

Wyoming 1879

A Play

by Kim E. Ruyle

Kim E. Ruyle
W6842 Blue Heron Blvd, #14
Fond du Lac, WI 54937
kim.ruyle@inventivetalent.com
616-308-3255



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Cast of Characters

<u>CLAIRE ROUSSEAU</u>	Female. White. 20. A schoolteacher.
<u>TOMMY GILLY</u>	Male. White. 21. A hostler who owns and manages a horse stable.
<u>LILLIAN HEATH</u>	Female. White. 13. Former student of Claire and aspiring physician.
<u>FANNIE BROWN</u>	Female. Black. 20. A barmaid.
<u>JESSE MILLER</u>	Male. White. 28. A druggist and fledgling scientist.
<u>WILLIE CONWAY</u>	Male. White. 32. A Bible-thumping preacher and widow.
<u>TIP VINCENT</u>	A Union Pacific detective. Doubled with Jesse Miller.
<u>BOB WIDDOWFIELD</u>	A Carbon County deputy sheriff. Doubled with Willie Conway.

LOGLINE: Is revenge the answer for a young schoolteacher in frontier Wyoming grieving the death of her fiancé at the hands of notorious outlaws?

SYNOPSIS: Claire, a young schoolteacher in frontier Wyoming, seeks revenge after the notorious outlaws, George “Big Nose” Parrot and “Dutch Charlie” Burris, murder her fiancé. Her decisions are shaped by three suitors who have very different world views. Lillian, a precocious teenager, helps Claire consider the propriety of the suitors and guides her through the turbulent political climate in Rawlins. Fannie, a local barmaid, provides a means for Claire to exact revenge. The western frontier is a dangerous place, and the way Claire chooses to deal with violence, revenge, and romance has profound consequences.

TIME: August 1878 – August 1879.

SETTING: Rawlins, Wyoming.

RUNTIME: ~115 minutes.

SETS: Split set with Claire’s parlor/kitchen to one side and Tommy’s stable to the other. Scenes occurring outside of Claire’s home and the stable are played far downstage or on the apron with few or no set pieces.

1. Campsite. The remains of a campfire, an empty whiskey bottle on the ground, and perhaps a log.
2. Claire’s modest home. A parlor with a settee, chairs, bookcase, and furnishings befitting a young schoolteacher. Adjacent is a compact kitchen with a small table, chairs, sink, and wood stove. There are doors for a street entrance to the parlor and another off the kitchen presumably leading to a bedroom.
3. Front Street in Rawlins, Wyoming.
4. Undertaker’s premises in Carbon, Wyoming. A pine casket on a cart.
5. Tommy’s stable. A bench, shovel, pitchfork, tack on a wall, and perhaps one or more hay bales.

NOTES:

- Character ages are those in 1878 when the story begins.
- The mannequin used in the penultimate scene should be as lifelike as possible to reflect the hanging of George “Big Nose” Parrot.
- In dialogue, words in brackets [] are expressed without speaking.

HISTORICAL NOTE:

This is a work of fiction based on historical events, the captures and lynchings of “Dutch Charlie” Burris and George “Big Nose” Parrot. Of the onstage characters, only Robert Widdowfield, Tip Vincent, and Lillian Heath were real people. Widdowfield and Vincent were lawmen murdered by Big Nose George and Dutch Charlie. Lillian Heath became the first female physician in the state of Wyoming and who, as a teenager, assisted with the autopsy of Parrot. The events described are fictionalized dramatizations loosely based on recorded histories with an accelerated timeline. Most characters referenced in the dialogue were real people, including Joe Horner (alias, Frank Canton), Dr. Thomas Maghee, and a prostitute called Beavertooth.

If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?
~ William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*

To Me belongeth vengeance and recompense...
~ Deuteronomy 32:35

All the variety, all the charm, all the beauty of life are made up of light and shade.
~ Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*

WYOMING 1879

ACT I

SCENE 1

Early Monday morning, August 19, 1878, near the base of Elk Mountain in Wyoming. The apparently deserted campsite of the outlaw gang led by George “Big Nose” Parrot and “Dutch Charlie” Burris. Barely dawning light reveals Bob Widdowfield and Tip Vincent stealthily approaching, pistols drawn, and badges visible even in the low light. When they reach an extinguished campfire, they pause and look around. A nod to each other to indicate it’s safe, and they holster their pistols.

WIDDOWFIELD

Sure ‘nough. Their campsite.

VINCENT

Whiskey bottle. Yeah. It’s them.

Widdowfield squats and extends a hand to feel the campfire ashes.

WIDDOWFIELD

Still warm. They can’t be far.

A rustling offstage causes the men to start.

VINCENT

The hell was that?

Widdowfield rises.
They draw pistols and scan the surroundings.
All goes black.
Then, bright flashes of light accompanied by a volley of gunshots.

BLACKOUT

END OF SCENE

ACT I

SCENE 2

Ten days later, Thursday afternoon, August 29, 1878, in Claire's parlor. 13-year-old Lillian, very mature for her age and passionate about her veterinary experience, speaks with Claire. The women sit at the kitchen table peeling and slicing fruit. Lillian occasionally punctuates her conversation with a paring knife.

CLAIRE

Castration? Isn't it dangerous?

LILLIAN

Not so dangerous when the horse is anesthetized.

CLAIRE

But how do you/ [do that]?

LILLIAN

/Chloroform. Cloth soaked with chloroform. And we hobble 'em just to make sure, so not so dangerous. Course, if you try to slice the nuts off a full-grown stallion without chloroform, without hobblin', you'll get your butt kicked to tarnation.

CLAIRE

Lillian! Such coarse language.

