

The Train from Godolphin

A Play in Two Acts

by Robert Daseler

Characters

Juan Carrasco, a Mexican bandit
Clara, the madam of a brothel, in her forties
Edwin, a professional conman and grifter, fifty
Howard, a prospector, late forties
Lily, a girl with a heart of gold, twenty
Ling, a Chinese servant, mid-fifties
Lofton, an Anglican priest, mid-thirties
Mildred, an ingenue, twenty
Percy, the ticket agent, indeterminate age
Solomon, a freed slave, thirty

Act I

Setting

The platform and ticket office of a virtually abandoned railroad station somewhere in the Old West circa 1883. The set should resemble that of a low-budget movie from the early 1960s, specifically the set of The Outrage (1964), directed by Martin Ritt, a pair of railroad tracks disappearing into a mist at the base of distant purple mountains. The railroad depot is not old, but it is already weather-worn, its wooden platform creaky under foot and badly in need of repair. A metal-wheeled flatbed wagon is upstage on the platform. A water tower can be seen at some distance up the tracks. A weathered sign, saying "Silver Gulch" is suspended on a board on the downstage side of the depot. The wooden door to the interior of the depot is almost falling off its hinges. The interior is furnished only with a few wooden chairs. Several pieces of luggage have been left in the waiting room.

There is only one person behind the grill of the ticket window, Percy, the ticket agent, and for most of the play he is reading a book or examining timetables or doing whatever else station agents used to do. Percy should not move around too much, because it is best that the audience does not notice him at first.

The time of the play's action corresponds minute by minute with the time of the audience. In other words, this is a "Greek" play.

As the lights come up, Howard and Edwin are standing on the platform. Howard is a good deal larger and less tidy in his clothes than Edwin, who is wearing a checkered vest under his jacket. Each man is carrying a pocket watch on a chain, and each of them checks his. The time is early evening. The sun has declined behind the mountains, but there is still plenty of light in the sky.

Howard

God only knows when the next train will stop here. The agent in there certainly doesn't.

Edwin

It might not come at all.

Howard

We can only pray for the best. Man proposes and God disposes.

Edwin

(Dubious)

Hmm. I don't have much choice. I've cleared out of my room at the hotel, and I've been encouraged not to come back.

Howard

Oh, yes, I recognize you now. You're the card sharp, aren't you?

Edwin

Gambler. I'm a professional gambler. I stake my livelihood on games of chance, and from time to time I arrange prize fights.

Howard

A sporting man.

Edwin

Yes.

Howard

I would be willing to wager, sporting man, that this isn't the first town you've been run out of.

Edwin

Out of which I have been run. Never end a sentence with a preposition, my good man. It's bad form.

Howard

A sporting man who is also a grammarian. That's a novelty!

Edwin

I am also a professor of Latin and Greek, or I used to be.

Howard

Well la-de-dah! A professor of Latin and Greek. How did you wander so far from civilization?

Edwin

It's a long story, my good man. It's a long story.

Howard

I'll wager it is.

Edwin

Somebody will write a dime novel about me someday, and that fabulist will become richer than I ever was or will be.

Howard

Is that so?

Edwin

Bet your bottom dollar on it. I am not yet fifty years old, and yet I have drunk deeper of life than any other man you've ever met.

Howard

Is that so?

Edwin

Do you always ask redundant questions?

Howard

(Offended)

If my questions annoy you, I'll not ask any more of them. We can wait here in silence, if you prefer.

Edwin

I am not in the least annoyed, my good man.

Howard

Stop calling me your good man. I am not your man, good, bad, or indifferent.

Edwin

It's just an expression, sir, an empty expression. It doesn't mean anything. A form of words.

Howard

You are most uncivil. If you were a bigger man, I should box your ears.

Edwin

Don't allow my size to dissuade you. I've done for larger men than you, sir.

Howard looks Edwin up and down, as if considering the challenge, but there is something sly and crafty about the latter that convinces him to let the matter drop.

Howard

I wouldn't soil my hands on your person.

Edwin

Indeed, you would not. You would never touch me with so much as a finger.

Howard

You are a rude fellow. I'll grant you that. Don't push me too far, or I won't answer for what I might do.

Edwin

I have been threatened by better men than you, sir.

Howard

I would easily believe that you have been horsewhipped by better men than me.

Edwin

(Laughs)

Ah, when it comes to being horsewhipped, I defer to your wider experience.

At this point Howard turns away. He does not have a ready riposte to Edwin's taunt. The two men turn their backs on each other. Howard walks upstage, toward the distant mountains, peering at the tracks for any sign of an approaching train. Edwin produces a cigar from an inner pocket in his jacket and holds it between his teeth while searching in his other pockets for a match. He cannot find one. He takes the cigar out of his mouth after a few seconds and examines it, as if it were deficient for not lighting itself, and puts it back.

Clara, followed by Lily and Ling, enters from upstage and climbs onto the railroad platform. Ling is dragging Clara's steamer trunk behind him. It is too heavy for him to lift. The steamer trunk is almost the size of a coffin, made of metal with brass clasps and bound with a leather strap. Lily is carrying a cheap cardboard suitcase of her own, and she is also carrying a cloth satchel containing Ling's worldly belongings. Clara and Lily are dressed like prostitutes in 1950s Hollywood movies: black stockings under long, full skirts, with lots of bows and frills on their dresses. Clara is carrying a furled parasol, which she uses almost as a weapon. Ling is dressed entirely in what look like black pajamas.

Ling struggles with the steamer trunk, and his struggle attracts the attention of Edwin and Howard, though neither man lifts a finger to help him.

When Ling finally has the steamer trunk on the platform, he sits down on it, exhausted, and produces a handkerchief to mop his brow.

Clara

(Addressing Howard)

When is the next train due?

Howard

Well, it ought to be along soon, but, on the other hand, it might have been delayed by Indians or rockslides or any one of a dozen other hazards.

Clara

Unh huh. And where are you going?

Howard

Me? I'm going wherever the train will take me. Ultimately I'm going to Sacramento, but it may take a few days for me to get there.

Clara

What's waiting for you in Sacramento? A wife? Children?

Howard

My wife, if she is still alive, is in Hartford, Connecticut. The elder of my two sons, well, he was working in a mine in Leadville, Colorado, last I heard, and the younger is somewhere at sea, I believe, following the imperceptible peregrinations of whales.

Clara

Like their father, they are pursuing their fortunes, in other words.

Howard

You could say that, yes. *(Beat)* My daughter, who was my favorite, is forever lost to me now.

Clara

She's dead?

Howard

She might as well be. She went into your profession and settled in New York City, where you can't swing a cat without hitting a whore.

Clara is familiar with the casual denigration of her profession by men like Howard, and she does not take offense, although she looks at him a little more closely after learning that his daughter is a prostitute. She pokes Ling with the point of her parasol.

Clara

Stand up, Ling. You are not to sit when your mistress is standing.

Although he has not been able to catch his breath, Ling stands reluctantly. He is a little wobbly on his feet.

Catching sight of Lily, Edwin, with elaborate carelessness, wanders over in her direction to have a closer look.

Clara addresses Howard.

Have you been waiting here long?

Howard

Half an hour.

Clara

What does the station agent say? Will there be a train tonight or not?

Howard

His exact words, spoken half an hour ago, were: "Your guess is as good as mine." *(Beat)* And where might you be headed this evening?

Clara

(Shrugs)

Anywhere but here. *(Beat)* I'm looking for greener pastures.

Howard

Aren't we all? *(Beat)* Aren't we all.

Clara

What brought you to Silver Gulch?

Howard

The name, I guess.

Clara

You are fond of gulches?

Howard

I have nothing against gulches. I've spent most of my adult life in gulches of one sort or another. *(Beat)* But it was the word *silver* that rang in my ear like trumpets blown by angels.

Clara

The founders of the community knew what they were doing when they selected its name.

Howard

I believe they did, the cunning bastards. *(Beat)* There was never any silver in these godforsaken hills.

Clara

No, not an ounce of it, but it's a natural crossroads, and if you dig a well deep enough you hit an underground lake of cool, clean water. For that reason, Silver Gulch is going to prosper and grow. Out here in the desert, water is more valuable than silver.

Howard

In that case, why are you leaving?

Clara

I am not a farmer, and I am not a speculator in land. Silver Gulch is going to prosper and grow, but maybe not for another twenty or thirty years. I can't wait that long. The miners in these parts can hardly afford a glass of warm beer, much less a woman of quality.

Howard

That's true. You might find more paying customers in Phoenix or Tucson.

Clara

I'm thinking of Glenwood Springs in Colorado.

Howard

But that's a health spa where people go when they're dying of consumption.

Clara

Men who are dying of consumption have the same physical needs as other men. Besides, I believe it has a more temperate climate than we have here.

Howard

So does Hell.

Edwin

(Addressing Lily)

I don't think we've ever been formally introduced. My name is Edwin Robley, at your service.

Lily

(She shyly glances at Clara before answering)

It's a pleasure to meet you. My name is Lily d'Auberville.

Edwin

Lily d'Auberville. Is that your real name?

Lily

Of course not, but it's what you may call me, if you wish to speak to me.

Edwin

And are you going to Glenwood Springs, too, Miss d'Auberville?

Lily

I guess I am. I go where she goes.

Edwin

I see. *(Beat)* Where are you from, Miss d'Auberville?

Lily again looks to Clara, who gives a minimal shake to her head.

Lily

It doesn't matter where I'm from, does it?

Edwin

No, I suppose not. *(Beat)* As for myself, I'm from Chillicothe, Missouri. Have you ever heard of it?

Lily

I think so. I'm not sure.

Edwin

It's about ninety miles northeast of Kansas City, in the middle of the state. It's not a large town, but it's the county seat of Livingston County, and it is where my mother and both of my sisters live.

Lily

(Uncertain why he is telling her this much)

I see.

Edwin

My mother is seventy-four years old, but she still has all of her wits. She has been a widow for more than twenty-five years. My father was killed by Indians.

Lily

Oh, dear!

Edwin

Or by Abolitionists. The truth has never been established.

Lily

Did you fight in the late war?

Edwin

Yes, I did. I was wounded at the battle of Pittsburgh Landing.

Lily

You served with the forces of rebellion, I take it.

Edwin

Yes, I did.

Lily

Because if you had served under General Grant, you would have called it the battle of Shiloh.

Edwin

You are very astute for someone who had not yet been born when that battle occurred.

Lily again glances at Clara, who again gives a minimal shake of her head. Edwin observes this silent censorship and smiles to himself.

I took a Minié ball in the chest at Pittsburgh Landing, and for a time doctors thought I might not make it. When I had recovered sufficiently, I deserted my unit and made my way to California, hoping to become rich in the goldfields, but the only gold I found was on a faro table.

Lily

You are a gambler?

Edwin

I prefer the term, "sporting man." I also help to arrange pugilistic competitions.

Lily

Have you made very much money playing cards?

Edwin

Indeed, I have, and I have lost it. Only six months ago I had more money than I could have spent in all the stores of Chillicothe or Silver Gulch, but like other sporting men, I alternate between feast and famine. *(Beat)* At the moment, famine prevails.

Lily

Aren't you getting a little old for that kind of life?

Edwin

(Dramatically clutches his heart)

Oh! The cruelty of youth! Too old! Too old! Good heavens, girl,
how old do you think I am?

Lily

I don't know. Fifty?

Edwin

(Laughs hollowly)

Fifty! You think I am fifty?

Lily

(Confused)

I don't know. Forty?

Edwin

(Shakes his head in sadness)

So young, and yet so cruel!

Lily

I'm sorry. I didn't intend to offend you.

Edwin

I *am* fifty, indeed. You were right the first time, but I pride myself
on looking a good deal younger than that.

Lily

Were you frightened in the war?

Edwin

During the War of Northern Aggression? Yes, I was frightened.
Once or twice I was so frightened that I. . .well, I'll spare you the
details. But mostly I was bored. That is what war is like, you see:
two months of almost unbearable tedium punctuated by a day or
two of utter madness, the world shattering itself, smoke billowing
up from the ground, tons of dirt heaved into the air, whistling
shells, men and horses screaming. . . . *(Beat)* And then, when the
battle is over, bodies lying so thickly on the ground it might be the
anteroom to Hell, and the wounded are crying out for their mothers

and for water, and there is the rising stench of death. You think that you must be dreaming. Men would never knowingly create a scene of such horror, and yet I knew men who loved it, loved the carnage, the wanton sacrifice of life.

Lily

But you didn't love it, did you?

Edwin

I don't know. I think I did, though only briefly, in the aftermath of a battle when I realized that I had survived. I felt that I was among God's chosen.

Lily

Did you kill anybody?

Edwin

I don't know. I fired my rifle into the smoke, and men fell, but I could not be sure that a ball from my gun had brought any one of them down.

Lily

My father fought in the war, too, but on the other. . . .

