

Brier Hill

By

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OVER BLACK

There is a sound of feet shuffling, then a metal jail cell door squeaking open.

SHERIFF KILROY (V.O.)
In you go, Laz-a-rus!

SMASH FADE IN TO:

1 INT. JAILHOUSE - DAY

A long-haired, rough-shaven prisoner is hurled into the jail cell by the burly SHERIFF KILROY (50's), sending the prisoner face-first to the dirt.

The prisoner winces as debris hits his eyes. He wears a BLUE BANDANNA around his neck.

The prisoner, LAZARUS POTOMAC (30's), quickly gets to his feet with a growl and turns to the door as it SLAMS shut with a metallic clang before his face.

There is a shorter, paler deputy at Kilroy's side, ABRAM JONES (40's), who is holding a ring of KEYS.

Abram and Lazarus briefly lock eyes before Lazarus turns his attention to the door.

"Southern California 1880" appears on screen, then fades out.

Abram fumbles with the keys. Kilroy presses his shoulder to the door. Lazarus doesn't advance.

KILROY
Don't even think about muscling
your way out of this one, Laz.

Abram finds the right key and jams it into the lock, hastily twisting it around. Once the door is locked, he jumps back beside Kilroy and wipes some sweat from his brow.

KILROY (cont'd)
(to Lazarus)
Might as well get comfortable.
(spits)
We can hold you for twenty four
hours before taking you to Judge
Hawthorne, and we don't intend to
rush.

(CONTINUED)

LAZARUS

You got no right, Sheriff.

SHERIFF KILROY

Right? *Right?! You rob a train, kill two engineers in the process, go on the run for a week, and you question me about whats right?*

Lazarus clenches his jaw.

KILROY

(to Lazarus)

Enjoy your stay at our little hotel-o-justice here.

(to Abram)

Think you can manage the company of this degenerate for the day?

ABRAM

I'll try.

KILROY

(softly)

Try?

(a beat)

What'd we talk about, Abe?

ABRAM

(straightens posture)

I mean, yes, sir, I will.

Kilroy shakes his head, turns on his heels, and heads towards the door.

KILROY

I'll be in Antry rest of the day.

(a beat)

Back in the morning to take this fella to Hawthorne first thing.

Abram nods.

Kilroy leaves.

Abram and Lazarus lock eyes.

LAZ

Well ain't he sweet?

Abram breaks the stare, turns and tosses the keys on an oak desk then sits down behind it.

(CONTINUED)

ABRAM

About as sweet as cider vinegar I'd say.

Lazarus turns and sits on a rickety cot in the corner of the cell.

Abram shuffles and stacks a pile of papers on the desk before glancing up at Lazarus--who is examining the walls of the cell from the cot--and pretends to read the first paper on top of the stack.

After a few beats Abram looks back up to find Lazarus staring right at him, grinning.

LAZARUS

Y'know, you look like a practical fella.

ABRAM

That so?

LAZARUS

Uh-huh.

LAZARUS (cont'd)

How long you been a deputy, Deputy?

ABRAM

'Bout nine years now.

LAZARUS

That's a long time. Long time to be the sidekick.

Abram returns his attention to the sheet of paper.

LAZARUS (cont'd)

You like it?

ABRAM

Look, I have work to do here.

LAZARUS

OK, sorry. Just tryin' to be amiable.

ABRAM

(not looking up from the desk)
Amiable?

(CONTINUED)

LAZARUS

Friendly.

ABRAM

(looks up)

I know what it means.

Abram's glance retreats to the desk. Lazarus leans back on the cot.

LAZARUS

If you don't like this gig, I have a proposition for you.

Abram shifts in his chair, but doesn't respond.

LAZARUS (cont'd)

Nobody knows or cares, but I robbed that train to feed my old lady and my little boy.

(a beat)

You got kin, deputy?

Silence from Abram.

LAZARUS (cont'd)

Yeah, you got kin. Anyway, I got more than I bargained for on that job. And I'm not talking about those engineers, either. Thought I was robbing a bank train. Didn't realize it was a government gold train.

