

THE BEDROCK FRYER

By B. Purdum

EXT. WELL AT TOWN SQUARE, MIDNIGHT, JULY 1914

A woman, 20s, blond, gasping, face splashed with tears and dirt, pulls herself, legs limp, across the dirt street towards the abandoned well in the town square. When she reaches the well, she scrawls a message on the stone with her blood, collapses and dies.

INT. SHERIFF CONNOLLY CONNOLLY'S BEDROOM

SHERIFF BLAIN CONNOLLY, 55, sleeps. He is a man of few words, capable, serious. We briefly see his dreams, flashbacks of a beautiful woman laughing in the kitchen. This is interrupted by a dream of a long underground tunnel, and a scream. He wakes up, startled.

INT SHERIFF CONNOLLY'S KITCHEN

SHERIFF CONNOLLY makes breakfast. SRA SERRA, 50, a wealthy local Californio, stops by the window.

SRA SERRA

Buenos dias Sheriff

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Mornin

SRA SERRA

How are the poached eggs this morning?

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Good

SRA SERRA

If you let me one of these days, I will come in there and cook for you some vanilla bean yogurt, chilaquiles, maybe with some goat cheese.. mm I tell you it's so good, mi marido- he does not complain.

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Maybe one of these days.

Sra Serra's young maid, MARIA/USEFUL HEART, 13, runs up. SRA SERRA scolds her in Spanish- she was supposed to fetch chilies from the market, for SRA SERRA's upcoming fiesta for important visiting Ranchos. Maria protests.

MARIA

La muerte! La muerte mañana!

SRA SERRA

Murder?? Maria what are you talking about?

MARIA

By the well at the square! A girl!

SRA SERRA

What girl? Who told you Maria?

MARIA

I saw! La muerte, la muerte!

Other children run up, crying "La muerte!" SRA SERRA speaks rapidly and angrily to them in Spanish. SHERIFF CONNOLLY grabs his jacket and toast and heads out the door.

INT. SHERIFF CONNOLLY'S OFFICE

Fred, 40's, a lean, tall, awkward fellow with one eye, is asleep at his desk with his feet up, hat over face, a cigarette dangling from his lip. SHERIFF CONNOLLY walks in. He stops, picks up a stack of heavy books and drops it on the desk. Fred snaps awake.

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

You come in early every day just to sleep more?

FRED

SHERIFF! You finally beat the devil around the stump and showed up!

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Kick up your mush-head mudpipes and get up, we got work to do.

Fred stumbles as they hurry out the door.

EXT TOWN SQUARE, WELL

SHERIFF CONNOLLY and Fred approach the scene of the crime. There is a crowd. The town coroner is there, along with some deputies who are keeping people away and working on the scene. DEPUTY PETERSON, 38, a nervous man, approaches.

DEPUTY PETERSON

Mornin Sheriff

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

What seems to be going on here Deputy?

DEPUTY PETERSON

Uhh.. I really don't know Sheriff..

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

What do you mean you don't know?

DEPUTY PETERSON

It.. she.. Mother Lopez found this dead girl by the well.. We don't know her from Job, she ain't nobody from town..

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

You don't know her?

DEPUTY PETERSON

No..we have no suspects..

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Find some.

SHERIFF CONNOLLY pushes past him, to the well.

EXT. ABANDONED WELL, SITE OF CRIME

On-lookers rubber-neck. SHERIFF CONNOLLY and FRED approach the site.

CORONER BIXBY, 40s, an aloof, skinny British man, and DR HYMAN, 40's, an attractive and deceptively intelligent woman, work over the girl's body.

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Mornin Bixby. What do you know about the death?

CORONER BIXBY

(puzzled) Good morning Sheriff. I'm not sure, to be frank. The cause of extinction is quite the mystery.. I've never once seen this before. Fourth-degree burns on her extremities, evidence of necrosis, apart from the external bleeding. Yet there is no indication of fire nearby. Strange, very strange..

DR HYMAN barges in, interrupts.

DR HYMAN

Sheriff I suggest we take the body to my personal lab for further testing. I'm confident we can find a.. conclusive diagnosis.

DR HYMAN smiles wickedly

CORONER BIXBY

(Ahem) SHERIFF, meet my new head of the medical department, Dr Hyman

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Dr Hyman, what sort of tests?

DR HYMAN

I suggest a thorough biopsy, a diagnostic assay, perhaps.

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

I suggest a thorough report of your findings, over dinner tonight.

DR HYMAN

How suggestive. I accept.

