



**A searing story of survival, redemption, restoration and a couple's love that must find its way through the devastation of war, greed, and a period in America's South unlike anything in history – Reconstruction.**



**Set in the lawless months between the end of the Civil War and official Reconstruction, families, torn apart by death, hate, and the ravages of war, must find each other and begin the long, torturous, task of rebuilding their lives while holding the carpetbaggers, scalawags, and even the occupying federal army at bay. They all meet - here - at**

***KNIGHT'S CROSSING.***

# Knight's Crossing

By: *Bill Ghent*

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A novel of  
*Southern Honor*  
During the most trying time  
The South has ever endured.

## Acknowledgements

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And to my loyal "readers": Becky, Barbara, David, Mary and Judy (and, of course, Shirley Jo) who continued to subtly push me when I struck the rough patches, my deepest appreciation. This book is a work of love and you are all in it.

**For**

*Andrew Thomas Rhodes*, my grandson, whose roots run well over two centuries deep into the red clay and sandy loam of the two Carolinas. May he always honor the memory of his ancestors who wore the Gray of the “Lost Cause.”

*Knight's Crossing*  
By: *Bill Ghent*

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**Ellie Grace Campbell**

She stood, facing the just risen sun, a wooden bucket by her feet, with one hand shading her eyes as a single wisp of sun bleached hair waved about her left ear. Here she had stood every morning for over four years, just like this one, waiting. Waiting and watching. Watching the eastern stretch of the dirt road winding its way up-river from the coast toward the farms farther inland, or what was left of them.

Ellen Grace Campbell, or Ellie, as she was known by those close to her, and nearly everyone was close to her, had been striking this pose for many months now as she strained her eyes in vain searching the distance for any trace of Captain John Knight, late of the Army of Northern Virginia, otherwise known as the Army of the Confederacy.

The war had been officially over in April and here it was July and Jack hadn't shown hide nor hair of himself. Either he had fallen, as had so many young men from

hereabouts, or something had held him up. Something important. It would have to be “terrible important,” too, thought Ellie, as she knew neither “hell nor high water” would keep Jack from coming straight home to his farm and family.

Luke, Jack’s brother, had tried as best he could, to get the farm producing again as soon as he was able. He’d been wounded in the left arm. With Brigadier General Lewis Armistead’s North Carolina troops, he was right in the middle of the God-awful charge led by General Pickett across that wide-open field at Gettysburg. Many men fell that day. Thousands. Many more, like Luke, had been wounded and made it back to safety; others had made it back to safety only to die of their wounds hours, or days, later.

Luke was one of the lucky ones. He had made his way back to the rear area and from there to the home of a family of Southern sympathizers who cared for him, night and day, ‘til his fever was down and he was able to be on his way.

He had walked from Pennsylvania to North Carolina. Walking by day, hiding out and sleeping in whatever shelter he could find by night - usually a thick stand of pine trees. Sometimes he would find a broken down, partially decayed cabin in which he shared the night with little, mostly unseen, nocturnal animals skittering about in the darkness.

He ate what he could find. Even now, he didn’t like to think about his “catch as catch can” menu. But, as bad as it was, it wasn’t much worse than the regular fare of the Confederate soldier at the late stages of the War. No doubt about it, he was a lucky man. He was alive! And he was home!

Ellie turned, as her apron lifted in the early morning breeze, picked-up her bucket, and headed for the well. It was time to start the day. It was daylight.

### **Captain Jack Knight**

The low ground fog of early morning still swaddled the rider in shadows of various hues of gray. The ghostly movements within the fog of the rider and horse were made all the more surreal by the gray clothing which shadow for shadow matched the shades of the fog. The muffled “clump, clump” of the horse’s hooves on the moist sandy loam of the roadbed only added to the image of the specter. The man astride the bay was motionless except for the natural movement caused by the horse’s forward motion. The leather of the saddle creaked gently like a favorite overstuffed chair. The occasional grinding of the

horses teeth against the metal bit and the soft jangle of the reins as they hung limp in the rider's hand all bespoke a certain tiredness, a spiritual tiredness as well as physical. The well-worn gray trousers and the gray waistcoat with the CSA embroidered on it and the Captain's insignia, as well, bespoke a man of duty and responsibility. The patches on the elbows and one knee told an additional story of deprivation. The golden band on his hat denoted the Confederate Calvary. Wedged tightly in the waistband of his trousers was a well oiled 1851 Navy Colt revolver. It was the favored handgun of the Southern Calvary. In a saddle sheath rested an equally well-kept Cook and Brothers rifle. It was the newer 58-caliber weapon. It was reliable. It had to be. His saber had been lost in some forgotten skirmish with a Yankee patrol months ago. Just behind the saddle was his bedroll. One blanket tucked inside an oilcloth. This had been his shelter for many months of fighting, running, and fighting again.

This was Captain John Knight, most recently one of Wade Hampton's men. Hampton, a Carolinian himself, had asked specifically that Knight be assigned to him. General Lee had, in turn, assigned Hampton to J.E.B. Stuart's "Riding Circus," as some of the men had taken to calling them, especially after their ride completely around the entire Yankee Army! Hampton was Stuart's second in command. That placed Knight as close to the top as he cared to be! Often it was closer!

The rider shifted his weight in the saddle and groaned softly as one used to moving quietly with a minimum of noise. The horse never changed its pace - still "clomping" along on the moist sand. Knight's hooded eyes seemed to be fixed on a point far off in the impenetrable fog. It was as though he COULD see right through the soup and into whatever lay on the other side. He couldn't, of course. What he was seeing was, in fact, in the past. A past, which lay far behind. Maybe too far. He hoped not. The past was where all the good things were. His farm. His brothers. The land. And, there was Ellie.

Sweet Ellie. Her memory brought the closest thing to a smile to his thin lips as anything had in, well, a long, long time. There was a sharp twitch at the corner of his mouth. His steady gaze never faltered. Straight ahead he rode, into the fog, into the future, a future most certainly not of his making. The horse, the rider, the fog, was all one now. One ghostly movement. Onward into whatever waited just beyond the filmy curtain of gray.

### **Knight Farm**

The morning sun was just beginning to burn off the low-lying ground fog in the hollow near the river where the Knight farm once nestled. A pile of burned debris, a well with a windless and rope, a lean-to shack which sheltered a lone mule, and another shack which appeared to have once served as a wood shed was all that remained after the renegade Yankee raiding party had finished with it. It had been raped. Violated! In the morning dampness the smell of burnt timbers still lingered in the air.

The mule stirred restlessly as she hinted to anyone near that she was ready for her morning meal. When that didn't bring immediate results, she stirred again. This time with a soft whinny. It was answered by a muffled shout from inside the wood shed. Luke Knight was stirring, too. He slipped his gallowes up, and over, his shoulders and slid his feet into what was left of his shoes and stumbled toward the uneven slab door. Made from the cast offs from their once profitable sawmill, it protested slightly as he leaned his weight against it, then swung open. Luke stepped into the doorway, rubbed his eyes, and made his way, haltingly, over to the well. Being careful to lower the bucket gently into the water below, so as not to knock the bottom out of it, he drew water for his morning drink and his morning toilet. This done he shuffled around to the backside of the lean-to and gathered an armful of fodder from what was left of last fall's corn crop. It was nearly gone. Stepping on around the corner, he deposited it in the feed trough for the mule.

For many years now, old Molly had pulled a plow and done just about every chore on the Knight farm that a man couldn't do. She was getting on. As she crunched and ground her breakfast, Luke began his walk back to the woodshed to forage for his morning repast. It would be the same as yesterday, salt pork and corn bread. It was his steady diet now. It was all he had. Well, that wasn't exactly true. He had killed and roasted a rabbit last week - a welcome change. He'd been meaning to set more traps, for he still remembered what his Pa had taught him about making "rabbit-boxes."

There was a wisp of forlorn looking smoke curling up from last night's cooking fire. He stirred the ashes in hopes of getting a flame. It worked. The fire sprang to life. He quickly fed it more fuel, set his cast iron frying pan down on the flat rock at the edge, and dropped in two thin strips of "fatback." He slipped his right hand into his trousers' pocket and removed a day old wedge of corn bread. There were only a few stray strands of lint on it. These were quickly disposed of, and then he turned the meat. Its aroma made his mouth water and reminded him of how hungry he really was.

He sat down on the ground and allowed his back to rest against a log he used as a chopping block for firewood. As the fatback sizzled in the pan, he surveyed what was left of the Knight farm. "Not much" was his first thought. That was true. The Yankees had just about finished it off. It was in pretty bad shape when he arrived, but it was salvageable and that was what he had intended to do. Then the damn Yankees had come again, yelling and riding like a summer storm into the yard in the middle of the night. They had grabbed everything they could lay their hands on. They had fed their horses from Molly's feed crib and grabbed the only two chickens he had left and then set fire to the house. Whooping and hollering, swinging the flapping chickens above their heads, they had thundered off into the darkness. After a while he had crawled out from under the woodshed where he had lain watching it all in great frustration and anger, for when the riders had arrived, with the pounding hooves and battle cries, instinct had taken over and he had rolled, without thinking, from the fireside to the edge of the woodshed then scooted under and lay motionless for the duration of the raid. Three years of fighting these jackals had taught him that unnecessary chances got you killed. He was certain they would kill him if he were found. So, he had stayed, corpse-like, while they robbed

him blind. There was no shame. He had learned from the war that you did what was necessary to say alive.

The meat was ready. Slicing the cornbread with his Barlow pocketknife, he laid the two strips of greasy fat meat inside and took a bite. Breakfast fit for a king! As he chewed he wondered about Jack. The war was over. Where in the hell WAS HE?

### **Momma Nan and Remembering**

Breakfast over and the dishes washed and cleared away, Ellie set about her chores. There was some mending of clothes to do. Since Fort Fisher had fallen in January, just about everything went from scarce to non-existent. So, what you had you continued to wear. If it tore, you sewed it up, or patched it.

Fort Fisher's fall had been January 15<sup>th</sup> after some 3,300 federal infantry troops assaulted it. It had taken a tremendous two and a half day sea bombardment from both the seaward side and the riverside to weaken it enough for the infantry attack to be successful. The smaller forts up the Cape Fear either fell or their occupants stole away. Shortly thereafter the city of Wilmington was occupied by Federal troops. With the Fort, which had given covering fire to blockade-runners as they stole into and out of the Cape Fear now in enemy hands, the stranglehold on the Confederacy tightened. Since receiving supplies was an impossibility, the Confederate troops were running out of everything. So were the civilians. If you couldn't grow it or make it yourself, you didn't have it. Starved for food, supplies of every kind, and money; it had been the end of the Confederacy.

As Ellie sat on the porch sewing up a tear in her best Sunday dress, she could hear Momma Nan in the kitchen already searching out the "fixins" for the midday meal. Mommy Nan was getting on in years. Daddy had already departed this world some years before and Ellie had really expected her mother to follow long before now. But, she endured. She was made of stern stuff.

As she sewed Ellie allowed her mind to wander to better times. She remembered the good times before the war when the community would gather on Saturdays for the big dance. All the handsome young men and all the gloriously decked-out young ladies were each eyeing the other in hopes of finding that single candidate for a wife or husband. It was a primary reason for the weekly affair. The other, of course, was for the community to catch up on the news and just relax and enjoy themselves after a long week of backbreaking labor. She remembered, most of all, the tall, handsome man with the ample black hair and the ready smile. He was John Knight of the farm just up the road. Every one knew him as "Jack." It had been understood that at some point in the future SHE would become Mrs. John Knight. Now, here she was nineteen years old and Jack was

God-only-knew-where; her heart ached to see that smile and hear that voice again. Just to know he was all right was asking a great deal these days.

Nearly everyday men straggled back from the war. She had seen some walking wearily down the River Road toward their homes up river. Homes that may, or may not, be there anymore. They had two things in common. The rags they wore and a hollow look about their eyes - a gaze, into the distance, that seldom wavered as though they were straining to see something very important somewhere out there, somewhere ahead, somewhere just over the next rise in the road. She wondered if they ever found it.

Momma Nan had the fire going again. She was ready to cook dinner. Nothing interfered with the order in her life. War, or no war, dinner would be at noon! Today was no different!

“Ellie,” Momma Nan called from the kitchen. Ellie knew that was her summons and that there would be no second call! She folded the dress she was mending and rose from the rocker. She paused long enough to take another long look down that road to the east, and then she turned and entered the house. It was dinnertime.

### **River Bluff**

The town of River Bluff received its name because of its location: a bluff in the bend of the River. This bluff protruded out just far enough to create a sheltered bay, or harbor, for fishing boats and commercial steamers coming up-river from Wilmington and points south. There was really only one street of consequence. The locals, of course, named it “Main Street”; however, the street with the REAL commerce was Water Street. It ran along side the wharves where the steamers tied up and where the fishermen hove-to with their catch of both fresh water fish and the offerings from the ocean, which had, for so long, been denied them by the Federal blockade ships. During the conflict, any boat venturing out into the ocean anywhere near the mouth of the Cape Fear was considered a Blockade-runner and was chased down and fired upon. This tended to cause the local fishermen to confine their quest for seafood to the brackish waters of the lower Cape Fear and the marshes near the mouth of the river. At least, there, they were under the protection of the Fort Fisher guns. Now, with the Federals in charge of the Fort, no fisherman in his right mind wanted to get anywhere near it. So, the choice of fish on any given day was of the fresh water variety.

There had always been activity on Water Street. The fishing boats would leave in the early morning hours and return at noon or by mid-afternoon. Much of the farm produce was shipped from the wharves on this street down river to Wilmington and some of the steamers, known as “coasters,” even plied the coastal waters all the way down to Charleston with the produce from the local farmers. On any given day, buying and selling



was almost continuous until the evening hours. So, there had always been a combination of farmers, businessmen, fishermen, buyers, sellers, and locals, all looking to ship or buy. It was a busy place, at least before the war. Now, some of the independent fishermen and steamer captains were making an effort to, at least, get started again.

It wasn't easy. Most of the farms had been shut down by the war - no men. The wives and daughters left behind did what they could to hold the places together until the return of their men- folk; however, many did not make it back. Lots of their farms were being reclaimed by nature. The weeds and "blackjacks" were now taking over the land that had been so laboriously cleared by the backbreaking work of clearing the timber, pulling stumps, and then breaking the "new" ground. Many grieving widows, young and old, stood at the edges of their once fertile fields and wept. It was a bad time. The South had lost and now it would pay.

The worse was yet to come. A horde of "fortune seekers" was already making its way into the South with the sole intent of making money off the misery of these unfortunate women and broken, war weary men. They brought every thing they owned with them in their heads and hearts... and in a bag made from a fabric, which greatly resembled that from which carpet was made. This bag gave them their name. "Carpetbaggers" -- name so vile that it would endure for centuries as a means of describing someone who knowingly and maliciously takes advantage of another's unfortunate situation in an effort to enrich themselves.

James Cole was a Carpetbagger. He rode into town on a sorry looking mule wearing what had recently been a black frock-coated suit. Now it was covered with a mixture of red dust from the piedmont and the nearly white talcum powder sand of the coastal plain. He had ridden a long way. Cole stopped in the middle of Main Street and slowly surveyed what he could see of the town of River Bluff. He smiled. This is it. This is where he would make his long over due fortune. The one he was owed by the dirty Rebs who dared to take on decent folk north of the Mason-Dixon line. They would pay now and, lord, how they would pay!

### **Bea Weatherby and James Cole**

A southwesterly breeze had picked up and was sighing in the tops of the loblolly pines at the waters edge and down by the marsh. The upper most branches of the long leaf pines were groaning and creaking as they rubbed against each other in the soft wind. Little dust devils swirled across Main Street as the face of Beatrice Weatherby peered from the window of her boarding house at the lone figure astride his disreputable mule in the middle of the street. Her eyebrows rose as she saw him smile, obviously pleased with what he saw. Bea was pleased as well. Firstly, because he was a man, there had been so

few around her for nearly four years, and secondly, because from what she saw, she knew she had found a kindred spirit.

Bea Weatherby had been born about a hundred and fifty years too soon. She was a handsome woman, a businesswoman, and an independent woman. She was also headstrong and “willful,” as her Father used to say. A busty woman with raven black hair and sparkling blue eyes, she knew she was beautiful. She drew men and she knew that, too. And truth to tell, she was not above using her charms to further her intentions, which were -- to get handsomely rich -- in as short a time as possible! Her plans had been stymied for four years now. That was about to change, she thought.

Bea stepped out onto the little wooden porch that served as a sitting area for patrons of her boarding house as well as a sidewalk for passing shoppers. Her long skirt just touched the rough planking of the porch floor and her white, high collared blouse molded itself to her lithesome body in the stiffening breeze. This did not escape the attention of Mr. Cole who had just turned her way. He smiled in her direction and tipped his hat in greeting. Bea smiled back and thought, “Yeah, gotcha.” Then she turned and re-entered her place of business.

James Cole, tired from the ride and excited by the opportunity he saw in River Bluff, dug his heels into the sides of the mule in hopes of getting her moving again. Sometimes mules moved when mules wanted to and not a minute sooner. Cole was lucky this time and his mule began that peculiar walk only mules and jackasses have: it rattled the bones of their riders. His ride from Pennsylvania had assured him of an arthritic future. Every bone he had was loose in its joint.

As Cole stirred the mule down the street his parched throat reminded him how much he needed a drink. A couple of drinks, actually. How he longed for a dram of good old Irish whiskey. These Southern Bible thumpers wouldn’t let a man satisfy his natural cravings for strong drink like God intended! Oh, they drank all right! They just made their own, and only a friend, a close friend at that, was invited to share it with them.

He pulled up in front of what appeared to be a general mercantile store. If good fortune shone upon him this day, the store keep would have a bottle for sale. As he threw his bulk to his left stirrup and swung his right leg up and backwards to dismount the mule, he heard something strike the ground beneath him. Completing his dismount he looked around him and there was his Pepperbox pistol lying in the dust of the street. It had fallen from his vest pocket. He retrieved it and carefully wiped the dust from it. It was an ugly little thing. A three shot Manhattan Pepperbox pistol, a twenty-eight caliber, made about ten years before. It was effective only at close range, but then, if you missed, it would scare the hell out of your opponent!

In Cole’s left boot there was a special little compartment in which he kept a forty-four caliber, single shot, Philadelphia derringer. The gun was not quite four inches long and fit nicely in its hideaway. Cole was never unarmed and he used only “pocket guns.” He carried no weapon that could be seen. Only he knew he was armed. It afforded him a

quiet confidence. It was his ace in the hole. Underestimating Cole was a way to get dead. Quickly. Already two men, one in Virginia and another in Baltimore, had had their tickets punched by Mr. Cole's twin sisters of death. He was not above violence and at times reveled in it, for Mr. Cole was a killer.

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East of town the lone rider kept coming - ever westward. As the shadows began to lengthen his perpetual motion continued. Still westward he rode. Determined. Persistent. Horse and rider appeared as one irresistible force against which there was NO immovable object. His shadow stretching out behind him now, he rode toward the end of his old life and the beginning of his new life or so he thought!

### *The Yankee Foraging Party*

As Ellie Grace opened the door of the smoke house, she knew it was nearly bare. Parts of a shoulder, one side of bacon, and a side of salt pork was all there was left. There was a close call with a Yankee raiding party a while back, which nearly cost them this. Had Ellie and Momma Nan not heard the gunfire from the Knight farm and recognized it for what it was, they WOULD have lost even this to the hungry raiders. When the echoes of the gunfire reached them they had been about to retire for the evening.

Momma Nan said, "It's them Yankees, a'comin!"

Ellie agreed and they raced to the smoke house. Grabbing all the meat inside, they ran to a shallow depression behind the corncrib and hastily covered the meat with fallen limbs and leaves. It could always be washed off. Then, making their way back to the house, as fast as they could, they shut and placed a drop bar on the barn doors.

Ellie said, "Come on Momma! Lets get in the house!"

As Momma Nan carried her wiry frame into the house, Ellie went to the old Pennsylvania Dutch cupboard and withdrew a hulking thirty-six caliber Griswold and Gunnison pistol made in Griswoldville, Georgia. It was a huge pistol for a woman to handle and it kicked like a mule. Ellie's father had taught her to shoot it years before so she knew, given a target, which was not moving, she could hit it with this gun.

"Momma Nan, you go in the bedroom and turn out the lamp and be quiet."

"But, Ellie, I wan..."

“No, Momma. Now go on. Get in there, quick.”

Momma Nan saw it was useless to protest further, so she did as Ellie had said. When she turned out the coal oil lamp, the room went into total darkness for a time. Then the brightness of the moon began to lighten the shadows. Momma Nan sat on the bed and waited. In the distance she could hear the pounding of approaching horses' hooves. Them Yankees WAS a'comin!

In the front room, Ellie waited just inside the door. Trembling, she leaned against the doorframe resting her forehead against the coolness of the heart pine and prayed. “Dear God, Help Me!”

Six Federal horsemen raced into the yard in a whirlwind of dust, yelling and calling out to each other to “get to the smokehouse!”

One rider broke away from the rest and rode toward the house with a lighted pine knot torch in his up-raised hand. Through the crack in the door Ellie saw the chevrons of a sergeant on his blue sleeve. Pulling the door full open Ellie stepped out onto the porch, in full view, while raising the pistol with both hands she leveled it at the on-riding sergeant. The hammer was full-cocked. The sergeant reined-in his mount. The horse reared at the sudden restraint and the sergeant held onto the reins with all his might rather than be thrown in the presence of his men and this... this...woman!

“Now, Ma'am, You don't want to be a-pointing that thang at nobody!”

“Wrong, sergeant. I want to be pointing it right where I am. Now, throw down that pine knot and get your men and... get out of here. Do it.... now!”

“Now, Ma'am, we wus just gonna see if you had anything to eat in that smokehouse of yorn and be on our way.”

“It's all gone.” Ellie said. “What we didn't eat, some of your brothers took last week.”  
Now, Git!”

“But, Ma'am....”

“I said...GIT!”

The sergeant spurred his horse forward to charge Ellie and the house.

Ellie fired! The pistol went straight up with Ellie hanging on for dear life. The horse reared again, screaming in agony, and the sergeant went flying off and landed face down in the dusty yard. The lighted pine knot flipped over harmlessly into the dirt and lay smoldering.

At the report of the pistol the other five riders rounded the house to see what was the matter. Seeing their sergeant lying in the dust, his mount bleeding from his left hindquarters and the little snip of a girl standing on the porch in defiance, they were momentarily confused. The sergeant began rising from the ground spitting dirt as he rose.

Ellie still held the big gun; the folds of her wrapper hid it nicely. She said nothing. As the riders milled about, the sergeant gathered himself, walked over to his horse trying to inspect the wound inflicted by Ellie. The horse shied away. The sergeant made another attempt to approach his mount and this time the horse allowed it. Deciding the wound was not fatal, he swung into the saddle.

“Let’s go, men!”

“But, Sarge...”

“I SAID, Let’s GO!”

Without another word he spurred his horse and rode off down the little wagon cut toward the River Road. His companions sat for a second or two longer then they, too, rode off, following their sergeant.

Ellie stood, the big gun hanging limp in her right hand and began to tremble. She slowly crumpled to the porch floor and wept. Her ears rang from the sound of the pistol shot amplified by the ceiling of the porch and the front wall of the house.

Momma Nan crept out onto the porch. “Ellie? Ellie?”

Ellie could barely hear Momma Nan. The ringing was awful! “I’m all right Momma Nan. I’m just a little sick right now. Give me a minute and we’ll go get the meat and put it back in the smoke house.”

“But them Yankees might come back and...”

“They won’t be back Momma Nan. Not that bunch!”

The memory of all this caused Ellie to shake herself in an effort to put it behind her. She sliced off two small portions of shoulder meat, stepped out of the door, closed and locked it behind her, and started toward the house. Dark was coming. The July Flies were singing in the warm late afternoon breeze. There was tenseness in the air, a feeling of the inevitable approach of the unexpected. She stopped, turned slowly around, looking again down the River Road, toward the east, then lowered her eyes and continued her slow walk to the house.

## *Home*

The Bay drank slowly from the black waters of the river. Captain Knight sat farther back on the bank and chewed his hard tack. It was almost gone. No matter, he was nearly home. He slipped the remainder of his dinner in his jacket pocket and lay, belly down, on the ground beside the river. He allowed his lips to just touch the fresh water as he drank long from its cool depths. Wiping his mouth with the back of his sleeve he sat up and clucked for the bay to come over. The horse obeyed and the captain slapped his pants' seat with the back of his hat and heaved himself into the saddle. Time to end this journey, leave the war behind, and get on home.

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With the help of old Molly the mule, Luke Knight dragged the burned timbers, one at a time from the pile that had once been the Knight's house. One charred timber at a time they would drag down to the "new" ground and leave it near the brush row. They would return to the pile, he and Molly, drag another and then another. It was slow going. He was sooty, sweaty, and tired. He remembered the house as it stood before the Yankee raiding party. It had been a proud old house that had stood a long time.

The Knight house had been nothing fancy. It was a practical farmhouse with two bedrooms, a dining room where visitors were served, and a living room. The living room was often referred to as the "front" room. The kitchen, where the cooking and family eating was done, was separated from the house by a short "dog run," in later years to be called a "breezeway." The separation from the rest of the house was for very practical reasons. The kitchen, where all the cooking took place was a fire hazard. So, many of the older houses had their kitchens separated from the house just as this one had. No Knight, in their wildest dreams, would have thought the Yankees would come and torch their home

The main house had had a hallway running through its center, completely through. You could look in the front door and see out the back. All the rooms opened onto this hallway. Practicality reigned here as well. This hallway allowed a constant flow of air to cool the rooms throughout. There were no closets. There weren't enough clothes for closets; however, there were two wardrobes: one in Ma and Pa's room, and he and Jack had had one. Both had been nearly empty. He and Jack wore half of what they owned while the other half stayed in the wardrobe. There were occasions though: church, weddings, and funerals when the other half was worn.

Luke tied Molly up at the watering trough and began to draw a bucket of water from the well. As he turned the windless, he could feel the bucket swing from side to side. Remembering his Pa's admonition not to let the bucket strike the side of the well, he

cranked more slowly. Finally, he was able to pull the bucket from the mouth of the well and have the drink he had been anticipating.

The shadows had begun to grow long and twilight was coming on. As he swallowed his second dipper of the cool water, he heard, at least he thought he heard, the slow cadence of a horse and rider in the near distance. He could barely make out something moving in the lengthening shadows on the River Road.

“Another damn Yankee”, he thought. Looking again, he thought, “No, Wait a minute. That looks like a gray uniform.” He watched, mesmerized, as the horse turned left onto the little dirt wagon road, which lead from the River Road to the farm. The rider gave no indication of prompting the horse at all. The horse just ...well...turned.

The rider had not moved. The bay horse plodded onward toward the house with the rider slouched, leaning slightly forward, in the saddle. Luke couldn't take his eyes from the apparition. On they came until they were not more than twenty feet from him. Luke couldn't move. Still holding the half full dipper of water, he was frozen to the spot.

The horse stopped. Just stopped. The rider did not move nor speak.

From the well curb, Luke spoke: “Welcome, Captain.” Then, he looked closer. There was something about the eyes. They were brown, but not a soft brown. The black hair, streaked with white, was about the shade of Ja...’s... Jack’s hair!

Luke eased slowly forward toward the horse and rider. The horse neighed. The rider turned slowly and looked down... directly into Luke’s eyes. “Hey brother,” rumbled his voice. “Don’t ye know me, Luke? It’s me. Ja...”

“JACK!” cried Luke.

## **Brothers**

As Jack’s boots hit the ground pain shot through the soles of his feet. He’d been in the saddle too long. Luke rushed to his brother’s side and slipped his arms under Jack’s.

“Here, let me help. You look like death warmed over.”

Jack couldn't argue. He just leaned against the bay and let Luke and the horse support him. “Let’s get you in the house.”

“Where is the house, Luke?”

“The Yankees burned it down last week.” I ain’t had time to do much about it yet. Come on, lemme get you inside and bedded down, then we’ll talk about it.”

By the time Luke got Jack inside the woodshed, Jack was nearly asleep. Luke decided to let him sleep. Tomorrow would be soon enough to relate the sorry story he had to tell. He helped Jack down onto the straw pallet that he, himself, had been using as a bed and managed with much effort to remove Jack's boots. From the way his brother's feet looked, this must have been the first time he had had his boots off in a very long time.

Jack was instantly asleep.

Luke went back outside, got the Bay, and walked her over to Molly's shed where he tied her. He removed the saddle and blanket and hung them over the tack rail placed there by his Pa many years ago. He went around to the crib, got an extra helping of fodder and put it in the feeding trough. The Bay began to eat immediately. Molly snickered her disapproval from the watering trough by the well where she had been left.

"You'll get your supper, too, ole girl," Luke called to the mule. He went over to the well and got Molly by the halter and led her back to the shed. She was not very happy about sharing it with the Bay, but she soon settled down when Luke gave her her share of fodder.

Walking across the yard to the woodshed where he could hear Jack's audible snoring, he wondered how he was going to explain what happen to the house and his lack of action to prevent it. Well, the truth is all, he thought. He'd tell him exactly what happened and hope for a reasonable reaction from Jack.

Luke slipped into the woodshed and rummaged around in the semi-darkness until he found, on a makeshift shelf, one of Pa's old corncob pipes. Further rummaging produced his tobacco pouch, which was just about half full. He eased back out the door and sat down by the well. He filled the Missouri Meerschaum with tobacco and fished a match from his shirt pocket. He hoped it wouldn't be too damp from his sweat to light. It wasn't. The second strike produced a flame and he lit the pipe. Drawing deeply he felt the fine North Carolina tobacco smoke fill his lungs and he sighed with satisfaction. As he rested with his pipe, Luke wondered if there would be enough timber on the southwest side of the farm to at least build a cabin. The woodshed might do for the summer, but with winter not too far away, something would have to be built to provide adequate shelter from the cold. As dilapidated as the shed was, it probably would not even last through the fall storms that came up out of the Caribbean.

Without his noticing it, full dark had come. Luke sat with his back resting now against the well curb puffing contentedly on the pipe and thinking about tomorrow. Besides, tomorrow was the only thing to think about. The past was too painful. Too much pain and death there. Too much hurt, too much...well, there was just too much to dwell on. So, he wouldn't. Tomorrow he would explain to Jack what had happened and how he proposed getting a cabin up before winter. It was too late to put in any crops to speak of. Maybe some turnips, mustard greens and the like. They'd just have to forage and make do on the meat they could scare up with their guns in the woods hereabouts. Before the



war, Luke reflected, the woods had teemed with deer and squirrels and rabbits and possums and coons and many other critters. He hoped the war hadn't driven them off. Oh, yeah, there had also been an occasional bear. Luke remembered, on more than one occasion, seeing bears lumber out of the woods and just sit down under Ma's old pear tree and help themselves to the pears underneath it. They didn't seem to mind the bees and yellow jackets and hornets buzzing about their heads as they ate. They'd just ignore them and keep on eating 'til they were full and then lumber back into the woods.

