

# COWBOY VILLAGE

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A Play in Eight Scenes

by

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## *Cast of Characters*

- Rex:* Administrator of Cowboy Village. Mental health counselor. Sixties. Easy going, humanistic. The villagers are family to him. He talks to them as to pets or infants, monologically, seldom expecting a response. Use of cowboy lingo makes him seem more forward than he is. Dressed as a working cowboy throughout.
- Alvar:* Villager. Midthirties. Usually expressionless, wooden. He never looks at anyone. Wears show-cowboy getup until Scene 7, when he appears in working-cowboy togs.
- Belle:* Villager. Thirty. Almost pretty. Usually expressionless, wooden. Never looks at anyone. Wears show-cowgirl getup until Scene 7, when she appears in working-cowgirl togs.
- Hattie:* Program director. Mental health counselor. Forty. Caring. Dressed throughout as she would be to speak at a civic luncheon in July.
- Doc Robert:* Psychiatrist. American Indian, wholly acculturated. Late thirties. Wears a panama and a summer suit until Scene 7, when he appears in show-cowboy regalia.
- Kate:* Professor of English. Editor, *Western American Writing*. Fifty-five. Dressed as a working cowgirl.
- Ben:* Professor of English. Associate editor. Fifty-two. Dressed as a well-to-do cowman, with belt, holster, and gun.
- Tony:* Associate professor of English. Associate editor. Forty. Wears show-cowboy getup, with belt, holster, and gun.
- Sarah:* Professor of history. Associate editor. Late forties. Wears show-cowgirl getup.

## *Scene*

Cowboy Village in the western Dakotas

## *Time*

Summer of 1992

*Scene 1*

*SETTING:* In the Cowboy Village saloon. Western motif. Upstage, a bar without stools. Downstage, chairs and tables. Entrance at stage left. A large coffeemaker and a stalk of Styrofoam cups back of the bar. No glasses or bottles.

*AT RISE:* Late afternoon. REX is alone at a table, stage right, making a leather belt as he hums “Home On the Range.” ALVAR is behind the bar, alternately leaning on it and wiping it with a rag. BELLE sits alone at a table, stage left, a cup next to her. She is slowly rocking back and forth.

REX

(Cowboy accent, to ALVAR, then BELLE)

Ain't you dressed up like a sore toe, bar dog. Fixin to go shadow ridin? Must be, in that there fumadiddle. I know what you are. You're a swivel dude.

(BEAT)

Belle. How much it cost to feather you out in all them flasharities? You ain't cow bunny to no stackwad, I can see that. Nope, and you're lookin set to shake a hoof. You, too, Alvar.

(Hums)

You know on them bottles of foreign beer it says “purveyors to the King of Denmark,” you know? Well, I'm cowboy to the crazy.

(Chuckles)

Just rawhidin. I'm a bit short of hat size out here, too.

(He checks his pocketwatch, gets up, strolls to the apron, and looks out over—not at—the audience.)

REX (Continued)

I do reckon we're in hootowl hollow. Nothin but prairie wool tween us and the Little Missoura and more beyond. Could be anno Domini 1892 for all I can raise. Exceptin that 1992 state-owned skunk wagon.

(Over his shoulder, to ALVAR)

Man at the pot, you got nough made?

(Turns, goes behind the bar, and checks the gauge on the coffeemaker.)

The lady range boss and that there new saddlebag doc will be comin in to see us, and them state caporals got to have their jamoka. But you been makin a hand, ain't you, Alvar? I aim to have some of this beef tea myself.

(Pours a cup, walks humming to his table)

Oh, Belle. You, Calico. We're in the shank of the afternoon. It's sixteen-hundred hours. Four o'clock.

(He resumes humming; then he sings a stanza to the tune of “Home On the Range.” During this, BELLE takes out a bottle of pills and swallows two or three of them with her coffee.)

REX (Continued)

(Singing)

Oh leave me alone to chew on my bone  
And don't let them kick me away,  
I'm a short-handled pup, I ain't getting up,  
Tra-la-la-ti-yi-yi-yea.

(REX goes on humming and working on the belt, singing the last line occasionally. BELLE takes her cup and goes to the bar. She stands there a moment before speaking.)

BELLE

I want some coffee.

(After a pause, ALVAR takes the cup, fills it, and sets it on the bar—not directly in front of her. She does not touch the cup.)

BELLE (Continued)

I want some other coffee.

REX

(Chuckling)

Other coffee?

BELLE

I want some other coffee.

REX

You're wantin sixshooter coffee, is it? I thought they spike-weaned you off that in Jimtown, a whole year back. They was intended to. You must be rememberin. You don't need none of that sixshooter anyhow, it'd only serve to make you goosey.

(BELLE takes the filled cup and returns to her table. The episode has not changed her at all.)

REX (Continued)

All we get's this here bellywash, and that's all you get. No six-shooter coffee, no brain tablets, no tonsil paint, and no heifer dust. Them's the powders in the village. You're still a green pea, but you'll get alkali'd. My range word on it. So don't be sullin around.

(BEAT)

Don't have much tongue oil, do you, Belle? You sure ain't no live dictionary.

BELLE

I don't like to be out in the open. With all those chipmunks.

REX

Chipmunks . . .

BELLE

I don't like to be out there with them.

REX

(Chuckles)

Oh, you mean *marmots*, Belle. No need to be shy of marmots. They want nothing to do with no loco sage hen out of Jim River country.

BELLE

(Laughs loudly)

Chipmunks? Little chickmumps?

(She does not keep laughing, but a smile has stuck to her. When REX speaks again, the smile vanishes.)

REX

(Unaffected by the antics)

The marmots got a dogtown the other side of the wash. You ain't been amblin over there, have you? We can't have you strayin. You amble over to dogtown and storm the puncheons with a marmot, and you'll end up as chuckleheaded as him.

(Resumes humming)

You heard the story of the stub-horned buckaroo?

(BEAT)

Well, you're goin to hear it.

(As REX narrates, ALVAR starts pacing behind the bar, though not in agitation.)

REX (Continued)

Many a time ago there was this button who blew into Jimtown lookin to ride for some brand. Hadn't heard the owl hoot much, but he wasn't no pilgrim. No, ma'am, he had grew up on the family spread, and he owned the bridewise mare he was on, and he could roustabout and do whichever way they pointed. Didn't happen to be much ridin in the country just then, so he had to sign on at the big Jimtown Ranch. It was a haywire outfit, too. Hospital cattle, for the most part. Dogies and leppies and mulies and mochos. Scalawags.

(ALVAR stops at the end of the bar nearer the entrance and gives a loud *moo*. REX ignores him. ALVAR waits a moment, then he resumes pacing.)

REX (Continued)

But he had little choice, and so they hired him on at that cap-and-ball outfit, and the next thing he knew ten years had took to the tules. This young one had got the bacon, I should say, and some Montgomery-Ward-woman-sent-west-on-approval had given him such a cupid's cramp that he had had to drop his rope on her, and though the two of them got no younkens in the dugout, the life on the lazy-pen Jimtown Ranch was good, he had to admit.

(A "real" moo is heard, off-stage. ALVAR stops pacing and seems to listen for more. REX has taken note.)

REX (Continued)

(Laughs)

Cabeza de Vaca! You've done boogered the she-stuff!

(This time, ALVAR waits longer before he resumes the pacing.)

REX (Continued)

Well, ma'am, the years kept foggin, and he got a few more wrinkles on his horns, and then wouldn't you know, his runnin mate went over the range to the bone orchard. He turned a little daunsy at that, and once on a cocktail guard he thought to himself, "When your cinch is getting frayed, it's a night to leave Cheyenne." But he did not. No, ma'am, he hanged and rattled, and by the time he was old and stove up enough to be ready to throw in his hand, that there buckaroo was augur of the whole Jimtown lay.

(He takes his coffee and goes to the bar. ALVAR immediately quits pacing.)

REX (Continued)

He bought him a shirttail outfit on the Missoura Drift, and when the day come he put thirty years' gatherins in his war bag and leather on his plug, and adiós, Jimtown. That stubhorn meant to do nothin but shadin till the last roundup. Oh, he'd have a cow or two to pail, but they and the nag would be it for company. He'd seed enough of the human bunch.

(He drinks. ALVAR has returned to leaning on the bar.)

REX (Continued)

Afternoon he got to the new ranch, so did a hell-wind. Hit not two whoops beyond the draw. In the mornin come a gully washer to spend the week. No, he wasn't quite singin with his tail up. In fact, this would-be buck nun was getting a touch of buck ague, not that wind or wet had done it to him.

(To BELLE)

You knows what had.

(Goes back to sit with his leather work)

Yes, ma'am, that there sagebrusher was me. *Changin*, what had done it. I had rode thirty years on a spread, then I changed to this one, and I reckon the ague or the bottle fever would have curled me up if the old man in Jimtown hadn't played a hand with his eyes shut and let me take

you all.

(BEAT)

Belle, you was in Jimtown half of them thirty years, and you've just blowed in, you're right in a jackpot of change and junin around as I did, and I'm bone-seasoned in the whole jamboree. I seed Alvar do it and them others, too. No good trying to hornswaggle me or walkin the fence. You'll mix the medicine soon enough.

(Hums)

Alvar was nothin but a phildoodle when he rode into the village. Now he's the top swamper and belly cheater west of the Mo. Ain't you, bar dog? *I* weren't so quick to change. You know, Belle, me and you are made of the same leather. We ought to be bored for the hollow horn.

(Pause. BELLE is no longer rocking.)

BELLE

Can I call my mom?

REX

To tell her what? "Bring me some more of that sixshooter coffee"? You think we wasn't watchin when she coyoted round the unit in Jimtown, big thermos cinched in one hand? If you ain't weaned, I can't ask why.

(Chuckles)

Let's not rack over that trail again. We got doins to attend to. We got them greener to string in the mornin. Once they're whingdinged out, you and Ma can chew the cud on the pay phone till you both hit the misty beyond. Save them short bits, Calico.

(He looks at his pocketwatch, then gets up to inspect the room. He wants to be sure that everything is in order. He goes on talking the while. BELLE resumes rocking.)

REX (Continued)

We got doins to do, and hadn't it been for the old man in Jimtown, wouldn't have any of you here to do them. Yep, that stub-horned ranahan was me, but tomorrow I'm the dude wrangler of wild willow west.

(Enter, in conversation, HATTIE and DOC ROBERT, the latter wearing a stethoscope. They are in good spirits. Their coming has no apparent effect on BELLE or ALVAR. But REX glows with hospitality.)

HATTIE

(No accent)

You mean a kind of fusing?

DOC ROBERT

(No accent)

A combining, at least. Medical practice with medical research. I'd go for that.

REX

Miss Hattie and Doc Robert—or am I lookin in a false pond? I reckon you’re set to belly up now.

HATTIE

(Sincerely)

Rex, I don’t know what to say. It’s wonderful. They’re wonderful.

DOC ROBERT

(Indicating BELLE and ALVAR)

Hi again, Rex. Are these the only two I haven’t met?

HATTIE

(Surveying BELLE, then ALVAR)

I can’t get over the outfits. They are so true to something.

REX

(To ALVAR)

A pair of overalls, pot man!

(To DOC ROBERT)

We’ll talk cow in a minute. First, we might want to use a rope arm to hoist a crock.

(ALVAR fills and sets out two cups. REX, HATTIE, and DOC ROBERT move to the bar.)

REX (Continued)

Havin look-seed at the village and the bunch of them, Doc, what do you think?

DOC ROBERT

(Staring REX in the eye)

As a doctor? Or as the grandson of a Kiowa chief?

(Pause. DOC ROBERT winks. REX and HATTIE laugh with polite restraint.)

