

THE LEGEND OF KIT CARSON  
AND THE CHO

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**PART I**  
*ENKIDU*

### **Episode 1: Ode to the North American Beaver**

This land alters everything save this land.  
To mark this land, a man will strive; falters.  
Ah—, dry this land. The air showers on the hands  
In drops of parched altitudes. Defaulters  
From ills and battles retreat through black eyes  
Of creosote that douse in shinblood  
And skin from the horses' flanks, and horse cries.  
Bays strain the intervals void. The ghosts bud  
Again only in the songs of youth's jests.  
As slender the rising pines. The trapped sun rests.

Oh Chaparral, your ocotillos that cover  
The sneaking migration of the red roans.  
Skeleton'd plaintrees. Are you some lost lover's  
Memory, or an epiphanic moan?  
Ha!— Lone yucca, plateaus of junegrass  
Will not permit droll bells to still their thirst  
For the rush of winds scaling bones, and mesas.  
Is death your final impasse, or the first  
Great error to enlighten your legend?  
Dampstreaked arroyo, it's gold you portend!

Broke'd ghosts of horses whinny liquid plaints  
Where pollen blows, in files like colored sand.  
Ah! Fluffsprites of cottonwood, hawks contain  
Their massing burden to vortex landwards,  
t'wards the plants where tree frogs of salmon smell,  
And sing! The egret who wild down on waters bellies,  
Salmon taught to jump near the willows felled,  
What ecstasy! Oh cannons! Oh tombstone ballet!  
Where there was creosote, only high grass,  
Where stout aspens stand, no sighing of Junegrass.

The ear of the moose and the antlers wide-brimmed  
Uptwitch, as the buzzfly circles. He chomps  
The waterweed. Across the creek three primed  
And rose-flanked roans stare blankly. The stream clomps  
Down timber scaffolds, mud-filled and anchored  
By many-hued rocks. The jolting freshness  
Of the air has men threatened feel, alert

To spurn a tiring journey's zeal for idleness.  
Cut cottonwoods line the perimeter;  
A sunken lodge that wolf nor bear may enter.

*Simplified for legend...  
When the eyes*

*Meet Carson, the trapped  
kit rests...*

*When the eyes*

*Meet Carson, the trapped  
Testes  
Abandon ship!—Ha.*

*That old streetcur barks at the dusk,  
When the changing diffraction  
Intimidates it like flaming vessels  
Stalking the tired eye of the horizon.  
Just the corrupt banality of whiskey. Will it be  
Enough to restore our heroic rhythm?*

*You're dying Kit Carson, I say, your dying.  
There's nothing to be done now, I must stop pretending.*

*So what if your heart and mine, in its turn,  
Plot to counter our life's constant music?  
Tonight we drink! Sweet heavenly whiskey,  
Like the right hand of God sprung from Boone County,  
And shall't conduct your heart's swollen pipes,  
And my heart's skipping drum,  
Till they abandon their improvising, and enjoy what's given.*

*You're dying Kit Carson, I say, you're dying.  
There's nothing to be done now, I must stop pretending.*

*In all Colorado Kit, there is none better  
Than I, your drunken friend and longtime physician,  
Nor one more oft ill-advised, nor one more devoted.  
For your defection, there's a curative I'm sure;  
The details of this, I know not much more.  
Though if one heart must be at work for two  
Till the both of us fall tired and die, I intend  
To journey far, and damned if I won't dare to find it!*

*You're dying Kit Carson, I say, your dying.  
There's nothing to be done now, I must stop pretending.*

## Episode 2: Kit Carson and the Two Grizzly Bears

Thief pursued. Rifled down near Green River.  
Horses reclaimed. Return to Snake River.  
Recruits three trappers, set off for Laramie River.  
Fall's close. Then rendezvous at Snake River.  
Trade their stock, Kit obliges to track supper.  
For with piece and sight. There's no man surer.

Fidgets Bridger in his rainworn buckskins.  
Fitzpatrick Lord Byron, Shakespeare recites.  
Old men and youngsters play while they listen:  
Wrestling, jaw harps, lanterloo, throwing knives;  
There's a native-friendly game of poker,  
In which jack serves as chief, queen merely squaw;  
All of what a horse or gun might broker  
In chance of passing time, spite of Eastern laws.  
Bridger interrupts, "Damn'd rabbit, just makes me shit!"  
Fitz glances up, shakes his head, laughs in a fit.

The pelts are kept covered, cleaned and preserved.  
The scalps born aloft on Bridger's saddle.  
Matted on a pole. "Look there," 'tis whispered  
By the fool halfbreed, and quits his prattle.  
Carson the *heiren* leads and approaching  
Familiar the cover of the treeline,  
The lowground steps by the brook's lapping  
muted. A trail of elk beyond the short pines.  
The nearest startles, thus Carson lingers not.  
Waits for the first jump. Turns. Leaps. Speeds his shot.

Bridger grins, pretends to hear the report,  
The wild ballet brought to a sudden close.  
Is there a more pleasant sound? And what a roar!  
What rage, quivering through the elk's lovely bones.  
The timbre unmistakable. Forfeits  
Kit his Hawken, the heiren a steel ball.  
Strikes the shoulder. Plump grizzly surfeited  
By the small one's raging, as by their forage that fall.  
Hinds the second bear. Kit pulls his hunting  
Knife, sinks one branch. Quicken both their climbing.

*Damn it all Kit!*

*The sun too impatient rising  
The dogs too eager to bark  
My hands were loud and shaking  
I decided it time for a walk*

*Over to Southey's whiskeybar  
And a drink then two dollars more  
Myself administered.  
There it was I took my stand.*

*Welcomed the saloon's early patrons  
And told them, without a shortage of admission,  
Yes, you all know me!, I'm a man whose few lasting pleasures  
Are found but in his greatest denials,*

*But beyond man's doubts, perhaps there waits solution.  
My friend, you see, he has this problem: a slight leak.  
And should his leak begin to pour  
'Tis a world I'm yet ready for.*

*The first patron's spirited response,  
The leak, is it thorough, or 'twixt the staves?  
He recommends we wedge the plies.  
Dams up the wedge the fluids enseamed.*

*Mary Lee suggests a thick sock  
And the dimmer the better for lighting.  
Some slight leakage, a third Patron  
Arose, is something a man in my business prefers.*

*Southey laughed and asked him, the Hell  
D'you marry a preacher's daughter?  
Blessed be the dike-pluggers, old rooster,  
Thos'uv us unworthy, we'll seek for the higher ground,*

*Cuz aint no sock in Lyon or wedge  
That could plug ol' Southey's cask.*



*The forth Patron beckon 'd Elijah  
Who he said drives a pure white bay.*

*The Forth says back in the fifteenth century  
'twas a man in Italy  
Rode the profit's bay to the darkened moon  
Where all things lost on earth are found!*

*Kit Carson, noble and admired,  
I refuse, my friend, to be a physician crippled.  
I rescue my patients from illness, my friends  
From their suff'ring.  
If it's to the moon to recover  
Thee, I ride.*

*Relaxed observation. Anticipating a mosquito's descent.  
Carson's eyes. Tilden's hands.  
Carson's belly. Sweating forehead, more balding.  
Carson's eyes. Tilden's hand. Pulls himself up, carefully,  
Out of the bed.*

*"Unfurl the buffalo pelt leaning  
O'er there in the corner,*

*And put on some coffee.  
Please, Doc."*

*Sun continues to rise, suddenly brightens.  
Tilden sluggish. Walks towards kitchen.*

*"Our friend's been gone  
For two days already. You know if he's intending*

*To be coming back here  
Anytime soon?"*

*Rug is unfurled, lay'd on floor. Kit Strips.*

*'Ah! – xinli weisenme  
youzeme  
fudanle? Oh, good heart, could it be you've never been so dull?'*

*White undershirt. Long sleeves, ribbed. Laid to dry on chair. Whicker. Doc Tilden*

*Boils water. 'gins to recite Kit. Carson. Dime. Novel. Title: Kit Carson's Revenge.*

### Episode 3: The Vengeance of Kit Carson on the Tlamath Indians

“Guess then, Kit, how vengeance is a fool’s game,”  
Speaketh the Heicho. “Another man’s misfortune,  
Is it Cho, can helpeth not the mind yet unlamed?”  
“No, Carson! For e’en the sage’s unseen portion,  
A fool could realize, it comes from this certain flux.”  
“Ah! The answer, *Hwunshye?*” Rides forth Kit Carson.  
“Damsels sometimes sneak ‘tween perfumed sheets to bed,”  
Cho explains, “Her loathed rival’s husband.  
In the height of her triumph, the damsel is cursed, and mocked.  
The cockquean greaves. The husband alone wets his winning.”

Cho, there’s scarce a pleased husband in this affair,  
No plotting temptress; we feel no guilt. Lajeunesse  
Is dead, along with two of our friendly beloved Delawares,  
Their nightsleep prolonged by the bony crests  
Of those well-purposed tomahawks. ‘tis the same, Cho?  
Ay, Kit, the self the same; and only the buzzards get their way.  
Men lose, the fool’s a man, thus the fool doth lose.  
“My own fair share of buzzard I’ve had in my day  
Though’t made me little satisfied, and ne’er did claimst I’d won.”  
“The prized victor, perhaps he too wa’n’t so well done.”

*Kandowluh oosshirghe pehngwoo zwuhyo.*  
Kit halts, reckons: ten, to one-hundred fifty.  
Fremont’s orders: to scout, do not go  
‘til the mark is confirmed, and Fremont’s party  
Or a situation pressing for them arrives.  
Kit’s troops wait tortured, deep in grief. How to withhold  
These men’s satiety? How halt you deprived,  
You passionate men! Why wait as Fremont Kit’s squad’s told?  
Enough. Ack! We’re spotted, soundless Carson thus signs.  
Families helpless. Braves warm. ‘genders the ridge a deciding line.

