

Smith and Jones

Written by Carter Swart
Saturday, 01 November 2008 00:00

Johnny Speakman examined the pair of tough-looking strangers who poked their heads out of the Santa Fe stage as it pulled up in front of the Sundown Hotel. A cold wind whipped at the men's hats when they gingerly stepped down from the mud-spattered Concord. Carefully dodging puddles of water and clumps of foot-deep, dirty snow, they stood waiting for their bags.

Soon the guard tossed them down, five in all.

Staying awhile, thought Johnny.

"Hey, kid," said the taller of the men, looking straight at Johnny.

"Yes, sir."

"What's your name, pard?"

"Johnny."

"Well, kid, how'd you like to earn some dinero?"

The speaker was a rangy, sheepskin-coated man who wore gray pin-striped woolen trousers stuffed into heavy boots. He was grinning, his thin lips drawn tightly over prominent front teeth. His eyes were hooded and dark brown, and for a moment they looked like those of a mad wolf Johnny had once seen out on the mesa.

Johnny dropped his glance to the flattened, desiccated body of a horned toad at his feet, unsure about what to do. The man scared him. There was some undefined threat in his harsh glance and in the cocky set of his narrow shoulders. He looked like a gent used to having his own way. His shorter companion, stout and pale, had cold gray eyes and an ugly scar that ran across his misshapen nose.

"Well, son?" pressed the tall stranger.

"Aw, guess I don't have nothing else to do," answered Johnny finally.

"Good. Name's Red," said the tall one to Johnny, removing his battered black Stetson with a bow and a graceful flourish. An abundant crop of carrot hair fell down about his neck. "Guess you know why they call me that," he added.

Johnny nodded and cut his glance to the smaller fellow. This one didn't smile a lick and seemed never to alter the gloomy planes and angles of his face. His coal-colored beard was voluminous, and his knuckles were laced with scars. And when he opened his coat, Johnny spied a holstered pistol on his left hip, its bone-handled butt yellowed with age. He reminded Johnny of a tough little bull terrier.

With Johnny's help the men's bags were soon out of the mud and piled up on the boardwalk. Johnny then carried them, one-by-one, into the Sundown Hotel, while the men stood around and gabbed. Finally Red stooped over and helped Johnny with the last of the Gladstones, one that seemed to weigh a ton.

At the counter in the hotel, Red shrugged out of his coat. Under it he wore a wide leather

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cartridge belt and a big holstered six-gun. Johnny noticed that there were troubling gaps in the cartridge array, reflecting much use.

"Afternoon, gents," said Priscilla Posgay, the hotel owner.

Red grinned. "We'd like to register, ma'am."

"Dollar a night. Be stayin' long?" Priscilla asked, shoving the register across the countertop and waiting expectantly for their signatures.

"Depends." The redhead pulled out some silver dollars and dropped them on the counter. There were four coins, and they clinked merrily.

"Obliged," said Priscilla, scooping them up.

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From just inside the doorway, Johnny inspected Priscilla's new boarders. He'd never seen men before who'd engendered such feelings of awe in him. It wasn't that they put on airs of toughness; it was more the silent, unequivocal strength these fellows possessed that made Johnny shiver.

Red signed the register and languidly pushed it back.

Priscilla pulled the dog-eared book around and exclaimed, "Mister Smith and Mister Jones. My, my. Real common sort of names."

Red shrugged.

"You fellas just passing through?" asked Priscilla, indulging in the innkeeper's time-honored penchant for polite interrogation.

"Maybe."

"Know anybody hereabouts?"

"Nope."

"Got any special business in these parts?"

Red smiled. "Who can tell?"

Priscilla gave up with a barely-stifled snort. Turning around, she grabbed a door key out of the rack and laid it smartly on the counter. "Upstairs. Turn right. Room 203."

