.

WILLIE

(sotto)

Never killed any-one.

WALDO, prone on the ridge, sights up the Repeater rifle.
MacDuff saunters up and nudges Waldo's legs from behind.
Waldo turns, annoyed.

MacDuff's teeth grab the leg of Waldo's pants, tugs and swings its head to forty-five degrees, as if beckoning.

Waldo cocks his ears at the CACOPHONY from not far OFF, places a finger to his lips and returns to his shooting position ...

THE RABBIT hops away.

WALDO saunters to another section of the ridge, near MacDuff.

WALDO
Think you know where they gone to,
eh?

GEESEER paces to and fro before Willie. He turns to his accomplices.

GEESEER
So, who's gonna have the pleasure
of promptin' this little ol' pony
into playing his part in this
pantomime?

Both Hector and Jerome look at one another, neither willing to commit.

GEESEER
Call yourselves Confederate
soldiers!

He turns to Isaac.

GEESEER
Looks like it's you who's gonna
hafta play master of ceremonies.

ISAAC
Not me. I'm not gonna be part this.
It's a traf .. a trav ...

He can't think of the word, turns to an obliging Willie.

WILLIE

Travesty, I think is the word
you're looking for young man.

ISAAC

(to Greeser)

That's right. An' I'd rather you
done shot me here and now before
I'll ever be part of this any more.

GREESER

Please yourself.

Greeser, smirk on his face, raises his pistol as if to oblige.

WALDO'S eyes widen, squint, widen again as he focuses.

A RABBIT nibbles, looks up, pricks its ears.

For the first time we HEAR Willie lose his cool.

WILLIE (V.O.)

(vehement)

Don't worry boy. We'll get our
revenge, one way or another!

WALDO'S finger eases back on the trigger.

A RIFLE CRACK ...

A MASSIVE splinter of wood flies from the branch, the bullet
only just nicking the rope.

Abe rears, threatening to hang Willie.

Mayhem on the ground ensues.

HECTOR

I thought you said they was on our
side.

JEROME

That's 'cos they cain't see our
uniforms.

GEESEER
Well put 'em on, damn yous.

They try to do just that.

WALDO in a different position fires off a couple rounds with the Repeater rifle.

BULLETS strike around the feet of the inebriated, uncoordinated Rebels, unable to don their pants.

Instead they grab for their pistols and start firing haphazardly.

Abe rears again, the partly severed rope holds.

Willie's eyes start to bulge.

But the knot untangles, and flaps away from Willie's neck.

A WHISTLE is heard O.S.

Abe pricks up his ears and trots off. Willie squeezes his legs as tight as possible around the pony's belly, leaves the rope dangling.

WALDO, In yet another position, methodically levers a new round, fires.

BULLETS continue to ping the ground at the feet of the confused Rebels.

Their spooked horses flee.

ABE trots Willie up to join Waldo on the Ridge.

Waldo quickly undoes the thonging, liberating Willie who takes up the Muzzle loader, positions himself alongside his son.

WILLIE
Hope you take in now what I say
about getting the first shot off
right ...

Waldo looks despondent at Willie.

But Willie just ruffles Waldo's pate.

A pleased Waldo offers Willie the Spencer but a simple shake of Willie's head prompts Waldo to hand over a calico bag of paper cartridges from inside his coat.

Willie rushes to another vantage point, expertly loads the Muzzle loader in quick time and, being the sharp-shooter he is ...

... GREESER'S weapon flies from his hand ...

... same with Hector's weapon ...

... and with Jerome's.

The half-dressed, disarrayed Rebels raise their arms in surrender.

Isaac stands, and he too raises his bound hands ...

Willie with the Muzzle loader approaches, MacDuff in tow.

His eyes meet Isaac's who matches Willie's smile.

Isaac lowers his hands as ...

Waldo, with the Repeater rifle, Abe in tow, approaches Isaac and unties his hands. Difficult with stubby fingers.

Isaac gives a 'hi-five' with Waldo.

Willie gestures to the abandoned pistols. Isaac responds and gathers them up and deposits them in MacDuff's saddle bags.

He picks up the discarded rifles, looks to Willie for instructions.

WILLIE

Old hardware, son. No use to anyone. Soon just be collectors' items.

With relish, Isaac slings them far away over the bushes.

WILLIE

But good old fashioned rope never go out of style. What say you, young man?

With the two rifles trained on the Rebels, Isaac gathers in the rope ...

and expertly fashions a cowboy lariat ...

much to the chagrin of Greeser ...

and the relief of Willie.

