

BUNTLINE AND CODY

PILOT

Written By

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BUNTLINE AND CODY

EPISODE ONE

"STRANGE BEDFELLOWS"

TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. HILL OVERLOOKING CHEYENNE CAMP - DAY

A LINE OF CAVALRY TROOPERS strung out along the crest. Horses pawing, restless.

At one end, A GROUP OF PAWNEE SCOUTS, commanded by MAJOR FRANK NORTH, (30s), world weary, weathered face. The Pawnee wear an odd mix of clothing: some only a loincloth; others an overcoat and loin cloth; others pantaloons, no shirt, and a cavalry cap.

CHYRON: *The Battle of Summit Springs, Nebraska Sandhills, July 11, 1869*

Major North looks down his group of scouts, as he speaks to them.

NORTH

(in Pawnee)

*No women and children. We only go  
after Tall Bull and his Cheyenne  
Dog Soldiers.*

The scouts shake their heads in agreement.

Next to Major North, a YOUNG TROOPER WITH CORPORAL STRIPES -- he speaks with an Irish brogue:

CORPORAL

(surly)

You speak their shite talk then.

NORTH

Sir.

CORPORAL

Sir.

NORTH

I do.

CORPORAL

What'd you tell 'em, sir?

NORTH

Anyone who shoots a child or a woman answers to me.

CORPORAL

Ah, surely that comes with a wink, it does.

NORTH

It does not.

The line of Blue Coats moves down the hill at a slow trot.

A BUGLE CALL - THE CHARGE

The Pawnee scouts race ahead like greyhounds from a starting gate.

EXT. CHEYENNE CAMP - DAY

The Pawnee Scouts swarm the camp ahead of the Troopers, catching the Cheyenne by surprise.

Chaos and panic as TALL BULL, THE CHEYENNE CHIEF, slides gracefully onto his horse, pulling his WIFE AND CHILD up behind him.

He yells to other warriors.

TALL BULL

(in Pawnee)

*Follow me. We fight until we die.*

He races out onto the plains.

Other warriors jump on their horses and disperse in all directions.

The Troopers arrive in a second wave: uprooting teepees and running down women and children, herding them into groups like cattle.

During the melee, a CHEYENNE WARRIOR springs onto the back of Major North's steed. He moves to slit North's throat, but the major jams his Colt revolver under his arm, and blows the warrior from his horse.

Nearby, TWO TROOPERS rip open a teepee to find a YOUNG WHITE WOMAN laying dead inside, head caved in by a hatchet.

Next to her, with a deep slice in her upper arm and covered in blood, a SECOND WHITE WOMAN screams in German. North sees her, rides over, dismounts, removes his bandana, tries to calm her while bandaging her wound.

As Major North does so, a PAWNEE SCOUT, wearing a red sash, rides in from the plains, shouting.

PAWNEE SCOUT  
(in Pawnee)  
*I have Tall Bull. I know where he  
is.*

EDGE OF CAMP

North and the Pawnee ride away from the Cheyenne Camp, now littered with burning teepees and dead bodies.

The Irish Corporal sees them leave -- he nudges IRISH TROOPER #1 riding next to him.

CORPORAL  
Let's see where that Indian-loving  
Major's going then.

EXT. SANDHILLS/PLAINS - DAY

Major North and the Pawnee Scout stop briefly to read the tracks.

PAWNEE SCOUT  
(in Pawnee)  
*He travels with family.*

The two men ride up a hill and as they move down the other side, a SHOT rings out kicking up dust in front of Major North's horse. The Pawnee Scout points.

PAWNEE SCOUT (CONT'D)  
(in Pawnee)  
*There. In the wash.*

Another shot clips the Major's saddle. He rolls onto the ground with his carbine, pretending he's hit.

Reading North's mind, the Pawnee scout gallops away with both horses.

Quiet. Then another shot.

North looks to his far right: the two Irish Troopers approach. Another shot. Irish Trooper #1 drops from his horse. The Irish Corporal turns and gallops out of range.

More quiet. North waits, aiming his carbine at the wash.

A rifle appears, then a head pops up over the bank. North aims, fires. The head disappears and the rifle drops on the bank.

North waits. Suddenly, a woman and child appear, hands in the air.

North walks to meet two, then past them to the wash and looks at Tall Bull's body.

The Irish Corporal returns, riding hard -- stops his horse directly in front the Cheyenne woman and her child. He aims his rifle.

NORTH

You won't! Stand down, trooper!

North grips his rifle.

CORPORAL

They killed Conor --

North points his rifle at the trooper.

CORPORAL (CONT'D)

This is what we're here for, isn't it.

He raises his rifle to shoot. The mother and child are terrified, in each other's arms.

North fires at the corporal. Drops him from his horse.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

EXT. NORTH PLATTE, NEBRASKA TRAIN STATION - DAY

The Union Pacific train pulls into a long, low station, with NORTH PLATTE written on its sign post.

CHYRON: *One month later.*

The door to a passenger car opens and NED BUNTLINE, a short, stocky man about fifty, with a seamed face dominated by a droopy red mustache, steps onto the platform.

He sets down his satchel, and takes a flask from his fine leather messenger bag.

After a very long swig, he straightens his bowler hat, strokes the twenty military medals and badges on his chest, and limps through the teeming crowd of soldiers and their wives, gamblers, and dusty overdressed salesman.

Buntline stops in front of a LARGE SURLY CONDUCTOR.

BUNTLINE

Excuse me, sir, but what would be the most efficacious means of conveyance to Ft. McPherson.

CONDUCTOR

What's that you ask?

BUNTLINE

How can I get to Fort McPherson?

The conductor makes a sweeping gesture at the swirl of wagon traffic passing the station.

CONDUCTOR

Hitch a ride on an army wagon, or take a hack with these great unwashed, or...

(sarcastic as he looks closely at the medals)

...someone as highly decorated as yourself, could probably have the general himself come get you.

Buntline stares for a second.

BUNTLINE

Sir, while I do appreciate a dry wit as much as the next man, I am a highly decorated veteran of the Seminole War, the Mexican War, and the Civil War, not to mention I am a Cavalry Scout and a supporter of the Cuban Revolution.

The conductor squints, staring hard at the chest full of medals.

CONDUCTOR

Uh-huh. What's that one say, "Sons of Temperance?"

FRONT OF TRAIN STATION

Buntline limps across the street, moving towards a row of hack passenger wagons, lined up like taxis.

As he approaches, an army ambulance wagon rumbles past at high speed. The lead mule lightly brushes Buntline and twirls him around -- he wobbles, then catches his balance.

INT. HACK - DAY

The small coach bounces along the dirt road winding through the sand hills to Ft. McPherson.

Ned Buntline sits next to A SWEATY SALESMAN (30s) engrossed in a dime novel.

Across from them, CLARA WEICHAL, (30s), the German woman from the Cheyenne village, with her bandaged arm in a sling, looks blankly out the window. She studiously ignores both men and tries not to let her knees touch theirs.

