

A PRICE FOR REWARD

Episode #2: "The Robbery"

Written by

Steel Bey

Screenplay

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steel@steelbey.com

FADE IN ON:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Fifty meters from THE BANK an old Ford truck sits idling. Through a hole in the back window we hear -

DANIEL
(under his breath)
Fuck.

Sitting in the front, silhouetted by the blinding sun DANIEL (40's) struggles to open the action of a clearly worn-down SHOTGUN. Frustrated he YANKS it, whipping the end of the gun towards his feet. Now open, he chambers a shell and tucks the gun into a large duffle bag. His gaze rises from the bag to the Bank across the street...

INT. BANK ENTRANCE - DAY

A scared BANK LENDER (30's) slowly raises her hands. A few feet in front of her Daniel stands, donning an oversized ski mask, his duffle bag on the ground and shotgun in hand... shaking.

DANIEL
Money on the counter. NOW!

Daniel tosses the duffle bag onto the counter. The oversized ski mask slides down his face covering his eyes. He quickly pushes it back up.

The Lender tries to open the small safe below her desk. She can't get it open... *What now?*

Two nervous BYSTANDERS sit against the far wall, hands in the air. One of them COUGHS Daniel WHIPS to face them, gun aimed. As he looks away the Lender DIVES across the counter and grabs hold of the gun, Wrestling it away from-

BANG!

The Lender drops DEAD. Daniel tries to pump the gun and reload: Jammed. *Shit.* The mask slides over his eyes again, frustrated he rips it off and for the first time we see his face: hollow, fatigued, lifeless.

His eyes LOCK with one of the Bystanders. He's been made. Panicked, he pumps the gun again, still jammed, *oh Fuck.* The bystander, noticing, reaches for his ankle. *FUCK!* Daniels legs move faster than his mind can register, abandoning the duffle bag on the counter.

From his ankle the Bystander pulls a small HANDGUN. Daniel sprints towards the door, hearing a gun being cocked behind him...

BANG!

Blood drips down the side of Daniels SHOULDER. He's been hit, but not fatally. His right hand now covered in blood, stains the door as he pushes his way OUT OF THE BANK.

EXT. BANK - CONTINUOUS

Shotgun in his left hand, blood dripping from his right, Daniel sees his CAR, still idling fifty meters away.

The town is EMPTY, gunshots have scared everyone into hiding. A few eyes peak from nearby windows.

Daniel struggles to catch his breath as he scrambles for his KEYS.

The BANK DOOR SWINGS OPEN, the bystander marching forward, gun aimed, he FIRES! The bullet cracking a hole in the front windshield of the car.

Daniel finds his key and RIPS the door open, launching himself in and shifting into gear. He can't see a thing through the CRACKED WINDSHIELD. The engine ROARS, tires SKID, and the old car takes off like a bat out of hell. The Bystander FIRES three more shots, only landing one on the back side of the car.

Racing through the small town road Daniels car passes under the towns GATEWAY ARCH.

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EXT. FARMHOUSE - SUNRISE

Sunrise illuminates the barren farm. EARL, gripping the trail camera and a knife, walks up to a faded scarecrow. He slits a small opening in the torso and tucks the camera inside.

EXT. TOWN ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

Entering town Earl walks under the Gateway Arch. The arch stands as a timeless sentinel at the towns edge. The sun behind it, it casts a long shadow, an anachronistic emblem of a bygone era, it's intricate metalwork a testament to the town's once-grand aspirations.

It frames the entrance like a portal to another age, a proud, if solitary, piece of art in an otherwise forgotten town. Earl's silhouetted figure and shadow becoming one with the arch as he trudges forward.

Earl strides down main street, his boots stirring up dust devils with every step. The Locals, gaunt as the day is long, shoot him sideways glances, their eyes hollow pits of resentment. An OLD LADY, her rocker creaking like an ancient floorboard, gnaws at her fingernail with the desperation of a starving rat.

OLD LADY
(With a crooked grin)
They Sproutin' yet, Earl?

Earl doesn't break stride, the question hanging in the air like smoke in a saloon. He knows each icy stare that follows him whispers blame. Their bellies empty, his fields barren - in their eyes, he's the drought personified.

The sheriff's office squats at the end of the street, it's paint peeling like sunburnt skin, windows dustier than a miners cough. The door hangs crooked on a single hinge, creaking, the ghosts of order long gone.

A BOOMING VOICE can be heard from inside, spilling out into the street.

MAN (O.S.)
-and let me tell ya, folks, justice
in our town ain't just a word; it's
a promise. A promise that I intend
to keep, come hell or high water...

Earl approaches, the gravelly voice growing louder with each step. He pauses at the door, removing his Stetson with reverence for tradition... or maybe just a habit.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Shafts of light cut through the gloom, illuminating the chaos of an office that's seen better days.

MAN (O.S.)
Because no stone goes unturned, no
shadow unchecked, That's the duty I
swore to uphold, and uphold it I
will. As sure as the sun sets in
the-

A sharp KNOCK interrupts him. Earl, impatient, doesn't wait for an invitation.

MAN
 ...West...

The broadcast cuts abruptly and we see SHERIFF BROOKS (the voice we've been hearing), aged beyond his years. His Presence alone explains the disarray. Too old to rock the chair, too stubborn to hand over the reins. He turns his chair, peering over the mountain of papers, his eyes narrowing as he sees Earl. A switch flips, the showman's bravado replaced by the weariness of the long held office.

