

COME WEST WITH ME

by

Craig Bolotin

Suggested by the play "Abundance"

by Beth Henley

And did you get what
you wanted from this life, even so?
I did.
And what did you want?
To call myself beloved, to feel myself
beloved on the earth.

- Raymond Carver

FADE IN TO:

A WHITE SCREEN

MAN'S VOICE

An American Gentleman, 35 years of age, six feet tall, in perfect health, fair habits, wishes to make the acquaintance of a suitable young woman for matrimony.

The faint, distant SOUND of galloping horse hooves.

MAN'S VOICE

She must be no older than 22 years of age, in good health, medium height, of genteel appearance, mild disposition, and an unblemished reputation...

The SOUND of the horse grows louder and louder, faster and faster, like rolling thunder drowning out his voice.

WE DROP down from what we now realize were thick, cotton-white clouds to the razor flat, endless Wyoming plain as a PONY EXPRESS RIDER barrels straight for us kicking up clods of dirt until the horse and rider FILL THE SCREEN and we

CUT TO:

THE BOSTON GLOBE PERSONAL ADS, MAY 14, 1867.

We see the ad we've been listening to as it's being printed.

MAN'S VOICE

...Must be willing to live a hard but prosperous life and have little fear of locust, inclement weather or the red man. Fare paid in full. Address stating all your particulars: William Conklin Curtis, Burnt Forks, Wyoming Territory.

The RAT-A-TAT of the printing press CLAPLUNKS to an abrupt stop after the final period and we

CUT TO:

A GOLD POCKET WATCH

7:08. It's snapped shut. We're in the ornate drawing room of a Beacon Hill house in Boston, Mass.

The voluminous satin drapes are as thick and dull as the crowd which has gathered for a piano recital.

A MATRONLY SOPRANO stands by the piano clearing her throat. The pianist is noticeably absent. There's an uneasy silence punctuated by coughs and loud whispers.

GERALD STANFORD drops his gold watch in his vest pocket and leans over to his wife, ROSEMARY.

GERALD

What can she possibly be doing up there?

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Elizabeth (BESS) is lying on her bed, her bare toes nervously wiggling against the mahogany bedpost.

Her face is nearly lost in the lace around her neck and the billowing muslin dress with it's ruffled rows of Valenciennes. She's reading a letter as she takes a drag on her hand rolled cigarette.

She lays the letter on her chest -- it's as if the weight of the world is contained in these three ounces of coarse paper.

We can clearly read the postmark stamped on the envelope: WYOMING TERRITORY.

Books cover her nightstands: Washington Irving, Emerson, Byron, along with a host of ten cent western romance novels: "Mountain Kate", "Nell Queen Of the Saddle," "Buffalo Gals..."

MOTHER

Elizabeth...

ELIZABETH

One minute, mother. Just one minute.

She flicks the cigarette out the window. Fans the fresh air from outside into the room with a Scribner's Magazine and smothers herself with perfume...putting a few drops on her tongue.

She quickly slips the letter -- along with a half dozen others -- into a nearby book Chapman's, "Out Where The West Begins" as her mother swings open the door.

MOTHER

Elizabeth, everyone is waiting.

Her mother starts out the door, then stops, smelling something:

MOTHER

Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH

Yes, mother.

MOTHER

Too much perfume.

CUT TO:

INT. DRAWING ROOM

BESS is playing the last few bars of a Schubert lied with brio. The Soprano endlessly holds a note, but Bess cuts her off and tears through the final bars. Enthusiastic applause.

GERALD

And now, if you please...I would like to make an announcement that fills my heart and soul with joy.

Bess looks down at the keys anticipating her father's words.

GERALD

On the first of May, my daughter Elizabeth and Mr. Robert Edison Farmington Jr. are to be wed.

Applause. MR. FARMINGTON stands. Thirties, distinguished, and quite handsome; he's from one of Boston's wealthiest families.

As the applause continues, Bess surveys the terribly proper young women in their flounces and point de Milan lace: they look like they've been stuffed into the satin arm chairs.

Bess sees the rest of her life sitting in front of her; a suffocating, Victorian prison.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Bess, her mother and her father are in the midst of the Kitchen Help who scurry past preparing desert and tea. It's sweltering, filled with steam from the kettles of boiling water.

BESS

...He's perfectly sweet, but I don't love him.

GERALD
You're telling us this now?

BESS
I've been telling you this for
months but you haven't
listened.

MOTHER
Need I remind you that you're almost
twenty-five and have not had many
gentlemen suitors. You are a handsome
girl but not necessarily -- and I love
you dear -- a great beauty.

GERALD
Neither your mother nor I are willing to
let this opportunity slip away. Do you
understand me, Elizabeth?

BESS
But father --

GERALD
(adamant)
Do you understand me, Elizabeth.

Bess, reluctantly nods.

CUT TO:

A LEATHER SATCHEL

BESS (V.O.)
Dear Mr. William Curtis...Will.
Dear Will...

A black dress, lace high top shoes, opera glasses, a kitchen
knife, a framed photograph of her parents, a canister of
Belladonna Leaves all quickly land inside the satchel.

CUT TO:

THE KITCHEN

filled with steam and servants racing round with silver
trays filled with desert tarts. Bess's FIANCE is searching
for her.

BESS (V.O.)
I have received your three missives and
studied them with great care.

CUT TO:

BESS'S SATCHEL

landing in a pile of powdered snow.

BESS (V.O.)
I have been reluctant in the past to
take up your offer. But I have had a change
of heart and do hereby declare I will be
arriving posthaste if you will still have me...

Bess's hand reaches in and grabs the handle.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET -BOSTON - NIGHT

Bess stands at the end of her cobblestone street in the
swirling snow, satchel in hand.

She pauses for a last look at her brightly lit house, warm
and inviting on this chilly March night.

BESS (V.O.)
...And pay my fare as promised, since I am
currently suffering from a rather acute
shortage of funds.

Bess's FIANCE bursts out the front door desperate to find her,
Bess's parents on his heels.

Bess disappears around the corner.

BESS(V.O.)
With the greatest of expectations,
Elizabeth Dortha Stanford. Bess.

CUT TO:

INT. TRAIN CAR - BOSTON - DAY

Bess in her stylish Toque hat, feet propped on her bag, smoking,
writing a letter. Sitting across from Bess, a stout Norwegian
WOMAN -- an immigrant -- is weeping.

BESS
Whatever's out there can't be worse
than what you've left behind, can it?
(hands her her handkerchief)
I know it can't.

We hold on Bess, framed by the window, trying to believe her own words, as the train slowly rolls out of the station.

CUT TO:

WISPY CLOUDS OF WHITE SMOKE

BESS (V.O.)
...I know it is difficult for
you to understand dearest
Mother and Father, but the one
life God has granted us is so
brief, I cannot resign myself
to being a spinsterish school
marm, nor merely the dutiful,
passionless wife of even the
most distinguished of Boston's
Brahmins.

Through the thinning smoke we glimpse Bess writing by the window.

BESS (V.O.)
The west is the last frontier.
A place where a woman can still
flourish and make a name for herself.

INSIDE THE TRAIN

Bess lights another cigarette, and continues writing on a new page.

BESS (V.O.)
Please try in your hearts to forgive me.
I miss you both terribly and always will.
I am as they say out west, 'off to see
the Elephant...'

EXT. WHEAT FIELDS - DUSK

We glimpse the tail of Bess' train disappear over a distant hill.

BESS (V.O.)
...All that is wild and untamed lies
before me.

INT. TRAIN PLATFORM, UNION STATION, CHICAGO - DAY

TWO SMALL children, one BOY and one YOUNG GIRL hurry toward us through the billowing steam. They're holding someone's hand we don't see until we tilt up and reveal EMMA BROWNE, their sister.

Trailing behind her are three more YOUNG girls and the MOTHER of this dirt-poor Scottish family. The boys are struggling with their sisters three heavy bags.

VARIOUS FAMILY MEMBERS

...Hurry...You're goin' to miss it.

...Back this way!

...Be quick 'bout it.

Emma's dressed in what her mother imagines a girl should wear for a journey to meet her husband: high lace shoes, gloves and a bonnet with satin ribbons -- a working class Little Bow Peep. Nothing could be less flattering, but it can't belie the fact that Emma is angelically beautiful.

They've found the car. Time to go. Emma embraces everyone in turn, then grabbing her three bags, heads for the train.

Emma drops her bags, hurries back and hugs her mother again.

MOTHER

It can only be for the best,
sweetheart.

The train is about to depart.

MOTHER

Go...go on now...He'll love you
too.

Emma hurries on board. Her mother turns away; it's too difficult to watch her go.

CUT TO:

INT. THIRD CLASS TRAIN CAR - DAY

Packed with screaming babies, families of ten, salesmen, gamblers, mountebanks, drunks -- enough riff raff and bad news to fill a small city jail.

Wooden seats. Wooden sleeping bunks three deep overhead. No cushions, no springs, nothing. A pot bellied stove in the middle of the car. Steerage on wheels.

Bess is buried behind Harper's Weekly with the headline,
 "Sixth Calvary Defeats Savages in Oklahoma Bloodbath."

Emma, squeezes down the crowded aisle, her cumbersome bags
 bumping into everyone and everything.

EMMA

Sorry...excuse me, sorry...pardon me.

The train jerks forward. One of Emma's bags goes flying.

Bess glances from behind her magazine at this frail, timid
 young woman.

Another bag slips out of Emma's hand, then another.
 EVERY MAN in the car is more eager to help than the next.

Exactly what Bess detests: the "helpless" woman. A handful
 of letters slip from the pages of Emma's bible.

EMMA

Oh no, my letters...Please...

A MAN returns them to her.

EMMA

Thank you, thank you so kindly.

Bess silently mouths: "Thank you so kindly," and returns to
 her magazine.

CUT TO:

INT. TRAIN - IOWA - NIGHT

Many of the travelers have dropped off to sleep. At the far
 end of the car, Bess and TWO OTHER brides-to-be are huddled
 together sharing biscuits and a flask of Old Cliff's
 whiskey. They're all slightly drunk and giddy. Bess is hand
 rolling a cigarette.

BRIDE ONE

...You think they're gonna wanna have
 intimate relations right away?

BRIDE TWO

I hope so. I'm not going all the way to
 Omaha to keep my virtue. I was doing
 that just fine in Cincinnati.

BRIDE TWO

All I care about is that he's got teeth.
If he doesn't have any teeth I'll perish
right then and there.

The girls wince at the thought of a toothless husband.

BRIDE THREE

What about you, miss?

BESS

Me? I'd like to shoot a buffalo.

BRIDE TWO

...Shoot a buffalo?

BESS

Yes, and converse with the Indians.

Laughter.

BRIDE ONE

(mockingly)

What are you going to do if one
captures you?

BESS

Maybe I'll marry him.

That quiets them.

BRIDE TWO

Aren't you concerned about
your fiancé?

BESS

Yes, yes I am...My hope is that
he'll treat me as his equal,
not as a maid or mother hen.

The girls are dumbfounded by her response. Bess leans
closer:

BESS

Don't you see? In fifty years
people won't only be writing
about who we married or how
many children we had, but
what we thought and what we
accomplished.

BESS

(licks her rolling paper)
This is the last frontier,
ladies, and we are the chosen
few.

(holds out her cigarette)
Cigarette anyone?

ON EMMA

in awe of Bess. She's never heard any woman speak like this
-- or any man for that matter.

Bess catches Emma's eye, offers her the cigarette.
Embarrassed, Emma returns to her bible.

CUT TO:

THE TRAIN - DAY

stopped in the Omaha station. One of the BRIDES is on the
platform being kissed by her fiance. She runs her finger
across her teeth: he has a full set. Eureka.

CUT TO:

THE TRAIN - DAY

TWO more BRIDES have disembarked.

One of the bride's fiance -- a coarse, unshaven behemoth --
crudely grabs her, and kisses her full on the lips. The
other bride nervously looks around -- no husband.

ON EMMA

anxiously watching from inside as the train pulls out. She
unfolds the letters she's clutching to reassure herself.

BESS

is the only other bride-to-be left besides Emma.

She glances up to see Emma's lips silently moving as she
reads from one of her letters -- a letter she's read a
hundred times. Emma spots Bess watching her.

EMMA

(embarrassed)
They're...uh...from my fiance.

Bess smiles politely and returns to reading Emerson's essays.

EMMA
(looking down at the letter)
He sounds very kind...

Bess glances up again. Emma's confidence in her potential husband is eroding by the second.

EMMA
And he says he loves me.

Bess again smiles encouragingly, then returns to her reading.

EMMA
(blurts)
You wouldn't mind hearing one
would you Miss --

BESS
(reluctantly glancing up)
Stanford. Bess.

EMMA
(coy little wave)
I'm uh...Emma Browne. May I --

BESS
Well to be perfectly honest
with you Miss --

Too late. Emma, clutching her letters, is on her feet hurrying toward Bess.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE HIGH PLAINS - DAY

Nothing but dusty, drought-stricken plain as far as the eye can see. Across the huge expanse of desolate land, we spot a small ball of swirling black smoke floating toward us.

EMMA (V.O.)
(full of wonder)
'...My Dear Emma, if I could be with
you this very moment the most heartfelt kiss
would I bestow upon you...

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON THE LOCOMOTIVE

as it sweeps over us. The whistle SCREECHES and we go...

INSIDE THE TRAIN CAR

where the corners of the windows have been crammed with bandannas and handkerchiefs in a futile attempt to keep the dust and cinders from seeping into the car.

The soot is so thick you can barely see past your own nose. Everyone is covering their noses and mouths with handkerchiefs.

As we move down the aisle we find Emma between coughs and sneezes reading her letters to Bess.

EMMA

...To fold you in my arms, to hear from your faithful lips that I am still your dearest would be sweet, sweet indeed.' It's beautiful isn't it?

Bess wants to be enthusiastic, but the saccharine prose is tough to swallow.

BESS

It's very...romantic, Miss Browne.

EMMA

Would you like to hear another?

Before Bess can respond, the train whistle SCREECHES and we

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIN MOVING - DUSK - THROUGH THE WINDOW

The train is chugging up hill. We see Emma ebulliently reading another letter out loud. Bess is trying not to nod off, forcing a smile whenever Emma glances up.

CUT TO:

THE TRAIN MOVING - NIGHT

A single kerosene lamp glows in the middle of the train. Everyone is asleep -- everyone except Emma who gazes out the window. Bess is stretched out on the seat, her eyes are shut, her coat folded beneath her for a pillow.

EMMA
(after a long beat)
Harelip.

BESS
Pardon me?

EMMA
A harelip is the only thing that
could spoil it.

BESS
They're quite rare, Miss Browne.

Bess shuts her eyes again. Emma ponders some more.

EMMA
Or bald.

Bess opens her eyes again.

BESS
Bald?

EMMA
Yes. I don't care for bald.

Bess rolls over, determined to sleep.

EMMA
(blurts)
I don't hate bald like I do a harelip.
It would take some getting used to,
that's all I'm saying.

After yet another contemplative pause:

EMMA
You know what Miss Stanford?
(Bess is afraid to ask)
It doesn't matter what he looks
like. I just want to be loved
by someone and love him in
kind.

Before Bess can respond, there's A LOUD PING against the side
of the train. Followed by another -- sharp hail-like sounds.

Someone cries out: "INDIANS."

EMMA'S POV OUT THE WINDOW:

TWO DOZEN SIOUX BRAVES on both sides of the tracks form a gauntlet for the train to pass through. They are shooting arrows at the train as it passes by.

EMMA
(terrified)
My God...

BESS
(elated)
My God...

The CONDUCTOR hurries in.

CONDUCTOR
(calmly)
On the floor, ladies and gents. It'll
all be over in a minute.

Everyone hits the floor as a window shatters. Smoke and cinders pour into the car.

The CONDUCTOR extinguishes the kerosene lamps plunging the car into darkness.

CONDUCTOR
Last week they stretched a rope across the
track trying to stop us.
(shouting out the window)
We're here you sons-of-bitches and
we're not leaving!

