

EXTERIOR. A WAGON TRAIN DISAPPEARING IN THE DISTANCE. Mike and Letty headed the other way in a wagon. Mike is wearing thick glasses.

MIKE: You shouldn't have taken Mrs. Granville's music box.

LETTY: Or Miss Hilliard's hair comb.

MIKE (softening): Or Miss Jenkin's silver spoon.

Their expressions lighten and they begin to laugh.

EXTERIOR. SECOND CHANCE MAIN STREET. Mike and Letty driving the wagon through town as a snowstorm blows in. They stare at the Mercantile and Trading Post with interest.

MIKE: They sell gentlemen's clothes in there.

LETTY (smiling coyly at the blacksmith): Your eyesight's growing weak, Mike. How much longer do you think you can support us selling suits? And who in the frontier will buy them? We need a stake and another wagon train if we want to get to San Francisco.

INTERIOR. THE SMITHY DURING A SNOWSTORM. Letty flirting with Jeb, who is busy making her a new frying pan.

JEB: I know I don't have much, Letty, but—

LETTY: I don't need nice things. (She laughs.) Except maybe a bigger frying pan now that I'm cooking for you and my brother. I'm afraid he's going blind.

JEB: I can take care of you, Letty. Both of you.

LETTY: I'm not the kind of woman who makes a good wife.

EXTERIOR. THE STAGE ROAD NORTH OF TOWN. A TREE HAS FALLEN ACROSS THE ROAD. Letty and Mike are both wearing fancy suits. At the sound of a stage approaching, they both pull flour sacks with eyeholes over their heads. Letty moves deeper into the trees and raises her shotgun.

LETTY: Stare at whoever's speaking. They won't know you can barely see.

Letty cocks her shotgun. Mike steps onto the road behind the tree, raises his arm and draws the hammer back on his six-shooter as the stage rounds the bend.

MIKE: This is a holdup. Throw down the cash box and everyone lives.

The guard begins to raise his rifle, but Letty shoots him first. He falls, dead before he hits the ground.

DRIVER: Who are you?

MIKE: The Merciless gang. Now throw down the cash box and no one else dies.

INTERIOR. THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE IN SECOND CHANCE. Mike's eyes are being examined.

DOCTOR: His vision is failing, miss. In a year, maybe two, he'll be completely blind.

Mike closes his eyes, visibly shaken. Letty presses her lips together, angry that with all their loot they

can't buy back Mike's vision. She knows she can't pull off the robberies alone. The mayor enters, visibly shaken. Letty covers the stolen ring on her hand.

MAYOR: The Merciless gang struck again. Took the stage on the south road. I've sent for the sheriff. He'll be searching the home of every able-bodied man in the territory.

The mayor pats Mike's arm.

MAYOR: Not your home, Mike.

INTERIOR. THE SMITHY. Letty and Jeb are in the midst of an argument, whispering as Mike dozes on Jeb's cot in the corner.

LETTY: What do you want me to do? Our crop was ruined by that spring snowstorm. We're behind on payments. We're going to lose everything.

JEB: I said I'd marry you, Letty. I didn't say I'd steal for you. After all those robberies—the ones you say Mike did—they're going to hang him, blind or not. I'm going to turn him in the next time the sheriff comes to town.

LETTY: You do and I'll swear on a stack of Bibles you're one of the gang. No one will believe a blind man could pull off all those robberies.

JEB (looking speculatively at Mike): All those murders...

LETTY (milking Jeb's fondness for her): No more talk of blood and mayhem. Kiss me, Jeb. Kiss me like today's our wedding day.

EXTERIOR. THE STAGE ROAD NORTH OF TOWN IN THE DEEPENING DUSK. Jeb is riding his horse, scanning the murky woods as he looks for Letty, hoping to stop her from doing something stupid with her brother's gang. Mike steps out in front of him, wearing the flour sack over his head and pointing a six-shooter at Jeb.

MIKE: Throw down your coin, friend, and I'll let you pass.

JEB (whispering): Mister...Merciless?

MIKE (chest puffed out with pride): One and the same. Throw it down, friend.

Jeb looks into the trees as he reaches for his newly purchased pistol.

LETTY (in a deep voice): Don't reach for that gun, friend.

JEB (a determined set to his chin): You'll be moving to another territory and leaving Miss Letty behind.

Mike seems taken aback. The "man" in the woods stands. Jeb's attention is on the shooter, the man he assumes is the real threat since he knows Mike is practically blind.

JEB: You'll be moving on...

Jeb draws his pistol and fires at the figure in the woods. A scream pierces the air.

MIKE (uncertain): Letty?

JEB (pale, leaps off his horse and runs to her side): Letty? Holy heavens! Letty?

Jeb reaches the fallen figure dressed in a man's suit. He pulls off the flour sack and cradles Letty in his arms as blood soaks her abdomen.

