

MARSHAL: So, tell me, what is it you want?

FOSTER: I was attacked on the prairie.

MARSHAL: So I hear.

FOSTER: Is that against the law around here?

MARSHAL: Well it certainly ain't customary. Who was they?

FOSTER: I don't know them. Three men. The boss was a greasy looking thing, scar on his face, a dead eye.

MARSHAL: I know the man.

FOSTER: And?

MARSHAL: And what?

FOSTER: Jesus Christ! What's his name.

MARSHAL: The man who attacked you is Liberty Valance. Valance and a couple of his boys. Just what's your complaint now? They rob you?

FOSTER: No. They didn't search me.

MARSHAL: Take your gun?

FOSTER: I didn't have one.

MARSHAL: Steal your horse?

FOSTER: They gave him a crack with a quirt and he ran off.

MARSHAL: So they didn't take anything from you? Nothing at all? Well in that case I can't see you've got any legal complaint. Where was this?

FOSTER: I don't know.

MARSHAL: So you don't even know what jurisdiction it was in. They knocked you around, that could happen to anyone. Man gets in a fight, maybe he speaks out of line, gets in a fight – could happen to anybody. Did he draw his weapon?

FOSTER: He struck me with his quirt.

MARSHAL: But he didn't draw his gun?

FOSTER: Why would he? I was unarmed.

MARSHAL: Sounds to me like a fair fight.

FOSTER: Three against one, how is that 'fair'?

MARSHAL: Well perhaps you best learn to weigh up the odds before getting yourself into trouble.

FOSTER: Well, Jesus! Thanks a lot!

HALLIE: Alright, Marshal. You've had your whiskey, best be getting along now – I don't want any more blood on my floor.

MARSHAL: Right you are, Miss Jackson. Thanks for the drink, much obliged. *(He goes to leave but stops at the door).* You know, son. There's a reward out for Valance.

FOSTER: Yeah?

HALLIE: He don't need to hear about it, Marshal.

FOSTER: Reward for what?

MARSHAL: Just a small bounty.

HALLIE: Don't fill your head with these ideas, Foster. Won't nothin' good come of it – mark my words.

The MARSHAL again goes to leave.

MARSHAL: Miss Jackson.

FOSTER: I still haven't got a gun.

MARSHAL: Well, piece of advice. If you're planning on staying alive around here you might look at getting hold of one.

FOSTER: Does he come here often? Valance?

MARSHAL: Into Twotrees? Nope. Nothing much for a man like Valance to want in Twotrees.

Silence.

You want him to come looking for you? He won't come after you here. Beat you up once pretty good, he won't come again for that.

HALLIE: And you'd be a certified fool to ride out there looking for him. Though I wouldn't put it past you.

MARSHAL: What's your name, son?

FOSTER: Ransome Foster.

MARSHAL: Listen, Foster. I have a fair collection of confiscated items – revolvers. Now the good ones I keep for myself, but I wouldn't mind giving you one of the older models. For a small fee of course. Even a pea-shooter'd be better than your bare hands if you come across trouble again. Why don't you drop by my office when you're feeling up to it? I'll sort you out.

FOSTER: Thank you, Marshal.

*The MARSHAL leaves.*

-END-

*FOSTER pulls a theatre poster from the wall.*

FOSTER: Next Saturday in Longacre. Now they ain't gonna be as good as the players in New York City, but it'll be unlike any damn rodeo.

HALLIE: I ain't sure.

FOSTER: Jim can look after the bar. We'll take the stage in the afternoon and travel back after the show.

HALLIE: It's an awful lot of effort for a show.

FOSTER: You won't regret it – I promise.

HALLIE: Alright then, Foster; I'll come with you. But I ain't makin' promises that I'll enjoy it.

FOSTER: Still pretendin' that it don't excite you.

HALLIE: What? This ain't pretence.

FOSTER: Poetry, drama, stories. You know you'd find it easier to just enjoy them than to put all this effort into dismissin' 'em all the time.

HALLIE: You really have got some nerve. I just agreed to go with you, didn't I?

FOSTER: For which I am truly grateful. But you don't have to hide your excitement, not from me.

HALLIE: Listen here, Mr Foster –

FOSTER: Miss Hallie –

HALLIE: I don't know why you presume –

FOSTER: Hallie!

HALLIE: What?

FOSTER: I'm just teasin' you, is all.

HALLIE: You are tryin' to wind me up?

