

## Wardell

On a Saturday afternoon in the Chief Theater a happy, enthused audience watches *Fort Defiance*, one of a dozen Western movies that have been filmed in the Gallup, New Mexico, area in the past few years.

The center section of the theater is filled with White people, most of them are dressed Western.

The theater is dim but not dark as the Calvary chases Indians across the desert.

The left section of the theater is filled with Mexicans.

On-screen, soldiers and Indians battle it out.

The right section of the theater is filled with Indians from nearby reservations. A middle-aged Indian man against the right wall looks around, smiles then calls out, "Hey, that's my horse."

Everyone laughs.

On-screen, an Indian shoots a soldier and a few of the Indians in the audience cheer.

The first few rows of the theater are filled with kids; most of them are dressed like little cowboys and cowgirls.

Later on-screen, when a soldier shoots an Indian some of the White men cheer.

Ty and Wardell sit in the middle of the center section watching the movie and laughing. Ty is eighteen years old and Wardell is twenty-four years old. They are working cowboys.

Later, the audience has loosened up and Mexicans are cheering when an Indian or a White man is shot. It's all in good fun.

When the feature ends a Roadrunner cartoon is shown.

Backstage, Sarah adjusts Dusty's bandana. They are both twenty-one years old, blond, and attractive.

After the cartoon, a black and white newsreel is shown while some of the audience are coming and going with popcorn and drinks. Kids of different races play down in front of the stage as the voice from the newsreel reports, "... Operation Wetback to send an estimated four million illegal immigrants back to Mexico."

Mexicans boo and hiss, while a few of the cowboys and Indians laugh and applaud.

A trailer for the Western movie *Shane* is played.

In the projection booth, a young man takes a 78-rpm record from its sleeve and places it on a turntable.

On-screen, a scene from the Western serial *Desperadoes of the West* ends with a cliff hanger.

Wardell looks at Ty, "So who's this Dusty character you were telling me about?"

"He's from here in New Mexico and he's been in about six B Westerns. I heard he's in town working on another one and that's why he's here today."

The theater owner, Mr. Ragsdale, walks to center stage dressed in a white snap-front shirt, Bolo tie, Levi's, a belt with a big oval buckle, and pointy-toed boots.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the Chief Theater is proud to present one a yor' favorite Western stars, New Mexico's favorite son, let's hear it for Dusty Armstrong."

In the projection booth, the young man cues the record and an instrumental version of *Don't Fence Me In* fills the theater.

As the music and applause rise, Dusty strides out smiling and waving. He is bigger than life wearing a huge white cowboy hat, with a giant red bandana around his neck, a fancy Western shirt, and jeans, boots, a belt with a big buckle, and in his right hand a coiled, braided-leather bullwhip.

"Yee haw, I'm proud to be back in my home state of New Mexico. Tierra de encantamiento."

He snaps the whip a few times, and Sarah marches out from backstage waving a big New Mexico state flag attached to an eight-foot wooden pole.

Everyone is standing and clapping. Some men hold their hats over their hearts, while others wave theirs in the air.

Sarah is wearing a tan and turquoise fringed skirt with a matching vest, and a white silk blouse. She has on tall, fancy boots and a turquoise cowgirl hat sitting back on her head. She displays an exaggerated posture and smile. She marches around the stage a couple of times waving the flag with the music playing, the crowd cheering, and Dusty popping the whip, then she marches off stage.

Dusty cracks the whip a few more times then goes stage right where Sarah takes the whip and gives him a rope. The music fades as he dallies out a small loop and begins twirling it around as he strolls back to the far side of the stage. The rowels on his

spurs roll across the wooden stage making the jingle bobs jingle. His boot heels scrape the wood, the rowels click around, the jingle bobs jingle; it's like music to young cowboy ears.

"I want to thank y'all for coming out today, and I wanna let you know that it's a pleasure to be back in Gallup. My new movie will be startin' up here in a few minutes."

He does the Butterfly trick with the rope.

"When I first got to Hollywood and got a part as an extra in a Western, there was this scene where the lead actor, the star, someone you have all seen in the movies, was supposed to rope a horse. He's a nice feller, and a well-respected actor, but let me tell ya' - he ain't no cowboy."

Dusty swings the rope so it is spinning in a circle in front of him.

"So, after watching him chase that horse all over the desert, ropin' air, I told the director that I was starting to feel sorry for the horse. He laughed, and I told him I could rope that horse for him. So, I rode out and roped the horse."

Sarah steps from the curtain on the far side of the stage, and Dusty throws the loop across the stage and right over her. It doesn't seem to touch her; it floats over her then drops to her feet.

Everyone applauds, Ty and Wardell exchange raised eyebrow looks that convey, "Pretty good."

"So, me and the Director became friends. A few weeks later he gave me a sidekick part in a movie he was working on, and since then - it's been a heck of ride!"

Dusty straps on his six-shooters and does some fancy tricks while he talks about his childhood, and the crowd loves it.

"... and we had one of them Philco radios, so at night, we would hook it up to a truck battery and listen to that border radio station out of Nogales. Yeah I feel like I was lucky to have growed up on a hardscrabble ranch in New Mexico."

At the back of the theater Mr. Ragsdale stands, smiling, with a few people who couldn't find a place to sit.

Outside the theater it is hot, dusty, and painfully bright as farmers, ranchers, and their families walk the sidewalks and frequent the stores.

Sarah hands Dusty his guitar, and as he is pulling the strap over his head, a young cowboy in the audience calls out, "Hey Dusty, where's Lightning?"

Lightning is Dusty's co-star, the Black Stallion. Other Western movie stars are also touring the country, and they all have bigger acts than Dusty. Roy Rogers tours with Dale Evans, Trigger, the Sons of the Pioneers, and others. Gene Autry tours with Champion, and an assortment of performers and musicians. Dusty isn't that famous, but in the small western towns where he plays, he's a local boy who has made good, one of their own, someone they can be proud of.

"Lightning is having his self a little vacation on my ranch down in Hidalgo County, I'll tell him you asked about him though. That reminds me, I heard y'all have a pretty good Fourth of July

rodeo up here. I rode the circuit for a while before I got in the movie bidness."

"You know, I'll be twenty-two years old this summer, so it was just a few years ago that I was settin' out there watchin' Westerns every Saturday and dreaming of someday bein' a cowboy up there on the big screen."

Dusty looks over his shoulder at the blank movie screen, and the projector suddenly beams a majestic color picture of the desert with mountains in the distance and a gold and purple sunset.

Dusty and Sarah stand stage right as he looks down front and addresses the kids in the front rows.

"You young buckaroos are lucky to be growing up in the greatest state in the greatest country the world has ever seen. This is the place where you can make your dreams come true. So dream big, work hard, and put a little Cowboy in whatever you do."

The music from *Don't Fence Me In* booms out again, and this time the first line of the lyrics appears across the bottom of the screen with a bouncing ball over it. The ball bounces from word to word, from syllable to syllable.

Oh, give me land lots of land  
Under starry skies above  
Don't fence me in

Dusty doesn't have to tell everyone to sing along. Between the music, the bouncing ball, and Dusty and Sarah singing, they can't help themselves. Ty and Wardell sing along with everyone else.

Let me ride through the wide open  
Country that I love  
Don't fence me in

Near songs end, the music is playing, the ball is bouncing, and the audience is singing when Dusty calls out, "Thank you all for coming out today, I really appreciate it. Stick around my new movie is coming up next. Thank you, gracias, thank you.

He and Sarah wave, smile and step backstage.