Buntline glances at the salesman and the cover of his dime novel.

A banner at the top reads:

*Ned Buntline's Own*, alongside a photo of Buntline in a Civil War uniform.

Underneath is the title:

*Life in the Saddle Or, The Cavalry Scout*

BUNTLINE  
Is that a good read?  
(no answer)  
I say, are you enjoying the book?

SALESMAN  
What?

BUNTLINE  
The dime novel. Is it good?

SALESMAN  
Well, yes and no. Oh, it's an  
adventure alright, and it passes  
the time. But not believable.

BUNTLINE  
How so?

SALESMAN  
You'd think Ned Buntline won the  
Civil War all by himself.

BUNTLINE  
I am familiar with the work. They  
say it is autobiographical, and  
factual.

SALESMAN  
Oh, come on!

BUNTLINE  
He was Chief of Scouts with the  
rank of Colonel.

The salesman looks around furtively, lowers his voice. The  
German woman listens in.

SALESMAN  
Friend of mine served in the New  
York Rifles with him. He was a  
sergeant. And he deserted.

BUNTLINE  
You should be careful, my friend,  
that could be construed as  
slanderous. A man's good reputation  
is his property, you know.

SALESMAN  
Just saying what I heard. Anyways,  
I wouldn't say it to his face.



The salesman goes back to his book. Clara Weichal has a clear view of the cover. She stares at it, and then Buntline.

BUNTLINE

Have you read his recent effort:  
*The Parricides*, about Lincoln's  
assassination?

SALESMAN

No.

BUNTLINE

It's quite absorbing. You might  
change your literary opinions by  
expanding your Ned Buntline  
library.

SALESMAN

I don't think so. I have to be  
honest with you, mister. It's not  
just his stories being corny and  
unbelievable, it's...it's the  
style. It's what my ma would have  
called exaggerated.

BUNTLINE

Exaggerated!

SALESMAN

Yeah, ma was a schoolmarm. Just  
write simple and straightforward,  
she'd say. Like Mark Twain. I read  
*Innocents Abroad*. It's real  
entertaining. Have you read it?

BUNTLINE

No. Do you know how much Ned  
Buntline made last year off his  
exaggerated dime novels and  
serials? Twenty-thousand dollars.

SALESMAN

How do you know so much about Ned  
Buntline?

Clara Weichal, who is still listening, reaches over and taps  
the cover of the dime novel, pointing to the banner.

She speaks with a German accent.

CLARA WEICHAL

There.

SALESMAN

What.

CLARA WEICHAL

Look there.

He looks at the photo and then Buntline. A couple times.

SALESMAN

Oh well, I ah...I didn't know.

BUNTLINE

How would you, sir?

SALESMAN

I might have been a little over critical. I am enjoying this one.

CLARA WEICHAL

You don't shoot him?

SALESMAN

What?

CLARA WIECHAL

Not you, him.

(to Buntline)

You don't shoot him for what he is saying.

BUNTLINE

No.

CLARA WEICHAL

Why not?

SALESMAN

What are you doing, lady?

CLARA WEICHAL

The whites shoot each other here. All the time. And the Indians shoot the whites. And sometimes do other things --

She pantomimes holding a knife and slashing her wounded arm viciously.

CLARA WEICHAL (CONT'D)

This is a horrible place. Horrible.

BUNTLINE

Ma'm, I can see that you have come to some grief. And I am so sorry. I would apologize for the entire country if I could. This is no way to treat a guest.

CLARA WEICHAL

I am not a guest. I come to live.

BUNTLINE

Can I ask, were you part of that Summit Springs fiasco, that I read about in the newspapers. Would that be the source of your grief?

CLARA WEICHAL

Yes, that would be "the source of my grief." And also the doctor at the fort, who is the butcher. Now my arm...infected.

BUNTLINE

Well now, in my experience, army docs and surgeons, they --

CLARA WEICHAL

No! I went to this town to find the good doctor, who knows carbolic acid. In Germany, they know carbolic acid.

Silence. She looks out the window. Buntline and the salesman sit quietly.

Then, the salesman opens his dime novel to the first page, and offers it along with a pencil to Buntline.

SALESMAN

Mr. Buntline, would you be so kind as to autograph my copy of *The Cavalry Scout*.

EXT. FORT MCPHERSON - DAY

The hack enters the busy frontier outpost with about forty buildings including barracks, homes, official buildings, stables, and corrals.

The hack rolls to a stop in front of the command building.

EXT. COMMAND BUILDING - DAY

A tidy log and frame structure, facing a trim parade ground.

INT. COMMAND BUILDING, MAJOR NORTH'S OFFICE - DAY

A small room: North sits at a small desk. He's writing something on Ft. McPherson official letterhead, struggling with it. Crumpling up paper. Starting again, three or four times.

Crumpled paper title: At the top, the words "*Letter of Resignation*"

A PRIVATE (20s) knocks on the open door.

PRIVATE

Sir --

NORTH

Yes.

PRIVATE

There is a Mr. E.C.Z. Judson to see you.

NORTH

Who?

PRIVATE

He says he sent a letter from Fort Sedgwick about an interview.

NORTH

A letter?

PRIVATE

Yes.

North looks vainly through a pile of papers on the side of his desk.

PRIVATE (CONT'D)

He's a writer.

North stops the search.

NORTH

What kind of a writer?

PRIVATE

I don't know.

NORTH  
Tell him I'm busy.

PRIVATE  
He's says he's come a long way.

NORTH  
Just get rid of him.

Buntline appears in the doorway.

BUNTLINE  
Major North, I presume.

NORTH  
Yes.

North stands, waves the enlisted man off. Buntline salutes him.

BUNTLINE  
Colonel Judson, retired. At your service.

The major does not return the salute, instead stares at the strange man in the bowler hat and military jacket covered with medals.

Then Buntline sticks out his hand to shake. Nothing.

BUNTLINE (CONT'D)  
I have detoured from my demanding schedule of temperance lectures just to shake your hand, sir.

He keeps it extended until the Major finally shakes.

BUNTLINE (CONT'D)  
I read about the Battle of Summit Springs in the newspapers, and I would like to immortalize your bravery.

NORTH  
You would.

BUNTLINE  
Yes, in a serial. I am also a storyteller, a spinner of yarns and tales of adventure. Perhaps you've heard of me. I go by the pen name Ned Buntline.

NORTH

Never heard of you.

BUNTLINE

Millions have, and millions haven't. Not to worry. Point is, the story should be told and I'm the perfect man to do it. To immortalize your battle to the death with the fearsome chief Tall Bull.

NORTH

So you want to make me the hero of this tale.

BUNTLINE

I do, sir.

NORTH

For shooting a Cheyenne chief.

BUNTLINE

Exactly. You rescued the white woman, whom I met on the coach ride to the --

NORTH

-- Yes, Clara. Mrs. Weichal.

BUNTLINE

It should be memorialized.