DR HYMAN winks.

EXT. ABANDONED WELL

SHERIFF CONNOLLY and FRED approach the well to look around.

FRED

That half-pennied painted cat is hot as a whorehouse on nickel night

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

You watch your French

FRED

I'm just airin' the lungs

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

We'll find out the cut of her jib.

FRED trips and lands near the base of the well, near where the body lies. A police assistant looks annoyed.

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Everything looks fine

FRED

Yep. 'Cept, this funny hog scratch down here

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Where?

FRED points to a faint inscription in blood that turned dark during the night hours, almost blending in with the stone. SHERIFF CONNOLLY leans down and touches it.

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Blood

FRED

Yep

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

(In perfect French) "De.. là.. est né.. COXI"

FRED

Sounds like wut my momma used to call me when she caught me salt-lickin' her
John Barleycorn.

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

No, the first part's French. "From there was born.. Coxi." Coxi.. Latin? We
need to see Professor Warren.

FRED

That old book dabster down at the Huckleberry factory?

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

That's the one

INT SCHOOLHOUSE

SHERIFF CONNOLLY and FRED are in the school library, consulting with PROFESSOR
WARREN, 50s, a studious and slightly batty old school marm with a college
education.

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Have you heard of the word? Is it Latin?

PROFESSOR WARREN

Ah Latin. "What is genius? 'Tis a thing seldom rewarded"

Awkward pause. WARREN hurries to the shelves, picks a volume and opens it.

PROFESSOR WARREN

Coxi - A Thai Red Mountain rattlesnake, shy, surprising speed, stubborn and
defensive, responds negatively to human touch. A vivacious species!

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

(gives her an odd look) Could be.. but I think there's more.

PROFESSOR WARREN pulls out her well-used Latin dictionary and searches.

PROFESSOR WARREN

Coxi, a form of coco.. oh! Sounds tasty.

SHERIFF CONNOLLY and FRED look at her, impatient.

PROFESSOR WARREN

Ahem, Coxi, a form of coco, cocere, coctus. To cook, to burn, to fry.

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Thank you professor, you've been a great help.

SHERIFF CONNOLLY and FRED leave.

PROFESSOR WARREN

Ta ta! Begin at the beginning! "But Boreas blew a terrific gale!.."

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE LAWN

SHERIFF CONNOLLY and FRED walk and talk

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

"To cook, to burn." Burns on the victim. I think we have a lead.

FRED

But how'd she get burnt?

Maria and several children run across the lawn, calling to the SHERIFF CONNOLLY.

MARIA

(in Spanish) Cadaver! Cadaver!

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

What is it?

MARIA

Cadaver! Otro cadaver! Another body SHERIFF! At the well!

EXT. ABANDONED WELL

SHERIFF CONNOLLY and FRED show up at the well, where another body, a young man, with the same burns, is lying limp across the stone wall. The same message is written again.

DEPUTY PETERSON

(Inappropriately triumphant) It's CORONER BIXBY'S son! We have a suspect!

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Show me the body.

SHERIFF CONNOLLY and FRED examine it. CORONER BIXBY stands near, sobbing.

CORONER BIXBY

Who did this SHERIFF!? It wasn't me! I'm telling you sir!!

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Well we don't know Bixby, we're trying to..

CORONER BIXBY

(grasping SHERIFF CONNOLLY'S lapels) You have to find out!! You have to..

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

I'm sorry Coroner, but we gotta put you in a four piece suit until further questioning. Tie 'im up boys

The deputies take CORONER BIXBY

CORONER BIXBY

No!! It wasn't me!! You can't! Stop! Sheriff!

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Don't worry Bixby, we'll sort it out. But first, I got a date with an angel.

INT. BELLY CHEATER BILL'S DINER

SHERIFF CONNOLLY and DR HYMAN sit across a dining table.

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

So what brings a pretty piece of calico like you to these parts?

DR HYMAN

I have my reasons. The open air..

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Never breathed by a breast so sweet

DR HYMAN

The sun..

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Never shined on a bustle so hot

DR HYMAN

..working with Bixby, the most revered coroner in the southern hemisphere..

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

..in a town where it's easy to honey fuggle the junipers and make tracks.

DR HYMAN

Are you accusing me of something SHERIFF?

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Let's just say this little town is all I got anymore. And I don't like anyone bringing any bit house chicanery around here.

DR HYMAN

Well this chica ain't into chicanery, so lay off, Judas Steer.

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

I'm just seein' how the cat jumps.