A simple beaver hat; a coonpelt dress;  
Cheeks ballooned. He calmly chews his maize,  
Glancing at his wife, who flees in striped socks  
Of tan and brown cotton, the daughters full beige,  
They follow her hairtails like two pups at play.  
Arms the Tlamath man. Waits there, some foreigner to challenge!

Bound to his land, his purpose, either way,  
Shall honored be. Stewart faces, tastes his revenge,  
Rides t'wards him. Mouthbag pops. Rib shatters.  
Kit's steel ball pops forth from his gall bladder.

Kit kills three, Jones kills four, the Cho one more  
Scalp then collects. When the spiteful inclination  
Of the foreign troop is seen, mercy's implored,  
Confidence shaken, without firm destination  
For their lifeblood they run, e'en the men boldest,  
And the women who lagged for the defense follow.  
The Cho trails a grass skirt, half-modest,  
A tanned back bare, and a chest of pearls.  
The Tlamath's tight nipples dance a waltz as she runs;  
She ties her hair back in a simple bun.

The hoofbeats strike louder. The Cho nears her.  
In a common tongue, taunts her, informs her  
Of the divers desires in him that she conjures,  
Aims his rifle at the man who runs at the front of her.  
The Cho's ball a crunching echo reports,  
As the firm skull opens, and the soft brain  
Churns liquids, and the eye-nest opens port  
For sharp beaks, the buzzing flies. The Cho shoots again.  
Thou shalt die by this cocked ball, Cho the girl informs,  
But should thee fall, nearby I'll ride: thy gentle surgeon.

Wigwam made of swamplaf. Kit Carson eyes close  
The subtlety of the craft, palpates its seam,  
And enters. The fish preserves offend the nose;  
Fine trout reliefs uphold the lake-side theme.  
Mush in the wooden bowl quieting its steam.  
The horsehaired tobacco pipe, quilled arrows  
Balanced by colored beads, by craftsmen who dream  
For balanced feathers, whose spirits sweep the furrows,  
Who smoke, and who pray with peyote designed.  
Kit packs the pipe. As the hoofbeats measure his mind.

Gunsmoke meditates aloft on the distant air.  
Owens arrives first, as Kit the sturdy wigwam  
Flattens, and then comes Douglas with three pelts of hair

And Edwards with two, the Cho with his bun.  
Comprehending well how to inflict most harm  
Kit orders Owens to gather the tinder.  
Fremont hies t'wards the darkened swarm.  
His party arrives; there's no leaf, nor splinter.  
Carson's word, he deems, is synonymous with the truth.  
Scouts'll return at night. The Cho serves food.

*Kit Carson makes inquiry to the doctor about his thoughts concerning death and the hereafter, and after a short period of hesitation, several hits of tobacco, a drink or two, and some clever prodding on the part of Kit Carson, Doctor Tildon finally agrees to open up to Kit Carson and disclose his beliefs about the deeper, fundamental truths of the universe.*

*"When I'm on duty I rarely think about death. Once death visits, my job is over and it's on to another. The physician's too preoccupied with maintaining the life processes, and relieving man of his diseases. Disease!—, now that's who I truly loathe. Not so much the deterioration, but the suffering caused, and the sadness in the eyes of those who once saw strength, who once saw such great force and life, in the son, or mother, or hero, struck by some insidious disease.*

*Death is just a passive onlooker, the disease process is the culpable thief and villain. Man fears death because he assumes there is suffering in death, but there is no suffering in death. There is no life without death, nor death without life, just as there is no right without wrong, or dark without light. So better to ask me about life.*

*Ah! My heart has calmed down, the doctor continues, as he pours another glass of whisky, this time a short glass. Now, as a man who drinks to simply maintain his body's homeostasis, and who smokes in the morning for pleasure, and in the nighttime for sleeping, and being that I also have an intimate acquaintance with the various pathologies of the liver, heart, lungs, gall, I think quite often of my own deterioration, of my life and most of all, the inevitability of my death.*

*Most nights there comes a point when my mind's too tired to work but not yet tired enough to sleep, and it is at this time that I begin to get inordinately drunk. On an occasional night I still won't be able to fall asleep and dream, and this is when my visions of life and death come to me.*

*And when they do, I drink some more. I'll tell you now of these visions, but being that I don't know how to explain it in a plain and simple grammar, I'll tell you in the way I saw it when it came to me:*

*Above the saddles, hunters' spears.  
Below the saddles, roaming horses.*

*The hunted buffalo: the trickling stream  
Shakes the pond, and the moons still.*

*The rifle, and the man shot down;  
Two arrows meet. Forming a point.*

*Beginning and end are the branching points;  
Two mirrors reflecting each other's light.*

*The rancher plants posts, stretches barbed wire;  
The sun contains itself, incites the lifeseed.*

*I've killed many elk and quite a number of men in my day, says Kit Carson, it sounds like you're saying I have been taking aim at myself all along.*

*You're not understanding my point, replies the doctor, there is no self, and time is not a flowing river, it's a vacuum and cold and solid.*

*Kit Carson drinks from his coffee mug, and the doctor takes a swig of whisky. They pass the tobacco pipe and listen to the cock crowing at the midday moon.*

**PART II**

*LATIUM*

#### Episode 4: Kit Carson and the Revolution in California

Benton, J. Polk, dispatch Fremont's party.  
Arkansas River. Near Sacramento.  
Sixty men. Pathfinding with artillery.  
Sutter's Fort. On to Monterey. General Castro,  
Suspicious, orders them leave California.  
Trundle two howitzers up the high Sierras.

Kit hunts. Fremont 'waits Polk's Declaration.  
'tween feeding their horses, their sixteen mules,  
Cleaning, loading their bountiful arms, what fun  
There's to share, if not much of it; they mull  
Over the strife they feel for Pico's government,  
Shout reprovals of *whaegwauh* discrimination.

Sixty insurgents grow bored playing cards,  
The horses are strong, the mules getting fat.  
Fremont figures the war must have started,  
So he tarries no longer, dispatches  
A squadron Sonoma's fort to capture,  
To find Vallejo and force him prisoner.

General Vallejo serves, but does not side  
With Castro, nor the Southern government.  
Fremont's his good friend!, And as a bonafide  
Supporter of California's severance  
From Mexico, he scorns its underqualified rule,  
With the competence, he jokes, of a startled mule.

The walls are white adobe, and baked brick  
Ennobles the second story roof.  
General Vallejo, 'neath his awning sits.  
He fans himself, unmatts a mustache tuft.  
He spots the horde approaching in the distance,  
And alerts the fort, as duty might commit him.

Fremont waits anxious some news to return.  
Assumes his loyal scoundrels will stand the victors.



Sonoma conquered. Polk's war confirmed.  
Vallejo requests promotion to honored prisoner.  
The general is chained, sent to Fort Sutter.  
Contracts Malaria; his heart flutters.

Monterey ambushed, but there's 'ready a claim,  
Welcomed by an American seafleet. Jump ship  
To San Diego. Join Stockton and train  
All sites on Castro; he's now well equipped,  
And well prepared in Ciudad Los Angeles.  
Carson hies out Kearny to apprise in Texas.

Seven hundred miles, the flattened  
Sea of the Mojave, the sands kicked up,  
As the roan rides full-tilt, cook and fatten  
The leather of Carson's bootheels; the basin  
Of shallow lakes by stranded boulders served,  
Black-seared ranges crawl out the Mexican earth.

Calls on Kearny, Brig. Gen., and through Indian  
Territory his dragoons guides: Apache,  
Arapaho,— silhouettes. In the mountains.  
Forty guards. With rifle armed or machete.  
They disappear over the mountain's ridge.  
Kearny's unsteady horse notes not the mirage.

Five miles down, the phantoms reappear.  
The mules wobbly, and the horses poorly broke  
Have the squadron jilted from their straight career.  
Carson senses the dragoons, hands pulsing to invoke  
The great talent of their rifles, their zeal to shoot  
Down this Mexican cavalry; fades to soot.

Divers naked butte. Not a walking beast  
Can Carson see, just Captain Moore's secondhand  
Appy, taken off a Mexican, his breath done ceased;  
Captain Beale spurs past, resheathes his cutlass.  
Taos so very close; Kit Carson reminisces  
'bout an Arapaho woman's childish kisses.

Stockton and Fremont wait impatient for Washington  
To send response, or for the return of Kit Carson,

But the desert sun, the sandpaper shrubs,  
This troop of California Mexicans  
Far renowned and feared wide for their skill and wild bravery  
Force Kearny's acquired vehicles to swerve and tarry.

Fade these shades once more. And Carson spots water.  
Kearny tells the men sleep-spiteful, that on the bank they'll camp.  
Affixed to their saddles the valiant soldiers totter,  
Still desperate for war, when like split rows of lamps,  
Or ghosts that come out and steal the dusk's horizon,  
Shimmer in the distance two flanks of guns approaching;  
Kearny's men lift themselves up, and gaze straight to oblige them.

Little did the Mexicans expect to witness  
Such fury!, such ruthless passion from these Americans  
Who had appeared the procedural conquest,  
Corpses in their saddles, faces pale as the desert sands.  
The Americans let loose, necks bent, and charge forth,  
Animals sprint; Guns fire; Oh, The unrelenting force!

Only. The animals do begin to bend.  
And the Mexicans are battle-sharp and quick to notice.  
They turn and make a rally, Kit's horse upends  
And he's tossed face-first to the sand and pumice.  
The others, mules and horses, teeter and totter.  
Moore is shot through the heart; Kearny, his metal shoulder.

Carson without gun or horse takes shelter.  
The Mexicans fight with red glowing eyes,  
Possessed by some sort of demon which in war's welter  
Refuge seeks. At last, Davidson's howitzer defies  
The deadly charge! But achieves no hold. The Californios  
Refuse letting up!— Chirp t'wards the cannon, float their lassos.