REX

I feared I had cut a big gut there.

DOC ROBERT

No, I agree with Hattie. What I’m saying, it’s authentic is what I’m saying. I don’t know how my grandfather would have reacted. Probably, “So this is what the white man’s West has come to.”

(Laughs)

He was a dichotomist. No, I’m enjoying it. But I imagine it’s a lot of work.



HATTIE

(To REX)

You get a little ranch to retire on, and you end up running a private group home. With nobody to help. I'm glad *we* didn't talk you into this.

DOC ROBERT

Five beds *and* an animal census?

REX

Six bunks, five of them filled. I ain't mentionin the ones in the pilgrim doghouse, which got clean straw. Then we have two head and one cayuse and me. Oh, I'm kept rattlin my hocks.

HATTIE

Are they learning? I mean, is every one of them beginning to contribute in some way?

REX

Alvar here's the roustabout. Startin tomorrow, he'll be the wreck-pan waddy to my bean master. Three you met paintin fence, Doc, them are my hay slayers and windmill monkeys and such. I wouldn't want to flannelmouth you, but the men don't go sit on their onespot like they did when they first come a-stoopin into Cowboy Village. Miss Hattie, you knowed them.

(Pause. He indicates BELLE.)

Now I have a sage hen, too. Wouldn't have did to have Belle in with the hands, so I put her hotroll in the big house where I got my own donkey's breakfast. She ain't worried with no duffer, though I could try—like a steer.

(Chuckles)

HATTIE

Well, it's only been a week. She looks good.

DOC ROBERT

This is Belle?

(He goes to her, HATTIE and REX following. BELLE's rocking stops.)

REX

(To BELLE)

You member Miss Hattie, who used to ride the unit at Jimtown fore she got to be range boss. Or "program director," as the early-boughtens say.

HATTIE

Belle, I want you to meet Doc Robert. Doctor, my friend, Belle.

(The three stand around BELLE, observing.)

DOC ROBERT

Hi. Any complaints?

BELLE

I want some other coffee.

DOC ROBERT

Have you been drinking what we're drinking?

(Sips from his cup, turns to REX)

Ersatz?

(REX and HATTIE nod.)

Seems all right.

HATTIE

(To BELLE, as though for the nth time)

You'll just have to develop a taste for it.

BELLE

Can I call my mom?

DOC ROBERT

(To REX)

Pay telephone?

(REX and HATTIE nod)

(To BELLE)

You can ask Rex. How does the world seem to you?

BELLE

I don't know which one.

DOC ROBERT

Anything else?

(BELLE does not reply. DOC ROBERT studies her a moment, then walks to the bar. REX and HATTIE follow. BELLE rocks.)

DOC ROBERT (Continued)

This would be Alvar.

HATTIE

I've known him a time, too. Alvar, meet Doc Robert.

(ALVAR leans on the bar, squinting into the distance.)

HATTIE (Continued)

You make delicious coffee.

REX

Can't even tell it's got the horns sawed off.

DOC ROBERT

(To ALVAR)

Any complaints?

ALVAR

I don't complain. No. I don't.

DOC ROBERT

Well, how does the world seem to you?

ALVAR

(BEAT)

I have to keep going.

DOC ROBERT

What else?

(ALVAR gives the hint of a shrug.)

DOC ROBERT (Continued)

Thank you, Alvar. Thank you, Belle. Okay?

(DOC ROBERT, HATTIE, and REX move along the bar. They face the audience. ALVAR wipes.)

DOC ROBERT (Continued)

(Removes and pockets stethoscope)

I don't know why I brought this thing.

(To REX)

You don't need me to check *your* heart, do you? Or to depress your tongue?

(He takes a bunch of tongue depressors from another pocket, shows them, puts them away, and grins.)

DOC ROBERT (Continued)

It's odd, not having to play doctor.

HATTIE

They've done well. It's working. You know, if it weren't for the licensing regulations, I wouldn't have had to drag you along.

DOC ROBERT

I'm glad you did. I grew up in Oklahoma and went to med school in Ohio, so I'm new to this part of the country. We had to drive, what, two hundred miles just to get here. *Nobody* around. I mean, it's beautiful is what I'm saying.

(To REX, with enthusiasm)

I always wanted a ranch. Something barren and remote where I could keep a horse or two and forget the practice. Like this one. I bet if a man looked, he'd find what he wanted around here.

REX

(Knowingly)

He'd have to be a lonewolfer. I didn't have no trouble.

DOC ROBERT

Cheap?

REX

Am I wallowin in velvet?

(With other things in mind)

Well, Doc, Miss Hattie, I'm not one to haze the talk, but oughtn't we be getting down to cases?

HATTIE

Let's do it. In here is all right with me.

(REX leads them to a table, downstage center. They sit. BELLE is rocking; ALVAR, wiping. When REX doffs his hat, the next scene begins.)

*END OF SCENE 1*

*Scene 2*

No lapse. Same setting. Lights down, except on the table that REX, DOC ROBERT, and HATTIE occupy. BELLE and ALVAR are not visible. With the hat, REX has removed his cowboy manner.

DOC ROBERT

You know what they were doing, don't you? Ward-talk. Old habits live on. Okay, I've read the charts, and I've read the program, and on the drive Hattie filled me in a little; so how do you want to take them, one-patient-at-a—  
(slaps forehead)

Sorry. I've got old habits, too. What I meant to say, do you want to cover them one-at-a-time is what I meant to—

HATTIE

(Interrupting)

It's an unusual program. Totally unstructured. So we haven't thought to impose structure on our monthly meetings, either. The consulting psychiatrist we had used to ask about the med-regimens and health and what not, then he and I would just chat with Rex. We're not on rounds, Doctor. We're visiting the country. But we do depend on Rex a lot.

DOC ROBERT

I can understand that. Chronic schizophrenics do not shine in the area of apt verbal communication.

(To REX)

Unless they're different with you?

HATTIE

Rex is the most nonthreatening caregiver I've ever known. They have always trusted him.

REX

(No accent)

I've been with them so long between Jamestown and here that I have come to regard them as family. I enjoy this group, and I agree with the director; they've done well. I wish I could take the credit.

(DOC ROBERT and HATTIE join him in a small smile.)

REX (Continued)

Proceed in any way you choose, Doctor. As Hattie mentioned, we don't have a meeting format, not now. When and if we start using the vulnerability-stress model, that will change. When and if.

DOC ROBERT

(Pleasantly startled)

The vulnerability-stress model?

HATTIE

Oh, I didn't want to bring that up yet. It all hinges on funding.

DOC ROBERT

I *love* the v-s model.

HATTIE

I know. It would be quite the research venue, wouldn't it? The village. But at the moment we don't have much for you to do, I'm afraid.

DOC ROBERT

(Coyly)

What about this little retreat you're hosting. Don't need my input?

HATTIE

I'm not implying—

REX

(Interrupting)

The retreat plan was about money, too. The lack thereof.

HATTIE

It costs money to run this village, and the state is pinched. When Rex came up with the plan, I had my doubts; but he's the one doing favors—he gives much more than he gets back—so in the end I okayed it.

DOC ROBERT

You had doubts?

REX

Which have been talked through. The unorthodoxy of the plan.

HATTIE

Yes. Medical, social. I think I'm comfortable with the idea now. But this is where your input *will* be needed, Doctor.

DOC ROBERT

Intriguing. We'll have to return to the subject.

(BEAT)

Why don't we get on with our visit to the country. I might as well do as my predecessor did. Okay, Rex, you're rooming and boarding five chronic-schizophrenic adults. Three simples, one paranoid, and a hebephrenic with catatonic features. Meds?

REX

They've all been on self-med for years. I guess you knew that. The only one I monitor is the tenderfoot. Sometimes I prompt, and sometimes I don't. When I don't, she takes them within twenty minutes anyway. I intend to DC the monitoring in a week and go to spot checks, as I've done with the rest of them. No undue extrapyramidal symptoms that I know of, so I haven't had to give any PRNs. In short, viva chlorpromazine.

DOC ROBERT

All five of them maintaining on the same drug. Neat.

HATTIE

(Taking a small package from handbag, giving it to REX)

Incidentally, we've brought replenishment for the cookiejar.

REX

Viva.

DOC ROBERT

Okay, Rex. General health.

REX

No one sick, no one hurt. Salubrious country, Doctor. A few minor traumata. Paring-knife cut, broken nail. The outdoor men get sunburnt on occasion.

(To HATTIE)

I just happened to think: Didn't Belle used to have amenorrhoea?

HATTIE

A long time ago, when she was stabilizing on the meds. Remember? You won't have to worry, Rex.

DOC ROBERT

No flu? Not even a cold?

REX

Nothing.

DOC ROBERT

Well, what's next on the check list? Behavior?

REX

The outdoor men had an argument, I was told. They must have settled it among themselves, because I haven't heard any more. Everyone is active in the program. Cleaning, repairing, gardening, cooking, helping with the livestock. Belle rocks, of course, and Alvar paces, and the sun gets up in the morning.

DOC ROBERT

Do they talk?

REX

Some, if I want them to. Alvar likes to talk to one of the cattle, and she talks back. *Mootual echolalia.*

DOC ROBERT

What you're saying, there's nothing wrong with them is what you're saying.

REX

I'm saying, Cowboy Village is ready to play host.

HATTIE

Doctor, when we screened people at Jamestown, we took la crème and la crème only. We wanted chronics who were in good health and stuck to the task and didn't act out. Not much supervision here at the village, you know. It shouldn't surprise anyone that they've done so well.

REX

I don't forget that they are and have always been schizophrenics.

HATTIE

And always will be.

REX

"Always will be" is the name of the program.

DOC ROBERT

But otherwise they are treated as if they were normal? Say one of your simples broke a leg or contracted pneumonia—it's, what, a hundred miles to the nearest emergency room?

REX

We'd do the same as we would if *I* had broken a leg. Call an ambulance. Get help. It's chancy living on the range. Oh, we protect them from the usual risks.

HATTIE

We don't let them ride.

REX

There's only the one mount, and King belongs to me, so they don't argue.

DOC ROBERT

(With subjective interest)

"King?" That quarter horse? I bet he can run.



REX

Could, in his day. If I ran him now, someone else would have to “burn the breeze,” though.

HATTIE

(Holding to the original subject)

What we have are demonstration animals. Tending to them is Rex’s job, but we do let the villagers contribute. They haul the feed and wash the curry comb and so on. We just want them to be around animals. Under supervision.

DOC ROBERT

(Wryly)

What you have is a petting zoo of Epicurus.

HATTIE

(Puzzled)

Doctor?

REX

(Chuckling)

And not the garden thereof.

HATTIE

(Pretending to get it)

Oh. Epicurus.

DOC ROBERT

(Back to business)

You say it’s working, they’re doing well. I congratulate you. But one does think of the legal aspects. A medico does.

HATTIE

Each of them is his own legal guardian, and everyone had to sign a comprehensive waiver. I said “his.” Meaning, except Belle. Her mom has retained guardianship. We could have Belle challenge that; I know she’d win.

REX

I don’t think Mom is going to sue anyone. She’s a grad of the state hospital, too.

DOC ROBERT

Belle misses her?

REX

Oh, that. She hadn’t asked to call Mom until she knew you were coming. Ward-talk, as you put it.

DOC ROBERT

Mom's an outpatient?

HATTIE

Alcoholic. She spent every winter in the ETOH-abuse unit for I don't know how long.

(Amused)

They think she got pregnant in the hospital.

REX

(Amused)

She did have a fall baby. Never got dry, though. She'd come to see Belle every weekend; often she was too drunk to let in.

HATTIE

She would smuggle in nondecaffeinated in a thermos. A mother's love. We tried to stop it, but Mom knew the ways of the ward.