NORTH

Okay Mr., ah, who are you right now, Judson or Buntline?

BUNTLINE

For the sake of our discussion. Call me Ned Buntline.

NORTH

Okay, Mr. Ned Buntline, this will not happen because there were no heroes at the Battle of Summit Springs, and even if there were, I don't abide writers.

BUNTLINE

Do you have a post library?

NORTH

One for officers. One for enlisted.

BUNTLINE

And in the officers, how many books?

NORTH

Perhaps three hundred fifty books.

BUNTLINES

So then, there would be many who do abide writers, fine ones such as William Shakespeare or Edgar Allen Poe?

NORTH

Let me clarify myself. I do not abide journalists for the yellow press, or dime novel writers such as yourself, who hide behind pen names.

North sits down at his desk, begins his letter again, ignoring Buntline, who continues to stand there.

NORTH (CONT'D)

Because they do not tell the truth.

BUNTLINE

There might be some slight embellishment from time to time, but only for the sake of entertainment.

NORTH

Entertainment? Sir, there is nothing entertaining here.  
(to the doorway)  
Private!

Voices from the office doorway.

Major North jumps to his feet.

NORTH (CONT'D)

Corporal! Remove Mr. Buntline and Colonel Judson from my office.

The private appears in the doorway.

PRIVATE

Sir, there is someone else...

Clara Weichal enters, very upset.

CLARA WEICHAL

Frank. The arm, the doctor say it  
is very bad. I may lose it.

She breaks down. North comforts her, put his arm around her.

NORTH

(to the private)  
Get him out of here!

She notices Buntline; he touches his hat in acknowledgement.

OUTER OFFICE

The private takes Buntline gently through to an alcove where  
he has a crude desk built into the wall, and closes the door.

One of Buntline's books sits on the corner of the desk.

PRIVATE

I know who you are, sir.  
(holds up the book)  
Two of your books are in the  
enlisted library.

He holds up the book. Buntline examines it.

BUNTLINE

Tell me, young man, is the other as  
dog-eared and soiled from over use?

PRIVATE

Oh yes, and I've read each book  
three times. Enlisted only have a  
total of thirty-five books.

BUNTLINE

Here, is my latest dime novel.

He pulls a book from his fine leather messenger bag.

BUNTLINE (CONT'D)

A contribution to your library.  
Let me put my name in it.

He helps himself to the pen on the private's desk.

BUNTLINE (CONT'D)

To...

PRIVATE

To Private Watts and the Fifth  
Cavalry.



Buntline signs the book with a flourish. Shows it to the private. Hands him the book.

PRIVATE (CONT'D)

Sir, I couldn't help but overhear --  
you are looking for a hero?

BUNTLINE

That I am.

PRIVATE

I know of someone. Will Cody. A  
crack shot and buffalo hunter.  
Known out here as Buffalo Bill.

BUNTLINE

Do tell.

PRIVATE

He's also the scout who led Major  
North to the Cheyenne camp.

The private smiles, pleased with himself. He turns, carefully places the new Buntline book on his desk. Then repositions and admires it, until --

BUNTLINE

And...

The private turns back.

PRIVATE

Yes.

BUNTLINE

Where might I find this Will Cody?

PRIVATE

Oh, of course. I saw him come out  
of the officers' mess and head to  
the stables a few hours ago.  
Sometimes he naps over there, under  
a wagon.

BUNTLINE

Thank you, young man.

PRIVATE

And by the way, I'd avoid the  
officers' mess, especially the  
coffee.

EXT. FT. MCPHERSON STABLES - DAY

A long stable with corrals spread out in front. To the side, a line of twelve idle ambulances and freight wagons.

The sun is high. The heat simmers.

Buntline swigs from his flask, then replaces it in his bag -- and continues to wave off flies as he walks the line of wagons, looking under each one.

Half way down the line, he discovers two long black boots sticking out from underneath a large freight wagon. Someone sleeps there in the shaded afternoon heat, on a pile of hay.

Buntline taps the boots. Shakes them. Then kicks them.

CODY

Whoever you are, you better have a good reason for waking me up.

WILLIAM, F. CODY, (24), a tall, lanky young man unfolds himself as he crawls from under the wagon. He wears his hair shoulder length and has handsome, delicate features with smooth skin.

He brushes hay from his corduroy trousers and blue flannel shirt. He stands an entire head taller than Buntline, and when he dons his broad-brimmed hat, he seems even taller.

He surveys Buntline in his oddball uniform.

BUNTLINE

I believe you, sir, are Will Cody.

CODY

I believe, sir, that I am. And you are?

BUNTLINE

Colonel Judson, I sometimes go by Ned Buntline...

(waits for a reaction,  
there's none)

...the dime novelist? That is my pen name. I write adventure stories.

CODY

Don't read much.

Buntline pulls another dime novel from his fine leather messenger bag. Offers the book to Cody, who takes it but is more interested in the bag.

CODY (CONT'D)

That's a mighty nice bag.

BUNTLINE

Yes, made by a master artisan from Florence, Italy.

CODY

I am partial to fine leather.

Cody caresses the bag.

BUNTLINE

I'm happy to relate its history, but first there's something more urgent to discuss concerning the very topic of reading.

CODY

What's that?

BUNTLINE

The Battle of Summit Springs. It will be my next adventure. And every adventure, sir, needs a hero. I want you to be that hero.

CODY

I ain't no hero.

BUNTLINE

I understand you were the scout that found the camp and joined in the charge.

CODY

You understand wrong. I did find the camp, and then led some men around the back. The battle was pretty much over by the time I got there.

BUNTLINE

Still.

CODY

I can be of no use to you. Now, I've got some business to attend to.

Cody begins to walk away from the wagons and Buntline, who limps along beside him.

BUNTLINE

My readers need to see this story  
through your eyes, and your spirit.

CODY

You want my spirit.

BUNTLINE

Yessir.

Cody stops.

CODY

Let me ask you this: is there any  
money in it for my spirit.

BUNTLINE

As of this moment, no.

Cody continues walking, a little faster. Buntlines limps a  
little faster.

BUNTLINE (CONT'D)

But who knows for the future. You  
are also known as Buffalo Bill, are  
you not.

CODY

Yes I am.

BUNTLINE

I am told you have participated in  
many other feats of heroism:  
scouting, hunting buffalo, and so  
on.

CODY

I am good at hunting buffalo --  
shot four thousand two hundred  
eighty buffalo in eighteen months.

BUNTLINE

Well that is impressive. I have  
written two hundred fifty seven  
dime novels and serials up to this  
point.

CODY

How in the hell do you do that?

BUNTLINE

Same way you shoot all of those  
buffalo. Take aim at my story and  
fire away as fast as I can.

CODY

And you sell 'em?

BUNTLINE

As fast as I can write 'em. I sense the possibility of a future for us in which you could buy many of these fine bags, and more.

Buntline pats his leather bag. Cody stops just on the edge of the wagons.

CODY

What else do you want, besides my spirit?