Davidson's chest, his sturdy back, peachfuzz cheek, both  
Lean thighs are parted by the Mexican sabers.  
But no matter the lifethieving effort they put forth  
Davidson and his troop will not relinquish their howitzers.  
The Mexicans relent. Kearny's men stack rocks for shelter.  
The guards prefer sleep, agree their offensive to defer.

Night falls. Kit and Beale are ordered to sneak  
'cross the Mexican line, recruit reinforcements  
From San Diego. Carson, the young 'un, crawl, limbs streak  
Through rough fields of prickly pear. Their boots' leather spent,  
Faint squeakings which recount an unannounced deluge.  
Strip their shoes. Creep in desert silence, drifting slugs.

Bypass the line. Stand up. Their shoes misplaced.  
Barefoot to San Diego. Ride back with Stockton  
And reinforcements. Kearny's troops drop without grace.  
Carson and thirty fresh men arrive. Mexicans  
Are routed. Kit rendezvouses with Fremont.  
Conquer Castro. Quash an insurrection.

Beale stays in the ward and pallid; he walks like a man  
Whose feet don't own the ground or the body.  
The Western land's conquered; Fremont begs command.  
Stockton leaves, and promotes Fremont gov'nor; the duty  
And rank, the Navy's bestowed already, to the grim exalted  
General Kearny. Fremont protests. Gets courtmartialed.

And when their eyes see Carson  
The trapped sun rests.

Doc Tilden percusses Kit Carson's chest, and finds that the zone of dullness has shifted another centimeter past the midclavicular line. There's no question. Something is expanding. The disease process that took root years ago, and took a firm but gradual course, has decided, as with any unwelcomed presence at the end of its run, to rapidly deteriorate, the disease process losing its ability to maintain its own preferred conditions, and the damage accumulated results, more and more, in a confusion of whether the disease and life processes should together continue or cease.

The doctor inhales slowly, deeply, as if to give his breath liberty from the pace of his thinking. He stares longingly out the window, agitated by the clanking and clanging and shouting of Fort Lyon's seven railroad extension projects, where construction noises become louder, then quieter, but which never seem to cease.

The doc looks down again at Kit Carson. He hyperextends his left middle finger, plants it on the clammy skin of Kit Carson's chest, and wedges it down into the coarse hair and maneuvers it, twisting about and pressing down lengthwise until his finger parts the soft flesh between the ribspace. It's at the tip of this finger that he takes aim with the bent middlefinger of his opposite hand, pale and displaying a slight tremor, and he hammers down twice the craning fingertip upon the distal fatpad, which gradually begins to redden upon its dorsum. The tapping gives rise to a set of hollow thumping sounds. He drags his anchoring hand slightly towards Kit's right flank and repeats the procedure again, and then reproduces the maneuver several times on other parts of Carson's chest, from the center to the distant left, assessing, once more, the shift in the dull registers that correspond to fluid-engorged blood compartments.

The doctor exhales, and Carson notes that the doctor's forehead is beading with sweat. Kit laughs, but Doc Tildon doesn't notice. The smile persisting even after the cunning laughter has quit his face. The doc asses the pulse on each of Carson's limbs and makes an estimate of his blood pressure. Examines the extremities for signs of poor circulation or tissue death. Consults a large, dusty book of pathology. He then proceeds to making inquiries of Kit Carson, quite impatiently, about the long saga of his pathological condition, and he asks Carson for his own interpretations of the various physical changes brought about by the malformed aorta throughout the evolution of his disease.

"Don't you have other patients, Doc?" Asks Kit Carson.

"Sure. Sure," replies the doctor.

"mayyo eeguh ruhn sihluh maa?"

"What's that? Not too busy. Pray it stays that way. Seven patients in the surgical department, a few hours work."

"Where you keeping the other six? Shouldn't you be requesting their stories too?"

"They're where they should be."

“And I’m here.”

“General Parsons’ orders. Kit Carson is to be treated as a priority patient. So they’re where they are, and you’re here.”

“You all think much too highly of me.” He responds. “Parsons,” and Carson thinks for a moment, “Don’t know a Parsons.”

“Says he knows you. Or knew you. Says you fought against the Confederates together, somewhere near El Paso.”

“Yah, a lot of men in that war, men with big ideas,” says Kit Carson. “I don’t know if the other patients would be too pleased to learn that their health i’n’t a priority.”

Doc tremors. Reaches for the whiskey. Takes quick swig. Kit Carson refuses.

“Senator Fremont. John Fremont,” he corrects himself. “The former senator. I’ve heard his name come up a few times around the fort.”

“Yah. Now, him I know.” says Carson.

“You know,” Carson continues, “Someday, Tildon, when people look back at these barbaric times we lived in, before the west had rails and wires, before the white men out in these parts forgot the native languages, I believe, out of all that was here, it’ll be Fremont who stands out as the shining beacon of our age, the most beautiful. The Pathfinder. What an appellation.” Noticing that the doctor isn’t paying attention, and failing to understand the physician’s recurring sense of agitation, Carson forces the subject of the dying patient, asking again, this time in the doctor’s preferred language—still a bit puzzled—about whether the physician, well into his career, had ever lost one.

“I’ve lost hundreds of patients, Carson.” He quickly amends his statement, “And I’ve saved thousands.”

“And in this sort of environment,” Carson continues with his line of interrogation, “I’m sure you’ve watched people you’re well-acquainted with breathe their last. And I assume some of them must have suffered much.”

“I’ve become quite close with the soldiers here, some of the finest relations I’ve had since the days when I had kin to call my own. I’ve watched some of ‘em come back, and saw they were dead already; there were others who never returned. I’ve watched young soldiers, who I’d known for years, men who I would call friends and who’d called me by my first name, they would return with wounds, or blackened flesh, incurable infections stretching from groin to scalp. Some, I cared for them, for weeks or months as they struggled, and there were times, surely there were times, when I was only able to watch and look on as they struggled for their last breath. It’s not easy to endure, not when the result is inevitably burial, a man ten years younger than me, but I’d endure myself through a hundred of their deaths if I knew that my efforts would save just one,” replies the doctor. “I am my vocation, and I would not choose another.”

“Ha!— Well. I imagine as a doctor it must be difficult, comin’ to terms with your limitations, when you realize there’s nothing you can do any longer, and all that’s left in your abilities is to tell yourself that that’s it.”

“It’s like leaving a fellow on the battlefield, I’d imagine.” He looks to Carson for confirmation, but receiving no response. “I know when it’s time to count my losses, Carson, but I’m not the type of physician that can rest well in his bed at night knowing that I abandoned hope on a man who still had some. I should be of special service to my patients. It’s all of what I’m good for, this and drinking more than the next fella. This specific talent of mine, it’s all that stands between ours being a world where Kit Carson remains of it, and the alternative, the world proceeding in your absence. I refuse to throw out hope for you. The world isn’t ready, I don’t think it’s ready.”

“You think too much of me, Doc.” Carson laughs, “I reckon you might be a little confused.”

“No, no, Kit Carson, you don’t understand,” says Doc Tildon. The doctor continues,

“How does the young child grow accustomed to the night sky?  
The daylight brings the harvest, the pleading locusts and the ruddy buttes.

There will come a day the starman visits earth, through space who flies;  
Without loyalty to our spheres, he'll relate ne'er to the poems we write to our moon."

## **PART III**

*AEAEA*



## Episode 5: Kit Carson Rides from California to D.C.

### *West Mojave*

Fremont dispatches Carson, the crippled  
Lieutenant Beale, who's openly confessed  
His traumas have left his mindpeace riddled.  
Kit Carson the Cho's company requests.  
Carson, Fremont prop Beale upon a mule.  
Cho straps the saddle; the babe upon his stool.  
Mineral rich rocks, the undeviating  
Existence of which has been forbidden  
To dispute, since the Proterozoic,  
Which stand the size of colossi, clustered  
Near the layered erosions of mountains  
Where the outer skinlayer peels back to show  
Amphibolite, schist, gneiss, granitic dikes,  
And all such inert monstrosities divided  
By the diverse salts and polygonal  
Sands of the dry and white-heat convective playa.  
"This land is not our land," say the Serrano,  
Who live among catcall and chuckwalla  
Where palm trees rise up out of the red-tinged  
Desert brush, the coarse-painted mountains faded.  
"Our Lord, who loves us, took us from our old world.  
Not earth. There were too many people, wars,  
Pain; he asked us to come. Some of us came."  
Kit sets pace. Beale tilts. The Cho wears a felt  
Hat yellow, puffs an oak pipe 'neath drooping brim.  
There is no cheat grass. There is no catcall.  
Kit takes survey. No smokebeam rising, crows  
Or buzzards circling, tracks of iguana,  
Desert tortoise, a horned lizard that had crossed  
Along the perimeter of the spring.  
And no horses. No mules or moccasins.  
Kit notices. Cho adjusts his burgundy shirtcuff.  
"Why tow'st the gimp?" Asks the Cho. "He's my friend,"  
Replies Carson, "And, my Cho, I intend  
To see to it that his mind is recovered."  
The Cho lingers. He spits. The horsetail wags.  
"The saddle appears a mattress, pommel  
A pillow, and Carson mounts a sickbed."  
Carson laughs. "The man's not sane, Cho, his thought  
Is heated and not at all stable. He speaks

Of a mutiny that never took place,  
And narrates his life as a journey  
That is in the final act, nearing its settled end.”  
The head bobs and sways. The head drools and sweats.  
“The desert air and fresh occupation  
Will be good for his mind’s peace,” explains Kit Carson.  
“What’s good for the head, ‘tis a sturdy body.”  
“So be it.” Kit presses his left chest, “Enough Cho.”  
But the Cho heeds not. Checks on Beale and laughs,  
“The living fear the emptiness of death,  
The dead fear the pains, and repetition of life;  
But, the mad, they fear what is already had,  
Desire what is guaranteed. Beale will die.”  
Carson responds, “No more of talking Cho.  
If he dies he dies. His mind wont’ be scrambled.”  
“Perhaps,” responds the Cho, “I’ve known a tossed  
Salad, the hoof was a’rot.” Kit picks up pace.  
Cho spurs Beale’s mule. Towstring pulls taut.  
Examines horse tracks, three or four. Playa  
Turns to desert pavement. Mules and horses  
Lumber. A Serrano woman, weaving basket.  
More Serrano. Carson signals friendship.  
Twelve Serrano hold talks behind the pediment.  
Invite him to approach. A trade for fresh animals,  
And Cho offers his thick felthat for a half-wove basket.  
“This is not my hat, my lord made this hat.”  
Kit ignores to translate. The Serrano are good.  
They’re noble, and Carson trusts them for their word.  
They mount Beale on his mule. The Cho crowns himself, tips  
The basketbrim. They depart. More desert. Night.

