

MRS. MAGRUDER'S APPLE PIES

“Sheriff, ya gotta do something. I’m runnin outta pie pans. Ya know we got the church social coming up on Saturday and they’re dependin on me to bring some of my award-winnin apple pies. Now, I ain’t gonna have any to bring, if’n somebody keeps stealin em. You know what I’m sayin, Sheriff?”

“Yes, Ma,” said Sheriff Long.

Everybody called Mrs. Magruder “Ma”, even though she wasn’t anybody’s ma. She just acted like she was everybody’s ma.

“Well...ll?” said Mrs. Magruder.

“Well, I don’t rightly have a lot to go on, Ma. I’ll ask around. I’ll see if anybody’s found any pie pans laying around. Most likely any other evidence has probably been et.”

Sheriff Long had mixed feelings about such a crime as pie stealing. It seemed kind of low on the totem pole of importance. On the other hand, he didn’t have any dead bodies to deal with. At least not if he found the criminal before Ma did.

Before leaving Mrs. Magruder's house, he checked the area outside the porch where she put her pies to cool. There looked to be two sets of footprints, and one of them had a heel that sunk deep. He followed the prints out to the trail where it looked like the two thieves mounted up and rode off.

Talking to himself, Sheriff Long said, "Those are some strange prints. Mules maybe. No ... those look like cow hoofprints. What kind of fools would ride cows and steal apple pies? ... I wonder if they're back in town ... yeah, could be. Those Stevens brothers have been in jail for about three years. It would be about time for them to get out. They probably stole the cows before they stole the apple pies."

He rode over to Milt Lefler's farm a couple of miles down the road. When he rode in the gate of the dairy farm, Milt came running out to greet him.

"Sheriff, I'm glad you're here," said Milt, excitedly. "Somebody made off with two of my best cows."

“I guessed that, Milt. I found two sets of cow prints over at Ma’s place. Somebody stole her apple pies, too.”

“Who do ya think it is, Sheriff?”

“Well, I’m not absolutely sure, but my gut tells me it’s the Stevens brothers.”

“Are they back?” asked the dairy farmer.

“Could be, Milt ... Let me look around your barn and pasture.”

“Okay, Sheriff.”

Just outside the barn door, Sheriff Long saw something very unusual.

“Milt, you ain’t been walking around here with snowshoes on, have you?”

“What in the world would I be doing that for? It’s the middle of August.”

“Well, somebody has,” said the sheriff.

“I’ll be ... You mean somebody wearing snowshoes stole my cows and then stole Ma’s pies?”

“It looks like it, Milt. Only they took the snowshoes off before they stole Ma’s pies.”

“Crazy, Sheriff. Just plain crazy.”

“I think we’ll get your cows back, Milt. I doubt if these thieves will go very far—especially not riding cows.”

“Thank you, Sheriff.”

Riding down Main Street towards his office, Sheriff Long pulled his horse up short.

“Sheriff, I want to report a theft,” said Byron Greene, the owner of the general store.

“I’m gonna take a wild guess here, Byron. Somebody stole two pairs of snowshoes, right?”

“Why, yes ... How did you know?”

“It’s a long story, but we’ll do everything we can to get them back ... You get a description of anybody? Anybody see someone take the snowshoes?”

“I didn’t, but Lucy Holmes thought she recognized them. She couldn’t remember their names, but one was a big, heavy guy and the other much smaller.”

“Yeah, sounds like the Stevens brothers, alright.”

“She said she saw them coming out of the hotel before they came in here.”

The lawman figured he better go on over to the hotel and check with Wendell. He walked up to the desk and rang the bell. Wendell came out of the back room, saw the sheriff, and opened a drawer.

“Sheriff, just the man I wanted to see. I had two gentlemen try to pay their bill with these five-dollar bills. My nephew was at the desk at the time, and he didn’t know any better.”

