Mexican Standoff

I sat in the saloon, drinking my problems away.

I was on the stool closest to the piano player. I found that the music helped me forget my pain.

If only for a little while.

I used to be part of an excellent group of bandits, we used to steal everything that our hearts desired and we never got caught.

But, about a year ago, they all got caught, I wasn’t on that particular heist because I was visiting my parents, I blamed myself.

Among those men was my brother, who I loved dearly, but he being as stubborn as he was, resisted arrest and was killed.

I looked down at my glass, it was empty. I sighed and waved the bartender over.

He walked over to me smiling. “Another drink, Standoff?”

I nodded silently.

Standoff was my nickname in the town because I never turned down a challenge and I always won, little did the people that interacted with me know that I didn’t do it for the glory or the joy of killing. I did it so that I could die.

The bartender gave me another drink, I looked at its liquid contents and wondered how many I would need to drink to die.

Just then, the doors burst open.

Everyone in the bar turned to the entrance, but I did not, I was too busy looking at the table to care who was at the door.

I heard footsteps approach, they were heavy, the noise from the person’s boots banged on the floor with every step.

The footsteps got closer and closer until they stopped right behind me.

I felt a hand clamp down on my shoulder and turn me around.

I looked up and saw that a hideous man was standing over me, leering at me.

“You got some nerve, kid,” He said as he wiped the drool from his mouth.

I smiled at him mockingly.

“What do you want?”

The man snorted, “I came here to challenge “Standoff” to a duel.”

My eyes lit up, this man could be my ticket to the afterlife and an end to monotonous existence.

“You’re looking at him.”

The brute stared at me incredulously, “You can’t be the man I’ve heard so much about, the man that has never lost a standoff?”

He looked around the room, everyone else in the saloon nodded wordlessly.

The man looked back over at me with confusion, “but you’re just a kid!”

I sighed not surprised by his shock, after all, I was relatively young and my baby face and slender physique didn’t help me look intimidating or old. But I still felt insulted so I decided to mess with him.

“But I’m a kid with an itchy trigger finger so I would deny that request if I were you.” I threatened as I reached for my gun.

The man looked dumbfounded for a few seconds, then he laughed.

“I like your balls kid, I’d be happy to duel you if you’d accept?”

He was taunting me, trying to test my honour and see if I’d crack at the first sign of resistance.

Obviously, I did not.

“Seven o clock, outside,” I stated to the whole saloon, I got the feeling this was going to be my first loss and I wanted the townsfolk to have a front row seat to their great attractions demise.

The man nodded and walked out of the saloon with a smile on his face.

The bartender grabbed me by the arm as soon as he left.

“George, are you crazy, do you know who that is?”

I shook my head absently.

“That man’s the best shot in the west, there’s no way you’ll win tomorrow!”

I smiled, good, maybe this time I would finally be put to rest, maybe finally I would see my brother again and atone for my failings.

I left the saloon and immediately went to bed, giddy from the excitement of the upcoming duel.

I woke up at 6.30 the next morning, I did not bother to get dressed, I never did before a standoff, zero protection means less chance of making it back alive.

I was dressed only in my pants and nothing else.

I walked over to my door and smiled, today is the day I die, I thought as I emerged from my crypt and wandered toward the town square.

Unsurprisingly, the brute was already there, waiting for me.

I bowed to him as I approached, he growled at me silently, then he gave me a look of total shock once he realised how underdressed I was for the event.

Then he smiled and shook his head, clearly he thought that he would take what he could get.

My bartender was officiating the duel, he gave me a wary look as if to say “Please don’t die.”

I ignored him, it wasn’t his business what I was going to do.

The brute and I stared at each other for a good few seconds, I could tell from his sneer that he thought that he had the upper hand.

I smiled back, confident that he was going to kill me.

We turned around to face away from each other, back to back.

“Ten steps,” the bartender reminded us before we started.

I took my first step.

“1.”

I move my other foot forwards “2.”

Then another “3.” I felt my nerves to start to rise and my body shook with anticipation, this was it, my death was only 7 steps away.

I moved forward again. “4.” 6.

Then again. “5.” I smiled soon I would be dead.

Bang

I heard a gunshot and felt the bullet whizz past me.

I reeled around and without thinking I fired my gun.

I hit the brute directly in the chest right were his heart ought to have been.

I watched in anguished awe as he fell to the dirt and died instantaneously.

For a while, I just stood there and observed the man’s decomposing body.

The crowd that had gathered were cheering, I had won them another standoff and now their town would become even more popular.

Was that all they cared about? The town’s stupid reputation?

A thought invaded my head, why did I shoot?

A voice in my head replied, “Because that would not have been an honourable death, and neither would any of the other standoffs you’ve participated in.

It is more honourable to live despite your pain than to die for it.”

I smiled, I had to agree.