

O Pioneers! O Settlers!  
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## Characters

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**Miss Emmeline** – a schoolmarm

**Rusty** – an unemployed postman

**Abigail** – a pioneer blazing West

**Gert** – a pioneer returning East

**Snake-Eyes** – an outlaw

## Setting

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A small camp in the woods during pioneer times.

*(Night. A campfire with a pot of chili over it. A few dishes sit nearby. MISS EMMELINE sings "The Ballad for a Bowl of Chili".)*

MISS EMMELINE

*I am a strict, sober schoolmarm  
travelling 'cross the plains  
I drive a mean covered wagon  
Yet my spinsterhood remains*

*Don't think I haven't dated;  
I'm the kind of woman who lives!  
But romance always abandons me  
Without the meal that sticks to the ribs!*

*It's chili, chili, just make me some chili.  
Don't give me diamonds, nor lace from Chantilly.  
I don't want bouquets of phlox and lily.  
Don't tell me stories, or jokes that are silly.  
I don't need picnics in parks lush and hilly.  
Who needs to hear they're a good-looking filly,  
And I'm too old for things that are frilly  
I won't go travelling willy and nilly  
If there's one thing I want:  
Really it's chili! Chili! Oh, how I'd love me some chili!*

*But I'm just a lonely teacher  
No one makes me food at all  
So I build a little fire  
And fill my single bowl.*

*(She hears something.)*

MISS EMMELINE

Who's there? *(She looks around.)* I said who's there? *(She listens.)* Be warned: I'm a schoolmarm. Professionally trained to deliver maximum punishment. Whippings. Strappings. Time-out. Detention. *(She listens.)* I'm going to my wagon and when I return: you'll be sorry.

*(MISS EMMELINE exits.)*

*(ABIGAIL and RUSTY appear from the shadows.)*

ABIGAIL

Okay, Rusty, you go get the kettle.

RUSTY

Abigail, I know you're not stealing those dishes.

ABIGAIL

Just do what I say.

RUSTY

Why do we always do what you say?

ABIGAIL

Because I wear the dress in this relationship.

RUSTY

But you can't leave a person in the wilderness alone without her dishes.

ABIGAIL

She's not alone. She's travelling with someone.

RUSTY

Or something.

ABIGAIL

Here we go.

RUSTY

What if she's got a buffalo monster?

ABIGAIL

There's no such thing as a buffalo monster.

RUSTY

The fur trapper by the river told me there's a buffalo monster in these parts. That eats people.

ABIGAIL

You know what the fur trapper told me?

RUSTY

What?

ABIGAIL

I married a stupid.

RUSTY

I'm cautious. Not stupid.

ABIGAIL

They're the same thing. Get the kettle, let's go.

*(MISS EMMELINE appears from the behind and takes RUSTY captive with her ruler.)*

MISS EMMELINE

Release my crockery. Or the boy gets it.

RUSTY

Abigail. Put. Down. The. Dishes.

ABIGAIL

She's got a ruler.

MISS EMMELINE

This ruler's taken down a whole school of sixth graders during a food fight. I could immobilize the both of you in the time it takes for you to say "Johnny cake."

RUSTY

*(Recognizing her:)* Miss Emmeline? By golly, is that you?

MISS EMMELINE

Rustopher?

RUSTY

It's Rusty. Just Rusty. I go by Rusty.

MISS EMMELINE

You'll always be 'lil Rustopher Cranston to me!

ABIGAIL

You know this woman?

MISS EMMELINE

Of course he knows me! I was his first grade teacher. He used to hug my knees and wear my bonnets.

RUSTY

I was six.

MISS EMMELINE

Now look at you, lil' Rustopher. You got old. And became a bandit.

RUSTY

We didn't mean to steal.

ABIGAIL

We're going West and ran out of supplies.

RUSTY

And a fur trapper said there was a buffalo monster!

MISS EMMELINE

Hold out your hands.

