

THE RED CACTUS

written by

Brian S. Thompson

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Brian S. Thompson  
Santa Lila - Manazana A - Lote 1  
Chiclayo, Lambayeque, Peru  
011-51-97-926-7475  
[californium\\_films@yahoo.com](mailto:californium_films@yahoo.com)

FADE IN:

EXT. LARGE ARIZONA OASIS - DAY

SUPER: ARIZONA - 1902

A BUZZARD soars effortlessly above the brutal Arizona desert.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

William P. Thornbush spent his  
entire life searching for the big  
score.

The buzzard watches WILLIAM P. THORNBUSH (WILL), 58, a worn  
and grizzled man with long crusty hair and beard, trudge away  
from a supply laden mule carcass.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)

A gold miner that gave up family,  
friends and a normal way of life to  
find that one strike.

The buzzard circles a speck of life, enveloped by death. A  
rocky cliff borders one side of the oasis. Green trees and  
bushes fight for space around the stagnant pond.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)

That one strike that would afford  
him what he always wanted. Family,  
friends and a normal way of life.

Will glances up at the buzzard then collapses to his knees,  
dying of thirst under the cruel Arizona sun.

Will lies down then struggles to crawl toward the pond.

Will's progress is halted by a magnificent red cactus with a  
white flower on top.

Will's weak and raspy voice escapes his peeling lips.

WILL

You got water.

Will slides his hand down to his ankle sheath. He struggles  
to pull out his knife then slides it to the cactus.

WILL (CONT'D)

You're beautiful.

Will hesitates, gazing reverently at the cactus.

Will cuts off one of the three large petals then cuts off its  
tip. Milky liquid drips from the petal's tip.

Will strains to roll onto his back then puts the petal tip in his mouth. His hands tremble as he squeezes the liquid out. Will's hands collapse across his chest.

Will looks up at the circling buzzard and whispers.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Not today.

As the years begin to melt away, Will gains the strength to sit up. He's shed five years off his age.

Almost a rebirth, Will's voice is strong and vibrant.

WILL (CONT'D)  
What the hell?

Will cuts the two remaining petals from the cactus then cuts their tips off. Will voraciously sucks the juice from them.

Will looks down at his dry wrinkled hands. The skin starts to rejuvenate and the wrinkles begin to subside. He's shed ten years off his age.

Will throws the knife into the ground then jumps to his feet, like an adolescent brimming with life.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Hot damn!

Will pinches his skin.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Ow.

Will looks like he did when he was forty. He looks down at what remains of the cactus then at his youthful hands.

Will laughs hysterically and tears seep from his eyes, leaving small trails of mud down his dust covered face.

Will studies his ever younger hands then claps them together. Their power inspires him to do an awkward dance, kicking up his heels and flailing his arms.

He bends down and grabs the knife, then cuts the white flower off the cactus. He stuffs it down his filthy ragged shirt.

Will gives the dead mule a mournful glance.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Sorry, old cuss.

Will slides his knife into its sheath. He spots a crevice in the rocky cliff, providing shade from the torturous sun.

Will trots over to the crevice. He kneels down, then crawls inside and lies down on his back. Will howls like a wolf.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Awhoooooooooooo!

Will's eyes slam shut. He falls asleep and starts to dream of days past.

EXT. COVE MOUNTAIN - DAY

SUPER: COVE MOUNTAIN, VIRGINIA - MAY 1864

Will, strapping and handsome, 20, in a tattered Union Army private's uniform, lies halfway up Cove Mountain. He aims his Henry repeating rifle upward.

Sporadic gunfire echoes in the distance.

A SQUAD MEMBER lies to Will's right, a trembling freckle-faced BOYISH SQUAD MEMBER lies to his left. The two aim their Springfield Model 61 muskets upward.

Will smiles at the Boyish Squad Member and tries to calm him.

WILL  
Relax and shoot straight.

A chilling rebel's yell blasts over the top of the mountain.

An energetic young GRAY COAT pops up at the top of the mountain. The Gray Coat screams wildly as he barrels his way toward Will's position.

The boyish Squad Member drops his musket then sprints away.

The Gray Coat's two REBEL COMPANIONS rush over the top of the mountain. The confederates use Springfield Model 61 muskets.

Will hears his other Squad Member yell.

SQUAD MEMBER (O.S.)  
Run, Thornbush.

Will looks over his shoulder and sees his Squad Members fleeing. Will leaps to his feet then sprints away, too.

Will crashes through the forest. Saplings and forest debris prove to be little hindrance in his quest for survival.

Will hears the demonic yelps of the Gray Coat close behind, pushing him to run even faster.

Will trips in a slight hollow at the base of the mountain. A shot rings out and hits the tree beside him.

Will scrambles to aim his rifle at the Gray Coat.

The Gray Coat kneels to reload his musket, far in front of his two Rebel Companions.

Will fires and misses.

The Gray Coat panics and drops the Minié ball as he tries to stuff it down the barrel.

WILL

Relax.

Will cocks his rifle and fires again.

Without a whimper, the Gray Coat crumples to the ground.

Time seems to stand still, Will hears nothing. He gazes through the smoke of his rifle at the innocent face of the dead Gray Coat and sees an eerie peace.

A Rebel's shrill yelp jolts Will back to reality.

The two Rebels are closing fast.

Will leaps up and sprints away. He hears two shots ring out behind him, but doesn't slow down or look back.

EXT. MINNEAPOLIS TRAIN STATION - DAY

PEOPLE on the wooden platform of the Minneapolis train station greet OTHERS emerging from the train.

MANDY, 20, a comely and wholesome woman, stands beside Will's brawny farm MOTHER, 50, who grips Mandy's arm.

Will, in civilian clothes, carries a haversack and his sheathed rifle off the train.

Will stops and looks around for Mandy and his Mother. He spots them and they wave.

WILL

Aiyeeeeee!

Will waves and runs to them. He drops the haversack and rifle. He hugs them both at the same time. Will's Mother starts to cry.

Will picks Mandy up and spins her around.

WILL (CONT'D)

I'm so happy to see you again.

MANDY

Me too, Will.

Will sets her down and hugs his choked up Mother.

WILL  
Missed you, Ma.

Will's Mother kisses him on the cheek.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Sure could use some of your home  
cooking.

Will's Mother wipes her tears and motions to go.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Lead the way, Ma.

Will picks up the haversack and rifle. Will's Mother walks away. Will and Mandy hold hands and follow her.

EXT. WILL'S FARMHOUSE PORCH - NIGHT

Will holds Mandy's hand as they sit in the swinging chair on the porch. Moonlight bathes the small Minnesota farm. Lantern light flows out of the windows.

MANDY  
It must have been horrible.

WILL  
Doesn't seem right. Didn't even  
know the names of the men I killed,  
but I'll never forget their faces.  
They won't let me.

Mandy holds him tight and kisses his cheek.

MANDY  
Well, it's over now. I'm just glad  
you didn't get hurt.

Will's Mother walks out of the house.

WILL'S MOTHER  
Can I get you two anything?

Mandy stands up then Will does.

MANDY  
No thank you, Mrs. Thornbush, I  
really must be going.

WILL'S MOTHER  
Are you sure?

MANDY  
My father.

WILL'S MOTHER

Okay, dear.

Will's Mother steps back inside the house.

WILL

What's he got against me, anyway?

MANDY

Nothing, my love.

Will grabs Mandy and they kiss.

EXT. MINNESOTA STREAM - DAY

Will and Mandy picnic beside a stream in the Minnesota woods.  
Will tears into a fried chicken leg.

MANDY

Slow down, Will, we have time to  
enjoy ourselves.

Will slows down.

WILL

This is nice.

Mandy kisses him on the cheek.

MANDY

Yes, it is, my love.

Will finishes the chicken leg then tosses the bone. He wipes  
his hands off on his pants.

Will gets on one knee and reaches into his pocket, then pulls  
out a skimpy engagement ring.

Mandy smiles as she stands up, tears start to flow.

WILL

Mandy, you are my heart and soul.  
Will you marry me?

Mandy covers her mouth. She smiles and nods yes.

Will places the skimpy engagement ring on her finger. He  
stands up and holds her close.

INT. MANDY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Kerosene lanterns cast light upon the farmhouse living room.  
A summer breeze drifts through the house making the shadows  
dance as it nudges the flames of the lanterns.

Will and Mandy sit snuggly on the sofa, Mandy clutches something in her hands.

WILL

It won't take long. I'll find that big strike and return to you, then we'll get married, Mandy.

MANDY

You've only been back two months, Will. Can't you stay here and farm?

WILL

Farming put my father in an early grave and he hardly got anything for it. We deserve better.

MANDY

It was torture waiting for you to come back from the war, and now you up and leave again.

WILL

I want to provide a great future for you and our children. I want us to have the best that money can buy.

MANDY

I don't need all that, Will. All I need is you.

Mandy starts to bounce her right leg. Will smiles at her nervous tic then pulls her close.

WILL

Just a few months, Mandy, I can feel it. Then we'll have everything we ever dreamed of.

MANDY

What we dreamed of?

Uncomfortable silence looms for a moment.

MANDY'S FATHER leans against the outside of the living room wall, listening to their conversation.

MANDY (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Are you still leaving tomorrow?

WILL (O.S.)  
Yep, everything's ready to go.

Mandy's Father smiles and tiptoes away.

MANDY

You be careful, I don't want to  
become a widow before we're even  
married.

Will looks at her and chuckles.

WILL

I survived the war, so this will be  
easy.

MANDY

I won't wait forever, Mr. William  
P. Thornbush.

Mandy opens her hands and gives him a silver pocket watch.

MANDY (CONT'D)

So you don't forget me, Will.

Will opens the silver pocket watch and sees Mandy's photo  
inside the cover.

WILL

It's as beautiful as you are. Thank  
you.

Will closes the cover and stuffs it in his shirt pocket.

WILL (CONT'D)

And how could I ever forget you?

Will wrestles playfully with Mandy and tickles her.

Will pulls out a folded paper from his shirt pocket and hands  
it to Mandy.

WILL (CONT'D)

Guess so you don't forget yourself  
neither.

Mandy unfolds the paper and reveals a remarkably detailed  
sketch of her.

MANDY

I love you, Will.

WILL

I'll love you forever, Mandy.

Mandy hugs Will and a passionate kiss ensues.

INT. WILL'S FARMHOUSE KITCHEN - DAY

Will sits in the farmhouse kitchen, fidgeting with the silver  
pocket watch Mandy gave him last night.

His Mother prepares breakfast.

WILL'S MOTHER  
When are you coming back?

WILL  
Won't take more than a few months,  
Ma.

WILL'S MOTHER  
Why can't you stay and build a good  
life here? Mandy's a fine young  
woman and you would be very happy  
with her.

Will stuffs the silver pocket watch into his shirt pocket.

WILL  
We'll do that, Ma, just as soon as  
we can.

WILL'S MOTHER  
If you're worried about money, you  
needn't worry about such things.  
Your father provided us with a good  
life by working the farm.

His Mother brings a hearty breakfast to the table and sets it  
in front of Will.

WILL  
I'll try it this way for a few  
months.

Will tears into the breakfast.

WILL'S MOTHER  
Then please find your gold fast.  
I'll miss you, Will.

His Mother puts her arms around him and gives him a crushing  
hug, tears drip from her eyes.

WILL  
We'll see each other soon, Ma, I  
promise.

His Mother releases her powerful hold then sits down.

INT. WILL'S BARN - DAY

Will, pistol strapped to his side and floppy hat on his head,  
stands in the barn beside a saddled and bridled CHESTNUT  
STALLION. His Henry rifle is in its sheath.

Will throws his haversack behind the saddle and straps it on.

Will's Mother enters with a paper bag full of snacks and hands it to Will.

WILL  
Thanks, Ma.

She kisses Will's cheek, then whirls around and leaves.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Ma?

Will agonizes as he watches his Mother walk out of the barn.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Sorry, Ma, but I gotta do this.

Will mounts the stallion then races out of the barn, paper bag in hand.

EXT. WILL'S BARN - DAY

Will and the stallion blast out of the barn then Will guides it down the dirt path.

Will's old scraggly DOG barks and gives chase.

Will's Mother sits in the swinging chair on the porch, handkerchief in hand.

Will fast approaches the hill in the path, dust rising from the rhythmic hooves of his steed.

The dog gives up and sits down.

Will's Mother stands up. She wipes her eyes as she watches Will ride over the hill and disappear.

INT. MINNEAPOLIS PASSENGER CAR - DAY

Will enters the passenger car of the train at the Minneapolis station. Few PEOPLE inside.

Will places the paper bag, haversack and rifle in a seat then sits down beside them. He sits back and pulls his floppy hat down over his eyes.

An OLD MAN, 60s, scholarly, sits down across from him.

OLD MAN  
Where are you headed, son?

Will lifts his hat enough to see who's talking to him.

WILL  
Elko, Nevada.

OLD MAN  
What are you heading there for?

WILL  
Gonna find gold and return to marry  
my gal.

OLD MAN  
Ah, another young man on a hopeless  
quest for gold.

Will is bothered by the Old Man's comments.

WILL  
I'll find it, I can feel it.

OLD MAN  
And what are you prepared to lose  
in the process?

WILL  
Huh?

OLD MAN  
One does not come by gold without  
paying a high price.

Will picks up his paper bag, haversack and rifle then storms  
to another seat. He sets his things down. He sits down and  
grumbles.

WILL  
Stupid old man.

The train's whistle screams and the passenger car jolts as it  
begins to journey down the tracks.

EXT. ELKO MAIN STREET - DAY

Elko, NV sits in a stream fed lush green valley, surrounded  
by barren rocky hills.

The stable, bank, saloon/hotel, sheriff's office, restaurant,  
and dry goods store form the main street. A few houses,  
little more than shacks, dot the area.

Will, in high spirits, rides his stallion through the empty  
street. Will inhales deeply through his nose.

WILL  
Smell that, boy? Gold awaits.

Will pats the stallion on the neck.

Will spots the stable and rides to it, then dismounts.