The sun is setting as Ty drives his new Jeep pickup truck down the one main street in Gallup with Wardell sitting on the passenger side. They pass signs that read, "Route 66", "Indian Pawn", and "Gas .22¢ a Gallon".

"Well, how'd you like the show Wardell?"

"I liked it okay, that Sarah was sweet."

"Yeah, she was."

Wardell pats the dashboard, "This is a pretty nice graduation present you got here Ty."

"Yeah, it is itn't? This is the first year they've come out with a six cylinder. I love it."

They stop at one of many pawn shops on Route 66 and go inside. There is turquoise jewelry, guns, guitars, saddles, blankets, pottery, and much more. Wardell buys a wood carving set.

Later that night, Ty parks in the crowded parking lot of El Rancho Hotel, headquarters for the movie crews that come to town. El Rancho was built by D.W. Griffith's brother, R.E. Griffith, who came to Gallup to direct a Western movie, then came back in 1936, and built the hotel.

The two-story open lobby is filled with Western antiques, Indian rugs, trophy animal heads, and Western movie posters. They walk through the lobby, past the gift shop and restaurant and then go in the lounge where a band is playing a Hank Williams song.

I got a hot rod Ford, and a two-dollar bill;  
And I know a spot right over the hill.  
There's soda pop and the dancing's free  
So if you wanna have fun, come along with me.

The crowd is about half locals and half tourists; most of the locals are dressed Western, and a few of the tourists are sporting cowboy hats, Indian jewelry, or cowboy boots, that look as if they were bought earlier in the day.

Ty smiles and waves to people he knows on their way to a table against the wall. Seated at a big table in one corner are four young, well-dressed Mexican couples. The big round booth in the back corner has a "Reserved" sign on it.

"Ty, don't you go getting drunk. I don't wanna have to explain anything unfortunate to your Dad. Again!"

"Okay, don't worry, I won't."

Wardell sees a girl across the room, "Oh good, there's Beth; she'll keep you outa trouble."

Beth smiles, waves, and starts working her way through the crowd toward them. She is Ty's age, petite, and cute.

Two hours and a few drinks later, the band is playing the Les Paul and Mary Ford song, *Vayo Con Dios*, and Wardell is playing table shuffleboard with a tourist lady when Ty and Beth approach Wardell. Ty points with a bottle of beer in his hand, "Hey look, there's Dusty and Sarah."

Dusty and Sarah come in from the restaurant and make their way to the round booth in the back where a few other movie people sit. No one else notices them.

Ty waits until Dusty goes to the room marked "Cowboys" then follows him in. Dusty stands before a urinal smiling at graffiti while Ty washes his hands and smoothes his hair.

"Hey Dusty, I saw your show today. You were great, Pard."

"Thanks. We usually only do shows like that when I'm between films, but I didn't have any shoots today so... it was kinda' spur of the moment."

"It's good to know that some of the people making Westerns are real cowboys."

"Well, thanks. What do you do?"

"My folks have a ranch about two hours south of here that I work on."

Dusty washes his hands, "How many acres?"

"Well, it's about twenty sections, but you know how it is - it takes thirty acres to keep one cow."

Dusty looks at Ty anew, "Whoa, that's huge Pard."

"Yeah, it's a lot a work is what it is."

Ty follows Dusty out the door.

"What's your name?"

"Ty, Ty Hart."

"Well, Ty Hart, come join us, I'd like to hear more about your spread."

Later, Ty comes up to Wardell beaming with excitement, "War, you shoulda come over when I waved to ya. Dusty told me where they're filming and invited me out to watch. Can you believe it? I'm gonna get to watch 'em make a Western!"

Wardell listens, but he is looking across the room where the girl he has been with all night is returning from the Cowgirls Room. A big guy has stopped her, and is holding her by the arm.

"That's great Ty. I'll be right back."

Wardell walks up to the girl who is trying to pull away from the man. The bartender comes from behind the bar.

Wardell says, "Come on Linda, let's dance."

The man puts his hand on Wardell's chest and gives him a little push, "Get lost, cowboy."

Before Wardell can reply, the bartender steps between them, "Alright you guys, we don't want any trouble in here. If you have a problem, take it outside."

The troublemaker sneers at Wardell, "Let's go cowboy". Then he looks at Linda, "Wait right here honey, this won't take long."

Ty, Beth and half a dozen men follow Wardell and the big guy out to the parking area. The troublemaker is leading the way; he suddenly turns and tries to sucker punch Wardell. Wardell ducks and comes up under the man's chin with a right powerhouse; his eyes snap shut, and he falls hitting the back of his head on the curb. There is a pop like a firecracker when his head hits the concrete curb; his body twitches for a second, then goes limp.

Ty kneels beside the body and feels for a pulse then he stands, turns, and whispers to Wardell, "He's dead, War."

Wardell frowns and shakes his head, "What?"

"Dead, gone, departed. It wasn't your fault; he hit his head on the curb. Everybody saw it. He swung on you, you hit him, he fell, and hit his head on the curb. It was an accident."

Wardell looks down and starts walking slowly in a daze toward Ty's truck. Some of the men go back inside.

Ty gets behind the wheel, Beth stands beside Ty's door, Wardell sits in the passenger seat looking down.

"War? You want to wait for the law?"

Wardell doesn't answer for a few seconds, then he looks up, "Hell no, get me back to the ranch."

Ty drives down the desert highway. Wardell rubs the knuckles on his right hand, and looks down at his fist where an old scar runs across the back of his hand.

Ty says, "You never have told me how you got that scar."

"It was a long time ago."

"Musta been pretty bad to leave a scar like that."

"It wasn't that bad, I just didn't take care of it."

Ty parks near the back door and they sit in the truck and talk until the kitchen light comes on.

Wardell sighs, "Lord, I dread telling Cole and Mary Jo about this."

"Come on, I'll tell 'em."

When they go in the back door Ty's parents, Cole and Mary Jo look at them with concern. Mary Jo serves coffee and fixes breakfast while Ty tells them what happened, and Wardell sits with his forearms on his knees staring at the floor.

When Ty finishes, Cole asks, "Who was the guy?"

Ty answers, "I never seen him before, probably a tourist passing through. He was dressed like a city dude, and he had a back-East accent."

"Anybody with him?"

"I don't think so."

Cole paces the kitchen then looks out the window. Ty and Wardell exchange worried looks. Cole looks to Mary Jo, she returns his look, and says, "He's not going to jail."

Cole leans back against the kitchen counter, "I want to be on record as telling you that you should turn yourself in. But you're a grown man, and if you chose not to turn yourself in, there's a lot of fence out there that needs tending to. This place has over eighty miles of fence around it and five line shacks. A man could stay out there until this thing blows over if he was of a mind to."

Wardell stands up, "Whew, good, that's just what I was thinking. I can't thank you enough Cole, Mary Jo. I'm sorry if this causes you any problems."

"Well, if that's what you've decided on, you better get started. The Sheriff will probably be out here in a few hours. Load a wagon and take it up to the Deep Creek line shack. I'll have Ty take supplies up there once a month, and I'll send word about how the Sheriff is handling things."

Mary Jo is not far from crying when she puts a plate on the table, "Here Wardell, you eat before you go."

About noon, the Sheriff and Cole sit in rocking chairs on the front porch as the Sheriff relates the same story that Ty had. Mary Jo comes out with coffee for them then she sits beside Cole.

The Sheriff asks, "So do you have any idée where he is?"

"You're welcome to look around if you want to Jack, but he could be half way to Mexico by now."

The Sheriff looks at Cole and nods.