LILLIAN

Can't blame the horse for wantin' to hold on to his nuts. A gelding's sure 'nough nice to ride. Docile they are. But I'm pretty sure every colt wants to grow up to be like his daddy, a stallion with a fire in his belly and a hankerin' to mount every mare in heat. And losin' their nuts doesn't mean they can't still get an erection. It's gotta be frustratin'.

(Amused by Claire's gasp)

They're massive, ya know. A horse erection. Ya need a yardstick to measure one. But what good's a stiff cock without the nuts to back it up?

CLAIRE

That's crude! This is not an appropriate conversation for ladies. It's impolite.

LILLIAN

Nuthin polite about horse cocks and testicles. Especially when the testicles are rigged. But why can't ladies talk about doctorin'? About healin' the sick and injured?

CLAIRE

Well, okay. But speaking about, um, *rigged testicles*? I have no idea what you mean.

LILLIAN

Dropped. The testicles. Even if both testicles ain't in the scrotum when the colt's born, they usually drop in the first month or two, but sometimes only one of 'em drops. Then ya got yourself a rig –a stallion that's not packin' both testicles in the scrotum. That can be a powerful problem. Now you're talkin' 'bout a *real surgery*.

CLAIRE

And where did you learn so much about this, um, this kind of operation?

LILLIAN

I watched lots of castrations out to the Sugar Creek Ranch. Mostly bull calves, but some colts, too. Simple ones they were. And the cowboys out there let me try my hand a few times.

CLAIRE

You're spending time with *cowboys*?

LILLIAN

And with Li, the chuckwagon cook. A Chinaman the ranch hired away from the railroad. The feller makes a bang-up stew with colt and bull calf testicles and serves them up with chili beans.

CLAIRE

The cowboys like testicle stew?

LILLIAN

We don't play it to the gallery. Don't let on about the testicles. I reckon the cowboys think they're gettin' some diced up chicken instead of beef in the stew. They appreciate the variety.

CLAIRE

What else do those cowboys have you doing? Cooking. Castrating. You're too young to be –

LILLIAN

No! I most certainly am not! And I'll tell you, Miss Rousseau, they can have the cookin'. But there's nuthin more rewardin' than pullin' nuts out of a scrotum.

CLAIRE

Think about what you're saying.

LILLIAN

They leave the scrotum open to drain. But I like to check for bleedin' and then stitch 'em up. Then I give the poor impotent critter a rub on his nose to let him know everythin's gonna be fine.

Despite concerns about Lillian's vulgar language, Claire recognizes her potential.

CLAIRE

You're really... You're something else, aren't you?

LILLIAN

Am I? Nuthin to a simple castration, but Tommy has a colt goin' on two years old. And –

CLAIRE

Tommy? From the stable?

LILLIAN

Yeah. He's got a way with horses.

CLAIRE

With people, too.

LILLIAN

Yes, Ma'am. He sure 'nough does. Tommy has this colt. A rig. A couple of days ago I was seein' to Ginger, my mare, and Tommy's worried 'cause he can't find a veterinarian to perform surgery. A rigged two-year old colt and lookin' like it might be in a dreadful fix. Now you're talkin' *full on surgery!* Invasive it is. But I convinced him to let me/ [give it a go].

CLAIRE

/Oh, my goodness! You're thirteen years old, and you performed surgery?

LILLIAN

On a horse. Yes, Ma'am. But we got lucky. The testicle could have been up in the belly, but it was just under the skin in the groin. Not so difficult. If stitches hold, shouldn't be a problem.

CLAIRE

I've got to say, it's going to be interesting to see where your education takes you.

LILLIAN

That's why I'm here, Miss Rousseau. I wanted to tell you in person that I do plan to finish.

CLAIRE

Finish?

LILLIAN

My education. I don't want you to be disappointed in me because I will. *I will finish.* You know I will. But see. The boys at the Sugar Creek Ranch offered me room and board and –

CLAIRE

What?

LILLIAN

High school can wait a few years. I'll be tendin' to all their livestock. Doctorin'.

CLAIRE

What about your education? Do not tell me you're giving up on high school!

LILLIAN

You know me better than that. And if you – I mean you don't have to – but if you send me out some homework every so often, I'll keep on with my studies.

CLAIRE

(Pacing, distraught)

No. That simply won't do! You're my best pupil. And there's more to your future than castrating horses and consorting with cowboys.

LILLIAN

Consortin'? *Consortin' with cowboys?* I'm not sure what you're implyin', Miss Rousseau. I thought I'd earned more respect from you than that.

CLAIRE

Lillian, if I didn't respect you, I wouldn't care so much about your education.

LILLIAN

I respect you, too, but we're not beholden to each other, are we? Of course, my future's goin' to be more than castratin' bull calves and colts. My gosh, it's like you don't even know me. If I tell you I'm goin' to finish high school, you must know it's more than a lick and a promise. The Sugar Creek Ranch is a school, too. A different kind of school, sure, but I ain't just barkin' at a knot. I'm fixin' to study medicine. You know, someday I might... Well, I don't know. Do you think someday I might be able to *really* do surgery? On people, I mean...

With a start, Claire retrieves a book and hands it to Lillian. They move to the settee.

CLAIRE

You want homework? Here's your first assignment.

LILLIAN

Don't waste any time, do you, Miss Rousseau?

(Chuckling as she hefts the heavy book)

Middlemarch. What is this? Must be a thousand pages! I'll need a packhorse just for the book. It's crackin' colossal.

CLAIRE

As are the themes. It's about how women make choices and must live with their choices.

LILLIAN

Sendin' me a message, are ya? And this author. George Eliot. Ya really think a man can write about the choices women make?

CLAIRE

George Eliot is a pen name. Just read it. She's a woman.

LILLIAN

Alrighty. If you say so, I'll read it, but I hope it's 'bout more than makin' choices about men.

