

# HOSTILE VALLEY

by Ben Ames Williams

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## CHAPTER XI—Continued

Saladine, watching Bart, saw that under this accusing fusillade, the man's face congested with a rising fury. This old woman with the tongue of a tergite lashed him raw. What she said might or might not be true; yet true or false, he could not retreat with the buffet and the blow her words deserved. He must stand helpless while she flayed him; yet his dark cheek was purple now!

"You fetched me some dry groceries from Liberty village last night," the old woman continued bitterly, "and listened outside the door and heard me telling Jenny to go get me a lily root from the brook today. That's why you went down brook, Bart. You never went to fish at all. I don't believe you ever even took your rod. You went to spy on Jenny!"

"And on the way back, I low you climbed up through the woods to see if you could get a sight of Huldy! Like as not you'd peeked at her before that, times when the hussy'd be sunning herself like a snake there on the ledge. I wouldn't wonder if that was why Zeke worked you over, that time. Like as not he caught you there. Anyway, my guess is you found her there today, and she tormented you the way she always did, till you couldn't stand it, and you grabbed her! And she fit you, and set her finger nails in your cheek; and at that, you went crazy mad, and you hit her so hard you broke your own hand on her face! That's what happened! I'm as certain of it as if I'd been there and see!"

The scratches on Bart's cheek were livid, but his lips twisted in a derisive grin!

Then she turned to Sohler. "There it is, Sheriff," she exclaimed, in a tone of finality. "There it is, if you've got enough brains to see!"

But the big man after a moment wagged his head. "Why, I don't see as there's anything only your guess, ma'am," he protested.

And Bart spoke, through stiff lips, yet easily enough. "It's all right, Sheriff," he said. "Old women get fool ideas!"

And he said, calmly: "It couldn't be the way she says." He appealed to Huldy's husband. "Will, you know mighty well that Zeke was always somewhere around Huldy. If this had happened the way Granny says, Zeke he'd have been on my tail in no time at all. You know that, Will, as well as me!"

Will, thus interrogated, nodded slowly. "That's so, Bart," he admitted.

But Marm Pierce turned to Bart insistently.

"Bart," she said, "I dunno as I can prove what you did to Huldy, but I'll make you admit you're a liar! You've made up this whole tale, since you killed Huldy. You never went down brook to fish. You never even had your rod with you. You picked it up at your house, on your way to get Will!"

Bart chuckled patiently. "Ma'am, I can't help you're thinking anything you've got a mind, but you're wrong as can be."

She cried triumphantly: "Your rod's outside, with a worm on the hook, all dried up and shriveled! You didn't fish with a dead worm, did you? Her tone was hot with scorn."

"Why she," he protested, "a worm will dry up mighty fast."

Her eyes narrowed. "You told me you dug bait yesterday?" she challenged.

He nodded. "Certain," he said.

"Got your bait can on, ain't you?" she demanded. He touched his belt, in an assenting gesture.

And she took one step toward him. "Hand it here!" she demanded in a rising triumph. "Let me have a look at it! If there's any fresh-dug worms in your bait can, Bart, I'll take back every word I've had to say!"

Saladine, turning to look at Bart, found his eye caught and held by an object on the table between them. That heavy gun which Bart had laid beside the lamp, a black and deadly!

It was still there, black and deadly! The lamp was between it and Saladine; between it and Marm Pierce. But where Bart stood, the butt of the gun was not ten inches from his hand.

## CHAPTER XII

There was something ludicrously incongruous, and by the same token the more horrifying, in the terms of Marm Pierce's challenge. That the question of whether a man were guilty of murder should hinge on whether there were any fresh-dug worms in his bait box had something hideous about it; and yet what Marm Pierce said was ingeniously true. If Bart had indeed gone down Carey's brook this day to fish, as he asserted, then he must have been supplied with bait. If he had no worms, then his statement that he intended to fish was a lie; and his other words were doubtless lies as well. If Bart had no worms in his bait box, then he lied; and if he lied, then he had killed Huldy! Thus simply the issue phrased itself in Saladine's mind.