*(ABIGAIL and RUSTY hold out their hands. MISS EMMELINE raps their knuckles with ruler.)*

MISS EMMELINE

No swearing. No spitting. Use your listening ears. And no talking out of turn. The chili will be ready in a bit. Now who's your opposite sex friend?

RUSTY

Miss Emmeline, I'd like to introduce you to Abigail, my wife.

MISS EMMELINE

You're married? How could that be? I was your teacher. You're years younger. I had a head start. And many opportunities. You don't see me married. Except to my job. Consummate professional. Love teaching.

RUSTY

Abigail was a teacher.

MISS EMMELINE

Congratulations, Abigail! Good choice, Rustopher. You know they say teaching is the most noble profession.

ABIGAIL

I didn't like it.

MISS EMMELINE

Excuse me.

ABIGAIL

I found it limiting.

MISS EMMELINE

Limiting. You think my life's devotion is limiting?

ABIGAIL

Maybe not for you. But I have greater ambitions. That's why we're heading West.

MISS EMMELINE

And look how that turned out.

ABIGAIL

It's turning out fine.

MISS EMMELINE

You probably should have settled somewhere by now.

ABIGAIL

We're not settling.

RUSTY

We're pioneers.

MISS EMMELINE

*(MISS EMMELINE cackles.)* I'm sorry, I thought you were blowing smoke up my bustle. Aren't you a little too old to play pioneer?

ABIGAIL

You're heading West and you're significantly older than we are.

MISS EMMELINE

I assure you: I'm much younger than you appear. And I'm not heading West. I'm travelling back East. The West is not for Miss Emmeline. Impassable mountains, endless prairie, snakes and wolves, dirty men and bad grammar. Get me a one-room school, a home with a hearth, a closet of calico frocks and I needn't travel ever again. I am a very simple woman.

*(Wet breathing heard back-stage.)*

RUSTY

What was that?

MISS EMMELINE

I didn't hear anything.

ABIGAIL

That's because you were blathering.

RUSTY

Something definitely grumbled over there.

MISS EMMELINE

It was probably a shrew.

RUSTY

Or a buffalo monster.

MISS EMMELINE

He always had that active imagination. All the other boys would be off whittling sticks and Rustopher would be—

RUSTY

I was six.

MISS EMMELINE

—nancing around playground with a parasol calling himself Princess Butterchurn—

*(More wet breathing from back-stage.)*

RUSTY

There it was again.

ABIGAIL

I heard it too.

MISS EMMELINE

That was my stomach.

RUSTY

It sounded inhuman.

ABIGAIL

And came from that direction.

MISS EMMELINE

My stomach throws its voice. Like a ventriloquist. Oh the laughs I got in college! Right Tummy? *(Through the corner of her mouth:)* Right, Miss Emmeline.

ABIGAIL

Is there something in your wagon?

MISS EMMELINE

No. Nothing. Except crayons. And coloring books. Would you like to do a learning activity?

ABIGAIL

I'm going to look.

MISS EMMELINE

No. Don't. Please. You'll judge. Run away. Call me names. And I've had no one sensible to talk to for months. I've been so lonely in the wilderness.

RUSTY

What is it?

MISS EMMELINE

My deepest shame. A hidden tragedy. What I travelled West for. And I don't want you to see it.

*(GERT suddenly appears wet-breathing. She has sling for each arm, an eye patch, a peg leg and orthodontic headgear.)*

ABIGAIL

It's a monster!

MISS EMMELINE

No—

RUSTY

The buffalo monster!!

MISS EMMELINE

That's—

RUSTY

Help! Help! Oh help!

*(MISS EMMELINE claps three times. RUSTY immediately stops and claps three times in response.)*

MISS EMMELINE

That's not a monster. It's my sister, Gert.

RUSTY

What a horribly malformed creature.

ABIGAIL

What ever happened to her?

GERT

The West happened to me. It was the West.

