

# DESPERATE AMBROSE

A FARCE IN THREE ACTS

By Donald Payton

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*DESPERATE AMBROSE*

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**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(SIX MEN, SIX WOMEN, TWO EXTRAS)*

PANHANDLE JAKE (M).....The grizzly, whiskered, easy-going bellhop/desk clerk. Wears faded jeans, plaid shirt, old cowboy boots, and a battered western hat that, like Jake himself, has seen better days. He's spent the better part (or in his case, worse part) of his sixty years as a prospector. *(85 lines)*

AMBROSE GROVES.....A meek and mild-mannered young feller from the East, but when he arrives in Dead Man's Gulch, he is mistaken for Homer the Kid, the sure-shootin' desperado of the West. In Act One, he is wearing the kind of suit that a fella like Ambrose would wear when traveling from Kansas City to Sacramento. When "trapped" at Dead Man's Gulch, he changes to cowboy boots, ten-gallon hat, chaps, and general all-round Western garb. If this regalia is impossible to locate, Ambrose could be equally convincing in plaid shirt and jeans. A ten-gallon hat would help. *(284 lines)*

BERT MILLER (M).....Ambrose's partner from the East, dresses just like Ambrose. *(119 lines)*

SHERIFF CRANDEL (M).....The sheriff of Dead Man's Gulch, but, alas and alack, he is really the culprit who's causin' all the commotion in these here parts. He is intact with badge, two six-guns, and everything else that goes into the regalia of a villainy sheriff. *(169 lines)*

HOOT OWL PETE (M).....An old-time grizzly hombre. Dressed in - you guessed it - solid black. Wears boots,

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spurs, black sombrero, and a scowl from ear to ear. (Accessories may be simplified.)  
(138 lines)

STINKWEED (M).....Hoot Owl's hireling. A none-too-bright would-be rustler. Also rigged in Western garb. (51 lines)

NANCY MARTIN (F) .....Pretty, twenty-one years of age, the heroine. She comes to Dead Man's Gulch to take over the hotel that was left to her and her sister by her late uncle. (110 lines)

ANNE MARTIN (F).....Nancy's sister. She is nineteen, also pretty. Influenced by her sister, but still has a mind of her own. (94 lines)

TILLIE (F).....Chaperone and traveling companion of the sisters. She's loud and brusque, unmarried but looking - in Jake's direction. Probably in her mid-fifties. (43 lines)

BETH (F) .....Matronly, about forty-five, a Western type. She takes the girls under her wing when they arrive in this wild and woolly Western town. She carries a gun, wears a Western style skirt, cowboy hat and boots. (Substitutions for this apparel may be made if these items are too difficult to locate.) (143 lines)

MRS. SPOOL (F).....A middle-aged, gossipy gadabout resident of Dead Man's Gulch. (29 lines)

LENA (F).....Mrs. Spool's teen daughter. (24 lines)

JUDGE (M) .....The newly-elected judge of Dead Man's Gulch (13 lines)

**NOTE:** The women may wear old-fashioned floor-length gowns typical of the 1880's. However, the time of the play may be changed from 1880 to the present, in

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which case each woman would wear bright cotton dresses suitable for her own age and character.

*All characters and situations herein depicted are purely imaginary. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is sure enough a coincidence!*

**PLACE**

The Dead Man's Gulch Hotel

**TIME**

ACT ONE: The afternoon of a hot, sultry day in the year 1880 (*or present time*).

ACT TWO:

Scene 1: A few hours later.

Scene 2: That evening.

ACT THREE: A few hours later.

**HAND PROPERTIES**

Suitcase - Ambrose

Banjo – Ambrose

Trunk - Two Men

Suitcase - Tillie

Kitchen Plate - Tillie

Pistol - Beth

Guns and holsters - Hoot Owl, Sheriff, Stinkweed

Knife - Hoot Owl

A raw steak on a plate - Anne

Table service and food for two (*on table beginning of Act Two*)

Ambrose and Bert

Envelope - Sheriff

Autograph book or sheet of paper - Lena

Pencil - Lena

Badges - Sheriff, Hoot Owl, and Stinkweed

Big red handkerchief - Sheriff

Coffee pot - Jake

Cup – Ambrose

ACT ONE

**SETTING:**

*The Dead Man's Gulch Hotel, located in the little desert town of Dead Man's Gulch. There are three openings, one left, which is the main entrance to the hotel; one right, which leads to the kitchen; and the one center, which leads to the remainder of the hotel. There are two windows, one on each side of the door, left. A rather large desk is at up right with a chair behind it. A lamp, either kerosene or gasoline, is on the desk, as well as a register. There are three tables, one up left, one down left, and the last one down center. These tables are covered with plaid table cloths, and chairs surround all the tables. Another chair is down right. Add other furniture as desired.*

**AT RISE:**

*PANHANDLE JAKE, the gnarled, grizzly, whiskered, slow-moving bellhop/desk clerk, is sitting at the desk, drifting to sleep. As his head droops he jumps, shakes his head sleepily, scratches himself with eyes closed, and then starts nodding off again.*

**JAKE:** *(Talking to himself.)* Jake! *(He jumps, barely awake, opens eyes.)* Huh? *(Sharply.)* Wake up. *(Nodding again, eyes closed, mumbling.)* I'm awake. *(Jumps.)* Jake! *(Shakes head to clear it.)* You hear me, Jake? *(Nodding drowsily.)* Yeah...I hear ya. *(Catches himself again; sharply.)* Jake, you can't go to sleep. *(Nodding.)* Oh yes I can. *(Jerks head up.)* Jake, *(Sleepily.)* Huh? *(Sternly.)* You wouldn't be sleepin' like this if your old Grandpaw Griswald walked in here. You'd be on your feet. *(He looks up, blinks.)* I shore would. *(Sharply.)* You'd be on your feet 'cause his motto was "a day's work fer a day's pay." *(Eyes wide.)* I'd be on my feet 'cause they hung him thirty years ago fer cattle rustlin'. *(Disgustedly.)* Jake, I give up. *(Nodding, sleepily.)* Then that makes two of us.

*He nods, scoots down in the chair, and continues to scoot down until he is out of sight of anyone entering left. AMBROSE GROVES and BERT MILLER enter left. They are dusty, dirty, and have the appearance of two bedraggled individuals who have just walked a great distance. AMBROSE is carrying a suitcase and banjo. He lets these fall to the floor with a bang, then wipes the perspiration from his face with the back of his hand.*

**AMBROSE:** Whew!

**BERT:** I was never so tired in my life. *(He walks with great effort to the table center and drops into a chair.)*

**AMBROSE:** Me, too. *(He practically falls into a chair.)* And hungry. At least I ain't thirsty no more.

**BERT:** I should hope not, as much as you drank out there at that horse trough.

**AMBROSE:** Well, after trampin' all over the desert for two days, I felt like a horse. Boy, am I tired. *(He falls back into the chair.)*

**BERT:** *(Calling.)* Hey, waiter.

**AMBROSE:** Watcha callin' a waiter for, Bert?

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BERT: Something to eat, dunce. This is a hotel . . . said so out there . . . and I'm hungry.

