

Capitol Punishment

Who Is

That Man?

We Only

Wanted to

Thank Him

By Art Buchwald

The town of Gemstone was all in a tizzy. Big John Connally was riding in on his palomino horse, sitting straight in the saddle, his eyes shaded by a large, white hat.

He tied up his horse and walked into the saloon.

"Whatcha doing in town, Big John?" the bartender inquired.

"Come in to help Sheriff Dick Milhaus," Big John said. "Understand he's been having a little trouble in these here parts."

"Nothing serious," one of the men at the bar said. "His deputies have been accused of cattle rustling, horse stealing, bank robbery, swearing and lying. Kind of tough on the sheriff 'cause he did so well in the last election."

"Wal," said Big John, "Ah'll straighten the whole mess out. All we gotta do is clean house and everyone will forget what the deputies did. Guess Ah'll wander over and see Dick now. Ah sorta would like to look over the place anyway, just in case Ah want to run for sheriff sometime myself."

Big John walked across the street to the sheriff's office and knocked on the door.

"Sheriff, it's me, Big John. Ah came to help you out of your troubles . . . Sheriff, you in there?"

There was no reply. Everyone was watching to see what Big John would do. He looked at them. "Is he in there?"

"Yup," one of the men said.

Big John went around to one of the windows and tapped on it. "Dick, it's okay to open up the door. Ah'm here to help you save Gemstone."

There was still no reply.

Big John turned to the crowd. "You sure he's really in there?"

"Yup, he comes out once in a while and tells us he didn't know nothing about his deputies' cattle rustling, horse stealing, swearing and lying. And then he goes back in and locks the door."

There was a commotion at the courthouse next to the saloon.

"What's going on there?" Big John asked.

"That's the deputies. They keep being called in to the court to testify against each other. Lot of stiff warts on in this town in the last year nobody knew anything about," a cowboy said. "They would have stole the town square if it hadn't been nailed down."

"There's got to be some way Ah can get it to see the Sheriff," Big John said. He climbed up to the second-floor balcony and peered in. Then he shouted, "Now look here, Dick, Ah rode all the way in from Houston to give you a helping hand. You jes' open up that door and let me in!"

(Dead silence.)

"He ain't coming out," a man said. "You're wasting your breath. He's mad at everyone, especially the Gemstone Post for writing all about it."

"Sheriff!" Big John shouted again. "What in tarnation did you have me come up here for. If you won't listen to what Ah got to say?"

The crowd started laughing. "Big John, how you ever going to become sheriff of this place if the present sheriff won't even talk to you?"

Suddenly the window opened a crack and Sheriff Milhaus poked his nose out. He talked to Big John for about three minutes and then shut the window again.

Red-faced, Big John climbed down from the balcony.

"What'd he say?" someone in the crowd asked.

"We had a nice friendly chat and I think it did us both a lot of good."

Then Big John untied his horse and got back into the saddle and started riding out of town.

"Ain't you staying around, Big John?" a voice shouted.

Big John didn't reply. He just rode off into the sunset.