

THE TWO WISEMEN OF LAS CRUCES

By

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Outside of Las Cruces, NM in 1880, somewhere on the Chisum Trail, banker Reg Mantle brings a sack of money, a gun, and his son to wait for a confrontation in the desert with an old adversary. The shady financial dealings of Reg's governmental past are illuminated, his wife's love is tested, and he's forced to impart to his son the lessons of a lifetime in a matter of days.

Four actors play:

REG MANTLE, Male, late 30s. A banker, he thinks financial support is the most important aspect of being good father and husband. Tall and fairly well built, but with poor posture.

SAM MANTLE, Male, 14. Reg's son. Tall and scrawny. Fascinated with the seeming excitement of Mesilla, New Mexico. Average intelligence.

SABIDURIA MANTLE, Female, early/mid 30s- Spanish/Zuni, and wife to Reg. Beautiful long black hair, but looks older than her years. Discontent with her life, yet fiercely loyal to her son and the idea of family.

LANDON COATES, Male, late 30s/early 40s. Worked with Reg until the Civil War. Rugged and intuitive. Dresses sharp, not the stereotypical wild west gunman.

The following sample contains 13 and 1/8 pages, the entirety of scene 5.

We flashback to 1867, a year after Sabiduria and Reg have relocated to Las Cruces from Santa Fe. Sabiduria carries not only their first child, Sam, but the secret of her affair with Landon Coates.

FIVE

MANTLE HOUSE- 1867. NEARLY A YEAR AFTER THE MANTLES RELOCATE
TO LAS CRUCES FROM SANTA FE, SUNDOWN

An incredibly pregnant Sabiduria lies on the floor, nailing
together a baby crib. She's been at it for a bit. A rocking
chair in the corner.

Reg enters carrying a briefcase. Brief nod to Sabiduria.
Leaves the room.

She waits for his return for a beat, gives up, and goes back
to the crib.

Reg re-enters with a glass of water.

REG

Looks good.

(no response)

Brought you some water.

Sits in the rocking chair.

REG (cont'd)

You built this today, too?

SABIDURIA

Yes. How's it feel?

REG

Good. It's sturdy.

She slides out from under the crib.

REG (cont'd)

Been at it long?

SABIDURIA

(drinking)

No, doesn't take me long. You know that.

REG

Want any help?

SABIDURIA

No. That's why it doesn't take me long.

REG

All right.

SABIDURIA

You're not much of a builder.

REG

It's a crib. Can't be that hard.

SABIDURIA

It's not. But our table still wobbles, even after I corrected your mistakes.

REG

Yep. Well.

SABIDURIA

Are you able to make some coffee?

REG

(small smile)

That I can do. You leave enough wood for the stove?

SABIDURIA

It's already in it.

Goes to the kitchen while Sabiduria works.

SABIDURIA (cont'd)

It is quite late, isn't it?

REG

(offstage)

Bout twenty after seven.

SABIDURIA

Quite late.

No answer. She sits in the rocking chair, wipes sweat off her brow.

SABIDURIA (cont'd)

(more to herself)

I used to think I was unique.

REG

(offstage)

You are. As you've pointed out, I could never construct something the way you do.

(returning)

Water's on to boil. Mind if I take a look?

SABIDURIA

Go ahead.

He gets down on his knees. Inspects the crib.

REG

Good work.

SABIDURIA

It's not finished. A couple more slats to cut.

REG

Well, it looks good. Built to last.

(silence)

Could hold two or three kids.

SABIDURIA
Is that what you want?

REG
Not sure. You?

SABIDURIA
Not sure.

REG
Hm. It's nice.

SABIDURIA
... thank you.

REG
Are you upset with me?

SABIDURIA
Yes.

REG
Hm. Work?

SABIDURIA
Yes.

REG
Is that what spurred the 'unique' comment?

SABIDURIA
Actually no. I've just had a lot of time to myself this year.

REG
You knew when we moved to Cruces it wouldn't be easy.

SABIDURIA
I know. And it isn't.

REG
Why were you up so early this mornin? You were up before me.

SABIDURIA

(evasive)

I had to send a letter at the post office.

REG

Talkin' to your father?

SABIDURIA

No. He still hasn't sent any word.

REG

He will.

SABIDURIA

(searching, then quickly:)

My sisters and I have been writing each other.

REG

(shocked)

That's a first.

SABIDURIA

Yes. We're...

REG

Did you ever get on with your sisters?

SABIDURIA

No. Both of them were much older.

REG

Water's gotta be boiling.

He moves to the other room. Sabiduria rocks, holding her stomach.

SABIDURIA

I promise, child, you will know your mother.

Drinks some water.

SABIDURIA (cont'd)

(calling out)

Reg...

REG

(offstage)

Wait, please. Almost ready.

SABIDURIA

You should join me at church tomorrow. Doesn't look right for a man to be working on Sundays.

REG

(offstage)

I have to work every day.

SABIDURIA

No you don't.

REG

(offstage)

I always have. It's for the good of the town.

SABIDURIA

So you're doing good, then?

REG

(offstage)

Everything is for this town. And for our well-being, Sabiduria.