Ty rides up toward the Deep Creek line shack and fires a rifle in the air to let Wardell know he is coming. The shack is eight feet square with no windows, a low ceiling, and a dirt floor. It is constructed of skinny unpeeled logs that were cut on site. Stacked near the shack are some fence posts, rolls of wire, and a pile of firewood. There is a fire ring made of rocks in front of the shack. The Deep Creek line shack can be reached by wagon over a very rough trail; the other shacks can only be reached horseback. It is between these line shacks that Wardell rides, repairing fence, alone.

Ty looks at Wardell, "Well I see you didn't bring your razor with you."

"Actually, I did. I just haven't bothered to use it. So, what's the news?"

"Well, they're calling it Involuntary Manslaughter."

"What's that good for?"

"Five to twelve."

"Is there a statute of limitations?"

"No."

Wardell is silent for a few seconds then, "Next time bring me a Hershey bar or something."

Ty laughs, "No problem War, anything else?"

"Naw."

The inside of the shack is barren except for an Army cot, a kerosene lantern, and a small wood burning stove.

While unloading the wagon Ty says, "After you came up here, I went out on location, as they call it, and hung around with Dusty and the movie crew for a few days."

"Oh yeah, how was that?"

"It was great! I loved it. I got to be an extra in a few scenes, and before he left, Dusty told me if I came to Hollywood he'd see to it that I found work in the movies."

"That sounds like fun. You gonna do it?"

"Yeah, I think I might. He told me about this friend of his, Cowboy Cody, who's a New York actor that came to Hollywood to be in Westerns, not just movies but Westerns. And how he doesn't have any cowboy skills and that he needs a double for just about everything. Dusty said I'm the right size and look and that I might could work with him."

"You love the movies, and you're outta school now, but what about Cole and Mary Jo?"

"They're not too keen on the idea, but whatever I do, I'll still be coming up here to check on you every now and then."

"Awww, don't worry about me. Hell, I love it up here."

Cowboy Cody is crouched behind a boulder shooting it out with the Barcroft Gang while his stunt double, Ty, watches from just off camera. Cody is twenty-two years old, square-jawed and handsome.

Standing off camera with Ty, a stuntman is firing a pellet gun at the rocks around Cody.

Cody asks, "What's in those bullets?"

"They're low power and packed with a clay-like material. After sound's added it'll look like bullets hitting the rocks around him."

Ty and Cody are about the same size and are dressed exactly alike with fancy Western shirts with piping, big white hats, and Levi's.

Ty asks the stuntman for the gun then he peppers Cody with a few shots that come a lot closer than is usual. Cody glances over and sees Ty aiming at him. Cody fires a couple of blanks at Ty, and Ty falls back as if he has been hit while Cody frowns trying not to laugh while the camera rolls.

Later, Ty tries to show Cody how to work a bullwhip, but Cody only succeeds in hitting himself in the back of the head with the tip of the whip and knocking his own hat off.

Ty laughs, "I'll tell you what Cody, they're ready to shoot, you just swing it around and I'll stand off camera and pop my whip when yours should be popping."

When the cameras roll, Cody swings the whip around and gets it caught in the overhead boom then gets it wrapped around his legs.

After the shoot Cody asks, "How'd you learn to do that with the whip?"

"I practiced. And I got a lot of tips from Wardell, the cowboy back home I was telling you about."

In the middle of a huge expanse of desert, Wardell uses post hole diggers while his saddle horse and pack horse stand nearby. The pack horse has a make shift sled tied to him with some posts, a roll of wire, and hand tools, piled on it.

Wardell sets a post in the hole and pushes dirt in around it with his boot. He looks down the fence line to where it disappears in the far distance, then looks in the other direction to where the fence seems to disappear over the curve of the earth. He begins to hum then sing, low at first then louder as he packs dirt in around the post.

Oh, give me a home where the buffalo roam  
And the deer and the antelope play  
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word  
And the skies are not cloudy all day

Home, home on the range  
Where the deer and the antelope play  
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word  
And the skies are not cloudy all day

He laughs and looks at the saddle horse, "Pretty good, huh? Yeah I thought you'd like that one."

In the Palomino Saloon on Hollywood Boulevard, Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys are onstage performing while Ty and Cody survey the young starlets and hopefuls who are out on the town. Many of the patrons are dressed Hollywood Western, and a couple of them are wearing Nudie Suits.

A beautiful young waitress in a skimpy cowgirl outfit walks by and smiles at Cody. He watches her walk away, and says to Ty, "That cocktail waitress is the best-looking thing in here and she said she'd go out with me when she gets off work, but that'll be at three AM, and I have to be on the set at six AM."

"Well Pard, you know I'm always willing to stand in for you."

"Yeah, I'll just bet you would but not tonight. Tonight, it's the real thing - and I mean it this time."

Ty laughs, "Sure it is Cody."

Wardell pans a small stream and comes up with a few tiny grains of gold. He uses tweezers to separate the gold from the sand then puts the gold in a Bayer Aspirin tin. His horse is tied nearby.

He looks up from the stream and sees a small cave about fifty yards above him. He wades the stream and climbs, with difficulty, to a level, empty space in front of the cave opening where there is an ancient fire ring. The cave is only a few feet deep, he scuffles his boots in the sand in front of the cave and

kicks up arrow heads, some broken and some whole, broken bits of pottery, and pieces of beadwork. He picks out some of the better arrowheads, and some of the beads, and puts them in his pocket.

At Iverson's Movie Ranch just north of Hollywood, Cody watches Ty twist a wire around a horse's foreleg down near the hoof. Ty wraps the other end of the wire around the saddle horn then he does the same thing to the other foreleg.

"Ty, you know you don't have to do this stunt if you don't want to. It's not my character taking a fall."

"I know, but hey, more money."

"Don't you worry about getting hurt?"

"The horse is more likely to get hurt than me. Some of these guys don't care; they just throw their arms up and hope for the best. But if you get the horse to turn his head to the side before he goes down he's less likely to break his neck."

Cody walks away shaking his head.

Ty races the horse toward a camera with Cody and half a dozen others watching. He holds the ends of the wires along with the reins. At the predetermined point, he throws his arms up as if he has been shot pulling the forelegs underneath the horse, then he pulls one rein a little more than the other to turn the horse's head. The horse goes down.

The Director yells, "Cut!" then Ty and the horse struggle to their feet with a scattering of applause in the background. Ty kneels, removes the wires, and gives the horse a pat.

Wardell sits in the saddle patting his horse's neck and looking at a broken fence line with fence posts leaning over and some posts lying all the way over on the ground. A few yards down the line he sees a tree stump.

It reminds him of another tree stump, long ago.

Fourteen-year-old Wardell lassoes a stump. It is almost dark, and he is in the backyard of a tiny rundown shack near railroad tracks. His dolled-up, floozy-looking thirty-year-old Mother opens the back screen door and calls out to him.

"Wardell, I'm going to work."

"See you later."

She turns and goes through the house and out the front door. A few seconds later Wardell sees her leave in a car with a man Wardell has never seen before.

He lassoes the stump again then walks toward the stump coiling the rope as he goes. He goes in the house and opens the ice box. It is empty except for a glass jar with a screw-on lid half full of water and a package of hot dogs. He drinks water from the jar, then walks through the living room where there is a couch with a pillow and blankets on it. He goes in the only bedroom, his mother's room.

The only nice piece of furniture in the house is his mother's dresser. It is dark wood with a big oval, beveled mirror. The top of the dresser is cluttered with make-up, cheap jewelry, bobby pins, brushes and combs, powder and paint.