One hapless bear, however, didn't get to lumber back into the woods. Pa came up out of the field he had been plowing, saw the bear, walked into the house, got his old Sharp's fifty caliber rifle and felled the bear with one shot. Of course, that had been a gun that would drop a Buffalo with one shot! Anyway, they had bear meat for a few days, 'til everybody had their fill. So, Luke continued his train of thought, he and Jack should be all right. Yes sir, they'd be all right. Just wait 'til the sun comes up in the morning and we'll get this all sorted out and do as we have always done.... what we have to!

### **Not Quite Birds of a Feather**

"Get off me!" Bea exclaimed as she lifted James Cole's arm and dropped it on the bed between them. She struggled to a sitting position and then, grabbing the edge of the sheet, she whipped it around her and stood. She padded, barefoot, to the window, pulling back the drape just a bit; she saw that it was full daylight. She looked down the street but saw that no one was stirring yet, at least not in sight, anyway.

Cole stirred, rolled onto his side and continued to snore.

How could she? Bea thought. Well, you knew what he was when he rode into town, she reminded herself. And she did need the money. She hadn't had a new dress since the river steamboat, the "A.P. Hert", had stopped making its up-river trips when the Yankees occupied Wilmington.

\*\*\*\* (Dear Reader: The A.P. Hert was a real Cape Fear River steamboat. She survived the war and some time later sank at her moorings at Wilmington where she remains 'til this day.)

Bea moved away from the window and shuffled into the kitchen. She got the fire going in the stove and put the coffee pot on to boil. The coffee was terrible but it was all they could get now. It tasted like ground acorns and might well be, she thought!

Bea's Boarding House had seen better times. Before the war, when the farms were prosperous, the tobacco buyers would hit town in the late summer to bid on the local tobacco. Her boarding house would be full for a few weeks. That made all the difference in her pocketbook for the remainder of the year. Occasionally, a traveler from down river

would stay over night and that helped, too. But during the war and to the present, times had been hard. The only people visiting here were troops and they were just passing through. No money to be made there. Well, a girl could make a green back, or two, if she was... well... inventive. And Bea was, well...inventive!

She looked again at James Cole lying, dead to the world, on her bed and thought, “What a sorry sight! He’s here to steal and rob and grab whatever he can, and...I’m helping him! Well, maybe not really helping him, but I am holding his coat! Cole had raised a ruckus at the store because the store keep wouldn’t sell him any whiskey. The fact that the store didn’t have any whiskey didn’t seem to satisfy him. Bea had heard the yelling all the way across the street at her place and had quickly gotten herself over to the store to see if she could help. When Cole saw her, he calmed immediately. He removed his hat, bowed slightly, and said:

“Ma’am.”

She lowered her eyes in salutation and acknowledgement. She had felt his eyes on her as she crossed the store to ask of Mr. Bowen, the owner, if there was anything she could do. Mr. Bowen explained that he had tried to explain to the “Northern” gentleman that there was no whiskey to sell and the “Northern” gentleman had become quite agitated.

Bea spoke to the “Northern” gentleman; “I have a bottle of Scotch whiskey, off the boat from Boston before the, ah, late unpleasantness. If you, Mr....”

“Cole”, said Cole.

“...Would like to accompany me to my establishment, you would be most welcome to share a dram with me.

“Why, thank you, ma’am. I’d consider it an honor and a privilege to share a libation with a lady as lovely as yourself.”

Back across the street Bea went, with Mr. James Cole in tow.

As the level of whiskey in the bottle dropped so did the sun and by the time they reached the bottom of the bottle... a libation was not all they shared.

That was last night. This is today, thought Bea. Is this to be my future? Is Cole my ticket to a prosperous future? Lord, I hope not! I mean I want a prosperous future and all, but, with Cole?

“Oh Lordy, I hope not!”

She didn’t even know she had spoken aloud!

## Ellie Grace and Jack

Ellie had decided she would take matters into her own hands and go over to the Knight farm to check on Luke and learn if he had any word from Jack. The only transportation she had was the old plow horse Pa had had for, Lord only knows how many years! Bess was a mare and she was gentle. Pa had said she was a cross between a Morgan and something else. Ellie didn't think anybody really knew. She went out to the stable and put the halter and bridle on ole Bess and led her outside.

Momma Nan was just peeking out from the kitchen door.

Ellie said, " Momma Nan, I'm going to ride over to the Knight's place and see if Luke has had any word from Jack. I should be back before time to fix supper."

Hearing that, Momma Nan nodded approval and ducked back into the kitchen.

Ellie led ole Bess over to the porch so she could get a step-up to climb on Bess's back – she had no saddle and, thus, rode bareback.

As Bess ambled down the dusty River Road, Ellie sat aboard and wrestled with the question of whether Momma Nan was any better, or any worse. When Pa took the fever and died, right after the war started, Momma Nan just kind of retreated into herself and stayed there. Every now and then she would venture forth for a moment or two, but most of the time she was withdrawn and quiet. The incident with the Raiders had been one of the rare moments when she had seemed to touch reality. Today, well, she was withdrawn and distant again.

Ellie knew that Momma Nan missed Pa. Terribly. They'd had that kind of love for each other that grows between a man and a woman married for many years. It was a thing not spoken. It was expressed in ways only they knew. Only they recognized. Momma Nan knew that Pa cared for her. With all his rough edges he really cared for her deeply and Momma Nan returned that love.

Theirs was a partnership. Pa kept a roof over her head, food to eat, clothes to wear, and provided a safe environment for Momma Nan. In return, Momma Nan provided him with a family and a home. She gave herself completely to him as his wife. She was there, by his side for all the times, good and bad. She was his wife. He was her husband. Take either one away and you had only half an entity, half a person. That's what Momma Nan had become after Pa died, half a person.

Ellie had become the responsible adult in the family. Someone had to and she was elected by default. Now her worry for Jack's safety was constantly tugging at her as well.

Ellie could just make out the wagon road to the Knight farm in the distance. There was a hint of wood smoke in the air. She took that to mean that Luke was home and her trip would not be wasted. At least she would get to talk to him.

As Bess slowly closed the distance between herself and the Knight's place, Ellie began to notice a figure moving about in the yard. Wait, there was another. Was it...or was it just a trick of the light? No! There it was again! A second figure! If she had any spurs she would have spurred ole Bess's flanks to prompt her to speed up! As it was, she just sat there and waited as Bess closed the ground between herself and the two figures in the yard.

Ellie was being hailed. It was Luke. The second figure had disappeared.

"Hey, Ellie! Good to see you." Luke called out. He was walking at an angle from the woodshed toward the well.

"Hello, Luke." Ellie replied as she looked, furtively about in hopes of catching a glimpse of the other figure she had seen from the road.

"Come on. Git down from there and have a cold drink of water. It's about all I have to offer you, but you are mighty welcome to it."

Ellie slipped down from atop Bess and accepted the outstretched dipper still dripping water. She sipped sparingly and cast her eyes about, all the while, trying not to be too obvious. She knew it was bad manners not to attend the person who was speaking. She couldn't help it. She had to know.

"Luke, I just rode over to check on you. After those Yankee raiders came by the other night, I thought I'd best drop by and see if you needed anything. I see they fired your house."

"Yeah," Luke said. "There was six, or seven, of them. I 'm ashamed to tell it, but I hid like a scared rabbit 'til they were gone. By then the damage was done and the fire was too far-gone for me to be able to put out. So, I'm sleeping in the wood shed. It's tolerable, at least 'til winter. Got to have a house by then!"

She couldn't stand it another minute! "Luke, have you heard from Jack?"

"Well, Ellie, I was gonna tell..."

"Is he all right? Is he hurt? Where is he?" she asked stepping closer to Luke with each question.

From behind her Ellie heard: "Why don't you ask me"?

She wheeled.

There he was! It was Jack. It was really Jack! There he was with dirty face and dark circles under his eyes and bearded.... but it was Jack!

She flew across the space that separated them and leapt into his arms. All the promises she had made to herself about lady like behavior... all forgotten!

“Oh, Jack, It’s you! You’re finally here!” Ellie sobbed for joy onto Jack’s shoulder.

Jack tentatively slipped his arms around her waist and squeezed. He whispered in her ear, “Ellie, didn’t I tell you I’d be back. Nothing was going to keep me from you. Nothing!” he said with quivering voice through clenched teeth. “Nothing!”

### **License to Steal**

Cole sat with his head in his hands leaning on the table in Bea’s dining room. Oh my, how his head hurt! In front of him on the tabletop was a letter. It was an official looking document with some sort of seal on the top. Cole had shown it to Bea last night and told her this was his license. She had asked, “for what?” And he had answered, “for just about anything.”

Actually, it was a letter of introduction to the Military Commander of the Military District to which North Carolina had been assigned. It, pretty much, summed-up his purpose for being in River Bluff: to search out and seize any contraband. Contraband was to be determined by the Military Commander and...of course...by James Cole himself. Anything Cole and the commander could come up with as suspected contraband, well, that was between them, so long as Washington got what they felt was their due. It was, indeed, a license to steal!

The back door slammed. Bea came stomping into the room. “Get out,” she said.

“What?”

“I said, get out. I’ve got work to do and I need you out of here.”

“Now, wait a minute. I’m paying you board.”

“That’s right,” said Bea. “That covers a place to sleep and eat and that’s it! Now you’re not sleeping and you sure aren’t eating, so, I want you out of here.”

“Awright. Gemme a minute to get my clothes on and I’ll get out of your hair. But, I’ll be back tonight. Look for me!”

“I expect you will,” replied Bea. “ Just don’t expect the company you had last night!”

“What? Don’t try to tell me you didn’t want it as much as I did. Why you little...”

“GET OUT OF HERE,” Bea shouted.

Cole stepped toward her with an ugly twisted grin on his face. Bea stepped back and her fingers slipped around the handle of a cast iron frying pan, still on the stove from this morning’s breakfast, and she picked it up and lifted it, back, above her head.

Cole stopped. He looked puzzled. Then his eyes lowered and he said, “All Right. I’m going.”

“Well, make it fast”! With that Bea stormed out of the room slamming the living room door behind her.

Cole gathered up his frock coat, his cravat, his hat, and headed for the door. He called back over his shoulder, “See you tonight, dear.” With a smirk on his face, he slipped quickly from the boarding house.

The street had become noisy. He could hear the clamor from Water Street and thought he’d make his way down there and have a look see at what was going on. Then maybe he’d saunter on over to the post office and see if he if he could get an address for the Military Commander of this district. Another day or so and he would be able to get things up and running. But first he had to meet with the MC to get any misunderstandings cleared up, and settled, before he set up shop, so to speak.

Cole’s eyes were drawn to a sign up ahead with a Star of David on it: “Bakery,” it read in two languages. The one he couldn’t read he took to be Hebrew. As he approached the Bakery window he noticed a beautiful golden menorah. He could just barely see it through the curtain, which obviously closed off the store from the living quarters of the baker. The golden menorah gleamed in the rays of sunshine reaching it from a window high up in the wall of the living quarters. It was beautiful.

That must be contraband, thought Cole. Well, if it were not on the official list, it soon would be. At least it would be on his contraband list. Somehow he was going to get his hands on that candleholder! It was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen!

## **Goldbergs**

The little brass bell tinkled sharply as Cole shoved the bakery door open. He went straight to the curtain, which divided the store from the home of those who lived and

worked there. He stopped at the curtain and was about to slip through it when a voice from behind him said, "May I help you?"

Cole turned to find a rotund man with deep-set, dark eyes and black beard looking him directly in the eyes. There was no malice there...just a signal of the man's resolve.

Cole said, "I saw that candleholder through the window and I want to buy it."

"Sir, that is not a candleholder. That is a menorah.... and it is not for sale."

"But I want to buy it."

"I'm sorry sir," the gentleman said, stepping past Cole to gently tug the curtains closed. "It is, as I said, not for sale. And again, it is not a candleholder. It is a menorah and it is used in our religious practices. Now, I if may help you with, perhaps some bread...?"

"No, I don't want bread, I want that candleholder. And I intend to get it. What's your name anyway?"

"Goldberg. I'm Jacob Goldberg and I live here with my wife Rebecca and my daughter Deborah. Now, may I please get you something.... besides the menorah?"

Cole could feel the heat of his anger rising up in his face. He sputtered, "I will have that... that... menorah. You know there is such a thing as contraband and that sure as hell looks like contraband to me! I'll be back Mr. Golden..."

"Goldberg."

"...Goldberg... and when I do, you'll see that I am not a man to be trifled with. Good day to you, sir!"

Cole slammed the door as he went out. He could hear the little bell tinkling furiously as he strode down the street.

Jacob Goldberg quickly locked the door behind Cole and then slipped quietly through the curtains to check on Rebecca.

Mrs. Goldberg stood at the table with a roll of dough she had been kneading. She had a floured hand at her throat and at look of utter fear in her eyes.

"What is it Jacob? Who was that and what did he want?"

"Nothing, dear Rebecca. Nothing. Do not worry yourself. I believe the man had been drinking. He'll not be any more trouble." Jacob walked over and planted a kiss on Rebecca's forehead. He said, "I'll just look in on the bread." Picking up a heavy thick cloth, he stepped to the huge oven and opened the door and peered in. Six perfectly

rounded loaves were just browning on their tops. The aroma was overpowering. He quickly closed the door.

“You know Momma, my waist gets bigger every day. I’m beginning to wonder if the bread has anything to do with it,” Jacob said with a lilt in his voice and a twinkle in his eye.

Rebecca looked at him with mock seriousness then rolled her eyes and went back to her kneading.

Jacob turned away from Rebecca. His face reflected the worry he felt. Cole's reaction to Jacob's refusal to sell him the menorah brought back memories of similar men, dangerous men, on distant shores in the not so distant past. Mr. Cole was a man to be avoided, if possible. If it were not possible, then one would have to tread lightly. Jacob knew that Cole, like an animal, could sense fear. When he did, he would strike.

## **Deborah**

Deborah Goldberg sat in her room upstairs, over the bakery and listened intently to the raised voices coming from below. She heard the Bakery door slam and the tinkling of the brass “door” bell. She waited for her father to come upstairs to reassure her. He didn’t come. She continued to brush her long, lustrous, black hair. Her hair was so black it reflected blue in the sunlight. Her dark eyes were pools of dark, southern, waters and could draw a man in up to his very soul. Her lips were full and rosebud red. Her high cheekbones set her face in ancient beauty. This was the sort of beauty Solomon wrote of. Deborah was a Semitic beauty. And she didn’t know it, which, of course, made her even more beautiful. Her mother and father knew and spoke to her many times of the perils her beauty would bring her way. Deborah was too full of life to take their warnings to heart. She liked being the center of attention everywhere she went. She liked having the boys follow her about on market day. She liked being Deborah Goldberg!

Now, worry creased her forehead as she listened for her father’s footsteps on the stairs. She waited a bit longer...still no footsteps. She put down the brush and stood. Her long “visiting dress” rustled about her as she turned from the mirror to the door. She would go down and see for herself what had caused the raised voices. As Deborah reached the door, she heard the familiar footfalls of her father climbing the stairs. She stepped back from the door and waited.

Jacob tapped gently on the door and called, “Deborah, may I come in?”

“Yes, Father, please do! I’ve been waiting for you.”



Jacob entered and embraced his beautiful daughter in a bear hug for a moment. Then holding her by both shoulders he stepped back and looked her over from head to foot. Her new blue visiting dress with the short white waistcoat enhanced her lovely femininity. Jacob was so proud of his daughter. His own Deborah! He regretted he had no son, but this beauty was the daughter of every father's dreams. Someday, her children would carry on the family traditions.

Jacob said, "You heard?"

"Yes, Father, I heard."

"A newcomer, he is, to our town. He didn't tell me his name but I know it."

"What is it? Father."

"Trouble", said Jacob turning from Deborah to look out the window overlooking the street. "The man is trouble. The finesse of a bull, he has! He wanted to buy our menorah!"

"You didn't sell..."

"Of course not. You know, I think he actually thinks it is gold! I never had the chance to tell him it was brass. Just brass. He is a foolish man...but a dangerous man. Deborah, I want you to be extra careful while this man is in town. What he is doing here, I don't know, but there is a potential for someone to get hurt. I don't want that you should be that someone! Do you understand?"

"Yes, father"

"Good! Then I'll speak no more about it. Besides, we have plans to make. The soldiers of this community will be returning home soon now, and we need to be ready for an increase in business. I want you should practice your skills at keeping the books. Your mother and I will be busy in the bakery, so you'll greet the customers and take care for the money. Jacob wagged his finger in the air as he said, "This is very important, this book keeping. With our business lives or dies. It will be in your hands."

Deborah said, "I know, father, I will do my best."

"I know you will, daughter. Forgive an old man his worries. We spent so much just to get here...then the expenses to get our ovens here and set-up. Then the war came. We have so little left. Your mother and I are determined that you will go away to the very best schools. That will take money, Deborah. Money we have yet to make!

"But, father, I don't want to go awa..."

"Always you say that, daughter. But away, you will go, for your education."

“I have had an education father!”

“From the books, yes...but, not of the world! This, too, is important! You shall have it. Your mother and I will see to it.” With that Jacob turned for the door. “Come down as soon as you are ready. Your Mother has some errands for you in town.”

Jacob paused and looked again at his daughter. She is truly a gorgeous woman, he thought.

“What?”

“Nothing dear. Just an old man’s admiration for beauty. Hurry up, now!”

He closed the door and hurried back down the stairs.

## **Plans**

The Knight brothers surveyed the timber in the southwest portion of the farm and they agreed that there was enough to make a substantial cabin as temporary quarters.

As they started back to what had been the home place, Jack said to Luke, “You know we’ll have to de-bark those pine logs?”

“Yeah, I know.”

“That’s a lot of work.”

“Well, we’d better get started then!”

“First thing tomorrow.”

“Right after breakfast, you mean!”

“Oh, yeah. Right. We’re having breakfast with Ellie and Momma Nan. I forgot.”

“Sure, you did.”

“No, really, I did! I got to thinking about this cabin and I just got caught up in it. I forgot. That’s all!”

They had decided that a one-room cabin would work for the two of them. They would have to get some flat rocks from the riverbed to serve as a foundation for the floor

runners. Jack was still insisting on a wooden floor. Luke was not arguing against it. He just wasn't thinking so much of a floor as he was of a roof over his head and walls to keep out the wind.

They would have to dig a sawpit to cut some of the logs up into wide boards for the flooring and for the roof. That meant that someone was going to have to be down in the pit on the other end of the saw. That one would get a lot of sawdust in his eyes and mouth. A bandanna would limit his diet of pine tree dust... somewhat – the eyes were another matter. Neither of the Knight's was particularly happy about the sawpit work but there was no choice; it had to be done.

Making shingles would wait for a while but, later, if they could fell a cypress or two down in the swamp, they would be able to make some really fine shingles. For now, however, the priority was a serviceable roof of any kind: boards lapped over each other by three or so inches would work.

They had to decide on an "A" frame or "lean-to" style roof. An "A" frame would take twice as much wood. It would, though, give better protection from rain and snow. Pine poles would make the rafters and trusses to which the roofing boards would be nailed.

Jack was insisting on a window in the front of the house. The problem was going to be finding the glass. It was scarce now. A square opening with a shutter may turn out to be the answer for that one. As the cabin would be facing east, and slightly south, that wouldn't be a problem. There would be no openings in the north wall. That was where the cold winds came from. A mud and rock chimney on the western end would provide warmth and cooking fire on the hearth.

Luke had assured Jack he could fashion a couple of bunks from the same kind of boards they would use to make the floor and roof of the cabin. He would tie ropes through the frames and then make mattresses from some of the cornhusks in the crib. That would be about the best they could do for a while. They wouldn't be feather beds but they would be serviceable. Luke had pondered that as tired as they were likely to be, they'd fall asleep on anything. Luke had also assured Jack he could make a table for eating and a couple of benches that could serve as workbenches when the need arose.

"We'd better take a look at the tools we have on hand," said Jack.

"That won't be hard to do", Luke snorted.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, we've got a couple of axes and a hammer or two, but I don't think we have a saw on the place."

"Think you could ride into town and get a saw before sundown?"

“Don’t think so.”

“Well we’ve got to have ‘em before we can do much, other than fell the trees.”

“I know. Tell you what. Why don’t you ride over and have breakfast with Ellie in the morning and I’ll go on into town and get what we need and meet you back here so we can get started by mid morning, at the very least. What do you think?”

“Sounds like the way to go. O.K. Let’s take a look at where we’re gonna put the cabin,” said Jack as they drew abreast of the well.

Luke shuffled ahead a bit and said, “ I was thinking here.” Luke pointed to a spot just north of the pile of burned timbers that had been the Knight farmhouse. “It’ll still keep us near enough to the well, the woodshed, and the stable and be a little upwind of the burned stuff.”

“Looks good to me.”

Jack walked over near to Luke and began making lines in the earth with his boot heel. He drew off a line about fifteen feet long running west to east, then stepped off about twenty feet and drew a parallel line again running west to east then he dragged out two more lines, one on the western end of the original two lines and the other on the eastern end. He then stood back, with Luke, and resting his chin in his palm, he looked intently at the practically “square” box he had drawn in the soil with his boot heel.

“Think we can do it?”

“Oh yeah! We just gotta get started.”

Laying his right arm across Luke’s shoulders Jack said, “Well, let’s get to it!”

The two brothers walked toward the lean-to to feed their “stock” which consisted of one bay gelding, and one rather long-eared mule. The Knight farm had been productive before the war. It would be again. They would see to it.

### **Luke Knight goes to Town**

Sunrise comes early to the east coast, especially in summer. It was light at 5:30 and the Knight boys were up and about. Jack threw his much used saddle on the Bay and Luke put a bridle on Molly and climbed aboard. They walked the animals down the wagon trail to River Road. Jack drew up the Bay, reached out a hand, and touched Luke on the arm; “you armed?”

“Yeah. I’ve got that old breech loading five shot revolver of Pa’s.”

“You don’t have much.”

“We’ll, it’s all I’ve got!”

“Here take my Navy.”

“No! Absolutely not! That hog leg would probably do more harm to me than to anybody I happened to shoot at!”

”Here!” Jack was insistent.

Luke was equally insistent, “No,” he said. “At least I can shoot this one. It ain’t much, but I’m used to it. There shouldn’t be any trouble anyway. The Raiders hardly ever work in daylight. They do their dirty work in the dark.”

“I’d feel better if you were better armed,” protested Jack.

“I’m fine. Besides I won’t be gone long enough to get into trouble.”

“Luke, you’re my brother. You must remember that trouble always seems to go looking for us!”

Luke dug his heels into old Molly’s sides and she started that half trot, half walk common only to mules and jackasses as he aimed her in the general direction of town.

“How’re you going to get that saw home?”

“Borrow Mr. Bowen’s cart,” replied Luke over his shoulder. “Be back directly.”

Jack sat still on the Bay for a moment watching Luke as he jogged up and down on the mule’s back. Then he reined the Bay slightly right and started toward the Campbell place.

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The townspeople of River Bluff were slowly coming to life. At the City Mercantile Mr. Bowen had just come downstairs from the family quarters above the store and had begun to straighten up the bolts of cloth after yesterday’s shoppers had mussed them up. He walked over to the front window and carefully raised the wide roll-up shade. He had started back toward the storeroom when a loud pounding on the front door suddenly startled him.

“Who in the world could that be this early?” he spoke aloud to himself.

“Open up!” Came from the street side of the door.

“Come back in an hour. We’ll be open then,” returned Mr. Bowen.

“Open this door, or I’ll kick it in!” The voice on the other side of the door shouted.

Mr. Bowen decided it would be all right to raise the shade on the front door to see who it was. After all, it could be an emergency of some sort. He moved swiftly to the door, now convinced that someone was in trouble and needed his help. As he tugged on the bottom of the shade it slipped from his nervous fingers and flew all the way up so fast that it flipped all the way ‘round the spool several times before coming to rest. Then Mr. Bowen’s eyes focused on the face that went with the voice and discovered he was standing face to face with a drunken James Cole. His bloodshot eyes were still trying to focus on Mr. Bowen.

“Come on, open this door, old man!”

“Mr. Cole, sir, if you’ll come back later, I’ll be able to help you, but I haven’t even had breakfast yet. We’ll open the store in about an hour.” Mr. Bowen was hoping that as drunk as Cole was, he would go away and forget all about whatever it was he wanted from the store.

It didn’t work.

Cole hit the door with his shoulder. The door gave about a half an inch then sprang back to its original position. He leaned back and hit the door again. This time the top of the door gave about an inch and Mr. Bowen was sure the glass was going to shatter.

“All right. Let me get the keys.” Mr. Bowen hurried across the store to the counter where he kept the keys on a peg by the pickle jar. He rushed back and unlocked and opened the door. Cole pushed past him into the room lit only by the rising sun.

“I want some whiskey!”

“Mr. Cole, sir, I don’t have any whiskey.”

“Yeah you do. You just won’t sell it to me ‘cause I’m a Northerner! Now, ain’t that the truth???”

“No sir, Mr. Cole. I don’t even stock it. I haven’t carried any whiskey since I got religion during the revival and stopped drinking myself, and that’s the truth!”

“You’re a liar! Worse, you’re a damn Reb liar!”

“Mr. Cole, it’s the Lord’s own truth! I swear it!”

Cole shot out his left hand and grabbed Mr. Bowen's vest front and shoved him against the counter. The edge of the counter top caught Mr. Bowen in the small of the back and brought an involuntary groan from him.

"What's that? What did you say?"

"Nothing Mr. Cole. My back hurts!"

"That ain't all that'll hurt if you don't get that whiskey!"

"Mr. Cole, I swear, sir, I don't have any whiskey!"

With that, Cole's right hand shot across the space between the two men and Cole brought it back with all the strength he could muster striking Mr. Bowen across the mouth with the back of it. The sound carried in the room. It exploded inside Mr. Bowen's head as he momentarily saw sparkles of light in the sudden darkness before his eyes. Then the pain brought his vision back. Cole's face was so close to his he could feel the droplets of spittle as Cole continued his raging command for the non-existent whiskey.

While Mr. Bowen's rattled brain was attempting to process all this, Cole drew back his right hand and struck him again, this time with his fist. The blow caught Mr. Bowen on the left side of his head just in front of his ear. He went limp. His knees simply relaxed and his own weight caused him to sag against Cole. Cole shoved him away with a great heave. Mr. Bowen again struck the counter top, then spun to his right and continued his fall striking the right side of his head on the edge of the counter as his entire weight crashed him to the floor.

"You damn fool. I told you I would have that whiskey! Now, get up and get it for me!"

Mr. Bowen didn't move.

Cole stooped and said again, "Get up, NOW!"

Mr. Bowen still didn't move.

Cole dropped to his knees astride Mr. Bowen's inert body and reached out with his left hand and grabbed Mr. Bowen's now torn vest front and partially drew him up and demanded, "Come on you old fool. Get me that whiskey right now, or I'll kick your brains out." Cole drew his right fist back and started to bring it down into Mr. Bowen's face a second time when a voice, with an edge like a knife, cut through the alcoholic fog.

"WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?"

Cole held on to Mr. Bowen but turned towards the sound of the demanding voice, a voice as cold as death. All the drunk could see was the figure of a man silhouetted in the door

by the now risen sun. In his right hand the dark figure held a gun. It was pointed directly at Cole's heart.

### **The Shooting**

In war the mind sees things so repugnant it simply refuses to process the information and just goes into a kind of "neutral" realm. Luke had experienced this many times on the battlefield. After the initial shock, the anger over the evil done to friends on the left and right of him would take over and he would rise up and strikeout at the enemy for no other reason than to stop him from doing further harm to his friends. He had learned the universal lesson of all soldiers. You fight not for God and country, but for your friends on the left and right of you. When you see great harm being done them, you do what you can to defend them. If that means taking the life of another human being, so be it. These people depend on you and you depend on them. This is the great motivation of the fighting man. It is defense of one's fellow soldier, one's friends.

Luke was a long way from his last battle at Gettysburg but that familiar urge had risen in him again. When he had stepped into the doorway of the City Mercantile and saw his friend being mauled by a younger, stronger man who appeared to be bent on killing him, Luke's mind screeched to a halt. When he saw Cole strike Mr. Bowen with his fist and saw Mr. Bowen fall, the flood of anger was almost unbearable. He snatched the gun from his belt and yelled at Cole. He did not recognize Cole, for he had never seen him before. He did recognize pure evil, though. Here it was, incarnate, right before him. As he yelled, he aimed the pistol right at Cole's heart.

Cole looked up at Luke and, snarled, "Move on, mister. Get on out of here. This is none of your business!"

"Get off him. Get up now!" Luke waved the pistol barrel in an upward motion.

Cole didn't move he just glared at Luke.

Luke pulled the hammer back to full cock, the cylinder rotated and brought a fresh cartridge to rest directly beneath the hammer and locked it into place. Just a gentle pressure on the trigger and the gun would fire.

None of this was lost on Cole. He was drunk, but not so drunk he didn't realize his life was in imminent danger. He slowly rose and brought his foot back from the opposite side of the prostate Mr. Bowen so that he was standing clear of the unconscious man. He swayed a little.

Luke hissed, "I don't know who you are Mister, but you had better hope Mr. Bowen isn't dead. If he is, I'll drop you where you stand. Now, move out of the way!"



Cole sidled over to his right, in front of the counter, while Luke moved to see to Mr. Bowen.

As Luke stooped over his friend, Cole appeared to sway and fall. He was half hidden from Luke by the store's counter. As Cole "fell" he reached into his boot and pulled the derringer from its hiding place. He turned and fired, all in one quick fluid motion.

Out of the corner of his eye Luke had seen Cole appear to sway and fall. His concern for Mr. Bowen drew his immediate attention so that he failed to see the gun appear in Cole's hand until the last second.

Luke was turning to fire when the derringer roared. A split second later Luke fired. His round struck the counter just below the top and lodged there. As he fell backwards from the force of the forty-five-caliber slug, he cocked his pistol again. When he hit the floor, his right elbow struck first. The impact brought a reflex and his trigger finger jerked. The thirty-two-caliber pistol barked again and this time the bullet found its mark striking Cole high in the upper left chest. In such close quarters and at such short range there was a lot of force even in a thirty-two-caliber bullet and Cole went reeling backwards, crashing into the table which held the bolts of cloth Mr. Bowen had, just minutes before, been straightening and rearranging. The legs splintered; the table, cloth, and Cole all went sprawling into the floor.

Luke was finding it hard to breathe. The forty-five slug had entered his left side just below the ribs. There was no pain just a feeling of having been hit with something very big. He felt as if he had been winded much as he did when he had fallen from the bent-over pine tree he had been riding as a kid. It knocked the wind out of him! He struggled to get up, couldn't, and fell back.

Cole, too, was trying to get up. He did get to his knees, fainted, and pitched face forward into the oily sawdust on the floor. He was out cold.

Luke pushed himself up into a sitting position and leaned against a barrel of flour. He could feel the wet stickiness of the blood running down his side. He found he could force his finger into the hole, but that didn't stop the bleeding. He still didn't feel pain and he wondered at that. He knew he was going to lose consciousness. He slowly crumpled onto the floor against the flour barrel and slipped into the enveloping darkness. The pistol slid from his limp hand, thudded on the floor into the ever-widening pool of his blood.

Smoke from the gunfire still hung in the air. The rank smell of gunpowder mingled with the metallic, coppery smell of blood added a surreal frame to this picture of violence.