CLAIRE

Of course it is. I made the choice to leave New York and move to Wyoming. It wasn't an easy decision, but I had to leave. And Lord knows, I've paid a price.

LILLIAN

What? Why did ya have to leave?

CLAIRE

My reason for leaving New York is not for you to [know]... No.

Claire gives a sad wag of the head. An uncomfortable pause before Claire recovers.

CLAIRE (CONT.)

And maybe here I can do more as a teacher for young women. Strong, independent women. Women with gumption. *Like you, Lillian.* I so admire your gumption. *One day, you will be a physician.* You'll perform surgeries! Who knows what you'll accomplish?

LILLIAN

Miss Rousseau, ya set my mind to spinnin'. I jes gotta say, I'm mighty proud to know you.

CLAIRE

There are lessons for women in the book. Important things for us to consider. Idealism. Disappointment. How women make good choices. Poor choices. And not just about men.

LILLIAN

But that's what you're ponderin', I bet. A choice about a man.

CLAIRE

Whatever are you talking about?

LILLIAN

(Lightly teasing)

That deputy from Carbon. Always dressed to the nines. The one on the trail of Big Nose George and Dutch Charlie. No secret that deputy has been callin' on ya.

CLAIRE

Mind your manners, young lady.

LILLIAN

Don't mean to be sassy, but I reckon you've got a decision to make 'bout that deputy. Am I right?

Claire hesitates, but considering Lillian's insight and maturity, can't help herself.

CLAIRE

You're too smart for your own good, aren't you?

(Opening the floodgates)

Ohh. Bob Widdowfield. The man surely does cut a swell. When I arrived in Rawlins, I don't mind telling you that I felt so out of place. How was I going to make a difference? Honestly, I was feeling a bit lost. How would I...? And then... So unexpected! The minute I saw him I was overcome with relief. Because I was found. He understands me. He's so. Courageous. And when I'm with him, it gives me courage, too. Now I'm lost in a different way. Lost in him. You're too young to understand. Someday you will.

LILLIAN

You think I'm too young, but I can imagine what it's like to be hit by a speedin' train. Yer in love.

CLAIRE

Yes, Lillian! I am! Wonderfully in love! He's so unlike the men I knew in New York. He's very strong and independent but respects the same in a woman. He doesn't see me as less. Doesn't treat me as less. I wasn't looking for love when I came to the frontier. But you never know what life throws at you... I found love in Wyoming Territory.

LILLIAN

But Carbon? Isn't it a full day's ride?

CLAIRE

Forty miles, but we're in the same county, so he's going to get permission to move to Rawlins. If he can't, he'll get on with Union Pacific. But I'll tell you, Lillian, if I must, I'll move to Carbon. I've made my decision. I'd go anywhere to be with him. Anywhere.

LILLIAN

He's proposed?

CLAIRE

Oh! You can't tell anyone! Promise me.

LILLIAN

Yes, Ma'am. My lips are sealed.

CLAIRE

After he brings in Big Nose George and Dutch Charlie, we're going to make it official.

LILLIAN

Miss Rousseau, that's grand!

CLAIRE

Remember –

LILLIAN

Yes, Ma'am. I won't breathe a whisper.

Claire paces, overcome with concern.

CLAIRE

It's been ten days, and no sign of him and his partner. There's a search party out, but... I'm getting worried... Really worried... Seems they've just disappeared and... What if...

Lillian lays book aside and embraces Claire.

LILLIAN

Big Nose George and Dutch Charlie are sure 'nough monsters, but your feller's bound to be okay. Those lawmen are walkin' in the light, they are. On the side of God and right.

CLAIRE

Thank you for saying so.

LILLIAN

When you're visitin' your beau in Carbon, stop by the ranch. I'll give you a look-see.

CLAIRE

I may do that but don't want to see any castration. And please don't serve me testicle stew.

As Lillian prepares to leave, a knock.

LILLIAN

Maybe that's him!

Claire rushes to open the door to reveal Tommy, hat on his head and book in his hand. She greets him warmly.

CLAIRE

Tommy. Come in. Come in.

TOMMY

That's okay, Ma'am. I'm just returnin' your book.

LILLIAN

How's your colt doin'?

TOMMY

Oh. Howdy there, Miss Heath. Colt's doin' fine, Miss, thanks to you.

LILLIAN

(Pulling Tommy through the door)

Good to hear. Well, don't be chicken livered. Come on in. Man's afraid to take off his hat. Git on in here and give us a look. Ever seen this man without his hat? He's got a beauty of a scar.

TOMMY

(Unperturbed, lightly)

Hold on there. I can sure 'nough remove my hat, but Miss Rousseau, you might want to turn away. Miss Lillian here thinks I'm a circus freak.

LILLIAN

No, I don't! You're not a freak. But sure as shootin', you've got a beauty of a scar. Come on, give us a look.

Tommy grins and demurely removes his hat to reveal a scar, a swath of hairless scalp.

TOMMY

(Playfully)

Have at it.

LILLIAN

(Pulling Tommy's head close)

Take a look at this Miss Rousseau. It's beautiful.

TOMMY

It's okay, Ma'am. I don't mind.

LILLIAN

It's got this lovely red streak, and you can see some veins.

CLAIRE

(Peering over Lillian's shoulder)

I had no idea.

LILLIAN

'Cause he always keeps it covered with a hat.

TOMMY

Yes, Ma'am. Don't want to send children in the street screamin' and runnin' to hide behind their mama's skirt.

CLAIRE

But *what* [happened]? I mean, *when* [did this happen]?

TOMMY

I was comin' up on eight years. We were travelin' with the Ivanovs up north a here a ways ridin' back to Rawlins with a string of horses we bought up to Muddy Gap. That's when –

LILLIAN

This scar? More than ten years ago, is it?

