

## **LYNCH LAW**

**Sanderson was screaming his rage. "There's been killin' here! All over this country them wolf-hearted throat-cutters is ragin' like a storm o' fire They killed my woman, burned my home to cinders. I say the killin's been on the wrong side! I want justice and I want it now!"**

**Others in the crowd roared their approval, "Hang the red devils now!" The men nearest Sanderson and his crew surged forward, revolvers drawn and eyes livid with hate.**

**The soldiers responded quickly, side-stepping their horses and spreading out to face the oncoming men. Their carbines were slung over their shoulders but, in a second they could unsling and lay down a withering hail of fire.**

**It was a perfect staging for a bloodbath-and Marshal Matt Dillon was caught right in the middle!**

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AN1284 SHOOTOUT

# GUNSMOKE

#1

## THE RENEGADES

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Adapted from an original television  
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## CHAPTER 1

The moon rode high behind scudding clouds which signaled rain. Chilled in Manitoba, the wind had slashed down through the Dakotas and Nebraska, and now battered the southern Kansas prairie.

The wind is a fact of life in Kansas, always there, testing and shaping the land, the men, the animals, the buildings. The Indians learned to live with it before the white men came, shaping their ways to its pressure and its occasional furies. The first settlers-only a few years back, in this part of Kansas-dug themselves into the ground in low, sod-roofed shelters and studied the wind before they put up houses that could stand up to it. In the <tornadoes of summer, it could level a town in seconds, with more fury than Sherman's cannons. But mostly it was a steady testing.

The three men who leaned into the wind astride plodding horses had met that testing over and over. One had shaped a rangeland empire in its face, making the Spade Bit brand a symbol of wealth and power throughout the West, turning windswept land and hungry cattle into a hard-won fortune. The other two had passed *his* testing as well-John Sanderson was harder on a man than any wind could be.

They drew up in the lee of the barn and dismounted.

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Afoot, Sanderson bulked larger than the others, easy in his size and power. A mountain man who **saw** him clean out a saloon in a roaring rage had remembered a morning on the Yellowstone when a grizzly had reared up out of the bushes and raked Sanderson's arm open to the bone. The man had rechristened Sanderson "Bear." Not too many Kansans had ever seen a bear, but they all knew Bear Sanderson.

He turned to his top hand and grinned. "She's a blower tonight, ain't she, Red?"

"She's that," Red said, looping the reins over his horse's neck.

Sanderson fumbled in his heavy sheepskin coat and brought a flat bottle out. "Have a pull, you boys. Squirt o' tarantula juice'll get your beard stiff and your belly quiet!"

Red reached first for the bottle, tilted up, and drank, letting the whiskey warm his hands and feet chilled by hours of riding the line, then passed it to young Joe Bob, the drover. Joe Bob swigged and choked, swallowed again, and handed the bottle to Sanderson.

He raised it, toasting, "Drinkin' to the best gal a walleyed old range stud ever sired," tilted up, and drank deep. "Haah!" He ran the back of his hand across his mouth.

Joe Bob, warmed now, spoke. "When you reckon she'll be gettin' in, Mr. Sanderson?"

Formality made Bear nervous. Though he had a good idea how people regarded him, he was not aware of the sheer impressiveness and authority he conveyed. Inside the hard bulk of the fifty-year-old ranch **owner** and master of the kingdom he had built out of the wilderness, lingered the hungry, driven cowhand he had been thirty years before-most at ease with other men at work. "Don't 'mister' me, son. Not while you're workin' for

me," he said. Then, answering, "I'd reckon tomorrow on the Wichita stage."

"Be a great thing for the Missus, her comin' home," Red said.

"Yeah," Sanderson said. "If this news don't make her grin an' wiggle, then ain't nothin' will."

Red and Joe Bob didn't comment. The notion of Lavinia Sanderson grinning and wiggling in response to anything struck them as improbable. Once in a while Red had had to use a fist to quell ribald bunkhouse speculation on how she had ever unbent enough to allow Cora Sanderson to be conceived.

Red said, "You want us to stick around tonight? Case she storms bad?" The wind was even stronger now, keening in the few trees, and the clouds rode faster and thicker across the moon.

