

Shameless

by
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Believe it or not, when I started out writing, I thought I'd be writing westerns. This was one of the first.

There be blood, guts, and senseless violence ahead. You have been warned. Oh, and cursing too... and wifely infidelity... and murders galore...

We all knew'd it was coming, my pa, my ma, and me. It weren't no surprise when Mr. Kartwrong showed up that morning on our little farm with four other riders demanding my pa sell out.

"\$200 bucks," Mr. Kartwrong said waving a handful of dollars from his horse. "It's more than this shit-hole is worth."

My pa had come out to greet Mr. Kartwrong and the four other riders with his shotgun laid across his arms. I recognized three of them. There were his foreman who was infamous these parts for his vicious temper and dirty fighting. Next to him were two of his mongrel ranch hands who seemed to like nothing better than to kick a man when he were down. The fifth rider kept his hat down low and didn't say anything. I couldn't get any expression from his face.

My pa stood tall and said, "I ain't selling to you Mr. Kartwrong, not today, not tomorrow, not the next day. I'm here to stay."

"The only way you'll stay here is in a grave, Pembroke," he spit the last word.

I got ready to defend my pa, but he put his arm down to stop me, and ma put her arms around my shoulders. I was trying to explain how pa had to defend his honor, but ma just said, "shush."

“That’s right. Shush boy. This here is man’s talk, though I reckon I don’t know how your pa fits into that,” Mr. Kartwrong said trying to goad my pa. The foreman and ranch hand’s snickered. The fifth rider just sat still. He was wearing dual revolvers and his hands were poised to grab them. I was guessing he was one of those hired gunfighters, when Mr. Kartwrong confirmed my thinking. “I didn’t expect you to be reasonable Pembroke, so I brought Alexis Clay to help with the negotiations.”

I’d heard of Alexis Clay. Everybody’d heard of Alexis Clay. He was a hired gun. He put his guns at the disposal of the highest bidder. My dad said he was nothing more than a murderer.

Alexis Clay took the opportunity to tip his hat to ma. “It’s a pleasure ma’am. I’m thinking you’ll be a widow before the day is out if your man don’t sell, so I’d like to put the offer in right here and now. Seldom does a man see a woman as perty as you, and it’d be a shame for you to sleep all lonesome, just cause you’re ignorant husband didn’t have the decency to ...”. He was going to keep on going. I guess he really wasn’t that quiet once he got started, but he was cut short. A rifle shot off from behind him and Alexis Clay’s head exploded, splattering my pa, my ma, and me with bloody gore. As Alexis Clay’s lifeless body fell from his horse we heard Shame call out, “Whoops. Sorry. Sorry. Little gun cleaning accident there. Nothing to be alarmed about.”

Shame. I’d forgotten about him. He’d shown up last night, dirty and dusty from the trail. He’d chopped a cord of wood for the rights to sleep in the barn and for a little dinner. In all the excitement, I hadn’t thought about him.

The foreman started to draw his gun and turn, but Shame shot again blasting a hole through his chest and filling the air with a spray of blood and guts.

“Sorry. My bad.” Shame called out. “I’m not used to this hair trigger. Maybe y’all should just kinda stay still.”

Mr. Kartwrong’s horse was starting to panic and prance in a circle. Shame’s gun blasted again putting a hole in the side of the gelding. The horse fell on Mr. Kartwrong. As he lay there Shame

walked into the open. “You two on the horse,” Shame called out, “get down. This gun just don’t seem to like early morning visitors,” and after a moments reflection he added “or the horses they come in on.”

The ranch hands got down. I could see one of them was shaking.

“Take off your gun belts,” Shame cried. The ranch hands did as they were bid. Shame walked slowly toward us until he was standing over Mr. Kartwrong. He looked down at Mr. Kartwrong, “\$200 don’t seem like much for a ranch.”

“You’ll pay for this,” Mr. Kartwrong said from where he was under his struggling gelding.

“You got a point there. I owe you for the horse. How about a penny?” Shame offered.