AMBROSE: Watcha gonna buy it with?

BERT: I'd dry dishes for the rest of my life before I'd just sit here and starve. (*Disgustedly.*) Trampin' all over the desert like a couple of gophers.

AMBROSE: Worse'n gophers, at least they've got a hole to go to.

BERT: (*Rising.*) If we hadn't stumbled into this town no tellin' what would have happened. (*Glaring at AMBROSE.*) We'd be out there walkin' yet. (*Walks slowly around the room.*)

AMBROSE: And years from now some prospector would stumble across our weary bones, where we fell weak, exhausted, and—

BERT: (*Breaking in.*) Shut up, Ambrose. We may have come closer to that very thing than you think. It isn't funny. (*Glaring at him again.*) If it hadn't been for you—

AMBROSE: Me? It wasn't my fault we were stranded.

BERT: (*Wailing.*) Oh no? (*Coming over to AMBROSE.*) Who bought the tickets to Sacramento?

AMBROSE: (*Hanging his head.*) I did.

BERT: And where did you put them?

AMBROSE: In my billfold.

BERT: And who lost the billfold?

AMBROSE: I did.

BERT: Thought so. The life savings of Ambrose Groves and Bert Miller stored inside it - all we had to our very names - as well as two tickets to Sacramento. (*Leaning on the table, opposite AMBROSE.*) Now . . . whose fault is it?

AMBROSE: (*Looking at him.*) Yours.

BERT: (*Exploding.*) Mine?!

AMBROSE: Well, that idea of going into vaudeville certainly wasn't mine. (*Mocking.*) Ambrose Groves and Bert Miller. The comedy team that'll have their sides splittin' from the U.S. to Britain. If they'd see us now, they'd split all right. (*Glaring.*) I can hear you now. (*Sarcastically.*) We'll have steaks smothered in mushrooms. (*Again wiping his brow.*) And the only thing that's smothered is us. Do you realize we ain't had nothing to eat since they threw those eggs and tomatoes at us in Abiline? What have you got to say?

BERT: (*Pounding the table.*) Hey, waiter?

AMBROSE: My achin' feet. (*He bends over, starts untying his shoe laces.*) Trampin' over the desert like a jackass.

BERT: You gripe more than any human being I've ever known.

AMBROSE: (*Disgustedly.*) Who wouldn't gripe? Walkin' across the desert. Clear across it, at that.

BERT: Why, oh why, didn't you put that money in your sock?

AMBROSE: (*Holds up his foot.*) A lot of good that would do. (*The foot is completely out of the sock and there's nothing left but the top.*) I've walked clear out of my shoes and socks. (*He pours the sand out of his shoes.*)

BERT: Wish we could get some service around here.

AMBROSE: Wonder where we are?

BERT: The sign said this was the Dead Man's Gulch Hotel. So I guess this is Dead Man's Gulch.

AMBROSE: *(Fearfully.)* Dead Man's Gulch? *(And shudders.)* The sooner I get out of here the better.

BERT: *(Calling.)* Waiter. *(He goes up center, peers out.)* Nobody stirring around here: Looks like it's deserted.

AMBROSE: *(Sadly.)* I wish I was choo-choosing to Sacramento.

BERT: *(Coming back downstage.)* I wish I was chew-chewing on something to eat.

AMBROSE: I was never so humiliated in my whole life. Kicked right off of a train in the middle of the desert. *(He rises.)* I'm a comedian - I tell funny jokes - people laugh at me. That conductor never heard of Ambrose and Bert—who keep the joint hoppin' from Frisco to Joplin.

BERT: *(Hands deep in his pockets.)* Of all the dumb tricks - losing your wallet.

AMBROSE: Well, it's gone and we walked and we're at least three hundred miles from nowhere right out in the middle of the desert in a place called Dead Man's Gulch and we're broke and we're due to open a two-week run at the Palace Theatre in Sacramento the first of next week. That brings us up-to-date.

BERT: *(Again looking around.)* This looks like a ghost town.

AMBROSE: *(Rambling on.)* And we're in a heck of a mess. I forgot that. *(He again sits.)* Oh, how I wish I was back in dear old Providence.

BERT: Not a soul around here - just look at the dust.

AMBROSE: I can't. I got my eyes filled with sand. Good, clean American sand.

*JAKE snores loudly. AMBROSE stands bolt-upright.*

BERT: What was that?

AMBROSE: *(Starting left.)* Must have been that ghost.

BERT: Where are you going?

AMBROSE: Back to the desert.

BERT: *(Disgustedly.)* Come back here, Ambrose, you're the biggest chicken I've ever seen. *(Crosses to desk.)* Hey, we're not deserted after all.

AMBROSE: You know who-who-who-it-is?

BERT: I don't even know what it is. *(Shakes JAKE.)* Hey, wake up.

JAKE: *(Sleepily.)* Huh? *(Louder.)* Huh? *(Jumping up, terrified.)* Who - what - *(Raises hands, trembling.)* Don't shoot. I didn't do it.

AMBROSE: *(Crossing.)* Who are you, anyway?

JAKE: *(Hands still raised.)* P-P-P-Panhandle J-J-Jake.

BERT: You work around here?

JAKE: Yes, sir. A day's work for a day's pay. I'm the bellhop and desk clerk - when the - hotel's open. *(Hands still trembling.)* Right now it's closed on account—

AMBROSE: What'ya mean, closed on account?

JAKE: Closed on account of the proprietor was sh-sh-shot *(Gulps.)* dead.

BERT: Shot?

AMBROSE: Dead?

JAKE: *(Nodding, fearfully.)* Mr. Mahoney was a fine ole gentleman. An' last week *(Gulping.)* they shot him.

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BERT: Who?

JAKE: *(Slowly lowering hands.)* The outlaws that's been hangin' 'round Dead Man's Gulch.

AMBROSE: You got anything around here to eat?

JAKE: Not a thing. They have me here to tell people we're not servin' nothin' 'cause Mr. Mahoney's been shot - dead.

BERT: But we've been traveling for two days without anything to eat.

JAKE: *(Sitting.)* They said they're not servin'.

AMBROSE: Who?

JAKE: The sheriff.

BERT: When can we get a train around here?

JAKE: Don't have trains into Dead Man's Gulch. Or out, neither.

AMBROSE: *(Astonished.)* No trains?

JAKE: Nope. But there'll be a stagecoach through here in the morning.

BERT: At least that's something.

AMBROSE: Can we get a room here tonight?

JAKE: The sheriff said no rooms, no food, no nothin'. The hotel's closed cause—

AMBROSE: Old man Mahoney's been shot - dead.

BERT: We're dead tired and need sleep.

AMBROSE: How about lettin' us stay here just tonight?

JAKE: But the sheriff said—

AMBROSE: We'll explain to the sheriff.