TOMMY

Uh, yeah.

LILLIAN

Has it changed much over the years?

TOMMY

My eyeballs don't get up there to see the top a my head. So. not sure how much it's changed.

CLAIRE

Lillian. Let the man finish his story. Why don't you have a seat? Would you like some coffee?

TOMMY

Thank you, Ma'am, but no coffee.

CLAIRE

(Sitting next to Tommy)

Claire. Please call me Claire.

TOMMY

Yes, Ma'am. I jes wanted to return your copy of Tom Sawyer.

LILLIAN

Tom Sawyer? I'll trade ya.

CLAIRE

Lillian! So, you and the Ivanovs...?

TOMMY

Yes, Ma'am.

LILLIAN

Mrs. Ivanov must be a heckuva shot. Saved Tommy's bacon.

CLAIRE

Yelena? Why did I not know about this?

LILLIAN

‘Cause you only just got to Rawlins last year. And you never do step a foot inside the Arcade.

CLAIRE

It’s not fitting for a lady to go into a saloon.

LILLIAN

But that’s where you’re gonna hear the scuttlebutt, the flap-jawed wranglers spinnin’ yarns.

TOMMY

They talk about me in the Arcade, do they?

CLAIRE

You frequent the Arcade?

LILLIAN

When I get a hankerin’ for a root beer. And folks talk more about Mrs. Ivanov than about you, Tommy. But I heard fellers say you’re sound on the goose. Best hostler between Denver and Virginia City. Tommy Gilly runs the best stable in all the Wyoming Territory, what they say.

TOMMY

Oh, well...

CLAIRE

But what happened?

TOMMY

You heard about the Connor Battle?

CLAIRE

I can’t say that I have.

TOMMY

There was a massacre up north to the Tongue River fourteen years ago. This month, in fact. General Connor/ and –

LILLIAN

/And Jim Bridger.

TOMMY

Well, yeah. Bridger was leadin’ Pawnee scouts and soldiers. They wiped out an Arapaho village. Mostly women and children. The braves were on the warpath ‘gainst the Crow. Course, Arapaho braves ain’t gonna sit on their hands after they return home and find their kinfolk killed. Scalps took, too.

Claire gasps, thoroughly shocked.

TOMMY (CONT.)

Can't blame the Arapaho for wantin' revenge. They lit out after Connor's outfit, and some a the braves went further afield. Four of 'em attacked us. Two of 'em skedaddled with our string a horses. Mrs. Ivanov shot the other two. Killed last one as he was scalpin' me. Saved my life.

CLAIRE

So... *Your whole family* [died]?

TOMMY

Ma and Pa and Annie, my little sister. They all got, uh... No. They didn't, uh, [survive].

CLAIRE

Oh, dear Lord. I had no idea. I am so sorry.

TOMMY

Mr. Ivanov got an arrow in the neck, so he didn't make it, either. We got away on one horse. Me and Mrs. Ivanov. Just the two of us got clean away.

LILLIAN

Clean away? With arrows stuck in ya and losin' a patch of scalp? Head wounds bleed to beat the Dutch. Weren't you bleedin' somethin' fierce?

TOMMY

Prob'ly, but I don't remember much. I'm sure 'nough grateful to Mrs. Ivanov.

CLAIRE

So that's why you and Yelena... She took you in.

TOMMY

Surely did. She's a kindly and right smart lady. Taught me all 'bout horses. Readin'. Writin'. Arithmetic. And *ya mogu govorit' po-russki*.

CLAIRE

She taught you Russian.

TOMMY

Yes, Ma'am, but I took more of a cotton to French. It's apple pie easy compared to Russian. I can sure 'nough speak some Russian but don't read it so well.

LILLIAN

What a feller. Man speaks French and Russian and burns the breeze on a mustang like a dang Cossack. Hey, Tommy. Ever think 'bout goin' after those two who stole your horses?

TOMMY

(Taking a thoughtful pause)

The best revenge is to be unlike him who performed the injury.

LILLIAN

If yer a saint.

TOMMY

That's from the *Meditations* by Marcus Aurelius. Mrs. Ivanov is flush with her books. She's gotta literary friend in Russia always sendin' her somethin' new. Now she's readin' installments of a book by some feller named Tolstoy. Anna Karenina. And it's sure 'nough scandalous. But you know... Russians.

LILLIAN

I'd rather read Mark Twain, but Miss Rousseau's gonna set me to right with a book 'bout women by a gal named George. Thanks for lettin' me take a look at that beauty of a scar. Take care a yer colt.

They all stand. Lillian shakes Tommy's hand and then embraces Claire.

LILLIAN (CONT.)

And, Miss Rousseau, don't mind my joshin'. I do thank you for the book. Hope our trails cross soon.

Tommy and Claire bid Lillian goodbye as she exits. Then, they slowly retake their seats. An awkward pause.

CLAIRE

So, Tommy. What's the latest news about Dutch Charlie and Big Nose George?

BLACKOUT

END OF SCENE

ACT I

SCENE 3

Continuing on Front Street, Fannie enters carrying a small satchel and hankie. She's distraught, makes halting steps, then stops when Lillian enters from the other direction.

LILLIAN

Howdy, Fannie. Somethin' eatin' ya? What's wrong?

FANNIE

(Pointing back up the street)

See fer yerself. It's plumb ugly.

Lillian waits, but Fannie just wags her head.

LILLIAN

What is it?

(Only a pained grimace from Fannie)

You need help? Are you okay?

FANNIE

No, I ain't okay, but don't need no help. Not me... No. There's nuthin ya can do.

LILLIAN

Yer sure? Nuthin?

