

# Sheriff Grizzly & the Coyote Colt Kid

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SHERIFF GRIZZLY

BOOK 3:

SHERIFF GRIZZLY AND THE COYOTE COLT KID

Adam Carter

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CHAPTER ONE

“Thank you kindly, please come again.”

Emerald Heist felt a strange swell of pride whenever people handed her their hard-earned wages. There was not a great deal of money to be made in Grizzleton, for folk in such a small town did not much care for becoming rich. Life in Grizzleton was all about the community, about finding one’s place and making the best possible life from it. In the frontier west, with nothing but desert

surrounding them for miles, money just seemed a little pointless.

Still, she took the bag of coins she had been given and set it to one side. Once she had enough she would see about putting it away in the safe. The bank itself was not large, but then it did not need to be considering Grizzleton had a population of only thirty-six. It consisted of a small room in which could stand half a dozen people or so, with a booth where Heist herself stood, separated from the main room by a waist-high counter and a couple of horizontal wooden bars to deter anyone from reaching over and grabbing her. Behind Heist was the door leading to the vault room.

With no other activity in the bank, Heist decided to deposit the coins she had just been given. It was only a small amount, but it was a lot to the man who had passed it to her and it was her responsibility to keep it safe. Opening the door behind her, Heist walked into the back room and confronted the vault. The round metal door was massive, larger than the tall Emerald Heist, and it was with a thumping heart that she punched in the correct codes. As the bolts clicked, she turned the giant lever and pulled the great door open. The vault never failed to amaze her, for it was not only huge inside, but its door was heavier than a wet bison.

Just as she was about to put the coins inside, she heard the tinkle of the bell above the main door. Dropping the small bag inside the vault, she left the great door open, for closing it was not a quick process, and she would likely be needing to open it again in a few minutes anyway.

Heading back to her desk, she adopted her most welcoming smile. The woman entering the bank was not only unfamiliar, but was also funny-looking. Whoever she was, she was certainly not one of the thirty-six people who called Grizzleton home. The woman was wearing brown leather trousers stained and blasted by the desert winds, with slick boots which clung to her legs all the way up to her knees. Her shirt was pale, with torn strips hanging from her waist like tassels, over which she wore an old leather jacket with far too many holes. She wore a big hat with such a wide brim it was as though she was intending to hire herself out as a sunshade.

She also had the head of a coyote, but Heist was not rude enough to stare.

"Can Ah help you, miss?" Heist asked, trying to remain polite.

The stranger glanced about the place, the disdain evident in her face. "Sign out front says this here's a bank. Bit small for a bank, though."

"It's all we here in Grizzleton need."

"Well if this is a bank, this here's a hold-up!"

The stranger yanked two pistols from her belt and opened fire recklessly, her bullets tearing through the wooden booth, shredding the meagre protection in seconds. With a maniacal whoop, the coyote-headed woman spread her arms so her shots ripped through the walls, the ceiling, everything she could see.

The only thing which saved Heist's life was her experience with gunfights. Even before the strange woman's hands were reaching for her guns, Heist was already moving, leaping for the back room. As such, she watched as her booth was shredded, but as the crazy woman turned her guns on the upholstery Heist was able to clamber into the back room.

Looking round in a panic, Heist realised she had left all her guns in the booth. All she had on her person was a letter opener, but that was property of the bank and she could not sully it with

the blood of outlaws. Leaping behind the giant metal vault door for cover, Heist crouched and waited for the coyote woman to show her face.

Heist's eyes widened as everything fell together rather badly in her mind. The coyote woman was there to rob the bank, that was what she had said, and here was Heist doing her civic duty to protect the money in the vault; but she still had yet to shut the dang door. If the coyote woman got the best of her, she could just waltz off with the money. Or she could just walk out with it like a normal person; waltzing while carrying sacks of gold would have been a bit weird, even for a woman with the head of a coyote.

She struggled with her dilemma for only a few moments. Heist had been charged with safeguarding that money, and her life was secondary. Abandoning her cover, she pushed hard at the vault door and slowly it began to close.

"What you doin' back here, bank teller?" the stranger asked, finally having grown bored of shooting up the bank, or perhaps she had only just realised Heist was no longer with her. "Say, that door looks mighty heavy. What say I give you a hand with that?"

"Thank you kindly."

"Or I could jus' shoot you down and steal the money."

"Well, while you have a think about that, Ah'll just get this here door closed."

