

FADE IN

EXT.SMALL TEXAS TOWN 1875.DAYTIME

From the eyes of The LLANO KID we see a small dusty town from the street, the horse pauses and the Kid swings down and ties up at a rail in front of an outdoor eatery. Llano takes a seat, pays his 25 cents and digs into his grub. Before long he finds a couple hard cases staring at him with contempt.

COWPOKE 1

We be missin' some cattle yonder where  
this here Injun come ridin' in.

MINOR

Same area that woman and two kids was  
chased and ...

The others nod concurrently as a few toughs drift closer to the table; one with a pistol on his hip stands behind Llano.

LLANO KID

(loudly)Anybody here got proof who  
rustled them cows ... and molested  
innocent folks?

Nobody speaks. Onlookers exchange glances, doubtful. Tension soon fills the air.

COWPOKE 2

I say we take him now, b'fore that  
sheriff gits the pleasure.

VOICE IN THE CROWD (OC)

Yeah, what're yuh waiting for? Someone  
git a rope. Fine day for a public  
hanging!

A crowd has gathered. Some push in for a closer look at the bronze-skinned stranger with black hair dangling from a flat crowned hat. Llano rises slowly.

LLANO (LOUDLY)

Why doesn't that fella in the back  
come forward? Seems he's willin' to  
put you folks between my guns and  
hissself!

The crowd shifts and chews on until a woman finally steps forward.

WOMAN

Folks don't have no right to accuse a man of rustling without proper evidence. And as for that sheriff, if he don't-

Suddenly a drumming of hoof beats comes around the corner and toward them. The two cowpokes turn to face Llano, hands hovering over their guns when as Llano reaches out and slaps the gun from the first cowboy, followed by a left hook. A solid right puts the partner to the ground before Llano disappears between two buildings where his horse waits. In all the commotion of horsemen, Llano isn't to be found.

EXT.ON A ROCKY RIDGE THREE DAYS LATER

Llano sits his horse, checking his back trail over the vast expanse of prairie.

LLANO KID

They're out there, boy. Coming to stretch my neck for something I never done. Like that in these parts; another Injun to be rid of.

INT.PECOS JAIL HOUSE

Llano is seen through the open door tying his dun then stepping to the boardwalk and into the Pecos jailhouse. Nods to the sheriff.

PECOS SHERIFF

Been expecting you, young man. Word has it you lit a shuck outta Odessa, and with trouble on your trail.

Llano nods, half expecting the cuffs.

LLANO KID

Wouldn't be standing here if I was guilty, Sheriff.

SHERIFF

I know. Truth is a couple of ornery Arkansas boys took them cattle. Some bad whiskey git in 'em and well, we all know what a feller can do on a drunk. Anything more is hearsay.

LLANO KID

I reckon. And I'm much obliged to yuh

for declaring my innocence. (beat)  
Them two back yonder in that cell?

SHERIFF

Yep. Instead of a hanging, that posse'  
coming will be hauling them back to  
their own jurisdiction. Got a full  
confession after they showed all  
liquored up and bragging over at the  
saloon.

Llano turns toward the door. Sheriff beckons him.

SHERIFF

You in town for a spell, or just  
passing through?

LLANO KID

Was fixing to find me some work.

SHERIFF

Couple of outfits around, may be  
hiring. Good luck, and keep your nose  
clean.

EXT.ACROSS THE STREET AT THE SIDEWINDER SALOON

Llano walks from the jail into the street. We see the sign  
advertising grub. Llano pushes through the bat-wings.

INT.INSIDE THE SIDEWINDER

Llano pauses, pans the room where a couple of card tables are  
busy, then walks to the bar.

BARTENDER

What'll it be, other than whiskey,  
Injun?

LLANO KID

Beef sandwich, coffee.

BARTENDER

Ain't got no cream, young man.

LLANO KID

What's that got to do with it?

BARTENDER

On account we don't serve no breeds  
whiskey I figured you'd be drinking

coffee and cream all day.

The comment elicits grunts and chuckles from the tables. Llano scans the room with cold black eyes. Gets the food and sits at a table along the wall. He digs in, famished. Soon a voice rumbles across from the nearest card table.

GAMBLER

Hey, you, Injun boy? You Apa-chee or you a Co-man-chee? Cuz either way, I got me a good rope outside.

Llano glances briefly their way, but gets back to his beef sandwich, taking his time. The big redhead looks around at his buddies for support. Starts to get impatient when he fails to get a reaction from the lone Injun.

GAMBLER

Don't reckon the breed understands English. (beat) I done asked you a question, Injun!

Llano ignores him, his hand sliding to the edge of the table over his thigh near his six gun. The gambler glances at the two guns tied to Llano's legs, then back around the room nervously. Finally, he stands up and grunts to the other gamblers.