*“You’re not the type of Kit Carson I’m looking for,” exclaims Kit Carson, and the doubt slowly corrupts Carson’s face into a centralizing pinchpoint. The gaze of hurried analysis that follows after a short delay. Carson postures his back and throws his arms akimbo, demonstrating the massing extent of his doubt, the gravity of his indignation. The sort of reaction you might have expected, rather, from a suitor who’s been duped into a rotten deal, or the sense of unrepenting folly felt by a man who’s casually been exploited by a friend, colleague, or townsman who had, otherwise, seemed a perfectly trustworthy fellow. “That’s how the kind Colonel addressed me at Fort Laramie,” Carson continues, by now quite short of breath, “I’m afraid I’m the Kit Carson I am—, the only one, and the one they’ll discover me to be.”*

*Mojave Valley*

Dunes cleansed sparse in prim rose. Streambeds trampled  
Under the thund'rous trot of roans. Firecracker  
Penstemon, crimson bells that 'scape the tower  
And toll in silent indication for the desert's living rot,  
The aged rabbit that feeds the maturing hawk,  
The lost soul who encounters the Aha-Macav  
Nestled in the valley's alluvial silt.  
The dreamworld is as real as a memory.  
The dreamworld is influenced by the physical.  
The physical world is influenced in turn  
By man's dreamscape. Thus believe the warriors  
Of the Aha-Macav. Ink-punctured faces.  
The men decorate their hair with thick mud  
And mold it into intricate patterns.  
Beale's lips are parched, his neck is bright as sandstone, eyebrows  
Chapped. The Cho speaks not. Kit puts his rifle  
'cross the pommel. Cho, though his basic  
Needs set for his weeks a bouncing quota,  
Three pelts he'll lure out 'fore they reach Santa Fe,  
He knows by now it's best to not confront  
The redtribes for whom Cho's death would portend  
A redgod's salvation. Palm shades the pistol  
Holster. Horse tracks a' plenty. Canyon pass.  
Kit turns, implores a mountain route. Beale jerks up,  
Sucking air. "We can't spare too much of delay,"  
Carson tells the Cho. "We've only thirty days.  
One month, and this package makes its destination.  
The boy needs nourishment, my God, his face."  
The Cho responds, "He's done drank all his water,  
And to hunt there's no game for miles,  
Time flies; but, Chrissy. You've a canteen, he's a mule."  
Kit's roanhorse struggles to keep its footing  
The cliff is steep, and the many small rocks  
Become unhinged when disturbed. "I'm dry, Cho.  
The Colorado's still six miles out.  
Give him a damned sip. Put some promise in his cheeks."  
The Cho grins. "What seems selfish to you  
Now, and *wah!* I'm hunted by a friend."  
Lifts his canteen. Unscrews the top. Kit draws  
His rifle. Cho toasts, he chugs. Pistol shot.  
Canteen explodes. Echo of pistol shot.  
Echo of canteen. Kit 'woke, and alarmed.  
Kit cracks his horse. The Cho his own spurs. And Beale.

Rocks tremble neath horses' hooves, as Kits sees  
The six-shooter snug in Beale's outstretched, languid  
Arm. Kit wails, "Curb it, Cho!" And Cho obeys.  
Comes forth a contention from the canyon down below.  
Horses sprint and gallop, stumble, struggling  
Up the steep hillside, and precarious  
For just how far they'd fall, The Cho yells  
To Carson, "Well, the desert air his brain's  
Done well. Pray't they've no down time to follow.  
Even a Cho thinks twice about having  
His face tattooed in a desert's fantasy."  
Reach the peak. No men seen following.  
Carson's horse limps, its right foot is bloody.  
Descend towards the great Colorado  
Rushing, which Beale does lap at in the distance.  
Come upon two scouts. Kit aims his rifle,  
Thirty yards to cover, hits him square in the chest.  
The other swift flees. Kit orders the Cho  
Lift the Pintohorse. Damn the scalp! Descend quick.  
Cho pulls his bowie, reaches for the reigns  
Of the pinto. A shot from behind. Let's  
Go, Cho! Kicks the rider off. Two more shots.  
The pinto resisting, and he lets it go,  
And in his rage turns back to fire on it; misses.  
The Aha-Macav he spots at the rock-edge.  
Cho follows Kit down, and looks not back.  
The men ride forth, and when they reach the river  
They spur their horses all, and for water  
Eager, they dash for safety. Unpursued.

### *Colorado River*

Colorado to Gila, Gila splits  
And take the San Pedro, then travel mine  
To copper mine up to Santa Fe.  
The lesson of the river Colorado,  
Earth is at the mercy of her waters.  
Evergreens tall and slender prick the sky  
And flat cliffs rise taller, spread out like hands  
In rapturous prayer. The waters create  
Everything in its path; the river devours  
Any rock, man or tree that tries to oppose it.  
Desert cacti begin to spring up on  
The Rio Gila. The sun sets. Beale is mobile,

And has been for about a day or so.  
The Apache's god is the fiery sun,  
Giver of life and irreplaceable  
Gifts; the mother of all life who preserves  
Men living, and issues her waters  
For youth eternal, the waterspring.  
Her first son had built great miraculous creations,  
Her second son is a student of war's slaughter.  
"The mountains!" Beale points to the vanishing  
Peaks of the Rockies, and his finger trembles  
And 'neath the horses' hooves leaves crumble,  
"When the sun goes down, they halve their sizes,  
Then before the sunrise their size 'gain doubles;  
They walk, Kit, they walk towards us. They will  
Snatch us and devour us, for our presence  
Has upset their customary slumber."  
Presses Beale's arm down, slaps him on the knee,  
"Oh, wouldn't it be the day, if all ills  
And malignancies on God's gentle earth  
Could be drawn out and fit into their human  
Form," says Carson, "And then you aim. Fire. Done."  
"They not only halve," the Cho provokes Beale,  
"Their halves halve, and their quarters halve, so forth,  
Until the mountains are as small as leaves."  
"And what damned proof d'you?" Beale demands. "Nothing.  
Hearsay," the Cho's horse lightly bucks and tugs,  
"Like most of my knowledge, which is not great  
Or impressive to you's, but that'll lease me a new day."  
Shots fired. Gila River Indians.  
"Get down!" Carson tells his team, "No one fire,"  
Pulling Beale from off his horse, signals Cho,  
And Beale's rifle presses to the lightless dirt.  
"It'll only give them our position!"  
They crouch in silence, and the thickened shade  
Cast by the sparse trees and straight cliffs  
Layered in multicolored sandstone, the hours  
Pass, and the eerie pitch of deep night falls  
Leveling out the vales to a lonesome hue,  
And the branches stay silent, the pounding pulse  
Of Beale's stifled breath, the distant muffled  
Tread of leaves 'neath thick-padded moccasins.  
"When they charge us," Carson quickly whispers,  
"Don't fire. We'll take them hand to hand. They're mean

And a foolhardy people, but warriors  
Great they're not known for being. Hit 'em hard.  
Use your rifle butts. They'll fear to see us."  
Beale sees a leaf and hits it just in case,  
Slamming without prejudice the weight  
Of his polished redwood eight-pound rifle  
Butt, and the leaf does crack. The Cho approves,  
"Fine work— Lieutenant." Carson snaps, "Focus,"  
Cho and Carson 'line their rifles, "Don't fire, Beale.  
Focus on the manshapes." Beale in cover,  
Looks towards the lights, grips tight the barrel.  
The noises subside, and the shapes withdraw.  
Gila decide not to launch close-combat  
Assault. "They've wearied. Two horses, rifles  
Three, e'en our scalps are not worth these spoils."  
Ride out. Cho on his horse, Beale asleep, and  
His head presses the back of Kit Carson,  
Seems a rucksack. Set up camp on the San Pedro.  
Twenty miles from the first copper mine.  
Sunrise. Beale inspects the mountains. Like a sick  
Man that examines his hands for subtle changes.

