

Chapter 6 word count approximately 2250

AMOS and the WILD WELSHMAN
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An Excerpt

Chapter 6
HILL FOLK AND LITTLE FOLK

When Amos and Bobby arrived at school on Friday, there were three horse-drawn buggies lined up in front of the building. Their black sides and tops were streaked with dust, giving them a drab look. Each buggy had a front window and windowed side doors with curtains pulled down. Horse's reins extended through a slot below the front window to the driver's seat. A tall bearded man wearing a broad brim black hat was holding the reins of the lead horse. He was dressed all in black from his hat to his work shoes. His somber appearance contrasted sharply with the cheery faces of the children who flocked around to admire his horse. Mrs. Krause emerged from the schoolhouse, a pointer in hand, and blew her whistle. Students jostled playfully as they formed lines in front of their designated doors.

"Children," announced Mrs. Krause, "There will be a special presentation in the upstairs schoolroom. Fourth, fifth and sixth graders, file upstairs and go to your seats. First, second and third grades follow them up and go to the back of the room. Mrs. Williams is there. She will show you where to sit."

Several first, second and third graders giggled and shoved as they entered the upstairs room. When Mrs. Krause appeared through the door, they fell silent. Mrs. Krause assisted with the seating of students, directing them with her pointer.

A long table on sawhorses had been set up in the front of the room. It was covered with an odd-looking assortment of things. On the left side was a black metal box with a door. It had a bellows connected to it. An L shaped glass tube extended out of the box and down into a gold fish bowl. A tiny gold fish swam about in the bowl, inspecting

the tube. In the center of the table was a large glass chamber with a mouse inside. Next to the chamber was second black box with a bellows. A glass tube connected it to the mouse's chamber.

Two men wearing broad brimmed black hats, and dressed identically to the man outside by the buggies, stood beside an easel stacked high with charts. Behind the table three women waited silently. They wore long black dresses with no adornments. Their gray bonnets were pulled tightly around their heads. Amos sensed an odd sadness about them. None of the visitors smiled, except one. In the corner a tall man dressed in a black cutaway coat, white shirt and black tie nodded and smiled at the children. Amos didn't think it was a cheerful smile. It seemed more like a sneer than a smile. He was holding a leather bound book in his left hand. The way he stood there with his book reminded Amos of the picture of Ichabod Crane he had seen in his *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* storybook.

"Professor Schlechtmann and his helpers are here to tell you about the evils of smoking," announced Mrs. Krause, "They have come all the way from their community up in the hills. They have charts and pictures for you to see. And there will be a demonstration."

Professor Schlechtmann walked forward and bowed. His speaking voice was loud and raspy. As he described the evils of smoking he made sweeping gestures with his hands. His helpers held up charts to illustrate the points he was making. The charts were graphs of health statistics, and drawings showing how tobacco smoking coats lungs with thicker and thicker layers of black soot.

"Tobacco," shouted Professor Schlechtmann, "is evil, a temptation, and the work of the devil! It will destroy your health!"

He read a passage from the Bible, something about a beast that rose out of the earth. As he read he glanced over at Amos, drew in his breath, and paused momentarily in his reading. He looked startled. With a grimace he quickly looked away and continued. His action made Amos shiver. Why did he look at him like that?

The demonstrations shocked and astonished Amos. One of the men assisting Professor Schlechtmann held up a cigarette for all to see. The man beside him struck a match and lit both ends of it. The smoldering cigarette was then thrust through a door in the box connected to the mouse's chamber. A woman moved from behind the table, shut the door, grabbed the bellows and began pumping. Cigarette smoke flowed from the box through the glass tube into the mouse's compartment, quickly filling it with smoke.

A second cigarette was lit at both ends and placed in the box connected to the gold fish bowl. Another woman moved into position by that box and began pumping the bellows. A steady stream of smoke was forced through the tube to the bottom of the gold fish bowl and out the end. A stream of bubbles rose through the bowl, popping as they reached the surface. As the bubbles rose, the gold fish rolled over and floated, upside down, on the top of the water. After about two minutes of staggering about in the smoke, the mouse collapsed, feet in the air, and was still.

"There! See what smoking has done," bellowed the professor, pointing to the mouse and the gold fish, "This is what will happen to you if you adopt the devil's ways and smoke tobacco."

"Amen, brother," chanted the members of his group.

The room was silent. One first grade girl cried softly. Mrs. Williams comforted her and scowled at the professor. Professor Schlechtmann thanked Mrs. Krause. His people solemnly packed everything they brought with them into cases. Amos stood up to look but couldn't see what they had done with the mouse and the gold fish. He decided he didn't like those people. Professor Schlechtmann, in particular, gave him the creeps. Mrs. Krause started the upper classes on various schoolwork projects. Mrs. Williams directed first, second and third graders downstairs. The men in black hats followed them, thumping down the stairs as they carried their heavy loads. Amos could hear the noises of buggies being loaded and driven away.

When the classes went outside for recess, all traces of the people from the high hill community were gone, except for a few horse manure mounds along the road. Jake walked over to Amos and pulled a corncob pipe out of his back pocket.

"Listening to that stuff makes me want to smoke," he snorted.

Before he could act on that idea, Mrs. Krause appeared holding her whistle and pointed toward the doors to the classrooms.

Amos whispered in Jake's ear as they formed into lines, "Jake, I've got a peanut butter and mince meat sandwich today. I'll split it with you."

When lunch hour was announced, Jake walked back to Amos's desk. Amos handed him the half sandwich. Jake lifted the bread to make sure the mincemeat was visible. Then, he thrust the open sandwich toward the girl who had sneered at Amos' about his peanut butter and pickle relish sandwich the day before.