ABRAM

I'm gonna stop you right there and kindly remind you of your Fifth Amendment right--

LAZARUS

(sitting up on the cot)

Sure, sure. But I want you to know somethin'.

ABRAM

What's that?

LAZARUS

Get me out of this cell, and I'd be willing to share some of the gold with you.

(CONTINUED)

ABRAM

You do realize that everything you just said is going to keep you behind bars for decades, right?

LAZARUS

Not if you take my offer.

(a beat)

You do realize that not taking my offer is going to keep you behind that little deputy desk for decades, right?

Abram returns to the papers on the desk.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

2 EXT. ABRAM JONES HOME - DAY

Abram approaches his wife, ELIZA JONES, who is sitting in a rocking chair on the porch of their weathered house.

ELIZA

You're home early.

ABRAM

Got this fella in the jail. Real pain in the ass. Had to get away.

Abram removes his hat and sits down next to her on a stool.

ABRAM (cont'd)

How's William?

ELIZA

Not well. Gettin' worse every day.

Abram glances at the front door behind them, then down at the ground and sighs.

ELIZA (cont'd)

We have to get him to that sanatorium up in Barstow.

ABRAM

Can't get him there without a new axle on the carriage. Can't get a new axle until at least three more pays.

(CONTINUED)

ELIZA

That's six weeks. If doc Sanders
is right about it being
consumption--

(shakes her head)

Damn it, Abram! Can't you ask
Kilroy for an advance?

ABRAM

Already tried. Bastard wouldn't
hear of it. Even after I explained
about William.

ELIZA

And for all the work you put in for
that ogre over the years...

Abram takes Eliza's hand and looks off at the barren land
around their home.

ABRAM

We deserve better than this.

ELIZA

But what can you do about it?

A beat.

ABRAM

(still looking off)

I got an idea.

CUT TO

3 INT. JAILHOUSE - DAY

We see Lazarus asleep on the cot, drool streaming down from
his open mouth to a soiled pillow. He begins to snore,
when--

Abram bursts in through the door.

Lazarus shoots upward.

LAZARUS

(looking about)

Wha-what?

Laz's eyes fix on Abram, who is standing beyond the bars of
the cell door gripping the ring of KEYS.

(CONTINUED)

ABRAM

We got about four hours to dark.

(a beat)

How far away is this gold of yours?

LAZARUS

Is this some kind of trick?

ABRAM

I'll get you out of here if you give me half the haul. No trick.

LAZARUS

Well, alright then! Let's g--

ABRAM

(holds up a hand)

Here's the rules:

(a beat)

You stay cuffed and I'll do the digging. No shovel or blunt tools for you. If there really is gold--enough for me to retire from public service on--I'll set you free with your half.

(a beat)

Sound *amiable* to you?

Lazarus looks over at a GUN BELT hanging on a COAT RACK.

LAZARUS

Can I have my guns back?

ABRAM

No.

LAZARUS

I'm in no position to bargain.

(grips one of the bars)

Alright. That's all OK with me.

ABRAM

So, again, how far to the gold?

LAZARUS

You know Brier Hill?

ABRAM

The Ingin' burial mound in the Yucca valley?

(CONTINUED)

LAZARUS

Yeah. On the southern side.

(a beat)

Figured that would be the safest place where no one would find it.

(a beat)

Superstition keeps folks away.

Laz looks off.

ABRAM

(pointing)

You make one wrong move, and I'll shoot you dead, understand?

LAZARUS

(laughs)

Where was that tone when the ol' bastard sheriff was around?

Abram doesn't answer.

LAZARUS (cont'd)

Sure. Understood.

ABRAM

C'mon, we gotta make quick to Brier Hill if we're gonna get there and back before nightfall.

Abram steps forward and jams the key in the lock.

CLOSE ON - CELL DOOR LOCK

Abram turns the key with a metallic CLICK-CLICK.

CUT TO

4 EXT. OUTSIDE THE JAIL - DAY

Abram and Lazarus walk out of the jail and step quickly to the dusty road. Lazarus is handcuffed with his arms bound in front of his belly, and Abram carries a small shovel.

