

BLOOD PATH: AN ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY
BASED ON THE LIFE AND WORKS OF
JOHN ROLLIN RIDGE

by

JENNIFER CHAMBERLAIN

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

December 2012

Copyright © by Jennifer Chamberlain 2012

All Rights Reserved

DEDICATION

This screenplay is dedicated to the memory of my father, Nick Chamberlain. He would have been proud.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to Kenneth Roemer for his support and enthusiasm throughout this project. I would also like to thank Ya'Ke Smith and Cedrick May for their insight, guidance, and patience. I am indebted to James W. Parins and his biography of John Rollin Ridge, without which this project could never have come to fruition; I am also profoundly grateful for his willingness to serve as first reader on this project and for his excellent suggestions and advice. Finally, I would like to thank Tim Morris for encouraging me to pursue this path.

November 26, 2012

ABSTRACT

BLOOD PATH: AN ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY
BASED ON THE LIFE AND WORKS OF
JOHN ROLLIN RIDGE

Jennifer Chamberlain, M.A. English

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2012

Supervising Professor: Kenneth Roemer

Blood Path is an original, feature-length screenplay based on the life of John Rollin Ridge (1827-1867), a mixed-blood Cherokee whose work of sensational fiction, *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta*, is considered the first novel written in English by an American Indian author. A synopsis of the plot is as follows: After seeing his father murdered before his eyes at the age of 12, Ridge vows revenge on the rival faction responsible. As a young man, Ridge kills one of his rivals during an argument and is forced to flee to Gold Rush California, where he becomes obsessed with Joaquín Murieta, a legendary Mexican bandit who takes revenge on his oppressors with uncanny skill. Ridge sets out to tell Joaquín's story and in the process gains insight into his own family history, one that began on the Trail of Tears and ends on a path of blood. In dramatizing Ridge's life through the popular medium of film, my goal is to illuminate the story of a fascinating, and often contradictory, figure in American literature for an audience beyond the confines of academia, while at the same time highlighting the complex cultural conflicts that inform Ridge's life and work. These include notions of racial injustice and oppression and the individual response to those conditions; and the complexities of mixed-blood identity, including the implications of "passing" for white as a means of gaining status within the dominant culture.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
BLOOD PATH: AN ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY BASED ON THE LIFE OF JOHN ROLLIN RIDGE	6
REFERENCES.....	119
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION	123

INTRODUCTION

Description and Background

The goal of this project was to write an original, feature-length screenplay based on the life of John Rollin Ridge and his quest to uncover the story of the California outlaw Joaquín Murieta. Born in 1827, Ridge was a fascinating figure who lived during a turbulent time in American history when fortunes were made, wars were fought, and lives were lost, all in the name of Western expansion. Ridge was born into a distinguished Cherokee family; both his father and grandfather had been tribal leaders until a dispute erupted between the Ridge and Ross families over the U.S. government's removal of the Cherokee from their tribal lands in a series of actions that would eventually lead to the Trail of Tears. At the age of 12, Ridge witnessed the killing of his father by members of the Ross faction. This had a profound effect on Ridge, filling him with an insatiable desire for revenge. After killing a member of the rival faction during an argument, Ridge fled to Gold Rush California, where he established himself as a respected literary figure and newspaper editor. During his time in California, Ridge became particularly fascinated by newspaper accounts and stories of a Mexican bandit named Joaquín Murieta and eventually wrote a work of sensational fiction, *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta, the Celebrated California Bandit*, which is thought to be the first novel written in English by an American Indian author.

Purpose: Why a Screenplay?

In studying Ridge's life and work, it became immediately apparent to me that his story had all the makings of a Hollywood film. As I read James W. Parins' excellent biography, *John Rollin Ridge: His Life and Works*, I pictured scenes from Ridge's life as they might play out on screen: the brutal killing of his father and grandfather, the perilous cross-country journey to California, Ridge's failed mining attempts and subsequent success as a newspaperman, and, of course, his pursuit of the legendary bandit. Mark Rifkin has argued that Ridge deliberately chose the medium of sensational fiction to tell the story of Murieta because he wanted his social

critique to reach the broadest possible audience (30). In using the popular medium of film to dramatize Ridge's life, I have pursued a similar strategy. In so doing, my goal is twofold: first, to tell the story of an important, but largely forgotten, figure in American literature; and second, to illuminate the complex cultural conflicts taking place during this period in U.S. history.

Among his contemporaries, Ridge gained a degree of recognition, particularly in California. Upon his death, a number of newspaper obituaries heralded his achievements as journalist and poet; and Carolyn Thomas Foreman notes: "That Rollin Ridge is not forgotten in his adopted state is shown by newspaper stories about him that appear at frequent intervals" (307). Furthermore, his novel was successful enough in its time to spawn several bootlegged copies and to secure Joaquín Murieta's status as a folk hero (Jackson xxxii-xxxviii). In later years, however, Ridge's accomplishments were all but forgotten. The original edition of *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta* was nearly lost – only one copy is known to exist today (Jackson xi) – and only within the past few decades have the text and its author begun to receive serious critical attention (Christensen 61). By adapting Ridge's story for the screen, I hope to bring about an increased awareness of Ridge's life and contributions.

My second goal in creating this screenplay is to illuminate the complex cultural conflicts that inform both Ridge's actions and his interpretation of the Joaquín Murieta legend. These issues are particularly relevant to a modern audience as they remain largely unresolved today. One of the major themes in Ridge's novel is injustice; in his characteristically heavy-handed manner, the author tells us as much: "He [Joaquín] leaves behind him the important lesson that there is nothing so dangerous in its consequences as injustice to individuals – whether it arise from prejudice of color or from any other source" (136). Several critics have suggested that in his retelling of the Murieta legend, Ridge draws subtle comparisons between the treatment of Mexicans in Gold Rush California and that of his own people. Louis Owens, for example, contends that Ridge "encoded" his own experiences of oppression in the story of Murieta. He writes: "In this, his only novel, Ridge transforms himself and his bitterness against the

oppression and displacement of Indians, becoming a haunted shapeshifter writing between the lines” (32). Other scholars caution against relying too heavily on this interpretation, arguing instead that Ridge’s motivation was primarily commercial (Goeke 470), or possibly much more complex than even he realized (Mondragón). Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Ridge’s personal experiences influenced his portrayal of the bandit, and the screenplay highlights this deep bond between the two men.

Closely related to the theme of injustice, the concept of oppression versus freedom plays an important role in Ridge’s life and work. In the novel, Ridge portrays Joaquín as a noble character driven to acts of violence by the wrongs he suffered at the hands of “unprincipled Americans” who persecute him solely because of his race (3-4). At one point, Ridge even refers to Joaquín as a “hero who has revenged the country’s wrongs and washed out her disgrace with the blood of her enemies” (65). Despite Ridge’s emphatic defense of Joaquín’s actions, a thread of ambiguity runs through the novel as even the author seems at times to recoil at “the bloody and harrowing scenes” of death and destruction left in the bandit’s wake (119). A similar ambiguity marked Ridge’s reaction to the violence that haunted his own family history. On the one hand, Parins tells us that from an early age Ridge was obsessed with revenge. In a letter to his cousin Stand Watie, Ridge wrote: “There is a deep-seated principle of revenge in me which will never be satisfied until it reaches its object. It is my firm determination to do all that I can to bring it about” (56). Nevertheless, with the exception of killing David Kell, which newspapers at the time reported as being most likely an act of self-defense, Ridge never acted upon his desire for revenge. The screenplay dramatizes this tension over the compulsion to take revenge on one’s oppressors and the cycle of bloodshed that generally results.

Ridge’s life story and his portrayal of Murieta also provide insight into the complexities of the multicultural experience. As a mixed-blood Cherokee, Ridge could “pass” for white and often used this to his advantage. At the same time, he was proud of his heritage and frequently expressed a desire to return to the Cherokee nation and restore his family’s leadership role

within the tribe. Owens suggest that “Ridge, like many mixed-bloods who ‘pass’ and who have succeeded within the parameters of the dominant culture, must have felt the conflict deeply” (41). In his portrayal of Joaquín, Ridge indicates that the bandit demonstrated the same ability to “pass” as a European; even as an outlaw, Joaquín is often unrecognized in a crowd because of his fine clothes and gentlemanly demeanor (19,53). Parins notes that, in fact, Ridge describes Joaquín as looking much like himself (111), which serves to emphasize the connection between the two men and their liminal position in relation to the dominant culture:

Indeed, the romance’s protagonist resembles the writer in many ways: both men were dark and handsome, both saw themselves as leaders of minority groups, both harbored a thirst for revenge for undeserved wrongs, and both were outcasts. If Ridge can be said to have created Joaquín, he did so in his own image. (225)

Finally, I believe this project is important because it presents, in a popular medium, a rich, multi-textured story about the American Indian experience that does not rely upon tired clichés. Rather than the “us versus them” narrative that has so frequently portrayed American Indians either as a savage enemy or as a noble, dying people, it depicts an inter-tribal conflict between the Ridges and the Rosses from which there emerge no clear “good guys” but rather two different reactions to a very bad situation. I hope that I am not too bold in saying that I think *Blood Path* has the potential to achieve the sort of “cultural work” described by Jane Tompkins, providing our own society “with a means of thinking about itself ... dramatizing its conflicts and recommending solutions” (200).

Methodology

The idea for this project took root while I was working on a seminar paper about *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta* for a course titled “Reconstructing the American Literary Renaissance” taught by Dr. Kenneth Roemer at the University of Texas at Arlington in the fall of 2009. In preparing to write the screenplay, I studied a considerable body of material about Ridge and his work, all of which is included in my bibliography. For a “crash course” in

screenplay writing, I relied upon *Story* by Robert McKee, *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film* by Linda Seger and *The Screenwriter's Bible* by David Trottier.

The facts about Ridge's life presented in the screenplay are drawn almost entirely from Parins' biography and his original sources. I am deeply indebted to Parins' research, without which this project could have never taken shape. The depiction of Murieta is based entirely upon Ridge's novel, *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta*. In a slight departure from traditional screenplay formatting, I have used MLA in-text citations to indicate portions of the text that are quoted directly from other sources. In adapting the story for the screen, I have taken considerable creative license in imagining dialogue and details that are not in the historical record. I have also invented secondary characters who are entirely fictional as well as some who are based only loosely upon historical figures mentioned in passing in connection with accounts of Ridge and Murieta.

BLOOD PATH

Written by

Jennifer Chamberlain

Based on a true story

EXT. HONEY CREEK, ARK. SUMMER, 1849 - DAY

It is a beautiful summer day in the Cherokee Nation, near the four corners of present day Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma and Kansas. The lazy sound of cicadas mingles with the sounds of children playing stickball in a sunny meadow.

On horseback, JOHN ROLLIN RIDGE rides along a well-worn path through the reservation. A mixed-blood Cherokee, Ridge is an exceptionally handsome young man with light skin, a shock of thick, jet-black hair, full beard and moustache, and intense, smoldering eyes. His expressive face is presently set in a grim, determined scowl.

RIDGE (VO)

I was born in the Cherokee nation east of the Mississippi River on the 19th of March, 1827. My father, the late John Ridge was one of the chiefs of his tribe, and son of the warrior and orator distinguished in Cherokee councils and battles, who was known amongst the whites as Major Ridge. (Ranck 560)

EXT. KELL FARM, HONEY CREEK, ARK. - DAY

Ridge rides toward a farmhouse that sits in a clearing with a large pasture to one side marked off by a rustic fence. There is a barn in the distance and horses grazing.

RIDGE (VO)

I was called by my grandfather, Cheesquat-a-lawny, which interpreted means Yellow Bird.

In 1837, my father moved his family in quietude but the spring of '39 brought in a terrible train of events. It has darkened my mind with an eternal shadow. (Ranck 561)

A horse stands near the farmhouse apart from the others, a rope halter dangling from its head. Its awkward stance and rigidly raised head indicate that something is wrong, but Ridge does not seem to notice.

In front of the house, Ridge dismounts. On the front porch sits DAVID KELL, considerably larger than Ridge, mid-30s, Cherokee or perhaps mixed-blood, clothed like a farmer. He sits in a rocking chair, chewing on a toothpick. Kell grins as he sees Ridge approach; he has been expecting him.

KELL

(takes the toothpick out
of his mouth)
Well, Mr. Ridge, what can I do
for you today?

RIDGE

Where's my horse?

KELL

What, you mean that gelding over
there?

Kell laughs and motions toward the horse standing in the corral.

Ridge looks over at the horse. He sees the horse standing awkwardly and notices a pool of blood below the horse's belly. Livid, he looks back at Kell, and takes another step toward the porch, fists clenched.

KELL

(continues laughing)
Aw, c'mon now, he wasn't that
much of a horse to begin with.

RIDGE

(through clenched teeth)
Don't think I don't know what
this is about, Kell. You're
trying to bait me.

KELL

Now why would I do a thing like that?

Kell stands, and takes a step toward Ridge.

KELL

I mean, that treaty business, it's all just water under the bridge now, isn't it?

We're all here on the reservation now, one big, happy family. ... Just like the old Ridge wanted.

RIDGE

My grandfather wanted what was best for his people, and so did my father, and for that ...

KELL

(moves even closer)

Now, that's the kind of talk that could start a fight.

RIDGE

That's just what you want, an excuse ... to be free of the Ridges once and for all.

KELL

(grins)

Well, maybe not all of the Ridges. I'd love to keep that pretty, white wife of yours around.

RIDGE

Don't you dare ...

Kell steps off the porch and moves even closer to Ridge, who becomes visibly nervous at the threatening posture of the much larger Kell.

RIDGE

Don't take another step, Kell. I swear, I'll ...

KELL

You'll what? You'll kill me? I don't think you have it in you.

Your grandfather was made of much stronger stuff. You know he put up a fight, even in the end?

RIDGE

I know you all murdered him in cold blood! ... Back off, I say!

Ridge takes a step back, fumbles for a second and then shakily produces a pistol from his pocket while Kell continues to advance, menacing.

Seeing the pistol, Kell rushes at Ridge, grabbing for it. The two men struggle, and a shot goes off. Kell is shot through the heart and falls down dead.

Ridge, visibly shaken, drops the pistol on the ground, and rushes into the corral to get his horse. In the background, Kell's wife runs out of the house to her dead husband.

KELL'S WIFE

You killed him!

Ridge says nothing, mounts his horse, and hurries away, leading the gelding beside him.

INT. RIDGE HOUSE, HONEY CREEK, ARK. - DAY

The scene takes place inside the home of John Rollin Ridge and his wife ELIZABETH. They are a young couple with a one-year-old-daughter, ALICE. Their home is modest, but well-appointed. Elizabeth is white, young, attractive, but she is no shrinking violet. She is strong, practical, and level-headed.

Ridge bursts through the front door looking panicked.
Elizabeth rushes in from the kitchen.

ELIZABETH
Rollin, what's the matter? You
look a fright.

RIDGE
I just killed a man, Lizzie.

ELIZABETH
What! Rollin, what are you
saying?

RIDGE
He castrated Pronto and tried to
kill me. What was I supposed to
do?

ELIZABETH
What about Pronto?