JAKE: I don't aim to pick no fight with the law. I'm jus' an old grub-stakin' prospector tryin' to do a day's work fir a day's pay. *(Closes eyes.)*

BERT: *(Pulling a chair up beside him and sitting.)* Look. If you let us stay, there'll be a little something in it for you. *(JAKE opens one eye.)* We're flat broke now, but after we get to Sacramento there'll be something for you on the next stage.

JAKE: You tryin' to bribe me, Mister?

BERT: Well...sorta.

JAKE: *(Rising.)* Why didn't ya say so sooner? *(Points to suitcase.)* That your stuff?

AMBROSE: *(Happily.)* Yes, sir. *(AMBROSE picks up banjo.)*

JAKE: *(Picks up suitcase.)* C'mon. *(They start center.)* But if the sheriff says somethin', I'm sending him right up.

*As they exit center, SHERIFF CRANDEL, HOOT OWL PETE and STINKWEED enter left.*

SHERIFF: Well, Hoot Owl, I guess you can move in in the morning.

HOOT OWL: *(Looking around the room.)* Just what I've always wanted, Sheriff. A hotel all my own.

SHERIFF: Wal, here she is. *(A motion of his hand.)* The Dead Man's Gulch Hotel—

HOOT OWL: Owned and operated by Hoot Owl Pete.

STINKWEED: Don't forget me, Hoot Owl.

HOOT OWL: I ain't forgettin' you, Stinkweed. *(To the SHERIFF.)* Owned and operated by Hoot Owl Pete and his assistant, Stinkweed Meade.

STINKWEED: That's more like it, Hoot Owl. *(He starts roaming around the room.)*

HOOT OWL: I gotta hand it to you, Sheriff, this is a clever deal.

SHERIFF: Shh, somebody might be listenin', Hoot Owl. *(He looks cautiously around the room, tiptoes to the door at right, peers out, then comes back.)*

HOOT OWL: Wonder where Panhandle Jake is?

SHERIFF: Must be asleep somewhar, leastways, I don't think he's around here. *(After satisfying himself that there's no one in earshot.)* Now, what was that you war sayin', Hoot Owl?

HOOT OWL: I was just sayin' that this was the slickest deal ever pulled this side of the Mississippi, Sheriff.

STINKWEED: Just look at the first class furniture in here.

HOOT OWL: The whole joint is lousy with dust.

STINKWEED: *(Running his finger on the desk.)* But it's shore first class dust, Hoot Owl. In fac', everything 'round here's first class.

SHERIFF: *(Putting a foot on a chair.)* We've got everything in the county goin' our way now, Hoot Owl.

HOOT OWL: Yeah, that was real nifty thinkin', Sheriff.

STINKWEED: *(Strolling over.)* I still don't like the idea of us shootin' old man Mahoney like that.

SHERIFF: He was gettin' wise, Stinkweed. I think he suspected me.

STINKWEED: *(Worriedly.)* But I was just thinkin'—

HOOT OWL: *(Breaking in, sharply.)* You ain't gettin' paid to think, Stinkweed. *(Growling.)* See that it don't happen no more.

STINKWEED: Okay, from now on I'll be a perfect blank.

HOOT OWL: That's it, just act natural.

*STINKWEED again starts rambling about the room.*

SHERIFF: I'd been a-watchin' him of late, Hoot Owl. When he looked at me, his eyes war sharp, like he suspicioned maybe what I was up to. So I got to thinkin', if I come in here sometime, ask him to ride in a posse, and had one of your hombres planted in the hills just to shoot him, we'd kill two birds with one stone 'cause old Mahoney warn't married - didn't have no family - and didn't have no one to leave the hotel to - and with no one to claim the property, it goes to the court, naturally.

HOOT OWL: You're a sharp man, Sheriff.

SHERIFF: So I did some more calcylatin'. I'm the sheriff 'round hyar. The people trust me in Dead Man's Gulch. *(He smiles.)* And the hotel would naturally fall into my hands - bein' as how I'm the law - and it would be mine to sell to the highest bidder. And nobody ain't gonna know but what you turned over hard cash for the building, Hoot Owl. They saw you pay me the money - they saw it go on the stage - *(He sits importantly.)* but what they didn't see was our boys liftin' it off the stagecoach out by Big Rock.

HOOT OWL: That's real smart thinkin', Sheriff.

SHERIFF: It had to be smart thinkin', Hoot Owl. The beauty part of the whole thing was when they came back a yelpin' 'bout a hold-up, all I had to do was offer five thousand dollars reward - five thousand reward for my own hide. *(He and HOOT OWL chuckle merrily.)*

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STINKWEED: But some of the boys didn't like the idea of knockin' off the driver of the stagecoach, Sheriff.

SHERIFF: It'll be alright, Stinkweed. The five thousand will cover that, too. Toss in everything—give 'em their money's worth...the suckers. But nobody's gonna get wise, 'cause nobody knows nothing about it but you and Stinkweed. But you guys ain't gonna talk 'cause you're gettin' too much out of it, Hoot Owl.

HOOT OWL: Right, Sheriff.

SHERIFF: And you, Stinkweed, ain't gonna talk because you know you'd wake up and find yourself in the bottom of the river with water flowin' and gushin' through them nineteen bullet holes like the Niagry Falls.

HOOT OWL: You ain't got nothin' to be feared of, Sheriff.

SHERIFF: And if any coyotes try to stop us, we'll fill their carcasses so full of lead they'll never know what hit 'em. *(Banging his gun butt on the table.)* Cause we're tough.

STINKWEED: That's right, fellows, We're tough.

SHERIFF: You can move into the hotel in the morning, Hoot Owl.

HOOT OWL: Okay, Sheriff. I'll be a movin' in. And if anyone tries to stop me, I'll fill 'em so full of slugs that they'll look like a piece of Swiss cheese.

SHERIFF: *(Rising, pounding him on the back.)* That's the spirit, Hoot Owl. *(A pleased expression on his face.)* Yessir, I think you'll be a good man to have runnin' this hotel.

HOOT OWL: And you know, Sheriff, I think people here are havin' more respect for you all the time.

SHERIFF: I know they are, Hoot Owl. This election we're holdin' today - they been wantin' an election - wal - they're gettin' it. Hey, Stinkweed.

STINKWEED: Yeah?

SHERIFF: Did you copy the names off the tombstones like I asked you to?

STINKWEED: No, but I'm goin' to.

SHERIFF: See that you do. Everybody's votin' in Dead Man's Gulch today. Even those we shot.

HOOT OWL: Another good idea, Sheriff.

SHERIFF: I'm full of 'em, Hoot Owl. And nobody's gonna get wise about nothin', neither. 'Cause if they do, I can hang 'em of my own free will. You better go cram those ballot boxes now, Stinkweed.

STINKWEED: Okay, Sheriff. *(His boots make a noisy clatter as he starts left.)*

SHERIFF: You better go out the back way, Stinkweed. We can't be too careful.

STINKWEED: Okay, Sheriff. *(He turns and clatters out right.)*

SHERIFF: And maybe you'd better see how the election's coming, Hoot Owl.

