

March 10, 1998

“WARPATH”

An Original Screenplay

By

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A superimposed title reads: "Red Cloud, Nebraska, 1878 . . ."

EXT. THE GREAT PLAINS – DAY

The endless expanse of the Great Plains stretches out in all directions; blue skies, puffy white clouds, fields of wheat, corn, barely and rye waving languidly in the breeze. In the distance a man on a horse rides steadily toward a farmhouse that is even further off.

EXT. FARM – DAY

Plowing the field behind a mule is ALICE ERICSSON, a beautiful, tough, weathered woman of blonde Swedish stock. Alice's seven year old daughter, WILLA, hoes the vegetable garden, and Alice's five year old son ALEX is down on his hands and knees pulling weeds.

Alice runs the blade of the plow into a large, buried rock – *CLANG!!* – rattling her teeth. Alice bends down, digs out the rock, then attempts to lift it. It's too heavy, she can't move it an inch. She approaches the problem several different ways, then finally starts to cry and kicks the rock, hurting her foot. Alice yelps and falls to the ground.

Willa and Alex both look up, see their mother sitting in the dirt crying, then glance at each other. Willa notices something, looking to her right. She sees the man on the horse approaching. Willa runs up to her mother with an excited expression.

WILLA

Ma, Mr. Gunderson's comin'. Must have a letter, I bet.

Alice wipes her sweaty brow, shields her eyes and squints. She sees an old, white-whiskered man on a horse come riding up. He is MR. GUNDERSON, the postman. Alex comes running over to see what's going on. Getting a letter on a farm in Nebraska in 1878 is a big deal. Alice takes a deep breath.

ALICE

It's from your father. I can feel it. It must be. He's coming home.

Mr. Gunderson rides up, then slowly dismounts his horse.

MR. GUNDERSON

Mrs. Ericsson. Children. You got a letter here.

Mr. Gunderson hands over a yellowed, dog-eared envelope. Alice takes it slowly. The children watch expectantly.

ALICE

Oh, please God let it be from Earl. He's got to come home. He must. I can't do this by myself anymore.

(Alice opens the letter
and reads it aloud)

"Dear Mrs. Ericsson . . . ,

(it's obviously not from her
husband and her face shows
it; she goes on)

. . . this is Hortense Greely writin' from Greely's Outpost, 40 miles outside Fort Collins, Colorado. You wrote to the sheriff there askin' about your husband, Lucky Ericsson. We seen him last, before he lit out for his goldmine. But that was nearly 3 months ago and we ain't seen him since. That mine of his is located right in the middle of hostile Indian territory, just where the Cheyenne and the Pawnee Indians fightin' a war. Mind you, I ain't sayin' for sure that anything's happened to him, Mrs. Ericsson, but it don't look good to me. I'm real sorry. Your's truly, Hortense Greely, Greely's Trading Post."

Alice lowers the letter, her eyes filling with tears. Mr. Gunderson and the kids watch her closely. Alice takes a deep breath and shakes her head firmly.

ALICE

He's not dead. Not Lucky. They don't call him that for nothing. I'll just have to go find him.

MR. GUNDERSON

How ya gonna do that?

ALICE

I don't know, Mr. Gunderson, I'll just have to go there, I suppose.

WILLA

(concerned)

Where there's wild injuns, Ma?

ALEX

(smiles)

Wild injuns? Honest?

MR. GUNDERSON

(skeptical)

For goodness sake, Mrs. Ericsson, you can't do that. You're a woman.

ALICE

(incensed)

Oh, I can't can I? Well you just watch me Mr. Gunderson. I can and I will. It's time for Earl to come home. He made me a promise and now it's time for him to keep it.

(her eyes are blazing)

I'm a patient woman, Mr. Gunderson, but my patience has run out.

MR. GUNDERSON

But goin' into hostile Indian territory? All alone. I'm sorry to tell you, ma'am, that that's just plain old crazy. Besides, who'll take care of your young-uns?

ALICE

My dear friend Hella Bergdahl will happily take my children in for a time, if indeed it's any of your concern at all, Mr. Gunderson.

MR. GUNDERSON

(shakes his head)

You'll excuse me, Mrs. Ericsson, I certainly don't mean to intrude. But, you know, it's over 400 miles to Fort Collins, Colorado.

ALICE

That far?

MR. GUNDERSON

Yes, ma'am.

ALICE

Then I'd best get started.