INT. ELKO STABLE - DAY

Will leads his stallion into the stable.

A skinny old STABLE MAN with crooked glasses works on a hoof of the ELKO MULE. Sweat runs into his eyes as he looks up and watches Will walk toward him.

WILL

Afternoon, sir.

Stable Man releases the mule's hoof and stands up straight. He pulls out his handkerchief and wipes his face.

STABLE MAN

What can I do fer ya?

WILL

How much to keep him here for the night?

STABLE MAN

Dollar for the space, fifty cents fer feed and water. Gonna do some prospectin'?

WILL

Yep.

STABLE MAN

Might not wanna take this buzzard feast out there. Don't do too well in the desert. Give ya a fair price fer it.

WILL

He'll be fine, but I'd like to buy a mule.

Will digs in his pocket then hands Stable Man the money.

STABLE MAN

Ya be in tomorrow?

WILL

Yep, bright and early.

Will removes his haversack and rifle from the stallion. Will hands the reins to Stable Man.

STABLE MAN  
We kin hammer out a deal on a mule  
in the mornin'.

Stable Man leads the stallion into a stable.

WILL  
See you tomorrow.

Stable Man grunts.

Will turns around and walks outside.

INT. ELKO SALOON - DAY

Will carries his haversack and rifle through the swinging half doors of the Elko saloon/hotel, straight to the bar.

The bald bartender, EZRA, 40s, a jovial man, walks over.

EZRA  
Kin I get ya somethin'?

WILL  
Whiskey and a room, please.

Ezra turns to fill the order.

MABEL, 25, a prostitute weathered beyond her years, approaches Will and leans on the bar.

MABEL  
Hi.

Will politely nods.

MABEL (CONT'D)  
What's your name, drifter?

WILL  
Not.

Mabel looks at him, curious about the name.

MABEL  
Not? That's a peculiar one. What's your last name?

WILL  
Interested.

MABEL  
Not interested?

Mabel pauses, then glares at Will and walks away in a huff.

Ezra returns with a shot of whiskey and a key.

EZRA  
Two dollah an' a quarter. Room  
four.

Will digs in his pocket then pays Ezra.

Ezra hands him the key and Will takes a sip of his whiskey.

EZRA (CONT'D)  
Ya oughta be nice to Mabel, she  
might start to look purty good  
after ya been in the desert a  
couple months.

Will guffaws.

WILL  
Thanks for the advice, but I got a  
gal back home.

Ezra grins, having heard that before.

EZRA  
Suit yerself, young man.

Will sips down his drink then gently sets the glass down.

Will stands up and picks up his haversack and rifle, then carries them to the stairs.

Mabel's piercing eyes follow his every step as Will trots up the stairs.

MABEL  
Dodgeasted Mary.

EXT. NEVADA OASIS - DAY

Will rides the stallion, haversack and rifle strapped to it, to an oasis in the Nevada desert. He leads the Elko mule, loaded down with equipment and supplies.

There's a water hole, bushes, cacti and shade coming from a steep rock formation.

Will, dusty and weary with a blossoming beard, climbs off the stallion. Will slaps the days of trail dust off with his hat.

Will stretches in the burning sun to get relief from the long time in the saddle.

Will leads the stallion and mule to the water hole.

When the stallion has had its fill, Will leads it to a bush in the shade and ties it there. Will removes the saddle.

Will leads the mule to another bush and ties it there. Will removes the equipment and supplies from its back.

WILL  
Look like a good spot?

The mule doesn't acknowledge he exists.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Thought you'd like it.

Will begins to set up camp.

INT. SMALL NEVADA CAVE - DAY

Months later Will is scruffy with dirty long hair and beard. He's in a Nevada cave with a kerosene lantern, pick-ax and a wooden bucket.

Will walks along the cave and holds the lantern close to the wall as he goes. A gold glitter catches his eye and he stops.

Will sets the lantern down and swings the pick-ax, then examines the shards that have fallen. He smiles as he sees a small nugget of gold in the mix.

Will separates the gold from the other pieces that have fallen and gives it a kiss, then puts it in his shirt pocket.

WILL  
That's a start.

Will continues to strike with the pick-ax until he gets a sizable pile of rubble on the cave floor.

Will sorts through the rubble and removes any promising pieces, placing them in the wooden bucket.

EXT. NEVADA OASIS - DAY

Will has packed up the camp. His mule is loaded with equipment and the diminished supplies.

Will looks at the gold nuggets inside a leather pouch. He closes the pouch then ties it to the stallion's saddle horn. Will's haversack and rifle are strapped to the horse.

Will mounts the horse and rides off, leading the mule.

## EXT. NEVADA HILLS - DAY

Will continues his journey with horse and mule. Miles from the oasis, the landscape is less barren. Green bushes dot the rugged terrain.

In the distance fierce yellow eyes peer through a bush.

A DEER, unaware of any danger, makes its way toward the bush.

Equipment clanks on the mule's back. The deer glances at Will's caravan then bolts off.

A COUGAR crouches behind the bush. It snarls then turns its attention to Will's caravan.

Nearing the cougar, the stallion whinnies and bucks violently. Will is hurled off and thumps to the ground.

The mule stands its ground, but the horse sprints away. The cougar gives chase.

Will gets to his feet and fast as lightning draws his pistol, but the cougar is out of range.

Will tugs the mule's reins, but it doesn't budge.

WILL

Now's not the time you stubborn overgrown donkey. We gotta get that gold back.

## A MILE AWAY

The cougar feeds on the stallion carcass.

Will leads his mule. He stops when he spots the cougar fifty yards or so away.

Will pulls his pistol and fires a round.

The bullet rips into the stallion carcass and the cougar sprints away.

Will leads the mule to the carcass. He scans the area before he holsters his pistol.

Will kneels down beside the carcass. The leather pouch is not on the saddle horn.

Will slumps down and holds his head in his hands.

WILL

Damnation!

Will leaps to his feet, then pulls his pistol and fires wildly. He calmly holsters the pistol.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Horse shit and biscuits.

Will ties the mule to a bush then scours the area for the leather pouch.

EXT. NEVADA DESERT - DAY

Will, a bulge in his shirt from the leather pouch, leads his mule through gravelly desert hills, thinly populated with scrub brush and mesquite trees. The sun hangs low in the sky.

Will ties the mule to a mesquite tree. The mule now has the haversack, saddle and rifle strapped on, too.

Will walks around and scans the ground. He squats behind a burrow in the ground. Will slides out his knife from his ankle sheath and holds it above the burrow.

Will tosses tiny pebbles in front of the burrow.

A desert iguana crawls out of the burrow and Will slams the knife into its skull. The iguana flails for an instant then goes limp.

Will lifts up the knife and the iguana dangles from it.

Will walks over to the shade of the mesquite tree and drops the iguana on the ground. He puts the knife in its sheath.

Will collects wood and kindling then sets it in a pile. He uses a match to start a fire.

Will sits down by the fire then guts and skins the iguana. He skewers the iguana with a stick and roasts it over the fire.

Will lifts the roasted iguana from the dying fire. He lets it cool then begins to eat and it's not real tasty.

INT. ELKO BANK - DAY

Will carries his haversack and rifle into the Elko, NV bank. He walks over to the ELKO TELLER.

Will removes the leather pouch from around his neck then opens it, revealing the nuggets of gold he recovered.

ELKO TELLER  
Would you like to sell that, sir?

WILL  
Yep.

ELKO TELLER  
It's eighteen ninety-three an  
ounce.

Will nods.

The Elko Teller takes the pouch and turns to a scale behind him. He empties the gold onto the scale's tray.

The Elko Teller presses a fingertip on a small nugget. The nugget sticks to his finger and he curls it into his palm.

The Elko Teller balances the scale with weights. He pours the gold into a bottle.

The Elko Teller turns to Will.

WILL  
How much we got?

ELKO TELLER  
You have ten ounces, sir.

The Elko Teller hands Will his cash and leather pouch.

Will puts most of the cash into the leather pouch. The rest he puts in his front pants pocket. He puts the pouch around his neck then tucks it down the front of his shirt.

Will walks out of the bank, whistling as he goes.

INT. ELKO SALOON - DAY

Will carries his haversack and rifle into the Elko saloon/hotel. He walks to the bar then sits down.

EZRA  
Didn't think I'd be seein' you  
around here again. What kin I  
getcha?

WILL  
Whiskey and a room, Ezra.

Will turns around and nods at Mabel.

Ezra sees the gesture, smiles and shakes his head. He returns with a key and a glass of whiskey.

EZRA  
Two dollah fifty. Room two.

WILL  
Price has gone up.

EZRA

Don't it always? Told ya Mabel  
would start lookin' purty good.

Will sheepishly grins and pays Ezra. Will stuffs the key into his pants pocket.

EZRA (CONT'D)

Yup, the desert changes a fella,  
whether he likes it er not.

Will shrugs.

Mabel strolls over and sits on the bar stool beside Will.

MABEL

Hi, Not.

Will blushes and turns to Mabel.

WILL

Hi, Mabel, the name's Will.

Will extends his hand and she shakes it. Mabel touches his scruffy beard.

MABEL

You look like you need a shave.

Will smells himself.

WILL

And a bath.

MABEL

Well, finish up your drink and  
let's get that taken care of.

Will gulps the whiskey then slams his glass down on the bar.

Will stands up and grabs his haversack and rifle. He follows Mabel to the back of the saloon and they enter the

#### BATHING ROOM

Will sets his haversack and rifle on the floor. He removes the pouch from his neck then stuffs it inside the haversack.

Will sets his pistol belt down and undresses, dropping his clothes in a heap. He walks to the tub then jumps in. Will shudders.

WILL

Damn that's cold.

Will scrubs himself with soap. Mabel helps with a bath brush.

Mabel starts to cut off his beard with a scissors and throws the knotted mess on the floor.

Mabel cuts Will's hair crooked.

She lathers his face then shaves him with a straight razor.

Will sinks down into the tub. He washes away the clippings and shaving cream. He bursts out of the tub then dries off.

Mabel puts the razor and scissors on a table then sweeps up the hair.

Mabel returns to the tub and washes her hands.

MABEL  
Much better.

Will, towel around his waist, reaches into his haversack. He removes the pouch then puts it around his neck.

WILL  
Thanks, Mabel, I feel like a new  
man. You're a woman of many  
talents.

Will removes fresh clothes and starts to dress.

MABEL  
You haven't seen nothing yet.

Will buttons his pants then puts on his shirt.

WILL  
You hungry?

MABEL  
Yes, I am, Will.

Will kneels to remove the cash from the pocket of the dirty pants. He puts it into his clean pants pocket then stuffs his dirty clothes into the haversack.

Will sits on the floor and puts on his socks and boots. Will jumps up then straps on his pistol.

WILL  
Let's go.

MABEL  
Lead the way.

Will picks up his haversack and rifle. Mabel follows him out the door.

INT. ELKO RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Will and Mabel sit at a table in the dingy Elko restaurant.

MABEL  
You're going back out there?

WILL  
Yep, my gal's waiting for me and  
when I got enough for a good life,  
we're gonna get married and have  
kids.

MABEL  
There's a funny thing about plans,  
they never seem to go as planned.

Will ignores Mabel. ELKO WAITRESS brings stew and corn bread to the table.

Will starts to devour the meal. Stew drips down Will's chin. He watches the Elko Waitress walk away and mumbles.

WILL  
Thanks.

Mabel, amused by Will, pecks at her food.

Will finishes long before Mabel and is in a hurry for more. He looks to Mabel for approval.

MABEL  
Go ahead, Will, I don't want  
dessert anyway.

Will raises his hand to get the attention of Elko Waitress and she returns to the table.

WILL  
May I get that piece of pie and cup  
of coffee now?

The Elko Waitress nods and walks away.

Will gawks at Mabel as she daintily consumes her meal.

Elko Waitress brings the apple pie and coffee to the table and Will digs in.

MABEL  
Do you do everything like that?

Will chews and swallows, then looks at Mabel.

WILL  
Like what?

MABEL

Start fast and finish quick. Can't  
you just slow down and enjoy what  
you're doing?

Will, embarrassed, shovels more pie into his face.

MABEL (CONT'D)

That should make my job a lot  
easier.

Will looks up at her and grins.

INT. ELKO HOTEL ROOM 2 - NIGHT

Mabel undresses and Will lies in bed in his dark hotel room.  
Barely enough light to distinguish movement. Will's haversack  
and rifle sit in a corner.

Mabel joins him under the covers and caresses his body.

Will is having none of that. He rolls on top of her then all  
movement stops.

MABEL

Come on, Will, you paid for it.

Will rolls off of her.

WILL

Shit!

Will jumps out of bed and puts on pants.

WILL (CONT'D)

I can't, Mabel.

MABEL

No refunds.

WILL

You gotta go.

Mabel hops out of bed then gets dressed.

MABEL

Thank you for a nice evening, Will.

Will grumbles.

WILL

Yep.

Mabel opens the door and light rushes in from the saloon. She  
closes the door behind her and darkness consumes the room.

INT. MANDY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mandy, in a nightgown, lies asleep in bed. Moonlight bathes her bedroom. She tosses and turns.

Mandy opens her eyes then bolts up, terrified.

MANDY  
Will?

She gets out of bed, then walks to the window and stares out.

MANDY (CONT'D)  
What's happened, Will?

INT. ELKO HOTEL ROOM 2 - NIGHT

Will, in pants, sits at the desk and lights a kerosene lantern. Will writes on a paper: DEAREST MANDY,

Will scribbles a bit, then folds the paper and places it into an envelope.

Will begins to sketch.

Will looks at the almost angelic character with the face of the young Gray Coat he killed.

WILL  
Now go on and get outta my head.

Will drops it on the desk and turns off the kerosene lantern, then walks to the bed. He removes his pants and crawls under the covers.

EXT. MANDY'S FARMHOUSE - DAY

Mandy's Father sits on his porch, holding the envelope from Will. He watches a RIDER on a HORSE gallop away.

Mandy walks out the front door.

