

THE BULL RIDIN' PREACHER

Written by

Paul Peterson

PO BOX 6, Harrisville, MI 48740
989 . 657 . 0446

WGA: #1493931

FADE IN:

INT. PRINCETON SEMINARY FACULTY BUILDING - DAY

CARL VANDERHOFF (mid 20's), dressed in dark suit and tie, walks down a long, empty, cavernous hallway. His hard soled shoes echo on the stone floor.

SUPERIMPOSE: Princeton Theological Seminary - 1937

CARL (V.O.)

With a name like Vanderhoff, you would think "Dutch Reformed Church," but somewhere along the line my family went "soft" on Calvinist theology and descended into lowly Presbyterianism. -- We were good Presbyterians though. In fact, my father served as pastor of three different Presbyterian churches in Massachusetts and New Jersey. -- Thus, no one was surprised when I followed his footsteps down the hallowed halls of Princeton.

Carl stops in front of a closed office door. A sign reads:
FIELD EDUCATION OFFICE

CARL (V.O.)

But those halls lead to doors, and eventually those doors lead into the world.

Pauses for a moment in thought. With a deep breath, Carl knocks, turns the knob, opens door, leans his head into the office.

PROFESSOR (O.C.)

Hello Carl. Come in. Sit down.

CARL (V.O.)

My door to the world led to a place I didn't even know existed. The Big Hole Valley of southwest Montana.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BIG HOLE VALLEY, MONTANA - DAY

A 1937 Packard Touring Sedan kicks up a cloud of dust as it heads up the river valley.

CARL (V.O.)

The little town of Wisdom sits in the upper Big Hole. Population one hundred and fifty or so, depending on whether you count the moose. -- Wisdom didn't have a regular pastor. Seminary students usually filled the pulpit during the summer.

Full panorama of valley. Wide, high valley surrounded by snow capped mountains.

CARL (V.O.)

In the 1930's, Montana was still the frontier to Easterners. My mother wondered if I would be safe out there in the Wild West. My father snidely remarked that most Montanans couldn't even spell Presbyterian, much less be one. Me, I was apprehensive, but curious. All I knew about the West came from Hollywood movies. Cowboys and Indians.

Packard drives past Beaverslides (hay slides), bread loaf shaped haystacks, cattle grazing in pastures, cattle on the road with horseback cowboys moving them along.

CARL (V.O.)

I had no comprehension of just how big the West really was. My drive across Montana alone would have covered all of New England.

Carl slowly navigates the car through cattle on the road. A cowboy gives him a small wave and spits tobacco juice.

CARL (V.O.)

The Field Education professor neglected to tell me that cattle are not well versed in road etiquette. Both patience and adept steering are required to navigate through a herd and their end products.

The Packard runs over several fresh cow pies. This kicks up manure on the side of the car. As Carl follows close, almost bumping one stubborn steer that refuses to get out of the way, the steer unleashes a powerful stream of liquid manure onto the hood of the car.

CARL (V.O.)
 I finally gave up trying to drive
 around all the cow pies and
 accepted the fact my shiny new
 Packard would spend most of its
 time in the Big Hole Valley covered
 in dust and manure.

INT. PACKARD SEDAN - MINUTES LATER

Carl drives into Wisdom, manure visible on his hood. He wears a white shirt and tie. Suit coat draped over car seat. Slowly cruises past Cafe, General Store, Garage/Gas station, Saloon, Post Office.

CARL (V.O.)
 Wisdom was everything I imagined.
 Just not as much of it as I
 imagined. How could the biggest
 town in the Big Hole Valley be so
 small? Where was the movie theater?
 The Carnegie library? The village
 square and bandstand?

The simple wood frame church is visible through the front window.

CARL (V.O.)
 A bit more than 25 years old, the
 Wisdom church was a typical country
 church. Small and cozy, pump organ,
 wood stove, and outhouse in back. I
 loved it. At least this part of
 Wisdom lived up to my expectation.

EXT. LOG TOURIST CABIN - DAY

Carl unpacks his belongings from the car into the cabin.

CARL (V.O.)
 The congregation rented a tourist
 cabin for me. One room, not
 counting the bathroom, which I was
 thankful was inside.

INT. LOG TOURIST CABIN - NIGHT

A small reading lamp illuminates the plain wooden desk at which Carl sits. Carl writes as he looks back and forth from the open bible next to the paper.

CARL (V.O.)
 That first Sunday, I was fired up
 and ready to preach the gospel.
 Most people had been very warm and
 welcoming, so I looked forward to a
 church full of parishioners.

INT. WISDOM CHURCH - DAY

Carl stands in the pulpit looking out over mostly empty pews.

CARL (V.O.)
 That's why I was taken aback when
 only twelve people showed up for
 worship, eleven of whom were women.
 And it didn't help when following
 the service one of the women
 commented on the "good turnout" to
 see the new preacher.

TIME CUT:

FRED THOMPSON, a local rancher, shakes hands with Carl in the
 back of the sanctuary following worship. He is with his wife,
 DODIE.

CARL
 I have to admit I'm glad to see at
 least one other man.

FRED
 (chuckles)
 I bet. Actually, I sprained my
 knee, so I gotta lay off the ranch
 work for a few days. Figured I
 might as well come to church as lay
 around the house.

Carl's countenance falls.

CARL
 I see.

Dodie elbows Fred in the ribs.

DODIE
 You stop that!

FRED
 Just bein' truthful. This time of
 year, we make hay while the sun
 shines, like the Good Book teaches.
 I'm sure the Preacher understands.

CARL

The wisdom of Ecclesiastes. I do understand. -- So you're saying the men come during the winter?

FRED

(hems and haws)

Um . . . well, a few of us.

CARL

A few?

FRED

Maybe five or six. On a good Sunday. Church is mostly a women thing 'round here.

Carl pauses in thought. Scratches his head.

CARL

I don't understand. Why don't the men come to church? Surely out here, surrounded by the glory of God's creation, they must believe in God.

FRED

That's true. They see God everyday all around 'em. So why would they wanna sit on a hard pew, sing funeral dirges, and be bored by a droning preacher . . . present company excepted.

Fred's wife elbows him even harder.

DODIE

You stop that right now.

FRED

Aw, woman. He knows I'm just pulling his leg.

Carl smiles weakly.

CARL

I know. But point still taken.

CARL (V.O.)

Right then and there, I knew my mission for the summer. -- I had been sent to put cowboys in the pews.

INT. SMALL CAFE - DAY

Carl eats his lunch, alone, at a table in the corner. He is dressed in a suit and tie, just like he would be for a seminary class. Other diners pay no attention to him.

Carl scans the room. A cowboy, HANK, at the counter works on a plate with loaded with mashed potatoes. Two mechanics, TOM and GEORGE, eat burgers at a nearby table. Three older women, one of whom had been in church, have soup and bread.

The older woman who had been in church makes eye contact and smiles warmly. Carl smiles back.

Fred Thompson, dressed like the rancher he is, strides into the diner with a slight hitch from his sprained knee. He spots Carl.

FRED
Hey Preacher.

CARL
Good day, Mr. Thompson.

FRED
My name is Fred. And round here we say, howdy, not, good day.

CARL
(tentative, awkward, and weak)
In that case, Howdy Fred.

The cowboy horselaughs. Fred turns to the cowboy.

FRED
'Nuff of that, Hank. He's a man of the cloth.

CARL
Cloth? All I have is a dinner napkin.

FRED
(laughs)
And a sense of humor, to boot. Mind if I join you, Preacher?

CARL
It would be my honor.

Fred sits down across from Carl.

FRED

There you go again. Listen, if you're gonna survive the summer, you'd better loosen up. Not many Ivy League folks 'round here.

CARL

Old habits are hard to break.

FRED

So are wild horses, but we break 'em all the time.

CARL

I'm thinking that's some sort of adage.

FRED

Some time or another, we all get a saddle put on us.

CARL

Definitely an adage there.

FRED

But we toss our heads, fighting against that bit.

CARL

Now you're losing me.

FRED

I believe it says in the Bible, "He spake to them in parables. Only by parables did he spake unto them."

CARL

It also says the disciples didn't understand the parables, sort of like me.

FRED

Listen before you preach, son. That's the lesson. Get off that Ivy League high horse and pay attention to the people around you. And don't underestimate them. Lots of gems mixed in with the gravel.

Fred turns and calls out to the waitress.

FRED

Wanda, get me today's special. Whatever the heck it is.

CARL

You seem to know the Bible.

FRED

Just 'cause I don't get to church as often as I should don't mean I'm not a good Christian.

CARL

I never said you have to go to church to be a good Christian.

FRED

So you're saying it's okay to skip the rest of the summer. Boy, that's a relief.

Cowboy Hank at the counter again horselaughs.

CARL

Funny. But see, that's what I don't get. I still don't understand why so few people go to church around here.

FRED

Fair question. -- Folks here are good people. They believe in God. But for most, church is weddings, baptisms, funerals. That's why the few of us who keep the church going, keep it going.

CARL

Providing a public service.

FRED

That's one way to put it. I like to think we're feeding folks when they're hungry.

Carl reflects. Looks at Fred with new found respect.

The waitress drops a plate heavy with meat and mashed potatoes in front of Fred.

FRED

Sort of like this place.

He grabs his knife and fork.

FRED

So Preacher, ditch the suit and tie. Get some boots and jeans. And pass the ketchup.

EXT. GENERAL STORE - LATER

Carl stands on the wooden porch of the General Store. He studies the various cowboy boots displayed in the front window.

Across the street is a saloon. A run down wood plank building. On its covered porch sits JEB GARRETT (mid 40's), an itinerant cowboy who spends more time sitting in front of the saloon than working. His chair is leaned back and his feet are up on a hitching rail. A large wad of chewing tobacco swells his cheek.

JEB

(calling out)

Hey there boy. You's the new preacher, ain't ya?

Jeb spits tobacco juice.

CARL

Yes sir. My name is Carl Vanderhoff.

JEB

Jeb Garrett's my name. But you can keep callin' me Sir.

Jeb cackles. Carl furrows his brow, not sure what to make of this person.

JEB

Fixin' to buy some boots?

CARL

Boots, jeans, shirts. Vestis Virum Reddit.

JEB

Say what?

CARL

Vestis Virum Reddit. Latin for clothes make the man.

JEB
 (laughs)
 Yeah, well 'round here, men make
 men, and sissies make sissies.

Jeb cackles at his own joke. Spits again.

CARL
 I see. Well, good day, Mr. Garret.

JEB
 Mister! Best be careful, Preach.
 'Round here, them's fighting words.

Jeb again cackles. A puzzled Carl enters the store.

INT. GENERAL STORE - CONTINUOUS

A matronly CLERK approaches Carl with a smile.

CLERK
 Why you must be the new preacher.
 Fred Thompson said you might be in.

CARL
 He did, did he?

CLERK
 He said you need some real clothes.

CARL
 Real clothes?

CLERK
 Appropriate clothes. Now, lets
 start at the bottom and work our
 way up. What size shoe?

TIME CUT:

Carl struggles to pull on a boot. Several open shoe boxes and boots are scattered around.

TIME CUT:

Carl stands in front of a full length mirror. Boots, jeans and gaudy embroidered Western shirt. Shakes his head "no" to clerk.

TIME CUT:

Fully dressed in basic, fairly plain, Western garb, Carl places a tan felt cowboy hat on his head. The clerk inserts a feather in the hat band. She smiles proudly at her creation.

EXT. GENERAL STORE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Carl steps onto the store porch, fully outfitted in his new cowboy clothes. Jeb spots the preacher. Stands up to see. Spits. Crosses the road.

JEB
Yee haw. Look at you, Preach.
Decked out like a cowboy.

Carl ignores him. Jeb eyes the newborn cowboy up and down.

JEB
Yup. Decked out like a cowboy.
Course, that don't make you one.

Jeb gets in the face of Carl. Stares hard. Spits tobacco juice close enough to Carl's boot to get some on it.

CARL
(annoyed)
I didn't say it does.

Sound of boots on wood plank porch. Another cowboy, early 50's, ROBERT "WILY" CLAWSON, comes up behind Carl.

WILY
Git back where you belong, Jeb.

JEB
Aw, I don't mean no harm.

WILY
(sharply)
I may if you don't leave him be.

Jeb backs away from the preacher. He avoids eye contact with Wily as he turns and walks back to the saloon.

JEB
(mumbling)
Damn big shot ranchers.

Wily puts his hand out for Carl to shake.

WILY
I'm Robert Clawson. Folks call me
Wily, though.

Carl extends his hand in return. They shake. Carl winces a little from the firmness of Wily's handshake.

CARL
Carl Vanderhoff. I'm the new
preacher for the summer.

WILY
(chuckles)
I know who you are. This is a small
town, son.

From across the street, Jeb Garrett yells back at Carl.

JEB
Just so ya know. Ain't nobody gonna
wanna hear an East coast sissy boy
preach.

Before he can be rebuked by Wily, Jeb darts into the saloon.

WILY
Ignore him. That guy's worthless.
No one wants to hire him. I musta
fired him ten times myself.

CARL
Ten times?

WILY
I believe in second chances.

CARL
(reciting)
And Peter said unto Jesus, "How
many times must I forgive my
neighbor? Seven times?" And Jesus
said unto him, "Not seven, but
seventy times seven."

WILY
Seventy times seven! That's askin'
a hell of a lot. Pardon my French,
Preacher.