(Off Fannie's despondent wag of the head)

Alrighty then. I'm gonna get a look-see. You take care yerself.

Lillian gives Fannie a touch to the shoulder before exiting. Fannie watches her go then paces back and forth for a moment. She stops and opens the satchel.

FANNIE

Maybe somethin' I can do.

Slowly, she pulls out a derringer, studies it, hefts it, and grows a murderous look.

FANNIE

The bastards.

BLACKOUT

END OF SCENE

ACT I
SCENE 4

Claire and Tommy sit and quietly regard each other with interest until it gets awkward. Then...

TOMMY

Well, Ma'am, I best be on my way.

CLAIRE

Oh, no. Don't go. Tell me what you thought of Tom Sawyer.

TOMMY

I do thank you for loan a the book. It was sure 'nough easy to read. Didn't even have to think much when readin'.

CLAIRE

Really? Tom Sawyer didn't make you think?

TOMMY

(Lighthearted, a flirting tease)

Oh, course I was *thinkin'* when readin'. You ever tried to *not* think? Ain't possible. Even when you're sleepin', your mind's a thinkin'. Go ahead. Try it right now. Try to *not* think.

(Off Claire's amusement)

Can't do it, can you? I see your eyes keep goin' up to my scar and I reckon you're thinkin'...
Don't stare. Don't stare.

CLAIRE

Oh, my! No! I / [don't mean to stare].

TOMMY

/Don't mean to embarrass you, Miss Rousseau. I'm accustomed. Don't fret yerself.

CLAIRE

(A contrite pause)

Please call me Claire.

TOMMY

Okay. *Claire*. I know I'm an odd stick and that's why I keep my hat on. Course, when I'm in your parlor, it wouldn't be fittin' to keep my hat on. Tell the truth, I don't let it bother me when people wanna look at my scalp. I reckon that feelin's are contagious, so I just relax and figure if I ain't uncomfortable, maybe other folks ain't gonna be uncomfortable.

CLAIRE

You really are a thinker, aren't you?

TOMMY

Everbody thinks. Some think deep. Some shallow. Like a river. Runnin' slow, might be kinda deep. But fast waters don't run so deep. What I meant about Tom Sawyer. It reads fast which I took to mean it ain't so deep.

CLAIRE

Maybe it's deeper than you realize.

TOMMY

I reckon yer right. But it doesn't feel deep. It's easy. Kinda like swillin' cool water. Most a the books in Mrs. Ivanov's library ain't so easy. Like sippin' hot coffee. Just take a sip and then you gotta stop and ponder what you just read. I took Tom Sawyer to be more like a Beggar's Opera. Not so serious. Not like the philosophers in Mrs. Ivanov's library. Maybe that's why Mark Twain is such an ace-high writer. The story runs fast but the meanin' goes deep.

CLAIRE

Why, Tommy, that's some sharp analysis... Tom Sawyer grows up, doesn't he? I think that's what it's about. Learning to grow up.

TOMMY

Well, Miss Rousseau. Claire. No surprise with a name like Rousseau that ya got some philosopher in ya. Are ya any relation to that Jean-Jacque Rousseau feller? Feller who wrote The Social Contract. Emile.

CLAIRE

You know Emile?

TOMMY

I'm partial to Voltaire, but Rousseau sure 'nough writes deep ones. Take a sip, then ponder.

Claire pauses, amazed by someone she'd considered to be a simple hostler.

CLAIRE

Yelena must have quite a library, but I wouldn't presume to borrow any of her books.

TOMMY

I can't speak for her, but she's nuthin if not generous. I think Mrs. Ivanov would be honored for you to partake of her books. Course, ain't too many written in English. But I'd be pleased to try and translate for ya. Can't promise I'd do it justice but might be kinda nice to give it a go.

CLAIRE

Gracious. That's so generous. And, of course, you're welcome to borrow anything in my library. I'm not sure if I have anything you haven't read, but I'm glad to lend you anything that might be of interest. I have a good selection of American authors. Dickinson. Hawthorne, Thoreau, Alcott, Poe, Melville, and... Oh. Have you read Walt Whitman?

TOMMY

Sure 'nough. I read Arrow-Tip. It's a queer kind a story, but it does make a feller ponder.

CLAIRE

He wrote poetry, too. I've got Leaves of Grass if you'd like to borrow it.

There's a knock, and Claire leaps to answer.

CLAIRE

Maybe it's Robert!

Claire opens the door to Fannie who clutches her satchel in one hand and a hankie to her breast with the other. Claire reads Fannie's distress and is overcome with dread and unable to speak. Tommy steps forward.

FANNIE

Miss Rousseau. I'm Fannie Mae Brown.

CLAIRE

What's happened?

FANNIE

I work over to the Arcade.

TOMMY

Fannie, you're lookin' sad as a tick-fevered pup.

FANNIE

I'm sorry, but someone had to bring the news, and it fell to me.

CLAIRE

Is it... Is it Robert? Deputy Widdowfield?

FANNIE

I'm sorry, Ma'am. A wagon just rolled into town haulin' a coffin.

Claire wails and staggers. Tommy catches and holds her in a comforting embrace.

BLACKOUT

END OF SCENE

ACT I
SCENE 5

As Claire receives sad news, Jesse and Willy meet on Front Street. Jesse enters from one wing carrying a book, Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. He also carries a dinosaur tooth. Willy enters from the other wing carrying a large black Bible. They meet centerstage.

WILLY
(Pointing up the street)

What's all the commotion up yonder?

JESSE

A wagon just rolled into town haulin' a coffin from Carbon County.

WILLY

Who is it? Someone important then... Oh! *Did they do it?* Did they finally snatch up and kill Big Nose George?

JESSE

'Fraid not, Reverend.

