THE POWER OF THE DOG

Written by
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Based on
The Power of the Dog
By Thomas Savage
A Montana ranch scape with a curious hill feature, a sculptural outcrop that rises up into a plateau. A man is looking at it. PHIL BURBANK (40-50) tall, lean with a wry expression that softens into something speculative as he stares at the landform, seeing something that causes him to smile, some kind of private amusement. He walks on until he’s standing beside a GROUP OF COWHANDS. Behind them a herd of Poly Angus steers mashed six deep against a pole fence. Phil wears a uniform of close fitting blue overalls and worn wool chaps bare in patches. On his head a hat so battered it’s hard to know if it’s a cowboy or a sun hat. He’s quiet, his sharp see-all eyes watch. A big calf missed at spring is pushed out of the pack, Phil points to it.

PHIL
That’s him.

JUAN, MOUNTED COWBOY behind Phil gives fast chase, a lariat hurled high in his right hand snaps hard on the calf’s hindquarters and drops catching the animal’s back foot. Phil walks towards the struggling beast, a big one with kick. THEO a BLACK COWHAND gallops forward dismounting at speed, dust billowing and helps throw the animal – a crushing thud. TWO MORE COWHANDS run forward, together they tie off the front and hind legs stretching the calf out between the two horses’ saddle horns. Phil still walking with an easy grace, unsheaths his knife and straddles the bull calf facing his tail. The Cowboys holding the calf look serious, their eyes on the dirt. Phil takes hold of the scrotum and slices off the cup tossing it aside. The calf struggles, next Phil forces down first one and then the other testicle, slits the rainbow membrane that encloses them and tears the testicles out, he unstraddles the calf and takes the dangling testicles to a small branding fire, tosses them over the coals where they explode in the heat like huge popcorn.

PHIL (CONT'D)
You boys fooling with girls would do well to eat them.

Phil looks over at the Cowhands amused – no takers. He flicks them out onto the dirt, a dog carries one off to the end of the yard, the veins and nerves trailing.

STAN
One more lost boy, Boss.

The chase is on again. Phil once more straddles the bull calf cupping his testicles in his blood-stained, work toughened hands. As Phil drops the testes in the fire he sees George walking towards the coral fence.
GEORGE, Phil’s younger brother by two years wears a suit - no tie, he’s overweight and square shaped. He’s holding a notebook and a pencil stub. Phil wipes off his knife and climbs through the fence to join him. The two brothers, a study in opposites, walk on to the nearby stockyards where the steers are held. The dust from their shifting hooves rises up into the air. Several Cowhands sit up on the rails while one Cowhand, LEE balances on top of a post.

PHIL
What you got?

George reads the figures off the small notebook he holds in his hand.

GEORGE
1,051. You?

PHIL
1,055.

The brothers hear, then see, a mail delivery vehicle.

GEORGE
The boys’ gear I hope.

PHIL
Ohh, look at them running.

The Cowhands make their way off the stockyards and out of the sleeping quarters to receive their parcels from the truck flat.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Can’t wait to get in their Sears Catalogue high heels and be a cowboy. Not the way we were taught, brother. Remember that first camping trip up in the snow?

GEORGE
Bronco Henry shot us an elk.

PHIL
Saw a cougar too. What year was it?

George is heading away from Phil.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Our first year alone?
George does not look back as he takes the stairs to the grand BURBANK RANCH HOUSE, two storied, solid with generous proportions, an elegant turret and a deep first floor balcony.

The Cowhands are collecting their parcels and beginning to open them. JOCK 22, holds up his parcel.

JOCK
Hey Phil, my boots with the inlay.

Phil turns. Just his attention in the Cowhands’ direction sends BOBBY 28, eagerly towards Phil holding out a guitar shaped parcel. Behind him another Cowhand is holding up a tasseled shirt grinning.

JOCK (CONT'D)
What do you think, Boss?

PHIL
Waste of money.

Jock laughs he doesn’t care, Phil joshing him is as good as it gets. Bobby shows Phil his parcel.

BOBBY
My guitar came, Boss. Did you teach yourself banjo, Phil?

PHIL
Yep. So let’s have a look.

Bobby starts to open his parcel, frantic to be fast enough to keep Phil’s attention. But Phil has moved towards the Cowhands’ bunk room. He leans on the door jamb and watches as Jock barelegged steps into his inlays. Behind him a Cowhand, ANGELO parading a new hat suddenly sees Phil.

ANGELO
Oh Phil, hi, hey pass that chair.
Is the Visalia saddle all it’s cracked up to be?

A stool, once a chair, is passed down the bunk room and placed politely beside Phil who ignores it. Bobby comes in holding out the unpacked guitar.

BOBBY
Here it is, made of Rosewood.

But Phil barely glances at it, he’s on his way out.

PHIL
Up before dawn remember.
The tension and energy in the bunk room departs with Phil, the Cowhands relax and finish unpacking their goods.

Jock reads the description - wood pegged, brass nailed, steel shanked arches, comfort, class, color. But eyes are on Phil as he marches back to the house.

INT - DOWNSTAIRS BURBANK RANCH HOUSE - DAY

MRS LEWIS 55, generously proportioned complains as she moves about the back dining room setting out breakfast places for the ten Cowhands and two Brothers. She straightens as she hears Phil enter the front door and she moves through to the front dining room.

MRS LEWIS
Are you not eating?

PHIL
No.

Phil walks straight upstairs maintaining pace.

Mrs Lewis lumbers across to the long dining table covered in a snowy cloth, sharply creased from ironing. Two places are formally set at either end of the table grand enough to seat twenty four.

MRS LEWIS
Well I’ve set the whole table so I’ll just unset it.

The dining room is part of a cavernous connected ‘L’ shaped living room that includes a fire place, the hallway with its large dusty carpet runner and a grand staircase. An odd assortment of antique baroque armchairs and ranch themed furniture are scattered about with little apparent design.

Phil stands legs akimbo over a small chess table. He moves a piece and swaps to the opposite side of the table where he makes a counter move. The hall is hung with impressive hunting trophies, an ANTELOPE, BISON HEADS, MOOSE HEADS, WILD CATS and by the entrance a full rack of TWENTY WESTERN HATS.

INT/EXT - BURBANK RANCH/HALL/BEDROOM/BATHROOM/YARD - DAY

Phil climbs up the last few steps of the staircase and walks along the corridor to his and George’s shared bedroom. Inside there are TWO MATCHING SINGLE BRASS BEDS dating back to their childhood. In front of each bed is a GREEN SHELVED, GLASS FRONTED DISPLAY CASE.
Phil’s display case has a museum standard display of INDIAN ARROWHEADS, fanned out and carefully labelled. On a lower shelf his collection of RARE MINERAL ROCKS. Phil takes his BANJO out of its case on the top of his display case and begins to play. He’s fluent, gifted.

Phil walks towards the bathroom door and continues playing.

PHIL
Figured it out Fatso, what year we took over from the Old Gent?

GEORGE
Why?

PHIL
Hell, think about it.

Inside the bathroom George sits placidly in his bath making small splashes. His skin is milky white except where his shirt was open and there his neck and his hands are red brown.

GEORGE
You ever try the house bath Phil?

PHIL
No I don’t wanna smell like a piece of soap, like a flower. I like to smell like a man. What’s happened to you brother? Don’t forget the wilds or you’ll end up a house cat, too fat to catch a mouse... Or are you a mouse?

Phil lies stiffly in the dark. George gets into his matching bed, the two brothers side by side.

EXT - ROAD TO BEECH - DAWN

Before the sun rises the herd is lined out over the length of a half mile in the dark, the Cowhands are silent and the Brothers are silent, listening to the step-step-step of the cattle and the squeak-squeak-squeak of saddle leather and the ringing of German silver bit chains.

When the sun looms higher the warmth nourishes the men into hope and gaiety. Phil and George ride together. Phil on his nery Sorrel and George rides a horse as square and solid as George himself. The sun warms their backs the plains spreading towards the mountains. The cattle massing and threading, a black ink spill on the landscape.
Phil has spotted something he doesn’t like, he rides towards Cowhands Jock and Bobby, he’s looking out to the right where some cattle have strayed.

PHIL
You two real or are you in a movie picture?

Jock wears his catalogue new boots with the engraved side panel inlays, while Bobby has a tasseled cowboy shirt.

The Boys turn to Phil alertly and chuckle.

JOCK
We’re real.

PHIL
That’s good ‘cause there’s a calf dead off to the right, keep our cattle away.

Jock stands up in his stirrups looking at the dead stiff bloated calf in the distance.

BOBBY
What happened?

PHIL
Anthrax, so don’t touch.

BOBBY
We got it, Boss.

Bobby and Jock urge their horses out past the straying steers, pleased to show speed and sand spraying stops.

Phil shakes his head amused. He threads back through the beasts towards George. Phil is rolling a cigarette for himself with one hand. George two handed finishes a cigarette of his own, fat and funnel shaped.

PHIL
Well I guess this is ‘it’.

GEORGE
What’s ‘it’ Phil?

PHIL
What’s ‘it’? Okay I’ll tell you what ‘it’ is fatso, today is 25 years since our first run. Nineteen hundred and nothing. Nineteen naught, naught.
George takes it in, nodding.

GEORGE
Fact is I forgot.

PHIL
Well sort of makes it special, our silver anniversary, twenty five years on our own.

Phil is leaning in towards George luring him into a shared nostalgia, but George does not catch the mood.

GEORGE
That’s a long time.

PHIL
Well not too damned long. You know what we should do?

GEORGE
What?

PHIL
Go camping again up in the mountains, shoot ourselves some fresh elk liver, roast it straight on the coals like Bronco Henry showed us.

George takes a puff of his stubby cigarette.

PHIL (CONT'D)
You got a sore gut?

GEORGE
No.

PHIL
You act like it pains you to hitch one word to another.

Phil’s attention is diverted, a car is trying to push through the cattle, but instead it rolls off into a ditch, perilously listing to its side. The DRIVER and his FEMALE PASSENGER stand up in the vehicle and the driver honks and cattle nearby spook. Phil rides fast towards the car ready to teach this idiot in plus fours a lesson.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Shut that down. You want your car and your girl to be flattened? So quit that horn.
DRIVER
Can you help us?

PHIL
No I’d like to see yours and every other car blewed up.

Phil rides on, behind him George and Stan stop to help the stranded driver. Phil stands in his stirrups and turns round steaming.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Damn it George, leave him!

INT - THE RED MILL/BEDROOM - DAY

A BOY’S long pale fingers cleverly fold and pleat strips of magazine paper colored by illustrations and photographs. The Boy carefully draws the pleating together with needle and cotton making a tiny frilly skirt. The Boy hums as he works rolling a page into a thin long tube which he fastens with glue and holds tight with thread. Sun catches the Boy’s eyelashes and makes luminous his hazel eyes.

EXT - TOWN OF BEECH - DAY

The BARKEEP walks down the main dirt road of the four or five building town all false fronted, he looks behind him and sees a faint cloud of dust hovering in the landscape.

INT/EXT - THE RED MILL - DAY

The Barkeep walks into The Red Mill an Inn with a six tabled dining room and white washed board walls, a Pianola up against the back wall.

ROSE GORDON (36-40), in ‘pant’ and a shirt mops the floor.

BARKEEP
So there’ll be twelve for the night.

Rose looks up with her customary smile, unappreciated in these parts as ingenuine.

ROSE
Did they say what they prefer to eat?

BARKEEP
They like the fried chicken dinner.
Rose begins to push tables together to make the twelve places, the Barkeep backs away, everyone has a lot to do.

INT - THE RED MILL/STAIRS/HALL/BEDROOM - DAY

Rose walks up the wooden stairs and along the hallway to her son’s bedroom. PETER 17 years old sits at a desk near the window. He covers up the exercise book where he was busy gluing magazine pictures. He is neat and extremely thin with a slightly enlarged forehead and wide deep set eyes, that appear to see both everything and nothing.

ROSE
We are going to need your room, all the rooms up here - what are you doing?

PETER
Nothing.

Rose moves over to his table with its black leather bound Medical Text Books in a neat row and magazines and clippings, scissors and glue.

ROSE
Is it an album?

PETER
Not really.

ROSE
What’s in it?

She begins to turn the pages. There are magazine pictures of cruise ships and home designs, jewelry and automobiles all characterising luxury and affluence.

PETER
Nothing, just things I like.

Rose is looking at a picture of a woman like herself in a living room with a rock feature wall. In another picture a couple are in a luxury cruise liner dancing in moonlight. Beside the album Rose notices some handmade paper flowers, intricately folded and pleated with clipped and rolled frills for stamen. Rose examines one.

ROSE
Oh that’s clever Peter.

PETER
Not really.
But he nonetheless shows her a decorated milk bottle with several paper flowers together. She turns it about.

ROSE
For the tables? They’re lovely.

She puts it down.

ROSE (CONT’D)
I need three more chickens. Can you do them?

PETER
Yes Mother.

Rose starts pulling Peter’s sheets off his bed.

ROSE
Can you put your things in the shed? I’ll make a bed for you on the floor.

PETER
Where will you sleep?

ROSE
I’ll put a cot up in the kitchen.

EXT/INT - THE RED MILL/CHICKEN COOP/KITCHEN/DINING - DAY

In the chicken coop Peter quietly corners a suitable fryer. Rose in the kitchen closes the window and stops her ears as she walks through to the dining room and sits at the Pianola playing ‘The Red Mill’ loudly and well to drown out the squawking.

EXT - THE RED MILL/CHICKEN COOP - DAY

Peter takes the bird suddenly by the neck, twists his wrist just so; the body twirls twice and falls headless to the ground where it hops and flops and the discarded head beside it gazes with bright astonished eye at its own jerking body. Only when the body falters and lays quiet does the lid come down over the eye.

INT/EXT - THE RED MILL/BEDROOM/GRAVEYARD - DAY

Rose walks upstairs with an armful of sun dried sheets. From the window in the hall she sees Peter with his strange mechanical gait climb up the bald hill to a small haphazard graveyard, bordered with a single strand of rusted barbwire.
EXT - TOWN OF BEECH/GRAVEYARD - DAY

Peter passes several untended graves before kneeling in front of one with a newer headstone. He wipes the dust off the engraved name. DOCTOR JOHN GORDON, BELOVED HUSBAND AND FATHER to Rose and Peter Gordon.

Peter sticks a posy of his paper flowers into the earth and places on top an upturned large pickle jar as protection.

Peter makes his way down the hill squinting in the afternoon sun as he sees the first line of the Burbank outfit reach the edge of the town, Beech.

EXT - TOWN OF BEECH/ENTRANCE - DAY

The lead steers spook at the sight of the first buildings, straightening their front legs and sniffing the ground until pushed on by Cowhands.

RESIDENTS watch admiring from their windows and Phil keeps his eyes peeled for any fool wandering out to spook the cattle.

EXT - BEECH STOCKYARDS - EVE/DAY

OTHER RESIDENTS look on as the last of the Burbank cattle are corralled within the Stockyards adjacent to the railway yards. Two Cowhands and George look on down the tracks over a flat endless plain. No train yet. The Cowhands lead their horses across to the horse yards where a lump of hay awaits them.

INT/EXT - THE SALOON/BEECH STREET - EVENING

The whole Burbank Outfit stands along the bar small spirit glasses in front of each man. Phil is holding everyone off, Jock is standing lookout on the street.

PHIL
He there?

JOCK
Nope.

Phil is put out. He beckons for Jock to come in.

PHIL
Well we can’t wait forever the cattle are in the yards. So drink up.
JOCK
You going to say something?

PHIL
No. Not without my brother.

The boys lift their little glasses and drink. Phil is not a pretender he’s miffed and not drinking. The Barkeep refills. George walks in and over to Phil.

PHIL (CONT’D)
Where were you? I couldn’t hold the boys back forever.

GEORGE
That’s fine. Checked the power it’s held up, not coming till morning.

Phil passes George his shot glass expecting a brotherly toast.

GEORGE (CONT’D)
No thanks Phil. They’re ready for us over at The Red Mill.

This brush-off digs deep.

GEORGE (CONT’D)
Dinner boys.

Nobody listens.

Phil’s in a hell of a mood.

PHIL
Twenty-five years ago, where were you Georgie boy? I’ll tell you, a chubby know-nothing, too dumb to get through college. People helped you Fatso, one person in particular taught me and you ranching so we damn well succeeded.

George looks down and nods.

GEORGE
Yes, yes Bronco Henry.

PHIL
So to us brothers, Romulus and Remus and the wolf who raised us.

George picks up his glass, clinks with Phil.
GEORGE
To Bronco.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Il Lupo.

George drinks the spirits in two even sips while Phil downs his in one. Phil’s eyes water with emotion. He turns to the bar and gives a piercing whistle. The Burbank Boys look over at Phil who is headed to the door. Glasses are put down the Burbank Boys follow.

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EXT - BEECH MAIN STREET - EVENING

The Burbank Outfit, all twelve walk down the main street towards The Red Mill.

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INT/EXT - BEECH MAIN STREET/THE RED MILL/DINING - EVENING

Rose in the kitchen an apron over a twenty’s frock and low heels, her hair held back with pins stops her washing up as she sees the men approaching. Rose meets them in the dining room.

