

# L. RON HUBBARD



Death  
Waits at  
Sundown

GALAXY  
P R E S E N T S

## Chapter One

LYNN TAYLOR rocketed into Pioneer leaving a hurricane of dust in his path. He skidded his buckskin stallion to a stop before the sheriff's office and leaped down to stride with loud boots up the steps and through the door.

Pioneer's denizens had been startled at his abrupt appearance. The men in the sheriff's office stared at Lynn and then shot questions at each other.

Lynn Taylor's square jaw was set and his eyes were chunks of ice. His batwings were thick with the mud and dust of long travel and his stubble growth of beard was whitened with alkali. But on each thigh there gleamed clean guns, tied down—and those guns and thongs meant Texas.

“Which one of you gents is McCloud?” said Lynn Taylor, dropping his quirt with a crack upon the desk.

The man behind it sat forward with a humorless, confident grin and pushed his white sombrero up from his sweaty brow. “I'm McCloud.” And his stare plainly said, “What are you going to do about it?”

“I'm Lynn Taylor. Where's my brother?”

McCloud leaned back again, though the others in the room were still tensed and wary. “He's where he belongs, fellah. You wasn't thinkin' of doin' anything about it, was you?”

“I kind of had that in mind,” said Lynn, scanning the others in the room and labeling them as hard cases. “When is the trial?”

McCloud laughed easily. “Looks like your information come late, Taylor. The trial’s over and Frank Taylor swings tomorrow at sundown.”

“Maybe,” said Lynn, looking McCloud over. “I’m askin’ to see him.”

McCloud hesitated and then he shrugged. “All right, Texas. Can’t be any harm in that. But get this straight. The vigilantes has things in hand—and *we don’t want no outside interference.*”

He got up and took a ring of keys down from the wall. Two of the others stood and swaggered carelessly after the big Texan. It was dark in the cells. Ahead a cot creaked and Frank Taylor rose to eye the coming party with suspicion.

Worry and two weeks of confinement had thinned and blanched his young face. His young body was braced and surly as he waited for the head of the vigilantes. And then he gave a glad start. “Lynn!”

“Think I’d leave you in the lurch?” said the Texan. “Open it up, McCloud. I want a talk with the kid.”

“You say what you’ve got to say right here in my presence,” stated McCloud. “We didn’t go to all the trouble of pickin’ up this precious brother of yours just to let him get away from us again.”

Lynn barely glanced at the vigilante chief. He moved up to the bars. “I came as soon as I got your letter, kid. What are they doin’ to you?”

“It’s a frame!” said Frank Taylor. “I’m here because I was sap enough to build up my spread to a point where somebody else wanted it. I’m a fall guy for a set of jobs I never pulled. You got to believe me, Lynn. I didn’t rob nothing. If you want to see the guy that did it, turn around and look.”

“Shut up,” said McCloud. “Nobody’ll listen to a lie like that.”

“They’d listen if they weren’t scared of you!” said Frank. “Lynn, you got to set this thing to rights. I swing tomorrow night. I didn’t do a thing!”

Lynn looked at the eager, pleading face of his younger brother. “Sure, I know that, kid.”

“Time’s up,” said McCloud uneasily.

“Don’t worry about anything, kid,” said the Texan, touching the hand on the bars very briefly. He turned and walked back along the corridor, the outer cell door clanging behind him.

In the office again, McCloud looked carefully at Lynn. “Listen, Texas, I wouldn’t advise you to start anything. You ain’t got any friends in Pioneer.”

“Have you?” said Lynn meaningly.

McCloud laughed. “Ask around. Your brother is full of locoweed. He stopped the Overland seven times and took the weight off its springs. The last time he killed the driver. And plenty of cows have turned up missing since he started to increase his spread. I might,” he added, “go as far as to say that a Taylor would show good sense if he pulled out of Pioneer—tonight.”

“Yeah?” said Lynn.

“Yeah,” said McCloud.

“Thanks for the advice,” said Lynn. He casually inspected the five gunmen who lounged in chairs around the walls and each returned his stare silently.

Lynn walked out, conscious of the eyes on his back. He took his buckskin’s bridle and led him toward the Silver Dollar Stable for a well-earned rubdown and feed of oats.

The stableman offered to take the rein but Lynn withheld it, preferring to stall the buckskin himself. Glitter, though tired from the wearing ride, might still have enough energy left to make mincemeat out of a careless hostler.

Lynn poured a can of oats into the manger and went to work with sponge and brush. He was so deep in thought that he was startled when a stranger spoke behind him.

“You’re Lynn Taylor, ain’t you?”

Lynn turned to see a weather-beaten, sun-dried westerner whose leather vest bore evidence of having had something pinned over the heart.

“I’m Hawkins,” said the stranger. “Six weeks ago I was the sheriff around here—but that was before McCloud and his crowd began to yell for law and order and got the townspeople behind them. If I don’t make a mistake, Taylor, you’re thinkin’ of doin’ something to keep them from stringin’ up your brother.”

“Yeah, I did have some dim idea along those lines,” said Lynn, continuing his work.

“I’ve heard of you,” said Hawkins.

Lynn stabbed a questioning glance at the old man.

“We hear about most of the Texas gunfighters here in

Arizony,” continued Hawkins. “But I didn’t think you’d get here in time. As it is, you’re too late even now. You couldn’t break him out. There are fifteen men, all of them good, on that damned vigilance committee. I mean good with their guns. And McCloud’s got a reputation up north. He’ll own Pioneer in another month and the fools around here yell their heads off for him. Y’ain’t thinkin’ of standin’ up and blazin’ it out with him, are you?”

“Maybe.”

“Look, Taylor, I ain’t tryin’ to be nosy. It’s good business for me to give you a hand. I don’t rate in this place now. So many crimes came off while I was in office that it took two clerks to file the reports on them.”

“And you couldn’t stop them from happening?”

“Takes more than one old man with a gun to stop a man like McCloud. If you and me teamed up, maybe I could get my job back and remove McCloud’s danger to this town.”

Having finished the rubdown, Lynn wiped his hands and then extended his right to Hawkins. “Okay, but you got to do things my way. That all right?”

“Well . . .”

“Why hesitate?”

“I’ve heard your reputation, after all.”

“You never heard of me shootin’ a man in the back, Hawkins.”

“That’s so.”

“And if you don’t think I’ll move heaven and earth to keep my kid brother from swingin’, you’re crazy.”

“What’s your idea?”

“Is there a stage coming in here tonight?”

“One due at eleven o’clock.”

“Will it have anything on it?”

“Regular dispatch box. Maybe two—three thousand. Say, Taylor, you must be loco! How could that help your kid brother?”

“Never mind that. The point is, are you willing to help me rob that stage if there’s no shooting?”

“If . . .”

“You’re either with me or you’re not. You want your job back and unless I get killed in this bargain, it’s yours. Are you going to help me rob that stage or ain’t you?”

“All right,” said Hawkins, doubtfully, “but by God, I never thought I’d have to commit robbery to establish law and order.”