WILLY

Dutch Charlie Burris? One of their gang?

JESSE

No, sir. Wish it were so, Reverend. Sorry to say, it's a feller name a Tip Vincent, an agent from Union Pacific that was on their trail.

WILLY

Oh, no! What happened?

JESSE

Cowards shot him in the back.

WILLY
(Looking to the heavens)

Oh God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself!

JESSE

Yes, sir. Vincent must have been runnin' for cover when shot in the back. Had to be Big Nose and Dutch Charlie and their gang. They were holed up in Rattlesnake Canyon at the base of Elk Mountain, what I heard.

WILLY

So that's Sheriff Lawry and his posse up yonder.

JESSE

Yes, sir. They found their bodies hidden under some brush. Been dead for a week, what they say, and gettin' mighty ripe.

WILLY

You said... *Bodies*?

JESSE

Tip Vincent and a Carbon County deputy. Both of 'em killed dead.

WILLY

A deputy from Carbon County? The one carryin' a torch for Miss Rousseau?

JESSE

Bob Widdowfield. Poor feller. Shot to pieces. *Seven* shots to the head. *Shot in the face*, what I heard. Seven bullets!

WILLY

What? Must a been a bloody mess! Nuthin left a the man's head! Does Miss Rousseau know? The dear lady's gonna need spiritual comfort.

JESSE

I expect word's reached her by now, but not from me. No sir. I ain't goin' to be the one tell her Bob Widdowfield was shot seven times in the face.

WILLY

Lord, help us... But just one coffin?

JESSE

They left Deputy Widdowfield's body back in Carbon for burial, what I heard. But Tip Vincent is lyin' up in that coffin right there in front of the Arcade this very minute. Gonna bury him tomorrow here in Rawlins.

WILLY

I suppose they'll ask me to preach at the service.

JESSE

Big Nose George and Dutch Charlie. Meaner than riled up rattlesnakes. Bad 'nough when robbin' stagecoaches and trains. But now they're a *murderin'* bunch a thieves, what they are.

WILLY

Big Nose is a curly wolf, for sure, with a coal black heart. The man would eat the devil with the horns on. He's got to meet the hangman!

JESSE

Hangin's too good for him. What they oughtta do is slice off that huge honker of a nose a his, shove it down his throat, and let him choke on it. Choke real slow.

(Reconsidering)

Course, that ain't a Christianly sentiment.

WILLY

Long as yer slicin', why stop with that huge honker? I can think of things to slice. Maybe turn the varmint into a eunuch before stringin' him up.

Jesse's taken aback by Willy's cavalier suggestion of violence.

WILLY (CONT.)

Don't look so flabbergasted. There's nary an honorable man who wouldn't give his eye teeth to be the Lord's instrument of vengeance.

JESSE

(Unsure)

I reckon you're right, Preacher.

Jesse touches the brim of his hat with the dinosaur tooth and starts to walk away.

WILLY

Hold up there. What is that? What do ya got there?

JESSE

Oh, this? A dinosaur tooth. I found it in a dig yesterday and was fixin' to go show it to Miss Rousseau when there was all the commotion in the street. But now –

WILLY

Miss Rousseau? What do you mean, *goin' to see Miss Rousseau?*

JESSE

Was, but with all the fuss over dead lawmen, I don't expect it's a good time to be callin' on her. I figger to head over to the stable instead. I reckon Tommy will be interested in this artifact, a genuine fossil it is. And I might loan him a book, too. The man's got a mind for readin'.

WILLY

What business do you have callin' on Miss Rousseau? She's a right smart God-fearin' lady. And she ain't goin' to fall for your flapdoodle.

JESSE

Flapdoodle? What do ya mean, flapdoodle? You see it right here. Go ahead. Touch it. It's real, and it ain't from a grizzly or lion or nary a creature from anywhere in our time.

WILLY

You don't know that. Could just be a peculiar kind a rock.

JESSE

A rock? Have you seen the bones they're pullin' outta the ground at Como Bluff? Skeletons of giant creatures. It's the Simon pure, Preacher, and I can testify to it. There were huge creatures roamin' our earth a million years ago.

WILLY

Pull in your horns, Jesse. You're speakin' blasphemy.

JESSE

Science ain't blasphemy. I'm a scientist and I –

WILLY

Scientist? You run an apothecary.

JESSE

I'm a chemist! Even got a two-buck periodic table of the elements posted up behind my counter. Sixty elements accountin' for everythin' in our universe. Don't tell me I ain't a scientist!

WILLY

Druggist! Ain't no scientist. And you're flirtin' with fire spoutin' blasphemy about... What do ya call em? *Dino-Sars*.

JESSE

Charles Darwin has spelled it out, Preacher. Right here in this book. The Origin of Species. How the species come and go and change over thousands of years. Open your eyes. There's only too much evidence.

WILLY

Darwin's goin' to burn in hell. And you, too, Jesse, if you don't repent. I don't need my eyes. Faith is the substance of things hoped for. The evidence of things *not seen*.

JESSE

You know what the call a man that doesn't see, Preacher? *Blind*.

WILLY

Jessie Miller, my exhortation to you is to *burn that blasphemous book*. And stay away from Miss Rousseau.

The men glare at each other as lights fade.

BLACKOUT

END OF SCENE

ACT I
SCENE 6

Back in Claire's parlor, she chokes back sobs. Finally, she composes herself, but the pain is constant, and she remains agitated.

CLAIRE
I must see him! I must get to Carbon, but how...?

TOMMY
I'd be pleased to take you in my buggy, Ma'am.

CLAIRE
Thank you, but I expect I could be there for several days. Do you have a horse I might use?

TOMMY
Surely, but, uh...

FANNIE
Let Tommy fetch his buggy, Miss Rousseau. Not safe for a lady to be travelin' alone.

