

Lemmy hands his shotgun to Jonathan and positions Paul over the drop zone, puts the dangling noose around his neck. The crowd gets quiet as soon as Lemmy pull the rope tight.

SHERIFF BOB

Bet you never had so many people
waiting to hear what you had to
say.

Paul looks out at the crowd, scanning the faces. He stops at Mabel. He's as surprised to see her; his eyes turn glassy. Down below, so do hers. They're affection between them that no one else knows.

SHERIFF BOB

It almost seems like someone cut
your tongue out too.

PAUL

Get on with it.

It's quiet enough that they can all hear him. Mabel responds to this by unclasping her hang bag.

Sheriff Bob moves out to the edge of the platform, addressing the crowd.

SHERIFF BOB

Good morning, folks. I know it's an
unusual time for this but there
just ain't a bad time to see
justice done.

(beat)

And that is what you're about to
see.

Bob walks back and puts his hand on Paul's shoulder. Paul wants to turn and sink his teeth into it.

SHERIFF BOB

This man is a horse thief. A
jackal. He's been a scavengin' on
the outskirts of our town. And like
all bad men... his bad... got the
best of him.

Bob moves back out to the edge.

SHERIFF BOB

Let this be a demonstration. A
symbol of what happens when evil
comes around here.

(CONTINUED)

Lemmy claps. For a moment, it's only him but the rest of the town slowly joins in out of duty. Mabel is the only one who doesn't.

Jonathan scans the faces as Paul did and now spots his wife among them. He's upset at her presence and suddenly more conscious than ever at being part of this.

But Mabel doesn't see her husband. Her eyes remain locked on the outlaw with the noose around his neck. Her right hand moves inside the handbag.

Bob motions for Lemmy to proceed. The latter moves to the side where a lever controls the door beneath Paul's feet. The outlaw looks back at Mabel. He can see she's about to do something; he just doesn't know what yet.

PAUL

I would like to say something.

Bob grins. He can't wait to spoil this.

SHERIFF BOB

You had your chance.

JONATHAN

He's got the right to a few words.

Bob despises being challenged in public, revealing any cracks in his dominance.

SHERIFF BOB

What's the expression... wax eloquent.

Lemmy scratches his head at this, not sure what it means.

Paul looks out in the crowd once more, fixed on Mabel's face until he feels it might be too dangerous to look at her.

PAUL

What this man says here is right.

Bob can't believe it.

PAUL

I tried to own what didn't belong to me. But truth is, it didn't belong to no one else either. You can take what was once free and call it yours... but it ain't unless it wants to be.

Jonathan listens close. He doesn't know why yet but these words resonate.

PAUL

I just ask that no one hurts
themselves on behalf.

This last statement amuses the Sheriff. It puzzles Jonathan.

SHERIFF BOB

If that ain't wishful thinkin'.

Paul ignores him. Eyes back on Mabel, he moves his lips in the form of the words, "I love you". Mabel mouths the words back at him.

The sheriff raises his hand. The crowd tenses. Lemmy waits for the signal.

Mabel's hand rises from the handbag. She holds a small revolver. Her arm moves up, ready to aim the gun when a voice calls through the silence.

WILSON

Sheriff!

The newspaper run pushes through the crowd towards the platform. He bumps Mabel on his way, waving a piece of paper in the air.

WILSON

A telegram.

Bob grits his teeth. He knows what's coming. Hand still raised, he looks at Lemmy, almost to go forward with it anyway but the little man has reached the top of the steps. His hand drops, defeated.

WILSON

From Marshal Graham.

The little man heaves for breath as he gets the words out. At the sound of this name, Paul lowers his head as if it might have been better to hang. Jonathan moves to meet the messenger as he stumbles across the platform towards the sheriff. He looks back at Lemmy before reading it, nervous that the fellow deputy might pull the lever.

JONATHAN

Take off the noose.