That done, Isaac gestures to the Rebels to huddle closer together.

They do so and Isaac expertly lassos the three and wraps the rope around again and knots it tightly.

They attempt to walk but with each wanting to go in a different direction, and given their state of inebriation, find they have nowhere to go.

WILLIE

Sorry 'bout the rabbits son. But
they made a fine meal ... for some.

WALDO

Those ladies will just have to wait
their turn, eh Pa?

Willie ruffles his son's hair, as the guinea pig pokes his head out from Waldo's coat.

He gives Waldo a helping hand to mount Abe...

WILLIE

I don't suppose we should deny a
man his boots, eh Isaac?

Isaac gathers the boots and shoves them willy-nilly at the three captives. Somehow, they manage to done them - but not necessarily the correct ones.

Willy gestures to Isaac to mount MacDuff behind him...

... and they slowly shuffle out of the campsite.

WALDO

What's revenge, Pa?

Willie shifts uneasily. Isaac listens intently.

WILLIE

It's when a man does wrong in
return to another man who's done
wrong to him.

WALDO
You gonna get revenge?

WILLIE
I don't think we need worry about
that today, son. More inclined to
natural justice.

Which gets Waldo thinking even more.

And prompts Isaac to withdraw his New Testament from his shirt.

WILLIE
Now tell me. What was that I said
about not straying too far from
home?

WALDO
Sorry Pa, but the hens had gone to
roost and you said you would --

WILLIE
Gotta feeling you have what it
takes, son.

EXT. OPEN TRAIL - MORNING

Thorpe and his Posse escort the women on the dray at
breakneck speed.

They raise dust like they were competing in an open land
grab.

A few other ELIGIBLE MEN in their 40s in carts and buggies of
divers designs, loaded with swags and tied bundles of
whatever, keep pace with the convoy.

EXT. UNDULATING KANSAS PLAINS - MORNING

The band of Kiowa Natives watch some activity in the near
distance, are overcome with laughter.

They move off shaking their heads in disbelief - and now with
five horses in tow (the mustang and those of the Rebels).

AN APPROACH TO LAURAVILLE.

The Rebels in their long-johns tied and tethered, the rope
held by Isaac riding piggyback behind Willie on MacDuff,
trudge along the track in their ill-fitting boots.

All three try to maneuver into front position so that they can walk directly ahead -- but with little coordination.

A CLOUD OF DUST rising in the distance to one side grabs Willie's attention.

He calls a halt to proceedings.

INTERCUT

ANOTHER APPROACH TO LAURAVILLE

The Convoy accompanying the dray keep pace with Sheriff Thorpe as they gallop toward Lauraville.

Willie turns back to the Rebels.

WILLIE

Those your boys from down Texas,
come to meet up?

GREESER

What boys from down Tex --?

Willie shakes his head in mock pity.

Isaac turns and stares daggers at Greeser.

WILLIE

Perhaps it's the circus come to town.

Waldo drops behind the Rebels and gets Abe to give them a nudge on.

WALDO

And they be short a few clowns, eh
Pa?

The Rebels stumble every which way, struggling to stay upright.

EXT. LAURAVILLE MAIN STREET - DAY

Chester, in his rocking chair on the veranda whittles away, looks up as Thorpe and the entourage approach.

The dray and assortment of carts come to a halt and are soon smothered in the dust that chokes the air.

Thorpe trots off alone and does a short reconnaissance of the township, nearly collides with Howard as he rushes from his store.

Howard coughs his lungs out, and frantically waves his arms to clear the air, with little success.

He rushes to the dray.

HOWARD

Looks like you all been through to Hell and back.

Hannah turns in the seat, holds a hand out to Howard, anticipating ...

She watches as Howard instead soothes the sweating horses.

HECTOR

Best get them to the livery for some attention.

Howard does an inspection of the dray, checking the wheels for any damage.

In a huff, Hannah jumps down and goes to the waiting Harriet.

Thorpe shouts to the town folk assembled.

THORPE

So who's in charge of this neat little establishment?

The town folk consult one another, shake their collective heads as one.

THORPE

Not to worry. Now best not be gung ho about all this. First we gotta determine just where this vicious gang dragged off their quarry. So who's gonna point us in the right direction?

Howard points in one direction.

Some of the others offer the contrary.

More infighting ... until...

Chester rises from his rocking chair.

CHESTER

Lookit yonder.

Thorpe looks around, squints his eyes.