BUNTLINE

Your permission, and a few moments of your time.

CODY

You could just go ahead and do this without me.

BUNTLINE

Yes, I could, but you'll give me inspiration and authenticity.

CODY

You seem a man of smoke and mirrors. I don't think so.

BUNTLINE

I am very solid.

Cody walks away from Buntline again, this time even faster. He's in some discomfort. Buntline can barely keep up.

BUNTLINE (CONT'D)

Your business must be urgent.

CODY

It's urgency has increased.

BUNTLINE

This could make you a lot more than a scout's pay.

CODY

More than seventy-five dollars a month?

BUNTLINE

I made twenty thousand dollars last year.

CODY

See, there you go.

Buntline raises his hand as if giving testimony in court.

BUNTLINE

Swear to God, as if he were my bookkeeper.

Cody shakes his head.

BUNTLINE (CONT'D)

Do you have a family to provide for?

CODY

Yes.

BUNTLINE

As do I.

Cody still moving.

BUNTLINE (CONT'D)

At least, let me ride with you on one of your scouting expeditions. I believe so completely in this venture that I am willing to forgo my next very lucrative temperance lecture, tomorrow in North Platte.

Cody looks over the broken-down Buntline before him.

CODY

You sir, are in no shape to ride.

BUNTLINE

What a person seems and what they are -- often two entirely different things.

CODY

And you got a limp.

BUNTLINE

Yes, I do. And I am proud of that limp. There is a Confederate bullet permanently lodged in my right knee.

(MORE)

BUNTLINE (CONT'D)

And I also enjoy wounds in the groin and head from my Key West days serving in the Navy, battling the Seminole. In addition, I contracted yellow fever --

CODY

This is not helping your cause.

Cody moves even faster -- towards a row of three outhouses.

BUNTLINE

Ah yes, but it is simply meant to recall a time when I had the youth and vigor of yourself. Of course my youth has diminished, but the vigor -- well now that, sir, has in fact effervesced.

Cody rushes into the first outhouse, slams the door. Which does not seem to phase Buntline.

BUNTLINE (CONT'D)

And it is bubbling over for a ride on the plains with Buffalo Bill. And relive those days.

Toilet sounds.

BUNTLINE (CONT'D)

If I slow you down, simply abandon me. No hard feelings.

More toilet sounds.

Buntline takes a few paces back from the outhouses.

CODY (O.S.)

Fine, you have pleaded your case successfully. In the meantime, some advice: stay away from the coffee in the officers' mess.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. NEBRASKA SAND HILLS - DAY

On horseback, Will Cody and Ned Buntline slowly climb a low rise through the prairie grass, followed by A SMALL TROOP OF CAVALRY a quarter mile behind them.

Buntline wears his faux military jacket, now with only two medals on the right pocket.

Behind the troopers, sits a small wooden building with a large porch -- to the side a corral, empty with the gate wide open.

Union Pacific railroad tracks run alongside the building and off into the distance.

The sign on the building reads *O'Fallon Station*.

CODY

At least the Cheyenne didn't kill anyone, just stole the horses.

Cody studies the trail.

CODY (CONT'D)

Looks like ten or fifteen of 'em.

Cody looks over at Buntline.

CODY (CONT'D)

Okay, a couple things, before we move on: First, I hope to god you did not drink that coffee in --

BUNTLINE

Oh no, I took your advice.

CODY

-- because from here on we're going to be riding long and hard. We won't be stopping. And second, I do not exactly know why I let a peculiar fellow such as yourself ride with me today --

BUNTLINE

Curiosity.



CODY

-- No, more like: if I don't, I would probably never get rid of you. Anyway, before I cooperate, I need to see what you're made of out here on the prairie.

BUNTLINE

Oh, I love being tested.

Buntline adjusts himself in the saddle, winces, rearranges his bad leg.

CODY

You okay there?

BUNTLINE

The wound's aching a bit.  
 (slaps his leg)  
 Otherwise, I am quite at home in wide open spaces, and keep my sense of direction easily -- after being at sea during my navy days.

CODY

Okay then, which way are we headed right now?

Buntline looks out and around, then --

BUNTLINE

Northwest. No, North by Northwest. Omaha is roughly three hundred miles in that direction.  
 (points East, Cody nods his head)  
 I must also give some credit for my skills to the Black Seminole Trackers down in Florida. Are you familiar with them, sir?

CODY

I am not.

BUNTLINE

They are of African and Seminole ancestry. Able to follow a cottonmouth through the swamp for miles.

They ride a little further, stop at the top of the rise, look out on a panorama of the sand hills.

Cody suddenly stops his horse. Looks down at the trail.

CODY

Okay, got another test for you.  
This raiding party has split up.  
Tell me what you see.

Buntline leans over in the saddle, studies the ground closely.

BUNTLINE

The main group, with the stock,  
moves to the left, while they send  
two riders leading two or three  
horses this way toward the North  
Platte River in order to confound  
us.

Cody nods. The bright sunlight reflects off Buntline's medals.

CODY

You got a good eye, except for one  
thing -- making yourself a bullseye  
with the flash from those.

He points to the two medals.

BUNTLINE

Ah well, I can tell by these tracks  
the marauders pose no threat as  
they are miles ahead.

CODY

Nevertheless, remove the medals.

BUNTLINE

But I have already reduced their  
number.

CODY

Just take 'em all off and wait  
here, while I tell Lieutenant Brown  
what we know.

Cody rides down the sand hill toward the troopers.

Buntline makes no effort to remove the medals; instead, he sits on his horse watching Cody descend.

It is warm, quiet. The bright sun reflects off his *Sons of Temperance* medal, flashing like Morse code as Buntline moves in the saddle, taking in the panoramic view.

EXT. ATOP ANOTHER SAND HILL NEARBY - DAY

Buntline is a silhouette against the blue sky. Suddenly, a shot rings out: Buntline tumbles from the saddle. More shots.

EXT. SANDHILLS - DAY

Cody looks up towards Buntline and his horse. Cody draws his rifle, races up towards the fallen man, along with TWO TROOPERS.

BUNTLINE

Rolls behind a hillock.

More shots ping around him. Then, quiet. Buntline looks in the direction of the shots -- and sees two Cheyenne warriors, holding carbine rifles race off; riding bareback, leading two extra ponies, and whooping with bravado.

He cautiously stands, holding his right shoulder; looks at the right side of his jacket with the pocket and medals obliterated.

He picks up the remains of a shredded dime novel and his smashed flask, which has a dent in one side.

Cody races up to him.

CODY

Are you shot?

BUNTLINE

Just bruised.

The breeze blows off Buntline's derby hat. He scuttles after it.

CODY

Well, aren't you a Jim Dandy. Seems a few of 'em weren't exactly miles ahead of us.

BUNTLINE

Yes, sir, it seems I miscalculated, slightly. But no harm done.

CODY

We're going after them. You go back with the column.

Cody and the two troopers charge off in the direction of the Cheyenne.

