

I RECKON

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

A gritty mining town of the desert southwest. The dirt street is lined with western buildings and boardwalks.

SUPER: Arizona 1880

Aside from the few random kerosene lamps that hang along the boardwalks, the night is coal black.

Suddenly, at the end of the street, there is a silent flash. Brilliant as a strobe and gone just as fast.

From the flash rides the STRANGER. A lone rider dressed in all black atop a pale grey horse.

He rides slowly up the dirt street to a hitching post in front of the saloon and dismounts.

Piano music, laughter, and chatter radiates from the Saloon.

The closer he walks to the Saloon's lighted boardwalk, the darker he appears. As if he's a shadow cast by the night.

EXT. SALOON - CONTINUOUS

POPS (60's), a town drunk, sits on the walk with his back against the wall. He looks pathetic. His face is bloated and yellow with jaundice.

Pops is on the verge of passing out and happily mumbles an unintelligible tune.

Pops eyes suddenly go wide with fear as the Stranger nears.

With his hat low and being back-lit, the Stranger is but a dark silhouette.

POPS

You! I know you...it's time to pay
up, ain't it.

The Stranger squats down next to Pops, shakes his head, and speaks in a low, yet kind, voice.

STRANGER

Not today, Pops. You still have a
chance.

He reaches inside his black duster, pulls out a flask of whiskey, and sets it next to Pops.

STRANGER

Your choice. Rise or fall.

Pops doesn't even hesitate. He grabs the flask and downs a good swig. The Stranger shakes his head again and sighs.

STRANGER

I reckon soon, Pops. Soon.

He reaches over and places a gloved hand on Pop's shoulder. He shudders from the touch and passes out cold.

As the Stranger stands, a young MINER is hurled out the saloon's swinging doors by an unseen PATRON.

PATRON (O.S.)

And don't come back!

The Miner lands face down on the boardwalk and GROANS.

The Stranger kneels down, pulls out a knife and plunges it into the plank next to the Miner. He steps back to watch.

The Miner gets up on his elbows, spits out a mouthful of blood and cusses under his breath.

He notices the knife and yanks it out of the plank. He stands, staggers toward the swinging doors, and stops.

MINER

(to no one in particular)

Nah. T'ain't worth it.

He throws the knife and it sticks into the boardwalk. He walks past the Stranger without acknowledging his presence.

The Stranger nods his head and tips his hat to the Miner. He reaches down and retrieves the knife.

STRANGER

Wise choice.

The Stranger turns and continues down the boardwalk past store fronts closed for the evening.

EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

As he passes the Sheriff's Office, the Stranger stops and pulls out his pocket watch to check the time.

He takes two steps back and looks in the office window.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The SHERIFF is asleep at his desk with his feet propped up and hat tilted forward over his eyes. He snores loudly.

Behind the Sheriff is a jail cell. A lone PRISONER stands on his cot and places a bedsheet noose around his neck.

The Prisoner sobs as he contemplates his fate. As he steps off the bunk, he sees the Stranger in the window.

A look of recognition and horror flashes on the Prisoner's face. He lets out a squeaky YELP as his neck SNAPS.

The body twitches and spins.

EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The Stranger shakes his head and continues his walk.

STRANGER

It's a long fall.

At the end of the block, a sign for a BOARDING HOUSE swings and creaks in the cold night breeze.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - FRONT DESK - CONTINUOUS

The lovely and radiant owner, FELICITY (40's), stands behind the counter and sorts through papers.

The only sound is the loud click of a pendulum wall clock. It's almost midnight.

She GASPS as the front doors suddenly fly open with a gust of wind and blowing leaves.

A handsome and nicely dressed MAN enters with his WIFE and INFANT. The family is black.

The Man approaches the front desk.

MAN

Evening Ma'am. Beggin' your pardon,
but I was wondering---

FELICITY

Nope...git. Can't you read?

She points to a handwritten sign in the entry that says:

NO NIGGROS, CHINEE, OR INJUNS ALLOWED.

MAN

But Ma'am, there's no other place
available tonight. I'll pay
double--

FELICITY

I said NO! Go try the livery at the end of the street. Now git before I call on the Sheriff!

