

Oregon

1855

It was crowded that night, as usual at the tavern. Ted was serving the drinks quickly like a pro, like expected; but he was a little miffed that his assistant was late. There was a young pretty lady on the piano playing some up-tempo songs, which kept about ten patrons captive. And of course, the three card tables were packed with its usual rough patrons.

And if you were to pass by one of the lively tables, you would see that the players meant business. No one dared to bump into them as they passed by. They knew not to even glance at their hand, or you were considered an accomplice to one of the other players; which might turn into a deadly dual.

Mr. Peterson watched the games from a distance as he drank his beer. He was on vacation from Reno and wanted to stop by for a quick drink before he settled in. Truth be told, he wanted to get a good feel of the town. The best way to see people in their natural state is at a celebration or at a tavern, where they let their guard down.

He could see that table three just lost a player. He got up and walked over to the table. The two players looked at him like the drifter that he was. At the table, there was an old man named Lance, with the thickest bifocals he has ever seen.

He wore a dirty old cowboy hat, drinking whiskey. Henry was middle-aged, covered with scars on his face, and with a thick beard and never-ending sideburns.

Mr. Peterson, by comparison, was clean cut, wearing slacks and a pressed collared silk shirt. Henry shook his head. "This is no educational establishment. You best get yourself out of here, before you hurt yourself." He and Lance laughed. Mr. Peterson smiled nervously at them.

"I beg your pardon sir, I just arrived in town and I was hoping to burn off little steam before I turned in for the night." Lance gave him a look of evil. "A stranger who wants to join in a game of poker is a man who has something up his sleeve. Aw, get out of here you punk, we don't want your kind."

Mr. Peterson frowned and was a little surprised by the cold welcome. Getting restless, Henry's first instinct was to brandish his knife and throw it at the wall.

And then pull out his other knife and stare him down. But after taking a good look at his wardrobe, he thought this stranger was holding some serious coin. "Aw come on, Lance, this man is new in our town. Let's show him some courtesy," Henry said. Lance glared at Henry and then looked at Mr. Peterson.

"Aw fine, what am I complaining about? More money for me anyway, right?" Mr. Peterson smiled as he sat down. A young, pretty waitress placed her hand on Mr. Peterson's shoulder. "What's your pleasure, doll?" He looked up at her and smiled. He hasn't been called doll since grammar school. "I'll have whiskey please." "My pleasure," Sherry said.

Mr. Peterson looked at the men. "What game are we playing tonight, gentlemen?" "We are playing poker, two chips ante," Lance snarled, as if that was common knowledge. Mr. Peterson took a small coin bag out and tossed two coins. "That should cover it." Henry glanced at the coin bag and then quickly at his hand, hoping Mr. Peterson wouldn't notice.

"Let's play cards," Henry said with a smile. Ted saw that smile and knew he wasn't up to any good. He whispered to Sherry to keep an eye on the table. Henry was known for losing his temper and causing a scene. A scene that most often or not, left broken glass on the floor and tables on its side.