MR. GUNDERSON

(still skeptical)

And you'll just have to excuse me one more time, Mrs. Ericsson, but even if you do find your husband, you think you're gonna get Earl "Lucky" Ericsson to settle down and tend a farm?

ALICE

He married me, didn't he? He has two children and a farm, doesn't he? Why would he do that unless he meant to come home to stay someday?

MR. GUNDERSON

I don't know, ma'am.

ALICE

I've stayed awake night after night praying for him to come home. Now God wants me to find him and bring him home. And then he'll stay.

The old postman nods skeptically. Five year old Alex is still grinning.

ALEX
Wild injuns, ma? Honest?

ALICE
(sighs)
Honest.

Alice looks out at the great plains, far into the distance . . .

DISSOLVE:

EXT. FARMHOUSE – DAY

Alice and the two kids ride up in front of a farmhouse in a loaded horse-drawn wagon. The Bergdahl family stands in front of the house, a young husband and wife, HELLA, and three little kids. Alice drops off her confused children.

ALICE
You remember what I said and don't you give
Mrs. Bergdahl any trouble.

WILLA & ALEX
No, ma.

ALICE
OK, then. I'll be home before you know it.

Willa looks very concerned.

WILLA
Be careful, ma. Please.

ALICE
(nods)
I will, dear. Don't worry.

HELLA
Alice, are you sure about this?

ALICE
If I don't go, who will?
(everybody shrugs)
Then I must go. He's my husband.

Alice snaps the reins and rides away. Willa, Alex, and the entire Bergdahl family watch Alice ride away with stunned expressions.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL – DAY

A pile of horseshit sits on a mountain trail. A hand comes into view, scoops up some of the shit and smears it between the fingers. The hand belongs to EMMETT COLE, a tall, dark-haired, weather-beaten man of 40 with a long Fu Manchu mustache, an L-shaped scar on his chin, and a plug of tobacco under his lip. Cole smells the horseshit, furrows his brow, then wipes his hand on his pants. He leads his horse up a steep mountain trail in the waning sunlight of the Rocky Mountains.

Cole's eyes dart all around, completely taking in his surroundings, and anything that might lurk within or behind them.

His nostrils suddenly flare as he smells something. He spits and studies the sky.

A slight wisp of smoke rises from the thick foliage to his left. Cole takes a rifle from his saddle, ties up his horse, then stealthily crawls through the undergrowth.

EXT. ROCKY LEDGE – DAY

Cole comes out on a rocky ledge overlooking a campsite one hundred feet below where five dirty OUTLAWS sit cooking dinner. Cole takes out a small brass telescope and a stack of wanted posters from his saddlebag. He identifies each outlaw and studies the charges on the posters. Three of the men are murderers and thieves, wanted dead or alive. One outlaw is simply wanted for thievery, and one other has no poster at all.

Cole takes his Winchester repeater rifle, sets it on a rock, aims in on the campsite. He fires four shots in quick succession, causing mayhem and screaming in the campsite below. Cole dashes into the forest.

EXT. CAMPSITE – DAY

Cole reappears a moment later at the outlaw's campsite. Three of the outlaws are dead, one is wounded, and one is unharmed. Cole puts his rifle against the back of the live outlaw's head.

COLE

I ain't go no paper on you, so just disappear quick-like, y'hear?

OUTLAW

Yessir.

The outlaw runs quickly off into the woods.

Cole swings his rifle around on the WOUNDED OUTLAW, whose hand is an inch from a pistol. Cole's look dares him to touch it.

COLE

Go ahead, try it if you'd like—that's if
you want to be dead like your chums here.

The outlaw slowly moves his hand away from the gun. He looks down at his three dead comrades.

WOUNDED OUTLAW

Jumpin Jesus Christ! Ya kilt 'em all!

(looks up)

Why didn't you kill me, too?

Cole pulls out the wanted posters.

COLE

Them fellahs was wanted dead or alive,
you're just wanted alive. So alive's how
I'm bringin' you in. But don't provoke me,
understand? Ya ain't worth all that much
t' me dead or alive.

The outlaw nods—he understands.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. THE REPUBLICAN RIVER/ RIVER ROAD – DAY

Alice follows the course of the Republican River, riding along the river road. She passes many farms, endless fields of wheat, barley and rye baking in the hot sun under a turquoise sky.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. THE RIVER ROAD – NIGHT

It's pouring rain and Alice is huddling under the wagon, soaking wet. She is trying to unwrap some biscuits but is shaking too much. Alice starts to cry, tossing the biscuits to the ground.