CLAIRE
But who will mind your stable? It could be four or five days.

TOMMY
I'm game. And Mrs. Ivanov will sure 'nough step up to mind the business. She'll be glad to do it, and we can leave straightaway.

CLAIRE
(Hesitates, then nods)
Let me pack my things. Thank you.
(On exiting)
I need my black dress...

FANNIE
You can run along and get the buggy hitched up. I'll keep an eye on Miss Rousseau.

TOMMY
I've got my war bag and a bedroll at the ready, and it's a cinch to get Bessy in the harness. I'll be back with the buggy in two shakes.

Tommy opens the door to exit just as Lillian is preparing to knock. She quickly steps in.

TOMMY
Miss Lillian. You're back.

LILLIAN

Where's Miss Rousseau? She okay?

TOMMY

Gettin' packed for a trip to Carbon.

LILLIAN

So, she knows? I saw the fuss on my way outta town and reckoned it's gonna put her in a might addled state... Me and my big mouth. I told her that her fiancé was gonna be okay.

FANNIE

Fiancé?

LILLIAN

Dad-blame-it! There I go again. Fannie, ya gotta keep that under your hat!

FANNIE

I knew she was sweet on the deputy but didn't know/ they [were engaged].

LILLIAN

/You didn't hear it from me! You must a brought the news. How'd she take it?

FANNIE

How ya think? She's purdy tore up.

LILLIAN

I'm headin' that general direction, so I can hit the trail with her. You got a spare horse, Tommy?

TOMMY

I'm fixin' to take her in my buggy, but you can ride along with us if you've a mind.

FANNIE

Listen. Before y'all hit the trail, I, uh...

TOMMY

Somethin' on your mind?

FANNIE

It's jes... I brought somethin' for Miss Rousseau.

LILLIAN

What ya got there in your poke?

TOMMY

Somethin' delicate? Want me to step out?

FANNIE

Hully gee, no. Ain't nuthin delicate. Jes somethin' I took back from Beavertooth.

TOMMY

From *Beavertooth*?

FANNIE

Gal who entertains fellers in a room upstairs at the Arcade. You know her?

LILLIAN

Course we know her.

TOMMY

Yes, Ma'am, I know her. But not in a carnal way.

FANNIE

Coupla years ago, I borrowed her a little piece a iron in case Big Nose ever comes back. Now, I reckon Miss Rousseau needs it more than Beavertooth.

TOMMY

Hold on. What do ya mean, *in case Big Nose comes back*?

FANNIE

Big Nose George. The ugly bastard was in the Arcade a coupla years ago raisin' hob with his son-of-a-bitch pardner, Dutch Charlie. Jane – that's Beavertooth's real name – was jes jokin' when she said... She told Big Nose that his nose looked like a Gila monster crawlin' out of a shithole.

TOMMY

Uh oh.

FANNIE

Yup. Jane used to had a purdy good sense a humor. But Big Nose George, the murderin' bastard, ain't got no sense a humor. Hauled off and slugged Jane in the mouth. Knocked out her front teeth. All but one. She was laid up for a coupla days, and when she finally came back downstairs, one of the fellers playin' poker took one look at her and – fer all the world to hear – the dumb son-of-a-bitch calls out: *Lookit the beaver with jes one tooth*.

TOMMY

Men ain't always sensitive about the feelin's of others.

LILLIAN

(Indicating Tommy's scar)

Guess you'd know about that. The wranglers do git rude when they're drinkin', but out on the range, they're polite 'nough.

FANNIE

Since that day, Jane ain't been called nuthin but Beavertooth.

From her satchel, Fannie removes a pair of
Remington Model 95 Derringers.

TOMMY

Whoa.

LILLIAN

Gosh darn! What a purdy pair a derringers. Can I have a look-see?

FANNIE

Careful. It's loaded.

LILLIAN

Well, I ain't gonna pull the trigger.

FANNIE

They're mine. A matched set. But Beavertooth's been holdin' onto that one fer in case Big Nose ever shows his face agin in these parts. Now, I reckon it's best held by Miss Rousseau.

TOMMY

Big Nose? The man ain't comin' here! He'd be crazier than a jaybird to ever come back to Rawlins. Least not 'til he's dragged back for trial.

FANNIE

We can only hope. And when the bastard does, it's time to play for real.

TOMMY

Fannie, that's crazy.

LILLIAN

Not so crazy. A lady ought not be without protection. I carry a Colt forty-five in my saddle bag.

TOMMY

But Miss Rousseau won't... It's jes askin' for trouble. I wager she ain't never even shot a gun.

LILLIAN

I can teach her.

FANNIE

Easy as pie. It's loaded and ready to go. You gotta cock the hammer all the way back. That first click is the safety, so gotta be pulled all the way back. Then, jes point it at the son-of-a-bitch's belly and pull the trigger. Cock it once more to fire the second barrel. I'd put the first bullet in the bastard's gizzard. I'd blow his damn nose or his pecker off with the second.

LILLIAN

His nose might be a bigger target.

TOMMY

I can't let you do this. Miss Rousseau ain't never gonna... She ain't given to takin' revenge.

FANNIE

Bosh! Y'all think women are faint-hearted? Let me tell ya, however much as she's in love with that deputy feller, that's how much she hates the bastard who murdered him. I loved my brother with all my heart, and I hate Joe Horner, the son of a bitch, with all my heart, too.

LILLIAN

Joe Horner? Did he kill your brother?

FANNIE

Not outright. But Horner, a stinkin' outlaw, shot my brother in a saloon in Texas. Moses was a Buffalo Soldier, and after gettin' shot, I nursed him a coupla years before he died. Last I heard, Horner busted outta jail and headed to Wyoming Territory. That's why I'm here. One day, the bastard will pass through Rawlins. And I'll be ready for him.

