

OUT OF THE LOOP

EXT. SOME TOWN WEST OF THE MISSISSIPPI - DAY

SUPER: "June 1875"

A stereotypical western township is laid out on the plains of the western United States. A lot of dust through the central main thoroughfare leads off into grassy yards and big, old houses.

A man sweeps the stoop of one of several stores on the main road through the town. This is TOM JOHNSON, a 45 year old man aged beyond his years. He turns and walks into the store.

The sign above the stoop proclaims: General Store.

INT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

Tom walks past several well-stocked aisles to a passage to behind the counter where many more items are stocked. A cash register rests on the counter top.

SARAH JOHNSON, a pretty girl of about 20 walks out of the back. She wears a plain dress and smiles upon seeing her father.

TOM

What I wouldn't give to not have to sweep the porch out there every time a coach rides by.

SARAH

Daddy, you've complained about that for years. I think we'll have to live with it.

TOM

Yes, but it doesn't mean I have to like it.

Two WOMEN enter the store. They look at Sarah and smile before walking into the store.

TOM

Good afternoon, Mrs. Rollins.

MRS. ROLLINS  
Afternoon, Tom. Nice day.

TOM  
Very. Anything we can help you  
find?

MRS. ROLLINS  
No, it's just a couple of little  
things. We'll be fine.

TOM  
All right. Let us know.

MRS. ROLLINS  
Thank you.

The women disappear into the store just as an older man enters. He looks around for a moment before walking to the counter. As he approaches, two other men enter the store and disappear within it.

Tom walks to the man.

TOM  
Afternoon, Paul. What can I get for  
you?

PAUL  
Dem bandits done made off wit mah  
shovel agin. I reckon I oughta git  
me another before I fall too far  
behind.

TOM  
Sorry to hear that. Anyone know  
anything about it?

PAUL  
Not a thing. How're you doin' Miss  
Sarah?

SARAH  
Very well, Mr. Samuels.

PAUL

You lookin' forward to later?

SARAH

Later?

PAUL

Oh, that's right. Nevermind I said nothin'.

TOM

Something going on?

Mrs. Rollins approaches the counter.

MRS. ROLLINS

You gonna get somethin', Paul, or just keep yackin' yer jaws all day?

PAUL

Sorry, Mrs. Rollins, just the shovel, Tom.

SARAH

I'll get it.

Sarah exits. Tom looks back to Paul.

TOM

Something happening to Sarah later?

PAUL

Oh, er, no.

MRS. ROLLINS

Paul is just talkin' out of turn, as usual. Now, if you don't mind, Tom, I'm in a hurry here. I need to get this home and be bac- oh, I have something to do later.

Tom looks at Mrs. Rollins, apparently mystified. He nods and takes her items: wine glasses and linen napkins.

TOM  
Having a celebration?

MRS. ROLLINS  
A little later.

TOM  
The glasses are thirty-five cents,  
and the napkins are thirty cents.  
That'd be sixty-five cents.

Tom types this into the register. Mrs. Rollins hands over the money.

MRS. ROLLINS  
Thank you.  
(to the woman with her)  
Let's go, Mildred.

The pair grabs their items and leaves as Sarah returns with the shovel.

SARAH  
Here you are, Mr. Samuels.

PAUL  
Thank you.

Paul takes the shovel from Sarah.

TOM  
Now what is going on later with my  
daughter?

PAUL  
These here shovels are still a  
dollar, right?

TOM  
Don't avoid the question, Paul.

Paul lays a dollar on the counter and backs away.

PAUL

I reckon I oughta be goin' now.  
Good day to ye.

Paul exits. Tom folds his arms.

TOM

Sarah, what is going on?

SARAH

I don't know, daddy.

They look out into the store for a silent moment. Tom turns to her.

TOM

Say, when is that boy that's been courting you coming back from the city?

SARAH

He only went up overnight. We should see him today, I would reckon.

She smiles distantly.

TOM

You seem mighty happy to have him back in town.

She shrugs shyly with another smile.

TOM

Those boys are trouble, I'm telling you.

The pair of men that walked in earlier approaches the counter. One of them stretches out his hand in greeting to Tom.

LUKE

Afternoon, Tom.

TOM

Luke, welcome back. We were just talking about Jim.

LUKE

Yeah, we're back, but Jim's at home. Sorry to disappoint, Sarah. He's coming around later.

TOM

Paul seemed to think something was going on later. You know anything about that?

Luke furrows his brow for a moment, but almost immediately relaxes again.

LUKE

Nah, that's just Paul talking. You know how he is.

Tom looks at the other man, JED, suspiciously.

TOM

Jed, you know anything?

JED

Nope. Not a thing. Can't say as I do.

TOM

Oh no?

JED

Nope. That's what I said. Nope.

TOM

Yes, I heard you.

LUKE

You see, Tom. Nothing happening.

JED

Yup, nothing.

LUKE

Now, we just came over for some emergency tools. Seems that we had ourselves a last minute request over at the tailor shop, and we done ran plum out of a lot of stuff all at once.

TOM

I see. How very...coincidental.

LUKE

Yes, we're all bent out of shape over it.

Luke places a few items on the counter: thread, buttons, and needles.

TOM

Four cents for the needles, the rather elegant buttons are a dollar twenty-five, and the thread is three cents.

He presses some buttons on the register.

TOM

Comes to a dollar thirty-two. What's the occasion?

LUKE

Occasion?

TOM

No one spends a dollar twenty-five on buttons without a special occasion.

