

THE TATTOOED WOMAN

Bruce Pearl

53 Hollowbrook Lane

Cortlandt Manor, NY 10567

[Bruce.pearl4@gmail.com](mailto:Bruce.pearl4@gmail.com)

(914) 319-8737

When Olive Stratton returns home after having been abducted and living with the Mohave for 13 years, she finds that her husband has remarried; and shunned by the Town, she is forced to live alone in a ramshackle cabin in the desert. Until a Mexican bandit reawakens her desire to live and love.

## Cast Of Characters

Olive Stratton:           The tattooed woman

John Stratton:           Her husband

Bonet:                    His Segundo

Roper:                    A cowboy good with a rope

Ruben Vega:             A Mexican rustler

Diego Lutz:             A seller of horses and Ruben's friend

### Scene

Perdition, Arizona

### Time

1889

Scene 1

SETTING: A ramshackle cabin, with a curtain for a door, in the scrub land, nine miles outside Perdition, Arizona. There's an old pump in the front yard.

AT RISE: Play California Dreaming. We hear the wind blow across the scrub. Olive enters from the cabin. She's wearing moccasins and an old skirt and blouse and a cowboy hat pulled down low over her eyes. She crosses to the pump, fills a basin, and having scanned the horizon, begins to bathe herself. RUBEN VEGA, unshaven, wearing a revolver, enters, apparently unseen and watches. Suddenly, aware of him, OLIVE exits back into the cabin. RUBEN crosses to the pump. OLIVE pulls back the curtain/door: SHE is holding a rifle. RUBEN stops and takes off his hat.

RUBEN

Respectfully, may I have some of your water - for the horse? I am Ruben Vega. Do you know Diego Luz, the horse-breaker? (Pointing) He lives up there in the foothills with his family and delivers horses to the big ranches, the Circle Eye and the Mariposa. If you ask Diego Luz, he will tell you, I am a person of trust. May I ask how you are called?

OLIVE

You watched me.

RUBEN

No, I only waited. I didn't want to frighten you.

OLIVE

You stood there and watched me.

RUBEN

No, I respect your privacy.

OLIVE

You came to look at me, just like the others.

RUBEN

Who comes to look at you?

OLIVE

What difference does it make. You're from Mexico?

RUBEN

Yes, I work here, I work there. What else can one do?

OLIVE

You should leave.

(Having taken off her hat, we see she has a thick black line tattooed like a bar across her face and several thin vertical lines tattooed on her chin.)

RUBEN

Who did that to you?

OLIVE

You know, you're the first person to just come out and ask.

RUBEN

The Mohave, maybe, but there's something different. The Mohave only tattoo their chins, I believe.

OLIVE

That's right, so they look like they've eaten berries. They etch it into their skin with a cactus needle. I told them, if you're going to do it, do it all the way, not just some dribble on my chin. They didn't know what to make of that, so they just shrugged and did it.

RUBEN

You know they were just marking you, so that people would know you were part of the tribe.

OLIVE

Is that what they were doing? You know what they called me - at least at first - Deh-He-Wa-Nis -

RUBEN

"Pretty girl."

OLIVE

That's right. My husband used to be all over me about how vain I was, always looking at myself in the mirror. "Vanity is a sin," he'd say. "No, being slovenly is a sin," I'd say. Filthy and ragged, I thought, maybe, with my face tattooed, the Mohave would leave me alone - and it's not like there were any mirrors - but they didn't care: they took me anyway. It's ironic - do you know that word?

RUBEN

Yes, funny.

OLIVE

That's right, funny, despite everything, I never really felt like a prisoner till I got home.

RUBEN

How old were you then

OLIVE

You've seen me and had your water, now leave.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 4

SETTING:           The next day: the Hotel dining room in Perdition.

AT RISE:           STRATTON is sitting at a table: BONET enters.

BONET

There was trouble yesterday out at the cabin.

STRATTON

That so?

BONET

We caught this vaquero out there, sniffing around.

