

The West's Phantasm

I board the train with my sister, Wendy, who is trailing behind. The desert wind blows sand in my hair, dirtting my blonde locks. Wendy comes up from behind, holding our suitcases.

"Henry, we have to get going!" she exclaims. "Help me carry our luggage." I turn around and grab my suitcase. My sister sighs as the heavy load is removed from her.

"Come on then," I say, going up the train's stairs. Wendy follows and we take our seats in the first class compartment. I pull out my journal and pen.

I had chosen a job, which required me to leave my life living by the lakeside. My job as a journalist took me to a small town in the desert of California. It is a small town, named Eagle Mine, just like any other. It has its wooden saloons and houses, the miners walking around singing their songs and the cowboys that ride in for a drink. Although it's the typical western town, there's something that sets it apart.

Every evening, when the bandits come, a mysterious phantasm rides in a black stallion. He has no name. The locals called him the sheriff. He drives out the outlaws with his intimidating figure. No need for violence. No one knows who he is. They only know that he brings justice every night, but those outlaws come back. A full description consists of a red bandana covering his face, a brown, leather coat and a large, white Stenson. The story of this western phantasm enticed me and I decided to solve the mystery.

The grasslands transform into a desert landscape as the train speeds by. Wendy hums as she crochets a scarf, meant for our mother. My sister came along to travel. She wanted to get out, so I reluctantly agreed to allow her to come. As the day fades into the twilight, I have finished writing the beginning of my story.

"That's coming out nice," Wendy says, looking over and reading the first words. I close my book, setting down my pen.

"I'm not satisfied with the intro," I reply. "There's something that's missing." Wendy sat back in her seat.

"Maybe when we get there, you'll find the missing piece," she says. I smile.

"You should get some rest," I say. "We'll be Eagle Mine by tomorrow." My sister nods.

"Goodnight Henry," she says before closing her eyes. I watch as Wendy falls asleep. Her red hair falls loose and down her face. I smile. She seems peaceful like that.

The sun rises as the moon sets and our train pulls into Eagle Mine's station. I wake Wendy up, gathering our luggage. The locomotive stops and we disembark. The station is rowdy. I keep my sister close by as we navigate our way through.

"Who knew towns could be so crazy?" I say, getting through it .

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"I expected a little more order," Wendy replies. We walked from the station to the hotel near the saloon. As we walked, people watched us with strange looks. The men, with their dirty faces and overgrown beards, spit at my shoes. I'm careful not to step in anything, including their spit. Wendy holds on tight as we enter the hotel. A skinny, frail woman sits at the counter.

"Ah, welcome, young strangers," she says. I smile. I try to keep friendly in foreign places.

"Greetings," I say, walking up to the desk. "I would like a room for two." The old smiles.

"For how long?" she asks. I look at Wendy, who shrugs.

"For three days," I reply. The old woman grabs a key from the wall.

"That will be a dollar and five cents," she says. I pull out my wallet and hand the innkeeper her money, in which she hands me my key. I nod my thanks. Wendy and I go up the stairs. We find our room with the number the key's tag says. It is bare, with nothing on the walls. There is only a night stand and two beds. Wendy groans, setting down our suitcases.

"This could use a little bit of sprucing," she says.

"It will do," I say. "The outhouse is in the back." My sister groans. She never liked using those rooms.

As we settled into our room, the crowd outside got louder. I look out the window and see that the fabled bandits from the stories come riding in on their horses. The people scatter like ants, searching for safety.

"Brother, what is?" Wendy asks.

"Stay back," I reply. "The bandits are here." She gasped. Some of the members stagger off from the others. I close the door, "Wendy, bring me the stand!" I exclaim. She runs over to the other side and drags the nightstand over. I use it to barricade the door. We outwait the raids. Nothing terrible is heard, except for the glass shattering. This must happen so many times for the villagers, they must submit easily.

After a while, I looked out the window. All the lights were out and no more outlaws were out and about.

Nothing can be seen in the dark. Only the shadows of the bandits, who seem to have been rounded up by something. Wendy looks over my shoulder.

"I can't see a thing," she whispers. A gray fog glooms over the area. I gulp.

He was here.

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I rush over to my opened suitcase and pull out my pen and journal. I open the window, sticking my head out. I hear the whimpering of the troublemakers. Some whisper to one another, but they go silent.

Horse hooves clop loudly through the town. I write down the mood of the setting. Wind shrieked, startling my sister and I. Then everything seemed to die down.

The lights turn back on. The bandits run away in a cloud of dirt. In the center of the town, the phantasm sheriff stood there, on his horse, the black stallion. I smile in awe, rushing down the stairs and out into the outdoors. The phantasm is about to leave when I stop him.

"Wait!" I shout. The sheriff turns around. "I have something to ask." He dismounts his horse.

"We can talk in the restaurant," he says. His voice is muffled by the mask he wears. "She can come too." The phantasm swats the air, motioning us to follow. We do and he leads us to the saloon. People celebrate the small victory the sheriff granted. He takes a seat and a waiter quickly serves him a glass of water. "Thank you, my friend," he says. The waiter nods and returns to his duties. "Sit," the sheriff says. Wendy looks at me and I nod. We take out seats across from the mysterious man. "So, what did you want to know?" he asks, removing his bandana. Wendy and I stare at him, shocked. The sheriff isn't a ghost! Just a man.

"I wanted to know who you really are," I answered. The man rests his feet on the table.

"What's your name, kid?" he asks.

"I'm Henry Goodwill and this is my sister, Wendy," I reply. "I took a job to write about you." The sheriff takes a sip from his water.

"I'm Gareth Jones," he says. "You can add that to your story." I added his name to my journal. I also scribble down a brief description of his appearance.

"I also have some questions," Wendy says. "Why act like a phantasm?" she asks. Gareth chuckles.

"Ma'am, where I come from there was a story about a ghost who wanted to bring justice," he replies. "Everyday, people would come and raid my town and I grew tired of it. So as soon as I reached the age of eighteen, I took matters into my own hands. I became the ghost to ward them off."

"So heroic of you," Wendy says. Gareth chuckles.

"Is that all?" he asks. I finished writing down the last couple of words. I smile.

"Yes, thank you for your time," I say. Gareth stands up and so do I. I shake his hand.

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"It was no problem, partner," he replies. He motions for us to follow again. Gareth leads us outside, where he mounts his horse. "Come back someday," he says. "It'll be nice having some friends." I smile.

"Goodbye," I say. He gives me a smile and pulls back on his mask. He gives the horse an urge and they ride off. Wendy and I return to our hotel room. As she readies for bed, I finish writing my journal entry.

I can now go to bed knowing the true identity of the Sheriff.

-THE END-