

## STAGE TO LORDSBURG

- 1) "This was one of those years when Apache signals spiralled up from the stony mountain summits and many a house lay as a square of blackened ashes on the ground..."
- 2) Passengers of the stage:
  - (a) Happy Stewart, the driver
  - (b) John Strang, shotgun guard
  - (c) A whiskey drummer
  - (d) An Englishman
  - (e) A Gambler
  - (f) A Cattleman
  - (g) A girl 'who was going to marry an infantry officer.'
  - (h) Malpais Bill
  - (i) A girl 'known commonly throughout the territory as Henriette'
  - (j)
- 3) The first crisis is a broken wheel.
- 4) Second crisis. The whiskey drummer is taken ill. Henriette ministers to him. But he dies.
- 5) At the second way station, they find that that the 'soldiers for tomorrow' have been chased out. "What ain't forted up here was sent to Lordsburg".  
The young woman engaged to the infantry officer learns that her fiance has been wounded.

## STAGECOACH

- 1) A Title Card, explaining the Stage-coaches, their significance to the opening of the West. Also, establishing Geronimo.  
Then an opening scene with a White Scout and Cheyenne indian informer reporting on Geronimo's warparties. The line to Lordsburg goes dead as they are getting the message.
- 2) These become:
  - (a) The Driver is Buck.
  - (b) The place of shotgun guard is taken by Curly, Sheriff of Tonto.
  - (c) Mr. Peacock, the whiskey drummer.
  - (d) Doc Boone replaces the English man and becomes a key character.
  - (e) The gambler becomes Hatfield.
  - (f) The Cattleman is replaced by Gatewood, the absconding banker.
  - (g) Lucy Mallory is now a wife - wife of one of the cavalry supposed to meet the stage. And she is pregnant.
  - (h) Henriette becomes Dallas and is more clearly established as a prostitute.

And a delayed entrance is made by the (i) Ringo Kid, replacing Malpais Bill.
- 3) The first crisis is that there are no soldiers at the first staging post. A showdown with Gatewood when the Lieutenant insists that the cavalry/escort cannot continue.  
The stopover and the meal is used to develop the characters and their relationships. In particular the attitude of the respectable people to the prostitute and the escaped Ringo Kid. Ringo's backstory is more fully established.
- 4) Lucy learns that her husband has been seriously wounded. She collapses. They realize she is pregnant. In a much expanded sequence, Doc has to be sobered to help with the delivery of the child.  
More character development over the dilemma of whether to continue or not. Friction with the banker.  
Ringo learns more of the Plummers in Lordsburg. He has a first scene with Dallas; and proposes to her. Dallas urges him to escape; why must he pursue revenge for the murder of his father and brother.

## The Western

### Stage to Lordsburg

Henriette tells Malpais Bill of her parents death in an Indian massacre. He hints at proposal, tells of his ranch and half-built house near Tonto. Henriette seems to have heard of his vendetta. She urges him not to pursue it, but realises that he won't listen to her.

- 6) They reach the next post, Shraibers, find that it has been burned to the ground. Scalped and mutilated corpses remain.  

The gambler shows concern for the women, not only the army girl but also Henriette.
- 7) Leaving Shraibers, they are expecting an attack and they prepare for it.
- 8) The fight is described from the point of view of Henriette and the occupants of the coach. The Englishman and the Cattleman succeed in shooting many of the Indians.
- 9) The gambler gives Henriette his gun. He has been shot. Presently, they come in sight of Lordsburg and the Indians give up the pursuit. But the Gambler is dead.
- 10) In Lordsburg, the girl who is to marry the officer learns that he is well. She thanks Henriette as they part.
- 11) Malpais Bill makes it clear to Henriette that he wants her to come with him. She tells him, no—"I am known through the Territory. But I can remember that you asked me".
- 12) The gunfight is described only as it is heard by the girl. She is sure that Malpais will not come back and is much moved when he reappears..

### Stagecoach

- 5) Lucy's baby is born. Doc Boone is recovering self-respect.
- 6) Dallas, advised by Doc, decides to try to dissuade Ringo from his vendetta with the Plummers by saying she will join him across the Border. Again, she urges him to escape. He starts to do so but returns on seeing signs of Indian attack ahead.
- 7) Arriving at a ferry, they discover its buildings and the boat have been burned. Curly has to take the handcuffs off Ringo to let him help get the stagecoach across. Hatfield discovers the scalped victims of the Indians.
- 8) As the occupants of the stage begin to think they are safe, Peacock is wounded by an Indian arrow. Doc tends to the wound. Ringo climbs out on the roof. The fight with the Apaches is more elaborate. Buck is hit and Ringo has to climb out onto the lead horse, etc.
- 9) They run out of ammunition. The Gambler has saved one bullet and is on the point of using it on Lucy when they hear the sound of the Cavalry bugle. The Apaches take flight, but one of their last shots kills Hatfield. He dies in Lucy's arms, identifying himself as the son of a good family known to her.
- 10) In Lordsburg. The Plummers are warned of the arrival of Ringo. Curly releases Ringo on a promise that he will return. Gatewood is arrested because news has come on the repaired telegraph line of his theft of bank funds. To disillusion Ringo, Dallas lets him follow her to the red light district where she was going, but he repeats his offer of marriage, promising to return after confronting the Plummers. Doc Boone takes the shotgun from Luke Plummer, but Luke is given a rifle when he gets outside. The local editor expects Ringo's death. But it is Luke, as he returns to the saloon who is

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the one who belatedly collapses, killed by Ringo.

Ringo returns to Dallas and Curly. But Curly, Buck and Doc trick Dallas into getting into a buckboard and sending them off to escape across the border.

NOTE:

Differences are obvious. The short story is remarkably brief, the screenplay is very economical in dialogue but very much more elaborate in action.

The new characters of Doc Boone and Gatswood have subplots of their own, Doc's alcoholism, Gatswood's embezzlement. Though drawn very broadly, all of the characters are somewhat more fully developed and they are kept in constant interplay.

Principle difference between the literary and the film version is the suspense structure. Though its implicit in the short story, the suspense of the journey is much more forcefully developed in the screenplay. The success of the film - and it was a huge box office success as well as winning awards - is very probably due principally to its narrative structure for which the director as well as the screenplay writer should be given credit.

Studying the structure, one is a little dismayed to recognise just how simplistic the material is, how corny and contrived. It may be an illustration of the principle that audiences are seldom upset by contrivance as long as the effect is to provide a vigorous series of obvious satisfactions at a pace that leaves no time to question their plausibility. The tone is one that is always on the edge of pretty broad comedy.

Would it have been better if the dialogue was less cliché, the characters not quite such stereotypes? It's doubtful. Westerns are 'fables' of a popular kind of mythology. The characters don't need depth because they, like the whole mythic 'West' that they inhabit are the stuff of modern fairy tales, 'believable' only through that 'willing suspension of disbelief' that is demanded by the genre.