

## Chapter 5 - A Snooping Sheriff

A couple of weeks after Sam Potter's funeral, the two women were cleaning up the church. It had been standing room only attendance for the sermon the day before. It had rained the night before, which made the yard around the church muddy. The church floor was covered by mud and dried dirt from the congregation's boots. It required constant work to keep the church and all of its pews clean. The Heady's motto was "Cleanliness is next to Godliness." All that Godliness took a lot of elbow grease.

Julia heard a horse clop coming up their road through the open church doors. It was unusual for anyone to be visiting them in the middle of a weekday. A moment later, Julia could see it was Sheriff Don Henderson. *That's odd*, she thought. She had never known Sheriff Henderson to visit them at the house. He never attended a church service, either.

"Momma! Sheriff Henderson's riding up the road. Any idea what he wants?"

"I have no idea whatsoever. Looking for your daddy I suppose," Sarah answered warily.

The sheriff rode up to the house and hitched his chestnut horse to the post by the front door. He dismounted his horse and headed towards the house. "We're over here, Sheriff. In the church," Julia called over to him.

The sheriff turned and walked across the yard towards the church. When he was ten or so feet away, he called, "Afternoon, Julia. Is your momma around?"

"Yes, she is. We are both cleaning up this mess after yesterday's rain. Come on in, Sheriff."

The sheriff kicked off the mud from his boots the best he could and walked into the church. Sarah stopped what she was doing, and she and Julia met him halfway down the aisle.



“If you’re looking for salvation, Sheriff, you missed it by a day. The services were yesterday. How can we help you?” Sarah asked.

“Oh, salvation isn’t what I’m looking for. I think I am beyond salvation,” he chuckled ruefully. “What I am looking for is any information you might have about a missing man that rode through here a couple of months back.”

“A missing man?” Sarah asked while Julia kept her mouth shut and looked back down at her muddy floor.

“Yep... He came through these parts on his way to Boston a few months back, but his family said he never made it. They’ve sent letters to

every sheriff from New York City to Boston but can't seem to find hide nor hair of him."

"What did the man look like, Sheriff? We get a lot of people that come to one of my husband's services then move on. It would be hard to tell one man from the many," Sarah replied.

"Seems like nothing special about him. He is five foot ten, 180 pounds, a short beard and mustache. He rode a gray quarter horse, new saddle, not much in the way of money or belongings. He was on his way from his brother's house in New York back to his family in Boston. He left the end of May but never made it home," he explained.

"Hmm..." Sarah remarked. "I don't recall seeing anybody fitting that description around these parts. Not that he couldn't have been here, only that I don't remember seeing anyone like that."

"Mind if I take a look around the place?" asked Sheriff Henderson.

"Of course, Sheriff. Help yourself. When you're done, maybe you'll stop by the house for a cold glass of lemonade?" Sarah offered.

“That sounds mighty fine, Sarah. I just might take you up on that.” With that, he turned and left the church. Sarah and Julia could see him through the side windows of the church, walking around to the back.

They suddenly looked at each other, their eyes as big as saucers. “What are we going to do, Momma!” Julia whispered.

“Stay calm, for one thing. That man is long gone and buried deep under Sam Potter. The sheriff could never find him there. And there’s nothing that can connect us with him. No one saw a thing. Even your daddy doesn’t know what happened that day. Just stay calm, and everything is going to be all right.”

The two women carefully peeked out the church window and monitored every move Sheriff Henderson made. They could see him as he walked out to the cemetery, studied the headstones, then walked back. He headed out towards the root cellar, disappeared into the darkness for a moment or two, then popped out into the sunlight. He went around the house, checking under the porch and behind the bushes. He then walked over to the barn and went in. The sheriff was in the barn for longer than the two felt comfortable with.

Sheriff Henderson came out of the barn and began walking back towards the church. Julia could hear her heart beating in her ears as the sheriff approached.

“Do you think he found out anything? Do you think he knows?” Julia asked, the panic rising in her voice.

“That’s impossible. He can’t know nothing. He’s just coming by to tell us to keep an eye out for him, is all,” Sarah quietly replied.