DOC ROBERT

Ah. The "other coffee" Belle wanted.

REX

I caught the mom one time, and I took the thermos and asked if she had nondecaffeinated in it. Know what she said? "Test and see." We couldn't test on Belle; wouldn't have worked anyway, she was loaded with psychotropics; and Mom knew we wouldn't bother to send it to a lab.

HATTIE

(Singing)

O test and see . . .

(Talking, to DOC ROBERT)

As you can imagine, Rex and I have a lot of ward stories to tell.

DOC ROBERT

(Sticking to business)

Any caffeine-withdrawal symptoms?

REX

They could be masked.

DOC ROBERT

Okay, should we touch on conversion? introjection? cyclothymia? Let's not. I won't ask about vegetative signs, either. What I'm saying, this is Cowboy Village is what I'm saying. But I would like to stick with Belle a minute. She's new, she's female, and she has a complicated diagnostic history. I don't worry about the simples or the paranoid.

HATTIE

(A bit apprehensive)  
You worry about her?

DOC ROBERT

I'm interested.

REX

(Thinking he's caught the drift)  
If you haven't read the P300-component study they did with—

DOC ROBERT

(Interrupting)  
She manifested pretty well on that. Look, I'm not worried. I'm just earning my living. What do you want me to do, turn in my caduceus?

(Laughs. REX and HATTIE seem relieved.)

DOC ROBERT (Continued)

I mean, this woman had episodes of catatonia. Now you've jerked her out of a known, safe environment and stuck her in the middle of, of—

REX

The Missouri Drift?

DOC ROBERT

Missouri Drift. The very name is textbook. You take this woman who has spent half of her life in an institution and set her on the Missouri Drift? I mean, what I have to know, have there been any posturings is what I have to know.

REX

Only the first evening.

DOC ROBERT

She went into a catatonic posture? Indulge me.

REX

Pardon?

HATTIE

(To REX)  
I think what he wants you to do is show him is what he wants you to do.

DOC ROBERT

Thanks.

REX

Oh. Let me see.

(He turns in his chair and puts both feet on another table, knees flexed and apart.)

REX (Continued)

How does that look? She did it right here in the room.

HATTIE

And she had on a skirt, too, naturally.

DOC ROBERT

Was there anything sexual in her, eh, presentation?

REX

(Chuckling, swinging his feet down)

Not that Belle knew of.

HATTIE

(Amused)

She was reviving another old habit. When Belle first arrived in Jamestown, she learned she could get negative reinforcement that way. Everyone would yell at her, just like Mom.

REX

But then we hooked her on positive reinforcement. She's no idiot.

DOC ROBERT

(Beginning to show disappointment)

You extinguished the posturing with behavior mod?

HATTIE

Yes. She didn't do it again till now.

DOC ROBERT

(Showing disappointment)

That's not catatonic. That's *cataleptoid* posturing. Darn. When I read the chart, I was wondering why she hadn't been *treated* as catatonic. I thought the behavior mod was just a part of *milieu*.

What we've got is one hoary misdiagnosis is what we've got.

(REX and HATTIE pretend to share DOC ROBERT'S chagrin; and now, as he perks up a bit, they seem to follow suit.)

DOC ROBERT (Continued)

Oh, well, they didn't have the DSM back then; and, who knows, *I* may be the one to diagnose her correctly. She's a hebephrenic, I have no doubt of that. I imagine the laughing and the neologism have continued?

REX

Mainly when someone is trying to transact with her.

DOC ROBERT

As at the hospital?

HATTIE

(With conviction)

If she had been inappropriate, we would not have let her come. The routines you mentioned have gotten more frequent, true enough, but that's only due to the change; and we're helping her with the change.

REX

Laughing and neologism *have* become more frequent since she arrived. That does not mean they happen *frequently*. Once a day, perhaps.

DOC ROBERT

(Knowingly)

We're getting to my point. The so-show is-you. You know, I'm a proponent of humanist-existential treatment theory. That's what attracted me to this program. The so-show is-you cannot be overemphasized. Okay, Cowboy Village. Cowboy Village is one more attempt to answer the big question: What do we *do* with them? We have subjected them to psychotherapy, behavior modification, electroshock, megavitamins. Nothing has worked. Not really. Perhaps we can't do anything with them. So if Cowboy Village presumes to think it can, I have a question for Cowboy Village: Are you the garden of Epicurus, or are you the ultimate back ward?

(He finishes his coffee in one long draught. REX and HATTIE are concentrating.)

DOC ROBERT (Continued)

Okay, you bring a hebephrenic from a controlled environment to a hitherto-controlled environment. Why was the one environment controlled? Many reasons, among them to limit so-show stimuli. Why do I say the other one is "hitherto"-controlled? Because into this environment, into this healing glade—or isolate human warehouse—you are admitting visitors from reality.

(He eyes REX and HATTIE, who have begun to look somewhat defensive.)

DOC ROBERT (Continued)

What did you call them, the Western Riding Association?

REX

No, *Western American Writing*. It's a magazine. An academic quarterly.

HATTIE

They are the editorial staff, two men and two women. Middle-aged professors. We did check them out thoroughly, and I didn't see they'd pose much of a threat.

REX

It's just a three-day annual retreat, nothing like a convention or a mountain-man rendezvous, nothing boisterous.

DOC ROBERT

And they know of Cowboy Village?

REX

(Self-consciously)

I'm something of an antiquarian of Western Americana, and I happen to subscribe to *Western American Writing*. When I read they were looking for a place to hold the retreat, I wrote in and told them about the village, and right away they wanted to come. But I had to talk to Hattie, of course; then she approved it, and I wrote back to them and detailed the arrangements.

DOC ROBERT

You're doing this for money.

HATTIE

(With pique)

For money for the village, Doctor.

DOC ROBERT

(To REX)

What did you tell them about our people?

REX

Oh, that they're mentally handicapped. The truth. That they're harmless, in remission—

DOC ROBERT

(Interrupting)

They're "in remission"? Chronic schizophrenics *in remission*?

HATTIE

In a remittent state, then. What does it matter? Were we supposed to give these academics a psychiatry workshop? They didn't seem concerned. But you—

DOC ROBERT

(Interrupting)  
We're closing in on my point.

REX

I might have said "remitting well," I don't know.

HATTIE

(To DOC ROBERT)  
I hope you don't mean to imply that Rex and I are doing this for personal gain.

DOC ROBERT

(Calmly)  
Have you considered that I might have meant you are doing this to raise money for the village might have been what I might have meant?

HATTIE

Fine, and that's true. We want to break even. We want to institute the vulnerability-stress model. If the retreat goes as planned, we can do another and another and be able to afford all this. But now you're suggesting that we have misrepresented the villagers. Remission, remittent, remitting—I mean, *please*.

DOC ROBERT

You're right, Hattie, it doesn't matter; I'm with you. Chronic schizophrenia eludes the very mind of medicine. How can I not be with you? I only want to have an inkling of what the guests will expect. I don't need to tell you that even the educated can have a misperception of the, eh, "mentally handicapped," do I?

(To REX)

Okay. Smoking, drinking, doping. Men and women who live in reality do these things.

REX

That was a tough one. We have rules, but I doubt *Western American Writing* would have gone for a church camp. As I arranged it, they can smoke in allotted outdoor areas, and they can drink in this room, bringing their own, of course. Drugs weren't mentioned. I don't think these book boyeros are into anything controlled.

DOC ROBERT

Interacting?

REX

(Chuckling)  
I wrote them half a page on the subject.

HATTIE

(Over her pique)  
He did stress that the villagers weren't to be given tobacco or drink.

REX

I said, we have nice, quiet people here who won't need special treatment. Don't avoid them, don't seek them out. Regard them as you would anyone else.

DOC ROBERT

We have gotten to my point.

(During the following, as he grows intense, DOC ROBERT rises and begins to pace. This continues to the end of the scene.)

DOC ROBERT (Continued)

Take Alvar. I don't worry about Alvar. He's appropriate. But what if the guests heard him talking to the cow and laughed at him?

(BEAT)

Belle. Say the editors of *Western American Writing* were in this room and so was Belle, and then she went into the cataleptoid posture you demonstrated.

(To HATTIE)

Wearing a skirt, too, naturally.

(REX and HATTIE watch and listen, as if knowing that a verbal response is not expected every time.)

DOC ROBERT (Continued)

I like Cowboy Village. The program has my blessing. To the ageold question of what to do with them, you have answered: Always will be, give up the dream of habilitation, let them subsist. I *think* your answer is correct, which would certainly put you in the vanguard of medical thought. I mean, the normalization movement is no longer moving. What's left but Cowboy Village?

(Pause. He gives a sad smile.)

Always will be. To that you have added: *And nothing is wrong*. I like that less. Your retreat plan has come of the notion that nothing is wrong. Hattie, the medical and *so-show* unorthodoxy of the plan gave you doubts. I still have them. If Belle were to scandalize a guest, so what? I'm no guardian of propriety. My neck is not that kind of red. No, *she's* the one I'd be concerned about. What would all these new *so-show* stimuli have done to *her?*—to the simples and the paranoid, too, but Belle is the key. It's the *SO-SHOW is-you*.

(He should be pacing quickly now. Lights begin to come up on the rest of the stage, and it is seen that behind the bar ALVAR, too, is pacing, only not in the same direction as DOC ROBERT. BELLE is not rocking.)

END OF SCENE 2



*Scene 3*

No lapse. Same setting and characters.

DOC ROBERT (Continued)

Cowboy Village is a so-show experiment in which you have succeeded; and now in order to maintain and expand it, you are innovating. You are submitting these nice, quiet people to unknown visitors from reality. Who can predict the psycho-so-show consequences? If the innovation does not work, your entire program may be discredited.

(REX and HATTIE are tense. DOC ROBERT puts his hands on the back of his chair and looks benignly down on them. ALVAR stops pacing.)

DOC ROBERT (Continued)

Let me tell you why I am giving a tentative okay to the retreat plan.

(REX and HATTIE seem relieved again.)

DOC ROBERT (Continued)

I want it to work. I want to be part of instituting the v-s model someday. There is a risk, but if I don't let you try, I may never get a chance to do the research I dote on. What I'm saying, I want to know what'll happen is what I'm saying. Belle's my bellwether. Belle comes through intact, the plan works.

(Checks his watch)

We ought to be off, Hattie. I've got volleyball tonight. Rex, have a good retreat. We'll be back in a few days to hear how it went.

REX

(With good humor)

To check up on the garden of Epicurus, eh, or should I make that the human warehouse?

(DOC ROBERT winks.)

HATTIE

(To DOC ROBERT, embarrassed)

You know, I didn't quite follow you for a minute there. I wasn't impugning your motives. I simply didn't understand. My apologies.

(DOC ROBERT shrugs.)

HATTIE (Continued)

I think what you propose is equitable. A test. We can't ask for more than that; and I know Belle and the others will do just fine. Rex?

REX

I was getting a bit apprehensive. I thought Doc Robert was going to demand a security patrol.

(Chuckles)

No, these folks won't disappoint you. I've known them most of their lives, don't forget.

(Checks pocketwatch)

It's late. Would you want to stay to dinner?

(REX and HATTIE get up, REX donning his cowboy hat—and manner. They all begin to leave.)

HATTIE

(Looking at DOC ROBERT)

I guess we can't.

REX

(Cowboy accent)

You sure? We got some throat-ticklin chuck. Bull cheese and whistleberries. And if you chose to spread your soogans, Alvar and me could burn you some states' eggs in the morning, that or huckydummy or splatter dabs with larripy dope on them.

DOC ROBERT

Can't this time, maybe next week. I'll want to look at that horse, too.

