

Waiting for the right moment.

A short story.

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The early morning dawn shoots its bright, red light from the horizon changing everything in a snap. Here, in this city, there is no other natural splendor to take in. Soon that slow, familiar creak of metal will start rolling its wheels as the city wakes to the chorus of horses and carts. Yesterday, a hint of rain passed by with the thin, mild promise to wash this community clean of all grime and sin. Unfortunately for them--or me, now that I think about it--no dice.

It would've been a fine sight to take in even if today is the day that I am to be executed. By now, the sunlight has changed its red color to an orange tinge, falling upon the city of San Francisco; and yet none of it has decided to reach my rusting cell. It's a shame, but of course, the sunlight conveniently seems to favor the ten lawmen that now surround my sunless cell, eyeing me like some sort of savage beast, daring me to make a move. Excessive? I think not. I am actually insulted.

Their badges bask in the light, as if mocking me for not having one. But hey, at least I can read where some of them are from. Let's see, one is from Arizona, another from Nevada, Texas, New Mexico. *Hey*. Even one from ole New York! Some of the badges are illegible from where I sit, but I think it is safe to assume that the rest are deputies. Based on their mud-stained boots and trousers, I can tell that they have traveled a long way to get here.

Apart from the standard dirty boots and trousers, a few deputies stand out in terms of fashion. Well, most of them are dressed in tactical armors mismatched with western personal touches. One is wearing a grim-looking pair of leather black boots and grey sleek trousers. Another wears

a beaten onyx-lined waistcoat matched with a smooth midnight frock coat. Ooh, there's even one with a crushed felt outback hat, looking sharp enough to cut skin. Ha ha. Each of them cut an intimidating and merciless figure, leaving me with the feeling of being underdressed by comparison with the moldy orange jumpsuit I've been given.

The room that I've involuntarily been interned in--in case you were wondering--is a large and empty one, big enough to hold a courtroom session. Luckily for me, I was able to receive the finest of accommodations in this first rate establishment: a smelly cell placed in the middle of the room with nothing but oak-wood floor and a black iron manacle to keep me fixed to the center. I have nothing to pass the time, save for listening to that ceaseless ticking sound that can be heard from the gaping blackness in one of the dark corners of the room, counting down the time I've left in this world.

I cross my legs as best I can, considering the leg brace, while stroking my ungroomed beard. Then I flash my best smile to these fine gentlemen. I cannot show any sign of fear in front of these animals. Let's just hope that they cannot smell it.

Wait. Where is my coin? My lucky coin. I quickly search my pockets for it. Not there. I shoot a glare to the lawmen causing all of them to shift uncomfortably in their seats. Then I pick up on some of the men fixing their gaze from me to the deputy with the crushed hat. Ah, he has it. My luck, my life. My hand trembles ever so slightly. An omen.

The deputy with the crushed hat sits there transfixed on my coin. He stares at it for a moment before flipping it up in the air. A second of silence passes before it falls back on his hand. Considering his body language, his reaction is one of bewilderment. He flips it again. And again. His body language does not change. I know that reaction all too well. He keeps landing on the same side.

I smile, “So is this your lucky day, or is it mine?” To my disappointment, my response doesn’t gauge any reaction from him.

Suddenly a door swings open and just a little more of that fair morning light leaks into the room. There stands the silhouette of a man in tidy grays that match his thinning hair and heavy moustache. He has holstered twin ivory pistols matched along with the small dissonance of keys at his side, upon his broad black waistcoat sits that sagging tin star. The sheriff.

“It’s time,” he says in a quiet whisper.

Then he swallows, clears his throat, and repeats himself, but louder this time. He slowly limps to my compartment while pulling out the keys with stiff hands. I can now see the hard features and rough skin worn on this man. He looks like he hasn’t gotten much sleep as of late.

My long-time companion known as silence disappears almost immediately once the jail lock creaks open. Everyone is now on their feet, twitching their fingers near their holsters. Sweat beads starting to show on their brows.

“The door isn't that scary, I assure you.” I gesture exasperatedly with my hands. No response. Too bad. Sensing the aura of the room, I gather my resolve and stand up. Everyone stiffens, so I raise my hands as a small gesture to communicate that I am not going to do anything serious. The next few seconds are filled with only the rattle of my shackles and the soft scrap of my worn boots as I leave the cell. The lawmen quickly unlock the chains on my feet, the release making me feel like I can breathe again. Before I have enough time to savor my newfound oxygen, one deputy clasps my shoulder tightly while another takes hold of the other. Cheery.

As I enter the outside world, light beats down on my vision in a flash before eventually caving to the natural color of a clear, blue sky. I wait to turn and see the bustling, urban metropolis but instead, I feel the barren wind of a distant county town. Instead of bustling horses and the cries of distant trains, I get only the dissatisfying crunch of a raunchy makeshift road. This is not San Francisco, this is not much of anything. The town looks like a dusty burg with two dozen stout timber buildings scattered along the main street. Other frames seem to be waiting to be filled while a staggering number of carriages and wagons can be seen near the edge of town. I smirk. A dying town with a special event.

How did I get here? Did I get moved here overnight? Did I draw that much attention that I had to be moved somewhere distant? Questions such as these envelop my innermost thoughts as I am walking to a tall post with an anxious noose flapping in the wind.

