

SAM'S LAW



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BLUSHING BOOKS

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Published by Blushing Books®,
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ABCD Graphics and Design
977 Seminole Trail #233
Charlottesville, VA 22901
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EBook ISBN: 978-1-948045-05-6
Print ISBN: 978-1-948045-27-8

Cover Art by ABCD Graphics & Design

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CHAPTER 1



The gavel rapped smartly on the wooden desk that served as his bench for the territorial judge. Judge Frank Thomas was getting a headache. He was tired of the same old cases coming before him time after time, and he made a silent vow to be harsh with the next man and make an example of him. He didn't like the looks of the man who had been waiting his turn since the sheriff marched them over from the jail earlier that morning. He had a sweet little girl with him, and a man like that didn't deserve that kind of support. He read over the paper in front of him, and his frown grew deeper. Most of the crimes listed were of a mild nature, but all had to do with creating mischief of one sort or another. "Sheriff, bring forward the next case." He glared at the man, but when the sheriff called out a name, it was the girl who stood up. "What is the meaning of this?" the judge asked the lawman. "The name is Sam Gibbons. Who are you, miss?"

The redhead looked at the judge and rolled her green eyes, but she didn't answer.

"I asked you a question, and unless you want to be charged with contempt, young lady, you will answer me right now and with respect. Who are you?"

"The sheriff already told you my name, Judge."

"She is Sam Gibbons, your honor," the sheriff insisted. He leaned on the bench and whispered, "It's short for Samantha, but she sets up a real fuss when anyone calls her that."

"Are you afraid of a little girl, Sheriff?" the judge asked with a snicker, but when the onlookers laughed as well, he banged his gavel, then winced when the noise hurt his head. "You did all of this? Trespassing, criminal mischief? You started a fight with two drovers? Why would you do that?"

"It seemed like the thing to do at the time." Sam didn't start the fight, but the pompous judge wouldn't believe her if she told him the truth. She did the laundry and mending the two drovers asked her to do, and once the work was done, they refused to pay her. They denied it, of course, and Sheriff Zeke Blain took their side.

"Girl, I don't like a smart mouth on a female. If I was you, I'd be saying some 'I'm sorrys.'"

"I am sorry for one thing, Judge. I frightened little Billy Jones when I was playing a practical joke on his granny. I humbly apologize for that. I don't apologize to the drovers for losing my temper when they cheated me out of the money they owed me for doing their laundry and mending their ripped shirts and pants. They lied to the sheriff, and they are the ones who should be standing here, not me."

"Why would Sheriff Blain arrest you for that?" Judge Thomas questioned, looking at the sheriff in surprise.

"I would like the answer to that myself, Judge. I know he doesn't like me, but I thought he knew I always tell the truth."

"What have you to say to this, Zeke?"

"Aw, hell, Frank! There was two of them, and they backed each other up."

"Where are they now?"

"Off and gone back to the herd they was drivin' to Kansas."

"While this little gal sat in jail?"

"She's not the innocent she claims to be; she's rowdy, and always causing a ruckus."

"Where's your pa, girl?" the judge asked.

"Dead."

"Who is responsible for you?"

"I am responsible for myself."

"How old are you?"

"Old enough to take care of myself. I'm not rich, but I am getting by."

The man sitting in the front row, the one she'd been sitting beside all morning, made the mistake of shaking his head, drawing the judge's attention. "Who the hell are you, mister?"

"I didn't mean to disturb you, Your Honor. My name is Ty Lawson, but I'm called Law. I arrived here in Coyote a couple of days ago."

"Why are you here, Mr. Lawson?" the judge demanded with exaggerated patience. "More to the point, why are you front row and center in my courtroom?"

"I am going to publish a newspaper, Your Honor. I figured the best way to get to know this town was to sit in on your court and watch the proceedings."

"That's it? No ulterior motives?"

"Why, no, sir!" Law replied. "I want to get to know folks."

"Then why were you shaking your head?"

"Not at you, sir. I was shaking my head because Miss Gibbons' sassy temper isn't helping her one little bit."

"Are you married?" Judge Thomas asked, beginning to devise a diabolical plan in his aching head.

"No, sir."

"Then I am sure you will have need of a housekeeper, and someone to help you at the paper. I have the need to appoint a guardian for Miss Gibbons. I know she has the tendency to cause a fuss, but a firm hand and some hard work will settle her down. I am appointing you Miss Gibbons' guardian until she reaches the

age of twenty-five, or until she marries with your approval. I suggest you take this responsibility seriously, because I will be checking on you two each and every time I come to this town. Now take her with you, and get out of my courtroom.” He banged his gavel, and Sam screamed in frustration.

“If that isn’t just like a pompous, arrogant man!” she accused. “I do not want a guardian, and I especially do not want this jackass as my guardian. You just take it back, Judge.” Sam stomped her foot angrily. “I mean it, damn it! I won’t have some damn man telling me what I can and cannot do. I hate that!” This time she gave Ty Lawson a dirty look.