“It’s a prize winning thoroughbred,” Mr Kartwrong had started to say by Shame was ignoring him. He tossed a penny to Mr. Kartwrong and put a bullet through the suffering creature’s eyes. The blood splattered all over Mr. Kartwrong.

“You can’t just do that,” one of the ranch hands spoke up. I’m guessing he wasn’t the smarter of the two. “You can’t just toss a penny at someone and then shoot their horse.”

Shame considered this. He considered this by holding the rifle in one hand and scratching his head. “You don’t think so?” he asked.

“No,” the none-too-bright ranch hand said.

“Mmm,” Shame said. He was holding the rifle with one hand and tracking it back and forth as he walked in a circle. The rifle was first pointed at one ranch hand and then the next and then pa and ma. When he got to ma, Shame tipped his hat, “Ma’am.”

I looked up at ma. She was smiling. I guess she was thinking back to the prayer session she’d had last night in the barn she with Shame. From the sounds of it, they’d done prayed a lot of sin and suffering out of Shame. She’d come back in all rosy cheeked with the love of Jesus in her belly.

By the time I turned my attention back to Shame, he was regarding the slow ranch hand again.

“So, what you’re saying is intim-i-did-ation of folks is wrong.” Shame had stumbled over the bid word. He concentrated again and shook the gun for emphasis as he spoke, “in-tim-a-dim-nation,” with the last syllable his rifle when off again and shot the ranch hand in the foot.

“Fuck! You shot me,” the ranch hand cried.

“Oh, sorry. Sorry. It’s a new gun,” Shame tried to explain.

The ranch hand wasn’t thinking clearly now. He started in on Shame, “they’re going to hunt you down, you stu...”

He didn’t get no farther. Shame filled him full of bullets and the ranch hand dropped like a ranch hand that had just been filled with a bunch of bullets. “I don’t take kindly to being threatened,” Shame said by way of explanation. He turned to the remaining ranch hand, swinging his swinging his rifle wildly, and jerking it up now and then to keep his grip on the trigger, Shame asked him, “You ain’t gonna threaten me, are ya?”

“No, S-S-Sir,” the ranch hand managed by way of response before he shat his pants.

“Good. Good.” Shame said and turned his attention back to Mr. Kartwrong who was trying to get out from under his horse. Shame considered the situation. He pointed his gun at Mr. Kartwrong and then at the horse. Upon reflection Shame said, “That horse is dead.”

“What do you expect? You shot him.” Mr. Kartwrong exclaimed. Now folks around town loved to say how Mr. Kartwrong was some sort of financial genius, but you just had to wonder. Here he was, under a horse, two of his fellow riders dead, and he was sassing back to the man who had killed them. It didn’t seem all that much like the words of a genius to me, but then I was just a boy and didn’t understand these things.

Shame grabbed hold of Mr. Kartwrong by the hair. He started talking and pulling on Mr. Kartwrong’s hair at the same time. He said, “See,” and pulled real hard.

Mr Kartwrong cursed.

Shame pulled Mr. Kartwrong again by the hair and said, “It just ain’t proper...” then he relaxed and pulled again when he continued “...to sell a fella a horse that just goes and dies moments later.”

Pulling on his hair like that must have helped Mr. Kartwrong, cause he was clear of the horse by now. Shame threw him a few yards further and trained his rifle back on him. “I’m guessing you owe me a penny.”

Mr. Kartwrong looked at Shame in amazement, and I guess he didn’t want to go down being accused of being smart or anything, so he said “You’re crazy.”

“I’m gonna let that go. I’m thinking through all the excitement that that-there was one of those knee jerk responses.” Shame stopped suddenly, like he’d just said something profound. “Well now I’ve got it. I’ll take one of your knees in payment,” and before you knew it he’d shattered Mr. Kartwrong’s knee with a bullet.

Mr. Kartwrong clutched at his knee and groaned. Shame looked around and beamed with happiness. “That was fun. I don’t know when I’ve had so much fun.” His eyes alighted on ma and he found the answer, “last night ma’am. Finding the warm grace of god. That was better, but this here,” he said returning to Mr. Kartwrong and blasting away his other knee. “This here is pretty fun. Oh, I owe you a penny for that other knee.”