He opens a bottle of red finger nail polish and uses the little

brush to put a big drop of polish on the dresser. He screws the brush back into the bottle, presses the bottle down on the drop, then leaves the room.

Cole parks his pickup in front of the McKinley County Sheriff's Office just as the Sheriff comes out of the building, and heads for his black and white squad car. Cole gets out of his truck and calls to him.

"Hey Jack, where you off to?"

"Howdy Cole, what brings you to town?"

"I was on my way to the feed store and thought I'd stop by and see if there was any news concerning that incident with Wardell."

"No, nothing new. Why, have you seen him?"

"No, I haven't seen him, and you know it's been over a year now."

"Yeah, I know."

"Jack, that boy has worked on my place since he was fifteen years old and never done me no wrong. I was glad to have my son hang around with him and learn from him."

The Sheriff leans back against his car and looks at Cole.

"What are you getting at Cole?"

Cole looks down and struggles for a second, "Couldn't you just lose the file, or drop the charges, or something?"

"I'd like to, honest I would, but I don't have the power to do that. It's outta my hands."

"Damn, Jack."

Jack takes his hat off, looks around, then speaks in a lower voice, "I'll tell you what Cole. I'm gonna come out to your place tomorrow and look around. If I don't see Wardell I'm not gonna have time to go way the hell down there again looking for him. Okay?"

Cole nods, "Okay Jack, thanks. Fair enough."

Ty drives the wagon loaded with supplies toward the shack and fires a couple of shots in the air. At the line shack, he unloads the wagon. Later, Wardell rides up; his hair and beard are longer.

Wardell and Ty sit outside by the fire, "... so the Sheriff comes out and has lunch with momma and daddy and doesn't even look for you."

Wardell doesn't respond.

"So, you can go back to sleeping in the bunkhouse and eating dinner with the folks every night."

Wardell pokes the fire with a stick, "Oh, I don't know. I think I'll stay out a while longer."

Ty is dumbstruck, "What? You don't feel guilty about what happened, do you?"

"No. I feel bad that it happened, but it was an accident. I don't feel guilty about it."

"You know Dad has been putting your pay in the bank for you every month, so you've got money coming."

"That Cole, what a guy. I could never thank him enough. Closest thing to a father I ever had."

"Don't you get lonesome up here?"

Wardell looks around at the unspoiled vista, "It's hard to explain, but the longer I stay the... the bigger I feel. I feel more connected, more... alive. You know I don't just stay on the fence line. I've been all over the Gila country, and into the Reservations, and all over. I love it out here, it's beautiful. It really is the Land of Enchantment."

They look out across a stunning landscape. Wardell is transfixed, Ty looks around for a few seconds then clears his throat. Wardell comes back.

"So, how's it going in Hollywood? You a movie star yet?"

"Not hardly, but it is a lot of fun. Cody wants to come up here and meet you. That okay with you?"

"Sure Ty, any friend of yours..."

Ty drives his Jeep pickup east on a two-lane desert highway with Cowboy Cody leaning against the passenger door. There is snow on the mountaintops.

"Do your parents know we're coming?"

"No, we don't have a telephone, but they're used to me coming home every few weeks. And it bein' the week before Christmas... I've never been away from home on Christmas."

They drive through the small Western-themed town of Las Vegas, Nevada, past El Rancho Hotel, the Last Frontier, Desert Inn, Hacienda, and Tumbleweed Motel. At the railroad station, they turn right onto Fremont Street, and say, "Howdy Pardner".

An hour and a half later in Kingman, they get on Route 66 just as the song, *Route 66*, comes on the radio. They laugh and sing along.

You see Amarillo,  
Gallup, New Mexico,  
Flagstaff, Arizona,  
Don't forget Winona,  
Kingman, Barstow, San Bernadino.

Later, they pass a gas station with a sign, "Peach Springs Rodeo", and Ty says, "In rodeo if you get throwed you don't get paid, but in the movies, you get paid more to get throwed."

"You know sometimes the whole crew is holding their breath to see if you're okay.

"Do they now?"

"Yeah, it's scary; you could get hurt."

"Tell me about it! I'm still hurting from a fall I took for you last week. But you know, just between you and me - it ain't nothin' to me. When I was five years old, my daddy started puttin' me up on the back of anything with hair. I've ridden

sheep, goats, bulls, hell, we broke and trained our own horses. Me and Wardell used to enter local rodeos together."

"I'm really looking forward to meeting Wardell after all you've told me about him."

"Yeah, he's one hard working cowboy."

In a steep, narrow little ravine, Wardell sees what looks like smoke rising from a jumble of snow covered rocks. He climbs over slick, icy boulders and discovers a small hot spring bubbling up from beneath the rocks forming a pool about the size of a bathtub. Under the trees, all around, is a blanket of snow. Steam rises from the water.

Wardell piles his clothes on a rock beside the spring, then eases down into the hot water closing his eyes and smiling.

Just before reaching Flagstaff, they pass a tourist court with an almost empty parking lot.

Ty turns up the heater, "Dang, its cold up here. When you make a trip like this in the summer time, most people drive all night and then lay up in air-cooled tourist courts during the day."

"I'm just glad to be out here, I don't care what time of the year it is. I haven't really seen much of the West, you know. I took the train from New York, and that was nice, but this is even better."

Ty points to a side road, "That's the road down into Oak Creek Canyon. There's been a bunch of Westerns that filmed there."

Cody is driving through Winslow when Ty sees a poster advertising a rodeo, "Yeah, jumping off is easy compared to getting thrown off. And it pays a lot more. Course in rodeo, and on the ranch, you don't have nobody telling you what to do all the time. In the movie bidness, every day I've got some assistant telling me to wait over there, ride over here, fall off at this exact spot, and turn you head this way so the camera won't get your face, and..."

Cody, "You know what to me is the best thing about making Westerns?"

"Yeah, it makes it easier to pick up women."

Cody laughs, "That's true, but I was thinking about hanging out between shoots with the stuntmen and extras. Some of those guys, like you, are Cowboy through and through."

"Yeah, it's hard to find work on a ranch these days, and when you do, it don't pay nothing. And that reminds me, I been wondering, what do you make?"

"Three hundred a week. What do you make?"

"Two-fifty a week - but I have to do all the dangerous stuff!"

"You don't have to memorize pages of script."

"Oh yeah, that sounds real dangerous. Besides, you don't memorize doodily, you read the lines just before the camera rolls, and remember them long enough to shoot the scene. I do all the hard stuff; I should make more than you."

Cody laughs, "I agree. I wouldn't want to get thrown from a

horse going twenty miles an hour. Actually, I could do all that stuff you do, but the insurance company won't allow it."

Ty laughs, "Sure you could Cowboy Cody. You don't even need a double - you could do it all."

Cody looks at Ty, "You're not really my double anyway. We don't look anything alike."

"I know, I'm a lot better lookin' than you are."

Wardell kneels beside a small stream, picks up and examines tiny stones, holds them up to the light, and then puts some of them in his pocket.

In camp, Wardell builds something using empty tin cans, wire, and sticks. He cuts the larger tin can and bends the metal so it has three one-inch fins sticking out. He punches tiny holes in another smaller can with tools from his wood carving set.

He cuts wooden stakes, makes holes in one end, and makes a dowel. Assembled, it is a contraption; two vertical wooden stakes with a dowel through the top holes, wires coming down from the dowel and going into the ends of the horizontal larger can with the smaller can inside.

They are near the Petrified National Forest when a Roadrunner dashes across the road in front of the truck.

