

It came from the Devil's Mouth

Mathias P. Wilson peeled his eyes open. The light was blinding, so he growled unintelligibly and squeezed them shut again. His face stuck, adhered to the floorboard with equal parts spilt whiskey and saliva.

He groaned and pulled, feeling the skin break free with a sound reminiscent of tearing paper. Everything was a fog. The night before, how much he drank, and how he ended up on the floor.

Mathias was also pretty sure he got punched in the mouth too. It wasn't just the taste of stale liquor and blood, but the loose teeth as well. He tried to stand, but one of his arms was trapped under his body, wedged into his trousers. Mathias gave his balls a quick scratch and pushed off of the ground, feeling his chest hairs pulled out one by one, torn from his flesh by the horribly sticky mess in which he had come to lay.

The room around him was a mess. An empty bottle of Old Crow lay upended not far away, half covered by his shirt. The shirt looked dirty, probably smelled worse. His blanket laid half-off the small bed, barely covering the bare ass of a snoring woman.

"Bell? Oh, yeah!" Mathias grunted, vague memories of his drunken romp forming in his mind. There was nothing Bell about her, more like bronco. He had the bruises to prove it.

Running his tongue over his teeth, Mathias staggered to his feet and stumbled towards the door. His gun belt hung over the one remaining upright chair, but he wouldn't need it. Not in the outhouse.

"Damn, son," he grouched, staggering out into the hot, morning glare.

Mathias shielded his eyes with one hand, and pointed the other at the sky, wishing he could bleed away the sun's fury with a bullet or two, if just until the damn pain in his head subsided.

Feet aching already, Mathias approached the solitary, sun blasted structure. Hollyhocks clustered around both sides, but even their overpowering floral bouquet couldn't mask the smell of the sunbaked outhouse.

Flies swarmed sharply, their wings buzzing in an ecstatic chorus, driven to frenzy by the pungent smell of fermenting shit. Mathias swept his hand through the air, driving them away as he pulled the outhouse door open. He ducked inside quickly, eager to be free of the hot sun, and slammed the door shut.

The outhouse was pleasantly dark. It smelled horrible, but he'd smelled worse. Hell, he'd smelled lots worse in the war. Rotting bodies smelled, but the half-burned ones were the worst. Pulling down his trousers, Mathias sat down and leaned over, letting his head rest against the cool boards.

Light streamed in from a small hole in the door. It fluttered, grew bright, and dimmed again as clouds passed overhead. Mathias let his mind go blank, his vision going fuzzy. Bad things always crept in during his quiet moments. Like trenches filled with blue and grey bodies. Some moved, but he never knew it was because the poor saps were still alive, or because wild dogs and birds were pecking at them.

Bell yelled something from the house. He couldn't hear what she said, nor did he care. *Get your shit and head home*, he thought grumpily, wishing to loud-mouthed woman would be gone by the time he finished his business.

"Mathias! Where'd you run off to?" she yelled, her voice jabbing into his throbbing head like a branding iron.

"Can't a man shit in peace?!" he yelled back, rubbing his eyes. "Just run on back to town. I ain't fixin you breakfast or nothing!"

“Course ye aint,” she hollered back. He heard something crash, other things rattle, and what sounded like the tinkling of broken glass. A few moments later Bell came storming outside, snorting and grousing every known expletive, and a few new ones.

He heard her stop just outside the door, her breathing hard and loud.

“Next time you get liquored up and are looking for a poke, don’t come knocking on my door. Unless yer ready to make me bacon and eggs in the morning!” she yelled.

“Yeah-yeah-yeah,” Mathias growled dismissively, and laid his head back against the wall.

A few moments later he heard her horse snort and trot by, her wagon bouncing and creaking behind it. He closed his eyes and drifted off.

A stick snapped somewhere outside, jarring Mathias awake. He gasped a quick breath and oriented himself. How long had he been sleeping? His legs tingled and felt dead, which told him that he’d been there for a while.

A boot scuffed against the ground as someone walked by.