FOSTER: I'm afraid so.

HALLIE: It's like the God damn schoolyard with you, ain't it. Teasin' and chasin' the girls around; throwin' mud at her rather'n just say that you like her.

FOSTER: Well, in a school I guess it seemed the schoolyard approach most suitable.

HALLIE: This is a saloon, not a school. And you are a grown man, Foster. I have agreed to go with you to the show, have I not?

FOSTER: Yes, Miss Jackson.

HALLIE: That was the desired outcome of our conversation, was it not?

FOSTER: Yes, Miss Jackson.

HALLIE: Then our business has concluded for today, has it not?

FOSTER: Yes, Miss Jackson.

HALLIE: Then get on your way, Mr Foster.

FOSTER: I had hoped to stay and have a drink. If that's alright with you?

HALLIE: Do as you please. Give Jim your coin when he returns and help yourself for the time bein'.

*She goes to leave.*

FOSTER: Oh, Miss Jackson, before you go...

HALLIE: What is it, Ransome?

FOSTER: On Saturday evenin' perhaps you might consider wearin' clothin' more appropriate to the event...

HALLIE: I see.

FOSTER: When courting, especially to the theatre, it is customary –

HALLIE: Though I have never observed the custom, Mr Foster, I am aware of it.

FOSTER: Very well.

HALLIE: Am I free to leave or is there more knowledge and advice you wish to bestow upon me?

FOSTER: That's all, miss. I'll hold my tongue for fear of causin' further offence.

-END-

BARRICUNE: You seen the Chronicle, Foster?

FOSTER: This month's? It hasn't arrived yet.

BARRICUNE: Well I seen a copy over in West Anvil. There's a fine article in print about your little school – seems to have made quite a stir.

FOSTER: Is that so? I didn't realise you could read.

BARRICUNE: I read enough. You ain't so useful to all of us round here. And some don't take kindly to you bringin' education to the west.

FOSTER: People threatened by story books are they?

BARRICUNE: You can laugh all you want, Foster. But you gotta think what you're doin' here. Teachin' a coloured fella with a load of whites – you're askin' to cause offence.

FOSTER: No one's taken any offence.

BARRICUNE: Not here. But the world's bigger than Twotrees. All that's between you and the world is a horse ride or a few words in a letter, or perhaps in a newspaper – and you got trouble.

FOSTER: If someone takes issue with what's goin' on here then they come and deal with me.

BARRICUNE: The true American hero. You think coz you carry a pea-shooter round in an old sac that makes you a gunslinger?

FOSTER: I've been practising.

BARRICUNE: Ain't no practisin' when it comes to shootin' a man. Sure you can shoot at bottles or playin' cards – you might even hit a few – but when a man draws his gun at you, that's different.

FOSTER: I ain't afraid to shoot a man.

BARRICUNE: You're terrified.

FOSTER: I am not afraid.

BARRICUNE: Good. Coz Liberty's gonna come for you. And then you're gonna have to shoot him.

FOSTER: What does he want with me?

BARRICUNE: You think you can just arrive in town and start changin' everything? You think people here care for your big city ways?

FOSTER: This is about the school?

BARRICUNE: Where you bring education then there'll follow legislation, law, government. You think a man like Liberty wants the territory to become 'civilised'? How d'you think that's gonna affect his business.

FOSTER: This is about teachin' Jim? This is because he's black?

BARRICUNE: Sure it's that. It's the whole damn thing.

FOSTER: I'm not gonna shut it down if that's what you're askin'. I'm not gonna run.

BARRICUNE: Then you're foolish. You're foolish and arrogant.

FOSTER: You're embellishin' this coz you want rid of me. Well it's too late, Barricune, you should have just left me on the prairie.

BARRICUNE: Next time Valance comes for you I ain't gonna pick you up after.

FOSTER: You ain't gonna drag me back to town and leave me for Hallie to fix up? Well seein' as I'm already here that ain't gonna be such a problem.

BARRICUNE: You're gonna put Hallie in danger. You realise that? If you stay here she's in danger.

FOSTER: Hallie can take care of herself – I'd never put her in harm's way.

*Silence.*

BARRICUNE: She's my girl, Foster. You know that? She's my girl.

FOSTER: Is that so?

BARRICUNE: She's always been my girl.

FOSTER: Does she know that?

BARRICUNE: You better watch your mouth before it gets smacked.

FOSTER: Just seems strange, is all.

BARRICUNE: Yeah?

