Show Talk

by John Olson

Buffalo Bill sits in a wagon holding the reins to two big horses. Sitting Bull sits next to him. They ride through Thermopolis, Wyoming, followed by Turks, Gauchos, Arabs, Mongols and Indian braves. A preacher shouts from a picnic table that there is salvation in truth. The streets are full of cherry blossom. The wagon bounces over potholes in the muddy street. What feelings emerge when I say the word ‘clarinet' asks Buffalo Bill to Sitting Bull. I think of Mozart, said Sitting Bull, and the blade of my knife when it catches the sun and a great blue hour of sadness bleeds from the center of my chest. It's hard not to feel a little cynical at times, said Buffalo Bill. You brought it on yourself, said Sitting Bull. I know, I know, said Buffalo Bill. But it's the times. I feel that I am shaped by the times. I mean, how much of life is truly a matter of free will? Each man is good in the sight of the Great Spirit, said Sitting Bull. It is not necessary for eagles to be crows. Do you mind if we cut the attack on the settlers, asked Sitting Bull. But that's the center attraction, said Buffalo Bill. Everyone expects it. But it's a lie, a gross misrepresentation, said Sitting Bull. I feel like I am endorsing a great fraud. It's just entertainment, my friend, said Buffalo Bill. There are other ways to entertain people, said Sitting Bull. There doesn't have to be just that story. There are other stories. There are many stories. There is the story of How The Rabbit Lost His Tail, and the story of The Mysterious Butte. I don't know, said Buffalo Bill. Is there any violence in these stories? A little, said Sitting Bull. The rabbit actually does lose his tail. He is a foolish creature who has many misadventures and is saved by his brother the wind. Except for the very end. Where he loses his tail. I don't think so, said Buffalo Bill. People like the glory of battle. Guns blazing, arrows flying, bodies collapsing into dust. I don't think the misadventures of a foolish rabbit will hold their attention very long. I disagree, said Sitting Bull. I visited a gypsy fortune teller in Montmartre who told me that one day people will sit in a dark room and watch the foolish

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misadventures of pigs and rabbits. She was pulling your leg, my friend. You're so naïve sometimes. What was the name of that painting you bought in Paris? Starry Starry Night. I bought it from a man with red hair and blue eyes who told me that it wasn't the language of painters but the language of nature which one should listen to, the feeling for the things themselves. He sounded like one of my people. I've seen that painting, said Buffalo Bill. I still think you got taken. I've never seen stars like that. I have, said Sitting Bull. I see them inside, when I am feeling wide-awake, and large like an ocean.