

# Tuesday Night Requiem

## Episode #5 Nurse Kit Carson's Knife & Gun Club

by L.S. Collison

In a rented room at the 4Aces, a seen-better-days motel that sheltered East Colfax drifters, drovers, and drug addicts, the man who called himself the Lone Gunman stood before the bathroom mirror, armed with a toothbrush. His mama had always urged him to take care of his teeth. *Brush and floss religiously, Willie. Take good care of your teeth, and don't take up smoking, methamphetamines or cocaine, you'll ruin those pearly whites.* His beloved mama, God rest her soul, had been a dental assistant, the best damn dental hygienist in High Plains. She had also urged him to be a good boy Willie, and never play with guns. He took that advice very seriously; he never *played* with guns; he took them very seriously. Guns were his livelihood, and today he was going to make a killing.

After a final rinse and spit, Willie wiped his mouth with the white terrycloth motel towel and admired his reflection. His lean cheeks and square jawline sported

a two-day growth of salt-and-pepper hair - the stubble was a desirable look for High Plains cowboys. He lifted the black silk bandanna so that it rested across the bridge of his nose, covering his lower face and neck. Adjusting the brim of the black felt cowboy hat forward so that it hid his receding hairline and cast a shadow over his eyes, he scrutinized his image. Yepper, a fair enough facsimile.

He wasn't the real Lone Gunman, that myth, that legend, that Western metaphor for Death, but he had cultivated a true aim and abandoned his conscience somewhere along the trail, traits he thought suited him for the job. Like the Grim Reaper himself, the Lone Gunman was feared yet ignored. Folks didn't talk about the Lone Gunman; it was better to pretend you didn't see him standing there alone, all hangdog off to the side, like a boy at a square dance without a partner.

The way Willie saw it, the Lone Gunman was Death's own angel. Tonight, his target, the sick nurse named Kit Carson, would go to her just reward. She'd probably thank him, if she could. And he would be well compensated for it. But even when he didn't have a paying job, the Lone Gunman kept his skills honed by picking off the old and the weak, lungers and coughers who spread their germs and sucked in more than their share of the allocated breath of life. Looking at it scientifically, he filled an ecological niche. Back before antibiotics were developed, pneumonia was deemed "the old man's friend." Inflammation of the lungs took old

folks after a bout of the grippe or a fall and a broken hip. It finished them off, humanely, some would say. Pneumonia could be a blessing in disguise for those who had reached the end of their skein of existence. People clamored for "life support," not realizing they were already receiving life support - the best modern science had to offer. Today there were cures and vaccines for every damn little thing. There was no rest for the weary.

The way he saw it, what he did, he did in the name of love. There, by the door, his chosen instrument - a bolt action Springfield .30-06 - fine piece of Americana. His heirloom was in immaculate condition - cleaned, oiled, rubbed to a sheen and ready to do the master's bidding. None of those automatic slaughter machines for him. They were for pussies who shot up schools and shopping malls. The Lone Gunman had a reputation for selectivity. With his precision, his steady hand, he might have been a sniper or a surgeon. With his passion, his keen perception, his sense of timing, he might have been an artist or a musician.

The merciful assassin checked his pocket watch. The mission depended on precise timing; he needed to enter the facility during the change of shift. A tingling in his blood. It was time.

One last glance in the mirror. He pulled down the bandanna and drew back his lips in a skeletal, rictus grin - his teeth, big, white, and even as a picket fence.

American teeth. Mama would be proud. He would bequeath them to the High Plains Dental Institute in her honor. The image of his own grinning skull mounted on the wall like a trophy, the image gave him a comforting sense of immortality.

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