REX

I'll buck-strap him.

HATTIE

(To REX)

Thank you for everything. Call me when they've left.

DOC ROBERT

Ta-ta, Alvar. Keep on going. Belle, don't worry, I'm sure you'll find which world it is.

(ALVAR leans on the bar, squinting. BELLE does not rock.

Exeunt REX, HATTIE, and DOC ROBERT, stage left.)

REX

(Off-stage)

Be with you pronto, Doc.

(Enter REX, stage left.)

REX (Continued)

(Sotto voce, pleased)

Now ain't you got the wagon manners. Salty dogs, the two of you. But have you ever raised a *pillrollin mansito* before? He sure injuned up on *me*.

(Exit REX, grinning, stage left. ALVAR leans on the stage-left end of the bar. He delivers the following speech in a monotone and with pauses. Throughout, he seems to be addressing someone at the stage-right end of the bar, on which lights should go down a bit; and when CHARLES V “actually” appears there, ALVAR shows no reaction. He pronounces *v*, *ll*, *z*, and *d* in the Castillian manner.)

ALVAR

They removed my own head with a knife and screwed this one on . . . They wanted me to have the head of a cow when I went to the pass . . . The others would know what the head meant: They shall not pass through El Paso . . . You had nothing to do with it, Your Majesty . . . Narváez was to blame for what happened . . . I know he wanted to kill me and so did Dorantes and Castillo and Estevanico . . . But Your Majesty sent me to the Río de las Palmas . . . I couldn't find a room, because my hands weren't working . . . So I took Dorante and Castillo and Estevanico and got medicine from the Indians.

(Enter, stage right, CHARLES V, King of Spain, in robe and crown. He goes slowly to the stage-right end of the bar and stands with his back to the audience. CHARLES V is played by the REX actor.)

ALVAR (Continued)

I had to reach the cattle so that I would be safe . . . There were Christians among them, Your Majesty said . . . But the Indians did not give me medicine . . . I had to eat tuna and chacan and deer-tallow . . . Estevanico went to El Paso and traded an emerald for a house . . . The emerald had a garden of Eden in it . . . Your Majesty bestowed it on me in exchange for a miracle . . . The Indians burned Estevanico in the house he took . . . When I reached the cattle, they blessed me.

(Exit, slowly, stage right, CHARLES V.)

ALVAR (Continued)

They said Dorantes and Castillo were in jail . . . That was how I got the name of Cow's Head . . . I wanted my own head again, but nothing could pass through El Paso . . . The Christians grew hair . . . The head medicine man belonged to Your Majesty.

(A “real” *moo* is heard, off-stage. ALVAR freezes, listening for more. BELLE starts rocking. A long moment of silence.)

(BLACKOUT)

*END OF SCENE 3*

*Scene 4*

*SETTING:* On a butte near Cowboy Village. In fact, on the proscenium. No props or scenery.

*AT RISE:* Afternoon, four days later. Enter KATE, BEN, TONY, and SARAH, the editors of *Western American Writing*. They are winded from having climbed up but in a pleasant mood.

SARAH

I'm glad these things are flat on top.

BEN

That's why the French called them "buttes." In the Southwest, they were "mesas." Different term, identical landform.

KATE

Oh, come on, Ben.

BEN

Very similar.

TONY

Sarah, could I use that canteen I know you brought?

SARAH

You must be referring to the one you knew we wouldn't need on a short climb.

KATE

"Mesa" I can understand. From the Latin *mensa*, table. "Butte" is another story. The French *butte* means more like a ridge, I thought.

BEN

Now, you be nice, Kate.

TONY

(Hunkering wearily)

I'd never make a "footerman."

(BEN hunkers, too, SARAH and KATE eye the men.)

SARAH

(To KATE)  
We can't do that, can we?

KATE

Not *in publico*.

(Grimacing, TONY and BEN switch to sitting on the ground. The ladies join them.)

BEN

"Footerman." I believe that came out of the range wars in Wyoming.

TONY

It was never an honorific anyway.

SARAH

Tony will just have to settle for "cow prod."

TONY

I'll put that in my vita.

KATE

(Peering into the distance)  
All right, what have we got out there?

(The others look, too.)

BEN

That has to be Baker, Montana.

SARAH

You can see the road leading into it.

TONY

(Ironically)  
Baker, Montana, a town with the hair on.

KATE

That no ghost ever left. There's a toponym:  
(Pointing)  
White Butte.

TONY

Which one?

SARAH

I think I enjoy the plains so much *because* of the monotony. The dry heat, too.

BEN

Siouxland.

KATE

(Pointing)

Little Missouri and the mal país.

TONY

No, Ben, Fred Manfred worked east of here, I think.

BEN

(With a grin)

*Lord Grizzly?*

TONY

A ways east.

SARAH

(Pointing)

And Cowboy Village. I'm sure we can agree on that.

KATE

What a place name. Who ever heard of a ranch calling itself a village?

TONY

Who ever heard of a ranch with a saloon—an “N-A” saloon at that?

BEN

Kate will give us the Latin.

KATE

*Villa*, now that you mention it. Country estate. They've headed back toward the original meaning.

SARAH

*Rex* and crew.

KATE

I don't know where all this Latin is coming from. I should be thinking of a hammock and a double gin and tonic.

TONY

Could be a sign of incipient schizophrenia.

(They look at one another, then laugh in spite of themselves, though with restraint.)

BEN

(Carefully changing the subject)

We should be thinking about where the hell this quarterly is going to go. We've been on retreat for four days, and all we've managed to do is eat, drink, and be wary.

SARAH

I can't speak for the rest of you, but I've been having a very fun time. I have even made progress on my book. Not in the research department, of course—thinking and notetaking. And I haven't minded sitting in the sun, either. I must be the irresponsible new kid. *No* sense of identification with *Western American Writing*.

KATE

We're glad to have you, Sarah. You are the first historian to work on the quarterly.

SARAH

Isn't it nice how we can cross-discipline when we've got a common mania?

TONY

Well, historiography is part of western writing.

KATE

I've been enjoying myself, I'll admit. But then Tony has been having me read all this pulp.

BEN

(Feigning nausea)

God . . .

TONY

Just letting the new editor know where I'm at.

KATE

It was only fair, Ben, considering all those Jungian tomes *you* put me through.

BEN

(Snickers)

Just reminding you where the old editor came from. Oh, I'm happy enough to be an associate, as I've said two or three hundred times. I knew when I took the sabbatical that my editorship would be finished. I took it anyway. I'm at a point of wanting to get into another role. I was only drawing attention to what *Western American Writing* has been; I know my imprint is fading.

KATE

I doubt that. But among the board—among the readership, even—there is a perception that *Western American Writing* has gone adrift. And perception is reality.

TONY

No, what is perceived is thought to be real.

BEN

No, what is said to be perceived is real.

SARAH

Perception is treated as reality?

KATE

What is said to be perceived is treated as real. How's that? And academia's nothing but so-called perception.

TONY

We're not real?

BEN

(Firmly)

The West is real.

KATE

Oh, let's not get into semiotics—

TONY

(Interrupting, with a grin)

Yet.

KATE

(Cowgirl accent)

Ain't you cutting a shine, Tony.

(No accent)

I've been with the quarterly from the start, like Ben, and I do have ideas on where it should go. But I haven't said them. You have ideas, and you haven't said them, either.

BEN

(With tact)

We've been waiting for *you* to say the words.

KATE

That's all I've ever done—say and write words. I'm a linguist. Well, we went on this retreat so that I wouldn't have to say them alone.

(BEAT)



Here is what I have come up with: I want each of you, and me, to make a policy statement. Right now. Forget modesty and tact and the other arts of faculty intrigue. Speak as though you were the only one charged to set the direction of *Western American Writing*.

SARAH

I don't have my notes.

KATE

Good. I want it to be impromptu—and concise. And no Q and A afterwards. We'll just think about everything we've said, then at the colloquium this evening we'll do a joint statement. Agreed?

BEN, SARAH, TONY

Why not . . . a good approach . . . sure.

KATE

(Smiling at BEN)

Okay, let's start with our distinguished grissel heel.

BEN

(After a moment's concentration)

*Western American Writing* began at the sundown of the western film and the serious western novel, and as a last-minute mythographer it has had to do too much description and analysis. Scientific methodology is alien to the spirit *del oeste*. Only through the religious attitude of mind as seen in the Tao of native ceremonialism may the meaning of the region be apprehended. I'm going to have many contributions from religious thinkers and psychologists.

(Pause. SARAH and TONY have not looked at BEN, nor do they do so now; and BEN will not look at them or they at each other during or between or after their own speeches. Each of the three is self-absorbed, responding only to KATE. Presently, KATE nods at SARAH.)

SARAH

*Western American Writing* is a journal of literary criticism. This criticism depends on a literature that in turn depends on historical data that are too often warped or misinterpreted or incomplete. The West must be fully known to be fully understood. New data are coming in now, shedding light on the old, and these have to be published so that we can begin revising our flawed inheritance. If historiography is part of literature, then, too, is creative writing a part of history. I won't try to change the literary bent of the journal, but I will be opening its pages to historiographers, who must be allowed to contribute to this important revision.

(Pause. KATE nods at TONY.)

TONY

(Almost petulantly)

Literature is everything that is printed and read. Western literature is everything that is printed and read about the West. There has been too much exclusionism at the quarterly. The West as myth, the West as chronicle, the West as terrain—fine, I’ve read all that. But the West is pop culture, too. It’s still got the ear of the media. I plan to bring in some hot, young culture critics and let them do honor to the ongoing West—and to those writers of yesterday whom millions have loved but academia shuns.

(Pause. KATE shuts her eyes and inhales deeply.)

KATE

(With vatic intensity)

The function of the neopostmodern is to establish the essential predicate. *West* is the expression of a nerve stimulus in sounds. Imparting it one to another is to rattle a chain of expressed unities. But the chain of expressed unities has been mistaken for the chain of expressing unities. *The text is West* and *text is the West* are examples. The predicate must be wholly *and formally* contained in the essence of the subject. Now, *text is West* or *the text is the West* or *West is text* or *the West is the text*—these show what I would call essential predication. The function of *Western American Writing* is to be prolative.

(Long pause. They begin to relax.)

BEN

(To KATE)

Jacques Derrida?

KATE

(Emerging from trance)

Not exactly, but watch out—I get humorless when it comes to Derrida.

SARAH

Well, I’m looking forward to our colloquium. We should have, ah, quite a time of it. When Tony said—

BEN

(Interrupting)

Oops, no discussion till then.

SARAH

Oops, forgot.

KATE

I think we ought to enjoy our last afternoon on the Missouri Drift, simply *devote* ourselves to the enjoyment. Who knows when we’ll be back.

TONY

Not next year?

KATE

I don't know. What do you all think?

BEN

Cowboy Village has got my vote, "N-A" saloon notwithstanding.

(During the following episode, they talk sotto voce, as though not wanting to be overheard.)

SARAH

It's magnificent what they've done for these people. They get to live out of doors and do things, when they could be rotting away in some institution; and they haven't been any trouble to me at all.

TONY

Has Belle put the touch on anyone else?

BEN

Coffee. Yeah, I took Rex's advice and ignored it. She didn't seem offended.

KATE

Those three little men have done a great job cleaning the rooms and changing the bunks. I wish I could thank them; but Rex said, "No slackin of the jaw." I smile, and they don't smile back. I've only seen one of them smile; that was when he had tripped on a rug and fallen.

BEN

Schizophrenic behavior?

TONY

When I was a TA, "schiz" used to be a term of endearment.

KATE

If we don't understand a word, what do we do? Make it into a hypocorism.