“Now, look busy.”



“Hello, ladies,” the sheriff said as he entered the church again. “I’ll take that glass of lemonade if it isn’t too much bother.”

“Certainly, Sheriff,” Sarah said as she folded a cleaning rag and placed it next to her bucket. “Let’s walk over to the house. I’d be happy to fix you one.” To Julia, she added, “Why don’t you stay here and finish up, Julia. No need for you to stop working.”

“Sure, Momma. I’m good here.”

“Come with me, Sheriff Henderson. I made the lemonade fresh this morning.”

The two walked over towards the house as Julia pretended to keep working, but she was watching every step the sheriff made until they disappeared through the kitchen door.

“Your husband seems to be doing pretty well with his farm and church and all,” the sheriff commented as Sarah retrieved a tall glass from the cupboard.

“Thank you, Sheriff. We do fine for ourselves because we work hard. Lazarus is in the field now pulling stumps with an ox. That’s pretty hard work, but we do fine here.”

Your husband preaches from the good book, I hear.”

“He does. You should come one Sunday and hear him for yourself. He just might save your soul,” Sarah said with a smile, pouring the drink into the glass.

“That’s what I hear,” the sheriff responded as Sarah placed the large glass of lemonade in front of him on the kitchen table.

He looked at the lemonade then looked at Sarah but never reached for a drink. There was a long pause before Sheriff Henderson finally asked, “It that your saddle hanging up in the nail in the barn?”

“If it’s in our barn, it must be ours. Who else’s would it be?” Sarah jokingly asked.

“Maybe the missing man’s saddle,” answered the sheriff.

“Now, Sheriff, why would you go and say something like that to me?” Sarah asked.

“Because the saddle in your barn belongs to the missing man. That’s why!”

“That’s ridiculous, Sheriff! Why would I have a dead man’s saddle in my barn?”

“Dead man? I never said dead man. I said missing man...”

“I’m sure you said dead man, Sheriff. Why else would I have said that?” Sarah replied, trying to keep her face neutral and her hands from trembling.

“That’s what I’d like to know. What aren’t you telling me, Mrs. Heady? What do you know about the missing man?” he demanded.

“I’m sorry, Sheriff Henderson. I am sure I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Well, Mrs. Heady, I’m sorry... I’m sorry you’re going to have to come with me to the sheriff’s office while we sort this out.”

“I will do no such thing, Sheriff Henderson! You can’t come into my home and make wild accusations about missing men and take me from my home,” yelled Sarah.

“I am afraid I can, Mrs. Heady. I have reason to believe that you know something about the missing man. I think there’s been foul play and you know something about it. I think you were involved. We are going to my office, and you are going into a cell until we can figure out what happened or you tell me what happened,” Sheriff Henderson snapped back.

“Get your cloak, and you might want Julia to know you will be out for a while. Saddle up your horse and let’s go. Maybe you can use the new saddle on the wall in the barn. The one with the initials ‘JC’ monogrammed on the back housing. I know your husband is a preacher, but I am positive he doesn’t stamp the initials ‘JC’ on his saddles for Jesus Christ!”

Sarah stamped her foot, appalled at the audacity of the sheriff's comment. "Well, I never—!"

"The initials on that saddle stand for John Caver. The name of the missing man. You're going to come with me while we sort this out," he said in an angry voice.

Without the sheriff noticing, Sarah grabbed something from the cookie jar and held it tightly in her hand. She then reached for her shawl from the back of the kitchen door as he grabbed Sarah's arm and escorted her out the door to the barn. Sarah took the saddle from the nail in the barn wall and placed it on Black Hawk. She and the sheriff mounted their horses as he led Sarah's horse behind and alongside of his down the road from the Heady's home. Julia watched out the church window as the two rode down the road.

Julia left the mop leaning against the pew and ran to the barn to ready their mule. She hurried to loosen the floorboard at the rear of the barn, ripping the board from the floor and reaching in. A moment later, Julia pulled an old handgun from under the floor. It was the Root Cellar Man's gun. The day of the killing, she had taken his gun and hid it under the floor where her daddy would never find it. She then pushed it into her waistband.

