

LITTLE GUZZY
AND OTHER STORIES

By
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Little Guzzly

AND OTHER STORIES



THE CAPTAIN BURST INTO A LAUGH, WHICH MADE THE MINISTER'S
CHANDELIERS RATTLE.

To FRANK LESLIE,

Who, while other publishers were advising the writer of these sketches to write, supplied the author with encouragement in the shape of a publishing medium and the lucre which all literary men despise but long for, this volume is respectfully dedicated by

THE AUTHOR.

THE SCHOOLTEACHER AT BOTTLE FLAT.

IT certainly *was* hard. What was the freedom of a country in which the voice of the original founders was spent in vain? Had not they, the “Forty” miners of Bottle Flat, really started the place? Hadn’t they located claims there? Hadn’t they contributed three ounces each, ostensibly to set up in business a brother miner who unfortunately lost an arm, but really that a saloon might be opened, and the genuineness and stability of the camp be assured? Hadn’t they promptly killed or scared away every Chinaman who had ever trailed his celestial pig-tail into the Flat? Hadn’t they cut and beaten a trail to Placerville, so that miners could take a run to that city when the Flat became too quiet? Hadn’t they framed the squarest betting code in the whole diggings? And when a ’Frisco man basely attempted to break up the camp by starting a gorgeous saloon a few miles up the creek, hadn’t they gone up in a body and cleared him out, giving him only ten minutes in which to leave the creek for ever? All this they had done, actuated only by a stern sense of duty, and in the patient anticipation of the reward which traditionally crowns virtuous action. But now—oh, ingratitude of republics!—a schoolteacher was to be forced upon Bottle Flat in spite of all the protest which they, the oldest inhabitants, had made!

Such had been their plaint for days, but the sad excitement had not been productive of any fights, for the few married men in the camp prudently absented themselves at night from “The Nugget” saloon, where the matter was fiercely discussed every evening. There was,

therefore, such an utter absence of diversity of opinion, that the most quarrelsome searched in vain for provocation.

On the afternoon of the day on which the opening events of this story occurred, the boys, by agreement, stopped work two hours earlier than usual, for the stage usually reached Bottle Flat about two hours before sundown, and the one of that day was to bring the hated teacher. The boys had wellnigh given up the idea of further resistance, yet curiosity has a small place even in manly bosoms, and they could at least *look* hatred at the detested pedagogue. So about four o'clock they gathered at The Nugget so suddenly, that several fathers, who were calmly drinking inside, had barely time to escape through the back windows.

The boys drank several times before composing themselves into their accustomed seats and leaning-places; but it was afterward asserted, and Southpaw—the one-armed barkeeper—cited as evidence, that none of them took sugar in their liquor. They subjected their sorrow to homeopathic treatment by drinking only the most raw and rasping fluids that the bar afforded.

The preliminary drinking over, they moodily whittled, chewed, and expectorated; a stranger would have imagined them a batch of miserable criminals awaiting transportation.

The silence was finally broken by a decided-looking red-haired man, who had been neatly beveling the door-post with his knife, and who spoke as if his words only by great difficulty escaped being bitten in two.

“We ken burn down the schoolhouse right before his face and eyes, and then mebbe the State Board’ll git our idees about eddycation.”

“Twon’t be no use, Mose,” said Judge Barber, whose legal title was honorary, and conferred because he had spent some time in a penitentiary in the East. “Them State Board fellers is wrong, but they’ve got grit, ur they’d never hev got the schoolhouse done after we rode the contractor out uv the Flat on one of his own boards. Besides, some uv ’em might think we wuz rubbin’ uv it in, an’ next thing you know’d they’d be buildin’ us a jail.”

“Can’t we buy off these young uns’ folks?” queried an angular fellow from Southern Illinois. “They’re a mizzable pack of shotes, an’ I b’leeve they’d all leave the camp fur a few ounces.”

“Ye—es,” drawled the judge, dubiously; “but thar’s the Widder Ginneys—*she’d* pan out a pretty good schoolroom-full with her eight young uns, an’ there ain’t ounces enough in the diggin’s to make *her* leave while Tom Ginneys’s coffin’s roostin’ under the rocks.”

“Then,” said Mose, the first speaker, his words escaping with even more difficulty than before, “throw around keards to see who’s to marry the widder, an’ boss her young uns. The feller that gits the fust Jack’s to do the job.”

“Meanin’ no insult to this highly respectable crowd,” said the judge, in a very bland tone, and inviting it to walk up to the bar and specify its consolation, “I don’t b’leeve there’s one uv yer the widder’d hev.” The judge’s eye glanced along the line at the bar, and he continued softly, but in decided accents—“Not a cussed one. But,” added the judge, passing his pouch to the barkeeper, “if anything’s to be done, it must be done lively, fur the stage is pretty nigh here. Tell ye what’s ez good ez ennything. We’ll crowd around the stage, fust throwin’ keards for who’s to put out his hoof

to be accidentally trod onto by the infernal teacher ez he gits out. Then satisfaction must be took out uv the teacher. It'll be a mean job, fur these teachers hevn't the spunk of a coyote, an' ten to one he won't hev no shootin' irons, so the job'll hev to be done with fists."