SARAH

Even the mooing doesn't upset *me*. I always manage to read to the end of chapter. I'll have to vote pro-Cowboy Village, with Ben.

BEN

Sarah's never gone on retreat to Moab or Alamosa.

KATE

We've never had such good cooking as this.

TONY

But I don't like the way they won't look at you. I walk into the room, and Belle's there, and I feel that I'm not. *I* get schizy.

KATE

So your thumb is down?

TONY

(Changing his tune)

I'm not going that far. Being a little schizy hasn't interfered with my work. And Rex let me hook up the RV, which meant ice and cold brew—no small consideration.

SARAH

I do wish we could talk with them.

KATE

Perhaps they know only cowboy dialect.

BEN

Or Spanish. Have you ever listened to Alvar?

(They resume talking at normal volume.)

KATE

No need to hurry into a decision. We'll have months to think about it. As for me, right now I'm thinking about that hammock and gin and tonic.

BEN

I have to get in some yoga before the evening.

TONY

(With mock momentousness)

Well, the essay has been written.

(The others exchange glances of mock awe.)

TONY (Continued)

All I have to do is crib a title.

SARAH

I have to call Jerry, and that's it. He'll want to know that I haven't been poisoned or sodomized.

(They rise with effort, brushing themselves.)

BEN

(To SARAH)

Better wait till after the colloquium.

KATE

Now, Ben, you know we're going to have a good time, and coming up with a statement will just be a part of it.

TONY

Just a party.

SARAH

(To KATE)

Race you to the Jeep.

KATE

(Smiling)

We'll race you *with* the Jeep.

(Exeunt KATE and SARAH.)

TONY

(Cowboy accent)

I got me a dose of calico-queen fever, Ben.

BEN

From *our* old painted cats?

TONY

(No accent, chuckling)

Well, no, but that schiz in the saloon is looking pretty normal. You can see how bad it is.

BEN

You are missing the wife, aren't you, Tony?

TONY

Not to mention the girlfriend.

(Exeunt BEN and TONY)

(BLACKOUT)

*END OF SCENE 4*

*Scene 5*

**SETTING:** In the Cowboy Village saloon. Over the bar, a streamer with the words, ADIÓS WESTERN AMERICAN WRITING. On the stage-right end of the bar, a tape-player.

**AT RISE:** Late that evening. BEN, KATE, TONY and SARAH are at a table, center stage, which has glasses and liquor and mix bottles on it. An ice chest on the floor. In front of KATE, a steno pad and a pen. Having descended from a peak of drunken hilarity, they are somewhat dulled and snappish. BELLE is at her usual table, drinking coffee and rocking. Her face has been lavishly made up. ALVAR is again leaning on the bar and wiping it. The music on the tape-player—Gene Autry or the Sons of the Pioneers—is too loud.

BEN

Is western writing to be art, or is it to be pulp? Finished work or just material?

SARAH

*Everything* is material, even art. You know that.

KATE

(Brandishing pen)

We can't put down questions. All I'm getting are questions.

(To SARAH, kidding)

And you want to be the Thucydides of Pocatello.

SARAH

(Not angry)

Leave Thucydides out of this. Why don't you go and postdeconstruct yourself.

TONY

Amen, history department.

BEN

(To KATE)

Put down everything Sarah said: "Even art is material." Put it down. That's not in the form of a question.

TONY

Well, what have we got at this point?

KATE

(Showing blank pad)  
A dribble of booze—or is it a tear?

BEN

(To KATE)  
And then put one word: *cowchips*.

SARAH

You always were the editorializer, Ben.

(Amid all this, enter REX, stage left. He glances at ALVAR and BELLE and discreetly turns down the tape-player. Then, grinning, he approaches the “colloquium.” He is not noticed until he speaks.)

TONY

Maybe we should forget the whole damned thing.

KATE

I could draft a statement. Then you could put your massive heads together and see if you wanted to endorse it. Would that suit you?

REX

(Cowboy accent)  
Evenin, folks.

(BEN, KATE, TONY and SARAH turn to him with patronizing amiability. They make an effort not to act drunk.)

BEN

How’s it going, Rex?

REX

Keno.

TONY

Still up and at it?

REX

Oh, me and my happy jack been ridin bobtail guard on the men.

SARAH

That was the plummiest dinner you served us. Every one has been a delight.

REX

Glad you all felt like chawin.

KATE

The whole Cowboy Village experience has been a plum.

BEN

(To his tablemates)

We could ask him. He subscribes.

TONY

Yeah, hey, Rex, how come you think we've gone adrift?

REX

(BEAT)

Adrift? Said who? Ain't nothing of the maverick in any a one of you, as I can tell.

KATE

We mean the quarterly. We have to find a new direction.

REX

*Western American Writin*, eh?

SARAH

What would *you* do to change it?

REX

(BEAT)

It's a good scald now, I'm thinking. I'd let it hang.

(BEN, KATE, TONY and SARAH exchange a glance. They seem a bit let down.)

KATE

I suppose we'll have to consider that, too.

TONY

Let's give the man a drink.

BEN

You'll join us, Rex?

REX

Naw, I just wanted a look-see at the big powwow; and I don't lay the dust no more. I'm draggin it to the nose bag, thank you. Got to herd the kitchen string.

SARAH

Thank *you*, Rex. Thank you for an enchanting retreat.



REX

Thanks for makin medicine here with us.

BEN, KATE, TONY, SARAH

Thank you . . . Thank *you* . . .

REX

(Beginning to leave)

Don't stay out with the dry cattle too late.

KATE

(Indicating ALVAR and BELLE)

Oh. Are we bothering your, eh, staff?

REX

They're settin deep in their tree. Don't get wire-edged on account of them. See you in the morning?

TONY

(Gesturing at table)

If *we* can hang.

(Exit REX, with a wave, stage left.)

TONY (Continued)

(Cowboy accent, mimicking REX)

Let it hang. Don't get wire-edged. That old mountain canary would have us believing we ain't got our spurs tangled up.

BEN

What if he's right? What if this perception that we've gone adrift is nothing but a canard?

KATE

Well, I *am* hearing things. We have some more "medicine-makin" to go, I'm afraid.

SARAH

(Getting serious)

Would you permit me to offer a statement? I don't mean the big statement, not that. I just want to put a few words on the table and see where they roll. Would you have any objection?

(No response. SARAH drinks, and the others follow suit.)

SARAH (Continued)

I guess I have a problem with you, Kate. Don't misunderstand me; it's not personal. I admire the brio and the erudition in you. When a woman of your achievement was named editor, I was

delighted. And now I know that you're very good company. It's not you, the woman. The problem—let me think—but the problem has to do with the nomenclature of your field. Semiotics. Neopoststructural linguistics. I'm not impugning your disciplinary choice. No, I'm just saying that the nomenclature you bring to *Western American Writing* seems to have no relevance to western American writing; and I think the words you use have prevented us from articulating a joint thesis.

KATE

(Hiding hurt pride)

Thesis. Do we agree on Hegel, then?

SARAH

(Placatingly)

Oh, I'm sure we agree on a lot. I'm only—

BEN

(Interrupting)

Let's not forget all the time and spirit that Kate's devoted to the quarterly. What she does in the seminar room is not germane.

SARAH

But she's bringing it here.

TONY

(No accent, dander beginning to rise)

I think Sarah is being too tactful. Who's going to have the editorship next, an electrical engineer? "West is circuitry." I've listened to nothing but mumbo jumbo since I got to the retreat, and I want you all to know that as of right now I'll have no part of it. Or in it.

KATE

(Throwing up her hands)

So what should we do? Is there something I can do? Maybe each of us could edit one issue per annum.

SARAH

You're not addressing my point.

KATE

(Cuttingly)

Now we're having a little antithesis to my thesis, are we, a reproach to my approach?

SARAH

(With emotion)

Open up to the realities of the West, Kate. They're gorgeous. They don't ask you to be analytical.

KATE

Sarah, I've read your books. Your idiom is so consentaneous, it's dead. No wonder you feel at home in the dry monotony of the plains. The point is not my area of study. We're attempting to set the journal in a new direction, and editing one issue each per annum could be the way to go—the synthesis, if you *must* have the Hegelian paradigm.

TONY

(To KATE)

I know what you'd do with your issue: load it with the kind of prose that belongs on an insecticide container.

BEN

(To TONY)

What would yours be? A crock of antique drugstore pulp.

TONY

(With deadly point)

Yours would be all graphics, wouldn't it? Mandalas painted by native American sheep, using their own dung.

BEN

(Hissing)

You're a sociologist.

TONY

You're Carl G. Jung in a John B. Stetson. You can lead a horse to Waters, but you can't make him sink.

(BEN gets up, overturning his chair. TONY does likewise. Their right arms hang lax, set to draw. During the face-off, KATE and SARAH watch in alternating shock and semi-amusement. ALVAR and BELLE are unaffected.)

BEN

(Cowboy accent, coldly)

Dally your tongue.

TONY

(Cowboy accent)

Or you'll give me a thumb whippin? Naw, you ain't top screw no more.

BEN

You're runnin a blazer on me, Cat-eye. Well, I don't take much to this kind of chin music, so you better haul in your neck. You don't get a rope shook at you but once.

TONY

I wouldn't put no saddle on you, and I ain't swallow-forkin, neither.

BEN

I always knowed you was plumb cultus. Should have guessed you'd be a yack.

TONY

(Tensed to draw)

Dig for your blue lightnin, Big Augur.

BEN

(Tensed to draw)

You must be needin a wet nurse.

(He "draws," but only a pointed right index finger. The "shot" is the utterance accompanying this.)

BEN (Continued)

*Vardis Fisher.*

(Tony recoils a bit, then smirks.)

TONY

Now you ain't got the bulge on me, do you?

(He "draws," à la BEN.)

TONY (Continued)

*Zane Grey.*

BEN

(Snorting, then "drawing")

*Bud Guthrie.*

TONY

("Drawing")

*Luke Short.*

BEN

("Drawing")

*Harvey Fergusson.*

TONY

("Drawing")

*Max Brand.*

BEN

(“Drawing,” with taunting emphasis)

*Walter Van Tilburg Clark.*

TONY

(Sneering as he “draws”)

*Louie L’Amour.*

(This last “shot” has evidently driven BEN to the brink of true violence. He inches toward TONY, fist cocked.)

BEN

(Slowly, through his teeth)

You hoolihanin Monkey-Ward cow milker . . .

(Fed up, KATE now leaps in between the men, arms outspread.)

KATE

(Cowgirl accent)

*Mary Austin!*

(The situation is immediately defused. BEN and TONY hang their heads in puzzlement.)

BEN, TONY

(Mumbling, no accent)

Mary Austin? . . . Mary Austin . . .

KATE

(Hectoringly)

We horned the bush enough here, and we don’t need the two of you haulin hell out if its shuck. Neither one of you’s got beans in his wheel anyhow. So *hua!*

(BEN and TONY pick up their chairs and sink into them. KATE, having reestablished her dominion, sits last. A long pause. The four begin to look exhausted. They don’t touch their drinks.)

SARAH

I started all this, didn’t I? With my unthinking statement. I’m sorry.

KATE

(Gently but with the accent)

This here wild mare’s milk was what done it, ma’am. All’s skookum now, tween me and you, at least.

(To the men, sternly)

You henwranglers fit to do a little hatchet-buryin?

TONY

(Wearily, extending hand to BEN)

Sure. I went a bit too far into the next dimension, old hoss.

BEN

(Wearily, shaking hand)

So did I.

SARAH

(Eyeing KATE)

I think I'm beginning to understand. You're . . . Cattle Kate, aren't you?

KATE

Kin savvy.

(The spent KATE crosses her arms. She rocks a bit throughout the following, as though trying to hang onto her new role by keeping herself awake.)

