

"FROM HELL I CAME"

by
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(Sample Excerpt)

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FADE IN:

EXT. THE OZARKS - RIVER - DAY

The sparkling ripple of a current.

WOMAN (V.O.)
(singing hymn)
*Spring up, oh well, within my soul;
Spring up, oh well, and make me whole;
Spring up, oh well, and give to me
That life abundantly.*

A river snakes through a green valley toward the horizon. No signs of civilization.

WOMAN (V.O.)
(singing hymn)
*There's a river of life flowing out from me,
Makes the lame to walk and the blind to see,
Opens prison doors, sets the captive free;
There's a river of life flowing out from me.*

EXT. THE OZARKS, BACKWOODS - DAY

SHERRA JAMES (25), hauls ass through the woods in handcuffs and orange coveralls. Her heavy work boots thump through the leaves. She's on the run.

A QUARTER MILE BEHIND

Four local cops scramble behind three pissed-off German Shepherds tracking the fugitive's scent --

HOOPER struggles to hang on to their leashes.

SIEDOW grips a walkie-talkie.

ROSE and TRIMONT follow close behind wielding shotguns.

SIEDOW
(into walkie)
We got her! The dogs are singin'!

BACK TO SHERRA

The barking sounds closer but Sherra doesn't look back.

Sweat pours down her face. She runs as fast as her exhausted legs will carry her.

BACK TO SQUAD

The dogs know they're closing in. Taut leashes look like they'll rip Hooper's arm out of the socket.

HOOPER
Fuck me swingin'.

SIEDOW
(into walkie)
We're two miles north-east of the
old camp, headin' for the river.

FEMALE DISPATCHER (V.O.)
(from walkie)
Ten four, Siedow. Proceed with
caution.

Hooper grunts as the relentless dogs yank him along.

SIEDOW
Turn 'em loose!

ROSE
Aww shit, here we go.

Hooper drops the leashes and the dogs rocket ahead of the squad, over the crest of a hill and out of sight.

He cackles, calling out after them --

HOOPER
Proceed with caution, girls!

BACK TO SHERRA

who trips over a tangle and goes down hard.

A sharp snap and a fleshy rip. Sherra tumbles down an embankment, ass over elbows.

She lands flat on her back, wind knocked out. Clutches her ribs in pain.

The dogs sound way too close for comfort.

BACK TO SQUAD

racing through the trees, trailing the ceaseless baying of the unseen German Shepherds.

SUDDENLY -

The barks turn to gurgling yelps of agony and terror.
The four men slam on the brakes and freeze in their tracks.
They're all eyes and ears.

BACK TO SHERRA

who jerks her head back toward the horrific screeches that echo through the hollows.

She sits up. Listens.

BACK TO SQUAD

The screeching stops. Silence.
The squad stare ahead, bewildered.

FEMALE DISPATCHER (V.O.)
(from walkie)
Siedow, this is base. Do you copy?

Siedow ignores the call. His eyes scan the trees ahead.

TRIMONT
What the fuck just happened?

He looks to the others. No one says a damn thing.
Rose spits tobacco juice.

ROSE
Shit just went south.

FEMALE DISPATCHER (V.O.)
(from walkie)
Come in, Siedow. Talk to me.

Again, Siedow ignores the call.

SIEDOW
Come on.

Siedow stomps off, shadowed by Rose and Trimont.
Hooper holds three bone-shaped dog biscuits in his hand.

SIEDOW
 (into walkie)
 We lost the dogs. They're torn to
 pieces.

Trimont glances at the dogs. His face turns sour again.

FEMALE DISPATCHER (V.O.)
 (from walkie)
 What do you mean torn to pieces?

SIEDOW
 (into walkie)
 I mean they been butchered! She
 carved 'em up and took off like
 Moody's goose!
 (scowls)
 Out!

Rose spits another brown glob.

SIEDOW
 Shit!

Everyone looks to Siedow. He's steaming.

SIEDOW
 I'm gonna cut this bitch from
 asshole to appetite.

Hooper pulls his rifle from a sling across his back.

Trimont stifles a post-puke belch and blows it out.

Rose pumps his twelve gauge.

ROSE
 (to Trimont)
 Better cowboy up, son.

BACK TO SHERRA

who hunkers down inside the tree. Still out of breath.