MANDY  
Who was that?

Her Father feigns a smile and hands her the envelope.

MANDY'S FATHER  
This came for you, sweetheart.

Mandy smiles down at the envelope.

MANDY

Oh, thank you, Daddy. Maybe he's  
finally coming back.

Mandy kisses his cheek then runs into the house.

Her Father gazes into the distance, unable to hide his  
contempt for Will.

INT. MANDY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Mandy sits down at the desk in her bedroom. She opens Will's letter, giddy with anticipation. She begins to read and her smile turns to a frown.

WILL (V.O.)

I'm getting close, I can feel it.  
It won't be long now. I miss you  
with all my heart and am counting  
the days until we're together  
again. Love forever, Will.

Mandy talks to the letter.

MANDY

Oh, Will, you are such an ill-fated  
dreamer. You'll never change. I  
love you, but I shall wait no more.

Mandy crumples up the letter and throws it into a wastebasket. She removes the engagement ring from her finger and tosses it into a desk drawer.

Tears fall from her eyes. Her leg bounces nervously as she brushes her hair.

EXT. LARGE NEVADA CAVE - DAY

Another year or so has passed. Will, scraggly, kneels down outside a different Nevada cave. He covers his ears with his hands.

Boom! An explosion blasts a cloud of dust out the mouth of the cave. Will stands up and waits for the dust to clear.

Will grows impatient and walks to the mouth of the cave.

Will removes his hat and begins to frantically wave it in a futile effort to clear the dust quickly.

INT. LARGE NEVADA CAVE - DAY

Will pushes a wooden wheelbarrow, a kerosene lantern inside. He creeps his way through the haze to a pile of rubble.

Will hits his knees and furiously loads the rock into the wheelbarrow.

EXT. LARGE NEVADA CAVE - NIGHT

Will, exhausted, wheels the rock filled wheelbarrow, lantern inside, out of the cave. He removes the lantern then groans as he empties the wheelbarrow by an existing pile.

A fire crackles and Will opens a can of beans with his knife. He places the can on the fire and waits for it to heat.

Will stares at the sky dotted by a billion twinkling stars.

Will pulls out his silver pocket watch then opens it.

WILL

Won't be long, Mandy, not long at all.

He gazes at Mandy's photo by the firelight.

INT. MINNEAPOLIS CHURCH - DAY

In a small Minneapolis church, Will's Mother sits in the back row on the bride's side.

MANDY'S HUSBAND to be, subdued and ten years older than Mandy, stands at the altar. To his right is his BEST MAN and to his left is the BRIDE'S MAID OF HONOR.

The PASTOR signals his WIFE, sitting in front of her piano.

The Pastor's Wife begins to play a ragged version of "Here Comes The Bride."

Mandy's Father escorts Mandy, now 24, into the church.

They stroll to the front of the church and stop in front of the Pastor. Mandy's Father releases her arm then sits down in the front row.

The Pastor's Wife mercifully stops playing.

Mandy and her Husband to be glance at each other then turn to face the Pastor.

Will's Mother sheds a tear for her forlorn son.

INT. ELKO SALOON - NIGHT

Will, now 25, is clean shaven with neatly cut hair. He struts into the Elko saloon/hotel.

Will ignores Mabel's gesture then sits down at the bar.

EZRA  
Whiskey, Will?

WILL  
Yep.

Ezra pours him a whiskey and Will pays for it. Will gulps the whiskey then slams the glass down.

Will stands up then strides to the stairs. He bounds up the stairs two steps at a time.

INT. ELKO HOTEL ROOM 2 - NIGHT

Will sits in front of the desk in his hotel room, lit by a kerosene lantern. He opens a letter from his mother then begins to read.

WILL'S MOTHER (V.O.)  
Dearest Will. When are you coming home? I sold the farm and moved into Minneapolis. Things are going well. Two weeks ago I attended Mandy's wedding.

Will slams his fist on the desk then continues to read.

WILL'S MOTHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Please believe it is for the best.  
You will find someone to settle down with and raise a family. I hope to see you soon. Please be careful. I miss you, Will. All my love, Mother.

Will sticks a corner of the letter into the flame of the lantern. He watches the flames dance, consuming the letter.

INT. ELKO SALOON - NIGHT

Ezra hands Will a bottle of whiskey and glass.

Mabel looks on from across the saloon.

Will takes the bottle and glass to a table to drink alone.

Mabel bides her time.

Will has been hammering away at the bottle for half an hour or so and is now tanked.

A YOUNG MINER wannabe, a bit too refined for this rugged country, walks into the saloon and sits down at the bar.

EZRA  
What kin I getcha, young man?

YOUNG MINER  
A beer, please.

Mabel looks on.

EZRA  
First time in town?

YOUNG MINER  
Yes, sir. Do you have any available rooms?

Ezra places the beer in front of him.

EZRA  
Shore do, two dollah twenty for the room, thirty cents for the beer.

YOUNG MINER  
I'll take one.

Ezra gives Young Miner a key and he pays Ezra.

EZRA  
Room four. Ya headin' out fer gold?

YOUNG MINER  
Yes, I am. Do you have any tips?

EZRA  
Yup, don't.

Young Miner thinks for a moment and curiously looks at Ezra.

YOUNG MINER  
Don't what?

EZRA  
Out there ain't much more 'an two miles north a hell. I been here fifteen years an' the stories all end the same way. See that guy over there?

Ezra points to Will. Young Miner turns and sees Will mumbling to himself.

YOUNG MINER  
Yes, sir.

EZRA  
Few years back he came in just like you did.  
(MORE)

EZRA (CONT'D)

In a few years, if ya make it that long, you'll be sittin' there just like he is.

Young Miner scoffs.

YOUNG MINER

Maybe some people just don't have any luck.

EZRA

An' maybe some people just make the wrong choices.

Will struggles to stand. He grabs the half-empty bottle off the table then staggers over to Mabel. Will slurs his speech.

WILL

Wanna go have some fun, Mabel?

MABEL

Of course, Will.

WILL

Let's go, beautiful.

Mabel grabs his hand and she leads him upstairs.

Young Miner at the bar starts to chuckle.

YOUNG MINER

I'll never end up like that. I have a beautiful girl waiting for me at home. In a few months I'll return to her and we'll get married.

Ezra grins and walks away.

EXT. NEVADA DESERT - DAY

Will, scruffy and now 30, leads the mule through another part of the Nevada desert populated by scrub brush.

Will looks up at the cloudless sky and sees BUZZARDS circling ahead.

Will makes his way forward then sees a body sprawled out in the blazing sun. He trudges toward it.

Will reaches the bloated body. Will pulls his bandana up to cover his mouth and nose.

Will kneels down and turns the body over, revealing the Young Miner from the Elko saloon five years ago.

Will rifles through the Young Miner's pockets and takes what he can.

Will pulls out an envelope from Young Miner's shirt pocket. He slides out the letter it contains then begins to read. He reads one poignant paragraph aloud.

WILL

Sorry to tell you this through a letter. Rebecca has met another and soon will be wed. I am so sorry, my Son. Please do not despair, for she was not the right one for you anyway.

Will slides the letter into the envelope then into his shirt pocket.

Will plops down on the ground and removes the silver pocket watch from his shirt pocket. He opens it for a glimpse of Mandy's photo. Will talks to the corpse.

WILL (CONT'D)

We're two dumb bastards, that's what we are. Why can't we just live like normal folks do?

Will stows the silver pocket watch in his shirt pocket. He stands up and brushes himself off.

Will leads the mule away. He sees an ANTELOPE standing in the distance, staring at him.

WILL (CONT'D)

Gotta be a sign.

Will continues to walk toward it.

EXT. MINNEAPOLIS CEMETERY - DAY

In a Minneapolis cemetery a small CROWD has gathered for the funeral of Will's Mother.

Mandy, now 29, is in the front row with her Husband, their two DAUGHTERS, 3 and 4, and her Father. Mandy is in tears and furious at Will.

Four MEN lower the pine box casket into the ground.

The CROWD stands and begins to disperse. Mandy turns to her Husband.

MANDY

How could Will not be here? My God,  
it was his mother's funeral. What  
the hell is wrong with him?

Her Husband holds her.

HUSBAND

How could he have known?

MANDY

Hmph.

Mandy pushes him away and grabs the hands of her Daughters.  
She walks away in tears with her Daughters in tow.

INT. ELKO HOTEL ROOM 2 - DAY

Will sits in his Elko, NV hotel room, clean shaven and cut hair, holding a letter. Will beams as he opens the letter and starts to read.

MANDY (V.O.)

Will, I am sorry to have to tell  
you this news. Your mother has  
passed away and was buried on  
Saturday.

Tears well up in Will's eyes.

WILL

I'm so sorry, Ma.

Will crumples up the letter then plods out of the room.

INT. ELKO SALOON - DAY

A rowdy DRIFTER, eighteen if a day and not a hard year in his life, sits at a table not handling his whiskey too well.

Will sits down at the bar, looking like a lost child.

WILL

Whiskey, Ezra.

EZRA

Comin' up, Will.

Ezra pours Will a whiskey.

EZRA (CONT'D)

Everthin' all right?

Will pulls out the letter from the Young Miner he found in the desert then hands it to Ezra.

WILL

Found this guy dead in the desert.  
Would you write his family and tell  
'em what happened?

EZRA

You betcha, Will.

Will glances over his shoulder as he slides Ezra money.

A NEW ELKO PROSTITUTE walks down the stairs, younger and prettier than Mabel, but by no means a beauty queen.

Will looks at Ezra.

WILL

A new fancy girl?

EZRA

Yup, Mabel got married. Moved out a couple months back.

Will raises his glass and toasts.

WILL

Here's to Mabel, always came to a fight with her pistol cocked.

Will gulps down his whiskey and slams the glass on the bar.

This gets the Drifter's attention. The Drifter is aching for trouble and struts over to Will.

DRIFTER

What the hell's that about?

EZRA

Just the way he does it, kid.

Will ignores him.

DRIFTER

He need you to speak for him?

EZRA

Ain't too late to save yur life,  
kid.

Will gets off the stool and faces off with the Drifter. He puts his hand on his pistol.

The Drifter responds in kind.

DRIFTER

Whenever you're ready.

Will studies the Drifter's boyish pockmarked face. He shakes his head, then turns and walks away.

The Drifter taps his pistol and smirks, brashly nodding.

EXT. ELKO MAIN STREET - DAY

Will walks to the stagecoach with haversack and rifle. The COACH MASTER greets him.

COACH MASTER  
Had enough of the prospectin'?

The Coach Master takes Will's haversack.

WILL  
Just getting started.

Will steps into the stagecoach and closes the door.

The Coach Master throws the haversack on top of the coach.

EXT. LARGE ARIZONA OASIS - DAY

Returning to 1902, Will now looks 21. He awakens from his slumber in the crevice he first crawled into after drinking from the red cactus. He looks at his youthful hands.

WILL  
Hell and hotcakes, it really happened.

Will crawls out of the crevice. He stands up and looks around, a bit disoriented. He vigorously shakes his head to clear the cobwebs.

Will reaches down his filthy and torn shirt. He pulls out the white cactus flower and kisses it, then puts it back.

Will reaches into his shirt pocket. He pulls out his battered silver pocket watch then opens it.

Mandy's photo is as old and wrinkled as he used to be. He puts it back in his pocket.

Will scratches his nasty beard and pauses for a moment.

Will sees the dead mule being feasted on by several BUZZARDS. He rushes to the carcass then chases the buzzards off.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Get the hell outta here.

Will kneels down and strokes the mule's head.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Thanks for everything, old friend.

Will removes a can of beans from the pack on the mule's back.

Will sits down then opens the can with his knife. He swallows them out of the can.

A trail of brownish-red sauce streams down his beard. He wipes it away with his shirt sleeve.

Will wipes off his knife on his filthy pants then pulls out a map from the pack.

Will winces when he pricks his finger with the tip of his knife. He marks this spot on the map with a drop of blood.

Will waves the map in the air to dry the mark, then folds it and puts it in his pocket.

Will walks to the pond and kneels down. He stares at his reflection in the pond and pokes at his face, grinning.

EXT. ANTELOPE STATION STREET - DAY

Antelope Station, AZ is a rugged mining town, a population of thirty or so, on a green mountain that borders the desert.

Will, after trekking in from the desert, walks to the bank and stops in front of the window.

Will grins as he gazes at his young face in the reflection, unable to contain his excitement.

A MAN and WOMAN walk toward him, staring at his peculiar behavior. They pick up their pace to walk past him.

Will shrugs and takes off his hat. He spits in his hands and rubs them through his hair.

WILL  
You're a good looking man, William  
P. Thornbush.

Will smiles and puts on his hat. He turns to walk into the bank. He turns back to look one more time at his reflection in the window and winks.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Damn good looking.

INT. ANTELOPE STATION BANK - DAY

Will struts into the Antelope Station bank, then over to the teller, BERNARD, a scale beside him.

WILL

Hi, Bernard.

Bernard looks up, but doesn't recognize Will.

BERNARD

Hello, sir, how may I help you?

Will reaches into his pocket and removes a balled up rag. He places it on the table then unfolds it.

Numerous gold nuggets glitter on the rag.

Bernard lifts the filthy rag and pours the pieces of gold onto the scale's tray.

Bernard taps the rag a couple of times. He adds weights until the scale is balanced.

BERNARD (CONT'D)

That's fourteen ounces, sir.

Bernard looks up at Will's beaming face.

BERNARD (CONT'D)

Agreed?

WILL

Agreed.

Bernard writes 14 on a piece of paper.

BERNARD

The price is eighteen dollars and ninety-seven cents an ounce.

WILL

Yep.

Bernard writes 18.97 on the paper and multiplies the numbers.

BERNARD

The total is two hundred and sixty-five dollars and fifty-eight cents.

Agreed?

WILL

Agreed.

Bernard pours the gold into a glass bottle.

Bernard looks down at the filthy rag and nods to Will. Will picks it up and stuffs it in his pocket.

