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# The Shepherd Of The Hills

CHAPTER XXV.

They had found the officers ready to leave with their prisoners. All but two of the men were captured with their bodies—Wash Gibbs alone escaping badly hurt, they thought, after killing one of the posse.

When they had asked for Sammy, one of the officers told them that she was at Ford's over on Jake Creek, but another declared that he had heard a woman scream as they were making the attack. Young Matt had found her unconscious on the ground behind the cabin.

When the shepherd finished his brief account, the girl said, "Tell me all, Dad. I want to know all. Did they take Daddy away?"

"No, dear girl; they did not take him away." Then Sammy knew why Dad had scrubbed the cabin floor, and what the three men who talked so low had been doing in the other room.

She made no outcry, only a moan, as she looked away across the silent hills and the valley, where the mists were lifting slowly. "Oh, Daddy Jim, you sure kept your promise. I'm glad—glad they didn't get you, Daddy. They never would have believed what I know; never—never."

But there were no tears, and the shepherd, seeing after a little, touched her hand. "Everything is ready; would you like to go now?"

"Not just yet, Dad. I must tell you first how I came to be at home, and why I am glad—oh, so glad, that I was here. But call the others, please; I want them all to know. When the three, who with her teacher who loved her best, had come, Sammy told her story, repeating almost word for word what she had heard her father say to the men. When she had finished, she turned her face again to the open window. The mists were gone. The landscape lay bright in the sun. But Sammy could not see.

"It is much better, so much better, as it is, my child," said the old scholar. "You see, dear, they would have taken him away. Nothing could

stantly by her side. "It is easier, Dad, when you are near." Nor would she leave the house until it was all over, save to walk a little way with her teacher.

Young Matt and his father made the coffin of rough boards sawed at the mill; and from the country round about, the woods-people came to the funeral, or, as they called it in their simple way, the "burin". The grave was made in a little glen not far from the house. When some of the neighbors would have brought a minister from the settlement, Sammy said: "No, Dad would say all that was necessary." So the shepherd, standing under the big trees, talked a little in his simple, kindly way, and spoke the words, "Earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes." "As good," declared some, "as any preacher could o' done it"; though one or two held "it wasn't just right to put a body in th' ground 'thout a regular parson t' preach th' sermon."

When the last word was spoken, and the neighbors had gone away over the mountains and through the woods to their homes, Aunt Mollie, with her motherly arm about the girl, said, "Come, honey, you're our girl now. As long as you stay in the hills, you shall stay with us!" And Old Matt added, "You're the only daughter we've got, Sammy; and we want you a heap worse than you know."

"When Sammy told them that she was not going to the city to live, and his voice and manner alarmed Dad. But the boy's only answer to Mr. Howitt's question was, "Pete knows; Pete knows." Then in his own way he told something that sent the shepherd to Young Matt, and the two followed the lad to a spot where the buzzards were flying low through the trees.

By the shreds of clothing and the weapons lying near, they knew that the horrid thing, from which, as they approached, carrion birds flapped their wings in heavy flight, was all that remained of the giant, Wash Gibbs.

Many facts were brought out at the trial of the outlaws, and it was made clear that Jim Lane had met his death at the hands of Wash Gibbs just at the beginning of the attack, and that Wash Gibbs had been wounded at a moment later by one of the attacking posse.

Thus does justice live even in the hills.



Lane cabin, Pete was not seen. When at last he did appear, it was to the shepherd on the hill, and his voice and manner alarmed Dad. But the boy's only answer to Mr. Howitt's question was, "Pete knows; Pete knows." Then in his own way he told something that sent the shepherd to Young Matt, and the two followed the lad to a spot where the buzzards were flying low through the trees.

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Mr. Matthews and his son first heard of the stranger through Lou Gordon, the mail carrier, who stopped at the mill on his way to Flag with the week's mail.

"Talkin' about new fangled things, men! I seen the queerest sight last night that ever was in these woods. I reckon. It was a plumb wonder! Kicking one foot from the stirrup and hitching sideways in the saddle, he prepared for an effort.

"Little feller, he is. Ain't as tall as Preachin' Bill even, an' fat. An' he's got the prettiest old face; all red an' white, and round's a walnut; an' a fringe of the whitest hair you ever seen. An' clothes, say, men! There ain't been any such a sight within a thousand miles of these here hills ever. An' doin's! My Lord!"