She reaches into her pocket, pulls out a gold coin. She
 kisses it, twirls it nervously through her fingers.

She peeks through a crack in the bark. Sees nothing, until --

Rose creeps into view on point. Shotgun ready.

Sherra bites back a gasp, shrinks deeper into the hollow.

OUTSIDE HOLLOW TREE

Rose halts. Holds up a hand to signal the others behind him.

TRIMONT

What?

ROSE

I heard something.

TRIMONT

Heard what?

ROSE

I don't know! Something!

A twig snaps nearby. Trimont jerks his head toward the noise.

SIEDOW

Get ready, boys.

Siedow unsnaps his holster, ready to draw his Glock.

SIEDOW

Sherra James... Come on out,
darlin'.

Hooper sniffs. Grips his Remington tighter.

INSIDE HOLLOW TREE

Sherra rocks back and forth as she fingers her lucky coin.

SIEDOW (O.S.)

You ain't gettin' across that
river, sweetheart!

OUTSIDE HOLLOW TREE

Trimont gulps. Anxious.

Siedow glances out into the woods expectantly. His eyes
settle on the hollow tree.

INSIDE HOLLOW TREE

Sherra draws a deep breath and holds it, a sliver of daylight
across her eyes.

OUTSIDE HOLLOW TREE

The men are still as statues. Waiting for a pin to drop.

SIEDOW
(smirks)
Payback's a bitch, ain't it Sherra?

Rose spits.

OUT OF NOWHERE -

A lightning blur and the sound of steel on flesh.

Rose stands in shock with a v-shaped slash across his throat. Blood spits from the gaping wound. He falls to his knees.

TRIMONT
What the shit?!

Another blur accompanied by the same metallic slash.

Trimont looks down at a scalpel-straight incision across his belly. No blood at first. Then it spills out like lava.

He screams.

THUD.

All eyes turn to Rose as he hits the dirt face first. Dead.

Trimont backpedals, bawling. He slams into a tree and cracks the back of his head, jolting the shotgun from his hands.

BOOM!

The twelve gauge hits the ground and discharges, sending steel shot whizzing past Siedow's ear.

SIEDOW
Arrgh!

Siedow and Hooper turn back to back in a clockwise spin.

They see nothing but trees.

HOOPER
Where the fuck is she?

SIEDOW
I don't see shit!

INSIDE HOLLOW TREE

Sherra gawks in horror, hand over her mouth, gulping air through her fingers.

OUTSIDE HOLLOW TREE

Trimont skids down the tree trunk onto his ass and topples over. He's losing a hell of a lot of blood.

SIEDOW
(into walkie)
Base, this is Siedow! We need help
godammit!

SHING!

The walkie plummets to the ground along with Siedow's hand.

He wails in agony, seizing the stump where his hand used to be. Blood pulses up into his own face.

Hooper spins around. Blinks with disbelief.

HOOPER
Jesus wept.

Hooper sizes up the rifle in his hands and dumps it to the dirt. Instead, he reaches over and draws Siedow's Glock.

BAM! BAM! BAM!

Hooper fires blindly into the trees in every direction.

INSIDE HOLLOW TREE

Sherra cringes, clamping her hands over her ears.

A whizzing bullet ricochets off her tree, spitting splinters into the air.

OUTSIDE HOLLOW TREE

Half drenched in blood, Siedow stares blankly at Hooper.

Hooper empties the clip but keeps on pulling the trigger.

CLICK. CLICK.

He finally realizes he's empty and tosses the Glock away. Turns back toward Siedow, who's gone pale.

HOOPER

Let's get the fuck outta here, man!

WHOOSH, THUMP.

The muscles in Hooper's face go slack.

Siedow squints with dazed confusion.

Hooper one-eighties, revealing a bone-handled hunting knife buried between his shoulder blades.

Staring back at him is KELLER MCGAVIN (59), one mean old hillbilly with ice in his veins.

Hooper's legs turn to jelly. He collapses.

McGavin looks up and sees Siedow stumble off into the trees, clutching his bloody stump. Doesn't bother with him.

He cuts his glare back to Hooper, now dragging himself through the leaves toward his discarded rifle.

Calmly, McGavin walks toward him.

Trimont, now laying in a pool of blood, pulls a cell phone from a cargo pocket on his pant leg.

Hooper reaches the rifle and uses it like a crutch to prop himself up, sitting with one shoulder against a tree.

