

HIGH NOON AT THE O.K. CUTTING TABLE

by *Cindy Vincent*

It's a dry, dusty day in Albuquerque and the 2009 ASG Conference is in full swing. The thermometer outside is approaching triple digits, and I've decided to skip lunch and head straight to the vendors' booth area. After all, I'd spotted a teal blue silk the evening before that had gleamed up at me from a fabric booth and called my name. But alas, with too many packages and no time left for shopping, I'd had to say good-bye to the silk last night with the promise of purchasing it today.

Now, as I zoom through the double doors to the vendors' area, quickly flashing my badge...er, my name badge, that is... I glance at my watch. It's noon. High noon. And already the place is packed. Not a good sign.

I'm immediately nervous. What if someone's already bought the entire roll of the gorgeous silk? What would I do without it?

I rush toward the booth where I'd seen it, dodging conference-goers like a cowgirl cutting cows from a herd. Finally, I spot the booth where the silk is for sale and I rush to grab the roll that probably has less than five yards left.

A smile slides across my face. I've done it! I'll buy my silk and be all the happier for it! But just as I pick up the roll, I feel a tug at the other end. I look up to stare into eyes as cold as an iced tea on a hot New Mexico day.

The woman hanging onto the end of the roll stands firmly, like a mule refusing to move. She is dressed in denim and suede, with fringe hanging from the yoke of her western shirt. "I saw this silk first," she informs me.

"I saw it yesterday," I retort, not about to let go of what I consider to be my property. I give her my best Clint Eastwood squint.

She squints back. "This booth ain't big enough for the both of us."

"Then why don't you mosey on," I suggest.

I see her put a hand on her scissors holster and I reach for my glue gun.

"Ladies, ladies," the booth owner says with a tremor in his voice. "I don't want any trouble." His wife sidles up to him, wringing her hands.

He pulls another roll of teal blue fabric from his stack. "I have the same color in a nice polyester."

"We don't need no stinkin' polyester," my opponent declares as neither of us lets go of our end of the roll.

By now a crowd has begun to gather, and murmurs of a showdown echo through the group. Overhead, I hear the theme song from "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly" playing on the loudspeakers. A tumbleweed blows by...or, rather, a lady with a tumbleweed embroidered on a jean jacket walks past...

Then suddenly I hear someone yell, "Hi-yo, Silver!" and I look over to see a woman dressed in silver lamé from neck to ankle. A black half-mask partially covers her face.

"Who are you?" my adversary and I ask in unison.

"Never mind that," the woman tells us. She stands with hands on hips, her silver cape billowing in the air conditioning.

She points to me. "How much of the silk do you want?"

"Three yards."

Then she points to my nemesis. "And you?"

"I'd be plumb tickled with two and a half."

"Booth-keeper!" the lamé-clad woman exclaims. "Measure that roll, if you please!"

Barely able to control his shaking hands, the man does as he's been directed. "Only five yards left," he

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announces, as a hush falls over the crowd. All take a step backward.

My adversary and I resume our squinting.

"Wait," says the woman dressed in silver. "Look in your remnant pile."

Gasps arise from the throng of onlookers when the booth-keeper's wife pulls a rolled-up remnant of the very same teal blue silk from the depths of a plastic bin. The tag reads: 1 yard.

Applause rings in our ears as the silk is divided and we both go away with more than we'd wanted in the first place.

Before I can thank the mysterious stranger, I hear her holler, "Hi-yo, Silver... away!" And the next thing I know, she's disappeared from sight behind rows and rows of vendors and stacks and stacks of fabric.

"Who was that masked seamstress?" I ask the booth owner.

"Don't you know?" his wife pipes up. "That was the Lone Stitcher. She comes to ASG Conference every year. She lives in an area where she has no sewing friends. But here, she's surrounded by others who love to sew."

With my silk in hand, I stroll into the sunset... or rather, beneath a cluster of fluorescent lights that are flickering and about to burn out.

I'll never forget the woman in the silver lamé. A true heroine, a sister seamstress, and someone who understands the importance of looking in the remnant pile.

She truly saved the day.

Cindy Vincent is a member of the Denver, Colo. Chapter and a several-time winner (including a grand prize) in the ASG Creativity Contest. She is the owner of Mysteries by Vincent (www.mysteriesbyvincent.com), where she writes, manufactures, and distributes her own line of mystery party games. Her newest is "Stiffed at the Sewing Store," a sewing-themed murder mystery game.