Elizabeth walks over to the window and looks out at the
horse standing in the front yard, bridle dangling.

ELIZABETH
Was it one of the Ross boys?

RIDGE
It was Kell. He tried to kill me.
He threatened you. I-it was an
accident.

ELIZABETH
(sits down, thinking)
Of course it was. They've been
after you ever since ...

Ridge paces, running his hands through his hair.

RIDGE
Something has to be done. I'll
get some of our men together.

RIDGE (CONT'D)

We'll go after them, all of them.
We'll get justice ...

ELIZABETH

No, Rollin. You'll do nothing of
the sort. I'll talk to the Judge.
We'll try to get you a fair
trial.

RIDGE

They deserve to die for what
they've done to this family, to
my father ...

ELIZABETH

Hasn't there been enough
bloodshed already?

RIDGE

Not nearly enough!

ELIZABETH

You're not thinking, Rollin. Do
you want our daughter to see you
hanged?

(sits down)

I just need some time to think.

The sound of hoof beats breaks Elizabeth's chain of
thought. She rises suddenly, moves toward Ridge.

ELIZABETH

Rollin, you have to get out of
here ... now.

Elizabeth rushes into another room, begins hurriedly
packing some things. Ridge follows.

ELIZABETH

You'll go to Springfield. Stay
with Cousin Andrew for a while ...
just until things cool down.

Ridge takes the satchel Elizabeth has packed.

RIDGE
This isn't over, Lizzie.

ELIZABETH
Just go.

Ridge hurries out. After watching him go, Elizabeth turns to Ridge's desk by the window. She closes an open bottle of ink and begins tidying up paperwork strewn across the desk, including letters and stacks of newspapers from Arkansas and Texas. She lingers upon one clipping which contains a poem, signed Yellow Bird It reads in part:

INSERT - THE POEM

Of Her I Love

I READ but a moment her beautiful
eyes,
I glanced at the charm of her
snowy-white hand
I caught but the glimpse of her
cheek's blushing dyes
More sweet than the fruits of a
tropical land;

I marked but an instant her
coral-hued lips,
And the row of sweet pearls that
glimmered between—
Those lips, like the roses the
humming bird sips
On his bright wing of rainbows,
when summer is green.
(Ridge, *Poems*)

Elizabeth smiles ruefully, places the clip on the stack, sits down at the desk and stares out the window into the gathering dusk.

INT. A HOUSE IN SPINGFIELD, MO. - NIGHT

Ridge sits alone at a desk in a nondescript room, writing by the light of an oil lamp.

INSERT - THE LETTER

Dear Cousin Stand,

My mother and the family are very desirous that I should leave the Cherokee nation forever, and have nothing more to do with it. But from you, I would expect, of course, the true state of the case.

There is a deep-seated principle of revenge in me which will never be satisfied until it reaches its object.

It is my firm determination to do all that I can to bring it about. Whenever you say the word, I am there.

J.R.R. (Parins 56)

Ridge folds the letter and puts it into an envelope addressed to Stand Watie, Cherokee Nation, Arkansas.

INT. A SALOON SOMEWHERE IN MISSOURI - DAY

Ridge is followed into the saloon by WEAVER, an older, white man with something cagey about his demeanor. Weaver strikes up a conversation with Ridge.

WEAVER

Mr. Ridge, can I trouble you for a moment?

Ridge turns to face him.

WEAVER

I was very impressed by the speech you gave at the Reaping ... about those Indians, the, er, Ross boys was it?

RIDGE

(smiles humbly)
You are too kind.

WEAVER

I think there may be a way I could help you. Can I buy you a drink?

RIDGE

Certainly.

Weaver orders a beer for himself, a double whiskey for Ridge and the two men find a table at the back of the saloon.

WEAVER

So, about these Ross boys, you say they're murderers?

RIDGE

Cold-blooded killers! That's what they are. To murder a man in front of his own children and his weeping wife, why that's ...

WEAVER

Inhuman.

And you say you have support for this plan ... to, er, exterminate these savages.

RIDGE

Oh, yes, they are a plague upon our whole nation.

WEAVER

Well, I was thinking. I have some horses, fine young colts. And I could probably get a few men together, say 25 or so. Do you think that would suffice?

Ridge downs his whiskey, signals for another.

RIDGE

Yes, yes indeed. Twenty-five brave men would be more than sufficient to hunt down those cowards.

WEAVER

And we wouldn't have to worry about any repercussions?

RIDGE

Oh, no, the Cherokee Nation would be most grateful to you for ridding us of those bloodthirsty bastards. They've caused us nothing but strife since we came to this fair country.

(expansively)

On the contrary, I'm sure the elders would reward you richly for so great a service.

Weaver smiles and takes a sip of his beer.

WEAVER

Well then, it's settled. Let me talk to my men and see how soon we could get a party together.

Ridge reaches across the table to shake Weaver's hand.

RIDGE

You are truly a friend to our people.

WEAVER

Yes, well, you'll find that we Missourians are very sympathetic to Indians.

(tips his hat to Ridge)
The civilized ones, at least.

RIDGE

Yes, of course. I firmly believe that the Indian has a duty to leave his dark past behind him.

WEAVER

(raising his glass)
A toast, Mr. Ridge, to the civilized Indian.

Ridge smiles wryly, toasts and drains his glass.

EXT. A RUSTIC HOUSE SOMEWHERE IN RURAL MISSOURI - DAY

On the front porch of a modest, dog-trot style house somewhere in rural Missouri, Weaver converses with a BEARDED MAN and a YOUNGER MAN, who sits in corner cleaning his rifle.

WEAVER

Just got back from meeting up with that Ridge fellow.

Quite a character. Smart fellow, too ... for an Indian.

The men laugh.

BEARDED MAN

So, did he take the bait?

WEAVER

Are you kidding? He swallowed it whole.

(laughs)

Those red-skinned heathens are ready to tear each other's hearts out.

BEARDED MAN

So, do you think we can take them?

WEAVER

The Ross boys? Piece of cake. There aren't that many of 'em, and it doesn't sound like they've got many friends.

BEARDED MAN

Think they'll call in the law?

WEAVER

(shakes his head, spits)
Nah, the way I see it, them Indians don't need to know we were ever there.

We go in at night, take out some of these Ross boys and get the hell out of there.

Next morning, whatever friends those Ross boys had wake up to find a bunch of dead Indians. They go after the Ridge boys. Next thing you know, they've got a full-blown civil war.

BEARDED MAN

Let them kill themselves off.

WEAVER

(nods and smiles)

Exactly. Then the government comes in, moves them further out West, and we've got ourselves some prime timber land.

BEARDED MAN

So how many you think we need?

WEAVER

Aw, hell, you, me and Ned

Weaver motions toward the young man cleaning his gun.

WEAVER

A few of the Johnson boys. I'd say we don't need more than 10, 15.

BEARDED MAN

Alright then, arrange another meeting with this Ridge. Let's figure out the best way to get in and out without being seen.

INT. A HOUSE IN ARKANSAS - NIGHT

Ridge shows up at the house where Elizabeth, Alice, and the rest of the Ridge family are now living near present-day Bentonville, Ark. It is more cramped and less comfortable than their former residence.

Elizabeth answers Ridge's knock at the door, hurriedly pulls him inside.

ELIZABETH

Oh, Rollin.

Elizabeth embraces Ridge warmly, but her tone quickly turns colder.

ELIZABETH

It's about time you decided to
come home. Your mother and I have
been worried half to death.

Elizabeth takes Ridge's coat and hangs it in the closet,
and then motions for him to sit near the fire.

ELIZABETH

Where have you been? Cousin
Andrew said you left a week ago.

While Ridge sits by the fire, Elizabeth is busily moving
around the room, setting out food and drink.

RIDGE

I've been in the country, talking
to important men, gathering
allies.

Elizabeth waves her hand dismissively.

ELIZABETH

Oh, yes, Stand told me about your
hot-headed scheme.

Elizabeth stops what she's doing and looks Ridge dead in
the eye.

ELIZABETH

Rollin, What is the matter with
you? What are you thinking
talking to those men?

Do you care nothing about me and
Alice?

Ridge jumps up, rushes to Elizabeth and puts both hands on
her shoulders.

RIDGE

Oh, Lizzie, of course. I think
only of you ... all the time.

RIDGE

(releases her
shoulders)

That's why I have to do this.
Don't you see?

ELIZABETH

No, Rollin, I don't see what this
has to do with us. What the
Rosses did was terrible, but it's
in the past now. We have a life,
a future, a child ...

RIDGE

I know, Lizzie. And you deserve
more than this.

(looks around the room)

And you'll have more, if we can
just be free of them once and for
all!

ELIZABETH

(ignoring his last
statement)

What did Stand say about the
money for the trial?

RIDGE

There's not enough to buy a fair
trial.

Ridge kneels before Elizabeth, taking both of her hands in
his.

RIDGE

But, it's going to be alright,
Lizzie. I have a plan. I've found
a way to get all the money we
need - and more.

ELIZABETH

(wearily)

So when are you leaving this
time?

Ridge rises and begins pacing excitedly.

RIDGE

Tomorrow, Lizzie. I've signed on with the next wagon company headed West ... to California.

I'll make my fortune and then come back here and restore the Ridges to their proper place in the Nation.

ELIZABETH

You know you can't stay here tonight.

RIDGE

I know, Lizzie. I just came to get a few things and say goodbye to Alice.

Elizabeth turns from Ridge and sighs.

ELIZABETH

She's already asleep.

Ridge pulls Elizabeth closer, turning her toward him.

RIDGE

Lizzie, everything is going to be fine. I'll send for you and Alice.

ELIZABETH

Everything was fine, Rollin. We had a house, a farm, a place here. But all that is ruined ...

RIDGE

(embraces her)

It will be fine again, Lizzie. You'll see.

RIDGE (CONT'D)

Now let me go see my little
angel. I've already arranged for
mother to bring the two of you to
Fayetteville tomorrow to see me
off. But I had to come here
first, to make you understand why
I'm going.

ELIZABETH

I don't understand you, Rollin.
Perhaps I never will.

Ridge goes into the bedroom, where he finds Alice
sleeping in a small bed by the window. He strokes her hair
gently, then snuffs the lamp burning dimly by her bedside.

EXT. FAYATTEVILLE, ARK. - DAY

In a clearing just outside of town, a group of men make
preparations to leave by wagon train for California.
Ridge, his brother AENEAS and their African-American slave
WACOOLI banter as they prepare pack mules for the trip.
Aeneas is excited and optimistic about striking gold.
Ridge is in good spirits, but less animated than the rest.

AENEAS

I can't wait to see their faces
when we come back here loaded
with loot.

I'm going to build Nannie the
biggest house in the nation.

WACOOLI

I've always wanted to see the
ocean.

AENEAS

(jovially)
What, you live by the great river
- isn't that's enough water for
any man?

AENEAS (CONT'D)

What about you, Rollin? What are you going to do with all that gold?

Just then, an open stage pulls up bearing Elizabeth, Alice and Ridge's mother, SARAH ("Sallie") BIRD, an older white woman with a stately, rigid demeanor. Ridge rushes over to help them from the stage.

RIDGE

Oh, Lizzie, you did come!

SARAH

(interrupts)

I insisted. You haven't even been to see me, Rollin, though you haven't been shy about asking for money.

RIDGE

I know, Mother. But all that's behind us now. I am going to make my fortune and return here to you and Lizzie and Alice.

SARAH

Well, I certainly hope so. You disappoint me ... killing your neighbor and now rushing off to California like some outlaw.

RIDGE

Did you see what he did to my horse!

SARAH

(ignoring him)

Your father and grandfather were leaders of this nation. And you, with all your education, you should lead these people.

RIDGE

And I will, Mother, once I'm rid
of them.

SARAH

(turns to Aeneas)
Let me go say farewell to my
other son.

RIDGE

(takes Alice in his
arms)
And what shall I bring back for
my little angel? A lovely dress?
Or a new doll?

ELIZABETH

Just come home safely, Rollin.

RIDGE

Of course, Lizzie dear. Don't
worry. It will be an adventure. ...
A chance for a new start.

Everything will be just as it
should be. You'll see.

MONTAGE - THE JOURNEY OUT WEST - SPRING, 1850

Ridge, Aeneas and Wacooli set out by wagon train to
California. It is a journey that takes nearly four months.
They pass through Kansas, Nebraska and Wyoming. Grass
turns to sand, then clouds of dust. The men are parched
and weary, their animals even more so.

Somewhere in the high plains of Wyoming, they ditch the
wagon train and some of their belongings, pack the rest on
mules and continue on horseback.

RIDGE

(sighs)
Now comes the tug of war. We
should reach Sacramento in 25
days.

RIDGE (CONT'D)

(nods toward the loaded
mules)

We expect to eat beef, which is
very good; sleep without a tent,
which is not good; to cross a
desert, which is worse ...

But I expect not much more
hardship. (Parins 65)

EXT. FORTY MILE DESERT, NEV., SUMMER - DAY

With three horses and only one pack mule left, the men
make their way across the mineral flats of the Humboldt
Sink. The sun beats down mercilessly. The men are caked in
white dust. They wear bandannas over their mouths. The
animals struggle beneath their loads. As they ride, Ridge
falls into reverie.

EXT. JOHN RIDGE SR. HOUSE, HONEY CREEK, ARK. - DAWN
(FLASHBACK)

The stately, plantation-style home of JOHN RIDGE SR.
stands quiet in a wooded area. The lights are off and all
are sleeping in the grey, early-dawn light. There is
silence, except for the sound of birds chirping.

About 25 men approach the house in small groups, walking
softly to avoid detection. Members of the Ross gang, they
are brown-skinned, but most are dressed in typical mid-19th
century garb, with a few items of traditional Cherokee
clothing here and there.

As the others wait in the shadows, three men steal up to
the front door and burst in.

INT. JOHN RIDGE SR. HOUSE

Members of the Ross gang rush through the door of the
darkened house and charge upstairs. They're met in the
hallway by John Ridge Sr., who looks like an older, darker
version of John Rollin Ridge. He is disheveled, still in
his bedclothes.

About 12 feet apart, both parties stop. John Ridge Sr. glances at the lead man's waist and sees a pistol strapped to his hip. He takes a step backward just as the lead man grabs the pistol and aims. It misfires. John Ridge turns to run back down the hall. The lead man tackles him from behind. A struggle ensues, and they pull him, struggling, down the hall. His wife, SARAH Bird, emerges from the open bedroom and screams. She watches, horrified, as they drag him down the steps and out the front door.

A 12-year-old John Rollin Ridge watches the scene in the hallway through the crack of his open bedroom door.

BACK TO SCENE

A horse's whinny breaks Ridge's reverie. Aeneas' horse falters, refuses to go on.

AENEAS

It's the sulfur. It's making them
lame. They won't last much
longer.

WACOOLI

Neither will we.

Ridge looks down at the sores on his hands, says nothing. The two men manage to coax the horse on, and the journey continues. As the sun rises higher in the sky, Ridge falls back into reverie.

EXT. JOHN RIDGE SR. HOUSE, HONEY CREEK, ARK. - DAWN
(FLASHBACK)

John Ridge Sr. is on his knees in the front yard, his face bloody, flanked by two Ross men. The other men surround him in a semicircle. Sarah stands at the front door. One of the Ross men stands before her on the small landing porch holding a rifle and scowling. Young Rollin Ridge watches the scene from the upstairs bedroom window.

