

EL CORAZON

"The Hanged Man"

Written by

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Series Pilot Episode

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History shows that people in the "wild west" hungered for entertainment and craved melodramas.

Thus theatre became a gathering place and community builder.

Art was seen as a luxury -- yet became a craving -- and then a necessity, for it brought "life" to just mere living.

This is *Shakespeare in Love* in the mythic, archetypal west.

EL CORAZON
"The Hanged Man"

FADE IN:

ON A TINTYPE PHOTO FROM 1855

Of a well-to-do Southern family -- father, mother and son -- standing INSIDE a THEATRE, the empty stage behind them. The seven-year-old boy, BEAU BANDY, has a look of awe and wonder.

A hand LIFTS the tintype and we SEE we are actually--

EXT. THEATRE (1865) - BACK DOOR - NIGHT

As BEAU BANDY -- now 17 -- stares at the tintype. Parents now gone, he is an aspiring thespian, dirt poor, but driven by dreams ignited in the imagination of that seven-year-old boy.

On HEARING LAUGHTER from INSIDE the theatre, Beau slides the tintype inside his cheap, torn playbook of Shakespeare's *Richard III* and OPENS the backstage door and slips INSIDE--

INT. THEATRE (1865) - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

--hungry for a glimpse of the action. This is a performance of *Our American Cousin* -- and FROM THIS ANGLE, all Beau sees is the theatrical backdrop of a chamber in Trenchard Manor.

MRS. MONTCHESSINGTON (O.S.)

Ah, Mr. Trenchard, we were just talking about your archery powers.

ASA TRENCHARD (O.S.)

Wal, I guess shooting with bows and arrows is just about like most things in life, all you've got to do is keep the sun out of your eyes.

From OUTSIDE, Beau HEARS a horse approach and quickly EXITS--

EXT. THEATRE - BACK DOOR - NIGHT

--just in time to SEE a STRANGER dismount and lead his horse. He's handsome, mid-twenties, and sports a fashionable mustache. He ties up, glances at Beau, noticing his playbook.

STRANGER

Makes a good home, the theatre.
Remember it's what's behind the words that counts. The thing that makes a great actor... A hard life.

(MORE)

STRANGER (CONT'D)

(a beat)

Where you from?

BEAU

Richmond.

STRANGER

A southerner. Well I guess that's hard enough these days...

BEAU

Yes, sir.

STRANGER

Keep an eye on my horse?

BEAU

Sure.

STRANGER

Obliged.

He glances down at Beau's cheap playbook of *RICHARD III*.

STRANGER (CONT'D)

"Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by this sun of York..."

It's delivered like a pro. Beau's impressed. The Stranger nods at him and disappears into the theatre...

Beau slides his hand along the horse's flank -- glances to see that no one else is around -- and his passion gets the better of his promise. Beau OPENS the back door to HEAR--

INT. THEATRE - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

ASA (O.S.)

...the manners of good society, eh?
Well I guess I know enough to turn you inside out, old gal -- you sockdologizing old man-trap...

Laughter from the audience, then A GUN SHOT RINGS OUT! There are SCREAMS and the Stranger suddenly DROPS DOWN onto the stage in front of the theatrical backdrop!

STRANGER

Sic semper tyrannis!

ON a stunned Beau, all SOUND RUSHES to SILENCE as we--

SMASH TO:

EXT. DESERT (1875) - DAY

Flat and empty. Baking beneath a merciless sun...

Two covered wagons - one on its side - lie abandoned in a dry riverbed. Emblazoned across the canvas skin of each: "THE COPPERHEAD PLAYERS" in bright and gaudy lettering. The horses are gone. The wagons have been ransacked...

Empty steamer chests lie upended in the sand, their contents forming a debris field across the desert floor; colorful costumes, playbooks, make-up, rolled backdrops...

And there are bodies strewn here and there; dressed in early Renaissance garb, peppered with bullet holes, punctured by arrows, lying dead upon a vast and unforgiving stage.

The silence hangs as heavy as the desert heat and then...

A CRASH from inside one of the wagons. A man EMERGES. He's also in costume; a blood-splattered *Richard III*.