In the sudden quiet only the sound of the labored breathing of the three men could be heard. It was the strange quiet after battle. It was the sound of death visiting her intended.

## **Luke All Right, Pa?**

Deborah Goldberg was standing on the little balcony her father had had built for her overlooking the main street of River Bluff. This was her routine every morning. She would greet the day in this same way: winter or summer, no matter the temperature, she would step out onto this little private terrace to say “Good Morning, World.”

Today was no different. She had opened the door leading onto the balcony just as Luke tied Old Molly to the rail in front of the City Mercantile store. She saw him stop in the doorway; make indistinct movements with his hands then disappear inside. She breathed deeply two, then three times and turned to re-enter her room when she heard the shots. There was a loud bang and then two more, not as loud.

Deborah ran inside, grabbed her house robe and yelled, “Papa, get up! Someone’s been shot at the mercantile store! Come on!” She ran down the stairs not waiting for Jacob. When she came running into the kitchen she found Rebecca, her mother, already standing by the kneading board with a large roll of dough on it. Mrs. Goldberg’s hands and forearms were covered with flour.

“What...” she tried to say.

“Somebody’s been shot at the mercantile, Momma. Get Papa, I’m going over!”

“No wait, Deborah! Wait for your father!”

“Can’t Momma. I think it's Luke Knight. I think Luke’s been shot!”

Deborah ran through the shop and unlocked the front door to the bakery. She flung it open and raced across the street toward the Mercantile. Old Molly shied away and pranced nervously at the hitching rail. The gunshots had upset her and now this flapping house robe was bearing down on her! Molly was ready to bolt!

When Deborah reached the door to the Mercantile, she stopped. The gun smoke, the smell, the sight of the blood and the bodies were overpowering. She leaned against the doorframe for a moment. The man lying nearest her was not Luke. Of that she was sure. The clothing was different. Where was Luke, then? The early morning gloom made it difficult for her to see very far into the room. As her eyes adjusted to the light, she saw two more bodies just beyond the counter. One was flat on the floor and the other leaning against a barrel.

She felt a presence behind her. She turned to find her father stepping up onto the wooden sidewalk. He hurried to the door. He too, stopped at the sight...but for only a moment.

“Go get doctor Brown, Deborah!!”

“No, I want to...!”

“Go! Now! Get Doctor Brown and tell him to hurry! Go!”

Deborah turned away and headed down the street to the office of Doctor Samuel Brown. Dr. Brown was already sticking his gray head out his door looking to see if he could locate from where the sounds of the gunshots had come.

Deborah saw him and called, “Dr. Brown, Dr. Brown...”

“What is it? Who’s shooting? Somebody shot?”

Deborah stopped at the door. “Papa said you should come quickly to the Mercantile. Luke Knight’s been shot. Two others, too!” She managed to gasp out in her trembling voice.

“Let me get my bag!” He didn’t even stop to pull up his braces nor put on a shirt. Sam Brown just latched on to his black bag and ran. As a prison doctor at Salisbury Prison he had become accustomed to death and violence of every kind. He thought it was over. He thought he had put it behind him. The events of this morning would put that fervent wish to rest.

Back up the street they ran, their running footsteps thumping on the wooden boards of the sidewalk. When they reached the Mercantile, Dr. Brown didn’t even pause at the door; he didn’t even break his stride. In he went. He halted when he saw Cole lying in his own blood and the pile of cloth. Quickly surveying the room he saw Jacob stooped down near two others. There was one on the floor and another sitting upright against a barrel. He checked Cole for a pulse. He found one and called out to Jacob, “Are they dead, Jacob?”

“No”, they’re both alive, but not for long! Mr. Knight has lost a lot of blood. I can’t get Mr. Bowen to answer me!”

Dr. Brown got up and went over to check on Luke and Mr. Bowen. He saw that Luke had a sizable bullet hole in his left side and was bleeding badly. Mr. Bowen had been beaten the worst that he had seen in some time. He guessed a concussion. There could be a fractured skull. He just couldn’t be sure, not yet anyway.

“Jacob, go get some help. I need to get these people over to my office where I can treat them.”

Without a word, Jacob left the store and went searching for help. As he stepped out the door, Deborah touched his arm and asked, “Is Luke all right, Pa?”

“No, my little one. He’s been shot. He has lost a large amount of blood. I’m going to find help to get him and the others to the doctor’s office. It is best if you go home and see about your mother. She worries, you know.”

Tears had left wet traces down her cheeks. “All right Papa. I’ll go home. But promise you’ll let me know how Luke is, please?”

“I will, little one,” Jacob lifted her chin to look in her eyes now flooded with tears. “Go Home. I’ll stay with Mr. Knight. Don’t worry. Doctor Brown is a good doctor. He will fix him up again. Go now.”

Deborah turned and began her slow walk back to the bakery.

Jacob looked after her. He was very afraid the news he would eventually bring her would be bad - very bad.

### **Willie Jordan**

Jack was in sight of the Campbell farm when he felt, more than heard, a noise in the under brush on the left side of the road. He slid from the saddle on the right side of the Bay rather than the left so as to place the horse between him and the perceived danger. As he dropped to the ground he pulled the rifle from the scabbard and laid it across the saddle aimed in the general direction of the danger. The Bay trembled but held steady. This was a horse used to tense situations.

Jack called out, “All right, come out and let me see you!” There was no response. He spoke again, this time more forcefully. “Come on out, I said!”

There was another momentary silence then the low scrubs bordering the roadway began to part and out of the woods came a rider in gray, not unlike the gray Jack was wearing.

“Hold!” Jack demanded.

The rider pulled up. His horse, a black gelding, twitched his head as if his mouth was sore from the bit, pranced to this left, but did the rider’s bidding and stopped. The rider wore a black slouch hat pulled low over his eyes. His hair was sandy brown and his half-hooded eyes were ice blue. He was bearded and it appeared that he hadn’t bathed, nor shaved, in several days. Jack was glad he was up wind of the stranger.

“Who are you and what do you want?”

“Well, that’s about as direct a question as I have ever been asked! Suppose I don’t want to tell you?”

“Mister, I’m in no mood to take any slack from you, or anyone else this early in the morning. There are raiders about and I’m kind of suspect of people who skulk around in the bushes. Now, I’m going to ask you again, for the last time, are you going to tell me who you are, or, am I gonna have to come over there and see who you were? “

“Awright! Jack, you damn fool, it’s me, Willie Jordan! It’s Willie, Jack, from your old outfit. When you rode with Wade Hampton! I ain’t seen you since Appomattox!”

“Willie? Sergeant William Jordan?”

“I declare, Jack, your eyes must be going. Time was you’d ‘ov recognized me at a hundred yards in the dark!”

“I still don’t know it is you! Get off that horse and walk to me... slowly.”

Willie smiled and stepped down from Blackie. He held the reins and took a few steps toward Jack.

“That’ll be far enough. Take off that hat.”

Willie removed his floppy hat and uncovered a head full of long, stringy, dirty hair. Hair that would have been sandy brown had it been clean.

Jack had seen enough. He gently let the hammer down on the rifle and eased it from the saddle and began replacing it in the scabbard. He hadn’t said a word since he commanded Willie to remove his hat.

Willie was uncomfortable and spoke up, “Well?”

“Well what?” answered Jack.

“Well, is it awright? You satisfied? I mean... that I am Willie Jordan?”

“Yeah, I’m satisfied. Nobody but Willie could smell that bad... even up wind.”

“How you been keepin', Capn?”

“Fair I suppose. I’m home and I’m in one piece. That counts for a whole lot these days. How you been?”

“Not so good. I got home all right. There was just nothing and nobody there when I got there. Our house was gone. Burned to the ground. My folks were gone. Some of the town folks said they just picked up and left. Didn’t say where they was going. Just said

they put everything they had left over after the raids in the old wagon Pa had and left. I can't find a trace of 'em so far."

Jack gathered up the Bay's reins and pointed to a spot under a large long leaf pine and said, "We can talk over there."

The two men led their mounts to the side of the road and squatted in the time-honored tradition of men used to living in the field. The horses, finding no grass poking through the thick mat of pine needles, just stood by their riders suspiciously eyeing one another.

"Our house is gone, too," said Jack. "Yankee raiders got it just a few days before I got home. The farm is in a mess. I found my brother, Luke, living in a woodshed. Can you believe that? A woodshed!"

"At least you found your brother and your farm. I'm still trying to figure out where my family went. I'll go to 'em... if I can find 'em."

Jack looked up from the twig he was slowly stirring the pine needles with, "Where you staying?"

"In the woods."

"Around here?"

"No, I was just ridding through when I heard you coming. I took to the cover of the trees. I heard about them raiders in town. Thought you might be with them. Never thought I'd find Captain Knight way out here toward the coast though!"

"Well, you did." Jack chose a long pine needle from the thick mat below him. "You present a problem, Willie."

"What kind of problem, Capn?"

"Well, Willie, I can't allow you to live in the woods!"

"But Capn, You don't owe me nothing!"

"Yeah, I do, Willie. I owe you and every man who served under me. I always will. Tell you what. Why don't you ride with me over to the Campbell place and have breakfast then we'll go back over to our farm see what we can do about getting you a place to stay...at least 'til you locate your family."

"Now, Capn, I ain't looking for no charity, you hear?"

“I hear you Willie. I’m not offering any either! You can work with Luke and me ‘til you get some word on your family. In the meantime you’ll have a roof over your head, such as it is, and we can certainly use the help rebuilding the place.”

“Capn, I’d be obliged, if you’re sure that’s what you want!”

“That’s what I want, Willie.”

The two men stood and started walking back to the road. Jack said, “Willie what do you know about building cabins?”

“What kind of cabin, Capn?”

“The kind you live in.”

“Well, now...I ain’t never built no cabin before.”

“Well, you’re about to! Right after you get a bath!”

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Dr. Sam Brown was working feverishly to stop the bleeding in Luke’s side. Cole was on another table on the opposite side of the room. He was still unconscious.... mostly from the alcohol he’d consumed. He’d keep. Besides, Doc Brown thought, he wasn’t bleeding that badly. His was more of a flesh wound. He’d be all right. Luke, on the other hand...

Jacob Goldberg watched from across the room. What was he to tell his Deborah? He took a step toward the doctor. “Sam, will Mr. Knight be all right?”

There was a moment when the doctor didn’t answer and Jacob thought he didn’t hear him. He was about to ask again when Doc Brown said, “Jacob, the truth is I don’t know. I’ve about got the bleeding stopped. The bullet went clean through so we don’t have to worry about that. But, he’s lost so much blood...I just don’t know. Really, Jacob, I wish I could tell you more...but, well, I just ...”

“Thank you Sam. You are an honest man. I appreciate it.”

“I’ll keep him here in the office today and this evening as well. We’ll see what tomorrow brings. That is, of course, if he makes it.”

“I’m sure my Deborah will be glad to help, Sam. She is, well, she likes Mr. Knight...a lot. I’ll have her come over when you say.”

“That’s fine, Jacob. Let’s give it a few hours and then we’ll see.”

“I’ll be off then. I still have the bakery to open and Rebecca will be worried.”

“Jacob? Thank you for your help. Give my regards to Rebecca and Deborah. I’ll let you know later today, if her help will be needed.”

Jacob left closing the door quietly behind him. As he walked back down the wooden sidewalk he wondered how he was to tell Deborah the man she loved was hovering near death. Then he cheered, somewhat, when he realized the news he was delivering was not as bad as he had expected! There was a chance. That was something!

### **Trouble Ahead!**

As it turned out, Mr. Bowen’s injuries were not as bad as they looked. He had a concussion, a lot of bruises, and a couple of cuts about his face, and a very bad headache. He was sitting up on the examination table in Doc Brown’s office as the doctor prepared a potion for him to take later to help ease the headache.

Cole was beginning to move about a bit in the bed. He was still unconscious, but he was mumbling and twitching his head back and forth as his mind fought its way back to the surface.

Luke’s breathing was better. He was showing no sign of improvement, but neither was there any sign that his condition was deteriorating. He was holding his own.

Doc brown would be sending for Deborah soon. They would take turns watching Luke and Cole through the night. Mr. Bowen would be allowed to return home shortly.

Meanwhile, Jack and Willie had enjoyed a breakfast with the Campbells. A breakfast they had rarely had in the past four years. There was bacon and some eggs Ellie had stolen from some game hens the Yankees had been unable to catch. Scrawny little things, they were, but their eggs were delicious. And there was cornbread. Flour was too difficult to come by. Most times there was none available.

Luke had made sure Ellie understood he had only just met Willie on his way to the Campbell farm and that he would see to it that Willie was introduced to a bar of lye soap and the River just as soon as possible. With that, Ellie stayed just as far away from Willie as she could without being overly obvious. Momma Nan, on the other hand, had no problem with insensitivity to Willie’s feelings. When she came into the kitchen, she wrinkled her nose, looked about in a vain attempt to locate the offending odor and then pinched her nose with her thumb and forefinger. Willie did not fail to get the message. He off-handedly mentioned it had been some time since he had had the opportunity to bath seeing as how he was busy staying out of sight of the Yankees. But now that he was



among friends he would set that right at the earliest opportunity. That seemed to sooth the sensibilities of all present and the meal was eaten with gusto, enjoyed by all.

Afterwards, Ellie walked Jack and Willie out to their mounts and secured a promise from Jack that he would be back soon. Ellie also made Willie promise, in return for Jack's hospitality, that he would see that Jack came to no harm. Willie promised and "crossed-his-heart-and-hoped-to-die" that he would! The two men mounted up and rode back to the Knight place.

As Jack and Willie came in sight of the farm Jack was surprise to see there was no cart in the yard and no Molly under the lean-to. As they dismounted Jack searched the ground for cart tracks in the hope that Luke had returned and then driven the cart on down to the southwest woods. There were no cart tracks.

"Willie, tie your horse up under the lean-to. You'll find some fodder around back in the crib," Jack instructed Willie.

"Yes sir, Capn," replied Willie, as he led Blackie to the shelter. Jack went into the woodshed. When Willie came back toward the woodshed from the lean-to, Jack met him with a big, yellow bar of lye soap.

"Willie, you'll find the river about 150 yards on the other side of that road," Jack pointed toward River Road. "Go get yourself cleaned up. You got any clean clothes?"

"No sir, Capn. This is all I got to my name."

"Well, we might be able to find a pair of trousers that'll fit you, but you wash that shirt and those pants you've got on before you come back. Oh, and Willie, wash those long johns, too!"

Jack strode over to the Bay, reached into his saddlebag and produced a razor. Opening the blade he checked it for sharpness against the hair on his forearm and handed it to Willie. "You can use a shave, too."

"Capn, you're going to make a new man of me!"

"The old one will be just fine Willie - clean!"

Willie nodded and began his march to the river. Jack mounted up again and rode the Bay down to the southwest woods. There was no sign there, either, of Luke. Now he was getting worried. Luke should be back. If he wasn't home soon, Jack decided, he would ride into town and look for him.

Jack looked the trees over again and reassured himself they would do just fine for their cabin. He looked at the dark soil and remembered how it would grow anything you could put in it. The tobacco crops his Pa would grow were something to behold. The three of

them would haul it into town and sell it to the buyers for one of the highest prices of any crop in the county.

He swung back up into the saddle and started his ride back to the woodshed. As he neared the lean-to, he could see Willie approaching on the wagon road. He was carrying his wet shirt and pants. He was wearing his wet long johns and boots and hat. Jack smiled. Willie was a little slow in the thinking department, but he was a good man to have around when there was trouble.

Jack slipped off the Bay and went inside and rummaged about among Luke's things 'til he found a pair of trousers he thought would fit Willie. He stepped back out into the sunlight and met Willie by the well.

"Try these on, Willie. See how they fit. Hang your wet things on the...well... there used to be a plow line Pa had rigged up for Ma to hang washing on. It's gone! Just hang it on the rails of the corncrib for now. The sun will dry them and they'll be ready for tomorrow."

"Capn?"

"Yeah?"

"I thought you said your brother was to meet us here when we came from the Campbell place."

"I did, Willie. I don't know where he is. He should have beaten us back. Jack wrestled with indecision just a moment longer then said, "Willie, I'm going to ride toward town. If Luke's on the way home, I'll meet him. If not, then he may be in trouble and he might need my help." He swung into the saddle. "Make yourself at home. If I'm not back by nightfall, there's some salt pork and a can or two of beans on a little shelf in the woodshed there. Help yourself. I should be back before then, though.

Jack nudged the Bay with his heels and the horse leapt forward. When they got to the River Road, they turned left toward town. As the Bay slipped into a steady ground-eating gait, Jack was thinking of what lay ahead. He had a bad feeling about this visit to town. A sense of foreboding swept over him. He'd felt this before each battle. His senses were sharpening. There was trouble ahead and his mind was warning his body to ready itself. Old habits die hard, as they say. No matter. It would serve him well in the days ahead. There was trouble out there somewhere and he was riding into it. He was sure of it.

### **Why'd I Shoot Him?**

Luke's eyelids fluttered, then stayed open. At first he couldn't make out details...just shapes and images. He could see the form of a person in a chair alongside the bed. He couldn't make out who was sitting there and didn't really care. He moved his head slightly to the left and saw light. Nothing else. He closed his eyes. He was just too weak to hold them open longer. For the first time since regaining consciousness, he noticed noise. He could hear the sounds of people. They sounded distant. Closer, he could hear a woman's low, melodic humming. It was nice. It was comforting. He listened for a moment. He didn't recognize the tune. Then he was asleep.

Deborah had been by Luke's bedside since about midday. Doc Brown had come over to the bakery and asked her to please spell him for a while. He had to see that Mr. Bowen got home safely. She was happy to oblige. She had bathed Luke's face with cool wet towels and watched as his breathing became regular and measured. Then she sat back in a rocker near the bed and just sat there as a comforting presence.

It was now the middle of the afternoon. Doc Brown had been back for some time. He had checked on Luke when he first arrived and then reassured Deborah and turned to see what else he could do for Cole.

Cole was clawing his way up from the alcoholic pit he had so eagerly leapt into. Muttering curses, he pushed Doc Brown away. Doc held onto Cole's shoulders and spoke sternly to him.

"Mister! Mister! Do you hear me? Wake up now!"

Using one hand, Doc reached out, dipped his fingers into a basin of water sitting on the table beside the bed. He splashed a few drops into Cole's face. It startled Cole. He opened his eyes but closed them again. Doc splashed more water. Cole cursed and struggled against Doc's restraint. Doc stepped back and allowed Cole to push himself up on his elbows. His injured shoulder wouldn't hold him. Pain shot through his left arm and shoulder and he dropped back down on the bed. The sharp pain brought him to full consciousness. He looked around the room and then his eyes focused on Doc.

"Who're you? Where am I? What's going on?" His mouth was so dry his voice was raspy.

"Here, have some water. Then we'll talk," said Doc.

Cole drank thirstily from the glass. He paused, and then drank some more. He pushed the water glass away indicating he'd had enough and said, "I figure you must be the doctor. So, what happened?"

Doc. Brown replied, "Truth be told Mister, I don't know. I was called after all the shooting and found the three of you lying on the floor at the Mercantile. I got some town folk to give me a hand and got all of you here and patched you up. I don't even know your name."

“Cole, James Cole.”

“What’s your business Mr. Cole? I mean... in River Bluff?”

“Well, Doc, I don’t see as how that’s any of YOUR business, now, is it?”

“Mr. Cole, I didn’t mean to offend. I was simply inquiring as to the nature of your business. I figured if it was pressing, someone might could lend a hand while you’re recuperating, that’s all.”

“You’d do better to get me something for this pain in my shoulder. What is it anyway?”

“A gunshot wound. It’s a clean wound. The bullet went completely through and didn’t even touch the bone. You’re one lucky man Mr. Cole.”

“Who shot me?”

“Well, I don’t think it’s my place to say, Mr. Cole. But by the looks of it, the man lying over yonder on that bed put that hole in your shoulder. And, Mr. Cole, it would also appear that the derringer you had in your hand when I got to you is the gun that put the rather large hole in his side.” Doc stepped to the side to allow Cole to see Luke’s bed.

Cole lifted his head and strained his neck to peer across the room. He saw the figure of a man covered by a sheet. He appeared to be unconscious, or asleep.

“Who is he?”

“That, sir, is Mr. Knight, Mr. Luke Knight. He’s a local boy just back from the war.”

“How bad is he?”

“Pretty bad. He bled a lot. It’ll be a while before he’s up and around. That is, if he makes it.”

“Why’d I shoot him?”

“Like I said, Mr. Cole, I don’t have a clue. When I got there all there was... was... blood and gun smoke and three bodies on the floor.”

“Three?”

“Yes, Mr. Bowen, the owner was beaten badly. I patched him up. He’s at home in bed. At least he had better be. He has a concussion.” Doc did not tell Cole that Mr. Bowen had told him everything up to the point where he lost consciousness. There were times to keep your mouth shut!

Cole sat up on the bed groaning as he did. “Don’t you have something for the pain?”

“I do, but I’d rather you waited a few hours and let some of that alcohol wear off. You were carrying quite a load.”

“Hell, I don’t need it! I’m getting out of here!” He struggled to his feet, staggered, and fell back onto the bed. He pushed himself up onto his feet again, and this time he stayed.

“Mr. Cole, I don’t advise...!”

“Forget it Doc. I’m leaving. I’ve got a room over at the boarding house.” He turned to survey the room for his hat when he saw the woman. She was stunning! His eyes locked on her and he froze. “Who’s that?”

“That’s miss Goldberg, the baker’s daughter.”

“What’s she doing here?”

“She volunteered to help me this afternoon. Besides she’s a little sweet on Mr. Knight. In any event, I needed the help.”

Cole found it difficult to take his eyes off Deborah. He did, however, and started, haltingly, toward the door.

“How much I owe you, Doc?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Ask me again tomorrow when I change the dressing. If the pain gets to be too much, have someone come over and get the medicine. It’ll be ready.”

“Awright.” Cole opened the door and stepped out onto the sidewalk. The brightness of the sun startled him for a moment and he paused as his eyes adjusted to the light. He looked up and down the street and then began to walk toward Bea’s Boarding house.

Cole didn’t see the lone rider rein in his horse at the east end of Main Street and slowly survey both sides of the street as if looking for something in particular. He didn’t see the rider’s eyes lock on the mule tied up in front of the Mercantile. Nor, did he see the rider, as he spurred his Bay into a slow walk directly toward the mule, reach inside his waistcoat and pull the hammer back one notch on the Navy Colt that was tucked in the waistband of his trousers.

## Jack and Farley

Jack could feel the eyes of townsfolk who stopped whatever they were doing to peer at him, with curiosity and a vague sense of dread, as he walked his Bay with a determined gait toward the Mercantile. They had become accustomed to seeing Confederate soldiers walking into and through town in the few weeks since the surrender at Appomattox. Usually they felt no threat from these war weary men. Most of them were truly beaten. They evoked certain sympathy. In some cases even empathy. This rider, however, did not cause anyone to feel sympathetic. This rider was not bowed, or beaten. He was not drifting, as were most of the gray travelers before him. This man sat straight in the saddle. His clothes, though tattered and threadbare, were worn with dignity and pride. There was nothing about him, which spoke of loss.

Their eyes followed him as the Bay's hooves struck the ground with purpose and direction. They watched as his left hand held the reins gently but leaving the horse with no question as to who was in control. They watched as his right hand rested on the hilt of a weapon resting snugly in the waist of his trousers. There was imminent danger here. Every motion of this man and his horse were performed as though rehearsed. Indeed they had been. On every battlefield Jack and the Bay had fought upon. Each skirmish, every hit and run raid, was a rehearsal for the next one to follow. This was only the latest in a long line of battles. It appeared this Cavalryman knew exactly what was expected of him and exactly how he would accomplish victory.

As the Bay neared ole Molly, Jack's eyes were searching the immediate area. Nobody left his animal tied up at a hitching post with no food or water for nearly three quarters of a day. Not if he could help it. But ole Molly gave every indication that she had been tied here since early in the morning hours. Luke would not do that to his animal.

Jack stirred the Bay along side Molly. Molly snickered and the Bay quivered, but held his ground. Jack stepped down. He spoke gently to Molly as he ran a comforting hand along side her flank looking her over for any obvious injuries. Finding none, he tied the Bay to the same post and looked up and down the street for a watering trough. He found one near the Mule Auction. He untied Molly and walked her across the street and tied her near the trough and stood quietly as she drank.

Jack looked about. The town was quiet. It was not nearly the bustling little commerce center he remembered from before the war. He felt the eyes trained on him and shrugged them off. He decided to leave Molly here for a while and allow her to drink as much as she needed in her own time. He checked the bottom button on his waistcoat to be sure it was open for easy access to his weapon, then walked back across the street to the Mercantile.

The doors were closed and locked. It struck Jack as odd that the store would be closed without a note to its patrons on the door or in the window. As he turned away he saw a small head poking out from the hayloft of the Mule Auction across the street. Everyone

else seemed to have melted into the buildings. The street was empty save for Jack and the animals. Of course, the youngster in the hayloft had the vantage point for surveying the entire street. Jack glanced up again just in time to see the little one disappear back inside the hayloft. He shook his head and stepped down from the sidewalk and went back across the street to the stable.

The Mule Auction doubled as a livery. It was a large barn with double doors on the front and back. The back doors led into a lot, or corral, where animals were allowed to feed and exercise while they waited for their owners to come get them, or where prospective new owners could look them over. There were stalls on both sides of the barn and a forge where the blacksmith made and repaired horse and mule shoes as necessary. The forge was also used to make other things members of the community needed, such as hinges, nails, carriage bolts and so forth.

As Jack entered the doors from the street, he could see in the dimness a figure of a man at the forge. His sleeves were rolled up as far as they would go and he was blowing air onto the glowing coals with a bellows. Jack started to him.

“What can I do for you, Mister?” the smithy called out before Jack had taken more than half a dozen steps.

“Farley? Farley Carnes? Is that you?”

At the sound of his name the smithy stopped and turned to look over his shoulder at this stranger who knew his name. He squinted as Jack presented a silhouette, back lighted as he was. As Jack drew nearer recognition broke out on the smithy’s sweaty, dirt smudged face. “Jack? Jack Knight? Well I declare; it Is you. I swanee, Jack! I thought we’d done seen the last of you! Come on over here and let me take a look at you, boy!”

Jack walked on over and stuck out his hand in greeting. Farley Carnes, the town blacksmith, reached out his own bear claw of a hand and swallowed Jack’s in it! He pulled Jack toward him as he pumped his hand furiously and pounded Jack on the back until trail dust rose in the air.

Still pounding and pumping Farley said, “How you been, boy. We sure was worried about you. We didn’t get much news and when we did it didn’t have much to do with you local boys. You hurt? Shot up enny? Crippled up enny? Are ya home for good?” All of this was said in one breath.

Jack pulled back from the bear hug and gently extricated his hand form Farley’s. “Yeah, I’m home for good. I’m O.K. Got a few scratches, and one or two bullet holes, but nothing I won’t survive. Farley, have you seen Luke?” Jack came right to the point.

“Cain’t say as I have, Jack. That his Mule outside by the watering trough?”

“Yeah. I found her tied up in front of the Mercantile and the store is closed and locked. Luke was to ride in this morning and get a crosscut saw from the store. He didn’t come back by the time we expected so, I’ve come looking for him. I was hoping you’d seen him.”

“No, I ain’t seen much of nothing today. Been hard at it at this durned old forge making up a batch of mule shoes I hope the farmers will need when they get them farms up and running again!”

“Farley, I need to find him. This is not like Luke.”

“I seen him, Mister Jack.” The tiny voice came from the top of the ladder leading to the hayloft. Jack turned immediately to him.

“What did you see, son?”

He’s over at Doc Brown’s office. He’s been shot.”

“Been shot?”

“Yeah, some stranger in town shot him this morning down at the Mercantile store.

“Now Billy, don’t you go telling something you don’t know nothing about!”

“I ain’t Pa. Hope to die, if I ain’t telling the truth!”

“You say he’s at the Doc’s office,” asked Jack.

“Yes sir. Been there all day.”

“Farley, That’s a fine young man you’ve got there. Take care of him. I’ll be going over to the doctor’s office now. I’ll be back directly to pick up my mule. Would you see that she’s fed and watered?”

“You bet, Jack,” replied Farley. “She’ll be ready when you are!”

Jack turned to the door and strode out into the street. His heart was pounding as he headed for the doctor’s office. His outward appearance showed none of the concern he felt for his brother. What had Luke gotten into now, he thought. I warned him to be careful. Anger flared along side the worry. His emotions were storming as he stepped onto the wooden sidewalk and opened the door of Doc Brown’s office.

There were three people inside. Jack crossed the room and stopped at Luke’s bedside. Luke’s eyes were closed and he appeared to be sleeping. His breathing was normal. At least, Jack thought so.



The doctor stepped to Jack's side and said, "I think he's going to pull through in spite of everything." Doc looked up into Jack's worried face. "I was wondering when you'd show up. Didn't know you were home yet." Doc stuck out his hand in greeting. "I wish the circumstances were better, Jack." He shook Jack's hand.

Without preamble, Jack asked, "What happened to him, Doc?"

"He was almost murdered!" A woman's voice answered. Dock turned toward the woman.

Jack raised his eyes and saw her for the first time. He'd seen someone else in the room as he came in but had not really paid attention to this third person until now. His breath caught. He swallowed...hard. He opened his mouth to speak...found he couldn't... and just quit trying! My God, he thought, she is the most beautiful creature I have ever seen! "...Ma'am" he said.

Deborah Goldberg had just accomplished what the entire Union Army had not been able to do in four years of fighting! Captain Jack Knight had just been captured...completely!

### **She's the Baker's Daughter**

Jack was drowning in her beauty. Deborah Goldberg, without knowing it, had just captured Jack Knight's heart! He was smitten through and through.

She is absolutely beautiful, thought Jack. He had momentarily forgotten about his brother.

Deborah stood and offered her hand. Jack was clutching his hat in front of him with his eyes fixed on her every move. He reached and took her hand, his eyes never leaving her face. He bowed gallantly over her hand and then straightened. He did not release her hand. Deborah tugged her hand slightly, but Jack did not release it. She felt heat in her face and she dropped her eyes demurely from his.

Suddenly Jack realized his error. "I beg your pardon, ma'am! I didn't... I mean I was only I." He stopped. He, too, could feel the heat in his face. He released her hand.

Doc Brown understood the situation for what it was and moved immediately to ease the tension.

"Jack, I think your brother is going to live. Beyond that, I don't care to guess. It's going to take some time and bed rest for him to get over this. As you can see, he's sleeping now. That's good. He's already begun the healing process. He's a young man and that's

in his favor. I saw the scar on his left arm...apparently from a bullet, too. This fellow has been through a lot in his young life. I understand he was wounded in the war?"

"Yes, at Gettysburg, Doc. He was with General Lewis Armistead and the North Carolina troops."

"He was in Pickett's charge?"

"Yes sir, he was."

"My Lord! This man's a hero!"

"Well, Doc, I don't think my brother feels that way. He just did what he had to do... like the others who were there."