HOOT OWL: Okay, Sheriff. I'll be seein' you. *(He exits left.)*

SHERIFF: Wonder where Panhandle Jake is? Probably layin' in the shade someplace, doin' a day's work for a day's pay. *(JAKE enters center.)*

SHERIFF: Oh, there you are, Panhandle.

JAKE: *(Surprised.)* Sheriff, wh-what are you doin' here?

SHERIFF: Just dropped by to tell you the hotel's openin' tomorrow. Sold it to the highest bidder—Pete Brackett.

JAKE: *(Eyes wide.)* You mean, Hoo-Hoo-Hoot Owl P-P-Pete?

SHERIFF: *(Grinning.)* Well, I reckon, he's called that off an' on.

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JAKE: He's a mighty rough customer to be runnin' the hotel.

SHERIFF: Nonsense, Panhandle. I'm the sheriff, so I reckon I know who's rough and who isn't in this county.

JAKE: Guess you're right, Sheriff. Only I don't trust him no farther than I can see, an' today I'm havin' a heap o' trouble seein'.

SHERIFF: Anyway, they say he's got quite a way about him.

JAKE: Yeah. He's got away all right - from the marshall in Dodge, a posse in Pocatello, and the jail in Junction City.

SHERIFF: Since it's opening tomorrow, you make sure no one stays here tonight.

JAKE: Tonight? Then there's something you ought to know.

SHERIFF: Hoot Owl - *(Catching himself.)* I mean, Mr. Bracket is going to spruce it up.

JAKE: *(Pointing.)* There's a couple of -

SHERIFF: *(Breaking in.)* He's going to change all the sheets.

JAKE: But I already changed 'em.

SHERIFF: You did?

JAKE: *(Proudly.)* Changed 'em yesterday, Sheriff, from one bed to the other. 'Bout not sleepin' here tonight. You mean even people that are *really* sleepy?

SHERIFF: I mean anyone and everyone!

JAKE: Even folks that are plumb tuckered?

SHERIFF: *(Darting to window.)* Was that a stagecoach that just went by? *(At window.)* It is a stagecoach. There's none due in here until morning. *(He turns away as JAKE crosses to window.)*

JAKE: Hey, Sheriff, there's some ladies gettin' out.

SHERIFF: How many?

JAKE: More than two but less than four.

SHERIFF: *(Sharply.)* Quit playin' games. How many?

JAKE: *(Peering out.)* Three lovely damsels...two of 'em young an' innocent, an' the other a more mature, matronly lady with ruby red lips, soft blue eyes, an' a dimple on her chin.

SHERIFF: *(Squinting.)* I thought you were havin' trouble with your eyes?

JAKE: Looks like it just cleared up.

SHERIFF: *(Looking out window.)* They're lookin' this direction.

JAKE: They're even walkin' in this direction. An' look at that walk.

SHERIFF: That's odd. There was no stage due until morning.

NANCY: *(From off left.)* Just carry that trunk right in here.

*Two MEN enter carrying a rather heavy trunk. They are followed by NANCY and ANNE MARTIN and their chaperone, TILLIE, who's carrying a suitcase.*

MAN: Anything else?

NANCY: Yes, our suitcases, please.

MAN: Coming right up. *(The two MEN go out left.)*

ANNE: Well, Nancy, this is it. *(They look around the room.)*

SHERIFF: *(Quickly.)* Welcome to Dead Man's Gulch, my name's Crandel. *(Pulling his vest back to show his badge.)* Sheriff Crandel.

NANCY: I'm Nancy Martin and this is my sister, Anne.

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ANNE: (*Cordially.*) Hi.

JAKE: I'm Panhandle Jake.

TILLIE: Glory be! I never figured I'd see anything like you here.

JAKE: Surprised, huh?

TILLIE: Surprised? I'm terrified. I haven't figured out what you are yet.

SHERIFF: Don't be afraid of Jake. He's just a harmless old sourdough.

TILLIE: (*Rubbing hands together.*) I never worry 'bout how sour they are. (*Extends hand.*) Pleased to meet ya, Jake, I'm Tillie. Travelin' companion and chaperone for the gals here. (*They shake hands.*) You're just what I've been lookin' for.

JAKE: (*Pleased, beaming.*) I am?

TILLIE: Yeah. How 'bout hustlin' my suitcase upstairs. (*He stares at her, wide eyed, as love starts to chisel a foothold.*) Come on. (*She picks up suitcase.*) You do have moving parts? (*Disgustedly.*) Never mind. Just show me my room. (*They exit center, as the MEN reenter with suitcases.*)

MAN: Where shall I put these, ma'am?

NANCY: You may carry all of those right in there. (*Motioning center with tilt of her head.*) You show him, Anne.

ANNE: Alright, Nancy. I'll pick out the best room. (*She goes out center, followed by the two MEN.*)

NANCY: (*Walking around the room, scrutinizing it carefully.*) This place is certainly filthy.

SHERIFF: Well, you see, ma'am, it hain't open now.

NANCY: I know. And the dust—it's terrible. (*The SHERIFF takes off his hat, watches NANCY, scratches his head.*) It's not so bad. A little work will straighten it out.

SHERIFF: Nope—I reckon not.

NANCY: (*Looking around.*) And the whole place needs redecorating.

SHERIFF: (*Now very curious.*) You act like you might be aimin' on buyin' it, ma'am.

NANCY: (*Her back to the SHERIFF, as if lost in thought.*) Oh no.

SHERIFF: (*Very relieved.*) Oh, you're not?

NANCY: (*Looking at the ceiling.*) No - (*A pause, for emphasis.*) I already own it.

SHERIFF: (*Suddenly.*) You what? (*Catching himself.*) I mean -you do?

NANCY: You see, it belonged to my uncle, Jim Mahoney. (*She turns to him.*) Did you know him?

SHERIFF: (*Looking her square in the eye.*) Ah reckon I did, ma'am. Good friend of mine, Jim was!

NANCY: He willed this hotel to us years ago, when we were just little tykes.

SHERIFF: (*Trying to keep calm.*) Willed it to you?

NANCY: He said that if he ever - (*She lowers her gaze.*) when he died, that he wanted us to have it. (*She looks at the SHERIFF, he says nothing.*) I didn't like the idea of coming here - but he thought so much of us and we liked Uncle Jim (*Motions with her hands.*) and well, here we are.

SHERIFF: (*Craftily, moving to block them.*) You know, there may be some doubt about your taking possession.

NANCY: Oh, I have the will and everything - and you're the sheriff. Shouldn't be any trouble at all, should it?

SHERIFF: (*Turning, thoughtfully.*) No, I reckon not...

BY DONALD PAYTON

NANCY: We left as soon as we got word that...that— *(Coming over to the SHERIFF.)*

Was he really shot, Mr. Crandel?

SHERIFF: I'm afraid he was, Miss Martin.

NANCY: *(Shuddering.)* How terrible.

SHERIFF: This ain't a very healthy place for a fine lady like you, ma'am.