He pulls himself out of the wreckage -- clutching a TINTYPE, costume torn -- straps exposed that support the king's hump -- the hump lacerated -- two arrows are still stuck in the hump.

He surveys the carnage around him...

We recognize him. It's Beau Bandy. Ten years after the Lincoln assassination. And in his face, his eyes, the bend of his body, all the signs of a hard life...

He stumbles forward, breathing in the stink of death as he wanders among the bodies... Nothing's left. No water, no food, no provisions of any kind.

A slip of paper is caught on the spine of a cactus. It's a PROPERTY DEED. Beau pulls it free... folds it neatly into a square, stuffs it under his monarch's cap and gazes at the horizon... From all directions, a great nothing stares back.

He's clearly traumatized. He stares at his feet and SEES the SHADOWS of the two arrows still stuck in the costume's hump. He brings the tintype of his family when he was a boy up to his face -- blocking out the shadows of the arrows.

Staring at the photo, we SEE a resolve return to his eyes.

BEAU

(a hoarse whisper)

"Now is the winter of our
discontent made glorious summer by
this sun of York..."

He stuffs the tintype into his costume...

BEAU (CONT'D)
 "And all the clouds that low'r'd
 upon our house in the deep bosom of
 the ocean buried."

He reaches behind him and defiantly yanks out the arrows!

BEAU (CONT'D)
 "Now are our brows bound with
 victorious wreaths, our bruised
 arms hung up for monuments..."

He chooses a direction at random and starts walking...

BEAU (CONT'D)
 "...our stern alarums chang'd to
 merry meetings..."

EXT. DESERT ARROYO - DAY

Now dehydrated, Beau stumbles along, his body dazed, his
 passion carrying him forward...

BEAU
 "Speak the speech, I pray you, as I
 pronounc'd it to you, trippingly on
 the tongue, but if you mouth it, as
 many of our players do..."

EXT. DESERT DUNES - DAY

Beau crawls up the slippery, dusty high side, his words the
 force that carry him onward...

BEAU
 "...shall ne'er go by, From this
 day to the ending of the world, But
 we in it shall be remembered. We
 few, we happy few..."

He staggers to his feet and thrusts a tentative foot forward.

BEAU (CONT'D)
 "We band of brothers; For he today
 that sheds his blood with me..."

His legs give out. He can't speak another word... off in the
 distance, the *WHINNY* of a horse coming from...

EXT. CANYON LANDS - DAY

Red rock country. High and soaring over the flat of the desert. Three horses, saddled with packs, wait as...

Two ne'er-do-wells, SLIM and LUCAS WALTON, train their Colt revolvers at VIC CONAGHER, who kneels at the base of a sheer rock wall. He's 40. Ruggedly handsome. Well-dressed. Complex.

Most of Conagher's arm has disappeared inside a sizeable crack in the rock face as he searches around for something.

CONAGHER

(strains)

I'm telling you Lucas, ain't nothing in here...

LUCAS

And I'm telling you, Conagher, I'm damn well losing my patience. That there's your hidey-hole and we both know it.

(cocks his gun)

So git to it. Now.

Conagher redoubles his efforts. Reaches in further as...

INSIDE THE CRACK

His fingers brush a dusty metal pay box. The lock's been shot away. He flips the lid. Feels around inside.

CONAGHER

Maybe I spent it. I got a new business now.

BACK TO THE WALTONS

LUCAS

New business my ass. Yer in the same business you always was.

SLIM

The cheating 'n thieving business.

LUCAS

Same goes for that whore you been riding with...

There's another *WHINNY* from the horses. Slim glances over. He suddenly sees Beau, head to toe in trail dust, lurching toward them... a costumed apparition of Old England.

SLIM

Lucas...?

Lucas's eyes dart over, now not wholly focused on Conagher...

Giving Conagher the time he needs to pull a gun out of the pay box, jump back from the rock wall and get a SHOT off...

Directly into Lucas's face! Now Slim FIRES!

The bullet RICOCHETS off the rocks. Conagher FIRES again...

Slim falls back, dead, only a foot from where Beau stands.

The actor looks at the dead men, then Conagher. He's staring down the barrel of a gun. Now speechless, his hands go up...