The sheriff looked at the bills and said, “Confederate. I ain’t seen any of these for a while.”

“When I got back to the desk, the two gentlemen had left.”

“One a big, heavy guy and one much smaller?”

“Yes, that’s them,” said the hotel manager.

“Well, Wendell, I don’t know if I’ll be able to get your money, but I’ll try. I think the two guys were a couple of thieves that used to live around here. I will keep you informed as things progress.”

Perhaps you are wondering if the start of the Stevens brothers’ trail was anywhere nearby. Over the course of the day, the sheriff heard from a

farmer who gave the boys a ride into town—they stole his rifle. Then the train conductor reported two men taking two suitcases from a traveling salesman and getting onto a wagon headed for town. And then a train detective came into the sheriff's office looking for two men who stole two tickets for the River's Edge run.

When lunchtime came around, the sheriff went over to the diner to grab a bite. The cook came out complaining about two men who ordered the diner's deluxe, top-of-the-line dinner and then skipped out without paying.

About three o'clock that afternoon, he got a telegram from Sheriff McCalley in Richfield about two men who stole two men's clothes from the bathhouse and were last seen heading for the train station. At five o'clock, the sheriff got a telegram from Warden Owens at the state prison. He wanted to alert law enforcement in the area about two prisoners who stole a jailer's keys and escaped.

When Harry Lawson, editor-in-chief at the Glenville Gazette, got word of the whole fiasco, he made it the lead story in Friday's edition. The headline read, "They're Back". The article began with:

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where Gomer and Zeke break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves apple pies in heaven, where neither Gomer nor Zeke can consume. For where your apple pies are, there will your stomach be as well.”

Harry managed to ruffle a few feathers with his scriptural translation. The paper’s sales volume was such that they had to do a second printing, and they thought about doing a third.

The ladies went ahead with the church social on Saturday, even though they only had two apple pies. They held a drawing to raffle off pieces of Ma’s apple pies.

On Sunday, Reverend Smucker based his sermon on Matthew 6.19-21, the King James version and not the Glenville Gazette’s.

Remarkably, no reports of theft came into Sheriff Long’s office for the entire next week. On Monday of the following week, Bobby Thomason, the blacksmith at the livery stable, approached Sheriff Long outside the diner.

“Sheriff, I need to tell you something about the Stevens brothers’ case,” said the blacksmith.

“Whatcha got, Bobby?”

“I had a couple of horses in stalls I was supposed to shoe this morning, but when I got there, they were gone. And here’s the kicker—two cows were in the stalls instead. I reckon they must belong to Milt Lefler.”

“I’d reckon, Bobby.”

The sheriff put the cows on leads and headed for Milt’s dairy farm. On the way, he thought a little more about the latest development. He could only hope that it was a sign that the Stevens brothers had moved on and left the area. Milt thanked the sheriff for returning the cows, and the lawman headed back to town.

As it turned out, the sheriff’s hope became a reality, as Glenville never had another run of thievery for a long time. When the Stevens brothers left town, they took the sheriff’s headaches with them.

As the month neared end, the ladies at the church began planning for the next church social. In a move rivaling Solomon’s wisdom, they held their next planning meeting at Ma Magruder’s place. When Ma placed pie number fifteen on the cooling rack, she sat down with the other ladies. With the coming of an early fall, it wasn’t all that

unusual to see the ladies gather outside on someone's porch and enjoy the cooler weather. Perhaps a little unusual in this case, though, was how the rocking chairs were positioned on that porch. The six rockers formed a semi-circle in front of the pie rack—almost a defensive-like arrangement. But the ladies seemed very relaxed, gently rocking in their wooden rockers. They talked about the food for the social on Saturday, they gossiped a little about Harriet Marson and her latest beau, and they talked about Reverend Smucker's sermon last Sunday. The conversation seemed so harmless that a stranger might have difficulty understanding the twelve-gauge shotgun each lady cradled in her arms.