### *The Plains*

Santa Fe to Fort Dodge, by a straight route  
O'er the Rio Cimarron. Pawnee Rock,  
Then through the tallgrass fields to Independence.  
The blue grama drag like a fog of locusts  
Upon the plains, near Cimmarron crossing,  
And blends with the buffalograss, grease grass  
Where the ground wistful lips pouts in the unopposed  
Winds. 'neath the soapweed yucca's stacked clumping  
Bells, a garter snake shades itself, and pays  
No heed to the small delicate longspur  
That tucks its wings, perched atop the greasegrass.  
The great beauty of the plains, spite of the grass  
That the winds stir, that gives the plains its life,  
Is the curious distinction that's made  
Between what shall erode and what remains.  
Escarpments cut by rivers long dissolved,  
And rock formations that, by rain transformed,  
Seem shapes unimaginable  
To the living mind, except in the wild  
Explorations of dreaming. Buffalo

Seas of prehistoric beasts, or sages  
That roam in humble herds, lost seeking zen,  
Run for miles, but without any changes  
In the scenery, not until the sun  
Permits it. There is no God here, only  
The Great Spirit; that is, all what is seen.  
To the foreign man, how close a tribe are these  
Comanche, who raid for no god, and not  
For sustenance, not wealth, but for their own  
Entertainment. Wars with Cheyenne, Pawnee,  
Kiowa, Arapaho, part for land  
And family, part pride, part fraternity,  
And part, part especially, for The Spirit;  
That is to say, the plains' experience.  
Five miles past the Cimarron, Carson warns  
His men, who ride on bartered legs, to conserve  
The roans' untried stamina, be prepared  
At all times be ready, to ride full tilt,  
To spur the horse to a sudden dash, and  
Run the horse dry, as far as ten miles.  
Cho figures it's time to take out his pipe.  
"The buffalo," says Beale, "they also come  
From the mountain. The mountain sends them,  
To roam the flatlands and seek out the precious  
Forms of life the mother earth does offer,  
And to return them; they come to return me  
To the grass; all men must return to the grass.  
The buffalo eat the grass; and the insects  
Consume the buffalo; and the winged  
Creatures return to the mountains. The grass  
Kit Carson, the grass it sings such haunting  
Assurances, the buffalo weep with hunger;  
But damn them all, too soon. Ha! I'll never die."  
Beale hies forth, Carson and Cho pursue him.  
"He's no longer sick," Kit shouts back, "Body  
"Or in mind. Why won't his mind admit it?" The Cho  
Sudden breaks, and Carson continues his pursuit.  
Reciting Beale's words aloud, Cho chews his pipe,  
"The buffalo shall return me to the grass,"  
First with comedy, and comes frustration;  
He draws Beale's gun and pulls it up from his saddle, and  
The sight Cho 'lines o'er the gold-hued grassfields  
T'wards the sun that glows and blinds the western

Horizon of low trees and gentle-moving  
Buffalo, and he dismounts and deeply he breathes.  
Exhales. "If, oh what if, Lord, you, or I, would turn  
Beale to there everstretching green, but if't were I,  
Supposed if it were I, Kit Carson should grant  
The Cho that he must follow." Plucks a grasstuff.  
Shreds it. Scatters it to wind. Puffs his pipe.  
Carson heaves and grasps at the reigns of Beale's  
Roanhorse, and he does manage, and feels obliged  
Beale to strike across the nose. Beale relents,  
And Beale quits his spurring. "Do you hear it, Carson?  
It pulsates like severed piano keys  
Hamm'ring in the distance. No! It's gone."  
"I'm right here, and nothing's gonna happen  
To you, Lieutenant. Now pull yourself up.  
Goddamnit, you need to pull yourself up.  
The battles we've fought, our comrades fallen,  
Half the country crossed, and not a spare boot  
To our inventory, just you and me, and nothing  
But the cotton to protect our feet from scalding  
Rock, and miles of sandbeds, shrubs, nettles,  
Fireants, scorpions, enemy troops,  
Ah! Together we muddled through it all.  
We made it through, reached the city with days  
To spare, proved your valor with blisters to show.  
And I am your friend. But I've no issue  
Your arms binding tight in ropes again, if you can't  
Pull yourself up, and quick, Ned." Carson canters off North,  
Instructs Beale to set up camp, strike a fire.  
Chases a herd of Buffalo under  
A beam of cloud-covered moonlight, observes  
Their heavy trod, the absent melt of their  
Mind, if any fear is felt they express  
It not in the movements of their bead-eyes,  
Nor in the posture of their mechanic running.  
Spurs the roan to full canter. Riding close  
And swiftly, reckless he draws close, the neck  
Hair of the one could almost grip his bootheel.  
Shoots the buffalo. Slumps. Returns with dinner.  
Morning. Ride out. Reach Pawnee rock by night.  
The horrors of Injun diplomacy.  
Four days to reach the Missouri River.  
Ride at full pace o'er steep scarps, pediments



Through indiangrass and switchgrass, that chew  
The rider's knee, prod horses' ribs. Past forbs,  
Leadplant, rosinweed, magic coneflowers,  
And every now and then a white-tailed deer.  
Three days. Silent riding. Independence.

*Missouri River*

The town drunkard sleeps by the skids once more.  
Carson, Beale, the Cho, with their three horses roan  
From Independence part, the forecastle  
Upon which the men walk and find their footing,  
For a rail reaching as they look beyond  
The rising stacks of pitchdark smoke to watch  
Passing the Missouri river; Captain Marryat  
Overlooks it all, thus navigating,  
'tween the stovepipes paired, on the quarterdeck.  
'neath the deck is a fireman named John;  
He's dark as the pitchpine that's let above.  
A pound of fuel, a chord of fuel, the black  
Smoke mingles with the white pressing vapors,  
And the gentle sloping bluffs that contain  
The Rio Missouri 'long the Northern  
Watermargin, and the steep and carven  
Bluff that solicits the unsuspecting  
Attention of a traveler that veer the floor  
Plain to the south o'er, hurried to climb  
Where the forest of oak, and ash, and walnut  
Darkens on high. Dissolves all in the smoke,  
And then reappears afresh, as the boat  
Moves onward and takes a different vantage.  
The horses cry and protest. The Cho appeases.  
Cicadas fill the air with their flimsy.  
It is midday. Beale on hurricane deck.  
The smoke behind him, watching beams churning  
The rear paddlewheel. Kit investigates.  
Palpates the rivets. Ear tipped to the flues  
And the thrills of waters pumped and passing.  
The fireman's shovel strikes coal and out of  
The hull the echoes of labor and steel  
Screetching. The boat's entire incorporated  
Framework of alloys, coppers, irons, tins  
From El Paso, and blue aluminums,  
Reverberates in a vulnerable tone,

And the great misery, somehow, made to  
Escape, in spite of the fireman's obeisance.  
"I aint no nigger." Says the Cho. He pets  
The red-spotted roan, downstroking its mane.  
"Not like this boatnigger. The Cho's mother  
Osage, and his father freeman; there's law  
Goes an Injun can't be turned a nigger.  
But you know why the Cho aint a nigger?"  
The sun shining hot above him, he down  
The horse's side walks, and leans in close,  
"The Cho, he's not 'countable to no laws  
Of men. He's a bloodclot to the courthouse,  
And a harsh consumption for the gravity  
On which that whole machinery relies.  
The Cho's not complicit with the niggers  
Of cowardice, of pity, the vomit of slaveships.  
The Cho is a scary Cho!, but he owns  
No labels, none anchor him down, and when  
He rides upon a steamboat, The Cho's view  
Is of the floodplains and boist'rous forests."  
Sweat-wiping, the fireman scoops. Lieutenant Beale  
Takes more of the medicine he had procured  
In Independence, whilst Carson a riverboat  
To charter had been seeking, Cho a steak eating,  
And a shortshare of drinking enjoying.  
Captain Marryat is a Mississippi man.  
To his outlook. A certain confidence.  
He is well-traveled. Acts the ignorant.  
Hides his own wits as a premeditated  
Advance against swindlers, or to entice  
Those who would otherwise be put off by  
His great enlight'ment. The Cho at Marryat  
Glances, the steamboat rocking, pipes billow  
Starboard spraying clear mist, the Cho's pistol  
On his emaciated hip rocks, Cho stares  
Yet straight through him. Marryat's eyes are fixed  
On the calm Missouri. No waves. Windless.  
'tween the handcarved spokes of the captain's wheel  
The vantage of bow-waters split, there hangs  
The gift, shotgun of some old cavalryman.  
Soft breezes twirl around two protruding  
Smokestacks, and Beale from the maindeck regards  
The view, takes in the sooty air, tracks oil

Patterns eddying the river. Watches.  
Carson places his Hawken down upon  
The oaken bench to rest it; observes the kid.  
Leans and solemnly watches. The sandbar  
Redoubling its low sedge at the mid-Spring.  
A pair of geese, a soft-shell turtle plops  
From its rockedge. Coneflowers. Elderberry.  
“We’ll be dining with Benton in St. Louis,”  
Beale utters unto Carson. “Yah, I know.  
I think that’ll be nice,” Carson tells him.  
“He’s the kinda man could make you gov’ner,”  
Beale says, “or make the world revere you.”  
He smiles. “Or force ‘em to believe they should.”  
“Impressive man,” replies Carson. “The river,  
It’s quite beautiful today, Lieutenant.”  
“Yeah. It is.” Smoke flattens against the sky,  
Far in the distance, above St. Louis.  
The sun languors, and pauses, then droops.  
Stepping behind the wake of the steamboat,  
Down past the steep cliffs, down past the smokestacks,  
And the perimeter, only the bend’s  
Perimeter, glows, flashes, bursts a golden  
Halo that illumines the outline of box  
Elder and cottonwood, silver maple  
Red mulberry shouldering, all aglow  
And the center tinged salmon by shallow  
Reflections of the stringing clouds on low.  
Escaping from the stacks, the steamlines linger  
Momentarily to remind the man  
Onlooking of the direction of the boat’s  
Projection, and at times it will even  
Disagree with the waters. The modern  
Times. The new challenges of modern men.  
Carson asks the captain for an update  
On the steamboat’s progress, will they be docked  
In St. Louis before nightfall. Keeps warm  
Near the stacks, and listens to the coalpile  
That down the pipes ‘pon the deck beneath crack.  
The captain will soon prepare to dock, Beale’s eyes  
In proportion to the city stretching wide.  
A gunshot. Carson waits. Waits. He waits and scans.  
The Cho is dead. He knows it. If the Cho aint dead.  
How horribly wrong something else has gone.

