

## ***The Tale of the Sheriff Lady***

*"Sleepyhead, close your eyes, for I'm right beside you.  
Guardian angels are near, so sleep without fear.  
Lullaby, and good night, with roses bedight.  
Lilies o'er head, lay thee down in thy bed.*

*Go to sleep, little ones, think of puppies and kittens.  
Go to sleep, little ones, think of butterfl..."*

"Mama?"

"Yes, pumpkin..."

"Can you tell us the tale of the sheriff lady again?"

"Sure honey."

...

"Once upon a time there was a fair Sheriff of a fair town. Everybody loved him. He kept the town safe for more than ten years. He had a beautiful daughter named Christina. Once she hit twelve, the Sheriff taught her everything he knew. She was beauty, brain and brawn combined. They lived happily until her sixteenth birthday.

That day, an outlaw and his gang attacked the town; shooting guns at everything.

'Sheriff!' the outlaw screamed. 'You're gonna give me your daughter or I'll turn this town into an ash pile!'

The sheriff took a look at his beautiful daughter; there was no way that he'll let this outlaw get away with this.

'Christina, escape from the back. I'll distract them.' Sheriff whispered.

Christina nodded, she knew that her father knew best for both of them.

'Is this truly what you want Darren?' the sheriff asked. 'You know I cannot let you have what you want. Don't make me shoot you son; you're young, you still can change your way of life. Living in the mountains is not the easy way, is not the good way, son.'

'Don't call me son, old man.' Darren replied. 'You know nothing about me. You know nothing about my family.'

'On the contrary son, I do know a lot about you and your family. Poor old George, always took care of you when you got into trouble. He was always with you even when you're dead wrong. In his last breath, he wanted me to take care of you. I failed him, Darren. But I won't fail you.'

The sheriff went out on the street to see Darren. He was immediately surrounded by Darren's gang members and they brought him to their master. Darren was on a brown horse, waiting for them to reach him.

'Where's Christina?' Darren asked. The sheriff looked at him without saying anything. Darren looked down for a second, he looked like he was trying to find words to say to the sheriff.

'Then YOU're coming with us.' he yelled. One of the gang members hit the sheriff in the head with the hilt of the gun, rendering him unconscious. They pulled him onto the back of a horse and rode to the mountains.

Christina saw everything from the rooftop of the Saloon; she climbed right after she escaped the gaze of Darren's gang. She was angry and sad, but most importantly she wanted her father back. She went back to her house to get supplies; she was going after them. After a while, she was ready to go. When she opened the door, she was surprised by Frank's presence in front of her. His right hand was up, he was going to knock the door.

'Christina, hey, um... I know you and... you're going to follow them, right? I won't try to stop you unless I come with you.'

'I don't want anyone with me Frank, I want to take care of this myself.'

'Yeah well, don't make me use my authority as Deputy Sheriff. I want to save him as much as you do and you'll definitely need a second pair of guns. Please, Christina, let me help you.'

Christina realized that he's right. She nodded and in a matter of minutes, they were on their way to the mountains."

...

"Come on Mama, get to the good part."

"Yes Mama, please tell us how she killed Darren."

"Come now, this is no way to tell a story, is it? You wouldn't appreciate the parts you like if the story only consists of them, would you?"

"Yes, we would..."

"Anyway, where was I..."

...

"The next morning arrived when they came across a river, running right across their path. They stopped to rest and gather water from it.

'How are we going to get your father when we catch up to them?'

'We'll probably need to kill every last one of them. And that's why I want to reach them at dark.'

Frank agreed.

'Do you have your knife with you? It'll come in handy.'

She looked like she thought of everything and that made Frank content; he always knew that Christina is better at everything. That would make other people angry but Frank accepted it. He respected and adored Christina. One would even say that he was in love with her.

The day went uneventful but when midnight came, Christina and Frank saw the light of Darren's camp. They stopped and carefully approached it. What they saw was unimaginable; pieces of flesh are scattered across the camp, bodies are brutally mutilated and blood was everywhere. There were several disembodied heads rolled into the bushes. The scene was too hard for Frank to handle but Christina had only one thing in her mind: 'Where was her father?'

And then, she found him. The sheriff was killed in one of the tents with a bullet to his head. He was mercifully left intact, considering the others' fate just outside. Christina was devastated, she held her father's body and brought him to her horse; she wasn't going to let his body here.

Frank stood by her, he decided that she needed some space after the scene. They started their way back to the town. But that journey got interrupted pretty quickly.

After an hour of slowly paced riding, they started hearing some animal noises.

'I think the coyotes and jackals smelled our scent.' Christina looked at Frank. Frank disagreed, 'I don't think those are coyotes or jackals; they sound... bigger.'

They unholstered their guns, ready to shoot at any moving thing. But before they could even act, something attacked Frank from his left. He inadvertently shot his gun into the air and that scared the horses. 'Frank!' she shouted but to no avail. She looked around to see what attacked Frank but the night obstructed her sight. A moment after that, she got attacked too and she was rendered unconscious.

