

THE DEPTHS

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. PLAINS - DAY

Horse hooves pound a dusty trail. A full sprint.

JACKSON, male, 40s, gritty as hell, rides hard, urgent. Gold pans and other supplies draped behind his saddle bounce with every stride.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

A quiet night. Horse and carriage sit out front.

Jackson, his horse dripping with sweat, rounds the corner. He dismounts, barely waiting for his horse to stop, runs for the front door.

As he opens the cabin door, DOC, male, 60s, stethoscope around his neck, slides past him.

DOC

There's nothing more I can do.

Jackson ignores him, rushes into the cabin as Doc drops his bag into the carriage, climbs aboard.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

One room. Flames from a fireplace provide the only light.

Jackson pulls a chair to a bed in the corner, where MARTHA, female, 60s, fights to breathe. Her eyes flutter open and she smiles as he kisses her forehead.

MARTHA

Did you find any?

JACKSON

I don't give a hoot in hell about gold right now, Ma.

He spots a Bible on a nearby shelf.

JACKSON

Since when you read that?

MARTHA

Stay?

He takes her hand.

JACKSON
Of course.

A weak smile creases her face.

MARTHA
I knew you'd come.

INT. CABIN - DAY

Morning light filters through the windows.

Jackson, asleep in the chair, stirs awake, pries his hand from his mother's.

EXT. CABIN - BACK - DAY

Jackson, covered in fresh dirt, holds his mother's Bible as he stands over a new grave behind the cabin.

FATHER THOMAS (O.S.)
Hello?

Jackson wipes tears from his dirty cheeks.

EXT. CABIN - FRONT - DAY

Jackson rounds the corner to see: a horse tied out front and the cabin door open. He pulls a derringer from his boot and slips into the cabin.

INT. CABIN - DAY

Jackson presses the derringer to the back of the neck of...
FATHER THOMAS, 30s, soft and round, dressed in a gray missionary's habit and a large, flat brimmed hat.

Trying to hid the move, the priest slips his hand from his pocket...

FATHER THOMAS
I'm from the mission, down the
road. Father Thomas. Here for
Martha.

Jackson lowers the gun. Father Thomas turns around, cautiously.

Jackson stares, cold.

FATHER THOMAS

I see -- I'm sorry. I'll say a prayer.

He steps for the door, hesitates, turns.

FATHER THOMAS

I -- uh -- did she happen to mention the gift -- a donation -- to the mission? She told me --

Jackson lunges for his throat, presses him against the wall.

FATHER THOMAS

I'm a man of God!

Jackson reaches into the priest's pocket. He pulls out a silver spoon.

EXT. LAKE - DAY

Father Thomas rows a small boat. Facing him, Jackson, derringer in hand.

FATHER THOMAS

Derringer. Interesting choice.

JACKSON

What do you know about guns? A so-called man of God?

FATHER THOMAS

I've been in California long enough to know, men like you don't carry derringers.

JACKSON

I'm no cowboy. No bandit, either. Not like you.

FATHER THOMAS

Like me? No --

Jackson leans back while Father Thomas keeps rowing. He studies the gun.

JACKSON

It was my mama's. Protect herself from men like you.

FATHER THOMAS

The spoon -- I fear it may have given you the wrong impression.

JACKSON
Gave it to me when I went for the
shine. Prospecting.

Father Thomas stops rowing.

FATHER THOMAS
You find any? Gold?

Jackson thinks for a moment. Then, pulls several small bags
from his pocket, tosses them to the boat's floor. They land
with a CLINK. Coins.

Father Thomas leans forward, his interest clearly piqued.

Jackson, using the derringer, motions to the bags: Go ahead.

Father Thomas picks them up.

JACKSON
You can keep 'em.

Father Thomas hesitates. But, puts them in his pocket.

JACKSON
Blood money.

FATHER THOMAS
There's nothing in the good book
that says prospecting is --

Jackson flares...

JACKSON
I ain't talking about prospecting!

He gathers himself.

JACKSON
Not directly anyway.

He motions for Father Thomas to turn around.

The priest squirms, but the derringer pointed at his head
provides the motivation.

Jackson ties Father Thomas' hands behind his back. He spins
the man back around, leans in close.

JACKSON
I seen those fancy churches back
East. Dripping with gold.

FATHER THOMAS
No -- I'm just --

JACKSON
You ain't Catholic?

FATHER THOMAS
Yes, but --

JACKSON
Preying on sick, old women like my
mother.

FATHER THOMAS
No -- she -- she needed Jesus. I'm
the one who saved her -- you should
be thanking me.

Jackson yanks a pocket watch from his vest, jams it in Father Thomas' lap.

He reaches into another pocket, takes out a few coins, throws them at the priest.

JACKSON
That's everything I own. You can
have it all.

He stands, holds his arms out wide. The boat rocks violently.

FATHER THOMAS
Please -- !

Jackson looks to the sky.

JACKSON
Forgive me, Father, for I have
sinned.

Jackson, his face twisted in anguish, looks at Father Thomas.

JACKSON
I left her alone. For gold. Hell --
not even gold -- the pursuit of
gold. She suffered alone. Except
for the company of men like you.

Jackson, in one fast motion, shoots a hole in the boat floor. Water rushes in.

Pulling a bullet from his pocket, he quickly reloads. Jackson jams the derringer under his own chin as tears stream down his cheeks.

JACKSON
Forgive me, Mother.

He pulls the trigger.

His dead body quickly drops onto Father Thomas' lap.

EXT. LAKE - UNDERWATER - DAY

The sunken boat drifts past. Followed by...

Father Thomas, hands tied behind his back, flailing furiously as he sinks to the bottom.

Jackson's body comes next. Peaceful and still.

The derringer, the Bible, and finally...

A gold coin.

FADE OUT.