GAMBLER

This is gonna be like taking a gumdrop from a baby ...

Red glances around with a wide grin, flexing his fingers in preparation of yanking the breed out of his chair and teaching him a lesson. Next thing he knows Llano is arm's length from him with a pistol drawn.

LLANO KID

You say something, mister?

Reconsidering, the gambler gulps and places his hands flat on the table.

GAMBLER

Just havin' a little fun witcha, Injun boy.

LLANO KID

Reckon you'll git more amusement outta that there card game, mister. You just set back down and finish it.

All eyes are on Llano as he hitches up his guns and walks out.

EXT. PECOS STREET

Llano pauses in the street outside the Sidewinder, watching kids playing, women walking by, a school bell ringing, and wagons rolling past. Walks up to the bank and enters.

INT. BANK INTERIOR

Curt Rollins, fully reclined in a chair behind his desk, is startled by the visitor's entrance. Llano's eye catches him slipping a whiskey bottle out of sight. Rollins rises and comes around from behind his desk.

ROLLINS

What can I do for you, partner?

LLANO KID

Name's Llano.

ROLLINS

How old are you, young man?

LLANO KID

Nineteen, sir.

ROLLINS

Don't look it. Mebbe it's the breed in you. I've a cause to be calling you Llano Kid. (beat) Now, now, don't get me wrong. I see it as a compliment, ur, like that gun-slick fella, *Billy the Kid*.

LLANO KID

I wanna make a deposit.

ROLLINS

Where'd you get this from?

LLANO KID

Sold the farm back in Kentucky. (beat) I'm looking for work. Figured you'd know who's buying and selling livestock around here.

Llano lays out the bills he's holding. Rollins counts them and writes out a receipt after he closes the money up in the safe.

ROLLINS

Can yuh handle cattle?

LLANO KID

Reckon as good as the next guy.

ROLLINS

James Maxwell. Yes, he's a good man and could use a hand, I'm sure of it. Though I ain't seen him in quite a spell. Has a foreman running things these days. Dave Beckman is his name. Seen him over at the general store a little bit ago.

LLANO KID

Thanks.

ROLLINS

And if I was you, I'd steer clear of the Instrom outfit. Big range, the I-Bar is, but folks never see the cows. Always making big deposits with newly minted gold coins that ain't yet in circulation round here. Makes a feller wonder.

LLANO KID

Oh?

ROLLINS

I hear some outfit is rustling cows and running them over the border into Mexico. Got no proof, but rumor has it one of them Instroms dry-gulched a T-Bar hand.

LLANO KID

One of Maxwell's boys, huh? Thanks.

Llano exits without another word.

EXT.GENERAL STORE

Llano sees the man loading a wagon with supplies outside the store.

LLANO KID

You Dave Beckman?

BECKMAN

Yep. Who are you?

LLANO KID

Fella looking for work.

Beckman looks the young man in front of him up and down. The tied down guns, the dark sun-baked complexion.

BECKMAN

Always could use another hand. Can you use them guns?

LLANO KID

When the need arises.

Beckman scribbles on a pad he takes off the wagon and hands it to Llano.

BECKMAN

Here's the way to the ranch. Come in at *daylight* when ya do. Boys are a mite jittery.

LLANO KID

Obliged to yuh, sir.

Llano watches Beckman climb into the wagon and drive off.

EXT. IN A CANYON OUTSIDE OF TOWN

Llano winds his way down a steep canyon, pausing to let the dun drink from a stream off the trail. Through cover of foliage he watches a lone rider appear, unaware of his presence as he searches the trail for sign until Llano's words startle him.

LLANO KID

Pretty up yonder, whether a fella is fixing to stay or just passin' through.

RIDER

Mebbe he'd be better off passin' through, if he don't want no trouble.

LLANO KID

And if he were to accidentally meet up with Apaches?

RIDER

How do I know you ain't one of 'em?

LLANO KID

Folks call me the Llano Kid, and you are?

RIDER

Ain't important who I am.

LLANO KID

Sorry to hear you ain't important in these parts.

RIDER

That ain't what I meant! (beat) For a breed, you got a boldness about you I don't like.

LLANO KID

Never did cotton to crowd pleasin'.

Llano lets his words drift on the wind as he looks around from his horse while keeping the rider in the corner of his eye. Rider glances at the tied guns on Llano's thighs.

LLANO KID

I-Bar outfit operate out this way?

RIDER

Most of this is owned by Instrom. You huntin' a job? We done hired a greaser. Mebbe he'd take on a drifting no-account Injun.

LLANO KID

Odd thing is b'twixt here and town a body don't see a single head of cattle, unless...

RIDER

Unless what?

LLANO KID

Unless they're held somewhere out of sight, waitin' to be driven somewhere.

RIDER

You accusin' something, Injun?