A man with a scar across his cheek and another man with a short dagger stand on either side of Ridge. They lift him to his feet.

JOHN RIDGE SR.
(gasping for air)
Don't do this. We are brothers.

The man with the scar spits in John Ridge Sr.'s face.

MAN WITH SCAR
You betrayed your brothers when
you signed the treaty.

The man with the dagger stabs John Ridge Sr. Sarah screams. The man with the dagger glances toward Sarah and Rollin and then back at John Ridge Sr.

MAN WITH DAGGER
You were the first to come here,
leaving the rest of us to starve
and die like dogs while you built
your fine house. ... I say you
should be the first to die.

The men nod in agreement and then form a rough queue in front of John Ridge. Each steps forward to stab him almost ceremonially, enough to inflict pain but not bring death. Sarah sobs and curses in both English and Cherokee.

SARAH
Heathens! Savages! Murderers! The
Lord will have vengeance on you!

ROSS MAN
Shut up, woman. Your husband
signed his own death warrant.

Ridge Sr. screams in agony, holding out his hands and pleading with his attackers, who continue to stab him one by one. Sarah tries to rush toward him, but the man on the landing pushes her back through the doorway with his rifle. She backs into the house reluctantly, still sobbing.

The man with the dagger grabs John Ridge Sr. by the collar and pulls him close to his face.

MAN WITH DAGGER

Nu na da ul tsun yi (subtitle:
the trail of tears)

The man with the dagger slits Ridge Sr.'s throat neatly with a Bowie knife. The men then toss Ridge Sr.'s body into the air and let it fall to the ground. They march over his body single file as they walk away.

In the window, Young Ridge stares at the death scene, hatred simmering in his eyes.

BACK TO SCENE

Ridge's eyes smolder in the desert sun.

MONTAGE - THE END OF THE JOURNEY WEST

The men continue through the Forty-mile Desert, passing abandoned wagons, dead animals and other refuse along the way. They are parched, beyond exhaustion and caked from head to toe in white, alkaline dust.

Gradually, though, the landscape becomes greener and more inhabitable.

EXT. A RIVER NEAR PLACERVILLE - NIGHT

Ridge and his party arrive at a river, shimmering in the moonlight. They stagger toward the water's edge with their horses, drinking from the river and washing the dirt from their faces.

THE NEXT MORNING

Sitting around a fire, the men sort through their remaining rations and discuss plans for mining in California.

RIDGE

We should split up to improve our chances. There's no point in us both working the same claim.

AENEAS

(nods)

What about Wacooli?

RIDGE

You can take him. I want to spend some time on an established claim, see how it's done.

AENEAS

(smiles)

Yes, that's you, brother, always the observer.

(motions towards Ridge's breast pocket)

With that little notebook of yours.

Do you remember you used to follow Pa around, taking notes at all his tribal meetings?

RIDGE

(scowls)

I hardly remember anything from those days. It's as if another man lived that life ...

AENEAS

I know, brother.

(BEAT)

But you have to find a way to forget the past. We have the chance for a new beginning here.

RIDGE

(through clenched teeth)

As long as those murderers live, I will not forget. On the blood of our father, I have sworn revenge, and I won't rest until I get it!

Ridge gets up, walks away and begins to saddle his horse in silence.

INT. A DARK TAVERN IN PLACERVILLE, CALIF. - NIGHT
Ridge takes a seat at the bar and orders a drink. Eager to learn more about prospecting, he looks around the bar for someone to talk to, but the men seem guarded and sullen. To Ridge's right sits a grey-faced PROSPECTOR, hands grimy, hat down low over his eyes. To his left, two men talk in low tones. In the back corner of the bar, a group of Chinese workers talk quietly among themselves in their native tongue.

Ridge turns to the prospector.

RIDGE

You look like a mining man, I was wondering if you might need an extra hand on your claim.

The PROSPECTOR glances at him, shakes his head and peers back into his drink glumly.

RIDGE

Well, if not you, perhaps you know someone? I'm looking to spend some time on a claim, learn how it's done.

BARTENDER

(interrupting, to Ridge)
Look, I don't know where you're from, but around here, folks don't like to talk so much to strangers.

The bartender looks around conspiratorially.

BARTENDER

Especially right now.

RIDGE

Oh? Why is that?

BARTENDER

Well, I don't want to say much
myself, but we've had some
strange things happen lately ...

As the bartender is speaking, Ridge glances to the far end
of the bar and sees an exceptionally handsome young man,
who looks a little like himself. The man pushes back the
edge of his black hat, looks directly at Ridge and flashes
a smile. Dressed in black, with light skin, jet black hair
and piercing black eyes, it is JOAQUÍN MURIETA.

BARTENDER

... people going missing in the
middle of the night. Prospectors
getting their throats slit open
for a bag of gold, things like
that.

Ridge turns his attention back to the bartender.

RIDGE

Good heavens. Is anyone
investigating these crimes?

BARTENDER

We try not to trouble the law if
we can help it. Keeps things
simpler.

Do you want another drink?

Ridge glances in the direction of the stranger, but he is
gone.

RIDGE

No, thank you. It's a nice night.
I think I'll have a walk.

BARTENDER

(shrugs)
Suit yourself.

Ridge leaves the bar. When he gets to the street, he looks for the stranger, but he is nowhere to be found.

EXT. - A MINING CLAIM IN PLACERVILLE - DAY

Ridge rides up to a group of miners working a claim. The men eye him suspiciously as he dismounts and approaches them. But he soon wins them over.

MONTAGE - RIDGE TRIES HIS HAND AT MINING AND FAILS

Ridge spends time with the seasoned miners, carrying pick, shovel and cradle up and down hillsides, smoking tobacco with them in their ragged tents, eating slap jacks and salt pork, trading stories and writing in his notebook.

On a cold, wet day, he pans for gold alone in a muddy creek, looking like a drowned rat, calf-deep in mud. Looking at the few specks of gold dust in his hand after a full day's work, he throws the pick and shovel down in disgust and walks away from the site.

INT. OF A SALOON, SACRAMENTO, CALIF., 1850 - DAY

Ridge walks into a saloon, looking thus: "He was crowned with an old weather-beaten hat, filled with holes, from which locks of his black hair protruded, as if to keep it from falling from its elevated position; he wore a faded red flannel shirt, which buckled around his waist with a leathern belt, from which was suspended a murderous-looking butcher-knife; his nether limbs were encased in a soiled, greasy pair of leathern unmentionables; while to cap the climax of his outré appearance, a pair of glistening patent-leather shoes covered his feet" (Parins 72).

Patrons snicker at Ridge's appearance. Awkwardly, he walks up to the bar, and takes a seat between a well-dressed MAN and a DRUNK.

RIDGE

(to the well-dressed
man)

Pardon me, Sir, you look like a
gentleman. I was wondering if you
might help a newcomer learn his
way around.

Ridge fumbles in his pocket for a tiny bag of gold dust.

RIDGE

There's a drink in it for you.

Ridge motions for the bartender to come over. Unnoticed by
Ridge, a DRUNK to his left tries to swat at the bag as he
hands it to the bartender, who peers into the bag in
disgust as he takes it.

BARTENDER

What'll it be?

RIDGE

Two whiskeys, please.

MAN

So you've been prospecting.
Haven't had much luck from the
looks of it.

RIDGE

Yes, indeed. My brother and I
came here from Indian ... that is,
from Arkansas, hoping to make our
fortune.

MAN

Hmpf, what else is new?

The bartender brings the whiskeys. The drunk ogles them as
he sets them on the counter before the two men.

RIDGE

But I'm finished with all that
now. I'm looking for honest work

RIDGE (CONT'D)
here in Sacramento, perhaps
something in the literary vein.

The drunk laughs and snorts rudely. Ridge looks at him with reproach, then turns his attention back to the man.

MAN
So you want to be some kind of
writer?

RIDGE
Yes, I have considerable
experience. I wrote for some of
the best publications back home.

Unable to contain himself, the drunk barges into the conversation.

DRUNK
You should go see Colonel Grant.

(smiles and winks at the
man to Ridge's right)
One of the finest newspapermen
this side of the country, he is.

RIDGE
Well, I should like to meet him
then. Where might I find the
Colonel?

DRUNK
(motions vaguely)
Oh, his office is downtown, just
down the way.

(feigns seriousness)
A man of your talents should
definitely go see Colonel Grant.

Ridge turns his attention back to the man.

RIDGE

Please tell me where I might find
Colonel Grant's offices. I wish
to see him right away.

MAN

(shrugs)
Grant's the local agent for the
New Orleans True Delta. His
office is at the other end of J
Street. You should find him
there.

RIDGE

Thank you, sir. Thank you indeed.

Ridge quickly finishes his whiskey, shakes hands with the man and rushes out of the saloon. The man watches him go, then glances over at the snickering drunk, shakes his head and goes back to his drink.

INT. A BUSY NEWSROOM IN SACRAMENTO - DAY

Without bothering to change clothes or clean up, Ridge hurries to the offices of the True Delta, where he finds COL. JOSEPH GRANT in front of the building that houses the newspaper offices. An older gentleman, impeccably dressed, with a grand air and mischievous smile, Grant stands on a makeshift platform by a stack of newspapers, loudly proclaiming the virtues of his newspaper to passersby on the bustling street, while a newspaper boy beside him hands out papers and collects coins.

Grant holds out the latest edition of the newspaper.

GRANT

The New Orleans True Delta, best
newspaper west of the
Mississippi.

Find out who struck it big in the
gold fields today. Learn details
of the grisly wharf strangling.

Grant thumps the newspaper in his right hand.

GRANT
It's all right here in the New
Orleans True Delta!

A passerby pays the boy and takes a paper.

GRANT
(to the customer)
Thank you. You will not be
disappointed.

(grandly)
Now, gentlemen, gather round and
let me tell you the secret to
finding a beautiful homestead in
these parts. Yes, you too can be
a landowner like myself ...

As no one seems to be taking Grant's invitation, Ridge
steps in closer and interrupts his pitch.

RIDGE
Excuse me, sir, if I could have a
moment of your time.

GRANT
(Smiles)
Why certainly. What can I do for
you? Are you looking for a list
of active claims? Shipping
schedules? Brothels?

RIDGE
No, sir. I am looking to find
employment.

GRANT
Why, of course. What can you do?

RIDGE
Anything that's honest, sir.

RIDGE (CONT'D)

I-I have some experience as a
writer back home.

Grant looks him up and down, clearly amused by Ridge's
haphazard appearance.

Grant smiles, winks the boy, and then addresses Ridge
patronizingly.

GRANT

Is that so? A man of letters,
imagine that. What sort of thing
can you write, Mr. ...

RIDGE

Ridge, sir, Rollin Ridge. I can
write just about anything,
dispatches, poems, travelogues.

Glancing about, Grant realizes that he is losing potential
customers and is suddenly eager to get rid of Ridge.

GRANT

Look here, I'm a busy man, as you
can see. Why don't you write
something for me, as a sort of
trial?

RIDGE

What shall I write, sir?

GRANT

(dismissively)
Something, anything, whatever you
like. Write a poem, a song.

(looks him up and down)
You look like you've had some
adventures ... write about that.

Grant steps off the platform, and pats Ridge on the
shoulder, sending him on his way.

GRANT (CONT'D)

Yes, anything at all, just see that you make it interesting. We have no space for dull stories here. Californians want adventure.

RIDGE

Will I find you here tomorrow?

GRANT

(Hustling Ridge along)

Yes, yes. Well, I don't know, but someone will know where to find me. Now, good luck, my boy, you'd better be on your way.

RIDGE

(pleased, if slightly puzzled, turns to shake Grant's hand)

Pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Grant. I will not disappoint you.

GRANT

Of course. Have a nice day, Mr. Rollins.

Grant hurries back to his platform.

GRANT

Now, gentlemen, let me tell you where to find the most active claims, the ones guaranteed to make you a fortune, for a small fee, I will provide you with a full listing ...

Grant's voice fades away as Ridge hurries off to begin his assignment.

EXT. A QUIET SPOT NEAR THE RIVER - LATER THAT DAY

Ridge sits beneath a tree, writing his sample story for Grant. He glances up occasionally to collect his thoughts before putting them down on paper.

INSERT - THE STORY

After traveling over wide sand plains, traversed here and there by steep mountains all day at times to relieve our wearied beasts, having walked many hours fatigued, worn out; nearly dead, we reached our camping place. ...

Then at last to sit down, faint and hungry, to strong fat meat that tasted like rust, and a piece of bread that made the stomach retch at every swallow, was anything but comfortable!
(Parins 64)

With the sun sinking in the sky, Ridge finishes writing, smiles and folds the manuscript, tucks it into his front pocket and walks back toward town.

INT. DINING ROOM OF THE CITY HOTEL - DAY

Ridge strides through the lobby and into the dining room of the lavish City Hotel, where he finds Grant sitting at a table, smoking a cigar, with some well-heeled Sacramento businessmen seated around him, listening intently as he expounds upon his latest business scheme.

GRANT

Yes, gentlemen, everyone comes for the gold, but there's another type of gold in these hills that is just as valuable, nay more so.

Grant pauses for dramatic effect, and glances around the table.

GRANT

You just have to know how to take it! (grasps at the air)

Like a good prospector, you have to have the right equipment, and know where to look, and I have the tools to help you find it.

Ridge, who has cleaned up a bit, but still wears his old clothes, approaches Grant with his article.

GRANT

What have we here? A prospector?

The men sitting around the table chuckle as Ridge hands Grant the manuscript.

RIDGE

Here is the article I wrote for you.

Grant looks befuddled, having already forgotten about the assignment.

RIDGE

The one you asked me to write, sir, for the New Orleans True Delta. I think you'll find it quite good.

GRANT

Oh, yes. Yes, of course. You're the man from Kentucky, was it? The writer.

RIDGE

Arkansas, sir.

Grant takes the article and pulls a pair of spectacles from his pocket.

GRANT

Well, let's just have a look.

Not wanting to lose his audience, Grant stands up, winks at the man to his right, and "with the air of a Caesar" (Parins 73) begins to read Ridge's piece out loud, thinking it will be cause for hilarity among his friends. As he reads, Grant's tone turns from mirth to serious admiration.

INSERT - THE ARTICLE

I have been initiated into the mysteries of the miner's home. I have seen him with his long beard, and sometimes very long face, seated in his lowly tent, and dissipated the clouds of care with clouds of tobacco. ... I have spread my blankets side by side with him in the mother dirt, and laid me down to pleasant dreams, wherein the little sparkling pile I had gathered when awake, grew mountain like in my sleep. In truth I have had opportunities of viewing human nature in its many phases. (Parins 71)

Grant stops, looks at the article for a second and then eyes Ridge suspiciously.

GRANT

Did you ... write this?

RIDGE

(offended)

Of course. I told you that I am a man of integrity.

Grant smiles broadly and slaps Ridge hard on the shoulder.

GRANT

Well, "this is an excellent and valuable article.

