

NOT EXACTLY JOHN WAYNE

(A Black Comedy, with Gunslingers)

By Kerry Muir

ii.

**Setting:**

An empty field somewhere in America, in the endless present.

Parallel reality: the Wild West of America's mythic past.

**Characters:**

**Tara Lee**, a 14-year old girl in the present

**Gunther**, her father, late mid-late 30s or 40s

**Lorelei**, a 14 year-old girl in the mythic Wild West

**Mustang Mike**, an outlaw living large in the mythic Wild West

**Music:**

For moments set in the mythic Wild West, the use of "spaghetti Western" music, akin to Ennio Morricone's theme from *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, is encouraged.

**A Note About Safety:**

The only guns used by the actors in the play should be **NON-FIRING** prop guns, toy guns or replicas to ensure absolute safety. **Under NO circumstances should blanks or bullets be present on set.** (Blanks are dangerous too.)

Lights up, revealing: TARA LEE. She sits against a fence post, immersed in a book. Stacks of books surround her.

GUNTHER (O.S.)  
Tara...! Tara Lee?

Sound of squeaky screen door opening, slamming shut on rusty hinges. Tara Lee, lost in her book, doesn't respond. GUNTHER enters, gun in hand, half-empty beer bottle in the other.

GUNTHER sets bottle on top of the fence post.

TARA LEE  
What's that for?

Gunther pushes a stack of books to one side, sits by her.

GUNTHER  
Come on, life lessons now.

Tara Lee peeks out from behind her book, squints at gun.

TARA LEE  
Are there... actual bullets in there?

GUNTHER  
How else you gonna learn?

TARA LEE  
Maybe I don't wanna learn.

GUNTHER  
Ya gotta know how to defend yerself in this big, bad world. Learn to hold yer own. You're a young lady now.

TARA LEE  
Dad. I'm 14. And anyway, we're not living in some crazy cowboy movie. And you're not exactly John Wayne.

GUNTHER  
Who said anything about John Wayne? I'm just talking basics here. C'mon, put the book down.

Tara Lee goes back to her book.

Pause.

GUNTHER

What if I tell you a story? You love stories.

(beat, no response)

An open mind in exchange for a story. That's all I'm askin' for.

Slight pause. Finally, Tara Lee snaps her book shut.

TARA LEE

Fine.

Lights shift, ushering in a heightened, fictional, larger-than-life reality. Cue: Spaghetti-Western music, maybe something like Ennio Morricone's theme from "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly."

GUNTHER

Many, many moons ago, there was a famous outlaw by the name of...(making it up as he goes)"Mike Mustang"...

TARA LEE

Mike Mustang? Dad! That's so corny!

GUNTHER

...a horse-thief, by profession...

Enter MIKE MUSTANG, a Wild West outlaw out of a storybook.

MIKE MUSTANG

Yeeeeeee-haw! I'm Mike Mustang, hear me roar!

TARA LEE

Corny, corny, corny!

GUNTHER

Hey--some of the best stories are corny!

Mike Mustang stalks the stage like a coyote, a coil of rope over one shoulder; two guns weigh heavy in his holsters.

GUNTHER

Mike Mustang was a cold-blooded killer! A remorseless murderer of women and children. A bad guy! But he had a beautiful young wife, just about your age...

TARA LEE

A 14 year-old wife? Yuck!

GUNTHER

Hey, in those days folks had to wed early. They didn't live too long! Anyway, this lil gal went by the name of... Lorelei...

Enter LORELEI, carrying a bucket, a storybook version of a frontier girl. She crosses to an imaginary well, fills bucket with imaginary water, hums a cheerful tune.

GUNTHER

Lorelei was good-hearted and hard-working, but she had one fatal flaw: She was way too nice for her own good. Whenever she left the house, you know what she did?

TARA LEE

(shaking her head, "no")

Uh-uh.

GUNTHER

She smiled at everyone.

TARA LEE

What's wrong with smiling?

Lorelei smiles guilelessly at the audience.

LORELEI

(to random members of the audience)  
Afternoon, sir...! Howdy Ma'am! Mighty fine weather we're havin'! Afternoon!

GUNTHER

Well one day, Lorelei smiled at the wrong man.

Ominous chord strikes up, twangy and heavy on reverb.  
Lights shift: the sky darkens, blood-moon rises on the horizon.  
Mike Mustang lets loose a howl.

TARA LEE

Mike Mustang?

GUNTHER

How'd ya guess?

Mike Mustang and Lorelei step into the spotlight.

MIKE MUSTANG

(to Lorelei, tips his hat)  
Well hello, little lady.

Lorelei curtsies, smiles, starts to exit.

