

# The Hound - Part 3

*by* Thomas Shaggy

I awoke in a panic. The screaming sound of savages dancing around the fire, chanting, filled the night sky.

The one place I didn't want to be. I was face down in one of the huts. My eye swollen shut and blood crusted to the side of my face. I rolled onto my back and attempted to pick myself up.

I could tell by their sound they were Mohegan. I could make out some of the words, most of them involving 'white man,' 'death,' and 'pain.' I needed to escape before this escalated any further. I pulled myself to my knees. I looked around and put my ear to the side of the tent. Nothing. I put my nose to the small flap that acted as the doorway; only the smell of fire was in the air. Now was my chance. I pushed aside the door gently with my face and peeked out. A native's hand pushed me back into the tent. He stepped inside with me. I was on my knees again. I must have looked like a fool. Just what he wanted.

I did not hate the natives. It's what they were. It's what my family wasn't. I respected what these men, rather natives, had done. These people are more than men. They believe in the world around them. Not a single God that will deliver them from evil, no fallen angels, no heaven or hell. A place where every living thing could be together. I had more in common with these people than those of my own skin. Of course I couldn't tell them that. I couldn't be communicated with. The tall man in front of me escorted me out. He was a decorated warrior with the scalps of his fallen foes that hung from his neck like a trophy case. The bead work through out his clothing was that of a general. He pulled me hard and fast. A crowd gathered by a fire. He pulled me to the middle of the circle and placed my head onto a chopping block. The wood was stained with the blood of many white men. Many remained headless and decaying next to me. This is what I imagined hell to smell like; the smell of rotting flesh of men who strayed where they didn't belong. You needed to pay a toll they would never possess the currency for.

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The chief moved from the opposite end of the fire around to me. He stabbed my knife into the wood beside my face.

I wouldn't see the light of a new day.

The quarry up ahead had only three men stationed at it. They rotated shifts. One ate a meal and rested, the other stood watch and the other was digging. Luckily for me, the guy on break was sleeping. This left the man on watch and the guy digging. It wouldn't be easy getting to them, an uphill battle for me. The man on watch only had four fingers on his gun hand. If it came to a firefight he wouldn't be trouble, but that would wake the first guy. This would alert the man digging shortly thereafter. I couldn't allow anyone to get away to alert any nearby patrols. The wind still howled out of the northwest and the cover of night would help. I had to distract this guy.

Hard surfaces are perfect for walking silently on. If you are light enough on your feet you can glide across them. I took off my jacket to reduce the risk of it dragging on the rocks. The moon peeked out through the clouds. I pulled my hat over my eyes to keep any reflection hidden.

I hopped from one stone to another. I was a whisper in the night. I moved myself up just below the guard and perched myself right underneath a piece of sod that over hung from above. I could hear the man digging call out to the watch man. He was finishing up and going a little deeper into the tunnel and asked him to yell if he needed anything.

"Wake up Clide while you're at it." Looking down at the rocks below I pulled out my knife and reached up for the man. I grabbed his belt and pulled my knife across the back of his ankles. I could feel the tension of the tendon release and roll up into the back of his leg as my blade passed through each. This would reduce the risk of him trying to walk away in case dropping him on his head onto a bed of rocks didn't work.

Reduce risk of suspicion.

Man took a bad fall while on duty.

Cold, dark night.

I sheathed the blade and moved carefully down the cave. The man dug furiously. He was distracted by his own work. I took his head in my hands and spun in gracefully, yet forcefully to the right, severing the top of his spine in the process. His head flopped into my hands like a gutted deer, tongue and all. I needed to leave him there for a moment.

Two down, one to go.

I approached the man, Clide, that was sleeping along the ridge only ten or fifteen paces from where I threw the watchman over the edge. A path continued around the other side of the rocks. I put my hand to the ground. Four sets of tracks. Only three men visible. Where was the fourth? He was much smaller. I put my head to the side of the wall and my nose to the air.

Not a man at all. I looked and there she was. My pupils widened so much that I could have jumped through them. A woman was tied up and hidden amongst the rocks behind their small camp. Why? Where were they planning to do the same thing to her?