And his muscles drew taut for action. The silence in this small room might explode into a storm of violence.

Bart stood under their doubting eyes, his fingers within easy reach of the butt of that heavy revolver on the table just before him. His back was to the wall; he could if he chose hold them at his mercy. Thirty seconds' span must answer all.

Bart did not move till old Marm Pierce repeated, in triumphant insistence: "Let's see, Bart! Let's see if you've got any worms in that can at all!"

Then he was suddenly at his ease; he smiled and shook his head.

"Nary a worm, Granny!" he said cheerfully.

She nodded in crisp satisfaction, swung to Sohler. "There, Sheriff!" she cried.

Sohler looked uncomfortable. It was in fact an uncomfortable position in which he found himself. Bart was practically confessing to a murder; but Bart had a gun under his hand! The sheriff stirred uneasily, and he gathered the tails of his coat over his knees as though to rise.

But Bart said, chuckling: "That don't prove anything, though! I told you a while ago, when I came to pick Huldy up I took off my belt—with the bait can and my gun—and left it there on the ground. Time I got back to fetch it, the bait can, the cover on it had come open, and the worms had all crawled away."

Marm Pierce whirled on him in baffled fury. "You'd talk yourself out of your own grave, Bart!" she cried.

"But you won't talk yourself out of this. There's a dead worm dried on your hook on the rod outside the door! I guess you wa'n't fishing with that! And it didn't shrivel up the way it is just since you got through fishing, either. It's a wet worm, and slimy; but it's been dead on that hook for days."

Bart nodded. "Sure it has," he assented. "I forgot, when you asked me about that a while ago. But just before Huldy screamed, I snagged my hook on a log and had to break it off. Didn't have any spare hooks with me, but I found this one in my overalls pocket. I must have stuck it there some time and forgot it. It had this dead worm on it; but I tied it on my line, and I was just setting out to scrape the dead worm off with my knife when I heard Huldy yell!"

"That's a likely tale!" the old woman exclaimed in a deep scorn. "You mean to tell me you'd put a hook with a worm on it in your pocket?" she demanded. "I guess you'd have to be drunk to do that, Bart."

Bart grinned. "Well," he said, "matter of fact, I did have quite an edge on, the last time I went fishing. It was along toward dark, here last Tuesday night. Ike Putney come by my place after supper, and we had a few drinks, and we lowed to try the trout, and did. But half the time, I didn't know whether I was fishing in the brook or in the pasture. Likely I put the hook in that pocket then."

And he added persuasively: "Ike, he'll tell you the same."

The old woman uttered a sound like a sniff of scorn. "Ike! I'd believe anything of him. If you told me he carried his worms in his mouth, I'd believe it!"

Bart's eyes widened. "By cracky!" he exclaimed. "I mind, now. Ike had his store clothes on, and I lent him my overalls to wear when we went fishing! He put that hook in the pocket of 'em, I'll bet a nickel!"

Marm Pierce looked at the sheriff almost apologetically, in a curious chagrin. "That might be the truth, Sheriff," she admitted ruefully. "Ike was in here Tuesday afternoon to get me to give him something for an earache. I wrapped up a pinch of black pepper in some cotton, and dipped it in sweet oil and put it in his ear; and I told him to go on home and put a bandage 'round his head to keep it warm. But he lowed he wished he had a drink, and he set out to go over to Bart's. I mind he did have on his store clothes, just like Bart says!"

There was a reluctant honesty in her tones; she faced Bart again.

"But just the same," she insisted, "I don't swallow the whole of your tale!" She stood frowning with the intensity of her thoughts, searching for some crevice in his armor. "You said a while ago you had stopped fishing and was on your way home when you heard Huldy yell," she reminded him, seizing on a new point. "But now you claim you'd just broke a hook off, and tied a new one on. How could you break a hook if you wa'n't fishing?"