An arrow rips into the conductor's forearm.

CONDUCTOR
Dammit to hell!

ON EMMA

lying besides Bess. Chaos: SCREAMS. GUN SHOTS...

EMMA
I want to go home.

Emma panics, springs to her feet and scrambles down the aisle.

BESS
Miss Browne!

Emma, hysterical, grabs her bags and starts down the aisle as if she were planning to jump off the train.

BESS

yanks Emma down to the floor. A half DOZEN arrows shatter the windows, their stone tips falling harmlessly to the floor. More SCREAMS and GUNFIRE.

EMMA
(petrified)
Miss Stanford...

Bess takes Emma's hand.

BESS
Don't worry....
(squeezing Emma's hand)
I'll protect you.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE TRAIN - NIGHT

As it sweeps past the rows of Braves illuminated by their torchlights, then disappears down the tracks until the Indians are enveloped by the darkness.

CUT TO:

A FLASK

as Bess hands it to Emma, who's nerves are still frayed. Emma hesitates; she's never had a drink.

EMMA
(crossing herself)
If it's truly for medicinal purposes.

Emma takes a small sip and chokes on the hard whiskey. She returns it to Bess, shaking her head -- it's not for her.

Emma peers out the shattered window at the moonlit badlands.

EMMA
...We've fallen off the edge of the world.

BESS
Well, the United States are certainly behind us.

EMMA

Yes...

They both watch the desolate landscape roll past...Finally:

EMMA

Miss Stanford?

BESS

Yes.

EMMA

Did you mean what you said to those women? About being a man's equal and all?

BESS

Yes. Yes I did.

EMMA

Don't you want him to love you? And you him?

BESS

Yes, very much. But I believe that would mean he loved me. Because he'd be loving me for who I am.

EMMA

My mother said never to expect all that from a marriage.

BESS

So did mine. But I have the highest of expectations.

They share a warm smile. Bess holds up the flask.

BESS

To our dear mothers. And unchartered territories.

Bess takes a drink, then hands Emma the flask again. Emma hesitates, then, mustering her courage:

EMMA

And unchartered men.

Emma takes a sip, swallows -- this time she doesn't choke.

BESS
 (warmest of smiles)
 Yes indeed...Yes indeed, Emma Browne.

EXT. BURNT FORKS STATION, WYOMING TERRITORY -- DAWN

A sea of six foot high bear grass ripples in the wind as far as the eye can see. The end of the line; the end of the known world. The 'station' is a canvas tent.

A dozen passengers have disembarked. Wagons are waiting, some with women and children.

Bess, holding her parasol over her head with one hand, smoking with the other, stands on the very western edge of the platform overwhelmed by the beauty and grandeur.

Emma stands nearby fastidiously tying the satin ribbon of her bonnet, poking at the loose ends of her hair, dabbing herself with perfume trying to make herself presentable.

For Emma every man is a potential husband: her eyes meet theirs, her hopes are raised, her hopes are dashed.

A clean-cut YOUNG MAN hurries straight toward Emma. She shuts her eyes and says a silent prayer. He tips his hat then brushes past her and hugs his father.

Emma crushed, glances at Bess for reassurance. Bess shrugs, there'll be another.

Out of the corner of her eye, Emma spies an OLDER MAN, an obese eye-sore with a hungry grin, ogling her from across the tracks. Emma's convinced this is her fiance. But the man's middle-aged WIFE calls out to him from the wagon. He winks goodbye and hurries off.

JACK(O.S.)
 Is there a...uh....shit...An Emma...
 somethin' somethin' Browne up here or
 somethin'?

ON JACK RILEY

His shirt is tied around his waist, he needs a shave and a haircut and maybe even a bath. But it doesn't matter because he's deadly handsome. Mid-twenties, rakish smile, boyish good looks with an air of wild danger about him. He may be the sexiest man we've ever seen -- at least Bess thinks so.

BESS

Yes.

Jack starts up the platform steps, missing one.

EMMA

Oh God, he's drunk.

He holds up his palm, races back down the steps, rips a bunch of dandelions from the ground and hurries back up.

Emma recoils and slowly steps back leaving Bess on point.

Jack thrusts the bouquet into Bess's hands and kisses her. A long deep, lingering try-and-catch-your-breath kind of kiss.

BESS

I'm --

He kisses Bess again. She breaks free, gasping for air.

BESS

Elizabeth --

He tries to kiss her again. But Bess straight arms him.

BESS

(rapid fire)

Elizabeth Dorothy Stanford!

(catching her breath)

Bess.

She gestures toward Emma, now a dozen yards away. Emma wishes she could climb on the train which is now chugging back east along with her dreams.

JACK

May I, Bess?

She nods. He takes the flowers from her hand and starts toward Emma. Emma wants nothing to do with him and slowly back peddles.

JACK

My God you're beautiful. Isn't she beautiful, Bess?

BESS

Yes she is.

Emma's still back peddling.

JACK
(to Bess)
Could you ask her where she's going?

BESS
Emma, where're you going?

EMMA
He's drunk!

JACK
Tell her I'm not drunk.

BESS
He says he's not drunk.

EMMA
Tell him he's foul-mouthed.

BESS
You're foul-mouthed.

JACK
Tell her I'm sorry I kissed you.

After a barely detectable hesitation:

BESS
He's sorry about kissing me.

Emma continues to back peddle. Jack pulls his colt from his pocket.

JACK (to Emma)
Don't move.

BESS (OVERLAPPING)
Put that away --

EMMA (OVERLAPPING)
-- He's gonna shoot me. Bess!

He yanks Emma out of the way. BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!

EMMA
Are you crazy?

JACK
It was a rattler.

Jack sticks his colt in his pocket; he doesn't have a holster.

EMMA

(certain he's lying)

A snake? Oh, I bet you saved my life.

Jack walks over and picks up a four foot rattle snake that was coiled behind Emma.

He holds out his hand, clutching the snake. Realizing -- he quickly switches hands.

JACK

Miss Browne, Mr. Riley. I'm gonna be your husband.

Emma cautiously shakes his hand.

Then, from off screen:

MAN (O.S.)

You must be Miss Stanford.

BESS turns to see:

WILLIAM CONKLIN CURTIS. It's not that Will's unappealing, but it would be safe to say he's the opposite of Jack. Thinning hair, tall, gangly, mid-thirties -- Will always seems a bit uncomfortable in his skin.

He sticks out his calloused hand.

WILL

I can't believe it's you.

Bess forces a smile and they stiffly shake hands.

CUT TO:

JACK

piling Emma's bags on the railroad handcart on the far side of the barrier. A train can't travel yet on the freshly laid track.

Emma is about to climb up. Bess is beside her.

EMMA

Mr. Riley says we're 'bout thirty miles apart with Burnt Forks between us. Will you leave letters for me?

BESS
Yes. I will.

EMMA
And I'll have Mr. Riley leave
them for you.

Bess sees the fear Emma's eyes. Bess hugs her; Emma
doesn't want to let go.

Over Emma's shoulder, Bess spots Jack watching her over
Emma's shoulders. Bess quickly looks away.

CUT TO:

THE HANDCART

Jack is about to pump the wooden handle. Emma is perched on
top of her bags.

JACK
(calls out)
You got a Wild Mustang there, Mr.
Curtis!

Will, is tying down Bess's bags. He glances up and tips his
hat.

CUT TO:

ON EMMA

riding on top of her luggage silhouetted by the sinking sun, a
giant molten ball dipping beneath the far off horizon.

EMMA
Don't forget me, Bess!

We RISE UP FROM BEHIND HER, higher and higher, until we reveal
the pencil thin tracks stretching across the desolate brick-red
plain.

CUT TO:

INT. WILL'S SOD HOUSE - NIGHT

A bedroom and one large room with a large hearth and an iron
stove for cooking. Conspicuously neat. By Wyoming standards this
is a palace.

Bess is sitting across the table from Will.

He's made an elaborate meal for her: antelope, prairie turnips, cheese, bread and a bottle of Spanish Sherry. There are candles and even a blooming cactus.

Silence. Except for the scraping of the tin flatware and the whistling wind...Bess glances up, Will glances down. He's painfully shy.

More scraping, then their eyes meet. Bess forces an awkward smile; The distance between them is a mile wide.

CURTIS

You may not enjoy antelope, it's not to everyone's fancy.

BESS

-- No, it's excellent. I've actually read about it in Bret Harte's novel. Did you hunt the antelope yourself Mr. Curtis?

WILL

Course.

More silence except for scrapping of tin on tin. Finally --

WILL

(not looking up at her)
Am I what you expected, Miss Stanford?

BESS

More or less, yes.

WILL

You think I'm not good lookin' enough, don't you?

BESS

No.

WILL

If I'm too ugly you can tell me right now. I'll send you back. I'll even pay your fare.

She's genuinely touched by his sincerity.

BESS

Thank you Mr. Curtis, but I'm not going back.

WILL

All right then.

Will pulls a small box from his pocket and slides it across the table.

Bess opens it and takes out a gold wedding band: It's surprisingly elegant.

BESS
It's lovely.

WILL
It's my wife's.

BESS
Your wife's?

WILL
She passed six months back.

BESS
I'm sorry.

WILL
Death is a familiar face out here.

BESS
I didn't come out here to die
Mr. Curtis. I was doing that
in Boston.

Bess carefully sets down the ring.

CUT TO:

EXT/INT. JACK'S SOD HOUSE - NIGHT

Emma swings the door open as Jack unloads her bags.

The dirt floor is covered with straw, a bed that takes up half the room. The rest is a claustrophobic clutter of tools, filthy cooking utensils and soiled clothes. Emma's heart sinks.

CUT TO:

INT. JACK'S CABIN

As Emma yanks a dusty blanket off the bed and beats it against the wall. Jack is leaning back in his chair watching her. If she stops talking she's afraid she'll cry.

EMMA

...Some women get squeamish over ticks and lice. Not me. Where I grew up, we had lice, scabies, ticks. I'll root'em out with kerosene. Kill 'em all. Dead. Gone. Forever.

JACK

Ticks and scabies don't bother me.

EMMA

They don't?

He shakes his head. She can't stand the way he's eyeing her.

EMMA

I could...cook you something. I'm a good cook.

JACK

Can't say that I'm hungry, neither. Are you?

Emma shakes her head. Jack continues to follow her with his eyes.

EMMA

I should finish unpacking.

She opens her bag: a corset is on top.

JACK

Let me help.

He gets to his feet.

EMMA

No!...No thank you.

Jack unbuttons his shirt.

EMMA

Don't you ever keep your shirt on?

JACK

Look Emma -- Miss Browne -- it's like jumping into the river. All you got to do is close your eyes and leap. But it's best if you take your clothes off.

He lifts a dress out of her hand and kisses her neck, a bit too hard. She pulls away.

EMMA

You haven't even asked me to marry you.

JACK

You're right. I haven't. Marry me.

EMMA

That's not a proposal. That is not a proposal.

(then)

I don't understand you, Michael Riley. Your letters were so beautiful, so poetic. It's hard to believe you're the same person.

JACK

I'm not.

EMMA

Pardon me?

JACK

There was a cave-in at our mine outside Cheyenne. I'm Mike's brother, Jack.

After a long beat...

EMMA

Are you saying Mr. Michael Riley is no longer living?

JACK

Not for the past three weeks.

EMMA

(grabs her suitcase)

Oh my God...

JACK

You never laid eyes on the man.

EMMA

(waves the letters)

This was the man I was in love with. This man, not you.

JACK

You loved a bunch of letters.

He snatches the letters.

EMMA
(snatching them back)
No!

She throws her clothes back in her suitcase.

JACK
Where do you think you're going?

EMMA
Back to the United States.

JACK
That'd be Nebraska. This time of night it'd
be kinda tough to pick up the trail.

Emma slams her suitcase. More clothes are hanging out than are
stuffed inside.

JACK
Hey, hey...I started workin' a new mine. I'm
gonna fix this place up. Wouldya -- would you
please wait a goddamn minute here!

EMMA
Goodbye, Mr. Riley. Mr. Jack Riley.

She storms out, dragging two of her bags behind her.

EXT. CABIN - LATER

Jack is holding a lantern in one hand.

JACK
Emma! Miss Browne?

Nothing from the darkness. He walks farther out. But she could
be anywhere.

JACK
Miss Browne you cannot spend the night out
here, you'll freeze.

He continues to search for her.

JACK
You want the truth?
(no response)
Truth is my brother told me
'bout you just before he died.

JACK (cont'd.)

He wanted me to promise him I'd marry you. That's right, promise. I said, 'Mike maybe I'm not the marrying kind '-- since I've always had -- well, been fond of, the female sex as a species. But mind you, the man was slipping into darkness, and before he went he made me swear to meet you at the station.

(then)

Fact was, when I showed I wasn't planning on marrying you. Fact was, I was gonna help you with your fare back...But it gets lonely out here.

(kicking at the dirt)

Emma, I ain't no Saint, but I ain't no sinner neither.

Still nothing from Emma.

JACK

Would you marry me? Please.

(gets on one knee)

Will you Emma -- I forget your middle name -- Will you Emma somethin' somethin' Browne, be my bride?

Nothing from Emma. Jack gets up.

JACK

That was a yes or a no question.

He sits against the cabin door, his rifle on his knees.

JACK

If you're out here all night, I'm out here with you.

(a long beat, then:)

I want to marry you goddammit. You're the most gorgeous woman I've ever laid eyes on!

Silence. He buttons the top of his coat against the cold and settles in.

JACK
Where the hell are you, Miss
Browne?

We travel up the front of the house, over the sod roof and drop down on the back side to see Emma pressed against the rear wall sitting on her bag.

We now see Jack sitting against the front of the cabin, knees tucked under his chin, and Emma in back of the house sitting in the exact same position. Both stare off into the darkness.

CUT TO:

INT. WILL'S CABIN - THE SAME NIGHT

Bess is lying in bed staring up at the ceiling as the wind whistles through the cracks in the wall.

Will, lying on the floor beside the bed, is also staring at the ceiling. LONG SILENCE, then:

WILL
We only know each other through
our letters.

BESS
Yes.

WILL
Have you ever loved a man, Miss
Stanford?

BESS
No, I haven't.

WILL
Do you imagine you could love me?

Pause.

BESS
I don't know.

WILL
We can't expect to love one another
right away.

BESS
No.

WILL
I'll get a piece of tin and bend it
around for you until the time I can get
you another ring.

Pause.

WILL
Will you marry me, Miss Stanford?

Pause.

BESS
Yes I will, Mr. Curtis.

Will and Bess continue gazing at the ceiling.

WILL
Goodnight, Miss Stanford.

BESS
Goodnight, Mr. Curtis.

CUT TO

THE STAR FILLED SKY

EMMA (V.O.)
April 11, 1867...Dearest Bess, I hope
you will receive this correspondence
and return it in kind. My first night was
full of unexpected surprises and wondrous
events which I gather could only happen
out here in this wild, unchartered territory.

We drop down to find EMMA lying in the fetal position behind the
cabin.

CUT TO:

EXT. JACK'S HOUSE - DAWN

First blue light of dawn. Emma is behind the house, shivering in
the crisp morning air.

EMMA(V.O.)
Although Jack isn't exactly the man
I thought he was...

Jack comes around the corner to take a leak and spots her as he
unbuttons his fly. Emma misinterprets his intentions.

EMMA(V.O.)

... He proposed to me in the most extraordinary fashion...

Emma springs to her feet and runs for her life. Jack chases after her, catches her, and throws her over his shoulder.

He props Emma on top of a cow chewing his cud, then falls on one knee.

EMMA(V.O.)

...And believing that I could learn to love him in kind, I submitted to his romantic will.

He proposes. She nods. Jack stands and kisses her as the oblivious cow methodically chews his cud.

CUT TO:

INT. GENERAL STORE - BURNT FORK

Jack walks in carrying a letter. On the envelope, in smudged India ink is BESS'S NAME. He slides it beneath the iron postal grill.