CARL
(laughs)
I didn't mean you should keep
hiring him. It just seems like you
understand what Jesus meant better
than most people.

WILY

I see. That's a relief. I can only stomach so much of that fella. -- Anyway Preacher, why don't you come out to my place tomorrow night. We're gonna be branding and castrating. When we're done, we celebrate with a feast of Rocky Mountain oysters.

CARL

That's wonderful. Thank you for the invitation. -- You know, I guess I'm a bit wet behind the ears because I didn't realize you had oysters here in the mountains. I thought they were just an ocean thing. I can't wait to compare them with the ones we get back East.

Wily starts to correct the preacher, but stops. Thinks for a moment. Starts again to correct the preacher, but stops.

WILY

Well, okay then. Five miles west of town you'll see the entrance. Flying Diamond ranch. We eat at seven.

INT. LOG TOURIST CABIN - LATER

Carl inspects his new wardrobe in front of a mirror. He slowly turns, lifts, and bends so he can see every angle.

CARL

Doesn't look much like me.

He throws the cowboy hat onto the bed. Looks at his suit, hanging in the open wardrobe.

CARL

That's me.

EXT. ROAD TO FLYING DIAMOND RANCH - NEXT EVENING

The Packard sedan drives up the mile long driveway to Wily Clawson's ranch. The sun hangs low, soon to drop behind the mountains.

INT. PACKARD SEDAN - CONTINUOUS

Dressed in his suit and tie, Carl slows down to observe a group of cowboys who are branding and castrating steers. One cowboy looks up from his work, gives a little wave, then slices the testicles off a steer. Carl winces.

EXT. CLAWSON RANCH HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Wily Clawson walks from a barn as the Packard Sedan pulls up in front of the ranch house. He greets Carl with a welcoming smile and handshake.

WILY

See you found us.

CARL

No problem. Longest driveway I've ever encountered, though.

WILY

Discourages traveling salesmen.

CARL

(laughs)
I bet.

WILY

Be a bit till supper. How 'bout a tour of the place?

CARL

Great. -- So, how many head of cattle do you have?

The smile on Wily's face fades.

WILY

Something you need to learn about ranchers. Never ask how many head they run. That's like asking how much money they have in the bank.

Slightly embarrassed, Carl shifts his feet and looks down.

CARL

I understand. Sorry. And thanks for the education.

WILY

No harm.

Wily puts his hand on Carl's shoulder in a fatherly way.

WILY

Now, come on. I'll show you around.
 (with mock sternness)
 But don't let me catch you counting
 my cattle. For all I know, you
 might be a rustler pretending to be
 a preacher.

CARL

Rustling souls from the devil,
 maybe.

Wily laughs and leads Carl toward the barn.

INT. CLAWSON RANCH DINING HALL - LATER

A dozen people, most cowboys, sit at a long wooden table on benches. Carl sits near the head of the table by Wily Clawson. A young (mid 20's), attractive woman sits across from Carl. She is Samantha, daughter of Wily Clawson. Everyone calls her SAM.

An older couple, the ranch cooks, shuttle food and empty dishes back and forth from the kitchen. Dishes clank. Glasses bang down. Cowboys talk and laugh.

WILY

Sure glad you could join us,
 Preacher.

Carl chews on a deep fried Rocky Mountain oyster. He tries, but can't quite figure out if he likes them and what is different about them.

SAM

We don't get many new faces around
 this table.

Carl swallows. His face betrays the strong taste.

CARL

I appreciate the invitation. And I
 appreciate the tour of the ranch.
 Quite a spread.

COWBOY ONE

A bit over dressed for a ranch
 tour, Preach?

COWBOY TWO

Heck, if I'da known, I'da wore my
 tux for supper.

The cowboys laugh. Carl laughs with them. Sam frowns.

CARL

These are everyday clothes for me.

COWBOY ONE

Them's funeral clothes for me,
'suming I'm the one in the box.

COWBOY THREE

We ain't wastin' a box on you,
Walt. Straight in the ground.

COWBOY FOUR

And no fancy clothes, neither. He's
goin' in the way he came out. Buck
naked.

Everyone laughs. A few bang the table as they laugh.

WILY

Settle down boys, or you'll be
eating with the horses.

SAM

(scolding)

Pastor Vanderhoff must think we are
terribly uncouth.

One cowboy comically mouths "uncouth" to the other cowboys. Sam can't see him. The rest of the table snickers and tries to hold back laughs. Wily stares down the guilty cowboy, who hangs his head in mock shame.

Tense silence. Carl clears his throat to redirect the conversation.

CARL

So, tell me about these oysters.
Quite different in taste and
texture from what we get back East.
Are they like fresh water clams or
something?

The cowboys look at each other in disbelief, eyes wide. Wily takes a deep breath. Sam looks confused, then angry. Carl notices his question has stirred a variety of reactions.

CARL

What?

COWBOY ONE

(trying not to laugh)

Fresh water clams, they ain't.
(MORE)

COWBOY ONE (CONT'D)

But some of them steers may be givin' ya dirty looks on your way out.

CARL

I don't understand.

COWBOY THREE

Not clams. That's no bull, fer sure. Oh wait, them's all bull.

They all burst out laughing. Even Wily smiles and shakes his head. Sam is not amused.

SAM

Daddy, make them stop.

Carl still hasn't grasped their meaning.

CARL

Could someone please explain.

SAM

Rocky Mountain oysters are the testicles from steers. I'm sorry no one told you.

Sam gives her father a condemning look. Carl's demeanor goes through several phases as he considers the situation. Understanding, disgust, embarrassment, anger.

CARL

(sharply)

I'm glad you all had a good laugh at my expense.

WILY

Sorry about that, Preacher. I should have told you in town.

SAM

Daddy, how could you?

Carl looks around the table. Wily is clearly ashamed. Sam is upset. The cowboys avoid eye contact, but are tickled pink.

The Preacher pushes his stool back and stands.

CARL

(to Wily)

Thank you for the interesting evening, Mr. Clawson. I think I should be going.

WILY

Now son, don't let this get between us. Stay for desert. Strawberry shortcake tonight. A real treat.

Carl's expression softens, but he remains standing.

CARL

That does sound good. And this won't get between us. I believe in second chances too. But right now, it's best for me to head back to town.

Saddened, Wily stands to escort the Preacher out.

WILY

I'll see you to your car. I'm sorry, son. Really.

As they leave the dining hall, the cowboy next to Sam lets loose a loud calf sounding bawl.

COWBOY TWO

Mmmmyyyyyy baaaallsssss!

They all break out laughing, except for Sam who smacks the offending cowboy in the back of the head.

EXT. POST OFFICE - NEXT DAY

The POSTMASTER hands a couple of letters across the counter to Carl, who is dressed in his usual suit and tie.

POSTMASTER

Looks like a letter from home in there.

CARL

(looking at envelopes)
Could be.

POSTMASTER

Enjoy your supper last night?

Carl looks up.

CARL

Pardon?

POSTMASTER

Heard you had some of our fine fresh water clams.

CARL
Um . . . yeah. I'd rather not talk
about it.

POSTMASTER
(chuckles)
You don't need to. Already plenty
of folks talking about it.

CARL
Wonderful.

Carl stomps out, visibly upset and embarrassed. He nearly
bumps into an OLDER WOMAN coming through the door.

CARL
Ooops. Pardon me.

OLDER WOMAN
That's alright, young man.

EXT. POST OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Carl stops to sit on a bench in front of the post office to
read his mail. Before he has the first letter out of the
envelope, he hears through the screen door

OLDER WOMAN (O.C.)
(loudly)
Fresh water clams! Oh my goodness.
What a hoot.

With a deep sigh, Carl shoves the mail inside his suit coat,
stands and leaves, head down, hoping no one will recognize
him.

INT. WISDOM CHURCH - SUNDAY MORNING

Once again, Carl stands in the pulpit. Once again, he looks
out at a handful of older women. Once again, Fred Thompson is
the only other male in church. Carl preaches from written
text.

CARL
On that day of Pentecost, a handful
of followers received from the Holy
Spirit the courage to tell the
world the Good News of God's love.

Carl pauses. Looks at his written sermon. Looks up at the
congregation. Pushes aside his notes.

CARL

A handful of followers. Doesn't seem like you've progressed much past that around here. -- Now, I know you all work hard to keep the doors to the church open, but for what? They come for a funeral, but what about when they're alive? They have their weddings here, but do they sit as a couple on Sunday mornings? Married and buried. Doesn't seem like the Holy Spirit has set this valley on fire.

The expressions of the worshipers change from interest and feigned interest to resentment and anger. Carl notices.

CARL

I'm not condemning any of you. Really. It's just that I don't understand. I don't know what the answer is. I don't know how I should minister here.

The congregation nods with understanding, but doesn't know the answer either.

TIME CUT:

Fred Thompson and Carl shake hands following worship.

CARL

Your sprained knee still bothering you?

FRED

(laughs)
That's why you think I'm in church? No, much better now. Just thought I'd come to church, if that's okay.

CARL

Of course it's okay. Sorry for implying any other reason.

FRED

Don't be. I was the one being cute last time.

Fred places his hand on Carl's shoulder in a fatherly way.

FRED

Heard 'bout your adventure at the Clawson ranch.

CARL

I think every person in the valley heard about it.

FRED

Well, we don't get much excitement 'round here, so that was a juicy tidbit for the gossip chain. Three different ladies called my wife to tell her.

CARL

Glad I could provide some entertainment.

FRED

Don't look at it as a bad thing. Now everyone knows who you are. That's half the battle.

CARL

Except, they know me as a greenhorn. Jeb Garret's right. Nobody will come to hear an East coast sissy boy preach.

FRED

Jeb Garrett said that? Well, if Jeb Garret told you the sun sets in the West, he'd still be wrong. Don't listen to that good for nuthin.

CARL

Apart from the source, the heart of the matter remains the same.

FRED

No it don't. The heart of the matter is to find the heart of these folks.

CARL

And how do I do that?

FRED

Don't know for sure. But I do know you'd better come to understand this place. That's why I told you to ditch the suit and tie. Try to fit in. Ya may not feel like you fit in, but try at least. Get some shit on your boots.

Fred's wife, Dodie, who is talking with another woman close by, hears her husband.

DODIE
Fred Thompson, this is a church.
You stop talking like that.

Fred gives Carl a knowing grin.

FRED
Nothing God hasn't heard before.

He leans in close to Carl.

FRED
(softly)
Don't be fooled. That woman can out
cuss a sailor.

Dodie hears, grabs Fred by the ear and pulls him away.

DODIE
Excuse us, pastor. Time for us to
go.

Carl is stunned at the forcefulness used by Dodie on her husband. But when Fred winks at him, he understands it's really affection, and smiles.

INT. LOG TOURIST CABIN - DAY

Carl stands in front of his bed. He wears nothing but boxer shorts.

Laid out on the bed is his suit, dress shoes on the floor beneath it.

Next to the suit is his cowboy outfit, boots beneath it.

Next to the cowboy outfit is a road map.

Three choices. He moves from one to the other.

CARL
Stay and be me, and to hell with
them. -- Stay and be them, and to
hell with me. -- Or leave, and to
hell with everything.

Carl moves back across his choices, silently. Then again considers his choices.

CARL
 (looks up to heaven)
 Well God, not quite the level of
 Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane,
 I know. But I'd sure appreciate a
 bit of guidance.

There is loud pounding on the door. Carl nearly jumps out of his skin.

COWBOY FIVE (O.C.)
 (loudly)
 You in there, Preacher.

Bang, bang, bang on the door again.

CARL
 Yes, I'm here. Just a second. I'm
 changing my clothes.

Carl opens the door a crack to see the caller. The cowboy tries to see in past Carl, does see that Carl is wearing nothing but boxers, smiles, then remembers his purpose.

COWBOY FIVE
 I work out at the Johnson ranch.
 They want ya to come and say some
 words. Been a death.

CARL
 A death! Oh my. Who died?

COWBOY FIVE
 Uh, not who. What. Their daughter
 Sarah had a foal she was raising.
 It took sick and passed. She wants
 you to send it to heaven.

Carl is taken aback.

CARL
 A horse?

COWBOY FIVE
 Yup. Seems silly. But she's a nice
 little girl. Means the world to
 her.

CARL
 I see.

COWBOY FIVE
 Should I tell 'em you're coming? We
 already dug the hole.

Carl looks back at his bed with its three choices. He ponders for just a moment.

CARL
You tell her that I'm coming.

EXT. JOHNSON RANCH - DAY

The hole for the foal is dug in a field not far from the barn. Mr. (HENRY) and Mrs. Johnson, their three children and two ranch hands are gathered. Sarah Johnson (10), clings to her mother. Carl stands over the hole, bible in hand. He is dressed as a cowboy.

CARL
(reading)
Hast thou given the horse his
might? Hast thou clothed his neck
with the quivering mane? Hast thou
made him to leap as a locust? The
glory of his snorting is terrible.
He paws in the valley, and rejoices
in his strength:

Carl turns pages in his bible.

CARL
O LORD, how manifold are thy works!
In wisdom has thou made them all.
The earth is full of thy riches.
Both small and great beasts.

Again, Carl turns pages.

CARL
For that which befalls the sons of
men befalls beasts; as the one
dies, so dies the other; yea, they
have all one breath; so that a man
has no preeminence above a beast.