FOSTER: Seems strange she never mentioned it. Strange that the two of you are never together. Strange that she'd ever be interested in a Neanderthal like you.

*BARRICUNE draws his gun.*

BARRICUNE: You think coz you're an educated man that you're better than me? You think your books make the blind bit of fuckin' difference out here? FOSTER: You ever heard that the pen is mightier than the sword?

BARRICUNE: You ever seen a man holdin' a pen go head to head with a man holdin' a peacemaker?

FOSTER: What's the result?

BARRICUNE: Another couple of whiskeys and you'd have seen it first-hand. But I ain't gonna rot in a cell over the likes of you. *(He holsters the gun)*. Valance will finish the job he started, and you won't stand a fuckin' chance.

-END-

*The doors swing open. LIBERTY VALANCE enters with four men, their faces covered.*

VALANCE: A nice place you got yourself here, Mr...

JIM: Mosten. Jim Mosten, sir.

VALANCE: Nice place, Jim. You mind if me and my boys come in for a drink?

JIM: No, sir.

VALANCE: So, Jim, tell me, where's the tenderfoot?

JIM: Who?

VALANCE: Take a seat with me, Jim.

*JIM doesn't move.*

Come on, Jim; have a drink with me. *JIM, reluctantly, sits.*

So, where's the tenderfoot?

JIM: He ain't here.

VALANCE: Where is he?

JIM: He's gone out of town, sir.

VALANCE: Where?

JIM: Don't know where.

VALANCE: Take a drink. You play dice, Jim?

JIM: What game?

VALANCE: Charlie, bring us some dice. How about liar's dice?

JIM: Alright.

VALANCE: You know the rules?

JIM: I believe so, sir.

VALANCE: Ten dice on the table – I look at mine, you at yours. Then we bet how many of them is what number across the whole table. Each bet has to be higher till one of us calls the other's bluff. I think you're bluffin' and I call you a liar. If you bluffed, you lose a dice. Easy. After you, Jim.

*They roll.*

JIM: I bet two threes.

VALANCE: At least two threes? Easy. Three threes. So, where's the tenderfoot gone?

JIM: Three fours. Outta town; didn't say where, sir.

VALANCE: Three fives. He comin' back?

JIM: As far as I know, sir. Four fives.

VALANCE: Four fives? I don't think so. I'm callin' your bluff – liar.

JIM: I got two fives.

VALANCE: I only got the one. Three fives ain't enough. Lose one.

*JIM discards one die. They roll again.*

I bet there are at least two ones. So, tell me, you're the nigger who's been learnin' how to read?

JIM: Yes, sir.

VALANCE: You read anythin' good?

JIM: Yes, sir. Two twos.

VALANCE: Three twos. You read the newspapers?

JIM: Yes, sir.

VALANCE: You read anythin' about me? In them papers?

JIM: Yes, sir.

VALANCE: So you know who I am.

JIM: I do, sir.

VALANCE: And yet you agree to share a table with me, to share a drink, a game?

*Silence.*

It's your bet.

JIM: Three threes.

VALANCE: You know who I am and you agree to play dice with me?

JIM: I didn't feel I had a choice, sir.

VALANCE: You don't feel safe playin' dice with me, Jim?

JIM: Four sixes.

VALANCE: Four sixes? Nine dice on the table and you're sayin' four of them are sixes? I like that, Jim. I bet five sixes.

*Pause.*

JIM: Six sixes.

VALANCE: Six sixes, you have got some nerve, Jim. I bet... seven sixes. Call my bluff, Jim. Only nine dice on the table and seven of them are sixes? Call my bluff, Jim.

JIM: Eight sixes.

*Pause.*

VALANCE: Nine sixes. Call my bluff, Jim. *Pause.* Go on, call my bluff. *Pause.* Go on, Jim. *Pause.* Call me a liar, Jim. *Pause.* Go on, call me a liar.

*Long pause.*

JIM: Liar.

*The men suddenly grab JIM. A noose is put around his neck and he is dragged from the saloon.*

-END OF ACT ONE-

*JIM enters.*

JIM: Town's sure quiet this afternoon.

FOSTER: Ain't never much goin' on round here, Jim. How'd you end up in Twotrees?

JIM: As opposed to where, Mr Foster?

FOSTER: I don't know. Twotrees seems the kind of place people pass through, not where then spend their whole life.

JIM: Twotrees has been good to me, sir. It's been a good home to me.