He aims unsteadily as McGavin approaches.

McGavin doesn't flinch. Just keeps walking.

From the look on Trimont's face, that cell phone weighs a hundred pounds but he manages to snap a photo of McGavin without being seen.

Hooper tries to hold the wagging rifle barrel on McGavin.

HOOPER

(weakly)

Stop.

McGavin slaps the rifle out of Hooper's hands.

Hooper groans.

Stringy white hair dangles over McGavin's weather-beaten face as he stares down at the dying cop.

INSIDE HOLLOW TREE

Sherra leans forward to peer through the split in the bark.
The gold coin twirls over and over in her fingers.

OUTSIDE HOLLOW TREE

Bloody spittle sprays from Hooper's lips as he speaks --

HOOPER

Who are you?

McGavin jerks Hooper forward by the shoulder and yanks the knife out of his back.

Hooper yelps and McGavin shoves him back against the tree.

Trimont punches the cell phone's SEND button, a gelatinous blood cord dangling from his mouth onto the keypad.

McGavin kneels. Sticks the knife point under Hooper's chin.

HOOPER

Where did you come from?

McGavin squints.

MCGAVIN

See for yourself.

Hooper gives him a confused look, then screams in terror.

INSIDE HOLLOW TREE

Sherra watches McGavin drive the blade up into Hooper's lower jaw with a juicy rip.

Hooper's limbs spasm crazily for a few seconds, then go limp.

Sherra hears nothing but her own breathing and heartbeat.

OUTSIDE HOLLOW TREE

McGavin draws the knife out with a slurp and Hooper drops to the ground.

He nonchalantly wipes the bloody blade off on Hooper's uniform and slides the knife back into his belt sheath.

He stands. Stares at Hooper's lifeless face.

Trimont's eyes now blank and fixed eyes as well.

He turns to Rose, neck hanging open like a clown's grin. A wad of tobacco spills out of his mouth into the dirt.

INSIDE HOLLOW TREE

Sherra sits, still and quiet as a rabbit, until --

She fumbles the coin. It drops with a metallic ping. She snatches it back up. Eyes like saucers.

SHERRA
(whisper)
Shit.

McGavin slowly turns.

Sherra gasps as he walks straight for her. She backs away.

OUTSIDE HOLLOW TREE

McGavin slaps the bark aside with a violent swipe.

Their eyes meet, and McGavin's expression suddenly turns from rage to recognition.

SHERRA
No. Please don't.

FLASHBACK - INT. MCGAVIN BARN - DAY

ETHEL MCGAVIN (25), sprawled on a dirt floor in a sleeveless, floral sun dress as a SHADOWY FIGURE towers over her.

ETHEL
No. Please don't... I don't want to die.

BACK TO PRESENT DAY

McGavin squints. Sherra raises her shackled hands.

SHERRA
I don't want to die.

McGavin grabs the chain between her wrists and yanks her out of the hole.

EXT. CAPTAIN VARNELL'S HOME - DAY

The screaming teeth of a circular saw blade eat through a pine board across the grain.

Running the saw is Police Captain JOE VARNELL, 57, dressed in civilian clothes, a tool belt around his waist.

Behind him, a meticulously organized workshop through an open shed door.

Varnell finishes and sets the saw down. Picks up the board to inspect his work. Perfect.

INT. SQUAD CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Officer SHEA KNIGHT, 24, easy on the eyes, pulls into the driveway just as Varnell steps onto the first rung of a ladder propped up against the old cottage.

EXT. CAPTAIN VARNELL'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

Varnell glances at the car. Climbs the ladder anyway.

Knight cuts the engine and steps out. She's in uniform, but then again she always is. Hell, she probably showers in it.

She holds a manila envelope.

KNIGHT

Been tryin' to reach you, sir.

Varnell doesn't turn around. He reaches the top of the ladder and positions the fresh-cut board over a window frame.

VARNELL

You do know what the term
"vacation" means, don't you Knight?

Knight sighs and shuffles toward him.

Varnell pulls a galvanized finishing nail from his tool belt.

KNIGHT

Yes, Captain. I'd like to take
one myself someday, but this
is important.

Varnell starts the nail with a few hammer taps just as Knight reaches the base of the ladder.

VARNELL
(under his breath)
Important.

BAM. BAM.

He drives the nail with two precise hammer strikes.

