

BLACK SAND CREEK

Screenplay by
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FADE IN:

INT. DRY GOODS STORE - CHEYENNE, WYOMING - DAY (1875)

Sam sets his purchases on the counter.

SAM

I guess that'll do it. By the way,
know anybody around here from
Iowa?

The STOREKEEPER thinks.

STOREKEEPER

Well, there's old Silas. Has a
farm up northeast of town. Tough
as a bullet but getting on in
years.

(beat)

And there was a younger one. Not
as tall as you. Skinny. Wears a
gray shirt and a yellow vest under
an old coat. Which is unusual for
these parts. The vest, not the
coat.

SAM

Know where I could find him?

STOREKEEPER

I'd say saloon is your best bet.

SAM

There are five of them.

The STOREKEEPER grins broadly.

STOREKEEPER

Then I'd say you got your work cut
out for you!

Sam gathers his bags.

SAM

Okay, well thanks.

CUT TO:

EXT. SALOON - DAY

Sam pushes through the swinging doors.

INT. SALOON - CONTINUOUS

Sam steps up to the bar.

SAM

Beer. Make it a pint.

The BARTENDER pours. Sam tosses coins on the bar.

Sam scans the room.

At a small table sits EARL.

A MAN passes by.

MAN

Care for some cards, stranger?

EARL

(sharp)

No thanks.

(softer)

I mean, no thanks. But thanks.

Sam watches him.

SAM

(to bartender)

Know who that fellow is?

The BARTENDER shrugs.

BARTENDER

No idea. Comes in from time to time.

Sam finishes his beer, then walks over.

SAM

Sorry, friend, but don't I know you?

Earl looks up—confused, then annoyed—then recognition dawns.

EARL

Well by God... is that you, Sam?

SAM

It sure is! Hawthorne. And you're Earl... Earl...

EARL

Campbell! That's me! Sam!

They clasp hands.

EARL (CONT'D)

How are you, Sam? Have a seat!

They sit as the bartender brings beers.

SAM

Well, I'll be. It's great to see you. How've you been, Earl?

EARL

A damn sight better now! Sam Hawthorne... what you been up to? Were you looking for me?

EXT. SYCAMORE CREEK - TWILIGHT

Sam and Earl sit with their backs against their saddles.

SAM

OK, so I've got this idea. All the west is plated out. The few who hit it are gone and the rest are just scum. But not everywhere Earl, not everywhere.

EARL

With good reason. The rest is Indian country.

SAM

Yes, but I had the good fortune to hook up with an Indian squaw up near Casper.

EARL

You mean a whore?

SAM

Yes, but a damn fine woman. Nobody would have anything to do with her, but I found a nice little abandoned shack and we lived there for over half a year. I treated her well and she wanted to find a way to get back to her people. She was Salish. From up near the Rockies in western Montana. So I learned a fair amount of her language. Which doesn't go for much, there are hundreds of languages. But she taught me some sign language, which does well. We got along fine.

EARL

So where is she now?

SAM

Latehya. Died. Fever.

EARL

So what are you thinking?

SAM

She told me what tribes were best avoided. Crow, Blackfeet. Blackfeet are just murderous thugs. The Crow used to be friendly, but the whites treated them so badly so now they just kill any whites they see. She said if I see any of them just run like hell the other way. But her people have had almost no contact with the whites at all and are a very peaceable, kind people.

EARL

So how do you tell them apart?

SAM

Clothes. She taught me all I needed to know.

So anyway, she said there were some small streams that come down from the foothills that nobody has ever played yet.

EARL

Interesting.

SAM

And that area is controlled by the Salish.

EARL

You think they might help us?

SAM

No, but I think they'd leave us alone. Latehya told me that what the women wanted most was beads. They want to make decorations like the southern tribes. And what the women want, the men get. I've got a bunch of them.

EARL

Okay but what about the other tribes?

SAM

For some reason they seem to be thinning out. Dunno why. But I hear rumors.

EARL

What kind of rumors. I don't want to have anything to do with them. Heard stories.

SAM

Like I say, I dunno. But it sounds like Sitting Bull is starting to do some organizing.

EARL

Okay, so where do I come in?

SAM

Earl, I need someone I can trust. A man out there alone is just asking for trouble. And, Earl, just from what I know of you, and we came from the same town, I think you're the man I'm looking for.