Someone is dead. And the other someone  
Men'll be lured out to collect him, with no  
Remorse, not any, a stiff body to hang.  
The ironhot barrel of the six-shooter  
The roanhorse feels it pressed against its hind  
Jumps the railing, and the Cho, upon Captain  
Marryat smiles, and patient he follows.  
Beale holds a pistol. Carson his Hawken  
Clasps. He dashes for his saddlebag to load it.  
Old John's body rests upon the low deck,  
His face pressed in the boiler. Shot through the head,  
Hole gaped balding scalp. Captain Marryat  
Heaving biblical misquotes and ill-formed  
Accusations, of the ruckus below  
The fool who he saw splash foll'wing his roan,  
Assumes his fireman the perpetuating  
Force, what's happened once will happen again.  
'comes concerned. He asks what's happ'ning below.  
"John, you deaf old nigger, I say what's going on!"  
"The nigger's dead," says Beale. Carson thumbing  
Ammunition, feeds the rifle's chamber  
And notices the massed anomaly  
Treading in the water near the shoreline.  
'gainst his hip he feels Marryat's gun press,  
The breadth of his gut and breath of sulfur,  
"His head, your arse." The Cho straddles the rump  
Of his roan, and with pistol in hand laughs,  
He turns and grinning faces the steamboat.  
He shakes his head, at Beale his eyes are transfixed.  
Kit fires, strikes roanrump. Blood mixed with stale oils.  
The Cho hesitates, fires, misses wide. "Oh hell,"  
Shouts the Captain, "Ain't that a sham, Carson!"  
Carson hesitates, then takes sight. "I know your shot."  
Shotgun prods, deep, digging. Recounts a story,  
"Two boys in California. The same gun.  
2,000 feet. Just two shots. Same Hawken.  
He's barely 300 feet gone. What's wrong?  
Never had to kill a man for plain justice?  
Come on Carson, a nigger is dead!" Prodding.  
"Carson!" The Cho bumps, misfires, strikes the gunwale,  
Marryat covers, peeps back o'er, Kit Carson

Clouts him 'gainst the cheekbone, grabs the shotgun. Cho  
Laughs and the horse limps, finds footing  
In the floodplain. Maryatt's mouth spills o'er  
But he relents. "Bastard killed my fireman,  
Carson. If you can't count on your shot, you count  
On this. Count that I'll report that halfbreed.  
And that you're two complicit. And mark this.  
My word, I swear. I'll hire myself some new fireman.  
Someone younger. Tougher, than poor, poor John.  
And not a penny, no found jot of pennylint  
Will be spent 'xcept from you and the men  
Who employ you and your gun's services.  
Mark my word, 'fore I can hire me a replacement,  
Your friend'll be getting that nigger's justice.  
Your dog will be hung." Beale fires again,  
And Carson does tell him to hold his shot.  
Disassembles to plant parts the basket  
By Serrano hands woven that had worn  
The head obtuse, long-angled of Cho.  
"Not the hat," protests the Cho to himself,  
Furious then suddenly delighted,  
"Are you no longer confused?" Cho takes aim.  
Breathes. Beale's head in the site. Steamboat drifts.  
No easy shot. "Carson should have told you  
By now," fires his shot. And the Cho turns 'round,  
"E'en a fool can take serious  
What game to his pride's not so important."  
Beale's shoulder bleeding. "The rest is breadcrumbs."  
Beale on the floor, he presses his shoulder.  
Carson. Disappointed. His Hawken aims.  
Cho's head in site. The Cho's roanhorse stumbles.  
Cho's knotted skulltop. Carson's focused eye.  
The sight is still, and there's no sight like Carson's.  
Marryat watching. Beale says just a scratch.  
The Cho laughing. Carson winces, finger  
Feels for the trigger. Cho's head bobs, Carson  
Aims, slants to the shoulder. He fires. The Cho  
Falls from his roan. Shot. But gets back up. Hies  
Forth up the shallow hill and from their sight  
Disappears. They reach St. Louis. Benton  
Meets them at the docks. Luxury dining.

*Final Leg*

Catch train for Washington. More fine dining.  
Carson and Beale deliver dispatches.

*Return*

Leave Washington. Set for California.  
Beale has another spell. Leaves Beale  
In St. Louis. Rides for California.

**PART IV**

*FURIOSO*

## Episode 6: Carson and the Civil War

“Firme, muchachos. Firme!” Encounter  
A two-pronged counterattack, and counter,  
Along the Western flank of the Rio  
Grande, Carson’s regimen esteemed in blue  
Of Mexican Volunteers, the rebels’  
Desperate response, these cries quick gains foretell.  
Wide-arrayed’s the Grande with Confederate gray  
But from far-sight to the mesa, not a face  
Not even the ghost of a face, just shrunk  
Rumps of sallow horses, bondage debunked  
By the savage cries of lightfooted ranchers  
Whose faces brown’d pursue, wrinkled in dirt  
The soft, unforgiving scent of the damsel  
Victory, who unfasts her fetters, when the bugle  
Blows out, the second side of the mesa;  
The leftline shares not their shouts nor places.  
The Volunteers will be flanked and routed  
Should they not let up course, so thus crowded  
Though their retreat appears, Carson the Rio Grande  
Abandons as fleetheld spoils for yon band  
Of slave-spoiled youth, and his men turn back  
Flee, ride for the fort on a dustswirled track.  
The army for South’s wealth the Rio Grande’s waters  
Drinks freely. Carson disgusted. Prefers such men fodder.  
Retreat to Fort Craig. Carson assigned new  
Mission. Confederates upended in June.

*Everybody else in Fort Lyon, including Doctor Tildon, is fast asleep, awaiting their Monday to come. Kit Carson, kept from sleep by a lingering pain, finds himself continuously struck by sudden and unwelcome pangs of fear. He notices there is a woman sitting next to him. She folds her hands across her lap in a way that reminds him of his late wife, Josefa, but her skin is black like the silhouette of a mountain’s peak, and in spite of Carson’s attempt to adjust his angle and make out the contours of her face, her entire extremity from hair to neckline remains shrouded in a thick moonbeam.*

*“It’s you Josefa, you’ve come from heaven.” Carson tries to sit up and posture himself, but she lifts her hand and he lies back down.*



*“Wrong, Christopher. No.” Her voice comforts him.  
“Not from heaven, I come  
From the moon. Heaven  
Is reserved  
For the glory  
Of the earth*

*and her dead.  
Those of us who died  
Too early, prior to achieving  
Our own greatness, we dwell  
On the second side  
Of the moon, along with  
All of Earth’s forgotten  
Secrets, and all what is yet  
To be known.”*

*“If I have one regret, Josefa, it’s that we were robbed of our growing old together. I took you for granted. I assumed a life together with you would be there when I was done with all my roaming. For a long time now I’ve known that I’m dying. I feared not death, but only losing your company. I rode home to be with you, for as long as I could push myself to last, and expected that when the moment came you would be there by my side to comfort me back into this land. You weren’t supposed to die, Josefa. Death was supposed to be so natural, but I’m scared, I’m really scared Josefa, and I can’t control these feelings of fear and horror, and I’ve only a shade to comfort me.”*

*“Look around you, Christopher. This is not your world any longer. Everything that has brought you fame and glory has led to the levelling of the world you once considered home. You’re the stranger here. You have nothing left to do. No man has time to give away everything he has to give.” The moonbeam thickens and her arms can no longer be seen. She no longer speaks, and like a moonbeam slipping behind a cloud her body also dissipates.*

*Carson sees his horse through the window, and decides without much hesitation that he should pursue her. He leaves in his sickclothes and slippers. His friend’s Morganhorse is not there, it’s nowhere to be seen. It’s possible he won’t return. He’s already been gone for five days now. Straps saddle to bay horse. Mounts. Grabs his chest. Bends to the mane. Exits town. He rides, and for hours rides. Crosses the Colorado plains. Begins heading up into the mountains. Diademed fairyslippers and shortspined prickly pears. Crosses streams and vibrantly colored lichenbeds sprawled out on jagged waterrocks. All caked in moonlight. Ascends and ascends, until the horse begins to lag and pant for want of breath, then ascends some more to reach a*

*small plateau. Takes survey of his surroundings and realizes he has climbed too far. Carson sees it. Spurs his bay without restraints, and rides downward, towards the crescent moon. The bayhorse vaults the gap as Carson pulls unrelentingly on the reigns. Lands on the moon without major incident.*

The surface of the moon is very similar to the Northeastern part of the Great Plains where Carson had often encountered the Cheyenne, Comanche, Pawnee, etc., except that instead of the limestone and granite bluffs and escarpments of the tallgrass plains, all the features here on the lunar surface are formed of pale, crumbling moonrock.

Chalky plains where tens of thousands of buffalo graze, with coats that have paled by an adaptive process to the color of moonrock. In the distance tall rectangular structures made of glass and dull metals, they stand straight and their shadows intimidate with their reach, and some of the formations stand the height of mountains. An Indian chief from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. He smokes from his pipe, the tobacco mysteriously burning, and he looks into a mirror that gives off a series of changing images, and he moves his lips as if imitating sounds. A gargantuan arrow composed of lustrous metals blazes above in the black vacant sky, and emits an abrasive violet light in the shape of three windows with a patterned "7" in every one, and as the tail of the arrow rotates it resembles the intricate patterns of porcupine quill-work, successive strips of simple reds, whites, yellows, dotted through by a linear arrangement of black disks. Carson reaches the foothills of the large edifices and then rides through the formations in search of Josefa, calls her name loudly, sits up on his horse and adjusts his pale blue-and-white striped sickclothes. The population is dense and nobody recognizes Kit Carson. The locals are more preoccupied with the bright light in the sky, shining near to the constant red celestial dot, the latter of which Carson recognizes for the evening star. "He's coming! Finally, he's coming!" The people affirm each other. Redskin children play in the small makeshift park that's located at the center of it all, they toss moonstones distinguishable by painted chalk. While at the edge of this tall town, a man who calls himself nobody plays a plaintive tune on his guitar, and far away an orchestra is conducted by a small Italian man with thick tortoise-shell glasses and thin white hair that's been slickly combed over to the right side.