EXT. CANYON LANDS - LATER - DAY

Conagher pulls a wad of loose bills out of the pay box...

CONAGHER

You got a name?

BEAU

Beau. Beau Bandy.

CONAGHER

Stage name?

Beau shakes his head. Takes another drink from a canteen.

CONAGHER (CONT'D)

I'm Vic Conagher... Attorney.

BEAU

(glances at dead men)
Them?

CONAGHER

Former "clients."

He stuffs the bills in his pocket. Tosses the empty box.

CONAGHER (CONT'D)

Where's the rest of you?

BEAU

Dead. Hostiles. We were heading to Copperhead. Rehearsing while a wagon wheel was fixed and--

CONAGHER

Tell the sheriff in town. He'll let the army know. They'll bring back the bodies. These days...

(swings up on his horse)

...that's a full-time job. Think you can ride?

BEAU

Uh-huh.

CONAGHER

Good. Just so happens we got a couple of spares...

He nods towards the dead men's mounts...

EXT. TOWN OF COPPERHEAD - MAIN STREET - DAY

Covered in wheel ruts and horse shit, it cuts a haphazard course through a collection of wooden and adobe buildings. Conagher and Beau ride into town, trailing the third horse. Locals stop and stare at Beau's kingly get-up...

CONAGHER

I saw a show once. Negro show. 'Course there weren't no actual Negros in it --

BEAU

I'm no minstrel, sir -- I'm a professionally trained actor.

CONAGHER

So why are you here?

BEAU

I'm going to open a theatre. Got a deed to the Carleton Dance Hall.

CONAGHER

Can't say I've heard of it.

BEAU

You will.

CONAGHER

Lookee there, our sheriff.

(grins)

Ain't he pretty.

SHERIFF MADDOX FORD (26), all movie star good looks, stands before a festive crowd which has gathered around a rickety old scaffold to witness the hanging of one CYRUS BLENKARN, a weasly, sneering little man.

Beau and Conagher tie up as Ford plays his part with gusto.

FORD

CYRUS BLENKARN, you HAVE been found GUILTY of the following crimes by a duly appointed court of law for this territory...

(reads)

"Murder by POISON... murder by ILLEGAL and UN-NATURAL PRO-cedure. Interference with a DEAD BODY... interference with a LIVE BODY without HER knowledge or consent."

Dramatic pause. He glances over at Blenkarn.

FORD (CONT'D)

And YOU have been SENTENCED by that court to be HANGED by the neck until DEAD.

(beat)

Any last words?

You can hear a pin drop. As Blenkarn stares down at his audience...

Beau takes in the excited, eager faces waiting to see the man die. This seems to be what passes as entertainment in Copperhead. And it doesn't sit well with him.

Blenkarn sneers at the crowd. Spits.

BLENKARN

Yeah -- you can all go FUCK yourselves!!!

A cloth hood is quickly pulled over his grinning face.

FORD

May God have mercy on your soul, Cyrus Blenkarn...

A nod and as Blenkarn drops, Beau looks away. He's seen enough death for one day...

INT. DRY GOODS STORE - MINUTES LATER - DAY

Spacious and clean. The owner, MORRIS BLUNT, a middle-aged family man, looks up from the DIME NOVEL he's reading as Conagher and Beau come through the door. Conagher slaps some cash on the counter...

CONAGHER

Morrie, take a wild guess what this fellow's in need of...

The shopkeeper eyes Beau. Grunts. He hauls out a pair of dungarees and slaps them down on the counter.

MORRIE

Only got large. But the missus can tailor 'em. There's some shirts over there...

(exchanges a look with Conagher.)

... "Your Majesty".

Beau ignores the dig and looks through a pile of shirts by the window. He can see Blenkarn's body being cut down. A couple of WHORES, standing on the balcony of the Maharajah's Palace, wave and display cleavage to the dispersing crowd.

BEAU

That building across the way...

MORRIE

The Maharajah's Palace. "All your dreams made true." For a price.

CONAGHER

A whorehouse.

MORRIE

And then some.

CONAGHER

Ever hear of the Carlton Dance Hall?