DR HYMAN

Oh she jumps wherever she finds a mouse. But that doesn't mean she's laying traps.

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

What were your biopsy results?

DR HYMAN

Inconclusive

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

That's what I thought

SHERIFF CONNOLLY pays the bill and gets up to leave.

DR HYMAN

(as he walks away) You won't prove anything! Anything!!

EXT FRED'S SHACK, MIDNIGHT

SHERIFF CONNOLLY, carrying a lantern, pounds on Fred's door. Fred opens it.

FRED

Damn hell SHERIFF, are you jo-fired jingled? Get yer muck forks off my door!

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Shut your lip. Get your boots and peacemaker and come with me.

FRED

Aw hell SHERIFF, fine. I'll don my best bib and tucker.

EXT. WELL AT TOWN SQUARE

Cheerful noises from SRA SERRA'S fiesta can be heard in the background. SHERIFF CONNOLLY starts lowering rope down the well.

FRED

SHERIFF, you're not doin' what I think yer doin'

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Shut your cock holster.

FRED looks worried. When the rope is tied, SHERIFF CONNOLLY hands it to FRED.

FRED

Me first?? So I can catch your fall?

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Git in there

FRED whimpers and starts climbing

INT. SECRET UNDERGROUND TORTURE LAB

DR HYMAN yells in a strong German accent. CORONER BIXBY is oddly out of jail.

DR HYMAN

Such a breach in security shall never be tolerated again!! We were so close! And I was finally allowed on the surface of the earth, to bask in the sun..

CORONER BIXBY

Do you want to proceed with the next vict - er, patient?

DR HYMAN

What choice do we have? Proceed immediately! This time increase the voltage! We have no more time to be careful! The future of my science, of my passion, is waiting for us! The time will come when all the world will see the greatness of what can be done to the human mind, to the human spirit!

CORONER BIXBY

Dr. Coxi, is the next test subject ready?

DR HYMAN

Oh she's ready all right. So is she..

DR HYMAN strokes an electroshock torture device, some years ahead of its time.

INT. BOTTOM OF THE WELL

SHERIFF CONNOLLY and FRED land at the bottom of the well. It is very dark.

FRED

Well, SHERIFF, I guess there's nuthin' here, let's go back up..

FRED accidentally jostles an old wooden door in the wall, which opens.

FRED

Damn Sam hell..

SHERIFF walks in the door, FRED follows. They walk down a wet, dark tunnel.

FRED

(shudders) Where are we?

FRED slips on a wet rock and screams. SHERIFF CONNOLLY catches him.

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

You all right?

FRED

I'm all right, ya.. right as gin and molasses on Sunday. Sorry Sheriff.

Suddenly they hear a distant scream. SHERIFF CONNOLLY has flashbacks to his dream from that morning: this is the place from the dream. FRED almost panics.

FRED

You hear that SHERIFF?!

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Get out your Black-eyed Susan, Fred

They get out their guns and head towards the sound, FRED is trembling.

INT. SECRET UNDERGROUND TORTURE LAB

Animal cages line the wall, containing pigs and a few other animals. CORONER BIXBY walks around a table/electroshock torture device occupied by none other than the woman in SHERIFF CONNOLLY'S dream: his wife, BETTY, who disappeared 2 years ago. She trembles, and has clearly been through a lot of torture. BIXBY smiles, holding two paddles connected to the machine by electric cords.

CORONER BIXBY

Are we ready for the second "treatment"?

DR COXI

(Laughs) Yes of course. This has always been one of our stronger ones. You know what they say, "You don't break a horse. You come to an 'understanding'"

BETTY

You'll never get away with this Coxi. I've told you..

DR COXI

Enough! I will get away with everything, don't you see?? I have been trained by Kraepelin and the great Cerletti himself! When he sees what I have accomplished, what I have done with his work! Training the human mind, molding it to my desires. Any war could be won, for the beloved homeland, for Deutschland! We are years ahead of our time! When his work comes to light, I will be the most famous of them all! (laughs)

SHERIFF CONNOLLY and FRED burst in the room, holding up their sharp shooters.

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Not so fast Coxi.

BETTY

Blain!

FRED

(to BIXBY) Put down those queer-looking biscuit rollers before I pump you full of silver aces!

DR COXI

Ha! So this is all they send me? A forelorn Sheriff and one-eyed Wally?

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Coxi. The Fryer. Didn't think I'd ever see you again, after Fort McPherson.

DR COXI

Hahaha what are you going to do Connolly, lock me up? I have more connections in this little town than buzzard bait during mating season.