NANCY: *(Again, looking around the room.)* I must admit that it's not what I thought it would be. But first impressions are usually the worst.

SHERIFF: *(Anxious.)* And there hain't much to do 'round hyar. Nothin' like you're probably used to.

NANCY: *(Smiling.)* I think we'll have enough work to pacify us for awhile.

SHERIFF: I'd clear out right now if I was you, Miss Nancy.

NANCY: Why, Sheriff, I think you're trying to discourage me.

SHERIFF: On the contrary, ma'am, I'd like for you to stay. Pretty faces like yours and your sisters hain't been seen 'round these parts of late. *(But it just ain't a fit place for women.)*

*The two MEN reenter, pick up the trunk and carry it out center.*

NANCY: Well, we can give it a try, and if it doesn't suit us, we can always leave.

SHERIFF: Wal, I reckon you are your own boss.

NANCY: And if we get busy, we can be serving before long. *(She starts center.)* Please excuse me, Sheriff Crandel, but we've just gobs of work to do.

SHERIFF: *(Watching her.)* Why shore, ma'am, shore... *(He stands watching center.)*

*The two MEN reenter.*

FIRST MAN: Well, I guess that's everything, ma'am.

NANCY: Have we paid you sufficiently?

SECOND MAN: Yes, ma'am. And before we go, we want to wish you all the success in the world.

NANCY: Thank you, I think we're going to need it. Goodbye - and thanks. *(She smiles.)*

FIRST MAN: Goodbye, ma'am. *(They bow as she exits center.)*

SHERIFF: *(Coming over to them.)* You hombres drive them all the way here?

SECOND MAN: Just from King's Canyon. They got there on the train - they're from Kansas City. *(The two men leave left.)*

SHERIFF: *(Walking around the room, deep in thought.)* Kansas City.

*He is pacing around the room, rubbing the stubble on his chin, as HOOT OWL PETE comes barging in left, hurriedly.*

HOOT OWL: *(As he enters.)* Hey, Sheriff, have I got news for you.

SHERIFF: *(Still walking around the room.)* I got news for you, too.

HOOT OWL: What?

SHERIFF: Did you see that stage across the street?

HOOT OWL: Yeah.

DESPERATE AMBROSE

SHERIFF: (*Worriedly.*) That, my friend, brought the two new owners of the Dead Man's Gulch hotel to—

HOOT OWL: (*Breaking in, irately.*) Why you dirty, double-crossing, I thought I—

SHERIFF: (*Also breaking in.*) Take it easy, Hoot Owl. It shore hain't none of my doin's. (*He continues to pace the floor.*)

HOOT OWL: (*Following him.*) Whattya mean?

SHERIFF: (*Sitting.*) Two gals - name's Martin - got here from Kansas City. Nieces of old man Mahoney that you bumped off.

HOOT OWL: I didn't think he had no relatives.

SHERIFF: I didn't either, but they've got the papers to prove it.

HOOT OWL: What'll we do, run 'em out of town?

SHERIFF: Not now, but we will eventually. We'll make it so hot for 'em, they'll wish they'd never even heard of Dead Man's Gulch.

HOOT OWL: What'll we do?

SHERIFF: (*Frowning.*) I don't know (*Clenching his fists.*) But, we'll think of something. What was that you war gonna tell me?

HOOT OWL: It hain't very good news, Sheriff. I'll tell you that some of the boys said they saw Homer the Kid ridin' this way and—

SHERIFF: (*Rising, breaking in fearfully.*) Homer the Kid?

HOOT OWL: (*Growling.*) Yeah...him and Gun Smoke Carter.

SHERIFF: (*Astonished.*) Homer the Kid and Gun Smoke Carter?!

HOOT OWL: What'll we do, Sheriff?

SHERIFF: (*Again walking around the room.*) I shore don't know now, Hoot Owl. (*To himself.*) Why did he have to head to these parts?

HOOT OWL: I ain't afeard of Homer the Kid. I been waitin' for this opportunity. I can whip his hide any time, place, or fashion.

SHERIFF: (*Worriedly.*) He's the toughest coyote this side o' San Anton. And he's hanged, shot, or had shot every desperado he's ever mixed with north of the border. Things look tough, Hoot Owl.

HOOT OWL: (*Coming over to him.*) You ain't gonna quit, are you, Sheriff?

SHERIFF: Quit? I should say not. He's whipped men, fist with fist - I'm gonna outthink him - (*His eyes like slits.*) We're gonna do two things, Hoot Owl. We're gonna get rid of the most feared cowpuncher in the country and get some mighty meddlesome gals out of the way, too. This is gonna call for some thinking. (*He starts left.*) Come along, Hoot Owl. Let's hold a pow-wow.

*They start left as BETH MALONE enters left.*

SHERIFF: (*Changing his manner completely.*) Oh, hello, Beth.

BETH: Hello, Sheriff Crandel.

SHERIFF: Been out to vote yet?

BETH: Not yet I ain't, Sheriff.

SHERIFF: I have. (*A twinkle in his eye.*) And I nominated you for probate judge, too.

BETH: I don't know why in the world you nominated me for probate judge, Sheriff. A woman don't have no business in politics.

SHERIFF: You know darn well why I nominated you, Miss Beth. I've had my eyes set on you a long time. Be kinda nice havin' a judge and sheriff all in the same family.  
(*SHERIFF and HOOT OWL exit.*)

JAKE: (*Entering center.*) Jumpin' jackrabbits. (*Mops brow, leans against door.*) What an ordeal.

BETH: Howdy, Jake.

JAKE: Howdy, Beth.

BETH: You seen the new gals in town?

JAKE: Seen 'em? I just got away from one of 'em. Never met nothin' like her in all my born days. She's their travelin' companion. (*Staggers to chair, sitting.*) Only it's other folks that does the travelin'. In less than five minutes time, I travelled fer towels and I traveled fer soap and I traveled fer drinkin' water and I travelled fer a dust mop and when she turned her back—I travelled fer the door.

BETH: (*Smiling.*) Who are you talkin' about, Jake?

JAKE: Tillie, the Martin gal's chaperone, I believe in a day's work for a day's pay, Beth, but not in a time span of five minutes. If she comes breezin' in here, tell her I'm considerin' goin' back to prospectin'.

TILLIE: (*Entering center, pointing.*) There you are, Jake.

JAKE: On second thought, tell her I've done gone. (*He starts right.*)

TILLIE: (*Sharply.*) Jake, just hold your horses. We've got work to do. (*He freezes.*) An' after supper, Jake— (*She touches his arm.*)

JAKE: (*Eyes getting wide.*) Huh?

TILLIE: You're gonna take a bath.

JAKE: Take a bath?

TILLIE: An' spiffy up.

JAKE: Spiffy up?

TILLIE: An' we're goin' out on the town and you're gonna show me a good time.

JAKE: (*Sitting.*) If it's all th' same to you, I'll just sit and point it out to you.

NANCY: (*As she and ANNE enter center.*) We've so much to do I hardly know where to begin.