MORRIE

Shit, Conagher, that was the Carlton Dance Hall back when my pappy ran this place.

Beau's face falls. Conagher shakes his head. It's too funny. He places a friendly hand on Beau's shoulder.

CONAGHER
Maybe it's time we had a look at
that deed you got...

INT. HOTEL ROOM - LATER - DAY

CLAIRE CONAGHER (26), beautiful, with a wild, untamed edge,
sits in a large tub counting the money.

CLAIRE
This is all we got and you're
representing a penniless actor?!

Conagher sits and removes his boots, getting ready to join
her in the tub. He waves Beau's deed at her.

CONAGHER
The paper seems legit.

CLAIRE
Doesn't mean you can enforce it.

CONAGHER
Maybe, maybe not. But the way I'm
thinkin', does this town want a
theatre or a whorehouse sittin'
right out there? We can see times
are changin'. I'm bettin' theatre.

CLAIRE
'Cause whores are suddenly goin'
outta style?

CONAGHER
'Cause small thinking is.
(strips down to longjohns)
Every town's got its whores,
precious few have a theatre.

Claire thinks on it... and sees the logic.

CLAIRE
So what's our cut?

CONAGHER
Quarter ownership. Twenty-five
percent of the building, the land,
and whatever the shows bring in.
(beat)
Darlin', we're goin' into the
entertainment business.

CLAIRE
You figurin' on stayin' for awhile?

CONAGHER
Thinkin' on it.

It's part her decision too as she watches him roll down his longjohns to his waist. Across his torso, the old scars; knife slashes and bullet holes. She considers the wounds...

CLAIRE
Makes us easier to find. Slim and Lucas, out there today, they never were too bright. But Myron...

Conagher peels off his longjohns and slips into the tub.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
(serious concern)
...that's another matter.

CONAGHER
Myron's still in prison.
(strokes her face)
He's got five more years.
(she closes her eyes)
That's a lifetime...

She loves his touch... and opens her eyes, hungrily pulling him closer. And as they share a passionate kiss...

INT. "MAHARAJAH'S PALACE" - DRAWING ROOM - SAME TIME - DAY

Ornate and well-appointed. Beau is half-wrestled onto an overstuffed sofa by TWO eager GIRLS kissing him as the madame, NESSA BRIGHT, 30, listens. She's alluring despite hard years, a tough woman whose appeal is her not-yet hardened heart.

BEAU
You will summon who's in charge.
(Nessa doesn't respond)
I bought from a Mister Hennigan.
(off Nessa's blank look)
Jacob Hennigan.
(still a blank look)
He asserted he had the legal right to sell. The deed's with my lawyer, Mister Conagher.

NESSA
Him, I know.

BEAU

And seeing as how you have been unaware of my claim, I am willing to give you ladies a reasonable amount of time to relocate. Shall we say three weeks?

Nessa shoots a look to the girls. They quickly go.

NESSA

Well, that is most generous of you, sir. Naturally, I shall have to discuss this with the other ladies.

BEAU

I am most grateful for your understanding.

NESSA

Why don't I show you exactly what you think you've bought?
(she stands)
You did say a theatre?

INT. "MAHARAJAH'S PALACE" - BEDROOM - LATER - DAY

Where Nessa, naked but for a faux Indian headdress, kneels on a bed, snarling and feral.

NESSA

I'll find you. I swear it. Some night when you're all comfy in your blankets, sound asleep like a little baby, I'll slip in there just as naked as I am now. But I'll have a skinning knife with me...

Beau, now stripped down to his longjohns, refers to a script.

BEAU

(reads)
"You, uh... have been with the Cheyenne too long, girl. You, er... gone--"
(looks up)
"Gone"?

NESSA

Like it says.

BEAU

"...gone and picked up some of their women's bad habits. Well..."

(MORE)

BEAU (CONT'D)

(beat)
Who wrote this?

NESSA

I did.

BEAU

Oh. It's good. Uh...
(reads)
"...looks like I'm just gonna have
to fuck some of that injun right
outta ya!"

NESSA

Man ain't been born can break me!

BEAU

"We'll see about..."

Beau falters as his memory suddenly overwhelms him...