ROSE
This is your table.

Rose leans over and lights the candles melted into the wine bottles. George sits down at one end, Phil remains standing. He looks at a table of six next to their table where JEANIE (30’s) is drinking wine and telling a story loudly, she puffs on her cigarette something Phil finds repulsive in a female. Then Phil notices the paper flowers on his table.

PHIL
Well, well, ain’t that purdy.

Phil bends to sniff. The Cowhands cowered by the prissiness of the roadhousey atmosphere and the napkins look at Phil admiring his poise and ease.

ROSE
Everything alright?

GEORGE
Yes fine.

As Rose goes back to the kitchen Jeanie calls after her loudly.

JEANIE
Play us something, please Rosie.

The others take up the chant “Play”. Rose shakes her head. They are drunk and she’s busy.
Phil finally sits as Peter comes out in his white waiter’s shirt and black pants, combed wet hair and a white cloth draped over his stiffly folded left arm. He walks past Phil to the table of six where he starts to clear their plates. Phil leans back on the legs of his chair eyeing Peter with rising distaste.

PHIL
Where’s our service boy? Are we black or something?

Peter looks across anxiously but continues with his plate piling. Phil turns to his table and his eyes light again on Peter’s paper flowers. He leans forward and with his gnarled dirty hands, still bloody from a small cut on his palm, he takes the flowers in his fist and regards them closely, poking a finger into the paper flower corolla.

PHIL (CONT’D)
My goodness I wonder what little lady made these?

Peter turns, his hands full of plates.

PETER
I did actually sir. My mother you see trained as a florist.

PHIL
Well do pardon me, they’re as real as possible.

Phil puts them back in the jar pretending to arrange them.

Peter is paused, realising he’s being ridiculed. A couple of Cowhands giggle. Phil hasn’t finished.

PHIL (CONT’D)
Oh look here gentlemen, that’s what you do with the cloth.

Four or so of the Cowhands innocently mimic Peter’s waiter affectation draping their napkins over their arm. Rose hearing the laughter, opens the door and sees Phil offering the jar of paper flowers to the Cowhands to take mock sniffs. Rose’s heart sinks. Peter looks trapped and in hell as Cowhands CRICKET and SANDY masquerade with their napkins.

PETER
It’s really only for wine drips.

PHIL (MIMICKING PETER’S LISP)
Got that boys, only for drips now get us some food.
Peter looks down ashamed, his eyes smart, he continues into the kitchen. Phil and the Cowhands laugh. Phil looks at George who does not ‘join’ he wears his napkin on his lap and sits.

INT - THE RED MILL/KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A flustered Rose serves delicious looking fried chicken and wilted lettuce on the twelve waiting plates, Peter now expressionless carries them out two at a time.

INT - THE RED MILL/DINING ROOM - NIGHT

BOBBY
Did Bronco ever eat here?

PHIL
He did not.

BOBBY
So where did you eat?

PHIL
Back then we had herrings at the Saloon and a lot of alcohol. Once Bronco Henry made a wager that he could take any horse and jump the tables and chairs of the Saloon piled out on the street. We chose him a nag all right it didn’t bother him. He took off its saddle, walked the horse up to the tables, talking to him. Stroking its big ugly head while it sniffed. Then he swung on, rode back and...

Phil has meanwhile rolled himself a cigarette, he takes a paper flower and flames it up on the candle then lights his tight slim smoke.

BOBBY
What?

Phil pulls a disaster face. The Cowhands wait.

PHIL
Flew over.

Peter enters with more plates stunned to see his flower burning. Phil slowly shakes it out.
JOCK
But to get a nag to jump...

Phil nods blowing smoke. Rose brings to the table two
steaming platters of biscuits deftly removing Peter’s paper
flowers.

PHIL
Put it down to amour. What do you
say George?

The Cowhands turn to George who is head down eating.

GEORGE
What?

Phil stares at George. The Cowhands slowly begin to laugh.
George’s inattention throws Phil. Suddenly he is aware of the
loud revelling behind him on the Pianola. Phil turns sharply.

PHIL
Do you mind quietening, we’re
eating.

The MAN on the Pianola lifts his hands as the keys amusingly
play on.

PHIL (CONT’D)
Shut that down, or I will.

Phil stands. The Man stops the Pianola and the party assemble
to leave. Peter serves the last two plates, one to Phil. He
blows out the candles on the departed table.

INT - THE RED MILL/KITCHEN - NIGHT

Peter takes the empty pie plates into the kitchen where he
dumps them in the sink. Peter examines his napkin for dirt,
seeing a spot he throws it in the washing pile with the
others. He walks to the kitchen back door. Rose observes him
concerned.

ROSE
Where are you going?

Peter stops, he pulls his comb out of his pocket and drags
his thumb over the teeth, he looks past Rose. He is blinking
and there is a redness that has crept up his face.

ROSE (CONT’D)
Are you all right Peter?

Peter shrugs, pulls the comb through his hair and leaves.
Rose looks at the piles of smeared plates and at Peter’s flowers in their decorated jars. She is stung afresh by his humiliation and her part in it. Why had she encouraged her mysterious strange son with the paper flowers? Why hadn’t she thought to protect him? Rose’s eyes brim with tears of self-reproach and fear for Peter.

INT - THE RED MILL/DINING ROOM - NIGHT

In the dining room the Burbank table are leaving, pushing their chairs back, picking up hats.

GEORGE
You go on over I’ll settle up.

Phil twirls his chair on its back legs like a dance partner.

PHIL
Settle in the morning.

Phil dips his chair low then flips it up leaving it neatly on four legs.

GEORGE
I’ll be along.

The room is quiet, George looks across to the kitchen door as he hears what sounds like sobs. He is disconcerted, then concerned. He rises and goes to the kitchen door. Softly he knocks. No answer. The sobs stop.

GEORGE (CONT’D)
Shall I settle up now Mrs Gordon, or -

George gently opens the door as Rose hears the door she moves quickly to the sink where a loud sob escapes her, she can’t hold back the flood of tears. George surprises himself by moving to Rose his boots squeaking loudly, he then does something he has never done before, he gently pats her upper arm.

GEORGE (CONT’D)
Please you can send the bill. I’ll post a cheque.

INT/EXT - THE SALOON BAR - NIGHT

The PROSTITUTES from upstairs sit around the bar smoking and cadging drinks. Phil watches the young fellows oblige. Phil takes a breath he feels strangely lonely. The Boys are “la-la-laing” to the music box.
Their faces flushed with drink and good cheer and kisses. Phil watches singing the actual words in key and in time, but still that loneliness.

BOBBY
Do you guess anyone ever loved him? Or maybe he ever loved anybody?

Bobby looks towards Phil singing

PHIL
... hot time, in the old town tonight.

STAN
And what have you ever known, a couple of whores?

Stan joins Phil at the bar and orders.

STAN (CONT'D)
These kids’ll have big heads in the morning.

PHIL
And pick up syph or the clap too -

Phil grows silent.

STAN
Turning in?

Phil stares painfully into another time.

23 EXT - BEECH MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Phil walks across from the Saloon towards the Inn. Two Cowhands are trying to catch a loose horse. They’re very drunk, Phil pays them no heed.

24 INT - THE RED MILL/UPSTAIRS/BEDROOM - NIGHT

Phil walks into The Red Mill in the hallway he sees the registration exercise book and a sharpened pencil. He writes in beautiful cursive his name. He climbs the creaky steps.

Phil knocks on several doors.

PHIL
George?
He opens the third door, it’s empty. A coil of thick rope by the window glinting. Under the window a sign IN CASE OF FIRE.

Phil lies on the bed. He sits up.

PHIL (CONT'D)

George?

Phil looks out the hallway.

Phil in the bed sits up. ‘Had he dozed?’

George is standing in profile in the room unmoving. So strange a sight that Phil feels uneasy.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Where you been? The others bedded down yet?

GEORGE
What you said about her boy tonight
Phil, made her cry.

PHIL
Her? She had her ear to the door?

George moves to the side of the bed he loosens his belt.

GEORGE
She was crying Phil.

PHIL
What the hell it’s obvious her boy
needs to snap out of it and get human.

George lies down on the pillow next to Phil.

PHIL (CONT'D)
I pointed it out, that’s all, she
should damn well know.

Phil’s eyes gleam and dart defensively. George’s eyes are soft and steady in the moonlight.

FADE TO BLACK
EXT - THE WILLOWS/SACRED SPOT - DAY

Phil walks along the edge of the Willow copse out of sight of the Ranch turning frequently to be sure he is unseen, quickly he slips between the trees crawling through a hidden passage, a tunnel of bent and dense branches.

EXT - SACRED SPOT/RIVER CROOK - DAY

Phil is naked and alone among the river Willows. He rubs dirt and river sand over himself, sensually smearing it across his thighs and genitals, his chest and arms. Then breaking through the thick wall of Willows and as birds fly up, Phil hurls himself off the bank into the river below. The dirt and sand rinses off his body until he stands up in the river sobered by the cold water. Phil has a pale strong muscled body streaked red from the Willow scratches. The water about him stills and Phil looks at his well muscled reflection, then at the clouds passing beyond his head.

EXT - SACRED SPOT/CUBBY - DAY

Phil stands on the long soft grass in a dappled opening in the Willows his clothes strewn about him. Phil catches sight of an old CUBBY he and George made now overgrown with Willow shoots. Phil crawls into the tiny hut, his legs too long stick out. A few old nudie magazines from back-in-the-day are strewn on the ground. (Bronco Henry’s name on one.)

EXT - BURBANK RANCH/BUNKHOUSE/ROCKY OUTCROP - DAY

Cowhands are enjoying their day off; Cricket writing in cribbed hand to his Ma, “I tell you Ma it shur is grate been a cowboy”, Theo doing washing, beating shirts with a pot nailed to a plank and heckling Lee the trick rider. Stan and Another Cowhand empty a tin bath of dirty soap water. Phil is seen in the background approaching the bunkhouse. The Cowhands are keen to see what he makes of the horse stunt. The beat of hooves on the hard ground as a horse is lunged at a canter by Juan while Lee barefoot and in jeans tries to stand on its rump. He’s up and down trying to find balance before he wobbles and tumbles to the ground. Phil makes no comment. He has in his hands a miniature baroque armchair and is whittling the tiny legs.

JOCK
He was better. Is that how Bronco Henry learned it?
Phil watches as the Cowhand, dusts himself off and limping climbs back on the moving horse with a back glance to see if Phil is watching.

PHIL
I never saw Bronco on a lunge,
that’s a fact.

Phil’s attention is drawn to the distant formation of rock and slope that comes to life just as the shadows lengthen across its face. Phil walks a few paces towards it. Bobby walks up beside Phil, looking from Phil to the hillside, Bobby squints back at the rocky outcrop.

BOBBY
What is that you see there Phil?

Phil’s lips twist into a faint smile.

Bobby and now SEAN and Jock join them and all three peer at the hill, then back at Phil stymied.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
Are there rats up there?

Another Cowhand, SVEN joins the group hugging himself in the cold.

SVEN (TO JOCK)
Ask him for a hint.

To Phil the huge mythic dog outlined across the hill face, its hot snout lowered in pursuit of some frightened thing was so real he could smell the dog’s breath.

JOCK
Has anyone else seen what you seen Phil?

BOBBY
George... ?

Phil shakes his head smiling.

PHIL
Nope, not him.

BOBBY
Come on Phil what is it?

Phil turns away, George is coming from the Ranch House smartly dressed and heading towards the garage.
BOBBY (CONT'D)
There is something there right?

PHIL
Not if you can’t see it.

Phil walks to join George, but before he can get to the garage the old Dodge is backing out and George does not stop or wave but proceeds down the drive. Phil is stunned, he walks into the garage as if he had some other purpose and in the privacy of that dark space watches through the far door as the Dodge drives up the hill and disappears.

29  EXT - BEECH - DAY

George’s Dodge drives sedately into the small town and parks outside The Red Mill, next to two other sporty “out of town” vehicles.

30  INT - THE RED MILL/KITCHEN/DINING - DAY

Rose looks up as she sees George Burbank making his way along her weedy backyard path, past the chook enclosure up to the back door.

He knocks.

ROSE
Hello Mr Burbank.

GEORGE
Hello Mrs Gordon.

ROSE
How can I help you?

GEORGE
I really just came to see you.

ROSE
Oh, I’m quite busy.

George doesn’t move.

ROSE (CONT'D)
Would you like to come in? I’m mixing biscuit but you can sit if you like.
INT - THE RED MILL/KITCHEN - DAY

Rose has flour up her arms as she mixes. George reads a bottle label.

GEORGE
"This most wholesome sauce is excellent with meats, fish and cheese."

He traces his finger along the flower stems on the oilcloth. He glances at Rose’s hands and likes how busy and soft they are.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
The river is low I notice.

ROSE
Yes it’s been dry. (Pause) Peter is over at the school cleaning windows.

She turns to look at George concerned he might take mention of his absence to be provocative.

GEORGE
You must be proud of him from what I hear.

Rose is suddenly fiercely protective.

ROSE
Oh, so what did you hear?

GEORGE
Oh that he’s a smart young fellow.

There is a loud thump on the Pianola from the dining room, shrieks and laughs and the sound of dancing.

ROSE
They have wine with them. I wish they wouldn’t do that.

The noisy frolicking continues.

GEORGE
I’d say they have more in them than wine. Sounds like booze.

Rose puts the biscuit into the oven.
ROSE
They’re early. I should never have put the Pianola in there.

Rose takes a tray of glasses to the table and George sees through the swinging doors that the group are trying to learn the steps to some wild dance. George recognizes the DENTIST with his thin moustache and his dark haired dental assistant CONSUELA who leads the dance. The HERNDON UNDERTAKER MR WELTZ has his jacket off and his arms cling onto the shoulders of TWO YOUNG LADIES. He is so drunk he makes them all stagger. ONE OLDER MAN sits quietly pouring drinks at the table. Rose comes back to the kitchen.

GEORGE
I see the Herndon Dentist and the Undertaker Mr Weltz.

ROSE
Oh goodness I wish Peter was back, I need to fry the chicken and Peter should be serving salad. Sometimes if you get food on the table...

She pauses thinking.

ROSE (CONT'D)
Mr Burbank I’m going to run over and get Peter.

Some loud ‘whoops’, then voices, “higher, higher.”

George takes two plates from the counter and shoulders open the swing doors. Rose sees past George to the dark beauty Consuela kicking her leg indeed high. For a moment the noise continues, the voices louder. Then there is sudden and utter silence, a chord on the Pianola finishes unresolved. Rose opens the door, very curious.

GEORGE
Afternoon (laughs) looks like I’m the new waiter. How do you do?

The group stare at George and at the salad. The Dentist stands nodding to George soberly. George returns to the kitchen for more salads. Rose is leaning against the sink her shoulder shuddering, head shaking. George goes straight to her concerned. Rose is weeping again, this time from laughter.

ROSE (WHISPERING)
You were so perfect... They were so shocked. In their wildest dreams...
Rose doubles over with laughter again.

ROSE (CONT'D)
You were so, so perfect.

George smiles, then chuckles, enjoying every word of Rose’s praise.

GEORGE
Be back.

He picks up two more salad plates and backs out through the swing doors, Rose puts her hand over her mouth muffling laughter.

INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/DINING/LOUNGE - NIGHT

At one end of the long dark gleaming table an unused plate is set for George, the meat resting before it on a serving platter. Down the other end of the long table sits Phil in fading light. His food finished, his face expressionless. The heads of the dead animals loom from the walls, their eyes glassy, dusty. Phil looks at the snow falling heavily now.

EXT - BURBANK RANCH/YARD/GARAGE - NIGHT

Phil in a jacket but gloveless, walks over to the garage. He lights a match and holds it up against the wall where George stores his tools all outlined and labelled in white paint.

PHIL (READING TO HIMSELF)  
“Snow chains.”

Here they are, George has forgotten them.

INT - BURBANK RANCH/BROTHERS BEDROOM - NIGHT

Phil lies on his bed in the dark plucking on his banjo. He hears a car and sits up. He goes to the window. It is not George but some drunk Cowhands being dropped off by pals after a night out. They laugh and wave stumbling back to the bunkhouse.

INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/ENTRANCE/LOUNGE - NIGHT

George lets himself in the house. He sits in his huge overcoat and smiles recalling his evening.
INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/BROTHERS BEDROOM - NIGHT

Phil stands near his bedroom door listening. Slowly he opens the door and looks out over the bannister. The clock strikes two a.m. He spots George sitting motionless in an armchair.

PHIL (PRETENDS TO YAWN)
Run into any snow down below?

GEORGE
None to speak of.

PHIL
Well I’ll roll me a smoke since I’m woke up. How far did you get Georgie Boy?

GEORGE
Beech that’s where I aimed for.

PHIL
What did you do down there? Maybe a little ‘Tom-Cattin’?

A silence. The wind blowing under the front door lifts the hall carpet.

GEORGE
I was speaking to Mrs Gordon.

PHIL
Oh yes she cried on your shoulder.