Carl closes the bible as he recites the rest.

CARL
All go unto one place, all are of
the dust, and all turn to dust
again.

Carl bends down, grabs a handful of dirt, and throws it into the grave.

TIME CUT:

Henry talks with Carl while the ranch hands fill in the hole. The children watch them shovel.

HENRY

Those were some powerful words, Preacher. We sure appreciate you coming out. It meant the world to Sarah.

CARL

It was my honor, Mr. Johnson. She's a fine little girl.

HENRY

Call me Henry.

Henry notices Carl's boots.

HENRY

Looks like you stepped in some manure. Sorry about that, Preacher. Hate to take the shine off those new boots.

Carl looks down. Smiles.

CARL

No problem. All in a day's work.

INT. LOG TOURIST CABIN - MORNING

Carl puts the finishing touches of getting dressed in his cowboy clothes, then stands in front of the mirror to admire himself.

CARL (V.O.)

They say the Spirit moves in mysterious ways. Being called to do a funeral for a horse was certainly unexpected, but I got the message.

CARL

Howdy there, Preacher man. Reckon it's time to mosey on into town.

EXT. MAIN STREET WISDOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

The small town is busy with pick-up trucks and cars coming and going from the general store, post office, gas station and cafe.

Carl joins the pedestrians on the boardwalks. He tips his cowboy hat to the women. Nods and says "Howdy" to the men.

The townsfolk are polite and friendly toward the cowboy preacher, but not quite sure what to make of him.

Carl comes to Baker's Garage and Gas Station, where both cars and farm equipment in various states of disrepair are scattered. The owner, TOM Baker, sits on a stool in front, drinking coffee. He motions for Carl to join him.

TOM

Mornin' Preacher. Come and sit a spell.

CARL

Good morning to you, sir. Tom, isn't it?

Carl sits on an old wooden chair that barely holds together.

TOM

That's right. So what are you up to this fine day?

CARL

Not sure yet. Thought I might drive around the valley a bit. Try to learn more about this beautiful place.

TOM

Sounds like a good idea.

GEORGE, the mechanic who works for Tom, emerges from the garage. His coveralls look to be covered with several months worth of grime. He wipes grease off his hands with an oily rag.

TOM

Preacher, this is George. He works for me. Can fix anything broke. Course, half the time he's the one who broke it the first place.

George accepts the good natured jab in stride. Offers his hand to the preacher, but upon realizing how dirty it is, withdraws.

GEORGE

Maybe we should shake another time.

Carl steps forward and aggressively grabs George's hand. He gives it a strong shake.

CARL
Nonsense. A little honest dirt
won't hurt me.

As he shakes hands, Carl realizes that George has more than just honest dirt. The black axle grease transfers to his skin. Carl looks at his hand, then looks for something to wipe it with.

TOM
(laughing)
It takes George at least a half
hour each night scrubbing up before
his wife will let him in the house.

GEORGE
Even then, she complains about the
smell.

Tom tosses Carl a relatively clean rag.

TOM
You'll be smelling grease for the
rest of the day too, Preacher.

Carl wipes his hand the best he can.

CARL
(chuckles)
No harm.

TOM
(to George)
The Preacher says he's gonna look
around the valley some today.

GEORGE
Plenty of places to look around at.
The Big Hole is just that. Big.

CARL
You know, I've wondered about the
name Big Hole Valley. Must be a
story behind it.

Tom's eyes brighten, in a mischievous way.

TOM
Ya, a story. Quite a story.

Tom gives George a conspiratorial glance, then looks back to Carl.

TOM
You ain't been out to see it?

CARL
See what?

TOM
The big hole. One of the biggest
around.

CARL
(dubious)
Really?

TOM
Sink hole. Giant size. Looks like
it goes to the center of the earth.

CARL
No kidding?

TOM
Some say you can see right into
hell, which should be of interest
to a man in your line of work.

George swallows a laugh by coughing and clearing his throat.

GEORGE
Excuse me. Need some water.

George goes back into the garage.

CARL
You're pulling my leg, aren't you?

TOM
Pulling your leg? Think they'd name
a valley after a little hole?

Carl bites.

CARL
Where is it?

TOM
Well, it's a ways. But a bright
young fella like you should be able
to find it.

Tom calls into the garage.

TOM
George, bring me that valley map,
would ya.

EXT. BIG HOLE VALLEY, MONTANA - LATER

Carl stands next to his Packard Sedan on a isolated two track dirt road. A small creek runs next to the road. He looks at a map, confused and frustrated. Looks around at all the mountains, trees, pastures and cattle. No hole.

He scratches his head.

CARL
I must have missed a turn. But
you'd think they'd have a sign or
something.

EXT. WISDOM GARAGE - AFTERNOON

The Packard Sedan pulls up to the garage. Tom sees the Preacher and comes out to meet him before he can get out of the car.

Tom leans his head in the driver's side.

TOM
Well, what'd think? Quite a hole,
eh?

CARL
I couldn't find it.

Tom looks surprised.

TOM
Couldn't find it?

George walks from the garage, again wiping his greasy hands.

TOM
(to George)
Says he couldn't find it.

GEORGE
That so?

TOM
(to Carl)
You went West at Deep Crick Road,
South at Harmon's Crossing, and
West again at Jack Pine Trail?

Carl thinks.

CARL
West at Jack Pine Trail? You said
East.

TOM
East! Now why would I say East.
That'd get you lost.

Tom looks over to George, who is trying to mind his own
business.

TOM
George, I didn't say East, did I?

GEORGE
Don't recollect.

TOM
(to Carl)
Well, if I said East, that was my
mistake. It's West. Not far at all.
Surprised you didn't fall in
getting that close.

CARL
Close?

TOM
Well, relatively speaking. Anyways,
you got plenty of daylight left.

CARL
More daylight than petrol.

TOM
Oh, don't you worry 'bout that.

Tom looks over to George.

TOM
George, fill him up. No charge,
since I had 'em turn the wrong way.

George sighs and walks reluctantly to the above ground gas
tank.

EXT. BIG HOLE VALLEY, MONTANA - LATER

Carl stands on the bank of a briskly running creek, in which sits his car, axle deep in mud and gravel. He sighs, and starts back down the road.

TIME CUT:

Carl sits on a large rock, one boot off, massaging his blistered foot. He picks up the boot and eyes it like an adversary.

CARL

I don't doubt your usefulness on horseback, but you sure weren't made for walking.

TIME CUT:

As Carl limps down the road, a small ranch becomes visible. The sun is sinking low.

EXT. SMALL RANCH - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Carl approaches an older, WEATHERED MAN who is carrying wood into his house. The man notices Carl. Stops.

WEATHERED MAN

You lost?

CARL

Stuck. My car's in a creek a couple miles up the road. -- If that is a road.

WEATHERED MAN

Not dressed for fishing. Just what were you doing up there?

CARL

I'm the new preacher in Wisdom. Out sightseeing. I was looking for the Big Hole.

WEATHERED MAN

The what?

CARL

(less certain)
Looking for the Big Hole?

WEATHERED MAN

That so? -- (pointing) Well, look over that way, then that way, then that way, then that way. You'll see you're standing in it.

CARL

Standing in it? I don't mean the valley. The Big Hole itself. -- There is one, isn't there?

WEATHERED MAN

(laughs)

Well, young man, I'm afraid someone sent you on a wild goose chase. Hole is what the French trappers called a valley. The valley is the hole.

Carl absorbs the information. Looks down at his sore feet. Not happy.

CARL

The valley is the hole. -- Guess I'm the victim of a practical joke.

WEATHERED MAN

Looks that way.

CARL

Hole is valley. Big Hole Valley. Isn't that redundant? Misleading?

WEATHERED MAN

(slightly offended)

We add valley for ignorant folk who don't know what hole means.

CARL

Oh. Like me. -- Point taken.

The rancher turns to his barn.

WEATHERED MAN

Let's hitch up the horses and get you home before dark.

INT. POST OFFICE - NEXT MORNING

Carl, dressed in his cowboy clothes, with bits of dried mud on his jeans and boots, accepts his mail from the Postmaster.

POSTMASTER

Glad to see you didn't fall in.

Carl doesn't make eye contact.

CARL

I'm sure you are.

Dejected, Carl leaves. On his way through the door, he almost bumps into the same little old lady from his previous visit.

CARL

Pardon me.

The older woman looks at Carl with an air of expectation that Carl understands.

OLDER WOMAN

No harm.

EXT. POST OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Upon leaving the post office, Carl turns and stands just outside the door, so he can hear in. In mere seconds. . .

OLDER WOMAN (O.C.)

A big hole! Oh my. What a hoot!

His suspicion confirmed, Carl heads toward his cabin.

Samantha Clawson walks out from the General Store, carrying a grocery bag. She spots Carl.

SAM

(calling)

Pastor Vanderhoff. Pastor Vanderhoff.

Carl sees and hears her, but pretends that he doesn't. Sam hurries toward the preacher.

SAM

Pastor Vanderhoff. How are you this morning? I'm Samantha Clawson. We met the other night at my father's ranch. At supper. Remember?

CARL

I remember the evening quite well.

Sam realizes what she said and is embarrassed with herself.

SAM

Oh. Yes. I'm so sorry about that.

CARL

It's alright. Kind of funny when you think about it.

SAM

Do you think about it?

CARL

Actually, I try not to.

SAM

I don't blame you. I can't even imagine how I would have reacted had I been so embarrassed and humiliated.

Sam stops abruptly.

SAM

I'm making it worse, aren't I?

CARL

(laughs)

No, don't worry. I'm over that one. I have fresh humiliations to occupy me.

SAM

You mean the Big Hole? Yes, that was a mean trick.

CARL

You know?

SAM

It's a small town, Pastor. News travels fast.

CARL

(sarcastically)

Well, I'm glad to provide the good people of the Big Hole Valley, redundant as the name is, with some entertainment.

SAM

(frowns)

They are good people, whatever you might think.

Carl sees that he has crossed a line with Sam.

CARL

I apologize. They are good people.
I know that. It's the blisters on
my feet that are having a hard time
believing it.

Sam laughs.

SAM

Well, maybe those feet need a nice
massage to change their attitude.

Carl is caught off guard by the obvious flirtation. He
devolves into an awkward middle school boy.

CARL

Um . . . would you . . . would you .
. . uh . . . like to get a cup of
coffee with me, or something?

SAM

(smiles)

I would love to, but I can't. The
cooks have the day off, so I have
to get dinner ready.

CARL

Dinner? You still have most of the
day to cook that.

SAM

(laughs)

We eat dinner at noon. Supper in
the evening.

CARL

Really? So when do you eat lunch?

SAM

When we visit someone who doesn't
run a ranch or farm.

CARL

Well, since that would be me, how
about lunch tomorrow?

SAM

Can't. But Thursday works.

CARL
 (broad grin)
 Okay then. It's a date. Well, not a date. Um . . . an appointment. Hmmm . . . that doesn't sound like much fun.

SAM
 (a coy smile)
 A date.

Their eyes lock.

CARL
 A date. And call me Carl. Only old ladies call me pastor. You are certainly not one of those.

SAM
 Should I blush?

CARL
 No, I already have that covered.

Carl's red face confirms his statement.

INT. SMALL CAFE - DAY

Carl eats his lunch lost in thought. Pleasant thoughts, for a change.

A grizzled old-timer, GIDEON GORDON, looking like Gabby Hayes from the movies, comes into the diner. He sees Carl and approaches.

GIDEON
 You must be the new preacher man.

CARL
 (apprehensively)
 Yes. Carl Vanderhoff.

GIDEON
 Gideon Gordon. Mind if I join ya?

Before Carl has time to respond, Gideon is pulling out a chair.

CARL
 Well . . . I guess so.

GIDEON

So you're a preacher man. Don't get many of them round here.

CARL

So I gather.

GIDEON

I been to church a few times. Didn't much care fer it.

CARL

I see.

GIDEON

No offense meant, Preacher. Sure you do a fine job.

CARL

You're welcome to come any Sunday.

GIDEON

(cackles)

Ha! No, that ain't gonna be. The Devil's got a spot all warmed up for me. Hate to disappoint him.

CARL

(laughs)

Not a man to mess with, for sure.

Gideon yells out to the kitchen.

GIDEON

Hey ya lazy louts. I been sitting here waiting to eat. Bring me the special.

Gideon eyes Carl's half eaten plate of meat and potatoes.

GIDEON

Any good?

CARL

It seems to be sticking to my ribs.

GIDEON

That's what dinner supposed to do.

CARL

Dinner. Of course. -- So, Gideon, what do you do?

GIDEON
Survive, mostly. A little of this
and that.

CARL
I see. -- Well, actually I don't.
What is this and that?

GIDEON
Logging, running a few head, got my
chickens, and some panning for
gold.

CARL
Gold? Really?

The waitress drops dinner in front of Gideon. He smiles and
digs in.

GIDEON
(mouth full)
Really.

CARL
Where at?

GIDEON
Here and there.

CARL
(chuckles)
This and that. Here and there.
You're a hard man to pin down.

Gideon belches. Downs half a glass of water. Wipes his
bearded face with his sleeve.

GIDEON
You ever pan?

CARL
For gold?

GIDEON
What the hell else?

CARL
No.

GIDEON
Wanna?

CARL
Um . . . I don't know? Is it hard?

GIDEON
Naw. I'll take ya up to Gold Crick
and teach ya.