Now, now. I think to myself. *You should've expected this to happen. You can't decide everything about your life, especially the place where you die. Life is unpredictable. Nothing is truly in the hands of man. There are only the opportunities that life deals you and the choices that you make in response. Now, choose to live with what little dignity you have left.*

A large crowd stands together in front of the post, people from all walks of life: Americans, Native Americans, Irish; you name it, they are here. And it is probably best to make clear that these are not just the people who live here. I was a busy man and they are all armed.

Nobody else can be seen, save for a few horses being towed to a defeated saloon not too far from the hangman's post. The sun is now hanging high overhead and slowly broils the land.

As I come closer, I get a better look at the hangman's post and am drawn to a tall man who sports a rather fashionable figure with his flattering black-hood of death. His hand, it seems, is itching to be closer and closer to the lever of my demise. His stone-cold eyes remain on me the whole time conveying the same message over and over: *this is it.*

A sharp pain strikes me across the face, nearly putting me off balance. Shouting erupts from all around while I attempt to fight off the dizzying pain in my forehead. It takes a few moments to realize that someone had thrown a rock at me.

“Stop this right now! This is meant to be civil!” bellows the sheriff, but the crowd refuses to comply.

In response, the sheriff unloads one of his pistols into the air, a sound which reverberates over all the shouting. All the lawmen now have their own weapons trained on the crowd. Silence ensues. Welcome back my old friend.

“Take them all! Now!” The sheriff barks to the other lawmen and they respond in kind by confiscating the firearms dispersed among the crowd. They move in rapid succession, like a well-oiled machine. After having done this, they then haul out an auspicious, long table from that broken-down saloon and place all the confiscated firearms on the table. The long table is placed behind the post and I briefly wonder if anyone is guarding it.

The crowd does not take too kindly to being disarmed but the sheriff is a smart man as he makes the subtle promise that he will overlook some shooting of the corpse afterwards. Some real work of the law right here. But it also tells me that all of the weapons are loaded.

I try to swallow the bile slowly rising in my throat as I am led up the stairs to the platform, an earthly itch has found its way into my wrists. With great effort, I desperately try to scratch that itch, a poor attempt to distract me from the impending plans of my death.

I am placed on a platform and they fasten a noose in quick succession. The sheriff reaches into his coat to pull out a folded piece of paper. Then, he clears his throat to speak for all to hear.

“David Corpeus, you have committed numerous grave crimes against the United States. It has been requested that the most serious are to be cited before you are hanged.” He peers closer at that paper and fishes out a small pair of glasses to continue.

“Murder of a judge.” *We had a disagreement.*

“Murder of a sheriff.” *I don’t remember that.*

“Arson.” *It was cold.*

“Looting of others, specifically firearms.” *God, I love America.*

“Impersonating officers of the law.” *I was inebriated.*

“... Murder of ... Murder of ... Murder of ...”--*It's a long list*-- “... A lot of murder... And the last being general lawlessness. In the eyes of the law, you are hereby to be hung by the neck until dead.”

A man of the cloth approaches me while tightly holding a Bible near his chest. “Do you wish to repent your many sins?”

I stare at this leftover fragment of a man in a moment that seems to last forever and then turn to look around, seeing that few actually care to hear my answer. The sound of a coin flip makes its way to my ear. Turning to its source, I see the deputy with the crushed hat, holding my coin. A thought flashes through my mind, *was it heads or tails?* And yes, I am aware of how trivial this sounds but it pushes me over the edge. Feeling tired and frustrated, I give my response and I don't hold back.

Now the response I give is a little much, even for someone like me. I cover everything: racism, sexism and something about their mothers and such and such. By the time I finish, there is a complete and utter dumbfounded silence--it seems I have a way with words, maybe I should have considered being a politician.

A rumble starts to brew once everybody regains their composure. That rumble begins to rise in the crowd's throats and once the silence is at its zenith, all hell breaks loose. Everyone in the

crowd starts spitting, jeering and yelling all manners of insults and curses. Some cry out for justice, others clamor for vengeance. All of the lawmen rush to contain the crowd.

In the midst of the chaos, I spot one of the rioters approaching the post, eyes blazing, with a small pistol in hand trained on me. *Ah hell, it was heads.* However, as quickly as the man appeared, one of the lawmen jumped forward quickly tackling my would-be assailant to the ground--my knight in shining armor. But then I realized that my knight was too late as a bullet flies in my direction. I close my eyes...

A few moments pass. Is this the part where my life flashes before my eyes? It would be fun to see, I have to say. But then something heavy hits my head. Opening my eyes, I see a piece of rope lying next to me. Could it be? I look up and see that the rope that was once attached to the post now lies beside me. I grin. *So it was tails. Coincidence? I think not.*

I turn to look at my surroundings, the sheriff has his full attention on the crowd and the crowd, in turn, is in a frenzy. One of the rioters takes a swing at one of the lawmen with a rock in hand and the lawman crumples to the ground. Behind me, the long table filled with an arsenal stands unguarded and that is when all the pieces start to click together. I take one last look at the sky and with a wide smile, I say out loud, "The choices we make are only in response to the opportunities we are given."