Buntline collects his hat, and his horse, which grazes nearby. As he mounts the animal, he winces in pain from his shoulder.

EXT. SANDHILLS/PLAINS PANORAMA - DAY

Later: Cody and the troopers riding hard. Up ahead -- the Cheyenne warriors. Both Cody and the Cheyenne are graceful riders, seeming one with the animals.

As the Cheyenne appear and disappear over the horizon, they pull away, outrunning Cody.

At one point, the Cheyenne skillfully exchange horses mid gallop.

A small moving dot appears far behind Cody and the troopers.

It's now clear that the dot is Buntline, also riding hard.

Cody's group falls further behind the Cheyenne.

The chase continues -- the riders obviously covering many miles.

EXT. BLUFF - DAY

Much later: Cody and the two troopers stop at the top. In the far distance, the North Platte River. The Cheyenne are crossing, and almost to the other side.

As Cody leads his men down towards the river, Buntline catches them. Energized, he moves beside Cody.

BUNTLINE

I thought you might need some help.

CODY

You're the one that needs some help.

(Cody points to his head)

Right up here. I told you to go back to the column.

BUNTLINE

I know, but as I said, I do love inhabiting the outer edge of life. This is most exciting!

PLATTE RIVER BANK

High water, strong current. The group reaches the bank.

CODY

They have fresh horses, we'll never catch 'em. We'll stop here.

They pull up their horses.

BUNTLINE

So then, Will Cody, have you seen what I am made of? Do you see that I am solid.

CODY

I see that you are fearless, and reckless, but as for solid...

BUNTLINE

What else do you want me to do?

Cody points to the swollen river.

CODY

Are you a sporting man?

BUNTLINE

I have been known to make the occasional side wager.

CODY

And, I like a good horse race. So, let's put all this vagueness behind us.

BUNTLINE

Yes, let us bet the farm.

CODY

I don't have a farm.

BUNTLINE

Simply a metaphor.

CODY

Right. So if you cross that river and make it to the other side, I'll be the hero of your story.

BUNTLINE

Which I will write as a serial upon  
returning to my home in New York,  
once I have soaked up a bit more  
Buffalo Bill.

Cody nods, agrees.

Buntline watches the fast flowing river.

BUNTLINE (CONT'D)

And if not?

CODY

You go away, and leave me alone. So  
I don't have to tie you up and  
leave you out on the prairie.

Buntline extends his hand to shake. Cody does not take it.

CODY (CONT'D)

And what will you give me, if you  
do happen to make it across?

BUNTLINE

I will generously offer you ten  
percent of any royalties.

CODY

I would like that generosity  
increased to fifteen percent. With  
something up front.

BUNTLINE

I'll throw in fifty dollars.

CODY

One hundred dollars.

Buntline looks at his horse, then the treacherous water.

CODY (CONT'D)

That river's in flood, and it's  
gonna be real hard to rescue you.  
Plus, you got a bum shoulder.

Buntline throws his hand up to indicate he wants quiet. Again  
he studies the river.

BUNTLINE

Understood.

Buntline extends his hand. They shake.

At that, Buntline plunges into the narrow surging North Platte and rides his horse recklessly across.

Up on the opposite bank, he turns, waves, exuberant smile.

Cody yells to him --

CODY

Don't get too far ahead of  
yourself. You have to come back.

The rushing river drowns out Cody's voice.

Buntline shrugs.

Cody motions for him to return.

Buntline hesitates then plunges his horse into the river.

This time, the two are swept down stream fifty yards before struggling to shore.

Buntline and his steed then trot up to Cody. They're drenched.

BUNTLINE

That water is freezing.

CODY

You're a plucky fellow, I'll give  
you that.

BUNTLINE

You, sir, are not the first man to  
underestimate Ned Buntline.

Cody hands him his dry blanket. Buntline wraps himself in it.

BUNTLINE (CONT'D)

I cannot wait to finish my  
temperance tour, return home to  
care for my family -- and then  
begin your story, Buffalo Bill.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. SMALL THEATRE, CITY CENTER - DAY

Little more than a store front on a muddy main street, the theatre displays a small billboard:

*Temperance Lecture Tonight by the World Renowned Dime  
Novelist NED BUNTLINE*

CHYRON: *Omaha, Nebraska*

INT. SMALL THEATRE - DAY

Buntline on a makeshift stage, stands behind a crude curtain.

He swigs from his lucky dented flask, returns it to his breast pocket and steps through the curtain to THREE MEN AND ONE MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN scattered among fifty chairs. Two of the men are asleep.

EXT. TENT - DAY

A large grubby tent pitched at the edge of town.

CHYRON: *Des Moines, Iowa*

Buntline comes out of the tent and positions a sign with huge lettering:

*WORLD FAMOUS AUTHOR NED BUNTLINE*

*Fresh from California  
Temperance Lecture begins in ten minutes*

The tent collapses on one side.

EXT. ILLINOIS CENTRAL RAILROAD DEPOT - DAY

A modest one-story building with A BUSTLING MENAGERIE OF PEOPLE passing in and out.

CHYRON: *Chicago, Illinois*

In front, Ned Buntline, ignored by the crowd, balances a crude six-foot sign with huge lettering:



*BEWARE OF DEMON ALCOHOL!*  
*Temperance Lecture in Ten Minutes*  
by NED BUNTLINE  
*Prohibitionist, Dime Novelist,*  
*Publisher, Soldier, Sailor,*  
*Scout, Americanist*

Sound of Thunder. Flash of lightening. He looks up. A downpour. Huge rain drops bleed the lettering on his sign.

EXT. NEAT YELLOW BUNGALOW - DAY

The small garden in the front yard is enclosed by a white picket fence. FOUR SMALL CHILDREN -- three girls and a boy -- play in the dirt.

CHYRON: *Chapeau, New York, September, 1869*

INT. NEAT YELLOW BUNGALOW, KITCHEN - DAY

KATE MYERS, (30's), intelligent, fine features, sits at the kitchen table, focused on a newspaper.

Kate opens to an article -- revealing the newspaper's masthead:

*MORNING CHRONICLE*  
*San Francisco*

Halfway down, the article begins:  
*Buntline's Temperance Lectures A Signal Failure*

On the kitchen table in front of Kate Myers, two newspapers spread out.

MONTAGE OF NEWSPAPERS:

- Masthead: *THE RUTLAND DAILY HERALD, Rutland, Vt.*

Inside: *The News in Brief*  
*Ned Buntline has just been lecturing at Omaha on Mormons, Gentiles and Chinese."*

- Masthead: *THE OAKLAND DAILY TRANSCRIPT*

Inside: an article begins, *His career as a temperance lecture was a failure.*

END MONTAGE

Kate hears loud shrieks from the girls outside.

OLDEST GIRL (O.S.)

Pa! It's our pa.

She shoves the newspapers aside and moves to the door.