GEORGE
So she did.

PHIL
Give her a chance and she’ll be after some dollar for Miss Nancy’s College fees.

George pays no attention. Phil walks down the staircase to where George sits. He moves the chess pieces on a board near George playing both sides.

PHIL (CONT’D)
Remember how The Old Lady brought those girls to the Ranch as soon as we could get hard-ons? My God remember the tomato soup queen? Wasn’t it her that wrote you “I will never forget the western moon”.

(MORE)
PHIL (CONT'D)
Well I guess you could have taken
her out without first putting a
sack on her head unlike some
others.

George gets up and leaves Phil.

GEORGE
Night Phil.

PHIL
If it’s a piece of ass you’re after
fatso, I’m damn sure you can get it
without a license.

37 INT/EXT - BURBANK RANCH/KILLING SHED/YARD - DAY

Phil and another COWHAND are cutting away at a carcass in the
round killing shed. The DEAD BEAST hanging from its back legs
hoisted by chains high in the center of the shed. They slice
through the skin and the layer of fat beneath, peeling it
back.

38 EXT - BURBANK RANCH/KILLING SHED/YARD - DAY

Phil and Sven hang the large black hide over the railing next
to the shed. Beside it are TEN or so OTHER HIDES roughly
lumped together. CROWS gather waiting to pick the fat off the
skin. Beneath the rail a ring of blood drips, a couple of
DOGS catch the drips on their pink tongues.

Phil wipes his bloody hands on the snow. He looks up as he
hears George driving off in the Dodge, slushing on through
the melted snow.

SVEN
What do you do with these?

But Phil is stung watching George depart, yet again.

PHIL
Bloody hell!

SVEN
Do you cut them up or something?

Phil doesn’t listen. Sven wipes the knives watching Phil
awkwardly.
INT/EXT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/LOUNGE - DAY

Phil walks to the bureau in the large lounge area and takes out two pieces of writing paper, a pen and ink. He takes it across to the long empty dining table. He swings his leg over a chair and pushes back a portion of the long white skirt and sitting there dirty, blood spattered and unwashed he begins to write in his distinctly elegant hand.

Dear Mother and Father,
I can no longer keep from you the troubling situation where George is seeing...

Mrs Lewis comes in with a hot plate of meat - lunch. Then stops to see only Phil.

MRS LEWIS
He’s gone again?

She puts down the meat from habit by George’s place then clears George’s cutlery and plate, her eyebrows raised, head shaking, in the extraordinary mystery and irritation of George’s absence.

EXT/INT - SALT LAKE CITY HOTEL - DAY

A grand hotel set in Salt Lake City with commanding views of the mountains and the lake.

The wealthy of UTAH, RANCH RETIREES distinguished by their clean white western hats and western attire shuffle through the lounge assisted by white frocked NURSE AIDS. ELDERLY MEN gather in groups playing cards while the WOMEN collect at the picture windows planning small parties or playing Mahjong. The occasional visiting GRANDCHILDREN sit bored and glum their feet sticking straight out in the stuffed armchairs.

At the Hotel desk the CONCIERGE is sorting the MAIL and Phil’s neatly addressed letter is placed in THE OLD GENT’S white, soft manicured hand.

INT - SALT LAKE CITY HOTEL/A CORNER SUITE - DAY

The Old Gent and THE OLD LADY are deep in contemplation over the thorny problem of Phil’s letter. The Old Lady is sitting at an elegant little writing table with thin carved legs and gold leaf trims attempting replies to Phil’s letter.
The Old Gent paces back and forth reading Phil’s letter, he is dressed like an English Gentleman in a well cut suit and wears a western hat.

THE OLD GENT (READING AN EXTRACT)
‘... he has got himself entangled with a suicide-widow...’

Old Mr Burbank shakes his head at the crude term.

THE OLD GENT (CONT'D)
Suicide-widow?

Old Mrs Burbank nods her displeasure.

THE OLD GENT (CONT'D)
- and there’s a boy, yes?

THE OLD LADY
Yes, that is complicated.

Old Mrs Burbank looks back at her latest attempt to reply. She shrugs her shoulders.

THE OLD LADY (CONT'D)
‘... please think it over carefully. ...?’

She looks across at Old Mr Burbank who listens and nods.

THE OLD LADY (CONTINUES READING) (CONT'D)
‘... it might look ‘funny’ if we’re not there...’

The Old Gent stops pacing.

THE OLD GENT
Would George mind if things look ‘funny’ for once? He’s never done anything that looked unusual before.

The Old Lady fiddles with her pen.

THE OLD LADY
Phil cares.

The Old Gent turns towards his wife with her dignity and poise, her face now mirroring his own, their eyes meet as they lift the veil cautiously on Phil’s complicated personality.

THE OLD GENT
Do you think...?
THE OLD LADY
Do I think there might be something wrong with Phil caring?

The Old Gent frowns, his head held high, nonetheless it is a relief to get the thing out in the open.

THE OLD GENT
If there is, it’s not your fault.

THE OLD LADY
Nor is it yours.

INT/EXT – BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/BACK DINING ROOM – DAY

Outside the back dining room Phil allots the day’s tasks as the Cowhands group about him.

Inside, George watching Phil enters and takes a seat at his and Phil’s traditional places in the back dining room; down one end of the three long tables and opposite each other. LOLA ‘the girl’ (18) brings George coffee and pancakes. Phil joins George at the table, leg over chair, he’s uncommonly chirpy, perhaps proud of the little chair he has finished whittling and has left in front of George as a gift along with a recognizable carved replica of George’s desk set off in a corner in the dining room. Phil pushes the little chair up to the desk.

PHIL
Here you are old fella’ a little desk to go with your big desk.

George does not look pleased or grateful.

GEORGE
Phil.

PHIL (BRISKLY TRYING FOR HUMOR)
Yep got you old timer.

GEORGE
Did you write to The Old Lady?

PHIL (SWINGING A LEG ONTO THE TABLE)
Yep, I shot them both a line.

GEORGE
You said something about Rose?
PHIL
Rose, yes well you know as well as
I do what The Old Lady would feel
if you got mixed up with her. She’d
likely have a hemorrhage.

GEORGE
The Old Lady would feel what one
Mrs Burbank would feel for another
Mrs Burbank.

PHIL
Come again.

Phil sits up.

GEORGE
We were married Sunday. She’s got
rid of her property at Beech.

INT - BURBANK RANCH/BARN - DAY

Phil is shocked, rageful. He is pacing uneasily in the barn.
Phil’s Sorrel begins to act up shying around in the stall.

PHIL
Stop!

But the horse continues its jitters. Phil engulfed in rage
takes the horse out, ties it up close and then slaps it over
the head again and again with the saddle blanket.

PHIL (CONT'D)
You God-damned fool, you hear me,
you dirty flat-faced bitch etc.

Two Cowhands come towards Phil then melt back.

INT/EXT - MRS MUELLER’S BOARDING HOUSE/PETER’S ROOM - DAY

Rose and Peter are newly arrived at Peter’s room in MRS
MUELLER’S boarding house in HERNDON where he will board and
go to school. Rose is wearing her ‘going away outfit’, a dove
blue coat and dress with matching shoes and hat. Peter is in
school uniform.

MRS MUELLER
So dinner is at 6:30 p.m. No need
to help with the dishes if he has
school work. Oh, there are no shoes
inside.
ROSE
Oh, sorry.

MRS MUELLER
Not for you Mrs Burbank just the boarders.

Peter is sitting down on the big double brass bed pushing off one shoe then the other. After Mrs Mueller leaves Rose puts her wedding bouquet on Peter’s adult sized desk.

PETER
May I keep a few of those rose petals?

Peter pads over in his socks to examine the bouquet closely.

Rose watches as Peter plucks five or six cream petals with a crimson stain on the edge. Rose wishes he were not so interested in flowers and frowns a little.

ROSE
I’ll try and come to you every weekend. And maybe sometimes you might like to come to the Ranch, won’t that be fun?

Peter doesn’t think so. He slips the petals into his album and is beginning to stack his Father’s black medical text books on to the empty book shelf. He places his Father’s medical skull on his desk.

PETER
This is a pleasant room.

ROSE
Peter, sometimes I think you don’t listen to me. I can never tell what you’re thinking.

PETER
I’ll pay more attention.

Peter puts a limp arm around his Mother’s shoulders.

George is carrying the last of Peter’s belongings from the Dodge up to Peter’s room. It’s a struggle up the narrow staircase.

GEORGE
Hey ho.

He puts the suitcase by the door and looks at them smiling. Rose is unpacking a wax paper package of wedding cake.
She holds it out to Peter. He takes a slice and examines the icing.

    ROSE
    Here, take the rest for later.

Peter bites into the cake chewing, he likes it here.

45

EXT/INT - A ROAD ON ROLLING SNOW COVERED HILLS/DODGE - DAY 45

The old Dodge winds its way slowly up the snow topped hills out towards the Burbank Ranch. It’s late in the afternoon and there is still some warmth in the sun. Rose is tucked in with blankets and George wears his big bear coat.

    GEORGE
    I’ve been thinking we should have some sort of dinner party to introduce you to my parents.

Rose listens and smiles her ready amiable smile.

    GEORGE (CONT'D)
    And perhaps we could invite the Governor and his Wife too. I saw them in Herndon today and - I kind of already mentioned it to them.

    ROSE
    I can cook for us all.

    GEORGE
    No, please, I want you to enjoy yourself. Mrs Lewis will cook and Lola can serve but maybe you would be kind enough to play something on our old piano.

    ROSE
    But George I’m not very good. I only played for the moving pictures, not proper pieces, tunes, things I made up.

    GEORGE
    Oh you are plenty fine enough for us. The Old Lady can’t play a note. The Old Gent ordered a very good piano and it’s never really been used. It’s stored in the barn.

    ROSE
    If that’s what you want.
Rose is looking about the landscape, she spots a sunny place at the top of the hill.

ROSE (CONT'D)
This looks like a good place. Pull over here please.

GEORGE
Good place for what?

Rose smiles at George.

The car pulls over and Rose gets out and takes a wicker picnic case from the back seat which she balances on the bonnet of the Dodge. She unpacks a thermos of hot coffee and cups, another paper parcel of wedding cake and sandwiches. She pours George a cup of coffee.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Well, well, what a surprise and it’s not even noon. I’ve never eaten a thing except at the proper time. You are marvelous.

George is grinning biting into a sandwich. Standing together at the top of the snowy hill George and Rose are the little couple on top of the wedding cake. Rose puts down her cup and takes George’s from him too.

ROSE
Stand beside me George.

GEORGE
What’s happening?

ROSE
Follow me. One, two, three forward, right back left to the side, yes, again.

GEORGE
Ohh sorry, I really can’t.

ROSE (LAUGHING)
You are dancing George! (She giggles) Don’t think, I told you I’d teach you.

Rose “da, da da’s” a waltz and goes through the steps once more. George follows along, then he stops. Rose keeps demonstrating the steps until she notices.

ROSE (CONT'D)
What is it George?
George seems overcome, or sad, or both, he takes her hand and walks a moment.

GEORGE
I just wanted to say how nice it is
not to be alone.

46 EXT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE - EVE

The old Dodge approaches the darkened, lifeless Ranch House its headlights shining cheerily against the snow.

47 EXT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/STEPS - EVENING

Rose waits at the steps of the large dark log house her luggage spread about her in suitcases and two shopping parcels. George hustles back from the garage.

GEORGE
Go on up and get out of the cold.

But Rose doesn’t go anywhere, she smiles at George and waits.

48 INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/LOUNGE - EVENING

George opens the door and Rose steps in. There is only one small electric reading lamp on and Phil standing unyielding in the middle of the icy room.

GEORGE
Hello Phil. You remember Rose?

PHIL
Hello.

GEORGE
Something wrong with the furnace?

PHIL
Search me.

Rose stands feet together smiling and shivering, her bouquet clasped in her two hands.

GEORGE
I’ll go down and shake it up.

ROSE
We had such a nice trip.

Phil frowns ignoring Rose.
PHIL
I’ve been waiting round for you all
day. The Old Gent wants some deed
sent to him.

GEORGE
Well I figure that can go till
morning. Rose come over here and
get warm, while I start the
furnace.

ROSE
I’m perfectly all right, perfectly
warm George.

She is shaking from cold, but more terrified of being left
alone.

GEORGE
I’ll just be a minute.

Rose hears a door open and close, and steps descending. She
cannot control her trembling. She hears the excruciating
scraping of shovel on concrete that makes her flesh crawl.
Phil is playing chess alone, walking around the board to play
the opposing piece.

ROSE
Well brother Phil, it’s good to
have arrived.

Phil waits till he’s played his piece then smiles directly at
Rose.

PHIL
I’m not your brother and you’re not
my sister, you’re a schemer. It
worked on George but it won’t work
on me.

The kitchen door opens and Mrs Lewis lumbers in humming
something mournful to set the table for three.

INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/PHIL’S BEDROOM - NIGHT
Phil sits up on his bed, George’s ‘old’ bed beside him empty.
He plucks at his banjo and speaks to himself imitating Rose
uncannily.

PHIL
“We had such a nice trip.”
Then he sees the light under the bathroom door come on and
hears the quiet turn of the lock, followed by the careful try
of the handle.

INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/DOWNBELL ACCESS BATHROOM - NIGHT

George in pyjamas gestures to Rose to enter.

Rose in a satin nightgown and matching dressing gown steps
cautiously into the joint bathroom holding her padded toilet
bag.

INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/PHIL’S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Phil glances sideways as the light under the bathroom door
goes off and he can hear murmurs of George and Rose speaking
softly. He turns off the light.

EXT - BURBANK RANCH - NIGHT

Moonlight, clouds, a whistling buffeting wind.

INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/GEORGE AND ROSE’S ROOM - NIGHT

A murky bulk in the large double bed. Rose lies beneath
George, he moves urgently on top of Rose who is still and
silent. As George reaches climax he tenses and grimaces,
primitive groans escape him. Rose turns slowly to George
pleased to be the cause of George’s pleasure. They look at
each other with gratitude.

INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/PHIL’S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Phil lying alone in his bedroom sucks on his cigarette. The
tip of his cigarette lighting his fixed expression of rage.
Phil gets up as the whispering and murmuring from Rose and
George starts up.

INT - BURBANK RANCH/BARN - NIGHT

Phil turns on the new electric light in the barn. He pulls
off the blanket protecting Bronco Henry’s saddle hanging high
on a wall, under it a commemorative plaque. The sight of it
softens him.

IN MEMORY OF BRONCO HENRY - FRIEND
1854 - 1902
He takes down the saddle and wipes it clean with his calloused, scratched hand. He places it over a stall door and fetching a tin of saddle oil begins to work it into the leather. The saddle is already gleaming but the tactile work both calms and stirs Phil’s charged emotions. Twice he throws his head back to stop himself being overwhelmed with tears.

56
INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/GEORGE AND ROSE’S ROOM - DAY

A ROSE WALLPAPERED ‘Ladies’ sitting room decorated against the masculine dominance of cattle ranch life. Rose walks into the room with a sense of uneasy fate, she turns to George.

GEORGE
The Old Lady decorated it. You just make yourself comfortable. I’m going to bring you a surprise.

ROSE
What George?

GEORGE
Well then it won’t be a surprise.

George kisses Rose on the forehead. He leaves Rose sitting in the middle of the floral sofa smiling hard. As the door closes, she shivers, the room is freezing. She stands and looks about, the rose wallpaper, flower carpeted rooms, a terrible deadening malaise overwhms her.

Rose makes her way across the large lounge/dining room tensing terribly as she hears a door rattle then sees a gust of wind lifting the hall carpet, rippling down its full length.

57
INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/KITCHEN - DAY

Rose enters the kitchen where Mrs Lewis and Lola are clearing up from breakfast and preparing lunch.

MRS LEWIS (TO LOLA)
When the rains come in the cellar gets flooded and the rats drown and float to the surface so the lads have to scoop them...

Mrs Lewis and Lola turn to Rose. Rose picks up a tea towel.

ROSE
Please keep talking don’t mind me I like to be busy.
She walks to the dish rack where she begins to dry a plate. But Mrs Lewis and Lola are unable to continue. They work on silently until Lola distracted by the Cowhands struggling with a large object outside breaks the quiet.

LOLA
Oh goodness!

Rose and Mrs Lewis follow Lola outside to see Cowhands and George struggle towards the front steps of the Ranch House with what seems to be a piano.

ROSE
Is that, is that a grand?

George breaks away towards Rose.

GEORGE
It’s a Mason and Hamlin baby grand.

ROSE
Oh no, it’s too good for me. I, I only really play tunes. I’m just very average.

GEORGE
That’s what I want, tunes, the Governor too. We don’t want a concert. We want to hear you play Rose.

George and the Cowhands move carefully up the steps, speaking to each other. “One, two, step.”

MRS LEWIS
I should like to look on the Governor as he drives up and gets out of his vehicle.

ROSE
But we’ll introduce you Mrs Lewis.

MRS LEWIS
Oh no I don’t want that. Just to look on him from the window.