Katie, still on the dray, stands up and searches around. A triumphal smile comes across her.

Waldo precedes Willie and Isaac as they lead in the Rebels.

CHESTER

Seems to me, sheriff, your urgency
in attending to our plight has been
premature.

THORPE

How so?

CHESTER

That there be the one and only
Willie Telberg hisself.

THORPE

You mean the man we're after?

CHESTER

One and only.

THORPE

Do tell?

CHESTER

Smartest critter in all these
parts.

THORPE

Don't look too smart to me.

CHESTER

Then you ain't lookin' proper, are
ye! Like a lot of folks around
here.

Willie trots ahead of the pack as they draw close.

CHESTER

Put that man in your jail in the
morning, by sundown he be sitting
in the office chair eatin' rabbit
pot roast. And the jailer pleading
to be let out so's he too can enjoy
some of his own momma's home
cooking.

THORPE

That's a mighty big claim.

Thorpe turns his attention fully toward the new arrivals, issues an order to a few of the POSSE RIDERS:

THORPE

Okay, round up the miscreants.

A POSSE TRIO ride up to Willie just as he reaches down to his rifle holster. They train their weapons on him.

Willie raises his hands in the air.

Isaac swivels on MacDuff and points to Greeser et al.

Thorpe rolls his eyes in despair.

Embarrassed, the Posse Trio surround the tied and tethered Rebels.

One of them takes the rope from Isaac and, with the air of the hero, delivers them, stumbling every which way, back to Thorpe.

Isaac slips off MacDuff, gathers the Rebels closer.

Willie trots into the reception committee. Goes to Hannah, dismounts, removes the parasol from the saddle holster, and hands it over to her.

WILLIE

I believe this belongs --

Hannah near wets herself, accepts the parasol.

THORPE

(refers to Rebels)

You do this single-handed?

WILLIE

I must confess, sir. I had a smart young accomplice.

THORPE

I understand there's a paucity of those in this town.

Thorpe turns to the Eligible Men in their carts.

THORPE

So we recruited a few volunteers. Weren't too hard, neither, when they heard about the fringe benefits.

The various eligible Women of Lauraville eye off with the various Eligible Men.

WILLIE

That's most considerate of you,
Mister --

THORPE

Thorpe. Wylon Thorpe. Sheriff of
Lucille Town.

A few women wander over to particular men and openly flirt.

THORPE

I was petitioned by some desperate
ladies of this town, frettin' over
your welfare.

WILLIE

I appreciate their concern but I'm
not sure what it is I have to offer
them. Apart from supplying them
with some fresh meat now and then.

THORPE

Do tell.

Waldo and Abe move alongside Willie.

WILLIE

Sometimes my son here obliges them.

Waldo acknowledges Thorpe with a cheeky smile.

THORPE

Well that's mighty progressive.

WILLIE

My late wife played her part, too.
But now it's just the two of us.

The guinea pig pop its head out of Waldo's coat.

WILLIE

Oh, and Cav here likes to poke his
nose around while we're at it.

THORPE

(gob-smacked)

And the women folk here like it
that way?

Willie ruffles Waldo's hair.

WILLIE
Seems that way, eh son?

Unable to cope, Thorpe shakes his head in disbelief and pulls his horse back to the dray.

Gabby eases herself from the dray, goes directly to Chester.

GABBY
'fraid I'm not gonna be the ol'
rocker what I used to be.

She points to the broken rocking chair on the tray of the dray. In turn, Chester shrugs an empathetic smile, holds up his knife and the piece of sapling he has been whittling away.

CHESTER
See what I can do to rectify that.

Hannah gets up close and impersonal with Howard, pokes the parasol into his chest.

HANNAH
A few other things around here also
in need of rectifying.

Isabella gravitates to the cowboy, Vittorio ...

Katie sidles up alongside Thorpe and subtly rubs her bosom against his leg, causing it to stiffen in the stirrup.

The horse in turn shimmies, prancing front hooves, and Thorpe leans forward to comfort the beast.

THORPE
Know the feeling young fella, but
don't you go rearing on me there.

Thorpe turns to address the crowd.

THORPE
Folks. FOLKS!

Some semblance of order slowly ensues.

THORPE
Good folk of Lauraville. Seems our
arrival in your pretty little town
was most timely.

He nods piteously at the three bound up Rabble.

THORPE

I think we can safely say that you
won't be bothered no more by this
unsavory mob.

General cheers of affirmation.