"Well, he's still a hero in my book. I never came under fire, although it was close at times. I spent my army days trying to patch up the wounds of these young fellows. Most of the time we just had to amputate. There are a lot of fine young men who'll spend the rest of their lives with one arm, or one leg. Tell you the truth Jack; I was glad when they transferred me to Salisbury Prison. At least I thought I was. That was an entirely different experience. One I don't care to ever have to live through again!" Doc said this last while shaking his head.

Jack had never seen any of the prisons but he had heard of the horror stories about the prisons, not just the Yankee ones, but on both sides.

"Doc, I'm going to step out for some air." She said walking toward the door.

Jack watched her long black hair swing rhythmically as she moved. His eyes followed her across the room admiring the swish of her long skirt on the floor, the swaying of her hips as she strode to the door. His heart beat faster.

"It's all right Deborah. Take as long as you like. Luke is resting now. I expect he'll sleep until morning anyway."

"Thank you, Doc. I won't be long." She closed the door after her. The little round hoop on the end of the string tied to the shade on the door swung left and right. Still Jack stood... transfixed.

"Jack, that dream you just had is real. Her name is Deborah Goldberg. She's the baker's daughter."

"I'm sorry Doc, I..."

"That's all right, Jack. It isn't often men see beauty such as that. She is truly a beauty. It would appear, though, your brother has claims on her!"

“Really?”

“Yes. She is here because she wants to be. Jacob, her father, says she was of absolutely no use at the bakery. So, she’s here, where she wants to be, helping me take care of your brother. The funny thing is...I had two other patients at the same time. Deborah didn’t seem to be interested in them! Just Luke!”

“Doc, can you tell me what happened?”

“Jack, Mr. Bowen, the store keeper...”

“I know Mr. Bowen.”

“He tells me that Mr. Cole...”

Who is Cole?”

“Ah, Mr. Cole...well, he just came into town a couple of days ago. I don’t know anything other than his name. As a matter of fact, he told me it was none of my business what his business was. So I stopped asking!”

“Go on... with what happened, I mean.”

“Well, Mr. Bowen said that Mr. Cole came into his place, drunk as a skunk, and insisted he sell him more whiskey. Mr. Bowen told him he doesn’t stock whiskey and Mr. Cole wouldn’t believe him and began to beat him. I understand, from Mr. Bowen, that the last thing he remembered was Mr. Cole beating him. He said he fell to the floor and struck his head as he fell. Everything is blank ‘til he woke up here in my office. I took him home after I patched him up. The poor man’s beaten to a pulp!”

“What about this Mr. Cole,” asked Jack?

“He got himself up and left. I told him he shouldn’t but he insisted. He was still a little drunk when he left. He’s staying at Bea Weatherby’s boarding house just down the street.”

“Was he injured?”

“Yeah! It’s a small caliber...in the upper left shoulder. He’ll be sore as the dickens for a few days, but he’ll be fine

“Did he say anything about what happened?”

“No, actually acted like he didn’t know! I don’t find that hard to believe as drunk as he was! Look Jack, I’m not an idiot. The bullet that went through your brother’s side was a

forty-five-caliber. The Derringer I found in Cole's hand was a forty-five caliber. The bullet I took out of Mr. Cole's shoulder was a small caliber, maybe a thirty-two. It would match the caliber of the pistol your brother was carrying. Now put all this together and it sure looks to me like these two had a shoot-out and nobody won, except, maybe, Mr. Bowen. I believe, Jack, your brother happened on Mr. Cole beating Mr. Bowen and interceded and the gunfight followed. Now, I can't prove any of it. But I'd bet that's the way it was. If anybody knows, it'll be your brother. He was the only one not unconscious, or drunk at the time!" Doc turned back to the instruments he was rearranging on the table beside Luke's bed.

"Thanks Doc. Will you take care of Luke for me?"

"Sure, Jack, That's my Job."

"There's something I have to do. I won't be long."

"Now, son, don't go getting yourself hurt, too!"

"I don't aim to Doc. I'll see you directly."

Jack strode to the door and stepped out onto the sidewalk. He looked west and saw that the sun was about an hour from setting. He didn't see Molly at the watering trough. He assumed Farley had taken her inside to feed her. His Bay was still at the hitching post in front of the Mercantile. Jack turned left toward the Bay. As he neared the horse it neighed in recognition.

"Whoa," said Jack as he gently patted the horse's neck and simultaneously pulled the rifle from the saddle sheath. He checked to be sure it was loaded. It was. He spoke gently to the horse once more and walked down the street toward Bea's boarding house. The sun was just above the trees at the west end of town. Dark would be coming soon.

### **He's trying to kill me!**

Bea Weatherby was in the kitchen of her boarding house about to prepare supper. As she rattled the pots and pans about, she was formulating a menu for the evening meal in her head. She had really wanted collard greens with ham hocks this evening, but it was really too soon for collards to reach their peak and, besides, they needed that first frost to insure their sweetness. Oh well, she thought, she would go with the cabbage and speckled butterbeans and the last of the smoked bacon and a big cake of oven baked cornbread! That would do it. She had thought of mixing up a bowl of fresh lettuce and fresh green

onions all chopped up together and then pouring the hot grease from the fried bacon onto them as a sort of side dish, or salad, but she put that option aside, at least for this evening's meal.

As the war wound down the south had found itself in a very bad position. It was running out of nearly everything and that included food. The food most folks had today they raised themselves in the hog pens and pastures and gardens behind nearly every home and business. If you could raise it, you could eat. Bea's garden had served her and her few customers well, as it would today.

Bea was slicing thin strips of bacon when the front door to her boarding house flew open with a crash!

"Who is it?" called Bea.

No answer.

Who is it?" again from Bea. This time in a raised voice, in case the visitor had failed to hear her first request.

Still no answer.

Bea began to feel uneasy. She put down the knife and wiped her hands on her apron, stood back from the table and looked through the dining room into the living room, the room into which the front door opened. She saw a man. His head was turning from side to side and he was deeply concentrating, looking for something or someone. She turned towards him and began to walk his way.

Cole was in bed in his room up stairs, not directly over Bea's kitchen, but close. He had made it in the back way to Bea's after leaving Doc Brown's office and managed to get up the stairs, stopping a few times to catch his breath, allowing the pain in his shoulder to subside. He would climb a few steps and stop. Climb a few more and stop. This went on 'til he reached the top. He made it to his room where he fell across the bed, rolled over onto his back, managed to prop a pillow under his head and went off to sleep almost immediately.

He heard the crash of the front door. He roused, part way, from his sleep. He gazed around the room with glazed eyes, and then dropped off again. Whatever it was Bea would take care of it.

He was wrong.

To reach the living room from the kitchen you had to traverse the dining room, the most formal room in the boarding house. It was very simple. A long trestle table with eight, high back Shaker chairs and a hutch with some sort of German influence were the two pieces most prominent. There was a sideboard and a couple of smaller tables set against

the walls. There was a cluster of oil lamps affixed to a small wagon wheel, lying on its side, and suspended from the ceiling with small chains which supplied the light for late evening meals and for gatherings after dark. Since most socializing was done in the kitchen, the dining room was the least used of any room in the house. Its furnishings showed the care it received. It was quite nice in a “homey sort” of way. This was not lost on Bea’s clientele.

As Bea walked through the dining room she could see a man in gray standing at the foot of the stairs with his back towards her. He was dressed in a tattered and soiled Confederate uniform. It had the insignia of a Calvary Captain on it. His right hand held a rifle. She noticed the hammer was cocked.

She said, “May I help you, sir?”

He spun around with lightening speed and Bea was staring into the bore of the rifle.

Jack froze. The adrenaline was pumping. His mind sent a desperate signal: “It’s a woman! Hold!”

He did.

Bea’s right hand was clutching the waist of her apron and her left was at her mouth suffocating a scream! Her breathing stopped for a moment. She felt a mixture of fear and wonderment! Whoever he was, he was a handsome man, she thought despite her fear. Not in a “pretty” sort of way, but in a manly sort of way. His dark eyes were deep and unafraid. They had squinted as the adrenaline had flooded his system causing little crow’s feet at the corners. His face, though bearded and lined from the months and years of living outside in all kinds of weather, was chiseled from stone. It was the face of a man who had met his own fear many times before and bested it. He had it under complete control at this moment.

Jack still didn’t speak.

Bea said, “What do you want?” Her voice trembled just a bit, in spite of herself.

“James Cole,” answered Jack.

Bea’s pulse began to ease back to something approaching normal.

“He’s upstairs.”

“Where about’s, upstairs?”

“In the room directly opposite the stairs. I think he’s still there. Came in a while ago, stumbled up the stairs and closed the door. I haven’t heard from him since. I reckon he’s still in there.”

“Now listen carefully lady. I’m going to pay Mr. Cole a visit. You go back to the kitchen and whatever it was you were doing. Stay out of this. It’s none of your affair...at least as far as I can make out. Let’s keep it that way. Now go!”

Bea hesitated just a moment. Jack motioned with the rifle barrel and Bea turned and without a word, went back to the kitchen. Jack watched her go ‘til she was safely back at her work. Then he turned again to the stairs and began to walk up them one tread at a time. Every few steps he would wince when he heard the inevitable squeak. But he continued his climb. Reaching the landing, he stood for a moment across from Cole’s door. Then stepped forward and slowly turned the knob. The door opened noiselessly. There was a hooked rug on the wooden floor, which muffled his steps as he approached the bed on which Cole lay snoring.

Jack stopped at the bedside and slowly extended the barrel of the rifle until the muzzle rested against Cole’s lips.

“You Cole?” asked Jack

“Wha...”, mumbled Cole.

“I said, are you James Cole?”

Cole’s eyes were open now. He tasted the bitterness of the gunmetal and the oil on it and tried to turn his head away from it. Jack pushed and twisted the gun barrel so that it entered Cole’s mouth.

Cole’s eyes grew large and he stopped wiggling.

“I’ll ask you once again, are you James Cole?”

Cole tried to nod his head and was able to move it slightly downwards.

Jack said, “I’ll take that as a yes. I’m glad. I never have taken pleasure in busting up someone who didn’t have it coming. You do!”

Cole jerked slightly to the right and “snap rolled” to his left jerking the rifle barrel from his mouth and cutting the inside of his upper lip with the front sight. He yelped as he landed on the floor on his already injured shoulder.

Jack leapt over the bed just as Cole was jumping to his feet. Jack smashed the rifle butt into Cole’s stomach with all the force he could muster. Cole retched air as an explosion of breath blew from his bleeding mouth sprinkling Jack’s shirtfront with little freckles of scarlet. The rifle butt was still down low so Jack brought it upwards into Cole’s face throwing his right shoulder into it as he struck Cole in the face. The blow snapped Cole’s head back, threw him off balance and he went backwards with the momentum of the

blow into the open doorway. He clutched desperately for the doorframe as he went tripping backwards across the landing and began tumbling, head over heels, down the stairs. When he hit the main floor he lay for a moment as Bea came running from the kitchen in response to the noise.

Jack stepped out of Cole's room and started down the stairs. Cole managed to get up onto his hands and knees, blood streaming from his nose and mouth as he felt the added pain of cool air against broken teeth. He reached out and grasped the ball atop the stair post and pulled himself upright. He started for the front door, fell to his knees, managed to pull himself up again with the help of the doorknob and stumbled out onto the street.

Jack was just reaching the main floor of Bea's. Bea had backed away when she understood what was happening.

"Help!" cried Cole, falling again to his knees in the dirt of the street. It was twilight and lamps had been lit in the buildings along Main Street. You could still hear the noise of the fishermen from the street one block over bordering the river.

Jack walked out of the boarding house, stepped down into the street, and started toward Cole.

"Help me, somebody. He's trying to kill me!" A few people had begun to stop and stare at this scene in the street. A few more had poked their heads out of their respective places of business and were now watching, transfixed, as Jack calmly walked over and stopped. He loomed over the cowering Cole. Cole was now openly weeping.

"I don't intend to kill you Mr. Cole. I do intend to cause you some pain, though. I want you to remember, Mr. Cole, the man you shot is my brother. He is a good, decent man, Mr. Cole. He wouldn't hurt anybody without just cause. You, on the other hand, were beating up an old man. You were drunk, and you were defiling the hospitality of one of my neighbors. I don't know where you come from, sir, but down here, we don't take to that sort of thing." Jack leaned over as close as he could get to Cole's right ear and spoke in a voice so low only Cole could hear, "You son of a bitch, if you touch my brother, or any one of these people again and I hear about it, I'll be back. And when I do, you'll think this was a Sunday School picnic!"

He straightened up and swung the rifle barrel against the right side of Cole's head breaking the cartilage in his ear, creating a concussion, and causing Cole to lose consciousness completely. Cole went limp and fell face down in the street. He was out cold. Jack looked about him. A small crowd had gathered and they were all staring at him in shock and various degrees of disbelief. He didn't say a word. He let the hammer on the rifle down slowly, turned, and walked back to Bea's. Bea had followed them outside and now stood on the front porch of her business.

"Ma'am, if you decide I owe you anything for any damages I caused, let me know and I'll see that the sum is paid." He turned and began to walk away. He stopped and turned



back. "I'm sorry, Ma'am, for this," He nodded toward Cole. " I really am. But, Ma'am, you might want to be more careful in the future who you take in. This man is a snake!" He tipped his hat in a gesture of respect and bent slightly from the waist, replaced his hat, turned and walked down the street in the direction of Doc Brown's office.

Doc Brown assured Jack that his brother would be all right and then left to attend to Cole. By-standers had taken his still unconscious body back to Bea's and put him to bed. Jack went to across the street to the Mule Auction. Farley met him at the doors now closed for the night.

"That ruckus up the street...that you?" asked Farley.

"Not all of it," answered Jack. "All right if I bed down in your hay loft for the night?"

"You're welcome to it. You sure you'll be all right?"

"Been sleeping on the ground for so long that hay will feel like a feather bed." Jack slipped between the doors, climbed the ladder to the hay, found a spot where he could watch the street for a while and settled down.

Farley closed the barn doors, placed the drop bar in place across them, and walked next door to his little house. By the time he closed the door on his house and tucked little Billy in, Captain Jack Knight was sound asleep.

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Three miles west of town, just off River Road in a stand of hardwoods by the river, a troop of United States Calvary was setting up a "cold" camp for the night. The commanding officer, Colonel Rupert Garrison, had ordered no cooking fires lighted. He intended to ride into the town of...he looked at the map again, ran his finger down the line which represented River Road, to the dot which represented the town...River Bluff...completely unannounced. Tomorrow the good folks of River Bluff would come face to face with their conquerors. Their lessons would begin tomorrow. Col. Garrison smiled at the thought. He had been at Cold Harbor. Many men, many good men, had been lost to these damned rebels. Now, it was his turn. He knew exactly what to do! And he would do it...to the best of his ability! He stroked his mustache and smiled the smile of a wolverine in the darkness.

**Something's wrong, Willie.**

The rising sun cast long shadows on the Campbell farm as Ellie and Momma Nan had their breakfast. Ellie decided that she would take the Knight boys and Willie some breakfast, so she rolled up some biscuits and salt pork in a napkin, went out to the barn, and led old Bess to the porch where she climbed aboard and set out. As Ellie approached the well and woodshed at the Knight's place, Willie stepped out of the shed.

"Good morning Miss Ellie. Fine day, ain't it?"

"So far, anyway, Willie. Where're Jack and Luke?"

"Cain't rightly say, Miss Ellie. When The Capn and me got back yesterday from your house, Luke still wasn't back from town. The Capn, well, he was worried so he lit out after him to see what the matter was. I ain't seen hide ner hair of neither one of them since."

"Something's wrong, Willie. I'm going to town to see about them!" She wheeled old Bess around and nudged her ribs. The mare took off like a shot.

Willie watched the receding figure and decided he ought to go along in case there was trouble. He walked over to the lean-to, saddled up Blackie and took off, hell bent for leather, after Ellie. In a couple of minutes he caught up and the two riders fell into a comfortable gallop down River Road toward the town of River Bluff.

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The creaking noise of Farley Carnes' opening of the big double doors of the Mule Auction barn woke Jack from as restful a sleep as he had had in a very long time. He sat up, peered out the open door to the hayloft, past the rope and pulley, to the buildings across Main Street. The morning sun had already lit their eastern sides; he could hear Farley stoking the furnace below. He stood, brushed the hay from his clothing and climbed down the ladder to the main floor.

"Morning, Farley."

"Morning Jack. Sleep well?"

"Yeah, best sleep I've had for a spell."

"Go on over to the house. Got some fresh coffee on the stove. There's a biscuit in the pan and some cane syrup on the table. There's some butter on the sideboard, too. Help yourself. Billy will probably be up when you get there. Don't let the little fellow get in your way. As a matter of fact, tell him I said he was to come on over here as soon as he's had breakfast."

"Fine, Farley. Thanks for the hospitality!"

Jack stretched his back muscles, yawned, and then walked over to the Carnes house. Billy met him at the door; he had a biscuit in his mouth and he was pulling on his shirt as he scooted past Jack on his way to the barn.

“Morning, Capn Jack. Gotta go! Gotta get the Auction open!” He had snatched the biscuit from his mouth in order to speak. Now he shoved it back in and half ran and half skipped to the barn.

Jack went on inside and found everything as Farley had said.

Down the street, the Goldberg’s had been up a good while firing up the ovens and making and the kneading the dough. Mrs. Goldberg was just placing the first loaves into the oven when Jacob came in from the bakery sales room.

“Looks like a fine day, Rebecca”, he said.

“Yes, Jacob. Will you go fetch Deborah? That girl will sleep the day away if we allow it!”

“You worry too much, Rebecca, about the girl. A fine woman she is. She’ll be down soon to help, I’m sure.” With that Jacob went back to the front of the store where he had been arranging the sweet cakes and muffins before opening the door for the day’s business.

Across Main Street, just a block away on Water Street, the fishing boats had all gone. They left just at dawn and would be back about three in the afternoon. The warehousemen were opening their large buildings and the one restaurant in the town had its fires going in the wood stove in the kitchen. Smoke was hanging low over the water in the high humidity of early morning. Ripples of river water were gently lapping against the shore and around the pilings of the piers and docks along the street. Occasionally a turtle “plop” could be heard as it left its floating log perch to enter the water. The “July Flies” were tuning up in the willows on the opposite side of the river. A gentle southwest breeze caused their loosely hanging branches to sway and dip into the water. The birds were making their presence known and a lone raccoon could be seen dunking fresh water clams into the river before eating them. It was a beautiful morning, one typical to River Bluff’s waterfront.

Jack finished his breakfast and went to check on Luke at Doc Brown’s office. As he opened the door, he could see Luke sitting propped up in bed with his eyes open and eating what appeared to be cornmeal mush and drinking a cup of hot coffee! Jack was delighted. He stepped quickly to Luke’s bedside and said, “How you feelin’ Luke?”

“Well, I’ll tell you, Jack, I have felt better! All things considered though, I’m doin’ all right. A little weak. Feel better than I did at Gettysburg though, I’ll tell you that. Sure wish Doc Brown had been there!”

“Where is Doc, anyway?” asked Jack.

“ He went up the street to look in on some fellow he said you messed up pretty bad yesterday. What did you do, Jack?”

“Just had a talk with him, that’s all.”

“Musta been some talk!”

“Well, it did get a bit heated.... if you know what I mean.”

“I expect I do.”

Jack went around to the other side of Luke’s bed. “When’s the Doc gonna let you leave? Did he say yet?”

“He said I’d be here for a few days. Said I’d lost a lot of blood so I would have to make more before I’d be back to my old self. He said that would take some time.”

“Luke, What happened, exactly? Nobody but you seems to know the real story. What can you tell me about it?”

Luke told him all of it. Jack went white. The little muscles in his jaw were flexing like little animals under the skin. His eyes grew hot with anger. Finally, when Luke had finished, Jack exhaled loudly and sat back in the chair for a moment. He said nothing just sat in contemplation. Then, “It won’t happen again, Luke. Not to you anyway!”

Luke said, “Doc told me you met Deborah yesterday?”

If you mean that absolutely gorgeous woman by your side when I arrived, yes, I met her. Jack stammered a bit as he answered Luke.

“Isn’t she something?” smiled Luke.

“Lordy, yeah!” I don’t remember her from before the war.”

“Well, she was here, She was kind of young for you though, so you just didn’t notice her.”

“I noticed her yesterday!”

There was a commotion out in the street.

“What’s that”, asked Luke.

“You just lie there and rest. Finish your breakfast. You’re gonna need all your strength to get well again. I’ll go see what’s going on. I’ll be back and fill you in.” Jack reached out and touched Luke’s shoulder in the peculiar way brother’s express love for one another. Then he walked out.

### **Colonel Rupert Garrison of the United States Army**

Jack reached the street just in time to see a group of uniformed, mounted, riders coming into town from the west. They were Federal troops, a Cavalry Troop. Their commander, a Colonel was out front with his executive officer, a Major. Jack stood, hands on his hips and watched as the Troop came steadily along until they were abreast of him. Other townsfolk had come out into the street to see for themselves what was going on. The Colonel saw Jack standing in front of the doctor’s office in his Confederate Captain’s Uniform and since there did not appear to be another person of authority in sight, he guided his horse over and pulled up directly in front of Jack. “Major,” The Colonel called over his shoulder, “Halt the troop!”

The Major did as his commander ordered and stopped the Yankee Troop right in the middle of Main Street... directly in front of Doc Brown’s office...and Jack.

The colonel leaned slightly forward and nodded toward Jack. “Good Morning, Captain. Fine morning isn’t it?”

“If you say so, Colonel,” replied Jack.

“I do say so, Captain.... What might your name be, sir?”

“Colonel, with all due respect, sir, I believe it is you who should be introducing yourself... to the town.” Jack moved his right hand in a sweeping gesture toward all the towns’ folk now gathered on both sides of the street.

The Colonel stood slightly in the stirrups and looked to his right and then his left. He reseated himself in the saddle, nodded to Jack and said, “Under the circumstances, sir, perhaps you are correct.” He reined his horse hard right and walked it back to the front of his troop.

“Major, I want one volley fired in the air. I want all these folks to hear what I have to say and I want everyone here on this street in five minutes. See to it.”

“Yes sir!” replied the Major. “Captain O’Malley!” The Major bellowed.

“Yes sir,” came the reply from Captain O’Malley.

“Captain, you heard the Colonel?”

“Yes, sir, I did.”

“Then make it so, Captain!”

“Yes, sir! Right away, sir! Sergeant Jennings?”

“Yes Sir, Capn?”

“Sergeant, have first squad fire one volley in the air on my command!”

“As you wish, sir.”

Sergeant Jennings turned to his squad and ordered: “First squad, prepare to fire one volley in the air on my command!” The Sergeant then turned to the captain and awaited his command to have the squad fire.

In the meantime, Colonel Garrison was alternately looking at his “snap open” railroad watch his wife had given him on their last anniversary and pondering whether or not there was a place of “Comfort” for gentlemen in this little backwater town. As the minute hand ticked onto the five-minute mark he turned to the Captain and nodded. The Captain turned to the sergeant and gave the command: “FIRE!”

The Sergeant turned to his squad and relayed the order to complete the chain of command, “First Squad, FIRE!”

All eight of the new Henry repeating rifles fired at once. The booming sound reverberated throughout the little town. It brought folks running from Water Street who had no idea there were Yankees in town! They slid to a halt in the dust of Main Street when they saw them. A few stragglers came from behind places of business where they were completing morning chores. The colonel sat still for another minute until the muttering of the crowd ceased. Then he stepped his horse out three paces from the rest of the troop and said:

“Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to introduce myself. I am Colonel Rupert Garrison of the United States Army. As of this minute, I am the sole authority in this town, this county, indeed in this part of what used to be the state of North Carolina. I am, until further notice, the Military Commander of this Military District. You will obey my orders if and when I have any. You will answer any questions I may have and you will render any aid or assistance my men or I may need in the performance of our duties. Any resistance of any kind will be met with swift and severe punishment. I assure you, ladies and gentlemen, it will not be pleasant! I have the authority to hang anyone having in his or her possession or... trafficking in... contraband of any kind. And, ladies and gentlemen, it is I who will decide what is contraband! Now, I'd like to see the sheriff or

constable or magistrate or whatever passes for a peace officer in this town. Please, step forward.

Nobody moved.

“Don’t make me repeat myself,” the colonel said raising his voice for emphasis.

For a moment, nobody moved. The horses whinnied and neighed and shuffled their hooves in the dust. Finally a voice from the colonel’s left rear said, “Begging the colonel’s pardon, sir, but we don’t have a peace officer in this town. We don’t need one. At least we never have, that is...’til today!”

It was Jack.

“Major, bring that man here!” ordered the colonel.

Major Benson spurred his horse and brought it to an abrupt stop in a cloud of dust and dirt in front of Jack. He leaned down and reached for Jack’s arm.

Jack stood his ground and snarled through barely parted lips. “I don’t advise that, Major.” Bigger men than you, sir, have found that to be their last act on this earth! Now, be a good boy and ride back to your colonel and tell him I’ll be along as soon as I find it convenient.” With that Jack turned and stepped inside Doc Brown’s office.

Major Benson sat in the street, stunned. Finally, he turned his horse around and Jack could see through the office window that Major Benson was having a rather rough time of it with the Colonel who was red-faced and shouting in the Major’s face. Jack couldn’t tell what the Colonel was saying, but he’d bet it wasn’t pleasant. The Major rode to his proper place in front to the troop and brought his horse to rest.

Luke asked, “What’s going on Jack?”

“Just a minute. I’ll fill you in on everything in a minute.”

Jack saw Bea Weatherby leave the crowd and have a conversation with Colonel Garrison. The Colonel said a few words to the Major and then, with Bea leading, the Colonel followed her to her boarding house. The remainder of the troop turned and walked their horses, still in formation, to Farley Carnes’ Mule auction. They dismounted there and Jack saw them unsaddle their horses and release them into Farley’s corral at the rear of the barn. The Major and the Captain then followed the Colonel to Bea’s. Jack backed away from the window and strolled over to Luke’s bed.

What is it, Jack? What’s going on?”

“Well, brother, I think we have just been occupied by the United States Army.

"No," whispered Luke. "No, it can't be!"

"Oh, but it can, Luke, and it is!" answered Jack. "The commanding officer is Colonel Rupert Garrison. He has just headed over to Bea's. I guess he's going to join the other snake that's over there."

"You mean Cole?"

"Yeah, I mean Cole."

"Jack, you don't reckon there's a connection of some kind between those two...do you?"

"Well, now that is an interesting concept, Luke. Yes, sir, it really is!" I'm beginning to think there's more to Mr. Cole than we thought."

"There's more trouble coming, Jack. I can feel it!"

"Luke, if those fellows have come looking for trouble, they've found it. I expect it's going to be more than they bargained for, though." Jack walked back to the window and stared at the Yankee Cavalry just a few yards from him. How many times in the past few years would he have loved to have had them in his sights! My, how times do change, thought Jack. Maybe...maybe not!

### **What do they want, Jack?**

Ellie and Willie reined in their horses at the eastern edge of town. They had seen the Yankee troopers down the street and it was both frightening and confusing. Why were they here? They looked at each other then looked back at the troopers in front of the Mule Auction. Bess pranced to her right while Ellie pulled back on the reins and soothed her, "Whoa, girl."

"What do you think, Miss Ellie?" asked Willie. "Wanta turn around and go back home?"

"No!" said Ellie emphatically. "I've come here to see after Jack and I intend to do just that." She urged Bess on, and Willie clucked Blackie into motion as they continued at a slow walk into River Bluff.

At the bakery, Deborah had watched everything from the glazed door that led out onto her little balcony. She had not gone out. She was afraid of the soldiers. She had heard the Colonel's pronouncement through the crack in the door she had created by opening it a tiny bit. She had seen, but could not hear, the confrontation between Luke's brother



and the Major. She liked the way he had stood up to those ruffians. She smiled at the thought. Jack was a handsome man and a brave, reckless, sort. Just the sort of rogue to get her attention! He had done that! Anyway, she understood Jack was spoken for.

On the other hand Luke was the “safe” one of the two brothers. Solid, reliable, steadfast...and totally colorless! Jack, however, filled a room when he walked in. He had a commanding presence about him. There was an overwhelming confidence about him that led one to believe he knew what he was doing... all the time. For this reason men followed him into battle, and for many it cost them their lives. Yet, they followed him. He was a leader. He was born that way. Some folks are. Jack was one of them. Deborah sighed. Well, Luke would be her man! But, darn it, why couldn't she stop thinking about Jack??? It was unsettling! She turned from the door, flounced swiftly across her room, and plopped down on the little stool in front of her dresser and began brushing the long black strands of her hair.

At the doctor's office Jack was now seated in the chair Deborah had occupied only the day before. He was rocking the chair back and forth very slowly imitating the back and forth motion of a man in the saddle. He was caught up in thought. Luke was asleep, snoring softly. Doc Brown was making notes on some letter sized paper, most likely about Luke's condition and treatment. The room was quiet save for the scratching of Doc's quill pen and Luke's soft snoring. Jack wondered why Colonel Garrison didn't have him arrested when he refused an order from him. After all, the Colonel had just stated publicly that he would arrest anyone who did not follow his orders. Yet, he didn't arrest me, Jack thought. Why, what's he up to? What did Bea have to say to the Colonel that was so all fired important the Colonel left his troop to follow her? Was there a link between Cole and the Colonel? Jack rose from the chair and walked to the window and looked toward the Mule Auction. The soldiers were milling about in front of the big barn and near the watering trough. He'd forgotten until just this moment that his Bay and old Molly were in that barn! He'd have to wade right through that rabble to get to his animals! Well, he thought, I'll cross that bridge when I get to it! He looked to his left, toward the eastern end of town, and his jaw dropped! Ambling down the street, like they owned it, came Ellie and Willie!

“Well, I'll be a...” he exclaimed.

Doc looked up and said, “What is it Jack?”

“Doc, I don't believe my eyes! It's Ellie and Willie!”

Doc got up crossed the room to the window and peered to the east as well.

“Danged if it ain't!” Who is that with Elle?”

“That's a fellow I know from the war. His name's Willie Jordan. He's not from around here. Well, about twenty-five miles away, actually. When he got home his place was gone and so was his family. I came across him yesterday morning on River Road. He's a

good man. Yeah, Ole Willie can be relied upon in a fight. He won't run and he won't quit. He's staying with Luke and me 'til he can get some word on his family. He's going to help us...me...build a cabin in place of the house the Yanks burned down. I expect I'd better step outside and let them see me."

"Go on, I'll watch Luke 'til you get back," said Doc.

Jack looked again at the soldiers who were now eyeing the two riders as they drew near the doctor's office. Jack stepped out onto the sidewalk. Ellie spotted him instantly. She resisted the urge to gallop old Bess the remaining distance and, instead, let Bess have her head. Bess recognized Jack and turned to him and ambled right on up to the sidewalk in front of Jack.

Willie was right behind. His eyes were in continuous motion. He was scanning the buildings on both sides of the street. He looked at the sidewalks and the rooftops. He would flick his eyes back to the soldiers at the Mule Auction then continue his search for any possible source of danger. Blackie followed Bess and both riders ended their ride in front of Doc Brown's office.

Jack did not speak, nor did Ellie, nor did Willie. Both riders dismounted. Ellie flipped her right leg over old Bess's rump and slid on her belly down Bess's side to the ground. Willie stood in the left stirrup and swung his long right leg over and dismounted as one who was born to the saddle.

