

The Sheriff of Sundown City

By Jody Studdard

Chapter 1

John Westwood could hardly believe what had happened. He had only been the sheriff of Sundown City for a day, and already something had gone wrong. The nefarious outlaw, One-Arm Bill, and his equally nefarious sidekick, Yellowstone Malone, had robbed the local bank.

“What direction did they head?” John asked the bank’s teller, an elderly, wiry man named Ned O’Sullivan.

“You’ll never catch them,” Ned answered, shrugging his shoulders in resignation. “No one ever does. The sheriff before you—he never did. And the one before him—he never did, either. If you were smart, you’d save your hide and forget this whole thing ever happened. That’s what I’m going to do.”

“What do you mean?” John asked. “We can’t let him get away with this. The last time I checked, robbing a bank was a crime.”

Ned sighed. “There’s nothing you can do. And don’t go getting any funny ideas about chasing One-Arm Bill to get that money back. I don’t want your blood on my hands. One-Arm Bill will shoot you as fast as he shot the past two sheriffs.”

John frowned. When he had first moved to Sundown City (a week ago) to take the job as the town’s sheriff, he had heard it had had a long problem with outlaws. He had not heard, however, that the past two sheriffs (including the one he was replacing) had been killed by One-Arm Bill.

He looked around the bank. Several people were still recovering from the stick-up. An old lady brushed dirt from the folds of her dress. Apparently, in the commotion, she had been knocked down.

“Is everyone okay?” he asked.

There was no response, so he assumed everyone was fine. He turned back to Ned and continued his investigation.

“What does One-Arm Bill look like?” he asked.

“He’s the nastiest, vilest man in the entire west,” Ned said. “He only bathes once a month, sometimes not even that much, so you can smell him coming from several blocks away. His chin is covered with a nasty goatee, and his eyes are as black as the night sky.”

“What type of gun does he use?” John asked. As a deputy in Kansas City, he had learned it was wise to find out what type of weapon your opponent carried. A man’s weapon told you a lot about him.

“Colt .45,” Ned said, running his fingers through his wispy, red hair.

John shrugged. A Colt .45 was an impressive weapon. As far as sidearms went, it was one of the best. It had good range and was very accurate. Clearly, One-Arm Bill was a wise man, at least as far as weapons went.

Ned continued. “He calls his gun Widowmaker. And trust me, it’s an appropriate name.”

“Why do they call him One-Arm Bill?” John asked.

“His real name is William Johnstone,” Ned answered. “When he was a kid, he was playing near a railroad. He fell asleep on the tracks and didn’t hear the locomotive

until it was too late. It took his arm off at the shoulder. Folks have called him ‘One-Arm Bill’ ever since.”

“Is he from around here?”

Ned nodded. “He used to live outside of town, down by Clara’s Creek, but that was years ago. Nowadays, no one knows where he lives. Most people think he roams from town to town, robbing banks, stagecoaches, and trains along the way. He’s wanted in at least four states, probably more. In Texas he’s known as the One-Armed Bandit. In Mexico he’s called el Bandido.”

John nodded. “What about Yellowstone Malone?”

Ned chuckled. “He’s dangerous, but nothing compared to One-Arm Bill.”

“Does One-Arm Bill have any other accomplices?”

“Supposedly a nephew. They call him Weasel. I’m not sure what his real name is. One-Arm Bill keeps him around to do chores and the like. Unlike the other two, he’s not too dangerous. I’ve heard stories he’s good at making things.”

“Thanks for the information,” John said. “I’ll see what I can do to stop this from happening again. While I’m sheriff, robberies will not be tolerated in Sundown City.”

Ned laughed. “You law enforcement types are a strange breed,” he said. “The past two sheriffs said the same thing. Now, they’re pushing up daisies in the local cemetery.”

“I’m not like the past two sheriffs,” John said. “I’ll get the job done. When I was a deputy in Kansas City, I always did.”

“This ain’t Kansas City,” Ned said. “This is Sundown City. Around here, danger lurks ‘round every corner.”