CUT TO:

WILL

slipping another envelope beneath the grill, this one with Emma's name. He pays for his flour and walks out.

BESS(V.O.)

April 22, 1867. Dear Emma, Bravo...

EXT. WILL'S HOUSE - DAY

A dot in the middle of the vast, flat prairie.

BESS (V.O.)

...I too have been fortunate.

FROM HIGH OVERHEAD

A cornfield. We see the tall stalks mysteriously shaking back and forth. As we draw closer we spot Bess lost in the middle of the six foot stalks. She can't find her way out. She starts off in one direction, then turns around in the other...then after a few steps, another. She rises up on her toes but it's futile.

BESS(V.O.)
Although there isn't a Buffalo in sight,
much less any sign of Indians...

CUT TO:

BESS

drenched in sweat, is stirring laundry in a thick cauldron of
boiling water with a thick wooden stick.

BESS(V.O.)
....And Mr. Curtis remains as
distant and unfathomable as
either of our world's great
oceans...

Bess looks at Will trudging slowly behind his plow horse.

CUT TO:

BESS

furiously priming the pump. Not a drop of water. More
furious pumping. Finally....a gush of water.

BESS
Marriage remains a practical
proposition for me and so I
have decided to take the
plunge along with you. Forward
into the breech, my friend.

Bess lifts the heavy buckets and heads for the house.

BESS(V.O.)
Bess D. Stanford.

CUT TO:

EXT. BURNT FORK'S - DAY

Sheets of dust blow past the three white washed buildings.
One's a stable, the other the general store, the third a
saloon. Full time population: thirteen.

INT. THE GENERAL STORE - DAY

The wind howls. Dust seeps through the windows and doors,
covering everyone and everything.

ON EMMA'S HAND

searching for, finding and squeezing Bess's.

Bess has on her best dress -- it happens to be black. Emma is wearing her bonnet with tulle sewed along the brim as a veil. Jack's concession is to trim his hair and button his shirt collar. Will is wearing his Sunday best and his top hat.

We now see FOUR ADDITIONAL COUPLES waiting behind our two couples.

MARRYING SQUIRE

Do you, Emma Clarissa Brown take William
Conklin Curtis as your husband?

Bess laughs.

MARRYING SQUIRE

Excuse me?

JACK

You got it wrong.

MARRYING SQUIRE

(to Jack)

And how is that Mr. Curtis?

Emma giggles and clamps her hand over her mouth.

WILL

That's me.

MARRYING SQUIRE

(to Will)

What Mr. Riley?

Bess cracks up again. It's contagious. Emma laughs along with her and finally even Jack. Only Will isn't amused.

The other couples grumble: " Let's get a move on...We ain't paying money to stand around all day..."

WILL

Fellas, you mind if we get this right?

CUT TO:

TWO RINGS

one a sapphire, the other a tin band are slid onto two ring fingers.

MARRYING SQUIRE

Have him?

The additional BRIDES: "Yes, I will, uh-huh, yes sir."

BESS

Yes.

EMMA

I do.

MARRYING SQUIRE

Have her?

The additional GROOMS: "Okay", "Sure 'nough", "Yes sir, You betcha."

JACK

All right.

WILL

Kinder.

MARRYING SQUIRE

Done. Two dollars.

CUT TO:

A POWDER FLASH

The two couples, arm and arm, side by side, at the edge of the field. They're having their picture taken.

The PHOTOGRAPHER pokes his head out from beneath his black canopy and pulls out the wet plate.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Now it's forever.

Jack kisses Emma again and again, forcing her back into the tall bear grass. They tumble into the grass and disappear.

Bess glances at the ever practical Will paying the photographer then shaking his hand for a job well done.

CUT TO:

INT. WILL'S CABIN - THE SAME DAY

Bess slips off her gloves, removes her hat. Starts to unbutton her "wedding dress."

Her nosegay of wild dandelions rests on the table.
Bess looks out the window. Will is already sliding on his work boots. Bess watches him head out to the field as if it were just another day.

She stops undressing and sits down at the empty table. The only SOUND is the howling wind sweeping across the prairie.

She looks at the sod caked walls, the cast iron stove, the stone hearth, her magazines and books already gathering dust on the shelf. WE HOLD on Bess sitting alone, listening to the SOUND of the wind.

CUT TO:

EXT. JACK'S CABIN - DUSK

Jack is carrying Emma across the threshold still kissing her.

EMMA(V.O.)
May 1, 1867. Dearest Bess...

EXT. JACK'S CABIN - THE ROOF - NIGHT

A cow is on top of the sod roof chewing the sod.

EMMA (V.O.)
...I don't know how to describe my
wedding night.

We drop down into the cabin until we find

EMMA

lying in bed beside Jack who holds up the sheet so she can see his erection. He takes her hand and gently pulls it beneath the sheet...then he gently presses her head toward his groin.

EMMA (V.O.)
...Some things he demanded, I was by no means certain had to do with the procreation of our Lord's children.

She shakes her head. No. Jack nods. Yes. She shakes her head no.

EMMA(V.O.)
He claimed he was having troubles and reassured me that all paths lead to the same well.

To Emma's surprise Jack, unable to get an erection, tosses back the sheets.

He storms out the cabin stark naked, then abruptly sits on the front stoop and stares out at the night sky. Emma watches him through the open door.

EMMA (V.O.)

I'm sure your experiences with Mr. Curtis have been far less vexing.

CUT TO:

BESS

eyeing a rooster strutting on the bedpost, as Will methodically makes love to her in the matrimonial position.

Suddenly the rooster hops onto Will's back. Will, his face buried in Bess's shoulder is oblivious. The rooster slowly struts up the length of his back.

BESS

William...

Will grunts away as the rooster continues up his back.

BESS

Mr. Curtis...

When it reaches Will's shoulder, it turns it's head to peer at Bess with one eye. Bess swats it away. The bird bites her finger. It hurts like hell.

BESS

Mr Curtis!!!

Thinking Bess has climaxed, Will gently kisses her forehead.

CUT TO:

BURNT FORK'S - SEVERAL WEEKS' LATER

A YOUNG CHEYENNE slowly twists from a tree branch. A small crowd has gathered. McCULLEN, the photographer we saw earlier, is taking a photo.

A sixteen year old Caucasian GIRL, being consoled by her MOTHER, cries nearby.

Bess is standing in front of the general store watching.

JACK (O.S.)
Her daddy caught her with
that boy.

Startled, she turns to see JACK, a sack of flower over his shoulder, standing behind her. He momentarily takes her breath away -- she's forgotten how handsome he is.

JACK
They said she loved him. I
don't believe you should stop
something like that, no matter
who it's between. You, Mrs.
Curtis?

BESS
(slightly unnerved)
No...I guess I don't. Where is Emma? I
was supposed to meet her here.

JACK
She was feeling a little
sickness this morning. Said to
apologize. Best to your
husband.

He tips his hat and takes off toward the saloon. Bess watches Jack cross the street for a moment. Then catches herself and heads into the store.

CUT TO:

THE EDGE OF TOWN - LATER

Bess is slowly riding out of town when she spots a couple in the shadows between two buildings. She stops short:

Jack kissing a woman and it's not Emma. She digs her heels into her horse and gallops off.

CUT TO:

INT. WILL'S CABIN - DAY

Bess is furiously scrubbing the hardwood floor on her hands and knees; she pauses, then furiously resumes scrubbing. Finished. She tosses the brush into the pail in the corner. From O.S. she HEARS a loud GRUNT.

Bess turns to see their hog, its legs and belly dripping with mud, stepping into the glistening floor.

BESS
No...Will...WILL!

Bess springs to her feet, but is knocked aside by the two hundred pound animal as it slips and slides across the floor. It crashes into the bed, flipping it on its sides.

Will races in and tackles the hog, but it squirms from his grasp and scrambles out the door dragging a bed sheet.

WILL
(laughs)
Looks like Charles did us in.

Bess, kneeling in the middle of the floor, is not amused. In fact silent tears of frustration streak down her cheeks.

Will spots her tears, and for a moment, we think he is going to say something other than --

WILL
I'll get us a fresh bucket of water.

And he walks out the door.

CUT TO:

INT. CABIN - DAY

Silence. Will glances at Bess across from him, then returns to his beet soup. Only the scraping of the bowls again. Reminiscent of their first dinner. Finally:

WILL
(sipping the soup)
The soup is good.

Nothing from Bess. Will sets down his spoon.

WILL
It's different now. It's all the same, but it's all different.

BESS
How's that?

WILL
Plowing, chopping wood, even having dinner.

WILL
It's got a purpose with you
here.

Bess smiles.

WILL
I don't know what more one can
expect from this life....I
really don't.
(taking another sip)
Except a child perhaps.

BESS
I'm not ready for that, Will.

WILL
What do you mean?

BESS
I'm young. I have just arrived
out here.

WILL
(simply)
The lord determines when a man
and a woman will have a child.
Not us.

Will picks up his spoon and resumes sipping his soup.
Bess looks like a bird trapped in a cage.

CUT TO:

BESS - DUSK

- is pinning the last of the white sheets to the clothes line
in the midst of a stiff breeze. A tremendous gust tears the
sheets from the line and sends them flying high in the air.

AT THE FENCE

Bess gathers the sheets. As she clutches them in her arms,
she spots a line of CALISTOGA WAGONS crossing the prairie in
the distance. She watches them, then glances at her cabin.

CUT TO:

THE RISING SUN

Bess gallops toward us. She's wearing wool trousers and suspenders over a muslin shirt. When she fills the frame we

CUT TO:

EXT. JACK'S CABIN - DAY

Emma is pouring butter from a churn. Bess circles her on her Palomino kicking up a cloud of dust.

BESS

...I want to show you something.

EMMA

Right now?

CUT TO:

THE TOP OF A MESA - DAY

Bess and Emma, on horseback, are perched on the sandstone mesa. Far in the distance, a long line of CALISTOGA WAGONS rolls westward.

BESS

It's the Oregon trail.

(then)

They're heading farther west. We should join the next one.

Bess must joking; it's so preposterous.

EMMA

(laughs)

What, to see Buffalo and Indians?

BESS

It's what's best for us.

Emma thinks Bess is being preposterous.

EMMA

You can't just take one train all the way out here, then hop on another.

BESS
I regret that I can't seem to
love him either.

EMMA
Bess...You barely know him. You
have to try to learn to love
him.

BESS
(voice almost cracking)
I don't know how to do that.

It's the first time Emma's seen Bess's vulnerability.

EMMA
Will is a good man, Bess.

BESS
(compassionately)
And Jack, Emma, is he?

Emma is stunned by her question.

BESS
(facing her)
Does he love you?

EMMA
Yes.

BESS
Are you certain?

EMMA
I want to go home now.

BESS
You haven't answered my
question.

EMMA
(simply)
Jack is my husband.
(fighting back tears)
If things aren't good between
you and Mr. Curtis, I'm sorry
about that. I got what I came
for.

BESS

Emma --

Emma turns her horse around and starts off.

EMMA

-- Leave me be, Bess!

Bess watches her go.

BESS

All right then...

(calling out to her)

I'll write to you my friend.

Bess, turns her horse around and slowly rides off.

Emma turns to watch her. Finally:

EMMA

Bess...Bess wait.

Bess keeps riding.

EMMA

You don't have money! A woman
can't even own property without a
man!

Bess doesn't stop.

EMMA

Dammit, Bess, don't leave me here!

(Bess continues on)

I need your help...Please.

(then)

I'm gonna have a baby!

Bess's horse slows, then stops. She turns to look back at her.
Hold on Bess, then:

CUT TO:

BESS AND EMMA

slowly riding back to Emma's cabin.

BESS

...Didn't you say Jack was having problems
with intimate relations?

EMMA
I sing to it.

BESS
Pardon me?

EMMA
I squeeze it with one hand and I sing. It
blooms right there in my hand. Every time.

BESS
No.

EMMA
Yes.

BESS
What do you sing?

EMMA
'Get A Long Little Doggies.'

BESS
(incredulous)
No...

EMMA
Yes!

CUT TO:

THE TWO WOMAN

as they ride into the sunset singing a duet of: "Get A Long
Little Doggies."

CUT TO:

INT. SALOON - DAY

The BARTENDERESS, who we saw kissing Jack earlier is about
to pour Bess a shot of "Two Naturals."

Bess puts her hand over her glass.

BESS
You prefer Two Naturals or Old Cliffs?
I'm speaking personally now.

BARTENDRESS
Old Cliffs.

BESS

Make it Old Cliffs then.

She fills the glass for Bess. Bess picks it up and throws the Whiskey in the woman's face.

BESS

Jack Riley's wife's with child. You go near him again and I will not be so hospitable.

Bess tosses a greenback on the bar.

CUT TO:

EXT. BAR - DAY

as Bess bursts out. Jack is about to come in. She barrels past him, leaving a baffled Jack in her wake.

The Bartendress, wiping her face with a towel, charges out the door, right into Jack's arm.

BARTENDRESS

(to Bess)

Try that again, and I'll shoot your eyes out!

Bess, impervious, rides off. What has happened dawns on Jack, and he breaks into a big grin at her moxie.

CUT TO:

EXT. WILL'S CABIN - DAY

Bess rides up as Will climbs down from the windmill, a screw driver in his hand.

WILL

I thought you'd gone.

BESS

No.

But Will knows the truth.

WILL

I have simple needs, Bess.

BESS

I can barely make bread rise.

BESS (cont'd.)
I can't sew, and I wash clothes
worse.

WILL
I know that.

They share a laugh. Suddenly, Bess feels a wave of affection
for her husband.

BESS
I just need something more,
Will.

WILL
And what could that be?

CUT TO:

A FIELD OF DEAD BUFFALO

Dozens and dozens of carcasses lying on their sides. Ten
minutes work for two hunters.

CLOSE ON McCULLEN

their wedding photographer. He's about to take a photo.

HIS POV: through the dull ground glass of the field of
sprawled Buffalo. Suddenly Bess steps INTO HIS PHOTO and
stands on top of the dead Buffalo.
She's upside down, in the middle of his frame.

McCULLEN
Jesus!

BESS
Can a woman make a living taking photos
out here?

He pops his head up from beneath the cloth.

BESS
Can she?

McCULLEN
Yes I suppose she could. Would you please
step down.

She doesn't.

BESS

Do you suppose you could teach me?

McCULLEN

I suppose I could. If you got some money.

BESS

Do you suppose we could start immediately?

McCULLEN

No I don't.

Bess doesn't move.

McCULLEN

Yes, I suppose we could.

Bess steps off the Buffalo carcass.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Emma is silhouetted against the horizon. A thin black figure beneath the sweltering sun. The RHYTHMIC, DULL THUD of an axe cutting into the hard ground is overpowering.

EMMA

August, 17, 1868. Dearest
Bess...

We move closer and see Emma soaked in sweat, swinging the axe into the rock hard ground making rows for seeding her garden. She's four months pregnant and her belly is beginning to swell.

EMMA(V.O.)

The ground is like an oven, burning through the soles of my shoes. But I am determined to make a garden of beans, pumpkins and beets.

CUT TO:

EMMA

milking a thin, sickly cow. She glances up to see Jack riding back with his pick axe over his shoulder.

EMMA(V.O.)

For Jack continues to return
without so much as fool's gold.
And I fear for the newborn
kicking within me...

CUT TO:

THE BED NIGHT

Jack climbs into bed still wearing his clothes. He kisses her on the forehead and, exhausted, rolls over.

EMMA(V.O.)

Jack is not weak, but frail in
different ways than I. And in
our moments of melancholia and
faded hopes we are able to
comfort one another.

Emma curls her body around his. He rests his hand on hers.

EMMA(V.O.)

I don't know if this is love, but
I cling to the hope that it may very
well be.

CUT TO:

INT. BESS'S CABIN - DAY

Bess is reading the letter by candle light at the table. Her first attempts at making photographic prints are spread across the table.

EMMA(V.O.)

...I pray you have gained some
matrimonial ground with Will,
and think me not the biggest
fool to sleep beneath a sod
roof.