Rose’s anxiety starts to rise.
The long white pressed tablecloth with a neatly suited George down one end and Phil, unwashed, unchanged, dirty hands, down the other and Rose on the long side close to George, is dressed for dinner, her hair groomed.

George dabs his mouth with his napkin. Phil whistles and stands swinging his leg over his chair. Rose watches from the corner of her eye as Phil takes an easy chair by the fire and leaning back picks up a magazine.

ROSE
I hope nobody minds but I’m going to practice. It’s going to sound awful, sorry. The piano tuner can’t come till next week – and that will be too late for me.

Rose has risen, she selects sheet music from the top of the piano, opens the lid and sets the music on the stand above the keys.

ROSE (CONT'D)
All right, here I go...

Rose begins ‘Radetzky March’ with an unexpected vigour. The sound is jarring between Rose’s dropped notes and the piano’s off keys yet Rose’s rhythm is upbeat and jaunty, just as Rose gains confidence and adds a flourish Phil throws his magazine on the ground and stands. He heads upstairs to his bedroom. Rose pauses, she’s mortified at having sent Phil off.

GEORGE
Keep going, you’re very good.

A frowning Rose works her way stop/start through the tune. Lola comes in from the kitchen to clear the plates. Upstairs Phil’s banjo can be heard. Lola stands and listens a moment. Rose continues her practice but the musicality of Phil’s banjo stops her and she listens too. Phil’s musicianship is accomplished but more than that his playing has surety and spirit, even heart, something that impresses Rose. George has been pouring himself a whisky, he takes one across to Rose, they both listen. Phil has a musician’s skill, Rose is awed and despairing of her own efforts.
59 INT/EXT - BURBANK RANCH/ROSE & GEORGE’S ROOM/YARDS - DAY 59

Rose is dressed in a neat skirt and sweater, she is looking through the binoculars out into the yards around The Ranch, first she follows George but soon she slides off George to locate Phil. Phil is walking with Two Cowhands towards the stockyard.

Lola behind Rose is tidying the room, making the bed.

LOLA
Is it true that Hollywood stars have milk baths?

Lola’s voice is so small and high it’s difficult to hear.

ROSE
I suppose they might once in a while.

LOLA
Mrs Lewis is going to fix my hair with curling tongs for the Governor’s dinner.

Rose watches Phil as he and Two Other Cowhands mend a railing with a splint. Rose puts down the binoculars and picks up her sheet music.

ROSE
While the house is empty I have to practice.

LOLA
I can tell you if...

ROSE
If what?

LOLA
If, ah, he comes in.

ROSE
No. I’d rather practice alone, but after all it’s Phil’s house and he can come and go whenever he pleases. And now the piano’s tuned it’s not so awful.

Lola nods but neither she nor Rose are convinced.
INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/STAIRCASE - DAY

Rose keeping her Dutch courage walks downstairs, her hair has a charming bounce and her makeup is bright.

INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/LOUNGE - DAY

Rose puts the music on the stand, then once again checks on Phil from the window. Only the Two Cowhands are working on the rail, Phil is nowhere to be seen. Rose looks about at the several doors (5) to the lounge area and closes the open ones.

INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/LOUNGE - DAY

Rose is happily absorbed practicing back and forth over a Strauss Waltz (Radetzyk March). She starts to work a challenging section, she is enjoying the focus on her progress. Lola hustles in anxiously from the kitchen but Rose is too immersed to take Lola’s warning as Phil now enters from the opposite door and walks unseen by Rose up the stairs.

Again Rose goes over the troubling passage, she stretches her hands, did she hear a banjo? She starts afresh this time listening for the banjo, she feels confident she must have imagined it, but as she stops and marks her score with a pencil she clearly hears the banjo stop two notes later. Rose is puzzled, she looks around and now notices one of the doors is open. Fear runs down her spine.

Now as she plays she is listening hard. ‘Yes’ she can hear the banjo and as she deliberately pauses on the piano she can hear Phil pause too, or did she imagine it? Rose frowns, she summons her courage and anyway puts herself to the task of mastering the passage no matter what.

INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/PHIL’S BEDROOM - DAY

Phil moves from his bed to the door, which he opens dexterously with his foot.

INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/LOUNGE - DAY

Rose can hear the door open and Phil’s banjo playing becomes more distinct. Rose tries again to concentrate but this time as she breaks off, Phil does not stop but plays the exact same passage perfectly to the end. The aping of her playing and his musical superiority humiliates and scares Rose.
EXT - BURBANK RANCH/SURROUNDS - DAY

An unsteady and disturbed Rose walks away from The Ranch buttoning up her new fur coat. Outside it’s cold and bright, there are puddles and drifts of snow, head bowed she walks towards the Rocky Outcrop. She is surprised by the number of old bones that are scattered about the winter field.

Cowhands out in the corral watch her curiously.

INT/EXT - BURBANK RANCH/BARN/GARAGE - DAY

Phil is laying long cords of prepared rawhide from one end of the barn to the other. Sandy and Jock are helping Phil to keep the cords straight as Phil walks up the alley separating and sorting the lines before the final twisting begins.

George is backing the Dodge out of the garage, he parks it near the barn where two cow skins are stretched on wooden frames awaiting drying and cleaning. George strolls over to the open doors of the barn dressed formally in a suit. Phil smiles at George sure he is already regretting his hasty marriage and all the uneasy accommodations they both endure. The Cowhands look at George and Phil unsure whether to stay or go.

PHIL
You boys find something needs doing.

Phil unpockets his tobacco and easefully rolls himself a cigarette one handed.

GEORGE
I came over to speak about something.

But then he pauses. Phil looks over at him.

PHIL
Come on pardner open your talker. What is it?

George saunters awkwardly to the saw horse and sits silently for a moment.

GEORGE
His nubs will be here for dinner and The Old Gent and The Old Lady.
PHIL
Well sir aren’t we going into
sastiety - out with the finger
bowls.

Phil continues to untangle his cords.

PHIL (CONT’D)
She on the panano again? Setting
your teeth on edge?

GEORGE
No (laughs) I like to hear Rose
play.

PHIL
Well old timer what’s in the
noodle?

GEORGE
Well Phil...

PHIL
Go ahead, spit it out.

GEORGE
Well it’s about his nobs the
Governor.

PHIL
All right.

GEORGE
Well not so much about his Nibs but
his Nibs wife.

Phil stops and faces George, his mouth tensing a little into
a smile and he begins to chew.

GEORGE (CONT’D)
I was thinking his Nibs wouldn’t
mind so much, but his wife might.

PHIL
What for dear Christ sake?

GEORGE
Well it’s sort of a hard thing to
say. (George breathes) She might
mind if you come to the table
without a wash-up.

Phil looks at George for a long uncomfortable time.
EXT - MONTANA LANDSCAPE/TRAIN - DAY

The austerely beautiful and bare winter country between Salt Lake City and Herndon. A train, tiny in the vast winter landscape steams through.

INT - TRAIN CARRIAGE - DAY

The Old Lady and The Old Gent are seated in an elegant first class carriage playing cards and sipping tea from good railway china. They are arguing about Tutankhamen’s curse in relation to the death by mosquito bite of Lord Carnarvon. The Old Lady is shocked and strangely sobered to realize Tutankhamen was a boy of only eighteen years.

EXT - HERNDON STATION - DAY

George in his buffalo coat waits amongst COWBOYS in wide hats and TOWNSPEOPLE. As the PASSENGERS disembark he walks towards The Old Gent and Old Lady leaning to kiss his mother.

GEORGE
Hello Mother, Father, the car’s around the side.

George shakes The Old Gent’s hand formally.

THE OLD LADY
Is anyone with you?

GEORGE
My wife.

The Old Lady looks anxiously around. George turns to Rose who is standing off a few yards by the picket fence. Rose walks forward to shake hands warmly.

INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/STAIRWAY/DOWNSTAIRS/DOUBLE BEDROOM - DAY

Rose leads The Old Lady up to her old bedroom. Rose is carrying her bag for her. The Old Lady takes a step back.

THE OLD LADY
Oh but this is your room now, we can’t...

ROSE
Yes, please you can, I’ve prepared it for you as best as I could not knowing exactly how you like things.
The Old Lady walks into the room and shivers. She smiles and turns to Rose.

THE OLD LADY
One forgets how cold it is. I’m surprised you can stand it.

Rose laughs.

ROSE
I’m glad you have come. Somehow knowing George, I knew I could count on your kindness.

The Old Gent steps into the room and Rose smiling steps out. The Old Lady opens her suitcase.

THE OLD LADY
Well, what do you think of her?

THE OLD GENT
You hear that? The windows still rattle.

THE OLD LADY
Didn’t you hear me? I said what do you think of her?

THE OLD GENT
Think of her? I think it’s mighty considerate of her to turn her room over to us.

The Old Lady lays clothes out on the bed.

THE OLD LADY
She sees George’s kindness and that pleases me.

THE OLD GENT
Will you give her a little of the jewelry or such things?

The Old Lady has picked up a pot from the sill with a dead Geranium drooping from the stork.

THE OLD LADY
Oh I see Miss Jones is dead. I think we had better wait and see. Too bad there’s a child.

THE OLD GENT
It was dying before we left. It’s not the child you know that.
The Old Gent turned sharply walked across the room, turned sharply and walked straight back.

THE OLD GENT (CONT'D)
I can tell you one thing. I feel sorry for her.

The Old Lady fits a dress on a hanger and carries it to the wardrobe.

THE OLD LADY
God knows why George has the Governor coming for dinner.

THE OLD GENT
Phil can talk remember that, he’ll entertain them.

THE OLD LADY
But will he... ?

THE OLD GENT
Suit up?

The Old Gent cannot contemplate a problem this size. He hangs his own dress suit on the wardrobe door.

INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/LOUNGE/DINING ROOM - DAY
Lola and Mrs Lewis are setting the table on a highly starched white linen tablecloth. Mrs Lewis demonstrates how each setting should look including silver finger bowls. Lola’s hair is in a scarf to keep her curls tidy and Mrs Lewis’s hair has been freshly primped.

MRS LEWIS
The soup, the starter, the main and the dessert. The napkin is fanned.

Behind them Cowhands carry wood to stack beside the fire. They look on in wonder at the table.

MRS LEWIS (CONT'D)
Light the fire, we may as well try and warm this place.

INT - BURBANK RANCH/ROSE & GEORGE’S TEMP BEDROOM - DAY
Rose in satin underwear is trimming her nails in preparation for their work later in the evening. She notices that even now her fingers are trembling. She turns to George looking smart in his dinner suit.
He puts a comforting hand on Rose’s shoulder.

GEORGE
The Governor’s just rung. They are coming. I had hoped the weather would put them off.

Rose’s last hope is dashed.

GEORGE (CONT’D)
It will be fun, you’ll see Phil is a great story spinner.

ROSE
Oh that’s good. Maybe I won’t have to play.

They both laugh a little.

GEORGE
Don’t be surprised when his wife smokes.

Rose puts on a black satin turban, a long dark feather is attached to the front with a broach. It curls up high.

ROSE
I thought I should dress up because she might. You know she’s from a city.

George looks on smiling but worried – what will Phil say?

INT – BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/KITCHEN – DAY

A Cowhand pours more chips of ice into the sink where Mrs Lewis beats her mousse. She stands back a moment then straightens.

MRS LEWIS
That’s the car.

Through the kitchen window she sees the Governor’s smart black car on The Ranch road distantly approaching the homestead.

INT – BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/LOUNGE – DAY

Mrs Lewis hobbles through the lounge to the window by the dining table where she will view the Governor arriving and walking up the front steps. Mrs Lewis is careful to stand a good step back so as not to be caught staring.
George and Rose in the lounge look at each other and together walk to the front door.

EXT - BURBANK RANCH/Front Yard - Day

The Cowhands amble over in force wearing their mail order purchases, chaps, hats, shirts, spurs.

George walks cheerfully down the steps into the puddled and muddy yard and opens the door for the GOVERNOR’S WIFE, GEORGINA. The Governor’s Wife is puffing the last of her cigarette. She is hard eyeing her husband as he confirms the visit will be brief.

Rose also walks down the steps to welcome and shake the important Guest’s hands.

The GOVERNOR, EDWARD, raises his hat to the Cowhands who raise their cowboy hats back to him. They are shivering in their fancy shirts but they’re happy, some of them even shake his hand.

INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/LOUNGE - Day

Mrs Lewis backs away from the window as the Governor and his Wife followed by George and Rose turn towards the house.

INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/LOUNGE - Evening

The Governor offers to take his wife’s fur coat, but she holds on to it. Her eyes alight on George coming towards her holding two cocktails.

GEORGINA
I might keep that a moment
longer... oh sweet, it has its own umbrella!

EDWARD
It’s an island of civilization
here, thank you, very unexpected,
my God it’s cold on The Pass.

GEORGE
You enjoyed Europe?

EDWARD
Mmm... there I was in Paris
discovering this one speaks French
fluently.
GEORGINA
Non, ne vrai pas.

EDWARD
Yes you do, and German....

Georgina shakes her head laughing at her husband. George and Rose listen dazzled and a little afraid.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
I was telling Georgie about your brother, what was it Phi Beta Kappa at Yale?

GEORGE
Yes in classics.

EDWARD
So he swears at the cattle in Greek or Latin?

GEORGE
Heh, heh. Rose plays the piano.

The Governor swings around to look at Rose.

EDWARD
Do you? That’s a nice surprise.

ROSE
I can’t speak other languages...

GEORGE
I’ll just have a look-see out the back for Phil.

GEORGINA
Good I want to meet this brother.

The Governor puts an arm around Rose, looking oddly at the feather on her turban.

EDWARD
All right, we’ll tell you our secret. Georgina is French.

GEORGINA
You exaggerate. I was at boarding school in Lyon.

The older Burbanks are making their way down the stairs, very dressed up.
EDWARD
Ah here’s two people we can’t fool.

THE OLD LADY
No you cannot, we know everything, we’re encyclopedias, at least I am.
I have nothing to do but read, hello Edward, Georgina.

THE OLD GENT
She’s been reading The Curse of Tutankhamen in the digest.

The Old Gent passes The Old Lady an orange blossom.

EDWARD
So you believe in the curse?

THE OLD LADY
No, no I’m not drinking George’s contraption. Yes I do, but did you know that Tutankhamen was just a boy?

The Governor squints very interested.

THE OLD LADY (CONT’D)
Only eighteen.

THE OLD GENT
I don’t believe they can be so precise.

Rose fades smiling into the background, sipping heavily on her cocktail.

THE OLD LADY
Well they can. He was eighteen.

EXT - BURBANK RANCH/YARD - EVE

The suited frame of George is dark against the gloomy and patchy snow of the yard. He walks over to the horse paddock where he sees Phil’s horse among several others, heads down their rumps turned to the wind, one back foot resting.

George heads into the barn. It’s dark. George is about to leave when he notices Bronco Henry’s saddle is missing from above his commemoration plaque. The plaque is gleaming against the dark empty wall.

GEORGE
Phil? Phil are you here?
A match flares, Phil draws on the cigarette the glow briefly flooding his face.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
I was looking for you.

PHIL
Well you’ve found me.

GEORGE
Everyone’s here. We’re about to eat.

PHIL
So?

GEORGE
Well they are asking after you.

PHIL
Really?

GEORGE
Yes. We’re counting on your conversation.

PHIL
Well you can count again.

GEORGE
I shouldn’t have said what I said to you about...

PHIL
You two can keep your apologies to yourself. I’m not coming.

GEORGE
What will I say? The Old Lady wants to see you too, she’s come a long way.

PHIL
Tell them the truth, that I stink and I like it!

George looks stunned.

Beside Phil are the parts of Bronco’s saddle and bridle; all the metal pieces, the bit, the buckles, the spurs are lined up as Phil polishes with Silvo and a soft dark stained cloth. With his wool chaps on Phil looks like a satyr.
Rose rises as Lola comes in with a tray of coffee. She begins anxiously to pour the coffees. She is relieved that her hand only trembles a little as she serves. At the end of the table is Phil’s still set and untouched place, and part eaten mousses sit on everyone’s dessert plates.

GEORGINA
- One night I opened my closet and there on a blanket was a rat’s nest full of its treasure, six silver spoons with the Governor’s coat of arms. The rat was up on its hind legs showing its teeth to me.

And the Governor’s Wife does a toothy imitation. The group laugh but Rose can’t manage more than a weak smile as she passes coffee to the Governor with two hands to manage the trembling.

EDWARD
It’s a shame your brother missed the dinner.

THE OLD LADY
Nothing could have happened to Phil could it?

Rose looks at George disturbed.

GEORGE
No he’ll be fine, something just must have come up.

Rose sits back at the table, she bows her head and sips her wine. A pause descends. Finally the Governor’s eyes glide over to his wife then across to the piano.

GEORGINA
So Rose are you going to play for us?

THE OLD LADY
Yes, George told me you play very well.

ROSE
Ohh no, I’m terribly out of practice.

GEORGE
Come now, you’ve been playing a lot you know you have.
Rose’s head is whirling and a terrible pressure is squeezing her brain.

