

Scourge of the Highlands

A Ten Minute Play

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SCOURGE OF THE HIGHLANDS

Characters

NATHANIEL STRONG Male. Early 40s. White. Major in the American army.
 CLAUDIUS SMITH Male. Early 40s. White. Outlaw.

Setting

Two rooms, a living area (SL) and bedroom (SR) are connected by a long, narrow corridor. The corridor has a door on each end. A table and three chairs are in the living area. A dim light from an oil lamp flickers in the bedroom.

At rise. NATHANIEL is asleep in his bed. A musket and two pistols rest under the mattress. A CRASH is heard from the left side of the living room. A bounty poster rests on top of the table in the living area.

CLAUDIUS enters with an oil lamp that lights up a table and three chairs in the room. He has a pistol on his hip and a musket slung across his back.

CLAUDIUS

Good morning, Major!

NATHANIEL shoots up in bed and grabs his lamp.

NATHANIEL

Who goes there?

CLAUDIUS

You know who this is, Nathaniel.

NATHANIEL turns his oil lamp up all the way, fully illuminating his room. He gets out of bed, sets the lamp down, and picks up his guns.

NATHANIEL

Claudius? Is that you?

CLAUDIUS

I need to talk to you.

CLAUDIUS moves a chair around to face the door to the corridor and sits down.

NATHANIEL

I have nothing to say to you. Get out of my house. You are not welcome here.

CLAUDIUS

I'm a bad man. I've done things... things I wish I hadn't.

NATHANIEL opens the door to the corridor on his side. He aims his musket down the hall.

NATHANIEL

You have ten seconds before I start shooting!

CLAUDIUS

There's no need for that! And besides, you're a terrible shot. You couldn't shoot a sleeping pig!

A gunshot sound is played as NATHANIEL fires at the door on the opposite end of the corridor. CLAUDIUS jumps out of the way.

Calm down!

NATHANIEL

You're a rook! All you do is chisel and I won't have none of it!

CLAUDIUS readjusts himself and sits back down.

CLAUDIUS

I'm tired, Strong. I'm dog tired. I don't want to be a vile man anymore.

NATHANIEL

Claptrap! Nonsense! You're only loyal to one thing and you always will be.

CLAUDIUS

I want to change my ways. You're a good man. Will you really turn a lost soul away?

NATHANIEL reloads his musket.

NATHANIEL

Lost soul? Ha! You're a Loyalist. You've been stealing our military's supplies since the revolution began. Your gang has brought nothing but pain and sorrow to the folks around here.

CLAUDIUS

I know, I know. The British pay me good money for what I bring them. I don't agree or understand you Patriots. Everything was fine but you all went ahead and started a war.

NATHANIEL

You've been a bad man since you were born, Smith. Way before the war. You just capitalized on the situation. You use our revolution as an excuse to do more evil. We are trying to free the nation from tyranny! The British, they rule unfairly.

CLAUDIUS

They're making me rich! Why would I want to fight against the people that pay me? I'm well aware that you Pats couldn't pay me shit.

NATHANIEL

This is bigger than money. It's bigger than you and me! Our country will be able to thrive without the chokehold that the British have us in. We need change, Smith.

CLAUDIUS

I don't like change. It's dangerous. Complicated and unpredictable. I'm a man set in my ways.

NATHANIEL

Then why are you really here? What's your purpose for breaking into my house at this late hour? You aren't a lost soul. You don't seek redemption.

CLAUDIUS slowly claps his hands together.

CLAUDIUS

Well aren't you smart.

NATHANIEL

Claudius Smith. I'm going to give you a chance. Leave right now and I won't pursue you. There's a bounty on your head. I'd be letting a great opportunity slip through my fingers.

CLAUDIUS

A bounty? What are you talking about?

NATHANIEL

See for yourself. It's sitting right there on the table.

CLAUDIUS stands up and picks up the bounty poster.

CLAUDIUS

Only twelve dollars? I'm sure I got to be worth more than that.

NATHANIEL

Twelve hundred. You dimwit.

CLAUDIUS

Watch your tongue. I don't take kindly to insults.

NATHANIEL

I don't take kindly to marauders breaking into my home!

CLAUDIUS

And what are you going to do about it? Huh? You're not gonna do a thing! The way I see it is that this is my county. And I can do whatever I please.

CLAUDIUS rips the poster in half and sits back down.

NATHANIEL

You're a sick man. Maybe it's because of your father. Maybe he made you the way you are. But I think that you like it!

CLAUDIUS

What the hell do you know about my father?

NATHANIEL

I know that he beat your momma. He put her through hell. And he probably did the same thing to you.

CLAUDIUS

You're starting to upset me. Now, my daddy was a cruel man. Obviously, I learnt it from him. Now just because our great-granddaddies sucked from the same tit, doesn't mean you can talk about my family. And definitely doesn't make us kin. But I'll admit, my mother was pathetic. She never stood up for herself. And I hated her for it.

CLAUDIUS takes his musket off his back and examines it.

“Claudius, you will die with your shoes on, like a trooper’s horse!” That’s what she said to me. And I aim to live up to my momma’s expectations. I ain’t gonna die in some cotton bed with a beautiful lady by my side. I made my peace with that a long time ago.

NATHANIEL

You’ve said enough. Now scoot. Get gone. Before you get stuck in here with me.