Will is undressing by the bed. He walks over, and rests his hand on her shoulders and kisses the back of her head. Bess affectionately squeezes his hand.

Bess sets down the letter fondly watching Will, in his long johns, climb into bed.

EMMA (V.O.)
 With more love than this letter
 can ever carry, your Emma.

Bess blows out the candle.

CUT TO:

BESS -- MONTHS LATER -- DAY

is under the protective black hood of a view camera taking a photograph. Jack, Will and an eight months pregnant Emma are posing in front of Will's cabin.

BESS'S POV: The threesome are upside down.

BESS
 Tuck the gut, Jack.

JACK
 (raises his hand in protest)
 Hey...

Emma elbows Jack.

EMMA
 Jack, don't move.

BESS
 Emma...

Will, realizing they've all blown it, gestures "it's hopeless."

EXT. WILL'S HOUSE -- DAY

The wind and dust whips the checkered table cloth which is covered with empty bottles and plates. Bess is showing her collodion prints to Jack and Will.

INSERT PHOTOS:

An Indian burial ground, the cadavers, wrapped like mummies raised ten feet high, on wooden platforms.

A thief about to be hanged.

A family of Mormons pulling their handcarts.

JACK
 (wry)
 ...They're charming.

BESS
They're not supposed to be
charming.

WILL
She sold one to 'Harper's
Weekly.'

JACK
That's a living.

WILL
(pointedly)
It could be.

As opposed to the living Jack's making.

EMMA
Happy Anniversary, everyone.

Emma appears carrying a cornmeal anniversary cake.

CUT TO:

THE TABLE - LATER

Everyone has a had a lot of whiskey, especially Jack whose
gesturing at Will's field of parched, stunted cornstalks.

JACK
...If it's not drought, it's gonna be
locust, if it ain't locust, it's gonna
be a prairie fire. This ain't the garden
of Eden and only a fool believes it can
be.

WILL
So you're gonna keep staking claims on
dead-end gold mines?

JACK
They're only dead-ends till I hit the
mother lode.

BESS
You're wife's with child. She
needs to be provided for.

JACK
I got dreams just like you, Mrs. Curtis.

Bess looks up toward the sky as if to say, " yeah I've heard about your dreams."

Jack pulls out his revolver and slides it across the table to Bess.

EMMA

Jack...

JACK

You kill a man's dreams, you
kill the man...Go on, pick it up.

WILL

Put it away.

JACK

(looking Bess dead in the eyes)
Go ahead.

(nothing from Bess)

Doesn't weigh much...

EMMA

Jack, stop it.

Without taking her eyes off him, Bess picks up the revolver and aims at Jack.

EMMA

Bess...

BESS

Maybe you won't grow up until you're
ready to die, Jack Riley.

Bess cocks the revolver.

WILL

Bess!

EMMA

Bess!

JACK

(tapping the bridge of his nose)
Right here, right between the eyes.

These two love melodrama.

CLOSE ON BESS'S FINGER as she slowly squeezes the trigger.

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! Bess shoots -- but straight up in the air.
It scares the hell out of everyone, including Jack.

Bess slides the revolver across the table to Jack.

BESS
Watch over her, Jack. That's all I'm
saying.

Jack is clearly shaken. Emma shares a secret look of thanks with Bess.

CUT TO:

EXT. JACK'S SOD HOUSE - DAY

Jack disappears over the horizon, his pick-axe resting on his shoulder.

EMMA (V.O.)
October 15, 1867. Dearest Bess,
Jack left at dawn....

ON EMMA

watching him go.

CUT TO:

THE TOP OF THE HOUSE - TWO WEEKS LATER

Emma, looking very pregnant, is trying to shove the reluctant cow off the roof. It's chewing the sod and won't budge.

EMMA (V.O.)
He heard about a big strike outside Casper,
and said he'd be back with plenty of money
for the babe.

She gives the cow a swift kick. It turns its head, nonchalantly glances at Emma, then returns to eating the roof.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROOF OF HOUSE - LATER

Emma, having vanquished the cow, sits on the edge of her roof watching the molten sun slip beneath the horizon.

EMMA(V.O.)
It's been three weeks now and my loneliness
is as deep as our well. I truly fear I could
have the babe any day now and my Jack won't
be back in time.

We stay on Emma from behind, perched on the roof of her small house, floating like a life-raft on a hazy, golden brown sea.

EMMA (V.O.)

...Can you come stay with me until Jack returns? I need you. Emma.

We rise up to the thick white clouds until the screen is completely white. SLOWLY DISSOLVE as the clouds become the impenetrable SNOW of a raging winter blizzard, then drop down to...

THE PLAINS - DAY

Bess, snow caked to her hair and clothes, is on foot leading the horse through the waist deep snow.

She looks up to see: Emma's cabin half-buried beneath the snow.

CUT TO:

THE CABIN DOOR

as Bess swings it open.

INSIDE THE CABIN

A half dozen chickens, a few turkeys and a calf by the fire -- but no Emma.

BESS

Emma?!

CUT TO:

EXT. A SNOW COVERED HILL - DAY

The shadowy figure of Bess, hand cupped around her mouth, calls out in the raging wind and snow.

BESS

Emma! ...Emma!

After a long silence: Faintly, feebly:

EMMA (O.S.)

Bess...

CUT TO:

THE FROZEN WELL

glazed in ice. Two over-turned water buckets are strewn about. Emma is lying on her back nearby.

EMMA
(forcing a smile)
I'm in a little trouble here, Bess.

INSIDE THE CABIN

Bess is intently reading from a childbirth manual circa 1860 as she nervously crosses back and forth in front of Emma, supine on the bed. The menagerie of farm animals gobble, chirp and even moo in the b.g.

BESS
...The first thing it says is to remain calm.
We can both do that, remain calm...

Emma moans after a contraction.

BESS
(hardly calm)
Oh shit.

EMMA
Don't...cuss...The babe will hear it.

CUT TO:

BESS - LATER

clutching the book in her hand.

BESS
Breathe Emma, breathe. Through your nose then
your mouth...breathe.

Bess breathes along with Emma, who is clearly much more relaxed than Bess.

EMMA
(between breaths)
Jack'll...be here...won't he? He promised.

BESS
I'm certain of it. Breathe.

CUT TO:

BESS

massaging Emma's back as the contractions grow stronger.

EMMA

How long's it been?

BESS

Twelve hours.

EMMA

Shit!

EMMA - LATER

squatting, clasping her bible with one hand the back of a chair with the other.

EMMA

My god my god my god -- Gotta wait for Jack...My god my god my god...

EMMA

...My god my god my god...

BESS

...My god my god my god...

CUT TO:

BESS - NIGHT

Sweat pours from her face; she's hyperventilating.

ON EMMA

now lying on the bed as sweat rolls down her cheeks; she's hyperventilating too, writhing in agony after seventeen hours of labor.

Looking at both their faces, for a moment, it's hard to determine who's in labor and who's the mid-wife.

BESS

Push.

The contraction takes her and she screams in agony.

Emma pushes with all her strength, but she collapses, the contraction is gone...Her body trembles.

Bess sponges her face and chest.

EMMA
No more, I... can't...

BESS
Yes. You can. Come on. We're stronger than
this.

Another contraction. She's in agony.

Bess gets up and stands at the end of the bed, grabs Emma's feet
and presses them against her.

BESS
Push against me, Emma. Push.
Push, goddamnit!

Emma, her face gray, gives one final push.

EMMA
Gawd! Gawd!...

EXT. THE CABIN - DAY

A roar that echoes across the empty, snow covered valley.

EMMA(O.S.)
GAWD!!!

CUT TO:

INSIDE THE CABIN

as the baby girl slides into Bess's hands. Clay blue, dazed, eyes
wide open. She takes her first breath.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON THE UMBILICAL CORD

about to be cut with pinking sheers. A clothes pin is gently
attached.

EMMA(O.S.)
You sure that's the right spot?

BESS(O.S.)
You want to wait for a doctor?

SNIP!

CUT TO:

EXT. SOD HOUSE - DAY

The snow has stopped. A sliver of sun breaks through the silver gray clouds. The house is buried in snow; only the chimney pokes out.

INSIDE THE HOUSE

We're overhead as we slowly turn around the room, past the buckets of hot water...the bloody rags on the floor...an overturned bowl...Until it finds EMMA asleep in bed, the BABY sleeping beside her, and finally BESS curled at their feet sound asleep.

CUT TO:

JACK - DAY

trudging toward the cabin in the waist deep snow. As he reaches the crest of the hill he sees the cabin, buried in drifts, and hurries down the slope.

INSIDE THE CABIN

Bess and Emma are washing the baby on top of the table. Jack walks in, and spots his baby.

JACK

Emma...

Emma doesn't even look up, continues washing the baby. Bess takes a dirty bucket of water and brushes past Jack.

BESS

Congratulations. It's a girl.

CUT TO:

WE ARE UNDERNEATH

the surface of a lake. A rainbow trout slithers past us. A baby's head, then the rest of its small body fills the screen. It's spring.

CUT TO:

JACK, BESS AND EMMA AND WILL

As a PREACHER standing in the shallow lake holds the baptized baby above his head.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRY SIDE - DUSK

As Will and Bess silently ride home in their wagon.

CUT TO:

INT. WILL'S CABIN - NIGHT

They're in bed. Will is trying to kiss Bess, and she's not responding at all. Will slips off her, lies on his back, not facing her. Silence.

WILL

You don't even want me to kiss
you anymore?

Nothing from Bess.

WILL

Did I do something wrong?

BESS

No...

WILL

I want a child.

BESS

I know that.

Beat.

WILL

(not facing her)

I've come to love you, Bess. I wasn't sure
at times I would.

(stoic)

I'm not giving up.

Bess slowly turns to him and takes his hand in her's. We hold for
a moment, then

CUT TO:

EXT. JACK'S SOD HOUSE - DAY

It's raining as Jack, his pick-ax and mining lantern strapped to
his horse stops on top of the hill. He turns and waves goodbye.

Emma holding her baby in her arms, waves back from the cabin
door. He's gone. Emma is alone again.

EXT. JACK'S SOD HOUSE - A WEEK LATER

Emma carries her baby on her back in a homemade sling of leather straps and calico. She is picking berries from a Mulberry bush.

She looks up to see:

A CHEYENNE BRAVE

Maybe 17, maybe a bit older. Bronzed skin, well defined chest and shoulders, wearing only a breech cloth around his waist and deer-skin leggings.

Emma freezes. The Brave also stops.

EMMA

Hello...

Nothing from the Brave.

EMMA

Hello?... Well, I'm going to go now.
...Goodbye...Bye....

Emma slowly backs up, the young brave watches her...Finally, she turns... When she glances over her shoulder she sees...

THE CHEYENNE

following her, leaving a large gap between them.

A HIGH SHOT

of Emma quickly making her way down the flank of the hill, the Cheyenne following behind her from a safe distance.

THE CABIN

She's at the threshold, the Brave has closed the gap.

INSIDE THE HOUSE

Emma, slams the door shut. She slides the wooden bolt across the door but the Brave jams his arm between the door and the frame. He forces the door open. Emma tries to shut it, but he overpowers her.

EMMA

Oh God...

The Brave steps in, leaving the door open. Emma glances at the Winchester hanging on the wall. The baby cries.

EMMA

Please, don't.

To her surprise the inquisitive Brave walks past her and makes a quick tour of the house, fascinated by the brass pots, the flat - ware, picking up objects, then gently putting them back in place.

He spots himself in a mirror and leans closer, touching his skin with his fingers to confirm it's his face he's seeing reflected.

He walks over to the bed and sits on the edge of the mattress. Never having sat on one, he's startled by how soft it is.

BRAVE (In Cheyenne)

Your people leave you alone like this?

EMMA

I don't understand.

BRAVE (Cheyenne)

Alone, with a baby.

He points to the child. Emma, misunderstanding --

EMMA

NO!!!

Emma grabs the Winchester. The Brave rips it from her hands. He opens the breech, it's empty. He hands it back to her. He throws several sacks of flour and buckwheat, over his shoulder.

BRAVE(Cheyenne)

The buffalo are disappearing. Our women and children are dying from hunger.

He walks to the threshold, then stops to face her:

BRAVE (Cheyenne)

What kind of people treat their women like this.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE HOUSE

Emma watches the brave disappear over the crest of the hill.

THE ROYAL GORGE - DAY

Bess is hidden beneath the black cloth of her viewfinder camera lining up a photo.

EMMA(O.S.)

...He wasn't naked, but he wasn't wearing much in the way of clothes either.

BESS

Back...a little more...He just took some flour?

Emma takes a few steps back on the flat, narrow rock which precariously juts out over the abyss of this deep gorge.

EMMA(O.S.)

That's all...His chest was so beautiful and his eyes, Bess, they were like almonds. I was mortally terrified, but at the same time I was --

BESS

-- Don't move -- you wanted to take him in your arms.

EMMA

No. What? No.

BESS

And kiss him.

EMMA

Bess, stop.

BESS

And lie with him.

EMMA

No!!!

Bess emerges from beneath the black canopy with a knowing smile: it's precisely what Emma imagined.

CUT TO:

THE GORGE - LATER

BESS (O.S.)

...Who said we were never meant to sleep
with another man after we married.

Bess and Emma are sitting side by side perched precariously on
the end of the rock. The river far below.

EMMA

God. It's in the bible. Adultery.

BESS

Ask David and Solomon about adultery. The
Bible's as full of contradictions as we
are.

EMMA

Bess.

BESS

Read it!

EMMA

You're with someone else.

BESS

No.

EMMA

That's why you're not pregnant.

BESS

No...

EMMA

You are...that's it.

BESS

I said no, goddammit!

There's an uncomfortable silence.

BESS

I'm sorry...

(then)

I was pregnant. By Will. He never knew.

EMMA

What?

BESS

—I sent for a 'cure.'

EMMA

—Oh Bess...

BESS

It had turpentine. I couldn't
stop bleeding for weeks.

(then)

I couldn't have a child now if I wanted to.

EMMA

(gently)

Why.

Pause. A profound sadness in her voice --

BESS

I was afraid it would bind me to
him forever.

Emma rests her hand on Bess's, and after a pause:

BESS

When do you stop trying to love
someone?

Pause.

EMMA

I don't know...

She wishes she had an answer.

EMMA

I know I love my child and I
love you...

BESS

And Jack?

Pause.

EMMA

Yes...

They sit in silence, hand in hand, never having felt so close.
Then we hear Jack's voice:

JACK(O.S.)
Happy Anniversary!

CUT TO:

FOUR TIN CUPS

meeting in mid air.

EMMA
Happy Anniversary.

Bess, Emma, Jack and Will are sitting around the table, sharing a bottle of Mezcal.

WILL
Happy Anniversary.

BESS
Yes...Happy Anniversary.

Emma, her face tinged with sadness is watching Bess.

CUT TO:

OUTSIDE JACK'S SOD HOUSE - NIGHT

The only house on the prairie bathed is in moonlight. We faintly HEAR the fiddling from inside.

Will's and Jack's horses tethered outside, frantically tug at their ropes and neigh as if wolves were nearby.

INSIDE THE SOD HOUSE - NIGHT

Everyone has had too much to drink as Will wails on the fiddle. Emma and Bess are swinging one another around in a drunken jig. Jack bounces Lizbeth on his knee in time to the music.

Emma, her hair tied back with a yellow satin ribbon, locks elbows with Bess and spins her around and around until she is too dizzy to continue.

BESS
(giddy)
Stop, stop...I'm going to...Em,
let go, I swear...

Emma lets her go. Bess, trying to steady herself grabs the back of a chair.

Jack's retriever, Blue, HOWLS outside.

JACK
Blue, shut-up!

The dog continues howling.

WILL
Coyotes.
(then)
How 'bout some singing.

Both women demur. Will plays "Buffalo Girls."

JACK
Come on.

Emma whispers in Bess's ear.

EMMA
Will, you familiar with this one?

EMMA/BESS
'Get along little doggies...Get up
little shy one...'