The Governor glimpses his pocket watch then crosses his legs to the side of the table.

Rose’s palms are wet, her throat closed so her voice shoots up when she speaks.

ROSE
I don’t know what to play.

GEORGE
Play the one I like.

ROSE
What one?

George is surprised, Rose knows exactly which one he likes.

GEORGE
Why the one about the Gypsy.

ROSE
I’m not sure I can remember that one.

GEORGE
Play anything.

Rose moves over to the piano. She looks at Phil’s untouched place setting, chilled. She rubs her hands and places them on the piano. Nothing, absolutely nothing. The Governor and his Wife exchange looks. Rose can’t seem to move, she is frozen. Finally she brings her hands down beside her and folds them.

George’s beam turns to concern and confusion. He looks at the Governor who is raising his eyebrows and glancing at his Wife, there is no rescuing this little moment....

ROSE
I’m so sorry. I can’t seem to play.
I used to play in a cinema pit – for hours.

Rose shakes her head and sees George’s look of surprise and disappointment, her heart stops and her smile fails her. The Governor stands and everyone else stands and moves towards the door leaving Rose at the piano.

EDWARD
Well she got you halter trained, right George, that’s the main thing.
ROSE
I’m sorry.

George smiles puzzled.

EDWARD
No, it was a lovely, lovely evening.

The group are near the front door, coats have been fetched and in the confusion Phil has entered quietly. He looks at the crestfallen Rose who looks back at him, for once too numb to be afraid, yet she reads his victory and knows it’s true the evening has been a failure. Sharp-eyed Phil has noticed her turban and it’s now drooping feather he cocks his head on the angle of the feather. Rose watches him, face burning knowing now it can be worse, he could do much more than win, he could crush her.

The Governor’s Wife returns from the coat room to see Phil.

GEORGINA
Oh you’re Phil. So you weren’t eaten by a cougar.

PHIL
Not yet...

GEORGINA
I am sorry to have missed your conversation, I’ve heard that you’re brilliant.

The Governor turns towards Phil to shake his hand.

PHIL
You’re going to want to keep your distance, I’m straight off the horse. Anyhow you don’t need conversation you been listening to the panano and dancing I guess. You danced?

Nobody speaks. Rose shuts the piano.

PHIL (CONT’D)
You didn’t play? You sure practised a terrible lot.

Phil whistles the Gypsy song as he walks past Rose to the table, he takes a piece of bread from a silver bowl and coolly loads butter on it.
PHIL (CONT'D)
What a shame, see you wouldn’t
think there would be much
difference between a cinema pit and
a dinner party.

Rose is listening to Phil painfully, hopelessly. The Old Lady
stands abruptly looking at Phil sternly.

THE OLD LADY
Where have you been Phil? I could
hardly eat worrying about you.

PHIL
I didn’t get washed up so I didn’t
come.

Phil takes meat left on the table and goes to the fire where
he warms his back and eats.

THE OLD LADY
You didn’t wash?

EDWARD
He’s a ranch man, isn’t that right,
that’s honest dirt.

Phil gives the Governor his eye then placidly regards Rose
bent low on the piano stool. Rose reaches out and takes a
last slug of her wine.

80  EXT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE - NIGHT  80

George walks down to the Governor’s car with the Governor and
his Wife. Offering the Wife an extra blanket to take away.
Doors open and close. George is left taking the steps up to
House as the car drives away.

81  INT - BURBANK RANCH/ THE SENIOR BURBANK BEDROOM - NIGHT  81

The Old Lady seats herself on the side of the bed. The Old
Gent is taking off his jacket.

THE OLD LADY
I don’t think it’s going to...

The Old Gent turns.

THE OLD GENT
Why say it, it doesn’t need to be
said.
THE OLD LADY
Yes you’re right.

THE OLD GENT
I think the cocktails affected her badly.

The Old Lady nods pulling back the bed covers carefully.

THE OLD LADY
And the feather? What was that? Did you see it trembling?

THE OLD GENT
Yes.

The Old Gent shakes his head as he continues to undress.

THE OLD GENT (CONT'D)
Poor woman.

FADE TO BLACK

82        EXT - TREES/RIVER - DAY

The buds of leaves on the River trees shoot tender and delicate, waving above the snow melt rivers. A lone blossom quivers.

83        EXT - HERNDON/DODGE CAR - DAY

Rose and Peter drive through Herndon, garden sprinklers play on lawns, the mist catching rainbows. Rose glances anxiously at her strange son. She blinks with fear to imagine him soon on the Ranch.

In the back seat of the Dodge are Peter’s father’s medical encyclopedia, huge heavy musty old black books about bones and flesh.

ROSE
I wondered if you didn’t think about leaving the medical books here for the summer.

Peter is carefully combing his hair into place.

PETER
I thought about it - but you understand they were Dad’s. Don’t you understand?
ROSE
Yes I do.

84 INT - HERNDON/MENSWEAR SHOP - DAY
Rose is examining the fit of a pair of blue jeans on Peter.

ROSE
How will they stay up? Turn
around... you’ve got no hips at
all... are you eating?

PETER
I’ve made a friend. He calls me
doctor and I call him professor,
because that’s what we want to be.

The SHOP ASSISTANT an older pink faced man with neatly
pressed pants has brought over a selection of cowboy boots
for Peter to try.

ROSE
Why not invite your friend to stay
at the Ranch?

Peter examines one of the boots.

PETER
No Rose.

ROSE
Why not?

Peter puts the boot down. Rose passes him another, he puts it
aside too.

ROSE (CONT'D)
Try it.

PETER
I don’t want him to meet a certain
person.

ROSE
You mean Phil? Does he scare you?

Peter shrugs, he’s seen tennis shoes hanging on a rack and
he’s looking for his size.

PETER
I’m not afraid, I have my ways.
ROSE
What ways?

PETER
Well, I don’t think about him.

Peter is trying on a tennis shoe.

ROSE
What do you think about?

PETER
My plans for the future.

EXT - BURBANK RANCH/CORRAL - DAY

The heat and exertion of catching, branding and castrating the bull calves has the Cowboys sweating and dirt stained. The calves are separated from their mothers and roped then held tight. There are three separate fires heating branding irons and Six Cowboys on horses wielding lariats. Phil does all the castrating gloveless.

ANGELO
Bull calf, Boss...

Angelo looks about for Phil who walks smartly across to the immobilised calf winding his bandana around a cut on his thumb. Phil hands the Cowboy his knife.

PHIL
Take your gloves off. You can’t feel anything through a big hunk of hide. If you fray the knife through the cord it stops bad bleeding...

In the distance on The Ranch road Rose and Peter approach in the Dodge and pull up between the corral and the steps. Phil walks over to George who is wearing a work suit, no tie. Phil pressures the bloodied thumb with his bandana.

PHIL (CONT'D)
What a bitch! Castrate fifteen hundred head, then nick your thumb on the last.

George is writing in his Tally Book. Phil kicks dust into a fire nearby.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Well fatso I guess we’re finished.
Phil frowns as he sees Peter get out of the Dodge clutching his shopping including a white cowboy hat. He sees with further displeasure his Mama has got herself a matching hat which she plops humorously on her head. George turns as the car door slams, the sound of calves bawling in the corral is so loud it’s hard to think. Phil watches as George greets Rose and insists he’ll garage the Dodge. Peter watches the last of the branding from afar until he sees the cold eye of Phil turned on him, he puts his large white hat on his head and starts ferrying his books to the house.

JOCK
Who’s that?

PHIL
Miss Nancy.

JOCK
Oh, our waiter? He was the waiter right?

Phil looks hard at Peter, he hates everything about this Little Lord Fauntleroy. The way he stares, the way he walks, the books he’s brought with him.

PHIL
Yeah look out. He’ll be creeping all over the place from now on big eyes goggling.

Peter stiffens, he’s been through this before. Other Cowhands have joined and peer after Peter. “The Waiter”.

PHIL (CONT’D)
Little Lord Fauntleroy.

BOBBY (MIMICKING PETER’S LISP TO JOCK)
“One day all this could be mine.”

Phil overhears.

PHIL
There’s no way that’ll happen, no way.

Behind them the remaining fires are being kicked out, the irons collected and the bellowing calves and cows herded into the home paddock.
George and Peter are maneuvering George’s empty glass-fronted bookcase out of Phil’s room down the hallway to Peter’s room. Phil comes up the stairs.

PHIL
Where the hell’s that going?

GEORGE
To Peter’s room, he’s got a lot of his father’s books.

PHIL
I was all set to fit it out for my armory collection.

GEORGE
It’s been empty a long while.

Peter slinks away from the brothers down the hallway to his bedroom. Inside Rose is folding Peter’s clothes into drawers. Peter listens to the brothers by the door, Rose watches concerned.

GEORGE (V.O.)
What about when you have time to fit it out, I’ll get it back.

Rose goes to the door and looks down the hallway to where the brothers are standing on each side of the bookcase.

PHIL
So what Miss Nancy wants, she gets?

GEORGE
Quieten Phil he’s just in....

PHIL
I know where the hell he is, big ears flapping.

Phil’s eyes flash and he pushes past George to his own room slamming the door. Phil turns and gazes at the bright rectangle of wood where the bookcase has rested these past thirty years. He bends down and picks up two marbles left behind in a nest of fluff. They rest in his hoary blood stained hands.
In the darkness of her cupboard Rose unscrews the top of her stashed flask and quickly takes two large swigs. She can hear footsteps outside, quickly she puts the bottle down.

GEORGE
Rose?

Rose straightens up from the cupboard holding a pair of shoes. She turns brightly to George.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Does he like his room?

Rose changes her shoes.

ROSE
I think so.

Rose puts the old shoes back in the cupboard and screws the top back on the flask. She pops a peppermint in her mouth offering one to George. George takes it.

GEORGE
I want him to be happy. (Thank you) He’s certainly the neatest boy I ever saw.

Rose has laid out a new purchase to wear for dinner, George watches.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
That’s pretty Rose.

ROSE
I have it on appro so...

GEORGE
You should keep it.

ROSE
George I’m afraid Phil doesn’t like us, doesn’t want Peter and me here!

GEORGE
Oh no, don’t mind him, he’s just Phil. Old Phil he doesn’t have too much.

ROSE
Do you suppose we might ever have our own house, just for us?
GEORGE
How do you mean, build something new?

Rose nods nervously.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Oh Rose, this house has got sixteen rooms, what would Phil do living here by himself?

Rose smiles thinly, tears filling her eyes. George puts an arm around her.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
It’s going to take a little time but we’re all family and we’ll get used to each other. If I have to stay in town you can always come with me.

ROSE
That’s not so easy with Peter here.

GEORGE
Well he can come to but you know a ranch is a great place for a boy and you’ll have each other over summer. Phil doesn’t have anyone.

Rose puts her dress on. George blinks with appreciation.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Look at you, you should be in Europe. One year we’ll go to France and you can shop, we’ll take Peter if he can stand us. You all right?

Rose really wants to be.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Phil will adjust, he will.

EXT/INT – BURBANK RANCH/YARD/BACK DINING ROOM – DAY

The Cowhands, the horses, the dogs are all out in the yard excited and preparing for the drive of the cattle up to the high hills.

Mrs Lewis is handing out food parcels and Stan packs the packhorse with further supplies. Cowboys joke and feed their dogs stolen pancakes.
Inside the dining room Peter watches a plate of half eaten pancakes in front of him. Lola is clearing up the Cowhands plates only Bobby is left.

    LOLA (TO PETER)
    You like these pancakes or the last serve?

    PETER
    Yes.

    LOLA
    These ones you mean? Because I made these ones.

Bobby winks at Peter. Peter looks down at his plate.

    BOBBY
    I like you Lola, does that count?

    LOLA
    No it doesn’t count. (To Peter)
    He’s crazy, he said he’d make me a radio from pieces.

Bobby gets up and takes his plate to the bench.

    BOBBY
    I will I just need a couple more parts. I’m going to make a fortune
    fixing radios in San Francisco.

Lola looks at Bobby boldly, her eyebrows raised.

EXT - BURBANK RANCH - DAY

Peter loiters near the Ranch steps stealing glances at the Cowhands. He likes their easeful masculinity and the intriguing details of their costumes; their leather forearm bands, their sheepie chaps, their high-heeled boots and silver spurs. One of the many dogs an eager black and white Collie comes over to Peter and licks his hand. Meanwhile Phil has gathered the Cowhands together giving instructions. He too is in a jovial mood.

    PHIL
    ... those of you staying with the cows watch your fires, summer is
    coming which also means any
    Indian’s camping are to be moved
    off the property, no exceptions we
    have animals they want to eat.

    (MORE)
PHIL (CONT'D)
Got it? We don’t sell hides, we
don’t sell anything here.

Peter listens for a little but is soon playing chasing with
his new friend, running back and forth, the dog running
behind him. Phil turns as he hears the dog yelp playfully and
the Cowhands turn too. Phil gives a sharp whistle. The dog
instantly stops and runs towards Phil and the Cowhands who
laugh at Peter left exposed in the midst of the yard.
Suddenly the Cowhands are mounted and their horses are moving
past Peter, in front and behind, he feels scared. They wink
and laugh at each other as they watch Peter run panicked to
the safety of the Ranch steps.

EXT - HIGH COUNTRY - DAY

Up through the Aspens and wild flowers the men escort the
cattle and calves to the high lush pastures. The cattle are
spread even further and the Cowboys are light-hearted and at
ease. There are signs of a camp being established and Phil
and Several Others, Bobby included are making their way back
down.

Phil pauses by the camp makers.

PHIL
Keep your ears and eyes open.

Bobby gives a big wolf howl. A couple of Cowhands howl back.
The party continue down the trail.

PHIL (CONT'D)
This was an Indian Summer camp-
found five or six arrowheads, two
in good condition near here- some
bones too.

BOBBY
You listen to the radio, Boss?

PHIL
No I do not.

BOBBY
I reckon you could be on the radio
speaking about things.

PHIL (LIGHTHEARTEDLY)
Crap like all the others?
INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/ROSE’S BEDROOM - DAY

Rose lies in her bed in the darkened room. She’s wearing eyeshades, a nightgown and matching dressing gown. Out from the covers she eases a bottle of Bourbon and takes a good mouthful.

There is a soft knock on the door and the handle turns. Peter quietly comes into the room holding his sack and walks softly to the bed until he stands over Rose. He’s sweaty and adrenalised.

PETER
Rose.

ROSE
Hmm, that you Peter? I’ve got a headache.

Peter spies the bottle of Bourbon half empty under the covers. Rose pulls her eyeshades down and looks at Peter.

ROSE (CONT’D)
I’m not eating tonight it’s George’s day in town so it’s just Phil. Have a seat.

Rose tries to sit up while concealing the bottle. She reaches out to touch Peter’s hair, he leans away.

PETER
I made a trap.

Peter puts his hand in the sack and feels about for the rabbit.

ROSE
It’s not a snake is it?

Peter pulls out the rabbit.

ROSE (CONT’D)
Oh a bunny.

Rose strokes the shivering rabbit. She’s drunk so her hand moves clumsily, the rabbit jumps off shivering in a corner of the room.

ROSE (CONT’D)
Oh it’s scared.

Peter looks at his Mother and is troubled by her eyes, by their blank haze. Rose smiles at Peter not able to understand him.
Downstairs the front door opens and they freeze as they listen to Phil on the wooden floor below.

ROSE (CONT'D)
Don’t worry about Him, you can eat in your room.

92 INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/LOUNGE/DINING - DAY

Mrs Lewis walks into the dining room and deposits the large roast of beef in front of George’s seat who is out. Phil walks to George’s end of the table and carves himself thick slice of meat, he walks back to his place and starts to eat in solitary ease.

93 INT - BURBANK RANCH/KITCHEN - DAY

Sunshine through the kitchen window. Lola scrubs carrots and potatoes in the sink. Behind her Mrs Lewis is polishing silver cutlery while Rose smokes and sips a cup of tea, Mrs Lewis continues with her story.

MRS LEWIS
— so when they removed the graveyard because of the highway cutting through they had to dig up all the coffins, one of the tractor drivers was careless and he broke up one of the coffins and inside you could see it was just stuffed with the loveliest golden hair, except for a few feet from end where it was grey.

Towards the end of the story Lola turns from the sink holding out a single carrot for Rose to see.

LOLA
Can I take it up?

ROSE
What?

Lola pretends to be a rabbit scratching her nose with her paw.

ROSE (SLURRED) (CONT'D)
Oh, yes go and have a look it’s sweet.
INT - BURBANK RANCH/CORRIDOR - DAY
Lola walks up the dark staircase and along the upstairs corridor carrying a carrot.

INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/PETER’S BEDROOM - DAY
Peter is bending over his desk drawing when Lola knocks on his door.

PETER
Yes?

Lola slips into the room. Peter frowns.

PETER (CONT'D)
Hello.

LOLA
Where is your rabbit?

Lola is looking about the room as she comes up behind Peter.

The rabbit, it’s dear black eye glazed is on it’s back, it’s paws neatly together. It’s been dissected, it’s organs pulled out and pinned. It’s these organs Peter is sketching. Lola steps back shocked.