GRANT (CONT'D)

"In fact, it is the best thing I have read upon the subject, and deserves more than my means will permit me to pay;

(grandly)

"but for this and all equal to it, I will give you eight dollars an article." (Parins 73)

RIDGE

(beaming)

Why thank you, sir.

Grant glances around the table and smiles magnanimously.

GRANT

My pleasure, Mr. Raleigh.

RIDGE

It's Ridge, sir.

GRANT

I shall be glad to secure you as a correspondent for the *True Delta*.

RIDGE

Thank you, Colonel. When shall I begin?

GRANT

Whenever you like, my boy. Come to my office in the morning with a list of topics, and I will set you right to work.

RIDGE

I will, indeed!

The men shake hands. Grant resumes his monologue as Ridge strides out of the hotel.

MONTAGE - RIDGE ESTABLISHES HIMSELF AS A REPORTER

Now respectably attired, Ridge travels throughout the region writing articles as a correspondent. He accompanies Aeneas and Wacooli by whale boat up the Sacramento River, saying goodbye to them on the docks. He observes and writes about the bustling activity in Sacramento. He travels to Yuba City/Marysville, and there ...

EXT., OFFICE OF THE MARYSVILLE HERALD - NIGHT

Ridge stops by the offices of the local newspaper, the Marysville Herald, to ask if he can file a dispatch to his editor back in Sacramento. It's after deadline, and a few of the newspapermen are gathered on the front porch, drinking whiskey and talking about the day's events. A boyish, young reporter named COOPER with a thick, southern drawl is describing the scene of a murder he covered.

COOPER

There was blood everywhere. I didn't know a man had so much blood in him. His head was near severed clean off.

Cooper turns abruptly toward the approaching Ridge.

COOPER

Who're you?

RIDGE

(presents his hand)
John Rollin Ridge. I'm a newspaperman myself, correspondent for the New Orleans True Delta. I was hoping I could use your offices to file a dispatch to my editor back in Sacramento.

PRESSMAN

Telegraph operator's gone for the day.

The pressman takes a swig and motions toward Cooper.

PRESSMAN

But I imagine the boy could send it for you when he finishes his story. He's a prodigy with the machinery.

COOPER

As I was saying, they say the dead man was one of the boys that come after Joaquín and his brother.

EDITOR

Now, wait a minute, the sheriff said he didn't even know it was the Mexican.

COOPER

Are you shittin' me? That Mexican is out for blood. You think it's any coincidence that seven of the eight men who've gone missing had something to do with him? It ain't like we got murders around here every day. Nah, he's hunting them down like geese.

RIDGE

Tell me, who is this Joaquín fellow?

COOPER

You mean you've never heard of the Mexican, Joaquín Murieta? Been terrorizing these parts since they ravished his woman, took his land, and killed his brother. He's got a real blood vendetta.

RIDGE

What does he look like, this Joaquín?

COOPER

He's a handsome bastard, doesn't even look much like a Mexican. They say he came from a good family down in Sonora, a real gentleman, came up here looking to make his fortune.

[beat] Guess that's where he made his mistake. Americans don't take to kindly to foreigners.

(laughter)

C'mon inside. I'll show you a picture of him, and set up that telegraph for you.

INT. OFFICE OF THE MARYSVILLE HERALD - NIGHT

Ridge accompanies the reporter inside, where he shows him a line drawing of Joaquín.

COOPER

See what I mean? Handsome son of a bitch.

Ridge peers closely at the picture, furrowing his brow.

RIDGE

Well-dressed, too. What did you say the Americans did to him?

Cooper continues setting up telegraph machine.

COOPER

Well, it goes back a ways to the gold fields. Apparently, some Americans threw him off his claim because he's a foreigner. Then they came to his house and had their way with his wife - forced him to watch the whole thing. Sick bastards.

RIDGE

What a disgrace! I would have killed those ruffians with my bare hands!

COOPER

I know, and that ain't even the half of it. This Mexican still thinks he's going to live peaceful like, so he buys some nice land and tries farming, but lo and behold, the Americans don't like that much neither. They throw him off his land, and then accuse his brother of being a horse thief.

Cooper continues fiddling with the telegraph machine.

COOPER

After they done hung his brother and whipped Joaquín within an inch of his life, he decides he's had enough, so he starts killing all the folks that wronged him.

That's the speculation, at least. Some of them boys still ain't been found.

Cooper indicates that he's finished with the equipment.

COOPER

She's ready to go. Where did you say you're from?

RIDGE

Arkansas originally ...

COOPER

Well, I'll say. I'm from Alabama. Mighta heard it in the way I talk. You don't sound much like an Arkansan, though.

RIDGE

My parents sent me East for my
education.

Cooper looks at Ridge and then at the drawing of Joaquín.

COOPER

You almost look like ... well,
never mind.

Take all the time you need with
the telegraph. I'll stay here and
close up shop.

(exiting)

And if you hear any more about
that Mexican, you be sure and let
me know.

The reporter leaves Ridge alone with the telegraph
machine. Ridge takes one more look at the drawing of
Joaquín, and begins to type his telegram.

INT. A HOTEL IN MARYSVILLE - NIGHT

Ridge sits down at a small table with an oil lamp and
writes a letter.

INSERT - THE LETTER

Dear Stand,
I am tormented so by the folks at
home whenever I talk of going
back to the Nation ... "danger,
danger, danger," as though a man
had to be governed by his fears
in place of his reason and his
judgment. (Parins 92)

Ridge is increasingly agitated and uncomfortable,
loosening his shirt collar and wiping his brow as he
writes.

THE LETTER (CONT'D)

I had rather die than surrender my rights. You recollect there is one gap in Cherokee history which needs filling up. Boudinot is dead, John Ridge and Major Ridge are dead, and they are but partially revenged. (Parins 93)

Ridge is interrupted by a knock on the door.

RIDGE

What is it? Come in.

The hotel MAID enters the room.

MAID

Mr. Ridge, sir, will you be having your supper here tonight?

Ridge continues writing, waving her away.

RIDGE

I'm not hungry.

As the maid starts to exit, Ridge turns around, mopping his brow.

RIDGE

The room is warm. Could you open a window?

MAID

But, sir, it is very cold out.

RIDGE

Well, it's damn hot in here!

MAID

As you wish, sir.

She opens the window and quietly retreats from the room.
Ridge returns to his letter.

LETTER (CONT.)

I don't know how you feel now
Stand, but there was a time when
that brave heart of yours grew
dark over the memory of our
wrongs. (Parins 93)

Frustrated and unable to concentrate, Ridge throws the pen down, runs his hands through his hair, opens the front of his shirt and walks woozily over to the bed. He lays down and is almost immediately asleep.

INT. HOTEL - NIGHT

Walking down the dimly lit hallway with a small lamp, the Maid hears distressed moaning coming from Ridge's room. She knocks softly on the door. She can hear Ridge talking unintelligibly inside. She cautiously enters and finds Ridge lying in bed, drenched in sweat, tormented by fever. As she draws nearer, she can see his eyes open wide. He is obviously delirious.

RIDGE

The desert. I'm burning.

MAID

(stammering)

Mr.-Mr. Ridge. You are very ill.

RIDGE

(grabs her arm)

Oh, Lizzie, bring me some water.

Frightened and bewildered, the maid exits hastily and goes downstairs to get water. Staring at the small flame from the oil lamp, RIDGE falls into a delirious trance.

FLASHBACK - INT. JOHN RIDGE SR. HOUSE - NIGHT

Twelve-year-old Ridge sits stoically beside his mother at his father's wake. The room is dimly lit and dead still.

On the table in the center of the room lies Ridge's father. Blood seeps through his soaked winding sheet and drips slowly onto the floor. Dark faces come and go in the shadowy room, including some of Ridge Sr.'s killers.

BACK TO SCENE

Ridge sits up suddenly, grasping at the air.

RIDGE

No!

He moans in agony, grips his stomach and lies back down.

Later, the maid comes in and sets a pitcher of water down at Ridge's bedside. She lays a towel across his forehead, and his eyes spring open again, staring blankly. Unsure of what to do for him, she takes off his boots and covers him with a blanket. Ridge falls back into a dream.

DREAM - INT. A DIMLY LIT ROOM - NIGHT

Holding an oil lamp and treading softly, Ridge enters a strange room, where he sees a man in a long, black cloak bending over something in an iron bed in the corner. As Ridge draws closer, he sees blood spatter on the walls behind the bed and realizes the man is hacking another man to pieces, just as the young reporter COOPER had described. Ridge recognizes the scar across the victim's cheek and realizes that it is one of his father's killers. Just then, the cloaked man turns and smiles at him. It is Joaquín.

Joaquín sweeps his hand toward the dead man's face.

JOAQUÍN

Even here they hunt you. But I
have taken care of this one for
you.

He wipes the blood from his blade on his cloak, and then moves toward Ridge.

JOAQUÍN

I understand revenge, my friend.

With the blade, Joaquín gestures toward himself and then toward Ridge.

JOAQUÍN

You and me, we are the same.

Ridge backs away in horror.

RIDGE

No. No, not like this!

INT. HOTEL KITCHEN - DAY

The hotel maid walks into the kitchen carrying a tray holding a basin of water and rags. The Innkeeper, SADIE, a weathered, hard-working woman in her 60s, is making bread. The maid sets down her tray hard and leans both hands on the counter across from Sadie.

MAID

I can't do this, Sadie. He's been like this two days now, half mad from fever, crying out in the night. He's frightening the other boarders, you know.

(wrings her hands)

You can't expect me to be his nurse and still fulfill my duties here. It's too much!

SADIE

You think I don't know that? What am I supposed to do with him? Can't well throw him out into the street. Just have to do the best we can with him.

MAID

(becoming more anxious)

But what if he dies, Sadie? What about his family? Oh, how dreadful, dying in a strange country.

MAID (CONT'D)

We have to do something. What about that gentleman, Stand? The one I posted the letter to when Mr. Ridge fell ill.

SADIE

(thinking)

He does have family back East, a wife, I think. I'll see if I can raise them.

MAID

Oh, please do, Sadie. I'm just sick about him up there all alone.

SADIE

I'll send a telegram this afternoon. He can pay for it when he wakes up.

Now wash yourself up and help me with these loaves.

INT. HOTEL IN MARYSVILLE - DAY

A stage carrying Elizabeth Ridge arrives at the hotel. The Maid rushes out to greet her and carry in her baggage.

MAID

Oh, Miss Lizzie. I can't tell you how glad I am that you're here.

ELIZABETH

(perplexed)

Elizabeth.

The maid curtsays as she helps the stagehand with Elizabeth's bags.

MAID

Of course, I'm sorry, Mrs. Ridge.
He kept calling out for you in
his sleep.

The two women head toward the entrance of the hotel.

He's been dreadfully ill. I
thought ...

ELIZABETH

It's alright, Dear. You did well
to send for me. Where is he?

RIDGE'S HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Ridge is sitting up in bed. He is no longer delirious, but
looks pale, drawn and weak. Setting down the bags, the
maid knocks, but Elizabeth pushes open the door without
waiting for an answer.

RIDGE

(weak, but ecstatic)
Lizzie, darling. Is it really
you?

Elizabeth sits down in a chair by the bed. The maid gently
sets the bags down inside the door and leaves the two
alone.

ELIZABETH

Yes, Rollin, it's really me.

Elizabeth smiles and touches Ridge's arm affectionately.

ELIZABETH

You look dreadful ... but I think
the worst is over.

RIDGE

Oh, Lizzie, I've had the most
terrible dreams.

Ridge grabs Elizabeth's arm, sits up straight, and looks
at her intensely.

RIDGE

But I know what I have to do now,
why I'm here.

ELIZABETH

That's a good thing since you
won't be going home anytime soon,
not while the Ross boys still
have it out for you.

Elizabeth stops herself from saying more.

RIDGE

What have you heard?

ELIZABETH

Nothing that can't wait. Right
now you need to get your strength
back.

RIDGE

Ridge settles back, accepting her care.

RIDGE

Lizzie, I'm so glad you're here.

ELIZABETH

(smiles)
I'm not letting you out of my
sight again.

INT. OFFICES OF THE MARYSVILLE HERALD - DAY

Recovered from his stomach ailment, Ridge goes down to the newspaper offices, where pressmen and other equipment operators are busy at work. He strides into the office of the EDITOR, who is talking with a well-dressed young LADY who writes the newspaper's society column.

EDITOR

(reading)
Very nice as always, Mrs.
Ferguson. I will pay you after
the press run on Friday.

LADY

Thank you kindly. The little extra helps tremendously, especially with Jim down with the flu.

As Ridge enters, the editor stands up, says goodbye to the Lady and ushers Ridge in.

EDITOR

(watching her leave)

Lucky to find a woman to write a society column in these parts. Hell, lucky to find a woman at all!

C'mon in, Mr. Ridge, have a seat. Speaking of women, I hear they called your wife in to nurse you back to health. Doc says you had quite a scare.

RIDGE

Yes, I had the bilious fever.

EDITOR

Well, I'll say. You still look peaked. What brings you in?

RIDGE

I wondered if you could tell me the latest about Joaquín Murieta ... the bandit?

EDITOR

(shakes his head)

Lord help us, the bandit has been mighty busy while you've been out.

Let's see, there was the robbery and murders out at Bidwell Bar. I sent Cooper down to cover those.

EDITOR (CONT'D)

Then there were six found dead near Honcut Creek, all with matching noose marks around their necks.

RIDGE

Busy indeed.

EDITOR

Yes, it's become clear that his bloodlust goes beyond the men who tormented him. I've heard he has a vendetta against the whole American race.

(shakes his head)

It's irrational ... but then we are dealing with a hot-blooded Mexican.

The local citizens are terrified. They've asked the sheriff to gather a posse to go up to the Sonoran Camp and hunt for some suspicious men who have been seen around there.

Say, perhaps you'd like to join them.

RIDGE

Do you think it's safe?

EDITOR

You'll be with Sheriff Buchanan and his men. I'm sure you'll be quite alright.

You would just observe of course, perhaps write a dispatch for us.

RIDGE

(warms to the idea)

I would like to see what sort of man this Joaquín is.

EDITOR

Well then, it's settled. They're waiting for the full moon tomorrow night. I'll tell Sheriff Buchanan to expect you.

RIDGE

Thank you, sir.

EDITOR

(sees Ridge to the door)

You are quite welcome. Good luck, and, er, watch your neck.

EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - MOONLIT NIGHT

Ridge rides up on horseback to the tiny office of Yuba County Sheriff R.B. BUCHANAN. There he finds Buchanan and a tall, quiet man, IKE BOWEN, saddling up their horses. Dressed in the fine clothes of a gentleman, Ridge introduces himself, saying he'd like to ride along with the posse.

BUCHANAN

(eyes Ridge dubiously)

Now look, Mr. Ridge, I don't know that you coming along with us is such a good idea.

(sees the Bowie knife at

Ridge's side)

You know how to use a gun?

RIDGE

Why, yes, sir. I am a true shot with a pistol, though I've had no need lately.

BUCHANAN

Ike, get Mr. Ridge a pistol.

Ike goes back into the office to get the gun.

RIDGE

How many men are you expecting?
For the posse, I mean.