CARL
Really?

Gideon gives Carl a hard look.

GIDEON
You questioning my character, son?

CARL
No sir.

GIDEON
I do what I say, and I say what I
do. And I say we finish dinner and
head on up to Gold Crick.

CARL
Right now?

GIDEON
You got more important things to
do?

CARL
Probably not.

GIDEON
Well then, it's a date.

CARL
A date? -- Two for two, today.

GIDEON
What?

CARL
Nothing.

EXT. HIGH MOUNTAIN CREEK - DAY

Gideon shows Carl how to use the pan to separate out the gravel and sand from the creek bed. Carl imitates the best he can. Several times Gideon shakes his head no. Finally, he nods in approval.

GIDEON
Looks like ya got the hang of it
now, Preacher.

CARL
Well, maybe. But practice makes
perfect, so I'll keep at it.

Carl scoops up a fresh batch of creek bottom.

CARL
Will we be rich?

GIDEON
(laughs)
Do I look rich?

CARL
I measure wealth by the heart, not
the wallet.

GIDEON
Course you do. But they make me pay
hard cash at the general store.

Carl laughs.

CARL
I'm sure they do.

Gideon slowly rises from his crouching position. He betrays
stiffness.

GIDEON
Every year seems to take a little
longer to stand.

Gideon looks around.

GIDEON
Them mountains are ages older than
me, but it's me that shows the age.
-- Beautiful up here, ain't it?

Carl stops his panning and stands to join Gideon.

CARL
Yes it is. It most certainly is.

GIDEON
This here's why I got no use for
church.

CARL
What do you mean?

GIDEON
God lives up here. We talk.

CARL
 (reciting)
 I will lift up my eyes to the
 hills, from whence comes my help.
 My help comes from the LORD, who
 made heaven and earth.

GIDEON
 That from the Bible?

CARL
 Yep. Psalm 121.

GIDEON
 It's a good thing to lift up your
 eyes. Ya see more of life. I think
 ya gotta see life to live life.

Carl is surprised by the wisdom of his companion. He turns
 360 degrees to take in the full panorama.

CARL
 You're quite the philosopher,
 Gideon.

GIDEON
 Ever say that about me again, I'll
 shoot ya.

CARL
 (laughs)
 Our secret. Promise.

Gideon starts upstream.

GIDEON
 I'll be up that way. You head down
 a few hundred yards. There's an
 outcropping. Usually sheds some
 gold in the Spring. Could be she
 ain't been panned yet.

CARL
 How much should I collect before I
 yell Eureka?

GIDEON
 Best not to yell. You might rile up
 a grizzly.

Gideon continues up the creek bed, leaving Carl to wonder.

EXT. HIGH MOUNTAIN CREEK DOWNSTREAM - MINUTES LATER

Carl pans just downstream from a large rock outcropping that seeps water into the creek. He shakes the gravel in the pan, pouring off a little water at a time. Suddenly he does a double take. Looks closer.

CARL
What's that?

Carl smiles at his good fortune. Separates out some gold colored flakes. Digs deeper into the creek bed. Pans with more vigor. Looks at the pan. Puts hand over mouth to muffle voice.

CARL
Eureka!

TIME CUT:

Gideon works his way down the creek bed to where Carl is still panning.

GIDEON
Time to head down the mountain.

CARL
Really? Already?

GIDEON
Well, this here's Elmer Smith's claim. He's been known to shoot.

Carl pops up.

CARL
What!

GIDEON
Ah, don't fret. Probably not around, or you'd be shot by now.

CARL
(worried)
So, we're stealing his gold?

GIDEON
It washes into the river. Never took to how someone could claim it. Anyhows, I'll be lucky if I got five dollars of flake. How 'bout you?

Carl unhooks a small cloth bag from his belt. He opens it and looks in.

CARL
I have no idea. But my bag's mostly full.

GIDEON
Full? Let me see.

Proudly, Carl hands the bag to Gideon. Gideon looks in. Looks up at Carl. Looks in the bag again.

CARL
Well? Pretty good?

GIDEON
Sure a lot in there.

CARL
How much is it worth?

GIDEON
Less than you'd imagine. -- How 'bout this. You don't tell a soul whatcha did today. You keep what ya got as a souvenir.

CARL
Souvenir?

GIDEON
Did ya have fun?

CARL
Yes.

GIDEON
Well, that's worth more than all the gold in these hills. -- Now, come'on, let's go.

INT. GENERAL STORE - LATER

Carl walks proudly into the General Store. He carries his little cloth bag. The same clerk who outfitted him looks up and smiles.

CLERK
Hello there, pastor. How are you today?

CARL
Just fine, thank you.

CLERK
What can I do for you?

CARL
Is there a place in town that
weighs gold?

CLERK
An assay office? Nope. You'd have
to go to Dillon for that. -- Why do
you ask?

CARL
Well, I did a little panning up on
Gold Creek today.

CLERK
You did? Good for you.

Carl sets the cloth bag on the counter. Seeing it is nearly
full, the clerk's eyes widen in surprise.

CLERK
You got all that today?

CARL
Yep.

CLERK
Mind if I have a look?

CARL
Be my guest.

The clerk opens the bag and pours a little into her hand. She
eyes it carefully. Looks up at the beaming preacher. Again
looks at the gold colored flakes in her hand. Sighs at what
she has to do. Looks at the preacher.

CLERK
You ever hear of Fool's Gold?

Carl absorbs the words. His countenance crashes from the
mountaintop into the abyss.

CARL
I think I'm about to.

INT. POST OFFICE - MORNING

Carl enters. Forces himself up to the counter. With trepidation, he looks at the Postmaster.

CARL
Any mail, today?

The Postmaster looks around. Picks up a folded piece of paper. Starts to hand it to Carl, but stops.

POSTMASTER
Just this. Oh wait, that's a fool's letter. Darn those things. Keep gettin' mixed in with the real letters.

The Postmaster grins, proud of his latest jab.

CARL
What if I never came in for mail?

POSTMASTER
I'd find it hard to get out of bed in the morning.

CARL
Glad to know that I provide purpose to your life.

Carl turns to leave. He steps forward, then stops, waiting for something. He looks at the doorway. Nothing. After a few seconds, he continues to the door. At the door, he once again almost bumps into the little old lady.

CARL
You're late. -- And today, it's Fool's Gold. Isn't that a hoot?

Carl turns and gives a knowing look to the disappointed Postmaster. Carl tips his hat to the lady, and continues on. The old woman smiles like she doesn't have any idea what is going on, but her smile betrays the truth.

INT. SMALL CAFE - LATER

Sam picks at some remaining cole slaw on her plate. There is a half eaten ham sandwich sharing the space. Carl has the daily special, which, as usual, means lots of mashed potatoes and some kind of meat. Among the customers, the regular cowboy, Hank, is at the counter eating his lunch.

SAM

Don't let it get to you. More people around here than care to admit have been fooled by Fool's Gold.

CARL

What about you?

SAM

Me? Don't be ridiculous. Most certainly not.

Carl stares at her until she repeats the words in her head.

SAM

I didn't mean it that way.

CARL

What way? The way that sounds like I'm the only fool at the table?

SAM

Well, given my impropriety with words, I'd say you aren't the only fool sitting here.

CARL

Why is it that you talk more like me than anyone else in the valley?

SAM

An outcome of finishing school in New York.

CARL

City or State?

SAM

State. Rochester the city. My mother was from there.

CARL

When did your mother die?

SAM

When I was twelve. She made my father promise he'd send me back East to school.

CARL

Why did you come back here?

SAM
(puzzled)
This is my home. Why wouldn't I
come back?

CARL
I'm the wrong person to ask that
question.

Sam laughs, then gazes into Carl's eyes.

SAM
I hope there have been at least a
few bright spots in your time here.

Carl decides to go with his strengths in trying to impress
Sam.

CARL
Being in the presence of a radiance
unequaled by the sun itself
qualifies as the brightest spot in
my time on earth.

Sam blushes.

SAM
Oh my. You are a dangerous man when
it comes to words, Mr. Vanderhoff.

Carl takes on the air of Hollywood cowboy.

CARL
Well ma'am, I reckon the life of a
wordslinger taint for the faint of
heart. Always some young fast
talker thinking his prose's the
prettiest. Why, I took an adjective
to the thigh in Tombstone just last
year. But that's nuttin' compared
to the feminine pronoun that's a
piercing my heart right now.

Sam blushes even more. Cowboy Hank at the lunch counter
throws some change down, then walks over to Carl.

COWBOY HANK
Preacher, I don't have a clue what
you was sayin', but I sure like how
you was sayin' it.

The cowboy saunters through the door. Sam and Carl burst out
laughing.

EXT. HAY FIELD - DAY

Carl stands next to his car on the road up to the Clawson ranch. He watches two cowboys repair a hayslide, a twenty foot high apparatus used for making haystacks.

CARL
 (to the cowboys)
 So that's what you use to make
 haystacks. The land of 10,000
 haystacks. Isn't that what they
 call the Big Hole?

The cowboys continue to work as they engage in conversation.

COWBOY ONE
 That'd be right.

CARL
 And that device is called a
 Beaverslide?

COWBOY ONE
 That'd be right.

CARL
 And why would it be called that?

COWBOY ONE
 Well, like most things, there's a
 tale behind it.

His partner looks up at him quizzically.

COWBOY TWO
 A tale?

Not missing a beat, Cowboy One looks at Carl and continues.

COWBOY ONE
 Roy's right. More a legend, I
 guess. Can just tell what we was
 told.

COWBOY TWO
 That'd be mighty interesting for
 the Preacher to hear, sure 'nough.

CARL
 A legend, eh?

COWBOY ONE
 A true legend, in my estimation.
 'Cause I seen it twice myself.

COWBOY TWO
Twice? You don't say.

CARL
Saw what twice?

COWBOY ONE
The beavers.

CARL
Beavers?

COWBOY TWO
(to himself)
Beavers?

COWBOY ONE
They climbed right up and slid
right down. Saw it with my own
eyes.

CARL
Wait. You're saying you saw beavers
climb up an apparatus like that and
slide back down?

COWBOY ONE
Twice.

COWBOY TWO
Twice. Imagine that.

COWBOY ONE
Yep. At night, just like the legend
says. Never believed it was true,
till I saw it myself. Right about
this time of year too.

COWBOY TWO
This time of year?

COWBOY ONE
That's what I said, Roy. This time
of year. Now we better stop jawin'
and git workin'.

CARL
Nice visiting with you. -- You saw
it yourself?

The cowboy doesn't look up, but replies.

COWBOY ONE
Yep. Twice.

Carl gets back in his car and continues up the drive.

EXT. CLAWSON RANCH HOUSE - LATER

Carl sits with Sam on the front porch. They have glasses of lemonade.

CARL

So, I was thinking that maybe we could sit out tonight. It's a full moon. Who knows, we could get lucky and see a beaver slide down one of those beaverslides.

SAM

(laughing)

That's really funny. A beaver sliding down a beaverslide. Imagine that. Did you think of that yourself?

Carl considers for a moment. Covers the best he can.

CARL

Oh, yeah. -- I guess so. -- Just a play on words.

Sam puts her hand on Carl's.

SAM

You and your words.

She gives Carl a look that penetrates his facade, but with love.

SAM

They call them that because this is Beaverhead County, just so you know.

CARL

That seems more likely.

He looks down and shakes his head at his naivete.

SAM

But regardless of whether we see beavers sliding down beaverslides, I do find your original proposal of sitting out under the full moon very appealing.

Carl looks up and smiles at his good fortune.

EXT. MAIN STREET WISDOM - MORNING

A beautiful, sunny day. Carl emerges from the General Store with a small bag of groceries. He whistles a happy tune.

Jeb Garrett sits on his usual stool in front of the saloon across the street.

JEB
(calls out)
Mornin' Preach.

CARL
(cautiously)
Good morning, Mr. Garrett.

JEB
Looks like yer cowboy outfit's
gettin' broke in.

CARL
Um . . . I suppose.

JEB
Say, why don't ya come on over and
we'll share a chaw of t'baccy.

CARL
Nice of you to offer, but no
thanks.

JEB
Preach, if you're gonna ride a
horse, ya better carry a gun.

CARL
Pardon? What does that mean?

JEB
Thought you was an edjecated man.
It's one of them mettyfors or
nalogies. Sumptin' like that.

Carl takes a few seconds to decode Jeb.

CARL
Meaning that to be a cowboy, I have
to chew tobacco?

JEB
Bingo!

It only takes Carl a second to decide.

CARL
When in Rome.

Carl crosses the street. Sits on a bench next to Jeb.

JEB
You been to Rome?

CARL
No. It's just an expression.

JEB
Expressin' what?

CARL
That when in a new place, one
should conform to the customs of
that place.

Jeb eyes Carl, not sure what he is talking about.

JEB
Well, don't know what they do in
Rome, but round here, we chew.

CARL
So I gathered.

JEB
You ever chewed t'baccy before?

CARL
No sir, this is the first time.

JEB
Well Preach, you in fer a treat.

Jeb reaches into his pouch and pulls out a wad the size of a golf ball. Carl accepts the tobacco, but wavers for a moment as he wonders how much to put in his mouth.

JEB
What's you waiting for, sonny? Pop
that chaw in and get down to
business.

Carl opens his mouth, inserts the full load of tobacco between his teeth and cheek, just like he had seen in the movies. He is surprised the taste isn't half bad. The juices in his mouth flow.