ALICE

Why did I get a man that won't stay put?
Other women keep their men home, why
can't I? What did I do wrong?

Her crying jag starts to go out of control, she forcefully stops herself.

ALICE

No!

Alice lowers her head and takes a deep breath. She picks the biscuits up from the ground, cleans them off and takes a bite. She snuffles as she chews.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. THE RIVER ROAD – DAY

Alice, looking rather ragged after her wet cold night, rides along the river road. She comes upon a severely loaded-down wagon, with a young, blond couple aboard. They are PIETER and MARIANNE VAN KEUKENHOF. They are Dutch. They exchange greetings with Alice as she passes them by.

PIETER

Good day to you, ma'am.

ALICE

(smiles)

And to both of you.

Alice snaps the reins and leaves them behind.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. FORT COLLINS – DAY

Fort Collins, Colorado is a little settlement beside an army post. Cole rides into town with the three dead outlaws hanging from their mounts like so much meat. The wounded and bound outlaw watches as people swarm out to see what's going on. Before you know it everybody has come out to watch, the saloon keeper, the prostitutes, men from the claims & deeds office, the

printer from the *Fort Collins Register*. Cole cradles a rifle in his arms, chews his chew and looks uninterested. He rides up in front of the sheriff's office. The SHERIFF and the DEPUTY are both standing outside waiting.

SHERIFF

You sure don't waste much time, do ya, Cole?

COLE

The longer I wait the further they get and the further I got t' haul 'em in. A body just don't wanna stay on a horse, no more'n dead deer or a dead bear does. Just keep slidin' off not matter how ya tie 'em down.

SHERIFF

Yes sir, that sure is a big problem.

(the deputy nods)

So, come on in and we'll settle up. You got quite a bit of cash comin'.

Cole nods, looks around and sees the entire town looking back at him. He grins, spits, then dismounts.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. CAMPSITE BY RIVER – SUNSET

Alice has made camp early tonight, already has a fire going and a lean-to set up. The Van Keukenhof's loaded-down wagon slowly approaches. Alice stands and waves.

ALICE

Evening.

Pieter and Marianne both smile and wave back.

MARIANNE

Evening.

PIETER

(smiling)

We may be slow, but we caught up wit' you in the end, eh?

ALICE

Yes, you did. Care to share my fire and campsite with me?

Pieter and Marianne exchange a look and nod.

PIETER

Don't mind if we do. Much obliged.

MARIANNE

Thank you very much.

ALICE

(smiles)

My pleasure.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. CAMPSITE BY RIVER – NIGHT

Pieter takes a twig from the fire and lights his pipe. Dinner is finished. Marianne and Alice sit down after clearing up.

PIETER

Now you say your husband's in hostile Indian territory and you're going to go get him back?

ALICE

Yes.

PIETER

By yourself?

ALICE

(shrugs)

I don't know who would go with me?

PIETER

You need a guide, Mrs. Ericsson. Someone who knows the area. Like that bounty hunter fellah we heard about back in Omaha City.

Marianne raises her eyebrows.

MARIANNE

You can't trust someone like that.

ALICE

Who is that you're talking about?

PIETER

His name's Cole, and they say he's the only man who'll track criminals into the Indian lands. They say he's killed twenty men and brought in fifty more.

MARIANNE

They say he lives with the Indians and has an Indian squaw as a wife.

PIETER

They say the Indians fear him.
(Alice looks impressed)
But someone like that's who ya need.

ALICE

And you say his name is Cole?

PIETER

That's what they say.

Alice nods thoughtfully, staring into the campfire.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. LUCKY DOG SALOON – NIGHT

The Lucky Dog saloon is rollicking. Sitting at a table in the far back all by himself is Cole, busily polishing off a bottle of whiskey with a beer chaser. He smokes a hand-rolled cigarette and looks half-crocked. A pretty SALOON GAL sits down beside Cole.

SALOON GAL

Why're you sittin' here all by your lonesome, honey? Why don't you buy me a drink?

Cole picks up a glass with water in it, dumps the water on the floor, pours in a shot of whiskey and hands it to her.

COLE

Here.

The Saloon Gal takes the drink and downs it.

SALOON GAL

You want some company?

COLE

Maybe later.

SALOON GAL

Why not now?

COLE

'Cause I'm drinkin' now.

SALOON GAL

How much you gonna drink?

COLE

We'll just have to see.

