

# THE RELATIVE QUILT

About twenty miles west of Douglas Crossing sat Clarkville, a prosperous town, at least for one man. That one man went by the name of Amos Clark, landlord for two-thirds of Clark County. Situated at the confluence of the Saragonda and Hapshot rivers, Clarkville also served as the hub for the G & E Railroad. Brisk commercial activity lined the pockets of Amos and a few fortunate others with ample rewards. By and large, the general populace languished in debt to baron Clark, and frequently lived from one meal to the next.

The frigid air surrounding Jacob Morrow's entrance into Clarkville proved too much for a welcoming committee. No colorful banners flowed overhead. No band of musicians played jubilantly on the street corner. In fact, even if it had been a bright spring day, no such welcome would have awaited the man, for no one knew of Jacob Morrow and his arrival.

Well-worn, loose-fitting buckskin hid Jacob's muscular frame. He looked no different from most of the other men who came into town for a brief respite from the rigors of travel in that part of

the country. But there was something different about Jacob Morrow that the citizens of Clarkville would soon find out.

For one week, Jacob Morrow went to every shopkeeper in town with the following proposition, “I will shovel all the snow off the walkway in front of your store for free if you will but do one thing for me. On Saturday, January 21st at eight o’clock in the morning, I need you to come down to the church at the end of town with a six-inch square of fabric.”

What could the shopkeepers do? The offer seemed too good to refuse.

The next week Jacob visited the home of every citizen living in Clarkville. While the people shared a common hatred for Amos Clark because of his price gouging at the stores on Main Street, they shared little else. Chinese immigrants lived at the east end of town. Germans settled to the west. Mexicans kept to themselves in the south. People of color slept in ramshackle homes to the north.

Jacob offered the following to each citizen, “I will chop enough firewood for you to last the rest of winter if you will but do one thing for me. On Saturday, January 21st at eight o’clock in the

morning, I need you to come down to the church at the end of town with a six-inch square of fabric.”

This proposal likewise seemed too good to refuse for all but one man, Amos Clark. Amos said he had all the firewood he would ever need. He slammed the heavy iron gate to his front door in Jacob’s face.

Jacob lived up to his word, completing all the work he had agreed to. At the appointed hour, he waited at the church. Slowly, people began showing up at the church with their scraps of fabric. After a while, the church overflowed with men, women, and children of every age and every description. Hundreds of people stood outside in the freezing cold, trying to catch a glimpse of what was going on inside the church.

Jacob instructed dozens of ladies to gather all the squares of fabric and bring them to him at the altar. From there, he distributed them to numerous groups of other ladies he had organized into circles to sew the pieces together. He moved quickly from group to group, encouraging the workers, and reminding them that time was of the essence. As each group finished their blocks, they brought them to one last group who put the entire project together. With the last stitch made, Jacob threw the quilt

over his shoulder and headed out the front door. The crowd parted for him to pass through as he headed west.

Everyone wondered where Jacob was going and what he was going to do with the quilt. The lone figure of a man leading hundreds of people down the streets of Clarkville in the dead of winter evoked even more curiosity from those visiting the town for the day. As Jacob turned the last corner of Main St., he headed straight for Amos Clark's house. When the huge crowd behind Jacob arrived, they found the stranger standing over the shivering body of the Baron himself. Apparently, Amos had stepped outside for a minute and the enormous iron gate had closed behind him. He had not expected the gate to lock and, being without his key and only dressed in a light outfit, he soon felt the effects of the bitter cold. Were it not for Jacob Morrow and the huge quilt that now gave warmth to Amos, he most surely would have died.

As the crowd of people watched Jacob and Amos, they began talking amongst themselves. Jung Chai began speaking to Herr Schultz. Senor Lopez said some words to Mrs. Brown. Delbert Smith shook hands with Edgar Martinez. Pretty soon, the scene took on all the appearances of a

large family reunion. The people who had only lived among their own for so many years seemed to find long-lost relatives from the larger family of man.

When Amos Clark finally arose from the frigid snow, the people became eerily silent.

From the middle of the crowd, Nessie Gilbert said, “Would yas look at old Amos. The richest of the rich, near dead cept for what we’s, the poorest of the poor, could give him. It’s kinda like it was all backwards.”

“Amen,” said Rachel Gunders.

From the back came, “It’s all kinda relative.”

“What did he say?” asked several in unison.

Bobbie Thompson answered, “I said it’s all kinda relative. The riches and all, I mean. Ain’t it all kinda relative?”

There was an eerie silence again until Jacob Morrow responded to the complex question from the simple man saying, “Yes, it is, Bobbie. Yes, it is.”

“There’s one thing I don’t understand,” said Nessie Gilbert. “Jacob, how did you know old man Amos was out here?”

The crowd turned to hear Jacob's answer, but the stranger was gone.

“Well, ain't that curious,” said Nessie.

And curious it remained, for no one ever saw Jacob Morrow again. The years following that eventful day in Clarkville proved a little less harsh for the common folk of the town. Debtors who fell a little behind in their payments never felt much pressure from Amos.

Ten years to the day later, Amos Clark passed away. Having no living relatives, the Baron left his entire estate to the little church at the end of town. His will made only two conditions about the dispensation of his assets. First, all the money must be used to help people in times of desperate need. Second, the quilt he had grown so fond of must serve as a testament to man's relationship to God and his fellow man.

And so, you will find that, even in the poorest section of town, the streets are clean, and the people take pride in where they live. You will also find, at the end of town, a quaint little church that has a faded patchwork quilt hanging on its narthex wall. And, underneath that quilt, you will see the words, “It's all kinda relative”.