She took for the mule first a blanket, then the saddle, then a cinch in the front and a cinch in the back. Julia was now riding down the road after the sheriff and her momma. She could barely see them ahead of her through the trees. Her mule was stubborn and refused to cooperate this day. It would stop, rear up, and try to head back to the barn. The terrible sound it made was a mix between a neigh, a bray, and a whinny. No one ever knew what to call the sound a mule makes, but one thing for sure, it wasn't pleasant.

She kept pushing the old mule until they got to the Sing Sing Sheriff's Office. They had gone in already as their horses were tied up outside. Julia rode up to Black Hawk and the sheriff's horse telling them to be quiet, hush, don't make any sound. Julia watched from outside through the barred windows to see what was going on. She knew he had found out but couldn't figure out how. She saw her momma and the sheriff arguing, almost yelling at one another. Then she saw Sheriff Henderson raise his hand high in the air and swing it down across Sarah's face. The sheriff then pushed Sarah into a cell and slammed the cage door behind her. He walked away and sat at his desk.

Julia opened the door to the sheriff's office and walked in. "What the hell is going on here?" Julia yelled. "What the hell did you do to my mother?" she demanded.

"Just who do you think you are, little lady? Don't you get uppity with me! You might be free, but you're not free to come in here and talk to me that way!"

"Let my mother out of that cell, now!"

"Julia! Go home. This isn't about you, sweetheart. Go home and stay out of this. I am all right. Go home!" Sarah ordered from her cell.

"The hell I will, Momma! He has no right to treat you this way. I don't care if he is the sheriff. To hell with him!" Julia yelled back.

The sheriff reached out with his left arm and grabbed Julia by the shoulder and shook her hard. "I don't know what you did to that man, but I sure as hell am gonna find out. And when I do, you both are going to swing from the end of a new rope until you're both dead," he threatened. "Do you hear me? Uppity black bitch! Until I do figure this out, you can get in the cage like an animal with your animal momma."

Sheriff Henderson brought back his right arm and slapped Julia to the floor. Julia, stunned, sat on the floor with her hands behind her supporting her in an upright position. Julia said nothing, only stared at Sheriff Henderson's face in rage.

"Don't do it, Julia! Don't do anything stupid! Stay on the floor!" Sarah screamed to her daughter.

Julia slowly got to her feet when the sheriff raised his hand high once more and swung it down, striking Julia across her face, knocking her flat to the floor once more.

"Julia, don't!"

Julia slowly turned her head to see her momma lying in the cell with blood dripping from her mouth from the injury Sheriff Henderson caused by hitting her. Julia reached up and felt her own mouth with the back of her hand, pulling it away only to find it covered with blood from her own injuries.

"Julia, please don't! Listen to what the sheriff says! Please!"

The sheriff had a look of contentment and superiority on his face as he put his hands on his hips and looked at Julia bleeding on the floor. “Get up, you black bitch, and get in the cage,” he demanded.

Julia rose to her feet without saying a word, put her head down as if she were defeated, and placed her hands behind her back. The sheriff walked from around his desk over towards Julia and raised his hand in preparation to hit her again.



Julia surreptitiously pulled the gun from her waistband and fired at Sheriff Henderson. Julia didn't aim for the arm, leg, or even the shoulder, which would have definitely changed the direction of the situation. Julia deliberately pointed the old gun right at his face and pulled the trigger. The bullet hit the sheriff just below his right eye causing a red splash that sprayed the office walls, Julia, and her mother behind her. The one shot was all it took. The sheriff was thrown backwards, first hitting his desk, spinning, then landing face first on the hard wooden floor.

“What did you do!” Sarah screamed. “What did you do to the sheriff, Julia! Oh, my God! You killed the sheriff! You shot him!”

Julia stood frozen with the gun in hand, her face covered with the sheriff’s blood.

“Get the keys... Get the keys from his pocket... Julia! Get the keys to the cell from his pocket. Now!”