Jack's eyes followed Ellie's every move. Ellie tied Bess up to the rail and stepped past Jack into the office and closed the door. Willie stepped up onto the walk beside Jack, turning his back to the soldiers and said quietly, "Ever thang all right?"

Jack half turned and spoke softly, "Nope. Go on inside. I'll watch your back 'til you're in. I'll follow in a minute."

Willie opened the door and went in.

Jack waited and watched the soldiers for another minute or two, until they lost interest in him, then he, too, entered the doctor's office.

Ellie stepped quickly to Jack's side, reached her left arm around his waist and hugged. She asked, "What's happened, Jack? What's the story with all the Yankees out there?"

Willie said, "I thought I'd seen the last of them fellers. Never expected to see a whole troop of 'em here, anyway. What do they want, Jack?"

Jack managed to get everybody filled in on what had happened. After reassuring themselves that Luke was going to recover, they began discussing what might be coming their way in the near future.

“Luke, what’s a Military District?” Ellie asked.

Well, it’s kind of like a county, except it’s run entirely by the military. They give the orders. The commanding officer in charge of the district is Judge, Jury, and Executioner! He is the man in charge!

“ I don’t understand why they are here, Jack.”

“Neither do I, Ellie, but I expect we’ll soon find out, one way or another.” There was a commotion from outside. Jack turned to the window. Ellie and Willie followed. Jack cursed, “Oh, no!”

It was Deborah Goldberg apparently trying to cross the street to the doctor’s office. The soldiers had spied her and were calling out vulgar jeers and cheers as she tried to move as quickly as she could from the bakery to the office. Some of the soldiers began to move her way. A couple even broke into a run. Deborah sped up. It was going to be a foot race! It looked for a minute as if the soldiers would win and claim their prize.

Suddenly, the door to the doctor’s office jerked open and Willie Jordan stepped out and placed himself between the soldiers and Deborah. The soldiers stopped in their tracks. Willie was about six feet tall and looked every inch of it. In his belt, just to the right of the C.S. buckle, was the brass Confederate version of the Navy Colt. Willie’s right thumb was hooked in a belt loop just behind the butt of the Colt. The soldiers’ eyes went instantly to the Colt, then back to Willie’s face. Willie wasn’t smiling. Indeed, his face was blank. There was not a sign of fear or concern for the predicament he had just placed himself in.

“Why don’t you boys git on back across the street now. I believe that barn could use a good cleaning in them stalls. Seeing as how you boys are purty good at shoveling it, and slanging it, I expect you’ll be wantin to keep in practice. Hurry on back now, before somebody gets hurt. Looks to me like the sergeant’s alookin for you right now”. Willie nodded his head toward Sergeant Jennings who was coming their way.

The soldiers saw the sergeant, and immediately began their retreat toward the Mule Auction.

“What’s going on here?” demanded Sergeant Jennings.

“Nothin, ‘cept, me and you jawing in the street, Sarge.” Willie answered. ”I’ve said all I have to say. You have a right fine day, Sarge.” Willie turned and sauntered back into the doctor’s office.

Sergeant Jennings stood red-faced in the street for a moment longer, then whirled around and retraced his steps across the street calling the names of the two soldiers who had found something pressing to do inside the barn!

Jack said, "That was close, Willie."

"Naw, weren't too bad, Capn. Them boys weren't armed. They weren't looking for no fight."

Deborah was seated in the rocker hugging herself and trembling. Ellie was holding her hand and patting her softly on the shoulder.

It's all right now, Deborah. You're safe. These boys won't let anything happen to you. Somebody get her a drink of water," Ellie commanded. Doc Brown poured a glass instantly from the pitcher, which was sitting on his desk. He brought it over and Deborah sipped from it then leaned back in the chair.

"I was so scared," she said. Thank you Mr....?"

"Jordan, Ma'am. William Thomas Jordan. Most folks just call me Willie. I'd be pleased if you would, ma'am...call me Willie, that is."

"I'm in your debt, Mr. Jordan."

"No ma'am. I only did what a feller's supposed to do if a lady is in need of help. It appeared to me like you might need some. So, I helped. That's all."

"Well, I surely do appreciate it!"

"You're welcome, Ma'am. And Ma'am?"

"Yes?"

"If you're ever in trouble again, why, you just call on Ole Willie Jordan and he'll come a runnin'!" Willie tipped his hat as he said the last.

Deborah dropped her eyes and blushed. She felt the heat in her face and that just made it a deeper, darker scarlet.

Jack looked at Ellie. Ellie looked at Jack. Doc looked at both couples and Luke continued to snore softly as the temperature in the room went up a few degrees.

### **I'll Get You Home Safe**

"You fool! You complete idiot!" Colonel Garrison screamed at Cole. "You were supposed to stay out of sight. Not make yourself a public spectacle!" Garrison's face

was within six inches of Cole's as Cole sat propped up in an over-stuffed chair in Bea's living room. Garrison's face was beet red and he was speaking so forcefully he was blasting spittle all over Cole's face. Your instructions were clear! Mr. McGinnis will be furious with you... with both of us! I swear, Cole, I ought to shoot you! I ought to just take my pistol and shoot you right through your empty head!"

Garrison spun around and stomped across the room to a settee and flopped down on it. He whipped his hat from his head and flung it down beside him. He sat for a moment staring off into the near distance and said: "Where's the letter?"

"Hanging on a peg on the back of my room door...in my inside coat pocket," answered Cole through barely opened lips.

Colonel Garrison got up, went upstairs, and retrieved the letter and returned. He removed the letter from the envelope and sat down and read it. "It says here you are to act as the agent of Mr. McGinnis in all land acquisition. That right?"

Cole nodded.

"Of course you've been too busy getting drunk and raising hell to actually look at any land, right?"

Cole didn't say a word. There was nothing to say.

"Let me tell you something Mr. Cole. I have instructions from Mr. McGinnis, too. And one of those instructions is to keep a close eye on you! His instructions are for me to remove you as his agent at any time I feel you are not performing up to his standards ...and mine. He left it entirely up to me as to how I'm to relieve you of your duties...but let me make it absolutely clear. If you don't pull yourself together and start doing the job you were sent here to do, you may very well find yourself floating face down in that beautiful little river out there!" Garrison said, pointing in the direction of the river. "Am I clear on this? Am I?"

Cole said nothing and Garrison leaned forward on the settee and said, "Cole, I'm not going to waste my time with another warning." He lowered his voice, "You go off the deep end again and you're a dead man. No ifs, ands, or buts about it. You're dead!" Garrison got up, snatched his hat up from the settee, tossed the letter and envelope toward Cole, and stomped out the door. The single page letter and envelope fluttered to the floor.

Cole sat for a moment then slowly let his head sink to his chest. "When will Bea return from Doc's with the laudanum," he asked no one in particular? Major Benson was waiting with the Colonel's horse. "Ready Sir?"

“Ready Major.” The Colonel mounted and the two riders walked their horses in the direction of the Mule Auction.

Bea Weatherby had just left the doctor’s office and stood on the edge of the street as the two Union officers rode slowly past enroute to the Mule Auction. She acknowledged their nods and tip of their hats as she clutched a dark blue glass bottle to her bosom. When they were past, she continued on toward her boarding house keeping an eye on the receding backs of the two horsemen.

Jack and Willie watched Bea from the window of the doctor’s office. They watched as the two army officers walked their horses toward the Mule auction at the western end of the street. Jack said, “Doc, how does Bea get herself into such situations? I mean she had to know what Cole is when she put him up. Sometimes I wonder about that woman Doc., I truly do.”

“Bea is a hard-headed woman, Jack. You saw her determination to get that medicine for Cole. She intended to get it, no matter how it looked to you, or the rest of the community. Bea’s always been like that. At least since I’ve known her.” Doc placed the large bottle of laudanum back in the cabinet with the lock.

Jack and Willie watched Bea step up onto the sidewalk in front of her place of business and go inside. They turned their attention again to the two mounted Union officers.

“Wonder what they’re up to, Capn?”

“I have no idea, Willie. But it can’t be good.”

They saw Sergeant Jennings call the men to order, then Captain O’Malley come from somewhere in the barn and walked past his men to join the other officers. The three men had an impromptu meeting out of earshot of the enlisted men. The meeting lasted only a couple of minutes, then Colonel Garrison and Major Benson rode out of town in a westerly direction.

Jack and Willie watched all of this from their vantage point.

As they turned from the window, Deborah asked, “What are they doing?”

“Acting peculiar. That’s what’s so interesting. Usually an army unit is predictable. This outfit isn’t acting normally. I’m particularly interested in what the Colonel was doing at the boarding house. If he were arranging for quarters, he wouldn’t have been gone that long. The fact that Bea approached him has me wondering why? And where did he and the Major go? There’s something not right about this outfit. I just can’t put my finger on it. But it’s strange,” Jack replied to Deborah’s question.

Luke had awakened and was listening to them and trying to visualize this Cavalry unit he had yet to see. Deborah was standing by his bed. She was gently stroking the back of his

hand as they discussed this invasion by the Yankees. Luke took her hand and held it. She abruptly stopped looking at Jack and turned her full attention to Luke. She smiled and Luke brightened instantly.

“Hadn’t you better be going?” he asked. “I mean, I’d like you to stay, but, I expect your parents are worried about you... especially with that bunch in town.”

“Yes, I really do have to go. I’m afraid...” She trailed off and dropped her gaze to the floor. Willie didn’t miss it.

“Ma’am, if you’re ready to go, I’d be happy to be your escort. I’ll get you home safe.”

“Thank you Mr. Jordan. I appreciate that. I’ll just be a minute.” She slipped her hand from Luke’s, pushed a stray lock of hair from his forehead then leaned and gave him a chaste kiss on the cheek. She straightened up, gave Luke a beautiful smile and said: “I’ll see you again later. Rest and get well now.” Then she turned to Willie, “I’d like to go now, Mr. Jordan.”

“Yes, ma’am, Miss Goldberg. One thing, ma’am, before we go out... when we go through the door, I want you to stay to my left. Hook your right arm in my left and we’ll stroll back to your place. The Yankees won’t bother a lady with her beau. ‘Specially if her beau is as big as me.” He grinned.

Jack cast a sidelong glance at Ellie; Ellie was already looking his way. She raised an eyebrow and Jack raised his in reply. They watched as the unlikely couple left the doctor’s office and strolled, slowly back to the Goldberg’s bakery. As soon as they went inside, Jack released his breath. He hadn’t realized he was holding it. Ellie sighed as well. “I want you to go home, too.” Jack told Ellie.

“I know. I have to check on Momma Nan. I expect she’s getting worried.

“When Willie gets back I want you to ride out... with Willie.”

“I expect Mr. Jordan is going to have a different idea about who goes and who stays.” Ellie said.

“That may be, but he’ll see it my way. Trust me.”

“Oh sure! Mr. Jordan has demonstrated, already, he has a mind of his own. I expect you’ll get an argument from him!”

“I’ll deal with it. In the meantime, get ready to go!”

Willie slipped quietly through the door and closed it behind him.

Jack explained he wanted the two of them to leave. Willie raised the expected protest and Jack insisted. Finally, Willie nodded his assent and Jack stood outside the doctor’s office

door as the two of them rode down the eastern end of Main Street toward the Knight and Campbell farms. Jack then turned and re-entered the office. He turned the key in the door's lock and placed the key on Doc Brown's desk. Doc watched, and nodded, as Jack took his seat in the rocker by Luke's bed.

He couldn't shake the feeling that trouble had just begun in River Bluff. He shifted his weight and settled down in the rocker. He pulled the hat down low over his eyes and closed them. In minutes he was sound asleep.

Across the street, and a little east, at Bea's boarding house, Cole was sipping whiskey against Doc Brown's orders not to mix alcohol with the laudanum. He was swearing under his breath. Suddenly he hurled the glass of whiskey against the wall, and smashed it, streaking Bea's wallpaper with the cheap whiskey, ruining it. He slapped the table with his palm and exclaimed, "He'll pay. That reb's gonna pay for this if it's the last thing I ever do!"

Bea heard him from the landing upstairs. She clasped her arms and trembled.

### **Willie Watches Water Street**

About a mile east of town, Willie suddenly reined in Blackie and stopped. Ellie was not expecting Willie's sudden stop and she allowed Bess to continue for a few steps until she realized she was alone. She stopped Bess and turned on Bess's wide back as she looked over her shoulder at Willie. "What is it, Willie? Why are you stopping?"

Blackie had backed a few steps from the sudden pressure on the reins. "I'm going back, Miss Ellie. Jack may be in trouble. He may need me."

"But he told us to go home!" Ellie protested.

"I know he did, but I can't shake this feelin that he's gonna need help, so, I'm going back to town. You go home. Mrs. Campbell needs to be looked after. Go on now!"

"But, Willie, I can't..."

"Yes ma'am, you can. Now, git on along home. We'll be along just as soon as we can."

Willie pulled the reins hard left and Blackie responded. The big horse leapt off the road into the underbrush that lined that portion of River Road. In a moment Willie and Blackie had disappeared from sight. Twilight was coming on fast. It would be dark shortly.



Ellie urged Bess on toward the Campbell farm. She was still worried about Jack and, now, about Willie as well. She knew Jack could take care of himself, but, she thought, if Willie thinks Jack needs help, how much trouble is he in? She shivered in spite of the July heat and leaning forward she stroked Bess's mane as the big mare plodded on toward home.

Willie was winding his way through the brush and trees down to the river's edge. He would follow the river into town and enter from that side of the little city rather than return in full sight of the Yankee troops. He could see in the distance some movement on the piers and docks at the water's edge. Fishermen were tying up their boats for the night. Some were closing their shops and warehouses and preparing to return to their homes. He allowed Blackie his head as the big black horse walked nimbly among the loblollies and the shrubs near the water. The horse walked around and between the trees, stepping gently over deadfalls and side stepping what appeared to be shallow puddles of water that might conceal sinkholes. Blackie was used to this type of work and did it well.

The horse and rider halted a short distance from the end of the main dock on Water Street. They kept back in the trees out of sight of passersby. They would wait until the street was quiet before emerging from the woods. Blackie stood motionless as Willie sat comfortably in the saddle watching the shoppers and businessmen slowly leaving the area. Twilight had set in and it wouldn't be long until full dark.

As he sat waiting, Willie saw two men in the uniform of the United States Cavalry emerge from a warehouse about midway down Water Street. Walking swiftly, the two men mounted their horses, which were partially hidden from Willie's sight by a wagon parked near the building. They rode west down Water Street and into the woods on that end of the street.

"Interesting," Willie spoke aloud to himself. Blackie tossed his head and flicked his ears at the sound of Willie's voice. Willie urged the horse to move slightly to his right in order to get a better view of the building the soldiers had exited. A sign over the entrance to the big warehouse read: Crenshaw's Fish and Seafood. Willie saw the light go out in what he took to be the office and a short, rotund gentleman in bib overalls came out the Judas door of the building. He paused long enough to place a big pad lock through the hasp and ring, securely locking the building for the night. That done, he walked east toward Willie until he reached the end of the dock and with unexpected grace, stepped lightly down the five or six steps to the path that led to Main Street.

Willie sat still as a late arrival from the water tied up his boat and lifted a string of bream from the boat's bottom and picked up his cane pole, which had been lying across the boat's flat seats. He, too, went down the eastern steps and sauntered off toward Main Street.

Willie waited an additional ten minutes then nudged Blackie into motion. They emerged from the trees and made their way up the eastern path toward Main Street. There was an

alley that ran the full length of the business district between Main Street and Water Street. Willie turned Blackie right and entered the alley. It was dark now and there was no light other than that provided by the newly risen moon. He looked for a door, which might suggest itself as a back door to the doctor's office. When that failed, he started counting from memory the doors from the eastern end of town. In a moment he found a door he determined to be the doctor's back door. He slid quietly from the saddle and "dropped-reined" Blackie. He knew the horse would not wander until he returned. He moved quickly to the shadows and turned the knob on the door. As the door slowly opened, the hinges emitted an "oil-less" squeak. Willie stepped quickly into the partially lighted building and closed the door. He breathed a sigh of relief and turned around. He was staring down the business end of a Navy Colt aimed right between his eyes!

### **Where's Jack?**

When Ellie reached the Campbell farm, Momma Nan was waiting in her rocker on the front porch. Ellie took Bess to the stable, fed and watered her before she put her up for the night. Then she walked back to the house.

Momma Nan had already started a fire in the big wood stove in the kitchen. The heat of the July evening combined with the heat from the wood stove was almost unbearable. Ellie left the back door to the kitchen standing open and opened the front door to allow any available breeze to, hopefully, sweep through the house and carry away some of the heat.

Ellie's mind kept going back to the scene in town. She thought of the soldiers and Luke's proximity to them as well as that of Jack. She worried that Jack would be in danger. She consoled herself, somewhat, with the thought that Jack had lived with danger for four years and managed to come home unharmed...at least physically. She knew Jack could handle himself and she also knew that he was not reckless and didn't take chances, especially if it would endanger someone he cared for. She also knew he would protect Luke from further harm with his own life, if necessary.

They ate their supper in silence. Neither spoke during the meal. As they were washing the dishes afterwards, Momma Nan asked, "Where's Jack?" It startled Ellie and for a moment she was speechless. Momma Nan had not expressed concern for any one, other than Ellie, since her husband, Ellie's father, had died. Ellie didn't realize she had stopped washing and was standing stock-still staring at Momma Nan. Finally, she found her tongue. "He's all right Momma Nan. He stayed in town with Luke. Luke has been hurt and he'll be staying at the doctor's office for a few days. Jack is going to see that he is taken care of before he comes home. In fact, he may wait 'til Luke is able to travel and take him back to their place. Problem is they don't have a place. That Yankee raiding party burned their house to the ground." She paused. "'I don't know what they're going

to do Momma Nan!” Tears had welled up in her eyes and she was quietly weeping, unaware.

Momma Nan reached out and placed her hand on Ellie’s and said, “Luke can stay with us.” She turned and began placing the dried dishes in the cupboard. Ellie was dumbfounded! She couldn’t believe what she had just heard! What had happened? What had caused Momma Nan to climb out of the mental hole she had crawled into? As Momma Nan turned from the cupboard, Elle moved to her and embraced her. Momma Nan seemed startled for a moment, then returned Ellie’s hug. They stood there, the two women, mother and daughter, drawing strength from each other. A milestone had been reached. It was not clear what that milestone indicated, but it was there, and they had reached it. They parted and Ellie picked up the dishpan and walked to the open back door and tossed the dishwater out into the yard. A couple of hens came running in hopes of finding a scrap or two amidst the soapsuds. Ellie and Momma Nan retired to the front porch and their rocking chairs in hope of finding a cool breeze in the evening darkness.

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Doc Brown stepped into the dark supply room with an oil lamp. The light showed Willie with his back against the door and Jack aiming his pistol directly towards Willie’s forehead.

“Willie, what the hell are you doing? I nearly shot you!”

“I think you’re going to need help. I came back, just in case.”

“Yeah, well it nearly got you killed, too!”

“Everything all right back here?” asked Doc as he splashed the light from the lamp on the two men at the back door.

“It is now,” Jack said, shaking his head and replacing the pistol in his waistband behind his belt. “This damn fool nearly got himself shot!”

“That you, Willie?”

“Yes sir, Doc. It’s me. I figured this crazy man with the gun might need help. So I circled back down by the river and came up that little path that leads this way from the water.”

“Where’s Ellie?” asked Jack.

“I told her to go home,” said Willie.

“...And she did?” asked Jack, the disbelief obvious in his voice.

“Yep. She didn’t want to. She made that plain. But she went. She had to see to her mother. I think that’s why she went on home.”

The three men went into the front office where Luke lay sleeping.

“How’s he doing?” asked Willie.

“I think he’s going to be fine. His temperature is down. There’s no sign of infection and he’s eating well and drinking plenty of water. It’ll take a few days to rebuild the blood he lost but, all in all, I think he’s doing well,” said Doc.

“Good,” said Willie. “By the way, Capn, them two Yankee officers come back yet?”

“Yeah. They just rode in ...just before you came through the back door.”

“ Well, I seen something I think might be interesting, Capn.”

“What?”

“Well, while I was sitting in the trees, down by the river, I saw two Yankee officers come out of a warehouse down on the dock and ride west. I can’t be sure, ‘cause I’ve seen ‘em only once, but they sure looked to me like the two officers who rode out of here before Ellie and me left.”

“You sure?”

“No, I ain’t sure, Capn! That’s what I’m saying! It was dark. But, I don’t see any other Yankee officers around, ‘cept for the captain, do you?”

“No, I don’t,” said Jack. He walked back to the front window and peered toward the Mule Auction. In the darkness, he could see several Federal soldiers milling about near the big double doors. No threatening action seemed imminent. Jack rubbed his unshaven chin and shook his head, then strode over and settled himself in the rocker by Luke’s bed. Willie replaced him at the window.

“I don’t like it”, said Jack. Something’s going on. I don’t know what it is...but they’re up to something. Doc, how long before Luke can travel?”

“Oh, a couple of days, I expect...barring any setback, of course,” replied Doc rubbing his jaw. “Where you thinking of taking him?”

“I don’t know”, said Jack. “Our house is gone...burned by the Yankees. He can’t rest in the woodshed, that’s for sure. He needs a roof over his head for a few weeks... ‘til he’s mended.” Jack was thinking out loud. “Maybe Ellie and Momma Nan will take Luke in for a while. I’ll have to ask them.”

“Somebody’s coming, Capn,” Willie said, calm as always.

Jack was instantly up and by Willie’s side at the window. A dark figure was walking gingerly toward the doctor’s office. It was a man and he was not wearing a uniform.

Jack stepped to the opposite side of the door and said, “Let him in Willie.”

“Yes sir, Capn,” said Willie.

Doc brown handed Willie the key to the door. Willie placed it in the lock and turned it. Then he stepped back from the door. A moment later the door burst open and a man stepped through it. Jack moved before the door had closed and placed the end of the pistol barrel just behind the visitor’s left ear. “Don’t move!” he growled. The visitor lifted both hands and froze.

Willie covered the man as Jack moved around to the visitor’s front.

“Farley Carnes! What are you doing here?” Jack asked in surprise.

“ They got Billy, Jack! They’re holding him ‘til I get back. The colonel wants to see you, Jack. He said to tell you he wants to see you... now!” Farley said, biting off the last word with obvious anger.

“What does he want?” Jack asked.

“I don’t know. He just told me to get you.”

Jack moved to the window and looked toward the Mule Action diagonally across the street. He could see a silhouetted figure of a federal army officer standing in the light spilled from the open doors of the big barn. He was clutching the shoulder of a little boy. It was Billy.

“What now,” asked Willie?

“You stay here. I’m going to comply with the Colonel’s request.” Jack turned to Farley. “ Do they know Willie is here?”

“I don’t think so. They saw him leave with Ellie Campbell. I didn’t know he was here!” Farley stuck out his hand offering to shake with Willie. Willie switched hands with his pistol and clasped the big blacksmith’s hand and shook it.

“Willie, I have to cross the street with Farley. I have to see what the Colonel wants. If I’m not back in a few minutes...well...you’ll know what to do.”

“Yes sir, Capn,” Willie replied.

Jack opened the door and motioned Farley to lead the way. The two men stepped off the wooden sidewalk and began their trek to the Mule Auction.

### **You Are a Defeated, Occupied Country!**

As Jack and Farley approached the barn, the Colonel and Billy turned and went back inside. Soldiers stood on both sides of the big doors and watched carefully as the Confederate Captain and the Blacksmith walked between them into the barn. Colonel Garrison was seated at a hastily erected table made of two planks laid across a couple of sawhorses. A lighted lantern sat on the table. In its light Jack could see Billy. When Billy saw his father, he ran to him and leapt into Farley's arms.

"You wanted to see me?" Jack asked Colonel Garrison.

"Yes." The Colonel replied. "Thank you very much for coming. I need to get a few things understood between us as soon as possible. So, this conversation could not wait. I'm sorry for the inconvenience. You do understand, don't you?"

"Oh, I understand, all right," Jack answered.

"I'm sorry I can't offer you a chair, but you can see, none are available." The Colonel said sweeping his arm around the interior of the barn as an invitation for Jack to see for himself.

Jack said, "I prefer to stand, anyway, Colonel."

"Good. Then let me get to the point. I didn't have you arrested earlier today because I didn't want to start a riot in the streets. My business here is far too important for that. But, I want to make it clear, no such nonsense will be tolerated in the future. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Jack, standing with legs wide apart and hands resting on his waist. The Navy Colt was clearly visible in his waistband. From time to time the eyes of the soldiers would drop to the butt of that pistol then return to Jack's face.

"Captain, the war is over. You lost! You are no longer a state of the Confederacy. You are not even a state of the United States! You are a defeated, occupied country!" Garrison was leaning forward with his elbows on the makeshift table. He glared at Jack as he spat out the words. "I warn you Captain, if you start any trouble, I won't trifle with you. I will have you shot! I will confiscate any and all lands and property you have, and it will belong to the government of the United States! Do I make myself clear?"

“Yes,” said Jack. That was all he said. The colonel sat as if waiting for an elaborate reply from Jack. None came. It was disconcerting for Garrison.

“Captain, I don’t think you fully understand your predicament here. I really don’t! You dare to stand there, defiant as hell, and... and... you parade around in your old uniform as if it were a badge of courage, or something. I repeat, Captain, you lost!” Garrison shook his head in consternation as he sat back in his chair.

“Is that all, Colonel?” Jack asked.

Garrison seemed startled by Jack’s question. He knew the respect in Jack’s manner of speech was insincere...but he could do nothing about it.

“No, that’s not all. I don’t want you to go near James Cole again. You beat him senseless the last time you met. I’ve seen him. He’s in a bad way. Mr. Cole and I have business and I want him able to conduct it. So, Captain, I’m ordering you, don’t touch him again!”

“Begging the Colonel’s pardon, Sir, have you heard what Cole did to my brother...and to the owner of the Mercantile?”

“No, and I don’t care what he did. You will obey my orders or suffer the consequences, which I have spelled out as clearly as I know how!”

“Will that be all, Colonel Garrison?”

“Yes! You may leave.”

“Not before I have MY say, Colonel. “ Garrison looked up in surprise. “Colonel, you say we lost. We did lose. I can’t argue with that. You also say we are not a state of the Confederacy, nor of the United States. Well, Colonel, that makes us a sort of ‘No man’s land,’ doesn’t it. Getting to the nub of it Colonel, you have, maybe, thirty men in your command. We have over a hundred combat veterans still armed and not particularly thrilled that General Lee surrendered at Appomattox! You’re out-numbered Colonel. You’re out-manned and out-gunned! I suggest you consider this very carefully before you do something that will stir these men up. If you do, Colonel, they’ll come at you with the ferocity of a whirlwind! They’ve lost everything. You and your army have left them nothing to cling to. They will lay their lives down in an instant just for the satisfaction of seeing you and your men bleed! Now, Colonel, do YOU understand?”

Garrison went white. He rose from his seat with fury blazing in his eyes. He opened his mouth to speak but, Jack interrupted with...

”Good evening, Colonel!”

Jack spun on his heel and strode from the barn. As he walked through the door, one of the soldiers stepped into the light and looked to the Colonel for directions. “Let him go!” Garrison shouted to the soldier who stepped back into the shadows. Garrison sat heavily back in his chair. “How do you defeat these people?” he thought aloud. “Their arrogance is overwhelming! They’ll have to be crushed into the dirt! I’m going to take great pleasure in that!”

Farley, still standing to the side and holding Billy asked, “What, Colonel? What did you say?”

“Nothing!” snapped Colonel Garrison.

Willie was watching from the darkened doctor’s office as Jack came out of the barn and started toward him.

“Here he comes, Doc!”

Doc Brown got up from behind the little table that served as his desk and walked quickly to Willie’s side. He could just make out the figure of a man coming toward them. He slipped the key in the door’s lock and unlocked it. He turned the knob and opened the door, just an inch or two, to allow Jack to see it was, indeed, open.

Jack stepped up onto the wooden sidewalk and crossed it. He pushed the door open and stepped inside, closing it behind him. He walked straight to Luke’s bedside. He stood for a moment without saying a word. Then he backed to the rocker and sat down.

“We’re in big trouble, folks,” Jack said. “That’s an army of occupation across the street. They intend to strangle the life out of whatever is left of this territory. He told me we are not a state anymore and he can, pretty much, do what he pleases with, and to, us!”

“What are we going to do, Jack?” Willie asked.

“Nothing, for the time being, Willie. We are not in a position to do much of anything. I don’t want Colonel Garrison knowing that, though! We have to carefully wait this out. We have to learn what his mission is here. He’s up to something. I mean something, over and above, his duty as the Military Commander of this district. I don’t know what it is yet, but whatever it is, James Cole is right in the middle of it!”

***(Note: Statehood was not returned to N.C. until 1868! She was, for nearly three years, an occupied territory.)***



### **“...Paying Mr. Cole Another Visit, Capn?”**

Four days later, Luke was able to sit up and get out of bed for short periods. Deborah would come across the street to see to him several times a day. The soldiers would follow her with hungry eyes and catcalls as she quickly walked the width of the street. Willie would step out of the office onto the sidewalk as soon as he heard the raised voices of the soldiers. He would make a show of walking out into the street to meet Deborah and escort her to Luke's bedside. Deborah had come to expect, and rely upon, Willie's protective service on her visits. When she left, Willie would escort her to her door. Thus did Miss Goldberg come to see, in Willie, a source of strength and protection. Willie was just pleased that she would allow him to be of service. After all, she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. He was falling in love with Deborah and didn't understand what was happening. All he knew, for certain, was that he had come to look forward to her visits every day. It did not matter to him that he was escorting her to visit another man. He was just happy for the chance to be in her presence.

Jack had been watching their friendship develop. He had remarked to Doc about Willie's uncharacteristic behavior toward Deborah and Doc had told him to stay out of it! It could develop into an explosive situation. People on the periphery could get hurt in this kind of explosion. It was best, Doc advised; if everybody just got out of the way and let Nature take its course! It was a difficult thing to do, but Jack took Doc's advice and kept his mouth shut.

Ellie had ridden in to check on the men yesterday and had found them all right. She had taken some food from home, which was much appreciated. She had no trouble from the soldiers as she went in, for apparently they had made the connection between her and Jack and were not interested in raising the ire of the Confederate Captain. When she left, later in the day, the soldiers had watched as Jack helped her up onto Bess's back but said nothing.

Jack was standing, now, on the sidewalk in front of the office. Willie had tobacco and papers, so Jack had rolled himself a cigarette: putting just the right amount of tobacco in the paper, which he held between the first and second fingers of his left hand, he folded the ends of the paper over until they met, then ran his moist tongue down the seam to make a seal. He lit it with a kitchen match Doc had in the office for starting fires and lighting his old brier pipe. He dragged deeply and held the smoke for a moment in his lungs and savored the rush of glucose into his blood stream and brain. It was one of the few pleasures left to a soldier used to living off the land for so long. This was the first cigarette he had had in a few weeks. It was good! He held it out in front of him and looked at its glowing tip and watched the stream of smoke rise in the afternoon sun and then took another draw from it. He squinted from the sting of the smoke in eyes unused to it, wiping them with his left hand; he then looked to his right across the street to the Mule Auction and the Yankee soldiers. He had not seen Garrison in a few days. That was all right by him. He knew at some point in the near future the two of them would be joined in combat. He was not in a rush. He had time. He planned to use it. Some how

he had to come up with a plan to counter whatever was coming from the Yankee troops. Problem was...he had no idea what they were up to! He had to find out. He had to come up with a way to get information on Colonel Garrison and his reason for being here. That was imperative!

