

BUTCH AND MOONDANCE

The Official Biography Redux

Marks R. Nester

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Marks R. Nester
Visit my website at www.marksnester.com

*Dedicated to my father who would have
benefitted from a higher education;
to my mother who was smarter than she had
been led to believe; and
to my dear wife.*

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*Pure joy for aficionados of the
Hollywood of old.*

*Based on many true stories of the
Wild West. Perhaps some of them
even happened.*

*In the authentic twenty-first century
spirit, only the facts have been
changed.*

NOTE TO READER

Almost every character is an allusion to an historical person, a character from a film, or an actor. The occasional famous one-liner, book, poem and song name also appear. Some of the oblique references are overloaded with meaning. Thus there is one name that refers to an historical male figure, the corresponding movie character, and a female actor.

The so-called Cheat Sheet is the complete list of allusions which were deliberately incorporated in the story. It is located near the back of the published version of this book. However, in this PDF version it has been split up and relevant sections now appear at the end of each chapter. If you wish to discover all of the allusions before peeking at the Cheat Sheet, then be sure to read every word, including the reviews and chapter titles. Occasionally you might have to read to the end of a chapter before you are able to guess whom a character represents.

Note that in some cases there are remakes with the same film name. The Cheat Sheet lists only the version which I had in mind during writing, and usually it will be an older version rather than a recent version.

After I finished writing I noticed some additional accidental allusions in the text. They are not listed in the Cheat Sheet because they were not intended.

The List of Works section at the end of the book provides additional details concerning the films etc.

The author comments included at the end of many chapters in this PDF version were not included in the published version.

By the end of the second chapter you'll probably be convinced that this really might be the most unconventional conventional Western that you'll ever encounter. If you are willing to expect and accept the unexpected then you are well-prepared for this story. You can either

(i) relax and just enjoy the ride; or

- (ii) try to spot the allusions mentioned above; or, for the ultimate challenge,
- (iii) ascertain what Butch is planning before all is revealed.

If you're not familiar with some of the Hollywood classics mentioned in the Cheat Sheet then you might want to investigate or watch them.

I suppose this is where I should make my confession. The Interlude is true, and the rest of the story is pure fiction.

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1. CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE FIRST AND WORST KINDS

They say that only the good die young, but Death, that avid collector of souls, does not discriminate and cares naught for aphorisms ...

Butch paused. She listened. There it was again—the soft sounds of the wilderness shattered by a frantic scream.

She jumped off her horse and pushed through the heavy undergrowth towards the river. There, near the riverbank, was a woman writhing and struggling and scratching and gouging and pinching and biting and punching and kicking the huge brute of a man who was pinning her down.

Butch looked about and quickly found a lump of wood. She raced towards the pair and delivered a mighty blow to the man's back. He flinched. He raised his head to look around. Whack! He copped a stunning strike to the side of his face. He reeled, but still he wasn't finished. He began stumbling to his feet. Whack! A blow to the back of his head. Finally, he went down and stayed down. Was he unconscious or dead? Butch didn't care. She glanced at the naked woman, looked around, spotted some clothes a short distance away, and fetched them.

It was said that Moondance's mesmerizing beauty could distract both man and woman alike. Butch knelt down, and looked at the woman's battered face. Still in shock, the woman turned her head slightly and looked up at Butch who was momentarily bewitched by those big brown eyes.

Then from behind came, "Get away from her, you bitch! I'll do you after I do her!"

Before Butch could react, she was grabbed and tossed to one side. As she crashed to the ground, she hit her head on a rock and blacked out.

When she finally stirred and turned her head, a dressed, ashen-faced, teenage woman was sitting next to her. The woman's arms were wrapped around her bent knees which were pressed to her chest. Her eyes were red, moist with tears, but she was not sobbing. Just sitting, rocking. She turned her head slightly and looked down at her would-be rescuer.

Butch's head was pounding, and her vision blurred. She was having difficulty speaking and recalling simple words. Then she remembered the brute. She slowly turned her head and saw him a couple of yards away, lying on his back. He had some kind of wound to his leg, had been bleeding in the stomach area, and had a Bowie knife buried deep in his throat. When Butch had fetched the clothes, the knife was mixed in with them—unbeknownst to both Butch and the brute.

Butch eventually managed to sit up. The women sat quietly together for about an hour before the young woman spoke, "Thanks."

Butch nodded.

More time passed, and darkness approached. Butch began to collect her thoughts. "We can't stay here."

The woman nodded. She fetched her gun and retrieved her knife from the man's throat.

The ladies soon found their horses, which hadn't wandered far from the river, as well as the brute's horse. They removed its saddle, and took the horse with them.

They roamed well into the night, and away from the river, before setting up camp. They lay down—sore, battered and bruised. Butch finally rescued them from the reflective silence.

"I'm Butch."

"I'm Moondance."

Butch smiled. Because of the day's trauma, neither woman had paid much attention to where they were going.

“Do you know where we are?” inquired Butch.

“No. I’ll think about it tomorrow.”

During their wanderings in the wilderness for the next forty days, the new acquaintances formed a close friendship. They talked, laughed, and exchanged histories. Butch smiled when Moondance spoke of sweet dreams for the future. Butch didn’t have such dreams.

They also talked about practical matters such as where would they go, what would they do, and how would they survive. Moondance didn’t have any money, and Butch’s money was almost gone. Butch had no immediate desire to return to so-called civil society, and Moondance had no desire to visit it.

Butch made a bold suggestion. “We could keep on wandering out here, and generally avoid the towns. If we need something then maybe we’ll just take it. I’d rather do that than return to New York.”

Moondance was relishing having a big sister figure, so she didn’t care what they did. “Sure.”

It was a simple plan, but naively optimistic. Butch didn’t give it her usual depth of serious thought. She did not want to. She was relishing the vibrant company, and wanted it to continue. The history of the Wild West was about to change forever.

The young women never talked about the brute again, but in future whenever one of them was bathing in the outdoors, the other was always keeping guard nearby.

Chapter 1. Close encounters of the first and worst kinds

“Close encounters of the first and worst kinds”: Close Encounters of the Third Kind

“Get away from her, you bitch!”: Spoken by Susan Alexandra Weaver, using the stage name Sigourney Weaver, playing Ellen Ripley in Aliens

“knife buried deep in his throat”: Deep Throat

“I’ll think about it tomorrow”: Spoken by Vivian Mary Hartley (1913–1967), using the stage name Vivien Leigh, playing Scarlett O’Hara in *Gone with the Wind*

“wanderings in the wilderness for the next forty days”: He made them wander in the wilderness forty years, Numbers 32:13, *New American Standard Bible* (1977)

“It was a simple plan”: *A Simple Plan*

Chapter 1. Author comments

Deep Throat is a famous pornographic movie, and apparently quite exploitative. If I recall correctly, it’s one of three movies in the List of Works which I haven’t seen.

2. THE ADORABLE JOHNNY JAMES

Johnny James was a fabrication, and James wasn't Johnny's surname. In real life, James was Johnny's twin. Yes, there were two of them! The brothers were so embarrassed by their real surname, Throckmorton-Windsor-Smythe, that when still young teenagers, they shot their father for giving them that awful name, and they turned to a life of crime.

Throughout their wicked careers, Johnny and James pretended to be the same person and usually referred to themselves as "JJ".

It's worthwhile mentioning that a certain well-known Frankie James wanted to increase his status as a thug, thief and murderer, and so claimed to be JJ's brother. But, as many before him and since, he had wrongly assumed that JJ was only one person, and that they had the same surname as himself.

Whenever the Johnny James gang went out on a heist, one of the twins always led the gang, while the other stayed back at the hideout to do the washing, ironing and cooking. It was the cleanest and tidiest hideout that has ever existed in the history of hideouts. One of the gang even had a comb and used it every year after his annual bath. When he had finished with the comb, the twin on domestic duties would come along and carefully remove all of the hairs and put them in the kitchen-tidy. Their poor late mother, bless her soul, always told them that a clean house leads to a tidy mind, and they always wanted to be clear-headed when planning their next crime.

There was always a pot of warm, healthy vegetarian broth waiting for the gang when they got back from a job. And depending on what the stay-at-the-hideout twin could rustle up at short notice, also a whole buffalo or cow roasted on a spit. When once asked how one man could single-handedly place a whole beast on a spit, the twin smiled and replied that it was a chef's secret.

JJ were famous for wearing carefully starched and ironed shirts, and for dressing immaculately. But don't be fooled by their pressed shirts and sartorial elegance. JJ were the meanest, nastiest, most ornery villains who have ever walked the earth. Rattlesnakes are more charming. Johnny, or was it James, once shot and killed a waiter who tripped and spilt Johnny's coffee, or was it James' coffee, onto his clean white shirt.

They treated crime like all true professionals would—like a business. No, they weren't corporate crooks, but they were crooks who managed a small corporation, so to speak. Their business model, and their ruthlessness, were the inspirations for many organized crime syndicates ever since.

However, unlike the oft heard hollow mantra of today, JJ believed that their staff were their greatest asset. With this in mind, the criminal takings were distributed relatively equitably—30% for each brother, 30% shared by the staff, and 10% ploughed back into the business. Considering that there were always only three or four other staff, this was exceptionally good money.

Mind you, there was a very intensive selection and induction process. People who failed the induction training were almost always permanently terminated and their bodies never found. However, for those who passed, the financial rewards were high. JJ even had a system for granting staff recreation leave and occasional bonuses. On the other hand, spontaneous performance reviews were sometimes enacted, and staff who failed were immediately fired—usually with two bullets in the chest.

JJ were the kinds of sons that only a mother could adore. Surely Butch and Moondance would have avoided this gang of nasties.

Chapter 2. The adorable Johnny James

“Johnny James”: Jesse Woodson James (1847–1882), criminal, didn't really have a twin

“Frankie James”: Alexander Franklin James (1843–1915), criminal, really was Jesse James' brother

Chapter 2. Author comments

Yes, this chapter is a load of nonsense, by design. Throughout the book I tried to alternate a serious chapter with a fun chapter.

Ah, the white shirt. Surely bad guys didn't normally wear clean and pressed white shirts. On the other hand, if a baddie is wearing such a shirt then one would know which baddie it was.

3. THE GREATEST FORCE IN NATURE

If you ask a physicist what is the greatest force in nature, then he or she will probably respond with the question “What precisely do you mean?” If you have half an hour to spare then the watered-down response will involve known forces and dependence on distance etc. Finally, you’ll be recommended a textbook readable only by experts, but long before then you’ll probably be regretting that you even bothered asking. You might then ask a biologist and the answer will probably be the survival or reproduction instinct. Or you might ask a psychologist and be told that it’s a mother’s love for a child.

Out of desperation, you might even ask some economists and you would be told that they didn’t know there are forces other than market forces. You might then explain a few possibilities to them, and their little eyes will light up. They’ll be extremely excited at the prospect of yet another application for economics. They’ll assure you that they’ll have the definitive answer for you very soon, after you sign their service agreement. All they have to do is first assign a monetary value to every conceivable force. Perhaps you would then shake your head in disbelief and walk away.

Eventually you might think that you’ve been asking all the wrong people. You do what you should have done in the first place—you ask a philosopher. You would soon realize that it was a waste of time, because the precise meanings of “the”, “is”, “greatest” and “nature” would first need to be defined, analyzed and discussed, before even considering what a “force” is. You really wouldn’t want to wait months or years for the philosopher to merely develop a full understanding of the question.

If we ignore the responses of the economists and the philosopher, then the others are all good answers from certain perspectives. Perhaps it is ironic that the greatest force in nature is irony itself, just marginally stronger than happenstance.

Within five months of the brute's attack on Moondance, the two friends had decided to dress as men. Ambidextrous Moondance had a gun slung on each hip, a rifle scabbard on each side of her horse, and a hidden Bowie knife strapped to her outside left calf. A girl has to protect herself.

Butch had a gun on her right hip, a Winchester repeater carbine in a scabbard on her back, a Sharps single shot rifle on her horse, a derringer strapped to her left calf, and a stiletto on her right calf. The dagger was a piece of memorabilia from her European days. At first, she kept it in her saddle bags, but since the brute's attack she now always wore it. Perhaps our young ladies had armed themselves to excess, but the weaponry, most of it stolen, would serve them well in the years to come.

They had now run out of money. They had ransacked a couple of homesteads when the owners were away, and had held up some lone travelers, but none of their targets had much cash.

Why not try something a little more daring?

Meanwhile, The Chronicles of Swell Cargo record that the company was sick of their stagecoaches being attacked and robbed, despite heavily armed guards. The guards were an obvious signal to thieves that something very valuable was on board, so Swell Cargo decided to experiment with occasionally sending valuable shipments on stagecoaches without any guards at all. It was a risk. There's always a risk. So, the first such unguarded shipment set off.

The obvious happened next. Our heroines decided to hold up a stagecoach. Well, Butch decided and Moondance agreed. Their needs were not great. They would be happy if they could get a couple of hundred dollars or so. They also didn't want to be involved in a dangerous gun battle, so they would give one of those unguarded coaches a try.

The special Swell Cargo coach was meandering around a bend in the trail when two gunslingers suddenly stepped in front of it. With three guns pointing at him, the driver decided that it was safest, for him, if he stopped. The conductor, being a rational man, wasn't going to try anything foolish

either. Butch dashed around to one side and ordered the passengers out. The conductor was instructed to toss all the luggage down onto the other side of the coach, then he and the driver climbed down and stood next to the three passengers.

With hat slouched forward, and head somewhat bowed, Butch removed weapons and checked for cash on the passengers. About four dollars.

Not a good start.

She wasn't interested in jewelry or watches.

Moondance kept guard on the victims while Butch disappeared around to the other side. The latter soon fired a couple of shots, and each time the passengers and crew jumped. Moondance was also a little concerned.

After a few more minutes Butch shouted, "Okay. Got what we need. If any of you try to move in the next five minutes, our partner hiding over there will shoot you."

Our daring ladies rushed away to their hidden horses and galloped off. After an eternity of time, probably all of ten minutes, the driver instructed the passengers and conductor to stay put while he went and checked if it was safe. Apparently all were in favor of the driver being shot, if anyone had to be, so they waited patiently.

"I think they're gone," he hollered after a brief silence. "Come an' help me fix the mess they made with the luggage."

Meanwhile, Butch was recounting their good fortune. A strongbox containing cash and coins was inside one of the cases.

"I took all the banknotes and some coins, maybe \$700, and left the rest there. It'll keep us going for quite a while."

Moondance was perplexed that Butch didn't take the whole lot, but said nothing.

Chapter 3. The greatest force in nature

“Chronicles of Swell Cargo”: Tales of Wells Fargo

Chapter 3. Author comments

I don't recall hearing Sharps rifles mentioned in Westerns, although they may have appeared frequently. I stumbled onto their existence when researching this book. They were famous for their long-range accuracy.

Irony! In physics there is a famous principle known as the Principle of Least Action. On my website I have a collection of original (I hope) quotes. If you go to <http://marksnester.com/quotes/> you will find quote number 22, “Universal Law of Action: Fate operates in order to maximise nett irony”.

4. POPPED EYES

About a month after the stagecoach robbery, our young ladies drifted into Sidestep City. As fate would have it, another stranger in town paid scant attention to the two gunslingers but took a long hard look at their packhorse before scurrying off to the marshal's office.

Just as our ladies were dismounting and beginning to tie up the horses outside one of the many saloons, they were approached by the towering Marshal Matt Dijon.

Moondance barely noticed Butch muttering quietly, "Just wound him."

In fact, Moondance didn't even notice that the marshal had gun in hand. She was awestruck by the marshal's towering height. If he had removed his shirt then navel gazing would have retained its literal meaning for the petite Moondance.

She was lost in her thoughts, "Is 'e man, monument, monster, mountain ... or thing?" She slowly shifted her gaze up to the marshal's stern face. Finally, she focused and regained her composure.

"Raise your hands. Didn't you get that, shorty? I said 'raise your hands'. You're both wanted for armed robbery and probably murder."

Moondance began raising her hands with a deliberate slowness. Meanwhile, Butch was already reaching to the skies but kept on glancing over to the marshal's right. Suddenly Butch yelled, "Don't shoot!" as she lowered her arms and wrapped them around her face as if to offer some form of protection.

It worked. The marshal was momentarily distracted and he glanced over to his right to see what was happening. Maybe it was his limping sidekick, Lester. No, it wasn't. No one was there.

The several onlookers who were watching from a safe distance later gave varying accounts of the events. Most of them were also distracted by Butch's shenanigans, but a few swore that they weren't fooled and saw it all. In any case, everyone agreed that it was a blur. No, not their memories and recollections, but the rapidity of Moondance's hands—dropping to her sides, drawing both guns, shooting, wounding and disarming the marshal with her left-hand gun before spinning it on her finger and holstering it, meanwhile keeping her right-hand gun trained on the small but growing crowd.

The poor marshal had tumbled to the ground, and Butch knelt down to briefly tend to his wound. They had a quiet exchange.

"Sorry, marshal, we can't let you take us in. The armed robbery, do you mean the stagecoach?"

"Yeah, you two fit the description I received just yesterday about that \$1,200 robbery."

"We only took about \$700. We left the rest."

"I don't know anything about that."

"And murder? What murder?" asked Butch.

"When you rode in, a stranger came and told me about a horse he recognized. It belonged to a friend of his who he found stabbed to death."

"Oh. Yes, um ... he um ... attacked us without provocation."

The usually decisive Butch was caught off guard, suddenly trying to explain the incident with the brute. However, she was soon back in control and thinking of her special friend.

"He attacked us first, and it took our combined efforts to finally subdue him in fear of our lives. I doubt that we would get a fair trial. Your arm will be fine in a couple of weeks."

The young marshal was annoyed with himself for succumbing to Butch's distraction. Nonetheless there seemed something genuine about these two gunslingers, and even he was amazed at shorty's lightning-quick reflexes.

"Who are you, anyway?"

Butch considered for a moment, and thought it wouldn't matter.

"I'm Butch ... Rhapsody, and ... he's Moondance."

Butch stood up and unhitched their horses while Moondance kept her eye on the buzzing crowd. The two gunslingers mounted and galloped off.

Finally the crowd could unpop their eyes and lift their dropped jaws to the mouth-closed position. The legend of the quickest hands and fastest draw in the West began. It was first said that Moondance's draw was faster than a rattlesnake's strike. In time it would be said that she could draw and shoot faster than a man could think of drawing his last breath; and that her hands were so quick that she could draw a portrait before any mortal man could draw his gun.

Critical to every story is the corresponding untold story. The Swell Cargo experiment involved ensuring that even the stagecoach driver didn't know the full value of his shipment. When he bravely told the passengers to stay where they were while he checked around, he couldn't believe his good fortune when he discovered the coins that the gunslingers had left behind. He quickly carried them over and hid them behind a rock a few yards off the trail, and returned the empty strongbox to where it had been shot open.

It also transpires that the brute's friend had been hunting just a few hundred yards away when the vicious assault occurred. The brute and his friend had rather similar personalities and proclivities. When he took his friend's body to the nearest town, he didn't bother mentioning that there were obvious signs of a significant struggle and that his friend had his trousers down when found. Butch was probably foolish to admit the killing to Marshal Dijon, but she was certainly right in thinking that a jury would not believe their claim of self-defense. The prosecution's case would have

been clear-cut: “the half-breed deliberately led the poor innocent white man on, before stabbing him repeatedly in order to steal the horse.”

Be that as it may, our two young heroines soon had a \$1,000 reward on each of their heads for murder, horse theft, armed robbery, and shooting a law officer. Butch had to start thinking like a wanted fugitive. This was a new experience, but she would learn quickly.

This was the end of their beginning.

Chapter 4. Popped eyes

“Sidestep City”: Dodge City, Kansas

“Marshal Matt Dijon”: James King Aurness (1923–2011), using the stage name James Arness, played Marshal Matt Dillon in Gunsmoke

“Is ‘e man, monument, monster, mountain ... or thing?”: James Arness played 'The Thing' in The Thing from Another World

“Didn’t you get that, shorty?”: Get Shorty

“limping sidekick, Lester”: William Dennis Weaver (1924–2006), using the stage name Dennis Weaver, played Chester in Gunsmoke

Chapter 4. Author comments

There have been many claimed fastest draws in the West according to the entertainment industry, but obviously my Moondance really was the fastest draw!

5. THERE NEVER WAS A RHAPSODY IN PINK

Would Butch have become an honest crook if her early years had been different? As a teenager, she wondered about becoming a lawyer, but no law schools were prepared to teach a woman.

Butch's father built a cattle empire, and realized that even more wealth could be generated by controlling all aspects of the production chain. Consequently, he invested in rail for shipping his stock, then a slaughterhouse or five for preparing his product, and retail outlets for selling the beef. He was living in New York by then, and branching out into real estate and other enterprises. And so it was that Butch was born in New York city to a greying middle-aged man and his most recent wife—an accomplished musician of some note.

The father wanted another son and, being very pleased with the increased wealth that the slaughterhouses had brought, wanted to name his newborn Butcher. The wife was appalled to think that a son could be given such a name, let alone a daughter. She looked at her beautiful baby daughter wrapped in blue swaddling—the father didn't like that pink stuff.

She thought, "My wonderful rhapsody in blue."

The father decided that the baby would be called Butcher Rhapsody, until the emboldened wife decided that Butch Rhapsody would be preferable.

Butch's early years were a life of immense privilege. Her parents soon realized that she was extremely intelligent. They broke with tradition by providing her with an excellent education. Butch also learned all aspects of her father's business, as did her two older brothers. She also enjoyed her time on the family's ranches—learning to ride, shoot, muster and brand cattle.

To Butch's great horror, when she turned nineteen years old her parents began raising the "M" word with increasing frequency. Not "M" for Moondance, but "M" for marriage. Butch's father didn't care whom she married, provided it was one of the three rich elderly widowers or two young plantation owners he had chosen for her.

Perhaps it was not surprising that the few suitors approved by the parents excited Butch's ire rather than any other emotion. Upon her twentieth birthday she proposed a pact with her parents that if she was allowed to travel through Europe for about a year then she would return and marry. The parents reluctantly agreed, so she was soon off to Europe with a bag of funds in one hand, and a chaperone in the other.

Now in many situations an engineer will inform you that five is a good approximation to one, and so it was that Butch spent five years in Europe. She quickly managed to escape from her chaperone, but not before asking for, and receiving, extra funds from her parents. Within two years her parents had given her the ultimatum to return or be disowned. But there was still so much she wanted to do and see, so she relinquished her birthright.

In Europe, Butch socialized with the wealthy, went fox-hunting, practised shooting with all kinds of guns, and even took fencing lessons. She mixed with the intelligentsia—the ones condescending enough to engage in debate with those of her gender—and easily held her own in many wide-ranging discussions. She mingled with the poor, and lived in squalor in slums. She witnessed and experienced class distinction from both ends of the spectrum. When she finally left Europe, she was a worldly-wise woman.

However, Butch always planned for every conceivable contingency. She and spontaneity were never soulmates. Within a month of arriving in Europe she had squirrelled away enough funds for her return trip, whenever that might be. She also had the strength of character not to touch those funds, even during the most difficult times.

So, at long last, back in the States, what did she do? She bought a horse, of course, and went West.

Chapter 5. There never was a rhapsody in pink

“a slaughterhouse or five”: Slaughterhouse-Five

“My wonderful rhapsody in blue”: Gershwin’s Rhapsody in Blue

“Butch Rhapsody”: 1. Robert Leroy Parker (1866–1908), also known as Butch Cassidy, criminal. 2. Paul Leonard Newman (1925–2008), using the stage name Paul Newman, played Butch Cassidy in Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.

Chapter 5. Author comments

As done in this chapter, I include some social comment in a few places.

6. RULE NUMBER ONE

Eventually our young ladies' reputations would precede them wherever they went. This would often work in their favor because most people had enough good sense to leave them in peace. However, a couple of months after the Sidestep City incident, they reached one particular town before their reputations had arrived.

They made the most of their visit by enjoying a home-cooked meal at the boardinghouse, followed by a warm bath at the barbershop. Then they went to the saloon for a drink. Butch enjoyed a fine whiskey, not that she would get a good one there. Moondance generally avoided alcohol, although she was happy to have the occasional drink with Butch. Our ladies parked themselves at one end of the bar. Why would you want to sit at a table if you spend many hours every day sitting on a horse?

Three burly, filthy, unshaven men were at the other end of the bar. Their gun holsters were strapped high on their hips, so if they were capable of quick draws then it must have been on cigars.

If there was a Wild West Survival Guide, and if the men could read, then surely they would not have tried to stir up trouble with the two gunslingers at the other end of the bar. One of the men spoke in a deep, gravelly voice, "We don't know youse. We don't like furreners 'round 'ere."

When entering the saloon, our ladies had noticed the men, and had hoped there wouldn't be any trouble. They were still a small distance away and our young ladies tried to ignore them, but the men continued their baiting.

Butch sighed. She had summed the men up quickly—like three giant rattlesnakes with all rattle and no venom. She hadn't finished her whiskey yet. She was feeling peeved, and she had no time for buffoons.

Moondance noticed that Butch was becoming irritated and tried to warn the men.

“M’ partner’s Butch, Butch Rhapsody.”

The alpha buffoon laughed, as did his companions.

“Look, the little fella is a girl. Or is it a boy? I don’t care who yer pardner is, boy.”

Butch thought she’d better intervene and, feeling rather petulant, spoke in the best British accent she could muster.

“Oh, I say, chaps. If you do not like people of foreign extraction, then perhaps you should consider moving away from this quaint little village and live elsewhere.”

Moondance guffawed. The men took a couple of moments to process the advice. When it finally registered, one, then another, tried to draw their guns. In an instant, Butch had shot both men in the arm and pointed her gun at the third, who backed away slowly. Butch finished her drink. Moondance didn’t. Then they, too, quietly backed away and exited.

Eventually our ladies’ reputation arrived in town, and folks made the connection between the gunslingers in the saloon and the wanted desperados. Their reputations were further enhanced, or worsened, by this latest incident.

Later, Moondance twice recounted the event with great mirth to Butch. Butch was amused, too, but only during the first telling. She had been rehearsing it over and over in her mind. The more she thought about it, the more concerned she became. Maybe she shouldn’t have escalated the situation. What if they had underestimated those buffoons? What if the buffoons had been joined by others in the saloon? What if someone took advantage of the situation while both women were distracted? What if? What if?

Butch decided that if she and Moondance were going to survive, then they would need strategies for all situations. She made her first rule.

“Always walk away from a potentially dangerous situation whenever possible.”

Chapter 6. Author comments

This sort of gunfight in a bar is virtually *de rigueur* in Westerns. There’s a lot of “*de rigueur*” in this story, of course.

As you may have realized by now, most of the book is presented as a series of episodes, but a few episodes achieve considerable importance as the story develops.

In the old West, barbers really did offer baths and shaves.

Yeah, there are a few rattlesnake comparisons (“all rattle and no venom”) scattered throughout the book. Jellyfish didn’t make the cut.

7. MOONDANCE LEARNS TO BREATHE AND CLOSE HER EYES

Sometimes they say that nothing is as it seems. Sometimes they say never to judge a book by its cover. They possibly say it in many different ways. Here we say not to judge a person by their occupation.

The Transcontinental Railroad had already been built, but work continued on many spurs and new lines. About one year after the brute's attack, our heroines stumbled upon one such branch. They looked up and down the tracks, and noticed that the southern end was still under construction, perhaps three-quarters of a mile away. The ladies would soon have the pleasure of robbing trains, but for now thought there might be pleasure in seeing how the tracks are laid.

To clarify, Butch was interested in everything, and did almost all of the thinking, and Moondance always obliged. Butch confided later that she was already wondering about robbing a train, and believed that the more one knows about a system the easier it is to control, manipulate or break it.

No visible danger from where they were, so the plucky pair headed cautiously down towards the end of the line. Many Chinese, a few African Americans, and a few whites were laboring away with pick and shovel, wheelbarrows and a few other tools. An engineer was over near a tent, bending over a table. And presumably it was the foreman who was beating a Chinese worker with a cane.

It being none of Butch's business, and trying to maintain as low a profile as possible, Butch chose to ignore the walloping. Unfortunately, Moondance acted instinctively and had shot the foreman in the hand before Butch could stop her. The foreman yelped, dropped the cane, shouted the odd expletive or three, and turned around with the fiercest look imaginable—enough to make a rattlesnake quiver. Then he saw the two gunslingers on horses, one with the signature rifle slung over "his" shoulder. The foreman had heard

rumors, and guessed who they were. He promptly shut-up and stood in stony silence.

By then everyone had stopped what they were doing, and were staring at the “men” on horses. Quite a few were whispering.

Butch took control.

“What did the Chinaman do?”

“We pay ’im to work. I just fired ’im. I got sick of ’im stopping to pose for ’is damn cameraman,” grumbled the foreman.

“His cameraman?” responded the incredulous Butch as she looked around.

“Yeah.”

The little Chinaman stepped forward, full of smiles and repeatedly bowing.

“Yes, I finish here. Please take me to next town.”

“Yeah, you take ’im away. I swear, if ’e stays ’ere another night I’ll shoot ’im myself,” threatened the foreman.

“Yes, please. I on very important secret mission,” volunteered the Chinaman.

Butch had a weak moment, and was still somewhat annoyed that Moondance had gotten them involved.

“Okay.”

“You please take my cameraman too,” pleaded the Chinaman.

“No!” said Butch, who had just noticed the cameraman cowering with all of his gear behind a boulder.

The foreman interrupted whilst one of the workers was attending to his wound. “The train’ll return tomorrow morning with more supplies and sleepers. Old Stacy Jones can take the cameraman back to town.”

After some re-arranging of their provisions, Butch helped the Chinaman up onto the packhorse and the three set off.

The foreman couldn't help himself, or perhaps he had some idea as to how he might collect a reward for the two gunslingers. "That's not the way to town."

Butch gave a small wave in acknowledgement but kept on going. When the three were out of earshot, the foreman started swearing and cursing. By then, the Chinaman was also vehemently complaining about going the wrong way. Butch pulled out her gun, cocked it and pointed it at the Chinaman. He clammed up straightaway, so she holstered it.

When they were out of sight of the railway gang, they made a ninety degree change in direction. The Chinaman began grumbling again, so Butch put her hand on her gun, and he stopped. Soon he began muttering in Chinese, and he continued until that evening.

After dinner, the Chinaman thought that he had better change tack and stress the importance of his mission. Moondance was happy to listen, and Butch was finally feeling more relaxed. She also hoped that if he was allowed to talk then he might stop his irritating constant bowing and smiling.

"Thank you for stopping foreman from caning me. He not hurt me much. You white people don't know how to make cane hurt much. I get lots of beatings during training. I imperial guard. I once stopped thirty men using a thimble and toothpick. I easy stop foreman if I want to, but I make secret mission."

"Now what sort of secret mission could you possibly be on?"

"It very important. My master will be very angry if I fail. I must not say what it is."

Butch wondered if a simple bluff would extract an answer and began pulling out her gun.

“Okay. Okay. I tell you. I look for ducks.”

Moondance was stunned when Butch laughed out loud. It had never before happened. After some further questioning it seemed that the bizarre claims were probably true. China was running out of ducks and the emperor wanted a new supply for his favorite recipe. The Chinaman added that it was most unfortunate that the emperor wanted a photographic record of his guard’s endeavors as well as of the American countryside and peoples.

And then the Chinaman started smiling and bowing again.

Finally, they all introduced themselves. Wackie Chang had already realized that his so-called rescuers were women.

“Why you dress like men? Are you on secret mission too?”

“Yes!” replied the uninformative Butch.

Moondance was much more interested in how Wackie was able to singlehandedly subdue thirty men using unlikely weapons of choice.

“Tomorrow!” commanded the imperious Butch, inspired by all the talk about an all-powerful emperor.

The next day Wackie went on and on.

Yakety-yak, yakety-yak, “Where town?”

Yakety-yak, yakety-yak, “When we get there?”

Yakety-yak, yakety-yak, yakety-yak, with much bowing, but by the end of the day much less smiling.

Moondance was quite amused and enjoyed the extra company, but Butch’s continued annoyance was apparent.

That evening, Moondance was keen to learn about Wackie’s fighting technique. Butch was too annoyed to be interested, so she tended to the horses, started a fire and prepared some grub while the other two chatted.

Wackie knew kung fu and various Korean and Japanese armed and unarmed martial arts, but he seemed to be most enthusiastic about unarmed combat and creative use of any available props such as a chair, saucepan or ladder.

He said that he'd been trained by the great martial artist generally known as Leigh of Bruce, who, according to legend, once entered a fortress where he killed a dragon. Butch and Moondance were incredulous when Wackie made the apparently dubious claim that he also learned a lot by intensively studying a little grasshopper for three months.

After thirty minutes of this exciting background talk, Moondance was ever more anxious to learn some of these supposedly wonderful, yet mysterious, techniques. Wackie insisted that she would first have to learn to breathe properly—deep breaths through the nose from the stomach area and not the chest, and pausing briefly before exhaling slowly. She would have to practise this both with eyes open and eyes shut. Having eyes shut would involve going into a trance-like state in one instance; and enhancing all other senses in the other instance to the extent that she would be able to eventually hear and sense a butterfly flutter by—or a moth if it was nighttime.

After fifteen minutes of all this boring instruction about breathing and closing her eyes, the impatient Moondance was ready.

“Okay, now show me how t’ fight.”

“No. You practise breathing and closing your eyes for three months. Then I teach you how to fight.”

Dinner was ready. Butch was amused during the meal while Moondance pleaded and argued with Wackie for some unarmed combat training. She explained that they might never meet again after they got to the next town, and Wackie relented.

After eating, Butch decided to sit down and watch the show. Moondance removed all of her weapons in preparation, then Wackie gave some instruction about sparring, throwing, and being thrown. As with most

things, one learns best by doing, so Wackie and Moondance had a practice fight. She then spent a lot of time just picking herself up off the ground. Wackie was surprised at how supple she was, at how rapidly she learned, at how quick her hands were, and at how gritty her determination was.

Every time Moondance mastered a technique, Wackie would simply introduce a new and more sophisticated technique. Even Butch marveled at his movement—feigning and feinting and shifting his center of gravity, whilst somehow maintaining a perfect sense of balance and poise. After about an hour and a half, both combatants were exhausted, but Moondance was the only one who was battered and bruised.

“That was fun,” she said.

Butch was so impressed with Wackie’s array of moves that she clapped. Wackie was beaming to finally have Butch’s approval. He would offer one more demonstration of his prowess. He turned away and walked over towards one of the horses, stopped, turned slightly, then crescent kicked the horse in the head. The horse stumbled onto its front knees before staggering to its feet.

Wackie chuckled with glee and pride. He turned towards his audience to find an angry Butch pointing her gun at him, and Moondance bending down to pick up her two guns. The perplexed Chinaman began bowing repeatedly. There was an unwritten law in the Old West—if someone kills your horse then consider killing them back. The horse’s survival ensured the Chinaman’s, but Butch had had enough.

Next morning the still-livid Butch kept her distance from Wackie, for his own safety. Following instructions from Butch, Moondance gave him a canteen of water and pointed him in the direction of the nearest town.

“It’s about ten or fifteen miles away.”

“My mission very important. I have to hurry. I need horse.”

Moondance glanced towards Butch then back again.

“No, we think ya best first learn the value of a horse. Go now, before Butch”

“How I find my cameraman?” interrupted Wackie.

“Ya best worry about findin’ the town first. Butch is comin’. Go!”

Wackie wasn’t smiling as he strode away.

A few minutes later, Butch and Moondance set off in another direction.

Chapter 7. Moondance learns to breathe and close her eyes

Stacy Jones: Alan Hale MacKahan (1921–1990), using the stage name Alan Hale Jr., played Casey Jones in Casey Jones

Wackie Chang: Chan Kong-sang, using the stage name Jackie Chan, played Chon Wang in Shanghai Noon

Leigh of Bruce: Lee Jun-fan (1940–1973) known as Bruce Lee entered a fortress where he killed a dragon: Enter the Dragon

intensively studying a little grasshopper: Grasshopper was the nickname for David Carradine (1936–2009) playing Kwai Chang Caine in Kung Fu. The name was given to him by his Master when still a boy being played by Radames Pera.

Chapter 7. Author comments

A cameraman. Some deliberate mentions of roles involved in the film industry are scattered throughout the story.

8. A MISCELLANY OF NIGHTS

Awake

“Are ya asleep?”, inquired Moondance.

“No, I’m so tired that all I want to do is look at the stars all night long.”

“Me too.”

Butch sighed. She often sighed, but cared greatly for the younger, and less worldly, Moondance.

Love

“Butch, do ya believe in love at firs’ sight?”

“Well, they say it does happen. I suppose so.”

“Have ya ever been in love?”

“Um, well, there was this man in France and we ah ... it was never going to work out anyway. Um, no, I haven’t.”

War

“Do ya think there’ll ever be a war up there among the stars?” asked the unusually pensive Moondance.

“I don’t think so, not unless there are people up there too.”

Education

“I never went t’ school much. Do ya think I should learn t’ read an’ write proper?”

“Definitely.”

“Will ya teach me?”

“I’d love to.”

Frustration

It was always the same. Every night when they talked, Moondance would begin a conversation with a question and Butch would answer. Butch never had a question for Moondance. Until this one time.

“Moondance, are you awake?”

That wasn’t the question that Butch had in mind, that was just the question before the real question.

Silence.

“Moondance?”

More silence.

Butch’s question would have to wait.

Hope

“Do ya think we’ll always have t’ be on the run?”

“I hope not. I don’t think that would be possible.”

“What’ll we do? Do ya think they’ll capture an’ ’ang us?”

“Or they’ll shoot us,” added the somber Butch.

Realizing the import of these words on her young charge, Butch continued, “We’ll eventually have to find some way out. Maybe even leave the country. I’m not sure yet.”

That was good enough for Moondance. She knew that Butch would think of something.

Religion

“Butch?”

“Yes Moondance?”

“Am I goin’ to Hell?”

“What do you mean?” responded the startled Butch.

“Well, m’ ma used to talk about many Spirits, but m’ pa said there’s a Heaven an’ a Hell. I done some bad things.”

“If I were God, then I would want you in heaven. I think you would make it an even nicer place. I’m the one who’s more likely to go to Hell.”

“Well, if I’m in Heaven then I want ya there too.”

“Thank you. You’re so sweet.”

Moondance was satisfied, and Butch hid a tear.

Family

“Butch, why don’t ya ever talk about your family? Did somethin’ bad happen to ‘em?”

“No. They’re probably all still alive, but I haven’t seen them for a few years now. I was happy until Father regarded my marriage as a business proposition.”

“You never told me you were married.”

“No, I refused to marry. That was the problem.”

“Well I want to get married and have lots of children.”

Butch smiled, “Then I hope you do, Moondance. Good night.”

“Good night, Butch.”

Chapter 8. A miscellany of nights

a war up there among the stars: The whole Star Wars franchise

9. MOONDANCE, CHANCE, AND CIRCUMSTANCE

Butch was born into wealth, but Moondance was born in a ditch.

Moondance's mother was a Native American married to a white hunter. Her husband made her promise to go into town if he wasn't back when the baby started coming. Moondance's father didn't make it back in time, and her mother couldn't get to town before the baby arrived.

Sondance was born when Moondance was about three years old. A couple of years later, her mother lost a child when giving birth. Then Stardance was born when Moondance was about eight years old.

Moondance loved the woods. She went on hunting trips with her father, and occasionally spent time with her mother's tribe. She was more welcomed by the Native Americans than by some white folks. She once spent a few weeks with her uncle in town and tried going to school. The teacher was nice, as were many of the children, but her presence created problems. For some of the parents, the only situation that could have been worse than a "half-breed" would be having a "nigger" at the school. Moondance quickly decided that the town and the school were not for her.

Life was otherwise filled with fun and excitement for the young Moondance, but sadly, both her mother and an unborn child perished during the next confinement. Moondance then took on all home duties in the woods, looking after Sondance and Stardance whenever their father was off hunting.

These were difficult years for Moondance. Her father switched from hunting to timber-cutting, so that he could be home more often, but was still regularly away for a week at a time. There was more heartbreak when Stardance passed away from a mystery illness before his fourth birthday. Then two months later, her father was fatally struck by a falling tree. This

was the final destruction of the family unit. Sondance went to stay with the uncle in town, and Moondance went off to her mother's tribe when thirteen years old.

She learned many skills from the Native Americans, but the blossoming Moondance was having increasing difficulty in fending off unwanted attention from the young braves. So when seventeen years old, Moondance set off on her own. Moondance didn't have a plan; didn't have a destination. She was quite clueless as to what she might do. It was only one month later when she crossed paths with Butch in those grim circumstances.

Chapter 9. Moondance, chance, and circumstance

She was quite clueless: Clueless

10. THE EXPLANATIONS

It is strange, actually, perhaps more amusing than strange, nay, more sad than amusing, how, in these days of political correctness, stories of the Wild West contrive, somehow, to include a token black man, or woman, or two. These African Americans are usually ill-treated, yet noble and proud and helpful and honest and good. Their inclusion is possibly a belated, indirect acknowledgement of their sad importation to the States and the subsequent long history of maltreatment. This author does not think it necessary to resort to such cynical, disingenuous, crass and shallow behavior and is only interested in the factual narration of the lives of our heroines.