Julia walked over to the dead sheriff and knelt down beside him. She paused, not knowing what to do or where to start.

“Get the damn keys, Julia!”

Julia tried to reach in his pockets, but couldn’t. She knew she would have to flip him over on his back to get access to all of his pockets. The thought of touching another dead man made Julia sick to her stomach.

“Hurry! Get the keys, Julia!” Sarah screamed to get Julia’s attention.

Julia grabbed him by his shoulders and began rocking him from side to side until she got enough momentum to get his large body to roll over. There they were. The jail cell keys were on a ring sticking out of his right

front pocket. Julia grabbed the keys and ran over to her momma's jail cell. She fumbled with the first key but had difficulty getting the key to turn.

"Try another key, Julia... Quickly! Before someone comes and catches us! Hurry!" Sarah ordered nervously.

Julia tried a second key. That one wouldn't fit in the lock. One key left. Julia pushed the remaining key into the cell door lock and gave it a hard twist to the right. *Click, click*, and the door swung open.

"Now what do we do, Momma? What do we do?" Julia asked, terrified.

"Go back over to the sheriff and take his money clip. I'll gather up his guns. We need to make this look like a robbery. We can throw the guns into Indian Brook. We don't want to get caught with anything that belongs to the sheriff. Did you find it? I think he keeps it in his right front pocket. Quickly get it, Julia," Sarah instructed.

Julia rummaged through the sheriff's pocket until she called, "Got it! I got it!"

“Good,” Sarah said calmly. “Now give me the clip, and you take the money.”

“Why, Momma? Why should I take the money?”

“Because you have to leave! You have to get far away from here. As far away as you can.”

“Why, Momma? Why do I have to leave?”

“Because, sweetheart. It isn’t safe for you here anymore. We can cover the one murder, but we’ll never get away with two. The sheriff is known by everyone, unlike the Root Cellar Man, who nobody knew. There’s going to be a lot of questions asked about this murder. And I don’t want you here in case something goes wrong.”

“But Momma...” Julia said as if she were six years old again.

“Don’t ‘but momma’ me. This is for your own good. We’ll leave the sheriff right where he is. It will look like he arrested someone, there was a struggle and the sheriff got shot. Did anyone see you come in here?”

“No. The streets were empty. I didn’t even pass a single soul on my way down here,” Julia answered.

“Here, you take this money, too. I grabbed it from the cookie jar before Sheriff Henderson pushed me out the door. It’s the money from the collection plate. Here, take it,” Sarah insisted while Julia took the paper money and squeezed it tightly in her hand. “I’ll make up some reason why the money is gone and where you went. The missing money is going to be a lot easier to explain than the missing daughter. I might have to tell your daddy the truth. I so hoped it wouldn’t ever come down to this. He is so proud of you and so am I. What you did to protect me was very brave. I am proud of you, sweetheart... Very proud of you,” Sarah admitted.

“But you have to go. Take Black Hawk and the man’s saddle. I’ll take the mule back home. It’s dark now, and we can both get out of town without being noticed. Only if we leave now. I love you, Julia. I love you. Now go!” Sarah demanded.

Julia hugged her momma tightly, and kissed her on her cheek, causing the sheriff’s blood to smear on their faces. Sarah took her apron and wiped the blood from Julia’s face.

"I love you, Momma. I always will. I will write to you often to let you know I am all right," Julia said as she began to cry.

"Never write where you are. If things don't go well with all this, I never want a posse finding you and hanging you for this."

"I understand, Momma. Please tell Daddy how sorry I am and that I will love him, too, always," Julia said, sobbing.

"I will sweetheart. You know he loves you so much... Now git!" Sarah ordered, breaking the mood.

The two women slowly opened the door to the sheriff's office and looked out to see if there was anyone on the street who would see them leave. The streets were clear. Julia mounted Black Hawk, and Sarah climbed on the back of their old mule.

"I love you, Momma," Julia said quietly.

"I love you too, sweetheart."

The two rode off in different directions and disappeared into the darkness.