JACK
Emma...

This is the SONG EMMA USED TO SING to Jack to help him get an erection. Will jumps in with his fiddle.

JACK
Will, hold it now...Play something
else....Hey, that's enough now!

Will joins in singing with the woman drowning out Jack's protest.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE SOD HOUSE -THE WELL - NIGHT

Bess and Emma can't stop laughing as Emma pulls a bucket a water from the well. They're both still giddy from all the mezcal and dancing.

EMMA
...Did you see his face?
Like a big red beet!

BESS
Does he know I know?

EMMA
(laughing)
He does now.

Emma slowly pours the entire bucket of cool water over her hair.

BESS
Shut your eyes.

EMMA
What?

BESS
Shut your eyes.

Emma does. Bess pulls out a silver locket from her pocket and from behind, puts it around Emma's neck.

BESS
Happy anniversary.

Emma opens her eyes to see the silver locket around her neck. She opens it. There's a PHOTO inside of EMMA with her arm around BESS.

EMMA
It's the most beautiful thing
I've ever had.

BESS
I'm glad.

It dawns on Emma why Bess is giving this to her now --

EMMA
You're leaving aren't you?

BESS
I'm going to travel for a
while. And try and sell my
photographs.

Emma knows Bess isn't coming back.

WILL(O.S.)

Ladies, coffee's gettin' cold!

Bess takes Emma by the hand.

BESS

The coffee's getting cold.

Emma knows she can't dissuade Bess.

The Retriever HOWLS again in the distance.

EMMA

I should get him.

BESS

It's Prairie dogs. Come on.

EMMA

Go on, I'll be right there. Blue!

Bess goes inside momentarily leaving Emma alone outside.

EMMA

Blue?

Emma walks past the drying shed looking for the retriever.
She walks right past

A CHEYENNE BRAVE

lying flush against the ground.

Emma continues past another WARRIOR crouched in the
darkness.

Emma steps on something she can't see in the darkness and
quickly steps back -- it's the retriever. Its throat has
been cut.

A horse whinnies. She spins around in time to see their
three horses scatter and disappear into the night.

She hurries toward the house, then stops. Thirty yards in
front of her is:

RUNNING BEAR in full war paint. THIS IS THE YOUNG BRAVE WHO
VISITED EMMA EARLIER.

EMMA
(barely audible)
My God...

CUT TO:

INSIDE THE SOD HOUSE - NIGHT

Jack and Bess tuck Lizbeth into bed.

JACK
'Night sweetie.

BESS
No kisses?

Lizbeth reaches to kiss Bess when --

EMMA
(terrifying scream)
JACK!

EXT. SOD HOUSE - NIGHT

Jack grabs his shotgun and charges out the door. But the alcohol slows him down and dulls his perception.

JACK
Emma!?

A hail of arrows streak toward him. One tears into his thigh. Jack drops his shotgun, discharging one of the shells.

BESS POV: as Emma appears out of the darkness, running toward the cabin.

BESS
Emma!

But right behind her are TWO BRAVES ON HORSEBACK galloping flat out. They part, grab her beneath her shoulder blades and literally sweep her off her feet.

BESS

frantically jams bullets into the chamber of her pistol.

JACK

yanks the arrow from his thigh and crawls toward his gun.

WILL

hurries out, carrying his Sharp's rifle. He gets off one shot which sends a BRAVE flying off his pony. Two arrows TEAR into his shoulders with such force that he topples backwards.

Another BRAVE circles back to finish Will off.

The Brave rears on his horse, about to plunge his lance into Will.

WILL

Bess!

Bess whirls. Her first shot misses. Her second hits the Brave in the thigh. His lance harmlessly falls to the ground.

THE BRAVES

carrying Emma between their two horses gallop up the steep hill. Running Bear covers them from behind.

JACK

runs after his wife clutching his bloody thigh, then tumbles and falls on the hard ground.

BESS

fires until her chamber is empty. She drops the revolver and races after them.

BESS

Emma!

EMMA

OH GOD BESS HELP ME!

She disappears over the bluff.

BESS reaches the top of the bluff.

Far below:

The braves gallop across the plain...farther and farther away until they're consumed by the darkness.

BESS
EMMMAA!

CUT TO:

INT. SOD HOUSE - NIGHT

Will is sitting up in bed, his chest wrapped in torn, blood - soaked strips of bed sheets.

Jack's preparing his bedroll about to leave.

WILL
(to Bess)
...You can't track. You're not that good a shot. And if they capture you --

Will stops himself.

JACK
You'll only slow me down.

BESS
I'm not the one who's wounded.

JACK
You have to take care of Will and Lizzy.

Beat.

BESS
Bring her back, Jack.

Jack throws his bedroll over his shoulder.

JACK
I love her too.
(then)
You get better now, William.

CUT TO:

THE BADLANDS - DAY

The fine red dust blows across the parched earth: Hell with the fires gone out.

Jack walks into frame limping on his wounded leg following the trail of the Cheyenne's horses. It DISAPPEARS in the blowing dust.

EXT. WILL'S CABIN

A blinding dust storm. Bess is herding the cows, chickens and turkeys into the house.

INSIDE THE HOUSE

Bess slams the door --it takes all her strength against the sixty mile-per-hour wind.

Lizzy is terrified. Will is out of bed, but still bandaged from his wounds. Bess lifts the crying two year old in her arms.

BESS

Now now....little one.

Bess is about to close the shutters, but something stops her. She continues to look out at the raging storm.

WILL

Leaving the shutters open isn't going to bring her back.

BESS

It's been weeks.

Will takes the crying Lizzy from Bess's arm and presses her gently against his breast, calming her.

He reaches out with his spare hand and closes the shutters. They clang shut.

CUT TO:

INT. CAPTAIN'S OFFICE - FORT LARAMIE - DAY

Snow falls outside the window. A officious CAPTAIN is introducing Jack to a Crow scout. KICKING HORSE is in his sixties wearing a top knot, soldier's dress trousers, a cotton shirt and faded red suspenders.

JACK

... I want someone who speaks English. He's a goddamn Indian.

KICKING HORSE

(in perfect English)
Yes he is, Riley.

JACK
I need soldiers.

CAPTAIN
Mr. Riley, bands of Cheyenne
and Sioux have left their
reservations attacking everyone
and everything in their paths.
This garrison is at it's
minimum compliment. Kicking
Horse is an excellent scout. I'm
sorry about your wife.
(holding out his hand)
Now if you'll excuse me.

Jack ignores the Captain's hand and walks out.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT LARAMIE - JACK AND KICKING HORSE
riding side by side as the snow swirls around them.

JACK
Just don't shoot me in the
back, all right?

KICKING HORSE
I would. But I don't think
you'd taste very good.

It takes Jack a moment to realize Kicking Horse is joking.
Touche. Kicking Horse rides on.

CUT TO:

EXT. HILLSIDE - SPRING - SIX MONTHS LATER

Lizbeth, age two-and-a-half , wearing one of Emma's floppy
brimmed hats is perched on top of the hill having a
difficult time sitting still.

BESS(O.S.)
No...you can't move yet...

Bess is taking Lizzy's photo. Bess examines her pocket watch
to check the exposure time. Then snaps her watch shut.

BESS
Now it's forever.

BESS IS GIVING LIZZY

a piggy back ride back to the house.

BESS

You know who you look like more
everyday?

Lizzy shakes her head.

BESS

Your mama.

LIZZY

You take too many pictures,
Aunt Bess.

BESS

When your mama comes back
she'll know what you looked
like while she was gone.

Bess hesitates outside the cabin door, glancing back at the empty prairie hoping to see Jack and Emma. But of course, she doesn't. She takes Lizzy by the hand and disappears inside.

CUT TO:

A CHEYENNE CAMP

Dozens of tepees have been burnt to the ground. Others are still being consumed by the orange flames. Jack is slowly riding through the carnage: dead men, women and even children lie everywhere charred beyond recognition. This wasn't a battle: it was a massacre.

Jack nearly tramples a woman lying face down in muddy ground. For a minute he thinks it could be Emma...But her hair is black.

KICKING HORSE returns.

JACK

She's not here.

Kicking Horse points to a cloud of white smoke on the horizon.

KICKING HORSE
We should talk to the Blue
coats.

CUT TO:

U.S. FIFTH CAVALRY CAMP, COMPANY C - DAY

The wounded are being attended to.

The rest of the soldiers are eating, rubbing down their horses or resting in their tents after their "victory."

A SERGEANT is leading Jack and KICKING HORSE past dozens of beige canvas tents pitched in a sea of mud and snow.

They arrive at a canvas tent where a guard has been posted.

SERGEANT
I should warn you, Sir --

But before he can finish, Jack goes into the tent.

INT. TENT - DAY

TWO WOMEN wrapped in Army blankets are huddled in the far corner. They turn away when Jack, Kicking Horse, and the Sergeant enter.

One of the WOMEN does have Emma's flaxen hair and is about the right height.

JACK
...Emma?

Jack rests her hand on the woman's shoulder. She's glassy-eyed, catatonic, with dark, crude scars on her chin: tattoos.

JACK
(softly, looking away)
Christ...

A PRIVATE walks in.

PRIVATE
Sir. Captain Heinzelman requests
the civilian's presence.

INT. THE CAPTAIN'S TENT - DAY

Capt. Heinzelman is standing behind his desk, covered with remains of the battle. Numerous lances decorated with human hair, war clubs, arrows, jewelry, garments...

Jack and Kicking Horse sift through the various objects.

CAPT. HEINZELMAN

...Unless we're fortunate enough to take them completely by surprise they kill the whites right away...I'd hoped that one of the women we were able to save was your wife.

Kicking Horse picks up a lance with a long blond braid of human hair. It looks like Emma's hair.

JACK

Yes, but it could be any woman's.

From deeper in the pile Kicking Horse pulls out a silver locket and holds it up for Jack to inspect. This is the loket Bess gave to Emma but Jack never saw it before Emma was kidnapped.

Jack looks at it and shakes his head -- it's not his wife's.

Kicking Horse opens the locket. The photo of the BESS and EMMA is still inside.

Jack spots the photo and slowly takes the locket in his hand.

CUT TO:

BESS

sleeping with Lizzy in her arms. The door swings open.

WILL

Bess...Two riders!

CUT TO:

BESS

galloping through the snow toward the two riders in the distance.

She recognizes JACK's hat. But she can't see the second rider clearly. She digs her heels into her horse -- if only her horse could gallop faster.

CUT TO:

BESS

full of high hopes until she sees Jack and...then Kicking Horse.

JACK AND BESS

as he hands her Emma's locket. Nothing needs to be said.

Bess, in shock, slides off her horse and walks away from him, oblivious to where she's going, oblivious to the pouring rain.

JACK

Bess!

Bess continues walking toward the prairie.

Jack catches up to her and gently rests his hand on her shoulder. Bess slowly turns and faces him. They look at one another, tears in both their eyes.

They hold each other close, like a husband and wife mourning a child's death.

Will and Lizzy watch from the open cabin door. Will squeezes Lizzy's hand and we

CUT TO:

BESS AND LIZBETH

sit on a rocky outcropping facing the snow covered plain far below.

LIZBETH

(facing straight ahead)

Will my mama ever be back?

Pause.

BESS

No, she won't, Lizzy.

LIZBETH

I wish I could see her.

BESS
I wish I could too.

From behind, we watch Bess put her arm around Lizbeth;
Lizbeth leans her head against Bess's shoulder. Hold, then

CUT TO:

EXT. WILL'S HOUSE - DAY

Jack is hugging Lizbeth goodbye. Bess is beside them.

JACK
(to Lizzy)
...Soon as I can fix our place up. I'll
be back for you sweetheart.

Lizbeth kisses him on the cheek. Jack sets her down.
He turns to Bess, and, after an awkward pause, Bess puts her
arms around him.

ON WILL

collecting snow in wooden buckets for water. He glances up
to see: BESS holding Jack, comforting him.

INT. WILL'S HOUSE - DAY

Snow swirls outside the window. Bess sits at the table, head
bowed. She feels as hollow inside as an old shell. Will
takes a pot of coffee off the stove. He pours her a cup and
sets it down beside her.

She doesn't look up. He sits across from her.

BESS
The wind is so fierce today.

Long pause.

WILL
Yes, it is...

Hold on Bess, then CUT TO:

EXT. JACK'S SOD HOUSE - MARCH - DAY

Jack steps over a broken fence railing. A window is cracked,
the animals are gone.

INSIDE THE HOUSE - MORNING

Jack walks inside. A few roosters and wild turkeys have made it their home. Frost clings to the window panes.

He spots Emma's calico dress on top of her trunk. He can't be in here now. He walks out and sits on the front stoop, shivering in the biting March air.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. JACK'S SOD HOUSE - APRIL - DAY

Jack is sprawled on top of his bed, stripped to the waist. An open bottle of whiskey on the nightstand. The sun beats in through the cracked window.

LIZBETH(O.S.)

Daddy.

Jack rolls over, he hasn't shaved or bathed in weeks. Bess and Lizbeth are standing at the end of the bed.

JACK

Morning.

BESS

Afternoon.

She yanks the soiled bed sheet from beneath him.

JACK

Jesus.

BESS

You're better than this..

CUT TO:

EXT. BARN - MORNING

Jack has his mining pick in one hand as he scoops up his chisel and kerosene lamp preparing to leave for another mine.

Suddenly Bess appears. She lifts the mining pick from his hand, then his lantern.

JACK

What are you doing?

BESS
What are you doing?
You have a child to raise now.

JACK
Give me the pick, Bess.

Bess ignores him, the pick-axe resting on her shoulder as she heads toward the cabin.

BESS
(not facing him)
It'll make a fine hoe for the
field you're going to furrow,
Mr. Riley.

Jack looks at her in disbelief.

JACK
I'm startin' to have a lot of
sympathy for your husband, Mrs.
Curtis.

CUT TO:

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - A WEEK LATER

Transformed. The shelves have been ordered and stocked, the pots and pans cleaned.

Lizbeth with Bess's help is tucking in the clean sheets on her bed.

BESS'S POV OUT THE WINDOW: Jack is returning with his buckboard loaded with caged baby chickens, a baby hog and sheep. A cow trails behind on a rope.

CUT TO:

BESS AND LIZBETH

outside appraising Jack's purchases.

JACK
I had to trade just about
everything except my clothes.

BESS
It was wise of you to stop
there, Mr. Riley.

Jack can't help but smile. Never an inch...

THE SOD HOUSE - NIGHT

Jack lies in bed, his arm draped over the sleeping Lizzy.
He can't sleep. He's watching Bess sleeping across from him.
He rolls away from her...Bess opens her eyes, knowing he was
watching her...then returns to sleep.

CUT TO:

THE FIELD - DAY

Bess, a pouch full of seeds around her neck is throwing
handfuls of seeds in the furrowed fields. Lizzy walks beside
her.

Jack rides up to them.

JACK
Let's go.

BESS
We're not finished, Jack.

Jack leans over and takes the seed bag from around her neck.

BESS
(adamant)
Give me the seeds.

Jack gestures behind him. To Bess's surprise, he's strapped
Bess's camera equipment to his burro.

JACK
You said you wanted to shoot a Buffalo.

CUT TO:

A HERD OF BUFFALO

grazing in the tall grass.

Jack is helping Bess set up her tripod. Lizzy holds the
reins of their horses nearby.

BESS

the tripod over one shoulder, a rifle over her other, creeps
up on the herd. Jack behind her, carries the forty pound
camera box on his shoulder.

JACK
(sotto)
This is close enough.

She ignores him and keeps moving -- dangerously close.

JACK
(sotto)
They could stampede, Mrs.
Curtis.

Bess continues on. Jack has no choice but to follow.

CUT TO:

THE BUFFALO

and Bess beneath her camera hood. She's only a few dozen yards away from the five hundred pound animals. Jack is beside her, rifle cocked, "covering her." To say he's not worried would be a lie. To say he shouldn't be worried would be a bigger lie.

JACK
(ironic)
You certain you're close enough,
Mrs. Curtis. I mean we can't even
touch their noses.