The thin form of the native doubled up as he broke into a laugh that echoed and re-echoed thru the little valley, ending in a wild "Who-o-pee. Say! When he got out of the hack last night at the Forks, Uncle Ike he caught sight of him and says, says he t' me, "Ba thundas! Lou, looky there! Talk about prosperity. There's of jest at the whitest hair you ever see in th' summer time. Ba thundas! What! "What's he doing here?" asked Mr. Matthews.

Lou shook his head. "Blamed if I kin tell."

The mail carrier laughed heartily again. "Well, I must mosey along. He warn't up this mornin' when I left. Reckon he'll show up round here some time 'fore sundown."

Late that afternoon Lou's prophecy was fulfilled. A wagon going down the creek with a load of supplies for the distillery stopped at the mill shed and the stranger began climbing carefully down over the wheels. Budd Wilson on the high seat winked and nodded at Mr. Matthews and his son, as though it was the greatest joke of the season.

"Hold those horses, driver. Hold them tight; tight, sir."

"Got 'em, Mister," responded Budd promptly. The mules stood with drooping heads and sleepy eyes, the lines under their feet.

The gentleman was feeling carefully about the hub of the wheel with a foot that, stretch as he might, could not touch it by a good six inches. "That's right, man, right," he purred. "Hold them tight; tight. Start now, break a leg sure, sure. Then what would Sarah and the girls do? Bring a ladder. Bring a step. Look out, I say, look out! What on earth do you mean? This last was called forth by Young Matt lifting the little man bodily to the ground as an ordinary man would lift a child.

To look at the young giant, the

stranger tipped back his head, until his shining silk hat was in danger of falling in the dirt. "Bless my soul, what a specimen! What a specimen! Which one of the boys are you, anyway?"

"That's him, Doc," called the driver. "That's the feller what wallered Wash Gibbs like I was tellin' ye. Strongest man in the hills, he is."

"Doc," muttered the stranger. "My word! I wonder what Sarah and the girls would say?" He waddled to the wagon, and reached up one fat hand with a half-dollar to Budd. "Here driver, here. Get cigars with that; cigars, mind you, or candy. I stay here. Mind you don't get anyting to drink, nothing to drink, I say."

As he watched the wagon down the hill, the stranger mused. "Doc—Doc—huh. Quite sure that fellow will buy a drink; quite sure."

When the wagon had disappeared, he turned to Mr. Matthews and his son. "According to that fellow, I am not far from a sheep ranch kept by a Mr. Howitt. That's it, Mr. Daniel Howitt; fine-looking man, fine; brown eyes; great voice; gentleman, sir, gentleman, if he is keeping sheep in this wilderness. Just like him, just like him; always keeping somebody's sheep; born to be a shepherd; born to be. Know him?"

Young Matt answered, "Yes sir. We know Dad Howitt. Is he a friend of yours?"

"Friend of mine? Young man Daniel and David, I am David; Daniel and David lay on the same blanket when they were babies; played in the same alley; school together; same class; collected together; next-door neighbors. Know him! Where is this sheep place?"

"It ain't so far from here, sir. The ranch belongs to me and my son. But Mr. Howitt will be out on the hills somewhere with the sheep now. You'd better go home with us and have supper, and the boy will take you down this evening."

"Well now, that's kind, sir; very kind, indeed. Man at the post office is a savior, sir; old incorrigible savior. My Name is Coughlan; Dr. David Coughlan of Chicago; practicing physician for forty years; don't do anything now; not much, that is, Sarah and the girls won't let me. Your name, sir?"

"Grant Matthews. My boy here has the same name. We're mighty glad to meet any friend of Dad's, I can tell you. He's sure been a blessing to this neighborhood."

Soon they started homeward. When Old Matt had told how Mr. Howitt had educated Sammy, buying her books himself from his meagre wages, the doctor interrupted in his quick way, "Just like him! Just like him. Always giving away everything he earned. Proud, though, proud as Lucifer. Fine old family; finest in the country, sir. Right to be proud, right to be."

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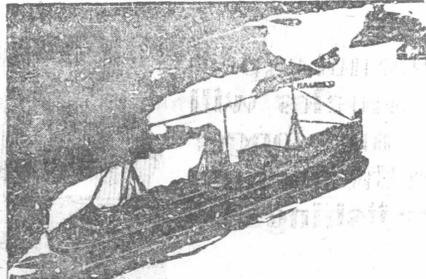
"You ought to hear how he talks to host, with merriment he could not us when we have meetin's at the Cove school house. He's as good as any preacher you ever heard; except that he don't put on as much, maybe. Why, sir, when we buried Jim Lane last week, everybody 'lowed he done as well as a regular parson."

At this Dr. Coughlan stopped short and leaned against a convenient tree for support, looking up at his big

(To be continued)

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