ANNE: I don't think it makes much difference. Everything's to be done over, anyway.

NANCY: (*Sees BETH, cordially.*) Oh, hello.

BETH: (*Smiling.*) Hello. Are you Nancy?

NANCY: (*Surprised.*) Why - why yes.

BETH: (*As if to an old friend.*) I'd have known you anywhere. Your hair, your eyes. I've heard your uncle speak so much about you and Anne.

ANNE: (*With surprise.*) Do you mean Uncle Jim?

BETH: Yes, Jim Mahoney.

NANCY: (*Smiling.*) Then you must be Beth Malone.

BETH: (*Smiling warmly.*) That's right, child. Your uncle and I were...were (*Dropping her gaze.*) going to be married.

NANCY: I know he thought lot of you. In every letter, it was Miss Beth this and Miss Beth that.

BETH: He was the only man I ever loved. But he was a good man. As good a man as ever drew breath. I lived forty-five years just waitin' for the right man to come along.

DESPERATE AMBROSE

Well - he came and he left me - but he ain't really gone. Still got memories, memories that'll last me forever.

NANCY: Uncle Jim always said he'd never get married - never - until he found the perfect woman. Miss Malone, I guess you're that perfect woman.

BETH: I'm going to help you girls make a success of it here. Jim wanted you here - he wanted it to be yours - and he wanted this hotel to be run good and decent - but it's gonna be hard. (*Earnestly.*) Can I help you girls? (*Looking from one to the other.*) Please tell me you'll let me help you.

ANNE: Of course you can, (*Pauses, for emphasis.*) Aunt Beth!

BETH: Aunt Beth. (*She wipes a tear from her eye.*) Thank you, child. Thank you.

NANCY: And I'm not near as scared now, Aunt Beth. But we won't be able to pay you much at—

BETH: (*Breaking in.*) Pay? I'm gettin' pay enough right now. You're wonderful girls - you're good girls - and you're always gonna be and I got a six shooter here that backs up my statement. (*She pulls out an old-fashioned, long-barreled pistol.*)

ANNE: Aunt Beth, was Uncle Jim - (*She stops.*) was he - (*She makes a face.*) he - in cold blood'?

BETH: Yes, he was, gals. Shot down in cold blood while ridin' in a posse. And it's all mighty peculiar, it is.

ANNE: Do you - know who did it?

BETH: No, not exactly. But I got my suspicions. Your uncle had his suspicions, too. That's why he was shot. But we're gonna catch the coyotes that did it, gals, or my name ain't Beth Malone.

TILLIE: Mmm! This sounds excitin'.

BETH: What we need is a couple of cowpunchers with good shootin' eyes and itchy trigger fingers.

NANCY: You mean we need a couple of - of gunmen?

BETH: Well, all men carry guns around here. And we can't run a hotel in Dead Man's Gulch single-handed.

TILLIE: In fact, I'm gettin' a gunpowder headache already.

ANNE: I took pistol shooting in school.

NANCY: She's really quick on the draw.

BETH: People are dangerous here, gals. They slip around and well, you'll never really be safe. But if we had a couple of hands...

ANNE: Can't the sheriff get us a couple?

BETH: Somehow Jim never liked the sheriff.

NANCY: You mean Sheriff Crandel, the man that was in here? (*BETH nods.*) Seemed like a good enough man to me.

BETH: For some reason Jim didn't like him. That's enough for me. And there's something about him that's mightily suspicious.

ANNE: (*To NANCY, smiling.*) This is just like a Western thriller. Even the sheriff's crooked.

BETH: I ain't sayin' he's crooked—yet. Talkin' 'bout gettin' a couple of cowpunchers for protection, I heard some of the townspeople sayin' a while ago that they heard somebody say that Homer the Kid and Gun Smoke Carter was a-headin' toward these here parts.

NANCY: (*Excitedly.*) You mean the Homer the Kid and Gun Smoke Carter that are so famous?

BETH: The very ones. The most feared couple of riders in these here parts.

ANNE: I read that Homer the Kid can light a cigarette at a hundred and fifty paces with his six-shooter.

BETH: That's right. And then Gun Smoke Carter puts out the match.

ANNE: (*Excitedly.*) If we could persuade them, I mean - if we could—

BETH: (*Breaking in.*) They may not even be ridin' in this direction. And if they was, they might pass right on through. But I wish we could get 'em. Why, men have been known to just look at Homer the Kid and faint.

JAKE: By the way, there's a couple of strangers stayin' all night here tonight. They was tired and sleepy and hungry and asked—

BETH: (*Breaking in, anxiously.*) Two men, did you say?

JAKE: They checked in jus' fore you got here. Said they'd been travelin' fer quite a spell.

NANCY: (*Anxiously.*) What'd they look like? .

JAKE: Like they was tired an' hungry an' sleepy.

ANNE: Maybe it's Homer the Kid and Gun Smoke Carter.

BETH: If it is, we're in luck.

NANCY: And if it isn't?

TILLIE: We're in Boot Hill.

BETH: Go upstairs and get 'em, Jake.

JAKE: (*Holding up hand.*) Whooaaa. You mean you want ME to go upstairs and order them critters to come down here?

TILLIE: Come on, Jake. (*She grabs him by the arm, hustles him center.*) Don't you have any git up and go?

JAKE: (*As they exit center.*) I think my git up and go just got up and went.

ANNE: Do you think it might be Homer the Kid?

BETH: I got a hunch it is, Anne.

ANNE: It's nearly too good to be true.

BETH: It certainly is. And they'll find out who killed Jim, too. (*Putting her hand on her gun.*) That's one thing that'll get done if I have to do it myself.

NANCY: Don't worry, Aunt Beth, Homer the Kid and Gun Smoke will do it. They've tracked down more than one tough desperado.

BETH: That's right. They're the rootinest, tootinest, two saddle-sitters that ever busted a bronco. And they've busted plenty of them. There just ain't nothin' that they can't do.

NANCY: And to think - they're right here in our hotel.

*AMBROSE and BERT enter center, followed by JAKE and TILLIE.*

TILLIE: Here they are, gals. Feast your eyes.

BERT: You want to see us?

*AMBROSE scratches eyes sleepily; stops, opens eyes, looks, blinks.*

DESPERATE AMBROSE

AMBROSE: (*Looking from NANCY to ANNE.*) Hey, do you see what I see or am I seeing things? (*He whistles.*) And right out in the middle of a desert. (*Turning to BERT.*) Don't tell me these are mirages.

ANNE: (*Sighing.*) A real Western hero.

AMBROSE: (*Turns, looks behind him.*) Where?

ANNE: (*Smiling.*) You, silly.

NANCY: (*Nudging her.*) Anne.

AMBROSE: Me? I mean me! (*In a gruff vice.*) Yeah, me!

BETH: Are you - you - do you live around here?

BERT: I'm afraid not. We're strangers. Just got in. You see, we -

ANNE: (*To AMBROSE.*) Then you are the cowboys.