VARNELL
Y'know, when my granddaddy built
this place in thirty-one he had
nothing but a pile of green lumber
and a bucket of rusty nails.

He reaches for another six penny.

KNIGHT
Sir?

VARNELL
Some days I just wish I could tear
the damn thing down and start over
again, clean.

Knight is getting impatient.

TAP. TAP. TAP.

VARNELL
The beginning... is the most
important part of the work. You
know who said that, Knight?

Varnell draws his hammer back to drive the nail.

KNIGHT
Jim Siedow is missing, Captain.

Varnell hits the nail off square, bending it over.

From the look on his face, that's a first.

KNIGHT
So are Rose, Hooper and Trimont.

Varnell finally turns around. Knight raises her eyebrows.

VARNELL
(nods)
Talk to me.

He backs down the ladder.

KNIGHT

Sherra James escaped from Rayville
this morning. Siedow and his boys
set out with the dogs.

Varnell steps off the ladder and turns to face Knight.

VARNELL

Where?

KNIGHT

Last we heard they were two miles
north past the old lumber camp.

VARNELL

(scowls)
Aww, hell.

KNIGHT

We lost 'em 'bout nine-thirty.
Siedow radioed in. Said the dogs
were slaughtered.

VARNELL

What? By Sherra James?

KNIGHT

(shrugs)
None of it makes any sense yet.

She slides a grainy black and white photo from the envelope
and hands it to Varnell. It's Keller McGavin.

KNIGHT

This came in just after Siedow's
last radio. No I.D. on him, yet.

Varnell's face goes ashen when he sees the man in the photo.

KNIGHT

We traced it back to Trimont's
cell. Haven't heard a thing since.

Varnell hands the photo back, then heads toward the workshop.

KNIGHT

Captain Varnell?

VARNELL

State been notified?

KNIGHT

Yes, sir.

VARNELL
(under his breath)
Shit.

Varnell reaches the workshop. Takes off his tool belt and hangs it on an old hook next to a gun belt.

VARNELL
Then we're gonna have to move fast
if we wanna beat 'em to it.

He grabs the gun belt and slings it around his waist.

Knight takes a few steps toward him.

KNIGHT
Beg your pardon, sir... but
shouldn't we take all the help we
can get on a search and rescue?

Varnell takes a deep breath and exhales.

VARNELL
This ain't no rescue, Knight.

She halts.

Varnell buckles his gun belt and turns toward her.

VARNELL
They're already dead.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

THWACK!

A hatchet blade severs the chain between Sherra's wrists.

She opens her eyes and breathes a sigh of relief. Now instead of cuffs she's just wearing two ugly-ass bracelets.

SHERRA
Thanks.

McGavin drops the hatchet into a leather sheath on his belt.

Glancing up to her without a word, he turns and walks away.

Sherra just sits there for a second in mental limbo, then pulls out her gold coin.

She spins it into the air, catches it in her palm, then flips it over onto the back of her other hand.

She pulls her top hand away.

The coin face depicts the blindfolded Lady Justice, holding her scales and sword. Heads.

SHERRA

Shit.

(sighs)

Outta the fry, into the fire.

She groans, then hops up and takes off after McGavin.

ON TRAIL

Sherra catches up. McGavin's busy tracking a blood trail.

SHERRA

So what's your story? You a runner?

No answer. McGavin just keeps walking, eyes scanning the ground ahead of him.

SHERRA

You're on the run, I can tell.

No response.

Sherra looks at his stringy hair and beard. Filthy clothes.

SHERRA

(sarcastic)

Looks like you been at it a while,
too.

McGavin stops. Kneels down. Touches the leaves on the ground. When he lifts his hand back up there's blood on his fingers.

He turns to the left. Squints. Ten yards away, a pair of boot soles, heels up. It's Siedow, face down in the dirt.

McGavin calmly goes for his knife as he approaches. Sherra follows cautiously.

By the time they reach him, it's pretty clear Siedow ain't gettin' up.

McGavin sheathes his knife, then unceremoniously flips the corpse over with his boot.

Sherra sees Siedow's bloodied brass nameplate, then groans and looks away in disgust.

McGavin squats down beside Siedow and grabs him by the collars, staring through the dead man's blood sprayed glasses.

He rips the gold badge off Siedow's chest and drops the body back to the ground like a sack of shit.