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Red murmured, "Okay, ma'am," then motioned Johnny over. He handed him a nickel. "Thanks for the help, pard," he said. And then he did something that made a conditional friend out of the boy. Instead of ruffling Johnny's yellow hair like so many adults were wont to do, or saying something patronizing like, you're a good kid, Red gravely reached down and shook Johnny's hand, murmuring, "Be seein' ya." Then he and his sidekick grabbed their Gladstones and tromped up the stairs, soon vanishing into the maw of the darkened loft above.

After they'd gone, Johnny asked Priscilla, "Who are they, really, you suppose?"

"Smith and Jones, they say," she muttered sarcastically. "Lordy, did you ever hear of such cheek? You'd better get over to Ike's office right quick and tell him a couple of gunhawks jist drifted in."

"Gunhawks? Sure enough?"

She grinned. "We got scorpions in New Mexico?"

Johnny chuckled, dropped the coin into his pocket, and trotted out the door.

As he crossed the muddy road and approached the marshal's office, his thoughts dissected the marshal in the most unflattering way. Considering Marshal Tindle to be as useless as biscuits without gravy, Johnny had no respect for the man. Ike didn't look like a lawman, had never whipped nobody, dressed like a sissy, and didn't near fit Johnny's conception of a fighting man. He jumped lightly up on the boardwalk, scraped his boots, glanced back at the hotel, then opened the door and slouched into the marshal's rustic domain.

Mild-looking, wearing glasses and a conservative brown suit and vest, Sundown's marshal, Ike Tindle, glanced up from his desk as Johnny entered the cluttered two-celled office. "Howdy, son," he said in his inoffensive voice.

"Marshal," Johnny acknowledged, pleased to note that Owen Melton, the beefy deputy marshal, was here, tossing chunks of wood into the stove. It was Johnny's contention that things were quiet in Sundown because of Melton and in spite of Tindle, who'd never even once laid open a scalp or shot anybody.

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After Johnny finished delivering Priscilla Posgay's commentary on Smith and Jones, Tindle morosely picked up a sheaf of "Wanted" posters. He idly examined them, then grinned, his eyes crinkling with a brief expression of mirth, saying, "Smith and Jones? Now that's a good one, eh, Owen?"

Owen smiled.

"They gimme a nickel jist fer helpin' carry in their bags," said Johnny proudly.

"Hmm. Big spenders," observed the marshal wryly.

"Yeah," said Johnny, missing the irony. "Hey, I believe I'll go down to the Chuck Wagon and git me some hard candy."

Preoccupied, the marshal waved the boy out the door.

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"Smith and Jones," Tindle mumbled to himself. Who are they, and what's their game? Ike was a cautious man, one who didn't like surprises. So he got up, put on his coat, nodded to Melton, walked outside, and began making his rounds, talking to people, all the time keeping an eye on the Sundown Hotel.

The next morning, a handsome young cowpoke rode into town, drew rein at the marshal's office, and trotted inside, spurs jingling merrily, his hat thrown back like he didn't have a care in the world. He wore a smile as wide as all outdoors stamped irrevocably on his nut brown features. He also carried a holstered 44 .40 Remington revolver.

Owen smiled and rose to greet him. "Timmie. How was your trip, sonny?"

They shook hands.

"Good." The youth slipped into a chair and took out his sack and papers. "It went good, Owen. How's things?" He began to put together a smoke, guileless blue eyes squinting over the task,

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his lips slightly parted.

"Two men showed up here yesterday," said Melton casually.

"Oh?"

"Yeah. They've plumb worried poor old Ike into a lather."

"How so?"

"Well, they registered at the Sundown as Smith and Jones."

Both men laughed.

Timmie lit his cigarette and blew a string of expertly crafted smoke rings. "They handy-lookin' jaspers?"

Owen yawned slightly behind a big hand. "According to Priscilla, both was wearing waist armor."

"Hmm. Don't see too many like that in this backwater burg," Timmie acknowledged, spitting stray tobacco grains on the floor.