Clara

(Interrupting)

Quiet! Do not give out personal information, dear. Remember what I told you.

Lily

(Obedient)

Yes, ma'am.

Clara

The war has been over for eighteen years. It was a painful time for all of us who lived through it. There is no point in dredging up those memories now.

Lily

Yes, ma'am.

Edwin

(Still addressing Lily)

Your father served on the Union side. I am sure he did so bravely. If he were here now, I would gladly have a drink with him. The war is over. I bear no animosity toward my former enemies.

Lily would like to talk about her father, but Clara has a stern expression on her face and is listening.

The war was still going on when I arrived in Nevada City, and I soon learned that I could earn more with a quick shuffle of cards than with a pickax and a shovel, for miners who had become suddenly rich were eager to lose it all again. That was a strange thing to observe: the greatest pleasure that wealth can confer comes when a man loses it on the turn of a card. I did my best, then, helping men to find that kind of personal satisfaction.

Clara

Lily has been good enough to give you her attention for some minutes now, sir, but I must beg you to desist. She is very young, and I don't encourage her to speak to strangers on railroad platforms.

Edwin

But I am not a stranger. You both know my name and where I come from and what I do for a living.

Clara

We know only what you have been telling us. What we cannot know is if you are truthful.

Edwin

If I were a liar, don't you think I could have invented a better story than the one I have told you? I could have said I was a colonel in the Union Army or that I owned a mansion on Nob Hill in San Francisco.

Clara

You could have told us many things, but you could not have convinced me that you were ever an officer in any army or that you had ever been wealthy for more than a week. You do not have the bearing either of an officer or of a man of property.

Edwin shrugs. He does not really care what Clara thinks of him. He turns back to Lily.

Edwin

What did you think of the trial yesterday?

Lily

What trial?

Edwin

Oh, you haven't heard about it? *(Beat)* We had a murder trial, right here in the lobby of the Grand Hotel, since there is no courthouse in this county.

Lily

There was a murder?

Edwin

Oh, indeed! A man was murdered, stabbed in the heart with a jeweled knife, but nobody could establish who did it. The sheriff arrested a Mexican named Carrasco, but the witnesses could not agree on what happened, and the jury acquitted him. I was a member of that jury. We deliberated a long time, for at least two hours. Most of us wanted to hang Carrasco, because he's an infamous outlaw, suspected of many crimes though never convicted, but the evidence just didn't support a finding of guilt. We argued about it vehemently. Two of my fellow jurors wanted to convict Carrasco, anyway, despite the insufficient evidence, but the rest of us insisted that you cannot convict if there is a shadow of a doubt.

Lily

No, you shouldn't convict a man unless you're sure he's guilty, especially if the punishment is hanging.

Edwin

That's what I said, and fortunately the other jurors and I were able to persuade the two who wanted to convict Carrasco, despite the lack of evidence against him.

Lily

Good. Justice was served.

Edwin

Well, I'm not so sure. Carrasco *might* have been guilty. He's a Mexican, and I've never trusted Mexicans. I admit that I would have liked to see him hang—I'd have stayed around another day or two just to see the sentence carried out—but the law is very clear on this question: you cannot send a man to the gallows unless you're absolutely certain of his guilt.

Lily

I think you did the right thing.

Edwin

Oh, Carrasco will swing eventually. I'm sure of that. He may have got away with murder this time, but he won't be so lucky next time.

Lily

Why do you hate Mexicans?

Edwin

I don't hate anybody. I just don't trust them. Some of them are decent people, I suppose, but many of them are not. *(Beat)* They're papists, you know. They pray to idols and saints. They're mostly Indians, anyway.

Lily

Our largesse? What is that?

Edwin

Our generosity. Our liberality. Americans are open-handed and trusting. We welcome strangers into our midst, strangers who are quite willing to take advantage of us.

Ling, who has been standing apart with his back to Edwin, Lily, and Clara, turns around to look at Edwin. His face is impassive, betraying no hint of what he is thinking.

Clara

(Mocking)

What do you say, Ling? Are Americans too trusting, too generous?

Ling lowers his gaze, stares at the wooden flooring of the platform, and says nothing. Clara laughs.

I think Ling would differ with your assessment of Americans. He thinks we're all barbarians. Don't you, Ling?

Ling turns away without answering. Clara chuckles.

You know the Chinese had a fully developed urban culture and a thousand-mile canal connecting their major cities at a time when Europe still didn't have paved roads or sewers. Their civilization was at least a thousand years ahead of ours, and they rightly regard us as barbarians.

Edwin

What happened to their civilization, though? Today China is a doormat for Europe. Chinamen come here by the thousands to work on our railroads. Americans don't go to China to work on *their* railroads. What has become of their mighty civilization?

Clara

You haven't studied history, have you? If you had, you would know that civilization is a relative term. Nations rise and fall and rise again. Although they do not have navies and armaments as powerful as ours, oriental people are in many respects more advanced than we are in philosophy and the arts.

Edwin

That is claptrap. They are beggars at the table of world commerce. Their greatness was eclipsed long ago. *(Addressing Ling)* I don't care what kind of *ese* you are, Chinese, Japanese, or Javanese, you're only fit to be porters and houseboys.

Ling

(Addressing Edwin)

I don't care what kind of *key* you are, sir, Yankee, donkey, or monkey. You are all equally foolish.

Edwin

(Laughs)

Impertinence from a houseboy! That's a new one! *(Beat)* I carry a gun, sir, and if I shot you dead right here and now, no jury in the land would convict me.

Ling

You are so drunk, I doubt you could hit the side of a barn in three tries. But fire away, if you wish.

Edwin

What cheek! You should be horsewhipped. I am certainly not drunk!

Ling

No? You smell like a distillery.

Edwin

I may have had a few drinks earlier, but that was more than an hour ago. I am quite sober now. But let us see if my aim is impaired.

Edwin draws a small handgun from a pocket inside his jacket. He cocks it and aims at Ling, who remains impassive. Clara and Lila gasp. Howard steps

swiftly forward and pushes Edwin's arm, causing the gun to fire, but nobody is hit.

Now look at what you made me do! I wasted a bullet.

Edwin turns the handgun on Howard now.

You should never interfere with a man who is holding a loaded firearm in his right hand. I had no intention of killing the Chinaman. I only wanted to teach him a lesson. But I wouldn't mind shooting you, sir.

Howard

You talk too much. If you're going to shoot, shoot. Otherwise, shut your foul mouth.

Edwin aims the weapon at Howard's broad chest. He is panting, and his aim wavers. Edwin frowns with effort. At last he lowers the gun.

Edwin

If I kill you, I'll have to stand trial, just like that Mexican bandit yesterday, and that will interfere with my plans. *(He pockets the gun.)* Fortunately for you, I have business to attend to.

Clara

(Addressing Edwin)

What a stupid man you are!

Edwin

More impertinence, and from a whore! That's ripe. I suppose you'd have liked to see me kill both of them, the Chinaman and the prospector.

Clara

Not as much as I'd like to see somebody kill you.

Edwin

(Laughs)

Ha!

Clara

Lily, we'll wait for the train inside the station, where we can sit down.

Lily

Yes, ma'am.

Clara leads Lily into the station, taking care with the door that is almost falling from its hinges. Inside she carefully dusts off a chair with her handkerchief before sitting on it. Lily also sits.

Edwin

I guess that just leaves us boys.

Neither Howard nor Ling responds to this fraternal sally. Edwin peers down the track in the direction of the mountains, which are slowly disappearing in haze.

Do you know what? I don't think there's going to be a train tonight.

Edwin scratches under his chin and gazes up at the sky.

All the same, it's a lovely night to be outdoors, don't you agree? Look at those stars! *(Beat)* Have you heard the news? Our sun is just one star among thousands, and it's entirely possible that some of the others have planets revolving around them, too. What do you think of that?

Both Ling and Howard turn away from Edwin, evidently wishing to avoid any dealings with him.

Mr. Chinaman, you don't hold a grudge against me for aiming a pocket pistol at you, do you? *(Beat)* Why, heavens, I wasn't going to shoot you! *(He laughs.)* Why, I could have been arrested and held over for trial just like that Mexican yesterday, Carrasco. *(Beat)* Now there is a bold fellow. You've got to admire a man like that, even if he is a Mexican. He never denied killing the man. All his lawyer had to demonstrate was that the prosecutor couldn't *prove* that he did it. Carrasco sat there as cool and defiant as a man could be. I respect that in a man, *any* man.

Edwin takes a moment to gaze up at the sky, then to glance up the tracks again.

Now, you, Mr. Chinaman, I pointed my little gun directly at your heart, but you never turned a hair, did you? Another man, in your shoes, would have begged for mercy, or he might have tried to hide behind one of the women, and then, though I didn't want to, I would have been obliged to kill him, for I can't abide cowards. You faced the music like a real Christian.

Ling

I *am* a Christian, as it happens.

Edwin

Are you really? *(He laughs.)* I'm not. *(Beat)* As it happens. When were you converted from your pagan religion?

Ling

While laying tracks across Nevada, many years ago, I was proselytized by a Congregationalist minister by the name of Thompson.

Edwin

And you speak pretty good English, too. That's unusual in a Chinaman.

Ling

It's unusual in Americans, too.

Edwin barks with laughter. Howard, who has been eavesdropping on this exchange, turns to smile at Ling.

And my name is Ling, not "Mr. Chinaman."

Edwin

Point taken. Point taken. I didn't catch your name earlier. *(Beat)* You've got some hard bark on you, Ling, I'll give you that. *(Beat)* Do you have a family here?

Ling

What do you mean by *here*?

Edwin

In this country. In the United States of America.

Ling

I have a married daughter in San Francisco.

Edwin

Is she married to a Chinaman or an American?

Ling

In point of fact she is married to what, I suppose, you would call an American, though he was born in Scotland.

Edwin

Good for her. Good for her.

Ling

You don't disapprove of marriage between the races?

Edwin

Not unless one of them is Negro. I'm against miscegenation. *(Beat)* But on the whole, I'm a tolerant man. *(Beat)* My side lost the war, and I expect that will lead inevitably to the mongrelizing of the races. It can't be helped, I suppose. It doesn't much matter whether I approve or disapprove. The world is going to go on in its own way, whether I like it or not. History is written by the victors, not the defeated.

Howard

(Laughs)

Ha! A philosopher, if you please!

Edwin

Any man can be a philosopher, my dear sir. Socrates himself didn't have degree in the subject. A philosopher is only a man who chooses to use his noodle a little more than other men. *(Beat)* Even a woman *might* be a philosopher, or a Chinaman, for that matter.

Howard

That sounds like socialism to me.

Edwin

Only because you know nothing about socialism.

Howard

I have never pretended to be an educated man.

Edwin

But you do pretend to be a man. That already is imposture.

Howard

Why do you enjoy abusing me?

Edwin

I don't know. I ask myself the same question. Perhaps it's because my side lost the war, defeated by a drunk from Ohio. I have known ignominy, sir, and so has every Southerner. It is a bitter lesson in life, and it's made me a bitter man.

Howard

All you Southern traitors weep into your whiskey and whine about the nobility of your cause, but there never was an ounce of nobility in it. Where is the nobility in slavery?

Edwin

Do not try my patience, sir. Our argument has been settled on the battlefield, and I accept the results. I neither weep nor whine, and I never mentioned nobility. *You* are the one who has brought nobility into the discussion.

Howard

Ah, but Jefferson Davis himself, the president of you traitors, likened you to the Cavaliers in the English civil war. Yours was the noble cause, was what he meant.

Edwin

Jeff Davis was a politician. He was trying to stiffen the backbone of the Confederacy at a time when its cause was flagging. A certain amount of poetic license must be allowed in such a case.

Howard

“Poetic license.” Those are just pretty words for lying.

Edwin

Have it your way. It doesn't matter now. The war is over.

Howard

Is it? I think it's just begun.

Edwin

I'm sure I have no idea what you mean.

Howard

I mean that the war is not over. I mean that you Southerners, with your love of the military and your hatred of the modern world and people with darker skins than yours, your indolence and your indifference to corruption, and especially your plangent self-pity, you will stomp on the brake of progress for as long as you can.

Edwin

You talk too much, sir. I should kill you right here. You people invaded my region with your rapacious carpetbaggers and your ideas about nigger equality, and you all but destroyed our culture and our heritage.

Howard

Now you are going to tell me about how the flower of Southern womanhood was despoiled by lascivious former slaves run amok under Reconstruction and how miscegenation is polluting the honor of the white race.

Juan Carrasco climbs onto the platform, wearing a sombrero and carrying a leather valise. He is wearing a gun belt and a sidearm. Howard and Edwin do not notice him at first, for he is standing in deep shadow.

Edwin

By God, you don't know when to shut your mouth, do you? I guess I will have to shut it for you.