BUCHANAN

(snorts)

How many men you think I need?
You ever been up to Sonoran Camp?
Them Mexicans are afraid of their
own shadow. They don't own a
single rifle between 'em.

I reckon Ike and I can handle a
couple of Mexicans.

Ike reappears with a pistol and holster for Ridge.

BUCHANAN

Besides, now I've got you for
backup.

Buchanan laughs as he hands the pistol up to Ridge, who
now has his own doubts.

BUCHANAN

Let's ride!

EXT. DESERT SCRUBLAND - SAME NIGHT

In the moonlit night, Buchanan, Ike, and Ridge approach
the Sonoran camp, a shanty-town in the desert. A few fires
can be seen, but for the most part, the camp lies quiet.
Just before they reach the first structures, the men hear
a low whistle and then they are ambushed by Joaquín,
THREE-FINGERED JACK - a hulking, scowling figure with two
fingers missing from one hand - and two more of Joaquín's
men.

For a split second, Joaquín and Ridge make eye contact.
Seeing the bandits with pistols drawn, Buchanan loses his
nerve and wheels his horse around. Bowen and Ridge follow
suit. Shots ring out.

JOAQUÍN

(laughing)

Save your bullets, Jack. We have
frightened the poor devils.

Jack continues to fire at the men. Buchanan is shot in the
back and slumps over his horse.

JOAQUÍN

(hissing angrily)

Enough, I said!

Joaquín raises his hand to halt his men, allowing the
sheriff and his posse to flee.

RIDGE

(to Ike as they ride)

The Sheriff's been shot!

Ike glances back and then spurs his horse on faster. Ridge
grabs the reins of Buchanan's horse and leads the horse
with the injured man away from the scene.

EXT. A DOCTOR'S HOUSE IN YUBA CITY - SAME NIGHT

Ridge rushes up to the door. The DOCTOR comes out in his
nightclothes. The two bring BUCHANAN inside and lay him
face down on the doctor's examining table. The doctor rips
away Buchanan's shirt to inspect the wound.

DOCTOR

Just one ball?

RIDGE

Yes. There were four of them.

The doctor continues to work on Buchanan.

DOCTOR

The Mexicans? Up at Sonoran Camp?

RIDGE

Just outside the camp. They were
waiting for us. I think it was
Joaquín.

The doctor gives Ridge a hard look, then goes back to his work pulling lead from the Sheriff's wound.

DOCTOR

Well, I reckon they'll bring in the Marshalls now - about time.

As the sheriff begins to stir, the doctor calls out for his wife.

DOCTOR

Marnie, get down here and bring some of the strong stuff.

(to Ridge)

You better get home to your own wife before she starts worrying.

Buchanan moans.

RIDGE

Will he be OK?

The doctor continues pulling bits of lead from the wound.

DOCTOR

Probably. Did he manage to get any lead into the bandit?

(Ridge shakes his head)

Figures. That Mexican's got at least nine lives.

(motions toward the door)

Now get on home.

INT. RIDGE'S HOTEL ROOM IN YUBA CITY

Ridge quietly enters the room he shares with Elizabeth to find her waiting for him by the fireplace. The fire has long since burned out, and she sits in the half-light of dawn. Elizabeth is not a woman given to hysterics, but Ridge has given her good reason to worry. As he enters and takes off his coat, she stays seated.

ELIZABETH

Where have you been?

RIDGE

On assignment.

ELIZABETH

Sometimes it would be easier to believe you were out with a whore, or drinking.

RIDGE

I told you I was going to be out at Bill Williams' claim.

ELIZABETH

And not out chasing that bandit? I'm not a fool, Rollin. It was the talk of the hotel at dinner last night.

Ridge sits down across from her in the semi-darkness.

RIDGE

This is my work, Lizzie. If you came here to worry about me, you should go home. You and my mother seemed to be doing enough of that back there.

ELIZABETH

I take it you're unharmed? And the bandit?

RIDGE

(disgusted)
Gone. Again.

ELIZABETH

I wish I understood you, Rollin. I used to think I did.

Elizabeth sighs, gets up and begins to walk away.

ELIZABETH

Well, let me get you some
breakfast. You must be starving.

Ridge catches Elizabeth's arm as she walks by and pulls
her onto his lap.

RIDGE

Lizzie, you do understand me. You
know me better than I know my own
soul. I would be lost without
you.

(searches her eyes)
Stay with me here, in California.
We'll make a new life together
far away from the Nation. We'll
bring Alice. I'll continue my
writing.

We'll leave the past behind.

ELIZABETH

Rollin, I wish I could believe
you. [beat] But somehow the past
always seems to find us.

RIDGE

(embraces her)
Not this time, Lizzie. I'm a
different man. You'll see.

INT. RIDGE'S NEW HOME IN MARYSVILLE, CALIF. - DAY

In the living room of their new home in Marysville,
Elizabeth is sitting at the piano with Alice, now a young
girl of 8 or 9, pretty, with long, dark hair and light
skin. Elizabeth is helping her practice a new song when
Ridge bursts through the door in a rage.

RIDGE

I'm going to kill that pink-livered son of a bitch.

Elizabeth stands up abruptly. Alice remains seated at the piano.

ELIZABETH

Who? What happened?

RIDGE

Lizzie, get my coat and satchel. I'm going up there and I'm going to bash his jo-fired brains in.

ELIZABETH

Rollin, your language.

Elizabeth casts a sideways glance at Annie, who merely looks bemused by the whole scene.

ELIZABETH

What on earth has gotten into you?

Ridge holsters a gun on one hip and his Bowie knife on the other.

RIDGE

It's that cussed editor Conmy. Did you see what he called me in the *Shasta*?

Elizabeth shakes her head. Ridge leans in toward her and, for the benefit of Alice, speaks more softly.

RIDGE

A Cayuse, Lizzie. He called me a Cayuse.

Elizabeth laughs softly, both amused and horrified at Ridge's over-reaction.

ELIZABETH

Come now, Rollin. Is it really worth all of this?

You're editor now. You have a reputation to protect.

Ridge slings his knapsack over his shoulder.

RIDGE

Exactly, Lizzie. And that's just what I'm going to do.

Ridge walks out, slamming the door behind him. Elizabeth doesn't bother going after him, knowing it would be futile. Instead, she sits down at the piano with Alice.

ELIZABETH

Now, where were we?

INT. ANDY CUSICK'S SALOON, SHASTA, CALIF. - DAY

Ridge enters the Saloon, a gaudy, colorful place, brightly lit with loud piano music playing. Scanning the room, he zeroes in on the editor of the Shasta Courier, John J. CONMY, middle aged, well-dressed, with a keenly Irish look. He is seated at a table with two other men, a full glass of red wine before him.

The man to Conmy's right catches a glimpse of Ridge striding towards them and nudges Conmy.

CONMY

(loudly, facing the
advancing Ridge)
Well, if it isn't John Rollin Ridge, esteemed editor of the *Trinity National*. What a pleasure.

Ridge says nothing, Conmy continues.

CONMY

Why just the other day, I was telling my colleagues about your fine work. I mean, you have really distinguished yourself, given your ... background.

(nudges the man to his right)

Murphy, did I tell you that Ridge came over here all the way from Indian country ...

In one fluid motion, Ridge slides beside Conmy, cups the back of his head in the palm of his hand and slams his face into the full glass in front of him, breaking the glass, bloodying Conmy's nose and spilling wine everywhere. He then spreads his hand in the mixture of blood and wine and presses it against Conmy's cheek, leaving a bloody handprint.

RIDGE

Cherokee. It's Cherokee, you orange bastard.

Ridge strides out of the bar, leaving Conmy's shocked companions to attend to their bloodied friend.

OFFICES OF THE TRINITY NATIONAL, MARYSVILLE - DAY

A carriage stops in front of the offices of the Trinity National, and two Cherokee men get out. One has lighter skin and, like Ridge, could pass for either Indian or white. However, a light scar across his cheek reveals him as one of the Ross men involved with Ridge's father's killing. His companion has darker skin. After looking around cautiously, they stride into the busy newspaper and head for the editor's office, which has Ridge's name over the door. Seeing the men enter, Cooper approaches them, a stack of papers in his hands.

COOPER

Mr. Ridge is out today. Can I help you fellows?

FIRST ROSS MAN

Do you know when he'll be back?
We have some business to settle.

COOPER

Nah, can't say.

(laughs)

He went up to Shasta to settle
some score with an editor.

Y'all come a long way? I can let
his wife know you're here.

FIRST ROSS MAN

(hastily)

No, that won't be necessary.

COOPER

You sure? Come to think of it,
the Sheriff may know when he's
coming back. They've been working
together on that bandit story.

The men exchange glances as Cooper sets down the stack of
papers and motions for them to follow him.

COOPER

C'mon, I'll walk you to his
office. It's just up the street.

FIRST ROSS MAN

No, that's quite alright. My
friend and I will come back
another day.

They turn briskly and head out the door. Befuddled, Cooper
calls after them.

COOPER

Hey, can I at least tell him you
were here?

OFFICES OF THE TRINITY NATIONAL, MARYSVILLE - DAY

Back in the office, Ridge sits back in his chair reading newspapers from around the region. He is interrupted when Cooper saunters into the room.

COOPER
Mornin' Mr. Ridge.

Ridge nods toward the chair across from him.

COOPER
You seen the latest from down South?

That bandit done went on a tear again, stealin' horses, shooting people in the head, all up and down the country from Santa Rosa clear up to Sacramento. No one can figure how one man could be so many places at once.

As Ridge listens intently, Cooper moves around to the side of his desk and starts rifling through a stack of papers.

COOPER
Aw, hell, there must be somethin' about it in here somewhere.

(continues to scan)
Or maybe them editors down south are too scared to put somethin' in there - he reads the papers, you know. Everyone says he's a right gentleman (laughs) when he's not rippin' someone's throat out.

(stops rifling)
Oh, well, don't guess it matters much unless he gets a mind to come back around here. I just thought you might be interested.

RIDGE
(strokes his chin
thoughtfully)
I am interested. Thank you for
bringing this me.

COOPER
Want me to go down there as a
correspondent, see what I can dig
up? I ain't afraid of that
Mexican, you know.

Ridge shows Cooper to the door, giving him a hearty pat on
the back as he exits.

RIDGE
No, I'll handle this on my own.

But thank you.

Cooper turns back suddenly.

COOPER
Oh, Mr. Ridge, I almost forgot to
tell you -- some men came to see
you while you were up in Shasta.

RIDGE
Oh?

COOPER
Sheesh, I don't know how it
slipped my mind. Two dark-skinned
fellows - well, one dark and one
lighter. Seemed real eager to see
you, but they didn't leave their
names.

RIDGE
(brow furrowed)
That's odd. Do you remember
anything else about them?

COOPER

(shakes his head)

They were acting sorta funny -
suspicious-like. Can't believe I
forgot to tell you until now.

RIDGE

(brooding)

That's alright.

COOPER

(brighter)

Well, I guess they'll come back
if it's important.

Cooper leaves. Ridge sits on the edge of his desk for a
minute, thinking, before turning back to his clippings.

INT. RIDGE HOUSE, MARYSVILLE - EVENING

Ridge, Elizabeth and Alice are having a pleasant dinner
and discussing plans for the future. While Elizabeth
finishes setting out the food, Ridge teases Alice
playfully.

Ridge eyes a plate piled high with rolls.

RIDGE

You had better be quick, my girl,
or I'll eat every last one!

ALICE

(giggles)

And then you'd be rounder than
old Daisy.

RIDGE

Now, don't call old Daisy stout.
She can't help it that they feed
her golden oats here in
California.

Elizabeth sits down at the table and begins serving food.

ELIZABETH

So everything is settled at the newspaper?

RIDGE

Tied up neat as a bow. I left Jackson in charge.

ELIZABETH

Ugh, I hate that man.

RIDGE

Well, you won't have to deal with him. Just go down to the bank once a week and draw off my savings until I return.

Elizabeth sighs, passing dishes around the table.

ELIZABETH

Off to chase the bandit again. I thought gold was the only crazy thing men chased in these parts.

RIDGE

(serving himself)

Now, Lizzie, don't be so negative. This book is finally going to establish my place in this world.

Ridge touches Elizabeth's arm affectionately.

RIDGE

Our place, that is.

This book will be a sensation. Everyone will be talking about it - from here to Boston!

Elizabeth shoots him a look.

ALICE

Will you get to see the bandit?

RIDGE

Probably not, dear. I'll spend most of my time rifling through stacks of old newspapers and talking to witnesses - just like I do here!

Alice smiles.

ELIZABETH

How long do you expect it to take?

RIDGE

It's hard to judge, but I hope to write it as quickly as possible - strike while the iron is hot, as they say.

And when it gets published, maybe we can finally return to the Nation ... and I can start that Indian newspaper Stand and I have been discussing.

ELIZABETH

(quietly)
Perhaps.

Elizabeth stops eating and looks at into his eyes.

ELIZABETH

I do hope the book turns out well, for your sake. I want the world to see how brilliant you are. A good reputation is the best revenge.

RIDGE

(raises an eyebrow)
Oh, who said that?

ELIZABETH
(smiles and laughs)
I did!

RIDGE
With a wit like that, maybe you
should be writing the books.

ELIZABETH
Oh, stop! What time is your
train?

RIDGE
8 o'clock tomorrow.

ALICE
I'll miss you, Daddy.

RIDGE
(tousles her hair)
And I'll miss you, too, my pet! I
promise to bring you back a
lovely dress from Sacramento.

ALICE
Mmmm, how about a picture book?

RIDGE
(surprised)
Why certainly!

(to Elizabeth)
A love of books already - just
like her Pa!

(to Alice)
A picture book and a new dress.
How's that?

Alice smiles, and the family continues their supper.

INT. A SMALL OFFICE IN SAN LUIS, CALIF. - DAY

Ridge sits across the table from Capt. Harry LOVE, a California State Ranger, in a field office in in San Luis. Love is a striking man, older than Ridge, with a rugged, sun-creased face and quietly imposing manner.

RIDGE

You're a hard man to find,
Captain Love.

LOVE

I don't usually spend too much
time in one place, makes me
uncomfortable. I blame that on
spending a life in the desert.

RIDGE

You're something of a legend in
these parts: decorated soldier,
express rider, explorer.

LOVE

Well, I don't know about all
that, just living life as I see
fit.

RIDGE

So tell me the latest about the
bandit.

LOVE

You're writing a book, you say?
Pardon me for asking, but do you
have any credentials?

RIDGE

Certainly.

Ridge pulls a folded newspaper from his jacket pocket.

RIDGE

Most recently, I was editor of the Trinity National. Here's an article about my leave of absence.

Love glances at the paper briefly.

LOVE

I see. Sorry about that, it's just that Joaquín has spies.

Love thumps the paper with his fingers.

LOVE

Reads the newspaper, too. Damn educated bastard. They're a little easier to handle when they're ignorant.

Well, no matter.

Love points to marks made on a map spread across his desk.

LOVE

I've been chasing Joaquín and his men all through these parts, following the trail of blood. The way I figure, one man can't possibly be in all the places at once.

Ridge studies the map.

LOVE

I think he's divvied up the work, and he's got one gang stealing horses, the other stealing gold.

Love grimaces, looking down at the map.

