

Tom found a spot for himself at the wall from which he could keep an eye on all the others. They were quiet. It was still too early for lunch. They were talking softly or dozing. Tom watched the horses sniffing at each other. They were calm and seemed contented. It was soothing to watch them.

The horses knew that even a brute wouldn't just suddenly start tormenting them if they did their work as was expected of them. In the same sense, Tom knew he wouldn't suddenly be murdered either. Nacho had found some use for him, even if just as some kind of dummy. As long as he didn't try to escape or do some other crazy thing, he would be left to live.

One of the horses lifted its tail and dropped big balls, in which some straw-stalks were still clearly visible, onto the church-floor. Tom wondered how it was possible that these elegant, high-legged animals with their long, slender heads, their wise eyes and their shiny fur could be nothing more than digesting machines like he was one himself. Even these proud animals had to admit, from time to time, that they couldn't just keep everything inside them that they had eaten up so matter-of-factly. The biggest part of what they had swallowed, seemingly so irrevocably, had to be given back to nature. Even these noble steeds had no real sway over matter. Behind their long, beautiful tail there was a hole – an asshole, to be precise – out of which stuff kept falling that they hadn't been able neither to keep nor to destroy. It had to be given back.

Tom looked at the outlaws and thought to himself that every single one of them had an asshole too, and that each one had to give back to nature most of what he devoured during their undoubtedly gruesome feasts. But unlike the horses, the outlaws surely went to hide when they had to stool. They were human, after all. They ate together, but they didn't stool together. That was a weakness that each one more or less kept hidden from the others.

Tom's eyes wandered on to the many statues of clay that were still standing around in the abandoned church. Some of them were being used as hat-stands. There were pious shepherds dressed in long robes, with sandals and a shepherd's crook. There were female angels too, with beautiful and sad faces.

You would have liked to embrace them, to hold their head against your chest. But you couldn't do that, because they had mighty wings on their back. There was no way your arms could have reached all the way around them.

Their hands were joined together in prayer, and their face was looking up into the sky, begging and yearning simultaneously. Unfortunately you couldn't see the eyes, because they were hidden under a cowboy-hat...

The angel had come to the bad men to save their souls. But the bad men didn't understand. They thought it was a hat-stand. They pretended not to see any other use in these angels. They put their hats on them to show their contempt.

Contempt means willfully overlooking certain facts whose meaning you refuse to acknowledge. If the bad men had REALLY overlooked the facts (rather than doing it willfully), they would have put their hats somewhere else. There were certainly other, more obvious places where hats could have been put in this church.

Tom thought to himself that these outlaws couldn't be as strong as they wanted to seem if they couldn't even bear the sight of the pious eyes of an angel and felt the need to cover them with a hat.

Tom was just thinking that the angel, if she has a mouth, must surely have an anus as well. But the big wings on her back would hinder you from ever getting close enough to find out. The anus of an angel can't have any meaning for you, because you're never going to approach it.

Now Tom's eyes found a small, genderless cherub with short wings. He was short-limbed like a small child and had curly hair. He was holding some kind of cloth in front of himself, conveniently hiding his genitals. But his behind wasn't hidden, and the two rounded buttocks had been modeled quite distinctly.

This one definitely must have an anus between those buttocks of his, mustn't he? So angels definitely have anuses too, but either they are too young, or they have such big wings, that it becomes meaningless to us human beings.

But they are sufficiently similar to us mortals to be able to understand us. Surely that's the point of angels.

It got time for lunch. A big fire was lit in front of a window without glass. Half a pig was skewered over it. After a while the still somewhat reddish meat was shared out. Nacho in person threw Tom a piece of ham and a piece of old bread. Wine was served in old beer-jugs. It had a rotten smell. Tom later got a headache from it.

The tough, smoke-laden meat wasn't appetizing, and the dry bread stayed stuck in his throat. The others seemed to enjoy their meal, though. Since Nacho was laughing and seemed in a good mood, they allowed themselves to become pretty loud too. The meal turned into a feast, and the wine was passed around generously.