STRATTON

And?

BONET

Well, he'd gotten himself some new clothes -

STRATTON

Now hold it right there: what do you mean, "He got himself some new clothes?" Had he been there before?

BONET

A couple of days ago - but he had just asked for water and then left.

STRATTON

But then he came back - and now he has new clothes?

BONET

Yes.

STRATTON

And?

BONET

So, we found him - them - in the yard -

STRATTON

Doing what exactly?

BONET

Just talking. So, I told him he'd made a mistake, his being there, and I told Roper to get a rope on him - so we could drag him back to Perdition - and he says, "You know who I am?" And I say, "Why don't you tell me." And he says, "I am Ruben Vega."

STRATTON

Who the fuck is Ruben Vega?

BONET

That's what I said. But then he says, "I hear the rope in the air, I'm gonna shoot him and then I'm gonna shoot you."

STRATTON

Just like that? Now don't tell me you let that Chicano bluff you.

BONET

But then your wife comes out of the cabin with that rifle you left her and said to leave or we'd have to walk nine miles to shade.

STRATTON

She was going to shoot the horses? Why? What are you not telling me, Bonet?

BONET

Nothing, Boss, there's nothing to tell.

STRATTON

I don't like this, he just showing up like that. You were supposed to be watching her -

BONET

We were, Boss, but the thing is, I asked around and it seems a vaquero by the name of Ruben Vega shot a couple of the hands out at the Mariposa - shot 'em dead.

STRATTON

Alright, here's what we're going to do: you take a couple of men back out there tomorrow and you wait for him -

BONET

If he comes back.

STRATTON

Oh, he'll be back - now that he's got the scent - and you get rid of him before this thing gets out of hand. Better yet, bring him to me: I want to see this vaquero who shoots people and makes love to other men's wives.

(STRATTON exits. BONET sits down at the table as RUBEN escorts OLIVE, now wearing the dress into the dining room. He seats her and then himself. OLIVE picks up a menu as BONET stares in disbelief.)

RUBEN

The place is quiet for dinner. You see how quiet it is.

OLIVE

(From behind the menu) Everyone is looking at me.

RUBEN

I thought they were looking at me. All right, soon they'll be used to it.

(BONET exits.)

OLIVE

And people are leaving.

RUBEN

That's what people do when they finish eating: they leave.

OLIVE

Who are you?

RUBEN

I told you: I am Ruben Vega.

OLIVE

But that's just your name.

RUBEN

You want me to tell you the truth: who I really am and why I come here?



OLIVE

Please.

RUBEN

I come to steal some of your husband's cattle.

OLIVE

Good. And?

RUBEN

To make love to you. Do you like fish? I know your painted brothers didn't serve you any: it's against their religion. We spend our whole lives learning the rules, and then they change them, like your husband did.

OLIVE

The rules. When I was little, my father brought us here from Illinois. He was a follower of James Brewster, the 11-year-old Prophet who proclaimed in a divine revelation he was to replace Joseph Smith as the head of the Church. And he also announced that Paradise could be found in the Valley of the Gila River. So, despite Brigham Young having already founded Zion in Salt Lake City, this is where my father brought us. And when we finally got here to this godforsaken wilderness of scrub and sage brush, having lost half the people on the way, the survivors named it Perdition, for that's what it was. Eventually I married John because he seemed to have some promise. You know what he did to get in the mood: he'd read the Bible -

RUBEN

The Bible?

OLIVE

The Gentile Bible, the Song of Solomon: Mormon pornography, worked every time. I believed in God then. But after I was taken and my family killed, I asked Him why? But He wasn't there.

RUBEN

That was the Yaquis?

OLIVE

They were such pigs: they never bathed and treated me like shit.

RUBEN

But then they traded you to the Mohave.

OLIVE

About a year later. They were starving.

RUBEN

What did the Mohave want with you?

OLIVE

Not what you think. It was more for insurance against the Whites, a bargaining chip should the Army find me. But the Chief's wife adopted me and I became part of the tribe.