SABIDURIA

We haven't even been here a year. I don't want to have to move again because of-

REG

(returning with pot and 2 cups)

We're staying put. Everything I do is legitimate.

(contemplative)

Everything. I promise.

He pours coffee, puts the pot back in the kitchen.

SABIDURIA

(drinks)

Damn good coffee.

REG

(returning)

Thank you.

(sips)

This is nice. We haven't had anything like this in some time.

SABIDURIA

Not since we lived in Santa Fe.

REG

(sadly)

No.

SABIDURIA

(puts the cup down)

I should get back to-

REG

Please, let's take a moment here. We don't get many, so-

SABIDURIA

I really want to finish-

REG

It can wait.

(she's about to protest)

Just this once.

SABIDURIA

Very well.

REG

You are unique.

SABIDURIA

In Las Cruces I am. None of the other ladies here do-

REG

Do you spend much time with them? I heard from Grady Deakins' wife that you'd come around.

SABIDURIA

I came around, then promptly left. They don't want me there, and I don't want to be there, so-

REG

Of course they want you there.

SABIDURIA

I'm not white.

REG

They aren't all white. Hell, half of the wives around here got some Indian or Mexican in 'em.

SABIDURIA

But not both. I'm a pariah.

Silence. Both drink.

REG

You're not a pariah.

SABIDURIA

Didn't you feel it in Santa Fe? No, you weren't around enough. I felt it. And it's the same here. I thought I was special, but I was a blight on my family's name.

REG

That's not fair. I...

Unaware of how to proceed, he takes another sip. Foreign territory for him/them.

SABIDURIA

Do you know why my father brought me to Santa Fe?

REG

No, I can't say that I do. He and I never talked much after you and I began courting.

SABIDURIA

I was under the impression-

REG

No. Wrong impression. Handful of words to each other, at most. Dad mediated, like he always does.

(beat)

Like he always did.

SABIDURIA

It's still so soon.

REG

I'm fine with it.

SABIDURIA

I know you are, but it's taking me some time. He was more a father to me than my own.

REG

Why do you think he brought you to Santa Fe from Zuni?

SABIDURIA

He told me.

REG

What did he say to you?

SABIDURIA

Something very direct.

REG

All right.

Beat while Sabiduria considers.

SABIDURIA

His mistake with my mother insulted my sisters, our pueblo, our honor. I had to leave.

REG

His mistake?

SABIDURIA

She was a Spaniard. From the outside. And he lived with his wife, and my sisters, in the pueblo.

REG

... I'm sorry. I didn't know. I always thought that your mother-

SABIDURIA

His wife raised me.

REG

Where was your mother?

SABIDURIA

Gone. Removed.

(beat)

He told me that on our wedding day.

REG

Why?

SABIDURIA

I wish I knew. Yet another thing taken away from me.

This slams Reg. It registers to Sabiduria, but if she feels remorse for the comment, she doesn't let it show.

REG

Some things are better left unsaid, Sabiduria.

He gets up, opens the door. Stands in the frame looking out, drinking his coffee.

SABIDURIA

(beat)

I wish to God you and your people hadn't "cultivated" me. Then I might be able to stay silent.

REG

My people?

SABIDURIA

(brushes hair out of her eyes)

"Wish to God". Do you know what I loved most about the old way? Hell, the way that my people still go about their lives? It is the richness of what we believe. Our many gods. Sun Father is extraordinary. Daylight means life, and the other way round. And Ma'l Okyattsik'i is our Salt Mother, who I walked to since my feet could carry me. She gave us so much. Her saltflats were abundant. Now she is ashamed of me.

REG

Why?

SABIDURIA

For not being what I should be.

REG

And what's that?

SABIDURIA

What others have seen in me.

REG

Oh, it's Coates, eh?

SABIDURIA

(alarmed)

What?

REG

What he told you that night we all went to dinner at Garduño's place.

Silence.

REG (cont'd)

You remember? You, me, Coates, Dad, and your father?

SABIDURIA

(relief)

Oh. Yes. That's it.

REG

He always had an eye for you.

(beat)

Thank you for choosing me.

Silence as Sabiduria stands and leans over.

REG (cont'd)

Are you all right?

He sets the coffees down and helps her to the rocking chair.

SABIDURIA

I'm fine. I'm fine.

REG

I'm just trying to-

SABIDURIA

Dammit, Reg, I don't need anybody to take care of me.

REG

Hm.

He backs off. Looks at the crib.

REG (cont'd)

I'll leave you to it, then.

Sabiduria leans back into the rocking chair.

REG (cont'd)

Coates was right. You are a great woman, capable of persuading men to do great things.

SABIDURIA

Your father taught me how.

REG

Yes. And he did a damn fine job of it.

(starts to exit, stops)

You'll get there, Sabiduria. We both will. When that child is born, we'll be on our way.

SABIDURIA

Thank you, Reg.

REG

(nods)

'Night.

He exits into the bedroom. She drinks some more coffee, stands and grabs a piece of wood and a hammer. Looks to the bedroom.

SABIDURIA

It can wait.

(sets tools down, moving to the bedroom)

Reg?

She unbuttons her shirt, begins to remove it while slipping into darkness.