THORPE

Now the question is. What to do
with them?

But Chester intervenes.

CHESTER

Shouldn't our own sheriff decide
that?

More general cheers of affirmation. All eyes turn to Willie.

The tsunami of pleading stares soon turns to one of verbal
entreaties ...

CROWD

WILLIE ... WILLIE ... WILLIE ...

THORPE

I'd say that was unanimous. What
say you, er ... Mister ...?

CHESTER

Telberg. Mister Willie Telberg.

WILLIE

But I'm just a simple farmer, not a
lawman.

CHESTER

Nothing simple about farming and
nothing simple about the Telbergs,
young man. We all know that.

Chester turns to the crowd for affirmation -- and gets it.

THORPE

(directly to Willie))

So what about it?

Willie, at a loss as to his sudden elevation in social
status, turns to Waldo.

Waldo nods, enthusiastic.

Before Willie can respond, Thorpe dismounts and moves to

EXT. GENERAL STORE - VERANDA - DAY

Thorpe whips out a silver star from his jacket, holds it high, starts to ramble on.

THORPE

With the power invested in me as a
duly sworn officer of the law of
the state of Kansas, I, Wylon
Thorpe, hereby nominate William --
(looks to Chester who
mouths "Willie")
-- Willie Telberg to be duly
appointed sheriff of the community
known as --

He again turns to Chester but he is greeted with a CHORUS:

ALL
LAURAVILLE!

THORPE

-- known as Lauraville, to uphold
all the laws and covenants of the
said state of Kansas.

CHESTER
All in favor?

Again a CHORUS:

ALL
AYE!

THORPE

Once again, I'd say that was
unanimous.

He gestures to Willie to join him on the veranda.

THORPE
Get you the right deputies, you can
still run your farm.

CHESTER
That's right. Yer only a holler and
a shout from the town anyways.

Thorpe turns to Waldo.

THORPE
So what do you say, mister?

WALDO
Master. Master Telbeg.

Waldo beams, gives his father a huge thumbs up.

That's the cue for the whole town to rejoice.

THORPE
Things are looking good. But we're
gonna need a Bible. Anyone got a
Bible handy.

PASTOR
Ahha. Got one ... lying around
somewheres.

The Pastor pats himself down. No luck here.

PASTOR
Hold the horses.

Rushes away.

Isaac timidly approaches with his Bible, an act that attracts the admiration ... and confusion of the town folk.

THORPE
Thank yee, son.

Taking possession of the Bible in one hand, Thorpe pins the silver star on to Willie's shirt over his heart and presents the Bible in his upturned palm.

THORPE
Repeat after me.

Willie places his hand on the Bible.

THORPE
I, William ...

He's interrupted by a chorus of Lauravillians: "Willie"

THORPE
... Willie Telberg, do promise to
uphold the Constitution of the
United States.

WILLIE
I, Willie Telberg, do promise to
uphold the Constitution of the
United States.

THORPE

And the laws of the state of
Kansas, the thirty-fourth of these
United States.

WILLIE

And the laws of the state of
Kansas, the thirty-fourth of these
United States.

THORPE

Without fear or favor.

WILLIE

Without fear or favor.

THORPE

So help me God.

WILLIE

So help me God.

The crowd cheer their new hope.

THORPE

Looks like Lauraville just made
history. First town in the west to
have a bl --

PASTOR (O.S.)

Bible, got it, got it!

The Pastor rushes to the swearing-in, holding high his Bible,
only to deflate on seeing the proceedings complete.

THORPE

Well, what about it, Sheriff
Telberg? Your deputies?

Willie looks around at the motley crew assembled.

Isabella moves close into Vittorio, takes an arm and give a
stern 'no' shake of the head.

Chester sticks his chest out, hopeful. Gabby raises her eyes
to the heavens.

"Dang it" Chester gestures with his clenched fists.

Hannah, parasol open to shade from the sun, yells out.

HANNAH

I know how to wear a pair of
dungarees, as well as any man.

Willie silently confers with Thorpe who shrugs -- none of his business any more.

WILLIE

I don't doubt that for a moment
ma'am.

HANNAH

I take it then, we'll get along
fine.

Willie turns to the crowd.

WILLIE

If there be no objection.

Poor Howard is about to object but the crowd makes him think the better of it.

WILLIE

(to Thorpe)

Means we'll need another star.

Thorpe pats his pockets, to no avail. He clicks his fingers to his own DEPUTY, still mounted.

The Deputy unpins his tin star with a "Deputy" imprint and tosses it to Thorpe.

