

TWO STATES OVER

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. DIXON PROPERTY - DRIVE - DAY

A ramshackle cabin tucked away in a backwater nook of desert sage and scrub oak. A pick-up and car parked in the drive.

TWO WORKMEN, late 20s, sweat their way towards the pick-up, straining under the weight of a worn armchair.

Workman in rear signals a stop. They let the chair down, pausing to catch their breath, peeling off vinyl gloves to mop their brows.

They watch a dust cloud forming along the access road. A sedan emerges from the haze, halts a short way from the pick-up.

PAT HANLON, mid-70s, lean, bowed with age, unfolds himself from the driver's seat. He retrieves a walking stick and dons a worn cattleman hat.

He takes in the surrounds with a long, studied look.

Pat limps towards the shack, relying on the stick for support. He acknowledges the Workmen with a nod.

He spots a third man dressed in office attire and vinyl gloves. The man flits between piles of rusted junk, taking pictures with a digital camera.

EXT. DIXON SHACK - STOOP - DAY

A tattered easy chair rests on the deck. Cigarette butts threaten to spill from a tin can at its foot.

A pair of rust-pitted wind chimes hang from the roof. Three naked strings dangled between them.

Hanlon twists a chime to see the nub of a rifle's foresight -

VOICE (O.S.)
Excuse me, Sir?

Hanlon turns to see the photographer hurrying over.

MILT WORTHING, mid-40s, sun-reddened arms sprouting from rolled shirt sleeves.

MILT
You'll be wanting vinyls-

Milt waggles a gloved hand.

MILT
You can't be handling the artifacts
with bare skin. It's the oils and
salts, they degrade a thing. You the
sheriff's man? Rosemount said someone
might be calling.

HANLON
(nodding)
Pat Hanlon.

Hanlon extends a hand. Milt pulls off a glove and meets it.

MILT
Milt Worthing. They didn't give a
name. Didn't say when neither.

HANLON
They told me crime scene had been
through?

MILT
Yessir, couple weeks back. I'm with
the county. Historic Preservation.

Hanlon frowns, nonplussed.

The armchair loaded, the Workmen return to the cabin.

1ST WORKMAN
You want us to start on the grounds?

MILT
No, it's junk. No sense in moving it.
Just clear the stoop and inside. See
it's well roped for that bone shaker
out.

The Workmen file up the steps and set to work on the chair.

MILT
(re: the gloves)
I got spares.

HANLON
I'm just looking is all.

MILT
Did you know him?

HANLON
We met one time, a ways back.

MILT
Quite the thing, him being out here
all these years. Reckon I'd sooner
take a cell.

He nods towards the pick-up -

MILT
I'm on the clock for the rental.
(to the Workmen)
Don't set it in the dirt like that
last one. And don't forget them
chimes.
(re: the wind chimes)
Looks to me like a thirty-aught-six.
I remember rightly, the same caliber
they used in Wichita Falls.

Milt waggles the camera and turns back for the junk piles.

MILT
Good to meet you, Mister Hanlon.

Hanlon wonders after him. He steps aside, letting the
Workmen pass with the chair.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
He come at me with that oils line...

Hanlon turns.

SABINE DIXON, late-60s, a force of nature, borne of hardship
and self-reliance, stands inside the doorway.

SABINE
I told him to go fuck himself.

HANLON
Beg your pardon, Ma'am, I didn't see
you there.

SABINE
I'm easy on shoe leather like that.

HANLON
My name's-

SABINE
I know who you are.

Her eyes stray to his walking stick.

SABINE
There's a beer inside. Water out back
if you prefer, but you'll be bringing
it up yourself.

She heads back inside.

Hanlon gives the chimes a last look and follows.

INT. DIXON SHACK - DAY

Hanlon sits at a table amid an otherwise bare room. He shakes a handkerchief from his pocket and lays it before him using it as a coaster for his beer.

He notes an empty rifle mount above the back door.

He flinches as a shoe-box THUMPS onto the table. Sabine opens the lid and sifts through a bundle of papers.

HANLON
Newspaper said septicemia...

SABINE
(agreeing)
Complications of the liver. It runs
in the family, on my daddy's side.

HANLON
Were you with him when he passed?