After several seconds, Carl looks to Jeb.

CARL

Where do I spit? Do you have a spittoon or do I just spit on the ground?

Jeb stares at Carl like he is crazy.

JEB

Spit? Whaddya mean spit?

Before Carl can answer, Jeb cackles.

JEB

Oh, I see. You been watching too many movies, Preach. It's only them sissy Hollywood cowboys that spit. Real cowboys swallow most of it.

Carl's eyes widen.

CARL

S..s...swallow?

JEB

Don't be a fool, son. Spittin' it all out would be like lightin' a cigarette and not inhalin' the smoke. How ya gonna get the full effect of the tabakka unless'n ya swallow?

Ignoring Jeb, Carl prepares to spit.

JEB

Look boy, do ya wanna be a cowboy or not?

Carl swallows. No immediate effect.

The two sit quietly. After a bit, Carl swallows again. Jeb spits.

CARL

How come you just spit?

JEB

I'm already a cowboy.

Carl ponders the reply, but his musing is interrupted by gurgles from his stomach. He shows discomfort. Beads of sweat appear on his forehead. He takes on a green coloration.

CARL

I think I'd better be going.

JEB
 Nice visitin' with ya, Preach. --
 Ya may wanna hurry.

Jeb cackles. Carl bolts off the porch toward his cabin.

INT. LOG TOURIST CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

The sound of violent vomiting comes from bathroom. Moans. Retching. More moans. Coughing. Gagging. More retching. Sobbing.

CARL (O.S.)
 Oh dear God. Kill me. Please Lord,
 please. Kill me right now.

Moans. Sobs. Another round of vomiting.

EXT. POST OFFICE - NEXT MORNING

Carl staggers like a zombie toward the post office. The little old lady sits on the bench in front.

OLDER WOMAN
 This time, you're late.

CARL
 That I am. I find it hard to walk
 this morning after vomiting chewing
 tobacco for several hours
 yesterday.

OLDER WOMAN
 Chewing tobacco?

CARL
 A victim of Jeb Garrett.

OLDER WOMAN
 Jeb Garrett! That good for nothing.
 I'll teach him a lesson.

The old lady heads briskly down the road to where Jeb is sitting at his regular spot in front of the saloon. Carl watches as she sets upon him with her purse.

OLDER WOMAN
 Jeb Garrett. You no good bum. Get
 back in that dark hole where you
 belong.

Jeb covers his head against her blows and retreats into the saloon.

CARL

Jeb Garrett beat with a purse by a little old lady. Now that's a real hoot.

Carl foregoes the post office and continues down the street. He notices the garage owner through the front window chuckling when he walks past. He spies two cowboys who pause and look at him before going in the cafe. They get big grins. A couple of teenagers come out of the General Store, see him, and laugh.

Each step heavier than the one before, Carl draws to a stop in front of the General Store. He looks at the cowboy clothes on display in the window.

CARL

(to himself)

Ditch the suit and tie. Get some boots and jeans. Be a cowboy. Sure. More like, be a joke.

Carl stares absently in the window. He comes to notice a poster taped up on the glass. On the poster is the picture of a cowboy hanging on to a bucking bull with one hand and swinging his hat in the air with the other. In large print, above the smaller particulars, reads: RODEO.

CARL (V.O.)

Most people have heard the old saying, "Necessity is the mother of invention." But not many know the rest of the saying, which goes, "Desperation is the father of foolishness." It was this part of the saying that had full control over me while looking at the poster about the upcoming rodeo.

Carl shifts, ponders, has an epiphany.

CARL (V.O.)

Only sheer desperation allowed me to envision my face on the face of that cowboy.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. RODEO ARENA - NIGHT

Carl imagines himself on the bull, riding like a champion. A bell rings, indicating he has lasted the eight seconds. Like an acrobat, Carl does a perfect dismount. He stands in the middle of the arena while the bull continues to buck in the background. The crowd roars. Cowboys run up to Carl and pat him on the back.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FRONT OF GENERAL STORE - CONTINUOUS

CARL
 (to himself)
 When I ride that bull, they'll know
 I'm not a sissy East Coast boy.
 They'll come to church and listen,
 one cowboy to another.

With new resolve, Carl straightens up and marches down the boardwalk toward his cabin.

EXT. RODEO CORRAL THOMPSON RANCH - DAY

Carl and Fred Thompson lean over the rail of the corral. They look at the empty arena.

FRED
 Two or three times a year, I put on
 a rodeo. Mostly local boys, but we
 get some cowboys up from Dillon and
 even from Hamilton.

CARL
 Must be a big deal.

FRED
 Three to four hundred folk show up.
 Pretty big for round here.

CARL
 What about the bull riding?

FRED
 Bull riding? Yeah, there's that for
 those fool enough.

CARL
 I'm thinking of entering.

Fred looks at Carl, sure he must have misheard.

FRED
What's that?

CARL
I'm thinking about entering.

FRED
Entering what?

CARL
The rodeo.

Fred is confused.

FRED
The barrel racing's for the ladies
and kids. -- Can't imagine you'd be
a team roper, since you gotta know
how to rope. -- You thinking 'bout
calf wrestlin'? That's harder than
it looks.

CARL
Bull riding.

FRED
Say what?

CARL
Bull riding.

Fred considers for a moment, then bursts out laughing.

FRED
Bull riding! Ha. That's a good one,
Preacher. You had me going there.

CARL
No, I'm serious.

Fred turns serious.

FRED
Like I said, you had me going
there. Best leave it at that.

CARL
I'm sick of being treated like a
joke.

FRED
Can't say I blame ya. But you don't
need to kill yourself over it.

CARL
I'm not going to kill myself. I'm
going to ride a bull.

FRED
I stand by what I said.

Stubborn silence.

CARL
So do I.

More stubborn silence.

FRED
You don't know the first thing
about bull riding.

CARL
What's there to know? You sit on
the back of a bull and hold on for
eight seconds.

Fred shakes his head in disbelief. Starts back toward the out-
buildings.

FRED
Come with me.

EXT. THOMPSON BARN - MOMENTS LATER

Carl and Fred come to a small corral behind a barn. Inside is
a bull.

FRED
Look at that. We're not talking
about riding a pony. A bull is two
thousand pounds of solid muscle.
That fella can break any bone you
got with one twist of its body.

The bull appears to know that it's the subject of
conversation. Its massive head turns. The bull stares
directly at Carl, snorts. Involuntarily, Carl takes a step
back.

FRED
Now, tell me why in the world you'd
even consider getting on the back
of that.

Carl breaks free from the bull's stare.

CARL
Respect.

FRED
Respect?

CARL
Like I said, I'm tired of being a
joke.

Fred considers.

FRED
I know it's been hard for you to
fit in.

CARL
Hard? I'd welcome hard. So far it's
been a complete and utter failure. -
- The bottom line is I have to show
people I'm not afraid. And that I'm
not a greenhorn.

FRED
No one thinks you a coward. But you
are a greenhorn. That's just the
way it is.

CARL
If I ride a bull, it won't be that
way.

FRED
Then what?

CARL
Then what? What do you mean?

FRED
What will ridin' a bull accomplish
beside making you not feel like a
joke?

CARL
Maybe it will get some of those
cowboys to take me serious and show
up for church.

FRED
A noble cause, fer sure, but
futile.

CARL
Why?

FRED

Three reasons. One. You won't stay on the bull. Two. You won't stay on the bull. And three.

(loudly)

You won't stay on the bull.

CARL

Well Fred, I have faith that if I do this to get the cowboys into church, God will give me the strength I need. It says in the Bible that with God, all things are possible.

FRED

I don't doubt God could ride a bull. It's you I'm worried about.

Carl paces back and forth while he thinks. Stops.

CARL

Consider it this way. That little boy David went out and killed the giant warrior Goliath with a sling and one stone. He had faith. He knew God would give him the strength.

He locks eyes with Fred.

CARL

Now do you believe that story was real or just a fairy tale? -- I believe it was real, and I believe God will give me the strength I need to do this.

Fred smiles patiently.

FRED

You have the makings of good sermon there, Preacher. But I think you best read that Bible story again. It says David went down to the creek and picked up five smooth stones. Now if he was sure he only needed one, what was the reason for the other four?

Carl starts to respond, but is cut off.

FRED

I'll tell you the reason. David was no fool. He had faith. But he also had common sense. He knew that if he missed with the first shot, he at least had four more chances.

Fred puts his hand on Carl's shoulder in a fatherly way while Carl considers.

FRED

Son, I've walked this earth for many years. And I've come to learn it's a fine line between faith and foolishness. If you get on the back of that bull, you'll have crossed it.

Carl looks at the bull.

CARL

I appreciate the advice. But I have to do this.

(to Fred)

Remember, it turned out David only needed one stone. Maybe God will be just as kind to me.

FRED

Son, if you don't die or get crippled for life, God will've been kind to you.

The bull snorts menacingly to confirm Fred's sagacity.

INT. WISDOM CHURCH - MORNING

Carl stands in the pulpit. He looks out over mostly empty pews. The usual few ladies are in church. Fred Thompson is not.

TIME CUT:

A CHURCH LADY shakes hands with Carl after worship.

CHURCH LADY

Pastor, several of us are worried about you.

CARL

Worried? In what way?

CHURCH LADY

Well, don't take this wrong, but worried that you may have lost your mind.

Carl is stunned. He tries to hold a smile.

CARL

Lost my mind? Now why you would think that?

CHURCH LADY

You know why. Entering that rodeo. What if you get hurt or die? They won't send us any more preachers.

Carl's smile fades.

CARL

Oh, don't worry. They won't blame the church. Anyway, maybe I won't get hurt. Maybe I'll ride that bull.

The church lady bursts out laughing. Turns to another lady, BERNICE.

CHURCH LADY

Did you hear that, Bernice? Ride that bull. Ride it to heaven, maybe.

She realizes her words. Turns back to Carl.

CHURCH LADY

Oh dear. Sorry Pastor. I shouldn't have said that.

BERNICE

(tersely)

But you did. And I say, Amen. Pastor, you better come to your senses before Friday night.

Bernice mutters while she storms out of the building.

BERNICE

Riding a bull. That man HAS lost his mind.

Carl shrinks away from the remaining women.

INT. POST OFFICE - MORNING

Carl looks across the counter at the Postmaster.

CARL
Well?

POSTMASTER
Well, what?

CARL
Don't you have some sort of witty
insult for me?

POSTMASTER
You mean about entering the bull
riding?

CARL
That would be it.

POSTMASTER
There's nothing funny about that.
All I can offer is some advice.

CARL
And what would that be?

POSTMASTER
Don't do it.

They look at each other for a moment. Carl turns to leave. At the door he almost bumps into the little old lady.

CARL
Pardon me, as usual.

She stops to look him in the eye.

OLDER WOMAN
Don't do it, Pastor. Don't do it.

Carl tips his hat.

CARL
Well, you have a nice day too.

EXT. WISDOM GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Tom Baker sits in front of his garage. As Carl walks by across the street, Tom calls out.

TOM

Don't do it, Preacher. Don't do it.

Carl waves.

EXT. SMALL CAFE - CONTINUOUS

The regular cowboy patron comes out the door of the cafe. Nearly bumps into Carl.

COWBOY HANK

'Xcuse me . . . Oh, it's you, Preach. Actually, glad I 'bout ran into you, 'cause I want to talk to you.

CARL

Let me guess. The rodeo?

COWBOY

Yeah, the rodeo. Listen Preach, I've cowboied most my life. And I did my share of rodeo. But I ain't never been on the back of a bull. Don't plan on neither. Ya see, being a cowboy got's nothing to do with riding a bull. -- Bull ridin's its own world. It ain't my world. It ain't your world. So, Friday night, why don't you be sittin' with me in the stands . . . watching?

Carl considers.

CARL

That's the best entreaty I've received so far. I'll give it some thought.

COWBOY

(scratches head)
Entreaty?

Carl continues down the boardwalk.

INT. GENERAL STORE - MOMENTS LATER

The clerk bags up Carl's groceries.

CLERK

The whole town's talking.

CARL
Nothing unusual about that.

CLERK
Talking about you.

CARL
Nothing unusual about that either.

CLERK
You know what I mean. About you
entering the bull riding.

CARL
I'm sure it's a good laugh.

CLERK
No one is laughing.

CARL
Sure they are.

Carl takes on the pose of a drugstore cowboy as he mock
drawls.

CARL
Dagnabit, that there greenhorn
preacher's at it again. Thinkin'
he's a cowboy. Gol darn fool.

Carl mock spits. Picks up his bag and leaves. The clerk is
clearly offended by his mockery.

CLERK
Nobody called you a fool. -- Yet.

EXT. GENERAL STORE - CONTINUOUS

As Carl leaves the store, he meets Gideon, who is standing,
looking at the rodeo poster in the window.

GIDEON
Howdy Preacher. Good to see ya.

Gideon points at the poster.

GIDEON
See that, Preach? That there's
fool's gold. Only a dang fool would
try to stay on the back of that.

Gideon turns to Carl.

GIDEON

Speaking of fool's gold, I shoulda told ya before, but I didn't wanna spoil yer fun. That bag a gold flake you panned ain't gold. Just fool's gold.

CARL

I know.

GIDEON

Well good. Wouldn't want ya looking the fool trying to cash it in, would we? -- So, what's new?