LOLA (CONT'D)
Oh bugger me!

INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/LOUNGE/HALL - DAY
Peter is finishing threading white laces into his new tennis shoes. Rose passes a tennis racquet to Peter and takes two others and a ball out of a large games cupboard in the lounge. Peter plucks the racquet like he does his comb.

ROSE
Even if you are happy to be in your room all day, it’s good for me.

EXT - BURBANK RANCH/YARD/DISUSED TENNIS COURT - DAY
Rose and Peter wander over to a long disused court passing old bones and pieces of malfunctioning equipment, pots with holes and other scattered debris.

ROSE
I thought you liked rabbits.
PETER
    Yes I do, but you know if I want to
    be a surgeon I have to practice.

Rose walks to one side of the court. There is a net but it’s
tattered and sagging. She tries to bounce the ball but it’s
pretty flat.

ROSE
    Well you’re not to kill them in the
    house. No, Peter I’m putting my
    foot down.

PETER
    Where would a man be if he always
did what his Mother told him?

Rose hits the ball to Peter, he swings wildly. Rose and Peter
search through the scraggly, weedy grass for the ball. Lola
comes and joins the search as do Bobby and another Cowhand.

ROSE
    Lola please take over I have a
    migraine.

Rose wanders back to the house and Peter follows, the
Cowhands and Lola whoop as they hit the ball about. “You’re
crazy.” “Get the ball.” “No.”

PETER
    You all right Mother?

Rose massages her temples.

ROSE
    I feel like my eyes are going to
    pop out.

Peter puts a stiff arm around Rose’s waist. Ahead they see
Phil walking in big strides up the Ranch steps. She stops.
The thought of Phil upsets Rose. The sight of him makes her
stomach heave.

PETER
    It’s Phil isn’t it? He’s cold.

ROSE
    He’s just a man Peter, only another
    man. You go ahead.

Rose walks briskly to the back of the house where she bends
over and dry retches. Back here she is in sight of the Ranch
rubbish pit, a deep trench where all kinds of Ranch refuse;
cans, bones, machinery and bottles are disposed of.
Rose makes her way to the edge glancing about. She lies on the edge of the pit reaching out towards a Gin bottle - empty - she lets it drop back into the pit.

INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/STAIRS/PHIL’S BEDROOM - DAY

Phil finishes climbing the stairs carrying a newly found fossil. In his bedroom he places the fossil inside his display case. Sharp eared Phil hears the drop of the bottle and opens his dormer window peering below. He sees Rose stretched out beside the pit now using a stick to roll a bottle of Whisky towards her, a good inch of the golden liquid at the bottom. As she reaches down to grasp it’s neck Phil whistles a short phrase from Rose’s Strauss Waltz. Rose pauses and Phil stops whistling. She pulls the Whisky bottle out of the pit and the whistling starts again, Phil above her watches amused. Rose looks all about including back up at the house. She doesn’t know if the whistling is real or she’s imagining it. She steps back against the shadows of the wall and swigs the dregs of the bottle.

INT - BURBANK RANCH/LOUNGE - DAY

Rose enters the lounge a lost smile on her face. No Phil. She goes to the book shelf and chooses a book, opens it then closes it on her finger as she hears Phil’s door upstairs open and close then his boots walking along the hallway to the stairs. Before he has got half way down she moves across to the staircase with a friendly calm smile.

ROSE

Phil.

He slows.

ROSE (CONT'D)
Why can’t we be friends?

Phil does not answer, he continues down the stairs to the hat shelf.

ROSE (CONT'D)
Please tell me Phil.

Phil puts his hat on his head.

PHIL
Because you disgust me with your lipstick teeth, and your dirty boozing.
Rose’s smile is frozen, she looks down at her book, she can barely stand. There is a floating feeling as if all this is unreal. The slow step of Phil’s boots continues down the hall to the steps.

100 INT - BURBANK RANCH/PETER’S BEDROOM/HALL - DAY

Peter is half in the hallway, half in his bedroom listening, slowly he withdraws to his bedroom tight lipped and disturbed. He soothes himself by looking at gruesome illustrations of diseases in his father’s big black medical encyclopedia.

101 EXT - FIELD/THE WILLOWS/RIVER - DAY

It’s late afternoon on a day off. The summer sun is lowering and the Cowhands lead or double bank their horses down to the Willows and the wide river with it’s large open beach of sand. It’s hot and most are bare chested, some carrying a small towel or shirt, and One or Two have a comic book sticking out their back pocket.

102 EXT - RIVER/THE WILLOWS - DAY

At the River wet horses are rolling in the sand. More horses stand in the waist high water while Cowhands sit or dive off them. Some are naked their jeans abandoned on the beach. There is an erotic charge amidst the group which breaks into wrestling attacks and laughter.

In the distant Willows Phil arrives saddled up shirt sleeves buttoned down. He is moved by the young men’s bodies, by the memories it stirs. Soon a couple of Cowhands spot him, he nods and moves on down through the Willows to his own sacred place.

103 EXT - THE WILLOWS - DAY

Phil takes his Black Horse into the river then up the bank between the trees into his sacred place. He takes the saddle off his horse. He removes his boots and overalls. Phil looks up at the trees, he finds the trunk and high up in a hollow he pulls out a faded silk red bandana with the initials B H embroidered on one edge. He smooths the bandana around his face, his eyes, he holds it to his nose. Wind through the trees disturbs the leaves of the Cottonwoods setting them shimmering, touching, kissing, lifting the hair on Phil’s head. The horse moves through the trees towards Phil nuzzling his hand. Phil strokes it’s velvet nose, it’s delicate nostrils, the loose hairy bottom lip.
Phil walks in his long johns to the river. It’s a little Eden, the grass is long and soft, dapples of afternoon light warm his back. The light on the water is alive - dancing; the bandana is loose around his neck.

104

EXT - THE WILLOWS/SACRED SPOT - DAY 104

Peter resets his trap before trudging on along the line of the Willows dragging his sack. He pauses and walks back three paces. Bending he peers into a long tunnel of tightly woven Willows, on all fours he burrows through. Inside Phil’s Willow cubby hut Peter turns a page of a tattered girly magazine with Bronco Henry written on the front. A girl with makeup and bare breasts gives him a steamy look. A sound not far off alerts Peter. He backs out carefully. Down past the Willows he can just make out the figure of a bathing man his body hairless and so white it shimmers in the light.

Phil is standing thigh deep in the clear water. His keen ear hears a rustling that is not a magpie or the wind and he turns and staggers to the river bank to cover his nakedness with a shirt. Just then he sees ‘Miss Nancy’ poised as delicately as a deer and his eyes are huge. Phil moves towards the boy who runs as a deer might, leaping back into the sheltering bush. Phil rages through the tight Willows after Peter shock turning to anger.

He catches and grasps Peter’s ankle hauling him out of the tight woven Willows. Peter is upside down his leg held high in the air. Peter does not dare look up at the naked Phil.

PHIL
What the hell are you doing here,
you little son of a bitch? This is private you little bitch.

Phil drops Peter and kicks him as Peter desperately crawls away.

Phil breaks off a stick and points it after the retreating Peter, whacking branches to scare him.

PHIL (VOICE CRACKING) (CONT'D)
If Bronco Henry found you here he’d damn well skin you, he’d kill you God damn it!

Peter leaps over branches and squeezes through the trunks of the Willows to the tunnel he had entered through. Holding his sack under his arm he crabs his way back out through the branches and out into the paddock. Phil stops chasing, he’s defended his territory, his special place.
Through the branches Phil sees Peter, tiny, running frightened through the endless hay paddock.

FADE TO BLACK

105 EXT - BURBANK RANCH/BARN/PADDOCK  -  DAY

The Cowhands finish pulling the last of the twelve large canvas tents out of the barn and spread them on the golden grass. FIVE are mending rips in the canvases from last year. ANOTHER, his boots off kneeling on the canvas is strumming his guitar.

106 EXT - BURBANK RANCH/SIDE OF BARN  -  DAY

Phil is walking to the side of the barn where a line of SEASONAL WORKERS (50) wait in the shade to be signed on. Phil is carrying a cardboard suitcase to show the man BILL at the front of the queue. He opens the suitcase to show a beautifully woven rope.

PHIL
Joe made it.

BILL
How long?

PHIL
Thirty feet. He refused fifty dollars for it – And look at these... made from horsehair.

Phil opens a cigar box inside the suitcase, inside are the most delicate and intricately plaited watch straps. Behind them is the coming and going of carts, horses and trucks.

Bill nods appreciatively.

BILL
I’ve not seen him.

Phil closes the suitcase.

PHIL
He’ll be dead or in jail. I’m storing it for him. Anyway Bill good to see you back.

Phil shakes his hand and the hand of the next WORKER a MEXICAN, and so they pass one after another with Stan recording name and date of arrival.
EXT - HAYMAKING CAMP - DAY

The haymaking camp is a tree-lined park area, a stream on one side, a cook wagon halfway along and the twelve canvas tents erected in a loose circle. It's the end of the day, horse teams are being washed down by the stream. Beyond them the last horse team finishes it's cut in the long grass. A few Workers rake the hay into sheaths. Workers sit by the trees, or the riverside and in front of their tents eating their meals. Men who have finished straddle the sickle bars like bicycles sharpening the steel cutting edge on a whirling grindstone.

Phil sits cross legged in front of the tent he shares with three of the Old Timers. Beside him, in a tin washbasin, he has a big handful of rawhide strips soaking in water resembling stout worms.

Phil's Black Horse haltered to the hitching rack raises its head and snorts. Phil looks to the entrance to the broad park and sees George, Rose beside him dressed in some fashion idea of an emancipated lady, a scarf, pants and long lacing boots and at the back of the spring wagon swinging his legs, sissy-boy, Peter, his feet in new tennis shoes just clearing the stubble.

The Men watch closely as Rose looks straight ahead. George stops the team before the cookshack. The COOK a tall skinny man with a towel around his middle, comes towards the supply wagon smoking a cigar. When he sees 'the woman' he throws it away. George greets the Cook. Rose starts to clamber down but Peter comes around quickly to give her a hand.

Now Rose rearranges her scarf. Peter is wearing his new clothes, a stiff pair of Levi jeans and his white tennis shoes. Stan looks at Peter then winks at Phil.

STAN
No one tell him to soak those jeans?

Phil raises his eyebrows in agreement. Peter stands awkwardly beside his Mother his weight on one leg the other resting behind. Phil watches Peter as he looks across the opening towards a Willow where a family of magpies have built a nest and are presently chattering. Then, all eyes on him, Peter suddenly begins to walk across the space before the open tents towards the Willow.

Smudges of green hay set off hazy smoke to ward off the mosquitos. Phil continues with his braiding of the rawhide strips holding each one up to let it drain. The skill of his fingers free his eyes to watch the boy traverse the opening;
at each step the stiff denim of jeans goes zip-zip-zip as leg passes leg. Stiff as a stick-man the boy moves with the slightest feminine twitch of his hips, the new tennis shoes vulnerable and white.

Rose watches Peter’s progress and Phil sees her stiffen when the first sharp wolf whistle flies like an arrow as the boy passes the second tent. George breaks off jawing with the Cook to look at Peter and hears another whistle tear through. Peter does not pause, nor falter in running the strange gauntlet before the open tents. He seems not to even hear, but once past the watching, grinning men he looks into the Willow with the tawdry nest and the chattering young magpies.

Peter returns the same way right past the open tents again, this time there are no whistles. Phil watches, ideas budding as he admires the boys gumption and his Mama’s frantic alarm.

Rose takes tentative steps towards Peter smiling encouragingly her balance is so unstable she retreats to the wagon edge. Phil sees the opportunity to topple her right before him and it amuses him that the means will be her sissy son.

PHIL (SOFTLY)  
Peter...

Peter continues his stiff walk back towards the cookshack and his Mother.

PHIL (SHARPER) (CONT'D)  
Peter?

Phil thinks for a moment he might ignore the summons but then the boy tacks suddenly like a sailboat and walks towards him, pauses, shoves his hands into the pockets of his stiff new Levis.

PETER  
You want me Mr Burbank?

Rose looks over anxiously as Phil twists his head from side to side as if he’s looking for someone.

PHIL  
I don’t know any Mr Burbank. I’m Phil.

PETER  
Yes. Mr Burbank.
PHIL
I guess it’s hard to get used to
calling an old fellow like me just
plain Phil - at first.

Phil lifts the rope.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Look at this Pete.

PETER
That’s fine work, sir.

PHIL
You ever do any plaiting or
braiding yourself Pete?

PETER
No, sir I never did.

Phil shifts a little so he can clock Rose over Peter’s
shoulder. He notes her holding onto the cart to steady
herself, frantically watching her poor little boy talking to
her enemy, him. Phil smiles warming to his new strategy
seeing how a little befriending so upsets her. Behind Rose
George and the Cook continue to unload the cans and side of
cooked meat.

PHIL
Pete, we sort of got off on the
wrong foot.

PETER
Did we sir?

PHIL
No forget the Sir stuff. That can
happen to people, you know, people
who get to be good friends.

Peter nods.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Well know what?

PETER
What - what, Phil?

PHIL
Now you see you did it, you called
me Phil. I’m going to finish up
this rope and give it to you and
then I’ll show you how to use it.

(MORE)
PHIL (CONT'D)
Now you’re on the Ranch, you might as well learn to rope and ride a little. Sort of lonesome place out here Pete unless you get in the swing of things.

PETER
Thank you – Phil. How long do you expect it would take to finish that rope?

PHIL
Oh, I imagine working off and on I could finish it before you go back to school.

Peter peers at the rawhide strips closely.

PETER
It won’t be very long then Phil.

Peter smiles at Phil and turns and walks back to the wagon, his stiff new Levis going zip-zip-zip like scissors. Peter turns back to look at Phil who gives Peter a smile in return.

Rose is holding on to the wagon to steady herself, she watches anxiously as Peter walks back but he doesn’t come to her he ignores Rose and easefully hoist himself on the back of the wagon.

Rose turns and stares at Phil, suddenly she knows she hates him. A chill follows, a sharp pervasive fear, hate to hate she is out matched.

108   EXT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/GARDEN - DAY

Rose is kneeling attempting to make a garden by the Ranch steps.

109   EXT - BURBANK RANCH/KILLING SHED - DAY

Peter in a white shirt, jeans and tennis shoes digs the soil directly under the hanging hides which is a dark rich color on account of the blood drips. He spades the dirt into a wheel barrow.

Peter pushes the wheel barrow around to where Rose is preparing the bed when Phil strides out of the barn and signals to Peter. Peter drops his wheel barrow and eagerly follows Phil into the barn. Phil smiles to himself as Rose struggles with the abandoned wheel barrow.
Phil swings Bronco Henry’s saddle onto a tall saw horse. He places it half in the light half in the shadow beside the bucket where he soaks the rawhide worms.

PHIL
On you get. You can sit on it Pete, get yourself used to it.

Peter enjoys swinging his leg over and resting in the polished leather.

PHIL (CONT'D)
You got any boots?

Peter looks down at his tennis shoes.

PETER
Yes.

PHIL
You should wear them. Don’t let your Maw make a sissy of you.

Phil shows Peter the length the rope has grown to. Peter turns and sits side saddle fully concentrating on Phil’s braiding skills.

PETER
That looks great Phil.

PHIL
Just sitting there you’re soaking up all the riding know how you’ll ever need, then some. That saddle belonged to Bronco Henry, the greatest horseman I ever knew.

Peter puts his leg back over and looks at it carefully, Phil looks at Peter’s face how it is caught in the sun that slants through the doors of the barn.

PETER
I was thinking...

PHIL (AMUSED BY PETERS EARNESTNESS)
Yeah what?

PETER
About the old days.

PHIL
There were real men in those days.
Peter nods gravely.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Why there are the markings of Lewis and Clark on a cliff out back of the Ranch and I found trails near piles of rock that seemed to lead somewhere. What say just you and me go out for a couple of days look for the trails, follow them to the end. Wouldn’t surprise me if there was gold or minerals among those rocks.

Peter’s eyes light up, Phil smiles imagining Peter’s thoughts of getting rich.

PETER
Do many of the calves die from wolves?

PHIL
There’s always some that get torn up and who are hamstrung or catch anthrax and die of black leg. You talk like a Victrola Record do you know that?

PETER
No, I didn’t know.

PHIL
Well you do.

PETER
Did Bronco Henry teach you to ride Phil?

PHIL
Yep along with how to use my eyes in a way other people can’t.

Peter gets off the saddle and looks at Phil puzzled. Phil strolls out of the barn.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Take that hill over there.

Phil points with his head at the rocky outcrop and keeps walking towards it.
PHIL (CONT'D)
Most people just see a hill right? But Bronco when he looked, what do you suppose he saw?

Peter comes up beside him.

PETER
A running dog.

PHIL
The hell you see it just now?

PETER
No, when I first came here. It looks like it’s pouncing, the two paws out the front.

Phil is shocked that Peter sees “the dog”, he frowns and looks for awhile at the hill.

PHIL
Well Bronco Henry saw it first.

He turns to Peter.

