

Blood Trails

By

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FADE IN

EXT. NIGHT-SHERIFF'S OFFICE-CARSON COUNTY

Rain gradually starts to pour. A sign reads "Sheriff's Office". A horse tethered in the stable by the building is startled by a flash of lightning.

INT. NIGHT-SHERIFF'S OFFICE-MOMENTS LATER

Decorations are sparse, adding to the somber atmosphere. A gun rack in reach of a simple bed, two chairs and a table by the door. Four cells comprise the rest of the establishment, with a lone occupant.

HUNTER, 28, is a well-built man of average height and short black hair. His green eyes are hidden behind his arm as he rests on a cot.

EXT. NIGHT-SHERIFF'S OFFICE-MOMENTS LATER

The rain is pouring harder than before as STEWART, 42, the lanky town deputy approaches the office. Revolver in hand, he fires twice in the air before stumbling up the steps to the door.

INT. NIGHT-SHERIFF'S OFFICE-MOMENTS LATER

Stewart saunters in, a bottle of whiskey in hand.

STEWART

Didja think ah'd forgotten about you, Hunter?

HUNTER

<groan>

Jim makes his way to the chair facing the cell and collapses into it.

STEWART

No sir, not ole Stewart.

He places his revolver and belt on the table next to the chair.

STEWART

(Mutters) You ain't going anywhere...

(CONTINUED)

Stewart pulls his hat over his face and goes to sleep.

After a while, the pistol falls off the table and fires after hitting the floor. Hunter wakes with a start. The bullet ricochets around the room.

HUNTER

What the...?!

On its final path, the bullet dismantles the cell door lock and hits Stewart in the head, killing him instantly.

Hunter pushes the cell door open and cautiously steps out. He surveys the room. Quiet. Lightning flashes.

After checking the deputy's pulse, Hunter steals his coat, hat, revolver, and grabs some extra ammunition.

INT. STABLE-MOMENTS LATER

Hunter, silhouetted by the moon light, saddles one of the two horses and takes off.

EXT. EARLY MORNING-SHERIFF'S OFFICE

The ground is wet. The rain has ended. JIM, 52, graying hair, happens by the stable. Noticing that the door is ajar, he makes his way to the Sheriff's Office. He knocks on the door three times.

JIM

Hello? Stewart? Anyone there?

Jim knocks on the door five more times before letting himself in. He walks in. He backs out the door and catches his balance on the railing, covering his mouth with a free hand.

EXT. MORNING-TOWN STREET

Jim is surrounded by angry townspeople as he finishes recounting what he saw.

JIM

...he was on the floor, bullet holes all over his body. Blood everywhere.

(CONTINUED)

TOWNSWOMAN

Someone needs to find the sheriff
right away!

CUSTIS, 19, short with black hair, nods his head and runs towards the saloon for his horse. He takes off to find the sheriff.

TOWNSMAN

...we need to go after him now
before he gets too far!

EXT. AFTERNOON-SPRING-HALF AN HOUR LATER

REUBEN HARMON, the local sheriff, is fly fishing in the lake. He's 48, well built, with a shock of graying hair in a sea of brown. There is a long scar that barely touches the left his gray beard.

Reuben casts his line a few times, not catching anything.

Custis rides his horse near the water.

CUSTIS

Sheriff! Sheriff Harmon!

Reuben turns back.

CUSTIS

We need you back in town...Hunter's
escaped!

REUBEN

Then go after him! That's why
Stewart's there!

Silence.

EXT. DIRT ROAD-CONTINUOUS

Hunter is asleep in a thicket by a dirt road. The horse is secured to a nearby tree.

He is awakened by the sound of a pair of horses as they gallop by down the road. Keeping low to the ground, he waits until he no longer hears them before moving to the horse.

HUNTER

This ain't gonna be fun.

Hunter takes the horse by its reins and moves further into the surrounding woods.

EXT. TOWN STREET-OUTSIDE THE SALOON-THIRTY MINUTES LATER

Sheriff Harmon and Custis ride to the saloon where five people from the mob have gathered. They dismount and walk to the group.

REUBEN

Who was the last to see Stewart
alive?

The saloon owner looks at Reuben from the shaded sidewalk.

SALOON OWNER

That would be me, sheriff. Stewart
was drinkin' pretty late.

REUBEN

Before morning?

The saloon owner nods his head.

REUBEN

By my calculations Hunter has a
good nine hour lead on us. I want
riders sent out to warn the
surrounding towns and farms...

JIM

Taken care of, Reuben.

REUBEN

Good man. He's armed and
potentially dangerous...

Some people in the crowd murmur.