EARL

Me? Well, dunno, have to think about it. Fact of the matter is I got nothin' here and I don't like the thought of going back with my tail between my legs. And I'm worried about those Indians. Like I say, there's good reason nobody goes up there.

OK, but how are you fixed for supplies?

SAM

Fixed fine and I can get more, all we need. It'll take all the money I've got left but...

EARL

OK, I say let's do 'er.

They shake hands.

CUT TO:

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

Sam and Earl ride.

SAM

That dry goods store I went to has all the stuff we'll need.

EARL

So, what are you thinking?

SAM

First, we'll have to trade for that pitiful nag you're on. We've got clothes to spare, rifle and gun, and bedrolls. We've got knives and spoons and pans, and ammo. Need rope, binoculars, I've got the beads.

EARL

I'm more of a practical type. I want a compass, a hoof knife, a sewing kit, hooks and line, flint and steel, which I see you have. I've got pencil and paper, **and scissors.**

SAM

Scissors?

EARL

Cut my beard. Damn if I'm gonna look like a mountain man.

SAM

Yeah, well. I want some buckskin for a tent, we can cut stakes. Kinda wonder what you want with all that sewing stuff, but it's small so what the hell.

EARL

Food.

SAM

Cornmeal, sorghum, beans, coffee,
some tabacker, bigger canteens. We
can shoot rabbits.

EARL

Sounds good. I'll think on what
else we might need.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

Sam and Earl ride across the prairie.

EARL

Thankee for the horse, Sam. Good
and solid.

They ride on, shooting rabbits along the way. Sam is more
skilled, but Earl improves.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

A campfire burns. A coffee pot sits nearby.

SAM

Damn. I forgot the bacon.

EARL

Too late now. Rabbit is fine.

Earl works over a cooking pot.

SAM

I saw you putting something into
that bag. What is it?

EARL

Beans in water. Let 'em jostle all
day and by night they're ready to
cook.

SAM

Well, ain't that a damn fine idea.
Earl, you are a wonder.

EARL

Hopin' I can keep up my end!

SAM

That you do. And fine company too.

CUT TO:

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

The Rockies loom in the distance. Sam and Earl walk beside their horses.

Suddenly—rifle fire behind them.

They turn—Indians approach at a distance.

They mount quickly and ride hard, firing behind them.

CUT TO:

EXT. PRAIRIE - LATER

They pull up, winded.

EARL

That was close.

SAM

Glad we kept our horses fresh.

EARL

You know what you're doing, Sam.
And that's a relief.

CUT TO:

EXT. PRAIRIE - MIDMORNING

A group of Indians approaches.

Sam rides slightly ahead, raises his hand upright, then dismounts deliberately.

Earl follows.

They stand, waiting.

Sam steps forward.

SAM

Ya-tah-hey!

An Indian boy approaches and leads their horses away.

EARL

Hey! Sam!

SAM

It's all right. Shows they trust us.

The Indians gather. A chief is seated on a blanket.

Sam and Earl sit.

Sam speaks in Salish, using gestures.

The Chief listens, nodding.

After a long exchange, Sam retrieves bags of beads and presents them.

The Chief examines them, pleased.

More conversation.

SAM

They are very pleased that I know some Salish. The Chief likes my gift. They will talk it over a while.

EARL

So, is this good?

SAM

Very good. Wait.

More conversation.

SAM

He says the Crow are organizing some of the tribes to fight the whites out East.

More conversation.

SAM

He says the early spring flash floods are over and we are welcome to go look for gold in the streams.

EARL

Don't they want it?

SAM

They don't care about gold except
as an ornament.

The Chief stands and shakes Sam's hand.

Sam and Earl mount and ride off.

CUT TO:

EXT. PRAIRIE - CONTINUOUS

EARL

Well, that went well.

SAM

Yes. He is a decent and honorable
man. That handshake was special.

EARL

So they'll let us pan?

SAM

**Yes. We are welcome here. Damn. I wasn't sure I could pull
that off.**

EARL

You coulda fooled me. You done us
right proud.

SAM

Whew. Let's get to scouting those
streams. Or make some coffee
first.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOOTHILLS - DAY

Sam and Earl scan small streams as they move north.

They pass several before stopping at a larger one.

They follow it upward into a meadow.

They look over the land.

EARL

Well this looks just fine. Plenty of grass for the horses.