Cole does a shot, then takes a swig of beer.

DISSOLVE:

turns the outlaw and the three corpses over to the authorities, collects the bounty and proceeds to the saloon. Cole is hopeless, heart-broken man. When he's drunk just the sight of other women makes him mad. Before you know it Cole's in a drunken saloon brawl and gets himself locked up.

* * * *

Emmett Cole awakens in jail to the sight of Alice looking down at him. It's like his dream won't end. She asks for his help to find her husband. Cole winces -- of course she's married. She hands him a photograph of her and her husband, Alice sitting, Earl standing, holding his hat.

"Why me?" asks Cole.

"Everyone I've asked says that you are the best man for the job," says Alice.

Cole nods his aching head. "Yep. I am. I get a hundred dollars a man. You got a hundred dollars?"

Alice nods hesitantly. "Yes, Mr. Cole, I do. Just."

Cole nods back. "Then I guess I better go find him."

"We, Mr. Cole. I'm coming with you."

Cole looks her in the eyes -- they're very pretty eyes, too. "Well, ma'am, you can come along as far as Greely's Outpost, but I ain't takin' you into hostile Indian territory. You're damn lucky *I'll* go in there."

"Well," says Alice, "we'll just see when we get there. Shall we go?"

Alice gets Cole out of jail.

Cole takes them to the land grant office and tracks down the location of Lucky's mine.

Just as Alice and Cole are heading out of Ft. Collins, a crazed, wounded soldier arrives with a wagon load of dead, scalped soldiers. Everyone in Fort Collins is outraged. Alice and Cole leave them all behind.

Alice and Cole enter the high country, she in her wagon, he on his horse. As they travel they talk and find out about each other. Cole was married and his wife left him for another man. As they ride along it becomes apparent that both of them are attracted by the other. They both confess to having been extremely lonely in the past several years. Alice and Cole are ridiculously polite and proper with one another. The subject of Alice's husband comes up regularly. Alice's husband, known as "Lucky," has spent most of their marriage out looking to make his fortune, leaving Alice to run the farm and raise the kids. Alice figures that maybe Lucky's had his fill of running around now and is ready to settle down. However, when they camp at night each of them is highly aware of the other one resting nearby.

They pass others heading the opposite way with horrific tales of Indians massacring each other and anyone that gets in their unpredictable paths. There are terrible stories of the crazed Pawnee Indians using human sacrifices in their rituals -- particularly young Cheyenne women.

Alice finally invites Cole to ride in the wagon with her. Cole ties his horse to the back, climbs in and Alice hands him the reigns. Alice takes the blanket covering her lap and extends it over Cole, too. Once again, they are very formal and polite with one another.

Suddenly, they are confronted by three highwaymen, thieves of the road, all brandishing weapons while riding right straight at them at full speed. The thieves demand all of the valuables from the wagon. Cole nods agreeably, reveals his hands from under the blanket

and he's holding his two colt .45 pistols. He calmly shoots all three of the thieves with his two guns. Alice watches in horror and astonishment. Cole goes through his wanted posters and can't find one for any of them. Cole shakes his head, "They wasn't even wanted." Alice watches as Cole strips to the waist, digs a hole and dumps the dead men in. He then starts to cover them up with dirt.

Alice asks, "Aren't you going to at least say a few words?"

Cole nods, "Sure. Good riddance. That was only two." He finishes burying them.

That night around the campfire Alice and Cole are both quiet and thoughtful. Finally, Alice asks, "We're you ever married, Mr. Cole?" He nods and says he once was married, but his wife left him for another man. The both set up their bedding and go to sleep. Cole throws a look toward Alice, closes his eyes and a little grin plays across his mouth and we know who he's thinking about. Suddenly, Cole opens his eyes and looming directly over him is Alice. Cole tries to speak, but Alice kisses him. They make love by the light of the dying campfire.

ACT TWO:

Alice and Cole arrive at Greely's Trading Post, the last vestige of civilization before Indian Territory. The outpost is run by the husband and wife team of the Greelys, and their teenage son and daughter. The Greelys are the ones that sent Alice the letter at the beginning. They are very hospitable people that won't leave their outpost under any circumstances. They'll fight it out to the end.

Cole tells Alice that this is where she'll stay until he returns, hopefully with her husband. This takes on a lot more importance now that they've gotten to know each other. The Greely's watch Alice and Cole and know immediately what's going on. Alice and Cole part.

