

"11:59 from Prescott"

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Screen Story #22

FADE IN:

EXT. -- FRONTIER TOWN, ARIZONA TERRITORY -- LATE 1800s

We find ourselves in a classic sagebrush boomtown in the Old West, approaching high noon. The town has a short Main Street lined with the typical wooden storefronts of a Wild West settlement, including a saloon, livery stables, mercantile store, blacksmith shop, a rooming house and a church. Main Street ends at the railway station. The town is well-kept but appears nearly deserted. A tumbleweed blows across Main Street in a lonely wind.

Two local COWBOYS walk slowly down Main Street, side-by-side, heading toward the train station. An undefined tension hangs in the air, and they nervously finger the guns on their hips. As they scan the buildings along Main Street, we see there are other men hidden along the street. One man is inside an open window of the blacksmith shop; another is hunched down on a rooftop, and a third is on the second floor of the rooming house behind half-drawn curtains. Other men are positioned in various hidden and partially exposed places along Main Street, each with a gun at the ready. The two cowboys exchange nods with each of the men they pass, as if to say, "Are you ready?"

The two cowboys encounter a small BOY playing in the street. One of them speaks to his MOTHER, who is just inside a doorway:

COWBOY #1

M'am, you need to keep your boy  
inside.

The mother quickly responds by pulling the child inside and closing the door. She then draws the curtains tightly together in an adjoining window.

The two cowboys reach the railroad station.

CUT TO:

INT -- SMALL RAILWAY STATION

The cowboys enter the waiting room of the station. They exchange tense glances with the STATIONMASTER inside a ticket cage. He looks extremely nervous and is sweating profusely. He looks at his watch and it shows 11:55.

The two cowboys pass an Arrivals board which shows only one train...

"Prescott. . . . arr. 11:59am"

Apparently satisfied that everything is ready, the cowboys leave the station. We hear a train whistle blow in the distance, and as it does we...

CUT TO:

EXT. -- MAIN STREET

We are looking straight down Main Street toward the distant train station. Then we glance sequentially at each of the men nervously anticipating the train's arrival. As we inventory them, we hear, but do not see, a steam train arriving, stopping, then departing.

The church bell tolls the noon hour, and as it does, we look down Main Street again to see three ominous-looking men, the STRANGERS, standing in front of the station, facing up Main Street. We can't quite make out their faces, but their attire is darker and more formal than the cowboys'. It is the dress of gentlemen, not working folk. They wear black cowboy hats, snakeskin boots and cape-like overcoats. They could be carrying guns under their overcoats, but this isn't clear. The man on the left is carrying a canvas satchel.

The three strangers begin slowly walking up the middle of Main Street.

At the other end of Main Street, the two cowboys take up a defiant position in the middle of the street, facing the approaching strangers. They are backed by several other local men, guns at the ready. The

strangers are outnumbered, but that doesn't make the situation any less tense.

Near the cowboys, the door of the rooming house opens, and a woman, rifle in hand, steps out to join the men. She is MISS KITTY, the proprietor. Her face shows some maturity and experience, but she is still attractive. Cowboy #2 motions her to stay inside, but she comes into the street anyway, determined to defend her town.

In the distance, the three strangers continue their approach. While they are still quite distant, one of the cowboy speaks up loudly...

COWBOY #2  
(shouting nervously)

We don't need your kind here! Go  
back where you came from!

The strangers do not respond but continue their slow march up Main Street.

MISS KITTY

We got to shoot 'em! Shoot 'em now!  
Didn't you hear what they did in  
Flagstaff and Kingman? We got to  
kill 'em while we still have the  
chance!

COWBOY #1

Get back inside, Miss.

Miss Kitty ignores the advice as the strangers continue their relentless approach. Tensions visibly rise among the local men. They finger their weapons but don't actually draw or point them. The strangers, however, show no emotion, and if they have any weapons, they aren't showing them.

