

DESPERATE ARMS

By

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EXT. HOUSE SEEN FROM ABOVE - NIGHT

A house sits alone at the end of a tree-lined dirt road. A lone rider thunders down the road toward the house, his long coat billowing behind him.

INT. JONATHAN'S BEDROOM

Inside the house, two men are on a bed, having sex. They are blond doctor JONATHAN SHERING, 30, and his lover, WADE.

EXT. ROAD

The rider's face is visible now. He's MICAH RICHARDS, AKA CHANCE DAVIES, 21. His expression is grim, intense. He wears his dark hair long, and it dances behind him in the wind. He's breathing heavily and there's sweat on his face.

MONTAGE

Scenes of Micah's desperate ride and the frenzied rutting on the bed alternate. Jonathan's aspect is that of a partner waiting for it to be over. Wade, above him, shows all the finesse of a wild boar. Wade's intensity builds. It's a race to see whether Micah or Wade will reach his goal first.

EXT. FRONT YARD

Micah rolls off the horse (without benefit of stirrups because there aren't any), holding his coat around him. He doesn't tie the horse. He pats it on the neck.

MICAH

You stay here.

For all the hurry on the horse, Micah's steps are slow and pained as he makes his way onto the porch and to the door.

INT. JONATHAN'S BEDROOM

Jonathan raises his head at the sound of a knock.

JONATHAN

Somebody's here. I need to go.

WADE  
You ain't goin' nowhere yet.

Wade increases his pace. The knock comes again.

JONATHAN  
(pushing upward)  
Wade! Let me up!

WADE  
Gimme a minute!

Jonathan rolls his eyes and suffers some more. The knock comes again.

WADE  
Why don't they go the hell away?

JONATHAN  
Somebody's probably hurt badly,  
Wade. Let me go.

The knock comes again, followed by a voice.

MICAH (O.S.)  
Is anybody here?

JONATHAN  
(yelling)  
I'll be right there!

EXT. FRONT PORCH

Micah closes his eyes, leaning his forehead on the door frame.

INT. JONATHAN'S BEDROOM

JONATHAN  
Let me go!

WADE  
I said no!

A struggle ensues--one that Jonathan can't win. Jonathan's toned, but Wade is huge and muscular, and he has Jonathan in a vulnerable position from the start.

JONATHAN  
Stop it, Wade!

EXT. FRONT PORCH

Micah hears the sounds of distant struggle. He tilts his head, listening. He makes his way to the back of the house and then up the steps that lead to a door on the second floor. He is unable to see into the room because of the curtains. He presses his ear to the door.

INT. JONATHAN'S BEDROOM

JONATHAN

Let me go! You're hurting me!

WADE

That's what you get for making me mad. You ever hit me again, I'll show you real hurt.

EXT. BACK DOOR

Micah's face is set in hard lines. He doesn't like what he's hearing. He carefully tries the door, but it's locked. He backs away, intending to ram through the door. He goes still at the sound of Wade's orgasm, his face revealing disgust.

MICAH

(whispering)

You better be done, you sorry cur.

INT. JONATHAN'S BEDROOM

Wade groans and growls his way to completion, collapsing. Jonathan makes a disgusted sound. Now that Wade's spent, Jonathan's able to tilt his body, rolling Wade off. Jonathan hurries from the bed, yanks on clothes.

EXT. BACK DOOR

Micah, with his ear pressed to the door again, hears that someone is up and moving. He quietly hurries down the steps.

INT. STAIRWAY/FOYER

Jonathan is still buttoning his shirt as he hurries down the stairs. He runs a hand through his hair and opens the door. He's shorter than Micah; he has to look up.

Micah's pained eyes meet Jonathan's, searching.

MICAH  
You the doctor?

Jonathan is wrapped in the spell of Micah's eyes; it takes him a moment to find his voice.

JONATHAN  
I am.

MICAH  
I need help.

Micah opens his coat. Reams of cotton are wrapped around his mid-section, over his shirt; the blood has soaked through.

MICAH  
I'm shot.