MIKE (kneeling next to them): Letty?

JEB (rocking Letty, crying): I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

The sound of an approaching wagon. Jeb raises his head, processing his options. He gently transfers Letty into her brother's arms, face strained with regret.

JEB: I'll tell them we struggled. I'll tell them I fought you. But you have to take her to safety.

MIKE (blinking eyes that can barely see): Where?

Jeb runs to his horse, brings her back to Mike.

JEB: There's a cave near Lookout Ridge. My horse knows the way. Take Letty there. I'll bring supplies later. Just keep her alive.

The sounds of the wagon grow louder, as does the sound of Letty's labored breathing.

JEB (stumbling to the road, staring at the blood on his hands): Go!

He waves down the wagon, prepared to feed them a story to save his darling Letty.

EXTERIOR. LOOKOUT RIDGE. Jeb digging a grave while Mike sits nearby, crying.

EXTERIOR. THE STAGE ROAD NORTH OF TOWN. Mike ties up Jeb's horse in the woods, pulls a flour sack over his head and steps out in front of the approaching stage to a chorus of shouts and screams. He shoots indiscriminately. The guard falls off as the driver pulls the stage to a halt.

MIKE: You remember to tell the sheriff that man's name. Wouldn't want it left off my wanted poster. Now throw down your cash box and move along.

The driver does as instructed, taking off almost before the cash box lands in the dirt. Mike waits until the stage is gone and then scrambles to the place he heard the box drop, shoots off the lock and grabs the sack of gold. The sound of a posse's thundering hooves fills the air. Mike stumbles into the woods and climbs on Jeb's horse. They race off, but instead of his mountain hideout, the horse runs back to the smithy, losing a shoe in the race.

INTERIOR. SMITHY. Jeb closes the doors to hide the fact that Mike is there.

MIKE: Stupid horse. Stupid lame horse. Jeb! You've got to hide me.

JEB: No. Your past is catching up to you.

Letty's music box is on a shelf. Jeb opens it up, filling the smithy with a bittersweet song—"You Are My Sunshine." The shouts of the posse reach them. Mike moves closer to Jeb and tosses the bag of gold to the blacksmith's feet.

MIKE: My sister would want you to save me. You know she'd want you to save me.

JEB (face contorted in grief and indecision): If you can make it to the cave, I'll bring you supplies tomorrow. But only if you leave town. Promise me.

MIKE (incredulous): I promise but the posse is here in town. They'll shoot me before I get across the road.

JEB: I'll slow them down. Go. Out the back.

Mike stumbles out to the old nag and climbs into the saddle. Jeb hides the bag of gold in his trunk and picks up a hunting knife. He opens the door to the smithy that faces Main Street.

JEB: For you, my love. May this make up for all our wrongs.

He stabs himself in the side, being careful to miss anything vital.

JEB (stumbling forward): Help! Help!

The posse descends upon the smithy, guns drawn.

SHERIFF: Who was it? Who stabbed you?

JEB (sinking to the ground): Mike. Merciless Mike Moody.

EXTERIOR. MOUNTAINS. A rumbling rockslide kills Mike.

INTERIOR. SMITHY. Jeb lying on his cot. Doctor inspecting his wound when a deputy bursts in.

DEPUTY: He's dead. Mike Moody's dead.

JEB (struggling with relief and grief): How? What did he say before he - "

DEPUTY: Nothin'. There was a slide on the ridge. He was dead before we found him.

JEB (closing his eyes): It's over.

DOCTOR: You okay, Jeb?

JEB HESITATES BEFORE NODDING.

EXTERIOR. LOOKOUT RIDGE. Jeb places a headstone on Letty's grave.

EXTERIOR. CHURCH IN SECOND CHANCE. JEB AND SCHOOLMARM CLIMB ON BUCKBOARD AMIDST WELL-WISHES TO THEIR WEDDING.

INTERIOR. MIKE'S HIDEOUT. Jeb painstakingly digs a hole in the rock wall inside the cave and hides the box of gold inside, keeping only one coin for himself. He sets off dynamite to cover the cave entrance with rock, sealing it from ever being found.

INTERIOR. THE BUCKING BULL RANCH'S FARMHOUSE. Jeb on his deathbed. His adult son is at his side. On a dresser, the music box plays.

JEB: That's why I buried your mother up there. It's where I want to be buried, too.

He presses a gold coin into his son's hand. His son stares at it in amazement.

JEB (drawing his last breath): In case you think I'm an old fool making up stories.

SON: Dad, is there more where this came from? Do you know where Mike Moody buried it? Dad?

The End

Want to read more about how Jeb's descendants found the cache of gold?

- Lassoed by the Would-Be Rancher, Book 4, by Melinda Curtis

Want to read more about the research that inspired this script?

- Enchanted by the Rodeo Queen, Book 5, by Melinda Curtis

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