“Silence!” the judge’s voice thundered in the room. “You will do as you are told, little girl, right this minute, or I will order your guardian to take you in hand in front of the entire room. I do not tolerate sass from a female.”

“I don’t know what female would be crazy enough to have anything to do with you!” Sam told the man, glaring at him.

“Sir, Miss Gibbons and I haven’t even been introduced. What you are suggesting is nothing short of unacceptable. People in town would talk and get the wrong idea. Miss Gibbons is too old to be placed in the home of a single man who has no housekeeper.”

“Miss Gibbons will act as your housekeeper, and no one will think a thing wrong with the arrangement.”

“Yes, they will. She isn’t a child.”

“All the more reason she needs a guardian. The appointment stands. Now, take her and leave.”

“You’d best be hightailing it out of town, Judge,” Sam said in a low, menacing voice as she glared at the man.

“Are you threatening me, young woman?” the judge demanded angrily.

“I didn’t do one damn thing wrong, old man. Those two men robbed me of my time and the money I earned. They also lied and got me into trouble. Then you, in your infinite wisdom, decide I am a menace because I am alone in this world! You bet I’m threatening

you! You are a half-assed, incompetent fool. A child could run this court better than you do. I am not going to go and live in this man's house. You can ask anyone in this damn town and they will tell you I am of good virtue. If I spend one night in his house, I will be ruined forever in these narrow-minded people's eyes. No, I won't do it. I shouldn't have been arrested in the first place. You need to fix this right here and right now!"

The judge banged his gavel loudly when the courtroom erupted in laughter, applause, and general mayhem. "I am holding you in contempt!" he roared.

"You are holding yourself up for contempt, Your Honor." Ty Lawson defended the girl. "You have no right to sentence an innocent woman to work in my household or my business. I do not want a housekeeper, especially one as beautiful as Samantha."

"Don't call me that or I'll knock your block off!"

"Don't sass me, girl. I'm trying to help you."

"Then tell him no, you won't have me to work for you," she bossed loudly.

"I think you need to quiet down, Miss Gibbons. You are only making matters worse by baiting the man. It isn't helping."

"Fine. *You* tell him he is an idiot!" she retorted.

"If you do not take this young woman in hand immediately, I am going to send her to prison for the next five years!" Judge Thomas threatened loudly.

"Your Honor, please be reasonable. Miss Gibbons is innocent of wrong doing. She shouldn't have been in jail in the first place. If the sheriff had done his job properly, you would be trying those two drovers for cheating her out of the payment they promised for work done. You can't punish her just because she is a female alone in the world."

"Maybe you want to be held in contempt of court too?" Judge Thomas was infuriated, and his headache was growing worse with each passing second.

"Your Honor, please hear me out. Do you have a daughter?"

“Yes, although I can’t see—”

“How would *she* react if she were in Miss Gibbons’ situation? How would you feel, as her father, if she were forced to move in with a strange man?”

The judge blinked, then asked, “Are you sure you’re not a lawyer, young man?”

“No, sir, the son of a judge. I learned a lot from him.” He grinned, and added, “I have never won an argument with him, however; but I learned a great deal of respect for the law.”

“You know as well as I do that a pretty young woman like Miss Gibbons is not safe in a town like this by herself. She needs a man’s protection.”

“I do not!” Sam argued, but the two men ignored her.

“I agree, sir. But, that man needs to have a wife so that Miss Gibbons’ reputation is protected. She cannot live with a single man.”

“I agree, Mr. Lawson. Miss Gibbons, I am convinced this young man has your best interests in mind. Please step forward.” The judge rose to his feet and stepped around the desk he used as his bench. “I agree that marriage is the only answer to Miss Gibbons’ problems. Once she is your wife, she will be under your protection, and no one can argue about her virtue, or lack thereof.”

“No! I am not marrying this son of a bitch!”

“My mother is a sweet woman, little girl. Refer to her in that manner again and I’ll blister your bare butt!” It took a lot to make Law angry, but when he did lose his temper, he was a force to be reckoned with. “You’d better hope this judge doesn’t marry us, or you’re in for an education you won’t forget for the rest of your natural life.”

“You two are going to marry right here and now. If nature doesn’t take its course, then I’ll give you an annulment in a year’s time. By then, I reckon this girl will learn to do something besides laundry to support herself. If not, I’ll put her in prison the first time she steps out of line.” He looked at Samantha. “Answer ‘I do’ or

you'll be on your way to prison for five years. The same goes for you, Mr. Lawson."

With those ominous words, the judge performed a brief wedding. When Sam decided to be stubborn, Law swatted her hind once and told her she would be raped by the prison guards her first night there. She could see that he was serious, and answered, "I do" when asked.