Edwin reaches into his coat pocket for the small handgun with which he previously threatened Ling. He doesn't point it directly at Howard, though, but keeps its barrel low, pointed at the ground.

If I kill you, though, I may not be as lucky as that dirty Mexican was yesterday. *(Beat)* His lawyer was very eloquent. The sly bastard must've paid a pretty penny for that eloquence.

Juan Carrasco lifts his handgun from its holster and aims it at Edwin. Carrasco speaks good English with a slight accent, which he varies in its intensity for purposes of irony or mischief.

Carrasco

Who are you calling a bastard?

With these words Juan Carrasco steps out of the shadows. Both Edwin and Howard are startled by his voice, but Edwin especially.

Edwin

What?

Edwin turns his head and sees Carrasco and the gun aimed at his head.

Where did you come from?

Carrasco

I came from Hell, and that is where I am going to send you.

Edwin returns his handgun to his coat pocket and turns to face Carrasco.

Edwin

You may not remember my face, but I saved your life yesterday by convincing the jury to acquit you.

Carrasco

My attorney convinced the jury to acquit me, as you just admitted. Who are you?

Edwin

I was on that jury. I voted to acquit you.

Carrasco

And should I be grateful to you? Is that what you are suggesting?

Edwin

Well, not grateful, necessarily, but. . . . It would *ungrateful* of you to kill me.

Carrasco

Because you voted for my innocence, I should allow you to insult me?

Edwin

Strictly speaking, I didn't vote for your innocence. I voted—and I helped to persuade others to vote—for your acquittal on the charge of murder. The distinction's important.

Carrasco

And you voted to acquit me even though I am, as you just said, a "dirty Mexican."

Edwin

I didn't mean *dirty* in the sense of soiled or unwashed. The word is actually in common use among native English speakers as a term of mild persiflage or raillery. It was not intended as a term of abuse.

Carrasco

But you also called me a bastard, and in this territory, where the law is mostly *ad hoc*, such an insult is deemed sufficient reason to kill a man. You were insulting my mother.

Edwin

No, no, no! I am unacquainted with the lady. The word, as used in common parlance among men, actually has no reference to parentage whatever. It is like the term *son of a bitch*, which only seemingly references to a mother, or the English curse, 's*blood*, which was derived from *Christ's blood*, but through common usage

over many years lost all connection with Jesus Christ. Do you see what I mean? *(Beat)* I have never met her, but I am sure your mother is a woman of sterling character, unblemished by. . . .

Carrasco

(Interrupting)

Enough! You are a silver-tongued devil, aren't you?

Edwin

Ha, ha! You see? You called me a devil, but the term has been scrubbed by common usage of any. . . .

Carrasco

(Interrupting)

I could shoot you just for talking too much.

Edwin

I'm finished. I have nothing more to say.

Carrasco

You should have been a lawyer.

Edwin

Thank you.

Carrasco

It wasn't a compliment.

Juan Carrasco returns his sidearm to its holster.

Is there going to be a train this evening or not?

Edwin

Quién sabe?

Carrasco

If you speak Spanish to me again, I really will kill you. *(He addresses Howard.)* Is the train going to stop here tonight or not?

Howard

There is some ambiguity surrounding that question. Even the station agent doesn't seem to know.

Carrasco

How can that be? He has a telegraph, doesn't he? The railroad informs him when a train is on the way, doesn't it?

Howard

That's how the system is supposed to work. I'm not sure it actually works that way, though.

Carrasco

How does it work?

Howard

I don't know. I don't work for the railroad.

Carrasco

Go into the office there and talk to the station agent. Tell him we must know if a train is coming tonight or not. Can you do that much?

Howard

I already talked to him. He said he didn't know.

Carrasco

Talk to him again.

Howard

I am not your factor. I don't have to take orders from you.

Carrasco

No, that's true, but he probably wouldn't respond politely to a Mexican. He might give you a straight answer, if you reminded him that there are people waiting, customers of his railroad.

Howard

I already asked him, not half an hour ago, but I suppose I could ask him again.

Carrasco

Por favor, señor! Ask him again, but with more urgency this time.

Howard

All right, but it won't do any good.

Reluctantly, sullenly, Howard shuffles into the station and approaches the grilled window of the station agent, who has hardly stirred. He leans on the shelf between him and the station agent, but we cannot hear what he says, nor can we hear the station agent's reply.

While Howard is consulting with the station agent inside, Lofton, an Anglican priest in his thirties, mounts the platform, carrying a heavy leather valise. He is clean-shaven and is wearing a broad-brimmed, black felt Parson's hat with a black ribbon around its brim and a long black coat, a black bow tie, and black boots. Edwin sees him first. The following dialog occurs while Howard is silently conferring with the station agent.

Edwin

Why, Parson, fancy seeing you here!

Lofton ignores the greeting. He sets down his valise with evident relief, draws a white handkerchief from an inside pocket of his coat, and wipes his brow.

Going somewhere, Parson? *(Beat)* You're not abandoning your flock, are you?

This jibe strikes home. Lofton turns his body a quarter-turn away from Edwin and lowers his head. Edwin is delighted.

You *are* abandoning your flock! That was just a lucky guess, but I hit the nail on the head, didn't I?

Lofton evidently wishes to be alone. He picks up his valise again and carries it as far as the flat-topped, metal-wheeled wagon. He stands by the wagon, facing upstage. Edwin addresses Carrasco.

The man of God does not deign to speak to us. Fancy that!

Carrasco

(Guttural growl)

Leave him be!

Edwin

Sure, I'm happy to leave him be. I give a wide berth to men of the cloth. I have an allergy. Organized religion makes me sneeze.

Carrasco

That is not something to brag on.

Edwin

Ah, come on, Carrasco, don't be a hypocrite! I don't imagine you've seen the inside of a church in many a day. Have you?

Carrasco

That is none of your business. At least I respect the Lord's servants, even when they're Protestants.

Edwin

Ha! That's not the way I hear it.

Carrasco

(Menacing)

What do you hear?

Edwin

I hear you killed a priest down in Chihuahua, and that's why you had to come up here, north of the border.

Carrasco

What you did not hear was the circumstances of that incident. In any case, he was not really a servant of God. He was a servant of a corrupt order, and he deserved to die.

Edwin

And you alone, I suppose, have the right to decide who deserves to die and who deserves to live.

Carrasco

(More menacing than before)

Don't push your luck with me, gambler! It may abruptly run out.

Edwin

Oh, I don't think you're going to kill anybody tonight, Carrasco. You just got let off one murder charge yesterday. You won't get off a second time, at least not here. Most people in Silver Gulch would cheer you for killing me, and then they would cheerfully hang you from the cottonwood over by the creek. There is no great fondness for Mexicans in these parts.

Carrasco

I might lose my temper and kill you despite the almost inevitable consequences to myself. Men do not always behave rationally.

Edwin

Most men follow what they see as their rational self-interest most of the time, Carrasco. I am a gambler. I gamble on the odds.

Carrasco

But occasionally you lose, do you not?

Edwin

Yes, indeed, I do, sometimes.

Carrasco

And in this case, if you misjudge me, you would lose the entire pot. The game, for you, would be over.

Edwin

Every man's luck runs out, sooner or later. If I don't die here, tonight, I will die tomorrow night, in another town, or a week from now, or a month from now. I don't see that it makes much difference. I've had a good run. *(Beat)* You frightened me a few minutes ago, but you don't frighten me now.

Carrasco

What has changed, for you? Why are you not frightened now, but you were a few minutes ago?

Edwin

I don't rightly know. There are mysteries of the heart, Carrasco, that you and I will never fathom. All I know is, we live by our instincts, and my instincts are those of a gambler. *(Beat)* If you are willing to hang for it, you will kill me. If not, not. So be it.

Carrasco

Are pretexts needed for crimes? Violence, in many cases, is its own reward. It is a free expression of the human will, which does not always seek for a rationale before it acts.

Edwin

Oh, you believe you are free? *(He laughs mirthlessly.)* You are more ignorant than I realized! *(Beat)* The man who acts on impulse is but a slave to forces he is too stupid to recognize. If you think that committing crimes proves you are free, you are an even greater fool than I thought you were yesterday when I saw you in the dock, answering for a murder that, I now am inclined to believe, you committed, imagining that you were acting as guiltlessly as the lion when it kills. *(He laughs again.)*

Carrasco, incensed, draws his gun again and aims it at Edwin.

Carrasco

No man laughs at Carrasco and lives to tell the tale!

Edwin

I just laughed at you, Carrasco. So shoot!

Carrasco cocks his gun. Lofton, who has been following this exchange, hastens to intervene. He swiftly approaches Carrasco from behind. Carrasco, hearing Lofton's footsteps on the hollow boards of the platform, swings about suddenly and aims his gun at him.

Lofton

Hold! Put your gun away, brother! There will be no killing here tonight.

Carrasco

Not a step closer, Padre! I don't want to shoot you.

Lofton

You don't want to shoot the gambler, either.

Carrasco

I've killed men for much less reason than I have to kill him.

Lofton

But you're not going to kill him. Or me. You're going to renounce killing for at least a week because, when you come to consider the matter, you gain nothing by it. He is nothing to you. His laughter has no significance to you. You are too important a figure in the history of the West to pay attention to the jeers of a bigot.

Carrasco

You are trying to cajole me with flattery.

Lofton

That's true. And if you succumb to my flattery, Mr. Carrasco, we'll both live to be grateful you did.

Carrasco

Mighty fine talk for a Protestant. (*He uncocks and holsters his gun.*) But you are right. Killing either of you would not enhance my reputation. You are not important enough to kill.

Lofton

Precisely. Killing an Anglican priest and a drunken gambler will not burnish your reputation in the least.

Edwin

What are you saying? I'm as sober as a judge.

Mildred climbs onto the platform, followed by Solomon, her mother's Black servant, who, like Ling before him, is heavily burdened with her luggage, which comprises two valises and a large hat box. Carrasco, Edwin, Ling, and Lofton

turn to look at her. She is the very picture of the late-nineteenth-century young white lady from a prosperous family. Solomon sets her baggage down and stiffly straightens his body. Solomon speaks with a faint but discernibly upper-class English accent.

Once on the platform, Mildred looks around brightly, apparently assuming that everybody has been awaiting her arrival. Mildred is not as pretty as Lily, but she has a good figure, and, though spoiled, she is an intelligent and inquisitive young woman. Solomon, tired from his exertions, leans against the flat-bed wagon.

Mildred

I guess the train hasn't come yet, or none of you would be here.
(Beat) I suppose it's late again. *(Beat)* My mother says trains rarely run on time.

Edwin

If you would like to sit, there are chairs inside, Miss.

Mildred

(Haughty: she doesn't like being addressed by men she does not already know.)

I've been sitting all day. I'll stand, if it's all the same to you.

Mildred is startled to recognize Carrasco, and she involuntarily puts her hand to her mouth.

Oh! You're Carrasco, the Mexican bandit!

Carrasco

A su servicio, señorita!

Mildred

You don't look so terrible. People say you are a bloodthirsty villain.

Carrasco

(Pleased to hear this)

Yes, they say that, don't they?

Mildred

They say you've killed twenty men.

Carrasco

Between twenty-two and twenty-five. It's not possible to be more precise.

Mildred

You're very well-spoken, I'll give you that.

Carrasco

You are too kind.

Mildred

Not at all. Not many Mexicans speak English as well as you do.

Edwin

We were just discussing that very fact amongst ourselves, a few minutes ago. The Chinaman over there speaks our language, too.

Mildred

Well, where would we be without a common language?

Edwin

Where, indeed? *(Beat)* We would be in Bedlam.

Mildred

We wouldn't understand one another. We would engage in elaborate charades to convey our simplest needs. Civilization as we know it would be impossible. We would be like a tribe of monkeys.

Edwin

Quite unworkable. And for a language to be sensible, we need a common frame of reference.

Mildred

A common. . . ?

Edwin

We would need to agree that the world is as it appears to us. That the water tower over there is becoming purple in the gathering

gloom of evening, as light drains from the sky. That the railroad tracks seem to come together in the distance, even though we know that they run parallel. That the moon looks like a gray fingernail paring in a sky of deepening blue. Otherwise words like *purple* and *blue* don't mean the same things for you as they do for me.

Mildred

But the water tower isn't purple. It is a sort of deep crimson, gradually submerging itself in shadow, which is turning it brown.

Lofton, who has been following this exchange, takes off his parson's hat as he stares at the water tower, too. He does not know what colors he is seeing.

Edwin

Crimson? Where do you get crimson? The water tower has a darkening lividity, a sort of deep violet shade, or purple.

Mildred

You must be color blind. It's not anything close to purple.

Edwin

Well, in any case, if we didn't share a language, we couldn't even agree that the tall structure we see in the distance *is* a water tower. In fact, we would have very little in common, and I could have no assurance that you had an inner life—private thoughts and memories and hopes—at all like mine.