Llano gives him nondescript Indian silence. Rider grows



restless.

RIDER

Such a notion has a way of getting a man kilt ... 'specially if he's poking around in the wrong places. So, mebbe, half-breed, you best turn and ride.

Llano sits his horse with a poker face until the rider grows nervous, grunts and rides out.

EXT.CAMP OFF THE TRAIL.NIGHT

Llano finishes a cup of coffee and banks his fire, curls up out of sight over some pine needles under a dome of stars. A rumbling sound is heard, suddenly growing louder, awakens Llano. Glancing at the red coals and sits up in time to realize it's a stampede. Rolling over the bank of the nearby stream bed he watches a herd of wild horses run by in the darkness.

EXT.DAYBREAK AT CAMP

Llano leads his dun out to the trail, carefully reading the sign over the trail.

LLANO KID

Wild horses, driven by rustlers. Who else is driving 'em by night?

The dun sets out on the trail. A sequence of scenes takes them into the day where Llano stops in another canyon and sits down against a sheer rock wall. He glances around and takes a whiff of the air. Suddenly his eyes dart to the dun whose head is up with distended nostrils. At once he is surrounded by warriors, his Winchester out of reach in its scabbard. Staring into the business end of a Sharps .50, Llano is careful to keep his hands clear of his six-guns. There are too many of 'em to try anything.

One of the braves leaps forward to dispatch Llano's weapons, including the Bowie knife hidden in Llano's waist seam. He waves it proudly back at the other young braves. The elder in the clan advances. A second warrior translates his words.

ELDER

You, no white man. No Apache!

LLANO KID

Cherokee.

WARRIOR

Only Apache and Comanche in this  
country.

LLANO KID

I come afar.

Llano plants a fist to the dirt and draws it westward. The elder seems irritated after glancing over the saddle and the attire on Llano.

ELDER

You live by white man's way. You are  
enemy to us.

Knowing some of the ways of the Apache, Llano elects to say nothing in his defense. He will have to show it through courage, bravery. Two braves are directed to seize Llano and he is led to a nearby camp. There, several young braves assemble themselves behind boulders as they sharpen their arrow and adjust the sinew across their bows. The elder speaks in his native tongue and the practice session begins with each one taking shots from fifty yards back from where Llano has been tied to a tree.

Most of the shots miss Llano and the elder expresses disappointment, then dispenses wisdom and instruction until one arrow enters Llano's thigh. He works himself into a mental state of showing no pain or agony. The elder suddenly ends the practice at which time Llano is left to himself while the braves consult with their elders. Promptly Llano is untied and a young girl emerges from the fire to apply a paste wrapped in leaves after removing the arrow from Llano's thigh. The elder's words are translated into broken English.

ELDER

Not like white man, you endure much  
pain. You no coward.

LLANO KID

It is the way of my people. We share  
much in common.

ELDER

We lose many horse. The white man's  
ways seek to profit by stealing.

LLANO KID

That is true among *some*. But many come  
here in peace and are willing to work  
for what they have.

WARRIOR

For who do you ride?

LLANO KID

I travel alone. When you found me I was tracking a group of riders whom I believe are rustling unshod horses, perhaps yours. And they may be selling them in Mexico. Horses are of high value, but rustlers will hang for their deeds.

The elder produces a faint smile as if he understood. The women finish applying the healing paste to Llano's thigh and back up with deference.

WARRIOR

Your name, we do not know.

LLANO KID

Llano is what I am called by most.

WARRIOR

Go in peace, Llano. You help us another day.

LLANO KID

Soon, I hope.

Llano's horse is led to him. He mounts and turns to the trail and disappears, a hand of peace raised.

EXT.T-BAR RANCH YARD.NEAR SUNDOWN

Llano rides into the yard and pauses near the veranda of the ranch house. Light from lanterns is seen through a few windows. From a corner on the veranda a ranch hand WILLY appears holding a rifle aimed at Llano.

WILLY

Hold it right there, mister.

LLANO KID

I'm friendly. Here to see James Maxwell 'bout a job. Name is Llano.

Dave Beckman stands in the doorway, overhearing Llano's greeting. Waves off the ranch hand.

BECKMAN

He's okay, Willy. Care for his horse.

Willy grunts and cusses under his breath as he leads the dun to the stables. Llano is motioned to come inside. Maxwell is sitting at the end of the supper table looking over some papers. Coffee is served by a girl.

MAXWELL

Light and set, young man. I hear you're looking for work.

LLANO KID

Yes, sir.

BECKMAN

Fine looking hoss you got there. Question is, can yuh ride him with a herd of cattle?

LLANO KID

Rode plenty on my pa's hog farm back east.

BECKMAN

That's a sight different from a cattle drive through Texas!

LLANO KID

Work is work. I can learn whatever the next guy can.