"Nope," agreed Owen.

"You figure they're gunhawks on the prod?"

"Probably." Melton rubbed his whiskered jaw. "Could be lookin' for somebody. Been askin' questions I hear."

Timmie exhaled a ragged cloud of cigarette smoke. "What kind of questions?"

"Oh, sorta general. But I see trouble comin'. Priscilla says they paid for four nights. So they're not just passin' through."

Timmie shook his head. "Wonder what it's all about."

Melton had a disturbing thought of a sudden and looked up sharply. "You didn't unlimber that iron of yours while you were down south, did ya Timmie?"

Timmie Sanger shook his head. "No, sir."

"How `bout your other thing?" Owen said pointedly.

Timmie frowned. "I think that's my business."

Owen gazed suspiciously at the young man. "Is there something I should know?"

Timmie shook his head and changed the subject. "Say, Owen, I run across Bill

Bonney down there and give him your regards."

Owen obligingly swerved onto this new track. "How's Billy been keeping?"

"Okay, I suppose. Calls hisself "Kid" Antrim or something. Same buck-toothed, crazy fella as always. He's running with a bunch of toughs called Regulators. Works for a young English dude named Tunstall."

"The rancher?"

"Yep. Billy and a few riders have taken up for him against the sheriff and Dolan and them bunch of politicians. Things is gettin' ugly."

Melton scowled. "I don't particularly cotton to the sound of that. Billy is a hothead. Dolan won't back down. Might be trouble."

"No doubt." Tim's glance wandered as he gathered another lung full of smoke and blew it out through his nostrils. His expression altered slightly, turning down the corners of his mouth. "Owen?"

"Yeah?"

Timmie hesitated. "I...uh...oh, never mind." He sprang up from his chair, spurs jingling, and headed for the door. "See ya big fella."

Owen nodded absently, wondering how long this good-looking kid could stay alive in the world, given his perpetual randiness and good looks. He'd have been dead years ago had he not been so handy with his shootin' iron. Women and men around town had complained about him on a regular basis.

When Ike came in for the shift change that afternoon, he and Owen briefly discussed Timmie's bad habits and speculated whether he might have gone off the reservation on his recent trip to Lincoln County. If he had, it could explain the presence of Smith and Jones. They wouldn't be the first husbands to come looking for Timmie. Of course, the town had had to bury the last one.

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After awhile Melton and Tindle let the matter drop, deciding that since Smith and Jones had not mentioned Timmie, it wasn't likely that they were on his trail.

Later Ike got up and went to the gun cabinet, unlocked it, strapped on his Colt Peacemaker, set it comfortably high on his right hip, then circled the small office, his mind uneasy about the two men idling away their time at the Sundown. After Owen went home Ike left to deliver a summons to the owner of the White Rose bordello, located just outside of town. On his way into the White Rose he saw Smith and Jones just coming out.

The next night, as Ike stood at his office window and covertly watched Smith and Jones strolling back and forth in front of the hotel, the evening stage bucked in from Chama and disgorged its half-frozen passengers. Ike went back to his desk and began to make up next week's schedule, thinking of bringing in Abner Mell as backup. Somehow he just knew they were going to have trouble with Smith and Jones.

An hour later, a stranger pushed through the door, shaking the water from his coat.

"Help you?" murmured Ike.

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"No, but I can help you, Marshal."

"Oh? Well, sit a spell." They shook hands, and, as the man sat down, Ike inspected his visitor with interest. A plump little fellow in a heavy black wool overcoat, the stranger looked like a prosperous whiskey drummer. His cheeks were as red as apples, and his nose was still damp from the cold.

"My name's Collingwood, Marshal, and I know something about two men I just saw eatin' beefsteak in your hotel dining room. By that I mean the redhead and his little sidekick."

"And they would be?"

"Harvey Leonard and Red Klausman."