EXT. NEAT YELLOW BUNGALOW - DAY

Ned Buntline stands at the gate, huge smile. The two oldest girls run to his arms. The two youngest children stare at him, open-mouthed.

Kate walks out on the veranda -- and glares.

KATE

Long time no see, Edward.

BUNTLINE

Yes, yes.

More cuddles with children. He hands out candy. Kate descends the steps. Clearly, he's afraid of her.

KATE

Exactly eighteen months.

BUNTLINE

Time flies.

KATE

It does not.

BUNTLINE

Well, I've returned now. A triumphal return. The temperance lectures went well.

INT. NEAT YELLOW BUNGALOW, KITCHEN - DAY

The children eat lunch. The two older girls squabble, the youngest one chews slowly, and the little boy drops food on the floor.

Kate throws the newspapers she has been reading on the table next to Buntline.

She returns to cutting vegetables with a large, sharp kitchen knife. Slicing, quickly and skillfully, on a large wooden cutting board.

BUNTLINE

I see you have been following my journey from afar.

KATE  
Yes, very far.

He looks briefly at the newspapers, then pushes them away.

BUNTLINE  
You know how the press likes to  
exaggerate.

KATE  
Almost as much as you.

Abruptly, she comes close to him, still holding the large  
knife -- he reels back, instinctively.

BUNTLINE  
I did manage to bring some  
Californians to sobriety and was  
rewarded handsomely with donations,  
I wired money to you. Surely you  
received the money and my letters.

KATE  
I got little money and very few  
letters.

BUNTLINE  
Oh dear.

KATE  
So I had to beg rent money from  
your publisher. However, we are now  
once again, at the edge of  
insolvency.

The two squabbling sisters explode, knocking over chairs.  
Buntline jumps in to separate them, placing them at either  
end of the table.

Kate chops vegetables with even more vigor.

BUNTLINE  
I have been somewhat remiss, I will  
admit it.

He kneels in front of her and takes her hand.

BUNTLINE (CONT'D)  
I am ashamed. So ashamed. I've want  
to make it right and provide for my  
family. You know I adore you.

She succumbs to this briefly, then pulls her hand away. More  
chopping.

KATE

Do you now? Look at me I'm  
disappearing. Vanishing.  
(softens, tears up)  
Eaten up with all this worry,  
trying to keep things together with  
the children and the house.

BUNTLINE

I'm back for good.

KATE

What if I don't want you back.

The little boy hurls his fried egg at his big sister, who screams and throws her egg at him and misses, hitting her other sister, who also screams.

KATE (CONT'D)

Children!

Buntline once more dives into the breach, offering all offended parties a piece of candy.

BUNTLINE

Children, why don't you take that  
outside and I will join you  
shortly.

They look to their mother for approval. Reluctantly, she nods her head "yes" and the four scamper to the yard.

He strokes Kates shoulder; but she turns away, sad; still holding the knife.

KATE

The only reason I haven't left is  
because I have no where to go. I  
can't return home, my parents are  
unsympathetic, as you well know.

BUNTLINE

I, on the other hand, am most  
sympathetic, and...

He moves in closer.

KATE

(pleading)  
How exactly do you plan to keep  
this roof over our head, Edward?  
How will you provide for us?

BUNTLINE  
Buffalo Bill.

KATE  
Who?

BUNTLINE  
A most engaging plainsman I have met on my travels. He is to be my next hero. He is going to make me, that is us, thousands. Thousands! I already have an agreement with Street and Smith.

KATE  
Your other work made thousands. Where are they?

BUNTLINE  
Expenses are high.

KATE  
Are you still married to Lovanche?

She points at him with the knife.

BUNTLINE  
Neither in my head, nor my heart.

He stares at the blade while putting a hand on his heart.

KATE  
What does that mean? Answer the question.

BUNTLINE  
We are lawfully divorced.

KATE  
Do you still support her, is that where the money goes? To your other wives.

BUNTLINE  
My dear, we have waded through that swamp before.

KATE  
There must be others.

BUNTLINE  
My dearest, I am here. I will work quickly, you know I can.

KATE

Oh, I see now, you are just looking for a place to work.

BUNTLINE

No, no. This is my home. I will rest up from my journeys, and then go into the spare room to begin my wildest and truest adventure tale of all!

She looks at him long and hard, then moves in close with the knife, which again unnerves him.

KATE

No, you will begin your wildest and truest adventure tale now. And, you will stay locked in that spare room to write and sleep until you have finished.

She backs him into the spare room with the knife.

BUNTLINE

But, I'll need writing supplies.

KATE

You will have them. We will deliver food. And you can see the children, through the doorway, at the end of the day if you have done your pages.

She pulls the door shut and locks it.

SPARE ROOM

Buntline grabs the door handle, turns it, pushes. Nothing. Then lunges at the solid wooden door. Bounces off it, in pain.

KATE (O.S.)

Settle down, Edward.

KITCHEN

The oldest girl skips up to her mother in the kitchen.

OLDEST GIRL

Where's pa?

KATE

In the spare room, working.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

EXT. WILL CODY'S CABIN - DAY

A long one-story rectangle, part of a small cluster of similar cabins, right next to the Ft. McPherson Reservation -- a squalid collection of teepees.

The cabin's front yard, one hundred yards away, is the rushing Platte River.

INT. WILL CODY'S CABIN, MAIN ROOM - DAY

Cody finishes nailing old tent canvas to the walls which are primitive chinked logs. Rolls of wall paper rest in the corner.

His wife LOUISA (LULU) and their five-year-old daughter ARTA watch him. Louisa is a delicate, pretty, unweathered woman in her mid 20s; the girl, a miniature version of her mother.

Louisa is upset.

LOUISA

Are you sure this will work?

CODY

Pretty soon this place'll look like the Ritz.

LOUISA

When they come for dinner, I want everything to be perfect -- as perfect as it can be living out here.

CODY

Come on, it's not that bad.

Cody inspects his work.

LOUISA

For me it is.

CODY

I am taking care of things. I said I'd take care of things, didn't I.



LOUISA

You did. And we are living in a shed. Next to a squalid reservation.

CODY

It is only temporary. I have a plan.

LOUISA

Yes, when we married you said you would give up the plains for me.

CODY

And I did.

LOUISA

For your mother's hotel, which failed.

CODY

It did not fail, it faded.

LOUISA

Oh, and let us not forget Rome, Kansas, your railroad town with that man Rose --

CODY

It was a good idea --

LOUISA

Except that it suddenly moved itself closer to where the tracks were actually to run. Rome, what a fitting name.

CODY

Due to an unscrupulous railroad agent --

LOUISA

While Baby Arta and I lived in the back room of that saloon, with the drunks and the fights and the --

CODY

Can we not have this same fight over and over and over.

LOUISA

I should never have let you lure me out here. What is your plan, then? You have to find something else.

CODY

I will, I'm still working on it.

Louisa snatches Arta and flounces into the kitchen.

