*The Begats* – Script with Text Storyboard

By R. Andrew Strickland © 2011

Story Board

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Shot | Description | Location | Character | Notes |
| 1 | Camera pans down from top of tree to pick up ROSS leaning against it | Tree | Ross |  |
| 2 | Close-up on ROSS’s face, pan down to gun hanging in his hand | Tree | Ross |  |
| 3(77b & 78) | Close-up of gun falling to the ground. Shot lingers on gun | Tree | Ross |  |

I always did what I thought was right. I want to say that good and clear, here at the start. I just can’t figure why things happened the way they did. Why I’m here with this gun in my hand. I’ve always hated the durn things. I ain’t never seen anything good come outta one in my life. But here I am. I’ve spent my life watching everyone around me, figurin’ out how to be a man, how to live right. Why am I here? Dear God, why am I here?

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| 4 | Title Sequence. Shoot lots of random country footage to play underneath. | Various | n/a |  |
| 5 | Long shot of AL and BOYS sitting on porch | Cabin | Al, Little Ross, Dusty |  |
| 6 | Close-up on AL reading. Record plenty of this. | Cabin | Al |  |
| 7 | Reaction shot: Little Ross and Dusty listening | Cabin | Little Ross, Dusty |  |
| 8 | AL talking to the boys | Cabin | Al, Little Ross, Dusty |  |
| 9 | Little Ross asking a question | Cabin | Little Ross |  |
| 10 | AL talking some more | Cabin | Al |  |
| 11 | Little Ross listening, perhaps nodding | Cabin | Little Ross |  |

Back when I was a boy, things made more sense. We had ourselves a little farm on the edge of the woods. Tweren’t much, I reckon. Just a couple dozen head of cattle, a few acres of crops, and a small cabin my Pa built with his own two hands. My Pa.

I reckon my Pa was purty much the whole world to me. I remember listening to him read outta the Bible on our porch. My brother Dusty would always be there too, but Dusty ain’t never seemed to listen none. But I did. I remember ‘specially the time Pa was reading to us from the Old Testament. He was reading these long lists of names, a whole passel of people who upped and died a long ways back. I was gettin’ plumb bored and asked him why we had to hear ‘bout all them dead folks. Pa said it was the Begats. Those names were a long line of Pas and their boys. Even some girls too. Somethin’ always comes from somethin’, Pa said. A whole mess of great things happened in those days, but each of the men who did those things had a Pa who came before him. It was good to know ‘bout those that came before, all those Pas who showed their boys a thing or two about living. It got me thinkin’ that if those Begats were written today it would have a line for my family too. Al Bandura begat Ross and Dusty. My Pa begat me and my brother. I liked that. I aped my Pa in everything he did, hopin’ to round into a man like him some day.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 12 | Later: AL goes off to work with his hoe. | Cabin | AL |  |
| 13 | Little Ross sees and follows, looks back at his brother | Cabin | Little Ross |  |
| 14 | Dusty is pounding on Bobo | Cabin | Dusty |  |
| 15 | Little Ross gives a quizzical look then follows Al | Cabin | Little Ross |  |
| 16 | Al hoes the garden | Garden | Al |  |
| 17 | Little Ross watches | Garden | Little Ross |  |
| 18 | More Al gardening action. Perhaps he plants some seeds. At the very least, he hoes some more | Garden | Al |  |
| 19 | Little Ross watches some more, then gets up | Garden | Little Ross |  |
| 20 | Little Ross follows behind Al imitating what he is doing, perhaps using a stick as a hoe | Garden | Al, Little Ross |  |
| 21 | Later: the hoe on the ground. A small hand picks it up. | Garden | Little Ross |  |
| 22 | Little Ross hoes the garden | Garden | Little Ross |  |
| 23 | Al watches smiling | Garden | Al |  |

Now, my Pa didn’t truck much with vegetables in his fields – those were always used to grow feed for the stock – but he did keep a small garden off past the barn. I used to follow to watch him work. Not Dusty though. He was too young and generally kept to Ma’s skirts. ‘Course he did love to punch that silly clown bag Pa had gotten from the general store in town. Never did understand why he had a mind to hit that thing so much. Guess he picked it up somewhere.

I would watch Pa hoe the garden for hours. I loved it. The way he moved put me in mind of the dances they sometimes had over at Talley’s barn. Every move had a purpose. I watched Pa so much that pretty soon I had a good idea how to go about it myself. I could see every move Pa used in my head.