Ike felt the bile creep into his throat. "Heard of `em," he murmured soberly. "You're sure about this?"

Collingwood nodded and fiddled with his hat brim.

"Hmm."

"They hang around Fort Sumpter, Marshal. Sometimes they work for J.J. Dolan. And I don't mean clerkin'."

Ike frowned. "Go on," he said, after a few moments of silence.

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"They're man-killers. Seen Klausman drill a fast gunslick named Harry Rorbaugh last year. Rorbaugh never cleared leather. And Klausman and Leonard shot three soldiers in a stand up fight outside Santa Fe last spring. Killed two of `em. Word is, that Leonard is just plain loco."

Ike sighed. "Wonderful."

Collingwood leaned forward. "I was you, I'd find out what they was a doin' here."

"I will." Ike slumped deeper into his chair, his expression unreadable. Then he stood up and thanked Collingwood, who quickly pulled together his coat, jammed on his hat, and stepped outside into a whining gale of sleet and snow.

Ike strolled to the window and watched the sleet rough up the horses tied at the rail in front of Silver Dollar. After a moment he went back and stoked the stove, stuffing it with more alder, then prepared to make his rounds. He knew this would have to be settled soon. He didn't want this pair of toughs intimidating folks in his town. He'd have to brace `em.

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The next morning, Johnny was hailed by the red-headed man as the youngster walked across the muddy street. The sleet had ended, but the cold was unrelenting, the kind that digs into one's very marrow. Cocking his head like a bird, Johnny walked over, peered up, and asked, "What is it?"

"Thought we could palaver," said Red pleasantly. "In my room. Where it's warm."

Johnny was flattered by the unexpected invitation. Though he'd heard all sorts of rumors about the two strangers, none of them complimentary, Red had treated him like a man.

"What say, son?" prompted Red, a lazy smile on his lips.

"Sure, let's go." Johnny jumped up on the boardwalk and, after shaking hands like a couple of gentlemen, Johnny and Red adjourned to Red's upstairs room. Mr. Jones, Red's sidekick, was absent. Red's rig with its big double-action Colt Peacemaker was hung on a hook on the wall; it carried an oily, metallic smell. There were also two Spencer rifles stacked in a corner.

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Red invited Johnny to take a seat on one of the bunks, and after Johnny was comfortable, Red laid out a silver dollar on the rumpled bedspread. "This is for you, John, you answer some questions for me and keep it to yourself."

"Gee."

"A deal?" asked Red, extending his long, slender fingers for Johnny to grip.

"Sure. What'cha want to know?" asked Johnny, glancing around the spartan room.

Red crossed his legs and pulled out a Roi Tan. "Well, friend, I got only so much time to spend in this burg, so I need some information on a gent named Sanger."

"Timmie? Sure, I know him. His pap's got a spread outside town. Why do you want to know?"

"Let's just say it's my business."

"Okay." But now Johnny felt a twinge of uneasiness, realizing that he was being asked to inform on Timmie, a nice fellow and a friend of Johnny's older brother, Zeke.

"So, he works for his pap, then," said Red.

Johnny hesitated. "No. He works for Mr. Vermillion over to the Double Deuce Ranch."

"I see. This Timmie, he come into town often?"

"Friday, Saturday night, always."

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Red nodded. "He a good friend of yours, Johnny?"

"Naw. I know him a little, but he runs with an older crowd."

"He handy with a six-gun?"

Johnny looked up. "He killed a man here a year ago. Right out there in the street. Man said Timmie had trifled with his wife. Man was a fool."

"This Timmie's good with a gun, then?"

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"Yeah. Real good."

"Uh-huh." Red thought a minute, then changed course. "How about your marshal, he good with a gun, too?"

Embarrassed, Johnny looked down at his feet. "Nope. He ain't drawed it once in the five years he's been here."

"And the deputy?"

"Oh, Owen's good with his fists. But he don't know a whole lot about gunplay. Sundown's a pretty peaceable town most times."