Carl processes the fact that the whole world doesn't know about his plans.

CARL

Nothing really. Good to see you again, Gideon. Take care.

EXT. CLAWSON RANCH HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Wily Clawson and Carl stand on the front porch.

WILY

Sam's out clearing some irrigation ditches in the north field. Gotta keep those willows cut back or it clogs them right up.

CARL

Sounds like a hard job.

WILY

She's a hard girl. Handy with an axe.

Wily gives Carl a look of warning.

WILY

Just so you know.

Carl laughs.

CARL

Definitely good to know.

Wily sits on the porch rail. Points to a chair.

WILY

Have a seat, Preacher. Chance for us to talk before she gets back.

Carl sits.

CARL

(wary)

Talk about what?

WILY

Heard you plan on entering the rodeo out at the Thompson ranch.

CARL

You heard correctly.

WILY

Bull riding?

CARL

That too is correct.

WILY

Now why in the world would you want to ride a bull?

CARL

Must have been all those Rocky Mountain oysters you served me. Got bull juice flowing through my veins.

WILY

(laughs)

You got me there, Preacher.

CARL

I'm sure it's your intention to dissuade me from entering.

WILY

From what Fred Thompson tells me, don't think I'll have much luck, but yes.

CARL

Well, Fred's right.

WILY

Listen, Preacher. No one will think worse of you if you come to your senses.

CARL

How could they think worse of me?
I'm the butt of every joke. I dread
seeing the cowboys that work for
you. They make me feel like a
little boy.

WILY

(sternly)

They don't make you feel that way.
You do. Pardon for being blunt, but
men know how to laugh at
themselves. Yeah, the jokes were
childish, but so's your reaction.
You've got some growing up to do,
Preacher.

CARL

With all due respect, Mr. Clawson,
back East we treat clergy with
respect.

WILY

This isn't back East. People here
earn respect from character, not
title.

CARL

Which I intend on doing by riding a
bull.

WILY

You won't stay on. Believe me when
I say that.

Carl considers a moment. A determined look grows.

CARL

You know, I think all you cowboys
are worried I might ride for the
eight seconds. A greenhorn doing
what most of you are afraid to do.

WILY

You won't stay on the bull. That's
a fact. Not an opinion.

CARL

Well, if you're so sure of that,
why don't we make a little wager?

WILY

A wager? You wanna bet money?

CARL

Not money. Of course not. But how about this. If I stay on that bull, you and all your cowboy buddies show up for church for the rest of the summer.

WILY

Are you serious?

CARL

Very.

WILY

You think dragging God into this is gonna help?

CARL

I'm not dragging God into it. I'm trying to drag you to God.

WILY

That what they teach you in seminary?

CARL

It's a simple wager. Like I said, I think deep down you're afraid I'll stay on. Afraid you'll feel less of a man.

Wily shakes his head in disbelief. He paces the porch.

WILY

(with building
forcefulness)

Now son, I've been patient with you 'cause in general you're a nice young man, and my daughter seems taken by you. But don't sit on my porch thinking you can taunt me like a schoolboy.

Carl can tell he crossed a line and remains silent.

WILY

But since you're bound and determined to do this, if you stay on, I'll polish up my boots for church. Hopefully for worship, not a funeral.

Carl is visibly shaken by the mention of a funeral.

A pickup truck, driven by Sam, pulls up to the ranch house. Immediately, Carl stands, gives Wily a nod, and heads over to the truck as Sam gets out.

Sam ignores Carl as he approaches. Carl is fully aware he is being ignored, but proceeds to engage her anyway.

CARL

Hi Sam. I thought you were coming to church yesterday. Didn't we have plans for lunch?

Sam grabs an axe and shovel from the pickup bed. Heads toward the tool shed.

SAM

I changed my mind.

Carl follows.

CARL

Changed your mind? Why?

Sam stops abruptly. Looks Carl in the eyes.

SAM

Because if I wanted to spend time with a damn fool, I'd have plenty to choose from around here. -- I thought you were different.

Carl pretends to be oblivious.

CARL

I don't know what you're talking about.

SAM

You most certainly do. Riding a bull. What in the world possessed you to even consider such a thing?

Carl looks down.

CARL

(softly)
Respect.

SAM

What?

Carl looks up.

CARL

Respect. No one respects me, Sam.

Sam's eyes soften for a moment.

SAM

That's not true. I do.

Her glare returns.

SAM

I did.

CARL

I thought if anyone would understand, it'd be you.

Sam sighs sadly.

SAM

I understand more than you think, Carl. The problem is you don't understand. I can't support you in this. I can't bear having any part in you being crippled, or worse.

Carl puts on a hopeful look.

CARL

How about we agree to disagree?
Lunch tomorrow?

Sam's eyes reveal the pain in her heart.

SAM

No. I'm sorry. Not as long you hold to this foolishness.

Anger and stubbornness rise up in Carl.

CARL

Fine. Turn on me like everyone else.

SAM

(surprised)
Turn on you? How can you say that?

CARL

Because that's what it feels like.

Sam comes close to Carl.

SAM

Well, that's not what it is. I would never turn on you. And it hurts that you don't know that.

Carl looks down, ashamed.

CARL

I better let you finish your chores.

He walks slowly to his car.

SAM

You're not alone, Carl.

Carl stands at the door of his car.

CARL

I suppose I know that. But right now, I feel alone.

Sam watches as Carl gets in and drives off.

EXT. BANK OF BIG HOLE RIVER - LATE AFTERNOON

The Packard Sedan is parked near the river. The driver's side door open.

Low over the mountains sits the sun, casting long shadows. Swiftly flowing water foams around large rocks. Birds sing their evening songs. A trout breaks water in a calm pool.

Through the rails of a buck and rail fence, a calf, who has ventured a short distance from its mother, watches Carl.

Carl leans against his car, beholding the river. In his hand is an open bible. After a moment, Carl looks down at the bible.

CARL

(reading)

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hung our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. -- How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land?

The calf bawls. Carl looks up.

CARL
 (to the calf)
 Come to church and I'll put you in
 the choir -- that we don't have.

The calf does a feisty kick and trots off toward the mama cow.

CARL
 At least you can run home to your
 mother. Wish I could.

Carl closes the bible and puts it in the car. He walks to the river's edge.

CARL
 He was baptized in the River
 Jordan. -- About the same size as
 you.

Carl crouches. Puts his hand in the water.

CARL
 You're much longer though. And some
 of your water will make it all the
 way to the Gulf of Mexico.
 Thousands of miles. -- The Jordan's
 water ends up in the Dead Sea.
 Dead. Because it's at a dead end,
 like me.

He sits down on the rock river bed.

CARL
 What possessed me to think I can
 ride a bull? -- I'll probably die.

Absently, Carl picks up a small, smooth stone and rolls it in his fingers. Another trout breaks water. Carl tosses the stone in the direction of the ripples.

CARL
 Missed.

Carl finds another stone. He recalls the words of Fred Thompson as he looks at the stone.

CARL
 (remembering)
 If David missed with the first
 shot, he still had four more
 chances. David wasn't a fool. He
 had common sense.

Pebble by pebble, Carl sorts until he has five smooth, round stones.

CARL
Now I just have to turn these into
common sense.

He ponders a moment.

CARL
Just a matter of getting the rocks
in my head to converse with the
rocks in my hand.

Carl stands, puts the rocks into his pants pocket. Heads back to the car. The calf, secure by its mother, bellows Fare Thee Well.

INT. LOG TOURIST CABIN - MORNING

The five smooth stones are on the wooden desk. Carl sits, considering them.

CARL
You guys sure seemed rich with
possibility down by the river. Now
you look like a bunch of rocks.

He picks up one stone and rolls it in his hand.

CARL
Common sense. -- Well, the most
sensible act of common sense would
be to withdraw from the bull
riding. -- But I'm too far down
that road. No turning back now.

Carl sets the one stone back down, but apart from the others. He focuses on it.

CARL
So, the first thing I should do is
prepare. -- Prepare. -- Prepare.

He picks up the stone again.

CARL
But how?

Bang, bang, bang on the door.

COWBOY HANK (O.C.)
(through the door)
Preacher. Hey Preacher. You in
there?

Bang, bang, bang.

CARL
Yeah. Coming.

Carl quickly pockets all the stones. He opens the door to
find Cowboy Hank from the cafe.

CARL
Oh, it's you. Good morning.

COWBOY HANK
Mornin'.

CARL
What can I do for you?

COWBOY HANK
I came to entreat you to come with
me.

Carl looks puzzled.

COWBOY HANK
I had to look that word up in the
dictionary. Kinda like it.

CARL
(smiling)
May I entreat why I should come
with you?

COWBOY HANK
To get ya prepared.

CARL
Prepared? For what?

COWBOY HANK
For surviving Friday night, I hope.

CARL
I see.

Carl considers a moment.

CARL
Surviving sounds like a noble
cause. Let me grab my hat.

COWBOY HANK
Spoke like a real cowboy.

INT. BEAT UP PICKUP TRUCK - MOMENTS LATER

Cowboy Hank sits behind the wheel while Carl climbs in. Visible through the back window of the truck is Hank's ranch dog, an Australian Shepherd with one blue eye.

CARL
Where are we going?

COWBOY HANK
My place.

Carl nods. They are silent as Hank grinds the gears and they drive off, various parts of the truck clattering.

CARL
I'm ashamed to say that I don't know your name.

COWBOY HANK
Harold. But call me Hank.

CARL
I'm Carl.

COWBOY HANK
Yep. But I'll call you Preacher.

CARL
Fair enough.

TIME CUT:

The pickup truck clatters down a rough dirt road.

COWBOY HANK
The broncs buck 'cause they pull a back cinch up tight on their testicles when they come out the chute.

CARL
Ouch.

COWBOY HANK
Yep. I'd kick too.

CARL
So bronc riding and bull riding are about the same?

COWBOY HANK

Nope. The bronc riders gotta roll their spurs across the horse's shoulders. Bull riders don't.

CARL

How come?

COWBOY HANK

'Cause holdin' on to a bull is hard enough.

CARL

I see.

COWBOY HANK

Actually ya don't. But you will.

They approach a small, well kept log cabin with several outbuildings, including a barn.

COWBOY HANK

Here we are. T'aint much, but it's mine.

CARL

It's nice. Just you?

COWBOY HANK

Just me. Had a wife, but she passed on years ago. Never got around to getting a new one.

Hank stops the truck. The engine diesels a few extra chugs after he turns it off and dies with a lurch.

EXT. COWBOY HANK RANCH - CONTINUOUS

Hank and Carl walk to the barn, followed by the dog. Hank opens the door.

COWBOY HANK

Here's where you'll do your preparin'. It won't change the outcome, I know, but that don't mean we shouldn't try.

CARL

How inspiring.

Cautiously, Carl sticks his head through the door to look in.

INT. COWBOY HANK BARN - CONTINUOUS

Carl looks in at a 55 gallon steel oil drum hanging from the rafters by a mishmash of ropes and pulleys. On the drum is a saddle.

CARL

Wow.

COWBOY HANK

Say howdy to the meanest bull this side of the Big Hole River.

CARL

Howdy.

COWBOY HANK

Watch this.

Cowboy Hank demonstrates the workings of the ropes and pulleys. He makes the oil drum rock and twist.

COWBOY HANK

Now, if I can entreat you to climb on.

CARL

You really do like that word, don't you.

Cowboy Hank smiles.

Carl climbs on the back of the oil drum bull using a bale of hay as a step.

CARL

Now what?

COWBOY HANK

Hold on to the bull rope.

Carl grips tight with both hands.

COWBOY HANK

Only get to use one hand. Don't matter which.

Carl uses his right hand.

Cowboy Hank pulls the ropes to start the oil drum bull rocking. Carl sways and bends with the rhythm.

CARL

Not as bad as I thought.

Cowboy Hank pulls harder and in a different manner. The oil drum bull rocks violently and twists. Carl flies off and lands face first in the hay. The dog runs over and licks Carl in the face.

Carl brushes hay off his head and body as he stands.

CARL

That was worse than I thought. I'm in trouble, aren't I?

COWBOY HANK

Well, you didn't do all that bad, Preacher. Get back on. I'll give ya some pointers.

Carl eyes the oil drum bull with trepidation before climbing back on.

COWBOY HANK

Thing is, you ain't strong enough to hold on with just your hand. You gotta squeeze your legs like a vise 'round the body.

Carl squeezes his thighs together.

CARL

I don't think I can squeeze much against a steel drum.

COWBOY HANK

You'd be more likely to bend the metal of that drum than dent the muscles on the back of a bull.

Before Carl can digest the meaning of Cowboy Hank's words, Cowboy Hank pulls the ropes. Carl holds on.

COWBOY HANK

Now stay forward, over your hand. Don't lean back. You lean back and the bull will whip ya forward when he bucks.

The oil drum bull does just that. Carl is thrown forward into the hay. The dog runs up and licks Carl's face again.

COWBOY HANK

When ya fall, roll with your shoulder. Won't hurt as much. Now, get back on.

CARL
You're enjoying this, aren't you?

Cowboy Hank grins.

COWBOY HANK
Not in the least.

MONTAGE of Cowboy Hank instructing Carl. Carl gets thrown. Dog licks face. Carl gets back on. Carl gets thrown. Dog licks face. Carl stays on longer.