"Congratulations to you both. Now clear this court. I'm hungry and thirsty, and sick to death of arguing."

Law took Samantha by the arm and led her out of the schoolhouse, which was used when they held court once a month, or more often if there was a serious crime committed. The children loved having the day off; the mothers not so much.

"Where do you live, Samantha?" Law asked softly. "We'll pack up your things, then go to my place. Don't expect anything fancy. I could barely afford my printing press," he admitted, uncomfortable with the thought of her likely reaction to his 'home'.

"I'm not used to fancy. That don't bother me none. I only married you to stay out of prison!" she warned in her usual honest fashion.

"That is the same reason I married you." He couldn't believe it when she walked to the livery stable and waved.

An elderly black man saw them and walked over. "Missy Sammy, you done got free. That there judge listen to you when you tell him the truth?"

"I think he believed me, Jericho. But he decided I needed protection. He forced me to marry this man by threatening us both with prison."

"Prison! That just ain't right!"

"No, sir, it isn't. But it's done now. My name is Law." He offered his hand.

"Jericho Coffing, Mr. Law. You gonna take care of Missy?" he asked curiously, studying Law intently.

"I won't let Samantha come to harm."

“Good. She’s a right good girl. Ain’t fittin’ for her to live in a barn.”

“You live *here*, Samantha?” Law was stunned.

“Jericho don’t charge me much.”

“Missy Sammy keeps watch at night; if someone gets up to mischief, she comes to get me. She stopped some young’uns from burnin’ the place down a few weeks ago. Givin’ her a room to sleep in is a small price to pay. Besides, folks don’t much cotton to Missy, same as me.”

Law didn’t know what to say to that, so he turned to the redhead and asked, “Do you need help packing, Samantha?”

“No. I’ll be done in ten minutes. Besides, the room is too small for both of us.”

When she disappeared, Jericho looked at him for a few seconds, then grinned. “You know that Missy Sammy done run out the back door and into the woods, don’t ya?”

“Aw, hell!” Law swore, running through the stable and out the back door while Jericho cackled with laughter.

“That boy is sure in for it, Trapper,” Jericho told his dog when he came to see what was so funny.

Sam ran as fast as she could, cursing the dress that hampered her movements. She felt as though she was escaping pure agony. The thought of lying with a man terrified her. She’d overheard a group of women talking about their first night of marriage, and it had terrified her. She wanted no part of it, whether or not Law had a legal right. She would run away, start over somewhere else. She had a bit of money saved. Perhaps she could find a job working for a seamstress? Sam loved to sew. This town’s one and only seamstress wouldn’t throw her a crumb of work. But she did mend the clothes that the men around town brought to her to wash and iron.

Sam finally stopped running, certain she’d given her new husband the slip. She considered her options, and decided she would walk to the line shack on the Double Bar D Ranch, spend the night, then head for the town of Ripple Ridge the next day. If she

was lucky Max might stop the stage if it was empty and give her a ride. If she was even luckier, Law wouldn't think to look for her in Ripple Ridge.



LAW FOUND it easy to follow Samantha's trail because she wasn't bothering to take measures to keep him from finding her. He smiled in satisfaction when he spotted her fiery red hair. When he caught her, the feisty brat was in for a good lesson. They were married, like it or not – and he sure as hell didn't like it – but he was going to do his best to make it work. His father would be humiliated to learn that someone in his family had a marriage legally dissolved through the courts, so Law had to find a way to get along with the feisty redhead.

Sam heard Law coming and took off running again, desperate to escape him. How had a judge's son followed her when he was new to the area? Life wasn't a bit fair to her lately!

Law gave chase, and caught up with Samantha just in time to grab her and keep her from falling when her hem got caught on a rock. "You come here, little girl!" he stated as he turned her around to face him. "What do you mean by running away from me?" He suddenly had his hands full of a spitting mad, angry wildcat of a woman. "Settle down!" he warned, but when she continued to struggle with him, he pulled her over to a tree stump, took a seat, and hauled her face down over his knee. "I doubt anyone has ever thought to give you a spanking or you wouldn't be so darn contrary!"

Sam fought to free herself from the indignity he had planned for her, but the man was simply too strong and she couldn't escape the hold he had on her. Sam cried out in fury when the first blow landed on her bottom. Her dress was thin, and so were the drawers she wore underneath. She didn't own a petticoat, and Law's hand could be felt through the old garments she was wearing. Before she

could tell him what she thought of his high-handed treatment of her, he spanked her again and again, and it really burned her skin. “Stop it, you bastard!”

“I have two older siblings. I am clearly not a bastard,” he said, trying not to lose his blasted temper again. “You need to control your tongue.”

“You need to drop dead!” A much harder spank followed, and Sam instantly regretted taunting him. “Stop! Stop! You’re hurting me!”