

SHERIFF JONAS MCCLINTOCK

Sheriff Jonas McClintock, the head lawman out in Buzzard's Creek, Texas, stared out the window at the freshly cut ruts of the afternoon stage. Autumn's cool wind made him glad he had a fresh cup of coffee in his hands. Focusing back on his somewhat messy desk, he grabbed a fresh batch of wanted posters and proceeded to the bulletin board. All of a sudden, Gully Watson, the local telegraph operator, came busting through the front door.

"Sheriff, I brung this over right away cause it looked mighty important."

Jonas opened up the telegram and commenced to reading. "Sheriff, I need you to go over to Dry Gulch. There's a bunch of outlaws hanging out at the Nine Mile Saloon, and I want you to tell them that if they don't start mending their ways, you're going to have to run them in."

It was signed, 'The Lord'.

The sheriff thanked Gully for his professional dedication. Then he folded up the telegram and put

it into his front vest pocket. He walked over to the gun rack, pulled out a Winchester, and headed out the front door. Grabbing the reins of Tornado, his trusty horse, he slipped his right leg up over the broad strong back of the animal. Turning Tornado's head to the west, he headed for Dry Gulch.

About five miles out of town, Jonas came to a fork in the road. The left side led to Dry Gulch, his intended destination. The right side led to Bear Lake. Sitting there for a couple of minutes in contemplation, the sheriff pulled Tornado's reins hard to the right. A little fishing seemed a might safer than going over to that outlaw den all by himself.

The fisherman had him a good afternoon, catching two walleyes, a mountain trout, and even an old gar. Glancing out at the horizon, Jonas noticed a storm abrewin in the west. He figured he'd better find some cover. By the time he'd gathered up his gear, the wind had already begun to blow respectably. Right about the time he reached for Tornado's reins, there come a vicious bolt of lightning. Spooked by the sizzling air, Tornado came up hard with that big ol' head of his and knocked Sheriff Jonas right smack into the lake.

Jonas struggled to maintain his footing on the slippery rocks and almost made it out of the water when something really strange happened. Seemingly out of nowhere, there come along this here huge big-mouth bass and, with one gulp, he swallowed the sheriff clean up.

Sheriff Jonas learned that there were two really bad things about being in the belly of a fish. One, there's that terrible stench. It stank so bad the sheriff couldn't help but, well, it smelled really bad. Two, there just weren't a whole lot to do inside the belly of a fish. So, Sheriff Jonas had him a goodly amount of time to do some thinking. After a while, he begun to recognize the error of his ways and he commenced to beseech the Lord to help him out of his situation. After three days, the Lord figured ol' Sheriff Jonas had learned his lesson. He made that big ol' fish spit Jonas out onto the bank of Bear Lake.

Luckily, Tornado was still agrazin on the lush grass near the lake bank. As Jonas walked over to his horse, he felt for the telegram in his vest pocket. He pulled it out and refreshed his memory on the blurry words. Then he got up onto his trusty steed,

rode over to Dry Gulch, and did what the Lord had told him to do.

When the sheriff got back to his office, he began to delve more deeply into the meaning of the little side path he had taken, particularly about his time inside that fish. Now he knew that there was gonna be some folks who would say that there ain't no way a man can stay alive for three days inside the belly of a fish. But how he come to see it was that if the Lord knew how to make him and that big ol' fish and that lake and that storm and that hard ground that he stood on, then He wouldn't have any trouble figuring out how to keep him alive for three days inside the belly of that fish. And he oughta know, cause he was there with a little first-hand knowledge.

Sheriff Jonas also kinda got a feeling he better do at least one more thing. So, he got up outta his chair and headed over to the telegraph office.

“Gully, I want you to send this telegram to the sheriff down in El Paso and the marshal in Laredo. Here's what I want you to say, ‘Boys, if the Lord tells you to do something, you best just go ahead and do it and save yourself a whole pack of

trouble. But if you feel a little stubborn streak comin on, and you decide to go ahead and take another path, I just want to tell you that sometimes that other path can really stink.’ I’d like you to get that out right away, Gully.”