Cody exclaims, "Look, Roadrunner!"

"Yeah, so?"

"Well that's the first one I ever saw."

"What? They don't have Roadrunners in New York City?"

Cody ignores him, "If we wait will a coyote come streaking after him?"

"Oh Lord, you've been watching too many cartoons."

Later Cody asks, "What are your folks like?"

"They're hardworking ranch people. I'm an only kid, so we were always close, and I feel kinda bad not bein' there. It could be a more profitable place with some work. It needs a few more windmills, stock tanks, cross fence... work."

"Do you have a girlfriend back there?"

"Yeah, sorta, Beth. She's got the hairiest legs in the county, but boy can she ride a horse."

Wardell hammers the stakes into shallow water, fits the dowel between them with the tin can hanging horizontal, half-submerged in the stream. The can turns slowly around in the current. He watches it with a look of pride.

In Gallup, Ty points to a big hotel, "That's El Rancho that I was telling you about. That's where I met Dusty. It's a pretty wild place on the weekends. We'll go there one night while we're here, I always do."

Late that night Ty turns off the road; Cody gets out and swings the gate open. Ty drives over the cattle guard, and under an archway with metal cut-outs of cows and the letter H in a circle.

Cody gets back in and looks back at the arch, "So is this the Circle H?"

"Yeah, that's our brand."

"How far is it to the house?"

"It's about four miles to the house, and we'll gain about three thousand feet in elevation."

"Good Lord, Ty, this place is huge!"

"Aww, it ain't much."

The rough road crosses the desert and starts winding its way up into the mountains, and... trees.

Cody follows the smell of coffee into the kitchen where Mary Jo stands in front of the stove cooking breakfast.

"Good morning ma'am."

"Good morning Cody."

"Where is everybody?"

"Ty's not up yet, and Cole's out checking on cows. What have y'all got planned for today?"

He sits at the kitchen table, and she puts coffee in front of him.

"I think we're gonna go looking for Wardell, or War, as Ty calls him."

Mary Jo smiles and places a platter full of breakfast in front of Cody, "Yeah, Ty's the only one who ever calls him that.. War."

"I don't guess I have to tell you that Ty really looks up to Wardell."

"I know; they're like brothers. And he's like a son to us."

"It must be hard for you, knowing he's out there, but you can't see him."

"Yes, it is. But still, I'd rather have him out there riding the line than sitting in prison."

She looks out the window at distant mountains.

At that moment, Wardell sits on a log a few steps from a line shack tending a fire and cooking breakfast. He stares into the flames and thinks back to his youth.

As young Wardell walks toward his house carrying school books a man comes out, gets in a car and leaves. Wardell goes in, puts his schoolbooks down, and walks past his mother's bedroom. He glances in and sees her messed up bed, and her sitting in front of the dresser putting on makeup. She is wearing a blue chiffon robe that shows her cleavage. Her legs are crossed exposing her thigh.

Wardell looks disgusted as he walks out the back door without

speaking, letting the screen door slam behind him.

Cody takes his breakfast dishes to the sink, and Mary Jo takes them from him, "I'll get these."

"That was the best breakfast I've had in years. Home cooking, been a long time."

"Where's your family Cody?"

"I was raised by my grandmother in New York, and when she passed away a couple of years ago I moved to California. I don't know if I have any other relatives."

She gives him a heartfelt look as he goes to the back door and looks outside while holding his coffee cup.

"This is what I've been dreaming about all my life. This place is beautiful, the house, the barn, the corrals, the mountains... it's all so real."

Mary Jo looks at him askance, "Yeah, it's real."

He looks at the door frame where pencil marks record Ty's growing up, "Movie sets are usually fake, but this, this is the real thing."

Ty comes in the kitchen, "Momma is Cody telling you lies about what a big movie star he is?"

Ty puts an arm around Mary Jo and kisses her cheek as she fills a plate for him.

Before she can answer, Cody speaks up, "No, I was telling her about that gap-toothed girl you've been dating in Hollywood."

Mary Jo looks at Ty, shocked and amused.

"He's lying, Momma. He once told me that he decided to become an actor when he realized what a good liar he is."

Cody looks at Mary Jo, "She's got a good quarter inch gap between her two front teeth that she can spit through."

Mary Jo laughs, "I hope Beth doesn't find out about this."

"Momma, if you and Daddy ever go see one of Cody's movies keep in mind that if he's doing anything other than talking on screen - it's probably me."

Cody laughs, "She can whistle through that gap so high that only dogs can hear it."

Ty and Cody ride horseback across a meadow with a few inches of snow covering it. Cody leads a pack horse. Ty pats this mounts neck, "This is Blaze. I've been working with him since he was a colt. I take him out every time I come home for a visit."

Cody isn't listening, he's looking all around, "Look at those mountains. Breathe this air. I'd like to start every day like this."

Ty says, "Maybe next time you get a part you could get 'em to let you show off a little. And by you, of course, I mean me."

"What are you talking about?"

Ty smiles, "Watch this."

Ty spurs Blaze and takes off riding fast in a big circle around Cody while doing tricks; he slides off the back of Blaze and

holds onto the horse's tail skiing through the snow, pulls himself back up, slides off the side holding onto the saddle horn, hits the ground with both feet then bounces back into the saddle, stands in the saddle, sits backwards on the saddle. Then he rides back up beside Cody.

Cody is wide-eyed with envy, "Holy cow! I didn't know you could do all that. That was amazing. Here," he hands Ty the pack horse reins, and takes off at a gallop.

Cody throws his right leg over the horse's neck, holds onto the saddle horn and slides off. When he hits the ground with both feet to bounce back up, he doesn't reach forward with his feet and falls face first into the snow. His horse gallops away.

Ty is still laughing when he rides up with the pack horse and hands the reins to Cody.

"Way to go Cowboy Cody. I wish there'd a been cameras rolling for that."

Cody brushes off snow and takes the pack horse reins.

"Oh, you think you're so smart. What'd I do wrong?"

"You spent most of your life in New York."

Ty is still laughing as he rides after Cody's horse.

Ty and Cody spend a day and a half looking for Wardell. When they find him, Cody is intrigued; he's never met anyone as calm, centered, and focused as Wardell. Without meaning to, Wardell makes Cody conscious of how shallow, materialistic, and unimportant his life is.

They hang around a fire in front of a line shack. Wardell hasn't shaved or cut his hair in months. His clothes are old and faded. He hunkers by the fire smiling at Ty and Cody. Ty turns skewers of game over the flames. Ty and Cody are clean-shaven, and well-dressed.

"So, Cody, you think you can make a movie star outta Ty?"

"Well, I don't know about all that Wardell. I haven't made a movie star out of me yet. I've only been in a few B Westerns. I don't think he's motivated enough anyway; he's kinda lazy."

Wardell smiles at Ty, "Yeah, I had almost made a cowboy out of him when he ran off to Hollywood."

Ty looks down, and shakes his head, "I shoulda knowed better than to get you two together."

Cole, Mary Jo, Ty, and Cody sit around the living room laughing and talking while a four-foot tall mahogany Magnavox radio plays Western music softly in the background. There is a Christmas tree in the corner. Ty stands in front of the blazing fireplace.

"Momma, has Daddy taken you to see any of Cody's movies yet?"

"Why no, he never takes me anyplace."

Cole looks at Mary Jo, "Honey I took you into town not more than three or four years ago, and all you did was complain and say you wanted to go home."

They laugh sharing a private joke.