LOVE

Goddamn intelligent plan if you think about it.

RIDGE

So there's more than one Joaquín?

LOVE

Perhaps. It's a common Mexican name ... kind of like John.

(laughs)

In any case, the real Joaquín, the bastard who started all of this, is on the side of killing men, and his taste for blood is rising.

RIDGE

What do you mean?

LOVE

He's become more brutal and more reckless.

RIDGE

I knew he was bent on revenge, but I guess I don't ... I mean, I didn't think of him as a coldblooded killer.

LOVE

A life of crime will do that to you, Son. You murder enough men and it becomes a sport, just like picking off Indians on the plains.

Ridge grimaces and changes the subject.

RIDGE

Where do you think he is now?

LOVE

He gave me the slip up at Gonzaga - I was damn close, too. Now, I expect he's taken his gang to Los Angeles.

RIDGE

So is that where you're headed next?

LOVE

Me? No, I've got other business to attend to. They've got trouble down in Sonora, some sort of riot. I'm headed down there to clean up that mess. Wish I could follow him, though.

Ridge is crestfallen.

LOVE

I'm sorry, Son. I guess that doesn't do much for your book. I can put you in touch with some eye-witnesses, though, if that helps. A few lucky bastards who saw the bandit and lived to tell about it.

RIDGE

Yes, Captain, that would be very helpful.

Love thumbs through some papers on his desk.

LOVE

Let's see, there's that Chinaman down at Chan's work camp - he might be a little hard to understand, though. Three-fingered Jack nearly scared the ponytail off of that poor chap.

Wait, here's a better one. There's a Frenchman up at Santa Clarita, speaks real good English. You might try there first.

Love hands Ridge a slip of paper with the man's name written on it.

RIDGE

Much obliged, Capt. Love. You've been very helpful.

I hope we'll have the chance to meet again.

LOVE

I reckon we will.

Love gazes out the window.

LOVE

Something tells me I haven't seen the last of that Mexican bastard, and when I do see him again, it'll likely be the end of one of us.

RIDGE

You are certainly the better man.

LOVE

I'm not so sure about that either.

[beat]

In any case, make me sound good in that book of yours.

RIDGE

I will indeed, Captain.

INT. A DARK TAVERN IN SANTA CLARITA - NIGHT

In a darkened tavern, Ridge sits across a table from an elderly FRENCHMAN. In the dim light of an oil lamp, the Frenchman's pale face bears a distant, shell-shocked expression. Ridge writes in a notebook as the man recounts his encounter with Joaquín.

The Frenchman raises his glass and speaks slowly, with distant eyes.

FRENCHMAN

It's funny, but in a way I owe the man my life.

RIDGE

Joaquín? But I thought you said the bandits aimed to kill you.

FRENCHMAN

Oh, I have no doubt they would have killed us if it had come to that, had we not given them the money. But it was the other one whose mind was bent on murder, that Three-Fingered brute.

(closes his eyes)

I still see his hideous face in my sleep, and that hand!

No, Joaquín is a gentleman, no different than you or me.

He studies Ridge for a moment before continuing.

FRENCHMAN

In fact, he looks a bit like you.

RIDGE

What do you mean?

FRENCHMAN

Oh, the same dark hair, those piercing eyes. His skin is light, you know. He could easily pass for an American ... or at least a Frenchman! That's why it's so easy for him to slip away.

FRENCHMAN (CONT'D)

But anyway, as I was saying,
there were 13 of us that day,
three of my countrymen, six
Germans, and three Americans, and
we had quite a haul among us,
thought we had done quite well
for ourselves in the goldfields.

We're walking along the road that
leads from Dead Man's Creek,
laughing and talking, drinking a
little, when all of a sudden,
they're all around us. It must
have been at least 30 men. I
don't know where they came from.
It was as if they just
materialized from thin air.

RIDGE

Thirty, you say? That must have
been before the gang split up.

FRENCHMAN

Oh, at least. And Joaquín singles
me out, gets off his horse and
walks right up to me, unarmed.

I fumble for my pistol, but it's
no use, my fingers have turned to
butter. I'm standing by my mule
and he walks right up to me,
grabs me by the hair like he's
going to scalp me and says,
"shell out."

Of course, I grab the purse off
my mule and hand it right over.

(touches his face)

How my cheeks flush just thinking
of it.

His voice trails off.

RIDGE

And then what happened?

FRENCHMAN

There was an explosion of gunfire from every direction. I just stood there frozen, watching my friends fall around me.

They had drawn their weapons, trying to defend our gold, but the bandits were too fast - and too many. It was over in just a few seconds, but it felt like an eternity.

(closes his eyes)

I can see it all: the surprised look on poor Louis' face as the ball cut through his chest, as he reached for me, falling.

And Joaquín in the middle of it all, smiling, those dark eyes glowing, brandishing his sword in all our faces and threatening to cut out our windpipes if we didn't hand over "what little loose change that we had."

He looks at Ridge wearily.

FRENCHMAN

So we did. We handed them all of it, some \$15,000 and six months' hard labor in the fields.

(smiles ruefully)

The bastard bowed and thanked us as he rounded up his men to go. And then I hear the big one, that three-fingered devil say, "I'll kill what's left of them. No need to leave witnesses."

RIDGE

And that's when Joaquín
intervened?

FRENCHMAN

Yes, he laughed and told the man
it would be ungentlemanly, and
that besides, a few witnesses
were good for their reputation.

They argued a bit, but Joaquín
prevailed. He is clearly their
leader. If someone can get to
him, the rest will go shrinking
back to whatever corner of hell
they came from.

RIDGE

And what will you do now?

FRENCHMAN

What is there to do? All the
money is gone. I don't even have
enough to pay my way back home.

Nothing for me there anyway. I am
an old man now, and this was my
last chance at making a fortune.
My wife will forget about me,
remarry perhaps. My children
won't remember my name.

Ridge clasps the man's shaking hands across the table.

RIDGE

You have helped me, my friend,
and if this book does well, I
will remember you, send a little
something your way.

FRENCHMAN

I just hope you help them catch
that bastard.

FRENCHMAN (CONT'D)

Gentleman or no, he is a plague upon our country, sucking the life out of men who have done him no wrong.

Ridge rises to go.

RIDGE

I'm sure he will be caught soon enough. Thank you again. Take care.

The Frenchman nods glumly, goes back to his drink. Ridge pockets his notebook and walks away.

INT. A HOTEL IN LOS ANGELES - DAY

Ridge enters the lobby of the Los Angeles hotel where he has been staying while doing his research. He walks up to the counter to inquire about his usual room and is greeted by the INNKEEPER, a small, middle-aged gentleman with a highly excitable manner.

INNKEEPER

Mr. Ridge, where have you been?

RIDGE

I was a few days in Santa Clarita following leads for my book.

INNKEEPER

(gesticulating wildly)
Well, you've missed it all! He was right here. I mean, just right up the way at the Bella Union.

RIDGE

What on earth are you talking about, man?

INNKEEPER

Joaquín! He was here. He shot a man. Well, not just any man. He shot Capt. Wilson, put a ball right through his skull and rode off shouting "I am Joaquín."
Right here, I say!

RIDGE

(now clearly agitated)
You must be joking. Capt. Love said the trail had gone cold.

INNKEEPER

Well, it's hotter than hellfire now, and blazing right through Los Angeles.

RIDGE

When did this happen?

INNKEEPER

The day after you left town. Right up the road at the Bella Union. The rangers are after them, but they can't seem to tell which way he went. Naturally, I thought about you and your book, well, as soon as the commotion died down, but I didn't know where you had gone.

RIDGE

Damn my luck. Well, I guess I'll be off to the Union to see who I can talk to.

INT. BELLA UNION HOTEL, LOS ANGELES - LATER THAT DAY
A small crowd of men have gathered at the bar, drinking and discussing the recent events. They stop talking and eye Ridge suspiciously as he approaches them and introduces himself.

RIDGE

John Rollin Ridge. I'm a reporter, well actually, I'm working on a book about the bandit, Joaquín Murieta. I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit about what happened here.

The men are silent.

RIDGE

Did any of you see him ... when he shot Capt. Wilson?

Finally, a small, nervous man wearing spectacles pipes up from a corner of the bar.

MAN IN SPECTACLES

I don't think Capt. Wilson even saw him, sir.

A few of the men nod their heads.

MAN IN SPECTACLES

I-I mean it all happened so fast.

He was here ... and then he was gone ...

(motions with his hands)
... just like that.

Ridge takes out a notebook and pencil and moves closer to the man in spectacles.

RIDGE

Did you see it happen?

MAN IN SPECTACLES

I was in my room upstairs, just over the street, when I heard a lot of commotion, and then a shot.

MAN IN SPECTACLES

(CONT'D)

When I got to the window, I saw a man on horseback riding away fast. It had to have been him.

SECOND BAR PATRON

YOU saw the bandit?

(chuckles to his companions)

Somehow I find that hard to believe.

MAN IN SPECTACLES

No, I did. He had long hair, and a very nice riding cloak. He was on a bay horse.

RIDGE

Does anyone know why Joaquín might have singled out Wilson?

MAN IN SPECTACLES

I don't have any clue. He just rode right up to him and bam!

He pantomimes a gunshot to the head.

THIRD BAR PATRON

Well, there has been some talk that Wilson had Joaquín's brother in law hanged a few months ago.

RIDGE

(writing)

So maybe it was just another case of revenge.

THIRD BAR PATRON

That's the talk, but who knows? Mexicans get hanged here every day. (laughter)

MAN IN SPECTACLES

But there had to be some reason.

THIRD BAR PATRON

Uh-huh.

He takes another drink and then turns to the man in spectacles.

THIRD BAR PATRON

A man like Joaquín Murieta doesn't need a reason to kill you. You might think about that the next time you go sticking your head out a window.

The man in the spectacles blushes as the others laugh.

RIDGE

(to the man in spectacles)

You've been very helpful, sir.
Thank you for your time.

Ridge shakes the man's hand and leaves the bar.

INT., RIDGE'S HOTEL ROOM - EVE

Ridge returns to his hotel room to write. Like any writer, it takes him a while to get into the process. He paces the room. He picks up the crumpled letter from Stand and studies it again for a moment. He pours himself a drink, pondering the letter, and then he sits down to write these words, which we hear as he writes.

INSERT - THE BOOK

CHAPTER SIX

THE MONTH of December was drawing to a close and the busy brain of the accomplished chief had mapped out the full plan of operations for the new year at hand.

Ridge gazes out the window at the dead landscape in the dying light.

It was the year that would close his short and tragic career with a crowning glory - a deed of daring and of power that would redeem the darkness of his previous history and show him not as a mere outlaw but as a hero who has revenged his country's wrongs and washed out her disgrace with the blood of her enemies. (Ridge, *Joaquín* 65)

Ridge goes back and underlines the word "hero." In the dim lamplight, he continues to write.

INT., RIDGE'S HOTEL ROOM - EVE

Ridge goes downstairs to post a letter to Elizabeth when he is surprised to see Capt. LOVE striding across the hotel lobby.

RIDGE

Capt. Love, what a pleasure.

LOVE

(grimly)

Just the man I was looking for.

(Ridge looks puzzled)

We've got another murder, and I think you should see this one.

RIDGE

The bandit?

LOVE

Yeah, on the way to Ft. Tejon.
Saddle up and meet me out front.

Ridge hurriedly posts the letter and leaves the hotel to join Love.

A DESERTED ROAD OUTSIDE OF LOS ANGELES - LATER THAT DAY
Love and Ridge arrive at the scene of the murder, where
they are met by the local sheriff and a few deputies.

A mule cart, loaded with groceries and supplies stands in
the middle of the road, the mule still placidly standing
under the yoke. On the ground lies a young, blond
American, not more than 20 years old. His throat has been
slit, and flies buzz around his body as the men survey the
scene.

The Sheriff tips his hat to Love.

SHERIFF

I sent for you as soon as we
found him.

Love squats down near the victim to get a better look.

SHERIFF

Who's your partner, Harry?

LOVE

This is John Ridge. He's writing
a book about the bandit.

The sheriff snorts and casts a glance at his deputies
before addressing Ridge.

SHERIFF

Why would you want to write a
book about a common criminal?

RIDGE

(stammers, taken aback)
Well, from what I understand, his
killings are motivated by
revenge.

The sheriff laughs out loud, then motions toward the body
on the ground.

SHERIFF

This had absolutely nothing to do
with revenge.

Love looks up from the body to the sheriff.

LOVE

Do you know who the kid is?

SHERIFF

Yes, sir. That's Allen Ruddle.
Worked out at Hickman's Rancho.

(shakes his head)

Decent kid, too.

SHERIFF

(to Ridge)

I can guarantee you this kid had
never heard of Joaquín Murieta
before he set out on the road
today.

No, this is just cold-blooded
murder.

Love examines the pistol still clutched in Ruddle's hand.

LOVE

Looks like he didn't have time to
fire.

SHERIFF

(still looking at Ridge)

No. That kid didn't have a
chance.

[BEAT]

DEPUTY

(to Love)

So was it was the bandit, Harry?
How many do you think he had with
him?

LOVE

(examines the ground)

Hard to say. It's dry, and I'm sure many have passed along this road before.

(looks down at Ruddle)

But this kind of cruelty ... It sure looks like Joaquín, or that three-fingered bastard he rides with.

(looks up the road)

I'd say we're back on his trail.

INT. RIDGE'S HOTEL IN LOS ANGELES, DAY

Ridge returns to his hotel to find Elizabeth and Alice waiting for him in the hotel lobby, having come down from Marysville to visit. Upon seeing her father, Alice runs up to Ridge, who picks her up in his arms, overjoyed to see his family. Putting down Alice, Ridge kisses Elizabeth on the cheek.

RIDGE

How was the trip?

ELIZABETH

Oh, you know.

ALICE

We had to look out for Indians and robbers.

ELIZABETH

(grimaces)

I don't know why our driver told you that.

RIDGE

Let's get these bags put away and get some dinner. You must be famished.

INT. HOTEL DINING ROOM

Ridge, Elizabeth and Alice catch up over dinner.

ELIZABETH

Do you think you'll be able to
come back with us?

RIDGE

I don't think so, Lizzie. I still
have a lot of work to do for the
book - some gaps to fill in.

ALICE

About the bandit?

RIDGE

Yes, dear.

(to Elizabeth)

I think they're closing in on
him, so I need to work fast.

Elizabeth says nothing.

RIDGE

Is something wrong, Lizzie?

ELIZABETH

(to Alice)

Now that your finished eating,
could you go buy your mother a
newspaper from the nice man at
the front counter?

Elizabeth gives Alice some change and watches her run
through the dining room to the front desk before turning
to Ridge.

ELIZABETH

Frankly, Rollin, I'm worried
about you here. It's in the
middle of nowhere. Something
could happen.

RIDGE
Something like what?

ELIZABETH
(evasively)
I mean, anything. It's not as if
you don't have enemies.

RIDGE
So you've had a letter from
Stand.

ELIZABETH
(looks him in the eye)
You can't take this lightly,
Rollin. Things have not gotten
any better in the Nation.

RIDGE
(his temper rising)
Do you think I don't know that,
Lizzie? There is nothing I would
love more than to go back and
settle this once and for all.