PHIL (CONT'D)
You just saw it huh?

Peter pulls his comb through his hair and nods.

INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/GEORGE AND ROSE'S ROOM - EVENING

As Peter comes in, Rose opens the door to her downstairs lounge. She holds onto the doorjamb.

ROSE
Peter can’t you come in and talk for a little?

Rose moves back into the room. Peter unwillingly ambles in. He looks away from her out into the rain that’s falling hard now.

PETER
What shall we talk about?

Rose sits on her rose patterned sofa.

ROSE
You’ve got to be quite friendly with Phil haven’t you? Is he nice to you?
Rose sips from a glass on the table and looks expectantly at Peter.

PETER
He’s making a rope for me.

ROSE
Making a rope?

PETER
He’s good with his hands, he’s making it out of rawhide.

ROSE
What is rawhide?

Peter is patient.

PETER
Nothing much, just dried strips of cowhide, and you soak them and — well, fashion them.

ROSE
Fashion them?

PETER
Braid them.

ROSE
Peter I wish you wouldn’t make that sound with your comb.

Pete stops dragging his thumb across the teeth of his comb.

PETER
I wasn’t aware.

He stands near the window, ready to move on. His Mother is drunk, the neck of her flask pokes out between the cushions. Rose gets up unsteadily and moves towards Peter.

ROSE
When I was little I felt a chill in my spine when I heard chalk squeak on the blackboard... Ah, Miss Merchant that’s who it was, she drew chalk stars by our names on the blackboard.

Peter moves aside. Rose draws a star on the fogged window where Peter was standing.
ROSE (CONT'D)
I wonder why it was always stars we got, why not diamonds or spades?
Why not hearts? I wonder why it was stars?

Peter speaks in profile and like a ventriloquist he scarcely moves his lips.

PETER
Because they’re supposed to be unreachable.

ROSE (SLURRED)
Yes. But they weren’t unreachable because she gave them to us.
And Peter...

PETER
Hmm?

ROSE
We used to have a Valentine box, it was covered with white crepe paper and we’d paste big red hearts on it, lopsided hearts, because all of us didn’t understand about folding the paper so both sides would match.

PETER
And you got a great many Valentines.

ROSE
A great many?

PETER
Because you were beautiful even then.

Rose looks at Peter feeling chagrined, had she forced him to say ‘you were beautiful’, and he said it with such intensity it made him blush.

ROSE
Is there a sound that makes you shiver?

PETER
I don’t remember, I’ve go to go upstairs now. I’ve got something to finish.
She reaches over and passes her palm clumsily over his neatly combed hair.

ROSE (SLURRED)
It’s been a nice talk hasn’t it?
We’re not unreachable.

Peter lifts his eyes and caught hers.

PETER
Mother, you don’t have to do this.

His eyes still held hers.

PETER (CONT’D)
I’ll see you don’t have to do it.

Peter goes to the door closing it carefully, noiselessly.
Rose turns to look at the rain falling and falling.

112 EXT - BURBANK RANCH/CORRAL (OR Paddock) - DAY

Peter bent forward clutching the pommel, joggles badly about the saddle, his horse, ears back trots in a circle on a lunge lead. Juan keeps the horse going by cracking a bull whip behind it. Peter is wearing his boots and his cowboy hat is squashed down over his ears. He wears a pair of leather forearm bands like many of the Cowhands sport, but on his slim wrists they are comically loose. There are “Ohhhhs” and laughter from Five Cowhands sitting on the rails as Peter lurches to one side almost falling. Phil walks past them into the corral.

PHIL
Why are you joggling? You rise to that trot or you sit it. No one told you how to fix your Levis? You put them in the river for a week with a big ‘ol stone on them.

Peter nods, joggling on.

PHIL (TO JUAN) (CONT’D)
This his first week?

JUAN
Nope it’s the third.

PHIL
Third? Take that lunge off. He can’t be led forever.

Juan looks at Phil disbelievingly, so does Peter.
PHIL (CONT'D)
Go on. Take her out.

The horse with Peter clutching on trots out of the corral. Phil follows behind giving the horse a whack, it bolts into the paddock shying left and right, Peter clutching low over it’s neck making a squeaking sound. The Cowhands are hooting. The horse disappears over a hill then trots back down the other side with no Peter. Peter emerges from the hill a look of resolute determination despite his limp. Juan goes to help.

PHIL (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

JUAN
Give him a hand.

PHIL
No. Let him work it out, or not. (To Peter) Keep practicing. That’s all there is, fall off get back on.

Peter nods he is using the high side of the hill to mount and once more he is trotting, zig-zagging about the paddock in a chaotic but determined effort.

113 INT - BURBANK RANCH/BACK DINING ROOM - DAY
Peter stands at the back of the breakfast room wrapping pancakes and bacon into a parcel and putting it into his back pack. The Cowhands are eating or finishing their breakfast.

114 EXT - BURBANK RANCH/DISTANT Paddock - DAY
Peter trotting, a little more confidently but not yet well has a back pack, a water bottle and his lunch ration. He has ventured off from the Ranch House.

He rides until he finds the rock fall but he doesn’t stop, he picks his way across and hurries further until the rocks disappear and there are just old tumble weeds. He comes to a ravine and follows an ancient cow path down its side. Below is a drop into a Gorge. As he continues the path becomes faint and perilous, stones are dislodged and skitter down. Peter closes his eyes and holds on as his horse stumbles but finds its footing. They arrive at the bottom of a cliff and Peter pulls up next to a dead calf. Peter looks around as calmly, as coyotes looked at him.
Then he reaches into his pocket and draws out his surgeon’s gloves and pulls them on as a doctor might, gets down from his horse and gets to work on the animal, with his knife as sharp as a scalpel, he carefully slices the hide from the carcass.

INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/ROSE’S BEDROOM/YARD - DAY

Rose wakes alone. Dogs are barking below in the yard. Through the lace on the window Rose can see George, his square solid horse in hand talking to Phil on his Sorrel with Peter close beside Phil on his mare. Rose watches Phil and Peter’s horses quietly sniffing each other’s nostrils. Pete looks at Phil with a dog-like loyalty. The sort of loyalty Phil likes. Rose is building herself into a painful fury. She goes to the wardrobe and sticks her feet into pearl colored high-heels, shoes chosen unwisely and at random. She takes a desensitizing swig on her stashed flask, though she is still thick headed from the night before.

EXT - BURBANK RANCH/YARD/RANCH HOUSE STEPS - DAY

Rose staggers badly out of the front door, all the men look towards her. George moves towards Rose to greet her.

Phil and Peter turn their horses for the trail and leave before Rose can join them. Phil with no gloves, Peter with his Sears catalogue gloves.

GEORGE
Hello there Rose, you feeling better?

ROSE
Peter! (Shouting after him)

Peter doesn’t stop or look back.

ROSE (TO GEORGE) (CONT’D)
Peter! Can’t Peter go with you today?

GEORGE
Well he could, but Phil and him have kind of paired up.

ROSE
I don’t want that, I don’t want him to be with Phil at all.
George is surprised, for the first time Rose does not smile. She is angry but unsteady and grasps hold of George’s reins then saddle to stop herself falling. George looks at her perplexed.

GEORGE
But Rose, he’s helping him. Look, he’s taught him how to ride.

A thunderhead looms in the sky and is piling up over the mountains to the north. An unnameable loneliness rises inside of Rose.

117 EXT - BURBANK RANCH/HILL AND STREAM - DAY

As Phil and Peter make their way out to a far hay stack Phil stops. His sharp eyes have seen smoke coming from a stream. Phil turns his horse towards it and Peter follows behind still awkward in the saddle.

Phil rides down the bank towards a small encampment where there’s a horse trap and an ancient sway-backed animal grazing nearby. A YOUNG INDIAN SHOSHONE BOY is playing in the creek and his father EDWARD NAPPO is cooking a salmon over a small fire.

Peter’s horse descends the path too fast for Peter barging past Phil finally stopping at some sweet riverside grass. Phil keeps his focus on the trespassers.

PHIL
What the hell do you think you’re doing here?

EDWARD
My boy and I are camping a little while. That’s my boy.

The Boy about nine joins his father.

BOY
My grandfather is buried up there.

The Boy points above them to the mountains.

EDWARD
He’s right about that.

PHIL
Right about what?

EDWARD
My father was the Chief.
PHIL
Is that right. Well let me tell you
I don’t care who in the hell he
was. You get yourself packed up in
that contraption and get going.

EDWARD
We’d only stay a couple of days,
long enough for the horse to rest.
It’s a real old horse.

PHIL
Nothing doing.

Edward walks to his buggy he picks up something from under
the seat. Peter looks at Phil suddenly alert, both think it
might be a gun but it’s nothing but a battered box. Edward
walks up to Phil with his box and removes the lid. Inside are
gauntlet gloves rich with bead work.

EDWARD
One or two days. They’re worth five
bucks.

PHIL
They sure are pretty slick. But I
don’t wear gloves. Never have. And
I don’t take bribes. Pack up.

Peter looks at the Boy his old patched oversized overalls,
his proud face. Phil looks over at Peter and gives him a
wink. The Shoshone Father and Son move slowly putting out the
fire and beginning to stack the buggy.

118 EXT - HAYSTACK/FIELD/POLES - DAY 118

The threatening thunder storm has retreated somewhat and Phil
works on a pole fence to protect the hay from the cattle.
Nearby a derrick, stands a makeshift hay sling used to
catapult hay up on top of the twenty foot stack.

Phil is struggling to find the right note of ease with Peter
who has sauntered off looking up at the clouds and at insects
he sees in the grass. Phil watches him suspecting he feels
bad for the Indians and it annoys him.

PHIL
Hey Pete my pal, you going to help?

Peter trots across to Phil and Phil is relieved to see the
frank eagerness in the boy. Phil gets Peter to hold the pole
while he thumps it into the hole he’s made.
PHIL (CONT'D)
You know who started riding as late
as you? Bronco Henry. Never rode or
rope at all till he was your
age... oh hello look at that
cottontail.

The rabbit might have been tame it was so bold. Phil smiled,
removed his hat and took aim and shied it at the rabbit; like
a hawk the hat rose its shadow a hawk’s shadow and it
descended. The rabbit cowers at the shadow then leaps under a
pile of old poles. Phil saunters over and retrieves his hat,
knocking the dust. Then frowning, he stooped and shook the
top pole of the pile.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Hey Pete, let’s see how long it
takes before Peter Cottontail makes
a run for the open. As boys we used
to bet on how many poles we’d have
to remove before the animals ran
for it.

Peter on one end of the pile, Phil on the other, they remove
first this one, then that, and set it aside. At the end of
the tenth pole, Phil thought he saw it.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Ah, yeah he’s in there. Gutsy
little bugger.

PETER
I guess he has to be gutsy.

They removed two more poles, the second disturbed the
precarious balance and poles collapsed like huge pick up
sticks. Underneath there was wild scurrying, then a clap of
thunder. The rabbit emerged dragging a broken leg

PHIL
Well put the thing out of its
misery.

Peter picks it up, Phil watches as Peter smooths his hand
over the rabbit’s head calming it and then the next minute he
was wringing its neck. Phil is shocked and admiring of
Peter’s proficiency, his deftness in dispatching the rabbit.
Now the rabbit’s hind leg relaxed, the eyes glazing over in
death.

Phil brings up his own hand, quite bloody and looks at it.
PETER
That’s deep. Are you all right
Phil?

Blood drips onto the yellow grass. Phil pulls out his blue
bandana and swabs off the wound.

PHIL
What the hell, must be a splinter.

The thunder booms and echoes over the vast valleys. Black
clouds hide the sun.

EXT - HAYSTACK - DAY

The Two sit on the shady side of the stack. Peter’s knees are
drawn up with his arms around them. Phil is looking a little
disappointed. The rabbit hunt didn’t create the nostalgia
he’d hoped. They pick at their lunch. Phil thinks it’s
curious how Peter’s face and arms seem to glow.

PHIL
That’s a tan, a Cowboy tan you got.

Peter looks mildly at his arms.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Bronco Henry told me that a man’s
made by patience and odds against
him.

PETER
My Father said obstacles, and you
had to try and remove them.

PHIL
Another way to put it. Well Pete,
you’ve got obstacles, that’s a fact
Pete-me-bye.

PETER
Obstacles?

Peter’s eyes are thoughtful.

PHIL
Take your Maw today or any day. How
she’s on the sauce.

Phil’s movements are slowed, he’s worried he might alienate
Peter by speaking too much to point. He tries to keep the
atmosphere pleasant, easy.
PETER
On the sauce?

Peter looks puzzled.

PHIL
Drinking, Pete. Boozing it up.

Peter winces and Phil knows now that Peter knows and it’s not possible for Phil to say too much.

PHIL (CONT’D)
I’m guessing you know she’s been half shot all summer.

PETER
I know she has. She didn’t use to drink.

PHIL
Didn’t she now? (Using an Irish accent)

PETER
No, she never did.

PHIL
But your Paw Pete?

PETER
My Father?

PHIL
I guess he hit the bottle pretty hard. The booze.

PETER
Until right at the end. Then he hung himself. I found him, I cut him down but he was, he was gone.

Phil reaches out to pat or touch the boy’s back, but he withdraws his hand and adjusts his bloody bandana.

PETER (CONT’D)
He used to worry that I wasn’t kind enough, that I was too strong.

PHIL
You, too strong? He got that wrong, you poor kid.

Peter smiles faintly.
PHIL (CONT'D)
Things will work out for you yet.

PETER
Thanks Phil.

INT/EXT (VIEW) - BURBANK RANCH/KITCHEN/KILLING SHED - DAY 120

Lola is looking out the kitchen window very absorbed as she is filling a glass of water. Rose sits herself at the kitchen table hunched over, her head hurting. She still wears the pearl colored high heels and now a silk dress that seems overdressed for the afternoon. Lola gives Rose the water then returns to ironing the great white tablecloth.

ROSE
Where’s Mrs Lewis?

LOLA
She’s with the Indians.

Rose looks at Lola, not believing.

ROSE
What Indians?

LOLA
Those ones.

Rose is making her way, chairback to bench holding each to steady herself. She looks out the window beside Lola.

In front of the killing shed rail where the cow hides are piled, Mrs Lewis is talking at some distance to Edward Nappo and his Son. Their wagon and ancient horse stand nearby. Mrs Lewis is shaking her head and walking away. The Indian’s begin to turn their wagon around.

Mrs Lewis steps into the kitchen.

MRS LEWIS
They were standing in front of the damn things and asking ‘Do we have any hides?’ Huh!

Mrs Lewis sits at the kitchen table.

MRS LEWIS (CONT'D)
Water! Are they leaving?

Lola pours Mrs Lewis a glass.
LOLA
Yes they’ve turned their horse.

MRS LEWIS
I told them the hides are going to be burnt.

ROSE
Why? Why are they going to be burnt?

MRS LEWIS
Phil doesn’t want anyone else to have them. He waits till there’s a pile and burns the lot. It’s a terrible smell all day.

Rose looks back out the window as the Father and son lead their horse off.

ROSE
Where do they come from?

MRS LEWIS
I don’t know, a reservation... The old Indian had me understand his Father was once the Chief here.

ROSE
What will that little boy feel? A white woman turning away his father, the son of a Chief. He’ll never forget it his whole life.

Mrs Lewis and Lola are startled by Rose’s speech, they look at each other afraid.

MRS LEWIS
‘A white woman!’ What can you mean?

But Rose is out the kitchen door. She’s trotting, hobbling in her high heels towards the Father and his son. When they see Rose running after them they take fright and keeping their heads down continue walking away. Rose falls over, but she doesn’t stop, she gets up and runs, shouting.

ROSE
Hey! Stop, wait! Wait!

Edward Nappo, pauses as Rose approaches.
ROSE (CONT'D)
Please take the skins, please have them. Take them. I would be honoured if you would take them.

Edward Nappo doesn’t move. Rose is dust covered, sweating and out of breath.

ROSE (CONT'D)
My husband owns the Ranch, please come back, take them.

After a pause, Edward Nappo speaks to the Boy in their Shoshone language. The Boy comes forward with a brown paper parcel, Edward Nappo signals the Boy to give it to Rose.

ROSE (CONT'D)
Ohh...

She leans against the wagon as she is having trouble standing, inside the brown paper is a pair of carefully crafted and beaded gloves. Rose is touched by the Indian’s gift, the kindness. She smiles and then cries all at once.

ROSE (CONT'D)
They’re so soft, deliciously soft.
And beautiful, but don’t you need them?

Edward Nappo confers with his son, then turns to Rose and indicates with his hand they are hers now.

Two of the Cowhands are watching uncertainly alerted by Rose’s shouts.

ROSE (CONT'D)
But you will take the hides?

Edward Nappo nods. The Boy and Edward lead their horse back towards the killing shed and begin to transfer the hides to their buggy.

Rose pulls on the gloves as exhausted, she staggers back to the house.