Bess pops her head up and slides out her exposed plate, then drops it in her developing case. She has her photograph.

BESS
(calling his bluff)
Should we get closer, Mr.
Riley?

CUT TO:

THE SOD HOUSE - NIGHT

Lizzy is sound asleep, this time in Bess's bed. Jack is watching Bess "sleeping" from his bed.

He shuts his eyes and rolls on his side facing away from her.

The moment he does, Bess opens her eyes. This time he calls her bluff --

JACK
(eyes shut)
Sweat dreams, Mrs. Curtis.

Caught.

BESS
Yes. You too, Mr. Riley.

THE RIVER - DAY

Bess is drying Lizzy's hair in the thick bear grass.
Then hands her the towel.

BESS
Soap.

Lizzy dashes back grabs the soap and they head back through
the tall bear grass.

Bess follows behind her. She turns to see

JACK

up river washing himself in the ankle deep water. Bess
stops.

She wants to move on, but she can't take her eyes off his
naked body. Jack looks up, spots her and doesn't make any
attempt to cover himself. Hold then:

CUT TO

THE SOD - HOUSE

The field has been plowed. A small vegetable garden runs
alongside one side of the house. The fattened cow chews his
cud. It's a home again.

Bess and Jack are sitting on the hillside, finishing their
picnic lunch, watching Lizzy put Jack's mining pan on the
straw scarecrow -- it's a perfect hat. Jack's mining axe
rests on its "shoulder" and Jack's mining lantern in its
"hand."

BESS
...I have to get back. You're
set here.

JACK

Lizzy asked me why you had to
be her Aunt instead of her mom.

Bess doesn't respond.

JACK

I want to raise her. I don't know
if I can do it alone.

BESS

Women do it all the time.

Pause.

JACK

Have you ever loved a man, Mrs.
Curtis.

Jack's at his disarming best.

BESS

I'm married.

JACK

Uh huh...And have you ever
loved a man?

BESS

I'm leaving.

JACK

Maybe Emma would want you to
stay.

Pause.

BESS

I said I'm leaving, Jack.

CUT TO:

INT. WILL'S CABIN - NIGHT

Will and Bess are sitting at the table having their dinner in
silence. The CRACKLE of distant thunder.

WILL

You were gone so long.

BESS
I didn't intend to be.

They continue to eat in silence. Will watches her. Bess looks up and sees the sadness in Will's eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. WILL'S CABIN - RAIN - NIGHT

Bess carries a pail of dirty dishwater out the door.

A COARSE HAND

reaches out and grabs her. Before she can call for help, the man's other hand covers her mouth. For a moment we think it's another Cheyenne attack.

BESS
What are you --

Jack kisses her pressing her against the wall. She shoves him back.

BESS
Stop...Jack...st...

He kisses her again.

BESS
You have to go.

JACK
You can take your photographs, we'll go anywhere you want...Just be with me and Lizzy.

BESS
I said go!

He looks at her in disbelief...then without another word, he slowly walks off, climbs on his horse and rides off.

Bess watches him ride away, and keeps watching, holding back her tears, until he disappears.

CUT TO:

BESS AND WILL - DAWN

lying side by side in bed.

BESS
Will.

WILL
Yes.

He looks over at her; it's as if he can read her mind.

CUT TO:

EXT. WILL'S HOUSE - MORNING

Bess is standing on the porch as the rain pours down. Will is sitting on the stoop looking out at the fields.

WILL
(a long pause, with
great dignity)
I need so little...
(then)
What haven't I given you?

BESS
A piece of whatever's buried so
deep in you that I can't touch.

WILL
I don't understand.

BESS
(with great warmth)
I know.
(then)
I'm sorry...I truly am.

CUT TO:

EXT. WILL'S HOUSE - DAY

Bess rides toward us a mule carrying her bags and camera equipment trails behind her.

Will calls out from the end of the field:

WILL
Bess!

Bess sucks in her breath, tempted to stop, but she kicks her horse and trots on.

CUT TO:

EXT. JACK'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jack walks out. A hand covers his mouth. Bess shoves him against the wall, and kisses him, harder and deeper than he's ever been kissed.

CUT TO:

BESS AND JACK

making love against the back of the sod house as the rain pours down.

CUT TO:

LIZZY - DAY

waving one of Jack's brightly colored shirts high above her head in the middle of a seemingly deserted plain.

ON JACK

waving another shirt on the far side of a VAST HERD OF ANTELOPE. Jack and Lizzy run toward the antelope, confusing and frightening them to stampede.

WE DROP DOWN

to find Bess, lying flush in the tall grass with a Sharp's rifle on her shoulder.

She waits and waits until the antelope are practically on top of her, then fires! Misses. Misses again.

JACK'S POV: As the antelope with their sharp hooves, stampede seemingly right over where Bess is lying.

JACK
(hurries toward her)
Bess!

Nothing.

CUT TO:

BESS

lying in the grass her hands still covering her head -- too petrified to move. LIZZY taps her on the shoulder. She glances up to see --

Jack proudly holding up the dead antelope Bess shot. She's just glad to be alive.

CUT TO:

THE HOUSE NIGHT

sleeping with Lizbeth curled in her arms. Jack beside her. He's awake. Bess opens her eyes, and reaches out, across Lizzy, resting her hand on his.

CUT TO:

EXT. JACK'S HOUSE - DAY

Jack is working on the shaft of his busted windmill. He HEARS footsteps behind him. Before he can turn around --

WILL(O.S.)
It isn't right.

Jack glances over his shoulder to see Will standing a few yards behind him.

WILL
Turn around.

Will pulls out his pistol. COCKS IT.

Jack slowly turns; he's unarmed, defenseless.

WILL
On your knees.

Jack doesn't move.

JACK
I didn't take your wife. She left you...
You know that, Will.

WILL
On your knees!

Jack sees the determination in Will's eyes. Jack slowly kneels.

WILL
Put your face in the dirt.

JACK
Will...

WILL

Do it!

Jack puts his face in the dirt. Will steadies his hand, his finger on the trigger; he's going to shoot.

After what seems like an eternity, Will slowly lowers his gun.

WILL

I'm the one who would've been
there when Bess got sick, when
she got old. Me not you.

He turns and walks off, and, without looking back --

WILL

You're never gonna fix that shaft using
number four bolts. You need sixes.

Will climbs on his horse, and rides off.

CUT TO:

BESS AND LIZBETH

their hair wet, returning from the river carrying their shoes and wet towels.

BESS

Hey you.

Jack is still working on the windmill shaft.

JACK

Hey you.

She kisses him, then throws her wet towels over the line.

JACK

Bess...

He comes over and kisses her as if she were the most precious thing on the earth.

BESS

...You got my heart in your hand Mr.
Riley, and you better not drop it or
there will be hell to pay.

CUT TO:

INT. SOD HOUSE - SPRING - DAWN

Bess and Jack are asleep. FROM OFF SCREEN Lizbeth lets out a terrifying SCREAM!

LIZBETH

Mama!

Jack grabs the colt beside the bed and aims at the window where Lizbeth is pointing. It's --

KICKING HORSE

his nose pressed against the glass. He holds up his hands to surrender.

BESS AND JACK

open the door.

KICKING HORSE

The Army's rescued a woman
from the Shutai. It may be her.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - FORT LARAMIE WYOMING - DAY

Jack and Bess walk toward us, holding Lizzy's hands, following a shavetail LIEUTENANT. There's a hushed silence except for the clicking of their heels.

LIEUTENANT

...You should know we had to
take her against her will after
shooting the Brave she was
with.

DOCTOR

She's refused to eat, or speak.
But she so closely matched your
description, Captain Heinzelman
thought you should see her just
in case.

JACK

(sincerely, to Bess)

I don't think we should get our
hopes up.

They arrive at the door. Jack kneels beside Lizzy.

JACK

Wait here, Daddy will be right back.

Jack glances up at the doctor. The doctor takes Lizzy by the hand to prevent her from seeing into the ward. The Lieutenant opens the door.

THE WARD

White: the walls, floorboards, beds, even the single wooden chair. Several wounded, bandaged soldiers lie in cots.

In the far corner of the room, beneath a cross, a woman lies in bed. Her eyes are shut; her face bathed in a feverish sweat. Bess walks toward her.

The woman's face is dark brown and weather beaten. Her hair has been darkened with animal fat. She's rail thin and there's a charcoal colored tattoo on her chin.

Bess slowly sits beside her and brushes the hair out of her face.

BESS

Emma?

Emma opens her eyes to see Bess sitting beside.

BESS

(barely audible)

My God...

Emma recognizes, Bess... Silent tears roll down her cheeks. Bess puts her arms around her and pulls her close.

BESS

(tears streaking down her cheeks)

Jack... Jack!

ON JACK

LIEUTENANT(O.S.)

Is this your wife?

He's too stunned to have heard him.

LIEUTENANT

Sir, is this your wife, sir?

JACK
Yes, she is my wife.

LIEUTENANT
Her name please. For our records.

JACK
Her name. Her name is Emma Browne Riley.

Jack comes over to her. Bess gets up, their eyes briefly meet as she walks past him.

JACK
Emma...It's Jack.

Emma self consciously covers her tattoos with her fingers.

CUT TO:

LIZBETH

being led by the hand by Jack toward her mother. Lizzy hesitates, frightened by this woman who has become a stranger to her.

JACK
Come on now sweetheart. It's your mother.

Emma reaches out her for her. Lizbeth turns and races out the door.

JACK
Lizzy!

EXT. HALLWAY - DAY

Lizbeth runs out the door and streaks past Bess.

BESS
Lizbeth!

Bess starts after her, smashing into a MIDDLE-AGED MAN as he comes around the corner, sending his satchel flying.

BESS
Excuse me.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN
(doffs his top hat)
I am the one who should be apologizing.

The MAN is fastidiously dressed in a top hat and a three piece suit fresh off the rack from Marshall Field's. Bess takes off after Lizbeth.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL

Jack sits on the edge of his bed not facing his wife.

JACK
(haltingly)
It's that -- I tried to explain to Lizzy
that God took you. And now it's difficult
for her to understand...

Jack stops mid-sentence. It's been nearly two years since they've spoken, but it might as well have been ten.

EMMA
Jack...

JACK
Yes.

EMMA
(softly)
She looks beautiful.
(facing him)
...She looks like you.

CUT TO:

ENDLESS WAVES

of tall grass being swept by the wind. A BLACK DOT enters the frame.

CLOSER TO:

A HORSE DRAWN MILITARY AMBULANCE

as it slowly rolls through the waist deep grass. Bess rides behind the wagon.

INSIDE THE AMBULANCE

Emma is lying on her back covered with blankets. Jack sits beside her. Lizbeth at her feet.

Emma takes Jack's hand, places it on her chest, then gently rests her hand on his.

ON BESS

riding behind them. Jack looks up to see Bess watching him. Bess digs her heels into her horse and gallops ahead of the wagon.

CUT TO:

INT. SOD HOUSE - DAY

As Bess quickly gathers her dresses from the wardrobe. Empties her clothes, combs and brushes, earrings from the drawers and grabs a framed photo of Jack, Lizzy and herself from the wall.

CUT TO:

EXT. SOD HOUSE - DAY

Emma is being helped down from the ambulance by the soldiers and Jack as Bess looks on.

LIZBETH(O.S.)

...Give us today our daily bread...

INT. SOD HOUSE - DAY

Emma head bowed sits at one end of a table. Jack is at the other. Bess and Lizbeth sit across from one another.

LIZBETH WITH BESS'S HELP

... Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Thank you Father for this food we are about to eat.

BESS

And for bringing Emma safely home to us.

BESS/JACK/LIZBETH

Amen.

Emma remains silent.

CUT TO:

THE TABLE - LATER

The SOUND of tin forks and knives scraping tin plates. Everyone is eating except Emma; she hasn't moved; her head is bowed over her untouched plate of pork.

Jack glances up at Emma, at Bess, then back to Emma.

JACK
Would you like some help?

Emma, almost imperceptibly, shakes her head.

BESS
If you don't feel like eating it's
all right.

Emma picks up her knife and fork to begin...then changes her mind and slowly, carefully, sets both utensils down. There's a far away look in her eyes, a hesitancy in her voice...

EMMA
(barely audible)
I prayed for so long.

BESS
What, Em?

EMMA
(louder)
I prayed for so long....
(then)
I was so sure, so...certain that if I prayed
everyday you'd come and take me home...But
days went by...months...And then one
morning I woke up and I couldn't pray anymore.
I tried, but I couldn't...
(beat)
And little by little I got used to it, used
to being Cheyenne.
(looking at her plate of pork)
They won't eat mud and water animals and
now I can't. I can't sit in this chair, or
drink this wine...
(then)
Or even say grace anymore...

She accidentally knocks over a pitcher of buttermilk. The thick milk cascades to the floor.

EMMA
I...I'm sorry.

She tries to set the pitcher up-right, only making things worse, soaking her dress in the thick milk.

BESS
It'll be all right, Em.
(to the others)
It's going to take time. But it'll
be all right.

CUT TO:

INT. SOD HOUSE - NIGHT

BESS
Does it hurt?

Bess is scrubbing the jet black bear grease from Emma's hair over the wash-tub. It's as thick as tar. Emma's wearing a cotton lace camisole.

Emma shakes her head, no. Spotting the tin mirror resting by the towel --

EMMA
Please.

Bess hands the mirror to Emma; she hasn't seen herself in close to two years.

Emma runs her fingers across her weather beaten face, touching the lines around her eyes, the tattoo on her chin.

EMMA
He can't even look at me.

BESS
You're beautiful. You always were.

EMMA
Stay with me for a while.
Please.

BESS
Yes, of course.

EMMA
Will won't mind?

BESS
No...Will won't mind.

CUT TO:

EXT. HILL - NIGHT

Bess is finishing a bottle of Rye. She's sitting on a rocky outcropping getting drunk. Jack comes up behind her.

JACK
Give me that.

Jack tries to take the bottle from Bess's hand.

BESS
Let go. Jesus, Jack.

The bottle smashes against the rock.

JACK
I thought she was dead. I was sure she
she was dead.

BESS
Well you were wrong.

JACK
(forcefully)
You saw the locket. The bodies
were burned to the bone in that
camp.

Pause. Mustering her strength, then perhaps the hardest words she's ever spoken --

BESS
(not facing him)
You get in bed with her, you look in her
eyes, and you tell her...You tell her
you missed her...You tell her you
love her, Jack.

JACK
Don't do this.

BESS
She wants me to stay until she's
better.

JACK
And then?

Nothing from Bess.

Jack gently rests his hand on her shoulder...For a moment Bess takes it in her's, wraps her fingers around his. But Bess lets her hand slip away from his.

JACK

You can't just toss away what's between us like water from a bucket. Even you aren't that strong, Bess.

Jack starts toward the sod house.

Bess watches him go. She wants to stop him; she wants to cry out, to tell him she loves him more than any woman could love any man on this earth...but she watches him disappear into the cabin.

CUT TO:

BESS'S BUCKBOARD - MOVING - DAY

Lizzy sits between Bess and Emma as they ride toward town. Bess glances at Lizzy who sits silently cradling her wooden doll. Bess reaches over and grabs Emma's hand.

BESS

You all right?

Emma nods.

BESS

Then forward into the breech, my friend.

She snaps the reins.

THE TOWN - DAY

Burnt Forks hasn't grown much: a post office, a dry goods store, a new saloon.

ON EMMA AND BESS

riding through town. People may not literally stop and stare, but pretty darn close. They all want to see the woman who has been raped and lived with the "savages."

In these Victorian times, Emma is worse than the most abject whore -- a Leper beyond cure or moral redemption.

INT. STORE - DAY

The CLERK is reluctant to sell Emma the elegant cotton dress she is trying on.

CLERK

...It just arrived in from Boston,
perhaps there's something more suitable
for...

BESS

More suitable for whom, Mister Sackler?

CLERK

I meant more appropriate for the
...season.

EMMA

It's too expensive, Bess.