However, fortuitously, there is one recorded contact between a token black man and our heroines during their extensive travels throughout the Wild West and beyond. Jango Jay Cash was the name given to him by the white man.

When still a very young man, Jango was nabbed and taken from his homeland, shipped across the waters, and sold. As a slave he had worked on a cotton plantation and was regularly beaten by the owner. After the Civil War he was a free man, but worked on a cotton plantation and was regularly beaten by the boss, who happened to be the original owner anyway.

When our ladies arrived at the plantation homestead, the owner had just finished using a whip to explain to Jango that he should stay away from the owner's daughter, Dixiebelle. And now he was threatening Dixiebelle with a strap in order to explain that he was tired of seeing her and Jango whispering and giggling together. Despite her protestations, he didn't want her to have designs "on the nigger, any nigger."

Upon witnessing the unfolding events, a livid Moondance shot the owner.

Moondance was often instinctive, spontaneous, emotional. These traits were sometimes advantageous, but sometimes dangerous in a treacherous world.

Butch preferred to be deliberate in her actions. So after a few moments' reflection, she set fire to the homestead in order to explain to the owner that certain behaviors are, well, not desirable.

By then, Dixiebelle was tending to her father's wound, and Moondance was doing her best to help Jango.

Our sympathetic and generous heroines offered money to the two victims to assist their passage should they choose to leave. However, Dixiebelle wanted to stay with her father to nurse him back to health and help him rebuild. Jango chose to leave, and Butch handed him some money. Jango asked Dixiebelle if it would be okay if he left and if she, herself, would be safe if she stayed.

"Yes."

She gave Jango a very brief pat on the top of his shoulder and a slight smile.

"I'm sorry," she added.

Jango departed on one of the homestead's horses, with the daughter's permission. The legally free Jango finally experienced a sense of financial freedom with the \$200 in his pocket.

There never were any romantic inclinations or aspirations between Jango and the daughter.

Before our heroines rode off, Butch turned and warned, "I'll be back!"

It was a threat which she had no intention of keeping, but which the plantation owner would never forget.

Chapter 10. The explanations

Jango Jay Cash: 1. Tango & Cash. 2. Django Unchained. 3. J. R. Cash (1932–2003), sometimes formally known as John R. Cash but usually known as Johnny Cash, was famous for dressing in black and his song Man in Black

“I’ll be back!”: Spoken by Arnold Alois Schwarzenegger, using the stage name Arnold Schwarzenegger, playing the Terminator in The Terminator

Chapter 10. Author comments

Yes, I was pleased with my first sentence in this chapter. Thirty-eight words and 11 commas. As I recall, I began writing it and thought it was becoming clumsy with several commas, then I thought why not go the whole hog and try to fit lots of commas in a relatively short sentence.

Me? Cynical?

11. THE COOK, THE THIEVES, THE LIES AND THE STAMPEDE

It was about eighteen months after the brute's attack, and the two survivors weren't sure where they were. They'd been riding for a few days and, not for the first time, were sick of eating beans and jerky. Some dust in the distance signalled the potential for a brief improvement to the diet. It was a cattle drive, and cattle drives have cooks. As usual, they would have to be careful, but even heroines sometimes take risks if there is a good meal at stake. Or a good steak with the meal.

They approached their hoped-for dinner.

Butch began reminiscing about her younger days on her father's cattle ranches, then commented, "At least a couple of thousand head here."

One of the cowhands caught Moondance's attention.

"Look at 'im, that tall, lanky man over there. He looks too tall for 'is 'orse. He's also quite rowdy."

Moondance had barely finished speaking when the tall fellow noticed them, turned his horse and started galloping towards them.

"Stay alert," said Butch.

The rider had just reached them when he spotted someone else coming towards them.

"The boss'll fix you up," and off he galloped back towards the herd.

"He's very tall," stated the fixated Moondance, perhaps recalling Marshal Dijon at Sidestep City.

Butch giggled slightly. Moondance was perplexed. Butch had giggled and reminisced all on the same day.

“You know ...”, began Butch, still chuckling. “Do you know what they say about really tall thin men? Well, during my travels I’ve seen ... well, how should I put it? I’ve been up close and personal with several tall men. There was Destiny. Have you heard of old Thomas Destiny, the lawman at Bottleneck? Then there was Marshal Bill Cain, who always seemed to be engaging in shoot-outs at noon. And there was old Randy Scott. Well, he wasn’t old when I first met him, but he seemed to keep popping up all over the place.”

Moondance was beginning to wonder if Butch would ever get to the point.

“Well, they’re the ones I knew best,” added Butch.

Moondance would have needed a crane to raise her eyebrows any higher.

“As I was saying, I suppose it’s really just a natural anatomical feature.”

Moondance wasn’t sure what “anatomical” meant, but didn’t interrupt.

“Maybe you know that short fat men are somewhat the opposite. Oh sorry, I was just thinking out loud. Anyway, tall thin men often have very long ... ah, this must be the trail boss. Howdy.”

The boss carefully studied the two strangers, uncertain if they were a threat.

“Yeah, howdy. Where’re you heading?”

“Laramie, a little place in Wyoming,” responded Butch.

“Then you’ve got a long way to go.”

“Yes. We were hoping we might get a meal with you tonight.”

The trail boss hesitated, then looked back at the herd. He muttered something about everything being under control, and must have concluded that he had time for some idle talk.

“My handle’s Willy Flavor. Who are you?”

“I’m Buddy Abbott, ... and he’s Monty Clift.”

Flavor was still wary.

“He is, is he? Can’t he talk for himself? Lift your hats up so that I can see your faces better.”

Butch rapidly assessed the situation. No real danger here, and apparently they hadn’t been recognized. With the prospect of a nice meal, she complied and tilted her hat back. Moondance took her hat off.

Flavor stared, then guessed.

“You’re women! I can’t have women here. Maybe I’ve heard about you two.”

“We just want a good meal. We’ll pay ten dollars. We’ll keep out of the way, and we won’t make any trouble.”

“You must be desperate if you’re willing to pay ten bucks for two plates of food. It’s not you I’m worried about, it’s the men if they find out there’s a couple of women here.”

“We can look after ourselves.”

Flavor eyed them up and down again.

“Yeah, I reckon you can. Okay, you can stay just for tonight. We’ll have to set up camp soon, and I want you two to keep away from the men. I’ll tell Sniffles to bring you your food. He has his bad days and his worse days—and I’m referring to his mood as well as his food. And I’ll tell Pearly some cock and bull story and tell him to keep the men away from you two. So what are your real names?”

“I’m Betsy Davis.”

“I’m Moo ... Moonstruck.”

“Sure you are. And I’m Bigfoot.”

Butch smiled. “I’m guessing Sniffles is the cook. I dread to think why you call him that. Which one’s Pearly?”

Flavor smiled. "He's my ramrod, the one who came over here before me."

"That's an unusual name," ventured Butch.

"Yeah, we call him Pearly Gates because he's helped a few people go through them. His real name is Flint Fleetwood but he seems to prefer the name we gave him. You better not try to mess with him."

Moondance smiled, but Butch kept a straight face.

"Thank you, Mr. Flavor. We'll be careful, and do as you say."

The little formality curried Flavor's favor and set his mind at peace. Butch was very good at dealing with people, if she chose to be.

"And as for Sniffles," added Flavor, shaking his head without finishing his sentence. "It's a real shame Drumstick suddenly came down with that fever. He's our usual cook and we didn't think we'd miss his cooking, but we do."

Both women raised their eyebrows, then Flavor rode off and talked to Pearly.

"Tell Sniffles to cook some extra food tonight and take a couple of plates to those riders over there. They're staying just for tonight. Tell the men not to approach them."

"Who are they, Willy?"

"Um, a couple of lawmen. They're hunting Billy Goatee. You know, that bonny young lad who turned really bad."

Pearly was unconvinced, "That little one is awfully short for a lawman."

Flavor sighed, and knew he'd been found out.

"Okay, I think they might be gunslingers. Maybe they're chasing Billy Goatee, but they won't give us any trouble."

Pearly just stared at Willy.

“Okay, if they weren’t women then I’d be pretty sure that they’re gunslingers. They want to give Sniffles ten dollars just for a meal tonight. I still don’t want the men to know they’re women.”

Pearly laughed. “I hope you warned them about Sniffles.” Then he mumbled in disgust, “You can’t have women here.”

Just as Pearly was about to turn his horse towards the chuck wagon, Willy spoke again. “Pearly, are we still good for late tonight? What do you reckon about meeting behind those rocks over there? We couldn’t live it down if any of the men see us doing it.”

“Sure, Willy. I’ll be up for it. I’ll be there at ten, but as I’ve told you before, I don’t care if the men know.”

Sniffles was setting up camp when Pearly arrived. He was already doing his fair share of muttering and complaining, and had just kicked a bucket, literally, for good measure.

“Sniffles.”

“Yes, what, pray tell, do you want now? It’s not ready yet. Don’t you know that I have to cook it before you can eat it?”

“Flavor wants you to make sure you have enough for two extra plates tonight. You see those two over there? They’ll be setting up their own camp away from the men, and Flavor wants you to take the meals to them.”

“Well pardon me.” Then Sniffles sneezed before he could continue. “They do not look like proper gentlemen to me. Do they think they’re too good to eat with us? You tell Flavor this isn’t a charity, and I don’t get paid enough to be both cook and waiter.”

“Flavor thinks they might be a couple of gunslingers, and that it’s best if they keep clear of the men. They’ll pay you ten dollars.”

The sweetener wasn’t quite enough. “Rich gunslingers, you say. Well, they can still come eat with us. I reckon they could just as easily shoot us from

over there as here. Why is he letting gunslingers stay at the camp?" asked Sniffles as he wiped his nose with his forearm.

Pearly was tiring of all the talking and arguing.

"They're a couple of women, okay? They might be gunslingers. Flavor just wants to keep them away from the men. Keep your mouth shut. They'll be gone in the morning."

"Well, all you had to do was say so."

Pearly rode off to help round up the last of the strays.

One by one, the men made their way to camp. It was strange that evening. As they rode in, they noticed the two strangers nearby, and were all satisfied with the simple explanation, "Gunslingers."

Well, the strangers were strange, of course, but that wasn't why the camp had an almost eerie atmosphere. Sniffles was whistling one moment, and singing the next, pausing only to sniffle intermittently. No one had actually seen him happy before, nor wearing a bow tie. When Pearly came into camp he spent a small age trying to dust off his clothes with his hat, then proceeded to have a shave. It was still only Tuesday, not even Sunday.

Most of the men were chatting, tending to horses, or just lounging around, waiting for dinner. The days on the cattle drive were long, hot, dusty, and tiring. Some of the men noticed Sniffles take a couple of meals over to the strangers. He was over there for a couple of minutes, but none of the men could hear the conversation.

"Here are your meals, ladies."

Moondance uttered a polite thank-you. He couldn't see their faces very well in the semi-darkness, but could see well enough to realize that the women were quite young. And oh, the silken tones of the short one's sweet voice, noticeable even during that brief response.

Then Moondance sat eating quietly while Butch charmed. Her voice was husky, but still appealing.

“Thank you, Sniffles. Mr. Flavor didn’t explain why you were given that cruel name.”

“Well I do sometimes have trouble with the dust and the cold night air. My real name is Jack Parlance.”

Butch took a mouthful, and was pleasantly surprised. It wasn’t wonderful, but better than she feared, and Moondance was obviously relishing her meal.

“Why, this is marvelous, Mr. Parlance. I’m surprised you’re not running your own boardinghouse, serving food of this quality.”

“Thank you, madam. I believe those unworthy souls over there don’t appreciate my expertise. Please call me Jack.”

“We heard you whistling and singing over there. It’s so nice to see people happy, even when they are working.”

Butch didn’t mention that he was off-key.

Poor Parlance had been desperately trying to suppress his sniffles the whole time he was with the ladies, when suddenly he unleashed an almighty sneeze. The darkness hid most of the consequences, but Moondance felt something on the back of her hand and Butch copped some of it in her face. However Butch maintained her decorum and didn’t miss a beat.

“I hope Mr. Flavor explained to you that we want to pay for this meal. I trust you won’t offend us by refusing our offer. We do insist, Jack.”

Butch handed Sniffles the ten dollars and he accepted graciously, “Thank you, madam.”

Pearly whistled to Sniffles.

“I better go now. I’ll come back later and collect the plates.”

“That would be wonderful, thank you.”

Butch and Moondance smiled when Sniffles jumped and clicked his heels during the short walk back to camp. Then he sneezed again.

Unfortunately, the evening soon deteriorated.

Sniffles began serving the men their meals. Several took a mouthful then spat it out. Now a lot of men like their meals salty, but ...

“What’d ya do to these slops?”

“Well, it may be that perchance I sneezed a bit when I added the salt. Perhaps too much tipped in.”

“Well, maybe we should get another cook after we bury this one.”

Something was brewing, and it wasn’t the coffee. It was mutiny.

“It’s a wonder them gunslingers didn’t shoot ya when ya fed ’em.”

“Well, perhaps ...”

“Perhaps what?”

“Well, perhaps ... um, perhaps I cooked their meals separately.”

“Now why’d ya go and do that?”

“Well, perhaps they were going to give me ten dollars, so I wanted to give them something special. They do appear to be very refined ladies, you know.”

Mayhem ensued. There was shouting and swearing, and two of the cowboys went to fetch their guns while Sniffles went running off into the darkness. Pearly knew immediately that his planned visit to the ladies wasn’t going to happen, nor his clandestine meeting with Willy, and he tried to reinstate some peace. Flavor stood and stared briefly towards the ladies. He knew it wasn’t their fault, or Pearly’s, or Sniffles’. It was his alone. Then he, too, tried to steady the ship.

Soon one of the cowboys was running off into the darkness and shooting. No one knew if he was aiming at Sniffles or the moon. It didn't matter. The cattle were stirring and creating a terrible ruckus with their mooing.

"Forget the gear," yelled Butch to Moondance, "we'll get it later. Mount up! They're going to stampede for sure."

There was no consorting at ten that night. The dance lesson would have to wait.

Chapter 11. The cook, the thieves, the lies and the stampede

The cook, the thieves, the lies and the stampede: The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover

Have you heard of old Thomas Destiny, the lawman at Bottleneck?: James Maitland Stewart (1908–1997), using the stage name James Stewart, played Thomas Jefferson Destrly Jr. as the deputy in the town of Bottleneck

Marshal Bill Cain, who always seemed to be engaging in shoot-outs at noon: Frank James Cooper (1901–1961), using the stage name Gary Cooper, played Marshal Will Kane in High Noon

Randy Scott: George Randolph Scott (1898–1987) used the stage name Randolph Scott

Laramie, a little place in Wyoming: Laramie

Willy Flavor: Edward Heddy Jr. (1925–1966), using the stage name Eric Fleming, played Gil Favor in Rawhide

Buddy Abbott: William Alexander Abbott (1897–1974) used the stage name Bud Abbott

Monty Clift: Edward Montgomery Clift (1920–1966) used the stage name Montgomery Clift

Betsy Davis: Ruth Elizabeth Davis (1908–1989) used the stage name Bette Davis

I'm Moo ... Moonstruck: Moonstruck

we call him Pearly Gates because he's helped a few people go through them. His real name is Flint Fleetwood: Clinton Eastwood Jr., using the stage name Clint Eastwood, played Rowdy Yates in Rawhide

Drumstick suddenly came down with that fever: Paul Alden Brinegar Jr. (1917–1995), using the stage name Paul Brinegar, played George Washington Wishbone in Rawhide

They're hunting Billy Goatee. You know, that bonny young lad who turned really bad: Henry McCarty (1859–1881), criminal, was often called William H. Bonney and had the nickname Billy the Kid

Jack Parlance: Volodymyr Palahniuk (1919–2006) used the stage name Jack Palance

Chapter 11. Author comments

I never wanted to miss an episode of Rawhide when I was a kid.

Technically I'm an author because I wrote this, but I honestly consider the description embarrassing in my case. Ditto calling myself a writer. Perhaps storyteller would sound less posh, less formal. There's nothing deep and meaningful in this book. Nothing fancy. I've tried to spin a fun yarn whilst paying tribute to the entertainment industry. That's all.

12. CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

They'd been riding for a few days before they neared the next town. It had been hot, dry, dusty and slow. Rations were getting low. They hadn't been in this town before so took their usual precautions. Butch had rules, lots of rules. She had rules for everything. Their survival depended on these rules. Occasionally Moondance would make suggestions, but she never set any rules. Except for the rule that she had set for herself—do whatever Butch tells her to.

As soon as the town was in view, they paused for a couple of minutes, and discussed what could be observed about the town from that distance—the number of roads in and out, their approximate directions, and the size of the town. Distances and directions to nearest hills, where the land was cleared or wooded, fenced areas, and locations of farmhouses were also noted. It was important to know anything that might be useful if they had to dash away. If the town was too exposed in open county with no nearby cover then they would give it a wide berth and keep on going.

Fortunately, this particular town looked safe to enter, so they searched for, and found, an isolated spot with a nearby watering hole to set up camp. Months earlier, they had sold the brute's horse and had bought two extra horses using stolen money. They considered it prudent to have two horses to be used as packhorses or in emergencies. They left one of the spare horses at the camp, and rode off towards town with the other. They found and stopped at some cover as close to town as possible.

The next part of the plan was potentially dangerous. Moondance placed her handguns in a saddlebag, then rode off alone towards the town.

She drifted slowly into the town, stopped briefly to give her horse a drink at a trough, then continued through and out of the town in the same direction. As soon as she was safely out of sight of the townsfolk she broke out into a gallop, circled around and then back to where Butch was waiting. She told

Butch as much as she could remember about the town—in particular, where the sheriff's office was, the locations of the general store, the bank, the saloon, and the church if there was one. Neither Butch nor Moondance was religious, but if the situation deteriorated then they might, just might, be granted temporary refuge in the church.

This town seemed okay so phase three began. Butch removed the rifles from her back and horse, and moseyed into town with a spare horse in tow. She headed straight for the general store; bought supplies; chatted with the shopkeeper, fishing for any local or national news; loaded up the spare horse; and continued on in the same original direction out of town. As soon as Moondance could see Butch travelling out of town she turned and headed back to camp. Eventually Butch also doubled back and managed to arrive at camp just on dusk. It was a dangerous game that Butch and Moondance were playing.

This was a pleasant campsite, so they stayed two nights. One of Butch's rules forbade them from staying more than two nights in any one place.

They thought that if they got a chance then they might come back here. Butch's rule: always wait six or more months before returning to the same campsite.

It took them three and a half stinking hot days to reach the next town. This was a town they were familiar with, and Butch had different rules for such towns. It was only about four months since their last visit so they duly found a new campsite about two hours from town and set up.

"I need a drink," ventured Butch, but she wasn't referring to water.

"Me too," responded Moondance, but she wasn't referring to alcohol.

They didn't need any more supplies—just a drink.

They timed their ride to reach town at dusk. No sheriff was stationed there, so it was a fairly wild place. No one would be expecting them, and so an ambush was unlikely. They went straight to the saloon, tied up their horses outside, and stepped through the swinging doors, armed to the hilt, with a

rifle still on Butch's back. Their reputations were great and still growing, so allowing themselves to be recognized by all and sundry in the saloon seemed the best strategy. Anyone silly enough to try to take them on would know they'd have a hell of a fight on their hands.

Most of the patrons glanced up. There was a loud shuffling of chairs. A few drinkers suddenly remembered that they were no longer thirsty and left the saloon. Butch carefully scrutinized everyone who left. A couple of groups of men moved away from the bar and relocated to the tables. The far end of the bar was still occupied so Butch and Moondance took the near end. Butch's rule: at this end of the bar Moondance was responsible for monitoring the entrance. Butch was well-positioned with respect to an all-important mirror behind the bar and kept checking on the rest of the room.

Butch ordered, "A whiskey and a soda water please."

"Just whiskey and beer."

"Then make it one of each."

Before the bartender had brought their drinks, a loudmouth cowboy with more whiskey in his belly than brains in his head started cursing. The three cowboys standing in the corner with him tried to hush him, then tried to drag him out of the saloon but he wasn't budging.

Butch and Moondance had already paid the bartender and were sipping on their drinks with heads bowed, but with Butch constantly glancing at the mirror. The cowboy was annoying, but this sort of thing had happened before. Our heroines continued to ignore him, drinking slowly and not making any sudden moves, but the cowboy kept mouthing off.

"Who let those vermin in here? ... Why don't youse [expletive] [expletive] and [expletive], ya [expletive] [expletive]'s? ... Are youse men or whores? ... If youse are whores then turn around and show us yer titties."

The ladies had just finished their drinks and were starting to turn away from the haranguing when the cowboy followed through with, "Ah, ya freaks."

Sometimes it takes only one word, and that was it. Butch cracked.

Before the cowboy could share any more of his opinions, Butch drew her gun as she swung around.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Right arm.

Left arm.

Left leg.

Right leg.

Butch maintained aim at the whimpering, bleeding mess who had dropped to the ground. By then, jaws had also dropped, glasses had dropped, chairs had toppled over with their riders, and tables had tipped. Butch's piercing blue eyes were glaring, and still firing bullets of loathing at her victim.

Moondance had never seen such raw, wanton ferocity in Butch before—in man, nor in beast. She trembled as she gently rested her hand on Butch's outstretched arm.

Butch pulled away and slowly stepped towards her victim while she continued to take aim at his head. The patrons parted, like the waters of the Red Sea had done long ago for Moses. By the time she was about a three feet from her victim, he was in a state of severe shock and bordering on unconsciousness. He never heard her words, but most of the terrified room did.

"And the freaks will have their revenge."

Then for the coup de grâce. But Butch did not deliver it. She had finally regained her composure. She holstered the gun, turned and stalked back

towards the bar. She seemed oblivious to the fact that Moondance had her back, but it wasn't necessary. Everyone else was either standing, sitting, cowering, or hiding in stunned silence.

Butch pointed to a half-full bottle of whiskey behind the counter. The bartender almost tripped and fell in his rush to fetch it. With shaking hands, he stammered, "Er, um, take it. I, I mean, keep it. Um, I mean, it's, it's on the house."

Butch grabbed the bottle and walked out. Moondance stayed briefly and watched over the room while Butch untied both horses. As soon as Moondance turned to leave, the cowboy's friends and a couple of others rushed over to help the mangled victim. Both women rode off at a canter.

It was a silent ride back to camp.

While dismounting, Butch uttered only one word, "Sorry."

She was trembling, and her sweaty hands were shaking. She had realized the brutality of her actions. She was regretting what she had done, but was even more distressed at realizing what she was capable of, both in a moral sense and in a weapon skills sense.

Moondance consoled Butch.

"It's okay. You go lie down an' I'll tend the horses."

Eventually Moondance unrolled her blanket and lay down near Butch. The latter couldn't face a whiskey after all, but she silently offered the bottle to Moondance. Moondance silently declined.

Not much moon that night, and not many stars either. It was too cloudy. Both women gazed up in silence. Moondance was soon asleep, but Butch hardly slept at all.

During breakfast next morning, Moondance tentatively broached the subject of yesterday's events.

“How ya feelin’?”

“I’m okay,” was the unconvincing response.

“Were ya gonna take the head shot?”

“No, I don’t think so. I can’t really remember for sure.”

Moondance was somewhat relieved.

Neither woman mentioned two of Butch’s rules: never waste a shot; and never empty the barrel unless the situation demands it. If Butch wanted to render the man defenseless then one bullet in any limb would have sufficed. If she wanted to kill him then a single bullet would still have sufficed. In her belligerence, Butch had wasted three bullets. She had foolishly broken two of her own rules, including the one to walk away whenever possible, and had come close to breaking a third rule. More importantly, she had temporarily lost control. She would never do so again.

After eating, they packed then rode off in silence. It would be another couple of days before normal communications resumed.

It was a fortnight before news of the incident had spread to a town with a printing press. The brutality of the maiming made headlines. At last report the victim had had two amputations and his life was still hanging in the balance.

It is ironic that the authorities added attempted murder to the long list of reasons for their capture. Butch would not have failed in an attempted murder.

Chapter 12. Crime and punishment

Crime and punishment: Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment

Ah, ya freaks: Freaks

Chapter 12. Author comments

Warning: some viewers may find the movie Freaks quite disturbing. Decades ago I waited many years for three particular movies to be released on Australian television: Freaks, King Kong (1933 version), and Attack of the Killer Tomatoes. Eventually I saw all of them.

13. MANNERS AND DEMEANORS

Our fearless and peerless fugitives had been on the run for almost eighteen months since their encounter with Marshal Dijon. Butch's infamous maiming incident was widely known, abhorred and discussed. No one seemed aware of, or to care about, the current status of her victim, except Butch herself. Our heroines had recently robbed a third stagecoach but money was getting low again.

It was a glorious, sunny day on the trail in Nevada when Butch unexpectedly quipped, "We need to get you a dress."

Moondance hadn't worn one since shortly after the brute's attack; and Butch hadn't worn one since she began heading west after returning from Europe.

"I'd like t' have a dress," mused Moondance, "but what use would it be out here?"

"And I'll have to teach you how to act like a proper lady of manners," continued Butch, not assimilating Moondance's response.

Moondance was delighted at the prospect of learning to be a real lady too, but wondered about Butch's intentions.

"Why do I need a dress an' good manners?"

"So that we can rob a bank."

Moondance was accustomed to Butch's circumlocutions, but this caught her off guard.

"Are you goin' to get a dress too?"

"No, I won't need one."

Moondance rolled her eyes.

“Would you like to rob a bank?” Butch finally asked.

“Well, I s’pose so. Do ya think it’s safe?”

Butch smiled, while Moondance was unaware of her little pun.

“Everything we do is risky.”

Moondance’s silence implied her compliance with Butch’s plans. She knew that she’d eventually learn more, and finally she knew why Butch had been unusually quiet the previous few days. Butch had been thinking and scheming.

That same evening, Butch began teaching Moondance the gentle arts of a refined lady. Butch finished the first lesson with “... and now that your reading is progressing well, I’ll also begin teaching you to speak like an educated lady of the world.”

“Whaddya mean?”

Butch smiled. “I mean that we’ll soon have you looking and acting the part. It may not be necessary out here, but eventually you might have a role where it will be advantageous to sound cultured as well.”

Moondance was offended by the callous, but accurate, appraisal. However, Butch was quick to comfort her companion. “Moondance, I was lucky to receive a good education, and it’s not your fault that you didn’t receive one. No one can blame you for that, and you shouldn’t either.”

Getting a dress and a bonnet for Moondance without going into any towns, and without stirring up any trouble, took days longer than Butch had hoped. Eventually they stumbled onto a cabin with the husband away, and the wife willing to part with her bonnet and her teenage daughter’s dress for the extravagant price of twenty dollars. The clothes didn’t fit Moondance well, but that was okay. Butch figured that Moondance needed just a reasonable dress before buying a specially fitted one.

With the dress procured and the trainee lady progressing well, two problems remained. Where would be a safe environment to put

Moondance through her paces, so to speak; and where were they going to find some gentlemen in Nevada, especially if our ladies still wanted to avoid towns? Butch had anticipated this moment, and had been steadily steering a course into ponderosa pine country for many days. They would visit the Cartwheels.

Benny and Penny Cartwheel were archetypal wealthy landholders with four sons.

The firstborn was called Adam, perhaps because he was the firstborn.

Next came Horsie. He wasn't the only man called Horsie in the old Wild West, but you have to wonder why so many people born in those days had such unusual names.

Horsie grew to be a giant of a man. Somehow the whole earth seemed smaller when he was standing on it. However, there's a good reason why the description 'strong as an ox' didn't fit him. It was a gross understatement. At one time, ten oxen tired when pulling a massive log up a slippery slope. The loggers then unhitched the oxen and hitched up Horsie instead. He got the job done. So if you want to pay tribute to an ox then you could say that it's as strong as a Horsie.

It's also said that Horsie was once at a circus fair and lifted up an elephant because it was about to stand on an ant. This is a silly exaggeration. Horsie had rather poor eyesight so he couldn't possibly have seen an ant. It was probably a beetle which the elephant almost stood on. Fortunately for man and beast, and insect, Horsie was a gentle giant and slow to anger. It's said that the only time he ever lost his temper he punched someone so hard on the chin that the man went flying through the air and landed clear in the next county.

The third son was Little Joey. They didn't call him that because they found him in a kangaroo's pouch. It was because he was ... little. Otherwise they would have called him Big Joey.

The fourth son was called Hope, and was given that name before he was born because the parents were hoping to finally have a daughter.

Moondance had known the Cartwheels for a few years. A chance encounter in the woods between a young teenage Moondance who was staying with her mother's tribe, and a wild but older teenage Little Joey led to a close friendship. Possibly Little Joey had more than friendship on his mind at times, but that was not to be. Little Joey had taken Moondance to the homestead a couple of times and she was made to feel welcome. Moondance once took him to visit the tribe where he was not made to feel welcome by the young braves. It was he who first taught Moondance how to draw and shoot a handgun.

Moondance and Butch had visited the Cartwheels several months after the brute's attack. At that stage the Cartwheels were unaware of their fugitive status, and our heroines did not disclose that fact. Butch knew that today's circumstances would be different. She also knew that Benny and Penny had raised their sons well, and that the Cartwheel males were about as close to gentlemen as you could find in this sometimes harsh and cruel territory.

Butch reminded Moondance to stay alert, and obtained her approval to do the initial talking. While approaching the house, Moondance dropped back a little and remained to one side.

Benny charged out of the front door, brandishing a shotgun. He aimed it at Butch and tried to keep an eye on Moondance.

Butch was not surprised by the prickly reception.

"Hello Benny."

"What do you two want?"

"Well, we would like a couple of nice meals, a bath, a warm safe bed for the night, a whiskey and a lemonade, and some pleasant company."

The irate Benny was not ready for such an answer—a deliberate tactic by Butch. Benny enjoyed being the hospitable host, but not to wanted felons. He took a few moments to respond.

“I’m sorry, but you’re no longer welcome here.”

That little word “sorry” was loaded with significance and implications for the perspicacious Butch. She was convinced that Benny wouldn’t pull the trigger, and that our heroines still had some chance of being accommodated.

Just then Horsie poked his head out the front door, realized who it was, and stepped out.

“Why, it’s Butch ... and Moondance. Let them in, pa.”

“We have no desire to harm or rob you. To be honest, I could have waited and picked you off with my rifle from the woods over there. And Moondance could have shot you as you came through the door.”

“She’s right, pa. Remember how Little Joey said that Moondance could draw faster than him almost as soon as he taught her.”

Benny wasn’t convinced. “I hear you two killed a man.”

Butch had anticipated some interrogation, but she had hoped to have it inside instead of out in the open. There was no point in denial, and Butch hoped that telling only half the truth would help Moondance avoid any embarrassment with her friends.

“He attacked me, and Moondance saved me. And we had to do some thieving just to survive.”

“I hear you viciously maimed a man with no provocation whatsoever.”

“I have deeply regretted doing that ever since.”

Benny and Horsie suddenly turned their gazes towards a beaming Little Joey coming out of the stable and walking towards Moondance. She looked around and returned the smile.

“Hello, Moondance. How long are you staying?”

Moondance had seemed quite somber and distant during the previous visit, and Little Joey never knew why. However, he was delighted that she now seemed to be back to her vivacious best.

Benny relented.

“Okay, you can stay the night, but I want you gone after breakfast tomorrow. Adam’s away so you can share his room.”

“Thank you, Benny. We won’t make any trouble.”

“Leave your weapons outside,” commanded Benny.

“Can’t do that, Benny. We need them to be more accessible, just in case. Would it be okay if we left them just inside the front door?”

“Okay,” agreed Benny reluctantly.

Little Joey and Moondance had been chatting and were oblivious to these latter proceedings.

“Moondance,” summoned Butch, “Moondance!”

“I’ll look after the horses,” volunteered Little Joey. “I’ve still got to finish my work. Moondance, why don’t you come over to the stable in a little while?”

The smiling Moondance agreed.

Butch removed her rifle and handgun, and Moondance removed her two guns, as they entered the house with Benny and Horsie. Benny went into the kitchen and informed Penny about the extra guests.

“You know that I don’t trust that Moondance. I think all that sweetness is just an act. And after what that Butch has done, how could you?”

“They’ll be gone in the morning,” responded Benny.

Being the wife of a gentleman, Penny went out and politely welcomed the guests while Benny and Horsie went into another room to finish some

business. Butch, being the daughter of a gentleman, politely asked Penny if the guests would be permitted to bathe, and Penny graciously offered to assist if needed.

Moondance wanted to scurry off to the stable, and Butch smiled.

“I’ll have the first bath. Make sure you’re back in an hour or so. We’ve got a lot to do to get you ready for this evening. Be careful out there.”

It took quite a while to boil some water but the wait was worth it. Butch closed her eyes while she relaxed in the bath. It had been ages since she had been at such ease during daylight hours.

By the time Moondance returned to the house, Butch was becoming impatient. She was sitting at the table with Benny, Penny, and Horsie in an awkward silence. Butch had begun the conversation by politely inquiring about Adam’s whereabouts. Penny grimaced while Benny explained that he was courting Eva Gardener, a temptress, as Benny put it, and in Adam’s last letter he mentioned that he had followed her to the small town of Eden in New York state. Benny sensed Penny’s anger that he had revealed too much of their private affairs; and the superb lemonade and cookies did little to reduce the tension. Horsie did his best by asking insignificant questions of Butch, but her brief answers weren’t helping much.

The mood improved briefly when Hope came home. Upon seeing Butch he began eagerly looking about the room and inquired, “Is Moondance here?”

Penny frowned while the other three smiled and Benny responded brusquely, “She’s over at the stable with Joey.”

Just as Hope’s shoulders slumped, a bubbly Moondance bounced into the room and announced, “We’ve been havin’ fun.”

It didn’t seem possible that Hope’s shoulders could drop even further, but they did.

However, Moondance's comment was quite superfluous. It was obvious from her mood, and the straw in her hair and on her clothing, that she and Joey had been having something.

Moondance was followed by a beaming Little Joey carrying her Bowie knife. He, too, had been rolling around in the hay.

"Moondance has been teaching me some Chinese fighting techniques."

That explained Little Joey's cut lip and half-closed, swelling eye.

Benny inquired about the knife. "Where did that come from?"

"Oh, Moondance removed it before we started fighting."

He handed it back to Moondance, and she pulled up a trouser leg and popped it back into its pouch.

Hope's mouth dropped open, Penny rolled her eyes, and Benny turned and glared at Butch. She smiled and shrugged her shoulders. Benny shook his head as he stood up to go back to work. Penny returned to the kitchen and the three sons also went away to continue with their duties.

"Your bath is ready, but first we'll fit your dress. Penny has some needles and threads, pins, and scissors."

Moondance tried on the dress. Butch was familiar with the fairly recent European fashions, and had an eye for style. With a snip here and a tuck there, the dress underwent a Cinderella-like transformation.

Preparing Moondance and the dress, followed by some imaginative braiding of Moondance's hair, was a rushed effort until almost dinnertime. Butch issued a final instruction for Moondance to wait five minutes before entering the dining room. Moondance thought that all this dramatic entrance stuff was nonsense, but obeyed.

Butch and the three sons were already seated when Benny arrived at the table. A few moments later, a blushing, nervous, embarrassed, and suddenly shy Moondance stepped into the doorway.

It's strange how a change of appearance can alter perception.

Little Joey stood up so quickly that he almost knocked his chair over. This was the same young woman who had almost knocked him senseless a few hours earlier. Little Joey's sudden movement startled Moondance so much that she ducked slightly and dashed a couple of steps forward before looking back. No one was there. Then she remembered Butch explaining that in polite society, gentlemen will stand up as a lady enters the room.

Horsie stood up and tried to remove the hat which he wasn't wearing.

Hope stared, then suddenly remembered his manners and stood up.

Benny also stood up. The elegant figure near the doorway reminded him of his dear departed first wife. Benny went over and escorted Moondance to her chair. Then he and Horsie sat down while Moondance carefully spread the napkin on her lap.

"Joey. Joey! Hope! You can both sit down now," insisted Benny.

Penny placed food on the table, then Benny pulled out the chair for her.

Finally, the old man relaxed, and soon everyone was in a buoyant mood. Except Penny. Benny sat at the head of the table and Penny at the other end. Moondance then Butch were on Benny's right, with Little Joey, Horsie then Hope on his left.

The dinner was splendid and lasted well into the night. Penny just sat there with a plastered smile but everyone else contributed to the conversation. Little Joey had some stories to tell about his various adventures, some of which his parents were surprised to hear for the first time. Whenever Moondance spoke, the intense, attentive silence from the others made her feel uncomfortable. Everyone was amused as she recounted their dealings with Wackie.

Benny mainly reminisced about the antics his sons got up to when they were youngsters. In one of his jovial moments, he forgot himself, and offered Butch a whiskey. She accepted.

Horsie's main contribution, other than his raucous laughter, was prompting Butch to talk about her overseas travels. She did so with wit and panache. Benny was confounded. There he was, sitting next to a beautiful killer in a dress and enjoying her company; and listening, enthralled, to a highly intelligent, well-educated, widely travelled, cultured woman who had committed a heinous crime.

The teenage Hope's boyish stories were all met with knowing smiles.

Throughout the evening, Butch studied everyone—their eyes, their mouths, their gestures. Little Joey focused on Moondance constantly, and vice versa. Horsie mainly looked at Butch, which she took some pleasure in. Benny spent much of the time alternating between gazing at Moondance and studying Butch. He even remembered to look at Penny occasionally. Hope gazed at Moondance, but Hope's hope turned to despondency when Hope realized his hopes were dashed because he had no hope with Moondance.

Eventually the others retired, but Butch and Horsie continued chatting. It was a rare opportunity for each of them to discuss the big topics such as race, war, religion and politics, instead of the petty and mundane; and there was no subject that fazed the masterful Butch.

Our young ladies slept well that night. This wasn't unusual for Moondance, but it was exceptional for Butch. Constant vigilance had been taking its toll on her. They weren't necessarily safe here, but Butch granted herself the luxury of not caring.

When the sun rose next morning, our ladies didn't. Eventually a refreshed Butch woke with a fright.

“Where is Moondance? What's happening?”

She emerged from the bedroom and discovered Benny, Penny, Hope and Moondance eating breakfast and discussing horseflesh. Butch glanced towards the front door just to check that the guns were still there. She was back in control.

The Cartwheels were getting ready for a big cattle sale, so Little Joey and Horsie were up at dawn and had already left.

“Horsie and Joey send their apologies,” volunteered Benny.

Butch wondered if her father’s burgeoning empire would be involved in the sale, but didn’t say anything. She sat down and ate, while the others continued talking. Benny made a point of not saying anything else to Butch but made a few polite looks in her direction.

Before finishing eating, Butch asked for directions on how to get off the property while avoiding the main trails. Benny obliged, then everyone left the table.

Butch went over to the stable to saddle the horses, collecting her guns on her way out. She rode back to the house, with the other horses in tow. Moondance came out, closely followed by Benny, Penny and Hope. Penny said a polite good-bye before dashing back inside.

“You have some mighty fine sons, Benny,” said Butch, and he thanked her.

“Many thanks for your generous hospitality. Don’t worry, I won’t be back.”

Perhaps Benny didn’t notice that Butch excluded Moondance from that commitment.

Before Moondance stepped off the porch, Benny gently placed his hands on her shoulders, kissed her on the forehead, and said “Good-bye.”

Moondance wasn’t sure what to do or say. She smiled, then quickly mounted when she realized that Hope wanted to steal a kiss. The ladies rode off.

After a while, Moondance remarked, “It might be fun to be a real lady.”

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, Penny was expressing her own opinion. “I don’t want to see those two ever again.”

“Yes, dear,” responded Benny.

Chapter 13. Manners and demeanors

steering a course into ponderosa pine country for many days. They would visit the Cartwheels: Bonanza is about the Cartwright family living on the Ponderosa Ranch

Benny and Penny Cartwheel: Lyon Himan Green (1915–1987), using the stage name Lorne Greene, played Ben Cartwright in Bonanza

The firstborn was called Adam: Pernell Elven Roberts, Jr. (1928–2010), using the stage name Pernell Roberts, played Adam Cartwright in Bonanza

Horsie: Bobby Dan Davis Blocker (1928–1972), using the stage name Dan Blocker, played Hoss Cartwright in Bonanza

He wasn't the only man called Horsie: A Man Called Horse

The third son was Little Joey: Eugene Maurice Orowitz (1936–1991), using the stage name Michael Landon, played Little Joe Cartwright in Bonanza

Eva Gardener: Ava Lavinia Gardner (1922–1990), used the stage name Ava Gardner

Adam's whereabouts ... Eva Gardener, a temptress ... followed her to the small town of Eden: 1. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden as mentioned in Genesis chapters 2 and 3

Cinderella-like: Cinderella

Chapter 13. Author comments

Some readers might want to try to guess what Butch is planning before all is revealed.