Cole looks at Ty, "I don't guess I understand the picture shows. They play at the Chief for two or three days, and then they're

gone never to be seen again."

"All the more reason to go see the ones we're in while they're there."

"And how come so many of them are in black and white?"

Cody explains, "Because black and white film is about four times faster to develop than color film. The studios are filling a need; they can't crank out Westerns fast enough."

Mary Jo says, "Now no offense to you Cody, but I'll be glad when Ty gets the movie making out of his system and comes back here to help his Dad run this place."

Wardell takes the dowel and the can from the stream leaving the stakes in place. He takes the smaller can from inside the larger can and opens it. The smaller can is about half full of wet white sand. The rough stones that he put in the can with the sand have been polished to gem quality. He smiles at their beauty; dark red garnets, turquoise, onyx.

He puts more rough stones and sand into the can, reassembles the tumbler, then watches it turn slowly around.

In the mountains, Wardell chops cords of wood and stacks them in front of each of the line shacks.

On the fence line, his horse pulls barbed wire tight, and he hammers staples into fence posts.

When he finds a stray cow he and his mount fight their way through dense undergrowth to chase it out in the open where he

ropes it, throws it, ties it, and brands it.

At any given time, there are a dozen windmills working on the range bringing up water, and another three or four standing idle in need of repair. Wardell fixes the broken ones, and greases the ones that are working.

At night, he crushes different colored berries in bowls and makes dye that he rubs into the wood of small hand-carved animals that he has created. On some of them he embeds small gems or tiny beads.

Ty parks the Jeep in the parking lot of El Rancho then he and Cody walk toward the lobby entrance. The parking lot, lobby, hallways, the whole area is crowded with cowboys, tourists, locals, cowgirls, and señoritas.

When Ty and Cody go in the lobby, music from the lounge and colorful Christmas decorations enliven the swirl of happy people. In one corner a tall, stately Saguaro Cacti in a four-foot square container has been set up and decorated with multi-colored Christmas lights.

Beth and her girlfriend Suce check their coats then go over and stand by the fireplace. They are dressed up in dark print silk dresses with low-heeled Mary Janes, and tiny matching clutches. Suce is twenty years old, tall and shapely with rust-colored hair, green eyes, and a few freckles. She radiates youth, health and fitness.

Beth spots Ty and Cody as soon as they enter the lobby, "Look, there's Ty." She starts toward him but Suce puts her hand on Beth's forearm, "Wait, let him come to you."

Ty sees Beth and motions for Cody to come with him. Cody is looking around appreciating the rich Western atmosphere, "Look at all this stuff."

As Ty and Cody make their way across the crowded lobby, Cody's eyes meet Suce's for the first time. His eyes say, "Oh Yes!" Her eyes say, "Oh no."

Later, the four of them sit at a table in the lounge where the girl singer with the band is singing the Patsy Montana song, *I Wanna Be a Cowboys Sweetheart*.

Beth looks at Ty, "So how long you home for this time?"

"We'll probably head back the day after Christmas."

Beth looks away, "Good. I'll be glad to be rid of you." Under the table, she puts her hand on Ty's thigh.

"Me and Suce went to see you guys at the Chief when *Gun Ridge* played there."

She looks at Cody, "You were great."

She looks at Ty, "Are you sure you were in it? We didn't see you."

Cody laughs.

Ty rolls his eyes, "Every time you saw Cowboy Cody here in a fight, like in the saloon, or when his horse went down - that was me."

Beth toys with him, "Well, you should look at the camera, so we know it's you."

"I can't, that's the whole idea. You're supposed to think -

arrggh! If you couldn't tell it was me then good, I was doing my job."

Beth says, "Ty, is it true that Wardell's working on a ranch down in old Mexico?"

"I don't know."

Suce leans in, "I heard he changed his name and is prospecting uranium up in Utah."

Ty and Cody exchange looks. The band starts playing a slow song, and Cody looks at Suce, "Suzy, would you like to dance?"

Suce looks at Beth. Beth turns to Cody and starts saying something to him.

Suce can tell that Beth wants to be alone with Ty, "It's *Suce*, not Suzy. And yeah I guess."

Ty and Beth watch Cody and Suce slow dancing around the floor. Cody is smiling at Suce and saying something; Suce looks away, uninterested.

Beth leans against Ty, "Looks like your movie star is falling for Suce."

"I know; I've never seen him like this before. In Hollywood, the girls are usually after him because they think he can get them a part... "

Beth interrupts, "And to Suce, him being an actor is a strike against him. She's not going to get involved with someone who is going back to Hollywood in a few days. She's... level-headed."

Later, the four of them sit at the table talking, Cody puts his hand on Suce's, and she pulls away. Ty laughs at him.

Cody asks, "Did Wardell have a girlfriend?"

Ty says, "No, well, not since Janine."

Suce looks at Cody, "Janine ran off with an osteopath from Albuquerque."

Ty looks down at the table, "A couple of weeks before the fight here."

Beth shivers, "I still can't walk past that spot where it happened."

Suce says, "Janine was nice, but she was a city girl."

Ty smiles, "Wardell didn't know what an osteopath was. The only doctor he'd ever knowed was the veterinary."

Late that night, Ty drives while Cody looks out the side window at the moon, "I finally meet the girl of my dreams, and she lives eight hundred miles away."

Cameras track Cody as he races his mount to the edge of a roaring river then reins him in. A few minutes later, the cameras follow Ty as he charges the same horse into the river. The horse stumbles, falls, and rolls over on top of Ty. Cowboy extras and stuntmen race their mounts along the bank of the river throwing ropes at Ty's fast disappearing form.

Later, Cody sits alone on a rock by the river holding his head and crying.

Cody drives Ty's truck East as the sun sets behind him. The sun

reflects in the rearview mirror casting a band of golden light across Cody's eyes. He looks grim. Over his shoulder, through the rear window, the bed of the truck can be seen. Suitcases and boxes hold down a tarp that covers Ty's casket.

Under a crescent moon, headstones stick up through a blanket of snow. Wardell sits bundled up on his horse while tears freeze on his face.

Tyler William Hart

1935 - 1955

Beloved Son

Cole and Cody work on a windmill. Cole stands on the ground looking up at Cody, telling him what to do. He tries not to think about how he once stood there looking up at Ty.

Cole drives a pickup truck across the desert with Cody beside him. He stops the truck, Cody gets out and throws a block of salt from the bed of the truck.

Cole and Cody are horseback pushing a dozen cows when Cole says, "I been meaning to tell you that me and Mary Jo really appreciate you staying around after the funeral and helping out the way you have. But it's been a couple of months now, and I know you probably want to get back to Hollywood so don't stay on our account. I mean, we really like having you here, but I'm

sure this ain't helping your career any."

"Thanks for saying that, Cole. I'll tell ya I been thinking about that a lot lately and I've about decided that I'd rather be a cowboy than pretend to be a cowboy."

They stop their mounts, the cows graze.

Cole's eyes are full, "Well good for you boy. I think you've made the right decision. And you've got a job - and a home - here for as long as you want."

"Thanks Cole, you know I love it here, and I'm not interested in movies anymore after what happened, I mean, if he hadn't been taking my place that day..." Cody can't finish.

Cole looks at Cody, "Don't go blaming yourself."

They sit in silence for a moment watching the cows, then Cole says, "Did you know that Ty couldn't swim?"

"No, I didn't know that."

"I shoulda taken him someplace when he was little to learn how but look around, there's not a body of water big enough to swim in within a hundred miles of here. Hell, I don't know how to swim."