JONATHAN  
Let's get you inside.

Jonathan helps Micah through the door and into the first room off the foyer.

INT. TREATMENT ROOM

It's a relatively modern surgery room for the time. Jonathan helps Micah onto the table.

MICAH  
(looking up at him)  
Are you all right?

JONATHAN  
I'm fine. Why?

MICAH  
You got bruises on your face. And a cut.

JONATHAN  
I get a little clumsy sometimes. I need to go wash my hands. I'll be right back.

MICAH  
I hate to ask. But could you give my horse some water? He ran hard.

JONATHAN  
Let's see to you first.

MICAH

Please. He needs water.

JONATHAN

All right, then.

MICAH

Thanks. He don't take kindly to strangers, so don't try to touch him or nothin'. Just get water in a tub of some kind and set it down.

JONATHAN

(patting his shoulder)

I'll be back real soon.

INT./EXT. KITCHEN/FRONT YARD/BACK YARD

Jonathan hurries to the kitchen and grabs a large bowl and two pails; he takes it all outside. At the pump, Jonathan washes his hands and gets water for the horse, which he carries to the front yard. The horse eyes him suspiciously as he approaches. He sets down the bowl and hurries back to the well, filling the pails. He takes the water inside.

INT. TREATMENT ROOM

Jonathan sets the water down on the counter. He opens a bottle and measures some of its content into the glass, stirring it.

JONATHAN

I need you to drink this.

Jonathan lifts Micah's head and puts the glass to his lips. Micah takes a drink and spews it out, wetting his face and Jonathan's. He sits up, wipes his face. Jonathan backs away.

MICAH

What the hell was that?

JONATHAN

Morphine. It will help take the pain away.

MICAH

I ain't hurtin' too bad.

JONATHAN

Well, I haven't started working on you yet. I'm sorry. I know it

(MORE)

JONATHAN (cont'd)  
doesn't taste good. And if we had more time, I'd give it to you in a more diluted form and you probably wouldn't even taste it. But we need to get to work here. So drink.

MICAH  
I bet that stuff could kill somebody.

JONATHAN  
Actually, if you drank enough of it, it would. But I haven't put nearly enough in here to be dangerous to you. So drink.

MICAH  
Just do what you gotta. I can take the hurt.

JONATHAN  
I'm not willing to take that chance. Now drink! It might help if you hold your nose. You can't taste as well then.

MICAH  
Seriously?

JONATHAN  
Have I ever lied to you?

Micah takes the glass, holds his nose, and drinks. Jonathan takes the glass away, sets it on the counter, and, with his hands, guides Micah's upper body back down. Jonathan begins cutting away the makeshift bandages.

JONATHAN  
How did this happen?

MICAH  
Guess I made somebody mad.

Jonathan rolls his eyes with a frustrated sigh.

JONATHAN  
You come in my house with a gunshot wound, you owe it to me to tell me how it happened. Because I have a right to know if somebody's going to be banging down my door, looking for you. Now answer my question.

MICAH

Was a card game. Everybody was drinkin'. Man said I cheated. Next thing I know, I got a hole in me. I ran. My horse is fast and we're good at hidin' our tracks. He couldn't follow.

JONATHAN

I pray to God you're not lying to me.

With the strips of cloth gone, Jonathan cuts the bloodied shirt. For a moment, his eyes are drawn to muscular, bare torso. He quickly gets back to business. More strips of cloth are around Micah's abdomen.

JONATHAN

How long ago did this happen?

MICAH

Not long after dusk.

JONATHAN

Why did you wait so long to come?

MICAH

Was a ways away. And then it took me some time to figure out where you were. What's a doctor doin' out here in the middle of nowhere, where there ain't no people, anyway?

JONATHAN

I like my privacy. I have an office in town that I open up a few times a week.

(lifting a bottle of alcohol)

This is probably going to sting.

Micah's breath hisses inward as the alcohol runs onto him. Jonathan examines the wound. He doesn't like what he sees.

MICAH

Can you get it out?