He answered, almost mirthfully: "I stopped to try the deep hole there at the foot of the ledge!"

He had parried all her thrusts so easily that there was a sort of madness in the little old woman now. She was like a caged animal, coursing to and fro in its search for some avenue of escape.

"Well, how come you to take so long hunting them feathers I sent you after, before Huldy died, and not finding any, when the hen pen was full of 'em?" she demanded. "Looks to me you was afraid if I had them I'd get Huldy to come to and she'd tell on you!"

"I was figuring you'd ask that, by and by," he assented frankly. "And I'll tell you how it was." He stood at ease now. "I set out to get you some feathers," he declared. "I didn't put any stock in it, with Huldy as good as dead, or maybe dead a'ready; but long as you wanted 'em, I started out to get some."

"But when I was going through the shed, I happened to look out the window on the back side, and I see something move over in the alders. It looked to me like a man. I stayed there watching, but I didn't see him again; so after a spell, I come back in the house."

"You never said nothing about that before!" Marm Pierce exclaimed.

"Soon as I come in, you jumped me right out into the barn again, went with me," he reminded her. "And when we come back with the feathers, Huldy was dead, and Jenny said there was somebody in the Win-side the house, so I knowed it was probably Win that I had see."

The old woman considered this. "Maybe if Win was around here after Huldy died . . ." she began thoughtfully, but then she remembered. "But it wa'n't Win that you see," she protested quickly. "He was in Liberty village by then!"

"Well, whoever it was," Bart said in a conciliating tone.

"They were all silent then a while, considering this suggestion that there had been some man, who was not Win Haven, near the house when Huldy died. But in the end Marm Pierce brushed this matter impatiently aside.

"Like as not it was a cow you see," she decided, returning to the attack. "Or maybe nothing at all. I think that's all a pack of lies, if you ask me."

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"Look Out, Granny! That Thing Will Go Off!"

we can come back here and pick up Will."

Saladine hesitantly agreed, since there seemed no better course. Huldy Ferrin was dead, and doubtless murdered; but if Bart were guilty, then he was an incredibly shrewd and crafty man; and if he lied, then he was incredibly apt at mendacity. Marm Pierce herself appeared to be unsatisfied, as though uneasily conscious that she had failed to prove her case. She stood with her hand at her mouth, her head bent; and her brow was furrowed with perplexity.

But she said no new word while the sheriff buttoned his overcoat, and Bart put his slicker on. Only then she exclaimed: "Sheriff, there ain't a mite of sense taking Will to East Harbor!"

The sheriff hesitated; but Jenny came to her grandmother's side, touched the old woman's arm. "It's all right, Granny," she said gently. "If there's any way he can help, Will he'd want to go."

But Saladine suggested: "Sheriff, taking Will along is going to leave these two women alone here."

Sohler scratched his head. "That's so," he agreed; and he said reluctantly: "Well, Will, maybe you'd best stay here tonight. I'll be out again in the morning."

"Whatever you say, Sheriff," Will assented.

Bart said in dry humor: "Looks like the pack of you was bound to lay this on me. Why sh'd I go, any more than Will? Huldy blamed it on him. Sheriff, you can't get around her own say-so, it looks to me."

The sheriff was uncomfortable; but after a moment Bart in a returning good humor yielded the point. "I can stand it, though," he said. "And Will had ought to stay here with them, at that. Zeke's around here somewhere. No telling what he might try to do; but Will can handle him."

So it was decided. It did not occur to Saladine till somewhat later that a remembered fear of Zeke on his own account might have prompted Bart to this easy—and surprising—surrender. Yet Bart, as the event proved, might have been justified in welcoming for a while the protecting custody of the law.