EXT. DESERT - FLASHBACK BURST - DAY

The chaos and confusion and death: the flash of a blade --
eyes in terror -- bodies falling in the dust...

INT. "MAHARAJAH'S PALACE" - BEDROOM - DAY

Beau drops the "script" onto the bed beside Nessa.

NESSA

What's the matter?

BEAU

Nothing... I just...

NESSA

So keep going. There's more pages.
(off his look)
Maybe you want something else. I've
got a harem girl story. The Lady of
the Lake...

BEAU

You don't ever do it normal?

NESSA

Normal's what your wife provides.
(removes headdress)
But if that's what you want...

The door to the room SLAMS OPEN. A man levels a gun directly
at Beau's crotch. He wears a badge. It's Sheriff Ford.

FORD

I hear you've been looking for the man in charge. Well... Here I am.

Beau stares at the gun and shoots a desperate look at Nessa.

NESSA

Now Sheriff, this here's Beau Bandy. He's a theatre man. We're rehearsing.

FORD

Well this here's the Maharajah's Palace. "Rehearsing" costs money. Pony up or we'll have more than words, Mr. Bandy.

BEAU

I've got a rightful deed to this establishment and --

FORD

I've heard the tongues a waggin'. You and that oil slick of a lawyer's got 'em all stirred up -- over a piece of paper.

BEAU

A Mr. Jacob Hennigan --

FORD

Is not here now. Until a judge decides whether that piece of paper is worth a damn, you are a paying customer or you are a trespasser.

Nessa leans in close to a penniless Beau and nuzzles him.

NESSA

A rehearsal costs five dollars.

Over the CREAKING SOUND of metal --

INT. JAIL - CELL - DAY

-- the cell door opens and Beau's pushed inside a small, bare cell with only two cots. His cell mate is MATT KELTON, 17, if a day, with patches of peach fuzz as a baby beard.

FORD

You two "rehearse" all you want.

The cell door SWINGS SHUT, the iron key CLICKS the lock.

MATT

They think you stole a horse too?

BEAU

More like a building.

Matt doesn't get the reference...

MATT

No tellin' what they do to you. I reckon it'll be plum bad. They're just fixin' on hangin' me.

Beau takes a good look at this boy, barely a young man, who's possibly accepted his dismal fate, then sinks into a cot.

BEAU

You got yourself a lawyer?

MATT

Nope, just got me a story to tell.

He launches into his tale with unrestrained eagerness.

MATT (CONT'D)

You see, I'm here on account of a horse. This rancher, Huntsford, says he owns it. Gotta big spread in the west valley. His ranch hands, they grabbed me. I told 'em I didn't steal it! The mare was off by herself, no brand, no fences far as the eye could see. Didn't even know I was on his dang property.

BEAU

So what were you doing there?

MATT

I'd been walkin' for days. Just wanted to get home faster is all. That Huntsford called me the devil. Said they'd stretch me but good.

BEAU

Why in God's name were you walking?

MATT

I was walking 'cause I left a cattle drive -- not his -- some others. They kept the horse. My mama told me they were mean, bad men. I was gonna bring some money back to her just the same.

(MORE)

MATT (CONT'D)

She lives in Colorado, you know. My dead pappy left her and me a little place at the foot of the Rockies. But I didn't pay my mama no mind. Looks like now I'm gonna swing. She gonna be tore up bad about it. I'm right sorry to do that to her...

BEAU

I had a story once too...

EXT. FORD THEATRE BACK DOOR - FLASHBACK BURST - NIGHT

The Stranger -- John Wilkes Booth -- bursts through the door and limps to his horse -- rides off into the night -- pursued by a furious crowd that pours from the theatre's back door!

MAN IN CROWD

(points at Beau)

Accomplice!

The younger Beau Bandy is slammed against the wall and held fast next to a posted playbill that reads: *FORD'S THEATRE Friday Evening April 14, 1865... President Lincoln Benefit and Last Night of Miss Laura Keene... Our American Cousin.*

INT. JAIL - DAY

Beau's own pain forces his eyes closed...

