

GRAVEDIGGER

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EXT. TWIN RANGE - STREET - DAY - 1882

Through a telescope's view, an empty desert plain shimmers in the blistering heat.

A YOUNG BOY (8) stands on the patio of a run-down general store, holding the telescope. Aside from the CREAKS of old wood and the HOWL of the wind, he stands in silence.

THUD! The telescope hits the ground! The boy runs as fast as he can. As we--

INT. SALOON - CONTINUOUS

--follow the boy into a packed saloon. BOUNTY HUNTERS... ten, twenty, more... Their commotion is deafening.

The Boy weaves through them and sneaks behind the bar. He whispers something to the BARTENDER (40s), a large man, stalky, rough, and somehow, whatever the Boy just told him scares him.

The Bartender grabs a shotgun from under the bar and raises it above his head...

BANG! Silence falls as everyone turns to look.

EXT. TWIN RANGE - CONTINUOUS

It no longer takes a telescope to see what the Boy saw. Blurred by waves of heat, a speck in the distance grows larger... Someone's coming.

INT. SALOON - CONTINUOUS

The Bounty Hunters load their guns, keeping them ready. Under tables, tucked into boots, nobody makes a sound.

A TEEN BOY (16) fumbles with his gun, hands shaking as he reloads it.

TING! He drops a bullet on the ground. The whole bar turns to face him. Overwhelmed, he sprints for the door.

BANG! A bullet hits the wall beside the Teen's head. He freezes, then slowly turns to face the shooter, CULLEN FARLEY (50s), a rugged man covered in the kind of scars and burns that would make an ordinary man wish he were dead. Farley points his gun towards the Teen's seat. 'Sit.' The Teen does as he's told.

Farley looks over at the bartender and gives him a nod. The bartender looks at the young boy and tilts his head towards the door.

The young boy glances at the door, then back at the bartender. His eyes remain steady, silently insisting.

EXT. TWIN RANGE - STREET - CONTINUOUS

We follow the boy out into the street. He runs away from the saloon until he sees something that forces him to stop.

From the boy's POV, a black steed, mountainous and wild, a beast beyond the control of any ordinary man, and no ordinary man rode it.

Our view is blinded by the sun, revealing only the silhouette of this legendary character. Notably, a shovel hangs from the back of the horse's saddle.

The man takes his hat off and places it on the boy's head.

MAN

Hold onto that for me, will ya?

Doors shut as the mysterious figure rides past them. An OLD WOMAN on her rocking chair pauses, her knitting needles trembling. She hurriedly retreats inside, slamming her door.

WINDOW SHUTTERS are drawn tight, and even the WIND seems to hold its breath.

There's no escape. The street is deserted, save for the boy and the rider.

INT. SALOON - CONTINUOUS

The bartender walks to the front of the building and closes the blinds. The only light enters from the saloon entrance, a harsh contrast to the dark corners of the room.

A series of nervous and dirty faces. The clicking of a broken ceiling fan. The creak of a chair. A gust of wind pushes against the entrance doors. The sound of hooves drawing closer.

Farley, still seated, keeps his gaze on the door, his fingers tapping lightly on his holstered gun.

A SINGLE BEAD OF SWEAT rolls down the TEEN BOY's forehead as he clutches his weapon tightly, his knuckles white.

A few of the more seasoned Bounty Hunters exchange glances, a silent understanding passing between them.

We hear two feet land on the ground and a smack to the back of the horse as it runs off. Whoever this is, he has no plans on leaving.

The footsteps draw closer. Patrons begin to pull their guns out, all aiming towards the entrance.

Silence. The footsteps stop. We wait... holding on the anxious teen... we wait a little too long...

One man slowly rises, gun pointed towards the entrance as he moves to get a closer look. He inches towards the door, ALL EYES ON HIM. Sweat dripping down his face, he LUNGES out the door.

Nobody's there?

TING! Everyone turns to the noise in the back corner, FIRING at it without hesitation. A man sits, throat SLIT open, bleeding out.

Two more bodies FALL, shots coming from the darkened corners of the room.

PATRON

Somebody open those goddamn blinds!

Chaos erupts. Tables flip over. Bodies drop to the floor.

We only see the mysterious Man's actions through brief inserts:

He grabs a new gun off a body, fires two quick shots.

Patrons duck for cover, returning fire blindly into the dark corners.

He flips a table, using it as a shield. Bullets splinter the wood.

The Bartender dives for cover behind the bar, frantically reloading a shotgun.

Farley stands amidst the chaos, his eyes scanning for the unseen assailant.

Another Patron falls, a bullet to the chest. Screams and gunfire fill the air.

The mysterious Man moves with lethal precision, a shadow in the chaos.

In a fluid motion, he disarms a Bounty Hunter, using the man's own gun to take down another.

PATRON (CONT'D)

Get those blinds open!

A bullet shatters a whiskey bottle, glass flying. The room is a blur of motion and violence.

Farley notices the man move behind a post and clips his shoulder, but the man returns fire straight to his face. Farley drops dead, crumpling to the floor with a heavy thud.

The bartender watches in horror as another man reaches for the blinds, only to be cut down by a bullet. He ducks behind the bar, terrified, his heart pounding.

We stay with him, jumping with each blast as it turns from many to few... then to none...

Silence. The smoke begins to clear, the echoes of gunfire fading. The saloon is a wasteland of bodies and overturned tables.

The bartender, shaking, slowly rises, his breath shallow and ragged.

Suddenly, we hear the COCK of a pistol.