He tossed Mr. Kartwrong the penny and then said, “Now get off this property.”

“I can’t walk,” Mr. Kartwrong cried in agony.

“You’re trespassing,” Shame warned him fair and square and then shot him in the hand. “Git,” he said again and then shot him again in the other hand by way of encouragement.

Financial genius or not Mr. Kartwrong wasn’t full of good ole’ common sense. He lay there and moaned, and Shame shot him in the leg. “Git going,” Shame said again, “Git off this property.” Mr. Kartwrong tried to get up to crawl, but he wasn’t

moving to fast, and to be honest, Shame never struck me as the patient sort, so Shame put a another bullet into his leg. This kept up for a while, with Shame offering encouragement by way of shooting Mr. Kartwrong. I have to hand it to Mr. Kartwrong, he was a hardy, bull-headed sort. Shame had to reload his Winchester twice before the life had gone out of Mr. Kartwrong.

When Mr. Kartwrong was good and dead Shame nudged him with his boot. "This is your last chance," he said to the corpse and then just to make sure Mr. Kartwrong didn't change his mind about being dead, Shame put a half dozen bullets into his head. "Nothing more annoying than running into some one you thought you'd already killed," Shame said by way of explanation. "You'd think they'd be happy to be alive."

Then turning towards the last ranch hand who was nearly hiding behind pa on the porch like a damn fool coward, Shame laid it out for him, "You see." The gun went jerking up and down and the hand tried to disappear behind pa. Shame put a bullet into the roof over his head, "I'm gonna take it as a sign of disrespect if you don't come out here were I can see you. I'm talking to you boy."

The ranch hand did not move.

"You're going to look at me, or I'm gonna shoot you," Shame made it as clear as possible for the ranch hand. Pa was helpful too, he moved out of the way.

The ranch hand had been stooping behind pa. He stood up now that he didn't have any cover. Shame leveled his gun at him and we all watched as the ranch hand pissed his pants. He must of hand to go real bad. Shame shook his head like he was looking at some disgraceful animal. "I only intend to say this once, so you're going to listen," Shame instructed him. "It never ceases to amaze me that if'n you kill a guy, never fails, you run into them again, and they draw a gun on you, or shoot you from behind a bush or something." Shame paused, "you following this?"

"Y-y-y-eah," the ranch hand managed to croak out.

"Well you'd think a guy would learn. First time we'd met, I'd killed them. Only stand to reason that the second time we'd

meet I'd just kill them again." Shame shook his head up and down.

The ranch hand answered by nodding his head rapidly.

Shame aimed his gun and shot the ranch hand only he missed. The bullet went wide and shattered the doorpost. Shame looked at his rifle in amazement. "I guess this thing is busted," he said regarding his rifle. He fingered one of his pistols. "I could just shoot you with this," but he reconsidered. "Tell you what, I'll just mosey on down the road a bit and clean my gun. You stay hear, bury your friends, and when you're ready, just come down the road, and I'll shoot you from behind some bushes or something."

The ranch hand just stood there.

"Or, I could shoot you right now if you prefer?" Shame added helpfully.

"I'll," the ranch hand was shaking, jerking around, and in general being hard to understand, so pa answered for him, "He says he wants to bury the dead."

"OK," suit yourself Shame said. He saddled up and got ready to leave, but before he did he came over to say goodbye. "Thanks for you hospitality," he said tipping his hat to ma, then to the ranch hand he said, "Now like I said I'm going to go up the road a ways and wait for you to bury your friends." As he road off he yelled, "Now, don't keep me waiting too long or I just might leave."

I never could understand why folks were always in awe of Mr. Kartwrong. He sure didn't hire fast workers. That ranch hand took two whole days to bury those four bodies. Pa said he was a "Piss poor worker," but ma said that all you had to do was look at his pants and you notice right away he was virtually overflowing with the stuff.

They never did put a posse together to go after Shame. Some folks said he had done the county a favor by killing Mr. Kartwrong. Some went further and said if they ever did catch him, the town should give him a reward. Pa just said he wasn't

surprised it ended this way, “Any damn fool reader could tell from the start, the story was Shameless.”

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