When Pa weren’t around, I used to pretend that I was a farmer, working in my own fields. I dassent use Pa’s tools, but I shore could work a furrow with a stick. I kept at it until one day I just had to try it for real. Pa had left his hoe by the garden patch while he answered what he said was a Call of Nature. I made sure he was out of sight and grabbed the hoe. It was a might heavy for a youngun like me, but I kept at it. Just I was startin’ to get the feel for it, I heard somethin’ behind me. There was Pa, leaning on the fence and grinnin’ at me. Instead of givin’ me a whuppin’, he told me to keep on. Pa seemed right proud that I watched him do somethin’ and figured out how to do it myself. Most of all he seemed pleased that I had the gumption to actually do it. I heard him tell the neighbors later that his boy Ross was goin’ to be a right good farmer some day.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 24 | Later: Al reading on porch again | Shack | Al |  |
| 25 | Longer shot of same, door opens | Cabin | Al, Little Ross, Dusty |  |
| 26 | Little Ross and Dusty exit. Little Ross has Al’s pistol. | Cabin | Little Ross, Dusty |  |
| 27 | Little Ross is playing with the gun, showing it to Dusty | Cabin | Little Ross, Dusty |  |
| 27b | If needed: Al finishes reading, walks to boys | Shack | Al |  |
| 28 | Al takes the gun from him, talks sternly to him – perhaps kneeling down beside him | Cabin | Al, Little Ross, Dusty |  |
| 29 | Reaction shot: Little Ross | Cabin | Little Ross |  |
| 30 | Al continuing to explain | Cabin | Al (and maybe Little Ross) |  |
| 31 | More reaction: Little Ross | Cabin | Little Ross |  |
| 32 | Father-sons hug | Cabin | Al, Little Ross, Dusty |  |

I shore didn’t always make my Pa proud. Once when he was off readin’ by the barn, I got into his special trunk. To my surprise, I found a gun. Not a rifle or shotgun like I’d seen Pa use for huntin’ deer or killin’ some animal that took after our stock. This was an honest-to-God pistol, like lawmen or gunfighters would use. I reckon I knew I was doin’ wrong, but I had to show it to Dusty. We went out on the porch where Ma couldn’t see and had us a good look at the gun. Unfortunately for me, Pa had a look at us too from the front step of the barn.

He grabbed the pistol outta my hand and set to scoldin’ me right fierce. Yet even at his angriest, Pa was always tryin’ to teach me somethin’. He asked me if I had ever seen him with the gun, ever seen him play with it like I was just doin’. ‘Course I hadn’t and had to tell him so. Pa said the gun was given to him by his brother, years back. A gun like this is made for only one thing: shootin’ another person. Why on God’s earth would anyone want to do that? Pa kept the gun just on the chance that he might need it to protect Ma and us boys. He had never fired it and hoped he never would. It came to me sudden-like that Pa was scared of us getting’ hurt by the gun mor’n anything. I was shore torn up ‘bout scarin’ my Pa that way, but he hugged me so tight I knew things were still good tween us.

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| 33 | MAN runs past | While taking place at the Cabin, this might have to be shot at a different location | MAN |  |
| 34 | Different angle: MAN’s retreating back. He jerks and falls. | See above | MAN |  |
| 35 | Al tells the boys to go into the house, he leaves the porch carrying the gun | Cabin | Al, Little Ross, Dusty |  |
| 36 | Al looks at the body | Shooting location | Al, Man |  |
| 37 | Al stands, looks back from whence Man came | Shooting location, perhaps angled back towards Cabin | Al |  |

Suddenly a man ran onto our land out past the garden patch. He was runnin’ like the devil himself was after him. All sudden there was a shot and the man fell down, hit. Pa made us go inside and then set to figurin’ out what was goin’ on. I was plenty scared, but just had to peep out the door to watch. Pa walked to the man and looked at him. He weren’t movin’ or nothin’ so I guessed he was dead. From what I could see, he looked like one of the hands from the Shaw spread off to the east.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 38 | CHEYENNE approaches from a distance | Shooting location | Cheyenne |  |
| 39 | Close-up of Cheyenne, perhaps a pan-down that lingers on his gun | Shooting location | Cheyenne |  |
| 40 | Al looking questioningly at Cheyenne | Shooting location | Al |  |
| 41 | Cheyenne looks back, then looks down closely | Shooting location | Cheyenne |  |
| 42 | Close-up of gun in Al’s hand | Shooting location | Al |  |
| 43 | Cheyenne reacts to seeing the gun, shoots | Shooting location | Cheyenne |  |
| 44 | Al is hit, goes down | Shooting location | Al |  |

Pa seemed mighty confused, lookin’ to see what was after the man. Then I saw him. He was a slick hombre with shiny boots that ain’t never been worn for workin’ with cattle. He was all fancified with a leather vest and a moustache, dark as night, that curled up at the ends. I ain’t never seen the man before, but everyone had heard about Cheyenne Miller. He had been a gunslinger, people said, but spent most of his time gamblin’ up in the saloons in town.

