

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 hide 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.

The priest tries to play it off with a look: I have no idea how that got there.

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.

The thought doesn't even register for Jackson.

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 God. 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.