Cody says, "You know... what happened to Ty... it wouldn't a mattered if he knew how to swim or not, it was the horse falling on him that did it."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah."

"I'm glad you told me that. Poor Mary Jo, she blames herself

because she didn't put her foot down and make him stay on the ranch. Then Beth comes out to see us after the funeral and she's crying and saying that she shoulda done more to keep Ty at home. I guess we're all trying to blame ourselves when really, nobody's at fault."

That night, Cody, Cole, and Mary Jo sit in the living room listening to *The Lone Ranger* on the radio. Mary Jo works on the books, Cole reads the Albuquerque newspaper, while Cody stares into the fire.

Cody is sitting in the Jeep pickup when Suce comes out of a law office wearing a business suit and low heels; she's carrying a small strapless matching bag and a handful of mail. She is surprised to see him, and goes over to the truck.

"Cody! What are you doing back in town?"

"I never left. I've been out at Cole and Mary Jo's since the funeral trying to help out around there."

"Yeah, I saw you at the funeral. Sorry I didn't get a chance to talk with you. So, you're working at the Circle H, huh? Are you a ranch hand now?"

"Trying to be."

"What about the movies?"

"It's not what I want to do anymore."

"Well, I'm sure Cole and Mary Jo appreciate having you around."

Cody smiles, "How 'bout you? Would you appreciate having me around?"

She blushes, "Co-dee! I, uh, I have to get to the post office before they close."

She turns to leave, then turns back, "How did you know where I work?"

"Mary Jo."

She nods, turns to leave, then turns back, "How did you know when I'd get off work?"

"I didn't, I've been sitting here for over an hour."

She looks at him and tilts her head a little, "Well, if you're sitting there tomorrow at this time I guess we could go get a Coke or something."

Cody smiles, "See you tomorrow."

Cody drives the wagon up to the Deep Creek line shack. Wardell is chopping wood.

"Hey Wardell, how are ya?"

"Good Cody, how you doin'?"

"Better and better every day."

Cody climbs down, stretches, and shakes hands with Wardell. They begin to unload the wagon.

Wardell says, "I'm sure glad you decided to hang around. If you didn't, I was thinking I should go back to the bunkhouse, and I don't really want to do that."

"Yeah, I couldn't leave Cole and Mary Jo after what they've been

through and... I love it here."

"Good."

"Mary Jo packed one of these boxes for you. It's got some new clothes and boots, and I don't know what all in it. Cole sent you some binoculars, I'm not sure why... they both want to know when you're coming down for a visit."

"Tell 'em I'll ride back down with you next month."

They go in the shack, and Cody is surprised to see the inside of the shack filled with animal skins, fur, antlers, horns, animal skulls, bones, Indian artifacts, mineral samples, and gems. There are also many small, beautiful woodcarvings of animals. Some of the animals are embedded with beads, gold, turquoise, onyx, or garnets.

Cody picks up and admires a lizard mounted on an old flat piece of wood. Wardell has stained the wood so it looks as if the lizard's shadow is on it, "Dang, Wardell you been busy. Did you make all of these?"

"Yeah, it's something to do of an evening."

"They're beautiful, you're an artist."

"Well now, I don't know about all that."

"Can I take some back with me?"

"Sure, I don't care, you can have 'em. The line shacks are all filling up with stuff."

Cody carefully examines a fist-sized bunny rabbit that is so detailed it looks real with turquoise eyes and an onyx nose.

Suce holds the carved bunny that Cody has just given her. They are sitting in a quiet, dimly-lit restaurant.

Suce is impressed, "Thank you, it's beautiful. I've never seen anything like it, where did you get it?"

Cody squints, "Well, I probably shouldn't say."

"Now what in the world could that possibly mean? You stole it from the secret bunny society? Bunny agents are out looking for it as we speak?"

"Okay, but you have to promise not to tell anyone. You promise?"

"I promise."

"Only two other people know what I'm about to tell you, so..."

"This is too strange. I promise I won't tell anyone where you got the bunny, Cody."

He leans across the table and whispers, "Wardell."

She inhales a short gasp, then "You're kidding. Where is he? What's he doing?"

"He's riding the line on the Circle H, working the land, staying in line shacks, and creating some really beautiful wood carvings."

"So, Cole and Mary Jo are the only ones who know?"

"Right. Cole and Mary Jo, and you and me."

She puts the bunny down on the table, "I'm so glad you told me, and don't worry I won't tell anyone. But... what does it matter?"

"Umm, well I don't know, I don't guess it does."

They sit in silence for a minute, then Cody asks, "Have you seen Beth lately?"

"Poor Beth, I saw her about a week ago. Losing Ty really broke her. She had her heart set on him."

Cody doesn't know what to say, "Ty told me once that she had the hairiest legs in the county, does she?"

Suce laughs, "Why no. That Ty, I swear. He was putting you on her legs aren't any hairier than anybody else's."

The next day, Cody goes in the El Rancho gift shop and shows the manager some of Wardell's wood carvings. There is a black scorpion with a garnet-tipped tail, an eight-inch Gila Monster with a shiny, black, beaded coat with pink and yellow markings, a jewel-encrusted Hummingbird, a dragonfly with lucent wings, a long-horned bull, and horses; poised elegant, standing on hind legs pawing the air, running.

"These are exquisite. I've never seen anything like them before. Who made them?"

Cody looks around before answering, "Wardell."

The managers eyes get big, "You're kidding!"

"Nope."

"I'll take all you can get."

The Jeep is backed into a space at the Apache Drive-in Theater. There is a bale of hay against the cab, deep, loose hay in the bed, and Cody and Suce lean back against the bale of hay looking at the giant screen where a Western movie is being shown. They are wearing jeans, boots, and long-sleeved Western shirts. A speaker from the speaker post sits on the bale of hay.

Cody puts his arm around Suce's shoulder, "This is a movie I was in before I met Ty."

Cowboy Cody appears on screen, Suce looks from the screen to Cody sitting beside her, and back again, then pretends to yell as she points at Cody.

"Hey everybody, look it's Cowboy Cody."

Cody grabs her uplifted arm and pulls it and her further down into the bed of the truck.

"Shhh!"

Suce laughs and looks up at the screen.

"Look at you, so serious and all. What an actor."

Later, they share popcorn while looking at the screen. Suce gives Cody a sly look, "Owww, didn't that hurt?"

"It was a stand-in, and those chairs are made of balsa wood. They weigh about, well I don't know what they weigh, but they're very light."

"Owwie, now I know that had to hurt - getting a whiskey bottle broke over your head."

"They're made outta sugar. You notice no liquid ever comes out when they're broken over someone's head."

"Maybe that's what's wrong with you - you got hit in the head too many times in these B Westerns."

Later, Cody is seen riding after bad guys.

Suce says, "Nice horse."

"It was rented, most of them are."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah."

"It's a Tennessee Walking horse."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah. Hey, this part looks like it was filmed around here."

"It's Pioneerville. Have you ever been to California?"

"Yeah, I've spent several summers with my aunt and uncle in Inglewood. And they took me all around."

"Do you like it there?"

"It's okay to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there. It's like there's two kinds of Gallup girls, the city girls and the ranch girls. The girls who grow up in town are more likely to move away after high school to Albuquerque, or Phoenix, or California, or someplace. And the girls who grow up on ranches around here, like me, are more likely to stay. It's the ranch, it gets in your blood, or something. I wouldn't want to live in town."

"I know what you mean. I love the Circle H. I wouldn't want to live anyplace else."

Suce looks at him approvingly.

Later, a different Western plays, the moon and stars shine, and Cody has his arm around Suce as she sleeps with her head on his chest.