MOB MEMBER NO. 1

Potentially dangerous?! He murdered
Jim!

The crowd murmurs their assent. A few more join the ranks.
FRED GEARY, 28, black hair and piercing green eyes, steps
closer to the sheriff.

FRED

He deserves to hang!

The assent grows louder. Reuben sees that he has a growing
mob on his hands.

REUBEN

I haven't seen what happened yet.
But hear this, justice will be

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

REUBEN (cont'd)
served. We need to know more about
what happened before looking for
more blood.

MOB MEMBER
We don't have time for this. You
said it yerself, he's got a head
start.

REUBEN
When I get back I'll organize a
posse. Until then, nothing happens.

The sheriff turns his horse around and gallops off to the
scene of the crime.

Mob member number two spits on the ground.

FRED
Aw heck, what does he know? Old age
is gettin' to him I say.

JIM
You watch your tongue, Fred Geary.
Reuben knows what he's doin.

FRED
Wasting valuable time is what he's
doin.

The mob clusters around Fred.

FRED
We need to get Hunter now before he
kills again.

The mob roars in agreement. Jim sadly shakes his head.

EXT. FIELD-CONTINUOUS

Hunter leads the horse from the woods onto a green ridge
overlooking a nearby farm. He stops to let the horse graze
and surveys the surrounding area.

A farmhand situated by the fence below the ridge fires a
rifle and hits Hunter in the left arm.

The horse starts as Hunter falls to the ground and rolls out
of the line of fire. Grimacing from the pain and doubled
over, he manages to overtake and get back on the horse
before riding off in the opposite direction of the farm.

EXT. DIRT ROAD-THIRTY MINUTES LATER

The mob rides by the same farm and are waved down by three farmhands in the middle of the road. The one that shot Hunter has an animated conversation with Fred, after which he points in the direction of the ridge.

The mob takes off for the ridge, leaving the farmhands in a cloud of dust.

EXT. PLAINS-CONTINUOUS

The horse trots along, with Hunter hunched over the saddle, barely staying on. His left arm bounces in a makeshift sling, inducing a groan from Hunter. There is a small stream of blood on the horse's flank.

EXT. RIDGE-CONTINUOUS

The mob reaches the ridge and look around. The one in the back points to a spot of blood on the ground. After finding which direction the trail of blood points to, they continue on in hot pursuit.

EXT. PLAINS-CONTINUOUS

Hunter notices his blood on the horse and looks back. Getting off of the horse, he pulls out his pistol and shoots the horse in the hind left leg, and slaps it on the rump. The horse gallops away to the left.

Hunter re-dresses his wound and walks off to the right after throwing the pistol away.

EXT. PLAINS-CONTINUOUS

The mob continues to track the blood trail.

EXT. PLAINS-CONTINUOUS

Hunter, now on foot, looks up and sees a nearby farm house. He gets close to the house before collapsing.

INT. FARMHOUSE-MOMENTS LATER

Hunter starts to slowly awaken. He finds himself staring at the ceiling near the door. Looking to the left he sees a kindly woman. LEANNE MASTERSON, 36, blonde hair, blue eyes, cleans his wound with a wet cloth.

Looking to the right, Hunter sees the smooth cylindrical barrel of a shotgun in the hands of a not-so-kind man. FRANK MASTERSON, 39, brown hair, blue eyes, glares down at him.

FRANK

We know who you are.

HUNTER

I didn't kill him...it was an accident.

LEANNE

He doesn't look like a killer, Fred. They said he was armed and dangerous.

HUNTER

Who?

EXT. PLAINS-CONTINUOUS

The mob rides up to a farm house. Dismounting, they draw their guns and approach the house, fanning out as they go.

INT. FARMHOUSE-CONTINUOUS

FRANK

Where's your gun?

HUNTER

Don't have one.

FRANK

Then what happened to the deputy?

HUNTER

You'd never believe it.

EXT. FARMHOUSE NO. 2-CONTINUOUS

Jim breaks into the house along with two other mob members.

INT. FARMHOUSE NO. 2-CONTINUOUS

The house is empty.

INT. FARMHOUSE-CONTINUOUS

FRANK

A'h don't believe it.

HUNTER

I'm not asking you to. All I ask is that you let me stay here until I feel well enough to be on my way.

FRANK

Why should we trust you?

HUNTER

I'm not threatening anybody. Whatever they said about me isn't true.

Frank lowers his shotgun.

FRANK

A'right...but not a second more.

HUNTER

Thank you.