He searches the dead cop's pockets. Finds a wallet with photos, cash, I.D. He flings it away like it's worthless.

Sherra stares at the body.

SHERRA

Why'd you kill him? He was after me.

Half a pack of crumpled cigarettes. McGavin pockets those.

MCGAVIN

Runnin' don't stop a man from chasing you.

A chrome Zippo lighter with "SIEDOW" engraved on the side. It works. Into McGavin's pocket with the smokes.

A pair of compact field binoculars. Handcuff keys.

SHERRA

He's dead because of me.

McGavin spins to her quickly.

FLASHBACK - INT. MCGAVIN BARN - DAY

Ethel sobs, aiming a revolver with two trembling hands.

BACK TO PRESENT DAY

MCGAVIN

You didn't kill him.

He tosses Sherra the keys and she snatches them mid-air.

She unlocks one wrist as McGavin stands and walks away.

SHERRA

Wait a minute. Where you going?

McGavin stops in his tracks. Pauses.

MCGAVIN

Into the fire, Miss James --

Sherra unlocks the other wrist and tosses the cuffs onto Siedow's chest with a hollow thump.

MCGAVIN

Into the fire.

EXT. AERIAL VIEW OF FOREST - DAY

A sea of trees, rolling over the hills like green flames.

INT. SEA PLANE IN FLIGHT - DAY

Varnell sits beside Knight and looks out the plane's porthole window. Two officers with rifles sit across from them --

JENKINS (26), a wiry smart-ass who didn't necessarily want the badge, just the respect.

CREED (32), a good-looking ape who had the respect long before the badge.

Creed buffs his rifle with an old pair of tightie-whities.

Knight checks the cylinder of the ridiculous hand cannon she's packing. It's a loaded .44 Magnum. Stainless steel.

The squad's in tactical black. Varnell's in uniform.

JENKINS

Hey, Callahan... Looks like you're ready for the Scorpio Killer.

Knight flashes a faint smile as she snaps the cylinder closed with a flick of her wrist.

CREED

Huh?

JENKINS

Nevermind.

VARNELL

Alright, listen up.

(turns from window)

Touchin' down on the river's gonna give us a jump on those state boys, but not much. I know we all want to be the ones slappin' that choke collar on Sherra James.

CREED

Amen.

Jenkins glances at Creed's chamois choice. Scowls.

VARNELL

Those cops down there are your partners -- Hell, they're family.

Nods of agreement.

VARNELL

But we still need to be fast and smart down there, compendo?

KNIGHT

Yes, sir.

Creed keeps polishing.

VARNELL

Knight, do your thing.

KNIGHT

(pulls out a dossier)
Sherra James, white female, age twenty-five. Four months shy of a deuce up at Rayville for petty. No priors, but no princess.

She hands Jenkins a photo. If it's possible to look pretty in a mug shot, Sherra does.

JENKINS

Well, hello Miss James.

KNIGHT

Just past nine this morning she made a break. Road crew up on County 35. Lieutenant Siedow made chase with three officers. They had the hell hounds with 'em.

Jenkins passes the photo to Creed.

KNIGHT

Siedow's last audible transmission came in at ten-thirty.
(closes the dossier)
He said the dogs had been torn to pieces.

JENKINS

Shit.

VARNELL

Oh shit is right. Pretty little Miss James could be armed now. At this point we can't assume we know what we're dealing with.

JENKINS

Guess she's more of a cat person.

Creed hands the photo back to Knight.

CREED

Any idea where she might be going? There a husband? Boyfriend? Kin?

Knight shakes her head as she hangs Sherra's mug shot from a clip next to the porthole window.

KNIGHT

No known family or associates.

Creed nods.

JENKINS

So she's flyin' solo?

Knight pauses. Looks to Varnell. Lets him field that one.

VARNELL

That's all we know.

Knight sinks into her seat.

CREED

Well, Miss Earheart...

He turns to the photo and chambers a round.

Sherra's mug shot swings from the clip like a pendulum.

CREED

Looks like you just passed the point of no return.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

McGavin and Sherra bolt through the forest.

Sherra's sleeve snags on a branch, tearing off a thin swatch of orange cloth.

To request the full screenplay of "From Hell I Came" please contact Doug Johnson at dojo@dojowrite.com with your name and a brief introduction.

Thank you for your interest.