A dead black bird lies on the ground in front of Wardell. He is sitting cross-legged before it, carving, when the sun causes the black wings to flash iridescent in his eyes.

A Texas state flag and an American flag fly in front of Fort Pecos High School. A group of teenage boys stand behind a pickup truck in the parking lot. The tailgate is down, and two boys are sitting on it. The boys are all older and bigger than Wardell. He slows down when he walks past and looks their way. They look at him.

One of the boys calls out, "Hey, are you Wardell?"

Wardell smiles and moves closer, "Yeah, I'm Wardell."

"You live in that little house down by the tracks?"

"Yep, that'd be me."

The boy glances around at his friends, "Yeah, my daddy knows your momma."

Several of the boys look away trying to suppress laughter. The boy who said it smirks at Wardell. Wardell turns red, grits his teeth, and walks away.

In the 1960's, near the corner of Hollywood and Vine, a new Lincoln Town Car parks in front of Pierre's Art Gallery, and the actress Dorothy Malone gets out of the car wearing a pants suit and sunglasses. She strolls around in the store then stops in front of a glass display case. She pulls her sunglasses down her nose and peers at the figures inside the case as the store owner hurries toward her.

"Pierre, you've been holding out on me. Where did you get these elegant little carvings?"

"I was just coming to show you those Miss Malone. Those are Wardell Wood. They're hand carved by a wanted man - an outlaw living somewhere in the trackless deserts of the southwest."

"You're kidding. What's he wanted for?"

Pierre leans across the counter and whispers, "Murder."

"Oh, my word, I want one." She stops and points to a little sign in the display case.

"What's this?"

The sign reads, "One per customer."

"Sorry Miss Malone, but these are rare."

"How much are they?"

"Two hundred dollars each."

She points to a miniature Gila Monster, "I'll take the lizard."

At a desert crossroads, several pickup trucks from the 1970's are parked in the dirt parking area front of a bar. Two of the trucks have gun racks in the rear window with rifles in them, and two of the trucks have CB antennas. A hand-made sign on the door to the bar reads, "No hippies or bikers allowed."

Country music plays on the jukebox while five rough-looking, middle aged men sit at the bar with beer in front of them. They've had a few.

The first man says, to no one in particular, "Last year during deer season me and a couple of other guys were hunting just outside Gila National Forest. One afternoon we seen this guy way out in the desert leading a pack horse. I looked through my scope and knew right away who it was."

He pauses, but no one asks who it was, so he continues anyway, "It was Wardell, the outlaw himself, trekking across the desert - alone."

The second man stares straight ahead, expressionless, "Bullshit."

The first man explains, "I knowed Wardell from up in Gallup years ago. I'm not saying we hung out together or anything, but we went to some of the same places."

Second man, "Bullshit."

The bartender wipes the bar and says, "I believe him. Wardell came in here about three years ago, sat on that very stool, and had a beer. I talked to him, seemed real nice."

Second man, "Bullshit."

Third man, "My cousin bought a horse off him."

Second man, "Oh my God."

Third man, "No, really. Everybody knows that Wardell breaks wild horses and sells 'em down in Deming. He stays down there in case the laws get after him he can slip across the border."

Near sunset, Cody, gray-haired and stout, drives a big ATV to the barn where Suce is washing the now thirty-year-old Jeep. He gets off the ATV, a little stiff, and kisses Suce on the cheek, then says, "I don't feel like I deserve all this."

She finishes spraying off the Jeep and drops the hose in a trough, "Deserve all what?"

They start walking toward the back door.

"Well, first of all - you. Then Cole and Mary Jo leaving the ranch to us. Now today Wardell tells me he wants me to invest that quarter of a million dollars he's let accumulate in the bank, back into the ranch. He wants me to buy those sections on the south, I told him they were too dry, and he said, sink some wells."

Cole opens the back door for Suce, and as she walks in, she pats him on the chest, "No, you deserve it all."

Cody and Suce stop their horses in the mountains and look down at the desert. In the middle of the flat open expanse, there is a serpentine line. They look from the line to one another, then back at the line.

Suce takes her hat off and wipes her brow, "What the hell is

that?"

"That's what I was fixin' to say."

They start down. Later, they ride up to the serpentine line; it's a hundred-yard-long fence for no reason, going nowhere, not connected to anything - undulating across the desert plain, tight, neat, and perfect.

They sit on their horses and look at the fence, speechless. They look at one another and slowly shake their heads.

Cody starts to laugh, "I guess he got tired of making straight lines."

Cody drives the ATV loaded with supplies to the Deep Creek line shack. Wardell is chopping wood. He stops and waves to Cody, "Hey, long time no see Ty. How you been?"

Cody notices that Wardell called him Ty, but he doesn't say anything about it, figures it was just a slip of the tongue.

"I been real good Wardell. How you doin'?"

"Can't complain. I been cross fencing that big stretch in the north valley. Ran outta wire. I see you brought some, very good Ty."

They start unloading the wagon, and Wardell says, "How's your momma and daddy?"

Cody hesitates before answering, "They're doin' good."

Wardell goes in the shack with a box. Cody leans against the ATV and stares at the ground. His eyes get full as he realizes that

Ty was once his double, and now... Wardell comes back out and notices that Cody is teary eyed, "What's wrong Ty?"

"Nothing War, nothing."

A slow-moving freight train can be heard in the background as fifteen-year-old Wardell goes in the kitchen and puts his Army surplus backpack on the table. He fills a thermos at the sink and stuffs it in the backpack along with some oranges.

He goes in his mother's room and looks at the dresser. The setting sun comes through the bedroom window and reflects in the mirror all gold and silver. He slams his fist into the mirror; it shatters into dozens of pieces as beams of light explode like fireworks filling the room. The flashing beams of light are accompanied by the whack, crash, and tinkle of the breaking glass.

Wardell walks toward the westbound train with the backpack slung over one shoulder. He takes a handkerchief from his hip pocket and wraps it around his bleeding hand.

A young couple stop for gas at a forlorn isolated desert gas station they would later describe as being, "in the middle of no place." The husband leans against their 2004 BMW and watches the gas pump. His wife walks around videotaping distant landscapes.

At the corner of the ancient building, she turns and sees an old man sitting on the ground, in the shade with his back against the building. He whittles. His hair and beard are long and gray, and his clothes are faded and dusty. About twenty yards away, a

packhorse grazes on desert stubble.

The young lady cautiously steps closer while holding the video camera casually in front of her. The old man looks up, "Howdy" then he rises effortlessly and stands straight

She smiles, "Hello. Do you live around here?"

He looks out over the empty desert to the distant mountains without a road or building in sight, "Sure do."

"Is that your horse?"

The old man looks at the horse, "Yeah, he likes to be called Chase."

Then barely raising his voice, "Chase, come here boy."

Chase looks up and ambles over. The lady pats his neck. For a few minutes the old man and the young lady make small talk about the weather, the price of gas, and where she and her husband are going.

Then he says, "We're going now. It was nice talking with you. Here, this is for you."

He reaches out to give her something and she notices a scar on the back of his hand. She takes the piece of wood that he has transformed into some kind of animal, not a real animal, but an imaginary animal from another world, exotic and beautiful.

She holds the work of art in her cupped hand, "Thank you, it's beautiful. I'll treasure it." She aims the video camera at the intriguing little creature, "Wow, this is amazing, I..." She looks up, but the old man and Chase have turned and are walking away. She watches and records as they amble away, and then disappear

into the shimmering desert heat.

end