Willie stepped out onto the walkway with Jack. He had pushed his old, floppy hat back so that it rested on the back of his head. For a few moments neither man spoke. Then Willie said, "any idea what they're up to yet, Capn?"

"Not Yet, Willie. That's the problem. I've been thinking about it for a few days now, and it seems to me there are two people who know what is going on: Colonel Garrison, and ...James Cole. I can't get to Garrison, but I just might be able to get to Cole!"

"You thinking about paying Mr. Cole another visit, Capn?"

"I'm thinking about it. It would have to be a very quiet visit, though. You know, like we used to make on some of our reconnaissance missions at night, remember?"

"Yep, I sure do, Capn. Them were some scary times. Wandering around in the dark with enemy soldiers all about us and trying to see what they were up to without getting caught... or shot. Yep, sure was scary!"

"Reckon you're up to another recon mission?"

"Capn, if you need me, I'm up to it! It's for sure we have to figure out what they're up to! You think Mr. Cole will tell you?"

Oh, I expect he'll tell me everything he knows. Question is, how much does he know?"

"Well, sir, when do you expect we might pay him a visit?"

Jack took another draw for the cigarette and exhaled the smoke before he answered Willie. "I've been looking at the moon since I've been out here. It looks like it's about a quarter full. Since we need to move as quickly as we can, I expect that's the best we're going to get. We need the information and we need it now. I plan to get Luke out to Ellie's place just as soon as I can. So, Sergeant Jordan, ready yourself for a little excursion tonight!"

"Yes Sir, Capn!" Willie answered with a full-toothed grin.

Jack took one more draw from the cigarette and holding the butt between his right thumb and middle finger, he flipped it out into the dust of Main Street and watched the sparks fly in all directions as it struck the ground. He then turned on his heel and went back into the office. Willie remained on the walkway for a few more minutes then he, too, went inside.

It was late in the afternoon and folks were beginning to look forward to going home for the evening and having supper and settling in for a night's rest. There were at least two who would not be resting this night. A certain Mr. Cole, currently a resident at Bea's boarding house, was about to receive visitors. Visitor's he did not wish to see in his worse nightmares!

### **Good evening, Mr. Cole**

As full night fell, the frogs along the banks of the river began their nightly conversation. After they all joined in, it became one continuous "humming" sound. Occasionally the "plop" of a fish would interrupt the frogs' songs as he broke the water by jumping for something back-lighted by the dim rays of the moon. The soft, continuous lapping of the water against the pilings of the piers and docks created a near lullaby. It was a warm, humid, mid-summer night in this Carolina town.

The two figures moving in the darkness were ethereal shadows. Their movements were slow and fluid. They moved east down the alley between Main and Water streets. They slipped, one at a time, across the entrance to the alley until they were against the backs of the buildings that fronted onto Water Street. They then began their slow deliberate movement toward the eastern end of the street. They paused for a moment when they reached the end of the last building. The lead figure slowly eased his head out of the shadows and faced the water and peered down a little pathway. Satisfied that the way was clear, he motioned to his companion who moved past him and turned down the little path that led to the docks. The first figure followed immediately behind him. When they reached the waterfront, they turned east along the river's edge until they were well clear of town. Then they turned south and made their way up the long sloping banks of the riverbed until they reached the River Road. For a moment they waited in the shadows to assure themselves there were no late night travelers on the road. Then they slipped across the road one at a time. Successfully reaching the south side of the road they continued their trek south through the pines, their footfalls almost noiseless on the thick mat of pine needles until they decided they had gone far enough to put them behind the buildings that faced onto Main Street from the south side. They then turned west and made their way quietly to the back of the buildings. Locating the back door to Bea's boarding house they again moved, one at a time, out of the trees, across the shallow clearing behind the boarding house, and up against the wall near the door. The lead figure produced a pocketknife and with the blade extended, managed to pull the bolt back on the door's lock. The door opened. They went in, one after the other, and closed the door behind them. They were inside Bea's boarding house. The taller of the two men went ahead of the other. They made their way across the kitchen and through the dining room. In the living room they could see the stairway leading up to the second-floor landing and they could just see the door to Cole's room. The taller of the two led the pair up the stairs. Each step was slow and deliberate. They placed their feet near the wall and

the outside of the stair treads so as to minimize the chance for squeaks. There were none. On the landing in front of Cole's door, the shorter of the two men stepped against the wall and turned his back to it. He was to the right of the door. The other man turned the knob on Cole's door and opened it. He went into the room while the other stayed outside on the landing. The curtains were open and the shade was half way up on the only window. The tall man reached inside his shirt and produced a cotton, ten-pound flour sack. The sack had two eyeholes cut in it. He pulled the sack over his head. Stepping lightly he went to the table near the window and lifted the glass chimney from the oil lamp and striking a match with his thumbnail, he lit the lamp. He picked it up and moved to the bed where Cole was lying asleep; he was snoring. When the light from the lamp fell across him, he stirred but didn't wake. The tall man put the lamp down on the smaller table by the bed and reached out and shook Cole. Cole ignored the intruder. The tall man shook him again and said, "Hey, Mr. Cole. Wake up!" This time Cole blinked, snorted, and aroused to semi-consciousness. The tall man said, "Good evening, Mr. Cole. How are you this fine evening? I'm sorry to wake you up like this, but we have to talk and it can't wait 'til morning."

Cole's eyes were wide with fear and disbelief. He couldn't decide whether to scream or just cry. He did neither. He snarled, "Who are you? What do you want? "

The tall man replied, "Who I am doesn't matter... for now, Mr. Cole. What I want, though, does matter and that's what we're going to talk about. Mr. Cole, what sort of business do you and Colonel Garrison have here in River Bluff? I mean... besides him being the Military Commander and such, what else are ya'll up to?"

Cole looked up at the tall man and started to rise. The sound of a hammer being pulled back into the full cock position stopped him. Again he turned to look into the dark eyeholes of the flour sack and saw cold determination staring back at him. He said, "Let me sit up on the side of the bed, damn you! " The tall man stepped back one pace and motioned with the gun barrel for Cole to sit up. Cole did so. "I don't have to tell you anything. You can go straight to hell!"

The gun barrel hit him on the collarbone and Cole could swear he heard it break. White, hot, pain flooded his left shoulder and arm. He screamed.

Just down the landing a woman's voice called, "What is it, Mr. Cole?" A light suddenly appeared under the door to her room. In a moment the door opened and Bea appeared still pulling her robe on as she stepped onto the landing. She stopped when she saw the man standing in the shadows with his back against the wall and holding his pistol with the barrel pointed upwards. The man nodded to her. She stood there for a moment longer, then went back inside her room and closed the door. After another moment, the light went out.

In Cole's room the inquisition continued. "I'm going to ask you again Mr. Cole, what are you doing in River Bluff with Colonel Garrison? This time why don't you answer and

spare yourself further pain. Mr. Cole, I can keep this up as long as you can stand it, but I expect it's going to get a little hard on you."

Cole spat back, "I'll have you hanged for this you son of a bitch!" He barely got it out of his mouth when pain shot through his right collarbone and arm. He screamed again!

"Now, Mr. Cole. I don't like to cause you all this pain and suffering, but, I gotta tell you, sir, you are going to tell me what I want to know before the night is over!"

Cole gasped, "There's a letter... in my coat... on the door!" He was rocking back and forth on the bed with his arms held forward, bent at the elbows, his hands opening and closing, and clenching into fists as they lay, trembling, in his lap.

The tall man quickly crossed the room to the door and removed the frock coat from the peg. He searched the outside pockets with no success and finally found what he was looking for in the inside left pocket. He withdrew the letter and went quickly to the lamplight. Slipping the folded letter from the envelope, he spread it out on the table and read it. Then, he re-read it. He turned to Cole. "This Mr. McGinnis, he a railroad man, or what?"

Cole said, "I don't know." His voice cracked with pain. The tall man brought the gun up as if to strike Cole again and Cole screamed, "IT'S THE TRUTH!" He paused. "I don't know what his business is. He told me to come here and act as his agent. He said Colonel Garrison would meet me with the details. He's paying me five hundred dollars to buy land for him. He gave me two hundred and fifty and said he would give me the remainder when the deal was complete. I'd only been here a day or so when I had that run-in with that fellow over at the store. Since then I've been here in my room trying to get my strength back." He conveniently left out any mention of the beating at the hands of Jack Knight!

The tall man asked, "Have you met with Colonel Garrison yet?"

"Yes, the day he rode in with the troops. He came here to the boarding house and chewed me up pretty good for getting into trouble and drawing attention to myself."

"Did he say when he would begin, whatever it is he plans?" the tall man asked.

"No, he didn't. He just cussed me out and stormed out of here. I thought he was gonna kill me!"

"Mr. Cole, are you telling me everything... I mean everything... 'cause if you leave anything out and I have to come back to ask you again, I won't go as easy on you as I have tonight. Now, how about it...?"

“I’ve told you everything I know! I swear! Please! Cole was beginning to weep. “The Colonel will kill me for sure, now!”

“The Colonel doesn’t have to know you and I had this little talk, now does he?”

Cole looked up. Tears streaked his face and twinkled in the orange lamplight. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, I won’t tell him, if you don’t! Besides, I might need to talk with you again. As a matter of fact, why don’t we do this often? I mean, have these little talks. You could keep me informed of what the Colonel is going to do and when, and I could keep you from, well...getting hurt!”

“You’re joking!”

“No, I’m not. I’ll come calling on you some night, well, lets just say, soon, and you can tell me what I want to know. I’ll keep quiet about our little visits. There’s really no reason for the Colonel to know and a lot of reasons for him not to know. That all right with you? “

Cole nodded. Tears were dropping into his lap where his hands were writhing and tingling in pain and numbness.

The tall man said, “I’ll take my leave, now, Mr. Cole. I expect you ought to lie down ’til morning and keep those shoulders still. That pain will go away by then. You’ll be sore in the morning, but you’ll be able to use them. Just watch the heavy lifting. You know, things like whiskey bottles and guns...things like that. Good night Mr. Cole.”

The tall man laid the letter on the table with the envelope and leaning over blew out the lamp. He strode to the door and slowly turning the knob, left the room. He closed the door behind him, motioned to his companion on the landing and the two of them went quickly down the stairs and through the three ground floor rooms and out the back door. They crossed the open space at the rear of the boarding house and disappeared into the trees of the pine forest. It was a beautiful summer night.

### **Dawn in River Bluff**

Deborah had not slept well. She now sat at her dressing table brushing her hair. She really had had a bad night. She had been awakened by a sound that she could not identify. She had gotten out of bed and rubbed the sleep from her eyes and gone out onto her balcony for air. The night had been beautiful with a sky full of stars and a quarter moon. Its dimness allowed more starlight to become visible. She stood, for a short while,

at the rail peering into the sky. Then her gaze had dropped down and swept the environs of Main Street from the east end to the west end. Nobody was stirring. It was quiet. She did see two soldiers standing guard at the Mule Action. She supposed it had become the temporary headquarters of the Yankees. Taking a deep breath and slowly exhaling, she turned to re-enter her room. There! She heard it again! It was a scream. A scream of someone in pain! She turned back to the railing and looked again, up and down both sides of the street. Nothing. No movement. Other than the two soldiers, there was no sign of a living soul apparent to her. She stood listening, turning her head from side to side. Still nothing. She stood like that for several minutes. Then, she mentally shrugged and went inside.

Now she sat, in the early morning light, slowly brushing her hair. She yawned. She could hear her mother down stairs in the bakery already taking the first loaves from the oven. The aroma was delightful. Her stomach growled its reminder that her brain demanded fuel. She took note, and standing, she reached for her robe. It was time to go down for breakfast. After that she would go across the street and check on Luke. She left her room, closing the door behind her, and headed downstairs for breakfast. She was looking forward to her mother's strawberry jam spread on the still hot bread. It was a beautiful start to the day.

At the Campbell place Ellie had been up for some time. So had Momma Nan. Bess had been fed. The old game rooster crowed at the break of dawn so Ellie rewarded him and his flock of hens with leftover corn bread from last evening's meal. She drew a bucket of cold well water and carried it back to the house. She poured the old blue, enamel coated, coffee pot about half full of water, and put four tablespoons of coarse ground coffee from the mercantile store into it. She then picked up an eggshell from the eggs Momma Nan was about to prepare and dropped it into the pot. The eggshell would soak up a good deal of the acid from the coffee and produce a strong, full flavored brew.

Momma Nan had the skillet hot and she sliced off two thick pieces of cured shoulder meat to fry. She laid them in the cast iron skillet and they immediately began to sizzle, spreading an aroma of something good to eat throughout the house. She broke four of the game hen's eggs into a crockery cup, added a dollop of milk, some salt, and a little pepper, and began to beat them so as to break the yolks. As soon as the meat was done, she would scramble them in the skillet for Ellie and herself. She bent over and opened the oven door revealing six big beautiful biscuits on the metal lid of a lard tin that served as her baking pan. They were browned on top to a turn. She reached for a big thick towel she had placed on the edge of the table and grasped the lard tin lid and removed those treasures from the oven. Then she turned the slices of shoulder meat and began to beat the eggs a bit more.

The droplets of water that had splashed on the outside of the coffee pot, began to sizzle and pop. Then the reliable old pot settled down to the serious business of boiling and producing coffee. Neither woman spoke. These were chores they did every morning and they didn't require conversation.

Momma Nan stuck her fork into the shoulder meat, found it was done to her liking, and removed it from the skillet placing one piece on each plate. Then she removed the skillet from the stove, for a minute or two, to allow the pan to cool down a bit. After it cooled some, she could put the eggs into it; cooking scrambled eggs at too high a temperature would produce a rubbery version of the dish. Neither of them wanted that.

Ellie went out and picked up an armload of stove wood and brought it back into the kitchen where she deposited it in the wood box behind the stove. She would have to get another armload at dinner and another at supper. Thus, the wood box stayed full. By the time she washed up, Momma Nan had breakfast on the table. The two of them sat and ate. Each woman was thinking of the chores awaiting them when they finished.

In River Bluff at the office of Doctor Samuel Brown, only the doc was up and about. Luke had stirred a bit and took a swallow or two of water from a glass on the table near the bed, then settled down and went back to sleep. Jack was rolled up in a blanket lying across the threshold of the front door, and Willie was asleep sitting on the floor with his back against the back door. It was a form of sentry duty and it worked. Doc raised the shades to allow the sun to lighten the office and to demonstrate to others, who might be interested, that nothing out of the ordinary had, or was, taking place at his office.

When the sunlight suddenly flooded the room, Jack opened his eyes then quickly drew his arm up over them for shade from the early morning brightness. He turned his head away from the light and then opened his eyes, blinking them a few times to allow them to adjust to daylight. That done, he sat up, stretched his back, and yawned.

A noise came from the back room. A muffled curse and Willie came clomping into the office. He too, stretched and yawned. Jack stood and rubbed his chin whiskers. All in the room could hear a heavy rasping sound. Doc said, "My razor is on the shelf by the wash bowl. There's water in the pitcher." Jack hesitated a moment, then went to the washbasin. Willie walked over and looked out the window toward the Mule Auction. Three soldiers were outside the closed barn doors: two standing sentry duty and the third smoking a cigarette while propped up on one foot, with the sole of the other resting against the wall of the barn.

Nothing much going on there, thought Willie. Jack was lathered up and about to apply the cold razor to his chin, when Willie said, "What's for breakfast?"

### **What are we going to do, Capn?**

Major Benson awakened Colonel Garrison. Captain O'Malley, who in turn, had been introduced to the day by Sergeant Jennings, had awakened Benson. Nobody knew who woke Sergeant Jennings. Some said he never slept anyway! He always seemed to know



what was going on, to whom, and where. He was the mother hen of the troop as well as the immediate authority figure for the enlisted men. If Colonel Garrison issued an order, the troops would look to Sergeant Jennings for his order. No matter that Sergeant Jennings was parroting Colonel Garrison. It was the chain of command. It was very much like the food chain.

This morning Colonel Garrison woke with a start. It took a few seconds for Garrison to orient himself. When you moved about a great deal it was not uncommon to awaken in a strange place and not know instantly where you were! It came to him and he sat up. He had been asleep on a pile of hay Farley kept on the main floor of the barn for the livestock people brought in. It made a comfortable bed. Garrison was tired from the saddle and he had fallen right to sleep and slept the sleep of the innocent. He stood and brushed the hay from his uniform as best he could. He felt his chin and, yes, he needed a shave. Whether he would get one was debatable. He looked for a mirror. Finding none he went to the table that had served as his desk last night.

“Excuse me sir,” Captain O’Malley said from behind him.

He turned, found a piping hot crockery mug filled with coffee being shoved toward him by the Captain. He gratefully accepted it and took a sip. It was hot and it was strong. This would get his heart pumping and his eyes open. He took another sip and set the mug down on the table. He fished inside his vest pocket and found an old brier pipe his wife had given him on his last furlough home. He rummaged in his right hip pocket until he found a rumpled pouch containing tobacco that had been pressed and flattened by the constant pressure of the saddle. The tobacco was still moist. He had learned a trick from Sergeant Jennings to keep the tobacco moist. A small slice of apple placed in the pouch would moisten the driest tobacco in just a short while - and keep it that way. He dipped the pipe into the pouch and began to press the tobacco into its bowl with his right index finger. He was careful not to pack it too tight. It wouldn’t draw properly if it were too tight. Satisfied he had enough in the bowl, he withdrew the pipe, rolled the pouch, and replaced it in his pocket. Then he fished about in his left vest pocket in search of a match. He didn’t find one. He got up to go to his saddle and get a match from his saddlebags then noticed the coals glowing in Farley’s forge. He picked up a sliver of straw from the barn’s floor and stuck the tip onto a hot coal. It flared instantly. He held the lighted straw up to his pipe, and drawing rhythmically, he pulled the fire down into the bowl of the pipe igniting the tobacco and producing a haze of blue smoke about his head. He dunked the lighted straw in the barrel of water by the forge and walked back to his chair and sat down. He continued to alternate between the pipe and the coffee for a few minutes. All the while he was thinking of the task before him. His talk with that Knight fellow last night had not been satisfactory by a long shot! He knew these people were arrogant, in the extreme, but he had no idea how “bull-headed” they were to boot! Would they never understand they had actually lost the war? They seemed to think nothing had changed. They would just pick up where they had left off when the war started! My, my, my, how wrong they were, he thought. They had yet to pay the cost of defeat. They had yet to taste the bitterness of involuntary servitude! They were about to learn all this, and more, as the reconstruction of the south began. He would certainly

do his part to teach them the all-important lessons a conquered people had to learn. The most important lesson was to teach them who the Master was now. He was the Master. He was the Military Commander of this District and he was just short of God! He could hardly wait to begin their lessons! He grinned and took another sip of his coffee and another draw from his pipe.

Colonel Garrison had no idea how wrong he was. Neither did he care.

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The front door of the Doctor's office opened and Willie came through it carrying a tray. On it was their breakfast, courtesy of Deborah's parents. The aroma of fresh baked bread soon filled the room. There was a plate heaped high with scrambled eggs and four cups stacked one inside the other, beside a pot of hot coffee. There were four pastries beside the plate of eggs, which was the last plate on a stack of five. There were knives, forks, and spoons for stirring the coffee. There was even a little sugar (and only God knew where they had gotten that!) for Doc's coffee. The Goldberg's had been doing this everyday since Willie's rescue of Deborah. The men each took a plate from the stack and helped themselves. They left Luke's food on the tray and sat it beside him on the bed. He had insisted he could get up and sit at Doc's desk to eat but was told he would not. He stayed in bed and ate. The breakfast was soon gone.

Willie rose to investigate a commotion from outside. He went to the window and saw Colonel Garrison walking down the opposite side of the street in the direction of the boarding house. Bea was about to have an unexpected guest for breakfast this morning. He hoped she was ready.

Jack said, "What is it?"

"The Colonel going for breakfast, I expect," answered Willie.

"And where is he dining this morning?" asked Jack.

"It would appear," said Willie, "he is headed for Bea's boarding house. You know, that place is getting real busy!"

"Do you suppose Bea is expecting him?"

"I don't know," said Willie. "If she is, we're in a lot of trouble, Capn!"

"Ain't that the truth!" said Jack placing his empty plate back on the tray and carrying what remained of his coffee to the window beside Willie.

"Well, Capn, we'll know shortly. In any event, our visit with her boarder last night was timely. I hadn't expected the Colonel to come a' calling so soon."

“Oh, Yeah,” said Jack. “ He wants to get the wheels rolling. He would like to strike before folks understand what is happening to them. The sooner the better, the Colonel thinks. He’s probably right, too, Willie.”

“What are we going to do, Capn? We can’t just stand here and let him get away with it.”

“Actually we can, Willie. In fact, we may have to. Remember, we’re not up against the Colonel and those worn-out troops of his. We’re up against the entire government of the United States!”

“I know, Capn,” Willie said shaking his head, “But we can’t let him take the farms, and homes, and stores, and the like, without trying to stop him.”

“You’re right, Willie. But we have to be smart about it. We have to do, whatever we do, in such a manner that he can’t prove we did it. It’s not going to be easy. We’ve got to get to the men folk of the town and county. We have to tell them what’s going on and what to expect. Then we have to organize some way of stopping the Colonel, or at least slowing him down, until we can get word to his superiors about what he’s doing here.”

“How’re we going to do that, Capn?”

“I just don’t know, yet, Willie. I just don’t know.... yet,” Jack answered. “There has to be a way and we have to find it. In the meantime, I want to ask Ellie if it would be possible for Luke to stay at her place until he’s better.”

That brought protestations from Luke in bed behind them. Jack didn’t even turn around.

“I don’t think that’ll be a problem, Capn.”

“Well, you never know ‘til you ask,” said Jack. “In any event, I’m going to ask her as soon as the opportunity presents itself.”

“How’re we gonna get him to Ellie’s place? He can’t sit a horse get.”

“Yes, I can!” Luke proclaimed.

“No you can’t, brother! You know you can’t! I’m going to see if Mr. Bowen will let us borrow his cart to take you home. I expect we can get you and that saw I sent you after in that cart. We might have to get the loan of a mule from Farley to pull it. I don’t think my Bay will do the job. He’s never been hitched to a wagon, as far as I know.”

“Blackie won’t pull it.” Laughed Willie. “I tried it once... up in... Virginia. He nearly tore the wagon apart! We had to unhitch him before he hurt himself!” Willie slapped his thigh and snorted at the memory.

“We’ll get the cart home, one way or another,” said Jack. He turned to sit in the rocking chair.

“Whoa!” said Willie looking out the window.

“What is it?” Jack asked.

“It’s the Colonel! He just left the boarding house! He’s headed back down the street toward the Mule Auction! Wait a minute; Deborah just stepped out of the bakery. Lord, Jack, he’s bowing to her! He actually removed his hat and bowed! I declare, that low down....”

“I know, Willie. I’m right here!” said Jack. He had returned to his spot just to Willie’s right rear.

“Hadn’t you better go meet Deborah?”

“Yeah, I’d better,” said Willie. With that he opened the door and began his advance toward Deborah.

Colonel Garrison, upon seeing Willie, stopped in his tracks. He watched as Willie closed the gap between himself and Deborah. The Colonel stepped off the sidewalk and started toward Willie. The door to the doctor’s office opened again and Jack stepped into the morning light. The Colonel stopped. He looked at Jack, then at Willie. He tossed his head as if to say, “I get it!” and then, bringing his gaze to bear on Jack, nodded respectfully, regained the sidewalk and continued on toward the Mule Auction. Willie and Deborah preceded Jack into the office.

Jack stood for a moment longer looking at the Colonel’s back. He knew that somewhere in the future the two of them would meet in mortal combat. It was a fleeting thought and a troubling one. Jack had hoped the war with all the killing was behind him. It did not appear to be so.

### **Jack, We Have Room At Our House**

It was near mid-day when Ellie and Bess came walking down Main Street from the east. She had two flour sacks tied together and slung across Bess’s broad back so that the weight was evenly distributed on both sides. The sacks were bulging. She stopped Bess in front of the doctor’s office where Willie and Jack came out to greet her. Jack helped

her down from her mount and Willie hefted the two sacks with ease and they all went into Doc Brown's office.

Ellie and Momma Nan had prepared the midday meal for the men. All the good things they could scrape together were in those sacks. Jack and Ellie cleared the table Doc used as a desk and spread out the food. All of them had a full plate of the home cooked fixings, even Luke, although he was still not allowed out of bed. Ellie prepared him a plate and he tore into the food with gusto!

After dinner Jack took Ellie by the elbow and nodding toward the door he said, "Let's take a walk." The two of them left the office and stood for a moment on the sidewalk in front of the office.

Jack said, "Ellie, I'm thinking of taking Luke home. Problem is...I don't have a place to take him. We were sleeping in the woodshed 'til this happened. I can't put him up in that woodshed!"

"No you can't!" said Ellie. Momma Nan and I have been talking about this. "We knew you were going to have a problem with this when it came time to take him home. Jack, we have room at our house for Luke... and for you!"

"Ellie, that's mighty nice of you, but...I don't..."

"Don't think twice about it Jack. Momma Nan will be upset if you don't accept her offer."

Jack looked up. Ellie said, "That's right! It was Momma Nan's idea. She brought it up. She really wants you to bring Luke to the farm until he's better. Maybe, by then, you can have a roof over your heads and he can go home."

"Well, I'm sure Luke would like that. Being fussed over by the lady folk and all. It's just that, well, it doesn't seem right somehow. I mean, well, we're not married, and..."

"And what, Jack?" People will talk? Is that what you were thinking? 'Cause if it is...don't worry about it! People are going to talk anyway. So let 'em! As long as we know the truth, it really doesn't matter, now, does it?

"Guess not," said Jack. "It would solve a very big problem. I'm going over to the Mercantile to talk to Mr. Bowen about the loan of his cart to take Luke home. How about walking down the street to the store with me?"

"Fine," said Ellie. They turned and began a slow, leisurely stroll toward the mercantile, her arm through his as they walked.

Mr. Bowen still had bandages on his face and head. He met them as they came through the door. "Jack! Jack Knight! It's good to see you!" he said, smiling broadly. He came across the oily, sawdust-strewn floor with his hand out-stretched in greeting.

"How's Luke," Mr. Bowen asked.

"He's much better," Jack said smiling. He grasped Mr. Bowen's hand in his and shook it vigorously.

"You know he saved my life don't you? I mean if it hadn't of been for Luke, why, I 'd be dead! That's what Doc Brown says! I don't remember much after that fellow, Cole, started beating on me. I'm just sorry Luke got hurt! Listen Jack, Mr. Bowen said, that Cole is a mean, lowdown sort of man. Don't take any chances around him. He's sneaky.... let me tell you! You can't ever be easy when he's near. Lord, what's the world coming to! We never had that kind of person here in River Bluff before the war. Now, first thing, right after the shooting stops, here he comes! Lordy, how we could have done with out him! Did you ever find out what he wants? What's he doing here anyway?" Mr. Bowen said all this without a breath.

Jack and Ellie just stood there for a moment waiting for Mr. Bowen to add still more. When he said nothing further, Jack said, "He's what folks are calling a Carpet-bagger," Mr. Bowen. "He has nothing and he plans to try to take advantage of the situation here and take what we have. That's simplifies it some...but, for the most part that does correctly sum up what Mr. Cole is and what he plans to do."

"Seems like a dirty sort of thing to do to folks, Jack. We don't have much of anything left. The war pretty much stripped us of everything but what we needed to survive! What does he expect to get from us?"

"Well, sir, I'm working on that. We're gonna have a meeting as soon as I can arrange a time place, and we will thresh this out and see what we can do... as a community. Whatever happens, Mr. Bowen, sir, we have to stand together. The next few weeks and months are not going to be easy ones for this part of the country. Like they keep telling me... we lost the war! I suppose this is what we get for losing!"

"It sure is a shame," said Mr. Bowen.

"Yes, sir. It sure is. Mr. Bowen, I need to ask a favor."

"Ask anything you like, son."

"I need the loan of your cart to take Luke out to the Campbell farm. I think it's time to take him home. Doc says he can make the trip all right if we take it slow."

"In my old cart, that's the only way you CAN take it!" Mr. Bowen laughed. "When you want to get it, son?"

“Well, I have to see Farley Carnes about something to pull it with. I don’t think my Bay is broke to a wagon. At least I’ve never tried it.

“That won’t be necessary, Jack. Bess will pull it!” Ellie tugged at his elbow. “She’ll probably enjoy the change anyway. Before Pa died, she pulled whatever he hitched her to and never complained.”

Jack looked at Ellie and then he turned back to Mr. Bowen. “I expect we’ll be needing the cart this afternoon, then! Ellie, you think we can get to your place before dark?”

“Well, it might be twilight, but we’ll still have light to see. Momma Nan will be tickled!”

“All right, then. Mr. Bowen, I’ll be back shortly and get the cart.”

“Anything else I can do. I mean can’t you use something from the store? No charge!”

“Oh, said Jack. There is one thing. Luke was coming to see you about buying a saw. We’re gonna need something to cut those logs into planks and boards.”

“That’s a two man job, Jack.”

“I know, sir. I have help.”

“Who?”

“A friend of mine from the war. He’s from over near Kingston. He lost his home and family. He’s gonna be staying with me for a while. He’s agreed to help me put up a cabin and get settled in. He’s a good man. His name is Willie Jordan. I’ll be right back to pick up the cart. You do have a saw, don’t you?”

“Oh, yeah. I got one. It’s just the thing you’ll need on those pine logs, too! It’ll all be ready when you get back!”

“Thank you, sir. Now we have to get back over to Doc Brown’s and see to getting ready.”

Mr. Bowen saw them to the door and said, “Ya’ll be careful now, you hear?” He glanced toward the Mule Auction as he said it. Jack’s eyes followed. He saw there was little obvious activity there. “We will.” he said. Taking Ellie’s arm they turned toward the doctor’s office.

The day had grown hot. It was a typical southeastern summer day: hot and humid.

Ellie said, “Maybe we ought to wait ‘til tomorrow morning. It’ll be cooler then, Jack.”

“No, we aren’t waiting. We have to get out of here as soon as we can! Sparks are flying and if we stay, there’s going to be a fire. I think we had best get Luke out of here and get him home ‘til this thing can be seen to.”

“You really think there’s going to be more trouble?”

“Nope! I don’t think it! I know it! I can taste it in the air. Trouble’s coming all right! We can’t stop it, so we’d better be prepared for it. That’s what we’re doing. Come on!” They hurried toward Doc Brown’s office.

### **Lordy, Lordy, What a Mess!**

Bess didn’t complain when Jack hitched her to Mr. Bowen’s cart. Jack was going to ask Farley for the loan of a harness, but Mr. Bowen offered his instead. The less Jack found to do in and around the Mule Auction, the better. They all agreed to that. Willie and Jack gently lifted Luke from his bed and placed him on a pallet they had made from hay and a couple of sheets placed on the bottom of the cart. They did all this at the back door to the doctor’s office, out of sight of the Yankees. The less the troops knew, the better!