In the valley there's a woman, who is sixty feet tall. She folds her hands like Josefa, only her hands are no longer shaded as they once were but are now simply the color of moonrock. She wears a mask, arroyo willow leaves bound by delicate reed. As he approaches, Carson notices that lining the valley are thousands of men, warriors who have died and chiefs whose names and deeds have been forgotten. Thirty maidens line up at the valley's isthmus as if preparing to start a race. Carson rides forth. As

Carson approaches, the young women denude themselves of their tops, uncovering their backs and revealing their youthful breasts.

Carson's wife, now the size of the other women, does the same, and the beautiful being who still seems the hue and texture of moonrock encourages Carson to join them. Sensing that there is something of importance in this ritual, that there is something to be discovered of which he is in need, Carson accepts his wife's invitation, and he unveils his yeyeduzi and prepares for the race. They run barefoot. There's a cedar box at the opposite end of the valley, and as soon as the women and Kit Carson begin to run towards the object, the warriors who line the narrow valley's ridges arm their bows. It is their most sacred duty to prevent the women from reaching the other end, oh how troublesome it would be for all those living if the archers were to allow Kit Carson or one of these women to access the spirit's great secret. The woman next to Carson is shot through the chest and she falls flat on her face, and blood pools from out her mouth wide-stretching. The woman on his other side is also shot through the chest, but she persists and she keeps running. After sprinting for another three or four seconds she is pierced by five more arrows, and she finally flops without a noise to the ground and her lithe waist folds upon itself, her supple breasts flopping lifelessly and the gore-darkened flank bumps sturdily and flattens out and she skids and her wounds spill out in abbreviated patches along the lunar floor. Twenty-nine other women lie dead in the plain, and Carson is shot to the ground as well, where he struggles to breath, but he watches Josefa dash forth to the end and she reaches the sacred box. Carson crawls over to her, tired and wounded. The light in the sky is beginning to grow larger, and it blinds Carson. Josefa opens the box and shows Carson the dazzling white, tight-woven sleeve that's inside, which resembles cotton, except that the material appears tougher, and the fibers are more elastic than flax, hemp, or any such natural fiber used in the weaving of textiles with which Kit is familiar, and as Josefa stands there calmly, revealing to Carson the aortic sleeve, she warns Carson, "Don't let the doctors lie to you." Kit tells her "Josefa, I miss you. Josefa, I'm not ready! It's not my time." The light glows above them, and the figure of Josefa transforms into a crystal buffalo. "I must kill this buffalo," decides Carson.

It would be difficult for Carson to recall a beast more dangerous in the hunt than the bison of the American plains. When the hunter jabs at the buffalo with his spear, or even fires upon it with his rifle from what appears a safe distance, the experienced buffalo hunter knows the stakes well, for this first offense must, without erring, pierce the creature's heart, because if he is to miss and the wounded animal retains its mobility and it is therefore still within its means to run after the offending party, the buffalo, as even the native children of the plains know well from their fables, will invariably come searching for its

vengeance, and not many horses, and ne'er a man stranded on foot, would be capable of outrunning a full-grown buffalo, and the pitiable logger trapped by the felled mass of some sky-brushing pine has more promising prospects for recovery than does the marked soul who has had his chest splintered and sent crushing into his heart and lungs and other vital organs by the magnificent impact of a buffalo skull to his ribcage.

Kit Carson still shirtless. And his gut spills out over his sickshorts. Jumps on a nearby horse. Decides it best to pace himself. The slain women, Carson notices, have now become dark figures. The women wear buffalo masks composed of moonrock. The masks pursue Carson. Carson unsheathes the spear decorated with Apache artwork that he finds strapped to the horse's side, and he jabs it into the neck of the buffalo. Carson furious. The buffalo doubles back and charges Carson, and the masked women break off and begin to encircle the ground of the chase. The light from the sky overhead. Manages to evade the charging beast, and as he does he takes advantage of a clear shot at its flank. The buffalo falls over on its side, and Carson dismounts and walks towards the downed creature to rescue the box that rests trapped beneath its neck. When Carson opens the box, however, he is disappointed to find that inside there is only a short scroll where there was once a sleeve. The light blinds the paper. For the aspiring necromancer: Good news, Business looking up! Everyone around you will soon be dead, but there's a way..." Carson looks at the scroll but it's impossible to know what's written, and he searches for someone to read it for him. He's arrived. Ground undulates beneath him. Silence. Blackness. Wet. Carson finds himself lying atop a rock in a small stream, a mile out of Fort Lyon. He crawls out, rides quietly back to camp.

## Episode 7: Kit Carson and the Navajo

Oh remnants of the land's historic veins  
Sandstone crossbeds, the Canyon de Chelly,  
In dwell there, not only the land's spirit,  
But also eight-thousand of the living  
Breathing, worshipping, raiding Navajo,  
Of four worlds cast. The 'scape changed, the small toe  
Difficult as ever, swells, glows rosy  
Bright, pulsing and throbs, the neighbors cozy  
Yet determined in the course pursued  
Show no patience for tracks that aim askew,  
Westward bound for open, dusty lands, gold  
In the western streams and hills. Few uphold  
The order of former times; hunting free  
On the plain has been displaced by the white's commodity,  
Famine, and quarrelsome trade. Solutions  
Surgical and clean, the untold divisions  
Among the tribe disprove such options  
That might salvage a country's extermination  
'thout intervention. Carson, well aware,  
Agrees to serve some hateful hands, and thus 'gins to 'dminister  
Merciful death to the hostile tribes: Utah,  
Apache, and now rides once more, to round up every squaw  
And child of the Navajo nation,  
Sons, husbands put to death, 'thout reservation,  
Orders of the Major General, George Carleton,  
Warchief raging for peace, and law sovereign  
Over man's ingrown tendencies. Impure  
Are the savages; spoils to the victor.

Ten-thousand proud reds dearly affected  
This day shall be, those who refuse: subject  
To a slow disfiguration, decay,  
And pitiable death, the great dismay  
'twould be of those who cared, and could have helped  
But chose to do nothing: some plan and develop  
The primitive land, the consequences  
To the western country beloved, true instances  
Of human harmonies, the bonds by empathy  
Driven, by their firm choice ignoring; the sham loyalty  
Sits not easy with certain tried and virtuous men.

The natural course: an insidious  
Consumption that scars hideous  
Even a man's fondest self-image. The face  
Of Kit Carson. Not an expression. Base  
As the plan in motion. Base as the erudite hatred  
Of Carleton, for this savage people that  
Pays no heed to any man's plans but their own.  
The canyon Carson's troops sweep; not a Navajo.  
Not a one. Bean patches. Trimmed and cut.  
Melon trees. Precisely groomed. Group input  
Into basketwork, fluting out the glass of warheads.

Carson is looked out upon through the thousand dead  
Skullholes of the lofty caverns, the butte  
That crowns the dome. The cold shadowed rebuke  
Masks the figure that stands atop, an old chief  
Of the Navajo beside; he does believe  
That there's Kit Carson, he's sure, at the Canyon's edge.  
The Cho stands a lank pinnacle along the ledge  
His rifle blends as the fifth branch of his silhouette.  
Carson doubts Cho's likelihood, distrusts his chest  
And that this campaign will still seem the best  
Option, with all its inefficiencies.

He shouts to his men, 'thout the leniencies  
Expected from the Colonel who's sympathy  
Has so oft guided his command, and seems not sorry  
Not the slightest, 'bout the orders issued, but comply  
His team of Utes does, as does the army  
Battalion to his squad assigned. "Destroy  
Every bean plot and melon in sight," he commands. Deploys  
Troops to every river and well. "And we wait."  
Carson and his men camp. Winter frosts. A stalemate.  
The Cho appreciates Carson's strategy, though  
He'd shoot him to have the squash returned, the Navajos'  
Commitment wavers; they grow thin; they struggle  
To keep their warmth in the winter huddle.  
Something is definitely wrong, Carson  
Admits, as a chest pang, soon gone,  
Nearly causes his knee to buckle.

A Ute scout informs, there's some blackened imbecile  
Warns them to leave, else to face his personal  
Fury. Carson laughs. "Ah, Cho! His opposal,  
Ha! Would he know how it warms me?  
I've also a deadline. When they're ready  
To draft terms for their surrender, a party  
Of four men can come on down, and we'll talk;  
'side from this, your answer's to be frank, my ears are shut  
And your Colonel cares not for their threats or their pleas."  
Frosted the wells, crusted are the peach trees.

Two days pass. Gentle dawn breaks, a parley  
Requested. Meet 'neath the redbarked peach trees.  
The Navajo look sickly, by prolonged fasting  
Mutated. Carson begins warmly, insisting,  
"I'm your advocate. We should leave. There's no other way.  
The Navajo people since my youth have played  
A most irreplaceable of parts in my own life's journey.  
My own children inherit, well, a nearby tribe's glory.  
There are pressing powers, and you need to know,  
These men share no hint of the sentiments that bestow  
Upon me this loyalty, this motivation  
To find for your tribe a lasting home, and your nation's  
Honor to salvage." Informs them his superiors  
Would have it all young men shot. The warriors  
Of Navajo, in their exhaustion, in doubt  
That they've any choice, trust Carson's clout  
That he could deliver their tribe, he'll take  
Care of their people, a pledge themselves are powerless to make.

"These four mountains," solemnly spake, on a high ridge  
The Navajo elder rakes 'tween his jutting ribs,  
To the Cho explains, as the ten rifles  
He wraps in children's clothes, "This is my home. Trifle  
Not with a man, and his connection to his land,  
The land where his tribe's forefathers, with their bare hands  
Planted the Canyon's far-reaching peach groves, tended  
Sheep and prayed to the majesty of the unending  
Sunrise over deep, red sandstone, and dreamed as the evening  
Poured forth and revealed herself with simple  
Boundless elegance." The Cho heeds not, the nimble  
Tiring eye the rear site of his rifle presses

And peers down towards the gath'ring masses  
On the ground floor of Chelly's main, narrow canyon,

"We're all ready up here." Blinks. Site finds Carson,  
Who still refuses a single step to admit  
Past the canyon's entrance. The first Navajo submit.  
Late dawn. By noon eight hundred have stumbled out.  
The sun is bright but the earth traps no warmth.  
Carson, his breath thick with moisture. A storm  
To the south is gathering. Carson eager  
To start his journey home, ne'er the clev'rest beaver  
Such angst prolonged, his wife to tend in childbirth.  
Losing patience. Minute by minute, as pour  
Out from the Chelly caverns, men bone thin  
And old women in scarves wrapped, refugees bunched in  
And children by their trembling thumbs holding.  
The Navajo are under the impression  
Their guide and promised savior's protection  
Will be there for their long procession to Bosque Redondo  
To ensure their safety; when he says go  
They'll follow, for what's been agreed upon.