CLAUDIUS

I’m not scared of you, *Major*. And matter of fact, *you* are the one that’s stuck in here. I’ve got my boys outside. Young Richard and James. I know their hearts are yearning for you to poke your head outside so that they can take it off. And this hallway of yours is far too narrow for you to get to me without getting shot. If you try then you’ll end up just like the Colonel.

NATHANIEL aims down the hall.

NATHANIEL

What did you just say? What Colonel? What’re you talking about!?

CLAUDIUS

Colonel Jesse Woodhull. Now, isn’t he your uncle?

NATHANIEL

What did you do, Smith!?! Tell me!

CLAUDIUS

Well, my boys and I decided to pay him a visit. Much like we are doing right now with you. We were there just an hour or two ago.

NATHANIEL

Did you kill him? God damn it, Smith! Did you kill my uncle?

CLAUDIUS

That was the plan. But sadly he wasn't home... But his wife and baby girl was.

CLAUDIUS laughs.

NATHANIEL

Dear God. What did you do?

CLAUDIUS

Well due to his absence we ransacked the place looking for that silver plate of his. That little baby just would not quit crying. Good Mrs. Woodhull kept trying to keep her quiet. And I just felt such pity for her. Always having to take care of the baby while her husband—

NATHANIEL

I swear to the Lord himself! If you touched a single hair on that child's head, Claudius, I'm—

CLAUDIUS

YOU'RE GONNA DO WHAT? Now, I don't much appreciate being interrupted like that! And I know for a fact that you're too yellow belly to do a goddamn thing!

NATHANIEL lowers his musket for a moment then draws it back up.

I didn't touch the child. Even I'm not that kinda man. But! The same cannot quite be said about my two boys out there. All I know is that, uh, after I was done tending to the lady of the house's needs... that baby weren't crying no more.

NATHANIEL

No! You're lying! You didn't do no such thing!

CLAUDIUS

Like I said, *I* didn't touch the baby.

NATHANIEL

I'm gonna kill him, Uncle Jesse. Don't you worry. I'm gonna shoot him dead.

CLAUDIUS

Quit your bitching! I need to talk to you.

NATHANIEL

I'm tired of talking! Your boys killed my baby cousin! You all are gonna rot in Hell for what you've done!

CLAUDIUS

And who's going to send me there? Will it be you? Huh?

NATHANIEL

Damn right it will be. Every pain and torture you've ever put upon any innocent life, I'm about to do to you!

CLAUDIUS

Well then quit talking about it and come do it!

NATHANIEL shifts his feet.

I can see you through this bullet hole. I can see straight into your rifle. I know that if you were going to do anything then you would've done it already.

CLAUDIUS aims his musket just above his waist at the door. It's not high enough for Nathaniel to see it.

I can tell that you're upset. Understandably so. You want revenge. I'd want the same thing if I were you. But here's the thing, I'd be able to get it. That's the difference between you and me. I'm a killer. And you're a coward.

NATHANIEL

Shut up! Why are you doing this? Why are you telling me these horrible things? What do you want from me!? Tell me, God damn it!

CLAUDIUS

I made a vow two months ago. I'm sure you remember. I made it known that I am going to kill four men. The four men that have interfered with my business the most. You're one of those four. And so is your damned uncle.

NATHANIEL

And so you're just fucking with me? Toying with my head? Why didn't you already kill me? You want me to suffer before you take my life? You are a devil, Claudius Smith!

CLAUDIUS

I'm well aware of what I am. And you're almost right. I do want to kill you. But I want to see what a respectable military man like you would do when his family has been taken away first. You can try and kill me now. But remember, I'm not the one who killed that baby girl. The two outside are. And if you try to kill me right now, then that'll end with you cold on the floor. Then you'll never be able to take your revenge on my boys.

NATHANIEL

You want me to kill your sons?

CLAUDIUS

I want to see you try. My blood runs through their veins, so you'll have a hard time killing them. Even if you do succeed, then it wouldn't bother me all that much. I have other sons.

NATHANIEL

I hate you. I hate your family. I hate your gang.

CLAUDIUS

I understand of course. But you should be thanking me, Nathaniel. I've just given you a new purpose in life. And for that you are welcome. But before I leave, I just need one more thing.

NATHANIEL

What?

CLAUDIUS

I want those pistols. The ones with the silver plates.

NATHANIEL

No. These were a gift from my uncle. Father of the baby your boys murdered.

CLAUDIUS

If you want revenge then give me the pistols. I'm fine taking them off your corpse but like I said, I don't want to kill you tonight.

NATHANIEL

You'll kill me as soon as I get close.

CLAUDIUS

I've made it very clear that that is not the case! Now lay down your rifle and bring me those guns. I *promise* that no harm will come to you.

NATHANIEL

You'll leave right after?

CLAUDIUS

I swear.

Pause.

NATHANIEL

Okay. Fine.

NATHANIEL sets his musket down and walks towards the door.

CLAUDIUS

Thank you.

NATHANIEL puts his hand on the door knob. The sound of a gunshot plays as CLAUDIUS shoots him dead through the door. NATHANIEL collapses and CLAUDIUS stands.

CLAUDIUS

I said I was gonna kill you. Stupid son of a bitch.

CLAUDIUS takes the pistols off of Nathaniel's corpse. He then picks up his oil lamp and walks off stage.

CLAUDIUS

(Off stage.)

Let's ride, boys!

Hoops and hollers can be heard off stage.

END OF PLAY