MISS EMMELINE

My sister embarked West years ago. To start a new life. In a wagon. With her ox. All the money she saved up from being a seamstress. And an impetuous friend. With a silly name. What was it? Beach? Crab? Dune?

GERT

Sandy?

MISS EMMELINE

Yes, Sandy! That's it.

GERT

We didn't want stay East and sew buttons all our life. We were to going to live fiercely. Independent. Be our own women. Make our own butter. Thrive! Out West.

ABIGAIL

But you didn't make it?

GERT

No, we made it. We got to the West. All the way. Far as you could go.

MISS EMMELINE

But she had a series of misfortunes.

GERT

Fell down a hill. Bit by a snake. Attacked by a bear. My ox died. I nearly starved. Sandy ran off. And my orthodontist made me get braces.

MISS EMMELINE

I heard what had happened to my sister and packed my wagon to bring her back East. To home. To settle. Gert's not the kind of person who lives on the frontier.

GERT

You don't know that.

MISS EMMELINE

She's needy.

GERT

I'm not needy.

MISS EMMELINE

That's why your friend Dune ran off. She got tired of you needing things.

GERT

Sandy met a gold prospector.

MISS EMMELINE

She made him up.

GERT

No she didn't.

MISS EMMELINE

Gert gets so dependent.

GERT

That's not true.

MISS EMMELINE

Everyday it's a new injury. My back hurts. This eye is sore. My arms are broken. I have classrooms that need less attention than Gert. I would concoct an imaginary gold prospector to get away too, if Gert weren't my sister and I didn't feel obligated.

ABIGAIL

We're heading out West.

RUSTY

But we were thinking of settling.

ABIGAIL

No we're not.

RUSTY

My wife thinks we can keep pioneering forever. Even though we've lost our money. The food. Both our oxen. And the covered part of our wagon.

ABIGAIL

Quit fretting.

RUSTY

I'm not fretting.

MISS EMMELINE

Don't bully my Rustopher.

ABIGAIL

I'm his wife, that's my job.

MISS EMMELINE

Not while I'm here.

GERT

What do you want to do in the West?

ABIGAIL

I'm going to start an organization to save the buffalo.

GERT

Wow.

ABIGAIL

Or I thought about inventing something. Or selling snake oil. Or becoming a medicine woman.

RUSTY

She doesn't know.

ABIGAIL

I have a lot of ideas.

MISS EMMELINE

If ideas were actions, you'd be settled somewhere by now.

RUSTY

I've always known what I wanted to do.

MISS EMMELINE

Good preparation is the sign of a good early education.

RUSTY

I'm going to be a postmaster.

MISS EMMELINE

If ever you quit blundering your way West.

ABIGAIL

You can't be a pioneer if you never leave home.

MISS EMMELINE

No one wants a postmaster who isn't settled.

RUSTY

I did see an advertisement for a postmaster in that little town over the bluff.

MISS EMMELINE

You should go make an inquiry, Rustopher.

ABIGAIL

We're not settling there.

RUSTY

Maybe we could.

GERT

And maybe she'll leave you.

*(SNAKE-EYES enters with a gun. He's an outlaw.)*

SNAKE-EYES

Alright! Everyone! Get up! Hands down!

*(Everyone looks at him. A pause.)*

SNAKE-EYES

I mean: get down, hands up.

*(And then continues:)*

MISS EMMELINE

No one likes a busy-body, Gert.

GERT

You're the busy-body.

MISS EMMELINE

But the difference is that I'm helpful.

SNAKE-EYES

Hey. Guys. This is a robbery. I probably should have been more clear.

MISS EMMELINE

Come on, Rustopher. Making an inquiry won't hurt.

RUSTY

It wouldn't hurt to look.

MISS EMMELINE

It'll be fun. I'll go with you.

ABIGAIL

Don't you go with her.

SNAKE-EYES

Hey guys.

ABIGAIL

I'll go West without you.

GERT

You should!

SNAKE-EYES

Guys.