Elizabeth grabs Ridge's arm.

ELIZABETH
Rollin, you can't. They would
kill you there and they might
kill you here.

Elizabeth sees Alice returning and lets go of his arm,
changing her demeanor.

RIDGE
(under his breath)
That's a risk I'll have to take.

Smiling, Alice hands Elizabeth the paper.

ELIZABETH
Thank you, dear.

Elizabeth takes the newspaper and immediately puts it aside, much to Alice's puzzlement. After waiting a moment, the girl picks it up herself and begins to look at the pictures, swinging her legs under her seat.

ELIZABETH

So, a few more weeks ... months? I hope you'll be home by winter.

RIDGE

Oh, yes, I should be done by then. As I said, they'll catch him sooner or later.

ELIZABETH

And I suppose you'll be disappointed.

RIDGE

Why would you say that?

Elizabeth shrugs. Ridge thinks for a moment and then responds.

RIDGE

Something's changed in him, and I suspect he won't stop killing now until he is caught.

Elizabeth notices that Alice is looking at the paper.

ELIZABETH

That's not for young eyes. You'll be up all night dreaming of bandits and stage robbers.

Alice hands the paper to her, grinning sheepishly.

ELIZABETH

Come on, let's get you to bed.

MONTAGE - RIDGE CHRONICLES JOAQUÍN'S EXPLOITS

Ridge continues to track Joaquín through newspaper clippings and interviews with those lucky enough to cross his path and survive. (In each scene, we see the events unfold as Ridge imagines them.)

- Ridge interviews an old woman living with her son and daughter in the mountains who recounts how Joaquín and three of his men showed up at their door asking for dinner. They were "splendidly dressed and armed to the teeth," the old woman says, adding that one of the men had four revolvers and a Bowie knife. After enjoying their meal, she says, one of the men put a pistol to the son's head and "asked him if he had any objection to having the house robbed." The old woman says she screamed out "Oh, Lord! I knowed it - I seed the coven-foot a'stickin out all the time!" The bandits then proceeded to ransack the house and take all their money. (Ridge, *Joaquín* 121-22)
- Ridge reads a newspaper account about the killing of young redhead named Joe Lake who was said to be a former acquaintance of Joaquín's who betrayed him. Joaquín shoots the man in broad daylight and narrowly escapes several men who, after witnessing the shooting, pursue him on horseback. (Ridge, *Joaquín* 37-8)
- Ridge interviews a man who describes seeing Joaquín come upon a sign proclaiming a \$5,000 reward for his capture. With several people standing nearby, Joaquín brazenly crosses out the amount, writes \$10,000, signs his name and gallops off. (Ridge, *Joaquín* 54)

INT. STATE HOUSE, VALLEJO, CA - DAY

Ridge attends a meeting of the California legislature, held in a rustic, two-story wooden building. He takes notes as the governor of California reads a proclamation giving Harry Love authority to organize a company of mounted rangers to capture and kill Joaquín and his band.

INSERT - THE PROCLAMATION

The people of the State of California represented in Senate and Assembly do enact as follows:

Captain Harry S. Love is hereby authorized and empowered to raise a company of mounted Rangers, not

to exceed twenty men, and muster them into the service of the State for the period of three months ...

As the speaker reads, we see LOVE mustering his men on horseback.

... unless sooner disbanded by order of the Governor, for the purpose of capture the party or gang of robbers commanded by Joaquín Murieta ...

LOVE and his men ride through towns, rounding up and arresting various Mexican "bandits," none of them Joaquín.

... It shall be the duty of the said Rangers upon taking any prisoners to deliver them safely to the County authorities for trial ... ("California State Militia")

INT. STOCKTON HOUSE HOTEL IN STOCKTON, CA - DAY
Sunlight filters through the brandy in a glass jar that holds the head of Joaquín Murieta on an elevated platform. An older gentleman pulls a monocle from his suit pocket and stoops to get a better look at the head in the jar. Behind the man, a long line has formed in the ballroom set aside for this occasion. The room buzzes with small talk as people wait their turn to gaze at the famed bandit.

Among those waiting in line is RIDGE. Near the entrance to the ballroom, a young BOY approaches him with a flyer.

BOY

Would you like a handbill, sir?
Only 25 cents.

Ridge takes a pamphlet and looks it over.

BOY

It tells the story of the bandit
and how he got killed.

RIDGE

In two pages? No, thank you.

Ridge hands it back. The boy fans himself, waiting for the line to move.

RIDGE

Has it been like this all day?
The crowds I mean.

BOY

Yes, sir. Everybody wants to see
the bandit. We've only got it
here for two days - the head, I
mean.

RIDGE

Have you seen it?

BOY

Oh, yes, sir. Pa let me see it
the first day. It's a fearsome
sight. But the hand! That's even
worse.

(twists up his hand in
imitation)

Got what was comin' to them
though, I reckon ... least, that's
what Pa says.

Sure you don't want one of these?

Ridge shakes his head. The line moves forward and he enters the ballroom as the boy moves on to the next customer.

INT. BROWN'S MERCANTILE HOTEL, SACRAMENTO - DAY
Publication of *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta* has made Ridge a minor celebrity in Sacramento (though no wealthier). Drinking and smoking cigars with some of the city's elite in the hotel parlor, Ridge regales the men with tales of the bandit. A copy of the book lies on an end table nearby.

MAN WITH CIGAR

So do tell us, Rollin, did you ever meet the bandit, in person, I mean?

RIDGE

Now, that's a very good question. It always seemed as though I was one step behind him, reading about his exploits in the newspapers, or talking with the odd fellow who met with him and had the good fortune to live to tell of it.

(becoming pensive)

But I think I may have seen him once in a tavern in Marysville ...

He had dark eyes, and the look of a man haunted by an obsession.

So naturally, when I saw a sketch in the papers, I was all the more intrigued.

The man in spectacles picks up a bound copy of the book and turns it over in his hands.

MAN IN SPECTACLES

It's a fine piece of adventure, but rather, shall we say, grim, don't you think?

RIDGE

I've done nothing here but report the facts. A bloody book for a bloody man, I suppose.

YOUNGER GENTLEMAN

So then I suppose you take issue with the piece in the *Chronicle*? The review, that is.

RIDGE

(chuckles)

I stopped reading reviews weeks ago ... so many, and all the same drivel.

(sarcastically)

What did this particular scribe have to say about my work?

The younger gentleman fumbles in his valise for a copy of the review.

YOUNGER GENTLEMAN

He says that it's not true ... about Joaquín being dead that is.

He looks around at the other men for support.

YOUNGER GENTLEMAN

I mean, there are a lot of men saying that ... that Love didn't kill him, but that he and his bride went back to ...

Ridge snatches the paper out of the younger man's hand.

RIDGE

Give me that!

INSERT - THE REVIEW

The book may serve as a very amusing reading for Joaquín Murieta, should he get hold of it, for notwithstanding all which has been said and published to the contrary, we have little faith in his reported death at the hands of Love's party.
(Parins 104)

Ridge tosses the paper back at the man in disgust.

RIDGE

Bottom-feeding scoundrels! Do you know I saw that rotting head with my own two eyes!

The younger man continues to engage Ridge, despite the other men's warning glances.

YOUNGER MAN

They said that could be any Mexican, some other Joaquín, or ...

RIDGE

Prove it! That's what I say to the bastards.

Ridge paces the room.

RIDGE

Let them travel the state up and down, digging through dusty old clippings, talking to Chinese merchants.

Ha! No, let them ask the governor! He believed it well enough to pay Capt. Love a rich reward.

Not dead? To think that I would stake my reputation on this book only to err in so great a detail!

(more calmly, with a hint of bitterness)
No, Joaquín is quite dead ... as dead as the men who wronged him, stealing his hopes for happiness in this blasted country.

Ridge turns to the younger man, who is in the process of stuffing the review back into his valise.

RIDGE

May I have that?

YOUNGER MAN

Certainly.

RIDGE

If you'll excuse me, gentlemen, I
have a rebuttal to write.

Ridge leaves the room.

MAN WITH CIGAR

(to younger man)

You're lucky. His book sales
seemed to have put him in a
decent mood.

YOUNGER MAN

You mean to say he has a temper?

The man with the cigar casts a knowing look toward the man
with spectacles.

MAN WITH CIGAR

You should ask John Conmy in
Shasta.

INT. RIDGE HOME, SACRAMENTO - NIGHT

Ridge arrives home from his dinner early to find Elizabeth
reading. Alice has already gone to bed.

ELIZABETH

You're home early. How was the
dinner?

Ridge sits down across from her at the table and hastily
gets out paper and pen.

RIDGE

Fine ... except for that damn
newspaper up in San Francisco.
They all but called me a bald-
faced liar.

Elizabeth looks at him quizzically. He sighs and takes her hand across the table.

RIDGE

It is good to be back home,
Lizzie.

ELIZABETH

Are you still going to try to get
on at the newspaper?

(smiles mischievously)

After you fire off a missive to
those ne'er-do-wells, of course.

RIDGE

Yes, I think that's where I
belong, at least until I can talk
Stand into helping me start up
that Indian newspaper back home.

Elizabeth's face clouds at the mention of returning home.

RIDGE

In the meantime, I need to earn a
living. Joaquín isn't exactly
sustaining us.

ELIZABETH

But you said it sold so well -
they wanted a second edition.

RIDGE

7,000 copies and I haven't seen a
red cent thanks to that scoundrel
publisher.

Elizabeth stands and smooths her hands through his hair.

ELIZABETH

You've accomplished so much since
we came here, and one day, you'll

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
get the recognition that's due. I
know you will.

Elizabeth goes to bed, leaving Ridge to his work.

EXT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE IN SACRAMENTO - NIGHT

Ridge has returned to work as a newspaperman in Sacramento. After deadline one evening, Ridge, a few reporters - including Cooper - and pressmen, gather on the back porch of the newspaper office to have a few drinks and unwind. Lanterns light the men's faces in the still night.

COOPER
(to Ridge)
I didn't expect to see you back
in the business, on account of
your being a big famous author
now.

Ridge shrugs.

COOPER
Whaddya make of that Mexican
anyway? You figure once he
started killing, he just couldn't
stop hisself?

RIDGE
I think the need for revenge
knows no bounds.

COOPER
How do you figure?

Ridge looks the reporter dead in the eye.

RIDGE
Did I ever tell you the story of
how I came to California?

Cooper shakes his head. Intrigued, the other men move closer to Ridge.

RIDGE

Our enemies, John Ross and his men, killed my father. They murdered him in cold blood before our very eyes.

They showed no pity for his sobbing wife, holding her back as they stabbed him over and over again.

When they were finished, they tossed him in the air like a worthless rag and let his bleeding body fall to the earth.

It was a sight to make one regret that the human race had ever been created, and "it darkened my mind with an eternal shadow" (Parins 30).

[BEAT]

COOPER

What happened to them, the men who killed your Pa?

RIDGE

And also my grandfather, Major Ridge. Another group ambushed and killed him not far from his home.

I can still see the faces of each one of them, etched on my memory.

Ridge takes a small, tattered book from his pocket.

RIDGE

I learned their names and have tracked them all these years. Only four are still alive.

He studies the names for a moment.

RIDGE

And here I am, all that hatred
still burning within me.

(smiles ruefully)

You know, sometimes I think
Joaquín was the luckier man.

Before Cooper has a chance to respond, Ridge gets up abruptly and walks out into the dark night.

INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - NEXT DAY

Ridge is sitting in his office discussing a story idea with one of his reporters, when HAROLD, a soft-spoken, older press operator, who was with the group last night, appears at the door.

RIDGE

Come on in, Harold. We were just
finishing up.

Ridge addresses the reporter sitting across from him.

RIDGE

I think it's a good idea, but try
that approach.

The reporter gets up to leave.

REPORTER

I'll try to have something for
Sunday's edition.

RIDGE

Excellent.

(to Harold)

How can I help you?

Harold takes his hat off and stands awkwardly before Ridge.

HAROLD

Something you said last night has
been playing on my mind. Do you
still have that list?

Ridge reaches into his pocket.

RIDGE

Of course, I keep it with me
always. Why?

HAROLD

Can I see the names?

Harold wipes his ink-stained hands on his apron before
taking the book.

HAROLD

Ross ... yes, that was it.

RIDGE

(growing impatient)
What about them?

HAROLD

There was a man in Weaverville,
Indian fellow named Ross, who
came in looking for a job while I
was there.

Ridge nearly leaps out of his seat, startling Harold.

RIDGE

Go on ...

HAROLD

He asked a lot of questions, said
he was trying to learn the
business.

Ridge snatches the book from Harold's hands.

RIDGE

Why didn't you tell me last night? How long ago was it?

HAROLD

(stammering and backing away from Ridge)

About a month ago. He was an Indian. I-I guess I didn't make the connection.

Ridge hurriedly grabs his hat and valise, shooting Harold a look as he rushes by.

RIDGE

He was Cherokee ... like me.

Ridge rushes out of the newspaper office, leaving the confused press operator standing in the door.

EXT. A ROAD OUTSIDE OF WEAVERVILLE - DAY

Having ridden his horse hard the two-day journey from Sacramento, Ridge nears Weaverville. From the road, he can see the majestic Mt. Shasta. Entering Weaverville, he rides through the city's Chinatown, a huge Chinese mining camp. Finally, he arrives at the offices of the Weaverville Trinity Journal, dismounts and enters.

INT. OFFICES OF THE WEAVERSVILLE TRINITY JOURNAL - DAY

Ridge strides into the editor's office to inquire about Ross. He takes off his hat and shakes the editor's hand.

RIDGE

Good afternoon. John Rollin Ridge, editor of the Sacramento Bee.

EDITOR

Pleased to meet you, Mr. Ridge. Your reputation precedes you. What can I do for you today?

RIDGE

I was wondering if you might have a man working for you by the name of Ross?

EDITOR

Why yes. Indian fellow, and a fine worker, too. Very interested in the newspaper business, but not much of a writer.

RIDGE

(visibly agitated,
interrupts)
Do you know where I might find him?

EDITOR

He has the day off.

Ridge looks disappointed.

EDITOR

But you can probably find him at the New York. That's where he's staying.

Ridge hastily turns to leave.

EDITOR

Is there a problem Mr. Ridge?

RIDGE

No. I just need to find him.
Thank you.

EXT. NEW YORK HOTEL, WEAVERSVILLE - DUSK

Ridge rides quickly up to the hotel and leaves his horse with the porter.

INT. NEW YORK HOTEL, WEAVERSVILLE - DUSK

As he enters the lobby, he slows his step, looking around warily. Approaching the front desk, he catches a glimpse

of an Indian man sitting at the bar. He approaches the front desk, all the while making sure not to let the man out of his sight.

Ridge addresses the front desk clerk.

RIDGE

Do you have a room for the night?

The clerk checks his log.

CLERK

No, I'm sorry. We're all booked up. You might try the Empire up the street.

Ridge glances at the man at the bar.

RIDGE

Yes. Well, I think I'll have a drink while I'm here. Perhaps even dinner. It's been a long ride.

CLERK

Please do. May I suggest the quail? It's the chef's specialty.

RIDGE

(Distractedly)
Yes. Thank you.