AMBROSE: (*Sticking out his chest.*) Cowboys? I should say I am. Why, just last week I was confronted by an hombre, see. He had a gun pressed in my ribs, see, one in my back, see, and another at my temple, see.

ANNE: (*Ecstatically.*) Oh, my goodness.

AMBROSE: But I didn't flinch. (*BERT gives him a dirty look.*) I just whirls, see, grabs him, see, and—

JAKE: Great jumpin' toad frogs, it's him.

AMBROSE: Stick around, brother. I'm just gettin' started.

BERT: You'll have to pardon my partner, he—

BETH: (*Breaking in.*) That's all right. We know who you are and what you're all about.

AMBROSE: (*Blinking.*) And you're still gonna let us stay?

NANCY: (*To AMBROSE.*) You're Homer the Kid. (*Turning to BERT.*) He's Gun Smoke Carter.

AMBROSE: (*Astonished.*) Huh? I mean uh-huh. (*To himself.*) Homer the Kid. (*Liking the idea, louder.*) Uh huh!

ANNE: (*Sidling up to him.*) We need protection.

AMBROSE: (*Importantly.*) Ma'am, you can count on us.

NANCY: After all, we can't stay here all by ourselves.

AMBROSE: You certainly can't.

BETH: Because there's liable to be bloodshed.

AMBROSE: Lady, we— *bloodshed?*

NANCY: What do you say?

AMBROSE: (*Starting left.*) I say I'm gettin' out of here.

BERT: (*Grabbing him.*) Come back here.

AMBROSE: Are you kiddin'?

BERT: Won't you let us talk it over?

AMBROSE: But—

BETH: (*Breaking in.*) Why, of, course.

AMBROSE: But—

BETH: In private?

AMBROSE: (*To BERT.*) But—

NANCY: And please stay with us a couple of weeks, anyway.

AMBROSE: (*Turning to NANCY.*) But—

BERT: Alright, we'll let you know in just a minute. (*BERT turns to AMBROSE; as the others go out right.*)

**AMBROSE:** (*His hands on his hips.*) Bert, have you plumb gone loco? (*Sarcastically.*) Don't I just look like Homer the Kid?

**BERT:** Then why did you say you were? (*Mockingly.*) Why, just last week I was confronted by an hombre, see. He had a gun pressed in my ribs, see -

**AMBROSE:** Bert—

**BERT:** And one in my back, see. (*AMBROSE slowly sinks to a chair.*) And another at my temple, see, but I didn't flinch, see.

**AMBROSE:** I thought they was kiddin', Bert.

**BERT:** But they're not. They really think we are Homer the Kid and Gun Smoke Carter. And if everyone thinks that—

**AMBROSE:** (*Looking at BERT, beseechingly.*) Oh no, Bert. Say you don't mean what you're thinkin'.

**BERT:** Why not, Ambrose? Free feeds - nothing to do but lay around, clean our gun barrels.

**AMBROSE:** I still don't like it, Bert.

**BERT:** And think of those girls—

**AMBROSE:** I don't care, Bert. I've got other things to think of besides girls. Like seein' tomorrow.

**BERT:** What hair, what eyes, what lips, what a way to spend a vacation.

**AMBROSE:** (*Pacing around the room.*) It just ain't gonna work, Bert.

**BERT:** I can see you now - as Homer the Kid. The great hero. (*Coming over to him.*) And do you know what the Western hero always gets? You get the glory—

**AMBROSE:** Phooey on the glory.

**BERT:** You get the girl.

**AMBROSE:** Phooey on the— (*He stops.*) the girl?

**BERT:** Always, it never fails. The hero always gets the girl.

**AMBROSE:** By golly, that's right . . . and them gals is sure something.

**BERT:** And maybe we can get in with them at the hotel. Put on our own little stage revue.

**AMBROSE:** By golly, you may be right, Bert.

**BERT:** I know I'm right, Ambrose.

**AMBROSE:** (*Strutting.*) Homer the Kid. That kinda stuff is right up my alley. I'm really fitted for the part.

**BERT:** (*Pounding him on the back.*) That's the spirit.

**AMBROSE:** (*Serious again.*) You sure nothin' won't happen?

**BERT:** I know it won't. And we'll really be heroes around here.

**AMBROSE:** Can you imagine that? Ambrose and Bert, who unwind their funnybones like a lasso from Chanute to El Paso, two of the most feared hombres to ever throw a leg over a cayuse. (*He starts singing.*) "On my cause, let me wander over yonder till I see the mountains rise, I want to ride to the ridge where—"

**BERT:** But don't forget. You're Homer the Kid. You're tough

**AMBROSE:** Tough!

**BERT:** You're fearless

**AMBROSE:** Fearless!

**BERT:** - and you're cold-blooded.

**AMBROSE:** You're so right.

*DESPERATE AMBROSE*

**BERT:** The bravest gun-toter in the whole wild West.

**AMBROSE:** *(Beating his chest.)* That's me! *(Serious again.)* You're sure nothing ain't gonna happen?

**BERT:** How could it, when people take just one look at Homer the Kid and run for shelter?

**AMBROSE:** Boy, I'm gonna enjoy this.

*They all enter right, looking at AMBROSE and BERT expectantly.*

**BETH:** Well?

**BERT:** Well, me and Homer here have decided to loiter 'round these here parts a bit, ain't we, Homer?

**AMBROSE:** *(Leaning back importantly.)* Yeah, me and Gun Smoke here have decided to do just that. *(He struts back and forth like a turkey.)*

**NANCY:** Thank heavens. *(To AMBROSE.)* I feel so much safer with you around.

**AMBROSE:** All right then, you just stay by me and you'll be protected, little gal.

**BERT:** By the way, when do we eat?

**BETH:** Everything's in the kitchen. Come along, girls. I'll show you around. And Jake, we need some wood.

**NANCY:** You two stay in here and rest. We'll call you as soon as it's ready.

**AMBROSE:** Wal, thank you, gal, thank you.

*They all go out right, leaving only AMBROSE and BERT.*

**AMBROSE:** *(Still talking in a drawl.)* You know, Gun Smoke, I'm beginnin' to like this here little plan better and better all the time. *(Dropping the drawl.)* You sure nothin' ain't gonna happen, huh, Bert?

**BERT:** Of course nothing ain't going to happen. And don't forget, I'm not Bert anymore, I'm Gun Smoke Carter.

**AMBROSE:** *(Sitting, propping his feet upon the table.)* Okay, Bert. I just wanted to make sure, that's all. 'Cause if there's any shootin', I'm clearin' out of here, 'cause I'm allergic to bullets.

*HOOT OWL PETE comes strolling in left; swaggers to a table, sits.*

**HOOT OWL:** *(Banging the table.)* Give me some service. *(BERT and AMBROSE ignore him.)* Waitress! *(He bangs the table again.)* Said I wanted some service.