Abram grabs Laz by the elbow and motions up the road to the mountains in the distance. Lazarus nods and follows Abram's lead.

They walk up the road away from town, and away from our POV.

CAMERA PULLS BACKWARD

as the men continue forward, making them smaller and smaller for several seconds, then...

(CONTINUED)

CAMERA PANS AROUND

to reveal Sheriff Kilroy leaning against the side of a building across from the jail, watching the men leave town.

Kilroy spits in the dirt by his feet, then looks back up the road, squints, and smiles.

DISSOLVE TO

5 EXT. SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA DESERT - DAY

The still-handcuffed Lazarus leads a weary Abram through the Mojave desert in early evening sunlight, casting long shadows as they weave around bushes and cacti in search of Brier Hill. Abram's shovel is now propped against his shoulder. They are walking up a large hillside.

ABRAM
(breathing heavy)
Is this it?

LAZARUS
Yep.
(a beat)
Never been here before?

ABRAM
No.

LAZARUS
I used to come out here all th' time.

ABRAM
Didn't creep you out? With all these graves?

LAZARUS
Not at all. Whether Indian or white folk, all graveyards are the same. A place of peace. A place to think.

ABRAM
Can't think in town?

LAZARUS
Hell, no. Town's where real life is.

(CONTINUED)

ABRAM

For your sake the gold better be
buried here in real life.

LAZARUS

It is.

(pointing)

Right there next to that cactus.

The cactus is about halfway up the hill, and there is a mound of disturbed earth beside it. There are also several rock piles deliberately positioned along the hillside marking the Indian graves.

Abram walks to the mound and Lazarus follows.

ABRAM

Alright, then.

Abram strikes the earth with the shovel and removes a heap of earth, tossing it to the side. Then he takes another scoop, and another, and another, working quickly. He starts to breathe heavy. A hole is starting to form where the small mound used to be.

LAZARUS

Hey, I can help, you know. If you
take off these cuffs.

ABRAM

(tossing another scoop)

No chance of that.

LAZARUS

C'mon. I showed you where to dig!

ABRAM

Might not be anything here.

(takes another scoop)

Might be a trick.

(tosses it)

Might be--

(takes another stab into the
hole and--)

A loud CLANK!

Abram stops, glances up at Lazarus. Laz smiles. Abram jabs back into the hole.

CLANK!..CLANK! CLANK!

Abram reaches down and unearths a gold bar. He looks at it disbelievingly, then pulls up another.

(CONTINUED)

ABRAM (cont'd)
Holy shit.

LAZARUS
See? I told you!

Abram rubs away the dirt on a third bar.

LAZARUS (cont'd)
C'mon, now. Can ya undo these
cuffs here?

SHERIFF KILROY (V.O.)
Hell no, Laz-a-rus!

QUICKLY ZOOM UP THE HILL

to Sheriff Kilroy, who is mounted on a HORSE and looking
down the at the men, gun in hand.

KILROY
(tips hat and smiles)
Did good, Abram.

ABRAM
Thank y'sir!

KILROY
(smile fades)
Keep diggin' them bars out.

ABRAM
Right.

Abram continues to work at the hole. Kilroy guides his
horse down the slope.

LAZARUS
What is this?

Kilroy dismounts the horse and approaches fast.

LAZARUS (cont'd)
Hey, that's my gold! I'm willin'
to share if you want in, but--

Kilroy pistol-whips Lazarus over the skull with a CRACK! and
Laz falls to the ground with a THUD.

Abram pauses.

(CONTINUED)

KILROY
 (holstering his gun)
 Well I'm not willin' to share,
 Laz-a-rus!

Abram resumes digging.

DISSOLVE TO

6 EXT. SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA DESERT - DUSK

CLOSE ON - BURIED LAZARUS

The scene opens to reveal Lazarus buried to his neck in the hillside with large rocks piled around him. He is regaining consciousness, groggily looking about as Abram lays the last rock next to his ear.

PULL BACKWARDS

to reveal Abram and Kilroy standing over Lazarus, admiring the sight.