Pa just looked at Cheyenne. I never knew Pa to do nothing in a hurry. He had to consider everythin’. Cheyenne was doin’ a mess of considerin’ too. I reckoned that he was goin’ to tell my Pa what had happened, why he done shot the ranch hand in the back. Before either of ‘em could say a word, Cheyenne saw somethin’. He saw the gun still in my Pa’s hand. I’m not even sure Pa knew he had it, but Cheyenne sure did. Before I could call out, Cheyenne’s gun was up and my Pa was flying backwards, shot straight through the chest.

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| 45 | Little Ross, watching from the door looks on horrified. | Cabin | Little Ross |  |
| 46 | Little Ross runs to Al, throws himself on the body crying. | Shooting Location | Little Ross, Al |  |
| 47 | Dusty looks on from the porch, hiding | Cabin | Dusty |  |
| 48 | Cheyenne walks up, talks to the boys | Shooting location | Cheyenne |  |
| 49 | Little Ross continues to hug Al’s body | Shooting Location | Little Ross, Al |  |
| 50 | Cheyenne talks some more, holsters his gun, and walks away | Shooting Location | Cheyenne |  |
| 51 | Little Ross on Al’s body some more | Shooting Location | Little Ross, Al |  |

I screamed Pa and ran to him. I didn’t know what to do, just caught hold of him and tried to keep him from dyin’. Did no good, he was already gone. Weren’t nothin’ I could do but hold him and cry.

Cheyenne talked to me then. Told me he had a right to shoot the hand because he had cheated at cards. That made the shootin’ legal. As far as my Pa, he had drawn his gun Cheyenne said. Weren’t nothin’ he could do but shoot him. It was self-defense he said, making it a fair shootin’ too. He told me I had better learn from my Pa. You learn from what you saw here, boy. Learn enough and you might live long enough to grow up. Get yore own chance to make a go of this miserable spread.

Then he turned his back on me and walked away. He never looked back, not once. My poor Pa was nothin’ to him, just a bag of bones on the ground. I tweren’t nothing either. Just another dirt-scratcher the world could do without. I cried on my Pa until they dragged me offen him. Lookin’ back, my Pa wasn’t all that died that day. My childhood died with him, there amongst the acorns in the woods where I had once played.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 52 | Previous shot fades into Little Ross kneeling at Al’s grave | Graveyard | Little Ross |  |
| 53 | Previous shot fades into adult Ross kneeling at Al’s grave | Graveyard | Ross |  |

Ma, Dusty, and me had a rough go of it after Pa was buried. We had to sell off mor’n half our land to get by. The neighbors helped some, shore, but we mainly had to go it alone. Cheyenne was never blamed for the shootin’. Nobody ever said it to me, but you could shore tell people thought my Pa soft in the head to go after Cheyenne with a shootin’ iron. Nobody believed that Pa would just happen to be carryin’ the gun with him.

I grew up, still bitter as Quinine about the death of my Pa. Ma died a few years back, worn plumb out trying to run the spread and raise two boys on her own. Dusty and me would work long days trying to keep from losin’ any more of Pa’s land. Still, Pa’s death haunted me. All I wanted was justice for my Pa.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 54 | Numerous shots of Cheyenne practicing his gunwork | Various | Cheyenne |  |
| 55 | Ross hiding behind a tree watching | Various | Ross |  |
| 56 | More fun with Cheyenne’s gunwork, perhaps shooting other victims | Various | Cheyenne |  |
| 57 | Again, Ross watches. This time he needs to be hiding in other places. | Various | Ross |  |
| 58 | Close-up of Ross watching | Various | Ross |  |
| 59 | Even closer – just his eyes | n/a | Ross |  |
| 60 | Various shots of Ross trying out the moves himself, without a gun | Various | Ross |  |
| 61 | Montage continues, now with the gun. | Various | Ross |  |

I started in to watching Cheyenne whenever I could get away from work. Oh, yes. He was still in town. Owned a saloon and was downright respectable. Hadn’t changed a bit over the years neither. Talk was that he bootblacked his hair and moustache to hide the gray, but that weren’t nothin’ to my mind. Soon I was neglecting my work to watch his every move.

He would still practice his gun play out on the edge of our field that bordered the town. He never seemed to tire none of it, neither. I didn’t miss a chance to watch every draw, every cock-sure twirl of his gun. The gun that shot my Pa.

I watched. And just like watchin’ Pa in the garden patch, I learned. I could recall every move, every bend of the arm, every twitch of the finger. It was all in my head, burned there clear as the brands Dusty and I put on our stock each spring.