"I see."

Tim looked uneasy. "Lookey here, Red, you ain't thinking of goin' after Timmie, are yuh?"

"Of course not, son," Red responded gruffly. "It's just that a man likes to know what he's up against when he's in a strange town."

But under Johnny's insistent scrutiny, Red's glance wavered, and he looked away.

Johnny stared sadly at the glistening silver dollar, feeling like a Judas. Abruptly he stood up. "You'd better keep your money," he said emotionally. "I don't believe you, Red. I think you're up to no good. So does my pap. And I won't take your money no more." Tears rose in his eyes. Spinning on his heels he went to the door, looked back briefly, then left the room.

After the boy left, Red got up wearily and closed the door, thinking: Good lad. Once the kid knew the nature of the game, he said no to the coin. Got integrity, that kid. Well, hell, we'll kill Tim

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Sanger tomorrow night and be home in a day or so. All be over with. Red violently crushed out his cigar and gave vent to a stream of curses, wishing they'd never come to this place.

Harvey was back an hour later, and they began to play poker. Soon they sent downstairs for a couple of steaks and a bottle. And by late evening, Red was smoothed out, eventually relating Johnny's insights on Tim Sanger to Harvey. Harvey nodded and smiled, but the mirth registering on his lips never quite reached his chilly eyes.

Friday afternoon when Ike came in to relieve Owen, he brought with him Abner Mell, the old man who sometimes spelled the lawmen. Ike wanted Mell to take charge of the jail, so he would be free to roam the town and keep an eye on Klausman and his pal. Owen chafed at this, offering to join Ike, wanting to do a double-shift this night in case of trouble. He was doubtful about Ike's ability to deal with man-killers like these two, both of whom were known as accomplished gunslicks.

But Ike demurred.

Just then, Johnny Speakman burst in, wiping his eyes and sobbing out his anguished tale of Red Klausman's betrayal. Ike sat him down in the marshal's chair and listened to every word, all about how Red Smith had tried to use Johnny to get at Timmie. Satisfied, he took great pains to make Johnny think that his revelation amounted to just a corroboration of what they already knew. Despite this, the boy was eaten up with remorse. Soon Ike sent him on his way.

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After Johnny left, Owen asked Ike what he was going to do.

Ike examined his friend, without speaking, then got up, went to the cabinet, and retrieved his six-gun and belt, strapped it on, and nestled the pistol in its soft, leather holster.

"Well?" pressed Owen.

Ike slipped into his heavy coat. "How long you know me, Owen?" the bespectacled older man asked.

"Five, six years, maybe."

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"Have I ever drawn my gun in all that time?"

"No."

"So, what does that tell you?"

Owen shrugged, not wanting to put it into words.

"Wouldn't you figure it either means I don't know how to use a six-gun very well, or maybe I don't want to use one?"

"Well, perhaps. But"

"Before I came here," Ike interrupted, "I'd lived a different sort of life. One I ain't proud of. Rode with some bad folks. I hope it won't make a difference between us."

Owen colored slightly and stood up. "Course not." He began shifting uneasily from one foot to the other. "This mean you're sayin' you do know how to use that shootin' iron?"

Ike nodded. "But I hope it won't be necessary."

"So, again, what now?"

Ike jammed his hat on his head and murmured, "Now I walk across the road and put a stop to this."

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"I'll go with you."

"No! I want you to ride out and grab Timmie Sanger. Bring him here and put him in a cell. Call it protective custody. Don't let him give you no sass. Tell him we ain't gonna let two rowdies railroad a man over a loose woman; which is what I figure this is all about."

"But"

"Do what I say. I'm going to the Silver Dollar and talk to these galoots."

"There are two of `em, Ike! They got big reps."