The stranger levelled her pistol and smiled. The gun clicked in anticipation of being fired. "I want you to tell folk that you was robbed by the Coyote Colt Kid. Now, afore I put a bullet between your eyes, do you have any final words?"

"You want me to tell folk who you are, after you kill me?"

The Coyote Colt Kid frowned, thinking that through. She looked up, as though debating something, ran some numbers through her head, then swore loudly. "Dang, I knowed I was doin' something wrong. No wonder no one recognises my name. You know how many banks I've robbed and no one's ever picked up on that before? And don't think I don't see you still pushing against that door."

"Force of habit. Well, thanks for dropping by. Ah'll be sure ta tell everyone at how mah bank was almost robbed by the fearsome Coyote Colt Kid."

"Thank you, much obliged." The Coyote tipped her hat and turned to leave. Then she stopped, her gun coming back around. "Dang tootin', you almost had me there."

"Oh well. Seriously, could you give me a hand with this door? It's really stuck today."

"Step away from the door, devious bank teller, so's I can shoot you in the legs. Don't need no legs to spread the story of the Coyote Colt Kid."

"Tempting offer. Let me think on it."

"Take ye time. You done yet?"

"No."

"Yer the most infuriating bank teller I ever shot up."

"Ah'm done thinkin'."

"And?"

"Ah decided Ah don't want you shootin' up mah legs none."

"Dang again. Wait, should I be offerin' you a choice?"

While the Coyote worked through her insecurities, Heist took action. She had no weapon, but Heist had never needed a firearm to deal with hoodlums. Tearing something from her lapel, she tossed it at the bandit and the flat metal object span quickly through the air like a shuriken. It struck the Coyote's gun and the outlaw cried in alarm as the weapon fell from her hand. Seizing the opportunity, Heist leaped for her, grabbed her wrists and shoved her into the wall. If her angle of attack had been better she would have been able to push her into the vault, which would have made for a handy cell. The Coyote reacted too quickly for Heist to do much of anything, however, and brought up her knee so savagely into Heist's gut that she was doubled over.

Shaking her stinging hand, the Coyote levelled her other pistol and fired. The bullet pinged off the floor, for Heist was already rolling. Grabbing up the fallen gun, Heist took cover behind the open vault door and fired off a shot without taking the time to aim. Stopping the Coyote was still her end-game, but her priority was staying alive.

The Coyote Cold Kid released a spray of bullets against the inside of the door, but Heist could feel the anger of the attack and knew the other woman was not aiming either.

"Boss, what's taking so long?" someone asked and Heist wished she could afford to poke her head around the door to see what the Coyote's gang looked like.

"Vault door's open," the Coyote said, "and I'm not leavin' until we've emptied it."

"Emptied the door, boss?"

"The vault, you eejit."

Heist checked the number of bullets she had left and wished she hadn't. She fired one off around the corner and narrowly avoided having her head blown off.

"Dang," Coyote's man said. "The door's shootin' back, boss. It don't want to be emptied, that door."

"Oh for ..."

"What's this, boss?"

Heist sat with her back pressed to the door and knew the Coyote's underling had found the thing she had spun at his boss's hand.

"It's a star," the Coyote said. "This bank teller's the law."

"The law! Boss, we got to split. This is a set-up."

“Out, go!”

Heist heard the scramble of their boots as they fled. It could have been a deception, but she was willing to risk it. Throwing herself into view, she fired off further shots from her pistol, but the outlaws were already back through the door and into the main area of the bank. Heist gave chase, but as she emerged into her bank she froze, her eyes welling with tears. The entire place had been shot up, the bullets having torn apart the wood as though the bank had been attacked by a swarm of termites. Broken glass littered the ground, the floorboards themselves were broken, with massive areas caved in from all the destruction.

Heist had worked hard to build the bank to the respectable level she had achieved, and now it was all gone. Gone in five minutes because some out-of-town bank robber had ridden through on a whim.

Through the broken door, hanging loosely by its hinges, she could see a group half a dozen strong. They were mounting their horses, firing pistols in the air and causing a lot of noise. Heist walked outside to them, her mind too dazed to allow her to return fire. The Coyote met her eyes as she took the reins of her horse, smiling like a fox in a chicken coop.

“Another time, banker. Arooooo!” Coyote called. Her horse reared and Coyote waved her hat in the air, shouting for her gang to ride. Heist watched them go, her brain finally kicking in and telling her she should be shooting them. Raising the pistol, she stopped herself from firing; they had already gone out of range and she did not want to hit any civilians.

