

"A HOLE IN THE GROUND"
by Joseph Formichella

FADE IN:

EXT CITY STREET -- NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSE: PHOENIX, ARIZONA TERRITORY, 1883

Two warmly lit taverns are spaced far apart among the darkened buildings lining the street. At the closest saloon, a sign reads LUKE BROTHERS BAR.

EIGHT HORSES and ONE MULE are tied to a hitching post in front. O.S. VOICES and O.S. PIANO MUSIC ring out.

JACOB WALTZ (71, stout and gray-haired in dirty work clothes) explodes out of the bar as if shot from a cannon.

His trajectory leads him headlong into the horses. Illuminated in the shaft of light from the open door, Waltz clutches a nearly empty bottle, which he somehow manages not to break or spill on the way down.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

And don't come back 'til you pay
up!

Scattered O.S. LAUGHTER drifts out of the bar as the doors swing shut, leaving Waltz in shadow. He shakes his head, drains the last drops from the bottle, then throws the empty at the saloon. It shatters.

With exaggerated dignity, he stands and dusts himself off. Teetering dangerously, he grabs at a nearby horse to steady himself. The startled animal loudly snorts as the old man jumps away.

WALTZ

Beg pardon, ma'am.

Swaying unsteadily, he surveys his surroundings. He spots the other saloon with a grin, then staggers down the street, whistling cheerfully.

CUT TO:

INT A SECOND, BRIGHTLY LIT SALOON -- NIGHT

HUMILITY (19, pretty even in theatrical makeup) poses on a small stage, apparently nude but for a strategically placed

parasol. She giggles and struts upstage, keeping everything covered -- just barely.

At the footlights, she pauses and ponders what to do next.

MOVE BACK to a crowded, smoky bar. The décor is tasteful, elegant, and sparkling clean -- in contrast with the clientele, which is anything but.

SAM NEIL, the middle-aged and balding bartender, busily works behind an ornate mahogany counter, complete with polished brass rail.

TWO PROSTITUTES (FLORENCIA RAMIREZ, 32, somewhat plump and of Hispanic descent, and CASSIE WELLINGTON, 23, attractive with striking red-gold hair), the only females in the place, work the rough looking crowd.

Half the men are white, the remainder Mexican -- except for two BLACK MEN sitting at the bar. All ogle the performer as she partially turns to almost reveal a bare backside.

She spins and wags a scolding finger. The audience collectively sighs, disappointed.

A pair of drunk COWPOKES (TEX WATTERSON and LYLE PORTER) play a half-hearted game of poker at a corner table, oblivious to Humility's antics.

WALTZ enters, drawing little attention, save for a weary glare from Sam, and an anxious appraisal from JULIO VASQUEZ (35), in a corner booth with TWO MEN.

Julio's clothing is simple, functional, and patched in places, but he is meticulously clean. He rises and respectfully approaches Waltz.

JULIO

Excuse me, Señor. Are you Jacob Waltz, the prospector?

Waltz stares blankly at Julio, who casts a furtive glance around the bar and moves closer, lowering his voice nearly to a whisper.

JULIO

I have urgent business of a private nature to discuss with the one they call the Dutchman.

Julio withdraws a half step, apprehensive.

JULIO
You are Jacob Waltz?

Waltz gives Julio a suspicious once-over.

WALTZ
Depends who's askin'.

Julio frowns, uncertain. Disinterested, Waltz casually turns to the bar. Julio speaks up, louder.

JULIO
I do my "askin'" over a bottle.

Waltz snaps to face Julio, now very interested.

WALTZ
Jacob Waltz at yer service.

Julio smiles and politely gestures toward a table.

ONSTAGE, Humility snaps open a large fan, instantly turns her back on the audience, and covers her posterior with it. Whistles and cheers erupt from the crowd as she saunters into the wings.

AT THE TABLE, FRANCISCO JUAREZ (33) and PEDRO CHAVEZ (27) rise to greet the old prospector. Francisco's clothing is similar to Julio's; Pedro's attire and bearing scream aristocratic wealth.

Francisco shakes hands with the skeptical but friendly Waltz, while Pedro bows, maintaining a haughty distance.

The men sit, and Julio uncorks a bottle of whiskey. The old man concentrates on the bottle as Julio pours a generous belt. He stops when the glass is two thirds full.

Waltz raises an eyebrow and motions to keep it coming.

Julio slowly pours as Waltz continues to gesture for more. When the glass is filled to the top, Waltz signals to stop.

JULIO
I am Julio Vasquez. This is...

Waltz grabs the glass and devours the whiskey in a gulp, then slams it to the table, eyes closed in pleasure.

WALTZ

Ahh ...

He opens his eyes and smiles expectantly at Julio.

Julio glances at Francisco, who shrugs. With a sigh, Julio pours another shot.

Pedro sneers as the uncouth prospector settles back into his chair with a wink. This time, he sips his elixir.

Julio indicates his companions.

JULIO

My associates, Francisco Juarez...

WALTZ

Charmed, I'm sure.

JULIO

And Don Pedro Chavez.

Waltz evaluates Pedro's expensive outfit with a whistle. He grins as the dandy seethes.

WALTZ

Now what can a broken down old man do for you young pups?

Julio is nervous, his tone conspiratorial.

JULIO

We believe that a very rich mine lies nearby. We need an experienced prospector...

Waltz cuts him off with a rude outburst of laughter, hearty and long. Pedro snarls.

PEDRO

You find that amusing, gringo?

WALTZ

Three Mexicans who think they can find gold in these parts?

Waltz laughs again. Bristling, Pedro rises.

PEDRO

My people were milking gold from this land generations before your kind ever set foot here.

Waltz grabs Pedro's hands, closely examining them as the startled dandy gapes.

WALTZ

Don't look like these hands ever
did much milkin'.

Waltz gazes directly at Pedro in mocking wonder.

WALTZ

How do you keep 'em so soft?

Indignant, Pedro yanks his hand away and reaches for a rapier at his belt.

PEDRO

Perhaps I should instruct you...

Francisco springs up and grips Pedro's arm.

FRANCISCO

Apparently our guest is
unaccustomed to the company of
gentlemen. I'm sure he means no
offense.

Francisco pointedly whispers into Pedro's ear.

The noble's anger freezes on his face, then melts into a rigid frown. His temper barely in check, Pedro reluctantly drops his hand to his side, forces an icy smile, and speaks through clenched teeth.

PEDRO

It was a pleasure, Señor Waltz.

Pedro stalks off. Waltz watches him go, a sly grin on his face.

WALTZ

I swear, he's 'bout the prettiest
Mexican I ever seen. Touchy,
though, ain't he?

Julio sighs, exasperated, but still courteous.

JULIO

Señor Waltz, we know the load is
there. We need a man of your
experience to help us locate and
mine it.