"Our work here's done. I'm going back to Taos," Carson  
Informs his Lieutenant Colonel, transfers  
His command. Mounts. To the huddled quorums he declares,  
"The Navajo nation shall be trusted  
To the careful supervision of the United  
States Army, supported by the Utes, and the Mexican  
Volunteers. You shall be given rations  
To meet your needs until you reach the Bosque.  
My men are well prepared. Theirs a vital task.  
I'll be in correspondence with the army;  
Arduous the trek, and long the journey,  
But you'll be taken care of. You've my word."  
His arms crossed tight. Rests them. Hilt of the Colonel's sword.  
The Cho lies patient upon the butte and watches  
O'er his site, trained on the tiresome arches  
Of Carson's thick, poorly expressive brows.  
At the Cho's distance they're two ants on a bough  
B'yond the forest teeming, resting small and indolent.



Cho's body calm, his finger holds firm with intent.  
The Navajo elder, bitter, discontent,  
Circles in his headdress like a guppy on the hunt  
Along with some nine younger warriors, their rifles  
Hidden in tribal-pattern cloth, velvets, all stifling  
Their chambers 'til they their planned position take,  
Near to Kit Carson. Adjusts Cho his sight. The Chief  
Yellow Bear, old, decrepit. Kit Carson. He breathes  
And gathers himself, site to Carson's heart.  
There is no relief or resting for Carson's heart.

The Mexicans employed work to keep the crowd  
That's nearing eight hundred in order, but they're loud  
And tired, aggressively compliant. They push  
Back and shove, refuse directions. They hush  
The frantic women, and then they cry e'en louder,  
Arrange them in a line and then more  
Cluttered it does 'come. Carson unfastens  
His holsterstrap, and places his right hand  
Near the grip exposed. Knows there's a grim, gaunt man  
Pacing. He's proudfaced, and acts suspicious.  
Not at all threatening. But is that all there is?,  
Carson to himself thinks. Seeing not the Cho,  
Carson does 'gin to wonder, and suspicious grows,  
Up into the high cliffs stares, eyes wid'ning  
What games Cho's played with this man's simple pride,  
His hand hung and ready. A smile of relief  
Cross the face blushes of the tribe chief  
Carson pulls his pistol and fires once, twice,

As the old man's rifle drops from 'neath his robe. The Cho's eyes  
Stirring with frustration. Shifts his site. Takes  
Shot. Drops dead to the right of Kit Carson  
A conspirator flanking. Carson observes  
The high cliffs. Nods in that direction, spurs  
His horse through the thick crowd pumm'ling.  
Glints of metal. Their expressions rummaging.  
Two men pull their rifles, and Carson responds  
By unloading his sixshot. Cho abandons  
His position, packs his rifle and mounts  
His mule. Four dead, logs Carson the formal count.  
No casualties. March out. Abandon the dead.

No stragglers in sight. Chelly to remain deserted.  
Peach groves scorched to ash. Cho amused by the flames,  
Carson sets off t'wards Taos. Cho hies th'other way.  
Cautiously descends the canyon's farside.  
Carson looks back not at the fire's great pride.

*And when their eyes see Kit Carson...*

*After assisting Kit Carson in changing out of his wet sickclothes and into a fresh set, the Doctor shows Carson across the wooden-paneled floor towards the buffalo rug that's stretched out in the middle of the living room, and as Carson attempts to sit down the doctor helps and braces Carson's weakened body. It is still dark out. The fireplace gently crackles, and the doctor adds some whiskey to Carson's coffee. Carson doesn't seem to protest. He parts his mustache and lifts the mug to his lower lip, taking in a generous gulp. Carson has the appearance of someone who has been altered by immense suffering.*

The Doctor, attempting to draw Kit Carson's focus away from his discomfort, begins to ask him, rather boldly, about his life's regrets.

"I try not to let myself feel regret, Tildon. It's always been too dangerous."

"No man's death haunts you in your dreams at night?" The doctor continues with the line of questioning.

"I'm human, Doc. Sure, I've made some mistakes, and hurt some people who probably didn't deserve what I gave them. However, that doesn't," he begins to feel the effects of the alcohol, and he likes it, "I don't think that makes me evil. My greatest regrets, thinking back upon my life, are still concerning those men I shot and didn't kill."

"There are some folk out there who talk ill about you. They do accuse you of evil. How about them?" inquires the doctor, and as the sick man combs his fingers through the fur of the buffalo rug upon which he lies aslant, curled and fidgeting, the doctor feels slightly intimidated by what Carson may do or say in response.

“Wicked men strive to do bad things but only achieve good, and they are unhappy. I look at what I’ve done, and I’m content, Doc.” And Carson manages to smile.

“The morality of a man’s actions can be determined not only by the quality of their results and intentions, but also by making a careful evaluation of the methods a man employs to achieve his ends, where good men,” the doctor emphasizes, “They achieve their goals by straightforward means; wicked men take shortcuts.”

“That makes you one evil somabitch, Tildon,” exclaims Kit Carson, by now quite high on spirits, “But a damn fine doctor. Ha!” He continues, “I never took shortcuts. Maybe a few times, but at the time, I definitely didn’t feel like that’s what I was doing.”

Daybreak, a humid morning in early May. Carson looks ready to close his eyes and sleep, so Doctor Tildon stands himself up and begins walking towards the door. Opens. Turns back. “One more question?”

“Go on, Doc.”

“The way the western lands were when you found it, all the wilderness that used to extend for miles to the east and north of here, the primeval beauty, the customs of the savages, all the beasts and those other wild, tameless things you must have seen in your time out here. Is there any part of you that wishes you could take it all back?”

“Of course. That country, that was my country.” Carson rolls to his other side. “But those were different times. Men were different back then. We had different ideals. Our native fellows had different gods. Different facts and legends. Those ways, to put it simply they don’t exist anymore. They wouldn’t get along here if they did, so it’s for the best, I do believe that; the men I knew back then, they’d say it’s a blessing those ways have been overturned.”

“You know how the legend goes, right?” asks the doctor as he exits, and he prepares to pull closed the door behind him. “Legend has it,” he continues with his eyes still set on Carson. He explains what he’s heard, without any hint of accusation, “Legend has it that it was Kit Carson who destroyed the west.”

“The old country was destroyed,” Carson coughs dryly, “because there was a desire for it to be destroyed, for it to become something different. Where’s the origin of that desire? Was it mine?” He lies askew on the pelt, struggling more and more to take a full breath.

# **PART V**

TAOS

## *Episode 8: The Journey Home*

Canyon Chelly to Taos, New Mexico.  
Three hundred Miles. Six or seven nights' ride.  
Carson spurs, hast'ning it to three and five.  
Sedimentary cliff faces gently warped  
Covered with a thin grass, and other times  
A small nub, a turtle's head projecting  
Into the pastelblue sky. The sandstone  
And shale. Erosions. Therefore exposing.  
Harsh crimson. Anoxic purples. Sandburnt  
Orange spread, everywhere coral, tawny,  
And rust, sprinkled with green, and lined with green.  
Buttes and hillocks, interwoven mesas,  
Arches. This is home. The Rio Grande.  
And on the other side, The Pueblo Taos.  
Carson arrives. Josefa delivers  
Successfully, but foll'wing the labor dies.  
Carson distraught. Decides he will leave Taos.

Sun begins to rise. Doc on front porch. Both of his arms tremor, forward, back, forward and back. Doc grabs the whiskey next to his right leg. Drinks some, and waits to stop shaking. He begins to sing,

"The Earth last week received a postcard from Saturn  
It was sent us by a purplehaired trav'ler  
She's fierce with bosom blessed, and guns that splatter  
'twas signed, PS: Do send me up tobacco, and a doctor."

Inside the house, Carson lies with his abdomen exposed, and his chest, pale and wiry, facing up towards the unpolished wood of the collar-beams that frame the makeshift ceiling, his body twisted uncomfortably and occupying the entire width of the buffalo pelt that has become warm and moist under the trapped heat of his aching back. Carson's friend has returned, and from where he lays Carson can see the white sheen of his friend's hand as it starts to stirring a cup of coffee in the kitchen. The rooster crows outside, and Carson notices Doc on the porch rocking back and forth, singing a song to himself. Carson feels a sudden tearing in his chest, which spreads up and down his back, and down to his navel. Pain and sudden pressure, insurmountable tightness. Vomits blood upon the pelt. The room begins to

spin. Carson knows. Time as Kit Carson is done. "Doc, Compadre, Adios." He shouts, and he speaks the words fondly, like a man starting on a new and welcome journey.

The roans run freely on this land. And then  
No roanhorses. The bays by tow'rs replaced.  
No yuccas, brushsage. No more steelglaz'd sheen.  
And the roans rampage the sun's waking grace.  
The beauty of the legend, in its stead,  
Lives on fore'er, where all else in the West  
The foxsquirrel, shalerock, the glorious red  
Of the newdawn, mingle, pound in the chest  
Of flesh and hairy carmine, purple bruised,  
The fine young hero by a castornut seduced.

*And when their eyes see Kit Carson,  
The trapped sun rests.*

## *Epilogue*

A black fool, with a train's stolen gold rides,  
Pointing at the spurr'd Sierras, "Men! Forward, HIE!"