Thorpe examines Hannah, disheveled after the recent dash from Lucille Town, but never-the-less still very much a woman.

Saving face, he hands the badge over to Willie.

THORPE

In your hands, Sheriff.

Willie beckons Hannah to the veranda and delicately pins the star on her heaving chest.

The other women look on with envy.

WILLIE

With the power invested in me ...
Oh, to heck with it. La, La, La, et
cetera. Deputy Johannsen.

He offers her his hand but she reaches up, pulls him down, and kisses him on the cheek.

Howard shifts uneasily.

WILLIE

Well, Deputy, I guess it's a case
now of "Hannah, get your gun".

Willie turns to Thorpe.

WILLIE

Sheriff Thorpe. I believe your work
here is just about done.

Thorpe refers to the bound Rebels.

THORPE

Perhaps I should take them off your
hands until you settle --

WILLIE

Oh, I think my Deputy and I can
handle them.

Thorpe accepts the assurance.

THORPE

Time to head back, then. A Town
ain't ever safe without its
sheriff.

He mounts his horse, turns to his entourage.

THORPE

All those headin' back, let's go.

There are no takers. His own Deputy screws up his face, pats
his breast, now void of a badge.

THORPE

A sheriff needs his deputy, dammit.

He quickly surveys the crowd, spots Katie.

THORPE

What say you, then, Miss Katie?

Katie gleefully rushes to Thorpe amid rousing cheers. He
hoists her up on the horse's rump and they ride off together.

Willie looks skyward, to the now blazing sun and consults
Hannah.

WILLIE

Might I suggest, Deputy, we adjourn
this discourse to some place more
comfortable.

INT. MEETING HALL - DAY

LATER

All the major players are crammed into the Hall.

Out front, Hannah stands beside Willie as he addresses the four Rebels standing in a corner of the room - all but Isaac still in long-johns.

WILLIE

I been thinking on the way here how
we're going to handle you all.

CHESTER

Well, we ain't got no jail.

HANNAH

He's right, you know. We're a town
without its own jail.

WILLIE

Nor its own school, for that
matter.

HOWARD

But we ain't got much need for one
of those. Only my Harriet.

Willie gives Howard a castigating look as he indicates Waldo.

HOWARD

(flummoxed)

And of course young Waldo.

WILLIE

As may be. But, you see, I believe
it was the intent of those fine
gentlemen four score and nine years
ago that we should be building a
new kind of society, a republic in
which all may learn and prosper.

By now, there's more than a few of the local women, of all
ages, paired off with the new immigrants from Lucille Town.

A VOICE #1

And who's gonna do the building?

WILLIE

I was thinking that maybe our
Captain Greeser here --

A VOICE #2
String him up, is what I say.

A VOICE #3
Yeah, we want our revenge.

Willie notices Waldo glaring at him.

WILLIE
Thinking more along the lines of
natural justice. Turns out that
Captain Greeser here is a, shall we
say, a building engineer.

Greeser straightens his posture, proud as Punch.

WILLIE
So I'm suggesting that, for his
misdemeanors against our community,
we sentence him to a period of ...
(he finger quotes)
... "community service".

The Townsfolk are dumbfounded -- WTF.

WILLIE
He pays us back in kind. Supervises
the building of our jail, our
school, our library, our city hall.

The citizens are impressed with the talk of a "city hall".

WILLIE
And he won't cost us a penny.

HOWARD
And who's gonna pay for all the
lumber, the nails the --?

WILLIE
Citizen contributions.

WTF again from everyone.

WILLIE
Taxes.

HOWARD
(aghast)
But I've never paid --

WILLIE

And now that we're all part of this great Union, we'll all have to start paying our share if we're going to get what we need to grow and prosper.

The negative mumbling slowly turns positive.

Willie waves his arm over the congregation of immigrants.

WILLIE

And besides, we have ourselves a brand new work force who no doubt will contribute their skills as best they can.

(indicates the Rebels)
Not to mention the free labor in our midst. Won't take us long.

GEESEER

Do you mean, Mister Telberg, you want to treat us like your slaves!

WILLIE

Indentured laborers, I think the term is.

Geeser goes to protest but segues into an understanding nod.

HECTOR

And what if I say no to all this?

WILLIE

Let's just say, a few of us here know how to tie a proper noose.

That puts Hector in his place.

Isaac timidly steps forward.

ISAAC

That include me, Mister Telberg?

WILLIE

Certainly does, son.