There is a SLED with a burlap sack on top of it a few feet away that is tethered to the saddle on Kilroy's horse. Some of the gold bars are sticking up out of the sack.

The men squat down in front of Laz's exposed head.

Eyes wide, Lazarus has now regained full consciousness.

LAZARUS
 (straining)
 What are you doing?! I can barely breathe!

KILROY
 Then you might not want to get so excited. Faster the heart beats, the more air you need.

LAZARUS
 (to Abram)
 We had a deal.

ABRAM
 (gesturing to Kilroy)
 And so do we.

LAZARUS
 (nearly whispering)
 What do you want?

(CONTINUED)

Kilroy glances over at the sack of gold bars, then back to Lazarus.

KILROY
Already got it.

LAZARUS
(eyeing the dirt around him)
Why do *this*?

KILROY
You see, one of them train
engineers was a brother.
(a beat)
Brother-in-law, actually. Didn't
even like him much. But, I figure
I owe it to my sister to make sure
justice is served. Judge
Hawthorne's a bit soft on
criminals, so...
(spits)
Here we are.

Abram and Kilroy rise.

KILROY (cont'd)
We'll be goin' now.

LAZARUS
Wha--no! Judge Hawthorne...H-He'll
be expecting me t'morrow!

KILROY
Ha! Why should he? He don't even
know you've been apprehended.

LAZARUS
You can't just leave me! You sick
sons of bitches!

A coyote HOWLS in the distance.

KILROY
Hear that? You might get lucky if
a coyote pulls you out.
(laugh)
'Course, they'll rip yer face off
first!

LAZARUS
Help!
(wheezes)
Heeeelp!

KILROY

Nobody can her you out here, Laz!
(laughs)
Keep yellin' and die faster from
exhaustion.

ABRAM

How 'bout I just shoot him now?

KILROY

(to Lazarus)
You know, there's another way out.

Kilroy squats back down.

KILROY (cont'd)

Brier Hill is called *Hutukngna*--the
dark place--by the local Indians.
Legend has it that no one outside
the tribe can be buried here.
Outsiders will rise from the grave
to wander elsewhere to find a place
for eternal rest.

(a beat)

There's no peace in death here.

ABRAM

(pulls his gun)
Look, why don't we--

Kilroy jumps to his feet and puts his hands to his guns.

KILROY

You shoot him and I shoot
you. Simple as that.

Abram re-holsters his pistol.

KILROY (cont'd)

Stick with the plan, Abe!

Kilroy ties the bag on the sled tight, checks the sled's
straps, and mounts the horse.

KILROY (cont'd)

Goodbye, Laz-a-rus.
(whips the reins)
Yaw!

The horse starts off with the sled in tow. Abram shakes his
head and follows by foot.

(CONTINUED)

LAZARUS
That's my gold, dammit!
(gasps)
I-I'll get you sick bastards!
(chokes)
Arrrgh!

Another coyote HOWL, and Lazarus becomes quiet.

FADE OUT

7 EXT. ABRAM JONES HOME - NIGHT

Abram walks to his porch, carrying a sack over his shoulder about half the size of the one seen on the sled in the desert.

He walks to the front door and finds it ajar, flickering candlelight from inside the house cuts out into the darkness.

Abram peeks though the crack, then slowly pushes the door open and steps inside.

ABRAM
Eliza?

CUT TO

8 INT. ABRAM JONES HOME - NIGHT

Abram steps inside and looks about. He slowly lowers the sack to the ground, and the floorboards creak under the weight of the sack inside.

ABRAM
Eliz--

Abram's eyes lock on the floor.

PULL BACK

to reveal muddy footprints and clumps of earth leading from the front door across the living room, and into the darkness of a hallway.

He picks up an OIL LAMP and creeps towards the dark hallway, his breathing intensifying as he goes.

Abram follows the footprints through the hallway and back to a bedroom door. The door is open a few inches, but there is no light inside.

Abram bursts through the door.

9 INT. ELIZA JONES' BEDROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The lamp illuminates the undead ghoul Lazarus Potomac standing over the bloody corpse of Eliza and holds the remains of a mutilated William Jones in his arms.