MIKE MUSTANG

(blocking her way) That's some mighty refreshing-looking water you got in that-there bucket.

LORELEI

Why thank you, sir! I pumped it from the well all by myself!

MIKE MUSTANG

All by yourself, eh?

LORELEI

All by my little lonesome!

MIKE MUSTANG

Well, if lonesome's what you are, I can solve that problem, pronto.

GUNTHER

(to Tara Lee, narrating)

And that's when Mike Mustang really threw down the gauntlet...

MIKE MUSTANG

There's a rickety, old chapel down in the gulch yonder. Let's you and me go there an' git hitched.

LORELEI

Hitched?

MIKE MUSTANG

Yeah, hitched! Me an' you!

LORELEI

Oh! That's a--a lovely offer but I couldn't possibly--

MIKE MUSTANG

We git hitched, ya won't be lonesome no more!

GUNTHER

To which Lorelei responded...

LORELEI

But, sir! I don't even know you!

TARA LEE

She had a point there.

MIKE MUSTANG

Mike Mustang's my name, and marryin' you's my game!

Mike Mustang whips off his cowboy hat, leans in, puckers up.

MIKE MUSTANG

Go on an' plant a kiss right here, little darlin'.

TARA LEE

(to Gunther)

Ew! And then what happened?

GUNTHER

She said...

LORELEI

Mighty tickled to meet you, Mister Mustang, but I really should be on my way. I've got fresh bison roasting on the fire back home—

Lorelei starts to bustle away. Mike Mustang stops her.

MIKE MUSTANG

Not so fast, little darlin'.

LORELEI

That bison's gonna burn to a crisp if I don't--

MIKE MUSTANG

NOT SO FAST, I SAID. Now, I just happen to know a defrocked priest over yonder who'll marry us for nothin, if'n we ask real nice.

LORELEI

Oh, but gosh-golly-gee I'm awful short on time! I got cows to milk, butter to churn, firewood to chop--

MIKE MUSTANG

Honey you got water, and me--I'm right thirsty!

Mike lassos Lorelei, reels her in! They freeze, mid-action--!

TARA LEE

(to Gunther)

So? What happened next? Did she run or what?

GUNTHER

Whattaya think she did?

TARA LEE

I don't know! Would I be asking if I knew? Tell me!  
Please!

GUNTHER

Why, she married him, of course! And she was forced to  
fetch water for that mean son-of-a-gun from that day  
on for the rest of her miserable life! Sometimes two,  
three, four times a day! The maniac drank like a damn  
fish! It was a living torture for her!

TARA LEE

I don't like that story!

GUNTHER

Neither do I, to be honest.

TARA LEE

I don't like that story at all!

GUNTHER

So... change the ending.

TARA LEE

Whattaya mean?

GUNTHER

I mean: If you could step into the story right now as  
we speak, and change the course a history, would ya?

TARA LEE

I mean--I guess, but--

GUNTHER

Say you just happened to be passing by Mike Mustang  
and Lorelei right at this crucial moment... And say  
you just happened to have a gun... Would ya have the  
know-how and the fortitude to use it? Or would ya lose  
yer nerve an' leave that poor girl to her fateful  
ruination? Think about it careful now. Consider all  
your options.

Mike Mustang and Lorelei un-freeze, resume struggling. Mike  
Mustang dips Lorelei like a ballroom dancer-- they freeze there,  
as...Gunther passes Tara his gun. She hesitates. Then takes it.



GUNTHER

Pretend you're in the story. How would ya change it?  
(he steadies her hands on the gun) You got an  
imagination, girl. Don't be afraid to use it.

Cue: Spaghetti Western "showdown" music. Tara Lee takes a  
breath, summons her nerve. Gunther withdraws to the sidelines.

TARA LEE

You there! Mustang Mike!

Mike Mustang startles and drops Lorelei--she scrambles to her  
feet! But Mike Mustang reels her back, puts her in a chokehold.

MIKE MUSTANG

Who the hell are you?

TARA LEE

I'm Tara Lee. You let her go, I'll let ya walk free--  
but lay one more hand on her and I'll--I'll--

MIKE MUSTANG

You'll what? You'll shoot? Why, you ain't nothin' but  
a scrawny tenderfoot! Practic'ly a baby!

TARA LEE

Look, I might not exactly be John Wayne, but I can--

MIKE MUSTANG

Who's John Wayne?

TARA LEE

That's irrelevant, Mustang Mike--

MIKE MUSTANG

That's Mike Mustang to you, missy! Get it straight.

TARA LEE

I said: Let. Her. Go.

Mike Mustang and Tara Lee counter one another in a circle.

MIKE MUSTANG

(re: Lorelei, still in chokehold)  
Who, her? Why this here's my fiancée, and we aim to  
marry!