SARAH

Cattle Kate. That's different. That may even be the solution. I bet if *Cattle* Kate were to sit down and write a—

(Interrupting herself)

never mind. Let's not reiterate the word. But if Cattle Kate were to do that, not a single one of us would argue with her. I'd just bet on it.

TONY

I doubt that either Kate or Cattle Kate would be up to doing much more this evening.

SARAH

Oh, right. A joint you-know-what is not going to be written at Cowboy Village. So much we have to admit. We'll simply have to keep working on one.

BEN

(Yawning)

Have to.

TONY

(Yawning)

Have to keep going.

(Hearing this, ALVAR grins and begins to pace. TONY sends a friendly little wave at BELLE, who does not see it. KATE is starting to nod off. SARAH has noticed TONY'S wave.)

SARAH

(Smiling toward BELLE)

Isn't she sweet? Almost cloying, with that face on.

TONY

She'll pass.

SARAH

I really wonder what she's thinking.

BEN

(Rising with effort)

She's thinking it's bedtime, and so am I.

SARAH

(Rising)

Well, I'm voting with you again. I told Jerry I'd be out of here by six in the morning.

(To KATE, who has nodded off)

Do you wish to come along, Professor?

BEN

(Cowboy accent, touching KATE's shoulder)

Awright, let's shake a bush. You too roistered to amble?

(No accent, to SARAH)

Make a hand here.

(SARAH helps BEN pry KATE's arms loose and get her to her feet. TONY does not move. He is looking at BELLE.)

SARAH

(To KATE)

Here we go. Text is bed.

(BEN and SARAH walk KATE toward the entrance, stage left.)

KATE

(Moaning, with accent)

I must of hollered calf rope . . .

SARAH

At least you're moving. Tony can't get up.

TONY

(Indicating table mess)

I thought I'd play janitor.

BEN

(Cowboy accent, winking)

And maybe do some rotten-loggin?

SARAH

Night, Alvar. Night, Belle. Thank you mucho. Good luck.

(Exeunt BEN, KATE, and SARAH. Pause. TONY continues looking warmly at BELLE. She is the only thing keeping him awake. BELLE rocks, ALVAR paces, and the music drones on.)

TONY

So how did you enjoy the party, Belle? You should have been sitting with us; *I* would have enjoyed it more.

(Pause. Now, deciding to make a move, TONY gets up and with bottle and glass strolls over to BELLE. He sits at the table next to hers.)

TONY

(With a little discomfort)

We didn't get introduced, did we? Rex told us your name, but you don't know mine. So. I'm Tony Tipton, the Chico Kid. Cal State Chico, that is.

(BEAT)

Yeah, I run my mouth for a living. Have you been to California?

BELLE

He must be the barhop.

TONY

(BEAT)

Barhop? I have gone barhopping in my time. Never met a barhop, though.

BELLE

He's the barhop.

TONY

Oh, you mean like "carhop." I guess that's what I am: a barhop. Tonight, anyway.

(Suggestively, to himself)

Though I'd rather be a *Belle*-hop.

BELLE

(Laughs loudly)

Barhops? Little parhops?



(TONY joins in and laughs longer than she. BELLE keeps grinning till exit.)

TONY

Parhobs. Indeed. You're just full of coinages; and you're a nice-looking woman, too.

(BEAT)

Yeah, I teach in California. I've written articles.

(Wanting to proposition her, uncertain)

Since I'm the barhop, I ought to get you a drink. But I understand that's a no-no.

BELLE

I want some coffee.

TONY

(Looking into her cup)

Warm it up?

BELLE

I want some other coffee.

TONY

(After pondering)

Tired of the house blend, are you saying?

BELLE

(Echoing)

Are you saying?

TONY

Well, I have some real good "other" in my R—

(Cowboy accent)

—in my pitchin Betsy—

(No accent)

—and I wouldn't mind fixing you a cup.

BELLE

You a cup.

(TONY thinks a moment, then smiles broadly.)

TONY

(With quiet deliberation)

Cook some coffee.

BELLE

Cook some coffee.

Text is bed. TONY

Text is bed. BELLE

Let's do it. (Showing lust) TONY

Let's do it. BELLE

Let's go. (Getting up) TONY

Let's go. (Getting up) BELLE

(BELLE, however, does not wait for the next cue. She walks mechanically to stage left. Exit BELLE. TONY grabs a bottle with one hand, collects the ice chest in the other, and reels after her.)

Larrupin truck! TONY  
(Attempting a cowboy whoop)

(Exit TONY. ALVAR continues pacing and grinning. Soon he begins to imitate TONY's reeling run. The remote voice of BELLE gives a laugh. ALVAR hurries to the tape-player and turns it off. He waits, not grinning, listening for more.)

(BLACKOUT)

*END OF SCENE 5*

Scene 6

*AT RISE:* Very early the next morning. Same setting. The banner is still up. Bottles and tape-player are gone, not the drinkers' leavings. BELLE is at her table with messed hair, smudged makeup, rumpled clothes, and only one boot on. Expressionless. She is drinking coffee and not rocking.

(The sound of REX humming "Home On the Range." Enter REX, with bustle. He goes to the coffeemaker as though expecting to have to make a new batch, then realizes that it's already hot.)

REX

(Cowboy accent, to himself)

Potman must have came in early.

(While getting himself a cup and filling it, he notices BELLE; for the moment, however, he does not look at her.)

REX (Continued)

Mornin, Belle. Hit the cook shack yet? Better fag to it, less you don't want none of the coosie's hen-fruit stir. He can stake you to a fill.

(Humming, he looks up at the streamer and removes it with a yank.)

You the one fixed jamoka? . . . Maybe it was them.

(Leans on bar, surveying room, not BELLE)

They tailed out of here in their skunk wagons at sunup and didn't even wait to line their flue. They just lit a shuck on the trail to Tucson or Chico or Laramie or Pocatello as though they hadn't did the high lonesome all evenin. Some tough old wisdom bringers, don't you think?

(Leaves the bar, cup in hand, to view the drinkers' table mess)

But they sure left us looking like a siwash outfit.

(Inspects a half-empty glass)

What time *did* you roll your cotton this morning? You, Leaky Mouth.

(Looks at BELLE and at first is amused)

Forget the cook shack, Belle. I see you're in need of the dippin vat. Where you slept anyway, in a Tucson bed with them marmots?

(The truth dawning, he looks more and more shaken.)

I was wonderin why I hadn't heared you quit the dive. Thought you was still under the hen skin. I thought—

(Pathetically, to himself)

Ain't I entitled to a warm corner?

(His upset now turning to wrath)

One of them old punks was gallin after you, huh? That it? That it? I knowed there was a one-eyed man in the game. I should have kept the double doors swingin. Mossy horn that I am, I would have knocked his ears down. Yeah, I should have stuck to the partida. I'm callin the lawdog!

(Calming himself, then pleadingly)  
I've always cut a rusty for you, Belle. Now I want you to start waggin your chin. Tell me who the long rider was.

(BELLE shows no reaction.)

REX (Continued)

He feed you some bravemaker, too?

(Pause. REX removes his hat, thus dropping his cowboy manner but regaining a bit of self-possession. He tries to be the counselor. However, turmoil shows through at times.)

REX (Continued)

(No accent, calmly)

Belle, I want us to talk a little. Okay?

(Sits in chair that TONY occupied in the evening)

Tony Tipton, wasn't it? I saw him watching you, but I thought he'd know better. This could be serious.

(BEAT)

Let me begin the story. I stopped in at eleven or so. They were drinking. You and Alvar were in the room. I turned down the music. I should have stayed on till they went to bed.

(Fidgets with hatbrim)

But they seemed to be having an ordinary good time.

(BEAT)

Can you tell me what happened next? Did the others leave? The women and the other man?

(BELLE seems to be paying attention. Her coffee-sipping becomes more frequent.)

REX (Continued)

Or did he take you somewhere, meet you somewhere?

BELLE

(In a monotone)

He had some other coffee.

REX

(With pain)

Oh, lord. He picked up on that, huh?

BELLE

I got some other coffee.

REX

Where? He took you to that RV of his? Oh, lord.

(Pause. BELLE does not answer. REX now tries to be therapeutic.)

REX (Continued)

You didn't *congress* with him, did you?

BELLE

The congressman.

REX

You know what I'm saying.

BELLE

He didn't have a TV. The kiss-man.

(REX drops hat, puts face in hands, groans.)

REX

He kissed you. He kissed you where, the lips?

(BELLE pulls down the hem on her skirt.)

REX (Continued)

You had all your clothes on? You would have had all your clothes on, like now. You did have all your clothes on?

BELLE

He spilled my coffee.

REX

(Slowly)

There is one thing I have to know. Listen. Were you in a catatonic—*cataleptoid* posture?

(BELLE begins to part and raise both knees.)

REX (Continued)

No need to demonstrate. I worked at the hospital.

BELLE

(Lowering knees)

He tipped me over.

REX

(Throwing up hands)

Enough, I've got it, thank you!

(REX retrieves hat, exhales at length. He seems controlled again.)

REX (Continued)

I'm not blaming you, but this could be serious. It *is* serious. I did not think that anyone would lay an eye of the wanton sort on an unprepossessing chronic. Oh, you're not ugly. I just didn't think anyone would look at you in that manner. Perhaps I've been a clinician too long. But that man did something to you, and now we've got to do something about *it*. The question is, to whom do we report. If we told the sheriff, you'd have to be examined today, you know. How are you feeling?

(Looks at her, then shouts)

Where's your boot! Other boot!

(BELLE does not react. REX shakes head and goes on talking reasonably.)

REX (Continued)

The one we should report to is Hattie. I am supposed to phone her anyway. If that man and you *congressed*, I'll have to tell her—understand?—and Hattie will have to tell Doc Robert, because he'll want to know what these “new so-show stimuli” have done to you; and when he hears that you've been poked by an “unknown visitor from reality,” he may think you have not come through intact. You're the key, Belle. You heard him talking. You come through intact, the plan works. Doc Robert may think you haven't and close us down.

(Gets up and paces through the following, speaking half to her, half to himself, his tone emotional.)

I grew old on the back wards, and all that kept me working was the dream of where I would go at the end of my Jamestown purgatory. Some quiet rincón in the badlands. Cowboy Village? I didn't intend there to be one. Then there was, and you all moved in to partake of the good air and the solitude, and I saw I *had* wanted company. I thought Cowboy Village would be a retreat where I could dawdle out my term, and you'd get as close to health as you'd ever get, and we'd all enjoy a life of meditiveness. Meditiveness. That's what the old need; that's what the chronic need. If others thought to stop here, they'd be welcome, too. But Cowboy Village would not be the scene of mayhem. Sex-crime would not happen at Cowboy Village. Then these goddamned sagebrush philosophers show up and—

(Pauses to collect himself)

No, Cowboy Village would not allow that, and I'm beginning to wonder if it really happened—if what I think happened to you really happened. I might have misread you. You've got a cockeyed sense of humor, I know; perhaps you're guying the old boy. If it happened, we'll have to report it. If it didn't, we won't, will we? If it didn't happen, we don't say anything; and life on the quiet range goes on.

(Hopefully)

Comfort me, Belle.

BELLE

I called my mom.

REX

(Stops pacing, stricken)

You called your mom.

BELLE

I called my mom.

REX

After that man was done with you? in the night? you called from here?

(BEAT)

What did Mom say?

BELLE

You're not supposed to call.

REX

*You're* not?

BELLE

(Echoing)

*You're* not?

REX

That's enough.

BELLE

That's enough.

REX

(Shouting)

Want me to lock up the coffee!

(Smiling, BELLE seems to give in. REX is deflated. His tone becomes cold and sad.)

