

Sam Houston Colt 45 Jones

(act one)

written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. WILD WEST - DAY

Hollering WAR CRIES and shooting arrows, a band of painted SAVAGES (18-40) gallops after a small wagon train.

The wagons race into a circle and the driver of one wagon - a SETTLER (40) - stands, aims his rifle, and FIRES!

A YOUNG SAVAGE (20) - circles the wagons, clutches his gut, keels over dead. His lifeless body flops against his horse's side, as the horse gallops on.

An OLDER SAVAGE (40) stops, bends over a small fire pit, ignites an arrow, looks up and sees -

a frightened boy, SAM (8), staring straight at him.

SAM

Noooo! Save me, Papa!

Terrified, Sam ducks behind the man seated at his side.

But the man - DANGER (45) - pushes Sam back at the Savage.

DANGER

Be a man, Samuel, be a man!

Face to face with

the Savage

Sam SCREAMS! Rears back, tumbles to the ground, jumps up and dashes away, past a row of anxious SPECTATORS (2-70).

APPLAUSE

WIDEN TO REVEAL: Spectators, dressed in their Sunday best, perch on bleachers around a riding ring and watch

A Wild West Show in progress.

In the front row sits Danger - tanned, rugged and handsome, with a blond handlebar mustache - peering after Sam.

The Savage turns, shoots his fiery arrow into a wagon. It ignites, and SETTLERS jump out of the inferno, into the dust.

APPLAUSE again, as Danger rises and heads off after his son.

SUPER: "FORT WORTH, TEXAS, 1871"

EXT. WILD WEST - BEHIND THE BLEACHERS - DAY

A carnival of Wild West games - shoot the savage, wrestle the bear, pound the railroad spike. A crowd of MERRYMAKERS (2-70) enjoys the fun.

Sam

races through the Crowd, a whirl of pumping arms and piston legs, then veers off toward a nearby grove of trees.

APPLAUSE erupts from the bleachers in the b.g., as Danger hustles into the carnival and scans the area for Sam.

Exasperated, he takes his hat off - golden locks tumble to his shoulders - and runs a hand through his hair.

A BORED MAN (40s) in the Crowd spots him, grows excited -

BORED MAN
It's Ranger Danger!

A PRETTY WOMAN (20s) looks up, all twitterpated.

PRETTY WOMAN
It's Major Ranger Danger Jones!

Danger smiles.

A LITTLE CUTIE (6) hands him her autograph book.

LITTLE CUTIE
Oh please, Ranger Danger, please
can I have your autograph?

Delighted, he signs, as Merrymakers gather 'round.

BORED MAN
Tell me, Ranger Danger - is it true
you chased a hundred rustlers into
Mexico and brought back a whole
herd of Texas longhorns, all by
yourself?

DANGER
Naw. Only ninety-nine uh them
rustlers ever gave me any trouble.
The hundredth one had a busted
knuckle.

PRETTY WOMAN
Oh, Ranger Danger - what a man!

She swoons and Danger catches her. She opens her eyes - looks into his, swoons again.

EXT. GROVE OF TREES - DAY

Sam lies face up under a tree, hyper-ventilating in fear. He's scrawny, and not exactly the hero type. Sam stops panting, calms down, rubs his eyes... and cries.

INT. WIDOW MOORE'S BOARDING HOUSE - DAY

SAM'S BEDROOM

A grown-up Sam - 24 and no longer scrawny - lies in bed and rubs his eyes, waking up.

SUPER: "16 YEARS LATER"

KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK! A woman shouts from behind the door -

WIDOW MOORE (O.S.)
Samuel! Get up, Samuel! It's
graduation day!

Sam bolts upright, excited. Graduation! He leaps out of bed, wearing a night shirt, and dashes

OUT THE DOOR

PAST THE WIDOW MOORE (50s)

DOWN THE STAIRS, OUT THE FRONT DOOR, AND ONTO...

EXT. WIDOW MOORE'S BOARDING HOUSE - DAY

THE BOARDWALK in front of her house.

Overhead, the Widow sticks her head out the window, shouts -

WIDOW MOORE
Sam! What about your clothes!

Sam screeches to a stop. Looks down. Sees hairy legs and bare feet sticking out of his night shirt. Embarrassed, he covers his crotch, turns, and faces

two BEAUTIFUL GALs (20s), twirling parasols.

SAM
Hello.

Horrified, they fend him off with their parasols. Ouch!
 Sam retreats to the house, disappears inside.

EXT. TEXAS RANGERS' FORT AND ACADEMY - DAY

SUPER: "OUTSIDE OF FORT WORTH, TEXAS"

A huge wooden fort. Above it flies the Texas Ranger flag - a star inside a circle. Down at the gate, several buckboards full of FAMILIES file into the compound.

Above the gate is a banner: "CONGRATULATIONS, CLASS OF '87."

EXT. TEXAS RANGERS' FORT AND ACADEMY - DAY

INSIDE THE COMPOUND

Families sit and face a makeshift stage, where four seasoned TEXAS RANGERS (60s) sit, holding rifles. One of them is Danger, aged 61. Silver-haired now, he still has his handlebar mustache - and a bit of a stomach.

