



**HELD
BY A
STRANGER**

**WRITTEN BY
DAN BARKER**

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Written By: Dan Barker

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2020 REMASTERED EDITION

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INTRODUCTION

Every town in the west had heard about 'No-Miss' Joe. This guy had never, ever missed a shot, never lost a shoot-out. Some would say, he was the greatest bounty hunter in the world. He even helped stop the Diamond Brothers from robbing the famed Pierce family crest.

Though, that was all so long ago now. Joe had retired and decided to settle down, enjoy his life, he wasn't getting any younger. In fact, he hadn't fired a gun in four years.

This is where we meet him.

‘No-Miss’ Joe was his name. An older gentleman about fifty-four years old but still a tough man.

The train pulled up to the empty, dusty, wooden train station – or platform more like. There was no ticket guy or anything like that, just old timber decking. Joe stepped on to the decaying wood, the white paint peeling from it like shed skin of a Texas Rattlesnake. He had just moved from a little no-where town called Sleeping Hills – it sat on, you guessed it, two hills. Joe had been born and raised there but it was time for a change. Leaving the platform, he noticed a sign squeaking in the arid desert wind, “Southwind Town”.

He had heard so much about it, anyone and everyone knew it was the place to be. Joe continued on towards the centre of the small town. He could hear a local bar, it was a bit rowdy for twelve o'clock in the afternoon, but it sounded like a good time, he needed to get to know the people of this town, right?

Joe came bursting through the saloon doors and the music suddenly stopped, the scrawny piano player in the flat-cap stopped playing the up-tempo honky-tonk Boogie Woogie music and everyone in the bar just sat in silence staring. He continued towards the bar, all this was strange but he still wanted a drink, he had just got off from a four-hour train ride.

“Jack on the rocks.” Joe ordered, but the round and butch barmaid just stood glaring at him. Joe should have been worried, you could’ve cut the tension in the musky air with a knife, but he wasn’t, he sighed slumping into a bar stool, he was ‘No-Miss’ Joe, after all.

Suddenly, a huge, fat, dark-haired man came up behind Joe. Casting a dark shadow over him.

“Y’know, this town may seem welcoming, but we don’t take too kindly to strangers ‘round here. What’s your business here, partner?” Interrogated the fat man.

“I’m rentin’ a room from Ms Rose over by the Blacksmiths, will that be a problem, partner?” Joe challenged sarcastically.

“You askin’ for a problem?”

“Not unless you want one, sir.”

“If you’re challenging me, ‘Bone-Crunching’ Thompson, you best be mighty brave, son.”

“Brave, I am.” Declared Joe, confident he could win the shoot-out.

The two men walked out of the bar and on to the old, dirt road. locals rushed to watch the shoot-out, noses pressed against the bubbled and uneven glass of their windows.

The two men stood back to back. The shadow of ‘Bone-Crunching’ Thompson’s enormous body loomed over Joe like a dark thundercloud on a sunny day. The men took ten steps forward at exactly the same pace. Each step on the dry, hot dirt echoed against the hollow wooden buildings, the paint peeling and curling from the western heat.

They hadn’t had a stranger in town for a while and for good reason. The ten steps were up, the men turned. Now facing each other, they just stood there, fixed on each other’s eyes like a lion and a gazelle. *But who was the lion and who was the fated gazelle?* ‘Bone-Crunching’ Thompson’s shadow just looming over Joe, they stood frozen as the breeze and dust flew through the whistling air, the only sound in an otherwise still afternoon.

“Draw!” The barmaid yelled.

The two men quickly drew their guns. ‘Bone-Crunching’ Thompson was much bigger but ‘No-Miss’ Joe had done this before. Their shots rang out. The blood seeped into Joes clothes, staining his white shirt. He had been shot. With a pained sigh Joe crumpled to the floor.

Joe laid there, the blood seeping from his wound, drenching the desert ground. He missed, for the first time in his life and it cost him.

‘One-Miss’ Joe laid on the dry, dirt ground of Southwind Town, lifeless as his body slowly shut down, held by a stranger.

THE END

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dan Barker was born in Nottingham, England in 1999. Dan has always been imaginative and creative but it wasn't until he discovered writing that he was able to actually create the worlds and characters he wanted. Dan started as a screenwriter and still remains, though writing stories and books are his main focus right now. Dan writes many short stories and books a year with the help of his editor and partner, Somalia Carty. Dan will share many more stories and characters with you through the months and years ahead, but for now, you've just had your first glimpse of what's to come.

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