"No, no use for that," Bear said. "You boys chase it into town. Get yourselves a noseful and a good rassle. I'll be here." He sniffed the wind. "Seen a lotta storms, but none I couldn't live with."

Red and Joe Bob knew that one of the storms Bear lived with was waiting inside the big house-Lavinia Donner Sanderson.

They mounted and headed toward Dodge. A long ride, but at the end of it waited the lights of the Long Branch Saloon, with its good booze, its noise, music, and girls-who were a lot more fun than the Spade Bit's cows.

Bear led his blue roan into the barn, stabled him for the night, and made his way into the house.

Lights-shone through the lace curtains like a beacon of welcome and cheer in the wild night, and Sanderson, as he had so often, felt a flicker of pride and warmth as he entered the home he had built in this wilderness. A flicker only, for as he came into the glittering, expensively furnished parlor, it died away.

His wife sat primly in the overstuffed chair, hands folded, looking at him expressionlessly as he came in. Bear Sanderson had built this house, but there was no mistaking that Lavinia Sanderson owned it. The room was like the woman: cold, spare, fussy. Like a ritual the image came to Bear, the same wry thought that struck almost everytime he came in: no room in 'em-house or woman-for Bear Sanderson . . .

His confidence in himself and his pride drained from him. He took off his coat, hung it on the ornate rack at the door, and with a duck of his head and a mumble at Lavinia, made for the whiskey decanter on the mirrored sideboard. Instead of the man he was-proud of the long day's work that would have exhausted a younger man-he felt like a range bum heading straight for the bar at the Long Branch. And even at the Long Branch, he'd be more welcome.

He poured and drank, looking defiantly at Lavinia's reflected disapproval, then turned to face her, putting his discomfort in the back of his mind from years of 'habit.

"Lavinia, I got a real surprise for you tonight, honey!" he said.

"What is it-that you're already drunk and still drinking? That's hardly news." For most of her forty-four years Lavinia Sanderson had fiercely denied herself almost every human pleasure, glorying in the moral rectitude of her conduct compared to anyone else's"-especially her 'all-too-human husband's. But she took 'an almost sensual joy in this kind of domestic combat, and was as expert at getting in the first sting as fast as any professional gunfighter.

But Bear Sanderson shrugged it off this time, even chuckled in rueful admiration of Lavinia's predictable waspishness. "No, don't get mad at me now, woman. Wait'll you hear-Cora's on her way home. Bight now?"

Lavinia's face softened; now she looked almost pretty,

eased of the perpetual frown. "Cora? You don't mean it," she said, reluctant to accept even good news from her husband.

"Telegraph office in Dodge got a message out of Saint Loo. She'll be in tomorra, most like," Bear said.

"But her schooling-the fall term . . ."

Bear shrugged. "Seems like she decided to sit one out Hell, she can go t' school any time, Lavinia."

"Not to Vassar, she can't," Lavinia said. The moment's surprised joy at the prospect of seeing her daughter had faded, and the cold rage that was her constant state seeped back. As always, someone's weak will and fool ishness was thwarting Lavinia Donner Sanderson's plans and disarranging her ordered world. Other, girls in Dodge had gone East to good schools, but none to the very top one, and Lavinia's prestige among the few women she deigned to see was unquestioned. And now the foolish girl had ruined everything-spite and silliness. She was Bear Sanderson's daughter, all right!

"I mean, the idea! Just deciding all on her own to pack up and leave? I can tell you they won't permit it." If there was romance in Lavinia's soul, it lay in the vision of a better world back East, where schools, banks, governments, and the better sort of businesses were run by right-thinking, proper people, people like Lavinia Sanderson, who would never permit disrespectful or unexpected conduct.

But Bear Sanderson had a more practical outlook. "I'm payin' them people a bullcook's warbag fulla gold eagles\_ for their troubles! They best permit it!"

"Typical of her to leave!" Lavinia warmed to the fight, her own equivalent of smashing a bottle on the bar and going for her opponent with the jagged neck. "And just like you to talk as if your filthy money could buy anything on earth, including the priceless treasure of a fine education-which you never did appreciate."