"Good!" said Mose. "The crowd drinks with me to a square job, and no backin'. Chuck the pasteboards, jedge——The——dickens!" For Mose had got first Jack.

"Square job, and no backin'," said the judge, with a grin. "There's the stage now—hurry up, fellers!"

The stage drew up with a crash in front of The Nugget, and the passengers, outside and in, but none looking teacherish, hurried into the saloon. The boys scarcely knew whether to swear from disappointment or gratification, when a start from Mose drew their attention again to the stage. On the top step appeared a small shoe, above which was visible a small section of stocking far whiter and smaller than is usual in the mines. In an instant a similar shoe appeared on the lower step, and the boys saw, successively, the edge of a dress, a waterproof cloak, a couple of small gloved hands, a bright muffler, and a pleasant face covered with brown hair, and a bonnet. Then they heard a cheerful voice say:

"I'm the teacher, gentlemen—can any one show me the schoolhouse?"

The miserable Mose looked ghastly, and tottered. A suspicion of a wink graced the judge's eye, but he exclaimed in a stern, low tone: "Square job, an' no backin'," upon which Mose took to his heels and the Placerville trail.

The judge had been a married man, so he promptly answered:

“I’ll take yer thar, mum, ez soon ez I git yer baggage.”

“Thank you,” said the teacher; “that valise under the seat is all.”

The judge extracted a small valise marked “Huldah Brown,” offered his arm, and he and the teacher walked off before the astonished crowd as naturally as if the appearance of a modest-looking young lady was an ordinary occurrence at the Flat.

The stage refilled, and rattled away from the dumb and staring crowd, and the judge returned.

“Well, boys,” said he, “yer got to marry *two* women, now, to stop that school, an’ you’ll find this un more particler than the widder. I just tell yer what it is about that school—it’s a-goin’ to go on, spite uv any jackasses that wants it broke up; an’ any gentleman that’s insulted ken git satisfaction by——”



TOLEDO AND THE COMMITTEEMEN'S VISIT TO THE SCHOOLTEACHER.

“Who wants it broke up, you old fool?” demanded Toledo, a man who had been named after the city from which he had come, and who had been from the first one of the fiercest opponents of the school. “I move the appointment uv a committee of three to wait on the teacher, see if the school wants anything money can buy, take up subscriptions to git it, an’ lay out any feller that don’t come down with the dust when he’s went fur.”

“Hurray!” “Bully!” “Good!” “Sound!” “Them’s the talk!” and other sympathetic expressions, were heard from the members of the late anti-school party.

The judge, who, by virtue of age, was the master of ceremonies and general moderator of the camp, very promptly appointed a committee, consisting of Toledo and two miners, whose attire appeared the most respectable in the place, and instructed them to wait on the schoolmarm, and tender her the cordial support of the miners.

Early the next morning the committee called at the schoolhouse, attached to which were two small rooms in which teachers were expected to keep house.

The committee found the teacher “putting to rights” the schoolroom. Her dress was tucked up, her sleeves rolled, her neck hidden by a bright handkerchief, and her hair “a-blowin’ all to glory,” as Toledo afterward expressed it. Between the exertion, the bracing air, and the excitement caused by the newness of everything, Miss Brown’s pleasant face was almost handsome.

“Mornin’, marm,” said Toledo, raising a most shocking hat, while the remaining committee-men expeditiously ranged themselves behind him, so that the teacher might by no chance look into their eyes.

“Good-morning, gentlemen,” said Miss Brown, with a cheerful smile; “please be seated. I suppose you wish to speak of your children?”

Toledo, who was a very young man, blushed, and the whole committee was as uneasy on its feet as if its boots had been soled with fly-blisters. Finally, Toledo answered:

“Not much, marm, seein’ we ain’t got none. Me an’ these gentlemen’s a committee from the boys.”

“From the boys?” echoed Miss Brown. She had heard so many wonderful things about the Golden State, that now she soberly wondered whether bearded men called themselves boys, and went to school.

“From the miners, washin’ along the crick, marm—they want to know what they ken do fur yer,” continued Toledo.

“I am very grateful,” said Miss Brown; “but I suppose the local school committee——”

“Don’t count on them, marm,” interrupted Toledo; “they’re livin’ five miles away, and they’re only the preacher, an’ doctor, an’ a feller that’s j’ined the church lately. None uv ’em but the doctor ever shows themselves at the saloon, an’ *he* only comes when there’s a diffikilty, an’ he’s called in to officiate. But the boys—the boys hez got the dust, marm, an’ they’ve got the will. One uv us’ll be in often to see what can be done fur yer. Good-mornin’, marm.”

Toledo raised his hat again, the other committee-men bowed profoundly to all the windows and seats, and then the whole retired, leaving Miss Brown in the wondering possession of an entirely new experience.

“Well?” inquired the crowd, as the committee approached the creek.

