

## Pa-Pew!

There is an alley that runs between the inn and the stables, down which a strange, shadowed man is presently stalking. He's removed his boots so that he might make little noise as he inches closer, back to the eastern wall, and peaks around the corner. Pa-pew! A bullet nicks the corner just above his eye. So much for stealth, Blumquist!

Deputy Poore has stationed himself in the middle of the town's thoroughfare, revolver primed and pointed. But what's this — not a moment after the shot rings out but one of the lovely dancers from the saloon is sashaying out the door, paperfan in hand as she waltzes up to Poore and slumps her body against his unraised arm. She fans herself, the cool air butting against Poore's cheek, flaring a nostril. His eyes dart. He shoots a quick burst of air from his lips. The girl makes queer cooing sounds as if gulping some fine thing. Ca-loo-lay-loo-lay-loon. Just then he catches a glint of metal peering out from behind the inn. He pulls his excited finger — Pa-pew! The glint disappears once more.

Beads of sweat roll on the unfanned half of Poore's face. He examines the dust thrown up by his missed shot, when — what is this — another young dancer, this one in a sherbet green dress, appears stepping out of the saloon door. She swoons in a wide southern arc behind Poore and twirls into a half-embrace upon his last un-womaned shoulder. The girls coo in concert, enchanted with their deputized perch. Distracted and knowing it, Poore's throat constricts. His eyes twitch, his finger goes faint, his shoulders feel heavy. He tests his throat again, grasping at whatever might be left to swallow.

Pa-pew! A small cloud of dust rises up from further down the street. Poore has let one go, a stray shot meant for no one in particular. But, oh, ho — a third girl has set herself at the entrance to the saloon, an eye for the poor deputy. And so the uneasy afternoon passes, a bullet exchanged for each half-seen glimpse of Blumquist behind the inn, and for each bullet, a dancer in kind, until there's Poore, wearing a veritable petticoat of women, a gingham and tulle man-o-war.

The cooing mass clings to him with such tenuous languor, such indistinct motive, like a crew of Junebugs upon a door, soon the women begin to overpower Poore's own intents and, with no true pilot at the helm, the group of them slowly drift around the dusty road like an aimless tumbleweed, propelled perhaps by those tiny wavers of the Chinese fans, never gathering too much momentum and never averse to changing course. Eventually, they leave the scene completely and Blumquist, boots back on, is free to write a word on the deputy's horse in chalk.