We pull back to reveal the gun placed on the back of the Bartender's neck.

MAN

You got a bottle of something strong back here?

The Bartender, hands trembling, reaches under the bar and pulls out a dusty bottle of whiskey. He places it on the counter with a shaky hand.

BARTENDER

Hope you find it to your liking.

The Man takes the bottle, pours himself a shot, and downs it in one gulp. He eyes the bartender with a weary gaze, the weight of countless battles evident in his eyes.

MAN

I figured an ambush with thirty men would've been enough. Thought I'd meet my end in a blaze of glory, not... this.

The Bartender remains silent, watching as the man pours another drink. The man slams the shot back, then leans on the bar, his expression softening slightly.

MAN (CONT'D)

Funny thing, death. Spend your whole life running towards it, thinking it's the end of all your troubles. Then, when it finally stares you in the face, you realize... it's just another door. One you gotta open alone.

The Bartender takes a deep breath, his eyes fixed on the scarred man before him.

BARTENDER

I have a son.

The Man looks up, surprise flickering across his rugged features. He studies the bartender for a moment, then nods.

MAN

Does he have a mother?

BARTENDER

No.

A heavy silence hangs in the air. The Man's hardened exterior cracks just a bit, a hint of empathy showing through.

MAN

I'm sorry.

The man grabs the bottle and pours a shot for the bartender, sliding it across the bar. The bartender hesitates, then takes it, downing the drink in one gulp. He sets the glass down, his hands still shaking.

EXT. TWIN RANGE - STREET - CONTINUOUS

The sun casts long shadows across the dusty street. The silence is thick, broken only by the distant sound of the wind.

A single GUNSHOT rings out, echoing through the empty town.

INT. SALOON - CONTINUOUS

INSERT - THE FACES OF THE DEAD

A YOUNG BOUNTY HUNTER (20s), his eyes wide open in a final, shocked expression.

A SEASONED VETERAN (50s), his face etched with lines of experience and fear.

The TEEN BOY, his youthful features forever frozen in terror.

The Man moves slowly, deliberately, his eyes lingering on each face. He pauses by Farley's body, taking in the rugged man's lifeless form.

He walks to the center of the saloon, finding a seat amid the overturned tables and shattered glass. He sits down heavily, his shoulders slumping.

His eyes glisten with unshed tears as he looks around at the destruction. He takes a deep breath, fighting to keep his composure.

EXT. TWIN RANGE - DESERT - MOMENTS LATER

Shovel pierces dirt, one by one the Man starts to dig individual graves. The sun beats down, casting long shadows as he works tirelessly.

From a distance, the Young Boy watches. The man notices him but continues digging, understanding the Boy's need to observe.

A while later, the Boy approaches again, this time with a smaller shovel in hand. He begins to dig alongside the man, his presence quiet at first, but soon, the questions begin.

BOY

Why are you digging so many graves?

MAN

Because these men deserve to be buried.

BOY

Why did you shoot them all?

MAN

They made a choice, son. Sometimes, choices come with consequences.

BOY

Did you know them?

MAN

Not personally. Just knew what they stood for.

BOY

What did they stand for?

The Man pauses, wiping sweat from his brow. He looks at the Boy, seeing the innocent curiosity in his eyes.

MAN

They were bounty hunters. Some good, some bad. But today, they were all in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The Boy continues to dig, asking questions with the relentless curiosity of youth.

BOY

What's gonna happen now?

MAN

Life goes on. Folks will mourn, some will seek revenge, others will move on.

BOY

Did you ever lose someone?

MAN

Yes. More than I care to count.

Finally, the Boy stops digging and looks up at the Man, his eyes wide and filled with a new question.

BOY

Which one's for my daddy?

The Man sets his shovel down, takes a breath and walks over to a freshly dug grave. The Boy follows, and they both stare at the hole in the ground.

BOY (CONT'D)

Did my daddy deserve to die?

The Man kneels down, looking the boy in the eye. His voice is soft, yet firm.

MAN

I don't know if your daddy deserved to die. Maybe he did, maybe he was hanging around with the wrong crew, or maybe he just got unlucky.

(MORE)



MAN (CONT'D)

Sometimes people just die, and there ain't a damn thing you can do about it. I tried to do something about it, tried to right a wrong, tried to purge some chaos from these lands, and now I'm digging your daddy's grave.

The Boy's eyes well up with tears, but he doesn't cry. He nods, understanding more than a child should have to.

BOY

Can I help bury him?

MAN

Yes, you can.

The Man and the Boy continue to work together, the sun setting behind them. They dig in silence.

They finish digging the last grave. The Boy hands the Man his hat back.

BOY

I don't want it anymore.

The man takes the hat, nodding in understanding. He whistles for his horse, which trots over obediently. He hitches the shovel to the saddle and mounts the horse. He rides through the row of graves, the hats of the dead placed on each.

The Boy sits on his father's grave. The Man stops his horse and looks back at the boy.

MAN

You need a ride someplace?

BOY

I ain't leaving my daddy.

The Man nods and turns his horse, riding back through town the opposite way he came.

EXT. TWIN RANGE - STREET - DAY

The main street is quiet, empty, the Man rides through.

Suddenly, the Boy runs onto the street about twenty yards away, staring him down. The Man stops his horse and turns to face him.

For a moment, they lock eyes, a silent understanding passing between them.

The man tips his hat, a gesture of respect and farewell. He then turns his horse and continues down the street, leaving the Boy and the town behind.