REX (Continued)

You talked to your mom. Now I won't have to call Hattie. Mom's already done it.

(To himself, not donning hat)

The ultimate back ward.

(Exit REX, slowly. Through the following monologue BELLE continues to smile, no matter what its content. She uses two tones: harsh-maternal, in the imperative mood; flat, the rest of the time. She takes no note of MOM's appearance.)

BELLE

Don't go and sit on the sidewalk. Don't ever raise your legs.

(BEAT)

I was five years old, and Kitty was two. Mom was backing out of the garage in the morning, and I couldn't see anyone. I couldn't see. But I knew I had a sister.

(BEAT)

You get in the living room, damn your dumb head.

(BEAT)

Kitty was in the living room. I was in the living room. I wanted to watch the station wagon back out.

(Enter MOM, stage right, in bathrobe and hairnet. Carrying a drink, she goes unsteadily to the stage-right end of the bar, on which the lights have gone down a bit, and stands with her back to the audience. MOM is played by the KATE actress.)

BELLE (Continued)

Watch the kid, I told you.

(BEAT)

If the screen door opened, that was no concern of mine. I didn't touch it. Kitty must have done it.

(BEAT)

Never say that word again.

(BEAT)

The bumper was moving quick, and she was running like an animal out of a tree. I didn't know her name.

(Exit MOM, slowly, stage right.)

BELLE (Continued)

See what you've done.

(BEAT)

On the sidewalk where the tire had moved—juice from a chipmunk. I didn't know which was Kitty.

(BEAT)

Get in the living room.

(BEAT)

She had been in there with me.

(BEAT)

Don't raise your legs. Think about it the rest of your damn, dumb life.

(BEAT)

I didn't know which one.

(Laughs loudly)

Chipmunks? Little chickmumps?

(BLACKOUT)

*END OF SCENE 6*



Scene 7

AT RISE:

Early afternoon, the next day. Same setting. The room is tidy now. REX is at the middle of the bar, hat on. ALVAR, who has changed into working-cowboy togs, is behind the bar. He and REX are drinking coffee. At the stage-left end of the bar, two unused Styrofoam cups have been set out. The leather belt REX was working on lies at his elbow; next to it, his pocket watch. ALVAR is leaning and squinting, not pacing.

REX

(Cowboy accent, morosely)

I never meant to run no cat wagon in the badlands, and that's what I done. It was me brung in that there chippy. I might have *knowed* she'd take to the badlands.

(Snickers bitterly)

Cowboy to the crazy? Pimp, too.

(Turns, gazes out over heads of audience, checks watch)

One o'clock, they said. They just can't wait to hang up our rope. Won't be long.

(Turns back)

Well, you've done to ride the river with, Alvar, but it seems I'll be playin a lone hand now. My saddle's goin to be sold, and I'll have to quit the flats. They'll herd you and them back to Jim River country, I expect. Me, I'll be on the high lope, waterin at night, or holed up in a swag till I whiff the pogonip and buck out among the willows someday. That won't be long, neither.

(Fingers belt with regret)

I don't travel like a colt no more. I'm hard-wintered; and it's between hay and grass for me, here to the end.

(Turns and looks out again)

That ain't a duster. That ain't a wohaw bunch on the road to the tallow factory. It's them.

(BEAT)

Doc Robert and Miss Hattie got hold of the jerk line, nothin I can do.

(REX turns back, removes hat, gives sigh of resignation.)

REX (Continued)

(No accent)

Where is she, do you know?

(ALVAR seems not to have heard.)

REX (Continued)

I told her to go easy on the makeup. I didn't want things to look as bad as they are.

ALVAR

Yes.

REX

You do know?

ALVAR

They were walking in dogtown.

REX

They? Al, I'm not interested in your Cabeza de Vaca expedition.

ALVAR

She was with them.

REX

So Belle went strolling in marmot town with the conquistadores, eh?

(BEAT)

Go find her, will you?

(ALVAR grabs the two unused cups, not lifting them.)

REX (Continued)

I'll see to it that the cups get filled.

(ALVAR lets go of the cups, then exits in a hurry, stage left. REX fiddles with belt, checks pocket watch and puts it away, glances out over audience. In what follows, he rehearses what he may say to DOC ROBERT and HATTIE, pacing slowly the while.)

REX (Continued)

(With exaggerated calm concern)

But she seemed perfectly all right. If there had been an assault, it would have shown, don't you think? You say she called Mom—according to the mom. You know Belle's mother, Hattie. Mythomania. So symptomatic of ETOH abuse.

(He pauses to think a moment.)

REX (Continued)

(Wordly-wise)

Of course, I have a pretty good idea of what happened and who was involved. But I didn't want to notify the authorities until I could consult with you, Doctor. I thought a delicate situation such as this would need a professional's touch; and maybe you'd choose to deal with it in-house. I'm really glad you've come.

(Pauses to think a moment)

REX (Continued)

(With remorse)

I should have stayed until they went to bed. No getting around that. No excuse. I am unworthy of—

(Interrupts himself, donning hat)

REX (Continued)

(Cowboy accent, loudly)

She said *which*? Why, that filly's throwin dust to cloud the trail, Miss Hattie!

(Enter HATTIE, stage left, unchanged. REX quickly removes hat and stops pacing.)

HATTIE

Beg pardon, Rex?

REX

(No accent)

Oh. Hello. Doc Robert's not with you?

HATTIE

He's talking to Belle and Alvar outside.

REX

(Trying to hide his discomfiture)

I knew he'd want to talk to both of them. Alvar was on duty that evening.

HATTIE

On duty . . . It must have been quite an experience for him and everybody. I didn't have time to ask when I called, but—how was it?

(REX grins sadly and shakes head. He fills one of the unused cups and hands it to HATTIE.)

REX

That's a hard one.

HATTIE

(Receiving cup)

Thanks. What do you mean?

REX

I don't have the answer.

HATTIE

Are you saying the whole retreat went badly? You didn't give me that impression on the phone; and *you* didn't call either, as I had thought you would.

REX

I'm not saying the whole retreat was bad.

HATTIE

(Smiling)

How was it?

REX

(Half-puzzled)

Enjoyable. Until the last night—no, including the last night, for me. I only heard about it the next day. Up to that point—

(Off stage, DOC ROBERT humming "Home On the Range."  
Enter, stage left, DOC ROBERT in show-cowboy regalia, ALVAR following. The doctor seems preoccupied. ALVAR immediately fills the second unused cup and sets it on the bar.)

DOC ROBERT

(Going to bar)

Rex.

REX

Doctor.

HATTIE

(To DOC ROBERT)

She's coming.

(Claims cups)

I said hello to King. You know, Rex, that is one very fine-looking horse. Is he at stud? I'm sure you've made a buck or two on him. I'd like to have him, Rex. Are you entertaining offers?

REX

(With humility)

Guess not. I'll be riding him more now . . .

DOC ROBERT

I understand. But you will let him come visit, won't you, when I get my own bunch? Usual fee?

(Sotto voce)

I'm checking into an outfit within ten miles of here. Three thousand acres. I contacted the owner's rep this morning.

(Back to business)

Okay, the retreat. Are you going to tell us what happened?

HATTIE

(Gesturing)

Table, gents?

(As they seat themselves, REX takes on a look of remorse.)

REX

(Glumly)

I should have stayed until they went to bed. There is no—

DOC ROBERT

(Interrupting)

Are you saying, went to bed the first night, is that what you're saying? I'm hearing "they," too. They the villagers or they the guests? Who were "they," and why do you feel you should have stayed up with them? Which night?

REX

Well, I'm talking about the guests.

DOC ROBERT

I don't think we should be doing that. I think we should be talking about our own people. We can talk about *Western American Writing* ancillarily.

HATTIE

Go on, Rex. Tell us what happened at the retreat.

(Bemused, REX has now taken on a look of exaggerated calm concern.)

REX

(To HATTIE)

She seemed perfectly all right. If there had been an assault, it would have—

DOC ROBERT

(Interrupting)

So we're still on the guests. One of the visiting women getting hurt—in a drunken mêlée, no doubt—wouldn't say much for your booze program. No matter. To heck with the guests. Let's move on to our own. I mean. *Belle* getting hurt . . .

REX

(Wordly-wise, to DOC ROBERT)

I thought a delicate situation such as this would need a professional's touch.

DOC ROBERT

Of course it would.

REX

I'm really glad you've come, Doctor.

DOC ROBERT

(Pleased)

It's my job, thank you. No, I have to admit it's a pleasure, too.

(Cowboy accent)

I couldn't wait to hit the breeze for Cowboy Village.

HATTIE

(To REX)

You said if there had been an assault—

DOC ROBERT

(Interrupting, no accent)

Are we having a meeting? What I'm saying, if we're having a meeting, let's get on with it is what I'm saying.

(Checks wristwatch)

The owner's rep is going to be at that ranch in half an hour, and so, with your cooperation, am I. I *can't* blow this deal.

(BEAT)

Where was I? Ah: Belle getting hurt, that would be . . .

(DOC ROBERT and HATTIE look at REX, who seems to know that "this is it.")

REX

(Coming clean)

Well, I overestimated the man and underestimated the rum. The fault was mine.

HATTIE

You wouldn't have been the victim or the perpetrator.

REX

I hope her mom agreed.

(Eyeing HATTIE and DOC ROBERT)

But she didn't, am I correct? The guardian would hold the licensed houseparent accountable. So would the law.

(DOC ROBERT and HATTIE exchange a glance into which nothing can be read. Enter BELLE, stage left. She is in working-cowgirl garb, including jeans. Her face has been lightly and attractively made up. BELLE seems relaxed and, if not quite "normal," at least "better." She has turned into a shy awkward woman; friendly, but still not looking at anyone.)

REX (Continued)

(Not noticing BELLE)

In view of which, I'm ready to accept whatever determination—

HATTIE

(Interrupting, smiling at BELLE)

Here's our key lady now.

(Sotto voce, to REX and DOC ROBERT)

She looks terrific. I don't get it.

(BELLE pauses at stage-left end of bar. ALVAR fills a cups and sets it out. HATTIE rises, approaches BELLE, and gives her a quick hug.)

HATTIE (Continued)

(To BELLE)

Aren't you the cute little cow bunny. You must be feeling okay.

BELLE

(Taking cup)

Do you want coffee?

HATTIE

Oh, I think I have some. Good of you to ask. Would you like to sit with us?

(Guides BELLE to their table)

We want you to sit with us a minute. Any objections, Doctor?

DOC ROBERT

Why not? She can help us get done.

(HATTIE pulls up a chair for BELLE next to her own, and they sit. REX looks uncomfortable. He seems to withdraw mentally from the conversation.)

DOC ROBERT

Belle, I have a question or two.

HATTIE

(To BELLE)

Listen to Doc Robert, now. This is very important.

(BELLE nods.)

DOC ROBERT

(After agonizing)  
Ah—any complaints?

BELLE

Physical complaints, you mean?

DOC ROBERT

Any.

BELLE

I can't tell.

DOC ROBERT

Right.

(Agonizes)  
Ah—how does the world seem to you?

BELLE

This one?

(DOC ROBERT says nothing.)

BELLE (Continued)

It's turning, but it's not turning my way. It's not turning against me, either.

(DOC ROBERT and HATTIE show delight.)

DOC ROBERT

(Slowly, to BELLE)  
I do believe you have found which world it is.  
(To REX and HATTIE)

I'd say she's one very intact individual. I'd even say the retreat had a benign psycho-so-show effect on her. Note the improvement of interpersonal transaction and historicity? Your plan worked. Congratulations.

HATTIE

(Squeezing BELLE)  
I'm so happy for you and all of us.