TARA LEE

From the look a things, she don't wanna marry you.

GUNTHER

(to Tara Lee, coaching from the sidelines)  
Aim steady at the bottle now! Take yer shot!

Mustang Mike whips out his gun! Lorelei, still in the chokehold, manages to kick Mike's gun out of his hand! Mike lunges for the gun, loosening the chokehold, and... Lorelei breaks free and flees to Tara Lee. She hides behind her.

LORELEI

I don't believe we've been acquainted. Ya thirsty?

TARA LEE

(to Lorelei)

Don't distract me.

(to Mike Mustang)

Now, you listen here, Mr. Mike, or whatever you call yourself. You mosey on down the road apace, and no funny business. I got my eye on ya.

GUNTHER

(to Tara Lee)

Steady yourself. Breathe.

Mike Mustang drifts directly in front of bottle on fence post.

GUNTHER

That's the ticket. Let that ole beer bottle have it!

MIKE MUSTANG

You ain't the fightin' type! Go back to yer storybooks, ya lily-livered yellow-belly!

TARA LEE

I'm--scared--

GUNTHER

Think of Lorelei!

LORELEI

Yes, think of me! Don't let that big bully rattle ya!

TARA LEE

My hands...! They're all sweaty...!

Lorelei frantically wipes the palms of Tara Lee's hands with the hem of her skirt.

GUNTHER

A little sweat never hurt anyone! Steel your nerve!

Lorelei helps steady Tara Lee's hands on the gun.

LORELEI

I'll help ya hold 'er steady.

MIKE MUSTANG

(to Tara Lee)

Why, you're the kind who lives her whole life with her nose stuck in a book! You don't have it in ya! You ain't the shootin' type!

(laughs uproariously)

Why, I'm tempted to marry both of you girls!

TARA LEE

(to Mike Mustang)

Aw, quit flappin' yer gums! Who the hell are you anyway? Just some corny character in some corny story!

LORELEI

(to Tara Lee)

Please! He's serious!

Mike Mustang menaces Tara Lee, circling lasso.

GUNTHER

(to Tara Lee)

Hurry up, an' pull the trigger! Then class will be dismissed.

Mike Mustang advances, menacing.

TARA

(to Mustang Mike)

Back off, cowboy!

GUNTHER

(to Tara Lee)

Sorry, don't mean to be pushy--

TARA

(to Gunther)

Not you!

LORELEI  
(to Tara Lee)  
Honey, mind if I make a little suggestion?

TARA  
(turns back to Lorelei, distracted)  
Shoot.

Mike flings the lasso in Tara Lee's direction.

LORELEI  
(to Tara Lee)  
That's exactly what I was gonna tell you!

The lasso hits its target, Mike pulls the rope tight, binding Tara Lee. Startled, Tara Lee whirls around, and...

...BLAM!--her gun accidentally goes off!

TARA  
Oops.

A moment of silence and then: Gunther keels over.

GUNTHER  
What the hell! You hit me! You hit me in the arm!

TARA  
I'm so sorry!

GUNTHER  
The bottle, I said! The bottle! Not me!

TARA  
I'm sorry-- I-- I got carried away!

GUNTHER  
I'm bleeding all over the place!

Lorelei rushes over, inspects Gunther's arm.

LORELEI  
It's just a surface wound. Barely grazed him. Here, take off your hoodie and make a tourniquet.

Tara whips off sweatshirt, ties it round Gunther's arm.

LORELEI  
Tie it tight.

MIKE MUSTANG

I'm gettin the Sam Hill outta here! This lil gal's  
right dangerous!

LORELEI

(curtsies) Nice knowin' you, Mr. Mustang!

MIKE MUSTANG

(tips hat) Nice knowin' you too, Miss Lorelei!

Exit Mike Mustang.

LORELEI

No offense, but I gotta get a wiggle on! I've got cows  
to milk, butter to churn, fire wood to chop...

TARA LEE

...bison to burn...

LORELEI

That, too!

Exit Lorelei, skipping. Lights shift: back to day.

GUNTHER

Oh god, what have I done...?

TARA

Calm down, dad. Breathe. Think about something nice.

GUNTHER

(wincing)

Oh, boy. You're no John Wayne.

TARA LEE

Not exactly.

GUNTHER

Not at all!

TARA

Shhh. Try to relax, dad. Calm down.

(beat)

Here, let me tell you a story...

She presses the unscathed, half-empty beer bottle into Gunther's  
good hand. He takes a long swig as if to drain the whole bottle.

TARA LEE

Once upon a time, many moons ago, there was a...

Cowboy-Western movie music swells as...

Lights fade.

-The End-