Bernard opens his drawer and puts the gold in. He removes the money, counting to himself, then counts it for Will.

BERNARD

One hundred, two hundred, fifty,  
sixty, sixty-five dollars. Fifty,  
fifty-five, fifty-eight cents.

WILL

Thank you, Bernard.

BERNARD

You're welcome, sir.

Will pockets the money and is on his merry way.

Bernard, puzzled, watches Will walk out the front door.

INT. ANTELOPE STATION BARBERSHOP - DAY

Will sits as the BARBER, 50s, throws a stained white sheet over Will.

BARBER

What can I do for ya?

WILL

Haircut and shave, please.

BARBER

How ya want it cut?

WILL

Spare about two inches.

The Barber starts to hack off the beard with a scissors.

BARBER

First time in these parts?

WILL

Been here about... Yep, it is.

BARBER

Looks like you been through all  
kinds a hell.

WILL

Been the best trip of my life.

BARBER

You musta had a pretty tough life,  
son.

The Barber starts to cut away at Will's hair.

WILL

Up till now.

Will grins.

INT. HOGAN'S DRY GOODS - DAY

After his haircut and shave, Will cradles a pair of pants, shirt, socks, long johns, hat and boots in his arms. He walks to the counter of the dry goods store.

MISS HOGAN, 40s and tough as nails, sits behind the counter.

WILL

Hello, ma'am.

Will sets the items on the counter.

MISS HOGAN

That be all for ya?

Miss Hogan is fixated on Will's eyes.

WILL

Yep, that's everything.

Miss Hogan writes the prices of the items and calculates them on the paper.

MISS HOGAN

Thirteen-sixty.

Will reaches into his pocket and pays with a twenty dollar bill.

Miss Hogan looks it over then back at Will.

MISS HOGAN (CONT'D)

Have we met before, young man?  
Somethin' about ya says ya been  
here before.

Will grins.

WILL

No, ma'am.

INT. HOGAN'S DRY GOODS - DAY - FLASHBACK

Six months ago, Will, 58, clean shaven, short hair, same clothes as he wears today, but cleaner and less ragged. He stands in front of the counter, flirting with Miss Hogan.

MISS HOGAN

What can I get for ya today, Will?

WILL

How about a little love?

MISS HOGAN  
 Ya ornery old goat, I oughta smack  
 ya across the chops.

Will chortles.

MISS HOGAN (CONT'D)  
 Ya buyin' somethin' or ya just  
 wastin' my time?

WILL  
 How about we go get us a drink?

MISS HOGAN  
 I'd ruther bed with a cactus than  
 be drinkin' with you.

Miss Hogan grabs her broom and walks around the counter.

MISS HOGAN (CONT'D)  
 Let's go.

She swats Will on the ass and he cackles.

MISS HOGAN (CONT'D)  
 Go on now, shoo.

Miss Hogan chases Will out of the store, swatting him with  
 the broom.

BACK TO PRESENT

WILL  
 I wouldn't forget someone as  
 beautiful as you.

Miss Hogan blushes.

MISS HOGAN  
 There ain't no discount for  
 flattery, young man.

WILL  
 Wouldn't expect any, pretty lady.

Miss Hogan smiles and hands Will his change. She fumbles to  
 put the items in a sack, not taking her eyes off of Will.

Will grabs the sack and winks at her.

WILL (CONT'D)  
 Thanks, ma'am.

Will whistles as he walks away. Miss Hogan whispers.

MISS HOGAN  
Bye.

Miss Hogan grins as she watches Will walk out the door.

INT. ANTELOPE STATION BATHING ROOM - NIGHT

Will enters the bathing room in the Antelope Station saloon/hotel. A hot bath awaits him.

Will drops his sack of new clothes on the floor. He removes the silver pocket watch, cactus flower and map from his shirt pocket then places them inside the sack.

Will sheds the grimy clothes. He now has a large scar from a knife wound on his left calf.

Will gets into the tub. He feels his powerful arms and grins.

WILL  
Nice having you boys back.

Will scrubs to get the months of dirt and grime off. He then washes his freshly cut hair.

Will slides under the water and bubbles arise.

Will lunges out of the water, clean and refreshed. He jumps out and dries off, then wraps the towel around his waist.

Will opens up the sack then pulls out his new clothes. He drops the towel to the floor then puts on the clothes.

Will pulls out the new boots and socks then sets them on the floor. He places the silver pocket watch, cactus flower and map in his left shirt pocket then buttons it.

Will plops down on the floor then puts on his socks and boots. He leaps up then beats his chest a couple of times.

Will leaves the pile of filthy clothes and ragged boots behind. He exits the bathing room and enters the

SALOON

Two old RAGGED MINERS sit at a corner table.

Will walks to the bar then sits down. He entertains himself by looking into the mirror behind the bar.

The alluring and brazen Antelope Station prostitute, CORA, 20s, sits across the saloon and stares at Will.

The old ANTELOPE STATION BARTENDER comes over.

WILL  
Whiskey.

Antelope Creek Bartender pours a glass of whiskey then Will pays him.

Cora saunters to the bar then sits down beside Will.

CORA  
Hi, handsome, care for some  
companionship?

WILL  
Would be nice.

CORA  
Do I know you?

WILL  
You're gonna.

Will motions Antelope Creek Bartender to pour her a whiskey.

WILL (CONT'D)  
You hungry?

CORA  
For what?

WILL  
For food, I'm starved. Want to go  
get something to eat?

The Bartender slides Cora a whiskey and Will pays him.

CORA  
Sure.

WILL  
Let's go.

Will gulps down his whiskey then slams the glass on the bar. Cora does the same. Will grins.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Now that's the way you're supposed  
to drink whiskey.

They stand up then stroll out of the saloon, hand in hand.

INT. ANTELOPE STATION RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Will and Cora eat inside the little restaurant. Will wolfs down his last bite, Cora not yet half finished.

CORA  
When's the last time you ate?

Will signals to the homey waitress, MATTIE, 30s.

WILL  
Been a while since I ate anything  
but stinking beans.

Mattie comes over and speaks pleasantly to Will.

MATTIE  
Yes, sir, something else?

WILL  
Apple pie with whipped cream and  
coffee, please.

Mattie looks at Cora and coldly asks.

MATTIE  
And you?

Cora grins devilishly.

CORA  
None for me, thank you, Mattie.

Mattie picks up Will's dirty plate and glass. She walks away.

WILL  
You two still feuding?

Cora looks at him funny.

CORA  
Still feuding? How the hell could  
you know that?

Will thinks for a moment.

WILL  
Since we got here, you two have  
been going at it.

Cora squints at Will.

WILL (CONT'D)  
What's with you two?

CORA  
Let's just say she had trouble  
pleasing her man.

Mattie brings the pie and coffee to the table.

WILL  
Thanks.

MATTIE  
You're welcome, sir.

CORA  
But I didn't, did I Mattie?

Mattie snarls at Cora and storms away. Will attacks the pie.

CORA (CONT'D)  
Are you always in such a hurry?

WILL  
The war taught me that you never  
know when your last breath's gonna  
come.

Cora thinks for a moment.

CORA  
War? What war were you in?

Will mulls it over for a moment.

WILL  
Prospecting is a constant war, a  
battle to survive. The slow ones  
fail or die.

Cora isn't buying it and looks at Will.

CORA  
You're pretty young, how long have  
you been mining?

WILL  
Seems like a lifetime.

INT. ANTELOPE STATION BATHING ROOM - NIGHT

A rugged cleaning woman, IDA, 30s, carries a bucket of water  
and sponge into the bathing room.

Ida looks into the tub at the filth Will left behind.

IDA  
Pig.

Ida drains the water then cleans the dark soapy crud.

Ida kicks Will's old clothes and boots close to the door. She  
stares at them as if she's seen them before.

Ida gets down on her knees and closely inspects them. She lifts Will's filthy shirt into the air and examines it.

IDA (CONT'D)  
Oh my God.

Ida scoops up the clothes and boots then rushes out of the bathing room.

INT. ANTELOPE STATION SHERIFF'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Antelope Station's sheriff, PETE, 50s, a gentle giant, sleeps with his feet propped up on the desk. A kerosene lantern burns brightly.

Ida barges in and startles Pete.

Pete looks at her carrying the filthy clothes and boots.

IDA  
Sheriff.

Pete removes his feet from the desk then sits up straight.

PETE  
Sorry, we don't do laundry anymore,  
Ida.

Ida's not in a mood for jokes.

IDA  
I think something happened to Will  
Thornbush.

She sets the clothes and boots on his desk. Pete chortles.

PETE  
Now what makes you say such a  
thing?

Pete looks cross-ways at the filthy clothes on his desk then pokes them.

PETE (CONT'D)  
And what are you doing with these  
old rags?

IDA  
A young guy came in to take a bath  
and left them there. They sure look  
like Will's clothes.

Pete takes a look at them.

PETE

All miners wear about the same clothes.

IDA

I bet he killed him and stole his things.

PETE

Let's not rush into anything here.

IDA

What else could it be? Unless he found Will dead and swapped clothes.

Pete picks up the filthy tattered shirt.

PETE

A fella'd have to be wearing some pretty shitty clothes to swap for these.

IDA

Why are you joking about this?

Pete picks up the boots and sees the initials WPT crudely burned into the back of each boot. Pete gets serious.

PETE

Hmm, William P. Thornbush.

IDA

What are you waiting for, Sheriff?

PETE

How old is the guy?

IDA

Maybe twenty.

PETE

These boots gotta be more than ten years old. And you have never seen him before tonight?

IDA

Nope, but I know I've seen these clothes before.

Pete puts down the boots and stands up. He straps on his pistol belt.

PETE

Where's he at now?

IDA

I don't know, probably in the hotel. He rented a room.

PETE

What's the room number?

IDA

Three.

PETE

You go back to the hotel and I'll be over shortly. Don't say anything to anyone. Understand?

Pete pulls his pistol out of the holster.

IDA

Yes, Sheriff.

Ida walks out of the office.

Pete opens his pistol then checks it for ammunition. He closes it then holsters it.

Pete grabs his hat off the nail in the wall and places it on his head, then strides out of his office.

INT. ANTELOPE STATION HOTEL ROOM 3 - NIGHT

Cora starts to undress in Will's dark hotel room.

Will hurriedly removes his boots and clothes.

Will jumps into bed and under the covers. Cora joins him.

Will touches his strong young chest, now seemingly more interested in his body than in hers.

Cora starts to stroke his chest. Will refocuses his attention on her. He rolls on top of her then kisses her neck.

Light floods the room when the door creeps open. Pete enters, pistol leveled at Will.

PETE

Everybody move nice and slow.

Will rolls off Cora then looks at Pete. Will and Cora sit up in the bed.

WILL

What the hell, Pete?

Pete looks at Will, puzzled.

PETE

Pete? You can go, Cora.

WILL

But I already paid her.

Cora jumps out of bed and scrambles to put on her clothes.  
She runs past Pete and out the door.

PETE

What's your name, young man?

WILL

William.

Pete finds this pretty odd.

PETE

Okay, William, get dressed and come  
with me.

Will crawls out of bed then puts on his clothes.

WILL

What is it you think I've done,  
Pete?

Pete waves the pistol for Will to see.

PETE

Am I going to need this?

WILL

No, you won't.

Pete holsters his pistol.

PETE

I just want to ask you a few  
questions in my office. Don't do  
anything stupid.

WILL

I'm tired of doing stupid.

Will trudges out the door and Pete follows.

INT. ANTELOPE STATION SHERIFF'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Will enters the sheriff's office, followed by Pete. Will's  
old clothes and boots are still on the desk.

PETE

Sit down, William.

WILL

You can call me Will, just like you used to.

Will sits down in front of the desk and Pete mumbles.

PETE

Like I used to?

Pete hangs up his hat on the nail in the wall then sits behind his desk.

PETE (CONT'D)

Recognize these?

Pete throws a boot to Will and Will catches it.

WILL

Yep, they're mine. I left 'em at the bath. You're welcome to 'em if you want 'em.

PETE

I think I'll pass. Where did you get them?

WILL

I bought 'em several years back at Hogan's.

PETE

How could you have bought them at Hogan's when this is the first time anyone's seen you here?

WILL

The first time anyone's seen the new me.

PETE

The new you?

WILL

Don't you get the feeling you know me, Pete?

Pete stares at Will for a moment then rubs his head.

PETE

Did you steal these clothes?

WILL

They're mine, I bought 'em.

PETE

Where's Will, the man you stole  
them from?

WILL

Who would steal those old rags,  
Pete? I'm Will. Can I show you  
something?

PETE

Go ahead.

Will reaches into his left shirt pocket and pulls out the white cactus flower.

WILL

I found this in the desert. I drank  
the liquid inside the cactus, and  
when I woke up, the new me. Just  
like I was when I was twenty-one. I  
am William P. Thornbush.

Pete scoffs.

PETE

You expect me to believe that load  
of horse manure?

WILL

No, I don't, but it's the truth.

PETE

Okay then, convince me. I've got  
all night.

WILL

Remember the first day you met me?

PETE

Yes, I remember tonight, young man.

WILL

I was walking my mule down the  
street and we said hello.

PETE

Okay.

WILL

My dumb ass mule started to buck  
and it took both of us to keep the  
damn thing from getting away.

Pete stands up and leans toward Will. He looks into Will's eyes then sits back down.

PETE  
Got anything else?

WILL  
Remember this?

Will stands up and lifts his left pant leg. He shows Pete the large scar on his calf and Pete smiles.

WILL (CONT'D)  
In the saloon when that crazy ass  
kid thought I was stealing his true  
love away from him.

PETE  
That old whore didn't want nothing  
to do with him.

Pete relaxes in his chair.

PETE (CONT'D)  
Okay, Will, considering I have no  
body to say you killed him and no  
witnesses to say you robbed him,  
I'm going to let you go. On one  
condition.

WILL  
What's that, Pete?

PETE  
You get on the stagecoach to  
Phoenix tomorrow. I don't know if  
anything you're saying is true, but  
either way I want you gone.