Lined up beside the stage are twelve GRADUATES (20s) in their best duds, including Sam - sporting a new black eye.

The Graduates raise their right hands and look up to the stage, where an aging ranger, JEB (60s), stands behind a podium and reads -

JEB

Do ya'all swear undying allegiance
 to the Great State of Texas?

ALL 12 GRADUATES

We swear!

JEB

Do ya'all swear to enforce the law,
 protect the innocent, pursue all
 lawbreakers, and bring 'em in to
 justice, so help you God?

ALL 12 GRADUATES

We swear!

JEB

By the power invested in me, I
 hereby appoint you-all privates in
 Battalion B, of the Special Forces
 of the Texas Rangers!

CHEERS and APPLAUSE

Jeb picks up a rolled-up diploma, reads -

JEB
Cecil Beecham Lamar.

APPLAUSE, as CECIL (20s) walks across the stage, gets his diploma, shakes hands, then exits down the other side.

JEB
Leander Travis Johnson.

APPLAUSE, as LEANDER (20s) gets his diploma, shakes, exits.

JEB
Samuel Houston Colt 45 Jones.

LAUGHTER.

Danger stands - COCKS his rifle - the laughter STOPS.

Up walks Sam. He gets his diploma, shakes, walks across the stage, trips, and tumbles into the lap of somebody's GRANNY.

| | |
|-----|--------|
| SAM | GRANNY |
| Ow! | Ow! |

LAUGHTER.

Danger closes his eyes, mortified.

LATER

A punch-and-cookies reception is in full swing, when

SHERIFF DAN (40s), red-haired, wiry and bow-legged, gallops his horse into the compound.

JEB
Sheriff Dan!

SHERIFF DAN
Mad Mack and his gang are on the
rampage!

A BUZZ from the crowd.

SHERIFF DAN
They attacked a wagon train this
morning, killed everyone on board,
including women and children.

OUTRAGE, *ad lib*, from the crowd.

SHERIFF DAN
Then they stole all the guns and
horses, and headed for the
panhandle.

SOMEONE'S GRANDPA
This is an outrage!

SOMEONE'S MOTHER
Mad Mack must be stopped!

WHOOPS of agreement. Sheriff Dan turns to Jeb.

SHERIFF DAN
If you can give me six rangers on
fast horses - then we'll track 'em
down, and bring 'em in to justice.

More WHOOPS.

JEB
Who will ride with Sheriff Dan?

ONLY 11 GRADUATES
I will!

Sam backs away, hyper-ventilating.

Danger appears at his side.

DANGER
Be a man, Samuel, be a man.

He propels Sam forward. Sam crashes into Sheriff Dan, and they tumble to the ground, face to face. Sam on top.

SAM
I'll g-g-g-go!

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Sheriff Dan and his posse - Cecil, Leander, Sam, and three other Graduates - ride across the sandy terrain, then stop. They stare up at --

EXT. DEVIL'S PUNCH BOWL - OUTER WALLS - DAY

A huge outcropping of red rock, with a narrow passageway into the middle.

SHERIFF DAN
The Devil's Punch Bowl. This could
be a trap, men.

A CHORUS OF YEP's from the Graduates.

SHERIFF DAN
Guns at the ready - look sharp!

A CHORUS OF RIFLES coming into hands.

SHERIFF DAN
Cecil - you cover my back. John,
William, Henry, Leander - you cover
our flank.

SAM
Wh-wh-wh-what about me?

The Sheriff's face shows he'd like to forget about Sam.

SHERIFF DAN
Right. You stay here and make sure
nobody sneaks up from behind.

Sam looks over his shoulder, at the wide open desert, where
no man could hide.

SAM
Okay.

Sheriff Dan leads the rest of the posse into

THE NARROW PASSAGEWAY

and out of the sun. Uneasy, everyone looks around, rifles up
and ready. Behind them, silhouetted against the sunlight, is

Sam,

his image growing smaller and smaller, as the posse heads
deeper and deeper into the Devil's Punch Bowl.

EXT. DEVIL'S PUNCH BOWL - INNER BOWL - DAY

The MACINTOSH GANG - six in all - perch on ledges, high atop
rock walls.

Below them, into a natural rock bowl rides the posse. Sheriff
Dan stops, looks around.

SHERIFF DAN
There's no way out!

High overhead, red-bearded Mad MACK (30s) waves across the bowl at One-eyed BUTCH (30s), with a patch over one eye.

Butch stands over the end of the passageway, leans on a huge board, and shoves a gigantic boulder over the ledge.

It comes CRASHING down and blocks the passageway.

CECIL

Take cover wherever you can!

A mad scramble for cover - as Mad Mack takes aim from above.

EXT. DEVIL'S PUNCH BOWL - OUTER WALLS - DAY

An uneasy sentry, Sam shoulder his rifle, faces the open desert, and WHISTLES to keep up his courage.

A GUNSHOT rings out. Sam jumps! ANOTHER! Sam's horse bolts off across the desert, while Sam hangs on for dear life. He drops his rifle, it hits the ground, and BAM!