They shook hands all around. Doc kissed Ellie lightly on the cheek and Deborah, who had come over from the bakery to see Luke off, stood, looking longingly at Luke until Jack suggested they all find something to do at a distance so the two could have a couple of moments of privacy. The four of them went back into the doctor’s office on the pretence of checking on Luke’s medication. In five minutes or so, Deborah came in with tears in her eyes - hugged Ellie, smiled at Jack, kissed Willie’s cheek, and left before she completely lost control.

Willie, dumbstruck, stood stock still with his mouth open and eyes staring wide. “She kissed me!” He said. “She actually kissed me!” he repeated. Ellie laughed and Jack slapped him on the back and said, “Come on, ole sport!” and went out to the cart. Willie followed in a moment, still moonstruck. Ellie climbed aboard Bess and Jack mounted the Bay. Willie was still in a kind of shock. He tried to mount Blackie from the right. Blackie shied away leaving Willie standing with the reins in his hand. He shook his head as if to shake off an aggravating insect, and seemed to return to sanity. He walked around Blackie and stepping into the stirrup, he mounted with no problem. Blackie still wasn’t sure what he had been trying to do.

”All set?” asked Jack. Three “Yeps!” came back and he said, “Let’s go!” Ellie nudged Bess with her heels and they began slowly to move. Jack urged the Bay into motion and eased up along side Ellie. Later he would take the point and ride slightly ahead of her to watch for any trouble ahead. Willie fell into the rear guard position. The little caravan left town by the alley. They turned right onto Main Street at its eastern end and then



turned left toward home. Nobody seemed to notice... .. except, the two Yankee soldiers the Colonel had posted in the trees on the southern side of the road. They watched intently as the riders and cart left town. One soldier turned to the other. The second soldier left immediately, at a run, to inform the Colonel of Jack's movements. The Colonel would want to know about this right away.

The afternoon was tolerable. It was hot and a bit humid, but there was a breeze in the tops of the pines which kept the hot air rising. A few clouds formed in the southwestern sky but quickly blew toward the east and were soon gone over the horizon. The rhythmic swaying of the two-wheeled cart soon had Luke asleep. Jack had taken his position out front and Willie was bringing up the rear. He would occasionally stand up in the stirrups and look back over his shoulder as if expecting someone to suddenly appear from that quarter.

About three miles out of town, Jack turned and rode back to Ellie. "I think it's time to take a break. He said. "There's a shady spot up ahead. We'll pull the cart in there and rest a bit. I expect Luke will be thirsty." He turned to motion to Willie to come on in, but Willie wasn't there! All he could see was a cloud of dust around the last turn in the road as though a number of horses were coming from the direction of town.

"Ellie, go ahead and pull the cart into the shade," Jack said. Seeing the same dust cloud, Ellie urged Bess toward the shade. Luke was beginning to stir. Jack quickly followed her and drew up beside the cart facing the oncoming riders. He eased the hammer of his Colt back to half cock and pulled his rifle from the scabbard and checked to be sure it was ready to fire if he needed it. He laid it across the saddle between his thighs and the saddle horn. The barrel was pointed toward the unidentified riders coming their way. He wondered again where Willie had gotten to and what he was up to.

As the riders drew near Jack could see they were the Yankee troops from town. Someone had seen them leave! The Colonel most likely had us watched, Jack thought.

The riders pulled up when they reached the cart. It was Captain O'Malley, Sergeant Jennings, and eight troopers.

"Captain Knight, you'll have to turn back!" said Captain O'Malley.

"On whose authority?" Jack demanded.

"Colonel Garrison's, Captain. He says nobody moves anywhere without his permission." Captain O'Malley said. "You don't have it!"

"Believe me, Captain. I don't need it! I'm on my way home with my wounded brother, here. Now if you don't mind, we'll be on our way." Jack said. He turned to Ellie and said, "Let's go, Ellie!" Ellie's heels dug into Bess's side and the cart lurched forward. One of the Yankee troopers rode forward and grabbed the bridle on Bess's head just

behind the bit. He forced her to halt. She snatched her head back in a vain attempt to rid herself of this strange man's hand, but found she couldn't.

Ellie shouted, "Get you hand off my horse!" The trooper looked at her with a vicious grin showing tobacco stained teeth. The corners of his mouth were streaked with tobacco juice. He reached over to pat Ellie on the thigh when Jack hit him with the rifle barrel knocking him from the saddle. He landed on his right side on the ground. His horse pranced back and away from the commotion.

Captain O'Malley drew his weapon and cocked the hammer of the single action revolver and said, "Hold it!" Jack sat perfectly still.

The "BOOM" from Willie's big rifle was so sudden and unexpected, everybody jumped involuntarily. Captain O'Malley's hat flew from his head and his horse reared tossing the captain onto his butt in the dirt of the road. One of the troopers immediately drew his weapon from his holster and a second "BOOM" echoed through the trees as Willie's rifle fired yet again! The trooper also went spinning from the saddle and found himself bleeding from his left shoulder as he lay, face down, on the roadbed. The two rifle shots reverberated through the trees. Jack's Bay shied away from the rearing horse, but held his ground as Jack spoke softly to him.

Jack said, "Captain It would appear you have found yourself at something of a disadvantage here. Tell you what, Captain. I'm gonna suggest you get your men calmed down and get them on back to town. It appears that two of them need medical attention. In the meantime, we will continue on our way." Jack turned the Bay toward the Campbell farm. He suddenly reined in and said, "Oh, Captain, please give my regards to Colonel Garrison." He clucked the Bay into movement again and Ellie dug her heels into Bess's ample sides and the cart began to roll once again toward home.

Captain O'Malley still sat on the ground looking through glazed eyes at the backs of Jack and Ellie. Sergeant Jennings just sat atop his horse. He lowered his head and slowly shook his head from side to side and muttered under his breath, "Lordy, Lordy, what a mess."

A small dark cloud was forming off to the southeast. It looked like it might rain before morning.

### **John Amos Keifer**

As the cart rolled on toward the Campbell farm, Willie and Blackie stole through the trees on the right side of the road. For about a mile Willie continued this "outrider" service until he was sure there were no troublemakers hidden in the woods with the intent of causing a problem for their little convoy. Then he quietly slipped from the trees and

fell in behind the cart at a discreet distance, matching the same position he had had before the Yankee troop showed up. Neither Jack nor Ellie turned around.

They rode that way for another mile or two. Then Jack saw in the distance a rider and mule approaching from the east. As the distance between them grew shorter, he could see the oncoming rider was a big man, wearing bib overalls and a straw hat pulled down low over his eyes to shield them from the sun now low in the western sky. Some ten yards from Jack the mule rider “Whoa’ed” his mule and sat in the road awaiting Jack’s arrival. When Jack turned to tell Ellie to stop the cart, he saw Willie at his appointed place. He hadn’t known he was there! Jack rode on the few remaining yards and drew up the Bay along side the big man.

“Name’s Knight. Jack Knight,” Jack said extending his hand in an offer of introduction and friendship. “Who might you be?”

The big man grasped Jack’s hand and shook it. Looking Jack straight in the eyes he said, “ Mr. Knight, I’m Amos Keifer... John Amos Keifer... from Alabama. Folks just call me Amos.” With that he released Jack’s hand and sat back in the saddle.

Jack asked, “What brings you to this part of the country, Mr. Keifer?”

“Relative’s.” Mr. Keifer answered. “Actually, the death of a relative. My wife’s Aunt is from around these parts. She died and left some property to my wife, and so I’ve come ahead to claim the land and try to get the place in order before the family gets here.”

Jack said, “They’re not with you? Your family, I mean.”

“No sir, they’re not. My eldest son Frank is bringing them on up here. They left much later than I did. They ought to be here before too long though. You got land around here?” He asked Jack.

“Yep,” replied Jack, “The Knight farm, about a mile down the road from here. You must have passed it a while ago.”

“That the place where the house is burned to the ground?”

“Yep, that’s it,” said Jack. “I’m gonna rebuild but it’ll take a while.”

“My place is the farm on past the Campbell farm.” Mr. Keifer volunteered.

Ellie said, “That’s the old Roberts place. Annie Belle Roberts your wife’s aunt?”

“Yes’um, she was. A fine woman... Annie was. Only saw her when Sarah and me got married about twenty year ago. Didn’t know she thought so much of Sarah.... to leave her a farm, I mean.”

“That’s a fine piece of land Mr. Keifer. You hold on to it. It’ll grow anything...cotton, sugar cane, tobacco, corn...anything,” exclaimed Ellie! “Mr. Keifer, I’m Ellie Grace Campbell. Momma Nan, my mother, and me, live on the Campbell place. Feel free to drop by when you can. Let us know when your family arrives. We’d love to meet them!”

Jack said, “That fellow you see way back yonder is Willie Jordan, a friend of mine. He’ll be helping me around my place for a while. Get to know him Mr. Keifer. He’s a good man to know in a pinch,” Jack smiled.

Mr. Keifer straightened in his saddle and pointed toward town. “Y’all coming from town? How are things there?”

“Well, sir, not so well. A troop of Yankees has set up camp in town. Their commander, a Colonel Garrison, is, at least according to him, the new Military Commander of this District. Best I can make out, Mr. Keifer, we’re no longer a county, but a Military District! That Colonel Garrison is so full of himself he’s apt to explode! Steer clear of him if you can. He could be a dangerous man!” Jack answered.

“Did you say Colonel Garrison...Colonel Rupert Garrison?”

“Yeah, I believe he did say his name was Rupert, didn’t he Ellie?” Jack turned to Ellie for confirmation.

“That’s what I was told, Jack.” Ellie replied.

“Lord, Lord,” said Mr. Keifer shaking his head from side to side and looking at the ground.

“What,” asked Jack?

“Well, Mr. Knight, if it’s the Rupert Garrison I know, he’s a devil!” answered Mr. Keifer. “See, during the early days of the war, I rode with some partisan troops made up of local boys around my home in Alabama, and we attacked a Captain Rupert Garrison’s camp one night. We tore ‘em up pretty good that night. Next day Garrison went from farm to farm and burned them all to the ground! Some twelve or thirteen of ‘em, there was. One farmhouse even had a mother and two children inside. No sir, Mr. Knight, He’s not dangerous! He’s evil!” Mr. Keifer’s face was red with anger when he finished speaking.

Jack sat, not saying anything for a time. Mr. Keifer didn’t look up. The animals were even quiet. It was a moment of remembrance and sorrow for Mr. Keifer and nobody wished to intrude. Finally, he looked up.

Jack said, "Sir, if you do see this Colonel Garrison, I'd appreciate it if you would stop by on your way back from town and let me know if he is your Captain Garrison. I think I may have need of that information in the future."

"Be glad to," Mr. Keifer looked at Jack's insignia of rank on his tattered uniform and continued, "Captain Knight. Yes sir, I'd be glad to."

I think we'd better be on our way, Mr. Keifer. We're trying to beat sundown." Jack said extending his hand for a parting handshake.

"Me too," said Mr. Keifer taking Jack's hand and shaking it. "Capn, you be careful now, you hear! And Capn? Call me Amos! I'd appreciate it...I really would!"

"All right, Amos. I will!" Jack smiled as Amos dug his heels into the mule's sides and urged her forward. He tipped his hat to Ellie as he passed the cart. He noticed Luke asleep in the floor of the cart and drew his mule to a halt.

"That young fella hurt bad?"

"Pretty bad," said Ellie, "but the doc says he'll survive. He's Jack's brother, Luke."

"Better get him on home then," said Mr. Keifer as he got his mule going again.

When Ellie turned back to Jack, he was already moving toward her place. She clucked Bess into motion and the cartwheels began to roll again. She turned once more and looked over her shoulder and saw that Mr. Keifer was now stopped again, talking to Willie. She thought, that pair'll get along just fine!

About a half an hour later they passed the Knight farm. It looked so desolate with the house gone. Ellie felt a knot in her throat looking at the pile of burned timbers that had once been a proud Carolina farmhouse. The cart lurched and rumbled as the two wheels traversed the ruts which ran at ninety degree angles across the River road, produced over the years by the Knight's wagons rolling out from their wagon road onto the River Road, and across it, on their way to the river or where ever they were going.

Luke groaned as the cart lurched again. "What's that?" he asked Ellie.

"It's your crossroads, she said with a hearty laugh. It Knight's Crossing!" She laughed again as Bess steadily pulled the cart onward toward her home.

A breeze had begun to stir again in the tops of the pines. The skies had cleared of all clouds and the dome of the heavens was a deep azure blue. The breeze carried a hint of wild roses and hot pine needles accented with the smell of the road dust. It was the aroma of the South.

## How's my sister?

As the cart rolled to a stop in the front yard of the Campbell farm, Momma Nan was sitting in her rocker on the big front porch. She was gently rocking back and forth as she watched the little caravan come to a stop. She rose and stepped down the three steps to the ground and walked to the cart. Luke was awake. He said, "Hello, Mrs. Campbell."

Momma Nan replied, "How you feel?"

"Not very good." Luke answered.

By this time Ellie had dismounted and was at Momma Nan's side. Jack tied the Bay to a post on the porch and he, too, went to the back of the cart.

"Momma Nan, we sure do appreciate this." Jack said.

"It's nothing." Momma Nan said.

"Yes, ma'am, if you say so. But I want you to know how much we both appreciate this. I would have to put him in the woodshed at home. It's the only place we have left," Jack said.

"This ain't much better, but you're welcome to it. Your father helped my Ned many times before Ned died. I'm just returning the favor."

Willie rode up on Blackie and tied him to a post opposite the Bay. He sauntered over to the cart and asked: "We gonna get him in the house, or what?"

Jack looked at Willie and laughed, shaking his head, "I swear, Willie, I think you must be a gypsy, or something!"

"Why?" asked Willie with a quizzical look.

"Well," Jack said, with a chuckle, "You knew before the rest of us the Yankees were coming... on the road back there. Jack nodded toward the River Road. "I had forgotten how you seemed to be about two steps ahead of everybody else most of the time. It still surprises me. You disappeared and then reappeared like some kind of ghost!" Jack laughed again.

Luke said, "What's the joke?"

"No joke, Luke! Willie's been up to his old tricks again! Anyway, Willie, I sure do thank you for backing me on the road."

“Weren’t nothing, Capn. You’d have done the same thing. I know you would. I seen that dust cloud and I figured it had to be the troops from town, so I just did a little easing around amongst the trees to get a better look. I figured I’d better give you a hand when the gunplay started. That’s all.”

“Well, I sure do thank you Willie!”

Momma Nan said, “Are we gonna stand here jawing all night, or are we gonna get this boy inside and into a clean bed?”

That did it! Ellie slipped into the cart beside Luke, Jack leaned over from his side of the cart, and Willie went to the other; they gently lifted and partially carried Luke to the very end of the cart. Luke protested he could do this himself! Everyone knew he needed help, and truth be told, Luke did, too!

When Luke was seated on the edge of the cart Jack slipped Luke’s left arm over his shoulders and Willie did the same from the opposite side and they stood with Luke hanging limp between them. They soon had him up the steps, across the porch, and after a few starts and stops, into the bedroom at the back of the Campbell house. He was exhausted when he finally sat down on the side of the bed.

“I never knew a fella could be this tired!” Luke said.

“Blood loss will do that to you. I saw a lot of it during the war. It’ll take a while for you to get back on your feet,” Willie said.

Momma Nan was fussing around fluffing pillows and patting the feather mattress. “You just lay back and rest,” she said. “I’m just about to start supper. We’ll have you something to eat in two shakes!” She hurried out of the room enroute to the kitchen.

Ellie said, “All right, boys...I’m leaving, too. Get those clothes off him and I’ll see that they’re washed and hung on the line to dry. I’ll go get him a pair of Pa’s old Long Johns to wear in bed. Jack will you see that he gets some clean clothes tomorrow?”

“Yep!” Jack replied. I need to get on to the house anyway. Willie and I need go down to the woods tomorrow and choose some trees for the cabin. Luke, you’re gonna miss all the fun...or should I say work?”

“Works more like it!” said Willie. We’ll have you a house with four walls and a roof when you’re ready to come home, Luke.” He turned to Jack and said, “Ready to strip him, Capn?”

Ready!” Jack said. They quickly had Luke undressed and into the Long Johns, Ellie had tossed through the half opened door, and settled into the big bed. The two men had made it to the porch where they were enjoying the breeze and listening to the Bob Whites and Whip-O-Wills when Ellie came out and announced that supper was ready. They both

protested but in the end, they all had a good meal, as did Luke who went instantly to sleep still holding a nondescript spoon in his fingers, his head lolled to one side on the big feather pillow.

Later, again on the porch, Willie said, “Mrs. Campbell, I’ll probably have an opportunity to shoot a deer, or some such, in the next few days while I’m working in the woods with the Capn. I wonder... would you mind if I brought a mess of deer meat to you ladies? I don’t expect we’ll have anywhere to keep it and I thought you might have a smoke house, or something.”

“Why, Willie, that’s mighty nice of you! I sure would like some venison! It’s been a while.... a long while. When my Ned was alive, we had deer regularly.” She looked away in the distance for a moment, as though remembering happier times then dropped her head and leaned back in her rocker and began to gently rock. Ellie looked at Jack and motioned, with her head, for him to follow her to the stable where the animals were resting. As they walked they unconsciously held hands.

Ellie said, “Jack, today is the first time I have heard Momma Nan speak of Pa since he died. It’s as though she felt that as long as she didn’t speak of it, he was still alive. Today is special! I don’t know what happened, but she’s coming back, Jack!” She had a catch in her voice as she spoke.

Jack suddenly stopped her, pulled her close, and kissed her on the lips. It was a long, hungry kiss. The one he had dreamed of for nearly four years. Ellie was pleasantly surprised! For a moment she didn’t breath, then she leaned into him and folded her arms around his neck and pulled him tight against her. Her breath was coming faster now.

Finally they parted. Jack’s breathing was noticeably faster, too. Ellie stepped away and cast a furtive glance toward the house. She could only see the glow of Willie’s cigarette in the blackness of the porch. She turned back to Jack and reached again for his hand. He bent to kiss her again and she quickly placed her hand over her mouth. “Not now”, she said. We...I... have to wait. I don’t think I can... if we kiss like that again!”

Jack grinned. “You don’t know how often I dreamed of this!” He said.

“Yes...I do, Ellie said. “I dreamed, too. Always of you, Jack! “

He slipped his arm around her tiny waist and held her close for a moment then he tightened his grip for a second... then released her. “We’d better get back to the house. Momma Nan and Willie will be wondering what happened to us.” Jack said.

“I don’t think they’re wondering at all,” laughed Ellie! Together they turned and went back to the house.

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It was full dark when Amos Keifer arrived in River Bluff. He halted his mule out front of the mercantile store and sat there for a minute or two. He looked at the stores fronting onto Main Street and then reined hard left to get his mule started toward the Mule Auction. There were the two Yankee sentries standing guard at either side of the big doors. "Halt!" shouted the older of the two. Amos reined in the mule and she stopped. The guard said, "Who are you and what do you want?"

"I want feed and water for my mule and I want to talk with the feller that owns this place!" Amos said loudly enough for Farley to hear in his house next door. Indeed, he did hear! He grinned from ear to ear.

Sergeant Jennings came from inside the big barn and confronted Amos. "What's your business, sir?"

"I want food and water for my mule and I want to put her up for the night, damn it! What business is it of yours what I want, anyway?" said Amos, getting louder as he got angrier.

"No need to get upset, mister," Farley said from behind Amos. "I'll take care of your animal. Lite from up there. Go on over to the house. I'll be over as soon as I take care of your mule."

Amos hesitated for a moment then stepped down from the mule, handed the reins to Farley, and shuffled on over to Farley's house. Billy was standing on the small front porch of the gray clapboard house. He smiled as Amos stepped up onto the porch. Billy opened the front door and held it for Amos to enter.

It took Farley ten minutes to put Amos' mule in a stall for the night and see that she had plenty of feed and water. Then he bade the Sergeant and Captain O'Malley goodnight. Closing the big barn doors, he nodded to the two sentries and walked across his small front yard and into the house.

Billy had taken Amos into the kitchen. He was sitting at the table drinking hot, strong, coffee from a chipped white mug when Farley entered.

"Amos! My God! You're a sight for sore eyes!" exclaimed Farley. As Amos rose to greet him Farley encased him in a bear hug!

"Now Farley... hell, I'm glad to see you, too...but I ain't gonna squeeze the life outta you in the first minute though!" gasped Amos. Farley released Amos and stepped back. He was smiling brightly. "What are you doing here, Amos... and how's my sister?"

**I married his sister!**

The moonlight danced atop the waters of the river casting reflections of itself onto the sides of the warehouses and stores that lined the waterfront. The gentle caressing of the waves around the pilings continued endlessly and the current drove the water on to its eternal destination not too many miles east. During the day the water was black. At night the water appeared a deep green. Occasionally a muskrat would slide into the water and cause a ripple, which would spread to the opposite bank. The boats tied up at the piers rose and fell as the current created wavelets around underwater stumps and snags deep in the dark depths.

Farley and Amos talked late into the night. Billy had long since gone on to bed. The two had not seen each other in nearly twenty years. Alabama was a long way from southeastern North Carolina. Farley learned that Amos had two boys... Frank, now eighteen, and Joseph, now fifteen: nephews Farley had never seen. He was overjoyed to learn his sister Sarah was on her way back home to settle just a few miles east down the River Road.

“How is Sarah, Amos?” asked Farley.

“She’s all right. A little on the plumb side and still ornery as ever,” replied Amos. “I know she’s happy to be coming back here to her home. She’s talked about it for twenty years. If nothing else, maybe she’ll hush up!” laughed Amos. He had a deep rumble of a laugh from his huge chest. The two men still held the coffee mugs as they talked at the kitchen table. The oil lamps had begun to burn low. One had gone out completely leaving a lingering wisp of black smoke rising from the chimney as the top of the dry wick burned. Farley made a mental note to refill both lamps tomorrow. He would have to see Mr. Bowen at the Mercantile about more coal oil. He hoped Mr. Bowen had been able to get some sent upriver from Wilmington.

“You planning on farming the Roberts place, Amos?”

“Yep. I thought tobacco would be my best bet. I’ll have to take a look at the soil and decide what I’ll plant next spring. I know, I know, I’ll have to get the tobacco beds in long before then. That’s why we came on now rather than later this fall when the traveling would have been cooler. We need to get settled in and get familiar with the land. Farley, where’s Faye Leigh? I hesitated to ask when I first got here, but...well, how is she?”

Farley said nothing for a moment. Then he stood and walked over to the stove sitting “catty-cornered” in the kitchen and picked up the blue enamel coffee pot, swirled the cold coffee around in the pot, decided against pouring another cup, and sat the pot back on the stove. Amos remained quiet.

Farley finally turned and said, “Amos, Faye Leigh is dead. She died about three years ago. Not long after the war started. The doctor said it was consumption. I don’t know.” He held the cold coffee mug in both his calloused, scarred hands and twisted it as he

spoke. She never was a strong woman, Amos. You know that, but, Lord, I loved her! It's been hell without her, Amos. I've had to try to raise Billy and make up for his mother not being here... but I can't. A boy needs his mother. I guess I ought to think about remarrying. But, I just don't want to think about another woman, here, in Faye's house."

Amos rose from his chair, walked to the stove, poured another cup of the cold coffee and placed his big hand on Farley's shoulder and said, "Farley, you'll know when the time is right to remarry. It may never be right. If that's the case, then, well, ... you'll raise Billy just fine. I know you will. I expect that's one reason Faye married a big ole, ugly boy like you, anyway!" He chuckled.

Farley's spirits seem to rise with Amos' chuckle and they sat back down at the table and placed their coffee mugs on the tattered old checkered tablecloth. They continued to talk well past midnight. When fatigue finally caught up to them, they went to bed. Farley went to his bed and Amos to a pallet laid out on the living room floor. They slept 'til daylight.

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As the new day dawned, Jack and Willie had fed the horses and fried some "fatback" and a couple of eggs Ellie and Momma Nan had insisted they take with them when they left the Campbell place the evening before. They cooked their breakfast in an old cast iron skillet over an open fire in the same fire pit Luke had created and used. The stones surrounding it were hot enough to keep the coffee hot in the battered old pot. They ate from tin plates each had tucked in his saddlebag. When they finished, they rubbed sand into the tin plates then rinsed them with a bucket of cold water Jack had drawn from the well. They put the plates on the stump Luke had used to chop firewood and left them for the sun to dry. With their housekeeping duties now finished they saddled up, each man taking an axe from the woodshed, and rode down to the woods to fell a few trees. It would be a long day!

Both men had their rifles and side arms in the event of trouble. There was also the possibility they might spot some game for the pot. There were wild turkeys, deer, quail, raccoon, possum, and other things that made for tasty meals in the woods. There was even the possibility of a bear wandering their way. In any event, they were ready for the possibilities. Besides, they needed the meat!

They would choose the trees, fell them, and then trim the limbs and branches from them where they lay. They would have to wait 'til Farley brought old Molly from the Mule Auction to snake the logs up to the site where they hoped to build the cabin. Farley had promised to bring Molly to the farm today. Jack knew it might be afternoon before he came, but that was just fine. By that time, they would have several logs to move. Besides, Molly would need to rest after her trip from town so they wouldn't use her to move the logs 'til tomorrow.

Jack had figured they would need thirty-two logs just to build the four walls. Then, they would have to select logs to split and saw into boards and planks for the floor and roof. Windows and doors would be something else. They'd worry about that when they got to it!

By mid-morning several trees were on the ground. The two men were wielding axes, trimming the trees into logs. Jack and Willie looked up when they heard the unmistakable rumble of cartwheels. It was Ellie and Bess, pulling Mr. Bowen's cart to their work site. She had the saw Jack had procured from Mr. Bowen yesterday. She also brought a back-cut saw, which had belonged to her father. The back-cut saw would be a big help in felling the trees. It would speed up the work as they could now use the axe to notch the tree in the direction they wanted it to fall, and then cut it from the opposite side with the back-cut saw. It would reduce the time needed to fell a tree nearly in half! It was a welcome tool.

Ellie also produced a flour sack from the cart, which contained their dinner. Momma Nan had insisted Ellie take the men something to eat. Although it was still early for a midday meal, both men took a big, thick biscuit from the sack and ate it, washing it down with gulps of water from their canteens.

The men's horses had been hobbled and released in the field that bordered the woods to the north. They were having their own meal of the sweet grass growing in the fallow field.

Willie went back to swinging his axe while Jack found a shady spot to offer Ellie. She accepted his hospitality and they passed the next few minutes in conversation, which Willie couldn't hear above the noise of the axe on the green wood. After a time the couple rose and Jack escorted Ellie to Bess and helped her mount the big mare. She leaned down and kissed Jack on the cheek and clucked Bess into motion. They turned the cart and started back up the wagon road toward the River Road. Jack stood and watched her receding back for a while.

"Everything all right, Capn?" called Willie.

"Yeah, I reckon." said Jack. He picked up his axe and went back to trimming the tree he had been working on when Ellie had first appeared.

"Miss Campbell going back home or on to town?" asked Willie.

"She's taking Mr. Bowen's cart back to him," answered Jack. "She insisted that he might need it, so, she's taking it back."

"Oh," said Willie as he cut off a particularly aggravating limb.

Jack and Willie paused about midday for their dinner. They found another shady spot for their meal. Both men had stripped above the waist to their long johns and both mopped

sweat from their brows as they sat to eat. Willie was facing the wagon road and he was the first to see a rider, leading a mule, coming toward them.

“Who’s that?” Willie asked. Jack turned around and for a moment he was stumped. Then he recognized Amos Keifer. He was leading Molly.

Amos reined the mule to a stop near where the men were cutting trees. He dismounted and walked toward them. Jack and Willie stood.

“Don’t get up. I just stopped by to return your mule,” said Amos.

“Where’s Farley?” asked Jack.

“Farley’s just fine.” Amos assured Jack. “As fine as a body can be with a troop of Yankees boarding with you! Looks like you’re gonna need this mule to get those logs outta here!”

“Yeah,” said Jack. “We hope to get them up to the stable and woodshed by tomorrow. I’m surprised Farley allowed you to bring that mule to me!”

“Not at all,” said Amos. “Farley’s my brother-in-law. I married his sister!”

“Well, I’ll be!” exclaimed Jack. “I had no idea!” Jack wiped sweat from his eyes and returned his bandanna to his pocket. Amos was still grinning.

A cloud passed in front of the sun and for a moment the light dimmed and the shadows thinned.

### **We’re about to Get into Trouble Again...Aren’t We?**

Sunrise seemed to come early to the tired men. They would roll out, have breakfast, and get immediately to work. Snaking the logs from the woods was hard work for them and for Molly. By noon they had about half the logs pulled to the cabin site. The two men had decided that one would work the mule and another would begin notching the logs to prepare them for stacking atop each other. Willie drew the short straw and wound up working with Molly to get the logs to Jack.

The work went on day after day. Around noon each day Ellie would ride up with their dinner. Willie swore he was gaining weight as a result of Momma Nan’s biscuits. Jack assured him the hard work would keep him trim.

Each day, before Ellie left to return to her place, she and Jack would walk a ways from the work site and have quiet conversations, which Willie could see but to which he was

not privy. Then Ellie would take the empty sack, scramble up onto Bess' back, and waving goodbye ride off up the wagon road toward home.

Two weeks passed: working sunup to sundown they built a cabin. The window had no glass, but it did have a hinged shutter, which would latch. The door was mounted on a couple of hinges Jack had found in the pile of burned timbers nearby. They used a string and a drop latch to keep the door secure. They chinked the logs with mud from the river. When it dried, it was nearly as permanent as cement. It would last for years.

The cabin had a wood floor. Jack had continued to insist that the house have a wood floor, so, indeed it did! They had dug a sawpit and took turns being down in it. They would drag the logs up parallel to the sawpit then roll them across it. Then one of the two men would jump down into the pit and handle that end of the saw while the other did the same from above. Needless to say, the man in the pit ate a lot of sawdust. It did produce enough boards to floor the little cabin, place a roof on it, and create a door and a shutter for the single window.

Their chimney was made of stones, twigs, and wet clay from the river's edge. It made a fine chimney. The hearth stone for the fireplace was made from a flat piece of granite Jack had found in the "new ground" his father had tilled a number of years ago. Molly had dragged the stone to the door of the cabin where Willie and Jack had wrestled it into the house and into the space reserved for the fireplace. The fireplace itself was made of stones picked up in the shallows of the river and along its edges. Their flat sides allowed the men to stack them almost as neatly as bricks. Willie made a mantle board from a five-foot piece of a log he squared and then laid on triangular braces he had pegged to the log wall above the fireplace.

Luke had ridden over with Ellie to see the cabin and he had been impressed. A few days later, Jack had gone to the Campbell place and asked Luke if he was up to making the bunk beds for them. He happily said yes and the next morning, bright and early, he rode up on Bess. He immediately set to work and by midday had a double bunk bed framed up and ready to use as soon as someone laced the ropes through it. Willie volunteered and Luke set about making the second pair of bunks right after dinner. By nightfall they had beds. Jack had located two cotton sacks, which had been used in the fields for cotton picking and then stuffed with pine needles and dry grass. It would do for temporary mattresses.