George on his way back sees Rose fall to her knees then topple to the side where she lies still. The Cowhands look at each other then walk slowly towards Rose frightened to touch the boss’s wife. George joins them and dismounts. He gently sits Rose up. Her head flops sideways, her eyes flutter, she’s out cold.
INT - BURBANK RANCH/STAIRCASE/BEDROOM/BATHROOM - DAY

George and a Cowhand carry Rose up the staircase to her bedroom. Lola leads carrying Rose’s high heels and opening the door. George and the Cowhand put her down on the bed. As they pull back the covers a bottle of Bourbon is briefly revealed. George dismisses the others and pours the contents of the bottle down the bathroom sink. George brings a flannel to wipe Rose’s face.

ROSE (MISERABLY)
  George, George...

George blinks to hear her say his name. He removes her gloves and she rouses herself to keep them near her.

EXT - TRAIL BACK TO BURBANK RANCH HOUSE - EVE

Phil and Peter ride back towards the Ranch side by side, the Ranch House small in the distance. The whole layout of the place visible at once, the house, the corral, the barn, the abandoned tennis court, the kill house. All bathed in a golden light, dramatized by the still distant build of clouds.

Phil rises suddenly in his stirrups, as he looks intently at the empty rail beside the kill house.

PHIL
  Well I’ll be damned.

INT - BURBANK RANCH/STAIRS/GEORGE’S BEDROOM - DAY

Mrs Lewis heaves herself up the stairs breaking into George’s room where Rose still sleeps off her hangover.

MRS LEWIS
  You told me to tell you when he’s here and he’s here. Rode right about the killing shed looking where the hides should be.

George gets up gravely from the side of the bed. He puts on his hat.

GEORGE
  Thank you. Please make sure Mrs Burbank stays in bed.

MRS LEWIS
  I don’t want your brother thinking
  I gave the skins up.
  (MORE)
MRS LEWIS (CONT'D)
Indeed I did not, I told them they were not for sale or barter.

George leaves the room.

124 EXT/INT - BURBANK RANCH/BARNYARD/BARN - DAY 124

Phil has spurred his Sorrel into the barnyard. Peter alarmed, follows behind.

PETER
Phil - Phil what’s wrong? Phil is something wrong?

Phil dismounts in the barn.

PHIL
Wrong, wrong for Christ sake? Every God damned hide is gone.

Phil is tense with fury. He roughly hangs up his saddle from its stirrup and the bridle beneath it. Peter stands behind holding up his heavy western saddle and bridle.

PHIL (CONT'D)
She’s really put her foot into it this time.

PETER
You think she did it Phil - sold them?

Phil takes Peter’s saddle and slings it up on a wooden peg.

PHIL
You bloody tootin’. Or maybe gave them away.

PETER
Why would she do that Phil? Why? She knew we needed the hides.

PHIL
Because she was drunk. Pie-eyed. She was stewed. I’d think you’d know from the books your Paw left you that your Maw’s got a whatchamacallit alcoholic personality. It comes under the letter A.
PETER
Phil - you’re not going to say
anything to her?

PHIL
Say anything? I won’t say nothing
but sure as one good hell brother
George is going to.

Peter turns to see that George has walked quietly into the
barn. Peter is abashed and worried by what he might have
heard.

GEORGE
Rose is not well Phil, she’s ill.

Phil walks towards George.

PHIL
Not well?! It’s high time that bozo
and you got next to a few
whatchamacallit facts. She stashes
alcohol all around the place, even
drinks from the stinking pit. Look
at yourself in the mirror fatso. Is
it that she could like? Or is it
our money. Wake the hell up.

Peter slips out the back of the barn.

GEORGE
That’s enough Phil. What’s the
harm? The skins were only going to
be burnt.

PHIL
I needed them!

GEORGE
Well I apologise.

George turns to leave.

PHIL
They were mine!

125 EXT/INT - BURBANK RANCH/BARN SIDE/BARN - DAY

Peter is walking in a strange tight circle his boots kicking
up the dust in the shadow of the barn. He’s as tense and
focused as we’ve ever seen him, as he sees George leave he
goes back into the barn and walks up beside Phil staring down
his departing brother.
PETER
Phil?

PHIL
Mmmmm?

Then Peter touches his arm – touches it. Phil is stilled, he looks down at Peter’s hand on his own arm.

PETER
Phil – I’ve got rawhide to finish the rope.

PHIL
You’ve got it? What you doing with rawhide?

PETER
I cut some up, Phil. I wanted to be like you – to braid like you. Please take what I’ve got?

They are facing each other in the dark barn AND still the boy’s hand remains on Phil’s arm.

PETER (CONT’D)
You’ve been good to me, Phil.

At that moment Phil feels a catch in his throat that he’d felt once before and never expected or wanted to feel again, for the loss of it breaks your heart. Sure the boy might want to save his pretty little Maw, but he was trying to emulate him. Why else would he cut up the rawhide? He wanted to merge to become Phil. Ah, but Phil had almost forgot what the touch of a hand will do and in his heart counted the seconds that Peter’s was on him and rejoiced at the quality of the pressure. It told him what his heart required to know.

Phil slides his long arm about the boy’s shoulders his voice sounding husky.

PHIL
I’ll tell you one thing. Everything’s going to be clear sailing for you from now on in. And do you know, I’m going to work and finish up that rope tonight. Peter, will you watch me do it?

As Phil gripped his shoulder, Peter felt as special as he believed himself to be.
INT - BURBANK RANCH/BARN - NIGHT

Phil plunges his hand into the bucket swishing around Peter’s rawhide worms, fat and swollen. The water in the bucket turns pink from Phil’s wounded hand but Phil takes no notice, he’s squeezing the water out of a worm and braiding it in. Peter watches mesmerised. The light from the kerosene lamp makes for a cosy intimacy in the big wooden barn. Phil starts to work on the weaving, keeping a steady tension with the many threads he plait and weaves. Peter watches carefully as the rope grows in Phil’s tough dirty hands. Peter drifts across to Bronco Henry’s shrine where his saddle sits gleaming.

PETER
How old were you when you met Bronco Henry?

Phil takes a sip of beer.

PHIL
Well Pete you know what, about your age now.

PETER
Was he your best friend?

Phil tosses Peter his tobacco. Peter eagerly sits cross-legged to roll Phil a cigarette. Phil looks over at Peter his pale elegant fingers working the paper into a perfect hollow. But what was he thinking? Phil couldn’t tell. There was an aloofness in the boy, a distance Phil felt mystified by, it drew Phil to say daring things, things perhaps he shouldn’t say.

PHIL
Yeah, but more than that – once he even saved my life. We were way up in the hills shooting Elk when the weather turned mean. He kept me alive by lying body against body in a bed roll. Fell off to sleep that way.

Peter looks up at Phil very interested.

PETER
Naked?

Peter lights the tight rolled cigarette and once it’s lit he puts it to Phil’s lips. Phil is amused and encouraged.

PHIL
Just know a man’s feeling for another can go very deep.

(MORE)
PHIL (CONT'D)
It happened with me and Bronco,
shocked the life out of me I can
tell you.

Phil glances at Peter who is listening thoughtfully. Phil
passes him the cigarette and Peter takes an experienced puff.

PHIL (CONT'D)
We could go camping ourselves way
out back. Your ever hear wolves
howling Peter?

PETER
No. Is that cigarette too tight?
I’ll make a better one.

Peter passes back the cigarette to Phil and sets about
rolling more. The rope is coiled between Phil’s legs it’s
long now and almost complete. Phil doesn’t want the evening
to finish. The boys attention gives him a warm buzz just to
know his clever big eyes are on him makes Phil feel he could
go on braiding all night.

MUSIC OVER

INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/BACK DINING ROOM - DAY

The mousy sound of forks and knives and the ‘plink’ of china
as the men arrive and eat breakfast, each surprised that Phil
for once is not here first. Bobby stands looking at Phil’s
empty place.

BOBBY
Phil left already?

JOCK
Nah. He’s not come

Bobby’s eyebrows rise. ‘Wuh’. He sits and reaches for the
pancakes, glances again at Phil’s empty place. The men, to
ease the nervousness discuss a water snake prank played on a
sullen and angry looking Cowboy, CURT.

JOCK (CONT'D)
The thing was curled up right at
your neck.

Curt looks at Jock thinking him childish.
BOBBY (GIGGLING)
Sure take a snake to sleep with you, ha, ha.

CURT
Who the hell ever asked you? Not me...

There’s a general ‘Ohhh”, then Phil walks in, no jokes, or accents or ‘hellos’. He doesn’t even look like Phil, he’s grave and wet faced. Several Cowhands greet Phil but he does not reply. Mrs Lewis brings a fresh round of pancakes on her unsatisfactory feet and places them in front of Phil, who pulls out his chair and sits.

Peter comes in silently and sits unnoticed. Two fast eaters get up with their plates. George walks in.

GEORGE
Hello.

Lola, afraid of Phil’s wet face puts a steaming cup of coffee in front of him. He reaches out a hand picks up the cup and puts it down again and continues to look at his hand, bright red around the now black cut. He looks about the table with a curious mild expression, pushes back his chair, and leaves the room. George turns to watch him go.

128  EXT - BURBANK RANCH/YARD - DAY

Phil is bent forward leaning his backside against the barn. The light shines hard on his face and moisture from the night is rising mist like from the ground in front of him. Phil pushes himself off; and old man like, walks back to the house.

129  INT - BURBANK RANCH/CORRIDOR/PHIL’S BEDROOM - DAY

George walks to Phil’s bedroom door. He knocks, no reply, slowly he opens the door. Phil lies perspiring on his bed.

GEORGE
I’ll run you into Herndon.

Phil nods.
Phil arranged in his ill-fitting town suit and black shoes from the Army and Navy store with his hat sitting high, almost comically like a clown’s walks through the living room and out the front door. Rose surprised by his approach quickly leaves the living room for the kitchen where she pours herself a cup of coffee with a shaking hand.

The old Dodge shoots rings out of it’s exhaust into the cold air as George backs it out of the barn. Phil walks stiffly towards the car but instead wanders into the barn where he stoops to pick up the finished rope with the Honda the knot that completed the lasso he had completed late last night. George finds Phil in the barn his hands fingering a rawhide plaited rope.

GEORGE
What is it Phil?

Phil looks down at his infected hand and the rope held in it. There’s something, but Phil can’t put it together his mind is fogged. Then Phil steps out of the barn dragging the rope, he looks about the yard, he can’t tell if he’s cold or if he’s hot. The Cowhands joking by the corral melt away. Phil stepping drunkenly seems to be searching, he turns irritated to George.

PHIL
Where’s the boy?

GEORGE
Let’s go Phil. I’ll see he gets it.

Phil looks at the rope, he feels a terrible stab of abandonment, of loneliness. Phil lets the rope drop carelessly onto the dusty, turd stained yard. George opens the passenger door and Phil shuffles the last few steps to the car.

Peter is cross-legged in his bedroom sitting out of sight under his window and working on a craft project, a highly realistic paper rose with petals in heart shapes. As he hears the Dodge doors close - one, two and the motor start, Peter rises relieved to watch Phil in the Dodge leave the Ranch for Herndon.
EXT - SALT LAKE CITY HOTEL - DAY

Establishing shot of a large grand hotel in the Salt Lake City of 1925.

INT - SALT LAKE CITY HOTEL/CORNER SUITE - DAY

The Old Lady is dressed ready for travel. She is watering the last of the Geranium pots she keeps dotted about the apartment for color and homeliness. When finished she takes the can back to the kitchenette.

THE OLD LADY
No, they are good about it, if the tip is big enough. They’ll come in and water.

The Old Gent in his Prince Albert top coat checks his pocket watch.

THE OLD LADY (CONT'D)
We can get something to eat on the train.

As The Old Lady comes back into the living room she suddenly covers her face with her hands. The Old Gent walks at once to her as if he expected it.

THE OLD GENT
Now, now. Remember you were always patient, you were always kind.

The Old Lady drops her hands kneading them.

THE OLD LADY
Was I? Was I? Kindness! What else in God’s name is there?

INT - SALT LAKE CITY HOTEL/A CORNER SUITE/HALL - DAY

The Old Gent and The Old Lady leave the apartment and close the door behind them. The Old Gent tries the door once.

INT - SALT LAKE CITY HOTEL/LOBBY - DAY

The Old Lady and The Old Gent follow behind their luggage as it is ported through the hotel with its grand chandeliers and mixture of soft carpeted and polished floors. They walk towards the revolving doors.
George walks into the darkened funeral home carrying Phil’s suit over his arm. He walks past a selection of display coffins to the counter where Mr Weltz the undertaker meets him.

MR WELTZ
Would you like to select a casket?

Mr Weltz moves to turn on the light switch

GEORGE
No, don’t turn on the light I can see well enough. I’ll take this one.

George points to a Mahogany coffin with a white silk interior.

In the plain workroom of the funeral home Phil’s dead body is being fitted into his suit with all the expediency of the trade, the shirt sleeves cut and the shirt front altered for easy dressing. Phil himself has been shaved, his blue eyes as closed as they can be, his hair trimmed and neatened. A white bandage holds his jaw shut and another white bandage covers the wound on his infected hand. His hands are crossed on his chest.

MR WELTZ
One, two, three...

Mr Weltz and his SON lift Phil into his casket where he lies stiffly amidst the fine white pleated lining with lace edging.

Black cars crowd the exterior of the Hotel chosen for the funeral reception. The TOWNSPEOPLE and the RANCHER FAMILIES, their children and wives in their furs make their way through the cars into the rooms already crowded with the flowers brought from the church. A BLACK AND WHITE PORTRAIT of Phil is surrounded by a large floral border and stands at the front of the room. The Ranch Cowhands huddle together. WAITERS in black with white shirts hold trays of drink selections. The Old Lady and The Old Gent are already deep in the room, The Old Lady wearing an elegant fur stole turns to The Old Gent sternly.
THE OLD LADY
Remember you had precisely nothing
to do with this. Oh so many flowers
and in late summer, where do they
find them?

The Old Gent shakes the hand of a Herndon ACQUAINTANCE while
The Old Lady walks towards Rose and George as she sees them
entering. The Old Lady takes Rose’s hand and kisses her. Rose
looks tenderly at The Old Lady. The Old Gent observes from
afar as his wife suddenly removes the rings from one hand
then the other and puts them all in Rose’s hands. Rose is
astonished and moved. George pats Rose and joins The Old
Gent.

GEORGE
Rose wants you to join us for
Christmas; would you care to?

The Old Gent is watching his wife with Rose. Rose is putting
one of The Old Lady’s rings on her finger, carefully dropping
the others into her purse, he nods in assent.

The DOCTOR from the Herndon Hospital joins George with a
glass of sherry in his hand.

DOCTOR
I’m afraid I’m mystified. I’ll know
in a day or two when the results
come back. Those last
convulsions...

GEORGE
Yes.

George looks down and shakes his head.

DOCTOR
Terrible, truly frightful. You know
what I’m thinking?

George looks at the Doctor.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Anthrax.

George shakes his head.

GEORGE
But he never handled diseased
animals, he was particular on that!
The Doctor nods. The post funeral chatter is at its peak as the MOURNERS of Phil’s shortened life fill the reception room eating the elegant chicken and cress sandwiches and sipping on small glasses of sherry, brandy or champagne.

140  EXT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE - DAY  

Peter in his cleaned tennis shoes, plays out in the yard with the black and white Collie dog he befriended. Peter laughs finding it funny that it snaps and barks at its reflection in the Ranch House ground level windows.

141  EXT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE - EVE  

The sun has slipped behind the house which lays a black shadow across the road that creeps up the face of the hill. Peter looks at it moved.

142  INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/LOUNGE - EVE  

Peter browses among the books in the bookcase. It is growing dark in the lounge room so Peter brings the books close. “Memoirs of the Russian Court”, ”Grasses of the Western United States” and ”The Book of Common Prayer”. He sits cross legged and begins to read Psalm 22:20.

143  INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/PETER’S BEDROOM - NIGHT  

Peter washes his hands carefully in his bedroom sink then wets and combs his hair.

The dogs begin barking as the Dodge returns. Peter opens the window and looks out. At first they are hidden in the black of the shadows, he hears his Mother’s voice as George and Rose move softly into the moonlight holding hands. George stands still and pulls Rose towards him, he kisses her.

Peter watches pleased.

144  INT - BURBANK RANCH HOUSE/PETER’S BEDROOM - NIGHT  

Peter sits at his desk under his feet is the curled rope. He turns to Psalm 22:20 from the Common Prayer Book, he cuts with his father’s scalpel the words he so liked from the book.

**PETER (MUTTERS)**

*Deliver my soul from the sword, my darling from the power of the dog.*
With tweezers and glue he fastens the quote into his scrapbook. Loose next to it is his father’s open medical book. We just glance at the open page. “Anthrax is a disease of animals communicable to man. It finds its way into the human bloodstream through cuts or breaks in the skin from a man’s handling the hide of a diseased animal.” Peter smooths the page and carefully closes the book. He puts the volume back in the glass fronted display shelves amidst his father’s other volumes and sits back on his bed. He takes up the now complete paper rose from his bedside table and looks at it from every side.

CUT TO BLACK

CARD

Deliver my soul from the sword,
My darling from the power of the dog.

Psalm 22.20