The feast was still in full swing when Nacho suddenly turned silent. The men around him turned silent too, because when Nacho was quiet, everybody had to be quiet. Not everyone noticed the change, though, and Nacho had to call out: "Silence!"

The laughter and talking died off instantly. A whole minute passed in utter silence. Nacho looked at his men, one after the other, his chin thrust forward and his eyes full of fake pity and sorrow. His men knew that look – it meant he could turn sadistic in the blink of an eye.

After a long while he turned to his jug and took a rather loud gulp.

Hereby he had broken the silence at last – he would get to the point now.

With the jug still touching his lips he said: "Ned, Ted and Tom, it's time for you to head to Earlham!"

Ned and Ted stood up and saddled their horses. Tom took a bit longer to stand up from the corner where he had been sitting or lying for the last few hours. He lifted up his saddle that he had used as a pillow and carried it over to Bess. Ned and Ted had practically thrown their saddles onto their horses. Tom put his on Bess gently and shifted it into position with care, as he had learned from his school-mate long ago.

Ted and Ned jumped on their horses and rode out of the church. Tom followed them. After a few hours of trotting, Ned decided it was time for a break. They stopped, unsaddled the horses, found some wood and lit a small fire. Tom filled the rusty pot with fresh water and placed it onto the fire.

Then he stopped caring about the two men and their coffee. He rather watched the horses who were grazing in their usual carefree manner.

Tom wasn't carefree. He was wondering what the day held in store for him. He didn't have any clear idea yet how he would finish off Nacho and his gang. He had even less of an idea how he would stop the two bank-robberies, and whether he really wanted to stop them. He had heard that the bank of Anthony held more than half a million dollars. How would it feel to plunge his hands into half a million dollars?

On the other hand, what could he have done with that much money? He couldn't have spent it all in one go. That would have been more than suspicious – it would have been a glaring confession to the robbery! So he would have had to spend it in small amounts, but he wondered whether the life of a human being was really long enough to spend half a million dollars unsuspectingly...

For the first time Tom also wondered what Nacho and his gang might want to do with the money. Nacho's face was known to everyone – how would he ever get a chance to pay for anything honestly, except maybe occasionally for whisky in a saloon?

Besides, Tom couldn't picture Nacho as a rich rancher and father of a large family.

Nacho was an outlaw all the way through. He would never want to live on a farm with countless helping hands, a pretty wife and many nice children – that just wouldn't fit his style. He would always have other dreams, criminal dreams. Money, money, money... - just what could possibly be the point of it in Nacho's case Tom couldn't imagine!

Maybe it wasn't really about the money. Maybe it was about rising to the challenge and demonstrating power!

And then what? What the hell do you do with all that power? Power, just like money, allows you to reach goals. But if you don't have any goals, then it all becomes rather useless.

Maybe Nacho had once had the same dreams of a fulfilled life as everyone else. A good job from which to make a decent living and a nice family. Deep down that's all there is to a fulfilled life. It's just strange that for some people it seems so hard to get. Nacho hadn't been able to get it, obviously. Maybe he didn't even know that it would have been the right thing for him. Maybe he was lost.

Power is always a good thing, because it allows you to do other things that you really want. So when Nacho got some power he was happy. Except that he didn't know what to do with it, since he didn't know what the other things were that he really wanted.

Since gaining power had once given him some satisfaction, he went on to gain some more. It was better than doing nothing anyway. So then he went on to gain yet more. It was never enough, since he still never got as far as to know what to do with it. So he just went on getting more of it! For ever! It had become an addiction!

Until one day someone like Tom would come along and kill him.

Deep down this life couldn't be very fulfilling for poor Nacho. But standing still would have been no option either. As long as there's movement in your life, there's at least a hope of change (and thus of betterment). Standing still means that either you've accepted the situation as it is, or you've given up hope.

Maybe Nacho knew, deep down, that he was never going to get anywhere. He was a great outlaw, and all he could do was to become a yet greater outlaw, or go to prison or be hanged. It wasn't really an option anymore that he would ever become a decent, honest farmer or anything like that, was it? But the wilder his life was, the less chance there was of thinking about it too much. And wildness means continuous movement, continuous change, and thus continuous hope, even if it's not really a real hope in this case...