ABIGAIL

I will.

*(SNAKE-EYES gives up and exits.)*

RUSTY

Come on, Abigail, look what happens to people who go West.

GERT

Hey!

ABIGAIL

Look what happens to people who settle!

MISS EMMELINE

There's nothing wrong with me.

ABIGAIL

We heard you singing to your chili.

MISS EMMELINE

I was being whimsical.

*(SNAKE-EYES enters again from another entrance.)*

SNAKE-EYES

Alright! This is a stick-up! *(SNAKE-EYES' guns goes off.)* Oh. Whoops. Sorry. Excuse me. Is everyone okay? It's my first day as an Outlaw. So you'll have to bear with me. *(He picks out a piece of paper and reads it.)* My name is Snake-Eyes but everyone call me James. And this is a stick-up. So I'll be taking your money and jewels and dry goods.

MISS EMMELINE

Snake-eyes, if you're going to arrest someone, arrest her because she's stealing his dream!

ABIGAIL

I am not!

SNAKE-EYES

Outlaws don't arrest people.

MISS EMMELINE

There's a great job. In the town. And Rustopher could get it.

SNAKE-EYES

Has he inquired?

RUSTY

I'm thinking about it.

SNAKE-EYES

There's never harm in looking.

MISS EMMELINE

Listen to Snake-eyes, Rustopher, he knows what he's saying.

GERT

But Abigail's got to go West! And take me with her.

ABIGAIL

Oh Gert. I'm not sure that's a good idea.

MISS EMMELINE

She doesn't want to go with you. Right, Snake-eyes?

SNAKE-EYES

Doesn't sound like it.

GERT

You have to take me, Abigail! I can't get away. My sister has the sharpest eyes. That devastating ruler. A dunce cap. Every time I try to leave. She tracks me down. And I have to stand in a corner.

MISS EMMELINE

How dare you besmirch me in front of my friends.

ABIGAIL

We're not friends.

MISS EMMELINE

I'm talking about Snake-eyes.

SNAKE-EYES

But we just met.

MISS EMMELINE

You get me, Snake-eyes. Finally, someone gets me. And truth is Gert begged me to come get her from the West.

SNAKE-EYES

Of course she did.

GERT

I did not.

MISS EMMELINE

Wrote me letters. Sent me telegrams. Demanded I rescue her.

SNAKE-EYES

Until you felt bad.

MISS EMMELINE

Until I felt bad!

GERT

That's not true.

MISS EMMELINE

And now she doesn't want everyone to think she's settling.

SNAKE-EYES

So somehow it's your fault?

MISS EMMELINE

Puzzling, isn't it? But you get her alone, it's all she talks about. Going home. Sewing buttons. Never leaving.

SNAKE-EYES

She sounds ungrateful.

MISS EMMELINE

It's like you read my mind.

GERT

I'll go back to pioneering, Emmeline. Fight the elements. Beat the wilderness. Churn my own butter.

MISS EMMELINE

Watch this, Snake-eyes, she won't do it.

GERT

Maybe I could if you supported me. Helped me! Gave me encouragement. Instead of bundling me across a continent.

MISS EMMELINE

It's what she wanted. What she said.

GERT

You always hear what I say and never what I mean. In my heart. This spirit I've got.

SNAKE-EYES

She sounds needy.

MISS EMMELINE

You have no idea.

GERT

I'm not needy!

ABIGAIL

Maybe if you weren't so overbearing.

RUSTY

Don't talk to my teacher like that.

ABIGAIL

She's not your teacher anymore.

MISS EMMELINE

I'm not overbearing.

ABIGAIL

You've been bearing down on us since we arrived. Do this. Do that. That's why no one wants to live with you.

SNAKE-EYES

I'm sure lots of people want to live with her.

MISS EMMELINE

Thank you. They do. But I'm selective. Unlike her.

RUSTY

Hey!

MISS EMMELINE

He was the daintiest student I ever had.