Soon I started tryin’ Cheyenne’s moves out myself. I would quick-draw, play-acting like my finger was a gun. Every move, I would reproduce myself. Soon I was behind the barn with Pa’s pistol, workin’ at my gun fightin’. I got right good at it too. It still felt strange to be holdin’ Pa’s gun. I ‘most expected Pa to come from around the corner and whup me for darin’ to play with his gun again. That I had scared him again by not putting store in his words. Still, I kept on.

I don’t know if I had admitted it to myself, but I was rehearsin’ the killin’ of Cheyenne. It would be a fair shootin’, I reckoned. God knows he deserved to die for what he did to my Pa. It would just be another begat. My Pa begat me. Cheyenne killin’ my Pa would begat me killin’ him.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 62 | With determination Ross pockets the gun and sets off. | Cabin | Ross |  |
| 63 | Cheyenne is revealed sleeping in the woods | Woods | Cheyenne |  |
| 64 | Ross looks at Cheyenne, considers. | Woods | Ross |  |
| 65 | Ross draws the gun, aims at Cheyenne | Woods | Ross |  |
| 66 | Ross fights to fire the gun, fails | Woods | Ross |  |
| 67 | The gun slowly lowers | Woods | Ross |  |
| 68 | Cheyenne wakes and stands | Woods | Cheyenne |  |
| 69 | Cheyenne sizes up the situation, sees gun | Woods | Cheyenne |  |
| 70 | The gun in Ross’s hand | Woods | Ross |  |
| 71 | Cheyenne draws and aims at Ross | Woods | Cheyenne |  |
| 72 | Ross drops his head, ready for the end | Woods | Ross |  |
| 73 | Cheyenne prepares to fire, grimaces and drops | Woods | Cheyenne |  |
| 74 | Cheyenne’s body hits the ground | Woods | Cheyenne |  |

In the middle of my practicin’ this mornin’, I knew the time had come. Today was the day for Cheyenne to die. I set out with Pa’s gun, now my gun, to look for Cheyenne.

It took me no time to find the man. Cheyenne kept to his habits purty regular. I reckoned I would find him practicin’ by the field like always. I was some surprised to see him laying out on the ground, snorin’ like the steam locomotive that would roar through town every few days. I figured I would have to out-draw the varmint in a fight. Now he was stretched out on the ground, a target no different from the endless stones and wood chips I had shot to hone my eye.

I had learned how to use the pistol by watching the man himself. I remembered every move and had made them my own. The time had come to put my learnin’ to good use.

But as I held my gun pointed at Cheyenne’s sleeping body, I found I couldn’t shoot. I railed at myself. Inside I cursed my own weakness. I had Cheyenne dead-to-rights. Why was I taking water now?

As I fought to pull back the trigger, I kept hearin’ Pa’s voice in my head. A gun like this is made for only one thing: shootin’ another person. Why on God’s earth would anyone want to do that? Why on God’s earth would anyone want to do that? Why on God’s earth would anyone want to do that?

I simply could not pull the trigger. I tried to plan what to do next, when Cheyenne woke up. There I was with a gun at my side facing a known gun hand. Cheyenne took in the scene right fast. He couldn’t help but know who I was, looking so much like my Pa as I did. One look at the gun in my hand was all it took to make him reach for his own iron. I couldn’t even raise my own gun to him. I just lowered my head and waited for death to come. Waited to join my Pa.

When the shot came, I plumb near fell over. But it was Cheyenne on the ground. I knew I hadn’t fired a shot. Someone had shot him just as he drew on me. I looked everywhere, but saw nothing. I didn’t know who had killed Cheyenne.

Yet in my heart I did. The shot came from our fields, out where my brother was working. My brother Dusty who watched from the porch as my Pa died in the woods across from the cabin. Dusty who seemed to pay little mind to my absence from work the last months. My brother had shot Cheyenne when I could not.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 75 | Ross looks at the body stunned, then looks around | Woods | Ross |  |
| 76 | Ross stumbles to lean on a tree, recreating the first shot | Tree | Ross |  |
| 77a & 77b | The earlier shots of the pan-down to the gun and the gun dropping repeat here | Tree | Ross |  |
| 78 | Extended shot of gun on ground | Tree | n/a |  |
| 79 | Gun disappears, leaving the ground | Tree | n/a |  |
| 80 | End titles (Also over scenic footage.) |  |  |  |

Dear God, how did it come to this? How could I learn so much by watching Pa, but could not learn enough by watching his killer to get justice for him? I watched, I remembered, I made it mine. Yet when the time came I could not kill. Just because I had watched it and learned it did not mean I would act on it. Another bit of learnin’ came in the way. Learnin’ from my Pa so many years ago. I could not pull the trigger because Pa would not have done it neither. Pa begat me, so did his ways begat my ways. No matter what else I may have learned, I had to make the conscious choice to carry it out. But Cheyenne’s violence did not beget violence in me. My Pa begat me. There is always a choice. Always a choice.