DOC ROBERT

(Patting BELLE's hand)  
We're done. You can get back on your schedule now.



HATTIE

(Digging in handbag)

Oh, one more agendum.

(Pulls out an old stuffed squirrel or chipmunk and gives it to BELLE. REX watches in growing confusion.)

HATTIE (Continued)

We brought this along.

BELLE

(Laughs loudly)

This isn't what I asked for!

(But she holds onto the toy, continues smiling.)

HATTIE

(Kiddingly)

I know. You didn't expect us to bring in contraband, did you?

(To REX)

Her mom said she called.

REX

(Guardedly)

Yeah?

HATTIE

"I want some other coffee," etc. Well, Mom knew *I* wouldn't deliver a no-no item, but she wanted to send something.

BELLE

(Still smiling)

I hate it.

DOC ROBERT

(To HATTIE, starting to rise)

End of meeting. Okay?

REX

(With point)

One second, Doctor.

(To HATTIE)

I think we know that stuffed animal.

HATTIE

Of course. Who could forget? I was telling Doctor about it on the trip down.

REX

Belle slipped in the unit shower room and broke a wrist.

HATTIE

Had to be ten years ago.

REX

Yeah, and Mom gave her that stuffed animal. It had belonged to the young kid sibling, the one Mom ran over and—

DOC ROBERT

(Interrupting, nodding at BELLE)

You don't have to retell it. I don't see where you're going with this.

REX

Broken bone, stuffed animal. Why stuffed animal now?

(To HATTIE)

What else did Mom say Belle said?

DOC ROBERT

Rex, you're acting schizotypal.

REX

I'll get right into it, then. This "cute little cow bunny" was congressed with, and one Professor Tipton of *Western American Writing* did the deed. Then she called Mom, who I assumed would have reported it to you. Seems she didn't. That I can't understand. Anyway, I'm reporting it now. The retreat plan did not work quite so well as you think, and I am guilty of negligence. In view of which, I'll accept whatever determination you come to.

HATTIE

(Puzzled)

Enjoyable, you said—up to that last night.

DOC ROBERT

Are you saying Belle said she was raped, is that what you're saying she said?

REX

He took her to his RV. I found her here in the morning, messed up, half naked. They had already gone.

HATTIE

(To BELLE)

Did you tell Rex the truth?

DOC ROBERT

(To REX)

What you're saying, Belle said she was raped is what you're saying.

(To BELLE)

What are *you* saying?

BELLE

(Echoing, still smiling)

What are *you* saying?

DOC ROBERT

*I'm* saying, if you had been raped we'd know it is what *I'm* saying.

(To REX and HATTIE)

That's what I'm saying.

HATTIE

(To BELLE, gently)

Can you tell us a little more? You don't have to worry, nothing bad will happen.

(BEAT)

When the man took you to his RV, did he hurt you?

BELLE

(Still smiling)

I can't tell.

HATTIE

You can tell if you were hurt.

BELLE

No broken bones.

HATTIE

Very good.

(To REX)

I don't think it happened. Whatever she said at the beginning—she might have been trying to please you.

(To DOC ROBERT)

You could check.

DOC ROBERT

(Ironically)

You mean, do an exam, take my gloves and check for internal traumata?

BELLE

He spilled my coffee.

DOC ROBERT

(As before, to BELLE)

Can't check chemical or biochemical evidence. Forgot to bring the lab. Darn.

REX

(With tact)

*Something* could have happened. Wouldn't have had to be—congress.

HATTIE

She doesn't know anything about sex. She hasn't even thought it. That posturing is mere infantilism.

DOC ROBERT

(No longer ironic)

We're beginning to narrow in on my point. Say I did an exam, and the results were positive: a few little traumata. What would these tell me? Rape? No, only that sex had occurred. Any woman not used to doing it could show traumata.

REX

(With alarmed concern)

We have to think of the moral side, too. We're running a group home here, and I had briefed them. I told every one of those dudes not to consort with our people—"no slackin of the jaw," I said, in fact. Tipton should not have done what he did, even if Belle consented, even if she hauled him to the bunk.

DOC ROBERT

We're narrowing. Suppose Hattie—excuse me, Hattie, bear with—suppose Hattie had stayed in Cowboy Village during the retreat, met Tipton or some other academic stud, and then slept with him. Would you have made a moral is-you of it?

REX

Well, no, but Hattie isn't a chronic.

DOC ROBERT

Let's keep moving. Suppose Hattie—again, Hattie, bear with, I know you're joyously wedded—suppose she had been raped. What would you have done?

REX

Notified the sheriff, gotten medical assistance—

DOC ROBERT

(Interrupting, with a note of triumph)

As you would for anyone. And if you broke a leg, you would call an ambulance, get help. Remember? You said, "It's chancy living on the range," ironist that you were at the time. So: Hattie's raped at Cowboy Village, you notify the sheriff, get medical assistance; Belle's raped, you do nothing. How come?

REX

(Perplexed)

But *was* she—congressed with?

DOC ROBERT

You told us she said she had been, and you've known the woman most of her life—"She's no idiot," you had assured me—and you did nothing.

(Pause. REX scratches head. HATTIE and DOC ROBERT watch him. BELLE goes on smiling; ALVAR, leaning.)

REX

(Worldly-wise)

I thought I'd consult with you first. You might have wanted to deal with it in-house.

DOC ROBERT

Oh, and if Hattie had been raped?

REX

(As before)

Chronics are different, I think you'll agree. Didn't you voice concern about the impact that visitors from reality would have on them? Allow me to quote you: "Who can predict the psycho-show consequences." It was a delicate matter, and I proceeded in a way in which no harm would come to anybody.

HATTIE

(To DOC ROBERT)

He has a point.

DOC ROBERT

(Unfazed)

He's not even getting *at* the point. But now let's quench the megrim that Professor Tipton or anyone else "did the deed." Look.

(Taking BELLE's chin in hand)

If it had happened, the evidence would be right here in this cute little cow-bunny face. There is none. Look. What we see in it is the radiance of nothing-is-wrong.

BELLE

My mom gave me that other lipstick.

DOC ROBERT

(Not listening)

Hmm.

(Releases BELLE's chin)

HATTIE

Which brings us to—?

DOC ROBERT

My point. The *so-show-NON-is-you*. I was in fact concerned about the obtrusion of reality on Cowboy Village—too much, it seems.

(Patting BELLE's hand)

My bellwether has proved that. Not only is she intact, she's meliorating. The retreat worked. The Cowboy Village program is *on*.

(BEAT)

No violence happened. Nonviolent acts *don't matter*. We're not guardians of propriety. We're here to do tests.

REX

(Eyes becoming large)

Do you mean—

DOC ROBERT

(Interrupting)

I mean, the village is *not* a petting zoo of Epicurus is what I mean. I didn't get it at first, but nothing *was* wrong; the program *was* working. I've got it now.

REX

(Beginning to show relief)

The act of going to bed with someone doesn't matter?

HATTIE

(To REX)

I think what the doctor is saying, the act of bedding someone is not violent in and of itself is I think what the doctor is saying.

DOC ROBERT

Or seduction or being seduced.

REX

(Nodding)

So if Belle wants to sleep with a man, I shouldn't interfere.

DOC ROBERT

You wouldn't with Hattie.

HATTIE

(Smiling)

We're out of the back wards, Rex.

DOC ROBERT

We're beyond the group-home movement and normalization, too, and *always will be*.

(Recollecting himself, checking wristwatch)

I have to meet that rep in two minutes.

(Rising)

Oh, I think I've got somebody to fund the vulnerability-stress model. We could be ready to go by spring.

REX

(Pleased, rising)

The heck.

HATTIE

(Rising)

The best till last.

BELLE

(Rising, still smiling)

I'm the bellhop.

(DOC ROBERT, HATTIE, and REX look at one another.)

DOC ROBERT

(Winks)

Don't let her be *that*.

(BEAT)

One reason I want that ranch, I could live there and do the v-s model here. Neat, eh? Rex, why don't you take your pickup and tag along behind. I could use local support at the bargaining session.

(DOC ROBERT, HATTIE, and REX move to stage left.)

REX

(Indicting BELLE and ALVAR)

They'll be okay alone?

HATTIE

(Amused)

They're not *infants*.

(REX shrugs, smiles.)

DOC ROBERT

We'd come back to the village, but I have to hit the sack early. Dawn flight to Chicago. Tenth Congress of Native American Health-care Professionals. Make big medicine. Drink heap tiswin. Yeah.

(On hearing the word *medicine*, ALVAR starts pacing behind the bar, not in agitation. BELLE reacts to the word *congress*.)

BELLE

He's the congressman.

DOC ROBERT

(Grinning at BELLE)

I am, for three days.

DOC ROBERT, HATTIE

Ciao, Belle . . . Ta-ta, Alvar; keep going . . .

(Exeunt DOC ROBERT and HATTIE, stage left. BELLE pauses at stage-left end of bar, toy dangling from her hand. REX does not leave immediately. He puts on the hat.)

REX

(Cowboy accent, with good humor)

Well, seems we ain't an isolate human warehouse after all. No ridge runnin for me. Yeah-hoo!

(Claps hands, does a little jig)

REX (Continued)

(To BELLE)

I won't ever know if you was throwin dust to cloud the trail or what. As the chief said, don't matter. I can't read the Scriptures to you, but I *am* roddin this spread. We won't have you turning it into no hog ranch.

(Gives BELLE a pat on the cheek, starts off)

REX (Continued)

(To BELLE and ALVAR)

You two keep your moccasins greased, now. I wouldn't want you gettin caught short.

(Exit REX, stage left.)

*END OF SCENE 7*



Scene 8

*AT RISE:* No lapse. ALVAR and BELLE.

(ALVAR is pacing, BELLE, no longer smiling, puts cup on bar. ALVAR fills it, sets it back, and resumes pacing.)

ALVAR

(To BELLE, seemingly)

That Christian, did he stick you?

BELLE

(In reply, seemingly)

The barhop.

ALVAR

He took the espada in one hand and the trunk of broken glass in the other . . . I would have been next.

BELLE

He passed out on me. Damn, dumb dude.

(She goes to chair she occupied in Scene 6 and puts toy in it, then occupies chair REX used in that scene.)

BELLE (Continued)

(To toy, harsh-maternal)

Think about it the rest of your damn, dumb life.

(ALVAR pauses, facing the stage-left exit, and gives a loud *moo*; resumes pacing. Now he begins talking as he did at the end of Scene 3. During this, BELLE mimics the gestures REX used in his interrogation of her in Scene 6, e.g., shaking head, looking hopeful, raising arms, putting face in hands; and she directs all of this at toy.)

ALVAR

Espada y baúl. Dorantes got out . . . but I was with the head medicine man . . . The Indians didn't have a chance at your dead queen . . . One Christian made it through, and I saw him in a suburb of El Paso . . . He was how your queen died . . . The medicine man said that the Christian held the espada of Dorantes . . . I reached the animals. They were afraid . . . Baúl lleno de vidrio astillado . . . The medicine man took me to the Río de las Palmas, and the Christian struck her . . . He was Dorantes.

(A "real" *moo* is heard, off stage. ALVAR freezes. BELLE stops mimicking. Both smile. Pause. ALVAR leans on the bar and

sings—to the tune of “Home On the Range,” more or less.)

ALVAR (Continued)

(Singing)

Oh leave me alone to chew on my bone  
And don't let them kick me away,  
I'm a short-handled pup, I ain't gettin up,  
Tra-la-la-ti-yi-yi-yea.

(BELLE picks up toy and strangles it with delight.)

ALVAR, BELLE

(Singing)

Tra-la-la-ti-yi-yi-yea.

(BLACKOUT)

*END OF PLAY*