Cole rides off into Indian territory. He sees smoke rising in the distance, arrows in trees, a scalped dead Indian full of arrows, a charred, burnt-out wagon with a hand poking out from beneath.

Alice and the Greely family. They met Lucky and tell Alice he was with an Indian squaw when he came through.

A band of Pawnee braves attack Greely's Trading Post. The Greelys and Alice all try to hold them off, but they set fire to the cabin. The Greely family and Alice all come out of the smoldering outpost and give up.

Cole hears a commotion in the distance: guns shooting and Indian war cries. Cole crawls through the underbrush, stops, takes out his telescope and sees . . . A band of eight Pawnee braves attack someone defending the opening of a mine shaft. The defender is Earl "Lucky" Ericsson, Alice's husband. Cole quietly cocks his rifle, takes aim at an Indian, follows him for a moment, then lowers his rifle. He takes out the photo of Alice and Earl, placing his thumb over Earl's face. Cole very seriously considers the implications of what he'll do next.

Things are looking desperate for Earl down at the mine. Cole takes a small pouch of tobacco and casually rolls himself a cigarette. Cole lights his smoke, stands and looks like he's going to leave, then suddenly turns back, takes aim and begins plugging Indians from behind. Three Indians go down and the others make a quick retreat to the nearby rocks. Earl watches these events transpire in utter amazement. Screaming and firing from the hip, Cole dashes across the clearing to the mine opening. Cole arrives unscathed, puts out his hand and introduces himself.

"I'm Emmett Cole, your wife sent me. They sure don't call you 'Lucky' for nothing."

Earl "Lucky" Ericsson smiles his lucky smile while vigorously shaking Cole's hand. "That's a fact, sir. Very glad to make your acquaintance. Your timing's impressive."

* * * *

Alice, Mrs. Greely and her 17-year old daughter are prisoners of the Pawnee, bound and roughly pulled through the woods. They are taken to the Pawnee camp where there are five other women hostages, all Cheyenne squaws, and six other Pawnee braves, preparing for a sacrificial ritual by covering themselves with colorful paints and sharpening knives on rocks. The women hostages all huddle together, tied up like livestock.

* * * *

Now Cole and Lucky fight the Pawnee together. Things aren't looking all that good when the Pawnee braves suddenly scatter. Cole and lucky are baffled; what's happening? A war party of Cheyenne braves rides up from behind. The LEADER of the Cheyenne tells Cole and Lucky that anyone that fights the Cheyenne's enemy is the Cheyenne's friend. Go in peace. The Cheyenne all ride away.

Cole hears a sound from behind them in the mine, spins around with his rifle and finds a cute, 18-year old Indian SQUAW lurking in the shadows. Oddly, the girl has a gold crucifix around her neck. Lucky laughs, waving his hand. "Don't shoot her, she's a good Indian. I bought her. She helps me with the mine."

Cole nods. "Tell your wife, she's waiting back at Greely's."

Lucky considers this, then turns to the Squaw and says, "You're free. You can leave now."

Sadly, the Squaw has nowhere to go.

Cole and Lucky head out of Indian territory and the Squaw keeps following them and Lucky has to keep shooin' her away. Finally, with a sad expression, she disappears into the forest, her gold crucifix gleaming.

"How'd you find a Christian squaw?"

Lucky shrugs. "She ain't no Christian, I gave her the crucifix."

Later, they arrive back at Greely's outpost and find its charred remains, as well as the dead, scalped bodies of Mr. Greely and his son. No sign of the women.

Cole says, "The women are hostages. They've got Alice."
 Lucky looks suspicious. "Alice? When did you get on a first-name basis
 with my wife?"

"Coming to get you, remember?"

Lucky snorts. So, what should we do?"

"We'd better go get 'em if we ever want to see 'em again," says Cole,
 turning his horse around. Lucky follows Cole back into Indian territory.

ACT THREE:

As night falls, two Pawnee braves arrive back at the camp with another
 female prisoner, the Squaw that was with Lucky. They add her to the other women. Alice sees
 the crucifix around the Squaw's neck and asks to look at it. The inscription on the back reads:
 "To Earl, from Alice with love."

Just then the Pawnee choose two women for sacrifice in their upcoming
 ceremony -- the cute Squaw and Alice. They drag them over to the ceremonial fire pit and tie
 them up. The ritual begins: drummers pound, chants are sung, and fires are lit . . .