A large, faded map of the county dominates one wall, peppered with pins and scribbles. In the corner a hefty safe sits ajar. Brooks BOLTS upright, a predators attention catching Earl's sent.

BROOKS
 Earl, You son of a gun.

Closing the safe with a THUD, he strides over, a wry grin splitting his weathered face. Earl clocks the safe's size.

EARL
 Brooks.

They shake hands, an uneasy electricity in their grip. Settling across the desk, Brooks jabs a thumb at a half empty bottle of whisky.

BROOKS
 Toast to the dead?

EARL
 Not thirsty.

BROOKS
 Shame. That teller's blood's worth
 a drink, Don't ya think?

The silence is heavy, broken only by the ceiling fans erratic metronome.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
 Spit it out Earl. Why the house
 call?

EARL
 (A deep sigh)
 Brooks, it's complica-

BROOKS
 -Cut the crap. The bottom line,
 Earl.

Earl hesitates, his pride holding him back.

EARL

The farm's grasping it's last.

Brooks perks up, an opportunistic glint in his eye.

BROOKS

There's a bounty for info-

Earl slaps the paper with the bounty on the desk, his eyes screaming 'not enough'.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Can't help you then.

Earl's gaze flicks to the safe again, a silent accusation.

EARL

What if I dragged him in, dead as dust?

A chuckle rumbles from Brooks, bourbon lubricated and dark.

BROOKS

And if frogs had wings, they wouldn't bump their ass when they hopped.

EARL

No Joke. I'll deliver him dead. Self defense.

BROOKS

You'd be just as dead, Earl.

EARL

Dead here, or dead there. What's the difference if I'm landless?

Brooks softens, the reality of Earl's plight washing over him.

BROOKS

Earl, you're the backbone of this place.

EARL

(A hollow laugh)
Backbone's broke.

Brooks leans in, the stench of whisky and schemes mixing.

BROOKS
Exactly how broke?

EARL
Hundred grand.

Brooks pauses, the numbers settling like dust in the room. He takes a long swig.

EARL (CONT'D)
Think of the cash you'd keep in your pocket, no deputies risking their necks. No need for the manhunt, the overtime, the hazard pay. You wouldn't have to explain to some deputies wife why her husband ain't coming home. And let's not forget the press... No circling vultures looking for a story. Just a clean end to a dirty problem.

Brooks eyes the bottle, then earl. The gears turn...

BROOKS
And how exactly am I supposed to keep the townsfolk calm? Ain't no trust without transparency. If they don't see a posse out there or hear about an official bounty hunter, they'll think I'm just sittin' here, waiting for someone else to do my job.

Earl's eyes narrow, a plan forming...

EARL
You've got your radio show, don't you? You spin the tale. Every night, you give them an update- 'anonymous tips,' 'leads being followed.' Keep the hope on the airwaves. They don't need to see boots on the ground when they've got their ears glued to your voice, believing justice is hot on the trail. Besides, the people of this town are tired, they need a distraction.

Brooks taps his fingers on the desk, the idea taking root. The less he shows, the more they listen, the more they believe.

BROOKS
(nodding slowly)
Keep the legend alive without the
parade.

EARL
Exactly. You keep the calm, I do
the dirty work, and we both get
what we want.

The sheriff's eyes, usually a hard flint, show a spark of something else-greed or relief, it's hard to say. He takes one last sip of the bourbon.

BROOKS
I'll make a call.

Earl manages a smile as he gets up from the chair.

EARL
Thank you Brooks.

Earl opens the door, one foot out...

BROOKS
One last thing before you go.

He turns to face.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
Last we saw, he was heading north
towards the woods.

Earl nods, puts his Stetson back on, and exits.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Determined, Earl pulls the camera out of the scarecrow, And heads toward the house.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Earl pops open the camera, yanks the SD card, and jabs it into his laptop. He goes through the footage, skimming though every clip... Hours pass until...

EARL
Gotcha.

On-screen: A grainy figure in all black, harvests crops.

Earl's jaw sets, a predator locking onto his prey.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - SUNSET

Earl, under the setting sun, zeroes in on a patch of upturned earth. He crouches, looking closer at the soil beneath him when he finds BLOOD dried into the dirt. His eyes track to his left, a few more stains further down... He follows the tracks for a couple meters, then suddenly stops. Looking up he sees the forest in front of him. He pulls out his compass: North.

INT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Gear lines the table: jerky, a flask of water, coils of rope. Earls hands are quick, efficient. He stuffs a map into his backpack, alongside a compass and a handful of shells. A flash of steel-his knife slides into it's sheath. He snaps his rifles action closed, straps the pack tight, and slings the rifle over his shoulder. Earl pauses, the town silent beyond the window, one final look. Then he's out the door, the CLICK of the lock punctuating his departure.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Earl steps into the forest. Light fading as the branches above him fill the sky.

He winds deeper into the heart of the forest, the remnants of a passage mark his trail - droplets of blood clinging to leaves, a broken twig, compressed patches of dirt.

He pauses, examining a footprint, the depth telling of a recent passage. His eyes lift to follow a trail of bent branches, *whoever was here, was in a hurry.*

As he makes his way along the path he STOPS. A faint smell passes through him. Smoke. In the distance, an orange glow, smoke rising from it... Earls movements become calculated, his breathe controlled. The distant sound of footsteps crunches through the forest floor. Earl quietly hides behind the trunk of a large tree, rifle raised, his eyes in narrow focus.

A shadow moves, not his - something or someone is out there...

THE END