When she woke up, she felt immediate pain on her back. She didn't know how many hours have passed but it was still the night, looming over her. 'Frank!' she shouted into the night, hoping that he was near and alive. There wasn't any answer. With immense pain, she got up and started walking. She didn't know where she was so anywhere but there was fine with her. She kept walking until the first light of the day hit her. Thankfully, her deduction of the east was correct and a couple more hours later, she found the town. 'Gretchen!' she called to her friend, hoping for a hand to help herself. 'Gretchen!', her voice was weakening. A couple of steps later, she fell and disappeared in a small dust cloud.

Thankfully her friend, Gretchen, has heard Christina's call to her. She brought Christina to her home and attended her wounds. They seemed like claw marks. When Christina woke up, Gretchen couldn't keep herself asking 'Did coyotes attack you?'

Christina didn't have an answer, she hadn't seen what attacked her. All she knew was that whatever it was, it was fast and silent. Gretchen shivered in fear, 'That's why I don't go outside after it's late'.

Christina smiled, Gretchen is still the lighthearted angel of a person she knew.

'So, did you find your father? Where is he?' Christina stopped for a second, it wasn't a good idea to tell her the whole story she thought to herself.

'I found him, but I was too late. That's when the coyotes attacked me and Fr... wait, did you see Frank?' She had forgotten him completely!

'No Christina, there was only you.'

'I have to find him.' Christina said while she was getting up to run out of the room in a hurry.

'Wait, you must rest, your wounds are... healed?' Gretchen was shocked to see that Christina's wounds, the bleeding wounds she tended while Christina was unconscious, were almost healed. Christina looked at Gretchen. 'Don't worry about me, I'll be back.' All Gretchen could do was to nod.

Christina backtracked to the camp and returned but she couldn't find any sign of Frank. After a week, she decided to return home and declare that her father, Frank and Darren had died when a pack of coyote attacked. When she entered the town she saw a commotion. This was unheard of the town as the residents of the town were generally the quiet sort. Christina approached the crowd and saw Darren, lying, bleeding on the ground with bruises similar to hers.'

'Thank God you're alive!' Darren yelled while spouting blood from his mouth. 'I thought everyone was dead.'

'What happened Darren? What attacked you at your camp?'

'I... I don't know. I couldn't see. But I could've sworn that those were no jackals or coyotes or hyenas. They were something else.'

'Did you kill my father Darren?'

'Yes, I had to kill him but not because I wanted to. He asked me to.'

'WHAT?!'

Christina started shaking in her boots. This was not the reason she was expecting.

'I'm telling the truth, I swear. When they attacked us, we could hear the screams, the flesh ripping claws that stuck into my men. Out of nowhere, he wanted me to shoot him in the head. I looked at him and saw fear, Christina. Genuine fear. It wasn't the fear of animals or dying, no; it was truly something else. I couldn't help myself and I... I...'

BANG!

The gunshot split his words with precision and the bitter smoke that's coming out of Christina's gun revealed that those were Darren's last lies.

The town wanted Christina to be the new Sheriff and she accepted the duty to honor her father and Frank. She was great at keeping the town safe and sound, she was always the smiling negotiator whenever something happened. That is until he arrived.

That day, Christina was at her office as always, sipping her coffee that's been made by her fiancée, David. A resident of the town barged into the office, asking Christina to come along with her, 'He's here! He's back!'

When Christina saw who's back, things have changed for her, forever.

He was Frank, collapsed at the town center, paper white and barely alive. Strangely, he had no apparent wounds. The townsfolk took him to the infirmary and of course, Christina was there.

Frank opened his eyes two days later. Nurse Gretchen immediately informed Sheriff Christina about it. When she arrived, Frank seemed, unsettled.

'You're... oh my god.' Frank helplessly muttered. 'Please let me go, I can't stay here.' he told Christina.

'You were almost dead; there's no way we're letting you out of our sight Frank. Also, you have to explain where you've been for the past couple of years. We thought you were dead.'

'You don't understand. I came here thinking that I could hide but... it doesn't matter now. You have to let me go otherwise you'll be all dead.'

'Alright, everybody out.' Christina told others, 'I want to talk to him alone.'

Everyone left the room to Christina and Frank.

'Now, you're going to tell me what the hell's going on Frank. You can't just show up in a near death state and leave us in a couple of days.'

'Days? Oh my god, how many days have passed?'

'Two. You were unconscious the whole time'

'Christina, please, trust me on this. I'll only bring devastation if I stay.'

'Then why did you come here at all?'

'Because I thought you were dead.'

The room went silent. One could tell that Christina is stunned in her shoes, couldn't move, couldn't breathe, thinking all of the possibilities of what Frank had just said.

'What do you mean, you thought I was dead?' Christina silently asked with a shivered voice.

'When we were attacked that night, I lost you. I was taken by the creatures that attacked us. They fed me, let me live. But you weren't around so I assumed that you're... I've already said too much. Release me Christina so I can... be on... my way.'

Frank started crying in front of Christina. She had never seen him troubled, let alone crying. Frank was always the male version of Gretchen, always smiling and optimistic. Now, he was inches away from her, crying in despair.

Christina turned away, holding her thoughts and tears together. 'You'll be released whenever you want.' That's all she could've said.

After that night, no one saw Frank again. Though some say Christina have found him later. But that story is for another time. Now, you should get some sleep."

"Okay, Mama. Thanks for the story."

"Thank you, Mama. Good night."

"Good night pumpkins. Sweet dreams."