FOSTER: When d'you come here?

JIM: I was born here, sir. Ain't never been anywhere else. I was left – as a baby – in one of the rooms over in the Elite. Miss Hallie's parents took me in – seein' as how they had so many children, they figured what was one more mouth to feed. They took care of me 'til they died. Then Miss Hallie took care of me.

FOSTER: And you take care of her.

JIM: I try to, Mr Foster, when she lets me.

FOSTER: You think she enjoys readin', Jim?

JIM: Miss Hallie's never had time to enjoy anythin'. She's always had so much responsibility she never does anythin' for herself. 'I'll rest when I'm dead', she's always sayin'. Truth is, she's made different, she ain't made to keep house and raise little ones – she'd go out of her mind. She likes that there's always somethin' that needs fixin' – that there's always work to be done. That's the thing she enjoys.

FOSTER: That she doesn't have time to enjoy anything?

JIM: I know. Seems crazy don't it, sir.

*FOSTER pours JIM a drink.*

FOSTER: Here's to you, Jim – to your education.

JIM: And to you, Mr Foster – and to my good fortune and luck in your stumblin' across Twotrees.

FOSTER: I didn't stumble across this town, Reverend. I was carried over the back of a horse – near dead.

JIM: You've come a long way from that now though, sir. You've made a good life for yourself here. I didn't think I'd ever see a school here in Twotrees and here it is.

FOSTER: It ain't quite a school yet. But it's a start. And it's down to you.

JIM: To me, to you, Mr Foster, and to Miss Hallie. *Pause.*

FOSTER: When the time comes and you're ready to leave, where will you go?

JIM: I don't know, sir. I've been thinkin' what you said about carryin' books up here and I thought about goin' somewhere with all the books you can ever read. A library filled with all them words.

FOSTER: East then? To the cities?

JIM: I guess so, yes sir.

FOSTER: I'd be half tempted to join you.

JIM: But ain't you headed west? Why turn back?

FOSTER: It wouldn't necessarily be turnin' back. Seems my journey west has come to an end. Perhaps it's time to start a new journey.

JIM: That's a nice way for sayin' it, Mr Foster.

FOSTER: You mean it's a nice way of phrasing' somethin' meaningless. I'm coverin' the fact I ain't got a clue what to do or where to go next. Words of freedom and adventure.

JIM: Wherever you go, will you think of Miss Hallie?

FOSTER: Hallie?

JIM: She's taken a likin' to you, Mr Foster. I know her so long, I can see it plain as the night sky.

FOSTER: She humours my advances, is all.

JIM: You clearly don't know Miss Hallie, sir. She ain't never humoured nobody.

FOSTER: But she always fights – over everything.

JIM: Yes, sir. Miss Hallie grew up with three big brothers. If she hadn't learned to fight she wouldn't have stood a chance. Just 'cause she was a girl didn't mean nothin'; she was one of them. Like Mowgli and the wolves.

FOSTER: You read it?

JIM: Yes, sir. She learnt to fight with them and had to keep on fightin' once they'd got themselves killed. She ain't never stopped, I guess. But she likes you, Mr Foster – I'm sure of it.

FOSTER: How come?

JIM: Well she ain't been cursin' half so much.

FOSTER: No?

JIM: She's tryin' to be more ladylike. She even took a bath a couple of weeks back.

FOSTER: I didn't notice.

JIM: Course you didn't, sir. Takes more than one bath to make up for years o' not washin'.

FOSTER: I see.

JIM: You mind me askin', sir, you ever been with a lady?

FOSTER: You ain't a real Reverend, Jim; I ain't confessin' my sins to you. What about Hallie?

JIM: Ain't right for me to tell, sir.

FOSTER: Tell me and I might share some of my own adventure.

JIM: Miss Hallie's got the temperament of a dragon, Mr Foster; any knights brave enough to battle her end up gettin' scorched and burned.

FOSTER: Thanks for your comfort, Reverend.

JIM: There was one man who claimed to have known her. He was shootin' his mouth off in the Elite one night.

FOSTER: What did Hallie do?

JIM: Well, sir, rumour has it that the man rode out of town that night short of his manhood. Rumour has it that Miss Hallie took it from him and keeps it preserved in a jar as a warning to others.

FOSTER: Jesus! That can't be true.

JIM: Well, sir, I ain't never liked to ask. But, word of advice, if I were you and I were having dinner here, I'd avoid the pickles.

-END-