Sam falls off his horse, a gunshot wound in his leg. He looks down, sees blood - SCREAMS - and faints.

EXT. DESERT - SUNDOWN

A face fades into view and comes into focus - an Indian.

Sam SCREAMS, tries to rise, but strong hands hold him still.

The face stares down at him... solemn, calm, Indian.

PRONTO

Rest.

The face goes out of focus, fades from view.

EXT. DEVIL'S PUNCH BOWL - INNER BOWL - NIGHT

Sam lies by a campfire on a bed of skins. Beside him crouches PRONTO (20), his Indian savior, in buckskins and braids. Pronto takes a cloth from Sam's head, dunks it in a nearby stream, returns it to Sam's forehead. Then sits back on his haunches and waits.

EXT. DEVIL'S PUNCH BOWL - INNER BOWL - DAY

Sam opens his eyes to see Pronto, stoking the fire.

SAM
Pronto!? Where'd you come from?

PRONTO
Hello, Sam.

SAM
Am I dead? Is this heaven?

Pronto eyes Sam through the flames.

PRONTO
If it is, then we're both in a lot
of trouble.

Sam glances around, sees the rock walls and bolts upright.
Ow! He grabs his leg.

PRONTO
Easy, Sam!

SAM
But the others... where are the
others?

Pronto looks across the clearing at six newly-dug graves.
Atop each mound hangs a pair of spurs, a Texas Ranger star,
and a ten gallon hat.

SAM
Nooooo!

PRONTO
They were brave, very brave.
(frowns)
I can't figure out why you weren't
pumped full of lead, too.

SAM
You don't have to be pumped full of
lead, to be brave.

PRONTO
Sure you do. They had more holes in
them than a leaky teepee. All you
had was one.

Sam pokes at his leg.

SAM
Ow!

Pronto helps Sam lean back on the skins.

SAM
Hey, what are you doing here,
anyway?

PRONTO
Oh, I just happened to be in the
neighborhood.

SAM
Come on, Pronto, you didn't just
show up out of nowhere. Fess up!

PRONTO
You really want to know?

SAM
I really want to know.

PRONTO
You want me to tell you?

SAM
I want you to tell me.

Pronto grabs Sam and shakes him like a rag doll.

PRONTO
I want to know why you left me all
alone that night, without a "see
you later" or a "goodbye Pronto!"
You stupid, honky, white man,
punk!!

Terrified, Sam draws in loud, asthmatic breaths.

Instantly remorseful, Pronto pats Sam on the back.

PRONTO
I'm sorry, Sammy, really I am. I
guess I was a little more upset
than I thought I was.

Sam nods, gasps for breath.

PRONTO
It's just that I've been on the
road for over a year, now. And I
haven't had anyone to talk to since
you left. And the rage - the
despair - the anguish - it's all
pent up inside of me. You know what
I mean?

Sam shakes his head, "No."

PRONTO

But I feel better, now. Yes, I
really think I'm feeling better
now, Sam!

He gives Sam a hug - Sam passes out.

EXT. DEVIL'S PUNCH BOWL - INNER BOWL - NIGHT

Pronto stares into the fire, while Sam sleeps in the b.g. The flames rise up, as Pronto remembers his past...

EXT. FLASHBACK - SMALL INDIAN VILLAGE - DAY

And the place he once called home: A few teepees on an open plain, and a happy Indian tribe. SQUAWS sew moccasins. CHILDREN play Cowboys and Indians. Young BRAVES arm wrestle.

And white-haired CHIEF RUNNING BULL (50s) sits cross-legged by an open fire, happily smoking a peace pipe.

A Younger Pronto, 18, grooms a painted pony. He stops, looks up, hears a LOW RUMBLE. The pony rears, the rumble grows LOUDER. Recognition flashes on Pronto's face --

YOUNGER PRONTO

Stampede!

-- as a thundering herd of BUFFALO bears down on the village.

Indians look up, surprised - no time to scream - as a thousand hooves knock them down like bowling pins.

Pronto dashes to a pile of boulders, leaps on top, crumples in pain, grabs his leg and passes out - as a river of angry buffalo streams around his rocky fortress.

LATER

Sam, 22, rides up to the flattened village and sees Indians, squashed like road-kill toads, lying in the dust, their faces frozen in surprise.

Pronto MOANS.

Sam dismounts, picks his way over to the boulders, and discovers Pronto - un-squashed and alive.

INT. FLASHBACK - "CRAZY-QUILT" TEEPEE - NIGHT

Inside the patchwork teepee, Sam and Pronto eat by firelight.

Pronto's leg is splinted, propped up on a bed of skins.

PRONTO
What's your name, paleface?

SAM
Sam.

PRONTO
Just "Sam?"

SAM
My daddy calls me Samuel.

PRONTO
My daddy calls me, "Boy Who Runs As Swift As Deer." At least, he used to - before the stampede.

SAM
That's a silly name.
(he mimics)
"Come here, Boy Who Runs As Swift As Deer! Supper's ready!" By the time they finish calling you - your supper's cold. What you need is a nickname.

