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The Third Horseman

A 10-Minute Comedy

by

Ross Peter Nelson

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CHARACTERS
1W / 2M


INNKEEPER: Male, mid 40s.

DAUGHTER: Female, about 19.

SETTING
A tavern.

TIME
The middle ages, sort of.
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(A medieval tavern or inn. INNKEEPER is tidying up. DAUGHTER rushes in.)

DAUGHTER
Father, a guest approaches.

INNKEEPER
Run stoke the kitchen fires.

DAUGHTER
He looks important.

(She exits. Offstage we hear the sound of hoofbeats as the HORSEMAN enters the courtyard. He dismounts.)

HORSEMAN (offstage)
Groom! Tend to my horse. He’s thrown a shoe.

(HORSEMAN enters.)

INNKEEPER
Good morrow, sirrah.

HORSEMAN
I will tarry here while my horse is tended.

Of course. …

INNKEEPER
What are you staring at?

HORSEMAN
Your costume, m’lord.

INNKEEPER
You wonder why I’m always dressed in black?

HORSEMAN
Does that mean what I think it means? … Ring of Fire?

The time is near.
INNKEEPER

*Ghost Riders in the Sky?*

HORSEMAN

They will be seen.

INNKEEPER

*A Boy Named Sue?*

HORSEMAN

What?

INNKEEPER

I’m so honored to have you here. I’m one of your biggest fans.

HORSEMAN

What are you talking about?

INNKEEPER

*I Walk the Line*, magnificent. And *Folsom Prison Blues* sends a shiver down my spine just thinking about it. (*Sings the Folsom Prison opening lick.*) Dum-dum-dum dum dum down dum.

HORSEMAN

I'm not Johnny Cash, you idiot.

INNKEEPER

You’re not?

HORSEMAN

I am the Third Horseman.

INNKEEPER

The third … Of course, of course. I saw you play Clisson in ’98.

HORSEMAN

What?

INNKEEPER

At HellFest. Didn't you open for Cannibal Corpse?

HORSEMAN

We are not mere musicians … we ride in and lay waste to the countryside.

INNKEEPER

That's pretty much what happened, all right. Good times, good times.

HORSEMAN

Bring me a flagon of ale. I need some refreshments before I join my brethren.
INNKEEPER
Right away! Loved your cover of Don't Fear the Reaper.

HORSEMAN
I don't sing!

INNKEEPER
You're the drummer, right?

HORSEMAN
Get me my ale!

INNKEEPER
Yes, sir.

(He exits. HORSEMAN sits at a table. DAUGHTER enters with ale.)

DAUGHTER
Here you go Mr. ... ?

HORSEMAN
Black. Thank you.

DAUGHTER
My father says --

HORSEMAN
Your father is an idiot.

DAUGHTER
He is not! Sometimes he does get confused. ... (whispers) He did a lot of drugs in the 90s.

HORSEMAN
Didn’t we all.

DAUGHTER
So what are you then?

(PLAYER enters.)

HORSEMAN
I am the front man of the Apocalypse.

INNKEEPER
The Apocalypse? Great band, great sound.
HORSEMAN  

Listen --

INNKEEPER

You changed your hair, though, didn't you?

HORSEMAN

How many times --

INNKEEPER

The ale is on the house, by the way. Just a token of our appreciation for all those great tunes.

HORSEMAN

I. Hate. Music.

INNKEEPER

I know? The industry really sucks these days. Nothing like it used to be.

And you. You are --

DAUGHTER

Father, I don't think he wants to talk about it.

HORSEMAN

On account of your idiocy, I will call my brothers to begin our depredations here. The conflagration that is the end of days begins at your tavern.

INNKEEPER

Oh, that's a lovely offer, but we've only got a few rooms. We couldn't handle the crowds.

HORSEMAN

Human!

DAUGHTER

Look, you must be hungry after your ride. Let us get you something to eat.

INNKEEPER

Of course, pardon me for not offering, I just got a little star-struck.

DAUGHTER

What you you like? Some bread and cheese to start out?

INNKEEPER

I don't mean to brag, but we're famous for our mutton. People comes from miles around.
HORSEMAN

(Stands.)
Are you mocking me?

INNKEEPER

You're not a vegetarian are you?

DAUGHTER

If you are, we do a nice lentil curry.

