

PRIVATE PROPERTY

by

Marnie Mitchell-Lister

EXT. PRAIRIE - MORNING

Wind blows waves through acres of knee-high grass. A wooden "PRIVATE PROPERTY" sign juts from the landscape.

A clump of chew tobacco hits the sign and slowly drips down.

On horseback, under a large, shady tree is CASH CARSON (55), leathery skin, cheek swollen with tobacco, in dusty chaps, a gun belt and rifle strapped to the saddle. His chaps, saddle and horse, all branded with the initials, "CC".

JEB (O.S.)

No sign of him boss?

Observing the territory from atop a hill is JEB (40).

Cash tilts back his cowboy hat. Harsh wrinkles around his eyes deepen as he thoroughly scans the surrounding area.

CASH

He couldn't have gotten far. Keep
a man on each point.

(spits more tobacco)

We'll flush the little bastard out
before nightfall.

Jeb tips his hat toward Cash then takes off on horseback. Cash adjusts his gun belt then grabs the reins.

A drop of blood lands on the backside of his horse, then another. It comes from the tree above.

The horse stirs. Cash delays, takes another look around.

Lying across a branch above is LEVI (17). His face wet with perspiration, his shirt wet with blood. His hand pressed firmly on his wound as he struggles to remain perfectly still.

Another drop of blood lands on the horse just as Cash digs in his spurs. The horse bolts and in seconds, Cash disappears over the hill.

Blood flows as Levi removes his hand and labors down the tree.

Once on the ground, he lifts his bloody shirt to inspect his wound. It's a gunshot.

He grabs a revolver from the back of his pants and quickly hobbles toward a small barn a few hundred yards away.

EXT. BARN - MORNING

Gun drawn, Levi approaches the barn. He cracks the door open and peeks inside. It's dark.

He looks toward the open field then back to the dark barn. With no other choice, he reluctantly slips in the door.

INT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

The barn door closes. Levi strains to see as his eyes adjust.

Slivers of light shine through the slats, enough to reveal no animals occupy the stalls, only hay and farm equipment.

With slow, calculated steps, Levi sets out to the other side. He carefully checks each dark corner and every shadow.

As he reaches the end, Levi becomes unsteady. Very pale, his breath labored, he collapses on a pile of hay.

INT. BARN - AFTERNOON

A striped pattern of sunlight shines on Levi's sleeping face. He starts to wake, squints as the light hits his eyes.

Suddenly, a shadow passes over him. Levi peeks through the slats, catches a glimpse of a figure walking past the barn.

He winces in pain as he attempts to stand then quietly sneaks over to one of the stalls and hides behind a wall.

The barn door opens wide. Light floods the building.

Levi peers around the corner. Someone stands in the doorway, their face darkened by the bright sun light behind them.

He slides back behind the wall, musters up courage and readies his gun as he listens to footsteps approach.

A pair of black laced boots slowly follows the trail of blood on the dusty wood floor.

The boots belong to MADDIE (16), innocent face and thin frame under long skirt and peasant blouse.

Maddie's eyes track the blood stains to the back of the barn.

As she passes the dark stall, Levi jumps out and wraps his arm tightly around her neck. She gasps.

Shocked to realize his captive is a girl, Levi hesitates but Maddie fights back, so he tightens his hold and points the gun to her head.

LEVI

Who are you? Why you here?

MADDIE

Maddie. I, I just come here sometimes.
Let me go!

Maddie elbows Levi in the stomach. He doubles over in pain. She runs to the back of the barn. She's trapped.

His hand shakes as he strains to point the gun at Maddie.

LEVI

If you help me, I won't kill you.

MADDIE

What do ya want?

LEVI

Water. . .and a bandage.

Maddie contemplates. It's obvious that Levi is badly wounded. His weakened condition makes him less of a threat.

MADDIE

There's a well out back.

Levi gestures for Maddie to walk. She remains composed. He follows her, gun pointed at her back as they exit the barn.

INT. BARN - LATE AFTERNOON

Sleeves torn off her blouse, Maddie sits in a dark corner, blocked by a stall on one side and Levi, a few feet away on the other.

Levi is shirtless. The sleeves from Maddie's blouse wrapped around him like a bandage. Blood has begun to seep through.

Maddie eyes the gun in Levi's hand, his grip weakens as he fights to keep his eyes open.

She shifts her position. Levi wakes and attempts to remain alert. They glare at each other. Levi breaks the silence.

LEVI

Why you come here sometimes?

She hesitates then answers.

MADDIE

Just. . .to get away.

(ponders)

Why you here? Who you hidin' from?

LEVI

A bad man. He hurt my Mama. I was tryin' to protect her.

Maddie listens intently but remains aware of his every move.

LEVI

He wanted her for his own. He killed my Daddy years ago over a land dispute. That monster ain't gonna be satisfied till he owns everything, even people.

MADDIE

What he do to her?

LEVI

Beat her, raped her. . .branded his initials on her shoulder, like she was his property. He hurt her, so I tried to kill him.

Shocked by his words, Maddie turns away. After a moment, she looks back at Levi. The pain in his face softens her and for a moment, their eyes connect.

MADDIE

You gotta protect yer family.

LEVI

And I will. I don't care if I gotta die doin' it. I'm gonna kill that son of a bitch Cash Carson!

In a sudden shift of anger, Levi takes his eyes off Maddie. She lunges toward him, grabs his gun and gains control. Levi surrenders easily.

Maddie aims the gun at him as she backs out of the corner then slowly walks backward toward the door.

MADDIE

I'll leave your gun behind the barn.
Just give me time to get away.

Her eyes remain fixed on Levi as she pushes open the barn door. Levi's eyes widen in horror.

Outside, about one hundred yards away is Cash.

Her gun still aimed at Levi, Maddie turns toward the door, sees Cash riding toward her.

EXT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

Sun in his eyes, Cash squints to focus on Maddie, who stands just inside the door of the dark barn.

CASH

Maddie! You hidin' from yer Daddy?
Yer lil' sister in there with you?
(mumbles)
Can't find that brat anywhere.

INT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

Stunned, Maddie turns back toward Levi. His initial shock turns to disgust.

Levi stands. He glares at her.

LEVI

That degenerate is yer Daddy?

Maddie watches helplessly as Cash gets closer. Her body stiffens. She tenses her grip on the gun. She looks at Levi.

MADDIE

(voice trembling)
You gotta protect yer family.

Levi recoils and braces himself for impact.

Suddenly, Maddie turns and shoots Cash in the heart. With a jolt, he grabs his chest.

Cash opens his mouth but is unable to speak. He falls off the horse.

Maddie drops the gun.

Astounded, Levi hobbles over. He reaches out and tenderly places his hand on her shoulder.

Her body is rigid, her eyes fixed on Cash's dead body.

Levi stares at Maddie. Something catches his eye. He gingerly pulls her collar down, revealing a "CC" branded on her shoulder.

FADE OUT