Ridge takes a seat in the dining room that affords him a good view of the man at the bar reflected in the mirror. A waiter brings Ridge a drink and a menu.

Ridge glances over the menu and then back at the man at the bar, who turns in profile to reveal the distinctive scar on his cheek. Ridge watches the man get up from the bar and walk upstairs to his room. Ridge's hand shakes as he lifts his glass.

A few more seconds pass. Ridge declines the waiter's offer for dinner, instead asking for another drink, which he

downs in one gulp. After gathering his nerve, he approaches the front desk again.

RIDGE

(pouring on the charm)

Excuse me. I think I just caught sight of an old friend leaving the bar. Do you have a Mr. Ross staying here?

The clerk consults his records again.

CLERK

Why yes, Room 216.

RIDGE

(smiles broadly)

Thank you so much. Fancy finding an old friend on the other side of the continent.

Tipping his hat, Ridge heads upstairs, slowing his step as he reaches the top landing. Cautiously, Ridge proceeds down the hall to room 216. He halts outside the door, breathing heavily. Opening his jacket slightly, Ridge reaches for the handle of the Bowie knife concealed beneath. He closes his eyes and sees an image from the dream he had about Joaquín, in which Joaquín turns from the bloodied body of the man he has stabbed in bed and smiles at Ridge, seeming to encourage him to act on his desires for revenge. Ridge opens his eyes and breathes in sharply. Seconds pass.

Movement can be heard inside the room. Ridge closes his eyes again and sees the dark scene of his father's wake, his mother sobbing, blood dripping from the winding sheet over the floor. Suddenly, there is a noise in the hall. Someone is coming up the steps. Ridge puts his hand on the doorknob, fingers shaking - it's now or never. Hearing the footsteps approach, he changes his mind, hastily buttons his jacket and walks away quickly, tipping his hat to the stranger he passes in the hall.

EXT. A WHARF IN SAN FRANCISCO - SOME TIME LATER

At a wharf in San Francisco, Ridge greets his brother Aeneas, who has been working on the whaling ships. The two embrace, happy to see each other after so much time has passed.

AENEAS

(laughing)

There's my famous brother, all dressed up like a gentleman. Do you remember when we parted on these docks, without two pennies to rub together?

RIDGE

That seems like another lifetime!

It's good to see you, my brother.

(slaps him on the back)

Come let me buy you dinner at San Francisco's finest!

I want to hear all about your journeys.

Ridge helps Aeneas with his bags, and the two men walk along the busy wharf.

RIDGE

Where is Wacooli?

AENEAS

I left him at home the last time I was there.

Ridge stops and looks at Aeneas, troubled.

RIDGE

You've been to the Nation? When?

AENEAS

Don't look so surprised, Rollin. I've been back a few times ... to see Mother and Stand.

The men resume walking.

RIDGE

(bitterly)

I should be so lucky! The women have conspired to keep me as far from my homeland as possible!

AENEAS

You know it's not wise for you to return. The Ross men still want your blood ... and you'd have to face the murder charge.

INT. A HOTEL IN SAN FRANCISCO - DAY

The men arrive at the hotel. Ridge tells the hotel clerk that his brother's stay is on him and has the porter take Aeneas' bags to his room. The two men enter the dining room and resume their conversation over drinks.

RIDGE

(contemptuously)

The Ross men. What difference does it make if I'm here or there?

(grabs Aeneas' arm)

Do you know that I found one of them ... here in California? I had a chance to kill him, Aeneas.

(BEAT)

And I failed.

AENEAS

And what would that accomplish, brother? You hunt them down one by one. You kill them, blood for blood, just like that bandit in your book. And then what?

RIDGE

(through his teeth)

Justice. That's what.

AENEAS

Justice.

(shakes his head)

Brother, what do you and I know about justice?

They throw us off our land, just like those poor Mexicans, or the diggers you write about, and then they set us at each other like wild dogs. You call that justice?

Sign a treaty, don't sign a treaty. Leave when they say to go, or get driven out like cattle, sick, starving, naked.

No, brother. There is no justice for us. Not there, and not here.

RIDGE

Aeneas, you surprise me. You sound like you've been listening to our enemies.

AENEAS

I wonder sometimes if we've picked the wrong fight.

The two brothers reflect for a moment as they sip their drinks and glance around the opulent dining room.

RIDGE

Oh, Aeneas, having you here makes me all the more heartsick for home. I wonder if I'll ever get back there again?

AENEAS

I don't know, brother.

AENEAS (CONT'D)

(grins)

But I do know you're the pride of the Nation. Everybody has heard about that book you wrote.

RIDGE

If only my fame had brought a little more fortune! No matter, though, Elizabeth and I have done well.

AENEAS

I'm glad to hear it. You deserve some peace ... after all we've been through.

He motions for the waiter.

AENEAS

I'm famished. The Ridge brothers reunited - this calls for a feast.

(raises a glass)

To peace, and family,

AENEAS

And two sons of the Ridge, still standing!

The brothers toast as the waiter comes over to take their order.

INT. JOHN ROLLIN RIDGE HOME, GRASS VALLEY, CA., 1867 - DAY

Ten years have passed. Ridge, Elizabeth and Alice, now 19, now live in a modest, well-appointed home in a peaceful meadow in Grass Valley, California. The surroundings are not unlike the home they shared in Arkansas before Ridge's killing of Kell. It is a pleasant day, and with the doors and windows open, Elizabeth is tending some plants on the porch when Alice suddenly rushes out, clearly agitated.

ELIZABETH

What is it?

ALICE

It's Pa, he's worse. He's raving again and thrashing about like a madman.

Elizabeth puts down her watering can, wipes her hands and follows Alice back into the house.

ELIZABETH

Oh dear, he was sleeping so peacefully just a while ago.

Send for the doctor, Alice.

As Elizabeth heads for the back of the house, Alice gathers her things to go get the doctor. She hesitates a moment, watching her mother go down the hall, before turning to leave.

In the back bedroom of the house, Elizabeth rushes to Ridge's side. Ridge tosses in bed, his brow soaked in sweat. Older and thinner as a result of this long illness, Ridge's eyes are intense as ever as he seems to stare at things only he can see.

Elizabeth takes Ridge's hand and wipes his forehead with a towel.

ELIZABETH

Shhh, it's Lizzie. I'm here now.

RIDGE

The head. I saw his head in the jar. He couldn't have survived ...

Elizabeth sits beside Ridge and tries to soothe him.

ELIZABETH

Now, now, there's no need to think about such dreadful things.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Did you have a dream? Is that
what woke you?

RIDGE

I saw him ... those eyes, so dark.
They say he went back to Mexico.

Ridge falls back on his pillow and is quiet for a moment
before sitting up again with a start.

RIDGE

The letter. Did they get the
letter about the treaty?

ELIZABETH

Yes, dear. That was settled a
long time ago. Remember, you and
Stand went to Washington to
negotiate a new treaty for our
people?

RIDGE

But the money. That bastard Ross
told them not to let Stand have
the money.

Ridge moves as if to get up.

RIDGE

I have to get back to the Nation.
I have to make it right. They
need me!

Elizabeth gently presses Ridge back against the pillows.

ELIZABETH

Of course, dear. There will be
time for that, but right now you
need to get your strength back.
And to do that, you need to think
about good and gentle things.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Remember that poem you wrote - my favorite?

Elizabeth begins to recite the poem from memory, and it has a soothing effect on Ridge. He stares out the window as she speaks.

ELIZABETH

"A STRANGER in a stranger land,
Too calm to weep, too sad to
smile,

I take my harp of broken strings,
A weary moment to beguile ...
(Ridge, *Poems*)

As Elizabeth continues to stroke Ridge's hand and softly recite his poem "The Harp of Broken Strings," he hears the music he always imagined from that harp of broken strings and falls into a waking dream.

VISION

Ridge first sees Joaquín, alive, radiant in his youth and vitality, riding on his beautiful bay horse along a quiet mountain path. The path opens into a valley, where Joaquín sees his home and his wife, Rosita. He smiles as she turns to greet him.

Joaquín then looks back over his shoulder at Ridge, and the scene changes. Suddenly Ridge is riding toward his own home in Arkansas, the place where he and Elizabeth were most happy, before the murders of his father and grandfather. Elizabeth is standing on the porch. Ridge rides up to the front of the house and dismounts. Smiling, Elizabeth motions for him to enter the house. As he does, the scene changes once more.

Ridge is a boy again, in the grand old Ridge home back in Georgia, before the removal. In the living room, he sees his father and runs toward him. The elder Ridge scoops up the young boy, and over his father's shoulder, Ridge sees his grandfather sitting at a desk in the adjoining study. Through an open window behind his grandfather, Ridge sees

his original homeland. He sees Cherokee children playing stickball. He hears the sound of shell shakers and singing and the silhouettes of stomp dancers around the fire, and then he sees no more.

ROLL CREDITS

EPILOGUE

In no small part due to Ridge's book, Joaquín Murieta lived on in myth and legend. Some say he was the prototype for Zorro, the Mexican masked hero.

John Rollin Ridge was revered by his contemporaries as a great poet, newspaperman and statesman, and later as the first American Indian novelist. He is buried in Grass Valley, California, having never returned home.

THE END

REFERENCES

- Alemán, Jesse. "Assimilation and the Decapitated Body Politic in *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta*." *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 60.1 (2004): 71-98. MLA International Bibliography. EBSCO. Web. 11 June 2011.
- "California State Militia and National Guard Unit Histories: California State Rangers." *The California State Military Museum*. n.p. n.d. Web. 25 Nov. 2012.
- Christensen, Peter G. "Minority Interaction in John Rollin Ridge's *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta*." MELUS 17.2 (1991): 61-72. MLA International Bibliography. EBSCO. Web. 11 June 2011.
- Foreman, Carolyn Thomas. "Edward W. Bushyhead and John Rollin Ridge." *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 14 (September 1936): 295-311. Oklahoma State University. Electronic Publishing Center. Web. 22 Dec. 2011.
- Goeke, Joe. "Yellow Bird and the Bandit: Minority Authorship, Class, and Audience in John Rollin Ridge's *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta*." *Western American Literature* 37.4 (2003): 453-478. MLA International Bibliography. EBSCO. Web. 11 June 2011.
- Hazera, Lydia D. "Joaquín Murieta: The Making of a Popular Hero." *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 8 (1989): 200-213. MLA International Bibliography. EBSCO. Web. 11 June 2011.
- Jackson, Joseph Henry. Introduction. *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta, The Celebrated California Bandit*. By Yellow Bird. Norman: U of Oklahoma Press, 1955. xi-l. Print.
- Jordan, Tracey. "Joaquín Murieta, Cherokee Outlaw-Hero: Yellow Bird's Vindication of Cherokee Nature." *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 60.3 (2004): 1-32. MLA International Bibliography. EBSCO. Web. 11 June 2011.

- Kennedy, Mary Jean. "The Gold Cap of Joaquín Murieta." *Western Folklore* 13 (1954): 98-100. MLA International Bibliography. EBSCO. Web. 11 June 2011.
- Kroeber, Karl. "American Indian Persistence and Resurgence." *Boundary 2: An International Journal of Literature and Culture* 19.3 (1992): 1-25. MLA International Bibliography. EBSCO. Web. 11 June 2011.
- Lowe, John. "Space and Freedom in the Golden Republic: Yellow Bird's *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Muríeta, the Celebrated California Bandit*." *Studies in American Indian Literatures: The Journal of the Association for the Study of American Indian Literatures* 4.2-3 (1992): 106-122. MLA International Bibliography. EBSCO. Web. 11 June 2011.
- McKee, Robert. *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting*. New York: ReganBooks. 1997. Print.
- Mondragón, Maria. "'The [Safe] White Side of the Line': History and Disguise in John Rollin Ridge's *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta: The Celebrated California Bandit*." *American Transcendental Quarterly* 8.3 (1994): 173-187. MLA International Bibliography. EBSCO. Web. 11 June 2011.
- Parins, James W. *John Rollin Ridge: His Life and Works*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. Print.
- Powell, Timothy B. "Historical Multiculturalism: Cultural Complexity in the First Native American Novel." *Beyond the Binary: Reconstructing Cultural Identity in a Multicultural Context*. 185-204. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1999. MLA International Bibliography. EBSCO. Web. 11 June 2011.
- Owens, Louis. "Origin Mists: John Rollin Ridge's Masquerade and Mourning Dove's Mixedbloods." *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992. Print.

- Ranck, M. A. "John Rollin Ridge in California." *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 10 (December 1932): 560-69. Oklahoma State University Electronic Publishing Center. Web. 22 Dec. 2011.
- Raskoff, Jennifer M. "Joaquín Murieta: Can Anyone Agree?" *The Image of the American West in Literature, the Media, and Society*. 20-26. Pueblo, CO: Society for the Interdisciplinary Study of Social Imagery, University of Southern Colorado, 1996. MLA International Bibliography. EBSCO. Web. 11 June 2011.
- Ridge, John Rollin. *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta, The Celebrated California Bandit*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955. Print.
- Ridge, John Rollin. *The Poems of John Rollin Ridge: A Reproduction of the 1868 Publication Plus Fugitive Poems and Notes*. Eds. James W. Parins and Jeff Ward. UALR American Native Press Archives. Web. 22 Nov. 2012.
- Rifkin, Mark. "'For the Wrongs of Our Poor Bleeding Country': Sensation, Class, and Empire in Ridge's *Joaquín Murieta*." *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 65.2 (2009): 27-56. MLA International Bibliography. EBSCO. Web. 11 June 2011.
- Rowe, John Carlos. "Highway Robbery: 'Indian Removal,' The Mexican-American War, and American Identity in *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta*." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 31.2 (1998): 149-173. MLA International Bibliography. EBSCO. Web. 11 June 2011.
- Sandell, David P. "John Rollin Ridge's *Joaquín Murieta* and the Legacy of the Mexican American Frontier." *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 28.2 (2003): 21-55. MLA International Bibliography. EBSCO. Web. 11 June 2011.
- Seeger, Linda. *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film*. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1992. Print.
- Tompkins, Jane. *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*. New York: Oxford UP. 1985.

Trottier, David. *The Screenwriter's Bible: A Complete Guide to Writing, Formatting, and Selling Your Script*. 3rd ed. Los Angeles: Silman-James Press. 1998. Print.

Walker, Franklin. *San Francisco's Literary Frontier*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1939. Print.

Windell, Maria A. "Sanctify Our Suffering World with Tears: Transamerican Sentimentalism in *Joaquín Murieta*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 63.2 (2008): 170-196. MLA International Bibliography. EBSCO. Web. 11 June 2011.

Winter, Molly Crumpton. "Culture-Tectonics: California Statehood and John Rollin Ridge's *Joaquín Murieta*." *Western American Literature* 43.3 (2008): 259-276. MLA International Bibliography. EBSCO. Web. 11 June 2011.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Jennifer Chamberlain is a professional writer and editor. After receiving her Bachelor of Arts in English from The University of Texas at Arlington in 1995, Chamberlain worked as a professional journalist for 13 years. She currently works as a marketing writer for a Dallas law firm. Her research interests include American Indian literature and explorations of bi-ethnic and multi-ethnic identity.