Maybe Tom was just as lost as Nacho, but he decided here and now never to fall in the same trap as Nacho. He would keep his hands off the money of the bank of Anthony!

If you invest too much in a certain path, you end up becoming unable to follow any other. Tom didn't want to make that mistake.

He was just wondering whether maybe his parents had made exactly this mistake by seeing their poverty as a kind of virtue ("at least we're honest, not like certain other people!") instead of fighting it, when he heard Ted's voice behind himself:

"Don't you want any coffee?"

Tom turned around slowly. "Sure I want some!" he mumbled.

He sullenly sat down with his two comrades. Ted handed him a hot tin-cup. Tom took a few sips with long pauses in between.

Nobody spoke.

After a little while Ned stood up and walked away a few steps into the bushes. He left behind his belt with his guns. He undoubtedly had a little private business to attend to. But his absence seemed to have a magical effect on Ted. He became talkative.

“How did you join up with Nacho’s gang?” he asked Tom.

“Well,” said Tom, “I challenged The Boy. But he didn’t want to draw attention, so we didn’t fight it out. He took me along instead.”

Ted was flabbergasted.

“And you?” asked Tom. “What are you doing with these guys?”

Ted didn’t feel like answering. He was quite new to the gang himself, and he wasn’t really sure he wanted to stay part of it. But he didn’t know an easy way out.

Instead of answering Tom’s question, he called out: “You challenged The Boy?! I don’t think you’ll live long! Why on Earth did you do that?”

“Well,” said Tom and scratched his elbow, “I wanted to shoot him and Nacho and cash in. They’re worth a fair amount of money, I’m told.”

“If that were so easy, someone would have done it before you,” said Ted.

“Someone has to be first,” said Tom. “You’ll see, I’ll turn you all in, the whole lot of you.”

Tom said this so matter-of-factly that Ted didn’t quite understand what he meant. It wasn’t much of a joke, and yet, what else could it be?

In the end Ted pretended to take Tom seriously and said: “Nacho is kind of famous, you know. Not like you. Nobody ever heard of you.”

“They will, in time,” said Tom calmly.

“Why would they?” asked Ted.

“Because,” said Tom, “turning in a whole gang of killers, one as famous as Nacho and his friends, isn’t an everyday thing.”

He said this so damn calmly once again. If it was all a joke, it really wasn’t all that entertaining. What’s the point of a joke that isn’t entertaining? Ted was getting a bit tired of this, and slightly annoyed too.

“Look,” Ted finally said, “you wouldn’t even be able to beat me in a duel, let alone The Boy or Nacho!”

“Let’s bet on it,” said Tom.

“What do you want to bet with?” asked Ted, “what do I get if I kill you?”

Tom put his hand in his saddle-bag and got out a fistful of dollars.

“You get this,” he said dryly.

Ted’s pupils became huge, then they contracted and became very small.

Tom heard some rustling sound behind Ted. Ned was coming back.

Tom quickly put away his money.

Ned appeared from between the bushes and Ted pulled his gun. Tom’s left hand was still in the saddle-bag, but his right sprang forward with his own gun, cocked and ready to shoot.

But that wouldn’t have been necessary, because Ted had turned around and shot Ned rather than Tom.

The sudden bang was still ringing in Tom’s ears when Ned’s lifeless body came crashing down almost on top of them, the head plunging into the glowing embers of the fire.

Ted looked over to Tom and was a bit surprised to see that Tom was holding his gun in hand firmly pointed at Ted’s chest.

Tom said quite calmly, even though there was unmistakably some reproach in his voice: “You just shot an unarmed man!”

“In a fair fight even the two of us together would never have been able to beat him,” said Ted.

“Now I won’t ever be able to prove you wrong, will I? Why did you do that?” said Tom.

“I’ve just decided, here and now, to leave Nacho’s gang,” said Ted, “I’ll be satisfied with half of your dollars!”