LUKE

We're in a hurry.

Luke lays out the money on the counter. He takes his items and backs away.

LUKE

Good day, Tom.

JED

Nothing going on. Bye.

Luke and Jed exit. Tom shakes his head. He looks at Sarah. She looks just as mystified.

TOM

Girl, you know anything about this?

SARAH

I'm just as confused as you are, daddy. They're keeping something from us.

TOM

I think we both know that already. But I want to know what is going on. Mind the store.

SARAH

Yes, sir.

Tom walks around the counter and exits.

EXT. SOME TOWN WEST OF THE MISSISSIPPI

Tom walks into the road and looks around. People seem to be walking at a quicker pace than normal. He spots Mrs. Rollins exiting the Saloon with a bottle.

Tom squints his eyes to see into the windows of the Tailor shop where someone stands within having the expensive buttons sewn on a jacket.

MRS. KELLER, a woman in her fifties, walks along the sidewalk towards the General Store. Tom runs over to her and flags her down.

TOM

Mrs. Keller, how are you?

Mrs. Keller looks at Tom and smiles.

MRS. KELLER

I'm fine, Tom. How are you?

TOM

Good. Say, do you have any notion of what's going on around here.

MRS. KELLER

I don't want to lie to you, Tom. There is something going on, but I also can't tell you what it is.

TOM

Why not?

MRS. KELLER

Because I promised not to, that's why. You wouldn't have me break a promise, now, would you? Why, the Lord could take me home at any moment, and you want me to break a promise I made just this morning?

TOM

No, of course not. I'm sorry, Mrs. Keller.

MRS. KELLER

My advice to you is to stay in your shop, and provide the service you do so well. It won't be bad.

TOM

(defeated)

Very well. I'll do that. Good day, Mrs. Keller.

MRS. KELLER

Oh, I'll see you soon.

She glances across the distance to the Tailor Shop where a young man emerges wearing the coat with the expensive buttons. The young man looks nervous as his jacket is adjusted by Luke. This young man is JIM.

MRS. KELLER

Very soon, by the look of it.

TOM

Is Jim behind this?

MRS. KELLER

Go inside. Don't spoil it for everyone.

Tom nods.

TOM

Yes, ma'am.

With a final glance across to the Tailor Shop, Tom enters the General Store.

INT. GENERAL STORE

Tom enters and stands for a moment. Sarah looks up.

SARAH

Well?

TOM

Is Jim planning something?

SARAH

Not that I know of.

TOM

He looks mighty handsome in that jacket with the expensive buttons.

SARAH

Really?

Sarah picks up the front hem of her dress and runs to the front door of the shop. She looks out.

EXT. SOME TOWN WEST OF THE MISSISSIPPI

Jim leads Luke and Jed across the distance.

INT. GENERAL STORE

Sarah shrinks back.

SARAH

They're coming.

TOM

Well, let's get back behind the counter and find out what this is all about.

Soon, quite a few people enter the store. Tom and Sarah watch this with confusion in their faces. Mrs. Rollins enters with Mildred, the glasses, the napkins, a cake, and a bottle of wine.

TOM

Mrs. Rollins? What are you doing with all that?

Mrs. Rollins smiles and looks to the door behind her. Jim enters dressed to the nines, completed by the recently finished jacket. He looks at Sarah and smiles. She smiles in return.

TOM

Welcome back, Jim. Mind telling me what's going on?

Jim walks to him. They shake hands.

JIM

Yes sir. I don't think this will come as a surprise, but I wanted to make sure this was all done right.

TOM

All right.

JIM

Mr. Johnson, I think you know that I'm in love with Sarah. Her smile continues to brighten every moment I'm privileged to spend with her.

Sarah smiles in response. Tom breaks into a grin.

TOM

Go on...

JIM

Well, sir, what I wanted to ask was...

Jim takes a deep breath. Tom only watches him, amusement creeping onto his face.

JIM

I'd be honored if you'd grant me the privilege of marrying your daughter.

Sarah's hands shoot up to her mouth. Her eyes grow wide, but she is clearly smiling so widely, nothing can hide it.

TOM

Jim, I've known you your whole life. I've watched you grow from a boy to a man, and I've watched you learn your father's trade. I've watched you with my daughter, and I know very well how you feel about each other.

He turns back to Sarah. She looks at him. She brings down her hands and tries to look serious, but her smile continues to creep through.

TOM

Sarah, did you know about this?

Sarah takes a deep breath.

SARAH

We talked about it once or twice.

TOM

Do you want to spend your life with him?

She nods.

SARAH

Yes.

Tom looks at Jim.

TOM

You're a good man, Jim. Be good to her. You have my blessing.

Tom and Jim shake hands. Tom pulls Jim in for a hug.

JIM

Thank you, sir.

TOM

I couldn't ask for anyone better.

Jim steps back and looks at Sarah. Their eyes lock. Everyone looks on, silently. Sarah bites her lip with a huge smile. Jim takes her hands and kneels before her.

JIM

Sarah, there's not much more I can say that hasn't been said. I love you more than life itself. If you'll have me, I'd like to spend that life with you. So I'm asking you now, in front of all these people, will you marry me?

Sarah nods.

SARAH

Yes.

Everyone cheers. Jim rises to his feet and holds Sarah in his arms, swinging her around.

Behind them, Mrs. Rollins already has glasses of wine filled and is passing out cake. The young lovers pay no attention to any of it as they gaze into each others' eyes.

THE END