

THE MAN ON TOP OF THE HILL

Written by

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EXT. VAST, EERIE FIELD WITH DISTANT MOUNTAINS - DAY

TEXAS, 1867

Two men on horses are shown from a distance on top of a small ridge.

COWPOKE 1

What da ya think that is?

COWPOKE 2

Looks like a horseman to me.

COWPOKE 1

I know that, ye fool. I want to know what he's doin' there. He don't look like one of ours.

A man on horse back is shown at the top of a distant hill. As the day is dark and rainy at the prairies, it's only possible to see the stranger's silhouette and his horse, both in profile.

COWPOKE 2

Yer right about something. Surely it's not one of ours.

COWPOKE 1

And that worries me. Three thousand beeves surely attract a lotta no-goods.

COWPOKE 2

And we're still far away from good ole Kansas.

COWPOKE 1

Didn't even leave Texas yet!

COWPOKE 2

We're long ways from Abilene.

COWPOKE 1

Who the hell can that be?

COWPOKE 2

There's twenty of us in this godforsaken trail. Maybe, It's just one of us.

COWPOKE 1

Nah. They're almost done lunching and getting ready to push these stupid cows back to the trail.

COWPOKE 2

Nolan?

COWPOKE 1

Can't be Nolan. He must be a mile far now, scouting the country up yonder fer some water.

COWPOKE 2

Then, he's not one of ours fer sure.

They look back at the top of the hill.

But, there's only emptiness. The mysterious visitor disappeared.

COWPOKE 1

For crying out loud, where he's at? Nothing but a darn cliff on the other side!

COWPOKE 2

(whispering)
Could that be Buck Hendershot?

COWPOKE 1

Who?

COWPOKE 2

Um, nothing. Guess he was just a saddle tramp, one of those jaspers who go from city to city, betting money he don't have in the saloons. You know these kinds always got broke one way or the other. Tomorrow, he's liable to get down here to beg fer one or two beeves. The boss's gonna skin him alive.

COWPOKE 1

Yes, yes, but... What's that first name you said, Buckle or something?

COWPOKE 2

Nothing. Just a story that went from mouth to mouth among the drovers since we came to this valley. Ye know the new man we picked in Edgewood, the one folks call Toothless?

COWPOKE 1

Yep, I know.

COWPOKE 2

So, he grew up in these valleys. Yesterday night, I was working nighthawk with him, and he told me a story that, according to him, became a legend 'round the locals here.

COWPOKE 1

And what's the story?

COWPOKE 2

Ah, just some senseless horseshit. It's gonna make you laugh.

COWPOKE 1

Well, everybody needs a good laugh. Besides, we still gotta long time here to kill. Come on! Don't let me die curious!

COWPOKE 2

Alright. There was once this outlaw, Buck Hendershot was his name. So suspicious that he wore a bandana all the time, nobody ever saw his face. He was said to be a real fast draw. Him and his bunch robbed a stagecoach 'bout a year ago, one that travelled this country, heading north, to Rivercrest Creek.

COWPOKE 1

And what happened?

COWPOKE 2

Toothless told me that this gang was a mighty vicious one, famous for being cruel. After they killed all the passengers and the driver, Hendershot and his bunch fled to the east with the stagecoach loot. And they were never caught.

COWPOKE 1

How's that possible? There gotta be a reward for them, right?

COWPOKE 2

Five thousand dollars fer each one of them, dead or alive, plus a bonus for whoever brought Hendershot's dry carcass.

COWPOKE 1

All that money, and nobody ever caught them?

COWPOKE 2

Well, the group wanted to split the cash and disband. One is less likely to be captured if each man goes his separate ways. But Hendershot disagreed. He still wanted the bunch together fer one, maybe two more hold ups. The bastard wouldn't change his mind.

COWPOKE 1

And then what?

COWPOKE 2

The rest of the bunch was afraid to be caught or killed. Like you said, the reward was too big. And stolen money is only good if yer alive enough to spend it. They conspired against Hendershot and killed him with a shot in the back. They split the bounty, and each man went his ways. And they left their boss' carcass to rot in the desert, to become buzzard food. But it's said that Buck Hendershot, fer he died in hatred, will never rest in peace.

COWPOKE 1

And what's that supposed to mean?

COWPOKE 2

That the ghost of the bastard still rides these hills and prairies, planning a cruel revenge against them folks that murdered him.

Cowpoke 1 hesitates.

COWPOKE 1

This is a pack of bullshit!

COWPOKE 2

That's what I said, just good for a laugh. Well, at least we spent this boring hour someways. Now, we'd better go back to the herd before the boss comes here and tans our hides.

COWPOKE 1

Amen to that, partner.

Cowpoke 1 turns his horse around, back to the herd, but he does not go far.

BANG!

Cowpoke 1 falls heavily on the ground, his body colliding harshly against the hard rocks.

Smoke rises from the hole on Cowpoke 1's back, around his scorched vest.

COWPOKE 2

Now ye know how that feels.

Cowpoke 2 blows away the smoke from his gun barrel. He puts the gun back into the holster.

The holster attached to the belt is shown. As the belt golden buckle slowly comes into view, the letters 'B H' appear in the middle, shining.

BUCK HENDERSHOT

Saved ya fer last, Jim, 'cause yer
the one that pulled the trigger.

Buck rides to the opposite direction, his shiny and black horse snorting a frightful breath.

They stop at the top of that hill, their silhouettes contrasting with the ridge, which rises doleful in the gloomy, melancholic horizon.