14. THE FIRST BANK IS THE HARDEST

A true professional builds up a large knowledge base, the foundation of any serious problem solving. Sometimes the knowledge garnered for one purpose can also serve a different use.

We have already learned about Butch's elaborate method for doing the grocery shopping, otherwise known as buyin' supplies and stayin' alive. Our heroines were not yet professional bank robbers; in fact they hadn't robbed any banks yet, but they were very good at shopping. One can be sure that Butch's plan for robbing banks would be even more intricate.

"Do you still agree to rob a bank?" inquired Butch.

"Sure, but how are we gonna do it without gettin' ourselves killed? I don't really want to hurt anyone."

"Neither do I. I don't think we'll have to injure anyone—certainly not kill anyone. I've been mulling over a plan. I think it will work. We already have your dress. Now we need a narrative for you, and a talking point for me. I'll have to practise my sharpshooting."

"That don't sound like much of a plan. Ya didn't even mention a bank."

"Yes, I'm still working on the details."

"Okay."

"You can ride a horse facing backwards, can't you? Of course you can. I won't be able to hold the reins for you, and your hands will be full. We'll have to train your horse to just keep up with mine while you're riding backwards. You'll have to practise your shooting too."

Moondance didn't respond.

Whether shopping or bank robbing, the first phase of the operation was basically the same, except that if theft was being considered then Butch, not Moondance, would do the initial reconnaissance—slowly riding through town, scanning for banks and sheriff’s offices and churches, and stopping briefly to water the horse.

Our young entrepreneurs took a couple of weeks to find a town which passed Butch’s initial inspection, so then it was time for phase two.

They halted some distance from the stagecoach stop nearest to town. Moondance removed her guns. She then put her dress on over her trousers. Our budding bank robbers had been roaming the Wild West dressed as men and did not have a sidesaddle. A proper lady needs to be very modestly attired when straddling a horse. They packed a small carpet bag for Moondance, mainly to conceal a gun.

Butch gave Moondance a final reminder about her storyline and long list of tasks.

“Who are you, and who am I?”

“I’m Cherie Sibon, and you’re m’ brother Sonny.”

“And what are we doing?”

“Well, we’ve been ridin’ cross-country lookin’ for good farmin’ land. I’m gonna stay in the town for a while, and you’re gonna continue lookin’ throughout the county. After a week, I’ll catch the stagecoach out of town. If anyone asks, I’ll tell ’em that you told me you’d meet me in the next town if you were gonna take more than a few days.”

“Good,” said Butch, “and what are you going to do in town?”

“I’m gonna stay at the boardinghouse. And I’m gonna find out how many deputies the sheriff has. Oh, and I’m gonna see if the sheriff leaves town while I’m there. I’ll put some money in the bank, and I’m gonna tell you what the bank looks like inside. I’m still worried about goin’ to the bank.”

“I know you haven’t been inside a bank before, but there’s nothing to worry about. Just go up to the man behind the counter or the desk, and tell him that you want to deposit \$100. He should give you a receipt. If he doesn’t then robbing him will be an immense pleasure.”

Butch then checked that Moondance could remember how to spell and recognize their pretend names, as well as the number 100.

“Your reading and writing are progressing very well. One day we’ll have to get you some real paper and a pen and ink, instead of just writing in the dirt with a stick. Now, what else do you have to remember about the bank?”

“I have to find out everythin’ I can about the bank owner—the names of him an’ his missus an’ any children. Also where he lives, so I might have to go for walks early in the morning or late in the afternoon and try to follow him. You said I might even have to go to church on Sunday, just in case I hear their names. My pa took me to church a couple of times.”

“And what is one of the most important things you have to do all week?”

“Um, I have to try to keep m’ head bowed ... and avoid starin’.”

“Yes,” said Butch, “I don’t want you flashing those big brown eyes of yours at anyone.”

“Whaddya mean?” asked Moondance with an endearing wide-eyed innocence.

Butch smiled.

“Try to get yourself a new dress and a bonnet, and maybe some proper ladies’ shoes. But don’t buy anything too fancy. We don’t want you drawing too much attention to yourself.”

Butch removed the rifle from her own back, and the two rifles from Moondance’s horse, and temporarily hid them under a bush. The ladies mounted and slowly approached the stagecoach stop. When quite close, Moondance dismounted, grabbed her bag, and passed the reins to Butch.

As Butch was turning her horse to leave, she noticed an old man emerging from the cabin and greeting Moondance with a toothless grin. Butch went a short distance before looking back to see Moondance and the old man chatting as they disappeared into the cabin.

The week was long, lonely and boring for Butch. She missed Moondance more than she expected. She managed to continue her shooting practice, something which she would normally enjoy, but even that seemed a chore. She travelled the forty miles or so to the stagecoach stop nearest to the other side of town, and duly waited some distance from the stop on the appointed day.

Eventually the stagecoach rolled in and three passengers alighted. After a while, two passengers returned to the stagecoach and it departed. Then the third traveler looked around. Her eye soon caught Butch slowly approaching with riderless horse and packhorses in tow.

An ebullient Moondance skipped towards Butch.

“Hello Butch. How do you like my new dress? I had a great time. See, whaddy think of m’ new shoes? And I had *two* baths. I think I ate too much some days. Um, did you have a good time?”

“Yes,” was the little white lie, “you better mount up. I don’t want to spend too much time near the house.”

They rode off, and Butch let Moondance chatter happily about her “holiday”.

Finally the increasingly curious Butch addressed the main purpose of the visit to town. Moondance knew where the bank owner lived, and relevant details about his family. Yes, the banker had given her a receipt for the \$100 deposit without hesitation, and Moondance could describe the layout of the bank.

“And what about the sheriff?” inquired Butch.

“Well, he ain’t got any deputies, and I don’t think he left town when I was there.”

“Ah, you’ve done well.”

“But he kept lookin’ at me,” said Moondance.

“Who?” inquired an alarmed Butch.

“The sheriff.”

“What do you mean?”

“Every day I went back to the boardin’house for lunch, and he was there every day except Sunday. I kept my head bowed like ya said, but every time I looked up he was starin’ at me.”

“Did he say anything? Do you think he suspected who you really are?”

“No, I don’t think so. He just seemed to be always starin’.”

“Okay. How old was he?”

“Um, he was old.”

“Any idea how old?”

“I think he must’ve been at least 30.”

“Well I don’t think we have to worry about him. I think we can go ahead with the robbery. What do you think?”

“Sure, whatever ya say.”

“Okay. We’ve got to get fairly close to the town, and I need you to point out the banker’s residence.”

This was duly done, and Butch was satisfied with what she saw.

“Okay, let’s do this.”

That meant doing nothing, and laying low, for the next week. Butch's plan was never going to be straightforward.

The week passed, and finally Butch could create her talking point. She needed her Sharps rifle. She made sure it was a school day. Our ladies were hidden with about five hundred yards of open space between themselves and the edge of town. After about two hours of patient waiting, they spotted the banker's wife leaving the house. A minute later, Butch went into action—deliberately hitting the back door, then taking out a window, and finally shooting a tub near the back door.

"Lucky shot," quipped Butch.

"You gotta be mighty good to be that lucky," responded Moondance.

To finish making her point, Butch took aim at three random targets in town, missing one of them. Our conniving culprits then rushed to their horses and bolted.

Phase five of the plan involved more waiting and watching. After about five days the sheriff still hadn't left town, so they tried to flush him out. About ten miles out of town they created mayhem for a day and a half. They fired their guns and rifles at everything and nothing in particular. They rustled a few cattle, which simply meant herding them to an isolated spot a few miles away. That night they snuck into someone's stable and drove all the horses out. Then it was back to their observation position near town. The next day, the sheriff left town to investigate the havoc which our soon-to-be prosperous perpetrators had been creating.

Chapter 14. The first bank is the hardest

stayin' alive: Gibb brothers' Stayin' Alive

I'm Cherie Sibon, and you're m' brother Sonny: Salvatore Phillip Bono (1935–1998) and Cherilyn Sarkisian performed together as Sonny & Cher

there's nothing to worry about: Spoken by Barry Bostwick playing Brad Majors in The Rocky Horror Picture Show

Chapter 14. Author comments

I think any reader who guesses more than half of the cheat sheet references has done exceptionally well. Yes, I do enjoy The Rocky Horror Picture Show.

15. THE HISTORY OF INTEREST FREE, NON-REPAYABLE LOANS

If you wish to borrow money from a bank, then they will invariably perform some background checks on you. It therefore makes some sense that if you intend to steal from a bank, then you should carry out your own background checks on them. Moondance had spent her week in town—and bought a new dress. Butch had completed her sniping. The sheriff was out of town. Our enterprising heroines were about to rob their first bank.

After having recently been in town, it was imperative that the residents not see Moondance's face. Thus our ladies had cut two eye holes in a bandanna and found a way to keep it in place on Moondance. Butch tied a folded kerchief over her nose and mouth.

"Don't forget, we take only banknotes. We don't want to be weighed down by gold and coins. Let the customers keep their jewelry and watches. Give them some consolation," instructed Butch.

"Okay."

Our ladies then set off for the town. They tied up the horses near the bank, and rushed in. Moondance, with a gun in each hand, stationed herself near the door which she left ajar. Butch had gone in first and straight to the counter, with gun in one hand and empty saddlebag in the other. There was only one customer and, on seeing the robbers, his only reaction was to step back towards a wall with arms raised.

Butch surprised the banker with her opening gambit.

"Hello Mr. Jolson. Albert, isn't it? It's a lovely day."

Mr. Jolson was gobsmacked.

"How is your lovely wife Mary today? I suppose Freddy and Myrtle and Johnny are all at school. Well, education is very important, even for girls."

Butch then addressed Moondance, but her comments were directed at the banker.

“Moondance, you’ve done a wonderful job teaching Harvey how to shoot. That was amazing shooting he did last week. I mean, wow, that tub! Our little Chinese friend is such a pleasant little fellow, isn’t he? Thank goodness he wasn’t aiming at anyone. But he does like his money, doesn’t he? He’ll be disappointed if he doesn’t get any today. I hope he won’t want to shoot someone.”

Butch turned to face the banker again.

“Albert, you have such a nice family. Anyway, as much as I would love to chat with you and Moondance, I fear I’ve already stayed far too long. Before I leave, I would like to borrow some money, all that you’ve got. Why don’t we go and empty your safe together? Actually, if we can fill up this saddlebag then you can keep the rest. If you co-operate, I promise we’ll give our little friend his proper share. That should keep him happy.”

The banker complied.

“Now you’re not expecting us to return any of this, are you?”

The banker shook his head, his hands shaking.

“Well thank you, Mr. Jolson, that’s much appreciated. I think all will be well, provided no one tries to inhibit our departure. If you see the sheriff then please do tell him that trigger-happy Harvey Lee will be somewhere out there keeping a watch for the next hour or so. Have a nice day.”

Moondance had been intermittently monitoring inside and outside the bank. Butch stepped backwards towards the door, then Moondance watched inside while Butch looked out. All seemed okay so Butch exited and untied the horses, while Moondance stepped backwards out of the door. The women mounted up, and began cantering out of town. Butch had reins in one hand, and handgun in the other. Moondance was riding facing backwards, and holding one of her rifles. They had considered and practised this maneuver, and had concluded that cantering while ready to shoot was

preferable to galloping full bore. They also figured that as they got further from the center of town, Moondance's rifle would provide better cover and accuracy over a longer distance than handguns.

A couple of hundred yards out of town, Moondance swung around and they galloped away. However, they did not go far. When out of sight, they partly doubled back to where Butch had hidden her Sharps. For ten minutes, Butch occasionally fired at a few inanimate targets around town.

"That'll keep them wondering."

Our ladies skedaddled, and after a while, Moondance could no longer contain her curiosity.

"Harvey? Harvey Lee?"

"'Harvey' was the first name that came into my head. Then I remembered Wackie and said 'Chinese friend'. Finally, I thought I better give him a Chinese sounding name so I added 'Lee'."

"What's the point?"

"Well, you never know, someone might make the connection with Wackie. Who knows how many people that cranky foreman talked to after we intervened? Look, it probably wouldn't have mattered if I told the banker that Harvey is a six foot rabbit. They might think we're the ones taking those long shots, but they might also conclude that there really are three of us, and that our unseen partner might take a potshot at them. The more things we give them to think about, the more doubts they'll have. Then the more confused they'll be, and it's more likely they'll get things wrong. It's in our own interest to sow the seeds of uncertainty."

"Okay. I couldn't see what he put in the saddlebag. How much do ya reckon we got?"

"Maybe fifteen thousand dollars."

"What're we gonna do with all that?"

“I don’t know. I hadn’t really thought about it. I was more interested in planning the robbery than the money itself. I suppose we could put it in a bank for safe keeping.”

Our thieves adopted the same procedure for their second bank robbery. Butch was very keen to maintain the ruse that they had a hidden partner acting as sniper.

Subsequent bank robberies were more streamlined. Moondance always spent time in the town gathering intelligence, and no one ever made the connection between the quiet, reserved visitor and the robber with two eye holes in the bandanna. Sniping before a robbery was dropped, because it might alert the township to a forthcoming bank raid. Our young ladies also didn’t bother waiting until they could induce the sheriff out of town, since there was often a deputy or two hanging around anyway. However, occasional sniping after a robbery was still integral to the plan.

During the next couple of years, our increasingly wealthy investors profited from several non-repayable loans. Some of the names they used for Moondance’s narratives were Bonham and Claude Carter, Katherine and Spencer Heartburn, Lizzy and Richard Tailor, to mention but a few.

Only two bankers failed to succumb to Butch’s veiled threats to their families. The first such banker complied after Butch stepped forward and pressed her loaded gun into his shoulders and then his legs. Perhaps he had heard about Butch’s vile maiming.

The second stubborn banker was a more interesting case. He was also the only banker that didn’t hand over a receipt to Moondance when she deposited her money. When Moondance reported this to Butch, the latter took an immediate dislike to him.

After this bank owner refused to hand over the money, Butch pressed her gun into each of his limbs, and still he failed to capitulate, so Butch shot him in the foot.

This was the first occasion that either of our ladies fired a gun inside a bank.

“Either hand over the money, or I shoot you in the other foot.”

To Butch’s dismay, he still refused.

Promises must be kept, and public perceptions preserved, so Butch shot him in the shoulder.

“Huh,” she uttered, as she pressed the gun barrel into one of his nostrils, “I missed. I suppose that if you can’t trust bankers then you certainly can’t trust bank robbers.”

The banker was balancing on one foot, claspng his shoulder, and leaning against the counter.

“There!” she said, as she shot him in the other foot, “I’ll keep my word.”

Our ladies exited the bank, empty-handed.

On the night of the cashless robbery—or cashless loan—the crooks discussed the incident.

“I couldn’t have done that,” confessed Moondance, “I mean, I know I shot that foreman, but I, I couldn’t help myself. But the way ya shot that fellow ... I mean it was so, um so ...”

“So cold-blooded? Maybe I’m just a nasty person. It didn’t bother me at all. I don’t think I could have shot him if I thought he was honest. Anyway, I’m glad you couldn’t have done it. I hope you never become like me.”

“I still think you’re a real nice person. And I think you’re real smart, and real brave.”

Butch smiled.

Bizarrely, Butch may have saved the banker’s life. He had ingratiated himself with all the townsfolk, especially the community leaders, and since then had been systematically defrauding the poor residents at every opportunity. There was quite a celebration in town that night.

“Here’s to Butch and Moondance, for metin’ out justice when the law couldn’t.”

“Hear, hear!”

“And for savin’ us a lynchin’.”

“Hear, hear!”

“And may they never come back.”

“Hear, hear!”

A few months later, a man missing one foot and some toes on the other foot, and with a deformed shoulder, set up a real estate business in a new town.

Chapter 15. The history of interest free, non-repayable loans

Mr. Jolson. Albert: Asa Yoelson (1886–1950) used the stage name Al Jolson

Harvey Lee: Lee Harvey Oswald (1939–1963), assassin.

Harvey is a six foot rabbit: Harvey is the name of the invisible rabbit in Harvey

Bonham and Claude Carter: 1. Bonnie Elizabeth Parker (1910–1934) and Clyde Chestnut Barrow were known as Bonnie and Clyde, criminals. 2. Bonnie and Clyde (film). 3. Helena Bonham Carter, actor.

Katherine and Spencer Heartburn: Katharine Houghton Hepburn (1907–2003) and Spencer Bonaventure Tracy (1900–1967) used the stage names Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy respectively

Lizzy and Richard Tailor: Elizabeth Rosemond Taylor (1932–2011) used the stage name Elizabeth Taylor, and Richard Walter Jenkins Jr. (1925–1984) used the stage name Richard Burton

Chapter 15. Author comments

Although the real Butch Cassidy was involved in bank and train robberies, some claim that he never killed anyone, and possibly didn't even shoot anyone.

16. TAKING A SHOT AT FREEDOM

Freedom can be a physical state, or a spiritual state, or a combination of both. In a true democracy one would generally have freedom of movement, freedom of thought, and freedom of expression, although restrictions will be placed on some possible actions. In a jail one can conceivably achieve a spiritual freedom, although the body is confined. For some unfortunate people, their own minds are prisons from which escape is impossible, even though their movements may be unhindered.

Because of their wanted status, our beloved heroines had restricted freedom of movement. Eventually they would want to eliminate such constraints. In the meantime, a different kind of freedom was to take center stage—a freedom called Freedom.

He was generally known as Freedom Valentino although his real name was Rudy Valentino. The heavens announced Freedom's birth with a wandering star, and, perhaps due to some unexpected astrological influences, he continued to wander for most of his life. When he reached adulthood he occasionally stopped here to rob a bank, or tarried there to murder someone, or paused somewhere else to do a dastardly deed.

The origin of Freedom's nickname is part of Wild West folklore. He often said, "I have the power to set you free, and the power is in this hand." They were the last words his victims ever heard.

Our heroines first sighted Freedom when they were meandering along and spotted his gang surrounding a wagon some distance away. Butch and Moondance paused briefly. A well-dressed man was standing up in the wagon and arguing with the ruffians. The dude was threatening Freedom with something. Our heroines soon concluded that it was a book, maybe a bible.

“Foolish fellow,” remarked Butch, “he brought that upon himself,” as Freedom dragged the man down and began beating him. Our ladies turned their horses and continued on their way.

Butch’s fool was Lance Dullard, a lawyer from the East and on a mission to bring the rule of law to the West. He had been menacing Freedom with a law book.

One evening a few months later, our gun-toting nobody’s fools wandered into the town of Tibia for one of their customary drinks. There was quite a ruckus coming from the saloon. Our ladies hesitated before they dismounted. Then they saw a large crowd in the dining area and the bar almost empty. Moondance wasn’t eager, but Butch had quite a thirst, and her interest had been piqued.

“Shall we?” asked Butch.

“It’s up to you,” shrugged Moondance.

They tied up the horses and stepped through to the bar. Only the bartender noticed their arrival. He recognized them the moment they came through the swinging doors, but he expected that there’d be no trouble if they weren’t pestered. They ordered their usual drinks, and Moondance was pleased that the saloon sold soda water. When their drinks arrived, Butch inquired about all the commotion. Business was quiet, so the bartender was happy to chat about the goings on.

There were three people of special interest in the dining area. Freedom and Lance the lawyer were in there. There was also a certain Thomas B. Donlevy, the only man whom Freedom feared, and the only man who didn’t fear Freedom. Thomas appreciated Lance’s noble desire to establish the rule of law throughout the land, but thought that more than a law book would be needed to imprison Freedom. Lance and Thomas were friends, and Lance was courting Thomas’s cousin, Vera Longway.

Jayee was the fourth player of note in this chapter of our saga. J. E. Hoover was the sheriff, but everyone just called him Jayee. He was known for his

near divine propensity for running away and hiding at the slightest hint of trouble. When Freedom had entered the dining area, Jayee decided that it was safer if he had his drinks at the other watering hole down the street. This was long before Butch and Moondance had arrived.

Butch motioned Moondance to move down to one end of the bar where they'd be able to better hear and see some of the animated discussion in the dining area.

Freedom had a long history of unproven cold-blooded killings where there were no onlookers. If eye-witness accounts against him were possible, then he had the confidence to invite his victims to make the first move. Lance the lawyer had been a thorn in his side for the past several weeks, and not for the first time, Freedom was trying to stir Lance into action. After a few minutes of pushing and shoving and ranting and raving, Freedom left the saloon with the parting words, "Why don't we go outside and settle this man to man. Heck, I'll even let you draw first."

Lance would have none of it. He stayed in the dining area for a while, repeating his oft heard view that violence never solved anything.

"Yes, Freedom and his gang probably killed that farmer a couple of weeks ago; and yes, Jayee was incapable of handling Freedom. However, a marshal will arrive in a few days' time and he'll establish law and order."

Within fifteen minutes the roar had toned down to a quiet discussion.

Butch had been looking intently at Lance the whole time.

"I'm sure that's Destiny."

"Who's Destiny?" asked Moondance, whilst unwittingly making another little pun and bringing a slight smile to Butch.

"Him. The one they're calling Lance."

"Oh. He looks like that wagon fellow we saw being thrashed some time ago. You know, the one you called a fool, I think. Now I remember the name.

When we saw Pearly Gates on that cattle drive, you started tellin' me about tall men like him. Um, something about, um, ata, anatomical things."

Butch politely corrected her, "Yes, anatomical features. The word 'anatomical' comes from 'anatomy', which just means all the different parts of the body, including your insides."

"Well, what do those tall men have?" asked Moondance.

"Well they ... I'll tell you later. Destiny, I mean Lance, is leaving now. We better get going before they all come out."

Our ladies were tossing down the last of their drinks, when the big man with an air of invincibility and who had been sitting quietly in the corner of the dining area, stood up and followed Lance out.

"I reckon that's Thomas Donlevy," said Butch. "We have to go. We can't be sure what Freedom is up to, and I haven't seen his gang in here. A man like him is never far from his gang."

Our ladies mounted and began riding out of town when they spotted a figure in the darkness striding towards them. When almost upon him, they realized that it was a dogged Lance with a handgun and muttering away to himself. Freedom and his thugs had done something to stir him.

As Lance stormed past, Butch muttered, "The fool."

She sighed while shaking her head, then dismounted and passed the reins to Moondance.

"Will you tie up the horses, please? I'm going to follow him. Watch my back, and be careful. I wouldn't be surprised if Freedom has planned an ambush."

Lance advanced about fifty yards before Freedom stepped out into the middle of the street, about ten yards in front of Lance.

"You better be careful with that gun, lawyer. It might be loaded and you might hurt yourself."

“You’re darn right it’s loaded. I’m taking you to the sheriff’s office, and you can stay in jail until the marshal arrives.”

“So there’s a marshal coming, is there? Well that’s interesting. Me and the men will make sure we leave before he arrives.”

Lance kept pointing his gun at Freedom.

“Are you coming peacefully, or do I have to make you? You and your men can’t keep killing people, and beating them, and robbing them.”

“Supposin’ we did all those things, you can’t prove it.”

“I know what you’ve done. He’s still alive, did you know? He said that you did it.”

The news changed Freedom’s mood.

“I suppose you better shoot me, lawyer, because I’m about to leave. We might just meet again if you leave town.”

Lance Dullard was at his wit’s end and was perhaps going to live up to his name for the last time. He didn’t want to shoot Freedom in cold blood and become a criminal himself. Maybe he could provoke Freedom into a draw. Lance tucked the gun into the waistband of his trousers.

Freedom laughed, “You better go first, lawyer. It’s the only chance you’ve got. Don’t forget to pull your gun out before you shoot.”

Just then a shadowy form precipitated out of the murky darkness and positioned itself a few yards behind, and to the left of, Lance. It pulled its duster coat away from the gun slung low on its hip. Lance was unawares. Freedom couldn’t make out who it was, but was certain that it wasn’t Thomas.

Freedom’s only words were a slow, “What the?” as he steadied his hand over his holster. He knew that Lance wasn’t a problem, but the stranger might be.

Seconds passed. Lance cracked. He reached for his gun. Then Freedom went for his. The apparition went for its.

Bang! A single shot. The specter dissolved back into the night.

Lance finally got his gun out of his trousers. It had all happened so fast. Freedom was down with a bullet in his stomach.

Until then, the crowd in the dining area had merely moved to the bar, but they all came rushing out onto the street when they heard the shot. Others looked out of windows or peeked from behind curtains. And Thomas, with gun in hand, was running towards Lance. He had missed the action while he answered nature's call. Freedom's gang were following Thomas. They had been ordered to watch him, and shoot him if he went after Freedom, but it no longer mattered.

Everyone saw Lance holding his gun, with a dying Freedom before him. Everyone assumed the obvious. Thomas was astounded that Lance could take down Freedom, and asked, "Lance, are you okay?"

A confused Lance responded, "Yes, I think so."

Some of the crowd went over to Freedom, hoping that he was dead, rather than intending to render assistance. One of them was leaning over Freedom trying to check his pulse, when Freedom opened his eyes and said, "Who the?" He lapsed into unconsciousness and his pulse stopped moments later. Freedom had been set free.

Someone asked, "What did he say?"

"He said, 'Who the?'"

Unfortunately, Freedom's gang were at the back of the crowd and mistook 'who the' for 'Hoover'.

"We'll get him," said the newly self-appointed leader of the pack, "C'mon, let's go."

Meanwhile the ever-cautious Jayee was still in the other saloon. He waited ten minutes before coming out, just to ensure that all the shooting had stopped.

By then, Lance's savior and her sidekick were well on their way back to camp.

"Did you break the law when you shot Freedom? You know, I mean *your* law," inquired Moondance.

Butch had lots of rules, but only one law: All lawyers are presumed to be lying, hypocritical scoundrels until proved otherwise.

Butch responded after a few moments, "Well, he seemed honest and sincere. Did I have proof that he wasn't a scoundrel? No. However, given the urgent circumstances, I made a judgment call."

"You do realize, don't ya, that if we don't get shot beforehand, it'll be someone like him who has us hanged?"

"Yes, I know."

About a week later, poor old Jayee disappeared under mysterious circumstance and was never seen again.

For the town itself, the recent events had been a blessing. They elected a competent sheriff, and Freedom's gang never returned.

Lance realized that law and order in the town were won with a gun, and not a law book.

It's strange what can happen when words are misunderstood and events wrongly interpreted.

Although Lance and Thomas never discussed Freedom again, each believed that the other had shot him. The truth is, it was a woman who shot Freedom Valentino.

Freedom's last words were, "What the? Who the?" However, they morphed into "What the Hoover" and led to Jayee's disappearance. Ever since, some

have held the view that Freedom was referring to a certain manufacturer of a household appliance which won't be mentioned. Of course, this is nonsense since electric vacuum cleaners hadn't yet been invented. Even today, we often hear the expression "What the hoover" when one is having a bad day or when one is quite perplexed.

Chapter 16. Taking a shot at Freedom

Freedom Valentino: Lamont Waltman Marvin Jr. (1924–1987), using the stage name Lee Marvin, played Liberty Valance in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*

Rudy Valentino: Rodolfo Alfonso Raffaello Pierre Filibert Guglielmi di Valentina d'Antonguella (1895–1926) used the stage name Rudolph Valentino

announced Freedom's birth with a wandering star: Lamont Waltman Marvin Jr. (1924–1987), using the stage name Lee Marvin, played Ben Rumson and sang Lerner and Loewe's *Wand'rin' Star* in *Paint Your Wagon*

Lance Dullard: James Maitland Stewart (1908–1997), using the stage name James Stewart, played Ransel Stoddard in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*

Tibia: Most of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* is set in a town called Shinbone

Thomas B. Donlevy: 1. Marion Robert Morrison (1907–1979), using the stage name John Wayne, played Tom Doniphon in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. 2. Waldo Brian Donlevy (1901–1972) used the stage name Brian Donlevy.

Vera Longway: Vera June Ralston, using the stage name Vera Miles, played Hallie Stoddard in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*

J. E. Hoover: John Edgar Hoover (1895–1972) was the first Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation

He was known for his near divine propensity: Andrew Vabre Devine (1905–1977), using the stage name Andy Devine, played Marshal Link Appleyard in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*

it was a woman who shot Freedom Valentino: *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*

Chapter 16. Author comments

Obviously in a parallel universe there would be a classic Western movie titled *The Woman Who Shot Freedom Valentino*. (By the way, my personal opinion is that a lot of nonsense has been written about so-called parallel universes, even in some popular science books.)

17. THE GREAT SCHOOL ROBBERY THAT NEVER WAS

Ah reputations! It's impossible to live without developing one. Surely the most wanted criminals in the old American West would not sully their fearsome standings by robbing a widow, or a beggar, or a church. Or even a school.

Anyway, on an apparently unrelated issue, anyone for chess? Perhaps it is a game at which Butch would have excelled.

"Good night Butch."

"Good night Moondance."

Next morning when saddling up, Butch asserted: "If we hurry, we should get there by midnight."

"Where's there?"

"Broke Rock, that little town we inspected two days ago."

"But you said the bank wouldn't be worth robbing."

"I know," responded Butch. "I'm thinking of breaking into the school."

"Well why bother going back just to break into a school? And why do you want to break into a school anyway?"

"For your education, Moondance. Something for your education. Did you know that if we ever get a chance to go straight then I would consider becoming a schoolteacher? Anyway, the school is in a good location for a break-in so we won't have any problems."

"Okay," agreed Moondance, "but I don't think anyone is expecting us to rob a school. And no, I didn't know you'd like to be a school teacher. Sometimes, Butch, you hardly tell me anything at all."

"I'm sorry, Moondance. Sometimes I'm so deep in thought that I can't remember what I've told you."

"Yeah, I know!"

It was close to 2:00 a.m. when they arrived, exhausted.

"Good," said Butch, "there's the school. Will you keep watch while I see if I can get in?"

There was no lock on the door so Butch opened it and entered. She lit several matches while bumping and fumbling around inside before stepping out.

"Put your hands up," commanded a stern voice.

Butch complied immediately while she strained to see who it was in the dark.

"Oh, hello sheriff."

"No, I'm the deputy. You're that Butch fella aren't you?"

"I'm afraid so, deputy."

"What're you holding up in that hand?"

"A slate ... and a slate pencil."

"Huh, so now you're robbing schools as well as banks?"

"Not quite."

The deputy gleefully replied, "The reward is going to make me rich."

"I doubt it," responded Butch with a wry smile.

"Where's your partner?"

"Behind you, but just stay calm and no one will get hurt," advised Butch, as Moondance pressed a pistol into the deputy's back.

Butch continued, “What are you doing wandering around town at this hour?”

“Why should you care? Anyway, my little girl is sick with fever and me and the wife were both awake. I heard your horses pull up and thought I may as well investigate.”

“Well, that was enterprising of you,” bemoaned Butch before adding, “... very enterprising. Um, Moondance, just relax. We have more company. And I suppose you’re the sheriff.”

“Sure am,” as he continued to approach then pressed a gun into Moondance’s back.

This is the point in the old serial shows when “To be continued” would flash up on the screen and the audience would be left wondering for a whole week as to what would happen next. Of course the good guy, the hero, would always somehow survive. But who are the good guys, or good ladies, in this story? Legally speaking, it would be the sheriff and his deputy.

Obviously the story doesn’t end here because there are too many pages remaining. Perhaps only Moondance and the deputy perish, and Butch survives in order to continue on life’s journey. On the other hand, it would seem an outright tragedy if lives were lost during a school robbery. Surely Butch will talk their way out of this conundrum by mentioning their imaginary friend Harvey. No, she doesn’t, because she doesn’t need to.

I suppose it would be futile to ask the reader to wait for a week before continuing.

Butch began her opening gambit with “Sheriff, do you honestly think I care if you shoot Moondance? I can always find another partner. Suppose your deputy shoots me, then Moondance shoots him, then you shoot Moondance. If your deputy doesn’t finish me off with his first shot then you can be certain that I’ll get you. How good a shot do you think your deputy is from this distance, and can you risk it? And if you shoot Moondance first,

then how can you be sure that she won't just shoot your deputy by reflex? So, what are you going to do?"

After a few moments the sheriff stepped slightly to one side, pointed his gun at Butch and laughed, scornfully replying, "Well either the deputy will get you, or I will, so you're a goner in any case. So, what are *you* going to do?"

To everyone's surprise, Butch laughed. "You got me, sheriff." Then laughter evolved into anguish. "Well, I didn't anticipate that it would end like this. Somehow a trial and being hanged in a month's time seems more dignified than being shot here, right now, in the middle of the night, outside a school of all places. Moondance, they have us. Please do the right thing and surrender. ... Moondance! ... Our game is up. Let the deputy go. You have to do the *right* thing!"

Everyone waited and wondered. Suddenly Moondance swung her arm around to the right and pointed her gun at the sheriff before taking a step back.

Butch sighed with relief before taking command again. "Sheriff, the new situation is that if I die then you and your deputy are both doomed. If you lay down your weapons and allow us to depart in peace then I promise you won't be harmed."

"How do we know we can trust you?"

"You don't know, but my word is as good as any honest man's."

Common sense prevailed, and while our fiendishly clever, school robbers were departing, Butch whispered to the deputy, "*I do* care. I hope your daughter gets well."

Later Butch advised, "No sleeping tonight, Moondance. We'll have to keep moving in case they wake the town and form a posse."

Next morning, the teacher noticed that a slate was missing and two dollars was on her desk.

That same day a worried Moondance inquired, “You didn’t mean it, did you? You know, about getting a new partner.”

“Oh Moondance, of course not. I promise I’ll never hurt you, or wittingly allow you to be hurt. I was laughing on the outside, but terrified on the inside. I’m glad you got my hint about redirecting your gun, and I’m glad that no one was hurt.”

Chapter 17. Author comments

This chapter wasn’t in the original version of Butch and Moondance, even though I already had a very rough draft for a school robbery chapter.

18. HOW TO STOP THE LOCOMOTION

“I’m bored,” announced Butch.

It was more than three years after the brute’s attack, and our favorite felons were quite wealthy, thanks to several nonrepayable loans. They were also happy, so at least we know that money won’t necessarily prevent one from being happy.

Also, our ladies could not be described as the idle rich. Every day was a constant challenge to survive in a sometimes harsh environment, and to dodge the law.

Was Moondance bored too? No. Where Butch saw just another landscape, Moondance saw a different horizon, an interesting cloud pattern, an unusual land formation, a new flower or beetle, a plethora of tints and tones and shades, or a shy, camouflaged animal. Butch was oblivious to all of these nuances, unless they might be relevant to solving her latest problem. Thus one particular tree would soon excite her.

For the moment, though, Butch was busy, happy, healthy and wealthy, but bored. She needed a challenge.

“What do you want to do, then?” inquired the understanding Moondance.

“I want to rob a train. What do you reckon?”

“Well, that’ll be something different. Sure, I don’t mind. Do you have a plan?”

“No. I just had the idea a couple of minutes ago when we crossed over the railroad track.”

Butch went into deep thought mode. On the other hand, it wasn’t clear what, or even if, Moondance was thinking until a few minutes later when she battered Butch with a torrent of questions.

“Do all trains carry valuable shipments? Will we just rob the passengers? Do we have to stop the train before we board it, or do we somehow jump onto it? Should we board the train at a station just like ordinary passengers and then pull our guns out later? Do they have armed guards on trains? How do we keep an eye on everyone if there’s more than one carriage? Should we rob a freight train? Do you reckon we might need a lot of gunpowder to blow something up, or maybe some of that ... that other new stuff?”

“Hmm, maybe you’re thinking of nitroglycerin. No, I don’t want to go near that stuff. We’d be more likely to blow ourselves up with that. You’re right, of course, Moondance. I don’t think we know enough about trains, let alone how to rob one. This is going to be fun!”

Moondance rolled her eyes.

Butch decided that exploring along a railroad might provide the inspiration that she, or Moondance, needed. So they turned their horses and rode parallel to the railroad track. They rode, and they rode, and they rode—one day, two days, three days, four. Never before had the increasingly frustrated Butch taken so long to come up with at least one good half-baked idea. However, Moondance wasn’t concerned. She was enjoying the scenery.

Sometimes our ladies were right next to the track, and other times half a mile or more distant from it. Whenever they were close to a town, they would give it a wide berth and continue following the railroad on the other side.

When a train came into view, they would generally conceal themselves and watch its progress. They analyzed the possibilities. The trains always slowed down dramatically on steep uphill grades. It would be quite easy to jump onto such a train. In some places, there were boulders above the track, and one of these could possibly be rolled down the slope onto the track using explosives, or the track itself could simply be blown up. There were a few bridges which could, perhaps, be brought down. However, neither of our ladies had any desire to injure innocent passengers.

On the morning of the fifth day, Butch asked, "Have you ever been on a train?"

"No."

"I have, and I think we should go for a ride on a train. Maybe that will give us some ideas."

"Well, a train ride would be lotsa fun. I'd like that."

"Okay. I'll need a dress, too. I'll have to work out how we're going to do this. We've got to take care of the horses. Maybe we should catch a train back the way we've been coming. For the moment we'll just keep following the railroad."

A couple of hours later they were coming around a curve and down a grade when they spotted some men on horseback near a rail water stop in the distance.

"We better wait here and see what they're up to," advised Butch.

Three of the men dismounted and began clambering all over the water tank.

"Maybe they're a maintenance crew," suggested Moondance.

"I don't know. They don't have much equipment with them, and I don't think it should require five men just to carry out an inspection ... unless they're planning some big improvements."

"Maybe they're planning a big train robbery instead," announced a prescient Moondance, for once beating Butch to the same conclusion.

"You're probably right. Let's see what they do."

Actually, the men didn't do anything because a couple of minutes later they mounted and rode off.

"Well, I don't know," confessed a stymied Butch, "I think we'll wait here a while, then try to follow them."

Soon our ever-watchful ladies set off in the general direction that the men had taken. It was not an oft travelled route—twisting and winding around hills, up gullies, and along ridges. A couple of times our ladies lost the trail, but Moondance found it again.

“I’ve seen more than enough, Moondance. Let’s turn back. If we keep on going, we’re likely to be bushwhacked. I think you were right about a train robbery.”

It was a quiet ride back to the railway track, with both ladies apparently deep in thought, when suddenly Moondance announced, “I reckon we should watch how those robbers do it, then try it ourselves.”

“Maybe we should try to rob the train before they do,” responded Butch.

A couple of minutes later, Butch changed the subject. “I suppose you can do a really loud whistle.”

Without hesitation, Moondance placed two fingers in her mouth and made an earsplitting noise.

“Wow, that’s better than I can do. But come to think of it, you will be holding your guns, so I’d better do the whistling. Trouble is, I’ve only ever used my right hand, and I’ll be holding my gun. I better practise with my left hand. ... I suppose you’re good with an ax. I never had to use an ax. Father always had someone to chop the wood.”

“Yes, pa was often away, and when ma died I did all the chopping.”

“I saw a really nice tree up one of those gullies today. We might need to chop it down, and we might have to do it quickly, so I’ll have to help chop it.”

Finally Moondance twigged. It must have been all that talk about a tree.

“You want to rob the robbers?”

“Yes, but we don’t know when they plan to rob the train, and we can’t be sure that it’ll be at that water stop. It’s even uncertain if they’ll return up that gully again. I think we’ll just have to assume that it’s what they’ll do.”

“I think the bigger risk is that there’s five of them.”

“If I can whistle loudly enough, and at first attempt, then we won’t even need to engage in a gunfight.”

“Well, if you say so.”

Chapter 18. How to stop the locomotion

the locomotion: Goffin and King’s The Loco-Motion

Chapter 18. Author comments

Do you spell it as “ax” or “axe”? Some readers will have noticed that I usually end relevant words with “or” instead of “our”, e.g. “favor” instead of “favour”. I tried to maintain American spelling throughout the book.

A gully, a tree, an ax, a loud whistle and no gunfight. Perhaps some readers have already worked out what Butch is planning.

19. PRACTICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Our lovely young ladies had just spent five days trying to figure out how to rob a train, but now they had realized that an indirect approach might work.

“Moondance, we have much to do in a very short time. It’ll be dark soon and we need an ax today, just in case they rob a train tomorrow. How far back do you reckon that little house on the prairie was? Five miles?”

“More like seven miles.”

It was dusk when they neared the house. Moondance waited a short distance away while Butch continued on. Three hours later, Butch walked her horse back to Moondance.

“I was beginning to worry.”

“Yes, he greeted me with a shotgun. It took me a while to talk my way in. Eventually his missus didn’t want me to go. I gave her some news of the world, talked about European fashion, played with their two daughters and young son for a while, and had a nice meal.”

“Well, I’m starvin’,” grumbled Moondance. “Anyway, I see you got an ax.”

“Yes, I didn’t want to just steal it from him, so I offered him \$20.”

“Well that would’ve made him very happy.”

“But he drove a hard bargain, so I ended up paying \$100.”

Moondance’s jaw dropped.

“Did he want to know why you wanted it?”

“He was initially curious, but considering how much I was willing to pay I think he couldn’t care less.”

“Good.”

“Then I thought what if the handle breaks, or the head flies off, so I paid him another \$100 for his tomahawk. At least he sharpened them for us.”

The next morning, our wannabe robber robbers were up before dawn and rushed to get going. They needed to be at the designated gully before the wannabe train robbers passed through.