SAM

And I'll bet over those ridges there's more grass.

EARL

Yep. And when that runs out there's that small town back south.

SAM

Yes. Let's pitch a camp and then look at that stream tomorrow.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPSITE - EVENING

They set up camp, stake horses, build a fire.

They sit with coffee.

Sam smokes his pipe.

SAM

Damn, this taback won't last much longer.

EARL

We can get more when we go for feed.

SAM

There's plenty of dead wood for fires.

EARL

And no damn skeeters.

SAM

I'd say we hit 'er just right. But look over yonder... that lone hill.

EARL

Does it bother you?

SAM

Yes. But I don't know why.

EARL

This is a damn fine spot. But probably no gold.

SAM

We'll see about that tomorrow.

They retire.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPSITE - DAY

Days pass. They work the stream.

Sam struggles midstream.

SAM

Damn that water is cold.

Earl works below camp, sewing.

EARL

It'll work a lot better with these.

Sam approaches.

SAM

What the hell are you doing?

Earl holds up a mitten.

SAM

Well I'll be good god-damn.
Mittens!

EARL

Yep.

SAM

Earl, you're a goddamn genius!

EARL

And you thought my sewing kit was
a joke.

SAM

I did. And I'm sorry I did.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREAM BANK - SUNSET

Earl sits watching the water.

He notices something in the black sand.

He pans quickly.

He freezes—then shouts.

EARL

Sam! Sam! Come here!

Sam runs up.

EARL

We've been doing it all wrong!

SAM

Hot damn!

EARL

It's gold!

They grab each other, ecstatic.

EARL

We're rich, Sam!

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Gold sits in cloth piles near the fire.

They celebrate, dancing.

Later, calm.

SAM

Earl... I been thinking.

EARL

Yes?

SAM

All that gold would tempt Saint
Peter himself.

EARL

I see what you mean.

SAM

We should split it up.

EARL

That's a damn good thought.

They agree.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT (LATER)

Earl writes a letter by firelight.

SAM

So what's that letter you're
writing?

EARL

I'm writing my niece Karen.

SAM

Sure, I remember her.

EARL

I'm telling her what we found...
and where I hid mine.

SAM

How in hell do you suppose you'll
mail it?

EARL

There's a town south of here. I'll
pay them in gold.

SAM

Mail is sacred. I'll bet it gets
through.

EARL

If we don't make it, somebody
ought to get it.

Sam nods.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

Snake and his gang ride.

MIKE

Where'd he get the name Snake?

SHORTY

Back in Texas he was known for
stomping on a rattlesnake, pick it
up, whirl it around and bite the
head off.

MIKE

Wow.

Snake turns in the saddle.

SNAKE

At the post office I heard about a
guy who sent a letter back East.
Paid for it with gold. New gold.

DUKE

New gold? Musta made a strike.

SNAKE

That's right. They wouldn't tell
me his name but pointed to the
direction he'd gone off on.

DUKE

Ah.

SNAKE

So we're gonna pick up his trail
and follow him. Get your gear,
let's go.

They ride on.

CUT TO:

EXT. HILL ABOVE STREAM - DAY

Snake lies prone with binoculars.

SNAKE

That's him all right. At the
creek.

He passes the binoculars.

DUKE

Yeah. And there's two of them.

SNAKE

Yeah. And only two.

(beat)

Now all of you bed down. The next
day before dawn is when we go.

CUT TO:

EXT. RIDGE - PRE-DAWN

Snake and his men move silently into position.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPSITE - DAWN

Sam emerges, stretching.

Earl tends the fire.

He stops suddenly.

EARL

Something's wrong.

SAM

What is it?

Gunfire erupts.

Men charge down the slope.

Sam fires back.

SAM

Goddam it! That hill, I knew-

He is shot-falls.

Earl fires wildly.

EARL

The letter—goddam it, the letter—

He is struck repeatedly and falls.

Snake and his men descend.

SNAKE

Awright dammit. They're down!

One of the gang lies gut-shot behind them.

SNAKE

Leave him. He won't last long.

(beat)

Scatter! Look for that gold!

They tear through the camp.

Snake finds two small pouches.

SNAKE

Dammit to hell! There's got to be
more than this!

CUT TO:

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

Three men ride away.