RUBEN

That's when you were tattooed?

OLIVE

They asked me and I said yes.

RUBEN

Why did you add the bar?

OLIVE

I don't know - just being perverse.

RUBEN

The Mohave are tall and good looking.

OLIVE

They're fucking gorgeous, and they bathed all the time - more than the Mormons ever did - and they loved to have sex: all different kinds and ways - things I'd never even heard of. And they didn't force me, just invited me to participate. I said no at first but, eventually, I didn't care that they were Lamanites. You know what that is?

RUBEN

Blacks, Indians -

OLIVE

Mexicans - the Sons of Ham: cursed by God and so turned black or red -

RUBEN

Or brown -

OLIVE

For their disobedience.

RUBEN

Guilty as charged.

OLIVE

As it turns out, I really like having sex with Lamanites.

RUBEN

Were you happy there?

OLIVE

Eventually. But then the drought came. So, when the Army found me, the Chief agreed to trade me for food. My mother was against it and cried for days but he had no choice: they were starving. And then some even blamed me: said I was bad medicine and caused the drought. And then I came home and got blamed all over again, as if it were my fault, like I asked the Yaquis to take me. So, they shunned me, as if I were a leper. And then there was my husband.

RUBEN

I'd like to tell you something - if you promise not to get mad and point that rifle at me - I could spend my whole life looking at you and making love to you, and it would never be enough.

OLIVE

And it doesn't bother you, being with me after all the -

RUBEN

Painted tontos? As I told the priest, you are all good women.

OLIVE

All 200 of us? You're going to leave?

RUBEN

When it's time.

OLIVE

I was the white girl there; I'm the tattooed woman here. I don't know who I am anymore.

RUBEN

Who you are is the loveliest woman I know; and though you don't know it, the strongest. Now, are you ready? I think that man who's coming is your husband.

(STRATTON re-enters.)

Can I help you?

STRATTON

You have one minute to mount up and ride out of town.

RUBEN

Why don't you sit down and have a glass of wine with us. I'll introduce you to your wife. Do you know this man?

OLIVE

I don't think I've had the pleasure. Why is he just standing there?

RUBEN

I don't know, he seems worried about something.

STRATTON

I warned you: you can either walk or be dragged out.

RUBEN

All the gringos here have this thing about dragging people with a rope: why is that?

OLIVE

John, won't you please sit down. Can't you look at me?

STRATTON

Of course, I can look at you.

OLIVE

Then why don't you? I'm right here.

STRATTON

We'll talk later.

OLIVE

Will we? When?

STRATTON

You'll come up to the house.

OLIVE

You mean to see it? Is there a visiting hour?

STRATTON

No, to -

OLIVE

Live? So, you're going to introduce me to your new wife? Does she even know about me?

STRATTON

Yes.

OLIVE

Are you sure, John? How could you?

STRATTON

I thought you were dead.

OLIVE

And when I came home?

STRATTON

What was I supposed to do? I had a new wife.

OLIVE

Did you? I thought I was your wife.

STRATTON

You were gone for 13 years.

OLIVE

How could you send me away like that?

STRATTON

I had no choice.

OLIVE

Didn't you?

STRATTON

I had to live here, in this town, with these people.

OLIVE

So, I had to live there, by myself. John, it wasn't my fault.

STRATTON

I know.

OLIVE

Do you?

STRATTON

Why don't you come up to the house.

OLIVE

I don't think I can, John, not with your "wife" there. I don't know if we're still married; or even if I want to be. Can you understand that?

STRATTON

Whether we're still married or not, I have an obligation and I respect that. I provide for you.

OLIVE

He provides for me: did you hear?

RUBEN

He's a generous man. He gave you a pump.

OLIVE

No, that was there already.

RUBEN

I'm sorry but I have to go. You'll be alright, whatever you decide. Just keep in mind: there's no one like you.

OLIVE

I can always join a sideshow, charge admission. Do you think ten cents a look is too high?