SABINE
He was already too far gone. Time it
took for them to believe him, and
find me. Turns out it ain't uncommon
for a man to sow himself a last
earthly tangle. ...They gave me some
of his things. All I could do to keep
them from Gloves out there.

She removes a bundle of letters. The paper yellowed and brittle. She searches through them.

HANLON
Folk was writing him?

SABINE

He was writing them - half-writing mostly. This a one to the Governor. There's others, one to President Ford. Carter too.

She hands him a letter -

SABINE

A thing don't last in this dry.

Hanlon squints at the faded, near illegible scrawl before handing it back.

HANLON

He was looking for a way out.

SABINE

Guess his conscience were never pricked enough for stamps.

She looks around the room, flummoxed. Unable to locate the object of her search.

HANLON

You was the eldest, Sabine..?

SABINE

You got a keen memory.

HANLON

Some day's keener than others. How's Kansas City?

She gives the letters a last once over and dumps them back in the box.

SABINE

Hell, my mind, it roams all over.

She takes a seat - back with Hanlon now.

SABINE

You tell me. Left as soon as I could. Dixon weren't so much a name as a curse after that. Bussed in from Henderson, quit the wheel - arthritis - gift from my momma's side. Sheriff gave me a ride the rest of the way. He was none too pleased.

(MORE)

SABINE (cont'd)

Had to kick me up a righteous fuss
just to find out where this place was
at. I guess local law taking this
whole thing something personal.

HANLON

It'll dent some pride alright. He
ever try to make contact?

SABINE

I already gave my statement.

HANLON

Ma'am, I been retired near ten years.

SABINE

Retired, huh. Well that must make it
pleasure then.

Hanlon bristles, offended.

She puts the lid back on the shoe box. Leans back, sipping
her beer. Almost to herself -

SABINE

All but two states over...

The Workmen enter. Sabine cuts them a sideways glance as
they pass into the back room.

HANLON

Did you lose something?

A flicker of sadness cuts through her tough exterior.

SABINE

A photograph. Had it right here.

The Workmen emerge carrying a busted chest of drawers. Milt
hovers in the doorway, overseeing. He catches Hanlon's eye
and quickly looks away.

HANLON

I dare say you're not the only one
missing a thing.

SABINE

(re: the Workmen)

You know what that Sheriff told me?
That they take it all away to make
copies. It's them copies they send
back and charge folk to see.

HANLON

To see what?

SABINE

They calling this a place of historical significance. Like the Alamo.

His brow crinkles, baffled.

She shrugs, as lost by the notion as him.

SABINE

Guess they ain't building strip malls way out here.

HANLON

And you don't get no say?

SABINE

I don't want none. Just had to see is all. ...There's a coop out back. As a boy you couldn't get him near a bird, made him flighty as all hell.

Her gaze roams the room, bemused.

SABINE

Way the law sees it this is proceeds of crime. So much for living the high life on some island hideaway.

Sabine meets his eyes. Hard. Unforgiving.

SABINE

Take a good look, Mister Hanlon. This where he saw out his days. Half-blind, near crippled, just him and the bottle. My brothers was born to hard times and Lord knows they died no different.

HANLON

It's in me, I won't deny. But that ain't why I'm here.

She stares him down, prying the truth free.

HANLON

The boy I shot.

The Workmen loiter about the doorway sharing a smoke, casting sidelong glances, growing impatient.

SABINE
Maybe some truths is best left be.

He stares back, his mind made.

EXT. DIXON SHACK - BACK PORCH - DAY

A single wooden chair next to a rickety table.

Sabine leads Hanlon outside. She nods to a patch of trees rising from a fold in the land.

SABINE
There's a path of sorts.

She turns away, offering no more by way of explanation.

He considers his beer a beat. Sets it down.

EXT. TRAIL - DAY

Hanlon picks his way along a worn footpath. Behind him, Sabine waits in the chair. The Workmen heft the kitchen table towards the pick-up, Milt dogging their heels like an anxious puppy.

EXT. TRAIL/GRAVE - DAY

Hanlon descends a slope into a depression - the shack almost hidden from view from this vantage. He looks around, uneasy.