"See? Ground up wiggly worms," Jake announced, closing the sandwich. He took a large bite, grinning broadly as he chewed.

"Go away!" Squealed the girl, "I'm not looking."

When Amos finished his lunch and went outside, Jake was waiting for him.

"Did you see that? I really got her goat. Good sandwich. After school, you wanta look for the little people?"

Amos was surprised and thrilled, "Oh boy! That would be great!"

"Meet me at my house. Just you. Don't tell nobody. And for sure don't tell that Clarence guy."

"OK. I promise."

"He's a real pain. Always wants to know where he can go to see the little people. No way. He won't see them! He's got the wrong ancestors."

"Let me go home first. I'll tell my mom you're going to teach me how to play marbles. Then I'll be back."

When Amos returned Jake was sitting on his front porch with his sister.

"Goin' up hill, Millie," said Jake.

Millie smiled and nodded. Amos refrained from comment. She really did have a serious case of buckteeth. Her teeth stuck out and had big gaps between them. He felt sorry for her and decided he was really glad he didn't have that problem.

Jake and Amos scrambled up the hill behind his house. They passed through a large woods thick with underbrush, across a high meadow, and into a stand of birch, oak and maple trees. On the other side of those woods was a meadow and another tree-covered hill. They kept climbing and hiking over the rugged terrain. After about twenty minutes they reached a clearing. Tall trees completely surrounded a level grassy

area about the size of a baseball infield. Jake motioned Amos to stand flat against an oak tree at the edge of the woods. Then he strode to the center of the open area.

“Cynbel Cadwalader, come out!” shouted Jake.

Nothing happened, so he shouted again, “Cynbel Cadwalader, please come out!”

From a tree on the far side of the clearing a small man appeared. Amos was astonished. It looked as if he had materialized out of a tree trunk. He was not quite three feet tall, and was wearing a green coat, red cap and black boots. His red beard partially concealed an embroidered white vest. He did not look happy.

“I heard you the first time, young Jake. No need to caterwaul. Now you just stand there! Don’t say a word. Hear? That boy by the oak tree won’t be seeing me, and he can’t hear me. I don’t want you yapping like you’re talking to thin air. Why did you bring him here? You know better than that.”

“But I do see you,” exclaimed Amos, “And I hear you, too!”

The little man was startled. He stared at Amos with a puzzled look on his face. His intense blue eyes glowed. He seemed to be staring right through Amos.

“Are you truly seeing and hearing me? Prove it! Tell me your name.”

“Amos.”

“Aye, now there’s a good name,” said Cynbel, a smile lighting his face, “Good prophet. But he wasn’t no Celt.”

The little man stroked his beard with his fingers, as if in deep thought. Then he smiled, waved his hand, and said, “Come over here, lad, and lean down. I want to touch your brow.”

“Yes sir, Mr. Cadwalader,” said Amos stumbling forward, not knowing what to think, and afraid to disobey this vibrant little person.

“The name is Cynbel. Don’t ‘mister’ me,” growled the little man, “Those lord, lady, and mister titles are for fancy folk, not for the likes of me.”

When Amos leaned down, Cynbel placed three fingers on his forehead. Cynbel’s touch was warm. A tingling sensation penetrated Amos’ skin where the little man’s fingers touched. There was a long silence, broken only by Cynbel’s soft humming.

“Aha! Yes, yes. Now I see. You have Welsh heritage. In 1099, one of your ancestors brought tin miners from Normandy to fight with William the Conqueror at the battle of Hastings. When the Saxons were defeated he moved to Wales and started tin mining in our country. His sons married girls of the Glyndwr clan. That is how some of your ancestors became true Welshmen. Your grandmother, Alice O’Toole, may God rest her soul, came over from Ireland during the potato famine. Her father was Irish. But her mother was Welsh, and her blood is in you. That is why you can see me. Yes, and there is something else there in your memories.”

Amos was awe struck, “How do you know about my ancestors?”

“My fingers talked to the deep shadows of your mind. That’s where they found the old memories. You have memories there I don’t believe you know you have.”

The little man closed his eyes, folded his hands over his chest and spun around three times. As he did, he hopped, and clicked his feet together in rhythmic dance steps. Then he stopped, clapped his hands three times, and opened his eyes. From behind a large maple tree another little man appeared wearing a red hat and a green coat. The new arrival looked much like Cynbel except for his gray beard and the long white feather in his hat.

“Amos, this is Gwern Gwilt. He does sorceries, the very best of sorceries. Gwern, meet Amos,” said Cynbel turning from Gwern to Jake, “And, Jake, you are forgiven. I see now that you have brought a special person to our glen.”

Cynbel touched Amos’s sleeve, “Gwern, listen to Amos’s memories. I think you will be surprised at what you find there.”

Jake whispered to Amos, “Those are Welsh names. In Welsh Cynbel means warrior chief. Leader in battle, that’s what Cadwalader means. He’s chief of the Fair People. Gwern is the Welsh word for old. Gwilt means wild. He knows all the stories of the olden days.

“Amos, bend over. Let me touch your forehead,” said Gwern.

Amos leaned over and thrust his head forward as far as he could. Gwern pressed three fingers against his forehead and hummed a low-pitched tune for what seemed to Amos a very long time. Again there was the tingling sensation. Finally, the little man jumped back, clapped his hands gleefully, and shouted, “He is! He is! Yes indeed, he is.”

“Is? Is what? What is he talking about?” muttered Amos, feeling very nervous and uncomfortable.