SNAKE-EYES

I can imagine.

RUSTY

I was six.

SNAKE-EYES

Some things never change.

MISS EMMELINE

Seriously.

RUSTY

Postmaster is a tough job.

SNAKE-EYES

Well, it's not teaching.

MISS EMMELINE

Thank you, Snake-eyes.

RUSTY

And I live with this bulldozing brow-beater.

ABIGAIL

You want me to tell you what to do.

RUSTY

But you don't always have to wear the dress in the relationship.

MISS EMMELINE

Let Rustopher wear the dress sometimes.

ABIGAIL

He could if he was more daring.

RUSTY

That's it.

ABIGAIL

Where are you going?

RUSTY

To that town to check out the postmaster job.

MISS EMMELINE

Good boy!

ABIGAIL

Don't you dare. Don't you dare!

RUSTY

You want me to be more daring, Abigail? This is me being daring!

*(RUSTY exits.)*

SNAKE-EYES

Hey you, get back here!

MISS EMMELINE

You let him follow his dreams.

SNAKE-EYES

But he's a hostage, this is a robbery.

GERT

It is a robbery. He's stealing your future, Abigail. Selling it to the postal service.

SNAKE-EYES

That's not what I meant.

MISS EMMELINE

*(Yelling off-stage:)* Rustopher! Let me know if you need a character reference. Oh I should just go help him. Snake-eyes, can you hold down the fort while I'm away? Watch out, there are thieves in our midst. I'm looking at you, Abigail.

SNAKE-EYES

You can't leave, too.

MISS EMMELINE

But Rustopher's future employers need to hear about the time he came to school with a bra on his head and pretended to be a mosquito.

*(MISS EMMELINE exits.)*

SNAKE-EYES

This is the worst robbery. No one's paying attention. No one's listening.

GERT

No one ever listens to me.

SNAKE-EYES

I was listening.

GERT

I mean the people I want to hear me. That means you, Abigail.

ABIGAIL

I can't talk about your problems when mine are quickly multiplying.

GERT

That's okay. We can go West and you can talk all you want I'll just listen and laugh. And listen some more. I'm really good at listening. Look, I'm listening now.

ABIGAIL

I can't go West with you.

GERT

Is it because you think I'm needy?

ABIGAIL

No. Gert. It's. That. We don't have a wagon. Or oxen.

GERT

I'll be the wagon. I'll be your ox. I'll carry everything. Make you snacks. Eat your leftovers. I'll do everything. And you don't even have to say thank you. Let me go with you. Or you'll be alone, Abigail. And become a buffalo monster.

ABIGAIL

What's a buffalo monster?

SNAKE-EYES

It's a buffalo left behind by the herd. All alone they become monsters. You find them all over the prairie. Vicious creatures. Awful tempers. They trample everything. Terrorize everyone. Make misery for all they come in contact with. But you can't blame them. Really can't. You'd become a monster too if everyone left you.

ABIGAIL

Okay, Gert. Let's go West.

GERT

Holy bonnets, are you serious? I'm so excited, Abigail.

ABIGAIL

I know, you're salivating.

GERT

We're going West! Just like you wanted! I'll get my stuff from the wagon!

*(GERT exits.)*

ABIGAIL

What have I done, Snake-eyes, what ever have I done?

SNAKE-EYES

It'll be fine. Everything always works out. Maybe your husband won't get the job.

*(MISS EMMELINE enters with RUSTY throwing confetti.)*

MISS EMMELINE

He got the job! He got the job!

RUSTY

I'm a postmaster, Abigail. They made me the postmaster.

MISS EMMELINE

'lil Rustopher has a job!

RUSTY

With an office.

MISS EMMELINE

And a little satchel for mail.

RUSTY

I got my dream!

MISS EMMELINE

With the help of your teacher!

RUSTY

Abigail, aren't you happy for me?

ABIGAIL

I am. Rusty. I truly am. But I can't settle.

