

Rocky Raccoon

It was just another day in South Dakota, which is to say nothing was happening. But that was exactly what Lil liked. In fact, Lil had a lot to be thankful for this year. The winter that usually ravages her small mining town was mild this year, she scarcely had to put on her heavy coat, and she had finally finished her schooling; she was now free to do as she pleased. And at the moment, she was pleased with sitting in her yard listening to the songbirds that greeted her each day. She thought to herself that the only thing to make this moment better would be a man to share it with. But there was no one in her town that she fancied, so she let the thought pass and returned her attention to the performance of the birds.

Through the tranquility, the familiar voice of her mother called out, “Magill, I need you to run to the market for me. I forgot the onions.” “Of course, Mom” she called back, and promptly bid farewell to the birds. Lil was in such a good mood, that she didn’t even mind the two mile walk into town. Along the way she admired the serene beauty of the Black Hills that she was able to call home. Sure, other girls got to play on beaches and explore cities, but Lil had the vastness of nature, and she wouldn’t trade that for anything. The high rising pine trees were her skyscrapers, and watching the sun set behind the stoic mountains was certainly better than any sunset a beach could provide. And nestled somewhere in between it all was the small town of Amal Falls.

To call Amal Falls a town is the same as calling a ditch the Grand Canyon, but it had all that Lil and her family needed. A postal building, a market, and at the center of town was the saloon, which everyone knew for miles around as the place Bungalow Bill stopped for a drink during a hunt. The saloon’s owner Mr. Whitewood claims Bill had stopped there on purpose, but it was far more likely he stumbled in already drunk from celebrating his successful hunt of the North American tiger. Regardless, the saloon was the only place in town to have a drink, so the point was entirely mute. Although Lil only went for the hoedowns every fortnight, she was a regular at the saloon, and decided she’d stop by to say hello after going to the market.

She pushed open the dark pine doors to enter the market, and before they could swing close behind her the shop worker had already called out, “Nancy! I’m so glad to see you, how long has it been?” “Only a week” she replied in an annoyed tone, “and how many times have I asked you to stop calling me that?” It seems the one thing that could break her good mood was Rocky. Rocky has worked at the market for as long as Lil could remember, and every time she came into the store he never failed to ask her out. She had to admire his tenacity, but she simply had no interest in dating a man who spent his free time hunting the very same birds that sang to her so beautifully. “Of course, Lil, forgive me. But ya know, if you’re free Friday...” he began to say, but Lil knew where this was headed before it had even started. “Actually, I’m not. I’m just here to get some onions and I’ll be on my way.” No stranger to her rejection, Rocky proceeded to help her find the onions, and was left to watch as she once again walked out of his life and out of the market.

True to her word, Lil began making her way towards the center of town. Along her way other townsfolk called out to her, greeting Nancy as she passed. Having had enough attention,

she escaped into the saloon. She barely made it past the doors as they swung closed when she spotted a man she had never seen before. He was dressed head to toe in leather that was fit for the finest outlaw. Typically, Lil despised people such as this, but the man wore it so well it was hard not to believe he was born wearing them. Upon his broad shoulders was a head of long blonde hair and short matching beard that framed his face. Once again her mood had been lifted, as she was busy imagining their lives together, still staring in the doorway. He took his eyes off his hand of cards and met Lil's, a grin crossed his face as he folded and excused himself from the game, now making his way to the beautiful woman still staring from afar. "Hello Miss, I see it is true that there is treasure in these hills after all." One of the men he was playing poker with at the table called back to him, "Careful Dan, that treasure has cost every man in town their pride." The saloon broke out in laughter as Lil's cheeks flushed red. Dan was the only one not to laugh, "Because you all don't know what to do with treasure. You all go hunting for it, but what you need to do, is earn it." "You're smarter than you look" said Lil as she finally broke her silence. The grin again returned to Dan's face, "I also move quite well in these boots. Care to accompany me to the hoedown next week?" "I'll see you there" she said without hesitation, and left the saloon with her cheeks an even darker shade of red.

For the next week, Lil made the same trip into town, each time making sure to run into Dan at the saloon. Talking to him seemed to come so naturally to Lil, and after talking to him for hours on end, he would walk with her the two miles home. The only times absent of conversation were the ones when they stopped to listen to the birds sing. Finally, the night of the hoedown had arrived, and Lil couldn't wait to leave the house. "Magill, why do you now spend your days watching the clock instead of listening to the birds?" Her father asked. But her mother was quick to respond, "Oh dear, don't you remember when we met? I too counted the minutes until I could see you again. Magill is doing the same for Daniel." Without the need to explain it herself, she kissed them both on the cheek, and was out the door, wearing the best dress she owned.

At the same time in town, Rocky was checking himself into his usual room in the saloon. Nothing about this was unusual, he always did so the night of the hoedown, as he was never able to make it home after a long night of drinking. The difference tonight was that he had brought with him his gun, and had every intention of using it shortly. For the past week he had seen Lil every day, and he couldn't have been happier, seeing her only once was the highlight of his week. Unfortunately for him, he also saw that she was with Dan. Dan had made a name for himself quickly upon arriving in Amal Falls. Not only had he won the hand of Lil for tonight's hoedown, but he had also proven himself the best poker player in the town, taking most of Rocky's money. Rocky could live with being broke, but he could not live with the idea that Lil was with the man who made him so.

Outside of the saloon stood Dan, who had traded in his leather attire for a more traditional suit. His trusty gun still strapped to his side, and a lit cigarette in his mouth, he still appeared as someone you wouldn't want to cross. He spotted Lil in her dark green dress making her way and went out to meet her. "Shall we see if emeralds are able to dance as well as they shine?" he said offering Lil his hand. She wrapped hers in his as she once again blushed, "If you

dance as well as you speak, we shall have a great time.” And with that, the two made their way into the saloon just in time to hear the band’s first song.

Dan and Lil were finding that the other was not exaggerating their skills on the dance floor. As the two continued to dance, the more eyes seemed to find their way to their performance. As the song came to a close and their feet finally stopped, they were met with a round of applause. However, the applause was short lived, as it was broken by the rattle of spurs as Rocky made his way onto the dance floor to meet them, “Danny Boy, this is a showdown!” he shouted. Dan quickly stepped in front of Lil and had his finger on the trigger before Rocky could stop grinning. A loud crack echoed throughout the saloon, and Rocky collapsed in the corner.