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Maybe not, but I might have a few tricks up my sleeve.

The SHERIFF gestures to FRED. FRED raises his six-gun to pistol-whip BIXBY. BIXBY reacts quickly, holding out the paddles to touch the gun, electrocuting FRED. Meanwhile, DR COXI has grabbed a chair and swings it at the SHERIFF. It hits him square in the crown and he goes down. He tries to get up, to break the connection between FRED's gun and the paddles, before it's too late. DR COXI comes down on him again with the same chair while he's getting up.

DR COXI

That Amerikaner combat training always comes in handy, doesn't it Sheriff? SHERIFF CONNOLLY grabs loops of a live electrical wire like a lasso and throws it at DR COXI'S feet and pulls. It tightens around her feet and she falls. FRED is slowly but surely frying, while BIXBY watches with glee.

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Hang in there Fred!

SHERIFF CONNOLLY staggers around the table as DR COXI wrestles with the rope. He tackles FRED, breaking the connection. BIXBY looks annoyed. He turns to SHERIFF CONNOLLY, on the floor. SHERIFF CONNOLLY is still clutching the live wire. CORONER BIXBY puts the paddles on either side of SHERIFF CONNOLLY'S forehead and turns on the current. SHERIFF CONNOLLY'S body convulses violently. Meanwhile FRED has slowly come to and released BETTY. The two of them count to three and push the torture table across the room, knocking BIXBY over. SHERIFF CONNOLLY is still attached and being electrocuted.

FRED

How do we stop the current?!

BETTY

We have to cut the power!!

She points to a power box on the other side of the room. DR COXI has arisen, though still tied around one ankle. SHERIFF CONNOLLY looks close to death.

DR COXI

(laughs) Thirty more seconds and he's visiting the old ranch hand in the sky.

BETTY

You can't do this!!

DR COXI

Of course I can! Don't you see?? You can't use my own technology against me! In the meantime FRED has snuck across the room to the power box.

DR COXI

This is my final experiment! Nothing can stop me now!

FRED

Betty, catch!

FRED tosses BETTY another pair of paddles. She lunges at DR COXI and makes contact with her chest, just as FRED throws the switch, re-directing the current.

DR COXI

Noooooo!

The current goes from the wire on her foot through her body to the paddles, at the highest level of power.

DR COXI

Noooooo!

An explosion of light and energy/flashing lights.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM

SHERIFF CONNOLLY lays on a hospital bed, heavily bandaged. BETTY sleeps in an armchair, with a few bandages on her arms and neck. SHERIFF CONNOLLY wakes up.

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

Betty

BETTY jumps to his side.

BETTY

Yes darling

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

I thought you were gone forever

BETTY

I know darling

They kiss.

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

How's Fred?

BETTY

(smiles) He's all right.

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

What about Coxi, and Bixby?

BETTY

Let's just say we won't be seeing them for a while.

DEPUTY PETERSON enters. He hands the SHERIFF CONNOLLY a letter.

SHERIFF CONNOLLY

What's this?

DEPUTY PETERSON

A letter, from.. from the mayor.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE, TOWN MEETING NEAR THE WELL, JULY 28, 1914

MAYOR GRIMBLE stands at the podium. SHERIFF CONNOLLY is on the stand, in crutches, with FRED and BETTY. Applause dies down as the mayor speaks.

MAYOR GRIMBLE

We're here today to humbly and graciously thank those who have served to uncover important recent covert actions that were operating under our very noses. How many citizens would have been under threat, how many dangers would we have encountered, how many perils would we have been unaware, had not our SHERIFF CONNOLLY, Mrs. Connolly, and FRED been willing to risk their lives in the name of their country, their freedom, and this town..

The Mayor continues talking as there is more applause, and SHERIFF CONNOLLY, BETTY and FRED rise to accept awards.

The ceremony is interrupted by MARIA, who comes running with a newspaper. The townsfolk faintly hear her cry, not understanding until she gets closer.

MARIA

Guerra! En guerra!

She holds up the paper which reads: "WAR"

INT. JAIL CELL

DEPUTY PETERSON walks up to DR COXI'S jail cell, looking foreboding. Through the prison bars he hands DR COXI, not in the best of shape, a key and two envelopes. She opens one and reads the heading out loud:

DR COXI

Picana electrica

She smiles, followed by a look of deep hatred in her eyes. DEPUTY PETERSON unlocks the cell, offers his hand and gently helps her out. They board a waiting car that eventually takes them to the harbor, where she takes a ship to Germany.