MAN

Don't want no trouble, Ma'am. Sorry for the disturbance.

The Man opens the door to another gust of wind and the family exits into the night.

Felicity goes back to her paperwork and mutters.

FELICITY

God damn niggros.

She does not look as radiant or lovely now. Her beauty was nothing but a facade and now looks plain ugly.

The Stranger steps out from a nearby shadow and abruptly rings the front desk bell.

DING!

The sound of the bell startles Felicity and she jumps back with a shriek.

FELICITY

Sweet Jesus, Mary and Joseph! Oh, I'm so sorry! I didn't see you come in.

As he leans in close, his face remains shadowed and does not reveal any distinguishable markings.

STRANGER

My apologies, dear Felicity. May I call you that? Is that all right?

His voice is deep and smooth with a faint hint of a southern accent. It seems to settle her nerves.

FELICITY

(flustered)

Oh dear me, certainly. I still don't know how I could've missed you coming in, with that wind and all.

She leans forward and acts a bit flirtatious.

FELICITY

Have we met? You know my name...

STRANGER

Perhaps you were distracted with that family of color?

FELICITY

Ugh! Yes, they can be quite a distraction.

The Stranger gives a slight shake of his head and withdraws slightly as if repulsed.

STRANGER

Let's get to the matter at hand. I'm looking for a Miss Elizabeth Jackson. Is she here?

FELICITY

Oh! Of course! You must be the doctor. Her MIDWIFE just sent one of my kitchen help to get you. My, you got here quickly!

STRANGER

Yes, well, Miss Elizabeth. Where can I find her?

FELICITY

Top of the stairs, last door on your left.

As he turns for the stairway, he stops and turns back to Felicity. He places a gloved hand on one of hers and leans in close to whisper.

STRANGER

Rise or fall.

FELICITY

Pardon?

STRANGER

Let me ask, my dear Felicity. If the family of color returned tonight, would you reconsider and rent them a room?

Felicity doesn't think too hard before she answers.

FELICITY

No. Absolutely not. Rules are rules and I'm not about to break them. Especially for them kind!

The Stranger pats her hand.

Felicity COUGHS.

STRANGER

I reckon not. You are a woman of principle.

FELICITY

That's...
 (cough)
 ...right. You got to...
 (COUGH)
 ...stand by your principles.

She goes into a fit of coughs. She coughs harder and harder. She pulls out a white hankie and coughs up bloody phlegm.

The Stranger walks towards the stairs, stops at the bottom and turns to face Felicity.

STRANGER

That's a nasty cough. You should have that looked at.

He points at her.

STRANGER

I'll see you soon.

He ascends the stairs with an effortless glide.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

As he walks down the hall, a distraught MIDWIFE enters from the last door on the left. Tears stream down her face.

She runs straight towards and past the Stranger with a crying NEWBORN wrapped in a blanket.

Even though he tips his hat, she passes him like he wasn't even there.

He enters the last door on the left.

INT. ELIZABETH'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The room is small. It's lighted by a kerosene lamp set on a small dresser next to the single bed.

ELIZABETH (25) lies motionless under blood soaked sheets. The Stranger stands quietly by her side.

Elizabeth's eyes suddenly flutter. She sits up in bed and turns to the Stranger with great concern.

ELIZABETH
How's my baby?

STRANGER
She's perfect.

ELIZABETH
She? Oh thank the Lord. A baby girl. Will she be okay?

STRANGER
Healthy and happy.

ELIZABETH
Does that mean...

STRANGER
Yes, it will be some time till you see her again.

ELIZABETH
That's good...I guess.
(beat)
What happened?

STRANGER
There were complications. Your midwife gave you two options. The first would have risked your child's life yet surely saved your own.
(beat)
You chose the second option.

The Stranger takes off his hat to reveal the handsome face of the black man. His smile is friendly and comforting.

He reaches for and takes one of her hands in his.

EXT. MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

The Stranger and Elizabeth are instantly sitting atop his pale horse on Main Street.

ELIZABETH
What now?

STRANGER
I reckon, we rise.

As the two ride into the night, there is another silent flash and then darkness.

FADE OUT