“Well,” replied Toledo, “she’s just a hundred an’ thirty pound nugget, an’ no mistake—hey, fellers?”

“You bet,” promptly responded the remainder of the committee.

“Good!” said the judge. “What does she want?”

Toledo’s countenance fell.

“By thunder!” he replied, “we got out ’fore she had a chance to tell us!”

The judge stared sharply upon the young man, and hurriedly turned to hide a merry twitching of his lips.

That afternoon the boys were considerably astonished and scared at seeing the schoolmistress walking quickly toward the creek. The chairman of the new committee was fully equal to the occasion. Mounting a rock, he roared:

“You fellers without no sherts on, git. You with shoes off, put ’em on. Take your pants out uv yer boots. Hats off when the lady comes. Hurry up, now—no foolin’.”

The shirtless ones took a lively double-quick toward some friendly bushes, the boys rolled down their sleeves and pantaloons, and one or two took the extra precaution to wash the mud off their boots.

Meanwhile Miss Brown approached, and Toledo stepped forward.

“Anything wrong up at the schoolhouse?” said he.

“Oh, no,” replied Miss Brown, “but I have always had a great curiosity to see how gold was obtained. It seems as if it must be very easy to handle those little pans. Don’t you—don’t you

suppose some miner would lend me his pan and let me try just *once?*”

“Certingly, marm; ev’ry galoot ov ’em would be glad of the chance. Here, you fellers—who’s got the cleanest pan?”

Half a dozen men washed out their pans, and hurried off with them. Toledo selected one, put in dirt and water, and handed it to Miss Brown.

“Thar you are, marm, but I’m afeard you’ll wet your dress.”

“Oh, that won’t harm,” cried Miss Brown, with a laugh which caused one enthusiastic miner to “cut the pigeon-wing.”

She got the miner’s touch to a nicety, and in a moment had a spray of dirty water flying from the edge of the pan, while all the boys stood in a respectful semicircle, and stared delightedly. The pan empty, Toledo refilled it several times; and, finally, picking out some pebbles and hard pieces of earth, pointed to the dirty, shiny deposit in the bottom of the pan, and briefly remarked:

“Thar ’tis, marm.”

“Oh!” screamed Miss Brown, with delight; “is that really gold-dust?”

“That’s it,” said Toledo. “I’ll jest put it up fur yer, so yer ken kerry it.”

“Oh, no,” said Miss Brown, “I couldn’t think of it—it isn’t mine.”

“You washed it out, marm, an’ that makes a full title in these parts.”

All of the traditional honesty of New England came into Miss Brown's face in an instant; and, although she, Yankee-like, estimated the value of the dust, and sighingly thought how much easier it was to win gold in that way than by forcing ideas into stupid little heads, she firmly declined the gold, and bade the crowd a smiling good-day.

"Did yer see them little fingers uv hern a-holdin' out that pan?—did yer see her, fellers?" inquired an excited miner.

"Yes, an' the way she made that dirt git, ez though she was useder to washin' than wallopin'," said another.

"Wallopin'!" echoed a staid miner. "I'd gie my claim, an' throw in my pile to boot, to be a young 'un an' git walloped by them playthings of han's."

"Jest see how she throwed dirt an' water on them boots," said another, extending an enormous ugly boot. "Them boots ain't fur sale now—they ain't."

"Them be durned!" contemptuously exclaimed another. "She tramped right on my toes as she backed out uv the crowd."

Every one looked jealously at the last speaker, and a grim old fellow suggested that the aforesaid individual had obtained a trampled foot by fraud, and that each man in camp had, consequently, a right to demand satisfaction of him.

But the judge decided that he of the trampled foot was right, and that any miner who wouldn't take such a chance, whether fraudulently or otherwise, hadn't the spirit of a man in him.

Yankee Sam, the shortest man in camp, withdrew from the crowd, and paced the banks of the creek, lost in thought. Within half an hour Sam was owner of the only store in the place, had doubled the prices of all articles of clothing contained therein, and increased at least six-fold the price of all the white shirts.

Next day the sun rose on Bottle Flat in his usual conservative and impassive manner. Had he respected the dramatic proprieties, he would have appeared with astonished face and uplifted hands, for seldom had a whole community changed so completely in a single night.

Uncle Hans, the only German in the camp, had spent the preceding afternoon in that patient investigation for which the Teutonic mind is so justly noted. The morning sun saw over Hans's door a sign, in charcoal, which read, "SHAVIN' DUN HIER"; and few men went to the creek that morning without submitting themselves to Hans's hands.

Then several men who had been absent from the saloon the night before straggled into camp, with jaded mules and new attire. Carondelet Joe came in, clad in a pair of pants, on which slender saffron-hued serpents ascended graceful gray Corinthian columns, while from under the collar of a new white shirt appeared a cravat, displaying most of the lines of the solar spectrum.

Flush, the Flat champion at poker, came in late in the afternoon, with a huge watch-chain, and an overpowering bosom-pin, and his horrid fingers sported at least one seal-ring each.

Several stove-pipe hats were visible in camp, and even a pair of gloves were reported in the pocket of a miner.

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