Beckman looks doubtful. The girl brings in a platter of beef and beans and sets it in front of Llano.

MAXWELL

Git to it, Llano Kid. Isn't that what they call yuh back yonder?

LLANO KID

It'll do.

MAXWELL

We rise early, at first light around here. Plenty of work to do before we move those cattle out next month. See you bright and early for breakfast.

Maxwell rises to his feet but needs to be steadied by the girl as he retires to a back room.

INT.BUNKHOUSE.EARLY MORNING

Llano awakens to finds himself alone in the bunkhouse, he's

overslept! Dresses quickly and exits toward ranch house.

INT.RANCH HOUSE TABLE

Llano enters, averts eyes from others and plops down in the last empty chair. Starts in on eggs, ham, potatoes, etc. Silence fills the room other than the sounds of the hands eating, eyes fixed to his own plate. Margaret pours coffee and exits to kitchen. Beckman appears in the doorway.

BECKMAN

Thought you'd cut an run on us, Kid.

LLANO KID

Ain't slept in a real bed for months.  
Reckon it ...

BECKMAN

A soft bed can soften a fella right  
quick.

LLANO KID

Not here.

Llano waves a hand around to show what kind of men they have at the T-Bar. Beckman offers a doubtful sneer to Llano.

BECKMAN

Today might prove otherwise.

Llano ignores Beckman's innuendo as he forks more beef from a large platter on the table. The others glance reluctantly with a careful study on Llano. Beckman finishes building a cigarette and lights up as ERIC FOSS shows up at the door. Beckman informs him of the new hire in a way that evokes grunts and muffled sniggering around the table.

BECKMAN

Eric, that new fella over there, they call him the *Llano Kid*. Well, he's a mite green when it comes to ridin' with cattle, so I want you to learn him some ways we do out here in Texas.

FOSS

Alright, Kid, I'll see you out at the corral in fifteen minutes.

LLANO KID

Make it ten.

## EXT.RANCH CORRAL

Llano approaches the corral in time to hear Beckman talking to Foss. The other hands are following several paces back with interest. They spread out around the pole fence of the corral, eager to see a show.

## BECKMAN

Fetch him the roan. The Kid might as well start with our best ranch stock.

A moment later the stable boy, a dark Mexican, is leading an ornery looking horse into the corral. The look on his face shows concern. Beckman quickly dismisses the stable hand and takes the horse over to where Llano is standing. The other hands glance at each other, some grinning, others shrugging as we watch Beckman tighten the cinch on the horse's belly. Llano doesn't appear to notice what is happening. He climbs aboard and grabs the reins from Beckman who steps back warily.

## BECKMAN

He's a mite shy, so put some spur into him.

Llano nods back and braces himself as he pokes the horse in the ribs. Seeing the horse stand apathetically, Beckman frowns and looks over at Eric Foss as if something has gone wrong. Suddenly the roan blows and starts bucking like a mad beast. Llano rises up in the stirrups and holds on as the roan swaps ends several times and races to and fro across the corral for nearly a minute. The hands are dumbfounded to see Llano stay in the saddle, and soon cheering as he calms the roan who trots to the fence and stands. Llano smiles over at Foss.

## LLANO KID

He's a mite friendlier than I expected. Shall we start them lessons Mister Beckman ordered?

## FOSS

Uh, yes, let's do that. We'll start with *making a loop*.

Llano sits the roan and whispers to him as Foss prepares a lariat. Beckman stands across the corral watching as Llano slides down off the roan, loosens the cinch, walks around him with a currying hand, then climbs back into the saddle. Foss begins to demonstrate a toss onto a steer that has entered the corral. Meanwhile Beckman turns his attention to chasing

off the other hands to their morning chores.

FOSS

It's all about getting a little momentum in your loop, like this, while keeping an eye on your target.

LLANO KID

Yes, sir.

Foss hands Llano a lariat and watches him throw a couple of loops that fall short of the animal. After a series of bad throws, he begins to land them on the head of the steer but they get shaken off until he cinches one up and wraps the rope around the saddle horn. Foss nods and watches approvingly.

FOSS

There yuh go, set her down over the head and give 'er a good yank.

EXT.THE OPEN RANGE

The ranch hands are seen roping cattle and branding them with running irons. Willy rides up to Llano under a sweltering sun and drifting dust.

LLANO KID

Guess it won't be long before we're driving these cows to Abilene, huh?

WILLY

Nope. Maxwell cut a deal with a rancher south of here. Sold most all of 'em yuh see out yonder.

LLANO KID

Saves us a heap of trouble, I reckon.

WILLY

Mebbe. Gonna miss getting off the ranch for a spell. Get a way from ...

Beckman's got fire in his eyes as he rides up suddenly.

BECKMAN

No time for loafin', boys. Cut into them breaks for strays ... and hurry it up!