LILLIAN

It's true. Ya never know what life's gonna throw at ya. I jes wonder if this is gonna be too much fer Miss Rousseau.

Claire enters wearing a long black dress and carrying a satchel. When she sees Lillian, she breaks down again, choking back sobs.

CLAIRE

Oh, Lillian. They killed him! I feel lost... So very lost.

Lillian returns the derringer to Fannie and hugs Claire. When Claire regains some composure, Tommy reaches for the satchel.

TOMMY

Here. Let me carry that. Are you okay walkin' over to the stable?

FANNIE

Before y'all go, I've got somethin' for ya.

CLAIRE

A gun?

TOMMY

That can wait a few days 'til we get back.

CLAIRE

A gun? Whatever for?

FANNIE

Revenge. Sweet revenge.

LILLIAN

And protection.

CLAIRE

You think I need protection?

LILLIAN

Every woman needs protection.

FANNIE

Protection, sure 'nough. But there's gonna be boss bounties on Big Nose and Dutch Charlie. If a posse don't kill 'em, they'll be bringin' 'em to trial in Rawlins. Would be a helluva sight to see 'em strung up. But what they done is so personal, I reckon ya might not wanna wait for 'em to string nooses if ya get a chance to put a bullet in 'em.

LILLIAN

If they ever even git to the noose. Big Nose and Dutch Charlie are a coupla slippery devils.

FANNIE

That's right. Jes like Joe Horner, those bastards always find a way to escape the law. And it's personal. This is somethin' ya gotta do yerself.

CLAIRE

You want me to shoot them? You think I could?

TOMMY

No! Course not!

LILLIAN

A strong, independent woman maybe could. A courageous woman.

FANNIE

It might bring ya a bit a peace if yer the one who sends Big Nose George to hell.

CLAIRE

(Accepts the derringer)

You think so?

TOMMY

Peace? No, Miss Rousseau. You'd only be causin' yerself more grief by takin' revenge.

A knock. Tommy opens the door to Willy.

WILLY

Reverend Conway to see Miss Rousseau.

TOMMY

Oh, good. Maybe you can talk some sense here.

Willy enters with his large Bible. He removes his hat and gives a questioning frown in Fannie's direction.

CLAIRE

Reverend. I'm just about to leave.

WILLY

And I see yer packin' a derringer. Jes make sure ya know how to use it.

FANNIE

I can set with that, Preacher. She gets the chance, she'll send Big Nose George to the other side.

WILLY

Ohh, I see. And *yer* gonna teach her?

FANNIE

Lickety-split, I'll have her shootin' dead center.

WILLY

And she's gonna use that peashooter on Big Nose George?

FANNIE

Bullets to the belly.

WILLY

Don't that beat all?

TOMMY

That's right. Tell it to 'em straight, Preacher. This is crazy.

WILLY

Course it is. Yer gonna go after Big Nose George, yer gonna need to pack a cannon.

TOMMY

No! Okay. Maybe carry somethin' for protection, but not for takin' revenge. Preacher, don't you teach 'bout turnin' the other cheek?

WILLY

Everythin' in its season. Jesus drove out the moneychangers with a whip. I reckon He might use somethin' more powerful on a murderin' cur like Big Nose George. But Miss Rousseau, you ought not rely on a...

(Sidelong glance to Fannie)

Barmaid. Ya oughtta let a man of God get ya a bigger piece of iron and teach ya to use it.

CLAIRE

(Appraising Willy's smug grin)

What I think, Reverend, is that now is not the time. It's best if you leave now. And, Tommy, you can leave, too. I'll be right along and meet you at the stable.

Willy's expression turns to stone. Tommy nods and dons his hat.

TOMMY

Yes, Ma'am. I'll be ready and waitin'.

Tommy exits, but Willy makes one more play for Claire.

WILLY

I'm pleased to stay, Miss Rousseau. Stay with *jes you*... If you'd like to pray.

FANNIE

Get a wiggle on. You heard the lady. *Leave.*

(Off Willy's glare)

Light a shuck! Now!

Claire gives a gentle nod toward the door. Willy throws on his hat and makes a quick exit. A moment of silence, and then Fannie and Lillian burst into laughter.

LILLIAN

Fit to be tied, he is.

FANNIE

You showed him some cheek, Miss Rousseau.

LILLIAN

You, too, Fannie. Preacher ain't accustomed to gettin' cheek.

FANNIE

Not from no woman.

CLAIRE
(Handing derringer to Fannie)

I best be on my way.

LILLIAN
Ya ain't gonna take the gun?

CLAIRE
Thank you, but right now, I can only think about seeing Robert.

FANNIE
Shot in the face! Seven times! They put seven bullets in his head!

CLAIRE
What?

FANNIE
Wanted to spare ya that piece a news, Miss Rousseau. I did. But ya need to know. Big Nose and Dutch Charlie shot yer beau in the head. In the *face*. *Seven bullets*.

Claire chokes back a sob and leans into Lillian who steadies her. Then she resolutely turns to Fannie and reaches for the derringer. She studies it, and then...

CLAIRE
What the preacher said about the gun... Would I need something bigger?

LILLIAN
Might not be a bad idea. I can let you use my Colt. I reckon I'll be able to get another piece a iron at the ranch for my saddlebag.

FANNIE
Naw. Keep the derringer. Only thing... *Ya cain't be skeered of the bastards*. Ya gotta get up *real close*. Stick the barrel right in the belly. Can ya do that?

Claire considers and straightens with a steely resolve.

CLAIRE
Scared? No. No, I'm not. Not scared. Not this time. *Can you show me how to use it?*

BLACKOUT

END OF SCENE