PRONTO
I do not.

SAM
I've got it, "Pronto!" Yeah, I'll call you Pronto.

PRONTO
You will not!

SAM
"Come for supper, Pronto!"
(smiles)
You'll always eat your supper warm.

EXT. FLASHBACK - THE FOREST - DAY

SERIES OF SHOTS: PRONTO AND SAM BECOME FRIENDS

A) SPRINGTIME: Pronto leans on Sam and practices walking.

B) SUMMER: Sam watches as Pronto walks by himself, aided only by a walking stick.

C) FALL: Sam and Pronto race into a clearing, and Sam tags a tree two seconds before Pronto does. Pronto pants -

PRONTO

You're pretty fast for a white man.

SAM

You're pretty slow for a red man.

Pronto tackles Sam and they wrestle like bear cubs.

INT. FLASHBACK - "CRAZY-QUILT" TEEPEE - NIGHT

An unoccupied bear-skin lies on one side of the teepee, while Pronto snores on the other side. He awakens, looks around.

PRONTO

Sam? Hey Sam! Where'd he go?

EXT. FLASHBACK - "CRAZY-QUILT" TEEPEE - NIGHT

Pronto walks outside, scans the area, awash in moonlight.

PRONTO

Saaaaaammy! Hello!?

EXT. FLASHBACK - SOMEWHERE IN THE FOREST - NIGHT

Sam rides between tall trees. Tears stream down his face.

PRONTO (O.S.)

Saaaaaammy!

SAM

(sobbing)

Goodbye, Pronto.

He spurs his horse, rides on.

EXT. PRESENT DAY - DEVIL'S PUNCH BOWL - INNER BOWL - NIGHT

The fire has burned low. Pronto looks at the sleeping Sam.

PRONTO

Why didn't you tell me you were gonna leave?

Sam rolls over, BELCHES like a champ, and sleeps on.

EXT. DEVIL'S PUNCH BOWL - INNER BOWL - DAY

Sam sits up, stretches, sniffs the air.

SAM

Yum! What's for breakfast?

PRONTO

Fried rat.

SAM

Again?

The two eat in silence for a minute. Then -

PRONTO

Why didn't you tell me you were gonna leave, that night in the forest?

SAM

Ohhhhh - no particular reason.

PRONTO

Buffalo pucky! You planned it for weeks, and I want to know why.

SAM

Can't a man have a little peace over his breakfast?

PRONTO

No!

SAM

Well, I'm not telling.

PRONTO

Oh, yes you are.

Sam shakes his head, "No way."

Pronto drops his plate, grabs Sam's shirt, gets in his face.

PRONTO

Spill it, paleface!

Mortified, Sam whispers -

SAM

I was afraid.

PRONTO

What?

SAM
I was afraid.

PRONTO
What??

SAM
(shouts)
I was afraid, you moron!

PRONTO
What was so scary, that you
couldn't tell me about it?

SAM
(whispers)
Crying.

PRONTO
What?

SAM
I was afraid of crying.

PRONTO
Crying! You mean, like boo-hoo-hoo?

Sam nods. Pronto bursts out laughing.

SAM
It's not funny! People have laughed
at me all my life, and I'm sick of
it!

PRONTO
Gee Sam, it can't be all that bad.

SAM
Well, it is.

Pronto calms down, thinks for a minute, then brightens.

PRONTO
I know what you need!

LATER

Sam and Pronto sit, face to face, in the clearing.

Pronto holds up a tiny mirror, watches Sam smear BLACK WAR
PAINT around his own eyes.

PRONTO

Good! Now, put two blue stripes,
running from the inside of your
eyes, all the way down to the
bottom of your cheeks.

Sam dips his finger in blue, applies the stripes. He judges
the effect in the mirror, bares his teeth, GROWLS.

PRONTO

You're bad!

SAM

I'm bad!

PRONTO

You're mean!

SAM

I'm mean!

PRONTO

You're a fighting machine!

Sam looks at the mirror - wrinkles his nose. Euwwww.

SAM

I'm sorry, Pronto. I like covering
my face, don't get me wrong. But
this is a little extreme, ya know?

PRONTO

You like covering your face? Then
why don't you put a bag over it!

SAM

You don't have to get snippy. All I
want is something not quite so --

PRONTO

Savage?

SAM

Yeah! That's it, not so savage.

Disgusted, Pronto grabs the war paint, carries it to his
horse, stuffs it in his saddle bag.

A pair of purple silk bloomers falls out.

SAM

Those look interesting.

PRONTO

You wear ladies underwear on your head - you're riding alone.

SAM

Hey, they didn't fall out of my saddle bag.

PRONTO

I happen to be carrying those for my wife.

SAM

But you're not married.

PRONTO

They're for when I meet someone and get married.

SAM

Good, then you can give them to me, instead.

PRONTO

I will not!

LATER

Sam holds up a PURPLE SILK EYE MASK and ties it on his head. Pronto holds the mirror up, while Sam admires his image and throws some punches in the air.