“We’ll follow the route through to the first gully, and then get off the track. Do you reckon you can find a back way to that second gully?” inquired Butch.

“I think so.”

“If we encounter those men coming while we are going, then we might be in a lot of trouble.”

“I know,” said Moondance.

Moondance navigated their way to the second gully, and Butch had it all figured out.

“When they return from the robbery and come back along here, they’ll come round that bend. Then they’ll see the tree partly across the path up there, and they’ll stop because they’ll know it must have just been chopped down. That’s when you’ll jump up on your side, and I’ll jump up on my side, so we’ll have them all covered. Hopefully.”

Our ladies left their horses half a mile away. They remained hidden and settled down for what might be a long day. They waited and waited.

Late in the afternoon, Butch announced, “Oh well, maybe tomorrow. Let’s get back to the horses. We shouldn’t risk having a fire tonight.”

They also didn’t risk a fire on the second night. On the third evening Butch announced, “I suppose not everything works. It’s very boring waiting for something that mightn’t happen. Tomorrow we won’t even bother.”

However, Moondance was enjoying the idle days and nature’s varied gifts, so she countered with, “Let’s give it one more day.”

Butch agreed, and Moondance's patience seemed to pay dividends because a couple of hours after dawn, five riders with two spare horses rode through the gully and towards the railway track.

Ten minutes after the riders passed, the no-longer bored one and her accomplice furiously began chopping down the tree in turns while the other kept watch as best she could. Moondance did most of the chopping, but by the time they had finished, both had badly blistered hands.

"Do you think you can use both guns?" inquired the concerned Butch, looking at Moondance's blisters.

Moondance drew both guns, pretended to aim and fire both, twirled them around her fingers, and holstered them with her usual lightening-fast flair.

"Sure. It's only pain."

The ladies hid themselves on their respective sides of the gully, and waited.

Everything went like clockwork, and exactly as Butch had surmised. The riders paused, she stood up with gun in hand, and gave a piercing whistle to attract the riders' attention while she looked down on them. A couple started going for their guns, but Butch was already gesturing towards the other side of the gully. Moondance was standing there with both guns pointing down at the riders. Common sense prevailed.

As usual, Butch took the lead. She carefully studied the second rider.

"I'm guessing that you might be Johnnie James. That's a nice white, starched shirt you're wearing."

"And I know who you two are."

"Charmed, I'm sure. And these must be your lovely gang. I do confess that they lack a certain amount of sartorial grandeur. I imagine they elected you as their leader because they admire your shirt. And what, perchance, are those two packhorses carrying? Culinary delights?"

[Expletives deleted.]

“All you fine gentlemen, please remove your guns slowly, and gently drop them to the ground on my side.”

The gang obeyed.

“Now you three, dismount on Moondance’s side and remove the saddles. You other two with the packhorses, dismount, and tie their ropes to that tree over there. Now everyone move forward and stand there where Moondance can keep an eye on you.”

Butch climbed down, and continued with, “Moondance, I suspect that these fine specimens have just robbed a train.”

[Expletives deleted.]

“Mr. James, I do believe that what wasn’t yours is now ours.”

[More expletives deleted.]

“Moondance, please thank our generous friends here.”

Moondance hesitated, knowing that she usually shouldn’t speak in such situations.

“Go on, Moondance,” cajoled Butch.

“Thanks.”

Moondance’s terse response was enough to confirm suspicions.

“So it’s true,” said JJ, “you really are just a couple of wenches. That won’t stop me from killing both of you.”

[Several descriptive words and phrases were removed from JJ’s response, out of respect for the English language and sensitive readers.]

“Tut-tut, Mr. James. You’re hurting my feelings.”

[Many expletives deleted.]

Butch ordered JJ to remove his boots, but the others to keep theirs on. She threw a full canteen to one of the gang, and then noticed that he was

wearing a large knife. He was ordered to hand it over to a different gang member. Then she picked up one of the handguns, emptied all but one bullet out of it, and carefully placed it in another gang member's pouch. Moondance was very confused by all of this, and so were the gang.

"Now, my dear chaps, please toddle off home to your mummies while we two, young, tender, weak and virtually defenseless women enjoy the spoils that you five, formidable felons have generously provided us. And please recount these events to all of your friends. I'll start shooting in thirty seconds."

More expletives ensued while JJ and his gang absconded as quickly as they could.

"Moondance, I want to collect the guns and take all of these horses with us until we figure out what to do with them. We've still got to get our own horses. We better hurry."

Our ladies chatted while they were preparing to leave.

"Sometimes I think you talk too much, like when we rob a bank," said Moondance. "And why do you bother with all that fancy talk? You know it just riles them up."

"Well, for several reasons. I do get a thrill out of mocking vermin such as them. But importantly, it annoys them, and strangely, I find it all quite relaxing. The angrier or more confused they get, the more trouble they'll have thinking straight. Yes, they may make some foolishly rash decisions when in that state, but they're unlikely to make good decisions. All the better for us."

"And what was that nonsense about the gun and the knife and the canteen and the boots?"

"That'll take their minds off us, because they'll be busy wondering what each of the others will do."

“Butch, the first time we robbed a bank, you hadn’t even thought about what we might do with the money. What if we just got lots of gold today?”

“This time I thought about it, but you mightn’t like the idea. If there’s a few gold coins then it’s easy for you to deposit them in a bank. However it would raise suspicions if a woman took gold bars into a bank. They’d be expecting only men to do that. We can’t just keep accumulating gold bars and packhorses. I thought we might bury any gold bars.”

“What if we forget where we bury them?”

“Will it really matter?”

Our young heroines were about to leave when they heard a single gunshot.

“Butch, I think the gang just got a new leader.”

“Maybe, but I think it more likely that James already had the gun, the knife, and the canteen; and he just procured a pair of boots. I guess we’ll never know for sure.”

By that evening they had found a remote hiding place, but they dared not light a fire. They had their own horses and packhorses, two bonus packhorses, a considerable amount of cash and a number of gold bars. They had let loose the gang’s other horses.

“Do you know what, Moondance? We could count this as our first train robbery, and it will probably be our greatest. Do you know why?”

“No.”

“Well, we were maybe eight miles from the train when it happened, and the James gang will get the blame.”

“And do you know what, Butch? We still don’t know how to rob a train.”

“Well, we’re going to have even more fun. But first, I’ll take you on a train ride.”

Chapter 19. Practical psychology

that little house on the prairie: Little House on the Prairie

our first train robbery, and it will probably be our greatest: The Great Train Robbery

Chapter 19. Author comments

The Great Train Robbery is a must-see for all aficionados of Westerns. It is a silent film and is currently available here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jxqg21tfqCg>. It lasts for about 12 minutes.

20. PETTICOATS AND PARASOLS AT TWO PACES

Three months later, Butch and Moondance were riding through Tombstone territory, and were aware of the local silver boom.

Butch pondered aloud, “With all that silver, there’s probably a lot of money in the banks at Tombstone. How about we investigate the possibilities?”

“Well, a bath and some nice food sounds good.”

Butch was envious that she would be denied those luxuries, but it was all part of her own plan for robbing banks.

“Last I heard was that Tombstone is a fairly wild place—not much law and order. There might even be others interested in those banks. You’ll have to be extra cautious this time, Moondance.”

“Yeah, that’s okay. I’ll be fine.”

Our young heroines were more game than two ducks floating on a pond. Unexpected dangers were lurking in Tombstone.

After following the usual complicated protocol, Moondance arrived in town and stepped off the stagecoach. It was mid-morning. She found her way to a boardinghouse and arranged some temporary accommodation. Then she set off to explore the town, noting any banks or churches and the sheriff’s office as per Butch’s instruction. However, more to her personal liking was a certain store window with a parasol just begging to be bought. She entered the shop, and to her delight discovered several colorful parasols on offer. Finally she would be a proper refined lady. Whilst grappling with the big decision, she engaged in small talk with the storekeeper. She noted that the townsfolk were thrilled that the formidable Marshal Janus Wyatt had recently arrived to rid the town of troublemakers.

Unfortunately, and unbeknownst to most, the criminal mastermind, Al Mascarpone, and his three stooges had arrived even more recently in order to rid the town of Wyatt. The gang were suspected of having committed many dastardly deeds, but had thus far been untouchables as far as the law was concerned, thanks to the wily Mascarpone.

Just as Moondance was finalizing her purchase, she heard a strange, loud noise.

“What was that?” she inquired of the storekeeper.

“That was Wyatt’s burp. Three times a day he eats, then three times a day he walks up and down the street. He says it helps with his indigestion. The poor man suffers a lot, but so do we, three times a day.”

Moondance rejoined Butch a week later at the designated stagecoach stop. After they had ridden a few miles Butch could finally relax.

“I like your new dress.”

“Thanks. Me too. I also bought a real nice parasol, but it got broken and I thought I shouldn’t buy another one in that town. Maybe I’ll get one next time.”

“I’m sorry about your parasol. Did you keep your old dress?”

“No, I threw it away. I got blood all over it, but it was ripped anyway.”

“Moondance! Have you been injured?”

“No, I was fighting, and that’s when my parasol got broken.”

Butch’s surprise and confusion prompted Moondance to recount the whole story.

“On the second day, I wandered down to the Good Enough Livery Stable and Corral. You should see it, Butch. It’s huge. Anyway, I was checkin’ out the horses when I heard some groanin’ coming from an empty stall. A man was lyin’ there in the corner with blood all over his head and face. I knelt down to see if I could help, but he was in a bad way. When I stood up and

turned around to go fetch a doctor, there was a man standing in the gateway. Butch, did you know that men are so easily distracted?"

Butch smiled.

"Yes, I think most of them are. Go on."

"Oh yes, well, the man told me to give him a kiss and a cuddle. That's when I figured he must've injured the poor man on the ground. Then I thought if Wackie can use a broomstick or a thimble or whatever to fight off hundreds of men, then I can use a parasol to fight just one man. So I tried to poke him in the face with it. He just grabbed it, broke it in half, and started laughing. Then I thought I'd do one of those fancy crescent kicks. He was surprised when I turned slightly, and then I struck. I might have missed his head slightly because I kicked him in the ... between the legs. He doubled over and started moanin' and groanin'. That's when I picked up my broken parasol and kept bashing him on the head with it. But I don't think he even noticed. It's not funny! That was my nice, new parasol."

"You're right, I shouldn't have laughed."

Moondance smiled and continued, "Well, it wasn't funny at the time."

"What about the dress and the blood?"

"Well, another big man then grabbed me from behind. I think he might have been real smart. He had one arm around my chest and arms, and he put his other hand over my mouth and pinched my nose. I couldn't even breathe ..."

"Go on."

"Sorry, I was just thinking. He probably didn't want to shoot me because it might alert the marshal who they were wanting to ambush when he went walking after lunch. I suppose I'm lucky he didn't just hit me over the head with something."

"Makes sense. What did you do?"

“Well it all happened so fast. I mean, I couldn’t bite him, or scratch him, or grab him anywhere, or kick him anywhere that might hurt. Then I remembered all Wackie’s talk about breathing, but then I realized that I couldn’t breathe anyway. However, I imagined I was taking a deep breath and tried to relax. Then I thought of you, Butch, and I thought ‘what would Butch do?’”

Moondance paused, perhaps reliving the events over again in her mind, but Butch was becoming increasingly curious.

“Well, what would I do?”

“You’d do what you always do, Butch. You’d think. That’s when I remembered you told me to keep that knife handy. I raised my legs up to my hands. Eventually I got the knife out. He couldn’t see what I was doing. I stabbed him in the thigh, but he still wouldn’t let go. So I stabbed him again. I think I must have got him in the buttocks the second time. Anyway, that’s when he finally lost his grip, and I swung ’round and stabbed him in the arm. He grabbed my dress as he stumbled to the ground. That’s when he ripped it. He was lying there, bleedin’ and moanin’ and groanin’ so I put my knife away.”

“I think you did better than I could have done. Oh well, all’s well that ends well.”

“But that’s not all of it. I turned to go out and fetch the doctor for that poor man in the horse stall when another man jumped out in front of me. He was real easy. He was just holding his arms out to try to block my exit, and do you know what I did next? You’ll never guess.”

“I have no idea.”

“I smiled. Then I slowly bent forward and lifted up my dress slightly and showed him my petticoat and ankles.”

Butch raised her eyebrows, somewhat surprised by her young protégé’s womanly wiles.

“So what happened then?”

“Well, when he was looking down I punched him on the nose—just like Wackie showed me. Then I kneed him where it hurts. Then I whacked him round the ear. Then I kicked him at the knee joint. Then I may have ... well, you know. Eventually he was there on the ground, moanin’ and groanin’ like the other two.”

“Well done, Moondance.”

“But I haven’t finished yet. I went out of the livery to fetch the doctor, when I saw the marshal coming towards me. He started to draw. I wasn’t wearing my guns, so I dived onto the ground and hoped. I thought he knew who I was.”

“So?”

“So he fired one shot, and then a man tumbled out of the hay loft. The marshal ran over to the man, checked that he was dead, then came back, helped me up and asked if I was okay. He said that the dead man was Scarface someone, and did I see his gang in the livery. I just told him that I think the owner is inside and needs a doctor, and that I saw three men trip over and that one of them probably fell on something sharp.”

“Did he believe you?”

“I don’t think so. He tracked me down the next day, and kept on asking me all sorts of questions but I stuck to my story. He eventually said that he didn’t know how or what I did to those three men, but it must have riled that Scarface fellow so much that he decided to shoot me instead of the marshal.”

“I don’t think we should try to rob a bank there.”

“Well that’s what I wanted to tell you, Butch. The marshal might be slow on the draw, but if he gets the drop on us then we’d be goners for sure. It was a mighty fine shot he took at the man in the loft. He’s got some sort of long-barreled revolver and he’s deadly accurate with it.”

Our heroines understood the difference between fearless and foolish, and never returned to Tombstone. Prudence is not just for prudes.

No one knew at the time, but this little episode at the Good Enough Livery Stable was just the curtain-raiser for the main event—the gunfight at the Good Enough Corral.

Chapter 20. Petticoats and parasols at two paces

Tombstone territory: Tombstone Territory

Janus Wyatt: 1. Jane Waddington Wyatt (1910–2006) used the stage name Jane Wyatt. 2. Wyatt Berry Stapp Earp (1848–1929), lawman, gambler and businessman.

Al Mascalpone: Alphonse Gabriel Capone (1899–1947), usually known as Al Capone, gangster

his three stooges: The Three Stooges (1922–1970), a comedy team who appeared in vaudeville, film, and TV

but had thus far been untouchables: The Untouchables

He said that the dead man was Scarface: Al Capone was sometimes known as Scarface

the curtain-raiser for the main event: The Main Event

the gunfight at the Good Enough Corral: Gunfight at the O.K. Corral

Chapter 20. Author comments

I think this is my favorite chapter.

21. THE SALOON BRAWL

They passed through the swinging doors and paused briefly, as one does.

Moondance glanced about the saloon to see if she recognized anyone. No familiar faces here. However, Butch was more calculating. Every room, every situation, every circumstance needed to be rapidly analyzed and summarized. Any immediate dangers? Any potential threats? Where are the escape routes? And all of these were constantly being updated.

Nothing alarmed Butch as she scanned the saloon—a bartender wearing a filthy apron; a couple of men drinking and chatting together at the bar; another man drinking at the far end of the bar; one table with five raucous cowboys enjoying a day in town; another table with three men seeming quite secretive and perhaps plotting something; another table with a lady on a man's knee, and probably something else on the man's mind; and another man making good use of the spittoon.

Butch was drawn to the solitary drinker at the far end. He was a big man with a big moustache on a big upper lip, well dressed, head bowed, and tossing down a whiskey. She thought she understood such people—loners; wanting but not wanting company; slow to talk; often having interesting stories to tell, if they chose to speak; but sometimes incredibly dangerous and prone to extreme rage. She saw him briefly glance up at the mirror as they entered the saloon, and she believed that this was no coincidence. He was stationed where she wanted to stand, positioned perfectly for monitoring the room.

Butch made him her quarry. She went and stood at the bar about five feet away from the stranger, and Moondance followed. The distance was significant. Everything that Butch did was significant. It wasn't too close to him, yet he'd be able to hear snippets of the ladies' conversation. She was initiating contact, and knew that the stranger knew. She knew that the

stranger knew that she knew that the stranger knew. The rest was up to him. Meanwhile, Moondance knew only that she wanted a drink.

The bartender wandered towards them. He studied Moondance. Her head was bowed, her hat concealed her locks, and her face was covered in dust. Her loose fitting shirt and duster gave nothing away. She remembered Butch's rules and remained silent.

Butch ordered drinks.

The bartender wiped his hands with a dirty cloth, fetched a couple of drinks in dirty glasses, then went back to the two men at the far end of the bar. He said something to them, then they turned their heads and studied the two gunslingers. After a few brief exchanges among the three of them, they returned to their former conversation and didn't bother looking again.

Butch began talking about the four day ride they had just finished. After a few minutes, the stranger lifted his head and looked in the mirror. Butch looked back at him in the mirror. They studied each other's eyes for a second or two. Many calculations and estimations were made by both parties, then the man looked down at his drink again.

A couple of minutes later, the stranger raised his head and looked directly at Butch and Moondance. Butch was ready. She turned her head towards him and raised her glass. He responded in kind, then they both turned away and looked down again. About a minute later Butch straightened up, turned, and slowly moved towards the stranger. Moondance tagged along.

"Can we buy you a drink?" asked Butch.

"Ah, yep!"

"Two more whiskeys and a soda water, bartender. So, you're not from these parts, stranger?" continued Butch.

"Nope. Everyone just calls me Rep. You're not from around here either."

"Nope."

Rep noticed that the second gunslinger still hadn't said a word. He turned and looked directly at Moondance, studying her intently. Her head was bowed, but she knew he was gazing at her. She blushed.

Rep muttered, "Huh," then looked back at Butch.

"We move around a lot," added Butch.

"Yeah, I suppose you do."

"Not many people want to talk to us. It doesn't bother you?"

"No, I don't give a damn. I've got nothing that you could possibly want."

Butch smiled, but he was wrong. He could provide Butch with something more valuable to her than money—interesting conversation.

However, they were temporarily interrupted by the man and woman at the nearby table.

"C'mon Belle. Let's go upstairs and have our own party."

Belle refused, and the man pulled on her arm. Butch's hand slipped down to her gun. Rep noticed, and raised his eyebrows. Moondance shook her head at Butch. Then Belle whispered something in the man's ear, and they both went upstairs arm in arm.

Butch told Rep a few details about herself and Moondance, and about some of their recent adventures. Everything Butch did was purposeful. If she opened up, then surely he would too.

Growing in confidence, Moondance interrupted a few times, and occasionally looked up at Rep. She blushed every time. Rep seemed mesmerized by what he could discern under all that dirt and grime.

After Butch had finished her spiel, the stranger responded in kind and revealed aspects of his life. He used to be a representative for a company manufacturing and selling medicines and hair care products, and that's why everyone called him Rep. He had only ever loved one woman, but she was a troubled beauty who had had many suitors. Rep acknowledged that she

even had one admirer who would have made a super husband. Eventually Rep married her, but their relationship ended under tragic circumstances.

At that point he straightened up, as much as he could.

“I’m outta here! Thanks for the drink,” leaving his half-empty glass.

He surprised Butch by shaking her hand. He looked at Moondance, and was reminded once again of his own Sabrina O'Hara. Moondance looked back. She smiled, and didn't blush. He nodded in her direction and then walked out of the saloon. It was the first time he had shared his story, and he slept well that night.

Butch and Moondance finished their drinks and started heading out of the saloon. As they left, a big brawl erupted among the men at the other two tables. Butch and Moondance were pleased with their impeccable timing and hastened away.

On the way back to camp, Butch made an admission. “Rep was interesting. The conflicts of the world are mirrored in his soul. I wish we could have talked for longer.”

She slept well that night.

Chapter 21. The saloon brawl

She was initiating contact: Contact

Everyone just calls me Rep: William Clark Gable (1901–1960), using the stage name Clark Gable, played Rhett Butler in Gone with the Wind

No, I don't give a damn: “Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn” was spoken by Clark Gable playing Rhett Butler in Gone with the Wind

one admirer who would have made a super husband: George Keefer Brewer (1914–1959), using the stage name George Reeves, played Stuart Tarleton in Gone with the Wind. He also played Superman in Adventures of Superman

Sabrina O'Hara: 1. Vivian Mary Hartley (1913–1967), using the stage name Vivien Leigh, played Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*. 2. *Sabrina* (film).

22. MEET AND GREET THE SINISTER SEVEN

It is customary for the victors of any war to write the history, taking the opportunity to distort the facts if convenient. However, it is rare, indeed, for the losers of a battle to write the history and even profit from it.

The sinister seven went by many monikers—the mean seven, mongrel seven, miserable seven, malicious seven, and mangy seven. Several additional descriptions which shouldn't be used in polite literature have been excised from that list, as have a variety of Spanish expletives.

Brinner the Grinner was the leader of these misfits. He always smiled when he killed someone. Second in charge was Spleen McKeen. He continually vented his. Monsoon Bronsoon was always whipping up a storm. Vawn the Brawn was more muscle than brains. Slowburn Koburn was handy with a knife as well as a gun. His victims never knew they had riled him until they were already dead. Fester Dexter was regarded as a boil on society. The junior member of the gang was Tadpole Buckholes. He was more of a wannabe than an alreadyis.

One might be tempted to explain the behavior of these rotten tomatoes by claiming that they were merely products of their time; victims, themselves, of their own environments; and conditioned by unfortunate circumstances. Brinner, for instance, had such an imperious bearing that, in different circumstances, he could have easily passed as a king of a far-off country. Spleen McKeen had so much potential that he could have been anything he wanted; from a lepidopterist collecting butterflies in French Guiana to a wily poker player battling the incomparable Edward Gee in Cincinnati.

If the moody Monsoon didn't have such a death wish, then perhaps he could have been a kind mechanic fixing things for grateful folks. Vawn the Brawn could have been some lucky child's big, cuddly uncle. Maybe Slowburn could have been a happily married family man, hosting parties

and playing charades with his guests. In a different life, maybe Fester would have been a lifeguard watching out over a bay and dashing out into the ocean to save drowning swimmers. If fate had taken a different turn, then perhaps Tadpole may have led a beautiful life.

Unfortunately, all such romantic notions are irrelevant hypotheticals. The reality is that the sinister seven were a gang of vicious vipers that could scare the socks off a rhumba of ruffian rattlesnakes, if the rattlesnakes were wearing socks. So the seven had no trouble scaring the living daylights out of poor Mexican villagers.

It was four years after the brute's attack when Butch and Moondance wended their way down to Mexico and rode into a small, remote town. As soon as they were spotted, the locals ran helter-skelter into their dwellings.

"That's strange. We better remain extra vigilant," commented Butch.

Butch watered the horses at a trough while Moondance stood guard.

"Well, it's almost lunchtime. I was hoping to get a nice meal here. I don't expect to be welcomed with open arms, but this is ridiculous. I'll try knocking on some doors."

There was no response at the first two buildings. Butch was about to knock at the third one when she heard voices inside.

"Gracias. Adiós."

A man in black opened the door. With a guitar slung over his shoulder, he confronted the gunslinger who had a rifle slung over "his" shoulder. They looked each other up and down. He was Mexican, but probably not a local. Everyone on the street had been wearing white or coloreds. He wasn't wearing a gun, and the gunslinger wasn't holding "his". They studied each other's faces and gazed into each other's eyes. The Mexican showed no fear, but probably carried an anger or steely determination in his heart. He looked the gunslinger up and down again, then raised his eyebrows. As he closed the door behind him, Butch managed to glance inside.

As the Mexican slowly strolled away he noted Moondance, but was unconcerned.

Moondance and Butch seemed hypnotized and kept watching him. When he reached the edge of town, he swung his guitar around and began playing. He soon disappeared over the hill.

Butch refocused and began knocking persistently.

Eventually a man opened the door slightly and offered a terse "Qué?"

Butch gestured putting food in her mouth.

The man turned his head and had a lively conversation in Spanish with a woman inside the house.

"Okay, come in."

Butch stepped into the doorway and looked around.

"Are there any other Americans in town?"

"No, señor."

Butch signaled Moondance to come over.

Our heroines relaxed and took off their hats and dusters. The Mexican husband and wife looked at each other, then they, too, relaxed. Three children whispered and giggled in the corner. The wife went to prepare some food.

Butch and Moondance were exceedingly polite during the meal, except when they pulled silly faces at the children. But Moondance had a somber moment when one of the children suddenly reminded her of her kid brother Sondance. She never knew what happened to him.

Moondance regained her composure and left the table to play with the children. The oldest boy was interested in her two guns, but she wouldn't let him touch them. Soon Moondance and the children went outside to continue playing.

Meanwhile, Butch was curious.

“Who was that man who just left?”

“El Mariachi, señora.”

“What’s a mariachi?”

“He plays music. Very special music.”

“Ah, he’s just a musician.”

“No, no. *He is el Mariachi ... the musician.*”

Butch looked perplexed, so the husband continued, “They say he’s a desperado seeking revenge.”

“He wasn’t wearing a gun.”

“No, but they say he can always produce one if he needs one. But he was very nice to us.”

After some more idle chatter, Butch went over and looked out the door. It seemed that Moondance was playing with all of the children in the village, and that some adults had joined in, whilst others watched.

Butch turned towards the husband. “Is there anywhere we can stay tonight?”

“Well, you can stay here if you wish, señora.”

“Muchas gracias, señor.”

Butch maintained self-discipline and slung the repeater over her shoulder before proceeding outside to join in the activities.

An hour or so passed, then a break for rest and drinks, then out into the square again. Soon workers began coming home from the fields. There was much merriment until some gringos came galloping into town. The locals scattered, but Butch and Moondance stood their ground. The riders seemed

well trained. They surrounded our young heroines who were, by then, standing back to back. No guns were drawn.

With their washed faces, no hats or duster coats, Moondance wearing two guns, and Butch with her rifle on her back, some things were obvious.

Brinner spoke first.

“What are you two doing in my town? I know who you are.”

Butch replied, “And I can count to seven. Show me the deed which proves it’s your town.”

Brinner gave a haughty laugh. “Yeah, I heard that you’re the fiery one, but your little friend there is the quick one.”

Butch knew that most men are especially vulnerable in two places. Previously, Moondance had kneed and kicked Scarface’s stooges in one of those places.

“Well, we haven’t heard much about you lot at all, except that there’s seven of you. Maybe you’re not very famous. Does your gang have a leader?”

Brinner squirmed, and it was Spleen McKeen who grinned!

“Yeah, you sure are a feisty one, but we can fix that. Why don’t you come join us? Of course, you’d be working for me.”

“We don’t work for men, and we’re certainly not interested in having you lot work for us.”

In boxing parlance, Butch’s response might rate as a technical knockout.

“We don’t like killing women, but if you’re still here tomorrow at midday then you’re both dead.”

Brinner turned his horse and rode out of town, followed by the others. When the gang were over the hill, the townsfolk clapped and cheered as they swarmed around Butch and Moondance. However, the mood changed when Butch explained that the gang would return the next day.

Butch and Moondance went back to the house where they would be staying. While they discussed the situation, the townsfolk were having their own discussions elsewhere.

After dinner the husband explained that the gang had been imposing a tax on several towns and villages, and taking whatever they wanted. All the villagers in the district had pooled their resources and hired a certain señor Calavera to protect them. However, the gang had routed Calavera and his thirty men, killing most of them.

The husband pleaded for Butch and Moondance to become their new protectors, and after some persistent cajoling they agreed to think about it. They also appreciated the irony of lawbreakers being asked to be law keepers.

The husband thanked them, and assured them that they would be paid all the money that the townsfolk had. Butch didn't respond.

Butch's final words to Moondance that night were, "We'll talk about it tomorrow. Sleep well."

Chapter 22. Meet and greet the Sinister Seven

the Sinister Seven: The Magnificent Seven

Brinner the Grinner: Yuliy Borisovich Briner (1920–1985) used the stage name Yul Brynner

Spleen McKeen: Terence Steven McQueen (1930–1980) used the stage name Steve McQueen

Monsoon Bronsoon: Charles Dennis Buchinsky (1921–2003) used the stage name Charles Bronson

Vawn the Brawn: Robert Francis Vaughn (1932–2016) used the stage name Robert Vaughn

Slowburn Koburn: James Harrison Coburn III (1928–2002) used the stage name James Coburn

Fester Dexter: Veljko Soso (1917–2002) used the stage name Brad Dexter

Tadpole Buckholes: Horst Werner Buchholz (1933–2003) used the stage name Horst Buchholz

these rotten tomatoes: Rotten Tomatoes, a website for film and television reviews, <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/>

a king of a far-off country: Yul Brynner played King Mongkut in The King and I

a lepidopterist collecting butterflies in French Guiana: Steve McQueen played Henri Charrière in Papillon

a wily poker player battling the incomparable Edward G. Robinson in Cincinnati: 1. Emanuel Goldenberg (1893–1973) used the stage name Edward G. Robinson and played Lancey Howard in The Cincinnati Kid. 2. Steve McQueen played Eric Stoner in The Cincinnati Kid.

the moody Monsoon didn't have such a death wish: Charles Bronson played Paul Kersey in Death Wish (as well as the sequels Death Wish II, 3, 4 and V)

he could have been a kind mechanic: Charles Bronson played Arthur Bishop in The Mechanic

Vawn the Brawn could have been some lucky child's big, cuddly uncle: Robert Vaughn played Napoleon Solo in The Man from U.N.C.L.E.

Slowburn could have been a happily married family man, hosting parties and playing charades: James Coburn played Tex Panthollow in Charade

a lifeguard watching out over a bay: Baywatch

Fester would have been a lifeguard watching out over a bay and dashing out into the ocean to save drowning swimmers: Brad Dexter once helped rescue Frank Sinatra and another person from drowning

Tadpole may have led a beautiful life: Horst Buchholz played Doctor Lessing in Life Is Beautiful

the living daylights: The Living Daylights

man in black: Johnny Cash's Man in Black

her kid brother Sundance: 1. Harry Alonzo Longabaugh (1867–1908), also known as the Sundance Kid, criminal. 2. Charles Robert Redford Jr., using the stage name Robert Redford, played the Sundance Kid in Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid

El Mariachi: Carlos Gallardo played El Mariachi in El Mariachi

They say he's a desperado: José Antonio Domínguez Bandera, using the stage name Antonio Banderas, played El Mariachi in Desperado

the gang were over the hill: The Over-the-Hill Gang

señor Calavera: Eli Herschel Wallach (1915–2014), using the stage name Eli Wallach, played Calvera in The Magnificent Seven

23. GRAINS OF SAND AND TRUTH

Fighting the sinister seven would be a monumental task with only one plausible outcome. Any sensible person would walk or ride away.

Butch's mind raced most of the night, but Moondance slept well. They held some whispered discussions in the morning.

"Moondance, you know we can't possibly beat seven gunslingers."

"Um, probably not."

"I think I might try to help the people here anyway, but I want you to leave. If I ambush them, I should be able to easily get one of them with my Sharps, maybe another one. I should be able to get another one or two before they're all over me."

"If you stay, then I stay."

"That would be foolish."

"You mean, just like you stayin'. You once saved my life, and if we stay then I'll save yours."

Butch knew that the young tend to offset a lack of common sense with an excess of confidence, and Moondance would not be dissuaded.

"Well Moondance, what do you reckon we should do?"

"Tell everyone to hide or leave town, and we'll just wait here and see what happens."

"Okay."

Butch informed the husband after breakfast that the ladies would stay and fight. He said he'd been all over town and that he'd collected two American

dollars and lots of pesos equivalent to another sixty-four dollars. Butch thanked him.

The husband gathered his family and left. Within an hour the town was clear. Butch and Moondance took the opportunity to carefully inspect all buildings in the town for entrances, locked doors, windows, hiding places—everything that would be useful to know if the impending confrontation degenerated into guerrilla warfare.

Our heroines discussed separating and taking up different positions in town, but eventually decided to wait together in their hosts' house. Butch hid her repeater rifle in a nearby house, and Moondance hid one of her repeaters in a different nearby house.

It was close to midday when, out the window, they saw riders coming down the hill towards town.

"Please go, Moondance. You've already saved my life in more ways than you can possibly know."

"We'll be okay."

The seven dismounted at one end of town and began slowly walking along the street. Butch and Moondance stepped out into the middle of the street. The men shuffled positions and kept coming.

Butch was surprised, "So that's how he wants to play it. A straight-out draw."

"Suits me."

"Moondance, he's seeking glory and you're his trophy."

As the men got closer, they began spreading out across the width of the street.

"Clever," observed Butch.

Moondance realized that the gunfight had just become much more difficult. If our heroines missed a target then they were unlikely to accidentally hit an alternative target.

“What do we do?”

“We die,” responded Butch.

Butch and Moondance then moved a couple of yards apart.

Two of the men swapped positions.

Butch realized that the men had carefully planned the confrontation to their maximum advantage.

“Brinner is now second from our left. I presume that Spleen McKeen is second on the right. If we assume that they’re the two fastest, then the third fastest is probably the middle one. I’m guessing that the two, maybe three, on the right will try to take me so the rest will go for you. Clever.”

Butch continued after a brief pause. “I suppose I’ll go for McKeen. If I’m still standing, then I’ll try to go for the middle man, then start at the right and work my way across. I think you should go for Brinner, then the middle man, then work your way across from the left.”

Moondance didn’t respond.

“Moondance ... Moondance!”

“I’m thinkin’. I’m gonna use only one gun, so you’ll have to get at least one of them.”

Butch was stunned.

The men stopped a short distance away from our heroines.

Brinner spoke. “So, you’ve decided to stay and fight, eh? I told you, we don’t like killing women. This is your last chance to walk away. If you don’t trust us, you can just step backwards until you’re at a safe distance. We don’t have to do this, you know.”

Our ladies stood their ground, and Butch responded, "So it takes seven brave men to shoot two women, does it?"

"No. I'm gonna kill your little sidekick there, and the other six are going to make sure you don't interfere."

Those wasted words had as much impact as an extra grain of sand in a desert.

He continued, "I'll count to ten, and then we fire."

Butch and Moondance had a quick, but quiet exchange.

Butch theorized, "They won't wait until ten. Be ready."

Moondance simply responded, "We do it your way."

Then our ladies straightened up and readied themselves.

Brinner began slowly. "One ... two."

Everyone was surprised when Moondance suddenly interrupted.

"Brinner," she began, then after an agonizingly long pause, she continued, "First I'm gonna kill the three men next to you. Then if Butch hasn't already shot you, I'll do it m'self."

Those words were more irritating than a single grain of sand in one's shoe can be. A few men fidgeted, and a couple glanced at Brinner as if seeking reassurance that their plan, whatever it was, wouldn't be changed.

However, Brinner wasn't having a bar of it. He restarted.

"Two."

Butch immediately whispered to Moondance, "They'll draw on 'four'."

"Three ..."

Just before he said 'four', he went for his gun, the ladies went for theirs, and the rest of the gang went for theirs.

Before Brinner could finish 'four' he was slumping to the ground. A moment later, all seven men lay dead, dying or injured.

Butch had managed to fire four bullets, hitting three men, one of whom had already been shot by Moondance. Butch turned towards Moondance who was just holstering one of her guns as she looked back and smiled. She had emptied one gun, then drawn the other and continued shooting.

The men had fired a few rounds and missed, probably because they themselves had already been shot.

Moondance took control, "I'll remove their guns before you check them."

Three men were still alive, but only Spleen McKeen would survive the hour.

The jubilant townsfolk soon returned and gathered around. Some kept guard on the survivors, while others removed the dead for burial. One started belting McKeen with a shovel, but Butch intervened and said that enough blood had already been spilled. Soon, a few grabbed McKeen and draped him over his horse, arms dangling on one side and legs on the other. They walked the horse to the edge of town, hit it on the rump, and cheered as the horse trotted up the hill.

Tables were set up in the town square, and a feast was held in honor of the town's saviors. After a couple of hours, our heroines insisted that it was time for them to go. Everyone crowded around as they saddled their horses. Before they mounted, the husband stepped forward to again express everyone's gratitude.

Moondance was surprised by Butch's response, "Señor. You promised us some money."

"Sí señora. I have it here," as he handed a bag of money to Butch.

"Gracias, señor."

Butch placed the money in a saddle bag and both ladies mounted.

"But señora, we don't even know your names."

“And we don’t know yours.”

She reached into a different saddle bag, removed a wad of American dollars and handed it to the husband.

“You might have to share that with some of the other towns.”

“Muchas gracias, muchas gracias, señora y señorita.”

The ladies rode out of town to much clapping and cheering. Several children ran beside them for a while.

Butch soon cleared up Moondance’s confusion, “Always pay your debts.”

Butch began discussing the day’s events around the campfire that night. “I cannot possibly thank you enough, Moondance. You really did save me, and it was you who saved that town.”

“We’re a team, Butch. You do the thinking, and I do the shooting.”

Butch didn’t accept the rather simplistic overview, “Your interrupting Brinner was inspired. It sure rankled a few of them.”

“I have a good teacher. How’d you know they’d draw on ‘four’?”

“He restarted at ‘two’. If he intended to go all the way to ten then he surely would have begun at ‘three’. I figured he was repeating ‘two’ in order to give his men a little time to settle themselves.”

Moondance shook her head in admiration.

“I don’t know if he always intended to draw early, or if your interruption spooked him a bit. When he went for his gun, we went for ours before the rest of the gang went for theirs. I don’t think we had a chance if they all went for theirs first.”

“I suppose you’re right, Butch.”

“But what I don’t understand, is why you decided to draw only one gun when we both know that you’re so good with two. It didn’t make sense.”

“If they were all standing side by side then I would have drawn both guns. But when they were all spread out like that, I thought I’d have maximum control and accuracy if I focused on one hand when switchin’ between targets. I don’t know for sure.”

“Hmm, makes sense. I think I’ve seen enough of Mexico. What do you reckon about heading back to the States?” inquired Butch.

By defeating the Sinister Seven, our young ladies established themselves as the best bad guys in the West. Unfortunately, only they and a few Mexicans ever knew it.

Butch and Moondance never found out that Spleen McKen survived and returned to the States. He told a gullible journalist a fanciful story which made headlines. Then he paid an historian to help him write his fake memoirs. Fame and fortune sought and found him. He went on lecture tours, regaling captivated audiences with rousing tales of how *his* noble gang had saved a poor Mexican village from a gang of sixty marauding cutthroat bandits. Each of his associates had made the ultimate sacrifice. It was a beautiful gesture.

Many years later, George Orwell discovered the historian’s reckless recounting of the facts. Orwell admitted that the historian’s complicity was the real inspiration for the Department of Disinformation in his famous book “1948”.

Chapter 23. Grains of sand and truth

“What do we do?” “We die”: Spoken by George McDaniel playing a Kodan Officer, then Dan Mason playing Lord Kril, respectively, in *The Last Starfighter*

It was a beautiful gesture: *Beau Geste*

George Orwell: Eric Arthur Blair (1903–1950) used the pen name George Orwell

Department of Disinformation: Ministry of Truth in Nineteen Eighty-Four by George Orwell

famous book "1948": Nineteen Eighty-Four by George Orwell

24. THE STORY OF SONDANCE

Nature versus nurture debates are likely to continue forever, and what are the roles of environment and circumstance? Where can one good decision lead, or a bad one? Moondance probably had no choice but to kill the brute who attacked her, but should she have agreed to Butch's suggestion of a life of petty crime? Phenotypes are easily described. Just look in a mirror. But to ascertain someone's genotype, should you decode their DNA, or is it better to peer into their soul?

There may be some who are wondering whatever happened to Sondance, Moondance's kid brother.

The parents wanted to continue the astronomical theme when naming their children and call him Sundance. However, there was a mix-up in the County Clerk's office.

Sondance was a sickly child who hated the isolated lifestyle in the woods, but flourished when he moved into town to live with his uncle and attend school.

During his teens Sondance was ashamed to admit that he was related to his infamous outlaw sister, and was determined to embrace a noble and honest profession. When he turned twenty, he sailed to England in order to study calligraphy under the tutelage of the great masters. All was well for a couple of years until his money ran out and he couldn't find any work. Out of desperation he began stealing, but was soon nabbed by the constabulary. Because he came from their former American colonies, the Brits refused to pay for his keep during the eight year jail sentence, so they put him on a boat and shipped him off to Australia. Yes, the Brits always found it easier to dump undesirables in Australia rather than send them elsewhere. The Australian authorities did not know that they were still receiving convicts from England in the late 1800s.

Poor Sondance was never heard of again. However, it is rumored that he changed his name to Ukulele Peterson and began writing stories, poetry and unofficial national anthems. He also grew fond of the Australian bush and started moonlighting as the bushranger known as Captain Thunderclap. Thus, Sondance became a poet by day, and a rustler and armed robber by night. Making ends meet can be difficult when one is a poet.