**ANNE:** *(At the door.)* I thought I heard...

**HOOT OWL:** *(Breaking in, sharply.)* Bring me a steak.

**ANNE:** I'm sorry, sir, but we haven't opened yet.

**HOOT OWL:** Then now's a good time to open. *(Half rising.)* Because I'm hungry and I want a steak.

**ANNE:** *(Fearfully.)* Ye-ye-yessir. How do you want it cooked?

**HOOT OWL:** *(Banging the table.)* I want it raw!

BY DONALD PAYTON

ANNE's eyes become saucers. She just stands and stares at HOOT OWL PETE. AMBROSE jumps suddenly. He starts shaking, turns his head slowly toward HOOT OWL, who is staring at ANNE.

HOOT OWL: All right, don't just stand there, I ain't got all day.

ANNE: (*Fearfully.*) Ye-ye-yessir! (*She turns and goes out right, giving a fearful glance toward HOOT OWL as she exits.*)

BERT: (*Punching AMBROSE.*) Get up, Ambrose. Now's the time. Get up. Don't forget, you're Homer the Kid.

AMBROSE: (*Trembling.*) Yeah, I'm Homer the Kid. (*He rises, and his legs are like rubber as he starts pacing back and forth in front of HOOT OWL. As he passes BERT, he whispers.*) Like this, Bert? I mean, Gun Smoke?

BERT: Yeah - keep it up.

HOOT OWL turns around in his chair to stare at AMBROSE.

HOOT OWL: (*Growling.*) I don't like people walking around when I'm going to eat. (*AMBROSE continues to pace back and forth. HOOT OWL repeats himself, this time with more emphasis.*) I said I don't like people walkin' around when I'm gettin' ready to eat.

AMBROSE: Maybe I do. (*He continues to strut.*)

HOOT OWL: (*Rising, putting his hand on his gun.*) I said sit!

BERT: (*Standing right by AMBROSE.*) Don't let him talk to you like that, Homer the Kid. Don't forget, you're tough.

AMBROSE: (*His back is to HOOT OWL.*) Yeah, I'm tough.

BERT: You're fearless.

AMBROSE: Yeah, I'm fearless.

BERT: You're cold-blooded.

AMBROSE: Yeah, I'm - (*He turns, looks at HOOT OWL who draws his guns.*) goin' home. (*He starts left.*)

BERT: (*Grabbing him by the arm.*) Come back here, don't forget who you are.

AMBROSE: Okay, Gun Smoke. (*He starts pacing the floor again.*)

HOOT OWL: Sit down! (*AMBROSE doesn't seem to hear.*) Sit down. (*He cocks his gun and starts toward AMBROSE.*)

AMBROSE: (*Looking at HOOT OWL fearfully, backing away.*) Okay, okay. Just don't get so tough about it. (*And he sits.*)

HOOT OWL: (*Putting his gun back into his holster.*) Now that's more like it. (*And he sits.*)

BERT: Don't let him get by with this.

AMBROSE: By golly, I won't. (*To HOOT OWL.*) I was gettin' tired of walkin', anyway.

HOOT OWL: (*Again rising.*) Shut up! (*He puts his hand on his gun, AMBROSE swallows hard.*)

BERT: (*Pointing at AMBROSE.*) Do you know who this is?

HOOT OWL: (*Growling.*) I ain't got no idea.

BERT: This . . . is Homer the Kid.

HOOT OWL: Now ain't that just too bad.

DESPERATE AMBROSE

AMBROSE swallows hard again as HOOT OWL rises, walks toward him, and deliberately mashes his toe.

AMBROSE: (*Painfully.*) Ouch! (*Rising, looking up at HOOT OWL.*) You stepped on my toe.

HOOT OWL: Now ain't that just too bad, too. (*AMBROSE raises his foot, holds his toe.*) So you're Homer the Kid. The most fearless. hombre north of the border.

While AMBROSE is standing on one foot, HOOT OWL gives him a push, sending him sprawling onto the floor. AMBROSE's feet go up into the air, then drop to the floor with a bang. He rises slowly, brushes himself off. He is shaking like a leaf as HOOT OWL stands there glaring at him.

BERT: Do something to him, Homer the Kid. I'm behind you.

AMBROSE: (*Fearfully.*) Behind me?! Get in front of me and I will.

BERT: (*To HOOT OWL.*) You might be interested to know that he's whipped more than one hombre with just one hand.

HOOT OWL: (*Sticking his chin in AMBROSE's face.*) Then why don't you fight me?

AMBROSE: (*Shaking.*) Y-you've g-g-got t-two.

HOOT OWL: Listen, kitty, I want you out of town by six o'clock tonight.

BERT: Suppose he doesn't leave?

HOOT OWL: Suppose you stay out of this.

AMBROSE: Yeah, suppose you do.

BERT: What happens if he doesn't leave?

HOOT OWL: Then someone'll find his bullet-riddled carcass layin' behind the nearest cactus. (*Sternly.*) I want you out by six o'clock.

AMBROSE: (*Terrified.*) Wh-wh-what time is it now?

HOOT OWL: (*Looks at his watch.*) Twenty-eight after four.

AMBROSE: I'll be gone by four-thirty. (*He starts center.*)

BERT: (*Grabbing his arm.*) You're not leaving, Homer.

AMBROSE: You heard what he said about you keeping your nose out of this?

BERT: Yeah.

AMBROSE: Then see that you do. I'm leavin' here while I'm still in one piece.

BERT: Oh no, you're not. Don't forget, you're Homer the Kid. The most feared hombre in these parts.

AMBROSE: (*Wildly.*) At a time like this, he thinks of that.

HOOT OWL: You heard what I said. At six I'm coming back, and if I see that nose of yours, I'll blow it off the face of the map. (*He turns and strolls out left, his spurs jangling.*)

AMBROSE: Right here's where you and me part company, Bert, 'cause I ain't gonna stand here and get shot at like a stuffed duck.

BERT: You're just as tough as they are.

AMBROSE: I am?

BERT: Of course. You're Homer the Kid, remember?

BY DONALD PAYTON

AMBROSE: Why, I'm the most fearless - toughest - most cold-blooded -now listen, Bert, are you tryin' to get me killed?

BERT: He won't get you unless it's your time to go.

AMBROSE: *(Starts left again.)* It is and I'm goin'. So long.

BERT: *(Pulling him back again.)* No, you're not. Think of those poor, defenseless girls. Their hair, their eyes—

AMBROSE: *(Gazing into space, dreamily.)* Their hair, their eyes - *(He beats his chest again.)* Those big blue eyes, those smiles.

BERT: The next thing to heaven.

AMBROSE: *(Back to earth.)* Yeah, but if he shoots me dead, think where I'll be then.

BERT: You've gotta be brave, fearless.

AMBROSE: Yeah - *(Beats chest again.)* brave and fearless.

BERT: Show 'em you've got a backbone.

AMBROSE: Yeah, I'll show 'em.

ANNE: *(Entering with the steak on a plate.)* Where's the man that ordered this raw steak?

AMBROSE: *(Raising his hand.)* Right here. *(He grabs it and starts chewing.)*

CURTAIN.

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