SAM

I'm bad! I'm mean. I'm a fighting machine!

PRONTO

Wow, I'm scared.

SAM

This is great. Hey Pronto, I got an idea! We could ride the range together - the masked man and the Indian!

PRONTO

The Indian and the masked man.

SAM

Whatever. We could ride the range together - right all the wrongs, protect the innocent, and save lives!

PRONTO

Yeah! Okay! Especially pretty women!

SAM

Huh?

PRONTO

We could save the lives of pretty women!

SAM

All right!

(suddenly serious)

And we'll bring Mad Mack and One-eyed Butch to justice.

A clap of THUNDER from above.

EXT. DEVIL'S PUNCH BOWL - INNER BOWL - DAY

Pronto pounds a cross into the ground, at the head of a freshly-dug grave. Now there are seven graves.

Sam - still masked - takes the old, mangled hat off his head, places it on top of the cross and steps back.

SAM

Rest in peace - and good riddance.
The old "Sam" is gone forever.

On top of his head he places a new white hat, swathed with a purple hat band. He looks at his faithful Indian companion.

SAM

It's gonna be a brand new day.

EXT. DEVIL'S PUNCH BOWL - OUTER WALLS - DAY

Out of the passageway gallops the dynamic duo, doubled up on Pronto's painted horse, SPROUT. Sam sits behind Pronto and hangs on tight. He smacks Sprout's rump, hollers -

SAM

Hi-yo Sprout - awaaaay!

Sprout rears, Sam slides off - ouch! - and Pronto and Sprout gallop off across the desert.

SAM

Stupid horse.

EXT. GRASSLANDS - DAY

A grassy plateau. Pronto and Sam come into view, both atop Sprout. Carefully, they study the ground below them. Pronto dismounts, squats beside a pile of steaming horse manure, and gives Sam the "thumbs up" sign.

Sam is quietly excited. He dismounts.

Pronto points to the valley beyond the plateau. Sam nods, tethers Sprout to a scrub oak, and the two tiptoe up to the edge of the plateau, lie on their bellies, peek over to see -

A small herd of WILD HORSES, grazing 100 yards away.

One tall white STALLION stands sentry, as the others graze. The Stallion has its back to Sam and Pronto.

Pronto and Sam exchange a look. This is it! And sneak back to Sprout. Pronto starts to mount, but Sam stops him, whispers -

SAM
I wanna do it.

PRONTO
No.

Sam grabs the reins.

SAM
There's a first time for
everything!

PRONTO
No!

A WHINNY comes from over the hill. Sam and Pronto freeze - listening. Silence. Pronto grabs the reins, hisses -

PRONTO
I could do this in my sleep!
(under his breath)
White men! So insecure.

He mounts his horse, fashions two lassos from two lariats, ties both lariats to his saddle horn, then lays one lasso on either side of the saddle.

Pouting, Sam slithers back to the plateau's edge, studies the stallion, then gives Pronto the "thumbs up" sign.

Pronto judges the wind - good - then quietly steers Sprout

DOWN TO THE VALLEY,

and lassoes the Stallion around the neck!

The Stallion rears, bolts off in a panic.

Pronto chases it, lassoes it with his second lariat, rides to a tree, undoes the second lariat from his saddle horn and ties it around the tree trunk.

Then he jumps off his horse and shouts -

PRONTO

Take him out, Sprout!

Sprout bolts away from the Stallion, who is lassoed twice: one rope tied to the tree, the other to Sprout's saddle horn.

The Stallion charges at Pronto

but Pronto stands his ground

as Sprout runs out the slack, and WHAM!

Sprout and the Stallion both pull up sharply, as Sprout's rope stretches taut, and

the Stallion is stopped, inches away from Pronto's face.

The Stallion rears, but Pronto stands his ground. Foiled, the Stallion turns around and runs straight for Sprout.

PRONTO

Take him out, again, Sprout!

Sprout runs the rope out again -

until both ropes stretch taut in opposite directions, and the Stallion is caught between the tree and Sprout.

PRONTO

Good work, Sprout!

Sam runs up.

SAM

Wow, that was great! Where did you learn to do a stunt like that!?

Pronto takes a halter and a wide strip of leather from his pocket - shoots Sam a look.

PRONTO

I'm an Indian?

Pronto approaches the Stallion - it's wide-eyed and fearful - and soothes him, speaking in the Powatahanie tongue (with subtitles) -

PRONTO

You are a noble warrior. I apologize for taking you captive.

Stallion quiets down.

PRONTO

But my friend here, Sam, needs your muscles and your speed to help him ride the range --

He slips the halter on.

PRONTO

-- so he can save lives, and rescue pretty women.

Gently pulls the Stallion's head down.

PRONTO

You won't be alone. You'll have old Sprout to keep you company.

Sprout WHINNIES.

PRONTO

He has many stories to tell.

He covers the Stallion's eyes with the leather.

PRONTO

Sprout was once like you --

Ties the leather into a blindfold.

PRONTO

-- but he really doesn't mind his new life, at all.

Sprout STOMPS his hoof three times.

Pronto whispers in the Stallion's ear -

PRONTO

You'll see.