Chapter 24. The story of sondance

Ukulele Peterson: Andrew Barton Paterson (1864–1941), also known as Banjo Paterson, journalist, poet and author

poetry and unofficial national anthems: Banjo Paterson's *Waltzing Matilda*

moonlighting as the bushranger: Andrew George Scott (1842–1880), also known as Captain Moonlite, criminal

Captain Thunderclap: Frederick Wordsworth Ward (1835–1870), also known as Captain Thunderbolt, criminal

25. HORSE SENSE

It is well-known that a horse's brain is smaller than a typical human adult's brain. It is also well-known that genes can mutate in unexpected ways. However, it is not well-known that some horses can learn to talk. The only problem is that they are physiologically incapable of making loud human sounds, so you have to get close to their mouths and listen carefully. If it's in a good mood, and if it's one of those talking horses, then it will whisper something to you. If it's not, then it might just bite your ear.

Roger Royale was a really nice fellow, and a gun-toting rancher who lived on a big property near Silicon City. Roger enjoyed ridding the country of bad guys, but his greatest passion was his horse TriggerHappy. TriggerHappy was extraordinarily intelligent, even for a talking horse. Roger never did anything significant in his life without first consulting TriggerHappy. Sometimes TriggerHappy just tapped the ground with his hoof and communicated with Roger using Horse code. But most of the time, Roger had to listen carefully in order to receive advice from the four-footed man whisperer.

One balmy Sunday afternoon, Butch and Moondance were in the vicinity so they thought they would drop in on their old acquaintance Roger Royale. They took their usual circuitous and cautious route before riding up to the homestead. They looked over towards a nearby paddock and saw TriggerHappy whispering to Roger. First the horse looked up, and then so did Roger. TriggerHappy said something to Roger, who then came over to his guests.

Roger always suspected the true identity of his occasional guests Betsy and Mabel, but the ladies never displayed any aggression or bad habits during their visits. Besides, Roger craved an enthusiastic and appreciative audience and in this regard they never failed him.

"Howdy Mabel. Howdy Betsy."

"It's good to see you again," responded Betsy.

Betsy and Mabel were among the few people in the world who knew that TriggerHappy could talk, and that the horse was the real brains behind Roger's operation. A couple of visits ago, Roger got excited and inadvertently blurted out his and the horse's secret.

"We saw TriggerHappy whispering to you as we came up," continued Betsy.

"Nah, he wasn't whispering. He's been chewing my ear, literally, all afternoon. He's been really ornery because I can't do his latest trick yet. Anyway, sit yourselves down at the porch and I'll fetch some lemonade. He saw you gals coming, and he told me I could have a break while I've got visitors."

Roger and the ladies spent a very pleasant couple of hours chatting and laughing in the cool shade. Every now and then they'd turn to see what TriggerHappy was doing.

Mabel inquired, "What's he doing now? Is that a big ramp over there in the middle of the paddock?"

Roger paused momentarily, distracted by those dulcet tones, while he processed Mabel's words.

"It looks like he's going to start working on his new trick again. He doesn't need me for this one, thank goodness. Just wait and watch. I warned him that he'll break a leg or his neck one day, but he keeps insisting that he knows what he's doing. He's right when he says that it's never been done by a horse before. Well, not deliberately, and certainly not in this way."

TriggerHappy reared up on his hind legs, then galloped towards and up the ramp. He tucked his head down as he launched himself from the top of the ramp, and tried to do a somersault. The crash-landing was not a pretty sight. TriggerHappy lay there motionless. Roger and the ladies leapt up and were about to race over, when the horse raised his head. He stumbled to his feet, wobbled as he walked towards the water trough, had a short drink, then went over and stood, head bowed, in the shade of the tree in the far corner of the paddock.

“I told him!” said Roger, as they all sat down again.

The mood was somewhat subdued after that. Soon the sun was almost on the horizon. The ladies declined Roger’s kind offer to stay for dinner and even for the night. They thanked him for the lemonade and his exceptionally good company, then took their leave.

Chapter 25. Horse sense

Roger Royale: Leonard Franklin Slye (1911–1998) used the stage name Roy Rogers

lived on a big property near Silicon City: Roy Rogers lived near Mineral City in The Roy Rogers Show

his greatest passion was his horse TriggerHappy: Roy Rogers’ horse in The Roy Rogers Show was called Trigger

the four-footed man whisperer: The Horse Whisperer

26. THE BLUSH

Our heroines were in California and were still single at that stage. Perhaps for the younger one this was due to existing circumstances; and perhaps for the still quite young one this may have been by personal choice.

“I want to find a guy.”

The offhand and sudden remark rendered the younger one speechless.

“Well actually, I want to find a particular man who might be able to help me find a special guy.”

The older gunslinger’s clarifying remark was not helpful.

After a few moments, Moondance was quite pleased with herself when she thought of a response which wouldn’t seem too personal or prying.

“Tell me more.”

“He’d probably be very old by now, if, indeed, he’s even still alive.”

“So he’s an old acquaintance?”

“No, I’ve never met him.”

“Well, is there any reason why you want to meet him now?”

“I want to fight him.”

“So you want to kill him?”

“Oh no. Certainly not.”

Moondance was accustomed to Butch’s frequent vagueness and knew that eventually more would be revealed.

“Okay, what’s the plan?”

“Well I think we should just wander from town to town, making enquiries. He’ll probably be very hard to find.”

“Okay.”

So the ladies set off on their hopeless-sounding mission to find an old man for Butch to fight, but Moondance was secretly questioning Butch’s sanity. She wondered if all that constant thinking during their years together had damaged Butch’s brain. Maybe she would have to intervene if Butch began attacking a defenseless old man.

After three weeks wandering from town to town, our ladies found success in a seedy hotel bar.

Before Butch could speak, the bartender announced, “We don’t want any trouble here.”

Butch looked around again before responding.

“Yes, I’d say you’ve had a lot of trouble in the past. We don’t want any trouble either. We’re looking for an old Spanish soldier, probably very old. A certain Sergeant Carcía. He may have reached an even higher rank.”

“Yeah, I might know him. What’s it worth to you?”

“What’s it worth to you?” asked Butch as she reached for the repeater on her back.

“Come to think of it, you see those two at the table in the far corner. Try the one who looks as though all the beer he ever drank is still sitting in his belly.”

As the two young gunslingers approached the dark corner, the men at the table stopped talking and looked up. The one on the left was well-attired, and the disheveled one on the right was clearly the one that the bartender referred to.

“Are you Sergeant Carcía?”

“Ah, sí, I used to be.”

“I’m not sure if you’re the same Carcía. I’m looking for a guy—an old enemy of yours.”

“Well, I’ve had many enemies and I’ve outlived most of them. Who in particular are you looking for?”

Butch turned towards her friend, pointed down at Moondance’s leg and held out her hand.

“Are you sure?” asked Moondance.

Butch nodded, and the two men suddenly stared at Moondance when they heard her voice. The light was too poor for them to see her well. So were their eyes.

“You’re not going to hurt anyone, are you?” inquired Moondance.

Butch shook her head.

When Moondance pulled out her Bowie knife and handed it to Butch, the men straightened up in their chairs. Butch leaned over the table between them and carved a giant ‘N’. The men looked at each other, then burst out laughing. Moondance was mystified.

“Oh, you want *him* do you? He is a myth ... a legend,” explained Carcía.

The gentleman opposite Carcía finally spoke, “Yes, he is a myth, but Sergeant Carcía here was a true hero. You should be honored that you have now met him.”

Butch was disappointed, and Carcía wanted answers. “So, why were you looking for him? Even if he existed, he would probably be dead by now.”

“I wanted to fight him, to challenge him to a duel.”

Both men laughed. Butch was disappointed, and Moondance continued to be confused.

Carcía's companion continued, "The mythical man you seek was not a gunslinger. You can safely assume that you would have beaten him, if he existed."

"I wanted to challenge him to a swordfight."

By then, Carcía's hysterical fits of laughter were distracting and annoying the bartender and other patrons in the bar.

"I think we should leave," said the gentleman.

The others agreed, and all four walked outside.

"My apologies. I am Don Diego de la Faker and this is my very good friend Demetrio Carcía."

"I'm Butch Rhapsody, and this is *my* very good friend Moondance."

The response amused de la Faker.

"I'm sorry, but I've never heard of you. We old men spend most of our time living in the past. Anyway, why don't you all come to my hacienda? I still have some of my father's swords. Perhaps Demetrio would be willing to engage you in a friendly duel. Personally, I abhor the things with all those sharp bits. All forms of fighting seem so pointless to me ... I would rather engage in a battle of wits."

"So would I," responded Butch.

De la Faker smiled, "Touché."

"Moondance, shall we go to the hacienda?"

"Sure," responded the now curious, but still confused, Moondance.

The two men led the way in a buggy, and our heroines rode behind.

At the hacienda, de la Faker asked the gunslingers to leave their guns outside, but ended up agreeing that they could leave them inside near the front door.

Our ladies removed their hats and dusters. It had been too long since the hacienda had welcomed such beauties. De la Faker offered them light refreshments, and then it was time for the serious business of friendly sword fighting.

De la Faker left the room and returned carrying two swords. He offered Butch first choice and gave the other to Carcía.

De la Faker watched Butch inspect the sword and feel its weight.

“Ah, a rapier. I’ve only ever used a foil. This is heavier.”

“It’s unusual for a woman to be able to fence. Who taught you?”

“My um ... in France, a good friend. He gave me lessons during an eighteen month period, but that was a few years ago now.”

Butch proceeded to do a few warm-ups—slashing, thrusting, parrying, lunging, moving backwards and forwards. Carcía, on the other hand, was finally beginning to sober up and seemed more interested in eating than fighting.

De la Faker had seen enough.

“Demetrio, dear friend, you’re already puffing just standing there, and the fight has not even begun. I fear that one of you will get hurt and that it won’t be the señora. Why don’t you sit down? Señora, I’m so sorry that you won’t have a chance to fight. It’s starting to get late. Perhaps you would like to spend the night here. We could share stories about the Continent over dinner tonight.”

Butch knew that de la Faker had been monitoring her warm-up, and made a calculated guess.

“I would still love to fight El Fox. Will you do me the honor?”

De la Faker smiled.

“Yes, you do enjoy a battle of wits, don’t you? Perhaps we should see if your swordplay is just as good.”

Carcía could not hide his delight to hear this challenge, and Moondance was similarly thrilled to see her first swordfight. Both turned their chairs towards the middle of the room and sat down to watch the performance. However, Moondance was unaware that Butch and de la Faker would be playing a dangerous game. These weren't foils with covered tips, and there was no protective clothing. A mistimed move or careless action could be fatal.

The combatants saluted, touched swords and began slowly, very slowly, testing each other's abilities. Whenever Butch hastened her moves or introduced new ones, de la Faker simply responded in kind or with counter moves. After about three minutes, de la Faker made a parry, feint, and lunge, then slipped and stumbled as he lost his balance. Butch had to lean back to avoid being hit by de la Faker's swinging sword, and simultaneously withdraw hers to avoid running de la Faker through.

"Your powers are weak, old man."

De la Faker steadied himself, they saluted, and resumed their duel. He resisted using his sword to respond to Butch's cheeky bravado, and continued letting her set the tempo. For her part, Butch subsequently avoided any fast footwork.

After ten minutes, Butch had tried every trick and feint that she knew, but de la Faker was never troubled. His reputation as a master swordsman had been confirmed, but the old man was tiring and Butch graciously yielded.

"Bravo, bravo," shouted Carcía, and Moondance clapped.

De la Faker had to sit down immediately to recover, and Butch sat next to him. Meanwhile, Moondance wanted to hold a sword, and Carcía was keen to give her some instruction.

Butch and de la Faker chatted while they watched the old, slow, overweight and jovial Carcía coach the small, young and sprightly Moondance.

"I thought El Fox and Carcía were enemies," explained Butch. "I only went looking for Carcía because I thought that he might know someone who

knows you. But here you both are, good friends, and clearly he knows that you were El Fox.”

“Yes, we were once enemies, but with time, the battles of young men often become old men’s recollections of foolishness. Your friend learns very quickly. I noticed that she carries two handguns, and now she’s changing hands with the sword. That’ll confuse Demetrio.”

Butch did not hide her admiration for her friend. “Yes, she’s incredible, and such lightning reflexes.”

“With a dagger in one hand, sword in the other, and sufficient instruction, she’d be a formidable opponent,” remarked de la Faker.

After a few more minutes exchanging pleasantries, de la Faker again invited our ladies to stay the night.

“I’m sorry, we really must go. It’s too dangerous for us to stay, and it might put you in danger too. Some of the townsfolk saw us following you out of town and will be guessing that we’re here.”

“Then I assume that there’s a reward on your heads.”

“I’m afraid so. Okay Moondance, we’ve got to go now.”

The ladies readied themselves, and all went outside to the horses.

Moondance almost disappeared when the portly Carcía gave her a somewhat unwanted hug. De la Faker simply wished Moondance a safe journey.

Butch held out her hand and shook Carcía’s. She then held out her hand to shake de la Faker’s and said, “Thank you for your hospitality. It was an immense honor for me to try to do battle with you.”

De la Faker gently took hold of Butch’s hand, politely bowed, and kissed it.

“You brought a few minutes of immense pleasure to an old man’s heart. Godspeed.”

Our ladies mounted, looked back and waved, then broke out into a gallop. It would soon be dark.

That night around the campfire they had their usual review of the day's events. Moondance was still confused.

"What did the 'N' mean?"

"It looked like an 'N' from where we were standing, but it was a 'Z' from where they were both sitting. It was the mark of El Fox."

"So, this fox guy was the one you were looking for? And de la Faker was him?"

"Yes. Long ago, El Fox was a people's hero, but an enemy of the local rulers. Few knew his true identity, and Sergeant Carcía had been ordered to capture or kill him."

"Anyway, he's lucky you gave up 'cause he was sure looking tired."

"Despite his shaky old legs, if it had been a real fight I think he would have dispatched me within seconds."

"Butch, did you know that you turned real red when he kissed your hand?"

"Yes. I suppose there are still a few men who can make me blush. Good night Moondance."

"Good night Butch."

Meanwhile, back at the hacienda, "Diego, will you be coming to bed soon? It's getting late."

Chapter 26. The blush

Sergeant Carcía: Wimberly Calvin Goodman (1918–1975), using the stage name Henry Calvin, played Sergeant Demetrio López García in Zorro

Don Diego de la Faker: Armando Joseph Catalano (1924–1989), using the stage name Guy Williams, played Don Diego de la Vega/Zorro in Zorro. Note

that there are three instances in this chapter where Butch expresses her desire to find a “guy”. This is he.

Your powers are weak, old man: Spoken by Darth Vader, played by David Charles Prowse and voiced by James Earl Jones, in Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope

It was the mark of El Fox: The Mark of Zorro

Chapter 26. Author comments

I couldn't resist having a chapter dedicated to Zorro. The fictional Zorro was set in the early 1800s, and the real Butch Cassidy operated in the very late 1800s. In my story I imagine Zorro as being in his sixties or seventies, whereas he would really have had to be about 100 years old, if I was following strict chronologies.

27. THE ROOSTER AND THE HENS

His mother had done hard labor. Perhaps there is no labor which isn't arduous. After no weeping, but much wailing and gnashing of teeth, his elated but exhausted mother gave birth at the crack of dawn. Just then, a rooster crowed thrice. The proud father decided then and there to name the baby Rooster, and the poor mother could not dissuade him.

In due course, the baby was christened Rooster Colburn. Rooster grew strong, and was considered to be an educated man. He had spent four years at school, and could read and write a bit—even do 'rithmetic. You can imagine how much Rooster was teased at school, so other lessons were learned; in particular, how to fight and to not tell anyone your real name. Despite continual protestations from his father, Rooster's poor mother always called him Reuben. By the end of his first day at school he knew why.

When Rooster was fully 'growed', he was very handy with a gun and rifle, could track, and was probably the fiercest brawler this side of the Mississippi. And probably on the other side as well. He had even lost an eye in a saloon brawl after a couple of jokers asked him if he was feeling cocky, but, as they say, you should've seen the other guys by the time he was finished. Yes, Rooster preferred to be called Reuben, and sensible people always obliged.

Rooster had all the right attributes to be a law officer. Big Rooster, with his black eyepatch, became instantly recognizable throughout the West. He was the toughest and meanest marshal that ever lived, like a rattlesnake with a patch over one eye and which was the toughest and meanest rattlesnake that ever lived. Rooster had true grit, just like a one-eyed rattlesnake would have if its grit was like Rooster's. Rooster always got his man. Sixty-eight times! He was notorious for bringing back more dead prisoners than live ones.

The district judge had an important job for Rooster, something that only Rooster would be able to do. He was instructed to bring in Butch and Moondance, who, by then, had been evading the law for more than four years. The judge preferred that they be brought back alive, but knew it was probably a vain hope.

“Yes,” the judge assured him, “the whole reward will be yours if you bring them in.”

“I’ll leave tomorrow at the crack of dawn, Judge.”

Rooster spent the afternoon procuring and packing his gear—preparing for a potentially long and lonely absence while he hunted for the desperados. That evening, Rooster snuggled up to his big teddy bear in bed. However, teddy forgot to wake Rooster up early, so it was past midday when Rooster departed. Naughty teddy.

Thanks to Butch’s planning, there never was any discernible pattern to our heroines’ known robberies or known sightings. Rooster knew this. He knew that those varmints were as elusive as a rattlesnake wearing a red pimpernel. Rooster wasn’t as smart as Butch, in fact, probably no one was, but he was still capable of coming up with a good plan—a very good plan—the only obvious plan. Well, the only plan that was obvious to Rooster. He would wander aimlessly, and hope that his and the villains’ paths would eventually cross.

They say that fortune favors the brave. It also favors the gambler—sometimes. Rooster had gambled at extremely long odds and had gotten lucky. Butch and Moondance were riding slowly, side by side, along a wide dry gully.

“Halt, or I’ll shoot,” said Rooster, as he popped his head up from behind a rock. “Put your hands up, both of you.”

Butch’s brain went into overdrive. She realized who it was, that he had the drop on them, and that he was so close that he couldn’t possibly miss from

there. Worse still, the marshal's rifle was pointing at Moondance, Butch's "adopted" charge.

The marshal had underestimated the abilities of the two gunslingers. Butch would still have time to draw and kill the marshal if he shot Moondance, but that was unacceptable.

"Put your hands up," muttered Butch as she raised hers. "Mr. Marshal Colburn, um Reuben, do you mind if I call you Reuben?"

Rooster was surprised, and a little flattered. No baddie had previously been so polite.

"Sure. Go ahead. But this don't change nothin'."

Butch whispered to Moondance, "Remove your hat slowly with one hand, and shake your head slowly."

Moondance complied, while the marshal kept his rifle steadied on her.

As Moondance's tresses fell down, "Well I'll be damned. You're a woman?"

Moondance put both arms up high again.

Butch issued another quiet instruction, "Say something polite, and do that trick you've been practising."

"Howdy, marshal. I'm Moondance."

With all the dust and grime on her clothes and face, Rooster hadn't been completely sure until then. "You *are* a woman. So the rumors are true. What's that horse doin'?"

Butch interrupted, "Reuben."

Rooster's eyes oscillated between Butch and Moondance's horse. Butch lowered one arm, undid a couple of buttons, and pulled her shirt down just enough to evoke, "Goddammit. You're a woman too. Keep that horse still."

"Reuben, Dollor is always doing that if Moondance doesn't hold the reins. No one knows why."

“Goddammit, Moondance, take them damn reins. I’ll shoot you if you try anythin’.”

Moondance took the reins and the horse stopped. It had been slowly stepping sideways, taking cues from Moondance’s knees.

Rooster had lost control of the situation. With those few extra yards distance between the women, he realized that if he managed to drop one of them then the other would nail him anyway.

“Goddammit.”

Butch took the initiative, “Reuben, I think we have a stalemate. May I please make a suggestion?”

This sort of thing had never happened before. Rooster was so flummoxed that he couldn’t think straight.

“Yeah ... okay. But you’re still m’ prisoners.”

“May I suggest that you release us, and that we don’t do you any harm.”

After a long pause, the marshal finally responded, “Yeah, okay, but if I catch you again, I’ll kill you both first, and then arrest you.”

“You’re a fair man, Reuben. We’ve been warned.”

Butch turned her horse and cantered off. Moondance’s horse walked backwards for a while before she turned it and galloped away to join Butch.

Rooster made one final blasphemous remark as the women vanished. As he mounted his horse, he imagined what the headlines would read if the story got out, “Rooster Bested by Two Hens”. And if he brought them in dead, then it might be something like, “Rooster Gives Two Hens the Chop.”

He knew his life would be hell if he got such bad press.

Rooster did the only sensible thing. He spent a few more weeks wandering through the woods, hoping that he wouldn’t encounter those two cunning women again with their fancy talking and their clever horse.

When he returned to town he informed the judge, “I couldn’t find them goddamned hambres.”

Bad boys 0, Rooster 68.

Bad girls 1, Rooster 0.

Chapter 27. The rooster and the hens

After no weeping but much wailing and gnashing of teeth: “in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth”, Matthew 8:12, New American Standard Bible (1977)

at the crack of dawn. Just then, a rooster crowed thrice: “before a cock crows, you shall deny Me three times”, Matthew 26:34, New American Standard Bible (1977)

Rooster Colburn: Marion Robert Morrison (1907–1979), using the stage name John Wayne, played U.S. Marshal Reuben J. Cogburn in Rooster Cogburn. In the film, Cogburn preferred the name Rooster.

Rooster snuggled up to his big teddy bear: This is an anachronism. Teddy bears were named after President Theodore Roosevelt and were first produced very early in the 20th century.

as elusive as a rattlesnake wearing a red pimperl: Anthony Colin Gerald Andrews using the stage name Anthony Andrews and playing Sir Percy Blakeney in *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, says “They seek him here, they seek him there. Those Frenchies seek him everywhere. Is he in heaven? Or is he in—hell? That demmed, elusive pimperl.” This is a slight variation of the words in Orczy's book of the same name.

Dollor: Dollor was the name of the horse that John Wayne rode in Rooster Cogburn and in other films

Chapter 27. Author comments

I did a lot of research before, and during, the writing of most chapters. That’s when I stumbled onto Dollor.

28. YOU WON'T BELIEVE YOUR EYES, IT'S KENTUCKY BLUE SURPRISE

Our heroines had heard a lot about Kentucky bluegrass, and were only a couple of States away when they decided that they may as well mosey on over. A couple of months later when they arrived at their first field of ungrazed bluegrass they were amazed. It was blueish all over like a huge, badly bruised rattlesnake.

Butch and Moondance occasionally wandered into towns for a drink at the saloons, but all they ever heard were exaggerated stories about the famous former inhabitant, Festive Daniel B. Parker, and his exploits. They soon wearied of hearing about the local hero and subsequently avoided all towns in Kentucky.

They had been following a trail for a couple of days when, in the middle of nowhere, they encountered a stout, energetic, little man running a food stall. He was selling strange little blue things to eat. His arms were thrashing about as he beckoned and pleaded that they come and taste some of his weird-looking morsels. Our heroines looked at each other, quite bemused. They looked around and assumed it was safe, so they dismounted, tied their horses to some bushes and wandered over to the stall.

The blue things looked even worse close up than from afar. The little man, Corporal Blanders, told them his story. He had fought in the Civil War, then wandered all over for a few years before having his great epiphany—it would be convenient if travelers, or busy people, or lazy people, or even just anyone, could stop somewhere to have a quick feed and be off again. After several years of experimentation he had developed a secret recipe.

“Would you like to try one? I call them Kentucky Blue Surprise.”

It was a ridiculous location for a business. Butch doubted that Blanders could have been a clever bounty hunter hoping to poison the desperados

and collect the huge reward. However, she did wonder if he was just an ordinary thief who wanted to kill then rob his victims; or a silly little man who didn't have any business sense and who possibly couldn't cook either.

"We'll have some if you have some first."

The man scoffed one down, but Butch was still wary.

"What's in them?"

The Corporal proudly announced, "Well, actually, they're rattlesnake steaks cooked using my seven secret seeds and spices."

"I can assure you that one of your ingredients isn't a secret. It's Kentucky bluegrass. I can see all those blue seed heads mixed in with it."

"Oh, you guessed it. I might have to work on that."

"And how do you get a steak from a rattlesnake? Oh well, it doesn't matter. We'll try some."

Our two heroines each ate a sample.

"Not bad," said Butch, "... and not good either."

Tears welled in the man's eyes, and Butch took pity.

"Can we buy some to take away with us?"

The man's mood was suddenly buoyant. He packed some of the awful looking food into a special purpose-built bucket for them and handed it over. The women paid, then departed.

When the women disappeared from view, the little man began waving his hands with clenched fists in the air as if in some jubilant victory dance, shouting, "Yes! My very first customers. I'm going to make a fortune."

At that same moment, our heroines were about to toss the bucket of food away when they spotted someone ambling towards them. Here was possibly an opportunity for our heroines to do their good deed for the day.

As they got closer, they could see that it was a little tramp wearing a derby and carrying a cane.

“Howdy,” said Butch.

The man looked up but couldn’t see very well with the sun behind the ladies.

“Howdy.”

“We just bought this at the food stall down the road, but, to be honest, we didn’t like it. It’s still warm. You’re welcome to it if you want.”

Butch lowered the bucket to the tramp’s outstretched arms. He took one glance then refused.

“Don’t worry. It’s safe. We’ve both tried it.”

The little man nibbled a morsel then announced his verdict, “Nope. I’d rather go hungry.”

“So would we.”

The ladies gave the tramp some jerky, a drink of water and a few dollars, then dumped the bucket and rode off.

“It’ll never catch on,” was Butch’s appraisal.

Chapter 28. You won’t believe your eyes, it’s Kentucky Blue Surprise

Festive Daniel B. Parker: 1. Fess Elisha Parker Jr. (1924–2010), using the stage name Fess Parker, played Daniel Boone in Daniel Boone. 2. Daniel Boone (1734–1820), pioneer.

a clever bounty hunter: The Bounty Hunter

a little tramp wearing a derby and carrying a cane: The Tramp, or The Little Tramp, was a famous on-screen character created by Sir Charles Spencer Chaplin (1889–1977) using the stage name Charlie Chaplin

Chapter 28. Author comments

I've never seen Kentucky bluegrass, and to this day I'm still unsure about the claimed "blue seed heads" which I wrote.

29. THE WONDER OF ALL WONDER HORSES

In the early days, Hollyoak was a small farming and agricultural area, but the local property owners were astute businessmen and quite ambitious. They formed the Hollyoak Producers Co-operative Incorporated. The minutes of their second annual meeting record that the Chairman asked for suggestions on ways to expand into new markets. A few of the producers had already been giving this some thought, even before the Co-op was formed.

One of the directors, Johnnie Rivercrossing, responded.

“Mr. Chairman, I have a suggestion. I think that what the West really needs is some horses with real staying power. Horses that can gallop at full speed all day and all night, carrying a rider or pulling a stagecoach, without needing to stop for a drink or a feed. Not like those wussy Flemish horses which can’t even make it from Ghent to Aix.”

This received enthusiastic support from two fellow directors, Fred Long and ‘Awesome’ Wells. Following some further discussion, an appropriate motion was put, seconded, and carried unanimously. The meeting then nominated three producers, namely Sammie Goldwin, Frankie Capper and Stan Cubic, to form a committee and make it all happen.

Unlike many government committees, this was an action committee that actually acted. It got things done. The committee had soon set up a breeding program led by the famous geneticist Greg Mental, who swore on a Bible that his experiences breeding pea plants could easily be transferred to animals. It took many years, but eventually they established a special breed of horse called Silvestre, named after the magnificent Italian stallion which they had imported to begin the breeding program. It was said that Silvestres had unsurpassed staying power and could go and go and go.

The Hollyoak Co-op wanted a good gimmick to sell their new product. Mental had explained to them that, even though the Silvestre was a wonder horse, nay, the champion of all wonder horses, it was still just a horse. However, adopting standard commercial practice that scientific fact should not interfere with marketing fiction, the Co-op claimed that the new breed was so special that it had been given a new scientific name: genus *Equus-extraordinary*, species *grenendur*. The species name ignored all of those usual fancy Latin and Greek words, and was simply a contraction of “great energy and endurance”. In the marketing brochures, the scientific name was often replaced by the more convenient acronym Gee-gee.

After a long and intensive advertising campaign extolling the virtues of the Gee-gee, a large number of Silvestres were sold to the very wealthy. There was a lot of prestige in having a Silvestre or three in one’s stable, even if one rarely took the poor beast for a ride.

Now in modern times, any bad guy escaping the law usually wants to have a super fast car. However, in Wild West times, every self-respecting bad guy wanted a getaway horse with incredible stamina. Our two heroines were among the first to procure the expensive Silvestres, and they loved riding them.

The Co-op eventually made a small fortune from the powerful Silvestres.

Chapter 29. The wonder of all wonder horses

Johnnie Rivercrossing: John Martin Feeney (1894–1973), known as John Ford, was a film director and producer

those wussy Flemish horses which can’t even make it from Ghent to Aix: Browning’s How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix

Fred Long: Friedrich Christian Anton Lang (1890–1976), known as Fritz Lang, was a film director and producer

‘Awesome’ Wells: George Orson Welles (1915–1985), known as Orson Welles, was a film director, actor, writer and producer

Sammie Goldwin: Szmuel Gelbfisz (1879–1974), known as Samuel Goldwyn, was a film producer

Frankie Capper: Francesco Rosario Capra (1897–1991), known as Frank Capra, was a film director, producer and writer

Stan Cubic: Stanley Kubrick (1928–1999) was a film director, producer and writer

Greg Mental: Johann Mendel (1822–1884), later known as Gregor Johann Mendel, or more commonly Gregor Mendel, is considered to be the father of genetics

a special breed of horse called Silvestre, named after the magnificent Italian stallion: Michael Sylvester Gardenzio Stallone, using the stage name Sylvester Stallone, was sometimes given the nickname 'the Italian stallion'

the champion of all wonder horses: Champion the Wonder Horse appeared in Gene Autry (Orvon Grover Autry [1907–1998]) films

Chapter 29. Author comments

When I was a kid (in Australia), I think everyone knew that a “gee-gee” was babytalk for a horse. I think this term is now not familiar to many young people, and possibly not used in some English speaking countries.

30. BUTCH'S GENEROUS GESTURE

Some folk struggle to survive, but still manage to maintain their honesty and integrity. Butch respected such battlers. For others, survival is not an issue, but still they struggle for more wealth, more power, more fame—for imagined superiority. Butch was not one of those. She wasn't even a grey squirrel.

Ever since their first stagecoach robbery, our heroines had been generous with their ill-gotten gains. They had sometimes turned Christian practice on its head by keeping a tithe for themselves and giving the rest away. However, after almost five years on the run, they had still managed to amass a small fortune for themselves.

Their generosity had served them well. Although they had a few secret hide-outs scattered throughout the West, they had also befriended several individuals and families living in remote areas. Here were places where they could usually get a good meal or two, and sometimes the wife might even bake a pie or cake.

The hosts were always keen to hear news of the outside world. Butch tried to keep abreast of events by snatching any newspaper she stumbled across during a robbery, or procuring one when buying supplies. She shared whatever news she had. The isolated wives were always keen to hear about latest fashions and trends, and to dream of the impossible. Sometimes Butch would recount stories about her travels in Europe, and these usually kept the whole family spellbound.

Butch liked interacting with children, if there were any. She loved their innocence, but lamented that the world would destroy that purity eventually. Moondance, too, enjoyed playing with children, but every such visit seemed to fuel her maternal instincts. The children considered Moondance to be more fun, but Butch more interesting.

The mealtimes were fascinating affairs. The wife chatted constantly. The children would look and giggle at Moondance. The wife would frequently glance at the husband who would invariably be staring at Moondance. Butch would always be alert with eyes, ears and nose, surreptitiously monitoring everything that was happening—and not just at the table. And then there would be Moondance, who would listen to the wife, smile a lot at the children, sometimes look at the husband, and seem to forget that Butch was even there.

Everyone found these brief stopovers mutually beneficial in a multitude of ways. Some hosts knew who their special visitors were, yet they saw a tender side of their guests which could never have been anticipated on the basis of the reward posters.

Our heroines had left Kentucky a few months earlier, and were heading west again, back through the high country.

“Maybe we should drop in on old Judd.”

“Sure, why not?” responded Moondance.

Getting to Judd’s place would take a couple more days winding through the desolate hills. However, next day our tender, caring, and dangerous young ladies were wandering along a ridge and were surprised to see a lone rider slowly approaching. In those parts, three people on the same ridge constituted a crowd.

Butch made her customary unnecessary remark, “We better stay alert.”

As the rider got closer, they could see that he was tall in the saddle.

“He looks like that cowboy Pearly Gates from the cattle drive. That reminds me, Butch, you were going to tell me about those, those *a-na-to-mi-cal* features of tall thin men.”

Butch was deep in thought, but eventually she spoke.

“We’ll just move to one side and let him pass. Whatever you do, don’t make any sudden moves.”

Moondance was perplexed.

Clippety-clop. Clippety-clop. Clippety-clop. The stranger just kept riding past without pausing, and without so much as a glance in their direction; but twice he touched the brim of his hat, acknowledging their existence, and said, "Miss ... Miss."

When the stranger was beyond hearing range, Moondance couldn't contain herself any longer.

"He didn't even look in our direction. How could he know that we're women? Do you think he knew that we're not married?"

It had been enough to confirm Butch's initial suspicions.

"Legend has it that he may be some kind of spirit, perhaps a devil in human form, a ghost who walks and talks and rides and shoots. He mainly drifts along on the High Plains. Sometimes he ventures into a town for a quick drink then straight to the barber shop, getting ready to paint the town red. He usually has such a wild time that the townsfolk are invariably glad when he leaves. If the rumors are true, then he's done some good things, but also some bad things, and some downright ugly things. His are not angel eyes. If what they say is true, then even you couldn't outdraw him, Moondance."

Both women pondered Butch's words, and the anatomical clarification would have to wait.

The next day our heroines took their usual precautions as they approached Judd Iscot's log cabin. All looked well, so Moondance hung back while Butch proceeded. Judd was busy, head bowed, skinning some sort of critter, when he heard Butch's horse. He looked up and realized who it was, his beaming smile revealing some not-so-pleasant, tobacco-stained and rotting teeth.

Years ago, Judd had left his wife and daughters to travel west and make his fortune in the Californian gold fields. This was bad luck for Judd on two counts. Firstly, most of the easy pickings were gone by the time Judd got there, so like many others the only thing Judd made was a misfortune. Secondly, after a few years he returned East to his wife and family only to

find that they had left for parts unknown. After drifting for a couple of years, finding work here and there, he abandoned civilization and went up into the mountains where he now lived.

“C’mon in. I ain’t seen you gals for ages. I thought the law might’ve got youse.”

Butch dismounted and peeked into the cabin. All looked safe. She turned around, took her hat off, and beckoned Moondance with it.

“You gals must’ve guessed what I was doin’. I was just preparin’ a fine stew. We’ll have a good feed tonight.”

Judd couldn’t resist briefly ogling Moondance. However, as in former visits, he mainly addressed his comments to Butch. He always seemed to be able to relate better to the older and more mature Butch, rather than the unattainable and ever blossoming Moondance.

Packhorses can carry more than just food and water. Butch went out and fetched a couple of bottles of whiskey.

“One for now, Judd, and one for you to remember us after we leave.”

“Thanks Butch. Yeah, I noticed you gals got yourselves some new horses. I ain’t seen them sort before.”

“They’re a new breed. Some people call them Gee-gees. We’ve had ours for about nine months now, just after they came onto the market. They haven’t disappointed.”

The ladies sat on barrels next to the table while Judd continued cutting and slicing and dicing.

Judd stoked the smoky fire so that there would be plenty of hot coals come cooking time. There was constant bantering and chuckling among the three of them. Judd enjoyed any company, safe in the knowledge that no one would stay long enough to start irritating him. And this was the only female company he ever received. Even Butch’s raspy voice sounded pleasant, and it was something special whenever Moondance spoke. If anyone could spin

a good yarn then it was Judd. It's even possible there was an element of truth in some of his stories.

Not many would have enjoyed Judd's cooking, but compared with the meals that the ladies had been eating during the previous few weeks, the stew was delicious. After the meal, old Judd struggled to stand up, and tottered over to restoke the fire.

"You okay?" asked the sympathetic Butch.

"Yeah. Jus' gettin' too old. Ya probably know 'ow cold it was up 'ere this las' winter. M' chilblains are still killin' me."

And so the evening went on ... and on ... and on. Judd was the first to nod off, followed soon by Moondance and then Butch. One and a half bottles of whiskey were gone, yet Moondance didn't drink much of it.

Butch was the second to wake up next morning. Judd had already restoked the fire, which was smoky again, and was planning to finish that "damn fine stew."

After breakfast, Butch went out to ready the horses while Moondance and Judd kept chatting.

When Butch returned, Judd inquired, "You gals not stayin'?"

Butch smiled, "There's no point in our staying any longer, Judd. There's only about half a bottle of whiskey left. You'll need it for yourself."

Judd was disappointed, but not surprised. His guests sometimes stayed just one night, and never more than two. "Well, you gals take care, won't youse. I'll still be 'ere when ya come back."

Moondance gave old Judd a polite hug, then mounted and rode off with one of the packhorses in tow. As per usual, Butch thanked Judd for his hospitality, and offered him some money "for supplies and a couple of drinks when you next go to town."

Moondance glanced back just as Judd was energetically shaking Butch's hand, showing even more gratitude than usual.

Butch mounted, and with the other packhorse in tow, quickly caught up with Moondance.

"What was that all about?"

"I gave him a few dollars more than usual. Thirty dollars."

Moondance idly asked, "Why?"

"I didn't have any silver."

Moondance sighed, and didn't bother seeking clarification.

"Let's move it," said Butch, and the ladies galloped away.

Chapter 30. Butch's generous gesture

Butch was not one of those. She wasn't even a grey squirrel: "the squirrel was not one of those" comes from Wolfe's poem *The Grey Squirrel*

to dream of the impossible: *The Impossible Dream*, a song by Leigh and Darion

he was tall in the saddle: *Tall in the Saddle*

a ghost who walks: "The Ghost Who Walks" is a nickname for *The Phantom*, a comic strip character created by Lee Falk and first published in 1936

He mainly drifts along on the High Plains: Clinton Eastwood Jr., using the stage name Clint Eastwood, played the Stranger in *High Plains Drifter*

some good things, but also some bad things, and some downright ugly things: *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*

His are not angel eyes: Clarence Leroy Van Cleef Jr. (1925–1989), using the stage name Lee Van Cleef, played Angel Eyes in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*

Judd Iscot's: Judas Iscariot, betrayer

I gave him a few dollars more: For a Few Dollars More

I didn't have any silver: "What are you willing to give me to deliver Him up to you?' And they weighed out to him thirty pieces of silver", Matthew 26:15, New American Standard Bible (1977)

Chapter 30. Author comments

"The Grey Squirrel", "The Bridge of Sighs" and "My Last Duchess" are three of my favorite poems.

31. THE PERFECT POSSE

Ever since our ladies had departed Judd's cabin, Butch had insisted that they keep galloping. This wasn't difficult because they were riding Silvestres, and were also using Silvestres as packhorses.

Every ten minutes or so, Butch checked behind them, and Moondance assumed that she was being her normal cautious self.

After a couple of hours they were in open country. Butch soon looked back again, and then uttered one word.

"Damn."

Such strong language got Moondance's attention, so she looked back and uttered three words.

"Who are they?"

The 'they' were a large group of riders, still a long way back, and probably galloping in the ladies' direction.

Butch offered some reassurance, "It doesn't matter. Their horses will soon tire."

It was nearing nightfall a few hours later. Our ladies' horses had been galloping nonstop, and so had the riders'.

Butch summed up her thoughts again, "Damn."

As it got darker, the ladies slowed their horses to a walk. Eventually they looked back into the darkness and could see a fire. The riders had stopped to camp for the night, so our ladies did the same.

"They must be a posse, Butch. They seemed to be following us. And they must be ridin' Gee-gees, just like us. You must have known they were coming. How? I didn't hear or see anything unusual this morning."

“I didn’t know for sure. I became suspicious when the fire was smoky again, so when I went outside to ready the horses I checked Judd’s woodpile. Some of it was wet, but some was partly covered and still dry. I guessed that he was deliberately using the wet stuff.”

Butch’s intuition concerning Judd Iscot had served them well that day. However, this was no ordinary posse in no ordinary pursuit of no ordinary prey.

It had been almost a year since our ladies previously visited Judd. Just before the snows came, his poor eyesight and rotting teeth were getting the better of him, and the thought of another winter of itchy, painful chilblains was more than he could bear. If only he could get enough money to live out his days in comfort. So he went down to the nearest town and betrayed his friends. He explained that the bandits would probably return after winter, that he would signal if they came, and that he was entitled to at least half of the reward. His bargain was accepted after being passed up a chain of authorities.

All were aware that there was no guarantee that the ladies would revisit Judd, but the fact that the two most wanted fugitives in all of the U.S.A. continued to escape justice was an enormous embarrassment. Thus a posse was formed, and the strategy was simple—sit, wait and hope for a signal from Judd, then go hell-for-leather after their hard target.