WILL  
Okay, Pete.

PETE  
And no foolishness in the saloon  
tonight.

WILL  
I'll keep to myself.

PETE  
And burn this crap.

Pete points to Will's old clothes.

Will nods to Pete then stands up. He scoops up the clothes  
and boots. He turns and walks to the door then opens it.

PETE (CONT'D)  
Stagecoach leaves at nine.

Will looks back at Pete.

WILL  
Thanks, Pete.

Pete rubs his head as Will walks out the door.

INT. PHOENIX PASSENGER CAR - DAY

Will enters a passenger car of the train leaving Phoenix, AZ. Will looks around the car, several empty seats. He chooses one far from other PASSENGERS.

Will sits down and gets comfortable. Much to his disliking, an OLD MINER, 40s, sits across from him.

OLD MINER  
Where ya headin' young man?

WILL  
California.

OLD MINER  
Gonna try yur luck minin'?

WILL  
Trying to keep the streak going.

The car jolts as the train begins to leave the station.

OLD MINER  
Alaska, that's where the real gold  
is.

WILL  
If you want your oysters to freeze  
off.

OLD MINER  
This yur first go at it?

Will is amused with the Old Miner.

WILL  
I've been at it a while.

OLD MINER  
Well, at yur age reckon a year or  
two is a long time.

WILL  
It sure can be.

OLD MINER  
If ya needs some pointers, don't be  
sceerd to ask.

WILL

No offense, but I don't believe in  
asking a poor man how to get rich.

OLD MINER

Offense taken, boy.

The Old Miner stands up in a huff then moves to another seat.

Will grins and relaxes in his seat.

EXT. COLOMA STREET - DAY

Will walks down the main street of Coloma, CA, a bustling little town of about two hundred people.

Will spots the stable then starts to walk a little faster.

INT. COLOMA STABLE - DAY

Will walks into the dusty stable and sees an unfriendly man, TOM, 20, cleaning a stable. Tom doesn't look at Will when he comes in.

WILL

Hi.

Tom grunts.

WILL (CONT'D)

Got any mules for sale?

Tom doesn't even look up.

TOM

Two.

WILL

They young and strong?

TOM

One is.

WILL

Where they at?

TOM

Out back in the corral.

WILL

Mind if I go take a look see?

TOM

Help yerself.

Will turns and walks to the back of the stable. He walks out of the stable to the

CORRAL

Will climbs the wooden railed fence to enter the corral and walks past the old DROOPY MULE.

WILL  
Crow bait.

Will walks over to the ROBUST MULE.

Will lifts a front leg to look at the hoof. He coaxes the mule to open its mouth and examines the teeth. He runs his hand along the back of the animal.

WILL (CONT'D)  
You'll do.

Will climbs out of the corral then walks into the

STABLE

Will walks over to Tom who still won't look at him.

WILL  
How much for the young male?

TOM  
Thirty-two. Thirty-five with a  
bridle.

WILL  
I'll take it with a bridle.

Will reaches into his pocket and retrieves his money. He fumbles through it and pulls out thirty-five dollars.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Can I get a receipt?

Tom takes the money, but still won't look at Will.

TOM  
Sure.

Tom walks to a rickety table on the side of the stable then writes a receipt. He hands it to Will, being careful to not show the right side of his face.

Tom picks up a bridle then walks out to the corral.

Will looks around the stable while Tom is out.

Tom returns with the robust mule in tow then hands the reins to Will.

TOM (CONT'D)  
There ya go.

WILL  
Thanks.

Will takes the reins and walks away.

TOM  
Thank ya, sir.

Will leads the mule out of the stable.

Tom looks up and the right side of his face has been horribly scarred by fire.

INT. CALIFORNIA CAVE - DAY

Months later, Will has a long beard and hair. His clothes are filthy. With his kerosene lantern held high, he walks through the cave and looks closely at the sides.

A gold twinkle catches his eye. He stops and holds the lantern to it. He sees a speck of gold in the rock wall.

Will sets the lantern down then whips out his knife from his ankle sheath. He attempts to pry the gold out, but it won't break free.

Will continues to dig, an eighth of an inch deep and still gold. Will steps back filled with energy.

WILL  
This is it.

Will puts the knife in its sheath and sprints toward the cave's exit.

EXT. CALIFORNIA CAVE - DAY

Will sprints out of the mouth of the cave in the California wooded hills at sunset. A creek is nearby.

Will rushes to the pack beside his bedroll. He opens the pack and fishes around inside.

Will pulls out a hammer and drops it to the ground. He continues to feel around inside the pack.

WILL  
Where you at?

Will pulls a chisel out of the pack then kisses it. He grabs the hammer and rushes back into the cave.

INT. CALIFORNIA CAVE - NIGHT

Will trots to the lantern inside the cave. He holds up the chisel and hammers away, knocking shards of rock away from the gold.

After a few strikes he examines the rock wall. A crater in the rock surrounding his gold has been chiseled away.

Will holds the lantern close and wipes the area with his hand.

WILL

Doggone, you're a big boy.

The gold piece is large, a two inch crater and still no end to the gold fortune in front of him.

Will lifts the chisel and hammers it with more delicate precision this time. He slowly works his way around the outside of the gold.

Will again lifts the lantern to see his progress. Will howls at the piece.

WILL (CONT'D)

Awhoooooooooooo!

The howl echoes through the cave. Will pulls his knife from his ankle sheath and pries at the gold. He works it out of its lair then puts the knife in the ankle sheath.

Will dusts it off then holds up the six pound oblong piece of gold to the lantern, mesmerized by its warm amber reflection.

WILL (CONT'D)

Been waiting for you my whole life.

Will grins and bounces the prize in his hand.

EXT. CALIFORNIA CAVE - NIGHT

Will carries the gold and lantern out of the cave.

Will picks up a shovel then walks above the cave's entrance.

Will digs a hole behind a bush then places the gold inside. Will covers the gold.

Will carefully backs down from above the cave entrance, covering his tracks as he goes.

Will leans the shovel against the hill then walks over to his mule and pets its head.

WILL  
I'm gonna buy you the prettiest  
little mule I can find.  
(shouts)  
We're ri...

Will slams his hand over his mouth and scans the area.

Will retrieves a can of beans, pieces of dried meat, tin plate and spoon from his supply pack.

Will sets the lantern down then starts a fire with a match. Will turns off the lantern.

He opens the can of beans with his knife then places it on top of the fire. He jams the dried meat into the can.

After the beans have heated, Will removes the can from the fire using his shirt sleeve. He pours the steaming beans and meat onto his tin plate.

Grinning from ear to ear, for the first time in decades, Will eats slow and enjoys the meal.

Will grabs his rifle then lays it beside his bedroll.

Will removes his pistol from its holster then makes sure it's loaded.

Will, pistol in hand, kicks out the fire. He lies down on his bedroll, cradling the pistol.

Will covers himself with the blanket, then closes his eyes and falls asleep.

EXT. CALIFORNIA CAVE - DAY

Early the next morning the sun shines on Will's face, waking him. He opens his eyes then squints to keep the sun out.

Will sits up then holsters his pistol. He grabs his rifle then rushes to the mule.

WILL  
We did it, boy.

Will throws the supply pack on the back of the mule then slides the rifle into the scabbard.

Will trots to the shovel then picks it up. He rushes above the entrance of the cave.

Will starts to dig behind a bush. A deeper hole than he dug the night before and still no gold.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Shit.

Will panics and begins to furiously pull dirt out of the hole with his hands.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Where are you?

Will feels around in the dirt he removed from the hole. Will is defeated. He plops down with his head in his hands.

WILL (CONT'D)  
No. No. Aw, Goddamn it.

Will jumps up and starts kicking the bush and cursing gibberish.

He stops and catches his breath then glances at the bush he buried the gold behind and grins.

Will picks up the shovel and takes it to the bush and digs. He removes the gold from the hole. He holds it up to his face with both hands.

WILL (CONT'D)  
You scared the hell outta me.

Will backs down the hill with the shovel and gold in his hands. He throws the shovel into the cave.

Will wraps the gold in his handkerchief then stuffs it into his pants pocket.

Will trots over to his bedroll. He scoops it up and throws it into the cave.

Will trots back to the mule then leads it away.

EXT. CALIFORNIA FOREST TRAIL - DAY

Will leads the mule along a well-used trail that runs through a thick forest. Will hears a rooster pheasant squawk when it flies out of the brush in the distance. Will whispers.

WILL  
What the hell?

Will casually slides his hand into his pants pocket then removes the wrapped piece of gold.

Will looks to his right and sees a distinctive bush, then tosses the wrapped gold behind it.

He reaches into his shirt pocket then tosses the silver pocket watch.

Will advances a ways then slows and stops. He acts like the mule won't move and shouts.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Come on, you stupid mule!

Will pulls the white cactus flower, encased in glass, and the map where he found it out of the supply pack and drops them.

Will slaps the mule on the ass. The mule brays and bucks.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Let's go!

Will advances down the trail. An OUTLAW LEADER, his face shows he's been on the losing end of a scrap or two, steps onto the trail.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Morning.

Will walks toward the Outlaw Leader. Will releases the reins of the mule then puts his hand on his pistol.

OUTLAW LEADER  
Might not wanna do that.

Will hears the distinct cocking of two rifles come from the forest on both sides of the trail.

Two OUTLAW MINIONS walk out of the forest, rifles trained on Will. The Lanky Minion takes Will's pistol then tosses it to the Outlaw Leader. The Heavy Set Minion walks away.

OUTLAW LEADER (CONT'D)  
Go ahead and strip down to yur  
skivvies, mister. And don't shuck  
about, I ain't got all day.

Will coolly removes his gun belt, but the fire in his eyes tells another story. Will unstraps his knife sheath from his ankle and drops it to the ground.

Will sits down and wiggles his boots off, then removes his pants. He stands up and drops his hat then removes his shirt.

The Lanky Minion scoops up Will's things, except the hat, then leads Will's mule over to the Outlaw Leader.

Will, in long johns, picks up his hat. He calmly slaps his hat on his thigh then puts it on, seemingly carefree.

The Heavy Set Minion leads three HORSES out of the forest.

The Heavy Set Minion hands the Outlaw Leader his horse's reins. The Outlaw Leader mounts his horse.

The Heavy Set Minion hands the Lanky Minion the reins to his horse. The Heavy Set Minion mounts his horse then the Lanky Minion hands him the reins to Will's mule.

The Lanky Outlaw, holding Will's things, clumsily mounts his horse. It takes him more than one try, but he gets it.

OUTLAW LEADER (CONT'D)

Since you been so generous I'm  
gonna do you right. I'm gonna drop  
your pistol an' boots up a ways.  
Now go ahead an' have a seat.

The Outlaw Leader looks at his ragged clothes.

OUTLAW LEADER (CONT'D)

Reckon I'll keep the clothes,  
though.

Will plops down on the ground and pleasantly asks.

WILL

What's your name?

OUTLAW LEADER

Why?

WILL

I like to know a man's name before  
I kill him.

The Outlaws guffaw then ride away.

EXT. CALIFORNIA FOREST - DAY

Will is in his long johns, boots, hat and gun belt. The gold, watch, map and flower bulge out at his waist.

Will stops by a crystal clear stream and pulls his pistol. He squats beside the stream and points his pistol down.

A school of minnows swim below. In an instant they scatter. A rainbow trout swims past Will. Will fires and hits it.

The trout surfaces and begins to float away.

Will holsters his pistol then jumps into the stream. He snatches the trout out of the water and trots onto the shore.

Will reaches for his knife that isn't there.

WILL

Shit.

Will finds a sharp rock then struggles to clean the fish.  
Will tries to start a fire with two sticks. He gives up.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Goddamn thieves.

Will plops down and scowls as he eats the fish raw.

EXT. COLOMA STREET - DAY

Will is tired, but happy as a kid at Christmas, as he walks down the main street of Coloma in his long johns, boots, hat and gun belt. The gold, watch, map and flower bulge out at his waist.

PEOPLE gawk. Will smiles and waves at everyone he sees.

Will struts to the front door of the bank.

INT. COLOMA BANK - DAY

Will walks into the bank then straight to the weigh station of the Coloma bank.

Will nods at EDWARD, 20s, sitting behind the table. Edward nervously stares.

EDWARD  
Hello, um, sir, how may I help you?

Will grins widely as he pulls the gold, wrapped in his handkerchief, out of his long johns. Will places it on Edward's desk.

WILL  
I'd like to sell this, please.

Edward eyes bulge out and he forgets all about Will's attire.

EDWARD  
Damn!

Edward picks it up and looks it over. He places it on the scale then looks up at Will.

EDWARD (CONT'D)  
Double damn!

Edward places a five pound weight on the opposite tray. The scale doesn't move. Edward places a one pound weight in the tray and the scale is close to balance.

EDWARD (CONT'D)  
My God, where did you get this  
thing?

WILL  
Damn sure wasn't Alaska.

Edward looks at Will and smiles.

EDWARD  
What happened to your clothes?

WILL  
Marauders took 'em.

One at a time Edward places three one ounce weights on the scale and brings it to balance.

EDWARD  
Six pounds, three ounces.

Edward writes 6 times 16 on a piece of paper then writes 96. He adds 3 and writes 99 on the paper.

EDWARD (CONT'D)  
That's ninety-nine ounces, sir.

Will can't stop grinning.

WILL  
About time my luck changed.

Edward writes \$18.96 on the paper.

EDWARD  
That's eighteen dollars and ninety-six cents an ounce. The total is...

Edward multiplies it and writes \$1,877.04 on the paper. He looks up at Will then back down at his paper.

EDWARD (CONT'D)  
... whoa, one thousand eight  
hundred and seventy-seven dollars  
and four cents, sir.

WILL  
That's, that's great.

Will is light headed and wobbles as he stands. He closes his eyes and shakes his head to clear it.

EDWARD  
I'll need to get the manager in  
here to complete a transaction this  
large. Please wait here.

Edward walks to the manager's office then knocks on the door.

ROBERT (O.S.)  
(muffled)  
Come in.