BESS

(insistent)

We'll take the dress, that hat there, and
the shawl and these shoes.

CLERK

Yes ma'am.

BESS

And mister Sackler.

CLERK

Yes ma'am.

BESS

I'm not the only ma'am in here.

CLERK

Yes, ma'am.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET, BURNT FORKS - DAY

Emma walks out wearing one of her new cotton dresses.

BESS

Let me see, turn around. Turn a...round.

(Emma does)

You could melt a block of ice.

Emma turns around then sees her reflection in the store
window. Pleased.

Bess hands Emma her cigarette. Emma takes a few drags then
hands it back to her in silence...For the first time since
she's returned, we detect the glimmer of a smile.

From off screen:

LIZZY(O.S.)

Mama!

They turn to see Lizzy tear around the corner and race toward them. She's being chased by several CHILDREN making Indian "Whooping" noises.

Emma is expecting Lizzy to run into her arms, but her daughter wraps her arms around Bess's waist instead.

The children have drawn a "tattoo" with a piece of charcoal on Lizzy's chin -- exactly where Emma's has her's.

BESS

(to the children)

Go on. Leave her alone.

The kids scatter. Lizzy can't stop crying. Bess scoops her up in her arms.

BESS

Now now...now little one.

ON EMMA

watching her daughter cling to Bess -- devastated.

CUT TO:

EXT. JACK'S HOUSE - DAY

Jack is talking to ALEX BYRNE the fastidiously dressed man Bess bumped into at the hospital.

Jack holds several books in his hand. One is the "The Captivity of Mary Richardson."

BYRNE

...As you can see there's a tremendous demand for captivity stories not only in the East but in Europe as well.

JACK

(incredulous)

My wife, to write her story?

We HEAR a wagon approaching in the distance.

BYRNE

With our help, yes.

JACK
...I don't think so, Mr. Byrne.

BYRNE
I don't think you realize how
much we'd be willing to pay, Mr. Riley.

They turn to see Bess approaching in the wagon with
Emma and Lizzy beside her.

CUT TO:

EMMA

as Jack helps her down from the wagon. Byrne beside him.

JACK
Emma, this man has come a long way to
see you.

Byrne extends his hand, but Emma, devastated by what's
happened in town, ignores him and walks toward the cabin.

BYRNE
(calling after her)
Alex Byrne. McMillan & Puttnam.
It's a pleasure to meet you Mrs. Riley!

Emma slams the cabin door. Jack, dumbfounded, glances at
Bess.

INT. SOD HOUSE - NIGHT

Emma tosses her hat box on the floor, then sits on the edge
of the bed feeling like a caged animal. She can HEAR Jack,
Byrne and Bess discussing what happened outside.

As she sits alone in the cabin, she notices, for the first
time the neatly aligned pots, the way the linens are neatly
stacked on the shelves. The hand made curtains wafting on
the breeze...A woman's touch.

CUT TO:

EMMA

frantically searching for proof of what she she fears is
true.

She opens a trunk, and rummages through it, nothing - just
Jack's clothes.

She pulls open the top bureau drawer, nothing. The next. One after another. Finally the bottom drawer. Still nothing. She tears off a canvas cover in the corner of the room revealing Bess's 8x10 camera, and several boxes of equipment.

She opens one box filled with lenses, then another, this one has Bess's prints inside. Emma shuffles through the prints.

EXT. SOD HOUSE - DAY

Bess is has little patience for Byrne's pitch.

BYRNE

...Mrs. Riley's experiences are as exotic to the rest of the world as if she'd been kidnapped by Aborigines.

Byrne pulls out a broadsheet(a small poster)and hands it to Bess:

INSERT: " THE CAPTIVITY OF MARY RICHARDSON. SEE AND HEAR HER CHILLING TALE SUNDAY NIGHT SEVEN O'CLOCK.

BRYNE

In addition to a memoir, there would be an extensive lecture tour up and down the Eastern Seaboard as well as Europe.

BESS

You mean parade her like a freak in a carnival.

JACK

He didn't say that, Bess.

BESS

Jack, Mr. Byrne is leaving.

Bess starts toward the house.

BYRNE

(calling after her)

I don't believe lyceum societies and women's auxillaries qualify as freak shows!

Bess ignores him.

JACK

Bess!

BYRNE

Perhaps there would be a better time.

CUT TO:

INT. SOD HOUSE

INSERT THE PHOTOGRAPHS:

Shots of Buffalos, landscapes...hunters...A shot of Jack.
...Another shot of Jack and Lizzy. And finally...a Collodion
print of Jack, Bess, and Lizzy at Christmas.

CUT TO:

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

The middle of the night. Jack is sound asleep. Emma lies
beside him unable to sleep. She glances at-

Bess sharing a bed with Lizzy. They look like mother and
daughter,

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON EMMA

cutting her hair above her ears with a crude scissors. First
one side, then, the back, then the other side...finally her
locks. (A Cheyenne mourning ritual.)

EMMA

leans into frame and kisses her daughter gently on the
forehead so as not to wake her. Lizzy briefly stirs.

CUT TO:

THE PRAIRIE - DAWN

Perfectly still. In the dark blue, pre-dawn light it
resembles the ocean on a windless day. The SOUND of horse
hooves.

EMMA

enters the bottom of our frame riding away from us, riding
away from Jack's house into the vast prairie.

She removes her new hat and lets it fall to the ground
....then her vest....her white starched blouse...

HIGH OVERHEAD

a trail of clothes behind her as Emma disappears toward the horizon.

INT. HOUSE - DAWN

Bess wakes up and sees Emma is not beside Jack. Only Emma's golden hair neatly laid out in a row on top of the sheets.

CUT TO:

EXT. PRAIRIE BESS AND JACK - DAY

Bess kneels as she picks up the hat with it's silk bow she bought for Emma.

Jack, arms akimbo, stands facing the horizon.

CUT TO:

INT. SOD HOUSE - DAY

Jack is trying to calm Bess down. Lizzy's sitting at the table.

BESS

...She knew. We should have told her. I should have told her.

JACK

It's a helluva lot more complicated than that and you know it.

BESS

Lizzy please go outside.

LIZZY

Why?

BESS

Do as I say Lizzy, now!

LIZZY

I'm glad she's gone. She's not my mama.

Lizzy tears out the door.

JACK

Lizzy!...

JACK
(Lizzy's gone)
You're so goddamn self righteous.
Lizzy was happy. You were happy. We love
each other. That's the simple part.
(then)
How do you know Emma won't be happier
out there?!

It's as if a cloud has passed over Jack, and Bess will never
be able to see him in the same light again.

JACK
How can you be so sure is all I'm saying.
(then)
Christ Bess, I loved her too.

Hold on Bess, then:

CUT TO:

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

Bess is riding toward us, when, from OFF SCREEN:

JACK(O.S.)
Bess!

Bess turns to see Jack galloping toward her. She continues
riding.

JACK
If anyone's going after her,
it's gonna be me.

Bess ignores him, and continues riding.

JACK
(dismissive)
Go take care of Lizzy, I'll
bring her back.

Still riding.

BESS
(sharp)
How hard would you try, Jack.

JACK
I can't let you go by yourself.

Bess draws her colt and aims it at him.

JACK
(half laughs)
Come on, put that away.

Bess fires three SHOTS aiming at the ground in front of Jack's mare. She bucks, but Jack controls her, and rides toward Bess.

BESS
Please Jack. Go back.

JACK
It's gonna have to be right between the eyes.

He rides toward her. Bess, cocks the gun aims and --
FIRES striking him in the ankle.

JACK
Goddamnit to hell!

He slides off his horse in clutching his ankle. It hurts like hell, but it's little more than a flesh wound.

BESS
If I don't come back, you must
take care of Lizzy. You hear?

She whips her horse with her reigns and rides on.

JACK
Bess...Bess!

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT LARAMIE

KICKING HORSE, the scout who helped Jack, is putting feed bags on his horse. Bess rides up to him. He glances up and we

CUT TO:

A TRAIN - DAY

stopped in the middle of nowhere. Four cars, a coal car, and an engine sending up mushroom clouds of smoke.

Through the dust we see

A BAND OF SOUTHERN CHEYENNE

being loaded into railroad cars under the close supervision of a brigade of the Fifth Calvary. The Braves are chained together. The men and women are emaciated: pneumonia, lack of food, Cholera. Many of the children are bone thin from dysentery.

KICKING HORSE finishes speaking to a BRAVE who is about to be put on the train. The Scout then canters over to Bess.

KICKING HORSE

If she's gone back to the Shutai...
(he points north of the tracks)
She's out there.

BESS

Is that all he said?

KICKING HORSE

No. That I was responsible for this.

CUT TO:

BESS AND KICKING HORSE

riding across the tracks in front of the engine.

MAJOR NICHOLSON rides up to them along with his ADJUTANT.

The adjutant grabs Bess's reins, stopping her horse.

MAJOR

Ma'am, it's ill advised to cross these tracks.

BESS

Why is that, sir?

MAJOR

There are hostiles who have refused to surrender to the United States Government.

BESS

It doesn't look like there's any room left on your train.

MAJOR

I have orders to subdue them.

Bess knows exactly what he saying.

BESS

Thank you for your candor, Major.

The adjutant lets go of Bess's reins, convinced she isn't going to continue.

Bess taps her horse with her spurs and takes off across the tracks, due north...finally breaking into a full gallop.

Kicking Horse gallops after her leaving the stunned Major and his adjutant in his wake.

CUT TO:

EXT. SOUTHERN MONTANA TERRITORY - DAWN

Bess is riding across the plain with Kicking Horse beside her.

They spot gray columns of smoke rising in the distance -- enough smoke to guarantee it's an Indian camp.

Kicking horse reins in his horse. Bess pulls up beside him.

KICKING HORSE

That's their camp.

Bess hands him five gold coins.

BESS

You work for the Army. I imagine you wouldn't get a warm welcome.

KICKING HORSE

And yourself?

BESS

I'm certain I've done more foolish things in my time. But I can't seem to recall them at the moment.

Kicking horse returns her money. Looks into her eyes, then without another word, turns and gallops away.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE VALLEY - LATER

Bess is riding alone now through the mist enshrouded valley.

Dotting the landscape are dozens CHEYENNE BURIAL PLATFORMS ten feet high. On top lie the corpses wrapped in Buffalo hides. The valley of the dead.

Bess senses SOMEONE following her, but when she looks behind her -- she's alone.

She continues on...then glancing up and spots

ON TOP OF A PLATEAU

A HALF DOZEN braves riding parallel to her.

She glances to her left:

Another HALF DOZEN WARRIORS riding in the same single file formation on the opposite ridge.

Bess continues riding, eyes straight, hoping she can at least make it to the camp.

TWO BRAVES

one from each ridge, break off and streak down the hill brandishing their war clubs high above their heads.

Bess stops her horse.

She quickly tosses her Colt far in front of her, then yanks her Winchester from it's saddle holster and drops it on the ground along with her holster of spare bullets.

The two WARRIORS gallop toward Bess hell bent on a kill.

But they stop short when they clearly see it's a woman with her weapons on the ground.

The TWO BRAVES are hardly more than children. Fifteen.

She slowly pulls out a PHOTOGRAPH she took of EMMA and hands it to one of the Braves who, in turn, passes it to his companion.

BRAVE ONE

Istas.

BRAVE TWO
(taps photo)

Istas.

Bess, uncertain but hopeful, repeats what she thinks is Emma's name.

BESS
Yes, Istas.

CUT TO:

THE RAILROAD TRACKS - DAY

The train is gone. The troops have moved out. Only a chuck wagon and TWO SOLDIERS, packing it up, remain.

JACK, his foot in a bloody bandage, rides up to the soldiers. They point in the direction of the Cheyenne camp. Jack tips his hat, then gallops across the tracks.

CUT TO:

THE CHEYENNE CAMP - DAY

pitched on a bluff. The river far below. The lodges stand in concentric circles, columns of smoking rising from each one. Rain pours down.

Bess, flanked by the young Braves, rides through the camp. The Cheyenne are as sickly and pale as those Bess saw back at the station.

Spittle lands on Bess's cheek; she ignores it and continues, facing straight ahead.

CUT TO:

THE MIDDLE OF THE CAMP - DAY

The YOUNG CHIEF is looking at the photograph of Emma.

BESS
...I must see her.

The impassive chief doesn't respond.

BESS
I have food. Beans, dried beef --

She unties the sacks of beans, corn and dried beef strapped to her horse.

The Chief drops the photograph in the mud, and walks off.

BESS

I beg you.

She starts after the Chief. One of the Brave's grabs Bess's arm and yanks her back. She falls to her knees in the mud.

She starts to rise. But the Brave pulls out Bess's gun and cock's the trigger.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Go home, Bess. Go home or they will
kill you.

Bess turns to see Emma standing a few yards behind her. She has a blanket draped over her shoulder, but she is still wearing the skirt Bess bought her.

EMMA

(in Cheyenne)

She'll go now.

The Brave lowers his gun.

BESS

No, Emma. I'm taking you home.

Emma's face is drained of all emotion. They stand facing one another, oblivious to the pouring rain.

EMMA

(coldly)

You shouldn't have come.

Emma turns away and starts off.

BESS

Emma --

Emma keeps walking.

BESS

Emma, please try and
understand.

Emma stops, faces her.

EMMA

I understand. I came back and
you combed my hair, and held my
hand, and looked me in the eye,
and you couldn't tell me that
you loved my husband.

It's like someone knocked the air out of Bess. There's
nothing to say except the truth.

BESS

...I didn't know how.

A Brave gallops through the camp, calling out: "The Blue
Coats are coming!" The few remaining braves grab their
weapons. Women scoop up their children.

AN ELDERLY WOMAN comes from behind a lodge and CALLS for
Emma to come quickly.

BESS

I'm not leaving you here to
die.

EMMA

I belong here.

BESS

You have a child.

EMMA

(voice cracking)

I have a child here too. One
who needs me.

BESS

Oh Emma...

EMMA

When I woke up in the hospital, I
thought at least I had Jack, Lizzy, and...
you. And one day my son would be one of the
many things I'd have to learn to live without.

(stronger, fighting tears)

But you took my family, Bess. I belong here
now.

BESS

He still loves you.

EMMA
(cold fury)
Go home Bess...You've seen your
Buffalo and you've seen your
red man.

A TREMENDOUS explosion rocks the camp....Followed by
another, and another.

ARTILLERY SHELLS

rain down on the camp. Smoke and fire quickly engulf the
lodges. Terrifying screams. Chaos.

The Brave and Bess have been knocked to the ground, Bess
glances up to see:

Emma grabs her BABY from the old woman. He is strapped to a
cradleboard. Emma hurries into the thick of the camp. Bess
gets to her feet.

BESS
Emma!

BESS'S POV: through the smoke. Emma runs through the smoke
running with dozens of other women and children toward the
bluff as BRAVES drop to their knees and form a line trying
to slow the calvary assault.

CUT TO:

THE TROOPS

tearing through the camp shooting and hacking at anyone
alive.

CUT TO:

AT THE BLUFF

The women and children are huddled behind a thin wall of
Braves. Bows and arrows against guns and cannons -- a futile
last stand.

WE FIND Emma clutching her child as the valiant BRAVES are
hit and fall around her.

WE SEE

Bess, oblivious to the cannon fire and bullets, racing
toward her.

FROM OFF SCREEN:

MAJOR (O.S.)
Sound the charge!

SERGEANT(O.S.)
Sound the charge!

ON THE CHEYENNE

Realizing it's futile, one Brave SHOUTS to the terrified women . Several protest, shake their heads, no. He SHOUTS at them again. And we understand what he's saying when we see --

First one, then another woman holding children in their arms or by the hands LEAP off the sheer cliff to the river far below. Like Lemmings.

ON BESS

she's winged by a bullet and stumbles forward.

ON EMMA

standing on the edge of the precipice holding her baby strapped tight to the cradleboard. She jumps.

BESS
Emma!