Mildred

Perhaps I don't. You don't know what I think. You only know what I tell you.

Howard emerges from the station office, looking perplexed. He is trying to read some notes he has taken. Carrasco, Edwin, Ling, Lofton, Mildred, and Solomon all look at him with expectant faces, but Howard has some difficulty in sorting out what he is going to say. He opens his mouth to speak, but then he glances down at his notes. He clears his throat, but he says nothing.

Carrasco

(Annoyed)

Well, man, out with it! Is the train coming or isn't it?

Edwin

Speak, you damned Yankee scalawag!

Howard

(Finding his voice at last)

As far as I can tell. . . . This is very confused. The messages are all garbled, but. . . . Well, it appears that a train left Godolphin about two hours ago, heading in our direction at about forty miles an hour, but it had to stop at Ivoryton on the way, and . . .

Lofton

(Interrupting)

Godolphin is a hundred and twenty-five miles from here, it should arrive here in a little over an hour, but if it had to stop at Ivoryton, that would probably add another. . . .

Howard

(Glaring at Lofton)

You didn't let me finish.

Lofton

I beg your pardon.

Howard

It's not entirely clear, but the train might also have to stop at the town of Puddingstone, which is between Ivoryton and here. So that would add another twenty minutes or half an hour, depending on whether the train has to refuel or not.

Lofton

So it's a distance of eighty miles at forty miles an hour, which should translate to a little more than two hours' traveling time, but then you have to add one or possibly two stops along the way, each adding twenty or thirty minutes to the trip.

Ling

And don't forget that after each stop, it takes the train at least fifteen minutes to regain it's normal speed. On top of that, there's a steep grade between Puddingstone and here, which will probably

slow the train's speed to about twenty miles per hour for a stretch of about twenty miles.

Howard

The station agent and I tried to work it out between us, but it's a fairly complicated problem in mathematics. *(Beat)* By the way, the station agent's name is Percy. He's a good man, though mathematics is clearly almost a foreign language to him. *(Beat)* Anyway, as near as we could figure, the train probably should arrive here in about, well. . . . *(Howard consults the slips of paper in his hands.)* Between seventy-five and one hundred and fifteen minutes from now.

Carrasco

(Contemptuous)

That's as near as you could figure it? That's a variable of more than fifty percent!

Howard

It depends to an unknown extent on how much the train has to slow down as it climbs the grade outside Puddingstone and enters those mountains over there.

Howard points at the mountains in the distance. Everybody on the platform turns in unison to gaze up the tracks, as if expecting to see the train emerge from the haze at the base of the mountains.

Mildred

There are Apache in those mountains, aren't there?

Howard

That's unclear, too. There *used* to be Apache in those mountains, but they seem to have faded away. In any case, Indians have not raided a train on this line in seven or eight years, according to Percy. *(Beat)* He's a sort of historian. *(Beat)* Percy, I mean. Before coming here two years ago, he taught ancient history at a school in the East.

Lofton

(Intrigued)

Which school?

Howard

He told me the name, but I forgot it. *(Beat)* Seeing that we really have that much time to wait, I'm going over to our local Delmonico's for a hearty dinner. There's rarely a dining car on these trains, and this waiting around has made me hungry. *(He addresses Mildred.)* Would you like to join me?

Mildred

(Haughty)

I do not dine with strangers.

Howard

(Unconcerned)

Suit yourself. I only invited you because you remind me a little of my own daughter.

Mildred

I'm sure that, being a lady, she wouldn't dine with a stranger, either.

Howard

Ha! You hit wide of the mark with that shot, miss. *(Howard look about.)* Anybody else going to have dinner before the train comes?

Lofton

Well, since we have at least an hour and fifteen minutes to kill, I'll take advantage of the interlude to feed the inner man.

Howard

I'm sure we can leave our bags unattended. We are among honest folk.

Carrasco

Claro. I doubt you have anything worth stealing.

Howard

If the train arrives earlier than expected, we'll be at the Carlton House, which is, as you know, the best restaurant in Silver Gulch.

Carrasco

Claro.

Howard and Lofton exit. Carrasco addresses Mildred.

You should have gone with them. You might not have another chance to eat until tomorrow afternoon.

Mildred

(Haughty)

I am not in the habit of dining with men I don't know. My mother would be very upset if I did. *(Beat)* And I don't ordinarily talk to Mexican bandits, either.

Carrasco

(Ironic)

Perdóname, señorita. No quiero molestarte.

Mildred turns her back on Carrasco to show that she will not talk with him further.

Edwin approaches Mildred and speaks to her under his breath.

Edwin

Don't worry, Miss. I brought along a bag of Southern-fried chicken. It's in my luggage. I would be honored to share it with you, should you get hungry before arriving at your destination, wherever that may be. I can tell a lady of quality when I see one, and I would never allow a lady to starve. How far *are* you going, by the way?

Mildred

That is a personal question, sir. I don't believe in sharing personal information with strangers. Thank you, though, for your solicitude. I am sure I won't starve.

Edwin

You are a changeable and headstrong girl. You were talking to me quite easily not five minutes ago, but now. . . . *(Beat)* Well, women of quality are allowed to be capricious. They are even encouraged

to be. You may change your mind eight or nine hours hence, after we have been on the train for a few hours. The offer holds as long as there is any chicken left.

Mildred
(Coldly)

I am much obliged to you, I'm sure.

Carrasco

(To Edwin, nodding at Mildred)

This one is too high-born even to acknowledge that we live.

Mildred overhears this remark, as she is intended to, but she ignores it. During the following exchange between Edwin and Carrasco, Mildred wanders over to the door to the station and peeks in. She recognizes Clara and Lily and, knowing them to be prostitutes, she turns away.

Edwin

She is a lady of superb breeding, Carrasco. I doubt there is anything you could say that would interest her.

Carrasco

In her eyes, you are no better than I.

Edwin

We are equally strangers to her, but if she knew my family, her attitude toward me would change. It's not a concept I'd expect a Mexican to understand. What do you know about virtue or ladies of the finer sort?

Carrasco

Nothing. Nothing at all. I leave "ladies of the finer sort" to gentlemen like you, who would rather look than touch, rather think about than look, and rather remember than know.

Edwin

If our paths had crossed when I was younger, sir, I would have taught you a lesson you would not have forgotten. You are fortunate to have encountered me some years since I have passed my prime.

Carrasco

You invoke your age as an excuse for your cowardice, but I suspect you were always a coward. In my experience, brave men don't bluster as much as you. (*He observes that Mildred has wandered away.*) In any case, the object of your solicitous attention has forsaken you. She doesn't seem to care about your nobility of character.

Edwin

She might have walked away because she didn't want to be the cause of a dispute. She might be afraid I'll kill you.

Carrasco

(*Amused*)

Yes, possibly. It is not always possible to know why women behave as they do.

Edwin

At last we arrive at a proposition we can agree upon!

Carrasco

Upon which we can agree. Proper syntax forbids placing a preposition at the end of a sentence.

Edwin

(*Offended*)

You dare to correct my grammar, sir?

Carrasco

It's perfectly obvious that I dare, because I just did it.

Edwin

I will not fight you, Carrasco. You will not goad me into a fight, no matter what you say. I know that you would kill me and not give it a second thought.

Carrasco

That is the advantage that accrues to the man who has gained a reputation for violence: men voluntarily withdraw from competition

with him. Everybody in the territories and most people in northern Mexico know I have killed a slew of men, and so they give me a wide berth, meaning that I don't have to kill as often as I used to. In fact, to consider the matter rationally, it is possible that I don't have to kill another man as long as I live, for the legend of Carrasco is larger and more potent than the man. *(Beat)* Take your Billy the Kid, whom Pat Garrett killed a couple years ago. Everybody knows that Billy the Kid died at twenty-one, having killed twenty-one men, but the truth is that he killed, at most, a baker's dozen. Once his reputation as a killer was established, every violent death in the New Mexico Territory was attributed to him. It is well that he died when he did, for he had already, at twenty, outlived his own life. He had nowhere to go except into legend.

Having heard Carrasco out, Edwin turns away in silence and walks into the station, where, like Clara, he dusts off a chair before sitting down.

Solomon has been listening carefully, though standing apart from Carrasco and Edwin. While listening to Carrasco, he has begun to smile.

Solomon

And are you, Carrasco, prepared to become a legend, yourself? According to your own testimony, you have already killed more men than Billy the Kid. That should qualify you as a legend, don't you think?

Carrasco

But I am a Mexican, and Americans apply different standards to Mexicans than to themselves. A legend is a hero, removed forever from mere human frailty. He must be a man other men envy, but you Americans are loath to admit that you envy *any* foreigner, unless he is English. It would be entirely beneath the dignity of a white American to admit that he envied a Mexican, or a Negro, or, for that matter, a Chinaman like Ling over there. *(Beat)* To answer your question, then, I would say that a Mexican has to kill half again as many men as Billy the Kid to achieve the status of a legend, and a Negro like you would have to kill five times as many.

Solomon

I have quite a long road to go then, for I have never killed anybody.

Carrasco

Count yourself as fortunate. It is a road you would not enjoy walking.

Solomon

But you seem content with the road you have taken.

Carrasco

Hmm. I'm not sure I had a choice. I was born into a hierarchal society in which my family occupied the lowest level, and when an opportunity to join a band of outlaws offered itself, I didn't hesitate. I was fully prepared to die rather than acquiesce to my status as a peon. *(Beat)* But you, I would imagine, began in just as hopeless a situation as I. You must know something about bloodying your head against the doors closed upon you and your kind.

Solomon

Indeed I do, but we are very different people, you and I. I accommodated myself to my lowly position early in life, and I took advantage of whatever opportunities offered themselves. The family that owned me when I was a child were unusually relaxed in the discipline they exerted on their slaves. They were of English stock, and relatives from England visited them, allowing me to hear how English is spoken in the country where it originated. I was permitted to play with the white children, and one of the older ones taught me to read and write. Her name was Dulcie, and she extraordinarily kind to me. She read aloud to me when I was little, and later she let me borrow books from her father's library. And then, when I was twelve, all the slaves were freed. My mother took my sister and me north, to New England, and because I could read and write, I was able to attend school with white children, quite an extraordinary thing for a boy born into slavery. I was apprenticed at the age of fourteen to a printer in Hartford, Connecticut, and I soon became proficient in that trade.

Carrasco has little patience for other people's stories, and he is visibly becoming impatient with Solomon as the latter's story goes on longer than he had expected it to. He nods vigorously, a sign that he has heard enough, and Solomon, correctly interpreting this gesture, concludes his narration hastily.

In short, I have been favored at many points in my life, and I have not been forced into brigandage as you evidently were.

Carrasco

That's fine. That's fine. I'm very glad to hear it. Still, if I were a Negro in America today, I would get some guns and ammunition and a few allies, and I'd head to the hills. I don't bend a knee to any man.

Solomon

You have interpreted the circumstances of your life in such a way as to conclude that brigandage was the only self-respecting choice you could have made.

Carrasco

Yes, because that was how it was. I had a choice between servility and independence, and I chose the latter.

Solomon

I interpret my own life in such a way as to conclude that I have faced a cascading flow of circumstances, and in each instance I have endeavored to push myself in the direction of the more favorable of two options or the most favorable of three or more, smiling on those who are disposed to help me but not actually offending those who are not. I have not ranged my paltry self against the system, because the system is enormous and enormously complex, and I am no match for it. Generally speaking, I have survived by being assiduously inconspicuous to the greater world, which would crush me if it ever bothered to notice me.

Carrasco

That is the voice of servility I hear.

Solomon

That is the voice of survival you hear, Carrasco. You will die tonight or tomorrow night or a year from tomorrow night, either shot in the back or hanged, or first the one, then the other. You have killed some number of men, though probably not as many as you claim, but has killing any one of them ever given you more than momentary satisfaction? *(Beat)* You are less free than I am, because, wherever you go, your reputation precedes you, and you have to live up to it. Your gun has enslaved you.

Carrasco

What are you talking about? *He laughs mirthlessly.* Because of my gun, I am respected and feared everywhere, and, wherever I go, I can hold my head high. I have defied the world, and I have bent my knee to no man.

Solomon

We see things differently.

Carrasco

Indeed we do! You will never catch me hauling luggage for some spoiled white girl! I would rather die than do that.

Solomon

And sooner or later you will get your wish.

Carrasco glares at Solomon.

You will die with your boots on. Congratulations. But what will you have accomplished?

Carrasco

Accomplished? What are you talking about? What does any man “accomplish”? I have lived. I have fathered six or seven children. *(The precise number is immaterial. Even seven is a conservative estimate.)* I have suffered, and I have added to the suffering of others. What have *you* accomplished?

Solomon

Not very much, I admit, but I have expectations.

In response to something the station agent has said to her, Clara rises from her chair and goes to the station agent's window. She listens attentively to what he tells her.