Willy & Llano take out for a nearby ridge.

INT.RANCH HOUSE.DUSK

The ranch hands are filing in dusty and tired. Llano bellies up to the table as supper is served. Beckman is seen exiting a room past the kitchen, lingering near the table, watching the hands devouring the meal.

BECKMAN

Boss is looking for a couple  
volunteers to go into town tomorrow.  
Bank run.

None of the boys answer. Llano glances up, a puzzled look in his eyes, but says nothing. An awkward moment passes.

BECKMAN

Willy. And (beat) you, Llano Kid will  
go.

Willy delivers a faint nod. The boys avert their eyes as they continue eating. Room is silent, except Llano.

LLANO KID

Yes, sir! Ain't been to town for I  
don't know how long.

Beckman walks outside. Willy looks up at Llano as if he's broken some sort of cardinal rule. The boys glance around and get back to their grub.

EXT.MOONLIT RANGE.NIGHT

Margaret sits on a rock in the shadows of a canyon under the moonlight, her horse cropping grass contently nearby. A young man appears and slides off his horse. They embrace and speak in low tones.

YOUNG MAN

It's been too long!

MARGARET

Only a week since we met out here,  
same time, same place.

YOUNG MAN

Yeah, but ...

EXT.STAGE TRAIL.DARK

A man is hunched down a few feet off the road. In the moon light the stagecoach come lumbering over a rise. The man



steps out onto the road with a lantern in one hand and a rifle in the other. He waves at the driver to stop.

DRIVER

Ain't gonna do you no good to hold up this stage, pal. Carrying nothing of val--

ROBBER

I'll be the judge of that. Now git down and lie face down while look for myself. My partner's out yonder with a scatter gun, so don't nothing foolish.

Driver drops to the road. Robber opens the unlocked box under the driver's seat and finds nothing. He jumps down and walks around to the side door where a lady pops her head out.

LADY

Alright, what is it now ...

ROBBER

It's a hold up, lady. Gimme all your here valuables!

Lady hands over a pocket watch, and tells the others aboard to comply. We see a wallet and some other jewelry items passing through the window before the robber skips off into the woods. As we hear the stage continue on, we see the old man sitting on a log gushing over his loot, alone.

INT. BUNKHOUSE. NIGHT

The hands are turning in for the night. Llano is stretched out with his hands behind his head in the dim light. A couple of boys begin snoring from their bunks. Llano finally breaks the silence, followed by a stuttering voice in the room.

LLANO KID

I don't get it. Beckman throws us a line into to town ... and you guys clam up! What's wrong?

TOM'S VOICE (O.C.)

Yuh see, Llano, the ..the ..last guy to be c c carrying Maxwell's m...money to town, well, he ... he never come back. Jesse, he... he got hisself dry gulched, 'fore he ever g..got to town.

WILLY

They found him with a bullet in his back!

TOM

Twe..twelve thousand d...d...dollars!

WILLY

The killers, they was tipped off. Had to be from someone here at the T-Bar.

INT.I-BAR RANCH HOUSE.MORNING

The Instrom boys are getting up from the table as old man TITUS INSTROM sits nursing his coffee. He looks up with no nonsense in weary eyes.

TITUS INSTROM

Just git the money and leave 'em tied somewhere. I don't want no killin' this time. Folks is gettin' mighty suspicious these days. Come back with the money and no blood.

JACK

Okay, but what if they start draggin' iron, boss?

TITUS INSTROM

You take 'em by surprise. I'm depending on you boys not to botch this up! Got it?

JACK & GEORGE

Yessir.

EXT.T-BAR'S RANCH YARD.MORNING

Beckman is seen leading a horse from the corral. Maxwell totes a saddlebag from the porch, breathing hard and looking feeble. He glances at darkening skies. Margaret appears at the door.

MAXWELL

Get this money to the bank first thing this morning, Willy. Don't stop for nothing. Llano Kid will ride with you. Stay close together.

WILLY

Yessir.

LLANO KID

If we git ambushed all that money will  
be easy to grab off one horseman.

WILLY

He's right, we aught to split ...

BECKMAN

Willy carries **all** of it! Kid, you take  
this \$25 for supplies at the general  
store after the bank deposit. We'll  
see you both on the range by noon!

The two ride out of the ranch yard, the money across Willy's  
saddle. Worried looks are glimpsed from the hands in the  
corral.

EXT.ON A MOUNTAIN TRAIL IN STORMY WEATHER.FIRST LIGHT

Llano rides behind Willy with eyes sweeping the  
mountainsides. A patter of rain turns to torrents as they get  
into their slickers. A flash of lightning and burst of  
thunder startle Willy's gelding into rearing up.

LLANO (LOUDLY)

Cover his head with this and toss me  
the reins. I'll lead him a ways!

