

“A dark and brooding meditation about fatherhood: its burdens,  
its depths, its permanence.”

John Darnielle, author of *Wolf in White Van*

**EXCERPTS FROM**

# **BURNT**

**TIM KIRK**

Pages 41-44

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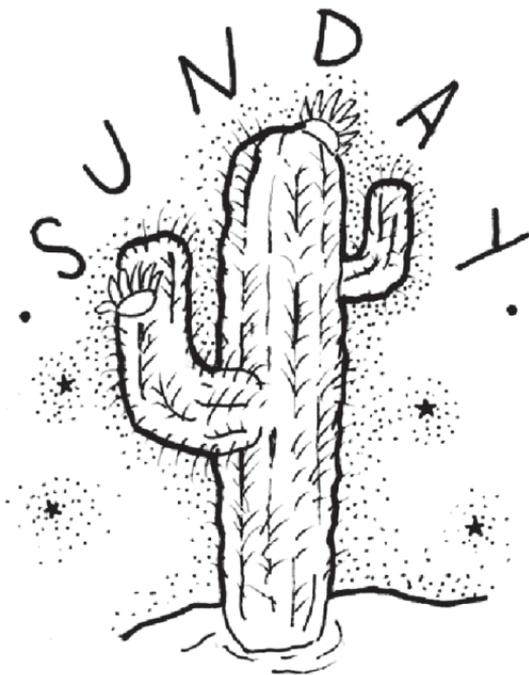
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1888

Sunday stares up at the damned thing, considering all the threads in the rope of a noose. There are far too many to count.

It's much easier to do the math on the folk who died hanging from those gallows.

Twenty-four were men from Los Rios — they were Arango's men and her father's personal enemies.

Thirty-one were his old friends.

The remaining seven were made up of local cow thieves, bad drunks and one drifter from Ohio who had the misfortune of being named Jesse James.

Sixty-two.

Waring is dying. This morning, she had the deputies haul his bed out in to the sunlight. Now the sun is dipping low and the gallows' shadow has nearly consumed him.

He starts and grips her hands. His eyes struggle to focus. He fills his lungs one last time and breathes out, "I am your father."

In fifteen years, she had never questioned it.

Now she knew he was lying.



She considered burning a lot of things.

The chapel where he knelt and prayed and didn't believe. The birthing tent where he played God to screaming women and newborns. The hammock where he spent his evenings. The house where she slept, dreaming that she was his daughter.

In the end, Sunday put a torch to the saloon he never entered. And the gallows, the goddamn gallows where he strung up each of his friends and most of his

enemies.

Then she turned her back on the flames and left town at a gallop. Headed south to Mexico. To find her real father.



The latest of herd of cattle has arrived in Dodge City, and with it plenty of hands with money in them. The muddy streets are transformed to a world of amusements, all for a coin. Or several coins. Or every coin.

Benton blames that damn carnival for giving him the image. Without it, his dreams could just go on being mean and angry without taking any specific form.

But now, every night, there is a shooting gallery. Targets rattle along, each the head of someone he knows. He shoots and they pitch backwards.

*Ka-DING! Ka-DING! Ka-DING!*

All through the night.

Maybe if he heads south, down towards Arizona, maybe Mexico...



Sunday rides into the last town before the border. She spends most of what's left of Waring's money on a fresh mount. Now she only needs to find someone to trust. Where she's going, it's not a good idea to be a woman riding alone. It's late so every suitable candidate is in the saloon.

She spots him right away.

A murderous bunch of cowhands are converging on a drunken and unlucky farmer. He's backing up the stairs, ranting through his fear. He's outnumbered and about to get clobbered.

There's a whistle. The big guy at the bar tosses him a stool. The farmer catches it and goes to town. He gets clobbered anyway, but, as these things go, he had a better shot with the stool.

Benton provides another stool for Sunday. He smiles like an old friend. Sunday quickly realizes that Benton is smarter than his size would suggest. She watches his eyes as he listens, taking her words in, considering them.

He'll do.

Inside his head, he only hears one thing. *Ka-DING!*



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tim Kirk is a writer and filmmaker. Among his films are *Room 237*, *The Nightmare* and *Director's Commentary: Terror of Frankenstein*. He lives in Los Angeles and is proud to produce *Tom Explores Los Angeles* and to have written the narration for the "Hall of The Crucifixion" presentation at Forest Lawn – Glendale.