ON EMMA

squeezing her baby to her chest as she plunges down the cliff and disappears beneath the roiling white water.

BESS

dragging her wounded leg, inches toward the cliff under a hail of bullets.

The SOUND of a BUGLE and thundering HORSE HOOVES from off screen.

THE CLIFF

As Bess looks at the rapids far below. Then, mustering her strength she leaps over the edge.

CUT TO:

BESS

drops down the sheer cliff.

CUT TO:

THE RAPIDS

Emma is choking, spitting water. She struggles to keep her baby's head above the foaming water. The infant is still strapped to the wooden cradleboard.

Bess spots Emma downstream as Emma is sucked into a whirlpool. The baby pops out and floats away from her, then disappears beneath the foaming water.

EMMA

NO!!!

Bess struggling against the current, swims toward where the baby went under. (NOTE: Emma doesn't know Bess is in the river.)

CUT TO:

A FORK IN THE RIVER.

Emma is sucked down the left branch of the river.

BESS

Emma!

Emma can't possibly hear her.

Emma is swept along by the furious current, searching for her baby. But to her horror, all she sees is roiling white water.

CUT TO:

BESS

being thrown against a boulder by the current, smashing her hip. She disappears down the RIGHT FORK of the river.

ON BESS

as she pops to the surface...spinning around, trying to find Emma.

BESS

Emma!

Nothing...then, miraculously, she spots --

EMMA'S BABY

riding the surface of white water. The baby's still strapped to the wooden cradleboard.

Bess catches up to him. He's alive!

BESS
(calling out)
Emma...EMMA!

Emma and Bess are carried farther and farther apart by the swiftly moving current.

CUT TO:

OVERHEAD

We glimpse two heads -- two black dots bobbing above the white water going down opposite forks of the river.

MUCH HIGHER NOW SO WE

can see the North and South forks of the Salmon River cutting across the high plains in nearly opposite directions.

CUT TO:

THE CHEYENNE CAMP - DAY

Indians lie in the smoke and dirt like pieces of raw beef in a charnel house. A single GUNSHOT here...Another there, as the Troops mop up and tend to their wounded.

WE GLIMPSE JACK

riding into the camp. He's too late. The burning flesh, the stench and screeching of the wounded is overwhelming.

He slides off his horse and picks his way through the corpses.

JACK
(calling out)
Bess!...Emma!...Bess!

SERGEANT
(spotting Jack)
Hey, you. Get out of here.

JACK
Not this time.

SERGEANT
I said get the hell away from
here!

JACK
(tears in his eyes)
Not till I find them!

A wounded BRAVE grabs a dead soldier's pistol and FIRES it until it's empty. One shot hits a TROOPER. TWO other shots strike Jack in the chest and shoulder. He crumples forward.

The Brave is immediately hit with a half dozen rounds from the soldiers.

The Sergeant kneels down over Jack. He's dead. A Lieutenant comes over.

LIEUTENANT
Bury him with the rest. Maybe
he'll find who he was looking
for there.

The Sergeant signals two soldiers to come over. They pick Jack's body up by his arms and legs. Unnoticed by anyone, something slips from Jack's fist and lands in the mud.

It's the locket Bess gave Emma. The locket has sprung open. We see the womens' photos before they're crushed by the hoof of a passing horse.

CUT TO:

A POOL OF WATER - DAWN

Water laps gently against the golden sand bar at the river's edge.

A WOMAN'S HAIR splayed in the water floats onto the screen. It's Bess. Her eyes are shut, a bloody gash across the side of her head. Emma's BABY lies nearby, face up, strapped to the cradleboard.

A PAIR OF BOOTS - DAY

splash through the water.

HUNTER(O.S.)
They're alive.

He's joined by another HUNTER. They try to lift Bess up. She cries out in pain, grabbing her hip.

MAN

Easy now, she's pretty busted up.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - BUTTE, MONTANA TERRITORY - DECEMBER

Snow flurries. Bess, carrying Emma's baby wrapped in thick blanket, limps down the front steps of the hospital

CUT TO:

EXT. BESS - DAY

We watch Bess riding slowly riding away from us. The baby strapped to her back on the cradleboard.

BESS

...Well little one, if your mama's out there, we'll find her. Till then, we got to settle on a name.

(pause)

How about...Emmet.

(the baby whimpers)

No. All right then...

Bess and the baby become and smaller and smaller, pin pricks on the horizon as the snow falls like a curtain of white silk.

BESS

This could be a bit biblical.

But how about...

DISSOLVE TO:

A WILD WEST SHOOTING GALLERY - DENVER - COLORADO -
- FIVE YEARS LATER

BESS

...Adam.

A line of target BUFFALO HEADS. Boom. A hit Boom, another hit. Whoever is shooting is a crack shot.

ADAM

Right between the eyes.

The shooter, ADAM, is now six year's old; a sandy-haired, blue eyed, half breed.

The Woman who reaches in and lifts his hand off the fake gun is, of course, BESS.

BESS
All right, Buffalo Bill we have
work to do.

Bess's dress is simple and worn, Her face is weather-beaten. She looks ten years older. She's clearly poor, but she hasn't lost any of her dignity.

ADAM
Maaa...

BESS
(imitating his inflection)
Aaadam...

She lifts the gun from his hand. Enough.

CUT TO:

INT. BESS'S PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO - NIGHT

A painted canvas backdrop of the Rocky Mountains. Circles are cut for the faces of the two horsemen "chasing" two Indians on ponies.

The sign above reads: WILD WEST TINTYPES FIFTY CENTS THREE FOR A DOLLAR.

The room falls off into darkness where the box camera rests. Bess is framing a print with Adam, her back to the back drop.

BESS
...When you get older, I'll
take you to shoot some real
Buffalo...If there are any
left.

ADAM
Promise.

From OFF SCREEN we hear a young girl's voice.

YOUNG GIRL(O.S.)
One photograph, pleeease.

MAN(O.S.)

Your mother will be furious if we're late.

YOUNG GIRL(O.S.)

We won't be. Swear.

BESS

(without turning around)

Welcome to the Wild West. Poke your heads through those holes and I'll be right with you.

Bess ducks beneath her camera cloth without glancing at her patrons. Adam hands Bess a fresh glass plate.

BESS

Give me a second to get you in focus...

BESS'S POV: Soft focus. As the picture resolves we see the young girl is --

LIZZY, now nine, in a striking green satin dress with a pearl necklace. The man is BYRNE.

BESS

That's better. Now it's for...

Realizing Bess stops in mid-sentence.

BESS

A big smile from the rider on Spotty.

Lizbeth smiles. The photographic powder explodes. Bess is careful to remain in the shadows.

BYRNE

(stepping forward)

How much do we owe you?

CUT TO:

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Rain. Lizzy and Byrne hurry down the alley beneath an umbrella. Lizzy is holding up the tintype.

LIZBETH

It doesn't look much like the wild west to me.

BYRNE
Hurry, up Lizbeth. Please.

LIZZY
(ironically)
No, we wouldn't want to miss
the big lump-in-the-throat
finale.

They disappear into the side door of a large auditorium.
We drop back to see BESS, under her umbrella, following
them.

CUT TO:

INSIDE THE AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

As Bess squeezes in the back door, shaking out her
umbrella.

FROM OFF SCREEN:

EMMA(O.S)
...I climbed out of the river,
alive but alone, as lost as
Moses and his tribe in the
desert...
(turning a page)
The Cheyenne believe that a
person alone is not a human
being. And that the greatest
pain one can suffer is to
wander the earth alone.

ON BESS AT THE BACK OF THE AUDITORIUM

in her cheap cotton dress, and worn derby stands glimpsing
Emma for the first time.

EMMA'S poised, graceful and stunning in a floor-length
white dress which resembles the one Bess was wearing when we
first met her. Even Emma's hair resembles Bess's earlier
style. Only the tattoo on Emma's chin visibly reminds us of
her former tribulations.

She's reading the concluding chapter from her book -- "MY
LIFE WITH THE CHEYENNE" -- to rows upon rows of wealthy,
plump and pampered women who hang on her every word.

EMMA

It wasn't until months and months later that I learned my husband had died in the attack, and I discovered my daughter had been sent home to Chicago. My dear daughter who is here with me tonight. Lizbeth.

Lizbeth, on cue, stands and waves to the audience. Then turns away from the audience and rolls her eyes -- she's heard it all a million times.

EMMA

Yes, I am tattooed. Yes I am scarred for life. But the Cheyenne are right. The most painful wounds aren't those etched on our faces, or on our arms, but those in our hearts.
(slowly closes her book for dramatic effect)
Thank you all so much for coming tonight...Thank you.

The APPLAUSE begins. One moist-eyed WOMAN rises to her feet, then another, until everyone in the auditorium is on their feet giving Emma a standing ovation.

Bess is the only one not clapping. A swirl of emotions.

BYRNE

Miss Browne has a ten p.m. train to San Francisco. If you'd like her to sign an edition of her book, please make your way to the front of the auditorium. Quickly, please.

Bess watches the women engulf Emma as she steps down from the stage. It's as if Emma were royalty.

CUT TO:

INT. BESS'S TENT - NIGHT

Bess slowly walks into the small tent. Adam is sitting on the edge of the unmade cot, reading a dime novel, "Hurricane Nell."

She stands watching him for a beat, then:

BESS
What have you got there?

He doesn't look up.

ADAM
'Hurricane Nell.' She's being mauled
by a bear.

BESS
Think she'll make it?

He nods still buried in the book. Bess walks over to him,
and presses his head against her chest.

ADAM
Will you tell me a story?

BESS
No, it's time for bed.

ADAM
The one where we floated down the
rapids.

BESS
(snaps at him)
You heard what I said.

She blows out the gas lamp, tucks him in, then sits on the
edge of the bed in the half light. The SOUND of a train
WHISTLE in the distance.

BESS
Hey...Do you know how much I
love you?

Their nightly ritual.

ADAM
(by rote)
More than all the stars in the
sky. Fiercer than the fiercest
of lion's. Deeper than the
deepest of oceans.

BESS
More or less.
(kissing his forehead)
More. Much much more.

We stay on Bess sitting in the darkness on the edge of Adam's bed...Finally, she removes the pins from her hair, then slowly unbuttons her blouse...We hold on Bess's profile looking RIGHT then

CUT TO:

EMMA'S PROFILE - TRAIN CAR

looking left. She's seated by the window reading Harper's Magazine, a picture of Alexander Graham Bell on the cover.

LIZBETH(O.S.)

I'm glad Byrne's not coming with us anymore. His feet smelled.

Lizzy is sitting across from Emma in the first class car.

EMMA

Thank you for sharing that with me, Lizzy.

The train WHISTLE BLOWS. A burst of steam. Lizzy shoves aside a stack of her mother's books, and pulls out a worn edition of "David Copperfield."

LIZBETH

You know what I think? I think you should write a new book. But by yourself this time. It's so cornball.

Something slips from the pages of Lizzy's book. It's the photograph Bess took of Lizzy.

Emma picks it up and is about to return it to Lizzy when she spots the ink stamp on the back of the tintype:

E. D. STANFORD
PHOTOGRAPHER

EMMA

Lizzy...

CUT TO:

INT. TRAIN CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Emma hurries down the narrow corridor. Lizzy stands the far end of the car.

LIZZY

It's right behind the auditorium. But
mama --

EMMA

Just wait here, Lizzy.

CUT TO:

EXT./INT. BESS'S PHOTO STALL - NIGHT

Deserted. The painted sign saying WILD WEST TINTYPES
PHOTOGRAPHER E.D. STANFORD swings in the breeze above the
painted backdrop.

Emma's looks around for someone to help her, but the rest of
the stalls are closed and shuttered for the night.
Crestfallen, Emma heads back into a waiting carriage.

CUT TO:

THE TRAIN PLATFORM - NIGHT

as Emma hurries toward her train.

Suddenly, through the swirling steam and smoke, Bess appears
like an apparition. Emma slows...stops.

EMMA

Bess...

BESS

...How have you been, Emma.

A long pause.

EMMA

I'm...good...

Emma holds out the tintype Bess took of Lizzy.

EMMA

All these years...Why didn't you
tell Lizzy?

BESS

It didn't seem like a good
idea.

EMMA

She'd never let me hear the end
of it if she knew I saw you.
She's such a terror, Bess.
Cocky, headstrong...I can't
imagine who she gets it from.

Seeing the profound sadness in Bess's eyes:

EMMA

Bess, are you all right?

BESS

Yes. I just -- I brought someone. Someone
I want you to meet.

EMMA

(hopeful)

You're married?

BESS

No...No, I'm not.

The train WHISTLE BLOWS.

BESS

I'll be back...

Bess starts off.

EMMA

Bess!

But she's vanished in the steam.

CUT TO:

INT. STATION - NIGHT

BESS comes up to Adam, who is sitting on a bench in the
deserted, cavernous station. A CONDUCTOR reads a newspaper
beside him.

BESS

On your feet, Buffalo Bill...

Bess kneels in front of Adam. He's wearing his Sunday best,
right down to his Buster Brown shoes. A western comic book
in one hand, his tiny suitcase in the other.

ADAM

(Bess cinches his tie)
Do I have to wear this?

BESS

Do I have to answer you again?

BESS

Now you listen to me. I'm going
to take you to meet someone.
And even though you don't know
her yet, she also loves you.
More than all the lions and all
the oceans, and all the stars
in the sky. And she will love
you and protect you for the
rest of your life.

ADAM

Just like you?

BESS

Just like me.

Bess squeezes him tight, unable to let go.

From off screen:

WOMAN(O.S.)

Bess.

Bess looks up to see Emma standing a few yards away. Adam's
back is still to Emma.

Bess lets Adam go, and slowly stands.

BESS

I...I want you to meet the boy
I've been raising. His name is
Adam.

Bess rests her hands on Adam's shoulders and gently turns
him toward Emma.

Emma steps closer. It takes a moment, but only a moment for
Emma to realize it is her son.

Emma kneels in front of him.

EMMA

Hello, Adam.

ADAM
Hello, Ma'am.

Emma brushes the stray hairs off his forehead.

EMMA
It's so nice to see you.
(then)
Naaxato Hon-ox-haxaza.
...I've missed you so much.

Adam looks at his mother, then at Bess. His eyes full of wonder. Emma hugs him tight.

Emma looks up at Bess.

BESS
I never meant to hurt you,
Emma.

EMMA
Nor I you.

Emma reaches out for Bess. Bess takes Emma's hands in hers...Then, she pulls Bess close and hugs her. It's been so long.

Another blast of the WHISTLE. Emma lets her go.

EMMA
Come with me, Bess.
(then)
Come west with me.

LIZBETH
(O.S.)
Mama, the doors are closing!

EMMA
I wouldn't have even had the
courage to get off that train
in Burnt Fork if it wasn't for
you.

Lizzy hurries up to them.

LIZBETH
Bess?
(wrapping her arms around Bess)
Bess!

CONDUCTOR (O.S.)
All aboard!

The final BLASTS of the WHISTLE. We hear the pullman doors slamming one after another. We hold on Bess, still not certain...then

CUT TO:

A SWIRLING CLOUD OF STEAM

We see Bess leading the charge, Adam in tow, then Lizzy and finally Emma. They're racing alongside the train as it pulls away from the station gaining speed.

BESS
(breathing heard)
You think this time maybe we'll
get it right?

EMMA
(breathing harder)
I doubt it...
(then)
But I do have the highest of
hopes.

A CONDUCTOR

reaches out from the bottom step of last car. He pulls the two children up first, then Emma and finally Bess.

CUT TO:

THE REAR OF THE TRAIN - MOVING -NIGHT

Emma, Adam Bess and Lizzy are together on the tiny platform. Emma points at the sky.

It is filled with more stars than we've ever seen. Adam points at one constellation, Lizzy at another. Bess at another.

We hold on the four of them squeezed together, gazing up at the night sky. A whole new world lays ahead of them.

The train pulls farther and farther away until all that remains is a swirl of smoke and a single brake light which grows dimmer...and dimmer...until it vanishes in the darkness.

THE END