The wash is running higher as Llano leads the gelding down  
the trail. They cross at one point and then attempt another  
before stopping under a cleft of rock to calm the horses.

LLANO KID

It's gonna be tough to get the horses  
across the wash now.

WILLY

Another hundred yards is a better  
crossing. But we don't have much time.  
I seen this wash flood right quick in  
a spring storm.

LLANO KID

Alright, let's move out.

They pick up the trail again and cross in knee-deep currents  
as the rain seems to let up. Suddenly a shot rings out from  
the mountain side, and the gelding collapses under Willy.  
Llano's rifle is up as he gets off a couple rounds. Willy  
spies two riders retreating up a high trail, one bent over in  
the saddle.

WILLY

Up there. One's hunched over in the saddle, clutching his shoulder. Some shootin', man. Where's you learn how to shoot like that?

LLANO KID

Growing up a half-breed you learn a lot of things to survive.

EXT.MAIN STREET OF TOWN.MORNING

The two ride double on Llano's dun, tie up at the rail and enter the bank with the saddle bags.

INT.BANK OFFICE

Rollins puts the last of the bills into the safe and hands Willy a receipt.

ROLLINS

You boys taking your chances coming off the mountains in that storm. I ain't like Maxwell to send his boys out in such weather.

LLANO KID

It was his foreman who kinda pushed the idea ... but we got through okay.

WILLY

Besides, the ranch is short on supplies. We'll be seeing you, Mister Rollins.

Rollins stands with a puzzled look outside the bank to watch the two lead the single horse over to the store. Willy walks on to the livery.

EXT.RANGE.MID DAY

Llano and Willy ride up to a branding scene. The hands are spread out around a small fire drinking coffee. Beckman stands as the two ride into camp.

BECKMAN

You two took your merry time gettin' out here.

The two ignore the comment as Willy swings down and leads the black he's riding over to Beckman, delivering an inscrutable

stare.

BECKMAN

What are you looking at?

WILLY

Take a look, boss. This ain't the same horse I was riding this morning.

BECKMAN

you better have a durned good explanation for loosing perfectly good ranch stock.

WILLY

We was dry-gulched at the wash. Someone who knowed we was coming through there shot the gelding out from under me.

BECKMAN

That's ridiculous.

WILLY

And if it wasn't for Llano's shooting we'd be dead and the money gone!

BECKMAN

That true, Kid?

LLANO KID

I reckon he's right.

BECKMAN

You on the dodge, Llano Kid?

LLANO KID

You run into a feller with a lame shoulder, you found yourself a man on the dodge.

INT.RANCH BREAKFAST TABLE.PRE DAWN

Beckman came through the door as the boys were eating and mumbling over the Kid's gunplay the day before. Beckman angles over to Llano as he pulls a small log book from his breast pocket.

BECKMAN

Kid, we be missing some cattle southwest of the pass, beyond Red

Rock. I want you to fetch 'em out of the desert.

LLANO KID

How many?

BECKMAN

Couple dozen. That's money down a rathole if we don't git 'em back.

The boys at the table avoid eye contact and look ill at ease over Beckman's assignment. Llano rises from the table, downs his coffee and moves toward the door.

BECKMAN

I'll have Margaret pack some grub, enough to last til you return.

EXT.RANCH YARD. DAWN

Llano sits his horse in the yard as Margaret hands him a sack of food. Beckman stands on the rambling porch and offers a faint nod to Llano who turns his horse to the gate.

EXT.NEAR TRAIL ALONG WASH.DAY

Llano pauses where the boys had pulled the dead gelding into the wash and caved in an overhang of sand over it. Llano fills his canteen at the creek, then searches the landscape and rides up near the foot of the mountain. Looks to the ground. We see several burnt cigarettes and a boot print.

LLANO KID

Willy wan't joking about them lying in wait for us. But who was it tipped them off?

He rides on further until he arrives at a cleft in the wall, rides through and up a game trail that tops a ridge before dropping down into a sandy basin; an infernal frypan.

Llano rides on into the desert, pauses to search for shade, becomes increasingly weary. Camps under some scant mesquite, rides on. We see the deterioration of him and horse.

He suddenly drops from his horse at the report of a rifle shot. The horse retreats as he lays unconscious. Later he stirs to life and after a few failed attempts, comes to a sitting position, muttering to himself.

## LLANO KID

Water. Got to find water. Creatures do it. I shall.

Llano becomes alert to the passing of a bee, then another. Crawling forward on all fours, he pauses to spy another insect join the others. He adjusts his angle, inching along and arrives at a small bog between two basalt boulders.