All is calm.

EXT. DEVIL'S PUNCH BOWL - OUTER WALLS - DAY

Looking grim, Danger, Jeb, and a few Young Graduates ride silently into the passageway and disappear.

The CLIP CLOP sound of the horses' hooves tapers off, until all is SILENT for a beat. Then a cry pierces the air -

DANGER (O.S.)
Nooooooooooooo!!!!!!!!!!!!

EXT. DEVIL'S PUNCH BOWL - INNER BOWL - DAY

Danger throws himself on Sam's grave.

DANGER
My boy! My boy!

Jeb squats next to Danger, puts a hand on his shoulder.

JEB
Be a man, Danger, be a man.

Danger looks up - horrified!

EXT. CATTLE RANGE - DAY

The sun blazes down onto the sunburned head of cowman CAL - 50 and tough as jerky - buried in the dirt, up to his neck.

Nearby is an ant hill, and on Cal's nose a RED ANT scouts for food. Cal looks down, cross-eyed, tries to blow the Ant off.

The critter stays, crawls into Cal's nostril.

EXT. COWMAN CAL'S RANCH HOUSE - DAY

A thriving ranch, with barns, a corral, and a big house.

On the veranda of the house stands cowgirl ROSE - 22, a sweeter, feminine version of Cal. She shades her eyes and looks out across the range.

ROSE
Where on earth can he be?

She disappears in the house, comes out tying on a straw hat - a fake yellow rose is on the brim - and hustles to the barn.

EXT. CATTLE RANGE - DAY

Rose rides up to Cal.

ROSE

Pops!

She dismounts, kneels, brushes ants from his face, stands, squashes the ant trail with her boots, kneels again.

CAL

Rose!

ROSE

Who did this to you, Pops?

CAL

They stole a hundred head of our prize Black Angus!

She fetches her canteen, gives him a drink.

CAL

We're ruined, Rose, ruined!

ROSE

Who did this, Pops, who?

CAL

(angry)
Mad Mack and One-eyed Butch.

Rose smashes the ant hill, places her hat on Cal's head.

ROSE

Can you hang on 'till I get help?

He nods. She turns to leave.

CAL

Rose?

(looks up at the hat)
Would you mind?

She turns back, takes the rose off the hat, then -

ROSE

I'll get you out of there, Pops.
And then I'm gonna find someone -
anyone, in this wild and lawless
land - who's not afraid of Mad Mack
and One-eyed Butch!

Over "The William Tell Overture"

CUT TO

EXT. PLAINS - DAY

The galloping hooves of a white Stallion, as they fly across the land. THUNDERING, THUNDERING fast as the wind.

EXT. COWMAN CAL'S RANCH HOUSE - DAY

SUPER: "MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE RANCH"

On the veranda, Rose hands a dirty Cal a glass of lemonade. The sound of THUNDERING HOOVES approaches, and Rose looks up to see -

Sam gallop into view, a vision of glory

as Pronto and Sprout bring up the rear.

Sam halts in front of the house. The Stallion rears, settles down, Sam tips his hat.

SAM

Ma'am?

Rose clasps her hands - the universal sign of hope.

ROSE

Oh thank you! Thank you for coming,
masked man!

Sam looks at Cal, then back at Rose. A heroic smile.

SAM

You take care of your daddy, Miss
Rose. I will take care of Mad Mack!

ROSE

Oh thank you, thank you, Mister,
ah..? I don't even know your name.

SAM

Just call me --
(a Mona Lisa smile)
-- the Straaaaaange Loner!

He waves his hat in the air, his horse rears up again.

SAM

Hi-yo Silverstein, awaaay!

He gallops off across the land, as "The William Tell Overture" swells up again - and Pronto and Sprout bring up the rear.

EXT.FORT WORTH HOME FOR RETIRED HEROES - DAY - (ESTABLISHING)

SUPER: "MEANWHILE, BACK IN FORT WORTH"

At a boarding house on a side street, a sign hangs over a door. It reads: "RETIRED HEROES ONLY. NO CRY BABIES!"

INT. HOME FOR RETIRED HEROES - DANGER'S BEDROOM - DAY

A functional decor. Danger sucks in his protruding gut, struggles to strap a double-holstered gun belt around his waist, then looks over at Jeb, who sits and watches.

DANGER

Nobody kills my boy and gets away with it.

JEB

I know you're angry, Danger, but ya gotta remember, we ain't as spry as we used to be.

Danger grabs his rifle, throws a bandoleer full of bullets over his shoulder, heads for the door. Jeb stands.

JEB

You can't ride all day, sleep rough all night - day in, day out, like you used to. It'll kill ya.

Danger grabs his bedroll, turns to Jeb -

DANGER

It's only pain.

EXT. FORT WORTH - HOME FOR RETIRED HEROES - DAY

Danger exits the door, mounts his horse, trots off down the street. Jeb watches him leave, when

BAM! BAM!

Shots ring out, and Jeb goes running

DOWN THE STREET

to see Danger, lying in the road, a bullet in his shoulder.