A cloud of dust settled upon the town as folk began to appear on the streets, flustered but safe now the danger had passed. Heist felt something crunch beneath her foot and looked down. Her star, dropped by the outlaw during the escape, stared up at her with raised eyebrows. Emerald Heist was a deputy sheriff of Grizzleton and she had failed to save the bank.

Outlaws had come to Grizzleton and the law had been powerless to do a thing about it.

## CHAPTER TWO

“At least you saved the gold.”

Heist looked at the sheriff and wanted to scream. She had not been injured during the attack, but the sheriff insisted Doc Tinkly look her over. As such, Heist was sitting in the small area which passed for the town’s infirmary. There was little to it save a single bed, a desk and a wall filled with charts Heist could not understand. Doc Tinkly was there, of course, and had found nothing wrong with her patient, at least physically. She was now shining a light into Heist’s eyes and the deputy sheriff felt like shoving a lantern up her backside to see how she liked it.

"Yeah, Em," Doc Tinkly said jovially, "at least you saved the gold."

Heist batted her away with her arm, a little less savagely than she would have liked; after all, no one could ever really want to cause harm to young Doc Tinkly. "Ah'm a deputy sheriff, it's my job to protect this town and now, thanks to me, we no longer have a bank."

"To be fair," the sheriff said, "it's more thanks to that woman who shot it up."

Heist knew he wasn't patronising her, but she had never been one to feel failure should ever be met with good will. She may have saved the money, but in losing the bank she had let everyone down. It was all she could do just to look the sheriff in the eye. She had not known how he was going to react, and she almost wished he would in fact explode at her. At least then she would be on familiar ground.

The sheriff held something out in his paw and Heist turned away. That he was fully prepared to hand her back her star only showed how decent a person he was, but Heist was not sure she deserved it yet.

"Ah need to bring this woman in," she said. "Only then will Ah be worthy a that badge, Sheriff."

"Pish," the sheriff said. "None a that talk, Heist. I need you focused on this one, so stop being so snively."

It was rare that Heist was spoken to in such a manner, and few would get away with it. But the sheriff was always right and this instance was no different. Sheriff Grizzly – real name Bear – was a fellow who inspired Heist to do her best. There were few she could have said such about, but Bear was a rare gem. At four foot five, he was short in stature but big of heart. He was wearing the black cowhide boots he always did, his spurs scraping the floorboards. He wore neither trows nor shirt, with a black jacket hanging open, a red neckerchief tied loosely about his throat. The black Stetson he wore upon his head was attached to a thin leather strap which ran under his chin. The silver sheriff's star pinned to his jacket marked him as the law, while a silver streak running through his coat lent him a distinguished air.

The sheriff was also covered with coarse dark fur, had four large pad-like paws and a long snout. His eyes were small, his nose wet and his teeth best suited for tearing salmon from waterfalls.

When Heist had first met him she had mistaken him for a grizzly bear in a sheriff's outfit, but ever since she had made her home in Grizzleton she had no idea why she had ever thought that way.

"Ah'm going after that outlaw," Heist told the sheriff. "She may not have got away with the gold, but she sure took mah pride."

"You leave the Coyote Colt Kid to me," Bear said. "I've heard the name, have it on a wanted poster somewhere around. She may not be in Grizzleton any longer, but if she took us by surprise she'll take the next town the same way. Problem with outlaws is that folk tend to forget about them once they're gone. Someone needs to take a stand and chase the varmints."

"Then we'll track her together."

"Nothin' doin'. You're too close to this one, Deputy. I'll get Rake and the two of us'll ride on out

and ...”

“Rake? Deputy Rake? But, Bear, Rake’s a useless waste of space if ever Ah did see one. Ow!”

“Sorry,” Doc Tinkly said darkly as she put her needle away. “Slipped.”

Heist wondered what she was even doing with the needle, considering the attack on the bank had not left her with the need for stitches. However, there were more important matters to attend to. “Bear, Ah need to do this.”

“You need to stay clear of it,” Bear told her. “I’ll get Rake talkin’ to people, see whether we can ascertain any useful information. Get an idea of numbers, any inkling as to where the outlaws are holed up, or where they’re headed next. Meantime, I’ll look into how a coyote can walk and talk like a regular person. Animals don’t just walk into a bank and shoot the place up without reason.”

“I’ll help with that,” Tinkly said. “My medical knowledge might come in handy.”