Carrasco

(Contemptuous)

Oh. You have "expectations." What do you expect?

Solomon

I expect the future to be different from the past. I expect to encounter the mysteries of life and to begin to make some sense of my own life before it fades. I expect to accumulate knowledge gradually and with immense effort. I expect to be confounded in my expectations and, it may be, to die a disillusioned man.

Carrasco

(Still contemptuous)

If I had your expectations, I would hang myself or, toward the same end, I would turn my back on an enemy.

Clara hastens out to the platform, though in doing so she has to push aside the loosely hanging door between the station's waiting room and its platform. She is unaccustomed either to exertion or excitement, and she is a little breathless when she tries to speak. She addresses herself to Carrasco. Edwin rises from his chair and follows her.

Clara

The train. . . . *(She struggles to catch her breath)* The train will arrive in. . . . *(She makes an effort to calm herself.)* The train will arrive here in. . . . It will be here within the hour.

Edwin

Hooray!

Clara

The station agent. . . just received a telegram from. . . He just received a telegram from Puddingstone. . . . It has left Puddingstone, and its next stop is. . . here!

Edwin

That's excellent news!

Mildred

What about the two gentlemen who went to dinner? Shouldn't somebody notify them?

Edwin

If they miss the train, that is their problem, not ours.

Mildred

Solomon, will you be so good as to run over to the Carlton House and tell the two gentlemen that the train will be here soon?

Solomon

Yes, Miss.

Solomon exits.

Mildred

I wouldn't want them to be left behind. *(Beat)* Thank Heaven we'll get out of this hole tonight!

Carrasco

There is an old English saying: "There's many a slip between cup and lip." Also: "Don't count your chickens before they're hatched."

Mildred

You mean you don't think the train will get here?

Carrasco

I mean precisely this: I'll believe it when I see it.

Mildred

You are a doubting Thomas.

Carrasco

Yes. Thomas has always been my favorite among the disciples.

Mildred

The train will be here in an hour. I am sure of it. *(Beat)* I, for one, will be delighted to see the last of this dry, boring little town and its provincial, unimaginative, greedy inhabitants.

Carrasco

Provincial, unimaginative, and greedy: that is a thumbnail description of mankind, my dear young lady.

Mildred

I'm sure that's all you know of the species, but you are an outlaw and a Mexican. I would not expect you to be acquainted with civilized people.

Carrasco

You are right. I am a reprehensible creature. Respectable people shun me, as they should. My knowledge of society is restricted to its dregs and its lees. Silver Gulch is probably home ground for me. Why should I leave it?

Mildred

Don't ask me.

Carrasco

I'm not.

Mildred

I'm sorry now they didn't hang you.

Carrasco

So you are beginning to find me attractive. Watch out, lady! That way degradation lies. *(Beat)* But then, I suppose it is degradation that you secretly crave.

Insulted, Mildred turns her back on Carrasco and walks away.

Ha! Just as I thought!

Edwin

Don't flatter yourself, Carrasco! A woman like her could never look upon a man like you except as some sort of reptile.

Carrasco

Perhaps you do not know women as I do.

Edwin

Perhaps most of what you think you know is an illusion, a mirage.

Carrasco

(Shrugs)

Perhaps, but it that is true of me, it may be true of you, as well.

Fade

The Train from Godolphin Act II

Scene

The same, twenty minutes later. Only Ling and Solomon remain on the railroad platform, Ling to guard Clara's luggage and Solomon to guard Mildred's. Everybody else except Howard and Lofton has gone inside the station to wait. Each is lost in his or her thoughts, seated in semi-darkness.

Ling

How long have you been with your mistress?

Solomon

She is not my mistress in either sense of that word. Her mother employs me, and at present I am charged with accompanying Miss Mildred as far as Tempe, where she will be met by friends.

Ling

And then what will you do?

Solomon

I'll return as best I can to Connecticut, where my employer lives.
(Beat) She did not want her daughter to travel alone.

Ling

How did you come into this lady's employ?

Solomon cocks his head and looks searchingly at Ling, made suspicious by these questions.

Solomon

Do you have a reason for asking these questions? My employment should be no concern of yours.

Ling

Curiosity. Simple curiosity. Please don't be offended. You will answer me or you won't, just as you please. It makes no difference. We have a certain amount of time to pass until the train arrives, and I thought we might pass it more pleasantly if we conversed, but if you would prefer silence. . . .

Solomon

In this country, information is a commodity. There is no such thing as an innocent question.

Ling

As you will. I apologize for having imposed on your privacy.

There is a momentary silence. Solomon confers with himself, his eyes roving about the platform, as if looking for somebody who is not there.

Solomon

I was working for a printer in Hartford, but his business foundered, and my job was lost. One day in the *Hartford Courant* I saw that a certain lady was in need of a manservant. I applied at the address given, and I was hired the same day. My employer had recently come into a small estate left to her by a maiden aunt in Boston, and she required the services of a literate dogsbody who could help her manage her affairs.

Ling

Does this lady have a name?

Solomon

Most people do, and she is not deficient in that regard, but I can think of no good reason to mention it here.

Ling

You are very conscientious.

Solomon

I try to be.

Ling

We have that much in common, you and I: we are both employed by ladies who depend upon us for a variety of services.

Solomon

Possibly, but the way you say it suggests that the services we perform may vary a great deal, and your services may not overlap very much with mine.

Ling

Oh, for a servant, you do put on airs!

Solomon

I do not “put on” anything, except my clothes, and certainly not what you call “airs.”

Ling

You may be black on the outside, but inside you’re whiter than anybody here.

Solomon

That’s a particularly stupid remark, but we’ll let it pass. In this country you are free to be as stupid as you like.

Ling

What is your name?

Solomon

Solomon.

Ling

A name that denotes wisdom, if the Bible is to be believed. But what does wisdom imply for the likes of us?

Solomon

Well, just that we humbly bow to the circumstances of the moment, though they were not of our choosing. We are domesticated creatures, abiding the will of others.

Ling

Yes, our similarities outweigh our differences.

Solomon

Don't be too sure of that. Appearances are deceptive.

Ling

(Annoyed)

Is that so? In what way do our circumstances differ?

Solomon

Our circumstances are much the same, but as people we differ. Even in our outward appearance, there could be no mistaking one of us for the other.

Ling

(Pursuing his annoyance)

You are very conceited, especially for a man who was born into servitude.

Solomon

What you call conceit I call self-esteem, and it is only by that I have risen. You have traveled from China to the New World, crossing an ocean to do so, and that is a great distance, but I traveled from slavery to conditional emancipation, and such a distance is beyond the calculation of geographers.

Lily comes out onto the platform. She is holding a handkerchief to her mouth, but as soon as she is in the open air she drops her hand away from her mouth and takes a deep breath. At first she ignores Ling and Solomon, but they fall silent because of her presence. Ling walks over to Clara's steamer trunk and stands beside it. Lily addresses herself to Solomon.

Lily

Tell me something, boy.

Solomon

Yes, ma'am.

Lily

You belong to the young lady, do you not?

Solomon

No, ma'am, I am employed by her mother.

Lily

I observed earlier that you were talking to the bandit, Carrasco.

Solomon

Yes, ma'am.

Lily

What were you discussing?

Solomon

We discussed many things, ma'am.

Lily

Such as?

Solomon

We talked, ma'am, about how a man's reputation can determine his actions. *(Beat)* That is to say, his actions will accumulate into a reputation, but then the reputation limits the actions he can take.

Lily

(Not understanding)

Oh. I see. *(Beat)* And what else did you talk about?

Solomon

We found that each of us has refused to let his birth determine his fate, and that is a point of similarity in our lives.

Lily

(Still unenlightened)

Oh. I thought you might have talked about something interesting.

Solomon

No, ma'am. We didn't.

Lily

He is rather famous, isn't he?

Solomon

Yes, ma'am. I believe he is.

Lily

And he has killed a great many men?

Solomon

Yes, ma'am. He does not deny it.

Lily turns away from Solomon and looks at the door to the station's waiting room to see if anybody is observing her. She is self-conscious about conversing casually with a Negro, for she knows she ought not to, but at the same time she is curious. She has never talked to a Negro before, and this one speaks so well that it might not be a serious transgression of propriety to talk to him.

Lily

(Indicating the station waiting room)

It's so close in there! I needed a little fresh air. *(Beat)* Where are you going?

Solomon

Miss Mildred and I are going to Tempe, in Arizona Territory. She has friends who live there.

Lily

Oh. How nice for her.

Solomon

Yes, ma'am.

Lily

You don't have to keep calling me "ma'am." I'm not a lady.

Solomon

It's best that we observe the accepted proprieties, ma'am. Otherwise misunderstandings can result.

Lily

I see. *(Beat)* Are you afraid of Carrasco?

Solomon

(Surprised by the question)

No, ma'am. I'm not.

Lily

I am. The man frightens me.

Solomon

I am sure he would be pleased to hear that, ma'am.

Lily

Why? Does he enjoy frightening people?

Solomon

I believe so, ma'am.

Lily

(A fit of pique)

Oh, for the love of God, please stop calling me "ma'am"! It's extremely annoying.

Solomon assumes a rather supercilious look, and though he does not turn away from Lily, it is apparent that he intends to speak to her no more if he cannot observe the proprieties. There is a silence of perhaps twenty seconds.

I'm sorry I spoke to you that way. *(Beat)* I've never talked to a Negro before. *(Beat)* You can call me "ma'am," if you absolutely must.

Solomon

Thank you, ma'am.

Lily

I'm not used to politeness, is all. Nobody else calls me "ma'am."
(Beat) What was it like, being a slave? I can't imagine.

Solomon

I'm not surprised you can't, ma'am.

Lily

Were you whipped very often?

Solomon

No, ma'am. I was not ill-treated. *(Beat)* But then I was only a child.

Lily

Thank Heaven the war put an end to slavery!

Solomon

Yes, ma'am.

Lily

Slavery was a terrible thing.

Solomon

Yes, ma'am, it was.

Lily

Each race has its own station in life, don't you think?

Solomon

Yes, ma'am. As things stand now, they do. *(Beat)* Ma'am.

Lily

You mean, you think that someday the races will have the same station in life?

Solomon

Not any time soon, ma'am. But we are all—aren't we?—God's children.

Lily

I don't know. Is that what the Good Book says?

Solomon does not answer her question. He gazes down in apparent submissiveness.

I am a Christian. I believe what the Bible says. I don't remember reading anything about all God's children being equal.

Solomon does not respond. He clasps his hands behind his back and mentally abstracts himself from his circumstances.

Because the only justice we will ever know in this life or the next comes to us through Jesus Christ, Our Lord. You believe that, don't you? *(Beat)* Don't you believe that, too?

Solomon

(Speaking slowly)

I believe, ma'am, that there is precious little justice in *this* life, and so we must pray for it in the next.

Clara, who has been in the waiting room, pushes through the door to the platform and stops, listening to the exchange between Solomon and Lily. Lily does not see her at first, for her mind is concentrated on what she is saying to Solomon.

Lily

Amen! *(Beat)* You see, though we belong to different stations in life, we agree on the fundamentals.

Solomon

Yes, ma'am. *(Beat)* But we find ourselves at the same station tonight, ma'am.

Clara

Lily, what have I told you about talking to strange men?

Lily

But he's not a stranger. He belongs to that young lady in there, the one who's dressed so fine.

Clara

He doesn't belong to anybody, Lily. That was established when Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox. And any man to whom you have not been properly introduced is a stranger.

Lily

But. . . .

Clara

(Interrupting)

Don't argue, Lily. Go inside and sit down with the others. The train won't be along for at least another hour.

Lily

(Submissive)

Yes, ma'am.

Reluctantly, and a little defiantly, Lily goes into the waiting room, but at the door she turns and speaks to Solomon:

Just remember: only through Jesus Christ!

Lily exits. Clara studies Solomon for a moment.

Clara

She's a sweet girl, but she's a little simple-minded. *(Beat)* You talk like an educated man. That's a dangerous trait in a Negro.

Solomon

Yes, ma'am.

Clara

I'd advise against getting in theological disputes with whores.

Solomon

Yes, ma'am.

Clara

Because if there was the least suspicion you weren't a Christian, anybody might kill you with complete impunity.

Solomon

I *am* a Christian, ma'am, but that's a feeble defense for a person of my race.

Clara

And you shouldn't be caught talking to white women in public on any subject whatever, because there are those who will hang you only for that.

Solomon

Yes, ma'am. I momentarily forgot myself.

Clara

You can't afford to forget yourself even for a second. *(Beat)* It's different with me, because I'm white, but I can't afford to forget myself, either. No respectable woman will speak to me, for I am considered unclean.

Solomon looks into Clara's face for a moment. She bites her lower lip.

Don't even look into my face, for though I am considered unclean, I am a white woman, and you cannot look at *any* white woman. Not directly, so that your eyes meet hers.

