

Jeremiah, no longer the focus of the immigrant youngsters, shuffled off back to the porch, calling to Zachary, "Hey Zach," he said, "I've got to get a better look at the gun that trailhand holstered. Let's go ask him to show it to us."

"You can't do that," Zachary said. "We aren't supposed to go on that part of the porch by the saloon. We can't go inside; Momma would skin our hides."

"How would she know? Papa will be back soon. Now is my only chance." Jeremiah hopped up on the porch in front of the station. Since the station and the saloon shared a common wall, the walk along the porch to the tavern had only an invisible barrier separating the two establishments. Parents' admonishments not to go further in the saloon's direction usually held sway over the immigrant children and the Brennan boys.

"I'm going over there," said Jeremiah, "I dare you."

Zachary looked to the sky. He sighed and scanned the meadow, hoping to find Lobo loping back to the station with his father. No one was in sight as far as Zach could see. He had never refused a dare by his brother. Zachary shook his head from side to side. *This dare would have consequences.*

"Come on," said Jeremiah, "are you scared? I double dare you."

Zachary jumped up on the porch in front of Jeremiah and walked along the porch toward the saloon.

"You boys better come back over here now," said one of the women sitting in one of the porch chairs. She had grandmother skin and a face set in a mean scowl. The other woman in the chair next to the grandma nodded and shook her finger at the boys.

"This is our place," said Jeremiah. "My father said we could," he lied.

Jeremiah shoved Zachary aside and strolled the remaining distance to the saloon, stopping just short of the doorway. Both boys could now clearly hear the ongoing conversation inside the tavern. Jeremiah peeked around the open door. His brother laid down on the porch and looked around the bottom corner of the open door. He had a clear view of the interior from an ant's point of view.

"Windemere," said the blond bearded man leaning on one elbow at the bar. "Why don't you take your pasty face out of here and let a man drink peaceable." The casual, lazy-looking appearance of the man seemed in no way threatening to Zachary.

On the other hand, Jeremiah noted the man's duster folded back behind his holster and his right hand hanging loose only inches away from his gun handle. Jeremiah was sure he had been right about the make and model of the revolver. If only he took it from his holster, Jeremiah would know for sure.

"You boys get over here," shouted the grandma from the front of the station. "I'll take a hand to you myself if you don't get away from that saloon."

Zachary looked sideways, catching sight of the second man's boots beneath the chair and table where the man in the white shirt sat. The gentleman held his gun at the ready in his lap. Zachary had no idea what kind it was, let alone the make or model. He would have to ask Jeremiah and now was not the time.

"I'm telling you, said the gentleman. "Stay away from my wife, you bastard."

"Or what," said Yellowbeard.

"Just stay away from my wife," the gentleman growled.

Jeremiah leaned down and whispered to Zachary. "I'm going over to the window to see better," he said.

Zachary, scared at the sight of two guns and two men arguing across from each other, thought to tell Jeremiah. Before he could eke out a warning, he saw the gentleman grip his gun tight and start to raise it above the table.

The melted snow from the roofs of the supply station and the saloon had flowed together, spouting onto the porch where the two buildings met. The water had run along the porch wall to the right of the saloon door, where it puddled. Jeremiah backed up two steps and leaped over the little pond. Quick as a sprite, he climbed atop the bench in front of the window, peeking through a dust-encrusted pane.

“Your wife,” said the man at the bar as he straightened to his full height. “Your wife. That woman hasn’t been your wife since Albuquerque. You know it, I know it. Now get out of here. Git.”

Zachary saw the gentleman’s chair slide, then topple over backward. A gunshot echoed in the near-empty bar.

Lorenzo heard the shot on his way back to the station with Lobo, thinking nothing of it. Immigrants needed to hunt for food as much as he did. They went far away from their camp to be safe.