For such an important mission, the posse would need a good, strong leader. However, strong leaders can still make mistakes. So, to minimize the latter, three leaders were appointed on the basis that if opinions differed then final decisions would be based on majority vote.

There must be something about lawmen. They so often are wild in their younger days, sometimes breaking the law, before eventually becoming law keepers themselves. Rooster Colburn was a case in point, as were U.S. Marshals Bertie Lambaster, Bill Beedle and Doc Douglas.

In his younger days, Lambaster made a bad name for himself after being involved in some shenanigans down in Veracruz. Similarly, Beedle was involved with a wild bunch before switching to the right side of the law.

Douglas was a special case. He always claimed to be some kind of medical person, but since actions speak louder than words, he was clearly a gunfighter, gambler and drinker. He once famously took a holiday in Tombstone for health reasons. The holiday did nothing for his health, but he did manage to sink a few drinks and chalk up a few wins and killings. If nothing else, Douglas was always admired for his fighting abilities and his tough and uncompromising nature. Thus he was deputized specifically to co-lead the posse because Marshal Wyatt wasn't available; and because he agreed to comply if outvoted by the other marshals.

During the winter, the three marshals made painstaking preparations. No expense was spared. They decided that there should be a total of fourteen lawmen. Their logic was interesting. If the villains manage to fire off one six-shooter each, and hitting their targets every time, then there would still be two officers left to take them down. The posse included three Indian trackers; one for each lady, and one for the mysterious Chinaman in case he really existed and was spotted. All horses were Silvestres, including the packhorses.

When the snows first began to melt, spotters on a series of hills worked in shifts, waiting for Judd to prepare a smoky fire. When our ladies arrived at Judd's the previous afternoon, smoke and mirrors were used to pass a signal all the way back to town. Final preparations were furious that evening, and the posse departed at dawn.

The chase was on.

Chapter 31. The perfect posse

go hell-for-leather after their hard target: Hard Target

[Bertie] Lambaster made a bad name for himself after being involved in some shenanigans down in Veracruz: Burton Stephen Lancaster (1913–1994), using the stage name Burt Lancaster, played Joe Erin in Vera Cruz

[Bill] Beedle was involved with a wild bunch: William Franklin Beedle Jr. (1918–1981), using the stage name William Holden, played Pike Bishop in The Wild Bunch

[Doc] Douglas was a special case ... He once famously took a holiday in Tombstone: Issur Danielovitch (1916–2020), using the stage name Kirk Douglas, played Doc Holliday in Gunfight at the O.K. Corral

The chase was on: The Chase

32. A PAIR OF QUEENS BEATS A FULL HOUSE

It was still only the first night that the posse was after them. The outlook was grim, and our heroines were worried.

“What are we going to do?” asked Moondance while they ate next to the fire.

“I don’t know. One thing’s for sure, we have to be on our way at the crack of dawn. Do you want first watch?”

Our ladies rode hard the next day, and so did the posse. The latter were still a long distance behind, but whenever line of sight permitted, the hunters and the hunted could see each other.

On the second night Moondance inquired, “Who are those guys?”

“Determined. Do you want first watch?”

Early on the third day our ladies split up. Butch headed off and around the mountain to the west. Moondance headed off and around the mountain to the east. They eventually met up again and continued galloping northwards. They soon realized that the posse had similarly split up, tracked around both mountains, and was still on their tail. At least our ladies had gotten somewhat further ahead.

On that third night Moondance wondered again: “Who are those guys?”

“Persistent. There’s so many of them that they can at least get a good sleep each night. I’m tired, and I’m sore. Do you want first watch?”

The fourth day went much the same as the earlier days. However, that night after lighting their fire, and seeing the posse’s fire in the distance, the ladies set off. It was rocky terrain, so they led their horses on foot in the darkness.

One of the packhorses fell, and became lame. They rearranged some of their gear, and dumped some nonessentials.

Afterwards, Butch volunteered, "I'll do it."

"No, I'd rather do it. Thanks. You start going. I'll catch up."

"Okay. Don't take too long. If the clouds hide the moon again you might not find me."

Butch set off, and a minute later heard two shots.

Next morning they were convinced that they had put a few more miles between themselves and the posse, but their pursuers had also walked their horses that same night.

By the fifth night our heroines were nearing exhaustion, and on the verge of losing all hope. Butch's mood was reflected by her somber words.

"It occurs to me that the distance from here to eternity can be measured with a bullet."

"What do you mean?"

"If they get us in gunshot range then we're dead. And they probably have marksmen too."

"Don't worry, Butch. You'll figure out something. You always do. ... *We'll* figure out something."

In the middle of the sixth day, our ladies were riding up a long sweeping valley when a saddle ridge between two mountains came into view. As they rode towards the high point, Butch remarked, "This is interesting."

When they reached the ridge, she noted again, "This *is* interesting."

"If you're thinking of making a stand here then I agree. There's a lot of cover on this side of the ridge. Boulders and bushes everywhere."

"It's the other side that intrigues me. There's not much cover for miles."

“Well, if you want to press on then we could still probably make it to that far woodland before they get here.”

When the cards are stacked against you, what do you do? What do you do? Well, if you’re desperate to win, then you bluff. But you must be convincing, and very lucky.

“Actually, Moondance, you see that small boulder down there on the other side, about three hundred yards away? I’m thinking we should tuck ourselves in behind it for the rest of the day, then make our way on foot to the far forest tonight.”

Moondance was stupefied.

“But on that side there’s only, what, maybe half a dozen boulders that we could shelter behind for the next half mile. Once they get up here, it would take ten or fifteen minutes at most for them to check them out. It’s madness.”

“That’s what I’m counting on.”

“And what do we do if they find us?”

“Well, we either start shooting, in which case we’re dead meat, or we surrender and we’ll be hanged anyway.”

“Oh, I don’t know, Butch.”

“Well, it’s your call. Hiding behind that boulder is the all-or-nothing approach. If we continue riding to the woodland, then we live to fight another day. It might even turn out better than making a stand on this side. In fact, on this side one of us could probably draw their fire and keep them at bay for maybe a couple of hours while the other went straight to the woodland. Since I’m better with the Sharps, I should hold them off. I could let them have it as soon as they started coming round that bend down there.”

“Oh, I don’t know.”

“There’s not much time, Moondance. I’m happy to do whatever you think. I’m ... I’m so tired.”

“Um ... the boulder.”

“Okay. Here’s what I think we should do. You ride back down the saddle. Go down two hundred yards at least—more if you think you can make it back up here in time. Make a deliberate half-hearted attempt to hide the horse, then leave some footprints going up towards one of the mountains. You’ll have to find a way back up to the ridge without leaving any tracks. Now, what’s the best way for me to get to that boulder without leaving any tracks?”

Moondance pointed out a promising path and warned Butch not to move any rocks out of position.

“You better give me your rifles before you go. You’ll need to move fast back up here, but you’ll still have to carry your canteen. If you spot them, and can’t make it back in time, then hide and stay low. If you’re not at the boulder within fifteen minutes, or if I think I hear them, I’ll start shooting to draw their attention. Then you’re on your own.”

Moondance set off back down the hill, while Butch unsaddled her horse and unloaded the packhorse. She collected some essentials, and was careful to leave some footprints leading back down the saddle. She then lugged her big bundle on a roundabout route down to the boulder. She was exhausted.

Moondance made it to the boulder about the same time that the posse came round the bend. Butch was relieved to see her.

Moondance caught her breath, then briefly inspected the bundle.

“Why’d you bring my dress and petticoat? Judd would have told them we’re women.”

“Yes, I know, but did they believe him? Probably everyone has heard the rumors, but there’d be many who wouldn’t believe that women could do

what we've done. Better to keep them wondering, rather than prove it. Try to get some sleep, Moondance. We'll have to move as soon as it's dark."

Meanwhile, the posse spotted two horses roaming near the top of the saddle. Marshal Lambaster expressed Butch's oft-repeated sentiment of the previous six days.

"Damn."

The posse halted, and two scouts were sent up the slope to look for tracks. When they returned, they reported that three horses went up, and one came back down. One of the scouts spotted it hidden when they were on their way back. They described the scene on the other side of the saddle. They couldn't see any tracks at the crest, except where the horses had been unsaddled and where just one person had been unpacking some of the gear before heading back down the hill. It looked as though the culprits kept all of their weapons, water and food, and abandoned everything else. The scouts claimed that the culprits would have to be crazy to hide on the other side of the saddle, given that it could take hours to find them on the current side.

"Damn."

The marshals unanimously decided to immediately start a systematic search. It was about four hundred yards to the saddle, maybe seventy-five yards up the mountain on the left before it was too steep to climb, and probably a couple of hundred yards of cover on the mountain to the right. However, Marshal Beedle first went up the saddle with one of the scouts. He surveyed the other side with his telescope, couldn't see any sign of the bandits, then returned to join the search.

After about half an hour, our ladies could hear shots being fired intermittently.

"What are they shooting at?"

"I have no idea. Try to get some sleep, Moondance."

More time passed. The exhausted Butch was soon asleep, but Moondance couldn't relax.

Suddenly a bullet hit the ground next to the boulder where they were hiding. Butch didn't stir, but Moondance began shaking her and put her hand over Butch's mouth. Just as Butch opened her eyes, another bullet hit the top of the boulder.

Both ladies remained still and silent, straining their ears.

About a minute later they heard another shot, but it wasn't in their direction.

Moondance whispered, "What are they doing?"

"Desperately hoping that some fool sticks their head out or tries to shoot back. Clever! Go back to sleep, Moondance."

But Moondance stayed awake, and woke Butch at dusk. They waited until it was completely dark before setting off on their trek to the woodland.

At dawn the posse renewed their search of the first side. A couple of hours later, and out of desperation, two scouts were sent to search the other side.

Our ladies had rearranged some pebbles behind the boulder so that they could sit in relative comfort, but this discovery was all too late and the posse had been outplayed. Doc Douglas, gambler, was amused and impressed. He wouldn't mind playing poker with those scoundrels.

Chapter 32. A pair of queens beats a full house

the hunters and the hunted: The Hunted

the distance from here to eternity: From Here to Eternity

what do you do? What do you do?: Spoken by Dennis Lee Hopper (1936–2010), using the stage name Dennis Hopper, and playing Howard Payne in Speed

33. DECISIONS, DECISIONS

Our ladies had made a great escape from the posse, but their problems weren't yet over. They spent a few days in the woods. They found a little stream after a while and were able to replenish their canteens. They avoided lighting a fire the first night, but managed to eat well the second, thanks to Moondance's hunting skills.

After finally emerging into some open country, they were desperate to procure some horses. However, at this point they didn't have enough cash to buy horses, supplies or favors; and their promises to return with more than adequate compensation were considered unacceptable. Thus they were forced to steal what they needed. Eventually they would buy some more Silvestres, but in the meantime ...

Many days passed before they made it around a bluff and cautiously up the narrow box canyon to where one of their old hideouts was. Finally they could unwind a little, and grant themselves two nights' rest. Despite the remoteness, it would be foolish to assume that any place would be safe for long.

There were probably only three physical skills at which Butch was better than Moondance, namely fencing, sharpshooting and riding a bicycle. And it just so happens that this was the hut where they kept their bike. Butch had uncharacteristically bought it on a whim when buying supplies. Given the problems that they had getting it to the hut, buying it was probably Butch's all-time worst decision.

On the second day at the hut, Butch wanted to do nothing but rest and recuperate, but after just one good night's sleep Moondance was full of beans, and it wasn't just the beans that she had for breakfast. She had chopped some firewood, groomed the horses they had stolen, and tried to train her new horse to perform a trick. She then had a pretend fight with a door. It was declared a draw, with both door and opponent bruised. After

that, she tried standing on a chair while attempting to balance it on two legs. And it was still morning.

After lunch, Moondance began riding the bike over the rocky ground down towards the canyon entrance, and continued even after a light shower began. By the time she returned to the cabin, Butch was standing in the doorway and smiling.

“Moondance, why are you singing in the rain?”

“I’m just so happy. The raindrops keep falling on my head and hitting my face. It’s so nice out in the rain, and you can smell the freshness. Why don’t you come out here too?”

Ordinarily, wet days were our ladies’ most miserable days, but Butch stepped forward, shook her hair loose, undid a few buttons, held her arms out wide, looked up to the sky, closed her eyes and sighed. Soon the rain was much heavier and she lowered her arms. The perpetual motion machine in her head was stilled. Butch was nowhere in space, nowhere in time, nowhere in Heaven, nowhere in Hell—a body separated from its self. A clap of thunder shattered her oblivion. She opened her eyes, and Moondance was standing in the doorway, smiling. Never before had she seen Butch so relaxed.

They spent the rest of the afternoon chatting in the hut. They talked about the many things they had done together—the highs and the lows, the mayhem, the hunger, the cold, the loneliness.

The wild aspect of the Wild West was rapidly disappearing. Immense skill and luck had enabled them to survive the Sinister Seven, Rooster Colburn, and the posse. Butch was tiring of the constant vigilance. In recent times, she had noticed Moondance eyeing every man in every saloon, bank, homestead and wherever they went. On several occasions Moondance had expressed a desire to settle down and live a quiet life.

Something had to change!

After much discussion, the women agreed that they would give up their life of crime. But how? Should they catch a boat to Europe and never return? Go down to Mexico or South America? Go live in a small town and just lay low for a few years? They agreed that a fail-safe plan was probably impossible, but that they would still need a good plan. Having made the decision, they felt relieved. They celebrated with a drink, and even Moondance indulged in a whiskey.

Chapter 33. Decisions, decisions

Our ladies had made a great escape: The Great Escape

singing in the rain: A song by Freed and Brown. Also a film

raindrops keep falling on my head: A song by David and Bacharach

Chapter 33. Author comments

Mention of a bicycle might seem somewhat incongruous but there was also a bicycle scene in Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid while Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head is being played. I couldn't resist the tribute to the great movie and the great song. By the way, the producers of The Roy Rogers Show had no qualms about including cars and telephones in their wild west series!

34. SURPRISE, SURPRISE! ARE YOU PLEASED TO SEE ME?

The reformed villains slept well that night. Next morning the mood was buoyant, with constant chatting and giggling. It was the first day of a new era.

If this was a Hollyoak production, then the sun would be shining brightly that day. In fact, the cloudless sky was a perfect blue, and the sun was shining brightly.

If this was a Hollyoak soapie then some quiet, soothing music would be playing, for instance, part of the John Williamson Tell Overture. It would momentarily pause so that the audience could listen to the sweet sounds of little birds in song. Butch and Moondance didn't speak while they saddled the horses. They were enjoying the sweet sounds of the little birds singing.

If this was a Hollyoak blockbuster the camera would zoom in and capture glimpses of contented little animals frolicking or feeding their young. Indeed, our heroines hadn't gone far when a little fawn briefly appeared at the edge of a dense wood before blending into the background.

It was shaping up to be the happiest day that the two friends had experienced. But it's strange how your day sometimes turns out. One moment you are flying high, then the next moment you're falling down without a parachute, reaching terminal velocity just before your fatal greeting with the earth.

Several shots soon rang out. Butch's horse tumbled, and a bullet missed Butch as she jumped off. Her horse managed to get to its feet before a second bullet finished it off. Butch rushed towards a huge pile of rocks next to the bluff, and dropped to the ground when a bullet hit her in the back. She somehow continued scrambling to the cover.

Meanwhile, Moondance's horse had reared, which may have saved it from the first bullet, but a second bullet brought it down. As it was going down, Moondance jumped off and made it to the other side of the rocks where Butch was sitting in pain.

While all that was happening, the packhorse was also being fired on. The first bullet hit the pack, and the horse began to bolt. It didn't get far when two more bullets finally brought it down as well.

"Moondance. Moondance! Are you shot?"

"They shot m' horse."

"Moondance! Did they get you?"

"They shot m' horse! Um, I'm okay. Butch, you're hurt."

"Just sore, I think. The repeater on my back may have saved me."

Butch removed the damaged rifle.

"Well that's the end of that. I'm glad you managed to grab one of yours. We'll need it."

Butch stuck her head up briefly. The bullets missed.

Moondance stuck her head out at the other side of the rock pile. The shooters weren't ready, and fired too late.

"M' horse is still alive. So's the packhorse. Why didn't they just shoot us? They're sufferin'," said Moondance.

Butch grabbed Moondance by the shoulders.

"You have to focus. They didn't want us to get away. And they knew we'd head straight for these rocks."

"They could at least finish the poor things off."

"Moondance! I saw three shooters. They must have wanted to pin us down here. It doesn't make sense. They can only attack us from the sides, and

then it's a fairly even contest. We'd already know it if they have anyone on the bluff above us. Maybe they intend to starve us out, or just move in at night."

Butch's musings were quickly answered with one almighty bang.

"That explains it."

The explosion got Moondance's attention, "There were four of 'em."

"Hello wenchies. Are you pleased to see me?"

Butch had an immediate response, "Of course we are. Hold your hand up, JJ, so that we know who to shoot first."

"You sure got guts, Butch. I like that. It's a pity I still gotta kill you. Are you badly shot? I'm sorry we missed your little friend, but we sure got her horse."

Moondance started screaming hysterically, and Butch had to drag her back from rushing out. The bullets missed Moondance.

Butch grabbed Moondance's shirt with both hands and glared.

"Moondance! I need you!"

Butch called out, "JJ, you finish off the horses, and then we'll make a deal."

The response surprised Butch. "Okay."

"Moondance, did you see any of them before I pulled you back?"

"Yes. One of 'em was crawlin'. About seventy yards away. Probably they all were."

Suddenly there was another explosion, and one of the shooters laughed. The packhorse had suffered horrific injuries, but its death was instantaneous.

JJ shouted, "Moondance, your horse is trying to lift its head every now and then. It might take twenty minutes to die, which is a lot longer than you two wenchies will last. The next stick of gelignite will be yours."

Moondance was livid, but back in full control. She had the makings of an idea.

“If we get the gelignite man then we’ve got half a chance. You draw their fire and I’ll take him out.”

Butch liked the plan, but both knew it was risky. They also knew that JJ intended to kill them come what may.

“Well, to be honest, Moondance, I’m a better shot with a rifle than you. How about you draw their fire and I shoot the gelignite man?”

Both roles would be dangerous, and Moondance agreed.

“Give me your hat,” said Moondance.

Butch cottoned on immediately. She briefly stuck her head out on her side before handing the hat to Moondance.

“Now give me your rifle. Sometimes hold the hats up just far enough for them to see them. Don’t stick your head in the hats every time. He’ll have to stand to throw the gelignite properly, maybe when he’s about thirty or forty yards away. I’m not sure. You’ll have to tell me approximate distance and direction.”

“Okay.”

Moondance proceeded to pop the hats up here and there along the top of the pile, sometimes moving them a short distance along before bringing them down again. She also stuck hers out her side occasionally. Whenever she was wearing one of the hats she avoided being shot.

The ruse had kept three shooters occupied, and when the gelignite man began to stand up Moondance advised Butch accordingly.

After a brief pause, Butch shouted, “Now!”

Moondance stuck her head and arm out on her side and fired several shots before ducking back. At the same time Butch rolled out on her side, took a

shot, and rolled back. Both women looked at each other, wondering, when suddenly there was another explosion.

“Did you miss?” asked Moondance.

“No.”

They looked at each other again, then both glanced out on their respective sides. Shots were fired again, but our ladies had spotted three of the shooters backing away. They peeked out again. The men were still retreating, but two of them fired. After being shot, the gelignite man had merely managed to toss the gelignite near one of the gang, who in turn had been hit in the face with stones from the explosion.

After a few minutes, the ladies warily emerged. Moondance went straight to her horse, shot it, then sat down next to it. Butch went over to the gelignite man and knelt down.

“You’re bleeding out. You won’t last long.”

Butch removed his gun belt, removed all but one bullet from his gun, and laid it down about six feet away.

“There’s one bullet in it, if you can get to it and want to use it.”

She went over to Moondance who was sobbing. Moondance’s anguish brought a few tears to Butch’s eyes.

“Come on,” she said, as she raised Moondance, “they won’t be back for a while, but we have to get going.”

“I’m gonna kill ’im.”

Butch didn’t respond.

Chapter 34. Surprise, surprise! Are you pleased to see me?

John Williamson Tell Overture: 1. John Towner Williams, usually known as John Williams, musical maestro. 2. Rossini's William Tell Overture

One moment you are flying high: Airplane! was released as Flying High! in some countries

the next moment you're falling down: Falling Down

reaching terminal velocity: Terminal Velocity

35. REVENGE IS NOT AS SWEET AS CANDY

Moondance had just announced her intention to inflict lethal payback on JJ, but Butch silently pointed to some of the gear on one of the horse carcasses. The ladies salvaged what they could. They were back to square one, on foot in the middle of nowhere. They were down to three rifles and three handguns, but had the considerable amount of cash that they had hidden near their hideout on a previous occasion.

It was pitch black, like a rattlesnake would be if it tumbled into a tub of tar, before they stopped walking, but they didn't risk lighting a fire. Eventually Moondance broke their silence.

"Will you help me find 'em, I mean them?"

"We'll talk about it tomorrow."

Butch slept well that night, but Moondance lay awake for long periods. Next morning was spent in silence until Butch made some observations before they set off.

"The food'll last a couple of days, but we'll have to find some water before day's end."

It was a long time before Moondance spoke.

"They drew first blood when they shot m' ... my horse ... our horses. Please help me."

"Well, from their point of view, what they did was simply tactical. Admittedly it was cruel."

"But it wasn't even necessary."

"Actually, it almost worked. You were so incensed that you almost got yourself shot."

Moondance slumped into sulky silence, and Butch realized that this wasn't the time for cool-headed analysis.

"You know I've never forgiven myself for shooting that cowboy. Killing in self-defense is one thing, but cold-blooded murder is something else. You'd never forgive yourself."

"I'll challenge him to a draw, and then I'll kill him."

"It might give the appearance of a fair fight, but you know that he'd have no chance. It'd be the same as murder."

"I don't care."

"What about our plans from just two days ago, to get out of this business?"

"I can wait. Will you help me?"

"You'll feel a lot better after a good night's sleep. Yes, tomorrow if you still want to go ahead with this, then of course I will help."

Moondance's mood lifted, and after a while she was ready to review the assault.

"How do you think they found us?"

"I've been wondering the same. After the posse, we made a few enemies when we stole those horses. Maybe someone let JJ know. He might have a few supporters around here, maybe even family. On the other hand, maybe his gang happened to stumble onto the hut and they had it under surveillance."

"Maybe it was that bike, Butch, when we took it there. A few people would have spotted us, and it could have drawn too much attention."

"Yes, that's another possibility. Irrespective of how they found us, they were probably camped within one or two days' ride from here. We have to remain vigilant."

The next day Moondance confirmed her desire for revenge. Butch expected it, and already had the makings of a desperate ploy to locate JJ.

“Moondance, it’s only a long shot, and my guess is that it’ll take about three months altogether. Given that he’s been evading the law even longer than us, he must be fairly cagey.”

“Thanks, Butch.”

“But are you sure that you want to spend possibly months on this, even though it may not work?”

“Yes.”

“Well first of all, we’ve got to get ourselves some horses again.”

It took a few days for our heroines to obtain some horses at a fair price. A week later, they were on Silvestres, armed to the teeth, fully stocked with supplies, and Moondance couldn’t wait any longer—for some details.

“Butch, I know you’ve been doing a lot of thinking ‘cause sometimes you didn’t even answer me when I spoke, but I want to know *now*. What’s the plan?”

“Well, first we go to a railway station and get some train times. Then we’ll have to follow the railway line for maybe a hundred miles, maybe more. We’ll have to spend a lot of time drinking. It’s going to be very risky. Getting some cattle will be easy around here.”

Butch’s lack of clarity correlated well with Moondance’s lack of understanding, and the latter responded with a despondent "Okay" while shaking her head.

Within a week, Butch had studied a train timetable and our two schemers had agreed on two spots between Johnstown and Wicksville which might be good for holding up a train.

“I suppose we do some drinking now,” conjectured Moondance.

“Soon. First we have to check that there’s a good place for a holdup between Fort Courage and Johnstown.”

“Why?” exclaimed the frustrated Moondance. “We’ve already found two good spots. I wish you would just tell me the whole plan, for a change.”

“Yes, sorry Moondance. I can’t decide whether it’s a brilliant plan or just plain ridiculous. I think it could work if we were really intending to rob the train, but in terms of tracking down JJ, we have no idea if news of our ruse will even reach him, or if he’ll fall for it.”

“Well, what *is* the plan?” inquired the increasingly frustrated Moondance.

“We’ll um ...”

Butch lapsed into a pensive silence until Moondance snapped, “Butch!”

“Oh, sorry. We’ll pretend that we’ve heard about a massive shipment of gold and cash that will be on a train passing through on a particular day. We’ll hire seven gunslingers. Three of them, dressed like law-abiding townfolk, will board the train at Johnstown. At that first spot after Johnstown we need some cowboys herding a few dozen cattle over the line. The train driver will be reluctant to slow down too much there, so those cowboys will have to be real friendly looking and salute the train driver. I’m hoping that when there’s cattle again at that next stop he’ll be relaxed and prepared to slow down a lot, or maybe even stop. That’s where we and the other three guns will board the train too. And maybe someone handy with explosives. So, what do you think?”

“Well, I don’t know. Are we just going to steal whatever’s there, pretend that it’s really valuable, and hope that JJ tries to rob us just like we robbed him after he robbed the train?”

“No, not at all. If our plan finds its way to JJ, he’ll know that we’re hiring seven guns, and four cowboys, so I’m hoping that he’ll consider our gang, including us, too intimidating to ambush.”

“Then why are we going to rob the train?” inquired Moondance.

“We’re not. Maybe our gang will, when we don’t show up at that second holdup spot.”

“But you said that we’d board the train at the second stop.”

“No, that’s just the plan we’ll be telling the gang. Hopefully you will already have had your revenge by then.”

Moondance decided to enjoy the scenery rather than seek further clarification.

The next night our thirsty ladies were ready for the drinking phase. As they entered through the swinging doors of the very first saloon, Butch was stunned and whispered, “Of all the bars in all the towns in all the world, we walk into his.”

“Whose?”

“Johnny Ringgold’s. Make sure that I’m not standing between you and him.”

Butch boldly marched straight to Ringgold and inquired, “Good evening, sir. We wish to hire a dwarf, do you know where we may find one?”

“Well, um ...”

“I noticed you pulled your coat to one side when we entered. Yes, it’s a fine-looking handle on that gun. Is that a few notches you have there? I assure you we mean you no harm. In fact if you know how to use it then we’d be interested in hiring you too.”

“I’m Johnny Ringgold. Of course I know how to use it!” was the proud and angry response.

“And I believe you. I mean, that you’re really Johnny Ringgold. Anyway, we’re working on something that could make us all very rich. If you’re interested then meet us at Powell’s Knob at midday in two days’ time. Harvey will be watching, and if you don’t come alone, then he’ll shoot you first. Now, the dwarf?”

“Well, I passed through Lago some months ago. They had a runt there for sheriff. I think his name was, um, Monty, um Muddy, Mordy, no ah Mordecai. He’s the only one I know of around these parts.”

“Lago, eh. Curiosity compels me to visit that accursed town, but judiciousness will keep me away.”

Everyone in the saloon had looked up when our heroines entered and approached Ringgold, believing that something interesting was about to happen. Some were disappointed, and the rest relieved, when Butch shook Ringgold’s hand before the ladies departed.

When they arrived back at camp, Moondance could wait no longer, “A dwarf?”

“Yes, I’d already been thinking for a couple of hours that if we were really going to rob the train then he would be mighty handy. Think about it, Moondance. You’ll figure out why.”

Two days later, Butch was waiting at the Knob as Ringgold approached, and Moondance snuck up behind him.

“Howdy,” said Butch.

“Howdy,” responded Ringgold who kept glancing behind as he dismounted.

“You may as well stop pointing that gun at me. Shooting me won’t do any good if Moondance kills you. As I said at the saloon, we need some men like you, and you’re no use to us if you’re dead.”

Ringgold was convinced, so he relaxed. Butch outlined the plan to him, adding that the train robbery would take place on June 2, and that they’d meet up with him again on May 26 for final details.

While handing over one hundred dollars to Ringgold, Butch added, “This should keep you going until then. By the way, just remember that your share alone will be a lot more than the reward on Moondance’s and my heads. Now there’s just one more thing before you leave. How’s your shooting?”

“I’m the quickest that ever lived.”

“Well that’s good,” responded Butch, “but I mean how accurate are you? We prefer to injure rather than kill, and only as a last resort.”

“Oh, I’m the best.”

A short target practice confirmed that Ringgold’s confidence was no match for Butch’s accuracy, but Ringgold was desperate to prove a point, a point he’d been wanting to prove since the saloon. Butch needed Ringgold’s cooperation if her plan was going to work, so she soon relented.

Butch and Ringgold removed the bullets from their guns, holstered them, then Moondance counted to three.

Everyone, except Ringgold, was surprised that he was quicker than Butch.

“You were right,” confessed Butch, hoping that Ringgold would be satisfied. “You’re obviously faster than us.”

Unfortunately, Ringgold wasn’t satisfied. Maybe he just wanted a story he could tell, and maybe he just wanted to make sure that he’d be able to collect a reward after the robbery, as well as his share. He wanted to draw against Moondance.

That same night, a buoyant Ringgold was back in the bar, buying rounds of drinks, and bragging about outdrawing the infamous Butch Rhapsody. Eventually someone pestered him about the other one. His mood changed, and his whiskey hand began shaking as he went a deathly white and simply uttered, “She’s quick.”

The final gang member was hired about three weeks before the planned robbery. After he departed with his retainer, Butch observed, “Gosh it’s hard to find six good men.”

Moondance countered with, “Yeah, I’d like to find just one good man ... the marrying kind.”

“I know.”

“Well, what do we do now?” sighed Moondance.

“Do you remember that third spot we found before Johnstown? If JJ takes the bait then that is one possible place for him to rob the train, so I think one of us should initially keep watch there while the other looks for alternative places closer to Fort Courage, and even further east. Then we’ll work out what to do next.”

“This is taking too long, Butch. I’m getting sick of it.”

“Me too, but it’ll take only another two or three weeks and you’ll have your revenge. Or we’ll know that it won’t happen.”

“Okay. By the way, I forgot to tell you that I figured out why you wanted the dwarf. I reckon you want to hide him in a box or something, and ship it off on the train as freight. They’ll put it in the baggage car and he’ll break out later.”

“Yes, you’re on the right track.” Moondance missed the little railway pun.

“But when some of those others we hired didn’t know any dwarfs you asked them about acrobats, and I can’t figure out why?”

“Oh, it’s obvious.”

Moondance decided that she’d have to keep on thinking until it was obvious to her, too.

Next morning, while saddling the horses, a circumspect Moondance stopped and turned towards her mentor and friend, “Butch.”

“Yes?”

“Would you be upset if I changed my mind about getting JJ?”

Butch smiled and was glad. “No, not at all.”

“Thank you. Do you know what I was thinking?”

“No.”

“When I was a kid, sometimes pa would bring home candy. The next time I’m in a town, I’m gonna buy some candy. Do you like candy, Butch?”

Chapter 35. Revenge is not as sweet as candy

inflict lethal payback: Payback

It was pitch black: Pitch Black

They drew first blood: First Blood

Johnstown and Wicksville: John Wick

Fort Courage: Fort Courage is the fictional setting for the satire F Troop

Of all the bars in all the towns in all the world, we walk into his: "Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she walks into mine" was spoken by Humphrey DeForest Bogart (1899–1957) playing Rick Blaine in Casablanca

Johnny Ringgold’s: 1. John Peters Ringo (1850–1882), also known as Johnny Ringo and Johnny Ringgold, criminal. 2. Johnny Ringo, a TV series

I passed through Lago: Most of High Plains Drifter takes place in a town called Lago

Mordecai: Luigi Curto (1909–1988), using the stage name Billy Curtis, played Mordecai in High Plains Drifter

the train robbery would take place on June 2: The real Butch Cassidy and his gang robbed a train on June 2, 1899

Chapter 35. Author comments

Some of the place names were designed as prompts for the Cheat Sheet References. Other names I made up but they could coincidentally refer to real places. Powell’s Knob is actually just a personal reminder of Howells Knob, a nearby lookout which I sometimes visited decades ago with my family.

36. INTERLUDE

An interlude is an advertisement break without the advertisements. I would have called this chapter an intermission, but then you'd be expecting some advertisements and this story doesn't have any. Anyway, I'll stop writing for the moment and mark this spot while you go get some popcorn, or stand up and have a stretch, or go to the bathroom, or whatever.



Shall we continue?

I know the outline of what I want to write next, but am not sure how to proceed. I've made a list of all the novels that I have read during the past sixty years or so. There are precisely seventeen books that I can definitely recall. As a worst possible scenario add another five, maybe seven, books which I was required to read at school about fifty years ago. Of course, the compulsory school readings were specifically designed to crush any desire to read literature. I can personally confirm that this objective was admirably achieved. In any case, the grand total comes to maybe twenty-four novels. I don't recall anything in any of them which would help me solve my present quandary. Admittedly, it's at least twenty years since I read a novel, so perhaps my memory is failing me. Despite my teachers' sinister efforts, I have occasionally read some poetry, but that isn't helping me here. I have read a few biographies of mathematicians and physicists, but they, too, don't offer much guidance. The scientists' lives seem relatively dull compared with the experiences of our two heroines. I don't know how to resolve my dilemma.

Where does one usually find inspiration? Out the window of course. From my study I look out over the few houses in the foreground to the tree-

covered hills and low mountains. It's a glorious day with lots of blue sky interrupted by a few harmless cumulus clouds. Perhaps I should be outside enjoying the sunshine. Well, no. It's probably about 94°F, which is hot, but by no means extreme, for around here. Better to wait for early evening.

I pause to think, I begin to stare, and my mind goes totally blank. My brain seems to have two speeds—racing and stop. When the window vista fails, I am left with no choice but to resort to nature's greatest remedy for everything. Food. I go downstairs and eat a small bowl of dry cereal. I was about to proudly announce that I eat quite healthily these days, that I already had some yummy extremely dark chocolate at lunchtime, and that I am now quite disciplined with my eating. Then I remembered the two chocolate-coated cherries that were too hard to resist before I readied my bubbly rice and bran mixture.

So, I'm now back in my study, and spending too much time gazing out the window again. Should I, or shouldn't I? I don't want to rely on a coin toss. That wouldn't seem professional, assuming someone bothers to read this book.

I have finally clambered out of the abyss of my indecision, and think 'what the heck, I'll offer the advice.'

Readers who would prefer to have only happy memories of our two heroines may wish to skip to the "Finding the glacé cherries" chapter towards the end of the book.

Chapter 36. Interlude

clambered out of the abyss: The Abyss

Chapter 36. Author comments

All of the other chapters are fiction, but this one is factual.

Even though I don't often read novels, you will probably not be surprised to learn that I do enjoy going to the movies.

Like Powell's Knob, the X marks the spot is another personal reminder, this time of my father. I can't remember the exact wording, and it possibly refers to an old joke, but he was extremely amused by it. It went something like, "I'll meet you at blah-blah. If you get there first then mark the spot with an X, and if I get there first I'll rub it out".

37. INTRODUCING THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Bad guys always get their just deserts. Perhaps our heroines were merely good people who had done some bad things, but such semantics are irrelevant in the eyes of the law.

Seven months after the JJ gelignite encounter, the Butch and Moondance era ended in a hail of bullets.

The setting was not in Mexico or South America, as some may believe. It happened in the U.S.A., but that is probably no consolation.

The somber recounting of those final months will be delivered as sensitively and succinctly as possible.

We will learn that the fun and happy days soon ended, that a certain relationship became fractured, that some nasty exchanges ensued.

If you notice any water marks on the pages then don't be alarmed. Even the author shed a tear when writing the tragic ending.

Our tale will become quite complicated when two new characters step onto the stage. Fortuitously, their initials are 'C' and 'L'. To help remember that 'C' goes with Butch, think of the ordering of the alphabet, i.e. 'BC'. Likewise with 'LM'.

Chapter 37. Introducing the beginning of the end

the fun and happy days: Happy Days

Chapter 37. Author comments

I think all stories should have logical endings, consistent with the characters and their past deeds.

38. THE DEFINING MOMENT

When Moondance relinquished her need for revenge on JJ, our heroines were ready once again to abandon their lives of crime.

Moondance's desperation to lead a normal life increased each day, as did her impatience.

"Have you got a plan yet?"

"Nothing that I'm happy with, Moondance."

Then a couple of days later the same question evoked, "I'm still thinking. If we want to make a clean break, then it needs to be watertight."

Moondance tried again the next day.

"Butch, I don't think the plan has to be perfect, you know. Good enough is good enough. We'll be alright."

"I think it has to be better than just good enough."

"Well, do you have any ideas at all? I want to start doing something."

"I have lots of half-baked ideas, but I can't work out a way to put them all together. Part of the problem is that I want us both to feel safe when we finally get out, and I think there's more than one way of doing it. There's one idea which I'm favoring at the moment. If the West is no longer safe for us, then we should head east."

"Fine. Let's do it."

"It's not quite that simple, I think. There has to be a complete strategy."

"Then we'll head east, and on our way you can work on your strategy."

“Okay, I understand your eagerness, but the thought of doing something potentially dangerous without a detailed plan makes me nervous. Maybe you’re right, and we should just go. Maybe one of us will become inspired.”

Moondance nodded and smiled, relieved; but Butch continued.

“One idea that I’ve been toying with, in case we head east, is simply hiding in plain sight. We could try standing out in a crowd. Surely no one would think that the two most wanted would be stupid enough to do that.”

“Fine by me.”

“I probably still have family in New York. Do you mind if we go to Philadelphia?”

“No, not at all. You’ve still never told me much about your family.”

“Well I don’t know if Father is still angry with me over the marriage matter. Besides, they probably all know what I’ve done, and I don’t think they’d be pleased to see me.”

“Okay.”

The trip east took several weeks. Moondance’s initial zeal turned to increasing despair as the trip dragged on. To add to her frustration, Butch pointed out that they could save a couple of days if they robbed a bank on their way, rather than make a detour to retrieve one of their money stashes or withdraw one of their bank deposits.

The bank job was going like clockwork, as usual, until Moondance stepped forward, pointed her gun at a woman’s brooch, and held out her gloved hand. She was breaking one of Butch’s rules—never bother with personal items, always leave your victims with a consoling thought. Perhaps Moondance was declaring her independence; or perhaps it was simply an expression of her ongoing frustration. It’s strange, or sad, how a mere trinket can have such a dramatic impact.

When Butch turned towards Moondance, Moondance pointed her gun at Butch, who responded in kind. The tension in the room was palpable. The

ticking clock sounded thunderous. Some in the bank hoped that the outlaws would shoot each other; but others were afraid of being caught in crossfire. Butch turned her gun away in order to defuse the situation, but uttered an angry “Moondance!”

There is a critical moment in every relationship, and that was theirs.

The mood was somber that night, and little was said.

“You surprised me,” said Butch.

“I wish I could have seen your face under that mask. Sorry.”

Butch responded with a wry smile. She knew that Moondance’s increasing assertiveness would ultimately be for the best.

The first crack in the friendship had appeared, and the story made headlines. Many a law officer and bounty hunter were delighted.

39. EACH TO THEIR OWN

While continuing their trip eastwards, Moondance continually pestered Butch for a plan, but Butch remained stumped on the details. However, Butch did offer much advice on how to survive in high society.

“It’s a different world, but they have their rules just like everybody else. Most of the men are real gentlemen, but you need to be wary of the others. Guns are not the weapons of choice. Words can be as damaging as grenades, and gossip as dangerous as snipers’ bullets.”

After some crucial preliminary maneuvers, the well-attired Butch and Moondance finally stepped off the train in Philadelphia. They claimed to be Betty Gable and Maureen O’Hair.

When they arrived at the finest hotel, their impeccable politeness towards each other did not conceal a certain amount of tension. They created a dilemma for the front desk clerk when they each insisted on having the best room in the hotel, and on being on different floors. Betty resolved the matter by saying something in French whilst placing something in the clerk’s hand. The latter didn’t understand the French, but he certainly understood the something.

Betty turned towards her travel companion and observed in a whisper loud enough for others to hear, “You see, dear cousin? That’s how it’s done.”

Maureen was visibly annoyed.

Highest priority for both women on that first day was shopping. They went in separate carriages and both arrived back with the finest wardrobes that the town could offer.

Next on the agenda was to attract a lot of attention, to flaunt their wealth, and to generate curiosity.

Within a week they were being invited to dinners and the theatre. Betty had ingratiated herself into those lofty circles with consummate ease— multilingual, highly educated, well-travelled and positively charming. It was initially quite difficult for Maureen. She seemed awkward, nervous, hesitant, and never had much to say unless a conversation turned to horses. Betty was always at pains to introduce her “cousin” to new acquaintances, but Maureen’s situation didn’t improve until a certain conversation took place.

“Are you really related? She looks part Indian.”

“Oh yes, we’re cousins. My uncle married Princess Morticia Addamsovitch of Lithuania. Maureen is accustomed to living in a palace, but their culture over there is quite different from ours. She is still getting used to our customs, and to not having servants. Please don’t tell anyone. She wants to be treated just like everyone else.”

