

Sheriff Bride

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Introduction

Sam Hardin picked up the letter that lay on the rough wooden table. It was hard to imagine that only two short days had passed since John Hardin had read the letter to his four offspring; a letter which invited him to become Sheriff in a town called Jackson Hole, in Wyoming.

Now two days later, John Hardin lay dead and buried in a wooden box. He had been killed by falling off his own horse after getting drunk from celebrating his new job.

Sam felt it was a Godsend for the town of Jackson Hole. Father or not, Sam knew that John Hardin had been an evil man. He would have ruined the town just like he had ruined his wife and children's lives. The wickedness in the man had caused what love their mother had for him to wither and die, but she had spent her life pouring her soul into her four children.

When the illness came upon her, John Hardin had refused to pay for the medicine, so she had silently and painfully drifted away. In Heaven their sweet mother would never have to defend herself or her children against the brutal man again; and now that he was dead, the reprobate she had called a husband could never touch her or her children again.

The four sullen offspring of John Hardin gathered around the table. Although they didn't love their father, he had provided a semblance of security for them. Now that he was dead, they wondered what they would have to do to survive.

"What should we do?" the youngest child asked.

"I don't know Rob," Sam said, "I've been thinking: We don't have any money; we don't have any way to pay to keep this place now that Pa is dead."

The others shook their heads in agreement. John Hardin had usually paid the bills by gambling or selling the animal skins that he forced his four children to hunt.

Sam, being the oldest, took charge and went on, "I have an idea, but we would all have to agree on it. We would all have to do it together."

"Sam you know you can count on Dan and Me," Jo, the second oldest answered in an agreeable tone. "We've always followed your lead."

"I know." Sam answered solemnly, "But now that Pa's dead, you are all free to make your own choices."

"Where would we go, what would we do?" Dan voiced the question quietly.

"There is only one thing we all know how to do." Sam said, as each of them nodded in agreement. "We all know how to shoot. Each one of us can probably shoot better than any man alive."

"What good will that do us?" Rob asked

"I thought, we could all go together and see if this town of Jackson Hole will hire us. We could all be the sheriff together. Four has got to be better than one!"

Jo stared at Sam in amazement. "Sam, how could we? Once they see us, they'll never accept us, and if they did, we might have to shoot people. I can hardly bear to shoot an animal, how could I shoot a person?"

Sam knew it was true. Although Jo was a great shot, Jo hated hunting more than all of them.

Rob jumped up in excitement. At the age of fourteen Rob was always ready for new adventures. "I think it's a great idea. We can't stay here. What other choice do we have? The town sent enough money for Pa to get there and some left over. If we don't

go, we have to send back the money. Then we won't have anything. The money should be enough to pay the way for all four of us. ”

Sam could tell that Dan was also in agreement with the plan, but Jo looked skeptical.

“If we have to shoot people, it will be because they are bad: bad like Pa was.” Sam watched the emotion flash across Jo's face. In a few seconds determination set in. Sam knew that Jo was now in agreement.

“When do we leave?” Jo asked.

“I don't see what's holding us back.” Sam looked around the dull room of the small building they called home. It was nothing to be proud of. There had never been anything nice about it. Their father had never allowed their mother to decorate with any frills, although she had made the house cozy in her own ways, but now the rooms were stark and barren. In fact, the house was really no more than an old shed. There were no possessions they needed to take with them except their mother's few belongings. They would pack up their mother's wedding dress, her Bible and their guns.

Dan's artist starved eyes flashed around the room in distaste. “I say we leave right now.”

Sam and Jo nodded in agreement.

“Yippee!” Rob yelled and ran out the door; never wanting to return.

“Say Sam, who sent Pa that letter anyways?”

“A man named Mark Carlin. He is the town's banker.” Sam explained to them all. “We need to send a telegraph ahead, letting him know we are coming.”

“Best just let him think its Pa that’s coming. He may tell us no, if he knows about us.” Dan added.