EXT. FARMHOUSE NO. 2-CONTINUOUS

Most of the mob is standing near the door to the house. Fred comes around the house with a horse. LUKE MICHAELS, 26, red hair and matching eyes, looks up.

FRED

Look what I found wandering around.

LUKE

A horse. How does that help us?

FRED

Not just any horse. This one's got a wounded leg.

(CONTINUED)

LUKE

So what?

FRED

Your brain could bounce around in a bird's nostril like a B.B. in a boxcar, Luke.

Fred turns the horse around so everyone can see the wound.

FRED

This horse's been shot, and not too long ago I reckon. Boys...we've been had. Who else lives around these parts?

MOB MEMBER

The Mastersons. Over by the creek.

They mount and continue on their way.

EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE-CONTINUOUS

Sheriff Harmon walks up the creaking steps to the office and stands in front of the doorway. Taking a breath, he opens the door and starts to step into the office.

INT. FARMHOUSE-CONTINUOUS

HUNTER

...almost asleep when he came in.
Had a half drunk bottle of
something in his hand.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE-CONTINUOUS

Reuben steps into the office and looks around. Aside from a coroner, JEFF WALTERS, 40, oily black hair and brown eyes, investigating Stewart's lifeless body, he is the only person there.

He sees the barren cell where Hunter was held. His gaze rests on a mostly empty bottle of whiskey by the chair.

INT. FARMHOUSE-CONTINUOUS

HUNTER

After I finally fell asleep, I woke up to the sound of a bullet whizzin' by my ear. As I opened my eyes I saw the deputy fall over...dead as a doornail.

LEANNE

And then what happened?

HUNTER

It was a miracle...or something. The bullet destroyed the lock to my cell door. I pushed it open and that was that.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE-CONTINUOUS

The sheriff continues to walk around the office, noticing small marks on the walls and on the lock where the bullet hit. He looks confused.

JEFF

Doesn't add up, sheriff. Jim said the body was full o' holes. Only one I can find is lodged in this here head.

REUBEN

Only one bullet?

JEFF

That's right. Less'n he collected the rest.

REUBEN

I doubt it. He wouldn't want to linger around here any longer than he'd have to.

Reuben scratches his beard as he looks around the room and thinks. He chuckles softly to himself.

JEFF

What's the joke, sheriff?

REUBEN

You wouldn't believe it.

EXT. PLAINS-CONTINUOUS

Fred in the lead, the mob bears down on the Materson's farm. Frank and Leanne walk out the door and greet them.

FRANK
What can we help you with?

FRED
Cut the crap. Where is he?

FRANK
Who?

FRED
I hate repeatin' myself.

Fred hops down from his horse and knocks Frank to the ground with the butt of his rifle. Leanne, sobbing, rushes to hold Frank.

LEANNE
Leave us alone!

FRED
You tell us where Hunter is and we will.

FRANK
I don't know what you're talkin' about.

FRED
I bet yur wife does.

Fred shoots Frank in the foot. Leanne screams. Fred steps closer and points his rifle at Frank's head.

FRED
Where. Is. He?

Leanne points behind the house.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE-CONTINUOUS

REUBEN
...and shot him right in the head.

JEFF
Ah don't believe it.

(CONTINUED)

REUBEN

It's the only explanation that makes any sense at all. Hunter would never do something like that.

JEFF

You'd better tell that mob before they find 'im.

REUBEN

What mob?

EXT. PLAINS-CONTINUOUS

Hunter is running across a barren plain towards a rocky hill. There's barely any cover at all between him and his destination. He glances back to see the mob at a distance. He quickens his pace as they give chase.

EXT. TOWN STREET-OUTSIDE THE SALOON-CONTINUOUS

Sheriff Harmon rides to the saloon and leaps off his horse. Nobody is in sight. He rushes up the steps and pushes the doors open.

INT. SALOON-CONTINUOUS

Reuben enters the saloon. The building is vacant, except for Jim who is heedlessly helping himself to a bottle of whiskey at the bar. Reuben approaches the bar.

REUBEN

Jim...what happened? Where is everyone?

EXT. PLAINS-CONTINUOUS

Hunter tries to escape by climbing over the rocks. The mob rushes in, firing wildly. Most of the bullets miss their mark, but a few find their way into Hunter's side and right leg. Fred stops his horse and takes aim with his rifle. He fires.

INT. SALOON-CONTINUOUS

JIM
Nuthin' I could do abou'
it...didn't list-en to me one bit.

Reuben takes a seat next to Jim and fills pours himself a glass of whiskey.

FADE OUT / FADE IN

EXT. PLAINS-SOME HOURS LATER

Hunter's horse rides towards the sunset on the horizon.

FADE OUT