EXT. TOWN OF COPPERHEAD - MAIN STREET - DAY

Conagher crosses the street carrying a BURLAP BAG over his shoulder. The bag bulges in several places with odd objects. He's headed to the jail but as he passes --

EXT. THE DRY GOODS STORE - DAY

-- he sees TWO of Huntsford's RANCH HANDS confronting a large black man with heavy feed bags of grain over each shoulder.

The ranch hands are tough, fearless men packing six guns and Bowie knives. The men finger their knives in the scabbards as they block the black man from getting to his buckboard no matter where he turns.

The handsome black man is WILLIAM STRODE, 34, an impressive presence, with a fierce and proud spirit. He's ex-military and it shows, all muscle and instinct.

The confrontation is about to explode into action even though Strode is unarmed, when --

CONAGHER
Huntsford not givin' you two
sidewinders enough work, you gotta
block my way?

Even though Conagher's got the burlap bag over his left shoulder, his gun hand is free, and today he's strapped. The ranch hands' respect for Conagher is evident and they pause... then move on without a word. Strode lays the feed bags down in the back of his buckboard.

STRODE
Why you helpin' me?

CONAGHER
I was helpin' them.
(off Strode's challenge)
I saw that look in your eyes.

Strode climbs aboard the buckboard. With a SNAP to the reins, he's off...

INT. JAIL - OUTER OFFICE - LATER

Sheriff Ford sits behind his desk counting a stack of money when Conagher comes through the door with the BURLAP BAG.

CONAGHER
You got my client.

FORD
I do, 'til he gets some sense in
his head.

CONAGHER
Well, you got a problem.

FORD
I don't see it that way.

CONAGHER
Brodie Jankowitz put an ax into his
foot choppin' firewood. He's not
movin' real well.

FORD
Damn it all to hell!

CONAGHER
We got no reserves.

Ford kicks the desk in fierce anger!

CONAGHER (CONT'D)
But you do have my client...

INT. JAIL - CELL - MOMENTS LATER

Ford yanks open the cell door --

FORD
Bandy!!!

Beau jerks awake just in time to see a heavy KEY RING fly past Matt Kelton hurtling toward his own face. Beau grabs it out of the air before it can connect. Good -- he can catch.

BEAU
This mean I'm free?

FORD
Nope. It means it's time to pay
your debt to society...

EXT. OPEN PRAIRIE - DAY

Beau stands under a vast blue sky and a beating sun. Before him, the grass of the prairie has been cleared away to carve out a baseball diamond and outfield. Beau is in right field.

Off of first base, Conagher dumps the BURLAP BAG open...
spilling out baseball bats, softballs and a few old gloves.

As he carries a beat-up glove out to Beau, we SEE the townsfolk arriving by horseback and wagons -- and not just from Copperhead, but from Twin Forks -- a wooden scoreboard with both names is hoisted up onto a makeshift scaffold.

CONAGHER
(hands glove to Beau)
Keep an eye on it. We only got
five.

Beau nervously turns the beaten leather glove over and over.

CONAGHER (CONT'D)
(hopefully)
You have used one?

BEAU
Truth be told, I've never actually
seen one -- field or glove.

CONAGHER
You might keep that to yourself.
This day is for braggin' rights all
year.

(MORE)

CONAGHER (CONT'D)

Copperhead lost to Twin Forks last year 37 to 35 in a four hour battle. Hardy Cordley's wife was so incensed she refused him her favors for damn near two months.

Beau notices both towns unloading church pews, benches and chairs from wagons and placing them alongside first and third bases. The seats are quickly and eagerly filled.

All the ladies of the Maharajah's Palace, including Nessa, fill an entire church pew by themselves -- off to the side.

Claire Conagher takes a seat next to Morris Blunt, the Dry Goods Store owner, along with other families.

BEAU

(looks around the bases)
So I should do what exactly?

CONAGHER

Let's ahh... shit... best keep it simple. Any ball comes to you on the ground, stop it any way you can, throw it to first base. Any ball in the air, catch it 'fore it hits the ground, throw it to first base.

(confidently slaps his shoulder)
You can do this.

BEAU

I feel I can.

Beau confidently shoves his left hand in the glove as Conagher walks toward third base, then he suddenly looks up.

BEAU (CONT'D)

Conagher?