He summons the will to scrape at the darkened sand, unearthing moisture, and soon he is sipping water from cupped hands. He takes more before dozing. The sun has sunk closer to the horizon when we hear a horse blow. Llano awakens, greets the dun and painstakingly climbs aboard. The horse moves out and after some time, through glazed vision, Llano sees a war party of Apaches flanking him at a distance. Wearily he slides off the horse and lies in the sand, donning only his bowie knife.

Soon a scout from the party approaches from behind as Llano waits, listens, feels the warrior's presence. As the boy pounces with weapon in hand, Llano twists around to meet him in the sand. The two roll and tumble until Llano extracts the blade from the warrior's grip. It falls to the sand and Llano quickly ties his hands and feet with pigging strings he pulls from his waistband.

Llano makes a small fire and puts on coffee he's taken from his saddlebag. His rifle across his knee, Llano eyes the war party as they approach on foot. He motions them to sit.

## WARRIOR #1

You alone in empty land. Either have good medicine ... or you are foolish one.

## LLANO KID

A little of both. I was sent here to find lost cattle that do not exist.

## WARRIOR #2

Many cows that way. None here in empty land. No water for big animal.

The two adult warriors glance at the young brave tied upon the sand, then look back at Llano with disapproval.

## WARRIOR #1

You do not kill your enemy?

LLANO KID

I do not wish to kill this young man.  
He demonstrated his bravery and so  
deserves to live, to learn the ways of  
his people. My wish is to pass through  
your land in peace, for I seek  
rustlers of cattle and horses. The  
same men who steal from your people.

The elder speaks in his mother tongue and the brave jumps to his feet. With his left hand, Llano unties the strings and watches him retreat to the group. The brave returns with a gourd of water and strips of dried meat, which he lays at Llano's feet before retreating. Llano watches as the party ride off.

EXT.RANCH YARD.EVENING

Llano walks the dun up to the ranch house and swings down. Beckman appears at the door with a surprise expression over his face. Despite his inquiry about the cattle, Llano pushes by in search of James Maxwell.

BECKMAN

Well, if it ain't the Llan--

LLANO KID

Where's Maxwell?

BECKMAN

Boss ain't seeing nobody today, on  
account of his poor health.

LLANO KID

I got some news for Mister Maxwell.  
news that can't wait until he's well.

BECKMAN

I'll pass it on to him. And how about  
them cattle that run off?

INT.RANCH HOUSE

Llano brushes by and enters the house, sees that Maxwell's bedroom door is closed with a padlock on the outside. Margaret enters from a back door with a bucket of water. Her eyes are filled with anxiety and fear.

MARGARET

Welcome home! Coffee?



LLANO KID

Yes ma'am. Uh, how's your dad doing?

Margaret starts to say something when Beckman enters, crushing out his cigarette on the plank floor. The ranch hands began filing in and taking up at the table. They eye Llano with curiosity. Beckman is looking for a showdown in the presence of all. Llano remains standing a few feet from Beckman.

BECKMAN

Well, let's have it, Kid. How about them cattle I sent you for?

LLANO KID

Ain't no livestock out where you sent me.

BECKMAN

You callin' me a liar, Injun kid?

The room is suddenly silent, all eyes darting between the two, waiting for Llano's response. Like a coiled rattler, Llano wheels with a left hook to Beckman's jaw, followed up by a right to the gut. Beckman folds, but only momentarily. Llano evades a couple hasty punches from Beckman, then the foreman picks up a chair. The room clears to the sides before the chair crashes down over the table. Llanos steps in and finishes off Beckman with some wicked punches only an Irish bred fighter might deliver, and Beckman is out on the floor.

Llano stoops over Beckman and plucks a set of keys from his pocket and hands them to Margaret.

LLANO KID

Git your daddy out here and make n=him real comfortable. I believe he'll wanna hear what I gotta say.

Margaret releases the steel bar over the door and escorts Maxwell out. The hands clear debris off the table and return to their chairs, eager to hear all. A drumming of hoofs is heard and the town sheriff (MASON) shows up at the door, glances over at Beckman and then greets Maxwell.

MASON

Well, if you ain't a sight for sore eyes! Reckon I've been remiss in not getting out here to check on you. When Llano come by my office this morning to lay out his supposition on your

missing cattle ... well, Jim, the whole thing just plum fit together like a jigsaw puzzle.

MAXWELL

That right, Llano kid?

LLANO KID

Well..

MASON

Trust me Jim, we got Llano to thank for putting this here scandal of Beckman's to rest. Pardon my tardiness, but I had to pay the Instrom family a little visit, and I'll be returning to make a few of my own arrests after I haul your foreman off to jail.

A rumble of bantering talk among the ranch hands escalates into chaos before Sheriff Mason sits everyone back down and cuts into his own dissertation of the crime in his heavy drawl. Llano and Maxwell grin as they exchange glances.

MASON

Now, boys, git yerself seated so as me and the Llano Kid can tell the whole story. And Miss Margaret, you git a fresh pot of coffee ta boilin'.