The strangers get closer and closer until they are only a few feet away from the cowboys blocking their path. Then they stop. These are efficient, steely-eyed men showing no sign of weakness. The LEAD STRANGER, in the center, is wearing a well-groomed handlebar moustache. He is chewing tobacco casually, as though

he has nothing to fear. He speaks in a slow, deep Western drawl.

LEAD STRANGER

This is our town now.

COWBOY #1

What do you mean "your town"? We live here. We built this place. What makes you think you can just walk in and take it?

The Lead Stranger is silent for a moment. He chews his tobacco, then spits out a wad of it on the ground.

LEAD STRANGER

There are two ways we can do this: the easy way or the hard way.

Cowboy #1 looks around at his neighbors. All of them nod their agreement.

COWBOY #1

This is our town, and we're not budging.

LEAD STRANGER

Very well.

STRANGER #2, to the right, steps forward and hands the Lead Stranger an envelope. The Lead Stranger slowly opens it, silently reads the paper inside, then calls out a name.

LEAD STRANGER

Josiah Spalding.

The locals turn their heads toward one man among them, obviously the one just mentioned, JOSIAH SPALDING.

JOSIAH SPALDING

What business do you have with me?

LEAD STRANGER

You got 140 head of cattle out on  
Mesquite Mesa?

JOSIAH SPALDING

Yes.

LEAD STRANGER

Not any more.

JOSIAH SPALDING  
(shocked)

Says who?

The Lead Stranger nods to his colleague on the left,  
STRANGER #3. That man puts down the satchel he has  
been carrying. He squats beside the bag, opens it and  
pulls out a thick book. He then stands up, opens the  
book to a certain page and starts reading.

STRANGER #3

"No cattle shall be grazed on the  
public lands without a permit. Any  
cattle found present upon said  
lands without such duly issued  
permission shall be subject to  
forfeiture." Section 432B.

LEAD STRANGER

They're our cattle now.

Josiah Spalding drops to the ground in agony, as if he  
has just been punched in the gut.

The rest of the men are stunned. Two of them help  
Josiah Spalding off the street.

COWBOY #1

That's a man with a wife and kids.  
How is he going to support them  
now? It's just not right.

## LEAD STRANGER

Right or wrong is irrelevant. It's the law. It's what the Legislature, in its infinite wisdom, has decided is best for everyone.

ALL THREE STRANGERS  
(in unison)

God save the Legislature!

Suddenly, a local man, the ROOFTOP CITIZEN, shows himself on a nearby roof. He raises his rifle and points it at the strangers.

## ROOFTOP CITIZEN

Ya ain't takin' me alive!

The Lead Stranger calmly raises his finger and points it at the Rooftop Citizen.

## LEAD STRANGER

Obstruction of a public officer, a misdemeanor. Section 223a.

Stranger #2 also raises his finger and points it at the Rooftop Citizen.

## STRANGER #2

When committed with a deadly weapon, a felony. Section 223c.

The Rooftop Citizen immediately drops his rifle and clutches his stomach, as if he has just been shot. Then he plunges off the roof and into the street. (Due to a hay wagon obstructing our view, we do not actually see him hit the ground.)

The other local men quickly draw their own weapons and point them at the strangers. Miss Kitty also raises her rifle.

STRANGER #3  
(reading from the book)

"Loaded firearms shall not be carried within the confines of an urban center without a permit."  
Section 311a, subpart 6.

All of the men instantly drop their weapons, as if the guns have suddenly turned white hot. Miss Kitty holds onto her rifle as long as she can, but even she has to drop hers.

MISS KITTY

You can't do this. We were doing just fine without you. Sure, we had problems but nothing like the ones you're bringing us.

The Lead Stranger spits out another wad of tobacco.

LEAD STRANGER

Miss Kitty, or whatever your name really is: Operation of a business establishment for the purposes of prostitution. Section 119c.

We now look at Miss Kitty's rooming house and see that just inside the windows are several pretty young women, provocatively dressed.