“Much obliged, Doc.”

Heist followed the exchange with exasperation. What Bear said was true – animals did not walk around doing much of anything that regular human folk did – but she could not see how Doc Tinkly’s medical knowledge would be of any use for something without any precedent.

“Bear, you can’t cut me out a this one. They shot up mah bank and Ah ...”

“You’ll do what’s best for the people of Grizzleton,” Bear growled. It was seldom Bear lost his temper, but he was on the verge of doing so now. Heist knew better than to push him, but to surrender this was hardly something she was going to accept.

“Just promise me,” she said, “you won’t ride off to face the Coyote without me.”

“I’ll promise nothing, Heist. With the Coyote’s posse so close to town it would be foolish of me to leave Grizzleton undefended. Unless you’d prefer I leave the whole town in the custody of Deputy Rake?”

Heist shuddered at the very thought. She opened her mouth to protest and Tinkly shoved in a thermometer.

“Finish up with Doc,” Bear said. “I’ll go tell Rake to get started on the investigation.”

Heist said nothing more as the sheriff departed. She sat seething and bit down hard on the thermometer. There was so much heat surging through her that she would not have been surprised should the thing have exploded.

“This isn’t fair,” she said to herself. Since Doc Tinkly was there, she even got an answer.

“Bear’s right,” Tinkly said. “Bear’s always right. And you shouldn’t be so mean to Deputy Rake. He tries his best.”

“Sure he tries his best, but when faced with the Coyote’s crew he’ll run away and hide under a rock.” She looked directly at Doc Tinkly, who lowered her eyes, knowing it was true. Tinkly was young, eighteen Heist believed, five foot five, with short dark hair and an oddly contagious

enthusiasm. Her youthful face was freckled, lending her a look of innocence which did not define her character. Heist had never known what to make of Doc Tinkly, for on the one hand she was a sweet, polite girl, while in some ways she was the most mature person in the entire town. Certainly she knew how to get folk to like her, which was always the first step to achieving one's aims.

"Trust Bear to know what he's doing," Tinkly advised as she put away her medical instruments. "He's held this town together for too long for us to question him now."

Heist found she could not disagree, which meant Tinkly's charm was working on her as well. "Ah do trust him," Heist said. "It'd just be nice if he trusted me."

"Sure Bear trusts you, Deputy."

"Then why's he giving the assignment to Rake?"

To this Tinkly had no direct answer, for there was no sense in voicing the truth. "Deputy Rake's been here longer than you," Tinkly reminded her. "Maybe Bear just thinks he works better with him. Would you like to lie down some?"

"No Ah wouldn't like to lie down some."

"Well, since you're already sitting on the bed I figured you might as well lie ..."

"Ah don't want to lie down on your medical bed, Doc. Ah got work to do. Ah screwed up, Doc, and Bear can't forgive that. No, Ah'm going ta have ta make amends for what Ah've done. That's all there is to it."

"You do anything stupid and Bear's going ta be furious, Deputy."

"An' if Ah don't do anything at all, Ah don't get to hold mah head up high again, Doc. Uh, what're you doing?"

"Me? Oh, nothing." Tinkly quickly pulled away the tape measure she had been holding against her shoulders. The population of Grizzleton was thirty-six, so folk had to double up on jobs, which was why Heist ran the local bank (although who had run the bank before Heist had come along, she had no idea). As such, Tinkly was not only the doctor, but a mechanic and the principal undertaker. Heist, therefore, knew precisely what the girl was doing.

"Well stop it," Heist said, "even if it is nothing."

Tinkly smiled sheepishly and pretended to busy herself with something else.

Rising, Heist determined she would prove her worth to Bear, would show them all she was better than Deputy Rake, while at the same time regain her own honour. Sure she might enrage Bear in the process, but that was a risk worth taking. As she stepped away from the bed she saw there were tiny black lines on the side. Peering closer, she could see they marked off the inches.

Frowning, Heist remembered Doc had asked her to lie on the bed, and she realised what she had been doing.

"Sorry, Deputy," Tinkly said, "but I'm the undertaker, remember. When someone courts death, it's best I get their measurements ready."

Without another word, Heist stormed out of the infirmary. It seemed no one in Grizzleton had any faith in her. Well, she would prove them all wrong, and in the process she would take down the Coyote Colt Kid.

It was time for Emerald Heist to show them all she was far more than just a failed bank clerk.

### CHAPTER THREE

“Well, thank you for your time. Have a nice day.”