SNAKE EYES SUE (O.S.)
Ahhh, ha-ha-ha-ha!

Jeb looks over to see SNAKE EYES SUE (40), an aging dance-hall floozy, straddling a fast horse and holding a Winchester rifle - pointed straight at Jeb.

JEB
Snake Eyes Sue!

SNAKE EYES SUE
That'll learn him, the little skunk! Put me behind bars again, for dealing off the bottom of the deck? I don't think so. Ahhh, ha-ha-ha-ha!

She gallops off down the road. Jeb reaches for his gun - comes up empty handed. He's not wearing one! He turns back to Danger, cradles him in his arms.

JEB
Speak to me, pardner.

Danger's eyes flutter open. He whispers -

DANGER
Whisky.

JEB
He's alive!

EXT. WIDE RIVER - GOOD-GUY SIDE - DAY

Pronto and Sam trot into view. Pronto points to the ground.

PRONTO
They crossed the river here.

SAM
Really, how can you tell?

Pronto points to the other side of the river, where 100 BLACK ANGUS graze on fresh grass.

SAM
Oh.

Sam steers Silverstein toward the water. Pronto stays put. Sam looks back - what's up?

PRONTO

So, do you know for sure that Mad Mack and Butch aren't waiting for us on the other side, or are you just guessing?

Sam returns to Pronto's side.

SAM

W-w-w-what'll we do?

PRONTO

We wait until nightfall.

SAM

Good idea.

They wait... and wait... until... CRASH! Night falls.

EXT. WIDE RIVER - GOOD-GUY SIDE - NIGHT

And all is dark. Pronto turns to Sam.

PRONTO

You cross upstream, and I'll cross down. Then we'll sneak up on 'em by foot and take 'em by surprise.

SAM

Roger.

PRONTO

Pronto.

SAM

What?

EXT. WIDE RIVER - BAD-GUY SIDE - NIGHT

On the other side of the river,

YARDS DOWNSTREAM, Pronto and Sprout ride out of the water and head for some large boulders. Meanwhile,

YARDS UPSTREAM, Sam and Silverstein ride out of the water and head for some trees. Silverstein walks under an oak.

A low limb peels Sam off his horse. He falls to the ground, conks his head. Ow!

Silverstein stops, sniffs his face, licks it. Sam giggles.

SAM

Stop.

Silverstein licks again. Sam giggles again.

SAM

No, stop.

Silverstein stops. Sam passes out.

DOWNSTREAM

Pronto tethers Sprout to a large boulder, then sneaks up to the Black Angus by the riverside. He pats one STEER's side, whispers -

PRONTO

I'll be back.

The Steer MOOOOOOOOOOOOS, loud and long.

PRONTO

Sssshhhh!

The Steer MOOOS, soft and short. Pronto nods, peers into the night, looks upstream.

PRONTO

Where is that masked man?

He spots A CAMPFIRE 100 yards away in the trees, and dashes - commando style - from object to object,

closer to the fire

until he sees

Mad Mack and One-eyed Butch

eating by firelight. They argue. Mack in a Scots brogue -

MACK

And I say we take 'em to market,
first thing, the morning!

And Butch in a hillbilly twang -

BUTCH

That's what I done tol' you to do
with them thar steers, yesterday,
Mack.

Mack draws his gun.

MACK
I'm the one giving orders around
here - Butchy Boy.

Butch puts his hands over his good eye, wails -

BUTCH
Please don't nail my good eye,
Mack! I'd be useless as uh old
hunting dog, if'n I couldn't see
nuthin'.

MACK
(smiles)
I like to see a grown man cry.

He holsters his gun.

MACK
That's why I'm gonna let you keep
your stupid eye.

BEHIND A NEARBY TREE,

Pronto looks away from the campfire and scans the area.

PRONTO
Where is that masked man?

Pronto sneaks back to

THE RIVER

THUD! Pronto trips, falls, comes face to face with the
sleeping Sam.

SECONDS LATER

Water pours onto Sam's face. Sam sputters, bolts upright, and
a hand clamps over his mouth.

PRONTO (O.S.)
Don't make a sound.

Wide-eyed, Sam nods. Behind Sam's shoulder we see Pronto.
Pronto releases his hand.

SAM
Helllllllllllllp!

BUTCH (O.S.)
What was that!

MACK (O.S.)
Shut up Butch, and listen!

PRONTO
Doggone it Sam, I said to be quiet.

Pronto hauls Sam into the saddle, smacks Silverstein's rump.

PRONTO
Now, ride!

Silverstein takes off, with a woozy Sam on board. "The William Tell Overture" plays, as Sam and Silverstein thunder around the grove of trees twice, then head straight for

MACK AND BUTCH'S CAMP.

They sail over the campfire, and gallop off into the dark.

BUTCH
Who was that masked man!?

Mack fires - BAM! BAM!

SAM
Oh my gosh! They're shooting at us,
Silverstein!

He holds on tight, as Silverstein bolts off into the night.

MEANWHILE, ON THE OTHER SIDE OF CAMP

Pronto rides up, unties Mack and Butch's horses, smacks them on the rump - and off they GALLOP.