Edward opens the door.

EDWARD  
We have a huge piece of gold. Would  
you come and make the transaction?

ROBERT follows Edward over to Will. Robert pays no attention  
to Will's garb and shakes his hand.

ROBERT  
Hello, sir, I'm Robert. Quite a  
monster you have there. If I may  
make a suggestion, we can open an  
account for you. Then you'll know  
your money is safe.

WILL  
I'd like that. Deposit a thousand  
and four hundred dollars into an  
account. Could I get the rest in  
cash?

ROBERT  
Absolutely, sir.

Robert looks at Edward.

ROBERT (CONT'D)  
Get a chair for him, Edward.

Edward rushes to retrieve a chair for Will.

Will plops down, emotionally and physically drained, but  
grinning from ear to ear.

EXT. COLOMA STREET - DAY

Will rides a PALE HORSE down the main street of Coloma.

BEN and GREG, two tough looking brothers, 20s, strapped with  
guns and knives, ride behind Will in a supply laden cart,  
pulled by a STRONG MULE.

Tom, last in line, wears a bandana on his face to cover most  
of the scar. Tom rides inside a two-wheeled wagon that  
carries equipment, pulled by his old droopy mule.

From pick-axes to dynamite, they're ready for anything.

A few PEOPLE walk down the sidewalks. They stop and stare at the procession making its way out of town.

Robert stops and waves.

ROBERT  
Good luck, Mr. Thornbush.

Will smiles and nods.

EXT. CALIFORNIA FOREST TRAIL - DAY

Will rides the pale horse and Tom follows in his cart down the forest trail that Will was robbed on.

A short distance down the trail the Outlaw Leader steps out. Will stops the horse a few feet from him.

OUTLAW LEADER  
See you brought us some more.

Will steps off the horse and walks it over to Tom, then hands him the reins.

WILL  
Ever see a man get killed?

Tom shakes his head no.

WILL (CONT'D)  
It's best to not look at his face.

Will turns back to the Outlaw Leader and barks.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Us?

Ben yells from somewhere in the forest.

BEN (O.S.)  
Got yours, little brother?

Greg yells from the forest on the other side of the path.

GREG (O.S.)  
I do, big brother.

Ben yells to Will.

BEN (O.S.)  
He's all yours, Will.

The Outlaw Leader isn't as bad ass as he was a moment ago. His eyes dart around then sheepishly look at Will.

OUTLAW LEADER  
Hold on, mister.

WILL  
One more time, what's your name?

The Outlaw Leader nervously responds.

OUTLAW LEADER  
I'm sorry for all the trouble,  
mister. I'm Jacob. You can let me  
walk. Never see me again.

WILL  
I do and you bushwhack us on your  
terms. No, we aren't gonna do that.  
But, you take me and these boys  
won't touch you.

Will studies the Outlaw Leader's face then shrugs.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Don't shuck about, I ain't got all  
day.

Will says it with such ferocity and coldness the Outlaw  
Leader panics and makes his move.

The Outlaw Leader gets his gun three quarters of the way out  
of the holster when a shot rings out. The Outlaw Leader  
crashes to the ground.

Ben and Greg rush out of the forest, impressed as hell.

BEN  
Damn, Will.

Greg whoops.

GREG  
Get that man a drink.

Will remorsefully holsters his pistol.

WILL  
Nothing to celebrate in killing a  
man.

Ben and Greg exchange confused glances.

Tom is shaken and as ill as it makes him, he just can't stop  
staring at the corpse. Will gently pats Tom on the shoulder.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Let's dig 'em an earth bath.

Will walks to the back of Tom's cart and pulls out a shovel.

EXT. CALIFORNIA CAVE - DAY

The caravan arrives at the cave. The outlaw's three horses are tied behind Tom's cart.

Will stops his pale horse in an open area. He dismounts and leads it over to Ben and Greg.

WILL

Unload the gear here.

Ben and Greg start to unload the cart.

Will leads his horse over to Tom.

WILL (CONT'D)

You okay?

Tom nods.

WILL (CONT'D)

Unload everything by Ben and Greg.

TOM

Yes, sir.

Tom leads his mule and cart to the open area then starts to unload its contents.

Will walks behind the cart and ties his horse beside the other three.

Will ties a rope between two trees.

Will gathers the four horses and two mules then ties them to the line.

Will walks over to Ben, Greg and Tom.

WILL

Get the tent set up and I'll start a fire. We start mining in the morning, men.

BEN, GREG AND TOM

Yes, sir.

Will grabs an ax and walks into the woods.

Ben, Greg and Tom wrestle with the heavy canvas tent and its sturdy wooden frame.

EXT. CALIFORNIA CAVE - DAY

The next morning Will is the first one out of the tent. He stretches in the early morning sun.

Tom, Ben and Greg make their way out of the tent.

WILL

Tom, can you make breakfast?

TOM

Probably taste like mule butt,  
though.

WILL

As long as we don't get sick and  
die, it'll be fine.

TOM

Not die, sick maybe.

Tom's first smile emerges. Will pats him on the back.

WILL

Ben, grab a pick-ax and come with  
me. Greg, prepare two sticks of  
dynamite.

GREG

Two?

Will smiles and nods.

Will walks with Ben to the supplies. Ben grabs a pick-ax.  
Will lights a lantern.

Will and Ben stride into the cave.

INT. CALIFORNIA CAVE - DAY

Will leads Ben to where he found his large nugget of gold. He lifts the lantern and caresses the hole.

WILL

Here's where we start.

BEN

Is this where you found it?

WILL

Yep, and there's a lot more here.  
Put a hole about a foot deep so we  
can blow this thing open.

Ben grabs the pick-ax and starts to swing away. He makes a hole big enough to hold the dynamite.

Will holds the lantern up to the hole.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Let's go eat.

BEN  
Yeah, I'm starvin'.

Will leads the way out of the cave.

EXT. CALIFORNIA CAVE - DAY

Will and Ben kneel near the cave entrance, covering their ears.

Boom! A huge blast occurs inside the cave and a gray dust cloud charges out of the entrance.

The dust starts to settle. Will and Ben jump up then dust themselves off.

Will shouts out a mountain shaking yell.

WILL  
Aiyeeeeee!

BEN  
That shoulda gotten some rocks  
loosened up.

Ben smiles at Will who tries to contain his excitement.

WILL  
We'll wait until the dust settles  
then start hauling rocks.

Tom and Greg run to the mouth of the cave.

GREG  
Never felt anything like that.

BEN  
Let's do it again.

WILL  
That we will.

Will and Ben walk to the entrance and stare into the dust filled cave.

INT. COLOMA BANK - DAY

Months of hard work have paid off for Will, Ben, Greg and Tom. Scraggly, they enter the Coloma bank in high spirits.

Will carries a five pound bag of gold fragments and dust.

Tom, beard only grown on three quarters of his face, carries a bag with thirty pounds of gold nuggets inside.

They walk to the weigh station. Edward sits behind the table and looks up at Will.

EDWARD

Got some more I see.

WILL

Yep, we do. Go ahead, Tom.

Tom sets his bag on the desk and opens it up. The gold nuggets shimmer inside.

EDWARD

This is going to make you a rich man, Mr. Thornbush.

WILL

And those three.

Ben and Greg exchange smiles.

EDWARD

If you need a woman, my sister is available. She's not much to look at, but damn she can cook.

Edward looks up at Will's smiling face.

WILL

Never had much luck with 'em. And they haven't had much luck with me, neither.

Will places his bag on the desk then opens it, revealing the fragments and dust.

Edward places a five pound weight on the tray of the scale. He grabs gold nuggets then fragments until the scale balances perfectly.

EDWARD

Eighty ounces.

Edward writes 80 on a piece of paper.

Edward lifts the tray and pours its contents into a square steel box on the floor.

Edward repeats this six more times and the steel box is loaded with gold.

Edward places the few remaining nuggets and dust on the scale. He balances it with two ounces of weight.

He pours it into the steel box.

Edward scribbles 2 on the paper.

EDWARD (CONT'D)  
Mr. Thornbush, would you please ask  
Robert to come out here?

WILL  
Yep, Edward, be happy to.

Will goes to the manager's door and knocks.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Robert?

Robert opens the door and warmly greets Will.

ROBERT  
Nice to see you again, Mr.  
Thornbush, find some more gold out  
there?

WILL  
That we did, Robert.

They walk to the desk. Robert's jaw drops when he sees the amount of gold in the square steel box.

ROBERT  
Holy... How much do we have here?

EDWARD  
Thirty-five pounds, two ounces.

Edward shows him a paper with \$10,655.52 written down.

Robert grins and turns to Will.

ROBERT  
How would you like this?

WILL  
Give these boys ten percent each  
then put seven thousand in my  
account and the rest in cash.

ROBERT

Yes, sir. Would you men like to open accounts? That's a lot of money and it'll be safe in here.

Tom looks down.

TOM

Yes, please.

Ben looks at Greg and shrugs his shoulders. Greg nods yes.

BEN

Us, too.

ROBERT

I'll be right back with the paperwork, gentlemen.

Robert strides to his office.

INT. COLOMA SALOON - NIGHT

Will, Ben, Greg and Tom sit in the Coloma saloon/hotel. All are clean shaven with haircuts and new clothes.

Two PROSTITUTES sit on Ben's and Greg's laps, one PROSTITUTE stands beside Will.

Will pours seven shots of whiskey. He passes them out to his Men and the Prostitutes.

Will stands up to make a toast and raises his glass high.

WILL

To us, men.

BEN, GREG AND TOM

To us.

Will sips down the drink then gently sets the glass on the table.

Tom sips his and his whole body quivers.

The Prostitute standing beside Will starts to stroke his hair. Will pushes her over to Tom. She sits on Tom's lap.

WILL

Are you three gonna be okay?

Tom coyly grins.

TOM

Yes, Will.

BEN  
Hell yeah, boss.

Will smiles.

WILL  
Okay, hand me your money. I'll keep it safe until the morning.

The Prostitutes give Will a nasty glance as they watch Tom pull out a wadded up ball of cash then hand it to Will.

Will gets the cash in order, then hands Tom a ten dollar bill back. He folds the rest then puts it into his shirt pocket.

WILL (CONT'D)  
That should be more than enough for the night. If you need more, come to my room.

Will does the same with Ben and Greg. He puts their money in separate pants pockets.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Night, men.

They grin and nod. Will walks away.

INT. COLOMA RESTAURANT - DAY

Will with Ben, Greg and Tom sporting hangovers, sit down for breakfast. COLOMA WAITRESS comes to their table.

COLOMA WAITRESS  
Rough night, guys?

Tom has his head in his hands and tries to stop the pounding.

WILL  
Yep, but they earned those hangovers.

COLOMA WAITRESS  
Maybe some breakfast will help.  
What would you like today?

WILL  
Ham, eggs, toast, fried potatoes and coffee, please.

Tom groans.

BEN  
Bacon, eggs and lots of coffee.

Will looks at the three well-dressed MEN, accountant types, 30s, that sit across the room and stare at him.

GREG  
Same for me.

Coloma Waitress looks at Tom.

TOM  
Just coffee.

WILL  
You need to eat, Tom, it's gonna be a long day.

COLOMA WAITRESS  
What would you like, sir?

TOM  
Ah, bacon, toast and coffee.

COLOMA WAITRESS  
I'll be back when your orders are finished.

She walks away and the three Men walk over to Will.

COMPANY BOSS  
Are you, Mr. William P. Thornbush?

WILL  
I am. Who might you be?

COMPANY BOSS  
We represent the Pan, Pick and Shovel Gold Mining Company.

Will reaches out to shake his hand.

WILL  
Word travels fast.

COMPANY BOSS  
That it does.

WILL  
Have a seat.

COMPANY BOSS  
Could you come to our table where we can discuss this matter in private?

WILL  
Here will do just fine. Pull up a chair, gentlemen.

Company Boss sits and the other two Men stand.

COMPANY BOSS

We would like permission to visit  
your claim and do a survey of it  
and the surrounding area.

WILL

You looking to buy my claim?

COMPANY BOSS

We might be.

WILL

You can go with us as soon as we  
finish breakfast.

The Company Boss nods.

INT. COLOMA BANK - DAY

The Company Boss, Will and Robert sit in Robert's office.

COMPANY BOSS

That's fifty-five thousand dollars,  
Mr. Thornbush.

The Company Boss opens a strong box loaded with cash and  
hands Will the key.

Will signs the document in front of him.

WILL

Will you please bring in the boys,  
Robert?

Robert walks out of the office.

Will counts out three stacks of five thousand five hundred  
dollars.

Ben, Greg and Tom follow Robert into his office.

WILL (CONT'D)

Here you go, boys.

Will hands Ben, Greg and Tom each a stack of cash.

BEN

Holy shit, Will, thanks.

WILL

You earned it. Just don't blow it.

Ben, Greg and Tom nod.

EXT. COLOMA TRAIN STATION - DAY

Will, COLOMA SHERIFF, Robert, Tom with Ben and Greg carrying the strong box, walk toward the Coloma train station.

They walk on the train station's wooden walkway to the security car.

COLOMA CONDUCTOR stands in front of the car and knocks on the metal door.

A metal slat slides open and two eyes peer out. The slat closes then the car door slides open.

Robert, Tom, Ben and Greg look on as the two GUARDS, holding shotguns, allow Coloma Conductor and Will to enter the

SECURITY CAR

Ben and Greg slide the strong box into the car. First Guard stands in the doorway.

The Second Guard places the strong box into a steel cage then locks the cage.

Coloma Conductor and Will walk out of the car to the

STATION WALKWAY

The Guards close the steel door then lock it from the inside.

WILL

Tom, I hope I see you again. Thank you for being a good friend.

Tom raises his head.

TOM

Goodbye, Will.

Tom shakes Will's hand then turns around.

Tom trudges away, tears streaming down his eyes.

Will hangs his head for a moment then talks to Ben and Greg.

WILL

You two be careful and take care of each other.

BEN

Yes, sir.

