

The House of Oliver

By Scott Wilson

“The old Oliver place?” The rube in the big straw hat said. “Well, now. You go three quarters a mile down that away, and turn right at the fork. But you gotta know this, that house is haunted.”

“Most obliged, partner,” Brent Caulfield, the bounty hunter said.

Brent downed his glass of whiskey and walked out to the dusty main street of Halford. A few locals walked along the boardwalk in front of the general store and looked away when Brent turned their way. He knew looked mean, no matter what he tried to do or how he dressed. There was just that something about him that shouted out *Bounty Hunter*.

“You going down to the spooks house, mister,” a young boy said to Brent.

Brent turned slowly and smiled.

“I don’t much believe in such fairy tales, son.”

“Neither did any them other men, just like you they were. Rode into town looking for that old fella, Mr Oliver. None of them ever come back, ain’t no other roads leading away either so they just stay there. Dead is what I reckon.”

Brent hopped on his horse and lit a cigarette.

“You saying there isn’t a way for Oliver to sneak out the back?”

“Yer, Mister,” the boy said, squinting at Brent. “Mountains all round that old house. Can’t see how you’d get anywhere easy.”

Brent tipped his hat and tossed a coin to the boy.

“Much obliged, son.”

He turned his horse around and rode towards the Olive house, somewhat disturbed by the words from the child. The scorching midday sun beat down on his back, yet a cold shiver ran up his spine.

The ride took just shy of an hour at a steady gallop, but the mountains seemed to get further away, the closer he got to the house. It was a typical homestead, nothing sinister or strange in its appearance, but somehow the uneasy feeling rose up in Brent’s gut as he neared it.

“So where are all of the horses?” he said, thinking that there should be a fair few strays milling around if there were as many bounty hunters with one way tickets as the boy reckoned.

Brent saw none.

He swung out of the saddle and led the horse to a water trough near the front porch. The horse neighed and bucked, not wanting to get any closer to the house.

“Got you spooked to, has he girl?”

Brent patted the Palomino on its pale mane and let go of the reins. The horse would not leave without its master, so Brent did not tie her reins down. He dusted his sleeves and trousers, and then walked slowly up the front stairs. His gun rig was out of view beneath his tan jacket, but Oliver would probably spot him as a bounty hunter anyway.

“Who’s there?” A voice whispered from inside.

“Mister Oliver. I am Brent Caulfield; I have some documents relating to your Uncle’s Farm. Can I speak to you please?”

Brent leaned to look in one of the front windows. They were black as a snake’s belly and he could see nothing, and no one inside. The cold shiver ran down his spine again and he stepped back from the window.

“What the heck” he said.

When he stepped back, he was stepping backwards into the house, looking out. He stepped forward, but the window remained out of his reach.

“It’s too late, now,” a voice behind him, whispered.

Brent spun around and drew his six-shooter. Countless familiar faces stared back at him. Each one long and drawn, void of all signs of life and scared with an O burnt into their forehead. He pivoted back to the window and let loose with his pistol. Each bullet splashed into the glass like a stone hitting the water in a pond. Brent spun the chamber out and emptied out the spent shells, and quickly reloaded with six fresh bullets.

Outside, the smiling face of Oliver grinned at Brent before turning and leading his horse into the small barn across the yard. The gap between the open doors rippled like water as Oliver walked through. He reappeared moments later with a wicked grin on his face and a red-hot branding iron in his hand.

Brent stepped forward, but could not get closer to the window. He realised then that there was no door leading outside.

“Only Oliver can leave this house,” one of the spectral bounty hunters said in a low, monotone whisper.

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