MACK/BUTCH
Our horses!

Mack fires at Pronto. BAM! BAM!

Pronto ducks, thunders off on Sprout, weaves in and out of the trees, and heads for

THE RIVER

Where Silverstein and Sam swim like mad, to get across. And like rats following the Pied Piper, Black Angus pour into the river and swim behind Sam.

Pronto and Sprout herd the stragglers into the water, then jump in. They are half way across, when Mack and Butch run up on foot. BAM! BAM!

But Sam and Pronto are already out of range.

MACK

Curse you - masked man! You haven't heard the last of Mad Mack and One-eyed Butch!

BUTCH

Yeah! Yeah! What he said!

EXT. COWMAN CAL'S RANCH HOUSE - CORRAL - DAY

Rose, Cal, and four COWBOYS (30s) finish herding Black Angus into a huge corral. With WHOOPS of joy, they turn to Sam.

ROSE

How'd you do it, Strange Loner?

CAL

How'd you get all them steers back from Mad Mack and live to tell about it?

SAM

Well...

He hops on top of the fence, his audience gathers close.

SAM

I laugh at danger, I sneer at fear,
I --

ROSE

Did you track 'em to the river?

SAM

I tracked 'em to the river. Where I knew my only hope was to laugh at danger, and sneer at --

EAGER COWBOY

Did you take 'em by surprise?

SAM

I took 'em by surprise.

Pronto COUGHS.

SAM

I waited until nightfall, then I crossed the river with my faithful companion --

ROSE

Silverstein?

SAM
Silverstein.

Pronto CLEARS his throat, COUGHS.

ROSE
(to Cal)
That's the name of his horse.

SAM
Then, all of a sudden --

EAGER COWBOY
You were face to face with Mad
Mack!

SAM
I was face to face with Mad Mack.
He had a gun in my ribs, and I was
so close to him, I could smell his
fear.

COWBOY
Wow.

CAL
And then?

SAM
Why, I laughed in his face.

EAGER COWBOY
Wow.

SAM
I sneered at his fear, and --

EAGER COWBOY
Then you wrestled him to the ground
and grabbed his gun!

SAM
Then I wrestled him to the ground
and grabbed his gun.

Pronto begins to MUTTER to himself.

ROSE
Now tell the truth, Mr. Loner.
Somebody else was there, too.
Right?
(eagerly)
So, what did you do to Butch?

SAM

Well, unbeknownst to me, One-eyed Butch was standing right behind me, the whole time. And before I knew it, he conked me on the head and left a bump, right here.

He bends over, shows them the bump on the back of his head.

SAM

Knocked me out cold. But soon, I had help, from my faithful companion --

CAL

Silverstein?

SAM

Silverstein.

PRONTO

Buffalo pucky!

CAL

Where'd you get such a smart horse, Strange Loner?

PRONTO

Yeah, tell 'em, Strange Loner - where did you get that horse!?

SAM

Oh, that's another story.

PRONTO

You bet it is.

ROSE

(to Pronto)

Ssshhh!

(to Sam)

Go on, Mr. Loner.

SAM

Well, when you've captured a wild stallion and tamed him yourself, he is your best friend.

Pronto blows a RASPBERRY. Rose gives him a dirty look.

SAM

There's nothing that horse wouldn't do for me. So that night...

EXT. CATTLE RANGE - SAM AND PRONTO'S CAMP - SUNSET

Sam and Pronto eat dinner around a campfire. Pronto is withdrawn, angry.

SAM

What's the matter, Pronto - you got a bellyache?

PRONTO

More like a belly full.

SAM

Oh, getting a little love pot from my home cooking, hey?

PRONTO

Don't you think you've humiliated me enough, for one day?

SAM

What?

PRONTO

Telling everyone how brave you are, and what a great horseman you are, and how your horse saved your life.

SAM

I was only trying to make it more exciting.

PRONTO

Buffalo pucky! You took credit for everything!

SAM

Yeah? Well I didn't see anybody holding a gag over your mouth.

PRONTO

No - but it was there!

SAM

Huh? Ya lost me, pal.

PRONTO

You know full well I can't take any credit, unless you give it to me.

SAM

What kind of garbage is that?!

PRONTO
Indian garbage!

SAM
You're not supposed to take credit
for anything you do - cuz you're an
Indian?

PRONTO
Duh! You saved my life, lamebrain.
That's why I had to come looking
for you.
(then)
You own me.

Sam GIGGLES.

PRONTO
It's not funny - I'm indebted to
you, for life.

Sam is hysterical with GIGGLES.

PRONTO
And only you can set me free!

Suddenly, Sam is QUIET.

SAM
Really?

PRONTO
Yeah, really. You have to tell the
whole world how brave I am, and
until you do, I can't take a lick
of credit for anything I do.
(then)
So, now that you know --

SAM
Now that I know.

PRONTO
-- you'll give me some credit, next
time, right?

SAM
Right.

Sam crosses his legs, and behind his back he crosses his
fingers.

CLOSE ON: Sam's face. He crosses his eyes.