JONATHAN

I can. But it hit you in a bad place. I'm going to need to cut you in order to fully assess the extent of the injury and patch you back up. I need you to lie real still while I do that. All right?

At Micah's nod, Jonathan pulls the things he needs from drawers.

JONATHAN  
What's your name, son?

MICAH  
Micah.

JONATHAN  
Micah what?

MICAH  
Richards.

JONATHAN  
How old are you?

MICAH  
Twenty-one.

JONATHAN  
Where you from?

MICAH  
Virginia.

JONATHAN  
You're a long way from home, Micah Richards.

Jonathan turns back toward the table to find Micah watching him. Again, he's struck by the intensity in Micah's eyes.

MICAH  
Am I gonna die?

JONATHAN  
I don't know, son. I'll do my best for you. You can help me out by praying. Now. What I'm going to do is going to hurt. If you need to scream, do it. That's another reason I live out here.

MICAH  
I ain't gonna. Men don't scream.

JONATHAN  
(with a quiet laugh)  
Yeah, people tell all kinds of stories to make them seem bigger than life. But between you and me,  
(MORE)

JONATHAN (cont'd)

I've never seen a man stay quiet,  
getting a bullet out. You let the  
hurt out how you need to, Micah.  
There's no shame in it.

Jonathan picks up a cloth and presses it into Micah's hand.

JONATHAN

But if you want to be able to  
honestly brag to your friends after  
that you didn't scream, use this.

MICAH

What kinda' doctor are you? Tellin'  
somebody how bad it's gonna hurt  
'fore you even start.

JONATHAN

If I said it wasn't going to hurt,  
you'd only be afraid when it did.  
This way, you know it's supposed to  
hurt.

Jonathan puts his hands to one of Micah's boots, to pull.  
Micah jerks his foot away.

MICAH

Ain't nothin' wrong there!

JONATHAN

If you want me to help you, it's  
going to be on my terms. Now let  
go.

Jonathan pulls the boot off and then removes the other. He  
lifts a leather loop-strap that's attached to another strap  
that circles the table support. He starts to put it over  
Micah's foot. Micah pulls his foot away.

MICAH

Quit!

Jonathan rolls his eyes and points toward the door.

JONATHAN

Get out of my house. I'm going back  
to bed.

A muscle works in Micah's jaw.

MICAH

Explain yourself.

JONATHAN

It's very simple. The more ability you have to move, the more likely you are to make me cut something that I don't intend to cut. Also, the more likely you are to do me grievous harm in a crazed moment. And since I am the only doctor present, there would be no one to fix me, if you broke me. Now put your foot in my strap or put it in your horse's stirrup.

MICAH

(grumbling as he puts his foot into the strap)

I don't got no stirrups. Hate stirrups.

Jonathan tightens both straps around Micah's ankles and then pulls the straps around the posts taut, buckling them. Micah starts to protest when Jonathan moves to bind his arm, but a look from Jonathan silences him. He gives his arm.

JONATHAN

Now. I'm going to let you keep that last arm, to hold your cloth. Keep it out of my way. And don't you dare hit me with it. Do you understand me?

MICAH

I understand.

JONATHAN

All right, son. Let's get you fixed.

Micah holds up as well as he can while Jonathan works. Silent tears run from his eyes. His chin trembles. Eventually he's arching his back, screaming into the cloth. Finally he loses consciousness.

Jonathan presses his hand to Micah's chest and then holds it beneath his nose, checking his heartbeat and breathing. Reassured, he pulls the cloth from Micah's mouth, smiling.

JONATHAN

It's about time you fell out. You are a tough little somebody.

(running his eyes down the length of Micah's body)

Well... maybe not little.

(sighing)

But way too young to be getting yourself shot.

Jonathan gets back to work. He takes the bullet from Micah's body, examines it, washes it, checks its condition, and sets it aside, resuming his work on Micah. Finally Micah is all sewn up. Jonathan wraps the wound and then gets a sheet and blanket from a cabinet, covering Micah. Jonathan leans over, looking at Micah's sleeping face.

JONATHAN

How are you feeling?