He limps his way along a dry wash. Then he sees it -

Neatly stacked rocks trace the outline of a grave mound. A freshly painted cross set at the head. A weathered chair rests close by, in the shade of a tree.

Hanlon edges closer. A name on the cross: BILLY DIXON, APRIL 24TH, 1956 - OCTOBER 10TH, 1971. RIP SWEET BROTHER.

Hanlon removes his hat.

He notes the chair: The paint chipped and worry worn at the arms. The front legs sunk deeper in the dirt as if the sitter's weight were hunched forward.

He toes the soil - shards of glass poke through. Greens and browns of beer and liquor bottles, worn smooth by time.

Hanlon holds there in silence.

EXT. DIXON SHACK - BACK PORCH - DAY

Sabine waits. Banging and scraping from inside the cabin as the Workmen clear the remaining furnishings.

Her gaze shifts to the distance as Hanlon makes his way towards the cabin.

There's a weight of sadness in the way he carries himself, mirrored in her eyes. A shared understanding.

Hanlon reaches the stoop.

They stare into nowhere. Guilty. Lost.

SABINE

I took some of that money, from that first Valley National they robbed in Douglas. I didn't ask where it came from. Had myself a whirlwind of a time, what I spent it on I don't recall. Felt like I was living. ...I was supposed to be the one looking out for them, much as Ma never could... I let them run their own way, while I cursed her out for giving up on life. ...I never believed what they said about their making the border. That was never their way - they didn't have no ideas bigger than their boots. And they'd sure as hell never split on one another. Not ever. They'd been beat down enough times to know there weren't no-one else to rely on.

A stillness falls over her. She closes her eyes. Spent.

An engine chugs into life from the front of the shack.

Hanlon looks to the empty shoe box. The sifted pile of letters in her lap. The handkerchief clutched in her hand.

EXT. DIXON PROPERTY - DRIVE - DAY

Milt packs his things into the car's trunk. The pick-up already kicking up dust along the access road.

He closes the trunk, turns to find Hanlon behind him - a little too close for comfort.

MILT

Mister Hanlon, I was about to come find you.

HANLON

Looks like I saved you a trouble.

MILT

That I'm hoping you might. This a unique situation, I'm sure you'll agree. Caused quite the stir. Quite the stir... And well, we've afforded a certain leeway in proceedings, but this is property of the county now and-

HANLON

I've seen all I need.

MILT

No, no, Mister Hanlon, we're grateful to host you, we are. It's just that I'd be ever more grateful if, well, you could extend my sentiment to Miss Dixon and maybe see her on her way. She doesn't seem to have taken to my vocation.

Hanlon thumbs the rim of his hat, nods faintly.

Milt smiles, grateful. He licks his lips, shifts, awkward, something else on his mind.

MILT

Your name sounded familiar. You were the patrolman them two boys shot in Wichita, summer of seventy-one? Right before they...went to ground.

Hanlon shifts his weight. Embarrassed. Guilty. He nods.

HANLON

A one of them.

MILT

How about that. Well, Sir, you're a part of New Mexico history now.

He opens the car door and climbs in. Pleased as punch.

MILT

I'll see you're sent an invitation to the opening. Better yet, I'll have them make you up a lifetime pass.

HANLON

You know, I'm poor company on drives. Perhaps you'd be good enough to see the lady to her bus?

Milt looks from the shack to the pickup's trailing dust. He squirms, not liking this suggestion at all.

HANLON

Hell, I guess you're on the hook for that rental, huh. I could just give the Sheriff a call up in Rosemount, let them know you said to come collect her. Milt, right?

Milt swallows. Caught in a bind.

MILT

Well now, I mean-

HANLON

Or you could just return her damn picture and I'll avail myself...

Milt sucks it down. He feigns a smile, reaches for the key fob - the car's trunk pops open.

EXT. DIXON SHACK - BACK PORCH - DAY

Sabine sits as before.

Hanlon places a photograph on the table. He crosses to the rail and gazes out at the trees screening the grave.

A faded Polaroid, circa mid 60s. It shows three smiling teens. A younger Sabine, her arms around two younger boys, one a little older than the other.

Sabine stares at the image.

They hold there in the gathering twilight. Each with their thoughts. A comfortable silence bridging the distance between them.

FADE OUT