ISAAC

I was plannin' on bein' a cowboy.

WILLIE

Can't be a cowboy all your life.
Things are going to change around
these parts, especially when the
new railroad comes through. As it
surely will.

The rest of the Townsfolk digest this and concur with ad hoc
comments on how it will be good for Lauraville.

WILLIE

And then there'll be a need for a
newspaper one day, so folks here
get to know what's goin on in the
big wide world. Ever think of that?

Isaac does think about that.

WILLIE

Just think. The Lauraville Times.
Proprietor, Isaac ...?

His look prompts Isaac.

ISAAC

Newman. Isaac Newman.

WILLIE

Proprietor, Isaac Newman. Has a
certain ring to it.

Isaac's smile beams for all to see ...

As does Harriet's.

Isaac's smile wanes.

ISAAC

But I can't read nor write.

WILLIE

Soon fix that, once you been
through your schooling in the new
schoolroom you're going to help
build.

JEROME

That ain't fair!

They all turn to Jerome.

JEROME

If he gets to go to school, what
about us?

Hector cannot believe his ears and stares daggers.

Willie turns to the crowd.

WILLIE
What say you all?

There are shrugs and raised eyebrows all round, and eventually, "Why not?"

WILLIE
(to Waldo)
You be willing to teach him his
alphabet in our new schoolroom?

Waldo's eyes light up like beacons.

From OFF, another voice booms. Howard tries to assert some sort of authority.

HOWARD
Lots of fancy talking about the
future but in the meantime we still
gotta keep these black hats locked
up somewhere, though, don't we?

But Hannah keeps her cool, takes over proceedings, calms the mob, some of whom still bay for blood.

HANNAH
So we lock 'em up at night in the
store-room out back of the store.

Howard goes to protest but doesn't dare defy his wife's penetrating stare.

HANNAH
Ain't no window, so there's no
escaping, lessen they want to break
the walls down. And good luck to
them with that 'cos the way Howie
had it built, there ain't no way of
breakin' in, let alone breakin'
out.

The Posse look about themselves -- "what's to become of us?"

Harvey sees an opportunity.

HARVEY
An' I got plenty fine rooms and a
bunk-house out back, for our
gentlemen here. Cheap tariff too.

Soft beds and plenty fine food. But
alas, very little whiskey.

The Posse take in the beckoning looks of the various women in their midst.

One of them addresses Harvey.

POSSE MAN #1
Guess it'll do for a few nights.
'Til we get ourselves established.

HANNAH
That settles it, then. Looks to me like we're all in this together.

Murmurings all round as they digest this portentous, political pronouncement.

Waldo raises a hand, waits patiently.

Hannah hushes the crowd, gives Waldo the nod.

WALDO
Does that mean you would still be wanting your meat nice and fresh, Missus Johannsen?

Hannah consults the other women who nod unanimously.

HANNAH
One way or another, I guess we will. You bring us all the bunnies you can. Although could come a time we might need a change of diet, now and then.

Unanimous consensual nods from the other women.

She turns to Howard and commands.

HANNAH
Howard, find some clothes for our guests, will you.

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY - DAY

Two rabbits fornicate on a small hillock.

WILLIE (V.O.)
Remember, son. Take him on the first shot, while he has other things on his mind.

A SHOT rings out.

Waldo and Willie, lying prone, camouflaged amidst some low brush, smile ebulliently.

Willie reaches his huge hand over and ruffles Waldo's hair.

WILLIE
That should do them for a while.

Willie stands, a silver star badge prominent on his chest. He leans down and gives Waldo a helping hand up.

He nods to the Spencer Repeater rifle Waldo holds.

Waldo removes the tube magazine from the rifle butt-stock, removes the remaining cartridges, places them in a small leather sack attached to his belt, re-inserts the empty tube into the butt-stock.

Willie picks up the haul of shot rabbits.

Waldo bends over, picks up Cav the guinea pig and stuffs him inside his shirt.

He proudly swings the rifle by its strap over his shoulder, and precedes his father to collect their latest bounty.

WILLIE
Yessir, I can see you have a fine future here in Kansas, young man.

WALDO
Pa. What that deputy mean saying the ladies might need a change of diet, now and again?

Willie looks straight ahead.

WILLIE
I wouldn't be fretting about that, son. Sometimes women just like a little meat of a different kind, now and again, is all.

THE END

FADE OUT

NO ANIMALS WERE HARMED DURING THE WRITING OF THIS SCRIPT.