WILL

Keep an eye on Tom, will you? He's a good man and could really use a friend.

BEN

We will and thanks for giving us a great future.

WILL

Use it wisely. Live your life well instead of wasting it searching for one.

Ben and Greg don't have a clue what he's talking about, but nod anyway.

BEN

Okay, Will.

GREG

Thanks, Will.

Will shakes their hands. Ben and Greg remain there.

ROBERT

Good luck in San Francisco, Mr. Thornbush. Thank you so much for all that you've done for Coloma. We do hope you return someday.

WILL

I hope so, too.

Will shakes Robert's hand.

WILL (CONT'D)

Thanks a lot, Sheriff.

Will shakes Coloma Sheriff's hand then follows Coloma Conductor to the passenger car.

INT. WILL'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Will purchased a two-story manor in San Francisco, lit by electric lighting. Dressed in a dashing suit, he sits on a plush sofa in his living room.

Light knocking on the front door. Will stands up and slogs to the door. He opens it and an attractive woman, LAURA, 20s, stands outside.

Will leans in and kisses her on the cheek.

WILL  
Come on in, Laura.

Laura enters the house. They walk to the sofa then sit down.

LAURA  
Are we ready?

Will is hesitant to speak and rolls his eyes.

WILL  
I guess.

Laura puts her arms around him.

LAURA  
It won't be that bad, it's a good  
play. You may even enjoy it,  
William.

Will feigns a smile.

WILL  
I'll try, Laura.

LAURA  
That's all we can do.

Laura stands up then pulls on Will's hands, encouraging him to do the same. Will stands and they walk to the door then exit the house.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT

Will, like a fish out of water, sits beside Laura in a balcony box in the dark theater.

Laura smiles as she leans forward and watches the play through her theater glasses.

Will fidgets with his theater glasses and looks around. He slumps down in his seat and frowns.

INT. WILL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Will is in his spacious bedroom after the play. He rips off his shoes, tie and jacket then throws them onto the floor.

WILL  
God, I hate this place.

Will looks at himself in the mirror and shakes his head.

WILL (CONT'D)  
What the hell are you doing here?

Will opens his closet then removes a locked box from the top shelf. Will slogs over to his desk.

Will sits down at his desk then opens a drawer. He pulls out a key then uses it to open the box.

Will removes the silver pocket watch from the box. The box also contains the map of where he found the cactus and the encased white cactus flower.

Will opens the pocket watch and beams as he looks at Mandy's battered photo. He gently caresses the photo with his finger.

Will closes the silver pocket watch then returns it to the box. Will locks the box. He puts the key in the drawer.

Will stands up and returns the box to the closet.

Will walks to a table then pours himself a drink. He walks out onto the

BALCONY

and stares off into the distance.

INT. SAN FRANCISCO RESTAURANT - DAY

Will sits alone in a restaurant and glumly eats breakfast. Will hears a young woman giggle and looks up.

Across the restaurant he sees a YOUNG COUPLE in love. They hold hands and laugh.

Will bolts up then rushes to SAN FRANCISCO WAITRESS. Will gives her a dollar and races to the door.

San Francisco Waitress stares at Will as he rushes out of the restaurant.

INT. WILL'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Will sits in an easy chair in his living room. A HUSBAND holds his WIFE, both 30s, on the sofa.

WILL

You made a decision to purchase my house?

HUSBAND

Yes, we really like it and would like to see if we can afford it.

WILL

You can have it for eight thousand  
with all the furniture included.

HUSBAND

Really?

WILL

Yep.

The Husband leaps up and vigorously shakes Will's hand.

HUSBAND

Thank you so much. We'll take very  
good care of it.

His Wife removes a handkerchief from her purse and wipes away  
the tears of joy.

HUSBAND (CONT'D)

God bless you, Mr. Thornbush.

WILL

How soon can we get this done?

INT. WILL'S BEDROOM - DAY

Will packs a suitcase in his bedroom. He leaves the fancy  
shoes and suits behind.

Will opens the closet. He removes the locked box and puts it  
into a small black bag, then places it into the suitcase.

Will removes work shirts and lays them over the bag.

Will closes the suitcase then picks it up. He strides out of  
the bedroom.

EXT. MINNEAPOLIS CEMETERY - DAY

Will carries white tulips through the Minneapolis cemetery,  
searching for his mother's grave. The summer rain pelts Will.

Will trudges down a row of headstones and spots his mother's  
headstone, glaring at him through the rain.

Will kneels down then places the flowers at the base of the  
weathered headstone.

Tombstone reads: SUZANNE MAY THORNBUSH - 12 FEB. 1815 - 4  
SEPT. 1874 - BELOVED WIFE AND MOTHER - REST IN GOD'S HOUSE

Will stares at the tombstone and begs for forgiveness.

WILL

I'm so sorry, Ma, I should have never left. You were right. Please forgive me.

Will starts to sob and can barely be understood.

WILL (CONT'D)

I miss you, Ma.

Will crumples to the ground and sits on the rain drenched grass, holding his head in his hands.

WILL (CONT'D)

I was selfish, Ma, selfish as hell.

INT. MINNEAPOLIS HOTEL DINING ROOM - DAY

Will is the only customer inside the hotel dining room. A dirty plate and glass sit in front of him. He sits in front of a window and stares out at the rain.

Will removes the silver pocket watch from his shirt pocket. He opens it and gazes at Mandy's photo.

MINNEAPOLIS WAITRESS comes to his table.

MINNEAPOLIS WAITRESS

Kind of a gloomy day.

Will closes the silver pocket watch and peeks up at her.

WILL

Tomorrow will be better.

Will puts the silver pocket watch back into his shirt pocket.

MINNEAPOLIS WAITRESS

I hope you're right. Care for dessert, sir?

Will looks at her.

WILL

Sure, why not. You only live once, right?

MINNEAPOLIS WAITRESS

You're right. What would you like?

WILL

Apple pie and whipped cream, please.

MINNEAPOLIS WAITRESS

Yes, sir.

WILL

And another coffee, too. Hell, make it two pieces of pie.

MINNEAPOLIS WAITRESS

Yes, sir.

Minneapolis Waitress picks up the dirty plate and glass then walks away.

Will resumes his stare out the window.

EXT. MANDY'S FARMHOUSE - DAY

Will, holding his small black bag, rides a skittish MARE to the open gate of Mandy's farm. Much has changed.

Will is hesitant, but the mare won't stand still. Will eases the pressure off the reins and the mare walks to the house.

Mandy, now 59 and widowed, sits in front of a table on the porch and looks at Will strangely.

MANDY

Hello. Are you lost?

WILL

Was for a long time.

Will gets off the mare and ties it to the porch rail. He walks up the steps then to the table.

MANDY

Do I know you? You look like someone I used to know.

WILL

You did, a long time ago.

Mandy looks at him and smiles.

MANDY

A long time for you is probably a short time for me, young man. How old are you, twenty or so?

WILL

Or so.

MANDY

Who are you looking for?

Will sweats nervously.

WILL

For you, Mandy. May I sit?

Mandy points to the empty chair. She can't stop staring at his familiar face.

MANDY

Well, you found me. What can I do for you?

Will smiles politely then sits and places the bag on the table.

WILL

I know you won't believe me, but what I'm gonna tell you is the truth.

Mandy gets a little uncomfortable and starts to bounce her right leg. Will smiles at her nervous tic.

MANDY

I have a pretty good b.s. detector, young man, so say what you have to say and we'll see. Let's start with your name.

WILL

I'm Will.

MANDY

Nice to meet you, Will.

WILL

William Poebly Thornbush.

Mandy stares intently.

MANDY

Oh my God, you're Will's son? You look just like your father.

WILL

I'm not his son. I am Will, your Will. My mother is Suzanne May and you wrote me after her funeral.

Mandy tenses up.

MANDY

If you're playing a game, I do not find it very amusing.

WILL

I'm not playing a game, Mandy. I know it's not easy to believe. In 1902 I was in the Arizona desert.

Mandy jokes with Will, not taking him serious.

MANDY

So you're sixty years old? You must tell me your secret.

WILL

I was dying of thirst and I crawled to a cactus then drank its juice. The next thing I know, I woke up and I was young again.

MANDY

Well, you can make a lot of money if you sell it.

Will gets frustrated.

WILL

I already got enough money.

Will reaches into the bag and pulls out the box. He reaches in his pocket for the key. He opens the box and removes the encased white cactus flower, then sets it on the table.

Mandy looks at it then at Will.

MANDY

Yes, young man, that's a flower.

WILL

This is from the cactus that made me young again.

MANDY

You sure look like Will and talk like him, but I need real proof to believe this tall tale.

Will removes the silver pocket watch from the box then opens it. He sets it on the table in front of Mandy.

Mandy's hands tremble as she picks it up. She examines it closely then looks at Will.

MANDY (CONT'D)

Oh my God, Will. You kept it all these years.

WILL

Yep, it's been with me every day.

MANDY

Why?

Will reaches across the table and grabs her hand. Mandy looks like she's about to faint.

WILL

Because, Mandy, I promised you I would love you forever and that's the only promise I've ever been able to keep.

They stare into each other's teary eyes.

INT. MANDY'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Mandy and Will sit at the dining table and eat dessert by the light of kerosene lanterns.

The detailed sketch of Mandy that Will gave to her in 1865 is framed and hangs on the wall.

Will attacks the apple pie.

MANDY

You can slow down, Will, it won't bite back.

WILL

Sorry.

MANDY

You are definitely William P. Thornbush.

Will starts to eat slower.

WILL

Ma told me you had two daughters.

MANDY

Yes, I do, and five grandchildren. They are the loves of my life. Did you ever get married?

WILL

No, after Ma told me you got hitched I just stayed out looking for gold.

MANDY

Did you ever find any?

WILL

A couple months back I found a lot.

MANDY

That's great, now you can get married, buy a house and raise a family. You can have everything you always wanted.

Will looks down.

WILL

That's why I'm here, Mandy.

MANDY

There are several nice young ladies  
in our church. Maybe you can go on  
Sunday. Will you be staying in  
Minnesota?

Will tenses up and looks at Mandy.

WILL

A lifetime ago I found the love of  
my life and I foolishly lost her.  
I'm here to correct my mistakes of  
the past.

MANDY

Oh, Will, stop chasing dreams that  
don't come true.

WILL

I'm serious, Mandy. I can return to  
the desert and find another cactus.  
It'll do the same for you as it did  
for me. We can start fresh.

MANDY

That sounds wonderful, but I'm  
afraid it's probably too wonderful  
to be true, Will.

Mandy looks at Will with pity, then stands and walks to the front door. Will follows.

Mandy opens the door and Will steps outside.

MANDY (CONT'D)

Thank you so much for coming, Will,  
I had a wonderful evening.

Will takes her by the hand.

WILL

I'll find it, Mandy. I promise you,  
I will find it.

MANDY

Don't waste your second life  
chasing something you'll never  
have. Go out and live. Get married,  
raise a family and be happy, Mr.  
William P. Thornbush.

Mandy pulls her hand away and closes the door on Will as he tries to kiss her.

WILL (O.S.)  
(muffled)  
Good night, Mandy.

Mandy places her hand against the door and whispers.

MANDY  
Goodbye, Will.

INT. ANTELOPE STATION SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Pete sits behind the desk in his office. Will opens the door and eases into the office, then humbly stands in front of Pete's desk.

PETE  
Hello, Will.

WILL  
Hi, Pete, may I speak with you?

PETE  
Certainly, please sit. What are you doing back in town?

Will sits down.

WILL  
Came back to ask a favor.

PETE  
Okay, Will.

WILL  
Went to see Mandy and I promised I would find another cactus for her. Then we can finally be together.

PETE  
How can I help?

WILL  
I'd like your permission to be here. I won't bother anyone and you won't see me much.

PETE  
I've thought a lot about how we parted last time, Will. I believe I should have never asked you to leave. Your wild story just scared the hell outta me.

WILL  
Sorry about that.

PETE  
Water under the bridge. I know it's you, Will. I realized it a couple days after you left. You're more than welcome to stay as long as you like.

WILL  
Thanks, Pete.

Pete leans toward Will.

PETE  
And I have a favor to ask of you.

WILL  
Sure, old friend.

Pete looks down at his old wrinkled hands.

PETE  
Let's say you find this cactus.  
Would you let me have some?

WILL  
Yes, I will, Pete. I absolutely will.

PETE  
Thank you, Will.

WILL  
Wish me luck.

Will stands up, shakes Pete's hand then leaves the office.

PETE  
Good luck, you crazy old bastard.

EXT. LARGE ARIZONA OASIS - DAY

Will starts his search at the oasis in the Arizona desert where he first found the red cactus. He leads a NEW MULE over to the pond and drops the reins. The mule starts to drink.

Will walks to the rock formation in front of him and sees the small crevice that he spent the night in.

Will looks around and sees a dark brown object a few yards away. Will walks over to it then kneels beside it.

WILL

Oh, no.

Will looks closely at the shriveled red cactus on the ground. Only a wilted flower and dried hull remain.

Will plops down. He thinks for a moment then smiles.

WILL (CONT'D)

This is the second one you've found, there's gotta be more.

Will stands and rushes to his mule, then leads the mule away.

EXT. ARIZONA CREEK BED - DAY

Will leads his mule down a dry creek bed, rocky canyon cliffs on both sides. Ominous storm clouds block out the setting sun.

Will ties the mule's reins to a bush then pulls off the pack.

EXT. ARIZONA CREEK BED - NIGHT

Will sits beside the blazing fire and sips a cup of coffee. His supply pack and tent are nearby. His mule tied to a bush.

Will sets down his cup. He pulls the silver pocket watch out of his shirt pocket then opens it.

Intermittent rain drops begin to peck at the fire.

The mule nervously brays and tugs at the reins.

WILL

Simmer down.

Will stands and a bolt of lightning flashes in the distance. Thunder booms down the creek bed.

The mule jerks free then runs off.

Will gives chase, but stumbles in the darkness and drops the silver pocket watch.