Tom didn’t answer at first. Then he said: “You can’t have half – either the whole lot or nothing!”

“Look,” said Ted, “I just did you a good turn – now you’re free! There’s no other way you could’ve gotten away alive from this adventure!”

Tom said: “Look Ted, I can see that you think I’m dreadfully naïve. I guess you need a practical demonstration. So let’s cut through the bullshit, okay?”

“What do you mean?” asked Ted, and now a glimmer of doubt came up in his mind.

“How much are you worth?” asked Tom.

“I don’t have any money on me,” said Ted.

“If I turn you in, I mean,” said Tom.

“I don’t know whether I’m even wanted yet...” said Ted.

“Do you want to find out, or should I rather turn you in dead?” asked Tom.

Ted said: “Look Tom, enough is enough. I guess you were right about one thing – let’s cut through the bullshit!”

They both stood up. Tom slowly lowered his hand with the gun. Ted’s gun-hand did the same, slowly.

Tom’s eyes weren’t looking into Ted’s eyes anymore. He was not looking at Ted as a person anymore, but rather as an object to be looked at whole. A fleeting thought crossed Ted’s mind: being stared at like this, that’s how a strip-tease dancer must feel...

Tom dropped his gun into its holster. Ted did the same.

Tom’s right hand was hanging next to the holster, relaxed.

Ted began to understand that he had probably badly underestimated Tom. Tom had seemed like such an ordinary young lad. Ted had thought that Tom was badly out of his depth in Nacho’s gang and that he was just hoping to bluff his way through, as inexperienced young men sometimes try to do.

Now he saw that perhaps he had been wrong. Very wrong. Tom was a killer. Maybe he would really beat The Boy, and Nacho, and all the others...

Ted’s arm was tense, his hand nervously hovering above the holster. Ted’s eyes were looking at Tom’s face, hoping to see a glimmer of weakness there, but there was none.

Ted’s tongue was sticking out between his teeth, but it wasn’t funny. It was pathetic. Tom’s outline seemed more and more like a shadowy threat and less and less like a tangible opponent.

Ted had the feeling he was losing his footing. His knees became weak. He felt he was in an impossible situation.

Maybe he should call out, while there was still time: “I give up! Let me live!”

But then he remembered that he had shot men before, men who had seemed much more formidable than Tom. Tom was just a kid. A careless kid not knowing what he was doing, bluffing beyond reason out of inexperience.

So Ted pulled himself together, bit his tongue and drew his gun with a sudden burst of courage!

A quick spasm flicked through Tom's arm, that was all. Else he stayed as immobile as before. The report of the gun echoed in Ted's mind.

Ted's gun fell back into its holster, from which he had barely started lifting it, as he clutched the wound in his chest. His last living impression was of the slim wisp of smoke rising from Tom's gun.

Then he fell over.

Tom came over to the dead body and turned it round with his foot. The body was bleeding worse from the mouth than from the deadly wound in the chest. The silly bugger had almost bit off his tongue!

"Conceited little guy," thought Tom to himself as he hauled him onto the horse. He tied him to the saddle.

Then he got Ned's horse and hauled Ned's body onto it and tied it on too. He tied the reins of one horse to the saddle-knob of the other. Then he saddled his own horse and mounted, holding the reins of Ted's horse in one hand.

Finally he rode off, leading the other two horses behind himself.

And he continued on the way to Earlham.

So, he had stopped going west! For the first time since escaping from home he was purposefully going in another direction!

All this just for Nacho. Was Nacho worth it? Nacho wouldn't be the first one Tom shot to get some money. The others he had done in just in passing. Why was he going to so many pains over Nacho? What was different about Nacho?

Well, Nacho wasn't just Nacho. He had a whole gang of killers. If you didn't kill them all, they would just find a new boss and come after you. They would find new members for their gang too. As long as you hadn't killed every single member of the gang, the gang would survive.

So it would never do to just shoot Nacho and a few of his close mates. You had to wait for a chance to kill all the others too. You had to wait for a chance to kill all of them TOGETHER. It was the only way to uproot the gang, and that was Tom's goal. Tom inwardly tapped himself on the shoulder for finding such a logical explanation. But actually he didn't really believe in it, he had to admit to himself.

Nacho was the boss of the gang, and without such a boss the gang can't survive. You can't just find a new one just like that. His mocking, sadistic ways, combined with his fake childishness, made him unique.

Children are weak, but they don't bear responsibilities. Nacho showed himself in a child-like way, BUT HE WASN'T WEAK, and that made his child-like unpredictability and moodiness extremely dangerous.

It was the continuous, complicated and unpredictable show of Nacho's emotions that held the gang together. The members of the gang had no time to fuss or squabble among themselves, because they were all under the spell of Nacho's every move.

They all had to pay attention to Nacho and had no time for anything else – that's what held them together!

If Nacho disappeared, the gang would collapse. They would probably finish each other off without any need for outside intervention. You don't find a gifted charlatan like Nacho every day.

So it was quite useless to want to kill the whole gang – all you needed to do was to kill Nacho. The rest was trivial. And Tom should have done that the very first time he met Nacho. It would all be over by now. Tom would be on his way west again, with lots of fresh money in his pockets, instead of shuttling between Earlham and Anthony on some crazy mission!

There was but one other possible motive for Tom's behaviour – he hadn't killed Nacho, because in principle he didn't want to kill at all. He wanted to experience what makes you into a MAN. He challenged men so that they would "show the man". So that he would see at last what made them into men. It was just an accident that he kept having to kill them. But it hadn't happened with Nacho yet, so maybe there was still hope...

And yet, did Tom really believe that a sadistic outlaw was going to make a good father-figure for him? Was he totally crazy or what?

Well yeah, he was undoubtedly crazy. Else he would be leading a normal life, wouldn't he? He would have a proper job and he would be dancing with pretty girls in the town-square...

But what is it really about, this whole matter of becoming a real man? Is it a question of power?

In terms of power, Tom had already reached the highest possible level, hadn't he?

The power to take another man's life. Is there anything beyond that?

Power... Is that what power really is, to be able to kill other people?

What can power mean if not the ability to head for your own, personal goals? If you don't have a goal, having power becomes pretty meaningless.

Killing people can help you reach some goals. So it's a form of power. But wouldn't it be much more powerful to get people on your side rather than killing them?

Every living human being is a potential power, and whoever makes this power work for himself quickly becomes much more powerful than a lonely gun-man.

Maybe a big part of the power residing in the ability to kill is more about threatening to kill rather than actually doing it. But threatened people will never be as faithful as true friends, and they never help you with ideas and motivation of their own.

Extorting people through your power to kill is powerful, but not as powerful as having friends.

So it seems the power to kill is not the greatest of all powers after all. The power to make friends is far greater.

But it's still all a questions of goals. Before you can say what you mean by "power" at all you need to have a goal. Whatever brings you closer to that goal is power. And whatever stops you from reaching it is weakness. But first you need to know your goal, else the concepts of "power" and "weakness" are meaningless.

If your goal is to kill outlaws to make money, then the ability to kill is definitely powerful!

Killing outlaws to make money. Yes, money. But money is just a means. When you have money, that means you have the means to... to do something else. To do whatever. It's up to you.

You need to have a goal, else money is meaningless.

So the question is: what was Tom going to do with his money?

What's it all for?

If you don't know what it's all for, then how can you say you have power? If you don't know what you're doing, then you're just a chance-occurrence in the world.

Then you're just a piece of wood drifting on the river. A piece of wood which has no power to make decisions for itself.

If you don't know what you're doing, then you don't have real power.

Tom wanted to be taken seriously. That's why he wanted to make money. He had the power to kill in order to make money. It was a beginning. Ultimately he would have to find out what to do with that money, what to do with his LIFE!

Tom looked back at the two horses following him, carrying their gruesome loads.

Ted - who was being carried along like a bag of potatoes - could perhaps have become Tom's friend. Together they would have been stronger than just one. But neither Ted nor Tom had any proper goal in their life, and their combined strength would have been a sick joke!

Every man Tom killed could possibly have been his friend, but Tom didn't know what to do with friends. His endless killings were nothing more than an indication of his clumsiness in life – it was a way of drawing attention, of calling for help!

Tom proudly trotted into the town of Earlham. People watched him coming. He led the horses straight to the sheriff.

The sheriff came out of his office and grabbed Ted by the hair to see his face. He raised an eyebrow and nodded. But when he saw Ned's face he said: "Oh!" with something like awe.

Tom got a thousand dollars for Ned, and a hundred for Ted. He also managed to sell the two horses of the outlaws for hundred apiece. So Ted hadn't been worth more than the horse on which he had been riding. It's really the peak of contempt to sell a human being for hundred dollars. There are lots of reasons to kill a human being, but hundred dollars are simply too little. Even outside of philosophical considerations, a human life is definitely worth more than that.

If Ted had worked for Tom, they would have made much more than a measly hundred dollars. You don't even need to take into consideration the emotional value. Selling a human being for a hundred dollars means willfully overlooking this fact, thus it's contempt.

Tom left the sheriff's office and was glad not to have to lead the two other horses behind himself anymore. He was alone with Bess once again.

And he had a thousand and three hundred dollars more in his pockets than before. But the money didn't mean so much to him. He had earned more with less effort previously. And he was used to earning his money in a more satisfactory way.

Things you do are satisfactory when you do them purposefully, which also means you could do them again, which means they're not just down to luck.

Tom had defeated Ted. He could do it again anytime (in case Ted was resurrected), simply because he was faster than Ted. But Tom hadn't defeated Ned, because it was Ted who had shot Ned.

If Ted had defeated Ned in a fair shoot-out, Tom would have felt okay about the whole thing. If Ted had been faster than Ned - and since Tom was yet faster than Ted -, that would automatically have meant that Tom was faster than Ned as well. This is basic logics. So Tom would have felt good about cashing in on Ned's body.

But Ted had shot Ned while Ned was unarmed. If Ned was to be resurrected, Ted couldn't have done that again, because Ned wouldn't have gone into the bushes without his gun anymore. Ted hadn't defeated Ned in a fair shoot-out, and so, even though Tom had easily defeated Ted, this meant nothing about him deserving to cash in on Ned's body. Tom didn't really deserve the victory over Ned.

What did it matter?

Well, it DID matter.

Wanting to win only in a fair way is called chivalrous, isn't it? And why would anybody want to be chivalrous?

Winning in a fair way means you could repeat the heroic deed anytime. But winning unfairly can only be done once. If Ned was resurrected, he wouldn't go back into the bushes without his gun anymore. He would be warned. So Ted couldn't shoot him again. The unfair way Ted had defeated Ned couldn't be repeated. And since it couldn't be repeated anyway, it doesn't command respect either. Bystanders wouldn't

admire Ted for what he had done. They wouldn't be scared that Ted could do it to them next. They would be warned. The trick only works once. So they are not awed by it.

The victory of the unfair winner doesn't need to be taken into account so much, because he couldn't repeat it anyway. Not taking something into account, in other words overlooking something willfully, that's called contempt.

Contempt is what you feel towards an unfair winner.

Tom had a thousand dollars in his pockets that he had earned in a despicable way, by selling Ned's body that he hadn't deserved...

He knew that he would have defeated Ned anyway, but anybody can claim that.

Now he just had to defeat Nacho. Nacho was Ned's boss, so surely he was faster than Ned. If Tom defeated Nacho fairly, that would mean he would have defeated Ned as well, and then he would truly deserve the thousand dollars he had got for Ned's body. And then he would be morally entitled to use those thousand dollars as well. For the time being he mustn't touch them. He mustn't even throw them away, because that would look as though he despised them. He had no right to despise that money, and he had no right to use it either. It was there in his pocket, dirty money, and there was no other way to get rid of it than to defeat Nacho.

On the other hand, nobody had witnessed the scene around the fire during the coffee-break. Nobody still alive, except Tom himself, knew how Ned had been killed.

Nobody could blame Tom for this unfairly earned money.

And yet Tom still had a feeling that some kind of invisible moral power had seen everything. Was it his own conscience?

To pacify this invisible power, Tom had to become the moral owner of these doubtful thousand dollars. He could only do that by defeating Nacho. It was like a secret link to his mission, his mission to defeat Nacho. He had to defeat Nacho to feel worthy.

There was no way back anymore.

Tom needed to feel worthy, because in actual fact he just wished to be acknowledged by his fellow human beings and to find his place in the world. Deep down what he aspired to was nothing more than that...

Tom had accomplished great deeds – he had shot some of the greatest outlaws of his time. Unfortunately it didn't really bring him any closer to fulfilling his dream.

As he rode past the houses, people followed him with their eyes suspiciously.

Tom had become a taciturn gunman. It began to show in his bearing. No feelings for others, no regard for living or dead things, no emotional responsiveness. He just went his way, calmly, and shot whoever had deserved it.

Tom was the archangel who purges mankind with holy thunderbolts, without even getting out of breath. He should have been highly respected. But it wasn't truly respect that he commanded – it was rather fear that people felt for him. Anyone could suddenly, at a moment's notice, deserve death at the hands of the archangel, and the archangel's thunderbolt would slam into him mercilessly.

Perhaps Tom was even worse than Nacho.

Nacho was just an outlaw. An outlaw kills for money. An outlaw is still human, and he still has feelings like greed for money. These feelings make him predictable, perhaps even impressionable. In short they make him human.

But what about Tom? Does he have any feelings?

It's impossible to tell...

Why does he only shoot outlaws when he could get a lot more money by robbing a bank? He has no reason to spare banks, since he isn't part of any community. Perhaps money is not the real issue in his case. But then what is?

A sense of justice? Justice for whom? He doesn't even belong anywhere. So what is he killing the outlaws for?

For revenge? Revenge for what? How can he take revenge on people he doesn't even know? It's impossible!

Unless of course he is the vengeful angel of God Himself!

Tom, the quiet, mysterious gunman...

While all he wanted in reality was to be a normal guy, to be part of things in his home-town, to be greeted like an equal by his mates. NOT to be the poorest and most self-righteous small-scale sheep-farmer despised by everybody and despising everybody in return!

Was that so damn hard? How had this made him into the vengeful angel of God? It was crazy!

If cruel Nacho was a lost soul, maybe Tom was even more lost than that!

It's paradoxical that evil is adorned with feelings while goodness is so detached from humanity that it is feelingless and cold!

It's probably due to evil being tangible while goodness is just a bit of foam crowning the swell of evil. Tom had become the representative of this foam crown!

Tom rode through town, not quite sure what to do next.

In a few hours Nacho would attack the bank in Anthony. And then he would realize that Tom was a traitor because Anthony would still be fully manned since nobody would have attacked the bank in Earlham to draw away a posse from Anthony.

Unless, of course, Tom attacked the bank here in Earlham right now.

If Tom robbed the bank here, Anthony would be warned by telegraph. This gave Tom an idea. He would just find the telegraph office and send a telegram himself. No need to attack the bank for real! Anthony would send out its men to help, and they would only realize that they had been cheated upon their arrival here in Earlham! After that they would ride back to Anthony in a hurry, no doubt, but they still wouldn't be back soon enough to stop Nacho and his men, and Nacho wouldn't guess that no attack had taken place in Earlham at all. Tom would meet up with him and his gang again, and he would have a sad story ready about how Ned and Ted got killed in the attack.

Okay, this would mean facilitating the bank robbery for Nacho and his men in Anthony. On the other hand, a big massacre would also be avoided that way.

So Tom rode through town till he saw the shield saying "telegraph office". He led Bess to the front of the house, got off, tied her up and entered the office like any ordinary customer. A smell of frying eggs wafted towards him.

The telegrapher was standing in front of the stove preparing fried eggs. As Tom came in he turned around.

He was a small man, well past the middle of his life. His sparse hair was graying. He was wearing the typical kind of sun-shade above his eyes which seems to be the badge of trustworthiness for state officials. The skin of his face was deeply furrowed and colourless. But there was still a sparkle of life in his clear eyes. His nose was small and dainty, with small holes into which no finger would fit, Tom felt sure about that.

When the man spoke, Tom had the feeling the dainty nose must be a bit congested.

The rosy lips were moist, and the little mouth sprayed small droplets of spittle around as he spoke.

"Good day, sir, can I do something for you?"

Tom didn't answer at first. He looked around in the room.

In a corner in the back stood a wooden rocking-chair, next to it a small table with a cup of coffee. In the middle of the room the stove stood with the pan on the fire and

the eggs in it. Next to it a few spoons were lying around, and a battered coffee-pot that wasn't in use right now.

Tom had a vision: he saw himself stretched out in the rocking-chair, the coffee-pot on the fire, and straw-bales blowing past outside the window. Then it started to rain. Big, warm drops splattered on the empty, dusty street which soon turned into a torrent. Tom lolled about in the rocking-chair and was glad to have a roof above his head. He heard the rain-drops drumming on it. The coffee-pot started whistling...

The vision passed. Unfortunately reality was quite different. When it rained, Tom was mostly somewhere in the prairie, and there was nothing else to do but to cower under his coat and wait for it to pass.

Sometimes he burned under the merciless sun, sometimes he shivered in his wet clothes when the rain hadn't stopped before nightfall...

It was seldom enough that Tom had the chance to rest in a room, and he never felt completely safe in a room, in a town, among people.

The small-scale official here in this office led a totally different life, even though he and Tom were both human and surely had the same basic needs. Tom sometimes yearned for this kind of quiet life. But didn't it ever get too boring?

Surely not! This man experienced other things that were exciting in another way. One day he had probably fallen in love and had had to fight for the one his heart had chosen. By and by he had evoked the favours of his loved one. The tenderness of the first kiss, the excitement of the first night, the birth of the first child...

All these are quite ordinary things. But Tom's brilliant shoot-outs, were they in any way less ordinary?

This evening the rosy little mouth would kiss a woman, and the sparkling eyes would appraise the little handicrafts of the enthusiastic grandchildren.

Tom, on the other hand, would be on his way somewhere with his horse, seeking out an outlaw worth ten thousand dollars.

Right here and now Tom stood above this small-scale state official. Tom was stronger. The reason for this was mainly that Tom had burst into a peaceful world that he could destroy. The threat wasn't mutual, because Tom had no world of his own that anyone could come and destroy...

"Can I do something for you, sir?" the official asked once again.

Tom said: "Nacho and his gang have robbed the bank. You should warn all the other towns around here."

"But sir, I didn't hear any shots!"

"Wanna hear some?" asked Tom and held his revolver under the nose of the man and pulled back the hammer.

"B...but...?"

„Just do what I say,“ said Tom and pushed the man down on a stool.

The equipment stood on a desk in the other corner of the room. Tom pushed the stool towards it.

There was a big box with wires coming out. Two wires went to a little device on which you could press with your finger, making contact, letting through the electrical current, pushing electrical charge to another, similar office far away, making a buzzer sound there.

After a little more encouragement the official got down to work: he put his middle finger on the small device and tapped the message.

The finger on the device almost had a life of its own. The steady tapping impressed Tom. He wouldn't have expected this dexterity from the little old man.

Tom didn't know the Morse-alphabet, but the man couldn't know that, so Tom trusted him to tap the right message. After a few moments he stopped tapping and looked up at Tom.

Tom pulled the stool away from the desk and tied the man to it. He also tied up his mouth with a kerchief. Then he went to the box on the desk and pulled out the wires. He had a last look around, took the pan with the eggs off the fire and put it on the table to cool. Then he walked out of the office like an ordinary customer.

Bess was waiting outside. Tom gave her a piece of bread and mounted. He rode out of town without haste.

He rode off in the direction of Anthony. He was aware of his crime – he had overpowered a state official on duty, and he had just facilitated a bank robbery for the worst outlaw of the country. But it was the only way to stay in touch with the gang.