Cody unrolls a strip of wallpaper, brushes paste on the back and hangs it on the canvas. Smooths it, sort of, with a two by four. Stands back and admires his work, and then hangs another strip.

As he admires the second strip, the first strip slides down the canvas, slowly and determinedly, to the floor.

INT. WILL CODY'S CABIN, MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

The wall paper is hung on the walls, and except for a few bubbles and wrinkles, looks respectable.

Will Cody and Louisa bustle about the three-room cabin setting a large table, lighting candles. It's tense but quiet due to a temporary truce.

Arta plays with a rag doll in the corner.

LOUISA

I haven't seen Clara since she went to see the doctor in North Platte.

CODY

Frank said she has become very reclusive during her convalescence.

LOUISA

It must be three weeks. I miss her. I'm so glad you introduced us --

CODY

I can't take credit. That was Frank's idea, and a good one. It's helping her to accept life after Summit Springs.

LOUISA

And me to accept life at Fort McPherson. If it wasn't for her, I swear to god, I would...have already taken Arta and returned to St. Louis --

CODY

They'll be here any minute. Let us not do this now, please?

LOUISA

She keeps me sane. We are very like minded.

CODY

Yes, I know, in that you both do not like the sand hills.

LOUISA

More than that, Will. She is a cultured soul. I don't know how she ended up out here. Do people say the same about me?

CODY

No, but they do wonder how I was lucky enough to end up with you.

His joke softens her.

LOUISA

I wonder that, too.

Cody kisses her cheek.

LOUISA (CONT'D)

I'm just teasing.

CODY

Are you?

LOUISA

Arta, go and get the knives and forks. The good ones.

Arta bounces into the kitchen, followed by her mother.

KITCHEN

Louisa goes to a large wrought iron stove. Opens the oven to inspect two roasting chickens. Then she checks a pot of boiling potatoes. Tastes a pot of vegetable soup.

A bowl of fresh spinach and an apple pie sit on a wooden table in the center of the room, just across from the back door.

Arta scrounges for silverware in a drawer. Louisa moves a large butcher knife away from Arta.

MAIN ROOM

Knock at the door. Will Cody opens it to Major Frank North and a subdued Clara Weichal, who wears a cape, holds a bag in her right hand.

CODY

Clara.

She nods.

Cody shakes North's hand, slaps him on the back.

Louisa comes in from the kitchen.

LOUISA

Oh Clara, it's so nice to see you again. I've been thinking about you. Can we take your --

Cody moves to take Clara's cape.

CLARA

(German accent)

No. I hang on to it for awhile, until I warm up.

LOUISA

Yes, of course. Good evening, Frank.

He playfully salutes her. She smiles, nods her head.

NORTH

Louisa. And where is --

Arta runs into the room. She slides in for a hug from North.

NORTH (CONT'D)

My favorite five-year-old girl in all of Fort McPherson.

ARTA

I'm the only five-year-old girl.

He pulls a candy from his pocket and gives it to her.

NORTH

For after supper.

CODY

Yes, for after supper.

Luisa guides Clara to a long bench on the side of the room, away from North and Cody. But Clara doesn't sit, still seeming uncomfortable.

LOUISA

I have so missed our talks. You're the only one here that reads. I started on Mark Twain, but, well -- Will doesn't read.

From across the room.

CODY

I heard that. I read, it's just that I don't have time. There's always something, isn't there, Arta.

The little girl smiles.

CODY (CONT'D)

This is the latest.

He points to the wall paper. Immediately North goes up and inspects it. Strokes one strip which immediately comes loose.

CODY (CONT'D)

Careful, Frank. It's still drying.

Cody sticks the strip back in place.

Clara still a bit quiet, awkward.

LOUISA

How was the visit to North Platte?

No answer. Clara looks across the room at North, who nods his head.

She slowly removes her cape to reveal a plain long sleeve dress with one sleeve limp, hanging from the stump of her left bicep.

Louisa stares in shock.

LOUISA (CONT'D)

I had no idea. Oh -- Clara, I wish you would have told me. I am so sorry.

NORTH

(to Clara)

See. I said you should have told them before we came to dinner.

CLARA

Yes, it would have been better.

LOUISA

Never mind. Now I know. May I hug you?

CLARA

No.

LOUISA

Please.

She embraces Clara who remains stiff, then covers with a forced good cheer.

LOUISA (CONT'D)

Well, how exciting, you are our very first dinner guests. Please sit and make yourselves comfortable.

CODY

This calls for a drink. I have a brand new bottle of Kentucky Bourbon, just for your visit, Frank.

Cody takes a whisky bottle from the cupboard as the others sit at the table.

EXT. PATH ALONG THE RIVER NEAR THE CABIN - NIGHT

Four pairs of moccasin-clad feet walk silently and quickly.

INT. WILL CODY'S CABIN, MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

The four sit around the table each with a glass of whiskey in front of them.

Arta looks down on the scene from the small sleeping loft. She's in her bedclothes, and sucks on the candy.

CODY

I would like to make a toast to Frank and Clara, to maybe a future together, if she can put up with him.

North smiles. Clara grabs his hand with hers.

LOUISA  
Yes, a toast to, to something  
good...but, oh Clara --

                  CLARA  
Please, I do not want this world to  
stop because of...

She touches her stump.

                  LOUISA  
I don't understand, I thought it  
was healing.

                  CLARA  
So did I. They have to take it  
because that butcher, the Army  
Doctor, he...  
                  (catches herself)  
No more with that story.

                  LOUISA  
Yes, yes. I'm so sorry.

                  CLARA  
We go on. So, I bring some books,  
from the post library.

She pulls out two books from her bag. Hands them to Louisa.

EXT. WILL CODY'S CABIN - EVENING

The moccasin-clad feet now move to the front of the cabin.

INT. WILL CODY'S CABIN, MAIN ROOM - EVENING

Louisa looks at the small window in the outside wall across  
from her.

A gust of wind -- a shutter bangs.

                  LOUISA  
Did you hear something?

                  CODY  
The wind has come up.

                  LOUISA  
I'm sure I heard something.

Louisa goes to the window.

EXT. WILL CODY'S CABIN - NIGHT

The moccasin-clad feet stop by the side of the cabin.

INT. WILL CODY'S RUSTIC CABIN, MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Louisa looks out of the window.

CODY

Lulu! There's nothing out there.

Annoyed with him, Louisa sits -- looks at the two books:

*The life of P.T, Barnum*

*The Red Avenger, Pirate King of the Floridas* by Ned Buntline

Cody notices Buntline's dime novel. Picks it up, thumbs through it.

CODY (CONT'D)

How is it?

CLARA

It is trash, but fun to read.

LOUISA

Will, isn't this the man who went scouting with you?

CODY

Yes, strange fellow.

CLARA

Yes, I agree. I ride on a coach from North Platte with him.

NORTH

The man had charlatan and scalawag written all over him.

CODY

Perhaps, but he was a plucky fellow out on the plains, I'll give him that.

(to Louisa)

And he had such a fine leather bag with him. Likes of which I've never seen. You would have coveted it, Louisa.