Bart and the sheriff stepped outside; and Saladine, after a word of farewell, followed them to his car. They had taken the rear seat. He cranked the engine, and climbed in and turned on the headlights. The kitchen door was open yonder, and Will and Jenny stood in silhouette against the light, their shoulders touching.

Saladine backed the car, preparing to turn; but in that last moment, old Marm Pierce came bursting through the door, brushing Will and Jenny out of her way, holding up both hands, calling something. Saladine waited, and she ran across the yard and drew close beside the car and shouted over the engine's roar:

"Sheriff! I've got a hold of the answer to it now!"

Her tone was ringing; her countenance triumphant.

"Listen here!" she cried. "If Bart had left his gun belt, with the bait can and the gun, there on the ground in all that rain while he fetched Huldy over here, the belt'd be soaked through and wet as a string; and there'd be rust on that gun! But there ain't a speck of rust, and his belt is dry as a bone!"

Saladine had not noticed whether Bart's gun were rusted or not; yet he perceived the justice of this argument, and turned to hear what the sheriff would say. But Bart laughed, and he protested:

"Maybe that belt looked dry to you, Granny, but it's wet enough! I can feel it right through my overalls. And the holster kep' the gun dry." He told Sohler: "I'll show you, when we get over to my place, Sheriff. You can see for yourself!"

Sohler accepted this. "All right, ma'am," he shouted to the old woman, over the engine's roar. "I'll look at it, sure!"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

**Raising the Hat**  
Raising the hat in deference to a lady is still a mark of a gentleman. If she stops to speak with him, he will remove his hat for the conversation, and carry it in his hand unless, because of his age or of inclement weather, she requests him to replace it. If so, he will again raise his hat when she leaves. The fact that some young men in college ignore the courtesy does not affect gentlemanly behavior. The origin of the courtesy is speculative. One version is that it arose in the days of chivalry when, in deference to his superiors and to ladies, a knight removed his headgear.—Literary Digest.

**Clever Reynard**  
The name Reynard came from a German book of animal stories published hundreds of years ago. In that book the fox was called Regin-hart, meaning "strong in counsel," because of the clever way in which he mastered the other animals. Ever since the book came to this country we have spoken of Reynard the fox—Reynard being our form of the German Regin-hart.—Fountain's Weekly.

**The Day of Rest**  
God's altar stands from Sunday to Sunday, and the seventh day is no more for religion than any other—it is for rest. The whole seven are for religion, and one of them for rest, for gaining strength for the other six.—U. W. Deecher.

**Happiness**  
One of the first steps to contentment and happiness is to learn not to begrudge other people the things they have because you cannot have them.

## IMPROVED UNIFORM INTERNATIONAL SUNDAY SCHOOL Lesson

By REV. P. B. FITZWATER, D. D., Member of Faculty, Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, © Western Newspaper Union.

### Lesson for January 12

#### SIMEON'S PROPHECY

LESSON TEXT—Luke 2:25-35, 40. GOLDEN TEXT—Mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people.—Luke 2:30, 31.

PRIMARY TOPIC—When Simeon Saw Jesus.

JUNIOR TOPIC—Why Simeon Rejoiced.

INTERMEDIATE AND SENIOR TOPIC—What Jesus Can Do for the World.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULT TOPIC—Jesus, the Hope of All Nations.

The occasion which brought Simeon to recognize Jesus as the Messiah was his being offered to the Lord by Mary and Joseph. According to the Jewish custom (Lev. 12), at the age of eight days the male child was circumcised and thus made a member of the covenant nation. In this case the child was given the name "Jesus" which indicated his mission (vv. 22-24). Then at the end of 40 days he was offered to the Lord on the basis of the original redemptive purpose, which was the priesthood of the first-born, and not according to the Levitical order (Exod. 13:2; cf. 32:26). The offering in such case was a lamb for such as could afford it, but for the poor a pair of turtle doves or pigeons was adequate. The Savior thus came to the level of the poor.

