

I HOPE THE TRAIN'S LATE.



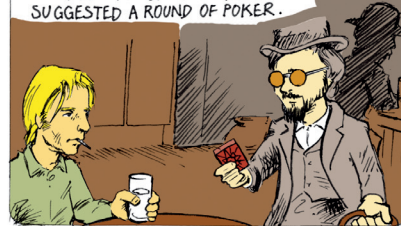
THE LAST TIME, THEY TARRD AND FEATHERED ME AND RAN ME OUT OF TOWN ON A BURRO



I HEADED SOUTH ACROSS THE BORDER AND WANDERED THE CAMINO REAL, PLAYING THE OLD THREE CARD MONTE. LATE THAT SUMMER I WASHED UP IN CHIHUAHUA



ONE EVENING I WAS QUIETLY DRINKING MY WINNINGS WHEN THIS ENGLISH GENT CAME ACROSS FROM THE BAR, TOOK OUT A DECK OF CARDS AND SUGGESTED A ROUND OF POKER.



I WAS PUZZLED BY HIS DARK BROWN GLASSES: THE CANTINA WAS ILL-LIT BY THE GUTTERING OIL LAMPS.



WE PLAYED FOR AN HOUR. DESPITE MY SLEIGHTS, HE WON HAND AFTER HAND. I GREW INCREASINGLY SUSPICIOUS BUT THERE WAS NO OBVIOUS DODGE: HE DEALT THE CARDS CARELESSLY, AND I COULDN'T SEE OR FEEL ANY MARKS.



HE STUDIED ME CLOSELY FOR A WHILE.

WHO ARE YOU?



I TOLD HIM MY NAME.

YOU'RE THE FELLOW THEY THREW OUT OF SOCORRO! I THOUGHT I RECOGNISED YOU.



SO HOW DO YOU DO IT?

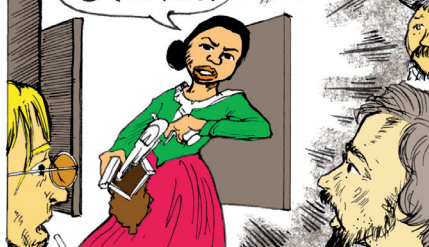


AS I PUT ON HIS SPECTACLES HE FANNED OUT THE DECK UNDER THE LAMP. ON THE BACK OF THE CARDS THEIR DENOMINATIONS SHONE AN UNEARTHLY GREEN.



AT THAT VERY MOMENT...

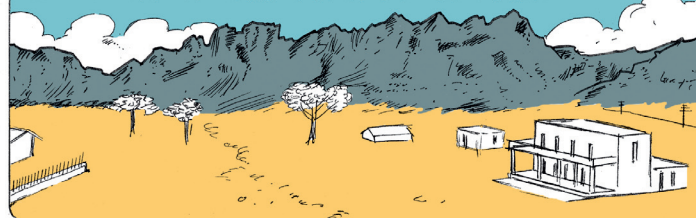
BASTARDO!



SHE SHOT THE ENGLISH GENT RIGHT BETWEEN THE EYES. HE FELL BACKWARDS, DROPPING THE CARDS ONTO THE TABLE. THE BAR WAS IN UPROAR. I PICKED UP THE CARDS AND FLED.



IN THE AUTUMN, I SLOWLY MADE MY WAY BACK NORTH. WHENEVER MY MONEY RAN LOW I'D PUT ON THE DARK GLASSES AND TAKE OUT THE CARDS. CROSSING THE BORDER EARLY IN DECEMBER, I DECIDED TO HOLE UP UNTIL THE SPRING IN A FADED HOTEL ON THE EDGE OF LAS CRUCES.



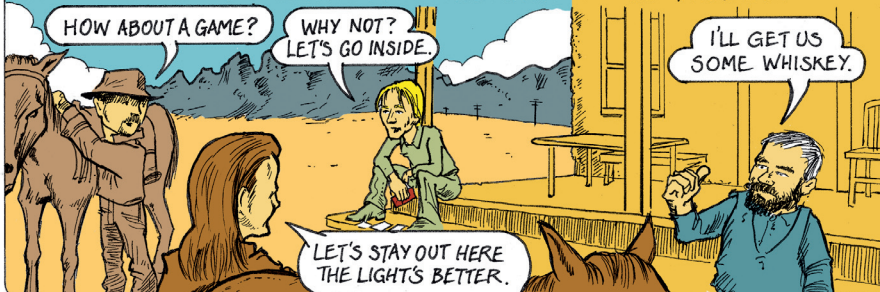
THIS MORNING I WAS PLAYING SOLITAIRE ON THE HOTEL PORCH WHEN THREE MEN RODE UP.

HOW ABOUT A GAME?

WHY NOT? LET'S GO INSIDE.

I'LL GET US SOME WHISKEY.

LET'S STAY OUT HERE THE LIGHTS BETTER.



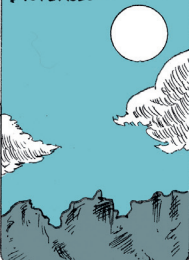
WE PLAYED AND DRANK STEADILY. I WASN'T WEARING THE DARK GLASSES BUT I WASN'T BOTHERED NONE: I DIDN'T NEED THE MONEY.



TOWARDS NOON I HIT A WINNING STREAK AND THE MEN BEGAN TO WATCH ME CAREFULLY.



I WAS DEALING WHEN SUDDENLY THE CLOUDS DISPERSED...



THE SUN SHONE BRIGHTLY THROUGH THE BROWN BOTTLE...



THE ACE OF CLUBS GLOWED GREEN ON THE BACK OF THE PACK...



LYING HERE, TIED ACROSS THE RAILS AT THE MOUTH OF THE TUNNEL, I HOPE THE TRAIN'S LATE.