Solomon

(Lowering his gaze)

Yes, ma'am. Thank you for reminding me, ma'am.

Clara

It's not right. I'm not saying it's right, but that's the way things are, and out here in the territories, people are not quite as refined as they are in the East. Savagery is quite common in these parts. Your life hangs by a thread each and every hour of the day. Do you understand?

Solomon

Yes, ma'am. Thank you, ma'am.

Clara

We live in the world we see in front of us, not in the one we construct in our minds. Do you catch my drift?

Solomon

Yes, ma'am.

Clara

If you survive, you might live long enough to see all of this change.

Solomon

I doubt that, ma'am.

Clara

And never contradict a white person, even if you think she's an idiot. *Especially* if you think she's an idiot.

Solomon

Yes, ma'am. But, if I may, ma'am, I do not think you are an idiot.

Howard and Lofton return from dinner and climb onto the platform. Seeing them, Solomon turns away from Clara and walks over to where Ling is standing. Howard and Lofton have had a hearty meal, and Howard has had perhaps a drink or two with his dinner and feels expansive. Lofton looks uncomfortable.

Howard

Well, well, well! Train hasn't come yet, I see.

Clara

No.

Howard

Ah! That was a fine meal. I feel a completely new man. *(Beat)* I'm not sure about the parson, though. He ordered the fish, though I warned him against it, and I don't think it is sitting well on his stomach at the moment.

Lofton

(Wishes to avoid the subject)

I'm fine. I might have eaten too much, though.

Howard

It's never a good idea to order fish in a town like this, a hundred miles from the nearest lake.

Lofton

I think I'll go inside and sit down for a few minutes, until the food settles.

Howard

Good idea.

Howard claps Lofton on the back as Lofton, his shoulders slumped, drags himself into the waiting room. Howard addresses himself to Clara:

I warned him against the fish. I did. But he wouldn't listen to me. I suppose he bent his ear to his God instead of me. Ha! *(Beat)* So where's our train? It should be along any minute, right?

Clara

Yes, it should be.

Howard

I wouldn't be surprised if it doesn't come until tomorrow night.

Clara

Why? Why do you say that?

Howard

We're in the territories. Trains in these parts are irregular. Sometimes they can't make it to the top of the steeper grades, if they're carrying too much freight. It's a question of man against nature, and in these contests nature wins more often than not.

Carrasco steps out onto the platform. He is carrying his sombrero and mopping his forehead with a handkerchief.

Carrasco

Whew! The air in there is stale. I need to breathe. *(Addressing Howard)* How was your meal, prospector?

Howard

It filled the bill. If I don't eat again until I get to Sacramento, I'll be fine.

Edwin also steps out onto the platform. He has loosened his collar and looks a little more rumped than he did in the previous act.

Edwin

It's insufferably hot in there! *(Beat)* But it's not much better out here, is it?

Clara

That's why Lily, Ling, and I are going to Glenwood Springs. It's in the mountains, on the Colorado River, where there are fresh breezes at night.

Howard

There is a mineral spring there, I believe. It bubbles to the surface from the bowels of the earth, and it's very hot, warmed, they say, by fires of Hell.

Clara

And that is why it is considered a good place for consumptives to live. They get a taste of their final destination. *(Clara giggles.)*

Edwin

Throughout history people have been drawn to hot springs. The Romans had their Divona Cadurcorum on the River Lot, and it became the town of Cahors, through which many of the crusaders passed on their way to the Levant.

Carrasco, Clara, and Howard turn to gaze at Edwin a moment, but not one of them speaks. Made a little self-conscious, Edwin attempts to explain his sudden burst of erudition.

I stopped there when I was in France. It is a picturesque medieval town with a cathedral built like a mosque. *(Beat)* Bath, in Somerset, England, is another such settlement.

The others continue to look at him a few seconds, and simultaneously they decide to ignore him.

Clara

Bathing in the warm mineral water is a cure for gout and rheumatism.

Edwin

That has never. . . .

Clara

(Interrupting)

But the fact remains, the water has been heated by the walls of Hell, itself. *(Beat)* Which makes it a curious cure for what ails the human body.

Edwin

Hot springs were worshipped by. . . .

Clara

(Interrupting)

And where the water issues from the ground it leaves a slippery slime that, if undisturbed, turns into rock almost as hard as marble.

Howard

Gold has sometimes been found in rifts through which hot water from the center of the earth has boiled to the surface. *(Beat)* If we dig down far enough, right to the gates of Hell, we might find gold everywhere, as plentiful in that region as granite and sandstone is in ours.

Clara

As a prospector, then, your ambition is to go to Hell.

Howard

Ha, ha! *(Beat)* No, I do not yearn for all the gold in which Hell is environed, only enough to fill two of my pockets. I would like to return to Connecticut someday, but not as a beggar. When my wife sees me again, if she ever does, I would like to stand on her doorstep dressed in a black suit of English design and a pair of fine black boots and an embroidered waistcoat, with my hair pomaded and smelling like lilacs.

Clara

(Laughs)

What a sight you would be! You might frighten the poor woman to death. She certainly wouldn't recognize you.

Howard

I don't want her to recognize me right off. I want her to wonder if a railroad magnate or a baron of finance has come to call on her. I want to throw her into consternation for a moment or two.

Clara

But don't you think she would be pleased to see you, even as you are today?

Howard

As to that, I can't honestly say. I think she was a little wearied of my presence before I lit out for the territories, promising to come home with my pockets full of gold. *(Beat)* In short, I don't think she was unhappy to see my back.

Clara

But the same can be said for nine out of ten married women. It is tiresome to live under the same roof with a man—almost any typical American man, be he rich or poor—for more than a year or two, especially if there are children. Men little appreciate how hard women work, even if there are servants in the house, and they beguile themselves into believing that their wives are infatuated with their dirty clothes and their fetid odors and wandering fancies.

Howard

(A little rueful)

Hmm. You are a clairvoyant, I see, in addition to being. . .whatever else you are.

Clara

A clairvoyant? No. I know men, however. Nobody knows men as intimately as the women they pay for an evening's escape from the demons of lust. To us, the women of the night, they unburden their souls as to nobody else, not even their wives.

Edwin

I have often heard women of your trade make similar claims, but I think you are basing your. . . .

Clara

(Interrupting)

Men who come to us with us with any frequency believe they are paying for a momentary surcease of the pangs of Eros, but in truth what they are purchasing is an hour's release from trying to be the men they want to be in the eyes of their fellows.

Edwin

Ha! This is a whore's philosophy! Every profession seeks its own form of glory, and the glory of the harlot is—if we are to believe you, which I don't—knowledge of the hearts of men.

Clara

(Ignoring Edwin, addressing Howard)

What I am saying, in its plainest form, is this: return to your wife now, without the gold in your pockets. She will either rejoice at the sight of you, or she won't. *(Beat)* If she doesn't, you can return to these desert wastes and your solitary habits by the next train, but if she does, you will have a soft bed on which to lie down every night and a companion for the closing chapter of your life. I recommend that you give it a try.

Edwin

(Mocking)

Advice from a whore! What is gold to that? By all means, heed what she says!

Howard

(Rounding on Edwin)

You are a small man, sir, and nothing you do can ever compensate you for having lost the war. Consequently you spew your bile wherever you go, as the inheritors of your humiliation will continue to do for a hundred years, I expect. That is no concern of mine. You can burn in Hell, for all I care.

Clara laughs outright at this, and her laughter infuriates Edwin. He wants to reach for the handgun in his inside pocket, but one glance at Carrasco dissuades him. He glares malevolently at Howard and, after a few seconds, turns away. Solomon, who is upstage from this exchange, nods his head approvingly but says nothing.

Carrasco

Aptly put, sir! What you just said captured exactly my own sentiments.

Howard

That fellow drew a gun on me, and this is something I cannot forgive and am unlikely to forget.

Carrasco

Nor should you. That man is an accident waiting to happen. I should have killed him, myself, but I didn't want shooting annoying men to become habitual.

Howard

A commendable precaution, Carrasco, although I think the world would thank you for ridding it of a perfidious scoundrel like that.

Carrasco

You might be surprised by how ungrateful the world really is. I killed a larcenous, degenerate priest once, and by that act I relieved the Catholic Church a blot on its reputation for sanctity, and how did the church thank me? By offering a reward for my humble person in Chihuahua.

Howard

Alas, ingratitude is rife in the world as it is.

Clara

Amen! *(Beat)* Tell me something, Carrasco.

Carrasco

(Bowling)

At your service, madam.

Clara

You were tried for murder yesterday.

Carrasco

That is true.

Clara

And you were found not guilty. But what if the jury had found you guilty? That might have happened, might it not?

Carrasco

I fully expected that to be the case.

Clara

But if you had been found guilty yesterday, you would have been hanged from the cottonwood down by the crick either at dusk yesterday or at dawn today.

Carrasco

I believe that is the usual procedure. I was told positively that I would not see the morrow.

Clara

My question is: if you had been condemned to hang, would you have gone to your death quietly, or would you have cried out against fate and protested your innocence?

Carrasco

(Smiles bitterly)

Who can say? I think I should not have protested my innocence, because, in truth, I was not innocent. Which of us is? But if I thought I might prolong my life for five minutes by crying and protesting, I might have done so, for even five minutes of life are unspeakably precious. Who knows? To a condemned man, those five minutes might, in the quality of consciousness they would produce, be as richly endowed with perceptions as any month—as any year!—in his life to that point. If I could delay my execution by weeping, or by begging my executioners for a priest to absolve me, might not those added five minutes be a counterpoise to my entire life? *(Beat)* Indeed, is not *any* parcel of time, no matter how small, infinitely precious, if only we could be, for even a tiny snipping from time, fully conscious of ourselves and our world? *(Beat)* To answer your question, therefore: I think I might well have wept, begged, and groveled, hoping for a respite of just five minutes. It is

the condemned man, after all, who best knows the value of the fleeting minute. Everything else is either the past or the future, either already lost or never to be known.

Clara

Spoken like a true philosopher! You are an extraordinary man, Carrasco.

Carrasco

I am deeply obliged to your favor.

Clara

You are walking proof that a man does not need to go to a university to learn to think.

Carrasco

In my own experience, which I admit is limited, men who have gone to a university have been very carefully schooled in how to prosper *without* thought, or with as little thought as possible. They rely on facts instead of imagination.

Edwin

(Scornful)

Ha! What bottlewash! The bandit dreams of being a poet! All the while the poet dreams of being a bandit! Here is irony to be savoured. *(Beat)* As for me, I have never wanted to be anything but what I was. I have a certain talent for cards. *That* is my endowment, and I have cultivated it to the fullest of my ability. Even so, it deserts me at times. Fortune frowns, and I cannot win a hand, for all of my skill. The cards have turned against me. But do I gnash my teeth? Do I whine to Heaven? Each of us is given a hand to play, and it does us no good to point out that God has dealt us a weak hand. We play that hand, and when we lose we try to scrape together the wherewithal to play the next hand, and so on until we die. No quarter asked, no quarter given. That's how I see it.

Carrasco

You are a man of very little imagination. If you were condemned to be hanged, I don't think that five minutes, give or take, would make much difference to you.

Edwin

I hope I would die bravely, like a soldier, not on my knees, whining for a few minutes more.

Carrasco

May God grant you your wish, *señor*. For my own part, I want to learn how to live fully in a single minute, and then, when and if I master that, I shall try to discover how much thought an hour may contain. I doubt I shall live long enough to explore the dimensions of an entire day, much less a week, but if I could fully inhabit a single hour, I would consider my life complete.

Clara

You should accompany Lily and me to Glenwood Springs. There the convalescents do nothing all day but contemplate the passing of time and the approach of death while bathing their bodies in steaming water smelling strongly of sulfur.

Carrasco

I doubt I would draw much useful instruction from observation of the dying in a place like that. I might become bored, and when I am bored I am apt to become reckless.

Clara

Are you easily bored?

Carrasco

I am. I think I have shot five or six men out of sheer boredom. All they could talk about was the weather and politics, and they had nothing insightful to say about either.

Clara

Well, until you can subdue boredom. . . .

At this point Lily stops out onto the platform from the station's waiting room, and, seeing Clara and Carrasco, she addresses herself to Clara, interrupting her.

Lily

I need some air! *(Beat)* I can't abide the closeness of that room! That other young lady is wearing a lilac-scented perfume, and in the heat and humidity of that confined space it is suffocating.

Clara

You may wait out here with the rest of us, child, so long as you refrain from conversing with Negroes.

Lily

There is only one. It's not as if. . . .

Clara

(Interrupting)

And so long as you don't interrupt or contradict your elders. *(Beat)* If you must engage in idle chitchat, you may converse with Señor Carrasco here or that other gentleman. *(Clara indicates Howard with a tilt of her head.)* You may even talk with Ling, if you like, but not with the Negro and not with the gambler. Do you hear?

Lily

Yes, ma'am.