Cowboy Hank is winded and has broke a sweat from working the ropes. Carl is dirty and scuffed up from hitting the ground so often. But Carl is still in the saddle.

COWBOY HANK
Well, I think you had enough for today. Know I have.

CARL
Today?

COWBOY HANK
They say Rome wasn't built in a day.

CARL
No, but it fell pretty darn quick, which I have a feeling is apropos to me.

COWBOY HANK
(laughs)
That's a good one, Preacher. --
Now, how do you spell that word "apropos"? I'll need to look it up.

Carl dismounts from the oil drum bull.

CARL
A. P. R. O. P. O. S.

COWBOY HANK
S? Well, I wouldn'ta guessed that.

From his pants pocket, Carl pulls out one of the smooth stones. He offers it to Cowboy Hank.

CARL
Here. I want you to have this.

Cowboy Hank takes the stone. Eyes it.

COWBOY HANK

A rock. What for?

CARL

The Bible says David picked out five smooth stones for his fight against Goliath. Part of his preparation. Seems appropriate for you to have one.

Hank pockets the stone with a proud smile. He puts his arm around Carl's shoulders.

COWBOY HANK

Come'on, Preach. I'll take ya back to town.

Carl looks at the dog.

CARL

At least I won't have to wash my face tonight.

EXT. GENERAL STORE - AFTERNOON

Carl carries a small bag of groceries. Jeb Garrett sits in front of the saloon across the street.

JEB

(calls out)

Hey Preach. I wanna talk to ya.

CARL

Another time, Mr. Garrett.

Jeb stands up.

JEB

No mean words or jokes. Promise. Just need to talk to ya.

Carl stops. Considers. He crosses the street.

CARL

What can I do for you?

JEB

Heard you're entering the rodeo.

CARL

Yes.

JEB
Not a good idea. Fer real.

CARL
You're not the first to tell me that.

JEB
Thing is, I had this friend who used to mess with bull ridin'.

CARL
And?

JEB
Well, he was mighty good. Won some serious money.

CARL
That's nice.

JEB
One time, though, that bull took just the right twist. Snapped the bone in his arm. Could hear that bone snap twenty feet away.

Carl winces at the thought.

JEB
Course, he was thrown. Landed hard. But he got up . . . just in time to be run over and knocked back down. Broke some ribs with that.

Involuntarily, Carl takes a step back.

JEB
Then the bull spun and stepped on his leg. Crushed the bone.

Carl takes another step back. Jeb shakes his head in pity.

JEB
Poor fella was crippled fer life.

Not a word from Carl as the images run like a movie through his mind and his face contorts.

Jeb perks up.

JEB
Well, anyways, best a luck, Preach.

Jeb saunters into the saloon with a malicious smile on his face.

Carl stands on the porch for a few seconds before continuing. When he does, his feet drag like he is in a funeral procession.

INT. LOG TOURIST CABIN - MINUTES LATER

Carl sets down his bag of groceries. Sits. Looks at his hands. They shake. He takes a deep breath. Pauses. Pulls out one stone from his pocket. Rolls it in his fingers. After a few seconds, speaks to himself.

CARL

Yea, though I walk through the
valley of the shadow of death, I
will fear no evil: for thou art
with me; thy rod and thy staff they
comfort me.

With determination on his face, Carl stands, pockets the stone, and leaves.

INT. SALOON - MINUTES LATER

Carl enters the saloon to find Jeb on a stool, leaning on the bar, nursing a beer. Jeb is the only customer. The bartender nods at Carl. Carl nods back.

JEB

Never thought I'd see you here,
Preach.

Carl pulls a stone from his pocket. Offers it to Jeb. Jeb takes it and eyes it quizzically.

JEB

What's this?

CARL

A rock.

JEB

Can see that. Why'd ya give me it?

CARL

Because I've purged fear from my
body. That doesn't mean I'm not
afraid, but fear won't control me.

JEB

Don't understand your meaning,
Preach.

CARL

Of course you don't, Jeb. Of course
you don't.

Carl turns and leaves. Jeb stares at the rock in his hand.

INT. COWBOY HANK BARN - DAY

Cowboy Hank works the ropes to the oil drum bull while Carl hangs on. Hank has the drum twist and buck every way possible, but Carl maintains his grip.

Winded, Hank brings the oil drum to a stop.

COWBOY HANK

Whew. This bull's had enough.

CARL

Ah. I was just starting to have
fun.

COWBOY HANK

Enjoy the moment, Preacher.
Tomorrow night's not gonna be fun.

Carl climbs off the oil drum bull.

CARL

Do I at least have a chance?

Cowboy Hank takes his hat off, scratches his head, looks down while he talks.

COWBOY HANK

You're gettin' mighty good on my
contraption, fer sure. And if we
had more time to let ya try out
some young steers for a ride,
that'd help.

Hank looks up at Carl.

COWBOY HANK

The thing is, nobody stays on a
bull the first time. Least ways,
I've never seen it.

CARL

So this has been pointless?

COWBOY HANK
Pointless? Heck no. You was
practicing how to fall.

CARL
Practicing how to fall?

COWBOY HANK
And you're darn good at it. Ya get
back up every time.

Carl looks at the oil drum bull.

CARL
Practicing falling.

Cowboy Hank puts his hand on Carl's shoulder.

COWBOY HANK
And ya learned how to ride some.
Maybe you'll hang on for a couple
of seconds. Never know.

Carl reaches into his pocket and pulls out one of the stones.
He places it on the saddle of the oil drum bull.

COWBOY HANK
So my practice bull gets one of
your stones too?

CARL
Yep.

COWBOY HANK
Suppose we shoulda' gave our bull a
name.

CARL
Goliath.

Cowboy Hank rolls his eyes.

COWBOY HANK
Don't think so. You ain't met
Goliath yet.

INT. LOG TOURIST CABIN - EVENING

Carl sits on his bed as he pulls on his cowboy boots. He
stands in front of the mirror, full cowboy outfit, except the
hat.

After a few seconds of reflective reflection, Carl sighs deeply. He takes his remaining two stones from the table and puts them in his shirt pocket. Grabs his hat. Heads out the door.

EXT. RODEO ARENA - EVENING

Carl parks his Packard Sedan in a field jammed with cars and trucks. He exits the car and begins his slow walk through running kids, hand-holding young couples, groups of cowboys and other rodeo attendees.

Fred Thompson sees Carl and comes to him.

FRED
Evening Preacher. See you made it.

CARL
Yes, I made it.

Carl looks around at the throng.

CARL
Quite a crowd tonight.

FRED
Biggest we ever had. Easy.

CARL
Any particular reason?

FRED
You'd be the reason.

CARL
Me?

FRED
The Bull Ridin' Preacher. Car loads of folks comin' up from Anaconda, Butte, Dillon, Hamilton, just to see you.

Carl notices people noticing him. He looks worried.

CARL
Just to see me?

FRED
Thought that's what you wanted. To get folks attention. Well, you got it, Preacher.

CARL

I see.

FRED

Not too late to change your mind
though.

CARL

I'm not changing my mind.

FRED

Didn't figure you would. -- Come on
over and sit with my Missus. The
bull ridin's not till the end.
Meantime, I gotta keep the show
rolling.

Fred leads Carl to a front row seat in the bleachers. Along with Fred's wife Dodie are several of the church ladies. They greet the preacher with hellos and worried smiles.

Carl scans the crowd. He sees many of the townsfolk and local cowboys. And many, many others he's never seen before. He spots Sam, who sees him. Carl gives her a timid wave. She just looks at him with sad eyes.

MONTAGE of barrel racing, team roping, steer wrestling, bronc riding, rodeo clowns throughout. During the bronc riding, cowboy Hank joins Carl.

COWBOY HANK

So, what'cha think of rodeos?

CARL

I think it would be more fun to
watch without a dark cloud hanging
over my head.

COWBOY HANK

Yeah.

A cowboy is thrown from a bronc right in front of them. He lands with a hard thud and is slow to get up. The crowd applauds when he does.

COWBOY HANK

That's Harvey Smith. Don't often
see him get thrown. But it happens
to the best of 'em.

An announcement comes over the tinny public address speaker.

RODEO ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
 Bull riders report to the booth for
 assignment. Bull riders report to
 the booth for assignment.

COWBOY HANK
 That's you.

CARL
 I know.

Carl remains seated.

COWBOY HANK
 That means ya have to go over there
 now.

CARL
 I know.

Cowboy Hank waits. The church ladies look at Carl, wondering.

COWBOY HANK
 You alright?

CARL
 I don't know.

Carl's entourage patiently waits. After a few seconds, he
 takes a deep breath and stands. Hank stands too.

COWBOY HANK
 I'll walk with ya.

CARL
 That'd be nice.

DODIE
 We'll be praying for you, Pastor.

CARL
 Thank you. -- Pray hard, please.

Carl begins like dead man walking on death row. Hank escorts
 him like he's the preacher, not Carl.

EXT. RODEO CHUTE AND BOOTH AREA - CONTINUOUS

Hank and Carl arrive to find Fred Thompson arguing with some
 of the rodeo judges. Fred shakes his head in frustration. He
 comes over to the pair.

FRED
Bull headed. And over a bull, to
boot.

COWBOY HANK
What's going on?

FRED
'Fraid the Preacher drew Bodacious.

COWBOY HANK
Bodacious! Zack Johnson's bull?

FRED
Yep.

COWBOY HANK
Dang.

CARL
What?

COWBOY HANK
Meanest bull here. No doubt.

FRED
Tried to get 'em to switch, but
they said it's the luck of the
draw. Bad luck.

Carl looks at the two of them like a deer caught in
headlights.

CARL
What do you mean by, meanest?

COWBOY HANK
He holds a grudge. Goes after the
rider. So, let the rodeo clowns do
their job and you get the hell out,
just like we talked about.

A CHUTE ATTENDANT stands on a rail and calls over to them.

CHUTE ATTENDANT
The Preacher is the next one up.
Let's go.

COWBOY HANK
This is it.

FRED
Good luck.

Carl starts toward the chute.

SAM (O.C.)
(calling)
Carl, Carl.

Carl turns. Sees Sam running toward him. She arrives, winded.

SAM
Promise me you won't get killed.

CARL
I'll certainly try not to.

SAM
(forcefully)
Promise!

CARL
Okay. I won't get killed. Promise.

Sam grabs Carl by the collar. Pulls him close and kisses him hard on the lips.

SAM
Good luck.

A flustered Carl looks over his shoulder at Sam as he walks to the chute.

CHUTE ATTENDANT
You the Preacher?

CARL
Yes.

CHUTE ATTENDANT
Then climb on up.

Carl tries to move, but can't.

CHUTE ATTENDANT
Take a deep breath, son. Your body and brain are tussling, 'cause your body don't wanna be here.

A deep breath. The chute attendant turns to the cowboy working the other chute.

CHUTE ATTENDANT
He ain't doing bad. I've seen grown men faint.
(to Carl)
Ready to go?

The chute attendant extends his arm to help Carl up.

CARL

Ready.

Carl takes his hand and is pulled up onto the rail fence around the chute.

CHUTE ATTENDANT

Alright. He's calm for the moment.
Better climb on.

Bodacious nearly fills the entire chute with his mass. The bull breathes slow and deep.

Carl climbs on. Bodacious turns his head to see who dares sit on his back. He snorts.

CHUTE ATTENDANT

Well, whada ya think?

CARL

Feels like I'm sitting on a rock.

Bodacious shifts.

CARL

A living rock.

Bodacious pushes against the back of the chute. Tosses his head.

CARL

A rock that doesn't want me sitting here.

CHUTE ATTENDANT

Ready for me to strap your hand?

CARL

Just a second.

Carl reaches into his shirt pocket, pulls out a stone and gives it to the chute attendant.

The chute attendant accepts the rock.

CARL

Proceed.

CHUTE ATTENDANT

Don't know the what and why, but I'm sure you do. Now, let's strap you on.

The chute attendant straps Carl's hand to the bull rope.

RODEO ANNOUNCER (O.C.)
Next up, riding Bodacious, is Carl
Vanderhoff, the Bull Ridin'
Preacher.

There is a smattering of applause, then silence. Total
silence. Only the short, snorting breaths of the bull. Some
people stand up to watch.

CHUTE ATTENDANT
Ready?

CARL
One moment.

Carl reaches in his shirt pocket and pulls out the last
stone. He looks at it, closes his hand around it, and prays.

CARL
O Lord, give me the strength of
Samson and courage of David, and
may you be glorified in this
moment. Amen.

Carl returns the stone to his pocket. Nods to the chute
attendant.

CARL
Ready.

The chute door opens and the bull explodes into the arena.
Bodacious does a straight up buck. Carl holds on.

The bull's head goes down to the left. His back end goes up
to the right.

The force of the twist rips Carl's hand from the rope. He
flies nearly ten feet up in the air. The crowd gasps. He hits
the ground hard, face first.

The bull spins and steps hard onto Carl's left buttock. The
bull turns again and starts to come head first at the
prostrate body of the preacher. At the last moment, a rodeo
clown jumps in front of the bull and distracts it while two
cowboys run out and drag Carl to the edge of the arena.

RODEO COWBOY
Can you stand?

CARL
I think so.

The cowboys relax their grip on Carl. His left leg gives way. They catch him.

RODEO ANNOUNCER (O.C.)
Well, folks, looks like the Bull
Ridin' Preacher took a beatin' from
Bodacious, but it appears he ain't
badly hurt. Let's give him a hand.