The first day that the two cousins entered the hotel, they caught the eye of a few men. By the end of the first week, the potential suitors seemed to be swarming. And it could be said that not all of them were eligible. More than one husband received an elbow in the ribs from an irate wife and was told to close his mouth when Maureen entered a room. Hotel management even noticed that business had increased.

There was much disappointment a few days later when Princess Maureen, as one silly person addressed her, appeared to grant one Guillaume Henri Louis de Lacy the privilege of courting her. Well, that’s who he claimed he was. Surprisingly, sometimes he didn’t even have a French accent.

Maureen made much of her success when she introduced her beau to her cousin. Betty realized that he was more slippery than a lathered rattlesnake, and just as slimy, but she was civil in the extreme and expressed her immense joy for Maureen. Poor Maureen was still adapting to this nuanced world and failed to recognize Betty’s mocking tone.

Perhaps Betty was continuing Maureen’s training. Or perhaps she was developing a plan which would free herself and her increasingly remote

friend. Or perhaps she already had a plan which excluded Maureen. And perhaps she didn't have a plan at all, and was merely engaging in petty competition with Maureen, because a few days later she had her own suitor. So many maybes, and so few definites.

Betty's male companion was a real Yankee doodle dandy. Jim Cagney looked like a grinning rattlesnake balanced on its tail, wearing a top hat, coat and tails and carrying a cane. And he was just as trustworthy.

Thus, cousins Betty and Maureen had matched up with scoundrels Cagney and Lacy. What could possibly go wrong with the country's most wanted desperados partnered with a couple of city slickers?

Chapter 39. Each to their own

Betty Gable: Elizabeth Ruth Grable (1916–1973) used the stage name Betty Grable

Maureen O'Hair: Maureen FitzSimons (1920–2015) used the stage name Maureen O'Hara

Princess Morticia Addamsovitch: Carolyn Sue Jones (1930–1983), using the stage name Carolyn Jones, played Morticia Addams in The Addams Family

a real Yankee doodle dandy. Jim Cagney: James Francis Cagney Jr. (1899–1986), using the stage name James Cagney, played George M. Cohan in Yankee Doodle Dandy

Cagney and Lacy: Cagney & Lacey

a couple of city slickers: City Slickers

40. HELL HATH NO FURY LIKE A BETTY ENRAGED

During the next week or so, the cousins mostly avoided each other, but always exchanged polite greetings when passing on the stairs. The slight tension which had been apparent when they first arrived in Philadelphia had worsened. Whenever either of them was queried about it, they maintained that there was no conflict. Maureen was increasingly self-confident in her new environment, and both women were frequently seen with their respective suitors.

Perhaps Betty was feeling that her many weeks devoted to formulating an intricate plan had all been unnecessary until one disastrous episode.

Maureen was in her room fiddling with a carpet bag when there was a knock on the door. It was Lacy.

“Wait on. I’ll be there in a moment.”

She soon opened the door, and he was permitted to give her a peck on the cheek. As was her wish, he left the door slightly ajar when he entered her room.

They began talking about plans for the evening when something caught his eye. He wandered over towards the bed, knelt down and found a crumpled \$100 note. He noticed the bag which had been hurriedly shoved under the bed without being closed properly. His eyes popped. A stash of cash! He didn’t hear the door being carefully closed as he put his hand in and fondled the money. He was beaming. Then he noticed a gun holster in the bottom of the bag, and his mood changed. It changed even more when he felt something sharp digging into his neck.

“Oh Gilly. What have you done?”

Lacy turned his head slowly towards Maureen.

“Slowly pull out the bag. That’s it. Now slowly move over.”

Whilst holding the knife against his throat, Maureen bent down and grabbed a revolver.

“Butch will not be pleased.”

Lacy was ashen-faced, but managed to speak.

“You mean Betty, don’t you? I had my suspicions, so you must be Moondance.”

“I’ll have to ask ... Betty what to do.”

Maureen placed a shawl over her gun and hand, and marched Lacy, arm in arm with gun pressed into his ribs, up the stairs to Betty’s room.

Knock, knock.

“Who’s there?”

“Maureen.”

“What do *you* want?”

“I have to come in. We need to talk.”

“Can’t it wait?”

“No. It’s important.”

“Okay, just a moment.”

Betty opened the door, and was surprised to see Lacy being shepherded in.

Betty closed the door. Cagney was sitting on the bed. He had been showing Betty how to play Russian Whist, the latest rage.

Maureen uncovered her gun and ordered Lacy over to the wall. Cagney saw the gun and almost tumbled off the bed.

“What’s going on?” he asked.

“Quiet!” commanded Butch. “Go stand next to Lacy.”

Betty’s wonderful charm had morphed into vile unpleasantness. She turned towards Maureen and glared.

Maureen held the gun, but it was her hand which began to shake. The two men were in awe at the chilling stare down.

“Give me the gun,” snarled Betty. “What have you done?”

Maureen described Lacy’s discovery of the money and gun, and followed with, “Do we have to kill them? I don’t think I can. You’ll have to do it.”

It would be impolite to name names, but one of the men had a toilet moment.

41. YOU SCRATCH MY BACK AND I WON'T STAB YOURS

It was a major setback when Betty learned that Lacy suspected Betty's and Maureen's true identities.

The men were ordered to stand several feet apart, facing the wall, and with hands held high against it. Maureen sat on the bed while Betty walked back and forth across the room, deep in thought. Minutes passed. Maureen slowly relaxed, while the men became increasingly anxious.

Finally Betty spoke, "Do you know what? You two are very lucky. Do you know why?"

The men shook their heads.

"Harvey, our Chinese friend, came to Philly with us, and he has already seen both of you."

Maureen smiled, and Betty continued.

"Have you heard of Harvey?"

Lacy nodded.

"Do you know why that's lucky for you?"

The two men shook their heads, and Maureen did too.

"If you two get a notion to collect a reward, and if we don't get you, then Harvey will. Do you understand?"

Both men nodded, and seemed relieved that they would not be killed immediately.

"To be honest, Moondance and I are both sick of all the killing and the running. But if it becomes necessary, I won't hesitate."

At last Cagney realized who the two "cousins" were.

“Okay, you can turn around now, but stay where you are.”

Betty was at her imperious best, and began with her cousin.

“Maureen, this is your fault. I told you that we have to be careful.”

Maureen looked like she was about to start bawling, and Betty followed with a consoling comment.

“Anyway, I am glad that you were able to subdue him and contain the situation.”

“I still had my knife strapped on like you always told me.”

Cagney looked at Lacy, who then nodded.

“Good. Now, as for you two. I’m going to make you an offer which is worth more than the reward, but you’ll have to work for it. The alternative is that they’ll find your bodies here some time tomorrow, by which time we’ll be well away. Are you interested?”

Betty continued after their affirmative responses.

“There is a bank where our usual methods won’t work. It will be your job to lure a posse out of town before we rob it. When it’s done, we will all be accomplices, and the law will know that you are with us. You’ll become as wanted as we are. If Maureen or I get caught, then we know your descriptions and current names, and vice versa. Everything will rely on none of us getting caught. Agreed?”

Lacy commented that it sounded very dangerous, but quickly agreed when reminded about the alternative.

Cagney asked about the size of his share.

“At least \$100,000 divided five ways, which reminds me. Harvey won’t be directly involved, but he’ll be keeping an eye on you two until it’s done. Trust me, not even Maureen or I are game to double-cross him. However, he’s fair, and I’m sure he’d be happy to part company on those terms.”

“How do we know that you won’t kill us after the job anyway?”

“We already have enough money. This way, you’ll keep your mouths shut, without us having to kill you.”

With that, the deal was sealed.

“When we all leave this room, we have to continue as we were thirty minutes ago. All smiles, as if nothing happened. I have a few things to plan and sort out. We’ll all catch a train together in about a week’s time.”

Later that evening, Maureen and Betty happened to pass each other on the stairs. Maureen glanced around before asking, “Harvey?”

“You and I can split his share.”

Maureen smiled back, a rarity since their arrival in Philadelphia.

If Betty was planning something, then not even Maureen knew the details.

42. TREACHEROUS TRAITORS BETRAY THE BETRAYERS

The next day Betty left the hotel early. She wasn't sure if Cagney or Lacy was following her, but she hoped that at least one of them was.

She walked a few blocks, looking back occasionally, before ducking into a Chinese laundry. She soon emerged, then continued wandering. She greeted a few Chinese before eventually speaking to one for a few minutes. After handing him some money, she walked another couple of blocks before stopping to sit on a park bench.

About an hour later a Chinese youth came and sat down next to her. He handed her a note and she read it. She gave the youth some money before tucking the note down her blouse and returning to the hotel.

Later that day, Cagney visited Betty in her room. She concealed her delight when he squirmed upon seeing a burnt note in the ashtray.

However, treachery would soon be afoot. Well, on eight feet, actually.

A couple of days later, Cagney warned Betty that Lacy and Maureen might be plotting against her. Betty replied that she would remain alert.

The next day, Lacy arranged a clandestine meeting with Betty.

"I think I should warn you. I suspect that Cagney and Maureen are conspiring to kill you."

"Thanks, but why should I trust you?"

"Well I ... I mean, I don't want you to blame me if they try something."

"Okay. If I'm forced to defend myself against Maureen, then you'll have to take care of Cagney. But pity help you if you're trying to play me. I hope they didn't see us together."

“I don’t think anyone saw me. I was very careful.”

Later that week, Cagney warned Betty again.

“I overheard Lacy and Maureen talking about getting you, but they stopped as soon as they realized I was nearby. I’m worried that they’ll try to get me too.”

Betty thought briefly before responding.

“You have no idea how quick Maureen is. If she wanted to get us, we’d both be dead in less than a second. If she had a mind to, then she could also kill Lacy just as quickly. My guess is that they won’t try anything until after the robbery, which would mean that we’d have to get them first. If pressed, Maureen is probably the only person on earth who I couldn’t bring myself to kill. Well, except for children and babies of course. If you’re wrong, then I wouldn’t want to hurt her at all. If you’re right, then the most I would want to do is temporarily incapacitate her. I’ll try to think of something and let you know. You better not be trying to double-cross me.”

“I wouldn’t be game. Shall we go to the theatre tonight?”

Both Cagney and Lacy had similar conversations with Maureen. During the conversation with Lacy she expressed a sincere desire not to hurt Betty, but confidently asserted that Betty had no chance of getting the better of her.

“But if the worst happens, then you might have to take care of Cagney while I deal with Betty. She’s very clever, and very resourceful.”

A couple of days later, two happy-looking couples boarded a train to their varied futures—some long and some tragically short.

43. CHOPPING THE VEGGIES

If one wants to prepare a nice meal then one must first cut the vegetables. Some people enjoy doing this, while others find it a tedious necessity. When the meal is served, one hopes that everyone will enjoy it. If they do, then someone will invariably ask about the preparation. This chapter details some of the events leading up to the final major scene. Dessert will be served after the main course, but it might just be sour grapes.

The recently formed gang of four travelled west by train for about a week before switching to horses. It seemed that Monsieur de Lacy had previously spent more time riding horses than practising his French accent. Cagney, however, was not very competent. Nonetheless, both received much riding and shooting practice during the next few weeks. Neither Cagney nor Lacy were good shots, but that didn't matter for the roles they were soon to play.

The time was also spent procuring all the gear that Betty insisted they would need. Betty and Maureen were both surprised at how easy it was to move around in the company of their male partners without arousing any suspicion. However, tensions remained high. Cagney and Lacy continued to alert Betty about the sinister Maureen, and they warned Maureen that Betty was hatching some sort of evil scheme. Betty and Maureen remained polite, but aloof, towards each other. Betty also noticed the two men having several quiet exchanges.

The grand plan – part 1

Finally, Betty revealed her intricate plan. All would take place in a region which Betty and Maureen knew well. The men's job would be to hide horses and clothes for the women a few days later at a designated spot near Silverado. Then, the next morning at dawn, dressed and armed liked the

fabled Butch and Moondance, the men would ride into town and create an almighty commotion, before galloping off.

“Make sure you fire a lot of bullets at the sheriff’s office. Try not to hit anyone, and make sure you don’t get caught. There’s a large contingent of law officers in the town. If they don’t quickly form a posse and go after you, then the plan won’t work.”

Betty gave them a map detailing a roundabout route to a remote abandoned mine entrance at the bottom of a hill.

“If you follow the map then the posse won’t know where you’ve gone. Stay well-armed, very alert, and keep out of sight until we get there. It’ll take us four days, including the day of the robbery. Maybe five days.”

“Well, what will you two gals be doing while we do that?”

The grand plan – part 2

The second part of Betty’s plan was more complicated than any recipe. It didn’t matter that it was very confusing. The important points were that Betty could remember it, and that she was confident it would work.

Betty and Maureen would ride to the nearest town, then catch a train to Ridge Top. There they would disembark, and the next day catch the stagecoach to Silverado. Betty described a prominent landmark near the stagecoach route.

“You’ll see twin peaks in the distance, and from the route you’ll see a huge boulder in front of the peaks, about a quarter of a mile from the road. If everything is okay, and our horses and clothes are in place, then make sure that exactly one of you is sitting on the boulder. Don’t wave. We should be on the coach. If all is well with us then we’ll wave a hankie. Harvey will be keeping an eye on you two, and he’ll also be expecting us to wave. If, for some reason, we don’t wave, then you better hope that Harvey doesn’t suspect that you double-crossed us.”

The ladies would spend the night in Silverado. If the posse left as hoped, then the ladies would ride a buggy out of town, change clothes and ride the hidden horses back to town. They would rob the bank whilst disguised, and then ride back to the buggy. Next, they would change back into their fine clothes, take the buggy a few more miles and then leave it. After changing into some plain everyday clothes, they'd walk to a nearby stagecoach stop and wait to catch the coach to Bent Knee. There they'd buy a wagon, work clothes for themselves and the men, and a few tools. Dressed like farmers they'd make their way to the mine with all the money from the bank job. Harvey would meet them before they arrive, collect his share, then go his separate way. At the mine, they'd dig up the gold and set off together like two young married farming couples. When out of the territory, they'd split up the money and part company, ideally to foreign lands.

"What gold?" inquired Cagney.

"Oh, I forgot to mention there's a lot of gold that we stashed there a couple of years ago. I suppose we could share it with you. Don't bother looking for it. There are tunnels and shafts everywhere. You'll never find it."

Betty was proud of her plan and smiled. "There. Simple, isn't it?"

The grand plan – part 3

Yet there was more to Betty's plan. She had a private conversation with Cagney a short time later.

"When you get to the mine make sure that one of you stays inside at all times, and only venture out to tend to the horses. Now this is very important. When Maureen and I arrive, make sure that neither of you ventures out past the mine entrance. I'll stop the wagon, and you should insist that I show you the money before you come out. I'll show you some. Then you'll have to insist on seeing even more money. That's when I'll stoop down and, as I stand up, I'll pull a gun on Maureen. You'll have to subdue Lacy at the same time. I don't care if you kill him. We'll tie up Maureen and

leave a knife near her so that she can eventually get free. Meanwhile we'll take the horses, money and gold."

Betty asked Cagney to repeat the details.

Later that day, Betty and Maureen set off for the nearest train station. Cagney and Lacy continued on horseback with the spare horses, necessary supplies and clothes for the women.

Chapter 43. Chopping the veggies

Silverado: Silverado

You'll see twin peaks in the distance: Twin Peaks

Chapter 43. Author comments

It took me about a month, using timelines and mud maps, to come up with a plan that was fairly watertight, yet complicated enough to be worthy of the clever Butch.

44. DEAD!

Betty was pleased that the plan was a success, because four days later they arrived in Bent Knee with the money. The only hitch was that they had to spend an extra night there because of problems procuring a wagon. Eventually they set off on the three day journey to the abandoned mine.

Maureen remained subdued the whole time. This was surprising because she'd been waiting impatiently for months to be unshackled from her life of crime; and, in theory anyway, it would soon be over. Perhaps she had succumbed to Cagney's and Lacy's persistent warnings about Betty.

At the time, our two heroines were playing the roles of young farmer's wives, and so were not wearing gun belts or rifles slung over shoulders. However, when Maureen climbed onto the wagon on the morning of the day they would get to the mine, she placed a handgun at her feet.

She turned towards Betty and remarked, "You never know."

She looked down and saw a Winchester repeating rifle around Betty's feet. Betty uttered, "Yes, you never know."

As they set off, Betty offered some reassurances. Or was it a tactic to lower Maureen's defenses?

"Moondance. I hope you know that I would never hurt you, or allow anyone to harm you."

"Yes."

About half a mile from the mine, Betty offered the same advice that Maureen had been hearing for years. "Stay alert, Moondance."

Maureen hoped it would be the last time she heard those words. And it was.

“I’ll be ready for anything ... and anyone,” was Maureen’s ominous response.

They stopped about thirty yards from the mine entrance. Lacy was standing there and he called out, “They’re here.”

Then he pulled out both of his guns.

Cagney came to the entrance, also holding two guns, and took command.

“Stand up so I can see you properly, and hold your hands up.”

That wasn’t in Betty’s script. Nonetheless, both ladies complied.

“Show me the money.”

Betty bent down, grabbed a handful of notes, stood up, and let them drop. They were caught by the gentle breeze.

“I hope you’re not playing games. Show me some more.”

Betty bent down, then began standing with her derringer in her hand. Maureen glimpsed it before Betty could point it at her, and the two ladies began to grapple.

Cagney and Lacy looked at each other, looked at the ladies, and began shooting as they rushed forward. Perhaps in a final selfless act, Betty tried to position herself between the gunmen and Maureen. But many shots were fired as the two ladies tumbled over into the back of the wagon.

One bullet-riddled, blood-soaked, twisted body sprawled over another. Butch and Moondance would maraud the West no more. Their time had come, their time had gone. The era was over. Not a tear was shed.

45. INTELLIGENCE DOESN'T ADD UP

They escaped the clutches of the vicious JJ gang. They defied then vanquished the Sinister Seven. They outfoxed the relentless posse. They had survived through many ordeals, and they never imagined that they would be gunned down by two New York scoundrels. And they weren't!

Louisa. Thelly. Are you okay?"

Butch slowly raised her head from behind the wagon seat.

"I'm okay, sort of. I'm not sure about Louisa."

Butch lifted herself off Moondance and rolled her over. Moondance's eyes were open but she was grimacing.

"Are you shot?"

"I don't know. It hurts to breathe."

Butch checked her over and was about to call out when she noticed that the marshal and his men had come over.

"I can't see any blood. I don't think she's shot."

The men gently helped the two women out of the wagon and began tending to their injuries. Butch, known as Thelly to the law officers, had a broken arm. Louisa probably had some cracked ribs. Thelly glanced over and saw the bloodied bodies of Cagney and Lacy being loaded onto horses. The officers were keen to get the bodies back to Bent Knee for a photograph.

Thelly looked towards Louisa and winked. Louisa tried to smile but was in too much pain.

A mathematician or statistician would probably say that intelligence isn't additive. By way of example, collectively a house of fools isn't much smarter than a single fool. Cagney, the fortune hunter, and Lacy, the con man, had grossly underestimated the brilliant Butch who was as smart as a rattlesnake with an I.Q. of 220, and just as dangerous if provoked.

Butch had struggled for many weeks to develop a good exit strategy. The brooch scene in the bank months ago had been staged. By the time they reached Philadelphia, Butch had a half-baked plan, but it needed two men. The frosty interactions in and since Philadelphia had been an act, and Butch had subtly signaled Moondance across the room when Lacy was selected.

However, the men's fates were sealed the moment they began their scaremongering. Until then, Butch was baffled as to how to convince the law that our heroines were men, without getting anyone hurt. She hoped that there would be a way to get the men safely to Mexico and provide them with a generous recompense. When the treachery began, she realized it would be much simpler to eliminate the men than try to guarantee their safety.

Butch was desperate to seek Moondance's approval for the drastic change in strategy. It was extremely risky to be seen together, but they managed a second secret meeting whilst in Philadelphia.

"Do we really have to kill them, Butch?"

"Well, you know I was just trying to force them to leave town with us. I didn't anticipate their scheming. I should have. I don't think we have much choice now."

"Did you know I waited in my room for more than an hour before that Lacy came and found the money? I suppose you're right. I wish we didn't have to do it."

"Moondance, you know what kind of men they are. They went after the wrong women this time. I think it will be easy to exploit their greed."

"Okay, we'll do it."

The women weren't able to talk freely again until they were on their own and riding to a station to catch the train to Ridge Top. Until then, Butch had relied on Moondance's resourcefulness to wing it, and she was delighted with Moondance's performance.

Whilst on the train, Butch finalized her plan and outlined it to Moondance. The latter was not convinced, but couldn't think of anything better.

"When we get to Ridge Top, I want you to do the talking."

"But I can't do that, Butch. I'll be too nervous and get all mixed up. What if they ask me a question I can't answer?"

"You've been brilliant these past few weeks. I have faith in you. And if you really are nervous, then you won't have to act nervous. You'll be fine."

Butch's confidence was not enough to allay Moondance's concerns, but she agreed to do it anyway.

The grand plan – part 4

About an hour after checking into a hotel at Ridge Top, Moondance went down and spoke to the desk clerk.

"Do you know the U.S. Marshal here?"

"Everyone here knows Marshal Gerrard, Sammy Gerrard. He's a fine man."

"My cousin and I think we're being watched, and that we might be in danger. We're being blackmailed by some dangerous criminals. Can you please arrange a secret meeting between him and me tonight, here in the hotel?"

The clerk agreed and the meeting was duly arranged. That night, Butch, Moondance and the marshal were alone together in a room. Moondance spoke first.

"Marshal Gerrard?"

"Yes, ma'am. That's me. Call me Sammy."

"Sammy, I'm Louisa and this is my cousin Thelly."

Louisa spun a yarn about visiting her cousin in Philadelphia. How they were befriended by two seemingly nice men. Three weeks later, the men began threatening the cousins, and even Thelly's family, if the women didn't go with them and help rob a bank in Silverado. The next few words got Sammy's attention.

"They told us that they're Butch and Moondance, and we believe them. That Butch is real mean, but I think Moondance is the clever one."

Thelly struggled to suppress a smile.

Louisa rattled on about how they were probably being constantly watched, possibly by someone called Harvey. She described how the robbery in Silverado was supposed to take place. She explained that the sheriff's posse must be allowed to chase after the desperados. A law officer from out of town would have to be in the bank to ensure that no one left the bank after Thelly and Louisa pretended to rob it, "Otherwise Harvey would shoot them."

Thelly and Louisa would have to be allowed to carry a couple of bags out of the bank, even if the bags didn't hold much money.

Louisa claimed that all they were told was that they'd know where to deliver the money by the time they reached Bent Knee, and that the hideout had several secret exits.

"Maybe it's a cave, or maybe a mine," she volunteered.

"That Moondance is real suspicious. If he or Butch spots any of your men before we get to the hideout then they won't show themselves. And we think they'll just try to kill us when we get to the hideout anyway. You have to help us. Please."

Poor Sammy was at a loss after the long story.

"I suppose we could stake out the hideout until you get there, but how will we know where it is?"

“Well, when we get to Bent Knee we have to buy some clothes and supplies. Maybe one of your men could wait in the general store until we show up.”

Sammy welcomed the chance to bring the desperados to justice.

Louisa made a final observation just before the marshal left.

“Do you know what, marshal? I think they’ve probably forced women to rob banks for them in the past. Who knows how many victims they may have killed?”

A few minutes later when they were alone together, Thelly congratulated Louisa.

“Moondance, you were marvelous. You played your role to perfection. And that last comment of yours was brilliant. I wish I had thought of adding that.”

Chapter 45. Intelligence doesn't add up

Louisa: Susan Abigail Tomalin, using the stage name Susan Sarandon, played Louise Elizabeth Sawyer in *Thelma & Louise*

Thelly: Virginia Elizabeth Davis, using the stage name Geena Davis, played Thelma Yvonne Dickinson in *Thelma & Louise*

Marshal Gerrard, Sammy Gerrard: Thomas Lee Jones, using the stage name Tommy Lee Jones, played Deputy U.S. Marshal Samuel Gerard in *The Fugitive*

46. A REWARDING EXPERIENCE

Our heroines, still masquerading as Thelly and Louisa, were in great demand during the few weeks after Cagney and Lacy were shot. Everyone wanted to know who they were, where they came from, and intimate details about their “coerced” time spent with the villains. The ladies didn’t anticipate that this would happen, and they spent most of the time moving from hiding place to hiding place.

However, the state governor insisted on a formal ceremony and would not be denied.

On that special day, Thelly announced to Louisa, “If all goes well, we’ll finally be free.”

Those encouraging words were unnecessary, for Louisa was at her giggling and high-spirited best.

As per the eventual agreement with our two ladies, no public were allowed, or even knew where the event took place. The governor, a senator, Marshal Gerrard, and the sheriff of Silverado whose name no one could remember, were the official guests and sat on a stage. Seated in the front row were our two ladies by themselves. Also present were two journalists, a cameraman and an artist.

Thelly sat quietly and paid due attention during the speeches, but Louisa kept looking about the room and chuckling quietly.

The governor spoke first. He was proud of the critical role that his state played in the capture of those murderous villains, and he commended the local sheriff and his men for their *significant* contribution.

“What does he mean?” whispered Louisa.

“He means that the sheriff and his posse didn’t know where the baddies went; but fortuitously the baddies were killed in his state.”

Louisa desperately tried to turn her giggle into a coughing fit and an attempt to clear her throat.

“Shush. Try to be serious, Louisa.”

The second speaker was the senator. He spoke about the outstanding bravery of the two women when facing mortal danger; how proud he was to be an American; how these wonderful women had set a fine example for all citizens to follow; how citizens such as these would make America great.

Louisa wasn't paying any attention at all. She was watching the press people when she suddenly realized that one of the journalists was quite tall. She turned to Thelly and whispered.

“I just remembered. You forgot to tell me about that anatomical thing that a lot of tall men have. Something extra long.”

Thelly whispered in Louisa's ear.

Louisa laughed and blurted out loudly, “Nose hairs!”

Everyone turned and looked at her. She salvaged some respect when it suddenly registered on her that the senator had just announced that all of the substantial reward for capturing the bandits would be given to these fine ladies. Louisa coughed and corrected herself, “No shares?”

The senator finished by asking the ladies to come forward to receive their letters of commendation signed by the President himself, and checks for half of the reward each.

When asked if either of them would say a few words, Thelly stepped forward. She praised the local sheriff and endorsed the Governor's comments. She expressed the women's eternal gratitude for the fine work done by Marshal Gerrard and his men; and stated that she and Louisa never felt they were in any danger, knowing that so many fine law officers were watching over them. She was glad that the country was rid of the Butch and Moondance pestilence. She offered special thanks to the President, and his

representative, the senator, for their kind words. She, too, was proud to be American.

As everyone was shaking hands, the sheriff asked Louisa if she would have dinner with him that night, but Louisa graciously declined. The Governor and the senator also invited both women to dinner that night, but the women again declined.

“Thank you, we would love to, but at the moment we wish to remain as inconspicuous as possible. We are still worried that their partner, Harvey, might track us down.”

47. FAREWELL, IT HURTS TO SAY GOODBYE

That night, Butch and Moondance had a quiet dinner together in the hotel. Nice food and reminiscing were on the menu.

“Butch, um, Thelly, you sure did some smooth talking today.”

“I just told them what they wanted to hear. That sheriff is a real buffoon, but I do like the marshal.”

“You told me you’d pull out the stiletto when we got to the mine, but you pulled out that derringer instead.”

“I wanted to surprise you so that you wouldn’t have to pretend. I do remember someone who pointed her gun at me in the bank, when the plan was that I would point mine at her.”

“Yeah, I still wish that I could have seen the look on your face.”

“I really thought you were going to start crying when I was doing my big rant after you brought Lacy up to my room.”

“Well, that time I wasn’t pretending. You were so scary, and I thought there must have been something I forgot to do. Anyway, I think they were more scared than I was.”

“If they hadn’t initiated that treachery then they might have been alive today, and we might have been the dead ones. Who can say?”

“By the way, did the marshal ever ask why we began fighting when we were standing up in the wagon?” asked Moondance.

“Yes, he is a smart one, that one. He asked while they were strapping up my arm. You were probably in too much pain to notice. How are the ribs now?”

“Still sore. It hurt a lot when I did that coughing today. So what did you tell the marshal?”

“I told him that we were lucky enough to find and buy the derringer at Bent Knee. I said we weren’t sure if the marshal would even be there at the mine, but we were quite certain that Butch and Moondance would try to kill us. We hoped that when they saw us fighting, curiosity would get the better of them and they would try to break the fight up. Then, when they got close, we’d get the drop on them with the derringer. The marshal was satisfied with that, but I was ready with more answers if he had more questions.”

“I didn’t think that grand plan of yours would work. It seemed too complicated. There were so many things that could have gone wrong.”

“Yes, I’ve dubbed it a reverse double-cross crisscross triple-cross, which is an exaggeration, of course. Fortunately it all went well. To be honest, in all our years together we’ve been far luckier than we deserve. We survived the encounters with Rooster Colburn, the posse, JJ and his gelnite man. And those gunslingers down in Mexico. To top it all off, that Cagney and Lacy were hopeless shots, but they still may have gotten us if it wasn’t for Gerrard and his men.”

“And don’t forget Harvey, Thelly. He helped us an awful lot. I think he’s the best imaginary friend that anyone could wish for.”

After a brief pause, Moondance added, “I really want to thank you for helping me so much all these years, especially when I wanted to kill JJ. I reckon you worked out a plan that would take a long while ’cause you were hoping I’d change my mind, and I’m glad I did.”

“So am I, and I’m proud of you.”

“And I figured out why you kept asking those men about dwarfs and acrobats.”

Butch smiled.

The women discussed their plans for the future, but neither was sure as to what they might do, or where they might go. Moondance didn't want to go to Philadelphia ever again. Maybe she would go to Chicago. Butch wanted to go somewhere quiet, maybe a small village in California.

"Nose hairs! Were you just making all that up?"

"It was just some silly nonsense. I thought you'd be able to control yourself, but you made a good recovery. You got some really surly looks, you know."

When the meal was almost over, Butch had an unexpected major announcement.

"I'm leaving first thing in the morning."

Tears began welling in Moondance's eyes. "So soon? Why?"

"It's for the best ... I have to. Officially we are dead, but there are still some people who will know that the real Butch and Moondance weren't shot. And I don't want to start crying too."

"Will I ever see you again?"

"Maybe in a few years. I don't know. I hope you find a good husband. I know you'll be a great mother. I'm going to miss you."

Butch stood up, and Moondance rushed around the table, sobbing. They hugged a while, then Butch let go. She looked into Moondance's eyes for a final time, and departed. Halfway up the stairs, she turned and looked back. Moondance was still watching her. They waved, then Butch continued up the stairs. When she rounded the corner and was out of sight, she wiped away tears.

Next morning, as soon as Moondance awoke, she rushed out and knocked on Butch's door. But Butch was gone.

Several days later, Horsie and Little Joey Cartwheel were buying supplies, and were surprised to see a newspaper special edition describing the slaughter of the notorious criminals and the prominent role played by two

courageous women. They studied the photograph centered on a governor and senator, each handing a commendation to a lady facing away from the camera.

Horsie began chortling, "Look! It's Butch!"

"And Moondance!" added Little Joey.

Horsie laughed his way through the whole publication, while Little Joey's constant amusement was more subdued.

"I think only Butch could have planned all that," concluded Horsie.

They took the newspaper home to show their pa. Benny studied the photograph, and kept shaking his head while he read the story.

"I liked that Moondance girl. She was a bit wild, but a real nice kid. It's a shame she ever got mixed up with that Butch."

"Pa, do you think we should tell ma that they're still alive?"

"Hell no!"

EPILOGUE

TriggerHappy

A few weeks after the ladies' visit, TriggerHappy broke his neck while attempting a somersault. TriggerHappy knew that he was done for. And so did the grief-stricken Roger Royale. As the teary Roger drew his gun to put TriggerHappy out of his misery, the horse gave an approving slow blink to help make it easier for the horse's favorite human. It was the biggest, and saddest, funeral that the Royale family ever had. Hundreds of people came from miles around to pay their respects and to reminisce about the wondrous horse who was as famous as Roger himself.

Fortunately, a few years before his death, TriggerHappy sired GunHappy. The latter took over the role of Roger's advisor and choreographer, and Roger was very pleased when GunHappy promised never to attempt a somersault.

TriggerHappy's bloodline continued for many generations. All the stallions were able to talk, but they only ever spoke if their owners were as nice as Roger had been. Eventually there was another gene mutation and some of the stallions no longer had to whisper. In fact, if you search around you may be able to find some actual recordings of the renowned Mister Ted.

Flint Fleetwood

Our heroines exchanged only a few words with Pearly Gates on the night of the stampede. They had also noticed a passing resemblance between Fleetwood and that drifter on the High Plains. They would never learn that some of Fleetwood's descendants were characters that made their marks on the stage of life.

Mack Fleetwood, for instance, was a famous musician who made a No. 1 hit.

If you're going to have a musician for a descendant then you may as well have a disk jockey too. Gav Garver was a late night DJ, and often played sad music for the lost and lonely. Garver's music selections kept many listeners misty-eyed for hours.

However, it's strange how some relationships blossom and others disintegrate. Sometimes it's the little irritations that grow out of all proportion and become insurmountable barriers. Garver had a lady friend, but their relationship began to sour when they argued about the correct way to hold a pair of scissors. She soon left the scene. Garver was all cut up but eventually he recovered.

There's even a distant connection between Rooster Colburn and another of Fleetwood's descendants. Soon after his failure to capture Butch and Moondance, Rooster created The Colburn Training School for Law Enforcement Professionals. The School continues to this day to be a raging success, but after several name changes, it is now simply called The Police Academy. In order to mentally toughen up its recruits, one of its better known methods was to force recruits to practise shooting cats out of trees. There are still some today who consider it unfortunate that this cruel behavior is no longer tolerated.

Harold Fleetwood-Callahan was an outstanding trainee at the aforementioned Academy. After he joined the San Francisco Police Department, his amazing ability to apprehend bad guys led to his rapid promotion to Inspector level. His weapon of choice was a .44 Magnum Opus. Possibly because he had an unfortunate disorder which compelled him to wash his hands often, he was given the ironic nickname Filthy Harold.

Other than washing hands and catching crooks, Harold had a third obsession, in particular, the appalling decline in national numeracy levels. After a big shoot-out, he always said to his prisoner, "Hey punk rocker. I can't remember how many times I fired. Was it five or was it six? If you can tell me and get it right then I'll let you go." Well, that's not strictly what he used to say, nor did he ever let them go. In fact, whether they got it right or

wrong, the consequences were sometimes tragic. Anyway, the important point is that during the years that Harold patrolled the streets, there was an upward spike in numeracy levels. Fortunately, all educators unanimously rejected Harold's teaching methods. Unfortunately, numeracy levels dropped again as soon as Harold retired.

Corporal Blanders

The Corporal never could improve much on his secret recipe. However, his son, Captain Blanders, was much more enterprising. He replaced the coarse grasses with tender herbs and incorporated additional spices. He also experimented with different meats—bear, buzzard, mountain lion—but none of them were very popular.

After the family moved to Delaware, Major Blanders, the Corporal's grandson, finally found the Goldilocks formula. It was the perfect combination of herbs and spices, and used duck for meat. This third generation cook and experimentalist also had smart business acumen. He knew that having a good name was essential. His grandfather once called his product "Kentucky Blue Surprise". After several iterations through the generations, the Major settled on the name The Delaware Delicious Duck Company—DelaDeliDuck. He also began building his food stalls where his market was, rather than close to the sources for his ingredients. His business empire became a world-wide phenomenon and was one of the inspirations for several copycat fast food outlets.

Soon many scrumptious items were added to the menu. These included Pennsylvania Pleasant Pheasant Phenomenon, Tasty Tempting Tennessee Turkey, Georgian Gourmet Goose, and Rhode Island Roasted Rooster.

The Major's recipe has remained a well-kept secret for decades. Neither the CIA nor the NSA can protect information for that long, so these and similar agencies always forward their classified documents to DelaDeliDuck for safekeeping.

It has been said that a Nobel Prize in chemistry awaits the first scientist who can identify all ninety-eight of the secret herbs and spices in DelaDeliDuck's products. It is not surprising that the company's own marketing people were the first to spread this rumor. They knew that any interest they can rouse will benefit the company's bottom line.

You, dear readers, are in for a surprise. I can reveal, for the first time, that all of the discussion about secret herbs and spices, and Nobel prizes, has been a carefully planned ruse. It's the kind of distraction, misdirection and deception which were Butch's hallmarks, and which are practised by all great magicians. After much cajoling, Major Blanders' son, yes, Corporal Blanders' great-grandson, Blimey Blanders the Fourth, has given me approval to share their secret. The delicious taste of the battered birds is not due to the secret herbs and spices, or the organic meats, or the distinctive oil, or the proprietary cooking method. Yes, these all contribute to the overall mouthwatering sensation, but the real secret is the special premium flour used in the batter.

JJ

Butch's arcane plan to lure JJ out of his, or their, hiding place for Moondance to exact her revenge was doomed to failure before it was even conceived.

When Johnny, or was it James, returned to camp without the gelignite man, and with one of the gang partially blinded, the other twin was seriously displeased. Butch and Moondance had relieved the gang of their gold after a train robbery, and this second humiliation was too much. An almighty fight broke out and one twin killed the other. The law didn't know that there were two of them, so this was an opportunity too good to pass up.

The surviving twin asked his most trusted gang member to take the dead twin to town, claim the reward, and bring it back.

"Can I trust you to do that?"

“Yes Johnny, or is it James? Sorry boss, which one are you?”

“Just keep calling me JJ. You know that I’ll track you down and kill you if you don’t come back, don’t you?”

“Don’t worry boss, I mean JJ, I’ll bring the reward back.”

An hour after his trusted subordinate departed with the body, JJ killed the other gang members, stole all of their monies, and set off after his minion. He did his best to keep out of sight, whilst keeping a watchful eye on this submissive subordinate. A couple of weeks later, the reward was collected, and the faithful servant headed back to the gang’s secret camp.

He was quite concerned when he was intercepted by JJ.

“I was beginning to think that you weren’t coming back, so I was coming to get you.”

“I told you, JJ, you can trust me. See, I have the whole reward here.”

“Well, that’s good then. Let’s head back to camp.”

“There’s something else I heard about in town. There’s talk that Butch and Moondance are planning a big robbery. I thought we could ...”

“Those damn wenches,” interrupted JJ. “I don’t ever want to hear their names again,” asserted JJ while drawing his gun then killing his last loose end. He smiled. With the law no longer pursuing him, he was as free as Butch and Moondance, and almost as wealthy. He decided to travel to France and pursue his main passion—cooking.

Within a year, he had mastered several new techniques, and was experimenting with different foods and recipes. Chefs do that. Unfortunately for him, JJ chose the wrong local mushrooms to cook, and he suffered a slow and painful death.

The JJ twins’ rampaging and murderous acts are widely known, but perhaps they deserve some recognition for their co-incidental contribution in a surprising context.

I confronted Ms. PenniMoni, President-Elect of the American Society for the Imposition of Political Correctness, with what I believed to be incontrovertible evidence that JJ should be regarded as the original instigators of the political correctness movement. My case was based on the fact that, apart from their mother whom they always called Mommie dearest, they called all other women “wenches” irrespective of age, marital status, occupation or any special predilections. I confessed that “wench” wasn’t as nice as “Ms.”, but it was used in much the same way. She replied that it would not be a good look to place such vermin on a pedestal, and that she didn’t want to hear any more about them. She called me a typical ignorant, middle-class, white, protestant, middle-aged, misogynistic, racist male; and she added that I’m probably not even gay. Before I could explain that I took great offence at her words because I think I’m older than that, she threw my documents into the bin and kicked me out of her office.

Author

I have now changed my name and gone into hiding. After this current effort my good reputation, what little there was, is in tatters.

Many are after my hide because they think they were mentioned in this story. Even more are after my hide because they weren’t mentioned in this story.

If you think you see me working in the garden, or kicking a ball down at the field, or driving fast cars then don’t be fooled. He’s my stunt double and he’s costing me a fortune. On the upside, I suppose, he can do all those things, and more, a lot better than I can. Maybe I should have paid a scriptwriter to pen this book as well.

Moondance

Moondance was devastated the morning that Butch left, but understood that it was meant to be. A few months later, she was calling herself Anna

Oakleigh and seeking out a certain Will Cody. After demonstrating her prowess at drawing, sharpshooting and horse riding, she became one of the star attractions at his Wild West show. However, before approaching Cody, she spent weeks practising drawing a gun consistently fast, but not at her natural lightning quick speed. She didn't want to arouse any suspicions by being as quick as the fabled Moondance. She considered it one of the hardest skills she ever mastered.

Moondance's initial thrill with performing in front of enthusiastic audiences eventually waned, then degenerated into a loathing of the show business lifestyle. It is possible that some unfulfilling dalliances during that period had contributed to those sentiments. She left the show, and was soon calling herself Maree Pickford and living as a lady of independent means in Chicago.

