

STRATEGY

By
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J *Clever Sheriff
Proves There
Is More Than
One Way
To Tame
a
Bad
Man*



SHERIFF Jud Wilder sat hunched in a chair before his old well-worn flat-topped desk. His elbows, supporting his long, gaunt body, rested on the desk. His head moved slowly at his keen blue eyes read the telegram he held stretched out before him. After carefully reading the message a second time, he slowly folded it, and thrust it into his shirt pocket, and sank back, as though weary, in the chair. He picked up the blackened pipe that lay on the desk, and scratching a match on his boot, puffed lazily away, his eyes fixed steadily on the hot, dusty street, visible through the open door of the office.

To a stranger's eye, the weary old man, with wispy, gray hairs straggling from under the drooping brim of his hat, did not look the prepossessing figure that a sheriff should. His mild blue eyes wandered slowly around; his solemn, lined face rarely changed; yet old timers would tell with awe of times when the sheriff had emerged from his shell, always to the law-breakers' sorrow.

A rider swung up to the door, dropped lightly to the ground, and made his way into the office, promptly seating himself on the desk, his legs swinging idly. In an effort to create a cooling

draught for his sun-burned face, he swung his big hat. The old man stared steadily ahead, eyes dreamily fixed on the wisp of dust rising on the horizon. His hand reached into his shirt pocket and drew out the telegram, which he passed silently to the younger man.

Nick Lander, deputy sheriff, unfolded the paper, his eyes fixed on the silent old man. Like many young men he was apt to discredit the reputation of older men, and although his connection with Wilder had not been long, he often thought that the sheriff was too old, and should make way for a younger man. In idle moments, his thoughts would often stray, and he would picture himself in the old man's place, building up a reputation that would be known throughout the Southwest. He dropped his eyes to the telegram, and his face brightened hopefully as he read:

Sheriff Jud Wilder—

Man reported headed your way. Hardware front and back. Use them too. Get him, but alive.

Marshal Black.

The deputy refolded the telegram, dropped it on the desk, and rolled a cigarette.

"Guess that job'll suit me, Jud," he said. "Goin' to take a feller pretty quick on the draw to bring that cuss in."

The sheriff puffed away at his old pipe for a few minutes and then removed it from his mouth.

"Guess that's right, Nick. This sheriffing business is getting right strenuous for us old fellers. Ain't so smart as we were once."

"Aw, it's not that, Jud," condescendingly replied the deputy, "but times change some, and these cusses are right up-to-date."

"That's so, Nick," answered the old man, "time some of us gave way a bit for you young 'uns."

A FEW hours later a wirily built man dropped from a powerfully built black horse, and made his way into the saloon. The old man half closed his eyes as he passed, and a larger puff of smoke than usual blew from his mouth as he noted the heavy gun hanging at the back of the stranger's belt. He groaned aloud as he rose from the box he had been seated on, stretched his long limbs, and made his way casually back to his office. He dropped into his chair wearily and picked up the deputy's matches from the table.

"Stranger in town, Nick," the old man drawled. "Plumb smart feller, too. Nice hoss. Nice guns. Got one hangin' right square back." The deputy leaped to his feet, and eased his gun in its holster, as he looked pityingly at the old sheriff. "Don't that sound like our man!" snapped the deputy.

"Why darn me, if it don't," slowly answered the sheriff. "Plumb forgot all about him."

"I'll go get him," sharply replied Nick.

The deputy carefully inspected his gun and saw that it slid easily from the holster.

The old sheriff snapped upright in his chair as the deputy left the office, his blue eyes alert. The lines around his mouth relaxed whimsically as he rose spryly to his feet and buckled on his well-worn gun belt. He watched his deputy enter the saloon, then made his way quickly to the hitch-rack at the store, and busied himself for a few minutes with the saddle of the stranger's horse. Completing his business, he again took on his weary pose, and dropped down on the edge of the rough board verandah, and drew out his old blackened pipe.

Nick Lander entered the saloon, his quick glance around lighting on the stranger standing at the bar, holding aloft a glass, evidently interested in studying the color of the liquor it held. Men drew aside hastily as the deputy drew his gun and advanced to the lone man at the bar. The stranger still held the glass aloft, his head motionless, but his body quivered like a coiled spring, as the deputy's gun muzzle touched his ribs.

"Keep the glass up," commanded Nick, reaching forward to draw the gun from the holster at the stranger's back.

Quick as a flash the outlaw's body spun round, the lightning-like swing of the hips sweeping the deputy's gun aside as his finger pressed the trigger. The heavy gun roared, the bullet crashing into the far wall of the saloon. The next instant the gun spun from Nick's grasp, and a heavy blow smashed down upon his hand. He shrank back under the shooting pain in his knuckles to face the expressionless, cold, gray eyes of the killer, fixed intently on him, drawn guns in hands that seemed of marble, yet reminded one of mechanism, quick and sure of action. A stab of flame leaped from the outlaw's gun as a man moved across the saloon. Instantly all hands were raised and the killer backed unmolested to the door. Nick nursed his numbed hand, his face revealing mixed emotions of pain and chagrin.

Reaching the almost deserted street, the outlaw cast a quick glance about him, his gaze passing over the form of the dozing sheriff, seated near the hitch-rack. He sheathed his guns and ran across the street, the marvelous speed of his actions evident in his running. Nearing his mount, he took a flying leap into the saddle, and bent forward as he applied spurs to his horse's flanks.

NO sooner had he settled in the saddle, however, than he was hurtling through the air, over the horse's head. With a heavy thud, he crashed to the ground, while the horse reared sharply. For a moment, he lay inert, stunned.

His scattered senses returning, he staggered to his feet, only to look into the muzzle of a shiny old gun, held steady in a gnarled fist. One look at the sheriff's face, and he elevated his hands.

Men emptied out of the saloons and quickly gathered about the pair, taking care not to be in

line with the old man's gun.

Old Jud sighted his deputy, who was making his way across the street, his gait not quite so jaunty, in fact, his entire bearing quite different from that of the young man who had left the sheriff's office just a few minutes ago. Again the lines around the sheriff's mouth relaxed; his eyes twinkled.

"Put the bracelets on him, Nick," he drawled.

The old man slid his gun into his holster with a deep sigh, his wrinkled face again taking on its weary look. He picked up his pipe and groped for a match.

"Plumb strenuous work, this sheriffing,

Nick," he exclaimed, his eyes half-closed sleepily. "Blamed bad business huntin' gun-men with a gun. Never believed in it myself, not wishin' to die young."

The deputy fidgeted uncomfortably under the amused glances of the younger men; the older ones snickered openly at him.

Old Jud leaned back comfortably against a post, his pipe erupting clouds of smoke.

"Might as well hist up that saddle on the black hoss, Nick," he mumbled; "don't like to keep prickly pear hangin' on a critter too long, even though 'tis in the cause of law an' order."