She saw me as I went to kill the last of the three men. She moaned for me to stop. She was gagged and her hands were tied behind her back. I moved quietly being careful not to wake him. She panicked the faster I tried to untie the bonds and gag.

"You must go. Now!" She gasped for air. "The Marcy's are setting you up."

"What? How?" I didn't understand. Clide, sleepy old Clide, stirred next to me.

"They knew you'd come after them. This is all a ..." The bullet split her head in half before she could finish her sentence. Her blood sprayed out onto my face and covered my lips. The taste of life as it suddenly ended. Nothing really ruins a day more, not to mention to see the lifeless, and now headless body of a twenty-something gal killed for the likes of me. There would be nothing silent about this kill. I could hear the men in the distance. The gunshot startled them.

I buried the rock deep in his skull. My eyes filled with the blood of the woman lying dead beside me. Her energy ran through my veins like a pack of wild horses and manifested into the hate that drilled the granite into this man's brain.

The men were closer, coming from the cliff above. I slid down the side and flipped my jacket around and onto my arms. I ran to Strider and hopped over his hind legs and onto the saddle. Luckily they were on horseback. It'd take them longer to find a new route around the quarry.

I rode off into the woods.

I looked back to see if my pursuers were anywhere to be found. Noone. When I turned back around, I felt the cold solid butt of a rifle strike the side of my face. My body flew off the back of my horse the only thing left to see was the scurrying leather shoes.

The Springs was where I met him.

It's a nasty gambling town right on the water, with a touristy front. Beautiful hotels lined the town, not really a place I would be welcomed in today. With Laura, it was a different story. She took the cold man I was during the war and made a gentleman out of me. The Springs was our last stop on our way through to George Lake.

Laura went out to gather supplies for our trip. I had some time to kill so I tried my luck at some Liar's Dice. It'd been a while.

He sat across from me calling my every bluff. He knew me better than I did. Damn near took all my money by the end of the round. He made small talk, telling old man stories about the frontier and this and that and how many towns he'd cleaned up, then the railroad.

It's always about the railroad. Can't a man just live.

When I stood up to leave the man followed me out. I paid no mind to him at first. Then he called on me.

"I know you Hound." I hadn't been called that in years and I wasn't about to answer his call. He wouldn't let it go.

"I'm talkin' to ye boy." I turned slowly to him. "Ye you. You have guts showing your face around here." I didn't know this man and he sure didn't want to know what I was really capable of.

“Not sure you know who yer talkin' to partner. Good day.” I tipped my hat to him. He came up quick behind me and spun quickly and pointed the gun my at his face. “Like I said mister. You don't wanna know me.”

“Out there,” he nodded and looked out at the trail, “someone will find you. But when the angel falls, I will be there to pick him up again.” He pushed himself away and fixed his coat.

I looked around at anyone who may have noticed. The crowd is normal.

“Darling. We have all the supplies are you ready to go? We should head out so we can reach the outer fields by dusk.” Laura called from afar. I turned and looked at the old man again. It was as if he shook as if walked away. He sat on the bench and watched me pack. As we rode out of town our eyes met again. This time, we met with a little more crazy.

The chief stood over me. He said a prayer for his people, not me. He looked down into my eyes as if to look right through the crucifix and into my soul. This is how these people looked at each other. For a split second I felt like I belonged. The shadow cast in front of me of an ax that would take off my head, purifying my body of my corrupted “white man” mind.

I could sense the crowd's excitement. The shadow showed all the muscles working simultaneously to control the power of the ax. I closed my eyes and thought of Laura. Would I be seeing her again? Those thoughts were shattered at the sound of a pistol. The man behind me flew to the ground.

Silence.

A barrage of gunfire filled the air around me. Was this Marcy's coming to claim me as their own or another overzealous troop of white soldiers looking to claim another piece what is wrongfully theirs? Before long, an entire tribe of Mohicans lay dead at my feet. Out from the shadows walked a dozen men.

At the head was my guardian angel from the Liar's Dice table. We shook hands, perhaps I shook his a little more than he, mine.