Abram SCREAMS as the lantern drops to the floor, flooding the grotesque scene in a fiery flash before--

SMASH CUT TO

10 INT. ABRAM JONES' HOME - DAY

Abram shoots up in his bed, SCREAMING. Sweat is dripping down his face.

ELIZA
What is it, Abe?

It takes Abram a few seconds to come to his senses.

ABRAM
Bad dream.

ELIZA
What about?

ABRAM
Nothing. That fella in the jail
yesterday must have got inside my
head.

Eliza shakes her head, then gets out of bed, puts on a robe and leaves the room.

Abram wipes the sweat from his brow, then looks over at the sack of gold bars in the corner.

ABRAM (cont'd)
(calling)
I'm goin' into town this morning.

ELIZA (V.O.)
For what?

ABRAM
See a man about that axle.

Eliza darts back into the room.

ELIZA
You got that advance?

(CONTINUED)

ABRAM

More or less, yeah.

Eliza smiles and exits.

Abram sighs, gets out of bed, and puts on his pants and a shirt.

He goes to the sack, carefully pulls it across the floor, and shoves it under the bed, pushing it an arm's length out of sight.

ELIZA (V.O.)

Breakfast?

Abram shoots to his feet.

ABRAM

(exiting the room)

Yes'm!

CUT TO

11 EXT. ABRAM JONES' HOME - DAY

Abram walks out the front door and quickly steps to the road and stops in the middle of it.

He turns rightward and we see town in the distance.

He turns leftward and we see desert hills.

Abram pivots left and makes haste for the hills.

DISSOLVE TO

12 EXT. BRIER HILL - DAY

Abram climbs Brier Hill, much as he did the day prior with Lazarus.

He stops suddenly and looks down, then bends to pick something up.

It is a BLUE BANDANNA. He continues up the slope faster.

At the site where Lazarus was buried he finds a gaping hole. There are clumps of dirt and some shreds of clothing surrounding the it.

Abram looks around, then back down at the hole.

CLOSE ON ABRAM'S FACE

(CONTINUED)

ABRAM
Coyotes must have pulled him out.

SMASH CUT TO

13 EXT. DESERT HILLSIDE - DAY

The undead Lazarus is stumbling down a hillside approaching our POV from several yards off.

SMASH CUT TO

14 EXT. BRIER HILL - DAY

ABRAM
No way he pulled himself out.

SMASH CUT TO

15 EXT. DESERT HILLSIDE - DAY

Undead Lazarus is now closer to our POV, revealing the details of a gored face and upper body lacerations. He GROANS.

SMASH CUT TO

16 EXT. BRIER HILL - DAY

ABRAM
Yeah, coyotes got him.
(looks at the bandanna)
He's a dead man.

SMASH CUT TO

17 EXT. DESERT HILLSIDE - DAY

Undead Lazarus GROANS into the camera then brushes by our POV...

Headed towards town, seen in the distance.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

18 EXT. OUTSIDE THE JAIL - DAY

Abram jogs towards the jailhouse. On approaching, he finds clumps of dirt on the steps leading to the door. The door frame is broken and the door is open a few inches.

He pauses, then turns and looks around, as if sensing someone watching him.

He slips inside.

CUT TO

19 INT. JAIL - DAY

Abram shuts the door and walks to the cell, which is empty.

He then examines his desk for a few beats, then quickly turns and looks over at the coat rack.

CLOSE ON - COAT RACK

Laz's gun belt is missing.

ABRAM

Dammit.

Abram darts out of the jailhouse.

CUT TO

20 EXT. ABRAM JONES HOME - DAY

Abram runs to the front door, panting. He opens the door.

ABRAM

(while stepping inside)

Eliza, we have to--

CUT TO

21 INT. ABRAM JONES HOME - DAY

Eliza is tied to a wooden chair, crying.

Sheriff Kilroy sits in a chair opposite her, his pistol resting on his knee but pointed in her direction.

KILROY

Welcome home, Abe.