MAXWELL

Do as the sheriff says before he splits a gut. I reckon he's as excited as a bullfrog at a horsefly roundup!

Everyone settles down as the coffee pot gets passed around and Llano is eyeballing Beckman who sits on the floor sullen and sallow-eyed.

MASON

You see, Jim, your foreman here saw the T-Bar as more than a job, but a lucrative business opportunity. A place to skim your profits by rustling your cattle, a few at a time, then fixing their brands before running them onto Instrom's range.

MAXWELL

What about our bank deposits?

MASON

Them robberies were always perpetrated the morning after an attempted holdup on the stage line, designed to tip off Instrom's boys the T-Bar was hauling money to town. Unfortunately some of your boys lost their lives in the process.

MARGARET

So, where was our money going?

MASON

The cash stolen from the T-Bar hands would be deposited into Instrom's account, and later Beckman's cut was sliced out of Instrom's payroll.

MAXWELL

Doesn't this suggest someone on the stage line was in cahoots with the scheme?

MASON

Not exactly, but Mister Beckman was preparing to pin it on Margaret's gentleman caller she was meeting not far from Instrom's ranch.

MARGARET

(glaring at Beckman)  
Of all the nerve!

MAXWELL

You ain't told us how the Kid played into figgering out their scheme.

MASON

Well, yuh see, their operation got sort of botched when the Apaches come along to retrieve six of their stolen horses. That's when Llano seen something kinda strange.

MAXWELL

Now hold on! You accusing us of stealin their ...

MASON

Not a-tall, Jim. It was just a neighborly exchange of stock, right

Llano Kid?

Llano nods mildly and gestures Mason to go on.

MASON

Yuh see, when Llano come into their camp with the horses he seen the steer ya'll sold them couple weeks back. Only thing it had an I-Bar brand on it instead of your T-Bar markings.

MAXWELL

(turns to cow hands)

Thought you boys finished branding our stock.

The boys look at each other puzzled and return a bewildered look to their boss.

MASON

I believe the Kid aught to be the one to tell this here bit. Tell 'em what you seen, Llano!

LLANO KID

Well, sir, under closer examination, I noticed the bottom of the "I" was fresh, and it bore the stench of freshly burned hide.

MAXWELL

I don't follow you, Llano. What are you getting at?

LLANO KID

Upon returning to the ranch, I did some snooping around and found the fabricated branding rod for burning the bottom cross piece to the form the letter "I", sir.

Mason is grinning ear to ear, ready to let more cattle out of the barn. Jim cocks his head and smiles over to the Kid while Margaret jumps in with more coffee.

MAXWELL

Looks like we solved us one problem but got us another. Unless my boys are out sniffin' cattle rumps, we ain't gonna know which one belong to us and which are theirs!

Mason stands up and all eyes follow him to the door where he reaches around for a branding iron leaning against the wall. Displays it proudly as evidence.

MASON

Ahh ha! That's where the Kid come through again for us. Yuh see, he took it upon hisself to file two slits in these here corners of Beckman's branding iron, on account of wanting more proof. Sure enough, the brands with the filed corners are proof of Beckman's alterations.

MASON

Evidence that will hold up in court!

The room is suddenly in an uproar with the hands talking and finger pointing at Beckman sitting on the floor looking sullen. Mason is shaking hands with Maxwell. Suddenly a woman's voice rings out and a hush descends over the room.

MARGARET

Most of them cattle were sold off! How could we know how many head were stolen over all this time? They're long gone! South of the border!

The sheriff smiles wryly, watching Maxwell turn a shade of pale in panic.

MASON

Good question, young lady. But some of you know that Beckman is a fastidious fellow likes to keep order, keeping records for his own satisfaction ... and payment.

MAXWELL

You think we're entitled to restitution, Sheriff?

MARGARET

*Resti* ... what?

MASON

Restitution. A monetary settlement for your losses. They gotta pay you back for all the cattle they stole. It's all in this here book I took off your x-foreman!

WILLY

I got a question. Llano, how did you come to suspect the whole operation in the first place? Too durn many cattle out there to notice just a few head missing, I mean without seeing the record book.

LLANO KID

Easy! I had taken a wrong turn in the canyon and unknowingly rode into a holding spot where they kept the stolen stock. Once they had a hundred or so, they moved 'em out like a legitimate cattle drive.

MASON

Well, there you have it. I'll take our friend here off the the jailhouse, and I'm sending the doc out here to see that you git right well, Jim.

Sheriff Mason leads Beckman to the doorway and pauses.

MASON

Reckon you better hire yourself a new foreman, Mister Maxwell.

Maxwell chuckles as he draws on his pipe, casting a grin at Margaret.

MAXWELL

Got us a few notions already, Sheriff.