Micah scowls in his sleep.

JONATHAN

That good, eh?

(smiling)

You're going to need some soup.

EXT. BACK YARD - MORNING

The sun is rising as Jonathan exits the kitchen door. He crosses the yard to the barn and emerges with an ax. He goes to the chicken coop and feeds the chickens from a barrel outside its door. After a ridiculous chase, he finally catches the chicken he's after. He puts its neck over the log in the coop, holding it with his foot, and chops. The head falls and the chicken body flaps around. He discards the head on the trash heap and carries the body to the back porch. He sits on the porch, pulling out the feathers.

INT. TREATMENT ROOM

Micah, still sleeping, is straining at the bindings and making pained sounds. Jonathan enters the room, sets down the glass of water he carries, and smooths the hair back from Micah's brow.

JONATHAN

You'll feel better soon, Micah.

Jonathan adds morphine to the water. He pulls a tube from a drawer and puts one end into the glass. He presses his finger to the other end of the tube, holding the liquid inside. He puts the end of the tube into Micah's mouth and releases the liquid.

INT./EXT. BACK PORCH/KITCHEN

Jonathan finishes with the feathers, cuts and washes the chicken, and puts it in a pot with water. He carries the pot into the house, puts it on the stove, and lights it. He gets another pot and fills it, putting it on the stove.

INT. TREATMENT ROOM

Jonathan enters, carrying the pot of warm water, soap and cloths. He sets the water down and begins the process of cleaning Micah. He unstraps him for the bath. He starts with his hair and works his way down. He removes Micah's pants, trying not to pay attention to what he's just revealed. He finishes Micah's bath and binds him again, unclothed; he binds both wrists in addition to both ankles. He gets a fresh sheet and blanket from the cabinet and covers him. Jonathan examines his own clothes, which bear evidence of all he's been up to. He goes up the stairs to his bedroom.

INT. JONATHAN'S BEDROOM

Jonathan finds Wade sprawled across the bed, snoring.

JONATHAN

Oh, hell. Wade?

(leans and shakes Wade,  
speaking more loudly)

Wade! Wake up.

Wade mutters something unintelligible and rolls away. Jonathan shakes him again.

JONATHAN

Wade! It's late!

Wade yawns, stretches, and checks the clock.

WADE

Why didn't you wake me up?

JONATHAN

I'm sorry. I thought you'd have left by now.

WADE

Damn you, good-for-nothing.  
 (sits up, looks around)  
 I'm late for work. Where's my  
 pants?

Jonathan leans to retrieve the pants. He hands them to Wade and gathers Wade's other things, putting them on the bed. Wade hurriedly dresses. He puts a loud, hard kiss on Jonathan's forehead, opens the bedroom's back door, and leaves. Jonathan studies the bed with a look of distaste. He gathers the bedding and carries it out the door.

EXT. BACK YARD

Jonathan throws the bedding on the bank of the stream. He goes back up the steps, into the house, and emerges with clothes, soap, and a towel. He strips and climbs into the stream, washing the bedding while he's there.

Wade rides out of the barn and the yard, never seeing Jonathan. He returns a moment later, jumps off the horse, and runs up the steps.

WADE

Jonathan!

JONATHAN

What?

WADE

(turns, then moves to stream)  
 Whose horse is that in your yard?

JONATHAN

It belongs to the boy who came in  
 last night.

WADE

How old?

JONATHAN

He said he's twenty-one.

WADE

What the hell you doin' runnin'  
 around naked with a man in the  
 house?

JONATHAN

He's asleep. And--

WADE  
He could wake up!

JONATHAN  
And he's strapped because I had to  
sew him.

WADE  
How long you plan on keepin' him  
here?

JONATHAN  
I don't know yet. He's not in any  
shape to travel.

WADE  
You get him out of here, Jonathan.  
I don't want him here.

Wade stalks to his horse, mounts, and rides away. Jonathan returns his attention to the bedding. One by one, he takes the pieces to the clothesline.

JONATHAN  
(on a sigh)  
I really need to break down and get  
myself a wife.