Deputy Phineas Rake was a thin, wiry man of eighteen years. At one time he had been a pickpocket, but Bear had taken him under his wing and had given him a chance at responsibility. Since that day Rake had vowed to never let Bear down, unless someone pulled a gun, at which point he would run as fast as he possibly could.

Right now he was talking to the townsfolk of Grizzleton. After the bank had been shot up, Bear had asked him to find out whether anyone had seen anything useful, but so far things were not going well. He had spoken to a dozen people now and had compiled a dozen different stories. If he believed all of them, the outlaw band had been formed of six outlaws, but also three dozen; their leader was a coyote, but also a mountain lion; they destroyed the bank and stole the church; and they were on a mission to locate the Holy Grail.

Rake was having trouble figuring out what to believe, although would have rather liked to be able to find the Holy Grail. He had no idea what a grail was, but if it was holy then it sounded important.

“Getting anywhere yet?”

Rake was decidedly uncomfortable. His fellow deputy, Emerald Heist, had been following him around as he spoke with everyone. She had not interfered with his investigation, nor had she offered him any help. She had simply stood there, leaning against walls, arms folded. She had also glowered a lot, which was not unusual for Heist. She was a glowery sort of woman and Rake would admit that she sometimes scared him, if by sometimes one meant every time they were in the same room, and often when they were not.

“Everyone knows everythin’,” Rake said, “which makes me think no one knows nothin’.”

“Want me to take over the investigation? All ya got to do is tell Bear ya can’t handle it.”

“I can handle it. I just don’t know what I’m trying to accomplish here. I mean, who cares what people saw? The outlaws came in, attacked the bank and rode off. That’s what happened, and

talkin' to folk about it won't change that."

"You don't know much about investigations do ya, Rake?"

"Excuse me, we can't all be bounty hunters."

Heist glowered at him again, which was something Rake should have been used to. The truth was Heist had indeed been a bounty hunter, right up until the point she had decided to settle in Grizzleton. Bear had taken her in, even after she had been hired to kill him. So far as Rake was concerned, that showed a distinct lack of common sense, but it was seldom Bear was wrong about people.

"Who's next on our list?" Heist asked sourly.

"Uh ... Pete Drunkenbum."

"Good Lord, what do we care what he has to say?"

"Because apparently he saw something."

"Guy sees pink fairies dancing at the bottom of his whisky bottle. You're goin' ta trust anything that man has to say?"

"I didn't say I was going to trust him, but talking never hurt no one, Heist."

She grunted, which was a habit she had picked up from Bear. Rake did not much care what she thought about things. Bear had given him the assignment and he would complete it as he saw fit.

Drunkenbum did not prove difficult to find. Rake went to the bank, which was falling apart after the outlaws' visit, and found the man sleeping amidst the destruction. He had made something of a comfortable den for himself and had pulled a broken floorboard over him for lack of a sheet. Drunkenbum was a filthy man with a bad odour. Rake did not know how old he was, but figured the man's sorry state added an extra decade or two to him. He had a wild beard covering a pockmarked face, and Rake had always felt a little sorry for him. There were those who dismissed Drunkenbum as a nuisance who deserved to live in the gutter, but the truth was Grizzleton didn't have good enough drainage to actually have gutters, so it was depressing to think he could not even find his place there.

"Hey, Pete," Rake said. The man did not stir, might well have been dead if the stink rising from him was anything to go by. "Uh, Pete? Can you hear me?" \*

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His town: Grizzleton. His name: Bear. His secret: He's a grizzly bear wearing a sheriff's uniform &#x2026; but doesn't realise.

Deputy Heist's bank is robbed by the half-woman, half-beast calling herself Coyote Colt Kid. Riding out for revenge, things turn sour when Heist is quickly captured, giving the outlaw and her gang the idea of returning to Grizzleton to finish what they began.

Meanwhile, Bear is trying to work out just what this new menace is. A creation of the Devil? A genetic wartime experiment? An acolyte of ancient deities? Bear's only clue comes from the Coyote's former lover, Father Yarek. Whatever the answer, the two ride out to find the Coyote, intending to put a stop to her crime spree.

What they find is their own deputy robbing the bank she's supposed to be protecting.

Also, there are a lot of railroad workers throughout the story, laying tracks and getting in the way. If you like trains, there are a couple of trains; and a cat.

Bonus story: Sheriff Grizzly & the Snakebite Bandits, which contains scenes of cactus mutilation.

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