The law never caught up with Moondance, but she soon caught up with them. Within eighteen months, she was happily married to a Detective Sergeant, and a year later she gave birth to a son. Marital bliss was the blessing she had longed for.

About three years later, she was expecting her second child when tragedy struck. The couple's house caught fire. Her dear husband shoved her out the front door where she was held back by bystanders while he rushed back in to save their son. That was her final memory of them both. Six weeks later, Moondance's baby girl was stillborn.

After a few years, she married an older, rich widower. She enjoyed his company, but informed him that she didn't have much left, emotionally, to give. He assured her that he had enough love for them both. It was a happy, but childless marriage. Moondance was quite sad when her second husband passed away.

As the years passed, Moondance reflected more and more about her caring mother and devoted father. She recalled the interesting, fun and dangerous times with her best friend of long ago, and wondered whatever became of Butch. But Moondance's most cherished memories were reserved for her son and first husband.

She concluded that the white man's hustling and bustling, shallow world was filled with too much meaningless dross. After having dwelt in Chicago for almost thirty years, she travelled to the reservation where her mother's tribe lived, and was welcomed.

Living conditions were harsh, but she didn't mind. Soon she realized that one of the elders happened to be one of the young bucks whose amorous advances she had rejected decades earlier. There was no rejection this time, and she remained content during her final years.

Butch

Butch's initial movements after leaving Moondance are not known, but about two years later she emerged as a formidable advocate for the women's suffrage movement. Tallulah Banks, as she then called herself, also tried campaigning against segregation of African Americans, and for citizenship to be granted to Native Americans.

A few years later, Butch's activism took her to Chicago. There she decided to cease politicking and see if she could find her old friend. The chances were slim, but with no other commitments she knew that time was on her side.

A couple of months later she was out walking when she spotted Moondance strolling along on the other side of the street. Moondance was glowing, with husband on one arm, hand-in-hand with a toddler on her other side, and obviously pregnant. Butch was delighted to see her friend so happy, but bowed her head, fearful that her sudden appearance in Moondance's life would disturb the tranquility. Suddenly, Moondance realized that it may be Butch on the other side of the road. She smiled broadly and began to wave, but there was no response. She often thought she saw Butch in a crowd, and she was desperate to introduce Butch to her family. Oh well, she must have been mistaken again.

More years passed, during which Butch's movements are still mostly unknown. However, she was in Frisco just before the big earthquake and

noticed a face from one night many years ago. He hadn't aged very much at all. Maybe she should stop and talk. No, she gave him an audacious wink and smile, but kept on walking. Rep was perplexed. Weeks later, he finally realized who that woman was. It was too late to smile back, but he smiled anyway.

Eventually Butch settled down in New Mexico. Calling herself Barbie Stanwik, she was the harmless, but eccentric, woman living on the outskirts of a small town. She grew vegetables, had a milking cow, and carefully tended two large flower pots.

Nothing much ever happened in the town, until two children went missing during a four month period. Many in the town had their suspicions as to who the culprit was, but nothing could ever be proved. One day a loud shot rang out, and a man dropped down dead with a high caliber bullet in his chest. No one knew who fired that distant shot, but no more children disappeared after that mysterious incident.

Barbie was fond of engaging in long conversations with anyone in the town who was educated, or intelligent, or had an interesting story to tell. She spent many afternoons and evenings in discussions and debates with the school teacher and the priest.

She developed a close friendship with the priest, and slowly revealed parts of her life story to him. He was skeptical at first, but a brief demonstration with a handgun and a new Springfield rifle convinced him.

"Yes, I don't just buy books when I'm out of town."

Moondance, as most others, had always assumed that Rhapsody was Butch's surname. Butch explained to the priest that this wasn't the case, but would only admit that her father was an astute New York businessman who had a happy knack of consistently trumping his opponents.

As Butch had correctly anticipated, the priest thought nothing would be gained by informing the authorities. However, he did invest considerable energy in trying to save her soul.

“What does it matter that I shot that murdering kidnapper last year? After everything else that I’ve done, one extra killing won’t matter. I can’t go to Hell twice.”

“Butch, you needn’t go to Hell at all. Why don’t you come to confession and all of your sins will be absolved.”

“But preacher, I have only one real regret. I once lost my temper and shot some loudmouth cowboy. I’m sure your God will judge me as He sees fit.”

As Butch got older, she reminisced more and more about her childhood and her mother, but rarely thought about her father. She recalled that he once confided that he wished his sons were half as smart as her, and that it was unfortunate that she was a girl. She never thought about her brothers. However, Butch’s most cherished memories were of the effervescent Moondance and their six years together. Butch never knew about the tragic events that befell Moondance and her family shortly after that brief sighting in Chicago.

The law never caught up with Butch, but a bacterium did. She cut herself while gardening one day, and the wound soon led to sepsis. There was no doctor in the town, but if there was then he would have been unable to save her anyway.

Butch’s final days were spent in considerable discomfort and pain. The priest was holding her hand when she tensed up, then relaxed as she uttered her final words, “Tell Moondance ...”

Epilogue

Mister Ted: Mister Ed

Mack Fleetwood: Fleetwood Mac, a band formed in 1967

Gav Garver: Clinton Eastwood Jr., using the stage name Clint Eastwood, played Dave Garver in Play Misty for Me

a late night DJ, and often played sad music for the lost and lonely. Garver's music selections kept many listeners misty-eyed for hours: Play Misty for Me

it is now simply called The Police Academy: Police Academy

Harold Fleetwood-Callahan: Clint Eastwood played Inspector Harry Callahan with nickname Dirty Harry in Dirty Harry

Chefs do that: Spoken by Virginia Elizabeth Davis, using the stage name Geena Davis, playing Samantha Caine/Charlene Elizabeth Baltimore in The Long Kiss Goodnight

Ms. PenniMoni: Miss Moneypenny is a character created by Ian Lancaster Fleming (1908–1964), and appears in many James Bond movies and books

their mother whom they always called Mommie dearest: Mommie Dearest

Anna Oakleigh: 1. Phoebe Ann Mosey (1860–1926), also known as Annie Oakley, sharpshooter. 2. Annie Oakley (TV series).

Will Cody: William Frederick Cody (1846–1917), known as Buffalo Bill, was a hunter, businessman and showman

Will Cody. After demonstrating her prowess at drawing, sharpshooting and horse riding, she became one of the star attractions at his Wild West show.: Buffalo Bill's Wild West show began in 1883.

Maree Pickford: Gladys Louise Smith (1892–1979) used the stage name Mary Pickford

Tallulah Banks: Tallulah Brockman Bankhead (1902–1968) used the stage name Tallulah Bankhead

she was in Frisco just before the big earthquake and noticed a face from one night many years ago ... Rep: William Clark Gable (1901–1960), known as Clark Gable, played Blackie Norton in San Francisco

Barbie Stanwik: Ruby Catherine Stevens (1907-1990) used the stage name Barbara Stanwyck

Epilogue. Author comments

Try saying “DelaDeliDuck” three times quickly.

In my original draft outline for this story I had Moondance drawing against JJ but eventually decided that it would be wrong for her character.

I also had a much sadder epilogue for Moondance (yes, sadder) but my wife thought that it was far too tragic so I changed it. She still thinks that it’s too sad.

FINDING THE GLACÉ CHERRIES IN THE FRUIT CAKE

The great profoundness and deep mysteries of the present work can only be realized and appreciated through repeated rereading and careful analysis. To guide the dedicated reader on such a noble and worthwhile quest, I offer the following prompts for careful consideration.

1. During the encounter with Marshal Colburn, Moondance's horse stepped sideways. Discuss the moral significance of this action and its implications for postmodernism.
2. The author once stated in an interview that he did not believe in political correctness until his wife told him to. What does this say about the author, his wife, and society in general? Please explain.
3. Discuss the provocative ontological existential surrealism portrayed in this book.
4. Do you like pandas? Why?
5. If you did not find parts of this book hilarious, then do you think there might be something wrong with you? Please explain.
6. Several truly lame similes using a rattlesnake theme were concocted for this story. Do you think they made you squirm as much as the author intended? There are forty-nine obvious reasons why jellyfish were rejected as an alternative theme. Please list them.
7. Do you think the author mixed in too much chaff with the corn? Since corn is an important cereal food, would you be prepared to eat this book if you got hungry?
8. Suppose you have a particular philosophical viewpoint and that you intend to deconstruct this story. How would you proceed? (Hint: Make sure that you have the paper version and scissors.)

9. The story is clearly a metaphor for life in an anthill. How do you think ants feel about being portrayed as good guys, bad guys and in-between guys? Do you think ant-discrimination laws should be introduced in order to protect their feelings? Please justify your position.

PAGE TWO HUNDRED AND TWENTY- TWO

Antipodean Seasons

April leaves are falling, air is chilling.
Frosty Jack came again last night.
The grass is dead. The sky is clear.
There's no escaping winter's bite.
Does anyone care what I am thinking?

September leaves are greening.
Innocent children are singing;
Oblivious to future pleasures, and
Unaware of coming suffering.
Does anyone care what others are thinking?

December rains are pending,
And the ants are foraging.
Years long droughts are often here.
Thoughts are peopling!

The summer sun is burning,
And the thoughts are playing
In the shallows of the ocean shore.
Do thoughts wander out
Into the deep dark waters any more?

Now winter is waxing
While the landscape is browning
And the mood is waning.
Blank verse and black thoughts
Are sentiments from Hell.
Saccharine rhymes and churlish chimes
Are punishments from Hell.
The bees and trees were heaven sent,
But people are the deeds of Hell.
Years long droughts are often here.

Then Patricia smiles at me,
And all is well.

PAGE TWO HUNDRED AND TWENTY-TWO. Author comments

A strange title for a chapter! When I created the redux version of this story I wanted to keep the exact same number of pages as the original. The poem happened to fall on p.222 of the paper version.

This is the n th iteration of this little poem, where $n > 8$. (Must be the mathematician in me.) It originated in much the same way as Butch and Moondance, viz. I woke up early at about 4:00am and, out of the blue, my brain went into overdrive concocting a poem. Now I swear it was finished and coherent when I went back to sleep, but when I woke I struggled to recall one particular stanza. Try as I might I could never remember that word-perfect stanza. Hence the many iterations. I'm reasonably happy with this final version.

REVIEWS

“I had a bad feeling about this, and I was right.”

Author’s wife: “I told him not to write it.”

“Be sure to watch out for the sentence with 38 words and 11 commas. It was the only highlight for me.”

“The author’s psycho! He’s mental as anything.”

“What the hoover?”

“If poor writing is an art form then the author has mastered it.”

“I thought this story would be a trip down memory lane, but it felt more like a fall down the stairs.”

Author’s daughter: “Daddy, please don’t try to write any more books. It’s so embarrassing.”

Author: This is typical. Absolutely typical. This is what happens when the publisher doesn’t offer the reviewers adequate incentives. Of course it’s

discouraging when they select unbiased reviewers. Everybody's against me. It's not my fault.

It may said that if you want something done right, then write it yourself. "A *raconteur extraordinaire* has arrived. The author's brilliance makes the sun seem dull and a polished diamond like a lump of coal. His unique insights into the collective psyche of humanity left me flabbergasted. I hadn't laughed, or even smiled, for decades—not since we lost the America's Cup in 1983. My life had turned to misery. Years of counselling and drug therapies hadn't helped. Electroshock treatment couldn't lighten my mood. Then I read this bold and original tale told with such panache and heartfelt honesty. It was a joy to read from the first sentence to the astonishing climax. I'm finally my old, happy self again. My wife is now considering ending our separation, and my children are talking to me again. This book changed my life. It can do the same for you."

Reviews

I had a bad feeling about this: Chronologically by release in the Star Wars film franchise, "I have a bad feeling about this" was first spoken by Carrie Frances Fisher (1956–2016), using the stage name Carrie Fisher, playing Princess Leia in Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back. The earliest expression of bad feeling in the franchise was "I have a very bad feeling about this", spoken by Mark Hamill playing Luke Skywalker in Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope.

The author's psycho: Psycho

He's mental as anything: Mental As Anything is an Australian band

This is typical. Absolutely typical.: Spoken by John Marwood Cleese, using the stage name John Cleese, playing Basil Fawlty in Fawlty Towers

It's not my fault: Spoken by Harrison Ford playing Han Solo in Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back

Reader Request

I hope you have enjoyed my book, and I assume that you have just finished reading the above reviews, all of which I wrote. Please do me a favor and write your own review. And if you didn't like it, at least be witty. I'm always up for a laugh.

Final author comments

I generally keep careful records when I'm working on a special project. Thus far (January 2023) I've spent just over 1,000 hours on this story— researching, drafting, writing, editing again again and again, and publishing. Words usually do not flow easily or quickly for me.

I think whole books could have been dedicated to Moondance's childhood and Butch's years in Europe, but writing them would be well beyond my expertise as well as my interest.

Since Butch and Moondance I've had an idea for a collection of short stories. I've written some of the stories, but floundered when it came to writing about a perfect crime. If ever I complete my vision then they will be an interrelated eclectic mix of genres all leading to a particular outcome— collectively interesting, I hope, but possibly too dark and depressing for some. At this point in time I'm lacking inspiration and I have higher priorities anyway.

I wasn't 100% confident with my Spanish in the Sinister Seven chapters, and I'm even less confident with the following.

Hágoónee' dóó ahéhee'

LIST OF WORKS

Titles of films, titles of TV series, and surnames of authors and composers etc. are listed alphabetically. Note that the titles of films and TV series appear exactly as they were mentioned in the Cheat Sheet. For example, the film “A Simple Plan” is listed as “A Simple Plan”, rather than as “Simple Plan, A.”

The entries for films and TV series usually include the director(s), production company(s) and original distributor(s).

A Man Called Horse (1970, film). Screenplay by Jack DeWitt based on Johnson, D. M. (1950): A Man Called Horse, Collier's magazine, January 7, 1950. Dir. Elliot Silverstein. Prod. co. Cinema Center Films. Distributor National General Pictures.

A Simple Plan (1998, film). Screenplay by Scott B. Smith based on Smith, S. B. (1993): A Simple Plan, Knopf. Dir. Sam Raimi. Prod. co. Mutual Film Company, Savoy Pictures, BBC, Tele-München, UGC-PH, Toho-Towa/Marubeni and Newmarket Capital Group. Distributor Paramount Pictures.

Adventures of Superman (1952–1958, TV series). Writers many, based on a character created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. Directors many. Prod. co. Superman Inc. Distributors Motion Pictures for Television and Flamingo Films.

Airplane! (1980, film). (Released as Flying High! in some countries.) Screenplay by Jim Abrahams, David Zucker and Jerry Zucker. Dir. Jim Abrahams, David Zucker and Jerry Zucker. Prod. co. Paramount Pictures. Distributor Paramount Pictures.

Aliens (1986, film). Screenplay by James Cameron based on a story by James Cameron, David Giler, and Walter Hill. Dir. James Cameron. Prod. co. Brandywine Productions. Distributor 20th Century Fox.

Annie Oakley (1954–1957, TV series). Writers many. Directors many. Prod. co. Flying 'A' Productions and Annie Oakley Productions Inc.

Baywatch (1989–1999, TV series). Created by Michael Berk, Douglas Schwartz and Gregory J. Bonann. Directors many. Prod. co. GTG Entertainment, Pearson Television, The Baywatch Company, Tower 12 Productions and Tower 18 Production

Company. Distributors The Fremantle Corporation, LBS Communications, All American Television and Pearson Television.

Beau Geste (1939, film). Screenplay by Robert Carson, based on Wren, P. C. (1924): Beau Geste, John Murray. Director William A. Wellman. Produced by William A. Wellman. Distributor Paramount Pictures.

Bonanza (1959–1973, TV series). Created by David Dortort. Directors many. Prod. co. NBC. Distributor NBC Films.

Bonnie and Clyde (1967, film). Screenplay by David Newman and Robert Benton. Dir. Arthur Penn. Produced by Warren Beatty. Distributor Warner Bros.-Seven Arts.

Browning, R. (1845, poem). How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix, Dramatic Romances and Lyrics.

Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (1969, film). Screenplay by William Goldman. Dir. George Roy Hill. Prod. co. Campanile Productions. Distributor 20th Century Fox.

Cagney & Lacey (1982–1988, TV series). Created by Barbara Avedon and Barbara Corday. Writers many. Directors many. Prod. co. Mace Neufeld Productions, Filmways Television and Orion Television. Original network CBS.

Casablanca (1942, film). Screenplay by Julius Epstein, Philip Epstein and Howard Koch based on Burnett, M. and Alison, J. (1940): Everybody Comes to Rick's. Dir. Michael Curtiz. Prod. co. Warner Bros. - First National Pictures. Distributor Warner Bros. Pictures.

Casey Jones (1957-1958, TV series). Writers many. Prod. co. Briskin Productions. Distributors Colex Enterprises, LBS Communications, Columbia Pictures Television, Columbia TriStar Television and Sony Pictures Television.

Cash, J. R. (1971, song). Man in Black. Label Columbia.

Charade (1963, film). Screenplay by Peter Stone, based on an earlier screenplay called The Unsuspecting Wife and written by Peter Stone and Marc Behm. Director Stanley Donen. Prod. co. Stanley Donen Productions. Distributor Universal Pictures.

Cinderella (1950, animated film). Many writers, and based on Perrault, C. (1697): Cendrillon. Dir. Clyde Geronimi, Hamilton Luske and Wilfred Jackson. Prod. co. Walt Disney Productions. Distributor RKO Radio Pictures.

City Slickers (1991, film). Screenplay by Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandel. Dir. Ron Underwood. Prod. co. Castle Rock Entertainment and Nelson Entertainment. Distributor Columbia Pictures.

Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977, film). Screenplay by Steven Spielberg. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Prod. co. EMI Films. Distributor Columbia Pictures.

Clueless (1995, film). Screenplay by Amy Heckerling. Dir. Amy Heckerling. Prod. co. Paramount Pictures. Distributor Paramount Pictures.

Contact (1997, film). Screenplay by James V. Hart and Michael Goldenberg. Story by Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan, based on Carl Sagan, C. (1985): Contact, Simon and Schuster. Dir. Robert Zemeckis. Prod. co. South Side Amusement Company. Distributor Warner Bros.

Daniel Boone (1964–1970, TV series). Writers many. Directors many. Prod. co. 20th Century Fox Television, Arcola Enterprises, NBC and Fespar Corp. Distributor NBC.

David, H. and Bacharach, B. (1969, song). Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head. (Single by B. J. Thomas, Scepter Records.)

Death Wish (1974, film). Screenplay by Wendell Mayes, based on Garfield, B. (1972): Death Wish, David McKay. Dir. Michael Winner. Prod. co. Dino De Laurentiis Corporation. Distributors Paramount Pictures and Columbia Pictures.

Deep Throat (1972, film). Screenplay by Gerard Damiano. Dir. Gerard Damiano. Produced by Louis Peraino. Distributor Bryanston Pictures.

Desperado (1995, film). Screenplay by Robert Rodriguez. Dir. Robert Rodriguez. Prod. co. Los Hooligans Productions. Distributor Columbia Pictures.

Destry Rides Again (1939, film). Written by Felix Jackson and screenplay by Henry Myers and Gertrude Purcell, possibly inspired by Max Brand, M. (1930): Destry Rides Again, Reader's League of America. Dir. George Marshall. Producer Joe Pasternak. Distributor Universal Pictures.

Django Unchained (2012, film). Screenplay by Quentin Tarantino. Dir. Quentin Tarantino. Prod. co. A Band Apart and Columbia Pictures. Distributors The Weinstein Company and Columbia Pictures.

Dostoevsky, F. (1866, novel). Crime and Punishment. The Russian Messenger.

El Mariachi (1992, film). Screenplay by Robert Rodriguez. Dir. Robert Rodriguez. Prod. co. Los Hooligans Productions. Distributor Columbia Pictures.

Enter the Dragon (1973, film). Screenplay by Michael Allin. Dir. Robert Clouse. Prod. co. Warner Bros. and Concord Production Inc. Distributors Golden Harvest and Warner Bros.

F Troop (1965–1967, TV series). Created by Seaman Jacobs, Ed James and Jim Barnett. Writers many. Directors many. Prod. co. Warner Bros. Television. Distributor Warner Bros.-Seven Arts.

Falling Down (1993, film). Screenplay by Ebbe Roe Smith. Dir. Joel Schumacher. Prod. co. Le Studio Canal+, Regency Enterprises and Alcor Films. Distributor Warner Bros.

Fawlty Towers (1975 and 1979, TV sitcom). Written by John Cleese and Connie Booth. Dir. John Howard Davies and Bob Spiers. Prod. co. BBC. Distributors BBC Worldwide, Zentertain, ABC (Australia) and Warner Home Video (US).

First Blood (1982, film). Screenplay by Michael Kozoll, William Sackheim and Sylvester Stallone; based on Morrell, D. (1972): First Blood, M. Evans & Co. Dir. Ted Kotcheff. Prod. co. Anabasis N.V. and Elcajo Productions. Distributor Orion Pictures.

Flying High! (1980, film). See Airplane!

For a Few Dollars More (1965, film). Screenplay by Luciano Vincenzoni, Sergio Leone and Sergio Donati; based on a story by Sergio Leone, Fulvio Morsella, Enzo Dell'Aquila and Fernando Di Leo. Dir. Sergio Leone. Prod. co. Produzioni Europee Associati, Arturo González Producciones Cinematográficas and Constantin Film. Distributors Produzioni Europee Associati (Italy) and United Artists (U.S.A.).

Freaks (1932, film). Screenplay by Willis Goldbeck and Leon Gordon based on Robbins, T. (1923): Spurs, Munsey's Magazine, February 1923. Dir. Tod Browning. Produced by Tod Browning, Harry Rapf and Irving Thalberg. Distributor Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Freed, A. (lyrics) and Brown, I. H. (music) (1929, song). Singin' in the Rain.

From Here to Eternity (1953, film). Screenplay by Daniel Taradash, based on Jones, J. (1951): From Here to Eternity, Charles Scribner's Sons. Dir. Fred Zinnemann. Producer Buddy Adler. Distributor Columbia Pictures.

Get Shorty (1995, film). Screenplay by Scott Frank, based on Leonard, E. (1990): *Get Shorty*, Delacorte Press. Dir. Barry Sonnenfeld. Prod. co. Jersey Films. Distributor Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Gershwin, G. (1924, musical composition). *Rhapsody in Blue*.

Gibb, B., Gibb, R. and Gibb, M. (1977, song). *Stayin' Alive*. A single from the album *Saturday Night Fever: The Original Movie Sound Track*. Produced by the Bee Gees, Albhy Galuten and Karl Richardson. Label RSO.

Goffin, G. and King, C. (1962, song). *The Loco-Motion*. Produced by Gerry Goffin.

Gone with the Wind (1939, film). Screenplay by Sidney Howard and revised by several writers; based on Mitchell, M. (1936): *Gone with the Wind*, Macmillan Publishers. Dir. Victor Fleming. Prod. co. Selznick International Pictures and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Distributor Loew's Inc.

Gunfight at the O.K. Corral (1957, film). Screenplay by Leon Uris, inspired by Scullin. G. (1954): *The Killer*, *Holiday Magazine*. Dir. John Sturges. Producer Hal B. Wallis. Distributor Paramount Pictures.

Gunsmoke (1955–1975, TV series). Created by John Meston and Norman Macdonnell. Writers many. Directors many. Prod. co. CBS Productions, Filmaster Productions, Arness and Company, and The Arness Production Company. Distributor CBS Television Distribution.

Happy Days (1974–1984, TV series). Created by Garry Marshall. Writers many. Directors many. Prod. co. Miller-Milkis Productions, Henderson Productions, Miller-Milkis-Boyettt Productions and Paramount Television. Distributor ABC.

Hard Target (1993, film). Screenplay by Chuck Pfarrer, based on James Ashmore Creelman's screenplay for *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932, film), which in turn was based on Connell, R. (1924): *The Most Dangerous Game*, *Collier's magazine*, January 19, 1924. Dir. John Woo. Prod. co. Alphaville Films and Renaissance Pictures. Distributor Universal Pictures.

Harvey (1950, film). Screenplay by Mary Chase, Oscar Brodney and Myles Connolly. Dir. Henry Koster. Prod. co. Universal Pictures. Distributor Universal Pictures.

High Noon (1952, film). Screenplay by Carl Foreman, based on Cunningham, J. W. (1947): *The Tin Star*. Dir. Fred Zinnemann. Prod. co. Stanley Kramer Productions. Distributor United Artists.

High Plains Drifter (1973, film). Screenplay by Ernest Tidyman and Dean Riesner. Dir. Clint Eastwood. Prod. co. The Malpasos Company. Distributor Universal Pictures.

John Wick (2014, film). Written by Derek Kolstad. Dir. Chad Stahelski and David Leitch. Prod. co. Thunder Road Pictures, 87Eleven Productions, MJW Films, DefyNite Films. Distributor Summit Entertainment.

Johnny Ringo (1959–1960, TV series). Created by Aaron Spelling. Writers many. Directors many. Prod. co. Four Star Productions. Distributor Peter Rodgers Organization.

Kung Fu (1972–1975, TV series). Created by Ed Spielman, Jerry Thorpe and Herman Miller. Writers many. Directors many. Prod. co. Warner Bros. Television. Distributor Warner Bros. Television Distribution.

Laramie (1959–1963, TV series). Writers many. Directors many. Prod. co. Revue Studios. Distributor NBC.

Leigh, M. and Darion, J. (1964, song). The Impossible Dream, in the Man of La Mancha musical.

Lerner, A. J. and Loewe, F. (1970, song). Wand'rin' Star.

Life Is Beautiful (1997, film). Screenplay by Roberto Benigni and Vincenzo Cerami, based partly on Salmoni, R. R. (?): Ho sconfitto Hitler. Dir. Roberto Benigni. Prod. co. Cecchi Gori Group. Distributor Miramax Films.

Little House on the Prairie (1974–1982, TV series). Created by Blanche Hanalis, based on Wilder, L. I. (1932–1943): Little House on the Prairie series, Harper & Brothers. Writers many. Directors many. Prod. co. Ed Friendly Productions and NBC. Distributor NBC.

Mister Ed (1961–1966, TV series). Based on a character which first appeared in Brooks, W. R. (1937): The Talking Horse, Liberty magazine, September 18, 1937. Writers many. Directors many. Prod. co. Filmways and The Mister Ed Company. Distributor MGM Television.

Mommie Dearest (1981, film). Screenplay by Robert Getchell, Tracy Hotchner, Frank Perry and Frank Yablans; based on Crawford, C. (1978): Mommie Dearest, William Morrow & Co. Dir. Frank Perry. Prod. co. Paramount Pictures. Distributor Paramount Pictures.

Moonstruck (1987, film). Screenplay by John Patrick Shanley. Dir. Norman Jewison. Prod. co. Star Partners II Ltd. and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Distributor MGM/UA Communications Co.

Orwell, G. (1945, novel). *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story*, Secker & Warburg.

Orwell, G. (1949, novel). *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Secker & Warburg. (Sometimes titled '1984'.)

Paint Your Wagon (1969, film). Screenplay by Alan Jay Lerner and Paddy Chayefsky, based on Lerner, A. J. and Loewe, F. (1951, musical): *Paint Your Wagon*. Dir. Joshua Logan. Prod. co. Alan Jay Lerner Productions and The Malpaso Company. Distributor Paramount Pictures.

Papillon (1973, film). Screenplay by Dalton Trumbo and Lorenzo Semple Jr., based on Charrière, H. (1969): *Papillon*, Robert Laffont. Dir. Franklin J. Schaffner. Produced by Robert Dorfmann, Franklin J. Schaffner and Ted Richmond. Distributors Allied Artists and Columbia Pictures.

Paterson, A. B. (1895, poem). *Waltzing Matilda*.

Payback (1999, film). Screenplay by Brian Koppelman and Terry Hayes, based on Stark, R. (1962): *The Hunter*, Perma Books. Dir. Brian Koppelman. Prod. co. Icon Productions. Distributors Paramount Pictures and Warner Bros.

Pitch Black (2000, film). Screenplay by Jim Wheat, Ken Wheat and David Twohy; based on a story by Jim Wheat and Ken Wheat. Dir. David Twohy. Prod. co. PolyGram Filmed Entertainment, Interscope Communications and Gramercy Pictures. Distributor USA Films.

Play Misty for Me (1971, film). Screenplay by Jo Heims and Dean Riesner. Director Clint Eastwood. Prod. co. The Malpaso Company. Distributor Universal Pictures.

Police Academy (1984, film). Screenplay by Neal Israel, Pat Proft and Hugh Wilson. Director Hugh Wilson. Prod. co. The Ladd Company. Distributor Warner Bros. Pictures.

Psycho (1960, film). Screenplay by Joseph Stefano, based on Bloch, R. (1959): *Psycho*, Simon & Schuster. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Prod. co. Shamley Productions. Distributor Paramount Pictures.

Rawhide (1959–1965, TV series). Writers many. Directors many. Prod. co. CBS. Distributor CBS.

Rooster Cogburn (1975, film). Screenplay by Martha Hyer, based on the Marshal Rooster Cogburn character in Portis, C. M. (1968): True Grit, serialized novel in The Saturday Evening Post. Dir. Stuart Millar. Prod. co. Hal Wallis Productions. Distributor Universal Pictures.

Rossini, G. (1829, musical composition). William Tell Overture.

Sabrina (1954, film). Screenplay by Billy Wilder, Ernest Lehman and Samuel A. Taylor; based on Taylor, S. A. (1954): Sabrina Fair, A Woman of the World, Random House. Dir. Billy Wilder. Producer Billy Wilder. Distributor Paramount Pictures.

San Francisco (1936, film). Screenplay by Robert E. Hopkins, Anita Loos, Herman J. Mankiewicz and Erich von Stroheim. Directors W. S. Van Dyke and D. W. Griffith. Prod. co. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Distributor Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Shanghai Noon (2000, film). Screenplay by Alfred Gough and Miles Millar. Dir. Tom Dey. Prod. co. Touchstone Pictures, Spyglass Entertainment, Birnbaum/Barber Productions and Jackie Chan Films Limited. Distributor Buena Vista Pictures.

Silverado (1985, film). Screenplay by Lawrence Kasdan and Mark Kasdan. Dir. Lawrence Kasdan. Prod. co. Delphi III Productions. Distributor Columbia Pictures.

Singin' in the Rain (1952, film). Screenplay by Betty Comden and Adolph Green. Dir. Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen. Prod. co. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Distributor Loew's Inc.

Slaughterhouse-Five (1972, film). Screenplay by Stephen Geller, based on Vonnegut Jr., K. (1969): Slaughterhouse-Five, or The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death, Delacorte. Dir. George Roy Hill. Prod. co. Universal Pictures. Distributor Universal Studios.

Speed (1994, film). Screenplay by Graham Yost and Joss Whedon. Dir. Jan de Bont. Prod. co. Mark Gordon Productions. Distributor 20th Century Fox.

Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope (1977, film). Written by G. Lucas. Dir. George Lucas. Prod. co. Lucasfilm Ltd. Distributor 20th Century Fox.

Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back (1980, film). Screenplay by Leigh Brackett and Lawrence Kasdan, based on a story by G. Lucas. Dir. Irvin Kershner. Prod. co. Lucasfilm Ltd. Distributor 20th Century Fox.

Tales of Wells Fargo (1957-1962, TV series). Created by James Brooks, Frank Gruber and Gene Reynolds. Writers many. Directors many. Prod. co. Overland Productions and Revue Studios. Distributor NBCUniversal Television Distribution.

Tall in the Saddle (1944, film). Screenplay by Michael Hogan and Paul Fix, based on Young, G. R. (1942): Tall in the Saddle, serialized novel, The Saturday Evening Post, March 7—April 25, 1942. Dir. Edwin L. Marin. Prod. co. RKO Radio Pictures. Distributor RKO Radio Pictures.

Tango & Cash (1989, film). Screenplay by Randy Feldman and Jeffrey Boam. Dir. Andrei Konchalovsky, Peter MacDonald, Albert Magnoli and Stuart Baird. Prod. co. The Guber-Peters Company. Distributor Warner Bros.

Terminal Velocity (1994, film). Screenplay by David Twohy. Dir. Deran Sarafian. Prod. co. Hollywood Pictures, Interscope Communications, PolyGram Filmed Entertainment and Nomura Babcock & Brown. Distributor Buena Vista Pictures.

The Abyss (1989, film). Screenplay by James Cameron. Dir. James Cameron. Prod. co. 20th Century Fox. Distributor 20th Century Fox.

The Addams Family (1964–1966, TV series). Created by David Levy. Writers many. Directors many. Prod. co. Filmways. Distributor MGM Television.

The Bounty Hunter (2010, film). Screenplay by Sarah Thorp. Dir. Andy Tennant. Prod. co. Columbia Pictures. Distributor Sony Pictures Releasing.

The Chase (1966, film). Screenplay by Lillian Hellman, based on Foote, H. (1952, play): The Chase. Dir. Arthur Penn. Prod. co. Horizon Pictures. Distributor Columbia Pictures.

The Cincinnati Kid (1965, film). Screenplay by Ring Lardner Jr. and Terry Southern, based on Jessup, R (1963): The Cincinnati Kid, Little, Brown & Company. Dir. Norman Jewison. Prod. co. Filmways and Solar Productions. Distributor Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover (1989, film). Screenplay by Peter Greenaway. Dir. Peter Greenaway. Prod. co. Allarts and Elsevier-Vendex. Distributors Palace Pictures and Miramax.

The Fugitive (1993, film). Screenplay by David Twohy and Jeb Stuart. Story by David Twohy, based on The Fugitive (1963–1967, TV series): created by Roy Huggins. Director Andrew Davis. Prod. co. Kopelson Entertainment. Distributor Warner Bros.

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (1966, film). Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci, Furio Scarpelli, Luciano Vincenzoni and Sergio Leone; based on a story by Luciano Vincenzoni and Sergio Leone. Dir. Sergio Leone. Prod. co. Produzioni Europee Associati, Arturo González Producciones Cinematográficas, Constantin Film and United Artists. Distributors Produzioni Europee Associati (Italy) and United Artists (U.S.A.).

The Great Escape (1963, film). Screenplay by James Clavell and W. R. Burnett, based on Brickhill, P. (1951): The Great Escape, Faber and Faber Ltd. Dir. John Sturges. Prod. co. The Mirisch Company. Distributor United Artists.

The Great Train Robbery (1903, film). Screenplay by Edwin S. Porter, based on Marble, S. (1896, stage play): The Great Train Robbery. Director Edwin S. Porter. Prod. co. Edison Manufacturing Company. Distributor Edison Manufacturing Company.

The Horse Whisperer (1998, film). Screenplay by Eric Roth and Richard LaGravenese, based on Evans, N. (1995): The Horse Whisperer, Delacorte Press. Dir. Robert Redford. Prod. co. Touchstone Pictures. Distributor Buena Vista Pictures.

The Hunted (2003, film). Written by David Griffiths, Peter Griffiths and Art Monterastelli. Dir. William Friedkin. Prod. co. Lakeshore Entertainment and Alphaville Films. Distributor Paramount Pictures.

The King and I (1956, film). Written by Ernest Lehman, based on Rodgers, R. and Hammerstein II, O. (1951): The King and I, musical; which was based on Landon, M. (1944): Anna and the King of Siam, John Day; which was based on memoirs by Anna Leonowens. Dir. Walter Lang. Produced by Charles Brackett. Distributor 20th Century Fox.

The Last Starfighter (1984, film). Screenplay by Jonathan R. Betuel. Dir. Nick Castle. Prod. co. Lorimar Productions. Distributor Universal Pictures.

The Living Daylights (1987, film). Screenplay by Richard Maibaum and Michael G. Wilson, based on The Living Daylights in Fleming, I. (1966): Octopussy and The Living Daylights, Jonathan Cape. Dir. John Glen. Prod. co. Eon Productions and

United Artists. Distributors MGM/UA Communications Co. and United International Pictures.

The Long Kiss Goodnight (1996, film). Screenplay by Shane Black. Dir. Renny Harlin. Prod. co. Forge, New Line Cinema and The Steve Tisch Company. Distributor New Line Cinema.

The Magnificent Seven (1960, film). Screenplay by William Roberts, Walter Bernstein and Walter Newman, based on *Seven Samurai* (1954, film): screenplay by Akira Kurosawa, Shinobu Hashimoto and Hideo Oguni. Dir. John Sturges. Prod. co. The Mirisch Company and Alpha Productions. Distributor United Artists.

The Main Event (1979, film). Screenplay by Gail Parent and Andrew Smith. Dir. Howard Zieff. Prod. co. First Artists and Barwood Films. Distributor Warner Bros.

The Man from U.N.C.L.E. (1964–1968, TV series). Created by Sam Rolfe and Norman Felton. Writers many. Directors many. Prod. co. Arena Productions and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Television. Original network NBC.

The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance (1962, film). Screenplay by James Warner Bellah and Willis Goldbeck, based on Johnson, D. M. (1949): *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, *Cosmopolitan*, July 1949. Dir. John Ford. Prod. co. Paramount Pictures. Distributor Paramount Pictures.

The Mark of Zorro (1920, film). Screenplay by Eugene Miller and Douglas Fairbanks, based on McCulley, J. (1919): *The Curse of Capistrano*, *All-Story Weekly*, August 9–September 6, 1919. Dir. Fred Niblo and Theodore Reed. Prod. co. Douglas Fairbanks Pictures Corporation. Distributor United Artists.

The Mechanic (1972, film). Screenplay by Lewis John Carlino. Dir. Michael Winner. Produced by Robert Chartoff and Irwin Winkler. Distributor United Artists.

The Over-the-Hill Gang (1969, film). Screenplay by Jameson Brewer and Leonard Goldberg. Dir. Jean Yarbrough. Prod. co. Thomas-Spelling Productions. Distributor ABC.

The Rocky Horror Picture Show (1975, film). Screenplay by Richard O'Brien and Jim Sharman, based on O'Brien, R. (1973, musical): *The Rocky Horror Show*. Prod. co. Michael White Productions. Distributor 20th Century Fox.

The Roy Rogers Show (1951–1957, TV series). Writers many. Directors many. Prod. co. Roy Rogers Productions. Distributor NBC.

The Scarlet Pimpernel (1982, film). Screenplay by William Bast, based on Orczy, Baroness E. (1905): *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, Greening; and on Orczy, Baroness E. (1913): *Eldorado*, Hodder & Stoughton. Dir. Clive Donner. Prod. co. London Films. Distributor CBS.

The Terminator (1984, film). Screenplay by James Cameron, Gale Anne Hurd and William Wisher Jr. Dir. James Cameron. Prod. co. Hemdale, Pacific Western Productions and Cinema '84. Distributor Orion Pictures.

The Thing from Another World (1951, film). Screenplay by Charles Lederer, Howard Hawks and Ben Hecht; based on Campbell Jr., J. W. (1938): *Who Goes There?*, *Astounding Stories*. Dir. Christian Nyby. Prod. co. Winchester Pictures Corporation. Distributor RKO Radio Pictures.

The Untouchables (1959–1963, TV series). Writers many, based on Ness, E. and Fraley, O. (1957): *The Untouchables*, Julian Messner, Inc. Directors many. Prod. co. Desilu Productions and Langford Productions. Distributor Desilu Sales.

Thelma & Louise (1991, film). Screenplay by Callie Khouri. Director Ridley Scott. Prod. co. Pathé, Percy Main Productions, Star Partners III Ltd. and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Distributor Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Tombstone Territory (1957–1960, TV series). Writers Steve Fisher, Andy White, Clark E. Reynolds and Gene Levitt. Directors Norman Foster, Eddie Davis and Walter Doniger. Prod. co. Ziv Television Programs. Distributors MGM Television and Peter Rodgers Organization.

True Grit (1969, film). Screenplay by Marguerite Roberts, based on the Marshal Rooster Cogburn character in Portis, C. M. (1968): *True Grit*, serialized novel in *The Saturday Evening Post*. Dir. Henry Hathaway. Produced by Hal B. Wallis. Distributor Paramount Pictures.

Twin Peaks (1990–91, TV series). Created by Mark Frost and David Lynch. Writers many. Directors many. Prod. co. Lynch/Frost Productions, Propaganda Films, Spelling Television and Twin Peaks Productions. Distributor CBS Television Distribution.

Vera Cruz (1954, film). Screenplay by Roland Kibbee and James R. Webb, based on a story by Borden Chase. Dir. Robert Aldrich. Prod. co. Hecht-Lancaster Productions. Distributor United Artists.

Wolfe, H. (1916?, poem). *The Grey Squirrel*.

Yankee Doodle Dandy (1942, film). Screenplay by Robert Buckner, Edmund Joseph, Julius J. Epstein and Philip G. Epstein. Director Michael Curtiz. Produced by Hal B. Wallis, Jack L. Warner and William Cagney. Distributor Warner Bros.

Zorro (1957–1959, TV series). Writers many, based on McCulley, J. (1919): *The Curse of Capistrano*, *All-Story Weekly*, August 9–September 6, 1919, and subsequent stories. Directors many. Prod. co. Walt Disney Productions. Distributor Disney-ABC Domestic Television.