(CONTINUED)

ABRAM

What are you doing?

KILROY

I reconsidered our fifty-fifty split of the gold. I'm gonna take it all.

(motioning with the gun)

But Eliza here doesn't have any idea what you did with your share.

ABRAM

(to Eliza)

William?

Eliza hangs her head and sobs hysterically.

KILROY

Sorry, Abe. Guess I gotta be the bearer of more bad news.

ABRAM

What did you do to him you son of a bitch?

KILROY

Easy, easy. Didn't do a thing to him.

(a beat)

Died of consumption this morning apparently. See for yourself, but drop your gun first.

Abram pulls his pistol and holds it in the air for a moment.

KILROY (cont'd)

(points gun at Eliza's head)

Don't go doin' something that would make a bad day worse, Abe.

Abram puts the gun down on a coffee table and disappears down the hallway.

CUT TO

22

INT. WILLIAM JONES' BEDROOM - DAY

Abram slowly opens the door to his son's bedroom.

There is a form of a child on the bed with the sheet pulled up over his face.

Abram smacks the door frame, tears welling up in his eyes.

(CONTINUED)

He turns and goes to Eliza's bedroom.

CUT TO

23 INT. ELIZA JONES' BEDROOM - DAY

Abram reaches underneath the bed and pulls out the sack of gold bars. He exits the room.

CUT TO

24 INT. ABRAM JONES' HOME - DAY

Abram reappears, clutching the sack at his chest.

KILROY

There it is!

Kilroy stands trains the gun on Abram and grabs the sack from his hands.

KILROY (cont'd)

You're loosing the loot, but look on the bright side...

Kilroy picks up Abram's gun and puts it in the sack.

KILROY (cont'd)

You're getting a promotion with me skipping town.

Kilroy holsters his gun and reaches behind his back for the door knob, keeping his eyes on Abram.

He turns the knob and pulls the door open. Light from the outside silhouettes his form.

Over Kilroy's shoulder we see undead Lazarus approach.

Kilroy turns to leave, knocking into the ghoul.

CLOSE ON - KILROY'S FACE

as his eyes widen in realization that Lazarus is back from the dead.

He SCREAMS as Lazarus bites down into his neck, causing blood to spray out like a fountain onto the open door. He pulls his gun but falls to the floor without firing it.

The gun slides across the floor to Abram's feet, and he picks it up.

(CONTINUED)

Eliza SCREAMS as Kilroy twitches and dies. Lazarus stumbles over the body and squares his feet towards Abram, who is holding the pistol parallel with his hip.

CLOSE ON - ABRAM'S EYES

SMASH CUT TO

CLOSE ON - LAZ'S EYES

as he GRUNTS and appears to smile.

SMASH CUT TO

CLOSE ON - ABRAM'S EYES

as they widen in realization of the imminent duel.

SMASH CUT TO

CLOSE ON - LAZ'S BRUISED AND MUDDY HAND

as he pulls his gun.

SMASH CUT TO

CLOSE ON ABRAM'S EYES

as they wince simultaneously with the BANG of a gunshot.

PULL BACK SLOWLY

to reveal the smoke coming from the barrel of Abram's gun.

Lazarus falls face-first to the floor, and we see a gaping exit wound on the back of his head with blood and brain matter oozing out.

Eliza is whimpering.

ABRAM

Are you OK?

ELIZA

(looks at the bodies, then her bonds)

No!

Abram comes over and hastily begins to untie her from the chair.

(CONTINUED)

ELIZA (cont'd)
(whispers)
Our baby William is dead.

Abram finishes untying her hands, then gets up and runs back into the hallway.

Eliza sobs a few beats, then proceeds to untie her feet.

Then we hear the floorboards creak behind her.

Abram is carrying their dead son in his arms. The boy is wrapped in the white sheet.

ELIZA (cont'd)
What are you doing?

Without answering, Abram steps past the body of Lazarus and over the body of Kilroy to the open doorway.

ELIZA (cont'd)
Where are you going?

Abram steps out the door into the sunlight beyond.

ABRAM
To Brier Hill.

FADE OUT

THE END