

LONGRIDER

written by

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The world is seldom what it seems; to man, who dimly sees,
realities appear as dreams, and dreams realities.

-- Samuel Johnson

OVER BLACK

The CLANG of spurs under heavy steps before we FADE UP ON:

EXT. PLAIN - MORNING - 1865

The sun backlights a COWBOY HAT rising where blue sky meets green land.

His head slumped. Muscular form. Uniform grey and dirty.

This is JOHN WESLEY (30), tired and broken, plodding towards a small HILL topped by trees.

Wesley is not a man to be trifled with. Not a man plagued by conscience. That man was left behind on the battlefield.

EXT. BASE OF THE HILL - MORNING

Wesley arrives. Glances at the ground.

Etched neatly into the overgrown grass is the OUTLINE of a SHACK, a burnt foundation its only testament. His home gone.

He unburdens his weary shoulder of a PACK.

Then turns his attention to a plot of earth almost six-feet in length. Rectangular dirt with weeds sprouting up.

It troubles him.

But before he can give it another thought...

LILY (O.S.)

John?

He looks over his shoulder to find, coming down the hill from the trees with sticks in her arms: LILY (27), a fair woman in a modest blue checkered dress. Pretty as a daisy.

She lets the sticks fall, eyes lost in disbelief.

LILY (cont'd)

... John?

He walks up the hill as she gathers her tattered dress in one hand and hurries down --

LILY (cont'd)

JOHN!

They meet. Lily doesn't touch him; he doesn't reach for her. Their eyes simply soak in one another for a long moment.

WESLEY
I'm home, Lily.

Finally, she hugs him, loving and soft at first, then her grip strengthens as if she might never let go. Not again.

The subtlest of smiles perches upon his lips and as he takes her hand in his... JOHN WESLEY WAKES...

EXT. THE GREAT OPEN - DAWN

... lying face-up among leaves and twigs, clean shaven, arms crossed over his chest like a corpse.

Fists cling to PISTOLS, thumbs on their hammers.

A caterpillar crawls along his shoulder; a spider over his throat.

And as the sun peeks over the horizon...

TWO HOOVES LAND WITHIN INCHES OF WESLEY'S HEAD.

Hot SNORTS blow down, but he's imperceptible in the grass.

The unseen RIDERS above spur their mounts and when they clear...

WESLEY RISES AT THE WAIST. Arms unfurl, pistols aim, and a SHOT RIPS OUT OF EACH.

The HORSES REAR and KICK their Riders free before falling alongside.

The Riders gather up and when they turn towards the dawning sun...

... they find the silhouette of John Wesley, standing like a warden of the reaper, pistols by his side.

Before they catch a breath... Wesley SHOOTS ONE RIDER square in the chest.

The other Rider scrambles for his belt but finds an empty holster, gun lost in the tumble.

RIDER
Hear me out!

Wesley holsters his pistols...

RIDER (cont'd)
It ain't as you think!

... and UNSHEATHES AN AX strapped to his back.

The Rider's lips quiver as he searches for what will most certainly be his last words.

RIDER (cont'd)

Y-you...

THE AX SWINGS DOWN. A sickening CRUNCH as flesh and muscle are cleaved from bone.

It's over quick. Two men dead.

Wesley searches the bodies, taking anything he can carry.

But pauses to roll up their sleeves... and finds a TATTOO on their forearms, that of a snake outlined red.

Wesley breathes in a long, deep breath.

Then stands as the sun screams its glory over the horizon.

Wesley turns as if his glare alone might make the star heel, then tilts the brim of his hat, shielding his eyes as he walks on.

CUT TO:

INT. CELLS - JAIL - MORNING

MIKE COLLIER'S (18) groggy eyes wake under the broken shadow of prison bars.

He swigs from a whiskey bottle.

The sun filters in from a high window as Mike stands, beams shining off the DEPUTY'S BADGE pinned to his shirt.

Another glorious day.

He pulls an odd-shaped SKELETON KEY from his back pocket and frees himself from the cell.

INT. OFFICE - JAIL - MORNING

Mike stares out warped windows at the motionless town of Amber Valley.

Over his shoulder stands a three-legged desk and a metal SHERIFF'S STAR at its edge.

He glances back at the engraved tin like it might have killed his dog.

Then yanks the Deputy's Badge from his shirt, ripping a swath with it, and tosses the badge to the desk alongside the star.