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Deja Vu

by Pat Nussman

Author's Note: This is based on the movie, *The Frisco Kid*, with just a bit of *Star Wars* added in, sort of (if you're a SW fan at all, I think you'll recognize "Leah"). Again, this was written long, long ago, if not in a galaxy far, far away...

Civilization! If this was it, then the poor ignorant bastards could have it with his blessings.

He coughed, ejecting large chunks of the unpaved street from his mouth back to its natural environment. *Folks think livin' out in the prairie is dangerous? They should try this place. 'Cept you'd have to be crazier than a coyote to live here.* He coughed again, experimentally. It was for damn sure that his lungs were coated about a foot thick with street dust. No way to avoid it when it rose in great choking clouds every time some wagon went by. And a lot went by. His lungs were probably shot for life.

He ducked back, pressing flat against a nearby building just in time to avoid having his boots tracked by wagon wheels. *None of the folks 'round here can drive, looks like.* Splinters from the raw boards pressed into his shoulders. *They can't saw wood any too well, neither.*

Dangerous place, San Francisco. No way in the world was Tommy Lillard stickin' around it.

Now if he could only convince Avram.

Tommy dealt the side of the schoolhouse a hearty thump, a sign that Avram should quit his jawin' with the lady teacher and come on along, if he was plannin' to get his errands done today. He wasn't stupid enough to go talkin' to any schoolmarm, that was for damn sure. Held had enough of them back in Georgia, dried up old prunes.

He shrugged impatiently. Hell, he didn't know what he was doin', anyhow, followin' the rabbi 'round town like some damn old sheepdog. Just 'cause Avram couldn't get across the country by himself, didn't mean he couldn't cross the blasted street alone.

Tommy held his breath while another heavily-laden wagon came within a half-inch of his dusty boot.

Had to admit, though. It wasn't easy as it sounded. Not around here.

Aw, hell! Stupid fool. Stop arguin' with him and just head out. No reason to stick around here. He's married, cozy as a rabbit in a burrow. His congregation's just plumb crazy about him, now that they're used to his ways. Doesn't need me around any more, that's for damn sure, just thinks he does.

'Damn fool" he muttered, makin' me follow him around everywhere."

"Who's the bigger fool?" The astringent tones seemed to come from nowhere. "The fool or the fool who follows him?"

The first time Tommy looked in the direction of the voice, he saw nothing. It wasn't until he adjusted his sight downward that he found the voice's owner.

The voice was a lot more impressive than the owner, her aggressive stance notwithstanding. Even in her laced-up boots, she stood no higher than five foot zero and everything else about her was to scale, from her shapely ankles to her regally-held head. Her dress, though, was as tight-laced as her voice, the prim white frock and firmly-wound coronet of brown hair announcing more loudly than words her profession.

She-eet! thought Tommy. *They sure ain't makin' schoolmarms like they used to. No wonder Avram was in there so long!*

"Well?" she demanded. "Are you going to answer me, Mr. Lillard, or are you just going to stand there and gawk?"

Tommy smiled. It was his best slow, maddening grin. It had broke a lot of hearts., out Virginia City way. "Reckon I'm just gonna stand here and gawk, ma'am, if it's all the same to you." Remembering his manners, he reached up to scoop off his hat, holding it politely before him.

The schoolmarm stood and glared at him. It didn't seem to be all the same to her, nor did his best grin appear to be having any obvious effect.

"The rabbi tells me that you're a friend of his, Mr. Lillard." She said his name like she was talking around an unripe persimmon.

"Yeah, that's right," he said cautiously. *His best friend, that's what he said. Made a fellow feel good, havin' a man like the rabbi call him that.*

Tommy wouldn't have thought her gaze could get any harder, but it did.

"He tells me that you're planning on up and leaving him, just like that." She raised one small hand as if to snap her fingers, then lowered it hurried. Tommy guessed it would've been unladylike. "Leave him among strangers while you go out robbing banks or stopping trains or whatever it is you do."

Damn, but Avram had a big mouth on him. What was he going to do next., take out an advertisement in the paper? *My friend, the bank robber, that's what it would read.* 'Sides, it wasn't no such thing. She made Avram sound like an orphan of the storm, 'stead of a happy married man with a congregation hangin' on his every word.

"Hey, lady, it's not like that at all. He's--"

Ruthlessly, she cut through his protest. "You're quite a mercenary, aren't you?" She sliced him with a glance, her eyes seeming to drill into his naked soul. "I wonder if you really care about anything--or anybody?"

She turned on one heel and stalked away, her skirt trailing out triumphantly behind and picking up quite a bit of the street on its way. As she sailed into the schoolhouse,, Avram crept out, wincing at the expression on Tommy's face.

"Do all rabbis have such damn big mouths?" Tommy demanded.

Wisely, Avram remained silent.

Balked of an argument, Tommy contented himself a lethal stare. *Stick around? Damn straight held stick around! Long enough to show her not to try and push Tommy Lillard where he didn't want to go. Push Tommy Lillard and held push back, and she was gonna learn that before she was much older.*

"Who *is* she?" Tommy was yelling now, oblivious of the curious stares of pedestrians and waggoneers alike. "Who does she *think* she is?" One callused hand described a short., chopping motion through the dust-filled air. "No, never mind. I don't think I really wanna know."

He stomped away, narrowly missing a collision with a lumber cart.

Avram addressed Tommy's retreating back. "Her name's Leah." The rabbi raised his voice enough so Tommy could hear him a full half-a-block away. "But people around here, they have what you call a nickname for her. She acts like she was royalty, they say, so they call her--what was it?--Oh, yes--" He raised his voice a little higher. The whole street was listening now. "They call her the princess."

And the rest is history.

end

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