Bear knew that he could buy just about anything he wanted, and that he personally didn't care two buffalo chips about booklearning-he'd learned how to build and run a ranch and grow rich at it, which damn few college graduates or professors could do-but one thing in Lavinia's tirade got to him.

"Now you look here, woman," he said, turning on her. "My money ain't no dirtier'n anybody else's for bein' raised. outa cattle. They don't have no shame takin' it, I can tell you that!"

Lavinia rose from the chair, said, "Pah!" scornfully-great ladies in the English novels she read frequently said "Pah!" when confronted with disgusting boors-and walked away from him.

Bear followed her, disappointment and whiskey feeding his anger. "An' I may not be no red rose for what I know outa books, but your old man was hotter'n a June bride to see you coupled t'me, woman!" Lavinia rolled her eyes upward and tightened her lips, how coarse!

"And him the Governor, an' you know why? Because he seen I was a man! Because he knowed for certain 'at I could tear a life outa alkali and Comanches, an' not go belly-up or bloodshort in the doin'!" He drained the glass and poured again, to the brim.

The image of Governor Donner handing his daughter over to this bull of a man to be serviced like a heifer turned Lavinia's rage to cold fire. She could sense where this was leading, and welcomed it. "You make my father's name a profanity!"

Bear was caught up in the rhythm of the fight now. "An' you make our life a graveyard for what he wanted!"

"How could you know?" Lavinia raged. "How would you *begin* to know what a man of sensibility might feel? You can't feel anything but anger-"nor *can I, God help me*, a very faraway voice whispered inside- her-"and lust and whatever dirty thrill raw whiskey gives you!"

Bear turned menacingly, "By heaven, woman, you *push* the edge!" The mountain man who had given Bear his name would have recognized that stance-and gleam in his eye-and felt the old claw wounds throb. But Lavinia knew nothing of grizzlies-or, in spite of twenty years of marriage, almost nothing of Bear. A lifetime of damped fury, of always being at odds with-her world, of being misunderstood and thwarted and mocked for being tight, was welling up in her. Flushed and panting, she felt power rising in her, and sensations that other women-women who had known joy from men and the sudden transition from fierce quarreling to fierce love-making-would have recognized. But anger was Lavinia's life, and the feeling only fed on itself.

"I push you? What do you think it's been 'for me? Wasting my life in this backwater-for the sake of a man whose idea of paradise is a hundred thousand acres of dirt and enough cattle to keep it stirred up! I might as well be dead!"

Bear's voice was a low, dangerous rumble. "The way you live, you just might be better off." Yet he saw with awe that she was more alive now than she had ever been-terrible and inhuman as a prairie twister, her voice implacable as the wind, her eyes glinting like lightning.

"You *worthless low brute*," she hissed. "You've ruined everything with\_ your selfishness and your ugly, vicious ways!" She felt triumphant, flashing like the sword of divine retribution. "Don't think I don't know what you do behind my back! Don't think Cod doesn't see the loathsome things you do!"

Her shouted last word was punctuated by Bear's open hand slamming across her face. Lavinia reeled backward, hit the sofa, and sprawled-on it. Bear smashed the empty tumbler into the tiled fireplace; the-chunky glass

exploded with a sound like a shot, some of the shards bouncing back onto the floor.

She pushed herself up from the sofa and shouted at Bear's retreating bulk: "Yes! Run, you *coward!* Leave me here alone! Go drink yourself into a stupor and never come back!" The slamming door cut her off as finally as Bear's hand across her face a moment before. She stood by the sofa, ashen-faced, trembling as her body was swept by waves of fury.

She paced the room—her room, her furniture, her taste—everything correct, in fashion, approved, no hint of the rough male presence she hated, except for the taint of whiskey in the air and the fragments of the shattered tumbler on the polished floor.

Back and forth she paced, her shadow flickering over the walls and curtains like a specter of fury as she passed in front of the oil lamp.

Eyes watched the swooping shadow on the curtains. The same eyes noted Bear Sanderson's wild exit from the barn, urging his roan into instant speed. The watchers knew this man would travel fast and far, would not be back for hours, if ever, from the way he rode. Long enough., .

The watchers kneed their horses into quiet motion, toward the lit house and the ever-moving shadow.