HORSEMAN

I am Famine!

INNKEEPER

Of course you are, you've been riding all morning.

HORSEMAN

I said Famine, not famished.

INNKEEPER

He’s like Madonna and Sting. Only needs one name.

HORSEMAN

Famine is not merely my name. I am the living embodiment of hunger. Starvation. Want. Emptiness. Desolation.

INNKEEPER

I understand. Just tell us what you want to eat and we'll fix it right away.

(Suddenly desolate, collapses into his chair.)

HORSEMAN

It's hopeless.

DAUGHTER

What's wrong?

INNKEEPER

Let me get that bread and cheese.

(INNKEEPER exits)

HORSEMAN

There can be no food for me.

DAUGHTER

Of course there can. Our pantry is full.
HORSEMAN
You don’t understand. I am a herald of the apocalypse. Wherever I go, famine follows.

(INNKEEPER returns with two baguettes covered with mold and some cheese wrapped in cloth. He sets the cheese down and puts the bread in front of HORSEMAN.)

INNKEEPER
Here, let me cut you a slice. ... Oh, this one’s no good.
(He sets one baguette aside.)
Wait, there's some mold on this one, too, let me cut it away.
(He cuts a chunk of bread off and sets it aside.)
Oops. There’s a little more.
(He cuts another slice off.)
Wait. Let me get this bit.
(He cuts away a slice and throws it away, then another, and again until no bread remains.)
I'm so sorry, it was fine this morning.

HORSEMAN
There’s no point.

INNKEEPER
Daughter, serve him up some fromage de compagnie.

DAUGHTER
Yes, father.

(She unwraps the cheese, screams, and drops it.)

INNKEEPER
What's wrong?

DAUGHTER
It's crawling with maggots.

INNKEEPER
I'm sorry, your grace. Nothing like this has happened before. Please, just a moment.

(He runs out to the kitchen.)

HORSEMAN
It's useless.

DAUGHTER
Has this happened before?
HORSEMAN

Everywhere.

DAUGHTER

When did you last eat?

HORSEMAN

It’s been millennia. When I ride across the land, wheat fields shrivel behind me in unseasonable heat. Populations burgeon, littering the countryside with too many mouths to feed. Evil barons shuttle crops into secret storehouses and hoard corn while their vassals starve.

(INNKEEPER returns with two eggs in one hand, and a bowl in the other. [N.B. The eggs look whole, but have had ink or dye injected.]

DAUGHTER

Oh, you poor man.

INNKEEPER

I went straight to the henhouse for fresh eggs.

HORSEMAN

No, please don’t.

INNKEEPER

Nonsense. I’m sure you could use some protein.

(He cracks the eggs and opens them into the bowl with a great flourish. Black goo runs out of the shells. All three turn away and retch. DAUGHTER takes the bowl and runs it off stage with her nose held. INNKEEPER falls to his knees.)

INNKEEPER

Forgive me.

(DAUGHTER returns.)

DAUGHTER

There’s nothing left.

INNKEEPER

I have never failed to show hospitality to a guest before.

DAUGHTER

Father, it's not your fault.

INNKEEPER

I am unworthy of being called an innkeeper.
HORSEMAN
Peace, my friend. She is right. Starvation is my doom. You have shown good intent. I will not blame you.

DAUGHTER
Is there anything we can do to ease your burden?

INNKEEPER
This is awful.

HORSEMAN
I am not of your kind, so it does not weigh quite as heavily on me.

DAUGHTER
But to never be able to eat.

INNKEEPER
Never. Not even mutton?

HORSEMAN
It has its compensations.

INNKEEPER
What could that possibly be?

HORSEMAN
The attentions of many women.

INNKEEPER
You’re taking about groupies, aren’t you.

HORSEMAN
You’ve heard of the Dior? Of Prada and Versace?

INNKEEPER
You know, I stopped listening after Pantera broke up.

DAUGHTER
The fashion designers?

HORSEMAN
Yes. They keep me on retainer.

INNKEEPER
You design clothes?

HORSEMAN
No.
INNKEEPER
I mean, that’s a decent cloak, but it’s nothing I’d call *haute couture*.

DAUGHTER
The models.

HORSEMAN
Yes.

*This is Not the End of the Play*
*Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes*