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## **Texas Jack**

When the morning stage pulled into Mariposa, Texas Jack had already been dead 10 minutes. He had worn a broad grin of confidence right up to the end. Almost leisurely he shifted his glance from the face of the clock in the cupola of the white framed courthouse to the road, which any minute would produce the stagecoach that would bring his salvation.

The clock hands moved slowly, but steadily, toward the hour of 10 AM. The echo of the last stroke of the clock was the signal, and at the that moment, the gallows trap was sprung.

Texas Jack had been a mean man, quick tempered and dangerous to cross. He had money and influence, and most of Mariposa agreed when he boasted that no jury would ever convict him for killing the Indian, Tasooka.

But, the jury listened to and believed the story of Tasooka's young bride of only one month. They sympathized with her in sorrow, and decreed that the man who had wantonly slain her husband must die for his misdeed, precisely at the hour of 10 AM on a late October morning.

However, Texas Jack was unperturbed at the verdict. Money and influence would surely win the day. Jack's lawyer hurried to the state capitol and soon returned, assuring Jack that there would be a reprieve, a commutation of the sentence, and a pardon. This is exactly what the townsfolk of Mariposa expected. They shrugged their shoulders in frustration as Jack sang loud bawdy songs from his jail cell.

In Sacramento, an illness had laid the Governor low, and delayed him in the performance of his official duties, including signing Jack's reprieve. This didn't worry Jack, for word had come of the Governor's recovery, and he was certain that the attendant paperwork, which would save him, would be dispatched in plenty of time.

The date of execution arrived. The fateful hour approached. The gallows had been erected and were ready to perform their one and only task. Jack walked with a bit of swagger as the sheriff escorted him to scaffold. The morning stage was due at any second, and the odds were that the governor's reprieve was in the mailbag. There were very few Mariposans who were willing to bet that a white man, no matter how guilty or how awful the crime, would ever hang for the murder of an Indian.

The minutes ticked off. The hour struck. The trap was dropped, and Justice was served.

The stage driver took exception to the good natured kidding he received from those assembled, for his being tardy. He was NOT late, he asserted with an appropriate amount of indignation. He was exactly on time, and he promptly produced his big silver pocket watch to prove it! It was at that very moment, 10 AM.

The townsfolk began to extract their pocket watches as well. They compared their watches to the clock up in the courthouse cupola. That springless timepiece, for which the board of supervisors had paid an extravagant \$1,000, was half an hour fast!

The sheriff climbed the courthouse stairs to the second floor. He pulled himself, with some considerable effort, up the ladder to the cupola. After careful examination, there appeared to be nothing wrong with the clock. The 10 foot pendulum was swinging back and forth. The crude gears, the

product of a simple blacksmith shop, were perfectly meshed and moved flawlessly. The other parts of this odd, but usually very accurate piece of machinery moved as they were supposed to.

The sheriff completed his inspection and descended the ladder and stairs. The clock, he announced, appeared to be operating properly.

But the sheriff casually forgot to mention what he had seen in the dust and grime of that open to the air cupola....the imprint of a dainty moccasin, such as one might expect to have been worn by an Indian girl, who knew first hand not only the inequity of the white man's law, but how to set ahead the hands of the white man's clock.