CONAGHER

(turns back)
Yeah...

BEAU

Which one's first base?

Conagher's heart sinks as he points back to first base...

CONAGHER

That's Hezekiah there.

At first base is a lanky, tall, bearded man about 30.

CONAGHER (CONT'D)
 (with a sense of doom)
 Just throw it to Hezekiah.

Conagher heads to third base as Beau pounds his glove with his fist, mimicking the actions of Hezekiah at first base.

HARDY (O.S.)
 You Bandy?

Beau turns at his name to see a wiry firecracker of a man striding purposely toward him from center field.

BEAU
 That's right.

HARDY
 I'm Hardy Cordley. The sheriff said
 you played a lot of ball back East.
 (slaps Beau's back hard)
 Makes me happy. Very happy indeed.

Hardy turns on his heels and strides back to center field.

NEAR THIRD BASE

The SHERIFF from Twin Forks draws his gun, FIRES in the air--

FORD
 (reacting to shot)
 Let's play ball!

He grabs a glove and a hand-made, stitched softball and strides to the pitcher's mound as the Sheriff of Twin Forks holsters his gun and unbuckles his gun belt... hands it to a Deputy... grabs a bat and strides to the plate.

Ford bears down and fires the first pitch -- hard -- with a fast underhand whip motion -- it SMACKS into the catcher's glove with a THWACK as the Twin Fork's Sheriff whiffs at it!

The Copperhead catcher throws the ball back to Ford and he raises it defiantly in the air to the Twin Forks players.

FORD (CONT'D)
 Here's your dinner boys!

What follows is no game for the frail or fainthearted.

EXT. OPEN PRAIRIE - BASEBALL FIELD - MONTAGE - DAY

WITH THE CRACK OF THE BAT, a ball down the third baseline sends Conagher into the dirt.

He stops it and fires to first getting the batter out by five feet, yet the batter still runs SMACK into Hezekiah anyway, knocking him flat on his ass! The Twin Forks players and town roar their approval!

A TWIN FORKS BATTER SWINGS HARD -- sending the ball rocketing right at Ford on the pitcher's mound, who catches it -- fires it to first for added effect -- Hezekiah catches it then rifles it straight into the chest of the still advancing batter -- knocking him on his ass -- and the Copperhead players and town roar their approval!

A TREE TRUNK OF AN IRISHMAN, with a thicket of wild red hair and a full bushy flame-red beard, grabs a bat for Twin Forks.

Out in center field, Hardy Cordley begins backing up... way back. Hardy sees that Beau is not moving and calls out --

HARDY
Hey -- it's Bohannon.

Beau backs up a little. Hardy is now righteously insistent!

HARDY (CONT'D)
It's Bohannon!!

Beau backpedals quickly to where Hardy is, which is basically to hell and gone in the outfield.

Ford rifles a fast one over the plate and BOHANNON CRUSHES the ball -- which rockets toward right field... and over Beau's head who's already on a dead run to catch up to it.

Bohannon rounds third for a home run. Out of breath, Beau chases the ball down and hurls it back toward first base as Hardy runs up like he's possessed!

HARDY (CONT'D)
The man's a devil!!

A BALL IS SMASHED PAST Beau and Hardy in right center. They both chase it down, grab for it at the same time, knocking each other over. Beau picks it up only to see Bohannon casually walking across home plate, taunting them.

HARDY (CONT'D)
He's the son of Satan!!

ROUNDING SECOND BASE -- Conagher is collared by the short stop trying to slow him down. Conagher drags him along and hurls him into the third baseman!

A fight breaks out -- both benches and half of both towns pour out onto the field clawing, kicking, punching...

INT. JAIL - CELL - DAY

Kelton stands on a cot pulled over to the barred window and listens to the sounds of the fighting coming from the ball field... then suddenly a GUNSHOT RINGS out and he flinches.

EXT. OPEN PRAIRIE - BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

The smoking gun is held aloft by a LADY WITH A BONNET. She stares at the fighting ballplayers and the field clears for play once more.

EXT. OPEN PRAIRIE - BASEBALL FIELD - LATER

Bottom of the ninth. THE SCOREBOARD READS 28 to 27 in favor of Copperhead. Twin Forks is up to bat. Ford is tired.