RUSTY

You're leaving me?

ABIGAIL

No. I'm staying with the Rusty who gave me the courage to go out West. Who pushed me to quit my job if it wasn't enough. Who set aside his dream to help me find mine. I would never leave that Rusty. But that Rusty, the one who I love, has gotten lost in the mail.

MISS EMMELINE

Don't you worry about her, Rustopher. You have a career now. And if that woman can't accept that, she wasn't a good person for you anyway. Your job comes first. That's part of settling and growing up. Take it from Miss Emmeline, people come and go but you'll always have your job.

RUSTY

You're right, Miss Emmeline. I'll always my job. And neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night will stay this courier from the love of his life.

ABIGAIL

Rusty?

RUSTY

If your address says West, then I won't quit until that perfect package is delivered safely there! Because every parcel I post is forwarded to the corner of Abigail and Rusty, wherever that may be.

MISS EMMELINE

Rusty, this is not the how you were taught!

RUSTY

Miss Emmeline, with all due respect, I didn't like you when I was six. And though I didn't know this was possible, I like you less now.

MISS EMMELINE

Rustopher, you get back here. You don't talk to your teacher that way. Rustopher

RUSTY

Abigail, let's finish what we started?

ABIGAIL

You'll get the chili?

RUSTY

If you get the dishes.

*(The play suddenly slaps to slow-motion: ABIGAIL and RUSTY run around causing mayhem and finally escape with the kettle of chili and the dishes.)*

MISS EMMELINE

Hey! Stop! You hooligans! I'll get my ruler!

*(She claps three times. Nothing happens. The slow-motion world stops. A pause.)*

SNAKE-EYES

Emmeline—

MISS EMMELINE

It's Miss Emmeline. So I'm reminded at all times that I'm unmarried. And have nothing. Except two hands that lost their magic. An endless herd of children who always leave me behind. And another fire that's missing the chili.

SNAKE-EYES

I've got a lean-to over-yonder and it's not very well-built so no one ever visits for very long, but if you're hungry, I've got a pot of chili on the hearth.

MISS EMMELINE

You make chili?

SNAKE-EYES

I wasn't a good farmhand. Oxherd. Cobbler. Army surgeon. Or outlaw. But you better believe I make a fine pot of chili. And I'd be honored to share it with someone like you.

MISS EMMELINE

Oh, Snake-eyes. I better not.

SNAKE-EYES

Why?

MISS EMMELINE

I can teach the ABCs, states and capitols, grades K through 12, but I've never taught myself to want more than my schoolhouse.

SNAKE-EYES

It's just chili.

MISS EMMELINE

Of course.

SNAKE-EYES

And maybe. Perhaps. Good company. I bet I could make good company. In time. If you'd teach me.

MISS EMMELINE

Well, Snake-eyes, I should warn you that I'm not very good at being kind or well-liked.

SNAKE-EYES

Then we've all got room for improvement.

*(SNAKE-EYES offers his hand. MISS EMMELINE takes it. They exit.)*

*(GERT enters holding a suitcase and two sandwiches.)*

GERT

Abigail! Sorry it took me so long. It's hard to pack when you only have one good leg. Amiright? But I made snacks for the road. It's sandwiches! Abigail? Hello. Anyone?

*(GERT sits down. And sings "The Ballad of Missing Chili".)*

*Chili, chili, you're missing  
Chili, chili, I'll wait  
Even if I'm here forever  
Holding an empty plate.*

*Chili, chili, you're gone  
Chili, chili, I remain  
When two people part,  
Is anyone to blame?*

*Chili, chili, you've left  
Chili, chili, I stay  
What happens to your bones  
When your heart walks away?*

*Chili, chili, hope dies  
Chili, chili, dreams defer  
I don't want to be alone  
and become a buffalo monster.*

*Chili, chili, it's decided.  
Chili, chili, this heart's pressed  
I'm leaving by myself  
And I'm going out West.*

**THE END**