“That is a good idea.” Sam said.

Rob flashed a devious smile at them all and added, “Won’t Mr. Mark Carlin be surprised when he lays eyes on his four new sheriffs.”

Chapter 1

Mark Carlin stood waiting impatiently at the train depot. He hated being away from the bank for long. Without a Sheriff in the small town of Jackson Hole, he was the only thing that stood between the money and the thieves. No one else in the town cared if there was a sheriff or not. Most of the town was made up of men who worked on the local cattle ranches. They stayed on the ranches all week long; then came to town on the weekends to live it up at the saloon. But, there were a few decent families beginning to settle near town and Mark wanted them to feel safe about using his bank.

Mark wanted a Sheriff around, so that he could walk away from the bank from time to time. He wanted to spend more time overseeing the house he was having built. He wanted to walk in the fields around his new house. He wanted to watch the sunset and the sunrise, without worrying if his bank was being robbed. Therefore, Mark had hired John Hardin; a man with a mean reputation, a man who was known to be good with a gun. Mark had high hopes that John Hardin could whip the cattlemen into shape and help create a nice quiet community.

Finally, the train pulled up into the depot. Mark watched the faces of the passengers that disembarked. He wondered if a man with such an evil reputation would look any different then the men he saw daily. Mark was used to seeing men with faces

shrouded in desperation, intoxication, and sorrow. He didn't really know any truly mean men.

Several people got off the train to stretch their legs. Mark didn't think any of them were John Hardin. As he stood there he noticed four women stepping down from the train. They seemed to be looking the town over. Mark was sure they were looking for a shop or a restaurant. He laughed inside. There was nothing that woman wanted in a town like this.

Several minutes passed, and no one else got off the train. Mark felt annoyance flickering through his body. He had wasted all this time away from the bank and no new sheriff had appeared. He was sure that Hardin's telegraph said that he would arrive today. He could only hope that Hardin showed up soon.

When the train began to pull away, Mark turned in disgust and started to stomp away. Just then, one of the women, whom he had noted earlier, stepped into his way. He wondered why they had allowed themselves to miss the train. No other train came through here until later in the week, and this was no town for women.

"Mr. Carlin?" One of the women spoke up. He was surprised that she knew his name. Mark also noticed that her eyes were green. The sun caught them at such an angle he thought they looked like sparkling emeralds. For a moment he even felt compelled to reach out and touch the gems.

When the woman cleared her throat, Mark reluctantly pulled his attention away from her eyes.

"Yes, I am Mark Carlin." He answered, wondering how she knew his name.

“My name is Sam Hardin, I mean Samantha. These are my sisters.” The girl kept staring at him with wide open eyes. “I know you were expecting my father, but he died a few days ago.”

Mark’s shoulders sagged. Now he would have to begin his search all over again.

“I’m sorry for your loss.” He told the lovely brunette, “but you and your sisters didn’t need to come all the way here to tell me.”

She laughed. The sound trickled down his spine causing him an uncomfortable sense of pleasure. “We didn’t come for that reason; we came to take the job.” She said and swept her hand indicating the other three women as being part of her plan.

“The job?” Mark said. “The job I hired your father for was to be our sheriff.”

“Yes, I am aware of it, I have your letter right here.” She said, pulling the crumpled paper from her bag. “We have come to fill the position”.

“What!” Mark exclaimed, “Have you gone mad? You’re a woman!”

“Yes, and so are my three sisters.” Sam stepped closer to the other young women who were standing just a few feet away. They were all watching their sister and the man; with a touch of anxiety splashed across their faces. If it wasn’t for their age differences, they could all have been twins, triplets, quadruplets. Each girl had a large suitcase sitting on the ground beside her. The most unusual thing though that Mark noticed about the women was that although they were all dressed in proper skirts and blouses: attire a woman would wear; bonnets and all, each of them held a rifle cradled in their arms.