The crowd applauds, weakly. The cowboys help Carl through a gate. Sam awaits, and hugs him while the cowboys transfer Carl to Fred and Hank.

RODEO ANNOUNCER (O.C.)
Next up, ridin' Locomotive, is
Robbie Wilson.

INT. LOG TOURIST CABIN - MORNING

Carl stands in front of his mirror, pants part way down, exposing his left hip and buttocks. They are red and blue from deep contusions.

He pulls his pants up and struggles to walk around the cabin, grimacing as he does.

Light knocks on the door. Carl looks. Says nothing.

Another series of light knocks.

SAM (O.C.)
Hello. Are you in there, Carl?

Carl considers.

SAM (O.C.)
I know you're in there. Open the
door.

Slowly, Carl goes to the door and opens it.

SAM
Come on. Let's go.

CARL
What?

SAM
Come on. We're going fishing.

CARL
Fishing? Are you crazy? I can
hardly move.

SAM
 Exactly. You sit around here
 moping, and you'll get all stove
 up.

CARL
 Who said I was moping?

SAM
 Your face. -- Now, come on.

CARL
 You're serious?

Sam grabs Carl by the hand and pulls him to the door.

SAM
 Very serious. I've got everything
 we need in the truck. Extra rod.
 Extra waders. Even an extra hat
 well stocked with flies.

Carl relents and allows himself to be led by Sam.

CARL
 I don't want to talk.

SAM
 Neither do I.

CARL
 Not even to say I told you so?

SAM
 Why state the obvious?

EXT. BIG HOLE RIVER - DAY

Sam and Carl stand in shallow water. They wear the same
 attire; hip waders, wicker basket hanging from shoulder,
 fisherman's hat adorned with flies.

Carl vainly tries to cast, but only succeeds in tangling his
 line. Sam casts with the grace of a pro.

SAM
 Relax. You're trying to throw the
 line out there.

CARL
 I thought that's the idea.

SAM

It is. But not with force. It's more like encouragement.

CARL

Encouragement? I should say uplifting things to the fly?

SAM

(laughs)
Something like that.

Sam reels in her line.

SAM

Now watch. It's about rhythm.

Sam's arm begins in motion, back and forth, creating a small arc above her head with the line.

SAM

There's a Presbyterian minister from Missoula who comes over here to fish with my dad.

The back and forth motion of the rod picks up speed as more line is released.

SAM

He says the correct way to cast is Presbyterian style. A four count rhythm between ten o'clock and two o'clock. Picture a metronome counting.

The fly whips over her head. The line snakes out. The fly lands perfectly in a calm pool. Almost instantly, a trout hits. Sam sets the hook and carefully works the fish toward her open basket. She drops it in.

CARL

Well, since you caught him Presbyterian style, I guess that fish was predestined for your stomach.

Sam laughs.

SAM

Your turn.

Carl starts a slow casting motion. Tangles his line. Starts again. Finds a rhythm. Works the line out and finally lands the fly in an acceptable cast.

SAM

Not bad. I think you Presbyterian ministers are more inclined toward fly fishing than bull riding.

CARL

Well, Jesus did call several fishermen to be his disciples. Not a mention of bull riders though.

SAM

You should have thought of that before.

Carl winces in pain as he adjusts his stance.

CARL

Hindsight is 20/20. But in this case, it's my hind that's the sight.

Sam turns her nose up with false propriety.

SAM

Not a sight I care to see, Mr. Vanderhoff.

She starts upstream.

SAM

Anyway, we didn't come here to talk. You go downstream about a hundred yards and you'll find a nice pool. I'll take upstream.

CARL

But I'll be to Scotland afore you.

Carl heads downstream.

EXT. BANK OF BIG HOLE RIVER - LATER

A dirty fry pan leans up against the circle of rocks around the smoldering coals of a fire. Carl and Sam sit on larger rocks. They finish their last bites of trout from tin plates. Carl tosses his plate down, slides off the rock to the ground and rests back against it, carefully, because of his bruises. Sam sets her plate down, but remains on her rock chair.

CARL

I've eaten in some of the best restaurants in New York, but they don't beat that.

SAM
You feeling better?

CARL
Yeah, but I still don't want to go
to church tomorrow.

SAM
Well, join the crowd.

CARL
Should you talk to me like that?
You do realize we aren't married?

SAM
(smiles knowingly)
Just practicing.

Carl reflects on the direction of their conversation, eyeing Sam carefully.

CARL
You know, part of the reason I
entered the rodeo was to impress
you.

SAM
But I didn't want you to.

CARL
I know. That's why I thought it
would impress you.

SAM
(shakes her head)
Men are stupid.

CARL
When it comes to women.

SAM
Then everything must be about
women.

CARL
Well, I have no shame in being
stupid about you.

SAM
That may be the smartest thing you
ever said, Mr. Vanderhoff.

With a coy smile, Sam stands, goes over to Carl, and kisses him on the forehead.

SAM

Let's get this cleaned up and get you home. I bet you still have a sermon to work on.

Carl slowly stands with great pain.

CARL

It's mostly done. Just have to rewrite the ending. Turns out in my little David and Goliath adventure that Goliath won.

SAM

That's why God made erasers.

CARL

I write in pen.

SAM

Because you believe in certainty. But life should be written in pencil. It's never what we expect. And anyway, it's better to erase mistakes than keep reliving them.

CARL

You pretty much just summed up a year's worth of theology classes.

Sam gathers up plates, utensils, and cooking gear into a basket.

SAM

And you wonder why people here aren't much interested in going to church. Too much theology. Not enough life.

Stunned by her wisdom, Carl stares in amazement.

SAM

(sharply)

Don't just stand there and stare. Pack up the fishing gear.

INT. LOG TOURIST CABIN - NIGHT

A small lamp illuminates the desk at which Carl writes, in pencil. He pauses to read what he has just completed. Shakes his head in disgust. Starts to crumple up the paper, but stops. Smooths out the paper and uses the eraser. Begins writing again.

INT. WISDOM CHURCH - MORNING

Carl sits in the front of the church looking out over the typical sparse crowd of older women. The organist pumps the squeaky foot pedals of the bellows to play the prelude.

Sam comes in, gives Carl a little wave. Sits down in the second row of pews.

Fred and Dodie Thompson arrive and take their places near the back. Fred gives Carl a nod. Carl nods back.

The prelude over, Carl slowly stands, betraying stiffness and pain. As he walks to the pulpit, Wily Clawson comes through the door, followed by his ranch hands. Carl waits as they awkwardly take their seats.

Just as they are settled in, the Postmaster and his wife come through the door.

Next, the clerk from the General Store.

The little old lady from the post office.

Several more cowboys, including Cowboy Hank.

A dozen more of the town's people follow, including the garage owner and his mechanic George and his wife.

Two ranch families with children arrive. One is the Henry Johnson family, including daughter Sarah, who waves excitedly to Carl.

Gideon Gordon, all washed and hair slicked back, sneaks in to sit in a back pew.

Finally, Jeb Garrett, looking the same as usual, but absent the chaw, steps in and leans against the back wall.

The small sanctuary is nearly full. Carl stands silently beholding the crowd. He looks down at the order of worship and his sermon. After a moment, he looks up at the awaiting congregation, which sits stiffly.

CARL

Since this does not appear to be a typical Sunday, maybe it would be best to set aside the typical worship service.

Carl holds up his sermon text.

CARL

I had a wonderful sermon prepared about David and Goliath and the five smooth stones David picked up for his battle with the giant. Of course, I relate that as me being David taking on the Goliath of bull riding. -- Earlier in the week, I had even written an ending in which I triumph. -- That particular ending was torn up and thrown away as easily as I was this past Friday night.

The congregation laughs and begins to relax.

CARL

Anyway, this morning I would like to share a few thoughts with you, take some hymn requests, and spend some time in prayer. But don't worry, we won't forget the passing of the collection plates.

Chuckles. Some people feel for their wallets.

Carl walks from the pulpit, down to the congregation, grimacing as he navigates the three steps. He stands in the middle of the center aisle, even with the first pew, that remains empty despite the large crowd.

CARL

Friday night, as I sat on the back of that bull, I prayed to God for the courage of David and strength of Samson. Foolish prayers, in retrospect. -- But I also prayed that God be glorified in that moment. That was a good prayer, and it was answered. However, God's answer sure hurts like a dickens.

Carl rubs his back end as the congregation laughs.

CARL

You see, as I watched you all come through those doors this morning, I saw God being glorified. -- There's a Hebrew word, *chesed*, which means loving kindness. I learned about it in seminary, but today I experienced it, for your presence has surrounded me with God's loving kindness.

(MORE)

CARL (CONT'D)

And even though I was thrown from that bull -- oh, by the way, is the bull okay? I hope I didn't hurt it.

Laughter.

CARL

Even though I was thrown from that bull, I now know that I can get up and face life again. And that I don't face it alone. None of us face it alone. We have each other.

Carl walks back up to the pulpit.

CARL

That's what church is about. That's what community is about. That's what life is about. -- We belong to God and we belong to each other. We are not alone. Thank you for teaching me that.

People nod in understanding and agreement.

DISSOLVE TO:

MONTAGE of congregation singing hymns, in prayer, groups of people talking after worship, some shaking hands with Carl.

EXT. WISDOM CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Carl and Wily Clawson stand talking.

WILY

That was quite a message, Preacher. Glad I came.

CARL

Why did you come? I lost the bet.

WILY

(chuckling)

That wasn't really a bet. A bet has to have at least a slight chance of going one way or another. There was no chance of you staying on that bull.

CARL

I realize that now. So, why did you come?

WILY

Well, as I thought about it, it seemed to me that you must really care about this church stuff to go so far out on limb. So I decided to come and hear what you had to say. And I convinced some of my friends that they should give you a listen too.

CARL

Thank you.

WILY

Oh, and Sam threatened me bodily harm if I didn't show up.

Carl looks over to where Sam is chatting with the Postmaster and his wife.

CARL

Not a woman to be trifled with.

WILY

Just like her mother.

They are quiet for a moment as they both watch Sam.

CARL

Well, I hope you'll come again.

WILY

I won't be here every week, but I'll be back. And I imagine some of these other fellows will be back too.

CUT TO:

Carl talking to Cowboy Hank after church while he pets Hank's dog, who is in the bed of the pickup truck. Sam stands next to Carl.

CARL (V.O.)

I never had that many cowboys in church again, but there were at least a few every Sunday. But more importantly, I had many heartfelt conversations with the people of the valley. . .

DISSOLVE TO:

MONTAGE of Carl engaging residents of the valley in various activities.

CARL (V.O.)
In the cafe,

Carl sits at the lunch counter flanked by Cowboy Hank and another cowboy. They talk as they eat.

CARL (V.O.)
At the Post Office,

The little old lady and Postmaster visit with Carl.

CARL (V.O.)
On the trail driving cattle,

Fred Thompson rides alongside Carl amidst noisy, dusty cattle.

CARL (V.O.)
Around the campfire,

Wily Clawson's ranch hands sit in a circle around the fire with Carl. One has a beat up guitar that he plays while they all sing.

CARL (V.O.)
Trout fishing,

Sam and Wily Clawson share the river with Carl, who works a large trout to his awaiting basket.

CARL (V.O.)
Panning for gold,

Gideon Gordon comes over to see what Carl has panned. Carl holds up a small nugget. Gideon's eyes light up as he looks closely at the real gold.

CARL (V.O.)
Putting up hay,

Carl stands on top of a beaverslide with a pitchfork guiding hay over the top as it feathers down onto a growing haystack.

CARL (V.O.)
And even in front of the saloon.

Carl is leaned back on an old chair next to Jeb Garrett in front of the saloon. Carl spits perfectly into a can. Jeb nods in approval.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. FRED THOMPSON RANCH HOUSE - DAY

Fred Thompson hands Carl a large wooden plaque carved in the shape of a steer's skull. Words are burned into the wood.

CARL (V.O.)

As a going away present, Fred Thompson gave me a carved Bible passage from Paul's letter to the Romans.

CARL'S POV: The plaque

CARL (V.O.)

It read, "Suffering produces endurance; endurance produces character; character produces hope; and hope does not disappoint us."

Carl looks up from reading the plaque. He smiles broadly with misty eyes.

EXT. BIG HOLE VALLEY, MONTANA - DAY

The Packard Sedan drives down the valley road, kicking up dust as it goes past the haystacks and cattle.

CARL (V.O.)

So it was, in that summer of 1937, I came to Wisdom, Montana full of hope. I suffered and endured much, but I wasn't disappointed.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. FIELD EDUCATION OFFICE - DAY

On the wall hangs the carved steer head plaque from Fred Thompson. Also on the wall are photos of Carl and Sam fishing, riding horses, getting married, and a family portrait with kids.

CARL (O.C.)

I learned that while life's road to wisdom is sometimes dusty and bumpy. . .

On the desk is a nameplate sign that reads: REV. DR. CARL VANDERHOFF - DIRECTOR OF FIELD EDUCATION.

An older Carl Vanderhoff sits behind the desk. In front of the desk sits a young wide-eyed seminarian.

CARL

. . . if we travel it with faith,
through the grace of God, we will
arrive. -- And that's no bull.

The seminarian laughs. Carl stands. The seminarian also
stands. They shake hands.

CARL

Have a great summer in Montana,
Tom.

FADE TO BLACK.