Clara

This is for your own benefit, child.

Lily

Yes, ma'am.

Howard has been following this exchange from a short distance off. When Lily looks at him, he smiles.

Howard

I am partial to the smell of lilacs, myself.

Lily

I hate it. It makes me want to puke.

Clara

Lily!

Lily

I'm sorry, but it does.

Clara

Ladies don't puke. At most, a lady may feel indisposed.
(Addressing both Carrasco and Howard) Her mother died when she
was quite young, and as a consequence. . . .

Edwin

(Interjecting)

You are acting *in loco parentis*.

Clara

(Ignoring Edwin)

I feel an obligation to instruct her how to behave in society.

Edwin

(To nobody in particular)

As if *this* were society!

Clara

(Defensive)

Many of my girls eventually marry and have families. They go out
into the world, like other women, and they need to know the
etiquette that other women observe. (She doubts that Carrasco,
Edwin, and Howard believe her.) It's true!

Carrasco

I don't doubt it.

Clara

I have always run a decent establishment.

Carrasco

I don't doubt that, either.

Clara

You are a gentleman, *senōr*. There are few of that sort to be found
in these parts.

Carrasco

I am much obliged to hear you say so.

Mildred comes out onto the platform, and as soon as she is in the open air she inhales deeply. She addresses herself to Howard.

Mildred

Your friend, the vicar, seems to be unwell. I think he may need a doctor.

Howard

He ate some bad fish. He'll be all right as soon as he empties his stomach.

Mildred

Will you please take a look at him? He seems fearfully ill.

Howard

As a favor to you, lady, I shall, but I am sure the malady will pass in an hour or two.

Howard enters the station's waiting room alone. Mildred, relieved to be in the open air again, now approaches Edwin and speaks to him.

Mildred

You are a sporting man, I hear. Are you by any chance acquainted with a man named Plumridge?

Edwin

Yes, Bob Plumridge is an old friend and colleague of mine, a sporting man. He served with the Union Army during the late war, but I am man enough to let that pass. *(Beat)* Are you acquainted with the gentleman?

Mildred

He is a family connection. When I get to Tempe, I'll stay with his family.

Edwin

Well, we are both connoisseurs of the manly art of self-defense, and we both have been known to wager on cards. He is a man of

principle and distinction. If I recall correctly, the last time I saw him was about half a year ago in Chicago. I trust he is well.

Mildred

As far as I know, he is.

Edwin withdraws a card from the pocket of his waistcoat and hands it to Mildred.

Edwin

When you see him, kindly give him my regards and felicitations.

Mildred glances at the card and tucks it into the sleeve of her dress.

We have been through some rough weather together, Bob and I.
(Beat) Are you aware that he was born in England?

Mildred

Was he?

Edwin

Indeed, he was, just like our ailing pastor. He came to this country by way of New Zealand as a small boy. His parents died on the passage between Wellington and San Francisco, leaving him an orphan. He was brought up by a butcher, almost without formal schooling, but he reads widely and is better educated, I reckon, than most men I've known who've been to university.

Mildred

That's admirable! A self-educated man! If you don't mind, I'll repeat what you have said about him when I see him.

Edwin

You have my permission to do so. *(Beat)* But if I may be so bold as to inquire, why are you traveling across the continent in the company of a Negro?

Mildred

My mother dispatched Solomon to look after me. I'd trust him with my life.

Edwin

Which is precisely what you are doing. I hope he deserves your trust. Generally, in my experience, those people are not trustworthy. They are shiftless and dishonest.

Mildred

(Slightly offended)

Solomon thoroughly deserves the trust my mother and I reside in him.

Edwin

All the same, it would have been better if your father had accompanied you. Or an older brother, if you have one. That is properly the responsibility of a male relation, not a Negro in your mother's employ. *(Beat)* Pardon me for instructing you in these matters. I don't mean to intrude. *(Beat)* Do you have an older brother?

Mildred

I have two.

Edwin

Then why isn't one of them with you?

Mildred

Both of my brothers are pursuing their own fortunes, one at sea and the other in Colorado, and my mother has received no letters from either of them in several months.

Edwin

What about your father, then? Why isn't he watching after you?

Mildred

My father is dead.

Edwin

How unfortunate. *(Beat)* Killed in the war?

Mildred

Not exactly. He died of his wounds after the war was over.

Edwin

What a pity. *(Beat)* Did you know him well?

Mildred

You ask a great many question, sir. I daresay I don't know you well enough to speak with you on matters of such intimate significance.

Edwin

I daresay you don't, but here we are, you and I, waiting for a train at a remote station in the territories with night coming on. Is there any harm in a casual exchange of personal information? You are free to ask me any question you like.

Mildred

There is nothing I want to know about you, sir. That you are a friend of Mr. Plumridge speaks strongly in your behalf, but I have only your word for that friendship, and, besides, I have not yet even met Mr. Plumridge. You may not presume upon a friendship with me.

Edwin

Well spoken, I must say! Spoken like a lady. I am sure your poor father would be very proud if he could see you today.

Mildred moves some distance away from Edwin and turns her face away from him. Edwin smiles.

Howard emerges from the station waiting room, virtually carrying Lofton, who is too weak to walk on his own. When they are both in the open air, Howard allows Lofton to slump against the station wall.

Howard

I would strongly advise all of you to remain on the platform. I'm afraid there's a mess inside that most decent folk would choose to avoid.

All eyes turn on Howard, except those of Ling and Solomon, who are conferring quietly between themselves.

The pastor is suffering from food poisoning, as I surmised, but he will survive. However, a crucial step in his recovery was emptying the contents of his stomach onto the floor of the waiting room.

Mildred
(Disgusted)

Oh!

Lily
(Sympathetic)

The unfortunate man!

Clara
(Amused)

Heigh-ho!

Lily kneels beside Lofton and places her hand on his forehead, to check for a fever.

The Lord looks after His own. I expect the pastor will survive.

Lily
He's burning up with fever.

Howard
Now that the poison is out of him, the fever will drop in a precipitate manner, I assure you.

Lily
Shouldn't we call a doctor, just in case?

Howard
Dr. Gibbs? He'll be four sheets to the wind by now. *(Beat)* Don't fret about it. The patient will recover in no time, now that his stomach is empty.

Lily

But what if you're wrong?

Howard

Well, then, maybe he'll die. I'll guess we'll have to wait and see.

Lofton is perspiring heavily and in pain, and he is too weak even to sit up properly. Nevertheless, he manages to speak a few words.

Lofton

I'll be. . . fit as a fiddle. . . in no time.

Lily

(To everybody, frightened)

He's sweating an awful amount! I don't think he can breathe!

Percy, the station agent, comes to the door of the waiting room and speaks loudly to nobody in particular.

Percy

There's a terrible, foul mess in here! Somebody's got to clean it up.

Nobody stirs to help him. Percy looks around. He focuses his attention on Solomon.

You, boy, come in here and clean this up!

Solomon does not move a muscle.

Didn't you hear me, boy? Get in here immediately and clean up the mess!

Lily

I beg your pardon, but you're talking to a free man. You can't order him about like that. He doesn't work for you.

Percy

Somebody has to clean up the mess. If the black man won't do it, let's have the yellow man. *(Pointing at Ling)* You, get in here!

Clara

Ling works for me, and I do not pay him to clean up messes made by strangers.

Percy

He's not a stranger. He's the minister in this town.

Clara

Not any more, he ain't. He's leaving town.

Percy

Who's going to clean up my waiting room? Tell me that.

Clara

It looks as if you will, partner.

Percy

(Almost speechless)

I'm not. . . . I'm not. . . . I am not the custodian. I'm the ticket agent and telegrapher.

Clara

The entire station is your responsibility, buster. Don't try to shirk it off on somebody else.

Percy, in desperation, looks around at the people on the platform for support. Edwin attempts to assert himself. When he says "the young lady," he indicates Mildred with a sidelong glance.

Edwin

The best thing would be for the young lady to instruct her servant to do the job. *(Beat)* That would be fair and just for everyone.

Clara

The servant is not a slave, sir, much as you might wish he were. He can make up his own mind as to what he will do and what he will not do.

Mildred, through all of this, is perplexed and indecisive. She is also a little afraid of Solomon, who has almost as much authority over her as she over him. When people look at her, she havers, glancing at Solomon. Now, when Mildred looks at Solomon, so does everybody else.

Solomon is unmoved by the mute appeal of those looking to him. His expression is perfectly impassive. Edwin appeals directly to Solomon.

Edwin

Won't you, sir, give succor to a fellow Christian in his hour of need? A man of God has suffered an unfortunate bodily malady, and as a consequence there is a There is a need for custodial intervention. You are the youngest and most able-bodied person present, and therefore it would be only. . . .

Solomon

(Shaking his head, but speaking softly)

No.

Mildred

Solomon, I ask you, as a favor to me. . . .

Solomon

(Implacable, but still speaking softly)

No. *(Beat)* I am a passenger on this railroad, not an employee of it. The employee is the station agent.

Percy

That damned nigger should be flogged for his insolence!

Edwin

I agree! If we accept this insolence, the masters will in time become the slaves. He won't even obey his own mistress. He should be flogged to within an inch of his life.

Solomon

(Calm)

Who is going to do the flogging?

Edwin and Percy look to the other men for support. Carrasco and Howard apparently are on the sidelines in this dispute. Lofton is sick, and Ling is with

Solomon. Besides, all by himself, Solomon is probably more than a match for Edwin and Percy combined. As this realization sinks in, Edwin loses his conviction.

Edwin

I don't know what this world is coming to, but it's a bad sign when white men won't stand together.

Lofton groans. Lily, who has stood up, sit on her heels and feels his forehead with her open hand.

Lily

He's burning up! He needs a doctor!

Howard

Nah! He'll be all right an hour from now.

Clara

How long ago did you eat?

Howard

Half an hour ago. Maybe an hour.

Clara

Food poisoning doesn't act that fast. It looks to me like he has the cholera.

Howard

The cholera? Where would he have gotten the cholera?

Clara

Anywhere in this town, if he drank water. *(Beat)* Ling, run and fetch Dr. Gibbs. You know where he lives.

Without a word, Ling departs. Clara also kneels beside Lofton and touches his face with the backs of her fingers.

This man is very sick. He's not going anywhere tonight.

Howard

He was hale and hearty when we went to dinner. He only began to complain of indigestion during the meal.

Clara

It wasn't food poisoning, then. In any case, we should transport him to a bed. He's very sick.

Everybody except Solomon stands about in indecision and perplexity, not knowing what to do. Solomon steps forward.

Solomon

We can lay him on the wagon.

Without waiting for confirmation or assistance, Solomon picks Lofton up and carries him upstage to the flatbed wagon with metal wheels. Lily brings Ling's cloth satchel, which is more or less the size of a pillow, and lays it under Lofton's head. Lofton's groaning has become fainter, hardly distinguishable from troubled breathing.

Clara, having followed Solomon to the wagon, now stands beside the ailing man.

Clara

Are you in pain, father?

Edwin

He's not a Catholic priest. You don't have to call him father.

Lofton says something in a broken voice that only Clara understands.

Clara

Where does it hurt most?

Lofton answers Clara's question with another garbled reply that only she can understand.

In the lower part of your stomach, below the navel, or in the upper part?

Lofton answers in the same manner.

Is it a sharp pain? Or is it a dull, throbbing pain?

Lofton answers in the same way. Lofton now tries to vomit, but he has the dry heaves. Nevertheless, the exertion of trying to vomit is painful, and he cries out.

Poor man! He is in terrible pain!

Howard

I still say it's food poisoning. He wasn't sick until he ate that fish.

Mildred has been standing to one side, both disgusted and fascinated by the fuss over Lofton. She is not by nature a very sympathetic person, but she does not want to appear callous, and the vicar's evident distress upsets her.

Mildred

(Addressing Howard)

He seems to be in pain.

Howard

Yes, I suppose he is. Food poisoning can cause very painful stomach cramps. I've suffered from it, myself, many times. When you live out here on the edge of civilization, the food you are served is not always. . . . *(He struggles for the right word.)*

Mildred

(Supplying it)

Comme il faut?

Howard

It's not always fresh and healthful.

Mildred

Do you think he's going to die?

Howard

The vicar? Nah! In general people don't die of food poisoning.

Mildred

But what if it isn't food poisoning? What if it's something else?

Howard

If it's something else, I'll eat my hat.

Mildred

But then you might get food poisoning, too.

Howard gives Mildred a quizzical look, uncertain whether she is teasing him or not.

Howard

He'll be right as rain in an hour. Believe me.

Mildred

I beg your pardon, but I find that hard to believe.

Lily has stepped up to stand beside Clara, and she holds Lofton's limp hand in both of hers.

Lily

He's getting weaker.

Carrasco

(Addressing Edwin)

I think he is going to die.

Edwin

His prospects don't look favorable, do they?