* * * *

As Cole and Lucky ride, Lucky keeps digging at Cole about what's going
 between he and Alice? Since Cole actually does care about Alice, it's making him *really* angry.
 Lucky keeps it up until finally Cole dives on top of him and the two duke it out. When they've
 beat the living crap out of each other, Cole holds up his hand -- he hears something. Drums.

Cole searches the night sky with his telescope. He spots flying sparks
 shooting upward from a large bonfire. He and Lucky move quickly through the woods.

They come upon the Pawnee camp and the sacrificial ceremony in full-
 swing. Alice and the Squaw will be burned alive. The fires burn toward the two women.

Lucky turns to Cole. "You got a plan?"

Cole nods. "Yep. But it ain't pretty." He hands Lucky a stick of
 dynamite. "You toss this into the center of things, away from all the women, then shoot each of
 the guys at the far ends, OK?"

Lucky takes the dynamite. "Sure. What'll you do?"

"I'll deal with everything else. Give me about two minutes."

With that Cole takes off into the night.

Lucky counts to himself as he cocks his rifle.

Meanwhile, the bottom of Alice's dress starts to burn, as does the Squaw's.
 The squaw starts to scream at the top of her lungs. All the other women wince at the sight. The
 Pawnee braves are dancing and chanting.

Lucky tosses the dynamite into the center of the dance, blowing two
 Pawnee braves to hell. He then takes careful aim and shoots the braves at the far ends.

Just then Cole appears out of the darkness behind the Indians, both his pistols blazing fire. Coldly and methodically Cole shoots every Pawnee brave. This done, Cole dashes over and gets Alice and the Squaw out of the fire. Alice and Cole have a silent thankful look between them while the Squaw runs over to Lucky who tosses her aside as he pushes between Alice and Cole.

"What's going on here?" Lucky demands.

Alice straightens up, offended. "Between Mr. Cole and I there is nothing. But what's been going on with you and her." Alice points at the crucifix around the Squaw's neck.

"She helped me with the mine," says Lucky, innocently.

Alice nods. "No doubt."

Meanwhile, Cole sets all of the Cheyenne women free, giving them the Pawnee's horses. The Cheyenne women take off as fast as they can. Cole puts his arm around old Mrs. Greely, who is sobbing, and her daughter. Cole watches Alice, Lucky and the Squaw. Lucky gives the unhappy Squaw a horse and sends her on her way, wherever that might be . . .

The dawn rises as they all ride back: Cole, Alice, Lucky, Mrs. Greely and her daughter. Alice tells Lucky about the kids and what she's done with the farm. Lucky keeps looking back over his shoulder, which both Alice and Cole notice.

Meanwhile, on a nearby hilltop stand the Cheyenne Leader, several braves and the women that have returned to them. They all watch our group pass.

Our group arrives back at the charred ruins of the last outpost, as well the freshly dug graves of Mr. Greely and his son. Mrs. Greely and the daughter look around in bewilderment at their shattered lives. Finally, the two women find usable tools and begin clearing the wreckage away. Alice watches in utter amazement.

"What are you two doing?"

Mrs. Greely looks up impatiently. "Rebuilding."

Lucky watches the women laboring, then finally shakes his head.

"Alice, I can't go back to the farm. I haven't made a cent. I'm a failure. I've still got to make my fortune. I hear that men are striking it rich in the gold fields of California. That's for me."

Alice can't believe it. "But Earl, dear, have you forgotten that you have two children, a farm and a wife."

"I'm not a farmer, Alice, you know that. You knew it when you married me. You just keep on taking care of everything, Alice, you do a darn good job." And with that Lucky turns and rides away.

Alice watches him go, shaking her head. "How long do you suppose it'll be before he meets up with the cute young Indian squaw with the crucifix?"

Cole shrugs. Alice looks at him.

"Have you ever been to Nebraska, Mr. Cole?"

"No, ma'am, I haven't."

"It's awful pretty."

Cole looks at Alice and nods. "I'll bet it is."

Alice smiles. "Richest soil in the whole country. You can grow anything."

"I'll bet you can."

Alice looks right at Cole. "It gets very cold at night, though. It's darn hard to keep warm."

Cole nods. "It's like that most everywhere."

"You ever get out that way, Mr. Cole, you make sure to look me up."

Cole nods again. "I most certainly will."

Alice snaps the reins and rides off into the blazing sun. Cole watches her go. After a moment Cole kneels down and picks up a handful of soil. He rubs it through his fingers and smiles. Cole gets on his horse and rides away.