Ike's mild features altered slowly into a thin-lipped smile, and then, for the first time, Owen saw the cold steel beneath the skin of this quiet marshal, one to whom Owen had so often felt superior. There was something unsettling in the steadiness of Ike's glance and in the predatory, frigid depths of his eyes.

Instantly, Owen became a believer.

Ike crossed the road through a sheeting wind and entered the saloon . Silver Dollar's got a smaller crowd than usual tonight, he noted as he entered and muscled his way to the bar. He spotted, from the corner of his eye, the two gunmen taking their leisure with a couple of bordello girls. He ordered a beer and hooked his heel over the brass rail, watching the desperadoes for a long moment while he slowly sipped his brew. The men each had a single, half-empty mug of beer before them. One of the women was playing a game of Solitaire while the others watched.

Ike took his beer in hand and strolled on over. In tandem, the men's eyes swung to his star as he approached their table. "Evening gents," he said, tipping his hat. "I hear you're looking for a friend of mine."

Red coolly ran his glance from Ike's boots to his Stetson. "Oh?"

"Yeah. Want you to know I'm taking Timmie Sanger into protective custody. Won't be no vigilante justice here. So you two galoots better just go back where you came from." Sensing trouble, the ladies got up quickly and vanished.

"He raped my wife," snarled Harvey.

"I doubt it," Ike responded mildly.

Red leaned back in his chair, exposing the heavy pistol at his waist. His eyes narrowed to slits. "You heard him. Woman still ain't waked up."

Ike frowned. "Listen to me. The Timmie I know don't need to rape women. Anyway, If he did as you say, I'd be talkin' to a sheriff's deputy right now. So, where's your warrant?"

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"The sheriff needed proof we didn't have," Red murmured after a quick exchange of glances with Harvey.

"He couldn't question my Mary in her condition," added Harvey. "She's like to die without waking up."

"I'm sorry about that. Look, I'm reasonable. What proof do you have?"

"Don't need no proof," snapped Harvey. His eyes were the color of dishwater. "They was seen together in a saloon just before midnight. When I come home she was a layin' on the floor."

"So, he was seen with her. That don't mean nothing."

Harvey shrugged. "Yeah, that's what Sheriff Brady told me."

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"You shoulda listened to him."

Red joined in. "We hear this Sanger is good with a six-gun. We'll take our chances. But you stay out of it, Marshal."

"No. I want you two on the morning stage. You're not there, I'll arrest you for threatening a citizen. You won't get out of my poky till summer. We clear on that, men?"

Harvey grunted, "Big talk, Marshal."

Ike slowly backed away. "I mean it. Be on that stage. He pointed a finger at Harvey. "I'll question Timmie about your wife, sir, but you ain't gonna touch a hair on his head."

The following morning, a weak sun provided a feeble illusion of warmth as Ike and Owen stoked the woodstove and put on the morning coffee. They had earlier grilled

Timmie, 'who was now cooling his heels in a cell' about Harvey's accusation, finding him resolute in his denial. "Me rape her? Pshaw, that woman practically raped me," Timmie had snorted. "I left her in the pink right after we made love in her shack. But I can tell you this, she was real afraid of her husband."

"You saying he did it?" muttered Ike.

Tim colored and blurted, "All I know, is that I didn't do it."

When the morning stage pulled in, Ike and Owen bundled up and went down to the hotel. Ike wanted to make sure that Red and Harvey were boarding the Concord.

Johnny Speakman was there, too, standing anxiously on the corner. Having heard through the grapevine of Ike Tindle's ultimatum the night before, he hoped Red would comply. He was through being angry with the big redheaded man, a fellow who, despite his sorry reputation, had treated Johnny with respect.

Just then, Johnny saw Red Klausman appear in front of the hotel, causing a stir among the onlookers. He carried no baggage, just his holstered six-gun. Harvey Leonard moved up behind him, then fanned out to one side, facing Ike and Owen who were standing sixty feet away.

"Give us the kid," grated Harvey.

"Better listen to him, Marshal," warned Red.