WILL (CONT'D)

Damn you, stupid mule.

A flash of lightning exposes the mule in the distance. The thunder boom quickly follows.

Will limps to the fire and grabs a burning limb. He returns to where he dropped the watch.

The clouds burst open and rain pours down on Will. Will gets a glimpse of the watch just before the flame goes out.

He crawls around, feeling for the watch. A bolt of lightning exposes the silver pocket watch and Will snatches it up. The thunder boom is ferocious.

The rain is unbearable as Will hobbles toward the tent, the fire no longer burns.

A rumbling sound rushes down the creek bed toward Will, but it's not thunder.

Will pauses and looks back over his shoulder.

The flash flood sweeps Will off his feet. It carries him, his supply pack and the tent away. Will fights for his life.

#### UNDER WATER

Light from a bolt of lightning shows the pocket watch slip from Will's grasp and churn in the water. The clap of thunder is muffled by the water.

#### WATER'S SURFACE

Will bobs and bounces along the canyon walls. He tries to latch onto the cliffs, but the raging water won't allow it.

A bolt of lightning flashes and reveals Will going under, twenty yards or so away.

#### EXT. ARIZONA CREEK BED - DAY

Only puddles of water and mud are left in the wake of last night's flash flood. Some of Will's supplies are scattered about, partially covered by mud.

Birds chirp and bathe in the puddles. A groan is heard nearby.

Will is sprawled out on a ledge in the rocky cliff. He took a hell of a beating, but he's still alive. One eye is swollen shut.

Will lowers himself to the mud below. He studies the area then begins to hobble in the direction he came from.

After walking a ways, Will sees a glimmer of sunlight reflect off of something in the creek bed. He goes to investigate.

Will groans as he kneels down and picks up the silver pocket watch. He wipes the mud off as best he can. Mandy's photo is gone.

WILL  
It's our destiny, Mandy, I can feel  
it.

Will stuffs the watch in his pocket and hobbles away.

Behind Will, a red cactus with a white flower is beside the rocky cliff, half covered by mud.

EXT. ARIZONA DESERT - DAY

Will's mule grazes on scrub brush.

Will hobbles toward the mule, a hundred yards or so away.

INT. ANTELOPE STATION SALOON - NIGHT

Will, all healed up, sits alone at a table in the Antelope Station saloon.

ZACK, 20, and his brother RONALD, 18, strut into the saloon, quite full of themselves. They walk to the bar and slap it.

Will looks on at these silly young men putting on a show.

Cora watches from across the saloon.

Antelope Creek Bartender gives them each a beer, Zack pays the Bartender.

Zack and Ronald walk to a table then sit down. Zack spots Will across the saloon.

ZACK  
Look over there.

Ronald turns to look at Will.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
I think that's him.

RONALD  
So?

ZACK  
I understand he's got a lotta  
money.

RONALD  
Could be he needs some help.

ZACK  
We could use a couple a bucks.  
Let's go find out.

They pick up their beers then strut to Will's table.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
Sir, I'm Zack and this is my  
brother Ronald.

RONALD  
Hello, sir.

WILL  
Hi boys, I'm Will.

Will shakes their hands.

ZACK  
Can we sit?

WILL  
Help yourselves.

Zack and Ronald sit down.

ZACK  
We understand you're lookin' for  
somethin'. We might be able to help  
ya out, Will.

WILL  
What help could you be?

ZACK  
We know the area real good, Will. I  
reckon we could find just about  
anythin' out there.

RONALD  
Six eyes are a whole lot better 'an  
two.

WILL  
Let me think about it.

ZACK  
Fair 'nough, Will.

WILL  
If you're still interested in the  
morning, meet me in the restaurant  
at eight and I'll let you know.

ZACK  
We'll be there, Will.

Zack and Ronald return to their table.

Will sips his whiskey then gently sets the glass on the table. He stands up and leaves.

Cora walks over to Zack and Ronald.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
Care to sit?

She sits down. Zack and Ronald grin.

INT. ANTELOPE STATION HOTEL ROOM 3 - NIGHT

Will sits at the desk. A kerosene lantern lights up the hotel room. Will has finished a colored sketch of the red cactus with the white flower and works on a second.

After he completes it he sets them aside.

Will marks two different areas on two maps.

Will stands up and turns off the kerosene lantern. He undresses then hops into bed.

INT. ANTELOPE STATION RESTAURANT - DAY

Will sits in the restaurant and eats breakfast. His small black bag sits in the chair beside him.

Zack and Ronald walk into the restaurant then over to Will.

ZACK  
Good mornin', Will.

WILL  
Morning, fellas, have a seat.

Zack and Ronald sit down.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Guess you're still looking to help.

ZACK  
Yes, sir, we are.

Mattie comes over to the table.

MATTIE  
Can I get you boys something for breakfast?

Zack looks at his brother who shakes his head no, then looks up at Mattie.

ZACK  
Sorry, ma'am, we can't afford it.

Will looks at them.

WILL

Order what you want, my treat.  
You'll need a good breakfast if  
you're going get something  
accomplished today.

ZACK

Thank you, Will.

Zack grins up at the Mattie.

ZACK (CONT'D)

I'll have the same as him.

Zack looks at Will.

ZACK (CONT'D)

If that's okay with you?

WILL

Order anything you want.

Mattie turns to Ronald.

MATTIE

And you, sir?

RONALD

The same.

MATTIE

I'll be back when it's ready.

Mattie walks away.

WILL

I'll give you one fifty a day and  
pay for all the supplies. Sound  
fair?

ZACK

Yes, sir.

Will reaches into his bag then removes the two sketches of  
the cactus. He hands one to Zack then one to Ronald.

WILL

This is what you'll be looking for.

Zack and Ronald look at the drawings.

ZACK

Never seen a cactus like that  
before.

WILL  
I'm guessing not many folks have.

Will reaches into the bag and removes the two maps, then hands one to Zack and one to Ronald.

WILL (CONT'D)  
These are the areas you'll be searching. If and when you find one, you mark the exact location where you found it.

ZACK  
Yes, sir.

WILL  
Do not touch the cactus.

RONALD  
Is it poisonous?

WILL  
Damn sure is. Are you sure you can handle this?

ZACK  
Yes, sir. When do we leave?

WILL  
First light tomorrow. Today we'll get the supplies we need.

RONALD  
We takin' horses?

WILL  
They don't last out there like a mule does.

Zack smacks Ronald in the back of the head.

ZACK  
Dumbass.

Mattie brings Zack and Ronald their order.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
Thank you.

RONALD  
Thanks, ma'am.

WILL  
Eat up, boys, it's gonna be a long month.

Zack and Ronald attack the food like they haven't eaten a good meal in a long time.

EXT. ARIZONA WOODED AREA - DAY

Will leads his mule and stops at a few acres of wooded area bordering the vast desert.

Zack and Ronald have their two YOUNG MULES in tow.

Will turns his mule around then faces Zack and Ronald.

WILL

Here's where we split up.

ZACK

Yes, sir.

WILL

Are you clear on your instructions?

ZACK

Yes, sir. We look for your cactus in our areas on the map.

WILL

If you find it, make sure you mark the exact location on your map. We don't want to have to do these areas over again.

ZACK

Understood, Will.

Zack deviously undoes the strap that holds the pack on his mule, being careful that Will doesn't see.

WILL

If you see one, come and find me.  
If you don't, we all meet back here in a month.

ZACK

Good luck, sir.

WILL

You too.

Zack jabs the mule in the ribs and it bucks. The pack falls to the ground.

ZACK

Goddamn mule!

RONALD  
Dumbass.

Zack snarls at Ronald.

ZACK  
Help me get this back up.

WILL  
You got it?

ZACK  
Yes, sir.

Will turns his mule around then walks off.

Zack and Ronald strap the pack on Zack's mule.

Ronald starts to lead his mule away.

RONALD  
See ya in a month.

ZACK  
Hold up.

Ronald stops then turns toward Zack.

Will and his mule disappear from sight.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
Come on back.

RONALD  
What?

ZACK  
Follow me.

RONALD  
That's not what Will said.

ZACK  
He'll never know the difference if  
you keep your big fat mouth shut.  
Follow me!

Zack and Ronald lead their mules into the desert.

EXT. SMALL ARIZONA OASIS - DAY

Zack has led Ronald to a small oasis. They tie their mules to a tree then remove the packs.

ZACK  
You go find some firewood.

Ronald walks away.

Zack removes cooking supplies from a pack when he hears Ronald yell.

RONALD  
Zack, come here. Hurry!

Zack runs over to Ronald, thirty or so feet away. Ronald stares down at something.

ZACK  
What?

Ronald points to the beautiful red cactus with the white flower in front of his feet.

RONALD  
Look.

Zack looks down at the cactus and pauses. He pulls out the drawing and looks at it.

ZACK  
Hmm.

Zack nudges the cactus petals with his boot.

RONALD  
Is that it?

ZACK  
Yup.

Zack puts the drawing back then kicks the cactus with his boot.

RONALD  
What the hell?

Zack continues to kick the cactus and flower until little more than mush remains.

Ronald looks at Zack like he's lost his mind.

RONALD (CONT'D)  
What'd ya do that for?

ZACK  
We get paid to search, right?

RONALD  
No shit!

ZACK  
What happens when we find his precious cactus?

RONALD  
He'll be happy as hell.

Zack glares at Ronald.

ZACK  
No, dumbass, he stops payin' us.

RONALD  
Yeah.

ZACK  
We get paid by the day to search  
for the cactus.

RONALD  
Uh-huh.

ZACK  
When we find the cactus he has no  
more reason to pay us, now does he?

Ronald thinks about it for a moment then smiles at Zack.

RONALD  
You're a godt dern genius, you  
shoulda been a lawyer.

Ronald jumps up and down on the remains of the cactus then  
kicks at the ground to cover it with dirt.

ZACK  
Go get the firewood and let's get  
comfortable. We're gonna be here a  
month.

RONALD  
Why don't we just go home and meet  
him at the woods in a month.

Zack thinks about it for a moment.

ZACK  
Nah, too risky. People would see us  
and you know they'd tell him about  
it. We're better off stayin' here  
if we wanna get paid.

RONALD  
You're right, big brother. I'll get  
the wood.

Ronald walks off. Zack walks back to the packs.

## INT. MANDY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mandy, in ill health, sits in her living room and reads a letter from Will. A fire roars in the fireplace.

WILL (V.O.)

Dearest Mandy, I do hope that you are well. I will return to you soon. I'm hiring two men to help in the search. Please do not give up hope for I believe it will not be long. I yearn to hold your hand and run through the meadow again. Yours forever, Will.

MANDY

Oh, Will, you've learned nothing. Stop looking for the life you want and start living the one you have.

Mandy stands up and crumples up the letter, then throws it into the fireplace. She slowly walks away.

## EXT. ARIZONA DESERT - NIGHT

Will, dirty long hair and beard, sits by a fire and eats beans and bread. His clothes are filthy and tattered.

Will sets his empty plate and spoon on the ground.

Will settles back against his pack, staring past the fire into the sea of darkness beyond.

WILL

God, help me find the cactus.

Will crawls into his bed roll then goes to sleep.

## INT. MINNEAPOLIS HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Mandy lies in her Minneapolis hospital bed, dying at age 61. Her two Daughters, now 35 and 36, sit beside her on opposite sides of the bed.

Mandy hands the Oldest Daughter an envelope that reads:  
WILLIAM P. THORNBUSH - ANTELOPE STATION, ARIZONA

MANDY

This is very important. Make sure you mail it immediately.

The Oldest Daughter puts the envelope into her purse.

OLDEST DAUGHTER  
I will, Mom.

MANDY  
Promise me you will do this.

OLDEST DAUGHTER  
I promise, Mom, don't worry.

Mandy takes her Daughters' hands.

MANDY  
Are you sure that all the paperwork  
is done so when I pass there will  
be no problems for you two?

OLDEST DAUGHTER  
Stop worrying, Mom, everything is  
fine. You just worry about getting  
better.

Mandy smiles lovingly at her Daughters.

MANDY  
I love you both so much, but I am  
not going to get better. Thank you  
for filling my life with purpose  
and joy.

The Daughters lay their heads on the bed while Mandy strokes  
their hair.

EXT. ARIZONA DESERT - DAY

Will leads his mule through the desert. The mule has had  
enough and is ready to collapse.

Will stops atop a sand dune and spots an oasis in the  
distance. Will removes a telescope from the supply pack.

He slides it open then looks through it to survey the oasis.  
Will sees something white flash past his view.

Will scans back and there it is, a beautiful white flower  
perched atop a red cactus. Will's voice is weak and raspy.

WILL  
We found it, boy.

He compresses the telescope then puts it in the supply pack.  
Will tries to encourage his mule to continue.

WILL (CONT'D)  
Just a couple a hundred yards then  
we got it. Come on, boy.

The mule collapses under the weight of the merciless sun.

Will kneels down beside the mule as it quietly passes away.  
Will gently strokes the dead mule's face.

WILL (CONT'D)  
So long, friend.

Will stands then trudges toward the cactus.

Will's almost there, just another twenty feet or so. He starts to wobble. His vision becomes blurry then he stumbles.

Will lies face down in the sand until his vision clears.

Will looks up at the cactus, it's so close.

INT. MINNEAPOLIS HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Mandy has little time left, but she's content with the life she's lived. She smiles and closes her eyes.

Her Daughters sit beside the hospital bed, holding her hands.

Mandy leaves this life as she led it, quietly and with dignity. She exhales her final breath.

Her Daughters start to cry.

EXT. ARIZONA DESERT - DAY

Will crawls to within a foot of the cactus. Will reaches to his boot then draws his knife.

Barely strong enough to slide the knife along the ground, he manages to reach the cactus with the knife.

Will is spent, there's no energy in his drained body. The knife slips from his grasp.

Will's trembling hand reaches up to touch the beautiful white flower of the red cactus.

Will's hand falls limp onto the cactus petals and his eyes close. His face lies on the ground and a puff of dust rises as he exhales his final breath.

FADE OUT.

THE END