Mildred

(Addressing Howard)

Where do you live?

Howard

Where do I live? I live everywhere and nowhere. I move about.

Mildred

I mean, where is your family?

Howard

I don't have a family.

Mildred

Everybody has a family.

Howard

Not I. When families were being handed out, they came up short, and a few of us didn't get one. *(Beat)* Anyway, I don't need one. I am what Ralph Waldo Emerson urged men to be: self-reliant.

Mildred

(Tart)

How nice for you!

Howard

The hearth has gone cold. I sleep on the ground more often than in a bed. That's the life I've chosen.

Mildred

If that is what best pleases you I congratulate you on the simplicity of your needs.

Howard

I have a wife and children. My daughter, who was the youngest, is forever lost to me.

Mildred

Is she dead?

Howard

I devotedly wish she were! No, she joined the same profession as the other two ladies. *(He indicates Clara and Lily with an inclination of his head.)*

Mildred

Oh, you mean. . . .

Howard

Yes, I am afraid so.

Mildred

That would indeed be very distressing, but how do you know it?

Howard

I learned of it from a man I met in El Paso.

Mildred

Oh. And was this man reliable, do you think?

Howard

Oh, yes. I believed him.

Mildred

What sort of man was he?

Howard

He was a drummer, a man who solicited custom by traveling from one place to the next. Such men see a great deal of the world.

Mildred

I suppose they do, but how can you be sure he was truthful?

Howard

He was very particular about her. He described her features with consummate accuracy.

Mildred

And what are her chief features?

Howard

Well, she would look something like you, I guess. She would be about your age, dark hair, hazel eyes, fair complexion, medium height for one of your sex.

Mildred

That could describe a great many women.

Howard

But what reason could the drummer have had to lie to me?

Mildred

I do not know. There is much perversity in human nature.

Howard

Aye, that is true, but how do you come to know such things?

Mildred

I have encountered hardships. My father abandoned my mother and me when I was but a girl, and we were not wealthy.

Howard

I grieve to hear you say it. I hope the scoundrel rots in Hell.

Mildred

I do not condemn him so far as that. I would give almost anything to meet him. I should like to hear his explanation for why he abandoned us and never wrote.

Howard

Ah! As for that, it is possible he doesn't have an explanation. He may be a poor wretch like me, driven by his infernal nature from pillar to post until his death.

Mildred

If so, I should like to hear him say it. Silence is ever so much worse than the most scorching of words.

At this point Lofton's body undergoes a seizure, violently shaking and trembling from head to foot. Lily screams and backs away instinctively. Clara, more experienced, quickly shoves a handkerchief into his mouth to prevent his biting off his own tongue.

Oh, Heavens, what is happening! Oh! The poor man!

Carrasco

He is having a seizure. He will either go into a coma or die.

Howard

(Thoroughly confounded)

But he was quite well when we went to dinner. Only an hour ago he was as fit as a fiddle.

Edwin

(Ironic)

It appears his condition has deteriorated.

Lily and Mildred, equally terrified by the seizure, embrace one another without a thought to rank or social position.

Clara

I'm afraid it is all over for him.

Ling returns alone. When Clara sees him, she stands, waiting to hear what he has to say. Ling is out of breath, however, having run from place to place in the town. Now everybody turns to him, expectant. Ling leans forward, hands on his knees, his chest heaving as he gasps for air.

Ling

I found the doctor. *(He pants some more.)* But, as somebody predicted, he is too drunk to be of any assistance. *(More panting.)* In fact, he was unconscious when I found him, and I was unable to arouse him from his stupor.

Clara

Alas, then, the preacher will die!

Carrasco

He would have died in any case. The doctor is a quack.

Lily

It was God's will.

Howard

Those are the four cruelest words in the English language. Why blame God for our folly? *(Beat)* I warned him not to order the fish. I did. He didn't listen.

Carrasco

The lady is correct. There was no food poisoning. I don't know what his illness is, but I know what it is not.

Edwin

Whatever it is, it appears to be fatal.

Clara

Without a doctor, what can we do? He's going to die right here, on a railroad wagon, and there's nothing we can do!

Carrasco

There is nothing Dr. Gibbs could do, either. He is as ignorant of medicine as you are. That is why he stays drunk.

Lofton has either fallen into a coma, or he is dead. He lies supine on the wagon, his body utterly slack. His mouth has fallen open, and saliva is running down his chin.

I think the parson is dead. Is he breathing?

Clara leans over the prostrate body with her ear close to his mouth and her open hand on his chest.

Clara

I can't tell. I don't hear anything.

Carrasco

Then he's dead.

Lofton's open mouth emits a hoarse sound.

Clara

He's alive!

Lily
(Startled)

Oh!

Carrasco
Don't get excited. That was his death rattle.

Edwin
Carrasco is right. That was a death rattle we just heard.

Edwin pulls out his pocket watch and checks it. After a brief pause, he taps its glass with an index finger.

Carrasco
What is the time of death?

Edwin
I don't know. My watch has stopped.

Howard pulls out his pocket watch and looks at it. After a pause, he also taps the glass with his index finger. Everybody is watching him, as if the exact time of death were of vital significance to them. Howard looks up and smiles sheepishly.

Howard
Damn! My wife gave me this watch as an anniversary present three years ago, but it's never been reliable.

Mildred cocks her head to one side and gazes steadily at Howard after hearing this.

I haven't the faintest idea what time it is.

Edwin
I don't suppose the precise hour and minute of a man's death matters a great deal, except to the coroner, who, in this instance, is Dr. Gibbs, and it seemingly matters very little to him.

Lily
How can it be that a man's life is snatched away so. . . quickly, and without any warning? I don't understand.

Edwin

I've seen it happen before. Once in a saloon in El Paso, a man who was drinking at the bar suddenly dropped to the floor, as dead as a doornail, without a word. It's not as unusual as you may think.

Lily

But he was alive and talking to us only. . . . *(She sighs.)* But it is no use questioning His will, is it? *(Lily looks around her.)* God alone possesses the wisdom to know why one man dies and another lives. *(Beat)* But it seems so cruel.

Clara

God and the stars have this in common: they twinkle in infinite silence, and they provide but little illumination.

Mildred approaches Howard stealthily. Howard is gazing at Lofton's body

Mildred

Pardon me, sir, but may I look at your pocket watch?

Howard

Of course.

Howard has pocketed the watch, but he takes it out and lets Mildred inspect it. She turns the watch over in her hand and brings it close to her face. At last she returns it to Howard.

You may have it, if you like. It doesn't keep time very well, but it's an ingenious little machine, and I daresay it could be repaired and made to run again like new.

Mildred gazes at Howard for a moment, and her expression is almost sorrowful.

Mildred

That is a magnanimous offer, but I cannot accept a gift from a stranger.

Howard

You needn't stand on ceremony with me. I'm old enough to be your father.

Mildred

It is, as I said, a generous offer, but thank you, no.

Howard returns the watch to his coat pocket and shrugs.

Howard

It might have been generous if I had offered you a timepiece that kept time, but. . .well, suit yourself.

Mildred

Thank you again. This is an occasion I shall not soon forget.

Howard

(A little mystified)

I shall remember it, too, I think. One doesn't very often encounter ladies of quality in these parts. You are something of a novelty here.

Mildred smiles coldly at Howard and then moves away from him. Howard speaks loud to himself.

Strange woman. Can't quite figure what she's about.

Edwin moves upstage and stares into the darkened distance. He turns back to the others with an audible sigh.

Edwin

Still no sign of that damned train!

Howard

Watch your language! There's a lady present.

Edwin

To Hell with the lady. I just want to get away from this town. It stinks of death.

Howard

And you fashion yourself a Southern gentleman!

Edwin

No, I am merely a sporting man who knows when he's holding a weak hand. It's time to shuffle the deck and move on.

Clara

Don't you think we should stay and bury this man?

Edwin

He's arrived at his destination. We do him no good by accompanying him further.

Clara

He was a better man than you.

Edwin

Perhaps he was. Perhaps he wasn't. In either case, he is beyond any courtesy I can show him.

Clara

Lily and I shall stay and bury him. Won't we, Lily?

Lily

Yes, ma'am.

Clara

The rest of you can go to. . .wherever you are going. *(She turns to Ling.)* Ling, carry my portmanteau back to the rooming house.

Ling

With pleasure, Madame Clara.

Ling drags the steamer trunk off the platform, exiting the stage. Clara follows him, using her furred parasol as a sort of swagger stick. Lily, though, faces a conundrum: Ling's satchel, which she was carrying when she, Ling, and Clara arrived, is propping up Lofton's head, and she doesn't dare touch him. It takes a moment for Carrasco to divine the cause of her perplexity. Without ceremony, he lifts Lofton's head and extracts the satchel, then hands it to Lily.

Lily

Thank you, sir.

Lily curtseys to Carrasco, then exits, following Clara.

Now Carrasco, Edwin, Howard, Mildred, Percy, and Solomon are left on stage with Lofton's corpse.

After a moment's silence, Carrasco turns to Percy.

Carrasco

Tell me, railroad man: is this train going to stop here tonight or not?

Percy

It will, eventually. I am fairly sure it will.

Carrasco

Then go inside and clean up the mess. I don't want to wait out here all night.

Percy

(Glancing at Edwin_

But. . . .

Carrasco

Now!

Intimidated, Percy slinks back into the waiting room and sets to cleaning up the mess made by Lofton. Carrasco addresses Howard.

You said he was a gentleman and a scholar, but that man is a fool.

Carrasco turns to Edwin with a malevolent smile.

Johnny Reb, run across the street and bring us back a large pot of hot coffee. Can you do that?

Edwin

(Offended)

Why me? Why not. . . . *(He glances at Solomon.)*

Carrasco

(Interrupting)

Because I want you to do it. *(He becomes visibly more menacing.)*
Do you refuse?

Edwin hesitates. He wants to protest, but something in Carrasco's manner cautions him against this course.

Edwin

No. I'll go.

Edwin exits, grumbling to himself. Carrasco turns to Solomon.

Carrasco

Did you ever see such a night?

Mildred listens intently to what follows, moving slowly closer to Carrasco and Solomon as they talk.

Solomon

(Surprised)

Well, honestly, no. The sky is larger out here.

Carrasco

That is what people say. What is the sky like where you come from?

Solomon

It is cloudy much of the year, and even when there are no clouds, the sky seems flatter, somehow, not as deep.

Carrasco

You should not go back. You should stay here, under the deeper sky.

Solomon

How should I support myself?

Carrasco

You are a clever man. You would find a way.

Solomon

Perhaps a printer would hire me. I know the trade.

Mildred

But Solomon has employment with my mother. She needs him.

Lofton's "dead" body stirs, unobserved by any of the others. Howard also has been listening to the exchange between Carrasco and Solomon. Lofton shakes his head and rises to his elbows on the wagon.

Carrasco

There are others who can take his place. This is a new world, and he deserves to have a go at it.

Mildred

Mr. Carrasco, I believe you are trying to suborn my mother's factotum. You are very wicked, indeed.

Carrasco

(Pleased to hear this)

It is gracious of you to say so. Not many of your kind truly appreciate wickedness when they encounter it.

Howard

(Addressing Mildred)

To be fair, madam, your mother's factotum, as you call him, will have more and larger opportunities to advance himself out here than ever he will find on the East Coast. You should consider that.

Mildred

(Haughty)

Solomon is a free man. He can go where he pleases. I'm just saying, however, that. . . .

At this point Lofton, who has, with some difficulty, lifted himself into a sitting position on the wagon, groans loudly, startling Carrasco, Howard, and Mildred. Mildred shrieks.

Aieeee!

Howard

(Almost as alarmed as Mildred)

Damnation!

Carrasco

(Amused)

Dios mío!

Lofton

I feel awful! I have a vicious headache!

Howard

We thought you were dead, old man.

Lofton

Dead? Right now I wish I were.

Howard

You suffered a fit of apoplexy, sir.

Lofton

(Neither surprised nor interested in this report)

Did I? I have no recollection. *(Beat)* Has the train come yet?

Howard

No, sir. It is expected. *(Trying to get through to Lofton)* We all thought you were dead, sir. This is a miraculous recovery.

Lofton

I must have fainted. My recollection is weak.

A train whistle sounds in the distance. All four heads turn at once.

Howard

Will wonders never cease? First we have Lazarus rising from the dead, and now the train from Godolphin. This is a night I won't soon forget.

Carrasco

(Laughing)

We shall all remember it as a night of miracles.

Solomon

Should I run to fetch the other gentleman?

Carrasco

Which other gentleman?

Solomon

The one you sent for coffee.

Carrasco

If he doesn't return in time, that's his never mind. *(Beat)* In any case, I don't care for his company.

The train whistle sounds again, closer now.

Howard turns and salutes the town with a formal, low bow.

Howard

Farewell, Silver Gulch! Please don't await my return.

Fade