Ford winds up and heaves a pitch -- it's wide -- ball four. The bases are now loaded! Grabbing a bat is Bohannon!

Beau watches as Bohannon strides to the plate and points his bat at Beau and over his head. He blows Beau a kiss...

Hardy strides over to Beau with resolute purpose...

HARDY

Gotta put the fear of God in ya!

Hardy then hauls off and decks Beau with a haymaker.

HARDY (CONT'D)

Catch the damn ball!

He leaves Beau on the ground rubbing his jaw. With growing resolve, Beau walks over to Ford.

FORD

Get back out there!

BEAU

Can't you just strike him out?!

CONAGHER

(joins them from third)
No one's ever struck him out.

BEAU

No one?

FORD

Ever... He's an unflappable son of a bitch. Just look at him. Way he plays to the crowd...

Bohannon pulls a face for the audience -- what's taking so long?!? He provides them with a dramatic yawn... scratches his ass with the bat as he waits for the pitch...

BEAU

Now that's a game I know.

He walks slowly and dramatically half-way between the pitcher's mound and home plate, then stops and lowers his head. All eyes are upon him.

When he lifts his head, he is imbued with a fierce presence and has taken on a new persona, a startling transformation of character. He dynamically raises his arm --

BEAU (CONT'D)

(in a commanding voice)

Give to me the cursed ball!

Ford tosses the ball, Beau snatches it forcefully out of the air, holds it aloft, then drops it and it strikes the dirt.

BEAU (CONT'D)

(impassioned, to all)

Pay heed to the signs that follow!

Beau suddenly crouches by the ball, sweeping his hands around it, raising a cloud of dusty dirt, obscuring what he's doing.

BEAU (CONT'D)

This cursed ball hath the smell of death upon it --

He rises up through the swirling cloud.

BEAU (CONT'D)

-- and wears a smile ripped from Satan's brow.

With a thrust of his arm, he produces the ball out of the swirling cloud as the crowd GASPS...

BEAU (CONT'D)

Strike this with your stick --

Beau thrusts the ball toward Bohannon's bat and Bohannon instinctively jerks the bat away.

BEAU (CONT'D)

-- and its evil leaps into your soul, to forever torment you, and place within your flesh a burning, searing hole. So this ball you will miss or this curse you will kiss!

Beau carries the ball, held in his outstretched hand, and slaps it into Ford's glove. Beau returns to right field... all eyes are upon him.

BEAU (CONT'D)
 (aside to Hardy)
 That is the fear of God.

Ford readies himself on the mound. Bohannon's grip on his bat tightens, but he's now not so steady at the plate for Ford's outstretched arm points the "cursed" ball right at him.

Ford winds up and hurls the first pitch -- and Bohannon takes a mighty swing -- but with a hitch of hesitation and misses.

Ford wipes the sweat from his brow and delivers again. Bohannon swings -- but again with a flinch -- and misses.

Like a bull, Bohannon paws his feet into the dirt, bracing for the next pitch. His hands tighten on the bat.

He defiantly spits into the dirt. His confidence grows. He will not let Bandy throw him off his game... he will not...

Ford is about to begin his wind up when suddenly --

BEAU (CONT'D)
 (booming voice of doom)
 And evil leaps into your soul!!

Beau points directly at Bohannon. He's no longer Beau Bandy. He's now nothing less than the spectre of death.

Hardy Cordley, game forgotten, stares mutely at this transformation, riveted with the rest of the townsfolk as...

Ford moves into his wind-up.

For a lingering moment there is silence... then the THWACK of the ball hitting glove leather and the ERUPTION OF CHEERS from the Copperhead townsfolk -- Bohannon's struck out!

Beau watches as Ford and the ballplayers are mobbed on the mound by the townsfolk -- all except Nessa Bright.

Nessa stands to one side -- appraises Beau with a long measuring look -- sizing him up like one does a dangerous opponent... then turns and leaves.

Conagher grabs Ford to point him across the field at Beau.

CONAGHER
 You'll be hard pressed to toss him
 back in jail now. He's one of us.