

A CUT FROM *BROKEN STRINGS*
BY BILL ROGERS

ANNIE
(Enters via front door)

I imagine you saw the Pinkertons.

JOHN
What'd they want?

ANNIE
They're lookin' for Jim. They know he's back in the county.

JOHN
Why'd they ride off?

ANNIE
I lied to 'em, John. I said we hadn't seen him.

JOHN
They know better'n that!

ANNIE
They believed me.

JOHN
What makes ya think so?

ANNIE
I had to tell lots of lies these past few years. I got pretty good at it.

JOHN
They know they got us treed.

ANNIE
They believed me, John. I can look like an honest woman. Besides, I expect they saw how bad we could use that reward money.

JOHN
Ain't no moon tonight. They'll wait till it's blacker'n pitch to come at us.

ANNIE
They asked could they water their animals. I said the well was dry. That pretty fella on the bay gelding is a gentleman. He thanked me for my trouble.

JOHN

Son-of-a-bitch!

JOY

I thought you couldn't abide profanity.

JOHN

Don't provoke me, old man, t'ain't the time.

ANNIE

It was a different story when anyone rode up here during the war. Nobody asked for anything back then, they just took.

JOHN

They wouldn't a took nothing' if I'd a been here.

ANNIE

Well you weren't here! You left me and my babies to fend for ourselves.

JOHN

Why can't you get it into yer head there was a war on?

ANNIE

Don't you preach to me about war! I fought this land till my hands bled and my legs knotted up to where I couldn't stand up straight. I fought to feed my children one meal a day, and all the time watchin' the crops wither and my babies burn up with fever. The hardest thing I ever had to do was drive the wagon away from here after Ewing's evacuation order. I had to watch those yankee soldiers trample their horses acrost my children's graves, and I did it all without you!

JOHN

They was hard times for ever'one.

ANNIE

Not for you they weren't! All you bushwackers ever talk about is what a high time you had back then setting fires and struttin' around for your whores!

(O'Toole enters via front door carrying the water bucket. Annie gestures towards him)

ANNIE

There's another one, coming under my roof with a human scalp round his neck!

JOHN

(To O'Toole)

Where you been? We couldn't spot you out there.

TERRY

Hell, Strut, I skulked out behind the thunder-box till them Pinkertons rode off. Never knew a shit-house could come in so handy. Even that Injun couldn't smell me back there.

JOHN

Which way did they head?

TERRY

They rode east.

JOHN

(Wipes face and neck with kerchief)

Ol' man, you reckon Jimmie'll come good any time soon?

JOY

I doubt he'll come good.

ANNIE

Looks like you'll have to do your own thinking for once.

JOHN

(Facing O'Toole)

I thought you was takin' that water in to Jimmie.

TERRY

That's where I was headed a'fore this come up.

JOHN

Get on in there then.

(Terry goes into the bedroom with the water. John speaks to Finn)

Go get yer brother, and keep an eye peeled.

(The boy stands staring, seeming not to comprehend the order. John grows impatient.)

Wipe that stupid look off yer half-wit face! Go on, get!

(Finn rushes out)

ANNIE

Don't talk to him that way!

JOHN

That's the only talk he understands.

JOY

You can't mean to make a stand if they come back.

JOHN

Got no choice.

ANNIE

This is our home! It's all we have left!

JOHN

We ain't gonna turn our back to Jimmie.