"Don't do this, Leonard," cried Ike.

Leonard's fingers hovered over the butt of his six-gun. "Give him up."

Red cast a hurried look at his partner, then his glance strayed slightly, and he marked Johnny standing on the corner. "Go home, kid," he cried. But Johnny shook his head and stayed put. There was the oddest look on Red's face, one Johnny couldn't decipher.

"You pull iron on us, you'll hang for murder," yelled Ike.

To Johnny, poor Marshal Tindle resembled a bank teller.

"It wasn't your wife," Harvey snapped.

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Johnny heard Red hiss urgently, "Harve, maybe you should listen to the man."

"No."

"Harve. Wait a sec. We can deal with Sanger later."

"No, by Lordy."

Just then a chill breeze fanned the hair on the back of Johnny's neck, whispering its soft call to mayhem, while sending an errant bit of paper swirling down the street. At this moment, Johnny saw Harvey Leonard go for his gun. Red followed suit. Fast they were, stabbing downward for their guns.

But Ike Tindle's draw was so astonishingly swift, so smooth, and his aim so deadly accurate, that seconds later Red and Harvey lay tumbled, dead, and twitching on the icy ground.

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It was over.

A shocked silence followed as the gawkers slowly took it in. Seconds later there was bedlam as they broke ranks and headed for the bodies. Ike shook his head as he and Owen turned and trudged back toward the jail.

Johnny watched them go, his mind in a turmoil. He leaned against the wall and shed his bitter tears. Finally he stumbled into the street to retrieve Red's hat which had come off as he crumpled to the ground. Johnny knelt by the fallen outlaw and peered into his pale, motionless face. Red's eyes were unseeing, blank, and half-open, so Johnny gently closed them. And as he did so, he felt a surprising tenderness for the gunman, followed by a deep sense of regret.

Back at the jail, Ike and Owen were talking.

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"Jesus, Ike," blurted Owen, "you're like a strikin' snake."

Ike shrugged and went behind his desk. "Sometimes there's more to a man than what's on the surface."

Owen nodded.

Then Ike pulled out his sack and papers and began to roll a smoke, his expression troubled. "One thing sticks in my craw, though."

"Oh, what is it?"

Ike worked on his cigarette with deliberate care. "Harvey Leonard. Why did the fool draw on me?"

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"Ike, he was nuts. Didn't we hear that somewhere?"

Ike crimped the ends and reached for a match. "Yeah."

"Well, that would explain it."

Ike lit up and sucked in smoke, blowing it out slowly. "Maybe. Still, was he loco, or was it a righteous hate that brought him here?"

"Guess we'll never know, Ike."

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Ike shrugged. "Guess not."

When they went back to the cells a few minutes later and told Timmie, he was joyous, tearfully praising the lawmen while he gathered his things and prepared to go home. He was a free man, saved by the unsung marshal no one in Sundown had respected.

Two weeks later, as Ike was cleaning a shotgun, a tall gentleman in a rumpled black suit and vest came through the door of the jail. He wore a star. His name was Holloway, and he was a sheriff's deputy from Fort Sumpter. He had a warrant for the arrest of Timothy Sanger.

Surprised, Ike asked, "What is this?"

"Suspect murdered a Mrs. Harvey Leonard."

Ike colored and stood up. "Bullshit."

The deputy sighed. "Sorry. Know you already had a pot of trouble over this. But jist before she died, Mrs. Leonard come out of her coma long enough to name this here Timothy Sanger as the man who did her in. Seems that after they was intimate, Sanger got crazy drunk. Knocked her down, and she hit her head."

"Goddammit."

"Yeah. Anyway, you know where I can find this particular gent?"

Ike stared bleakly at the deputy for a long moment. Then he got up, strapped on his six-gun, took down his hat and coat from the rack. "Not only do I know where to find him," he said coldly, "I'll even help you arrest the son of a bitch."