

A Crystal Ball Clouded

By

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FADE IN:

EXT. HILL - DAWN

A rugged hill rises from the edge of woodland. In the valley below is a large town. The sun casts light on a cliff face.

SUPER - BILLINGS - MONTANA TERRITORY JUNE 1880

A horse and covered wagon wait near the cliff. The wagon has exotic designs painted on it boasting:

'THE AMAZING MARIA * FORTUNE TELLER * SHE KNOWS YOUR FUTURE'

An opening in the rocks leads gradually to a cave. To one side is a wide hole, the edges of a ladder visible.

POV as someone nears the wagon. Footsteps...the goods in the back of the wagon are examined: fine dresses, boxes of jewelry, a satchel full of money. VOICES from the hole...

INT. CAVE - DAWN

By the light of a lantern, a MAN and WOMAN pack up more goods ready to remove. They are: FLOYD(30) tall, handsome, dressed in a neat suit, and MARIA(25) blonde, attractive, wearing a riding skirt and smart jacket.

FLOYD

One more trip and we're done.

MARIA

Thank the Lord. I can't wait to get out of this piss ant town.

A noise from above...the crunch of boot on stone. The couple freeze. Floyd puts a finger to his lips. Maria nods, takes a revolver from a bag, holds it by her side.

A FIGURE appears on the edge of the hole. The sunlight reveals a MAN wearing a long black coat and hat. TOM(23) looks calmly down at Floyd and Maria.

FLOYD

Ah, good morning, young man. Can we help you? We're just retrieving some goods we stored here.

Tom smiles, but there's no mirth in it. He lifts his arm to show he's holding a sawn off double barrel shotgun.

TOM

No use making up a story. I know what you and your wife have been up to the last two weeks.

MARIA

You mean reading the palms of the good people of Billings? Giving them some reassuring in their lives? While my husband has helped the needy by doing odd jobs?

Tom muses on this, crouches down. The shotgun isn't aimed directly at them but its not pointed away either.

TOM

That's how it looked on the surface. But I know the truth. You've made your dirty money. Now you're moving on.

Floyd looks startled, glances at Maria. She makes a gesture to her husband, tightens her grip on the revolver.

MARIA

Dirty money? People paid to have their fortunes read. All legal.

TOM

You got more than just cash in that wagon. Clothes, jewelry. I heard people talking at the general store about things missing from their houses. I wager your husband here paid them a visit while they were getting their future told. Also heard talk you're running the old badger game too.

FLOYD

That's a mighty serious accusation, mister...who are you, anyway?

TOM

Name's Tom Reed.

MARIA

All the goods in the wagon are ours. I have the receipts for them.

TOM

I'm guessing those receipts are old. Or fake. Anyways, it don't matter as it's over now.

FLOYD
(whispers)
We have to do something.

MARIA
(whispers)
Go to the ladder. Distract him.

Floyd nods. He edges his way forward.

FLOYD
Look, Mister Reed...Tom. You don't
want to do anything drastic. We can
come to an arrangement, surely?

Tom watches silently. Maria prepares to jump into action but...suddenly, Tom leans down, grabs the top rung of the ladder, steps back quickly, dragging it up.

Floyd YELLS, leaps at the ascending ladder. Maria raises the revolver, whips off three shots at Tom. They whistle harmlessly over his head as he's out of sight now.

Floyd grabs the bottom rung of the ladder. Tries to hang on as he's lifted in the air. The ladder stops for a moment then continues to rise as Tom gets a better grip.

Floyd's hands slip...he can't hold on. He falls back into the hole, landing awkwardly on his left leg. A sickening CRUNCH as his shin bone snaps. Maria steps aside as he tumbles at her feet. Floyd SCREAMS...

FLOYD
Oh Jesus, my leg is broken.

MARIA
God damn it! You son of a bitch.

She kneels next to Floyd, trying to aid him but he's a mess. His SCREAMS become a WHIMPER as shock sets in his body. The ladder vanishes. Tom is at the edge again. Maria looks up, points the gun, pulls the trigger... BANG BANG BANG.

Tom sways back as the bullets fly past, hit the roof of the cave. The hammer clicks on empty. She tosses the weapon away. It hits the lantern, smashing it. Floyd passes out.

MARIA
Why are you doing this? We took
nothing from you.

TOM

That ain't exactly right. Four days ago, my fiancée came to see you. Got her palm read.

He holds up a ring. Maria peers up at it.

TOM

Found this in your wagon. My Sadie's engagement ring. She used it to pay you.

MARIA

I...so? She offered it, I took it.

TOM

The thing is...you told her the future was good. That her unborn baby would be healthy, that her sick father wouldn't die.

He pauses, closes his eyes, SIGHS. A terrible sound.

TOM

Two days ago, Sadie's pa died. That night, she lost our baby.

MARIA

That isn't my fault. I can only__

TOM

Last night my Sadie took this very shotgun and blew her brains out.

A silence. Maria trembles. Floyd stirs, CRIES out.

FLOYD

Water...please...Maria.

She wipes his brow with her sleeve. She looks up at Tom.

MARIA

He needs to get to a doctor. I don't care about being turned over to the law. Just help us, please?

TOM

I have things to attend to. I'll be back in an hour or so.

He disappears. The sound of him GEEING the horse, then the CRUNCH of rocks as the wagon rolls away. Floyd MOANS.

LATER

Floyd is unconscious. Maria sits next to him. Tom appears.

MARIA

You can't leave us here. We'll die.

Tom shrugs. He takes out the shotgun, examines it.

TOM

I've left your wagon behind the town hall. The townsfolk can reclaim what you stole from them.

MARIA

Someone will find us. I'm sure people visit this cave.

TOM

They used to...not any more.

He opens the shotgun, takes out the two shells.

TOM

I got a new job working for the town. This area is being zoned off for new houses. And because there'll be children here, it wouldn't be safe with this cave and the old mine shafts here. So I'm about to put up a fence out the front. With warning signs.

Maria takes all this in, eyes dulled. She glances at her husband. Shakes her head. Looks up at Tom.

MARIA

You bastard.

TOM

I'm not entirely without mercy. Sadie taught me to forgive if I could. So I give you this at least.

He tosses the shotgun down. It hits the ground, bounces a little but isn't damaged. Maria picks it up. The two shells follow, fall at her feet. She picks them up. Stares at them.

TOM

It's more than you deserve.

He walks away. Maria listens until his footsteps fade. Carefully loads the shells. Looks at Floyd. Sits and waits.

FADE OUT