NORTH

You're not still in contact with  
Buntline, I hope.

CODY

To a degree -- he asked me to be  
the hero for his new serial. And I  
said yes.

LOUISA

I didn't know that.

CODY

Why wouldn't I, he agreed to pay  
one hundred dollars just for using  
my name. And I get fifteen percent  
of the royalties.

LOUISA

That is not a good deal, Will.

CODY

He originally offered ten percent.

LOUISA

An even worse deal.

CODY

Louisa, we ain't exactly gonna get  
rich off him.

LOUISA

You never know. Anyway, every  
little bit helps. And, I am  
wondering, how exactly do you  
calculate these royalties?

Cody glances at North and Clara, who are uncomfortable with  
this conversation.

Another toast.

CODY

Well then, here's to getting rich,  
and farting through silk.

EXT. WILL CODY'S CABIN - NIGHT

The four sets of moccasins now moving again creep silently to  
the backdoor.

INT. WILL CODY'S CABIN, MAIN ROOM - EVENING

Arta has fallen asleep in her small loft.

Louisa, the good hostess, serves four large bowls of hot soup.

LOUISA

This soup recipe is a speciality of my Italian grandmother, who for some reason, lived in the French section of St. Louis and would never share it with anyone there, except me.

The room is quiet except for the all slurping of soup, then --

NORTH

(uncomfortable)

We are moving to St. Louis. Clara and I.

Louisa drops her spoon into her bowl.

LOUISA

When?

NORTH

In two weeks. I handed in my resignation today.

CODY

Frank, your unwelcome news just cast a long shadow on this fine meal.

KITCHEN

The backdoor opens quietly, feet enter.

A hand grabs the large butcher knife from the side near the two roasted chickens.

Another hand with a large Bowie knife appears.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

INT. WILL CODY'S CABIN, KITCHEN - NIGHT

The Bowie knife raises -- and then slices through one of the chickens.

An elbow brushes the empty spinach bowl which crashes to the floor.

MAIN ROOM

Cody charges into the kitchen with his pistol.

Three strips of wallpaper peel from the walls and drop to the floor.

KITCHEN

Cody confronts FOUR THIN ELDERLY PAWNEES: THREE MEN AND A WOMAN. They look up, then continue ravenously consuming the chickens.

EXT. WILL CODY'S CABIN - NIGHT

North's Pawnee Scout with the red sash (from the raid on the Cheyenne village) escorts the four elderly invaders away from the cabin. Each one eats a large slice of pie.

INT. WILL CODY'S CABIN, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Louisa and Will clean up.

CODY

Well, it could have been a lot worse.

LOUISA

How, Will? How could it have been a lot worse? My god, she lost her arm.

CODY

I wasn't referring to Clara.

She scrubs a wrought iron skillet, then suddenly lets it crash to the floor.

LOUISA

I can't bear it. They snuck into the cabin. What if they weren't old and starving? Then what?

CODY

But they were.

LOUISA

You've brought us to a place filled with more danger than I can handle.

He takes her in his arms, holds her tight. Arta watches quietly from the other room.

INT. NEAT YELLOW BUNGALOW, SPARE ROOM - DAY

Buntline writing on the bed.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

-- He finishes a page. Places it on a small pile of pages. Then grabs the pile; rips it up.

-- He choreographs a pretend fight: Strangling himself. Being shot followed by a dramatic death. Then quickly writes it down.

-- He sleeps on the bed; foolscap pages litter his body. He rolls over, crushing/crumpling many of them.

END SERIES

INT. NEAT YELLOW BUNGALOW, KITCHEN - DAY

Off to the side of the kitchen, Kate Myers stands outside the door to the spare room.

KATE

Okay, Mr. Ned Buntline, you're pages are due.

The children giggle and bounce around behind her.

KATE (CONT'D)

Children!

They stop momentarily. A sheaf of crumpled handwritten pages slides from the bottom of the door. Carrie, the oldest girl, grabs them.

EXT. SANDHILLS/PLAINS - DAY

A small herd of buffalo grazes on a low hilltop. Two riders approach at some distance from them.

As they draw closer, we see they're Will Cody and Major Frank North.

CODY

When exactly did you decide you were leaving?

NORTH

After they took Clara's arm. Hell of a thing to bond over, isn't it.

CODY

Yes, it is. I hate to see you go. Have you told the Pawnee?

NORTH

Figured I'd tell them right after we find these Cheyenne and Sioux. Keep 'em motivated.

CODY

I don't think motivation is a problem, we are chasing a chief called Pawnee Killer. Besides, those scouts'd follow you anywhere, anytime. Even to St. Louis.

NORTH

Maybe so, but I've had enough.

CODY

I still think it's a mistake. What will you do?

NORTH

I don't know. But it's not this. Wouldn't it be nice to be paid just for getting up in the morning and being Frank North.

CODY

I get paid just for being Will Cody.

NORTH

Maybe you do for now, but when the buffalo are gone and all the tribes are on the reservation, and you don't get that seventy-five a month, then what? Writins' on the wall.

CODY

Is it, now.

NORTH

Yes, it is. Right there in front of you.

CODY

I like this life.

NORTH

I know you do.

They stop their horses. Sit silently for a while, then --

CODY

Yonder, is our dinner.

North pulls out his rifle. Raises it to shoot.

CODY (CONT'D)

Hold up.

North lowers the rifle.

CODY (CONT'D)

There's no sport in a shot from here. How about this -- I ride into the herd, wave my handkerchief, which is the "go signal." I bet I can shoot two "shaggies" before you shoot one from here. If I do, you stay in the army.

North laughs.

NORTH

That is not going to happen.

CODY

Good, then we got ourselves a bet.

North watches Cody ride off into the herd. The buffalo sense human danger and start to trot, then run, flat out.

Cody splits off a string of six huge bison galloping at high speed.

He barely keeps up, finally closes in when the lead beast, the size of a locomotive, swipes its horns unsuccessfully at Cody's horse and changes direction.

Almost thrown, Cody regains his balance and moves beside the six animals again.

He waves a red bandana at North, then pulls out his revolver to shoot at close range. Moves into position, loses it, gains it again, when a shot rings out.

His hat flies off his head leaving a thin five-inch bloody crease at the top of his forehead.

He looks back at North, who looks at TWO CHEYENNE WARRIORS that appear on the rise at the other side of the stampeding herd.

One of them raises his rifle again, FIRES, and Cody's horse drops from under him.

North fires at the two warriors -- suddenly joined by THIRTY OTHER CHEYENNE WARRIORS.

Cody recovers and kneels next to his dead horse, the stampeding bison having already passed. He grabs his rifle, aims at the band of Cheyenne, ready to fire.

The Cheyenne suddenly point their rifles into the air and begin firing, which turns the stampede back towards Cody.

There's no escape from the phalanx of two-ton animals rumbling towards him at thirty-five miles per hour.

END OF EPISODE