1. Simeon's Character (v. 25).

1. Upright. He sustained a right relation to his fellow men. He was "just."

2. Devout. He was of such a character as to enjoy personal fellowship with God.

3. Waiting for the "consolation of Israel"—Messiah. Waiting for the fulfillment of the divine purpose in the coming of Messiah had a blessed effect upon his life, inducing righteousness and godliness. Waiting for the second coming of Christ is set forth in the New Testament as having a salutary effect upon believers (I John 3:3; I Thess. 1:9, 10).

4. Under the sway of the Holy Spirit. One thus enabled would be in a condition to recognize the Messiah. A spiritual mind is absolutely essential in order to discern the divine purpose (I Cor. 2:14).

II. Simeon's Revelation (vv. 26-28).

He was assured that he should not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ. When Christ was brought to the temple, the Holy Spirit upon Simeon enabled him to discern the babe as the promised one. Happy is the one whose character and spiritual experience is such that he can discern the presence of the Lord. Truly it is in him that we live and move and have our being. To be in this state is to practice the presence of God. So definitely was he led by the Spirit that when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus into the temple, he took him up in his arms and blessed God, indicating his personal and affectionate appropriation of the Messiah as his Savior and Lord.

III. Simeon's Song (vv. 29-32).

This is the song known as the "Nunc Dimittis," so named from the Latin words with which it begins.

1. He prays for a peaceable departure (v. 29). Perhaps it was more than a prayer; it was praise to God that now he is having a blessed departure out of this life, having seen and handled the Savior. Truly blessed are the dead who died in the Lord.

2. He praises God for a world-wide salvation (vv. 30-32). The "Nunc Dimittis" is the universal song, thus widely differing from the "Magnificat" in that it is wider than the Jewish hope. Simeon saw Christ as the Light to reveal salvation to the Gentiles. This is the true glory of Israel. It is in keeping with the divine purpose in calling and disciplining this nation to make it the channel through which he might bless all the peoples of the world (Gen. 12:1-3).

IV. Simeon Blessed Joseph and Mary.

The revelation through Simeon caused them to marvel. To have such wonderful predictions made concerning their Babe filled them with amazement. His blessing contained wonderful and even dark words of prophecy.

1. "This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel." This means that Christ was to be a touchstone—destiny would be determined by the attitude of the people toward him. How definitely this has been fulfilled in the experience of that people!

2. "A sign which shall be spoken against." This had definite fulfillment in Israel and is being fulfilled today among many peoples.

3. A sword was to pierce Mary's soul. This perhaps refers to her suffering as she entered into sympathy with his unutterable suffering as he went to the cross, and her desolation afterward.

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Happiness

One of the first steps to contentment and happiness is to learn not to begrudge other people the things they have because you cannot have them.

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**Bayer Aspirin**

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THESE STEPS TO BELIEVED

A cleansing dose today; a smaller quantity tomorrow; less each time, until bowels need no help at all.

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A liquid laxative is the answer, mothers. The answer to all your worries over constipation. A liquid can be measured. The dose can be exactly suited to any age or need. Just reduce the dose each time, until the bowels are moving of their own accord and need no help.

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The doctors use liquid laxatives. Hospitals use the liquid form. It is best for them. It is best for home use. The liquid laxative most famous and best. Dr. Casper's Syrup Pepsin. Any drug store has it.

## Russian Children Are to Build a Railway Tunnel

A railway tunnel, 8,000 feet of line, and a station complete in every detail are to be built in their spare time by 500 children in the Tiflis Park of Culture and Rest at Moscow.

These projects will be an extension of the famous Children's Railway built in the park by the children themselves. It is run entirely by children and has two stations and 1,200 feet of track. It was opened three months ago, and since then 65,000 passengers have ridden in its tiny train, driven by a child. The work of building the railway was supervised by engineers of the Transcaucasian railway.—Montreal Herald.

## Engineers Will Move