FADE TO:

INT. KAREN'S FATHER'S HOUSE - DAY

A man hands Karen a letter.

FATHER

Letter came for you.

Karen looks at it.

KAREN

Oh, it's from Earl. I'll read it
later.

She tucks it into her apron.

CUT TO:

INT. WOODSHED - DAY

Karen and George sit.

GEORGE

So, what does it say?

Karen reads.

KAREN

My uncle Earl and your uncle Sam got hooked up in Montana and went looking for gold. Sam had hooked up with a squaw, Salish, and he learned the language. Everywhere else out West had been cleaned of most of the gold but they didn't go near the northernmost parts of the Rockies because of the Indians. But Earl went along with Sam and they got safe passage from the Salish.

So they found a stream in the foothills and found these deposits of black sand... and there was gold there!

GEORGE

Wow! They hit it?

KAREN

They sure did! And he wrote me this letter in case they didn't make it. West is full of cutthroats and thieves.

GEORGE

Yeah. Karen, it's February now. They're not back yet.

KAREN

I know. I'm afraid they didn't make it, George. Gold would just be a magnet for killers.

GEORGE

So, all the gold would be gone by now.

KAREN

No! That's just it. This letter was paid for with gold.
So, yeah, they found it. But listen!

Earl left me a little map. Two, one to find the
stream and another to show me where he hid the
gold. Him and Sam split it up and each hid their half.

GEORGE

You mean buried it?

KAREN

Yes! And Earl drew me a map with some kind of
landmarks to tell me where his is!

GEORGE

Why would they do that? Oh! Because they weren't
sure they could trust each other. Or maybe they split
it up so if we—

KAREN

Found one and maybe then the other.

GEORGE

But the thieves would have searched that whole
area. They'd have found it.

KAREN

No, George. They didn't have the map! They'd never
find it! And we've got the map!

CUT TO:

EXT. PARK - DAY

Karen and George argue.

KAREN

George! Why not?

GEORGE

We can't go out there!

KAREN

I'm nineteen. You'll be eighteen.
We're not kids anymore.

GEORGE

We'll get killed.

KAREN

You can either come with me or
not. But I have to.

George thinks.

GEORGE

Aw right... but if you get me
killed, I'll never forgive you.

Karen laughs.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

A train arrives.

Karen and George step off.

KAREN

Look at this great town, George!

GEORGE

Looks like something from the Dark
Ages.

CUT TO:

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

They practice shooting.

KAREN

Better. You're getting good at
this.

CUT TO:

EXT. BLACK SAND CREEK - DAY

Karen studies the map.

KAREN

This is it! We've made it!

They move toward the camp.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPSITE - MORNING

Bones and scattered clothes.

GEORGE

Gawd... look at this.

KAREN

Doesn't look good.

They search.

GEORGE

This is Sam's shirt!

KAREN

Three people were here.

They uncover gold.

GEORGE

This is gold!

KAREN

We're rich.

Later, by the fire-

KAREN

Finding that name changes everything.

GEORGE

What do you mean?

KAREN

I aim to find them.

GEORGE

Karen! They're killers!

KAREN

I know.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN - DAY

They gather information.

GEORGE

Names are Snake and Duke.

CUT TO:

INT. SALOON - NIGHT

George speaks to a bartender.

GEORGE

Snake... Duke...

CUT TO:

INT. ROOM - NIGHT

Snake sleeps.

Karen climbs behind him.

She cuts his throat.

CUT TO:

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

They flee.

CUT TO:

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Karen and George speak to a farmer.

They trade a horse for a buckboard.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD - DAY

They travel east.

CUT TO:

EXT. LINCOLN - DAY

Karen scouts.

She meets Dan.

KAREN

We need a bodyguard.

Dan studies her.

DAN

All right.

CUT TO:

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

Dan drives them safely.

CUT TO:

EXT. KAREN'S HOUSE - DAY

They arrive home.

Karen embraces her father.

George watches.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Karen lies weak.

GEORGE

Karen... what's wrong?

KAREN

I'm dying.

GEORGE

No...

KAREN

We just have this moment.

They speak together.

KAREN / GEORGE

I love you.

CUT TO:

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

Karen is buried.

George watches from a distance.

CUT TO:

INT. RICH ROOM - YEARS LATER

George sits alone, older, wealthy.

He breaks down.

GEORGE

What was it all for?

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END.

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