MISS KITTY

They're... they're... maids!

LEAD STRANGER

Uh-huh. We'll need that cleaned up by morning. [To the local men] Do any of you gentlemen have further issues you'd like to discuss?

All of the local men bow their heads and submissively pull back toward the sides of the street, letting the strangers pass.



## LEAD STRANGER

By noon tomorrow, every man in this town will register with us. We'll need an inventory of his property, his horses, his family members and his weapons. You're gonna be payin' taxes now -- to us. From now on, there's gonna be rules in this town.

The strangers continue walking along their original trajectory up Main Street until they reach...

The Courthouse. We haven't seen it before because we never looked in that direction until now. The Courthouse is at the opposite end of Main Street from the train station. As the townsfolk look on, the strangers disappear inside the Courthouse.

MISS KITTY  
(to the local men)

Are we going to take this? What kind of men are you? Doesn't anyone in this town have the guts to stand up to them?

COWBOY #1

They got the law on their side, Miss. There's nothing we can do.

MISS KITTY

Well, I'm going to do something.

Miss Kitty starts marching toward the Courthouse.

COWBOY #2

Miss Kitty, don't!

CUT TO:

INT. - SHERIFF'S OFFICE

In the Sheriff's office in the Courthouse, the three strangers are lounging around like they own the place.

Stranger #3 is putting books from his satchel up on a shelf. Stranger #2 is cleaning his fingernails in the corner. The Lead Stranger is seated at the Sheriff's desk. He is leaning back in his chair with his feet up on the desk.

Miss Kitty storms into the office in a rage.

MISS KITTY

What right do you have to waltz in here and take us over? We were doing fine before you arrived. We were proud and self-sufficient. We were responsible for our own problems, and we were free to solve them any way that worked. Now, the only way is your way, and if you ask me, your way stinks.

The Lead Stranger chews on his tobacco then spits a wad of it into a brass spittoon a few feet away.

LEAD STRANGER

I'm gonna tell you this only once, M'am. This is civilization, and you better get used to it. Civilization runs on rules. Sometimes they are stupid rules, but that's better than no rules at all. Without rules you have chaos. You have murder, rape, pillagin', lootin'. You have people eatin' their young. We're here to protect you from all that. So maybe we got to cut the heads off few daisies along the way. That's just the price of protection.

MISS KITTY

We don't need your protection. Yeah, we all get afraid sometimes, but we don't like the price you're asking. You people never built anything; you only tear things down.

## LEAD STRANGER

Don't complain to us, M'am. We're just messengers. If you got any problem with what we do, take it up with the Legislature.

ALL THREE STRANGERS  
(in unison)

God save the Legislature!

## MISS KITTY

Well, I've seen the Legislature. They're a bunch of idiots. All they care about is getting reelected. They have no comprehension of what their words are doing to real people.

## LEAD STRANGER

Defaming the Legislature. Section 223c. Don't make me use it. Listen little lady, I think you best be gettin' back to your establishment and preparin' for an inspection tomorrow mornin'. We'll be lookin' for "code violations."

All of the strangers laugh. Apparently, it's an inside joke between them.

STRANGER #3  
(laughing)

Code violations.

Miss Kitty is still furious, but she holds her tongue. In frustration, she spins around and storms out of the office.

The strangers look at each other and smirk lecherously.

LEAD STRANGER  
(sinisterly)

She's gonna be a fun one.

CUT TO:

EXT. -- MAIN STREET -- LATE AFTERNOON

We are looking up deserted Main Street toward the distant Courthouse. A lonely wind is heard, and a tumbleweed blows across the street.

The church bell tolls once, and as it does a title fades up in the middle of the screen...

"LAWYERS."

That title fades away. Then the church bell tolls again, and another title fades up...

"SHOOT 'EM WHILE YOU HAVE THE CHANCE."

The church bell tolls again, and we...

CUT TO BLACK

THE END