Luke and Jack had rummaged about in what had once been the kitchen of the burned house until they found a cast iron pot and a Dutch oven. These they took to the river to scrub up with sand and water. They were soon usable.

Willie had been busy making a table and two benches. Momma Nan had loaned the men one oil lamp and some coal oil. That plus the light from the fireplace was all the light they had. It would do until their next trip into town. They soon had pegs driven into the log walls on which to hang unused clothing, such as coats, hats, and rain slickers. Everything else, they wore.

Ellie had given the men an old wash basin she and Momma Nan had no further use for and Willie had pegged a couple of boards up to the left of the door on which to place it and a bucket of water. Jack's shaving mirror, the one he had carried throughout the war, was pegged to the logs; head high above the washbasin. Now, they could see to shave!

It was now September and fall was not far away. The days were noticeably shorter but it was still hot during the day, although cooler at night. So far, none of the storms from the Caribbean had hit and that was counted as a blessing.

On this particular evening dark had set in and Jack was sitting on the stump near the well. He had rolled a cigarette from the makings afforded by Willie and was looking at their little house. "Not bad!" he said aloud. Willie, coming out the door asked, "What?" Jack repeated himself and Willie agreed with him. Willie soon had a cigarette lit and was puffing away as he, too, looked at the cabin.

"You know Jack, that's durn near as good a house as I was raised in!"

Jack smiled in the darkness and said, "Better than some."

Willie took another draw from his smoke and said, "You know we have to go into town."

"Yeah, I know," replied Jack. "I'm not looking forward to it, but I know we have to get provisions."

"Think you'll be able to get back out without trouble?" asked Willie.

"I hope so," said Jack. "I'm not ready for it yet. It's coming, I can feel it. I just want a little time to prepare."

"Have any idea what it's likely to be, yet?" asked Willie.

"I don't know. Some how, I think Mr. Cole will be involved... and that troop of Yankees." I think we're gonna have to visit Mr. Cole again soon. First, we need to talk to Mr. Bowen and Farley and try to learn what they've been up to while we've been out here building the cabin."

"What about Miss Goldberg," asked Willie? He was looking directly at Jack in the dark.

"What about her," asked Jack?

"I mean... are we gonna talk to her, too?" The anxiety was evident in Willie's voice.

Willie could not see Jack's smile in the darkness as he replied, "I expect we may have to talk with her."

“GOOD!” said Willie. “I mean she’ll probably be a GOOD source for information!”

“Right!” said Jack. He stubbed out his cigarette on the sole of his boot and leaned back against the stump.

Neither man spoke for a time. There was a cool breeze coming off the river and it felt good. The stars were twinkling in the heavens and the moon was above the trees in the east. It was a beautiful evening.

Willie broke the silence. “We’re about to get into trouble again...aren’t we?”

“Yep, I reckon,” said Jack. He closed his eyes to shut out the world. Willie got up and walked through the open door into the cabin and crawled into one of the bunks. In a few moments he was asleep. Jack soon followed. Trouble could wait.

### **How is life with the Yankees?**

Mr. Bowen was straightening up a few shelves behind the counter as Deborah entered the store. He heard her and turned around, his feather duster still in his hand. She was beaming her usual smile as she approached the counter.

“Can I help you Miss Deborah,” Mr. Bowen asked?

“Yes, sir. Momma said I was to get her two large cans of peaches and I was to ask if you had received the flour she ordered last week,” Deborah replied.

”Yes’um. The peaches... I have, let’s see,” he said turning to do a visual search of the shelves, “are on... oh yes ...the second shelf down there,” he said pointing, “on the end.” He started toward the peaches talking over his shoulder as he went. “Your Momma’s flour came in yesterday... by boat, up river from Wilmington. It’s in the back.” He returned to the counter where Deborah was standing and deposited two large cans of peaches on it. “I’ll bring the flour over this afternoon when I close. There are two fifty pound sacks, so I’ll have to bring it over on the cart.”

“No sir, you do not have to do that. Daddy will be over with his pushcart this afternoon and he’ll take them to the bakery. No use in you going to all that trouble!”

“No trouble, Miss Deborah! I’m glad to help good customers like your folks!” Mr. Bowen said, enthusiastically.

Deborah had her shopping basket with her and she tucked the canned peaches into it. As she turned to go, she spied a new bolt of cotton cloth newly arrived and on display. She



walked over to get a closer look and to feel the texture of the fabric. "What a lovely piece of material." she said.

"Yes, it is," said Mr. Bowen. "Got it yesterday, too. I had several bolts of cloth to throw away after the scuffle we had in here." He dropped his head and his voice trailed off.

Deborah looked up. She saw the distressed look on Mr. Bowen's face. Walking over to him, she placed her palm against his cheek and said, "Mr. Bowen, don't trouble yourself with memories like that. It'll just ruin your day! Besides, it's in the past. Just forget it!"

"Wish I could, Miss Deborah. But, I can't! Every time I see that Cole fellow coming down the street, my heart freezes. I expect him to come in here again and finish the job! He nearly killed me the last time!" His voice trembled with anxiety. "I don't know what would have happened if that Knight boy hadn't come along when he did! I guess he WOULD have killed me! I'll be forever thankful to that young man. He has suffered so much for lending assistance to an old man. It just doesn't seem right! That was a brave thing he did!"

"Yes, it was, and he would do it again! That's the kind of person he is, Mr. Bowen. Luke is always looking to even the odds a bit. It's just like him!" She chuckled. "I have often thought his name fits!"

Mr. Bowen raised his eyebrows in question...?

"...Knight, I mean!" Deborah finished her thought and they both chuckled.

"Have you seen Mr. Cole in the past few days?" She asked.

"Only at a distance." He replied. "That's close enough! I've seen him across the street and down near the Mule Auction. He hasn't been back in the store, though. I figure it's just a matter of time."

"Maybe he's trading at one of the stores down on Water Street," Deborah said.

"That's fine with me," Mr. Bowen said. "As long as he stays away from this place!" The little bell above the door jangled and they both looked up to see Farley and Billy Carnes enter

"Hey Farley, how are you?" exclaimed Mr. Bowen, happy to change the subject. Deborah smiled at Farley and then at Billy.

"How are you, Billy?" Mr. Bowen took Billy's hand, as though he were a grownup, and shook it. Billy beamed with delight. Deborah strolled over to the counter that held the jars of stick candy. She chose two red-striped peppermint sticks. Taking them from the jar, she returned to the men. Billy's eyes followed the peppermint sticks all the way. She leaned down and handed the candy to Billy. "Here," she said. "Enjoy these!"

“Thank you, Ma’am!” Billy stammered.

“You’re welcome, young man.” Deborah replied as she straightened. “I expect you have to be a brave young man with all those Yankees staying at your place.”

“Yes’um!” said Billy. He already had one peppermint stick in his mouth and the other firmly clasped in his hand. His attention now was entirely on the task of devouring the candy!

“Well,” said Deborah. “I’d better be getting back home. Momma will be looking for these peaches. I’ll tell Daddy the flour is here, Mr. Bowen.” She started toward the door.

“Thank you. Miss Deborah!” Mr. Bowen called after her. She waved through the glass as she reached the sidewalk.

“You have any of my pipe tobacco,” Farley asked?

“Sure do!” said Mr. Bowen. “Let me get it for you.” He went to a table near the door to his quarters and picked up a paper pouch of Farley’s favorite pipe tobacco and returned. Handing the tobacco to Farley, he asked, “Anything else?”

“I guess not. I was going to get some candy for the boy, here, but Miss Deborah took care of that for me!” He smiled as he looked at Billy who was well on his way to making the second stick of candy disappear.

“How is life with the Yankees?”, Mr. Bowen asked Farley.

“Well, they’ve pretty much shut my business down! Nobody wants to come about the barn now. The soldiers, pretty much, lie about and get in the way. The officers aren’t much better. That colonel, Colonel Garrison, and the major...Major Benson, they stay gone a lot. I don’t know where they’re going, but they have their mounts saddled and brought to them in the morning and they ride out. Sometimes they’re back about dinnertime and sometimes its after dark before they get back. I wish I knew what they were up to.” Farley replied.

“How long, you reckon, they’ll be here?”, asked Mr. Bowen.

“I guess they’ll be here for as long as it takes.... however long that is!”, said Farley.

The bell over the door jangled again, Farley stood to the side to allow Mr. Bowen an unobstructed view of the door and Mr. Bowen said, “Can I hel...”

Standing just inside the store was James Cole. He had stopped as he closed the door. He stared at Mr. Bowen with hate in his eyes and said, “Where’s your cartridges?” Mr.

Bowen pointed in the general direction of the ammunition and Cole started that way. The fear Mr. Bowen felt was obvious. Farley looked at Mr. Bowen to signal that he would not leave until Cole was gone. That made Mr. Bowen breath a bit easier. Billy had looked up, but did not recognize Cole. He again turned his full attention to the candy.

Cole rummaged through the ammo 'til he found the caliber cartridges he was looking for. "How much are these?" he asked holding up the box of fifty rounds.

"Fifty cents," stammered Mr. Bowen.

"Ain't that a bit high?" asked Cole who seemed to be enjoying Mr. Bowen's unease.

"I don't think so," answered Mr. Bowen. "I have to make a profit."

"You know, this could be considered gouging!" smiled Cole.

"Look, Mr. Cole. I don't want any trouble! Just pay me what you think the cartridges are worth and let it go at that," Mr. Bowen pleaded.

Cole flipped a quarter in the direction of Mr. Bowen. The coin turned lazily in the air and landed in the oily sawdust at the feet of the merchant. Mr. Bowen looked at the coin, but did not pick it up. Cole hooked his thumb in his vest pocket, rocked on his heels, and grinned broadly. "Pick it up!" he said. "That's a good Union coin!" Mr. Bowen still did not pick it up. Cole laughed loudly and turned to the door. He was laughing as he strode through the door onto the sidewalk. Suddenly the grin froze on his face and the laughter choked in his throat. Blocking his way to the boarding house were Jack Knight and Willie Jordan!

"Why, hello, Mr. Cole!" Jack said, smiling.

"We were just talking about you!" said Willie, his voice cold as death itself.

The bell over the door Cole had just exited still jangled its merry melody.

### **That Man's Evil!**

Cole couldn't move! His brain was screaming in his mental ear: "Get outta here!" But his legs refused to accept the message or act upon it. He was frozen to the spot!

"What's the matter, Cole, cat got your tongue?" asked Willie.

"Mr. Cole, you all right? asked Jack.

“I’m...I was...uh...I ... I’m leaving,” Cole managed to stutter and stammer out.

“We can see that,” said Jack. “You feel all right? You’re a little green around the gills. Wouldn’t you say he was a little green, Willie?”

“Yes sir, Capn. Sure looks green to me!” Willie was openly chuckling now.

Cole stepped down from the sidewalk onto the dirt surface of the street. Half turning to keep his eyes on the two men he walked sideways until he was across the street. When he gained the opposite sidewalk, he focused his entire attention on the door to the boarding house and in his haste, failed to turn the knob far enough to open the door. As a result he slammed into the door face first! He could see little stars flashing before his eyes for a few seconds. When he regained his senses, he again turned the knob. This time he was successful and entered Bea’s and closed the door behind him.

“Did you ever see a man move that fast...without a horse?” Willie asked Jack.

“Not since First Bull Run!” said Jack.

Both men laughed and continued on into the mercantile store.

Farley was standing just inside the door and he, too, was laughing. “You boys sure scared the living daylights outta that fella!” he said.

Mr. Bowen said, “I just wish you had been here a minute or two earlier!”

“Was he up to something?” asked Jack.

“Well...yes and no! He was being the lowdown rascal he is...I guess.” Mr. Bowen lowered his head and looked for the quarter Cole had flipped his way. He saw it flicker a reflection of sunlight and he stooped to pick it up. He brushed it off on his trousers and took it to the cash drawer and dropped it in. “That man’s evil!” he said.

“You won’t get an argument from me,” said Jack.

“Nor me!” said Willie.

“What’d he want?” Jack asked.

“Mr. Bowen turned toward the ammunition shelf and said, “He said he wanted some ammunition. I think he really wanted to see if I was alone. If Farley hadn’t been here, I expect he would have beat on me again!” He reached up to remove his reading glasses; his hand trembled as he did so.

“Well,” said Willie, “I don’t think he’ll be back for a while.”

“Not likely,” said Jack.

Farley, turning to Willie said, “I’m Farley Canes; you must be that Jordan fellow Jack told me about. I’m happy to meet you face to face. I saw you several times before you left town.” He laughed. “You drove those Yanks crazy every time you escorted Miss Deborah across the street!” Farley put out his hand. Willie took it in his and they shook.

“Them Yanks still with you?” asked Willie.

“Fraid so,” answered Farley. “They’ve pretty much taken over my place! Nobody comes in unless it’s absolutely necessary. If they don’t soon move on, I’ll be broke!”

“This town’s not gonna let that happen, Farley,” Jack said. “These people love you and Billy. Don’t worry about it.”

“How’s the cabin coming?” Farley asked.

It’s finished, more or less... I guess,” said Jack. “We have to get a few things to spruce the place up a bit, and it’ll be home. Mr. Bowen, I have a list of things we need here.” Jack produced a piece of paper upon which was written a list of their needs and wants. Mr. Bowen reached for the list and replaced his glasses on his nose and began to peruse the note. He mumbled to himself as he began searching up and down the shelves for items on the list.

Willie said, “Mr. Carnes, you mentioned Miss Deborah a while ago. Have you seen her? Is she all right? Are them Yankees leavin’ her alone? Does she need anything...?”

Jack stared at Willie. Farley looked at Jack dumbfounded! For a moment Farley didn’t answer.

Willie, now embarrassed with himself said, “Aw, shoot, Mr. Carnes, I just wanna know if she’s all right!”

“First of all, it’s Farley, not Mr. Carnes! And, yes, she’s all right! Son, I swear, it’s been a long time since I’ve seen anyone that taken with Miss Deborah! Does she know how you feel?”

“No!” Willie shot back. “And don’t you tell her, neither!”

“Whoa, there, my boy!” Farley responded. “I gotta tell you, I expect she’d have to be blind not to see how you feel about her! I won’t have to say a thing!” He slapped Willie on the back and pulled him close in a friendly one-armed bear hug. He laughed until Willie broke into a grin and the tension disappeared.

Jack watched all this without a word. Mr. Bowen was still going up and down the shelves with a side trip or two into the storeroom at the back.

Jack said, "Mr. Bowen, we're gonna walk on down to Doctor Brown's office for a few minutes. We'll be back shortly."

"That's fine, son. I'll be working on your order while you're gone. Everything should be ready when you get back." Mr. Bowen stopped long enough to assure Jack he had heard him. Then he continued on his quest.

"Come on Billy. We gotta get home now." Farley called to Billy who was staring at the peppermint candy jar again. "No more candy today, son." Billy looked wistfully at the candy, then turned and joined his father. The four of them walked out into the sunlight onto the sidewalk, closing the door and jangling the little bell above it as they did so.

They all paused for a moment and Jack asked Farley, "You think he's going to be all right?" He nodded his head toward the store to indicate he was inquiring about Mr. Bowen. Farley looked back at the store and said, "I think so, Jack. He took a hell of a beating and he's scared half to death, but I think he'll be all right. He'd feel a lot better, and frankly, so would I, if that Cole fellow would just disappear."

Jack and Willie glanced at each other, and then hastily found something else to look at.

A one-horse wagon rumbled down the street past them. The horse's hooves kicked up little puffs of dust as it went. The driver was vibrating and shaking with every stone and rut the wagon wheels struck as he sat upon his seat made of a single board laid across the width of the wagon and nailed to each of its high sides. In a moment it was past.

The three men and little boy shook hands all around and then parted.

### **I'm Following You, Capn.**

"Sure is good to see you boys," Doc said, as Jack and Willie entered his office. "I've been wondering about you. How's Luke? How's the cabin coming?"

The three men shook hands and Jack said, "Luke's fine, Doc. He's getting fat and sassy at Momma Nan's house. She's taking care of him as if he were her own. The cabin's done, more or less. Luke came over to the cabin a few days ago to make some bunk beds for us. Did a fine job on 'em, too. Then, the rascal went right on back to Momma Nan's place, laughed Jack.

"I don't blame him!" said Willie. "Those biscuits of her'n will melt in your mouth."

“I expect he’ll be putting on a few pounds then.” Doc smiled. “That’s all right. He could stand to gain some weight after what he’s been through. You need some more medicine for him?” Doc started toward the locked cabinet where he stored his medications.

“No, Doc.” Jack said, “That’s not it. If you don’t mind, I’d like a little information.”

“Sure”, said Doc. “What do you want to know?”

“What can you tell us about what’s been going on. I mean with the Yankees. Have they been up to anything unusual?”

“Well, everything they do is unusual here in River Bluff!” Doc said. They’ve pretty much kept to themselves, though.” Doc thought a moment, and then said, “They did take Everett Jenkins’ place last week.”

“What do you mean took his place?” asked Jack, taking a step closer to Doc.

Turning from the medicine cabinet, Doc said, raising his voice, “They TOOK it. That’s what I’m saying! They just went out to his place and told him and his wife and kids to pack up and leave! Told them they owed back taxes on the place and since they couldn’t pay, they threw them off the land. Ev took his family to his Ma’s place over at Twin Pines. Haven’t seen hide nor hair of him since. The damndest thing I ever saw. They just ran him and his family off!” Doc was clearly agitated as he spoke. He had begun to pace and was rubbing his chin whiskers. It made an audible, rasping sound as he paced back and forth.

Jack looked at Willie sitting on the edge of the one bed in Doc Brown’s office. It was the same bed Luke had so recently vacated. Jack sat down in the rocker. Doc continued to pace.

“You know, that ain’t right! ... To take a man’s place after he worked durn near all his life to build!” Doc stopped directly in front of Jack’s chair. “I heard from Minnie Peters the other day that they were out visiting Carl Summers’ place, too. I wonder what they told Carl! I bet they’ll be after his place next!”

“Simmer down, Doc. Anything else you’ve seen that might be important?”

“Yeah... well, I did see that Cole fellow and the Colonel talking, in front of Bea’s, a couple of days ago. I couldn’t tell what they were saying but Garrison was chewing on Cole’s butt about something. Cole was fairly squirming. It was almost funny!” Doc laughed in spite of himself. “I don’t know what business that Cole has in River Bluff but, I swanee, they’re in cahoots! Garrison and Cole, I mean.”

“I think you’re right, Doc.” Jack stopped rocking for a moment. “Doc, did you ever hear tell of a Daniel L. McGinnis?”

“No. Can’t say as I have,” replied Doc. “ Why?”

“Don’t know, yet.” Jack answered. “Whatever those two are up to, Mr. McGinnis is right in the middle of it.”

Willie had been sitting quietly listening to everything the men had said. He was peering out the window as he sat. “I think we’re about to get some inside information,” he said.

“What do you mean?” Jack asked, rising from the rocker.

“Looks like that Sergeant is coming to pay Doc a visit,” replied Willie.

The office door opened and Sergeant Jennings came through it. He gazed around the office as his eyes adjusted to the change in light, then they settled on Jack, “You Capn Knight?”

“Who wants to know?” asked Jack.

Sergeant Jennings ignored the slight and said, “Colonel Garrison wants to see you, Capn.” He paused for a moment when he saw no obvious movement on Jack’s part and added, “Right NOW!”

Jack still did not move. Sergeant Jennings drew his pistol and stepped forward. “I said... right now!”

It was precisely at this moment Sergeant Jennings felt the cold steel of Willie’s Colt against his flesh, directly behind his right ear. It disturbed him. Adding to his discomfort was the distinctive double click of the hammer being thumbed to full cock on the single action weapon.

“Whoa, Sarge! Take it easy. Just put that gun away and settle down. The Capn, here, is kinda busy. You can see for yourself he’s consulting his physician.” The sergeant was a little slow in complying with Willie’s instructions. Willie nudged him slightly with the revolver. This time Sergeant Jennings put his pistol in the holster and buttoned the flap. He let his arms hang limply at his sides. “What now?” he asked.

“Why don’t you go on back to Garrison and tell him I’ll be along shortly. I’m just finishing up with the doctor here.” Jack stepped to the door and opened it for the Sergeant. He held the door as Sergeant Jennings slowly turned and looked, for a long moment, into Willie’s unflinching eyes. He let his gaze slowly travel to Jack and the open door. Without a word he went through the door, across the sidewalk, and across the street, heading for the Mule Auction.

“You know you just made an enemy, don’t you?” Jack asked Willie.



“Seems like that’s about all I been doing since I met up with you on River Road a while ago,” Willie chuckled.

“That ole boy looks like he could be real trouble, though, Willie.” Jack said thumbing his hat to the back of his head.

“Yeah, he’s a tough ole bird, Willie. I saw him whup one of those young Privates about a week ago. Big man, the Private was. That Sergeant just took him apart!” Doc observed.

“Well, right now, he’ll have to wait his turn!” Willie replied with another chuckle.

“I guess I’d better get on over to the barn and see what Garrison wants,” said Jack. As he started for the door, Willie fell in behind him.

“Where you going?” asked Jack. “With you,” answered Willie.

Jack looked at Willie for a moment. “Do you know what you’re getting into, Willie?”

“I’m following you, Capn.”

“Willie, the war’s over! You don’t have to go anywhere with me. You don’t take orders from me, or anyone else, for that matter.”

“Capn, there’s something bad wrong going on here! The war may be over, but people are still trying to take what we have. I kinda feel like that’s worth fighting for. That little ole piece of ground I got, on the other side of the county, is full of stumps and rocks and weeds and a piece of a house that’s all but fallen down but, Capn, it’s mine! I don’t want some scalawag or carpetbagger stealing it! Yes sir, Capn, I’m following you ‘cause you seem to me to be planning someway to fight the rascals! You bet I’m with you! ...And Capn, I ain’t so sure the war is over!”

Jack was dumbfounded. This was the longest speech he had ever heard Willie make! A grin started and soon spread across his entire face. He slapped Willie on the shoulder and said, “Come on, Sarge. Let’s go see what that Yankee Colonel wants with a couple of ole Rebs like us!” The two men started across the street, side by side, toward the Mule Auction and a very angry Yankee Colonel!

**I’ll Bet My Taxes Aren’t Paid, Neither.**

“You constantly amaze me Mr. Knight! You continue to insist upon trying my patience! Why, Mr. Knight, why, can’t you just comply with my orders and save us this constant wrangling. You know I’m going to win the argument sooner or later!” Colonel Garrison was standing behind the same makeshift table where Jack had last seen him. They were in the big barn of the Mule Auction. The Colonel had removed his uniform coat and had his sleeves rolled up and his collar opened. It was hot in the barn even with the doors on each end standing open. Farley was making some building spikes at the forge farther on into the barn. Sparks would fly in all directions with every impact of the big hammer. The ringing of steel on steel filled the barn and could be heard a good distance down Main Street. Jack wondered if the building spikes were necessary or if this was just a way for Farley to overhear the conversation between him and Garrison. Farley gave no indication he was listening. He continued to concentrate on his work as Garrison came from around the little table and planted himself squarely in front of Jack.

“Mr. Knight, it has come to my attention back taxes are owed on your property. Were you aware of that fact?” Colonel Garrison raised his eyebrows as he asked the question of Jack.

“No, Colonel, I was not. Then, I’ve been busy the past four years or so, trying to keep certain rascals in blue coats, very similar to yours, I might add, from grabbing it up along with the rest of my country,” Jack answered coolly. He was standing at “parade rest” with his legs spread and his feet planted firmly on the floor of the barn. His eyes never left those of Colonel Garrison. He gave no hint of any anxiety.

“Now, see! That’s what I was talking about, right there!” Colonel Garrison shouted, wagging his finger in Jack’s direction. “All you had to say was no! Instead you just had to say something to get under my skin! Is there no civility in you, man?”

Jack said nothing. Garrison edged forward a step. “Let me make myself perfectly clear, Mr. Knight. I want those taxes paid and I want it right away. If you don’t pay what’s owed, the U.S. government I’ll…”

“...Take my land like you did Ev Jenkins’ AND like you’re planning to do with the Summers’ place?” Jack finished Garrison’s sentence. Garrison’s face went white. He took another step toward Jack.

Willie had been standing in shadow just inside the door. He stepped out into the light and said, “Whoa, now, Colonel. You might want to think again about what you were thinking about just now. It could be very dangerous. Why, that Mr. Knight, standing there,” Willie said pointing at Jack, “is a hell of a man. Why, once I, personally, saw him wrestle a mamma bear to the ground over some honey we found in a hollow tree. He whupped that she-bear and took the honey. Hell, Colonel, he was wounded at the time, too! It’s a good thing for the bear. In another minute, or two, Mr. Knight there, would’ve got mad! Then it’d ‘ah’ been too wet to plow for the bear! Yes sir, he can get down right MEAN! The corners of Jack’s mouth turned up, involuntarily, at Willie’s exaggeration.

Colonel Garrison didn't find it at all funny. "Who are YOU?" he demanded of Willie.

"Well, I'm sorta the Capn's bodyguard, you might say. Not that he needs one, you understand; it's just that, well, it's safer to be with him than against him! I like being safe, don't you, Colonel?" As he talked, Willie was closing the distance between himself and the Colonel. As he finished his answer he came to rest at Jack's left. Jack was now smiling openly. Colonel Garrison was furious. "I asked your name, mister," he barked at Willie.

"Oh, my name? Well, sir, that would be Willie Jordan, from over toward Laurel. And, Colonel, I'll bet my taxes ain't paid, neither!" Willie said with mock apology.

Colonel Garrison was beside himself with fury. He stamped back across the floor and flopped down in the chair behind the little table. He sat for a moment that way. Then rousing himself he leaned forward and placed both elbows on the tabletop and asked Jack, "What do you know about a farm, east of your place, called the Robert's farm?"

Jack recognized it instantly as Amos Keifer's farm. "Nothing, other than it's there...like you said, east of my place." Jack glanced toward Farley who had stopped hammering the hot steel, and instead had turned and was looking at the back of Garrison's head. "What about it?" Jack asked.

"It's just that it has taxes overdue, too. I'll be riding out in a few days to take a look at it. I understand it's abandoned. That right?" Garrison asked.

"Could be," Jack answered. It's been a number of years since I've looked over the farms in this area." Jack hedged. He saw Farley's eyes travel from the Colonel to him. He allowed himself to show no concern. After a moment, Farley's attention returned to the Colonel then back to the anvil. He struck the building spike twice more and then plunged it into the water barrel at the side of the anvil. The water sizzled and bubbled, and a wisp of smoke traveled upwards from it before Farley withdrew the now cool spike.

"Tell me, Mr. Knight, does the river lie north of the Robert's place, too, with the road running parallel to the river?"

"Yes, it does. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, no reason, just wondering, that's all." Garrison bent to pick up a stray piece of hay from the floor and began to pick at it with his index finger.

Jack said, "Willie, would you mind going over to the mercantile and telling Mr. Bowen I'll be along shortly. Just put everything in the sacks and load the horses. I'd appreciate it."

"Sure, Capn. You sure you'll be O.K.?"

“Oh, yes. Besides, the Colonel and I need to speak privately for a moment. Thank you, Willie.”

Without another word Willie turned on his heel and left the barn.

“My. My. That’s a man who knows how to take an order!” said Colonel Garrison.

“It wasn’t an order; it was a request,” said Jack, “Willie doesn’t take orders from any man. Never did.”

Garrison shook his head from side to side and said, “You people…”

“That’s right, Colonel, we people,” Jack hissed at the Colonel. Garrison looked up in astonishment. “Colonel, if you don’t begin treating these folks like people, you’re gonna have more trouble on your hands than you’ll know what to do with”, Jack continued. “You’ve managed to get these PEOPLE,” Jack spat out the words, “mad enough at you to start a small war all on their own, WITH YOU! I warned you about this the last time we had a chat, but you, apparently, paid no mind to what I said. Colonel, you’d better start paying attention!”

Garrison snarled, “You start something and you’ll have the entire United States Army down on you!”

“I wonder,” said Jack, “Indeed I do!”

Farley, having heard everything, found another spike to pound on the anvil. The ringing of steel on steel nearly drowned out the Colonel’s profane cursing as Jack spun on his heel and marched out of the barn.

Willie, astride Blackie and leading the Bay, met Jack in mid-street. Both horses were loaded to the withers with provisions for the cabin. Jack glanced back, once, at the barn to see Colonel Garrison dressing down one of the Privates standing guard at the door. Then the two men turned their mounts toward home and began an easy walk out of River Bluff.

There was a breeze from the east. It carried the hint of salt air from the ocean. There was a storm coming.

### **...You Have Trouble Headed Your Way.**

The storm began just as the two men rode into the cabin's yard. Both men quickly dismounted and took the sacks containing their provisions inside and then raced back outside to get their animals under the lean-to shelter with Molly. She was already jittery from the thunder and lightening. By the time they returned to the cabin they were soaked, their clothes sticking to them and their boots squishing from the water in them. They stripped down to their long johns and Willie got a fire started in their new fireplace and soon they had their wet clothes drying in front of the blazing fire. Willie had whipped together some hoecake cornbread and fried some bacon in a cast iron skillet. That was their supper. The rain continued for most of the night.

As the sun rose, so did Jack and Willie. Willie, having somehow become the designated cook, pieced together a breakfast of flapjacks and bacon. Then he got busy finding space for all the provisions they had brought from town the day before. Jack saddled up the Bay and announced he was going to pay Amos Keifer a visit and hoped to be back by midday. He rode off up the wagon road and turned the Bay right at River Road. As he passed the Campbell farm, he wondered when Luke would be ready to move back to their farm.

As Jack approached the Keifer farm, he could see the big man swinging an axe clearing away some saplings that had sprung up in the abandoned yard over the past few years. As he rode up Amos saw him, shouldered the axe and walked to meet him. Jack dropped from the saddle to the ground and took the offered hand in greeting. There was a watering trough by the well, so Jack tied the Bay up there and the two men walked to the porch of the old Robert's house and settled in a couple of weather beaten rockers.

"What brings you all the way out here, Capn?" asked Amos.

"Amos, it looks like you have trouble headed your way and I wanted to warn you about it."

"What kind of trouble?" Amos asked as he stopped rocking and leaned over the chair's arm toward Jack.

"The worst kind, I think. Colonel Garrison told me yesterday there were back taxes owed on this farm and he would be out in a couple of days to collect. Now, Amos, it's none of my business whether you have the money or not, but, if you don't, they're gonna take your land and force you off of it! They've already done it to Everett Jenkins and, I understand, Carl Summers' place is next...then yours and mine. We've got a real mess on our hands, Amos!" Jack leaned back in the chair and resumed his rocking as Amos sat still mulling over everything Jack had just told him.

Finally, Amos sat back. "I've already paid the taxes on this land," he said.

“What do you mean?” asked Jack.

“I mean... I paid the taxes before I came up here. The money was wired to Annie Belle’s attorney in Wilmington, two, maybe three, months ago.” A note of worry crept into Amos’ voice as he spoke.

“What’s the matter?” asked Jack.

“I don’t know. Maybe nothing. Then on the other hand, ...Jack I don’t have the receipt with me. The lawyer in Wilmington wired us a receipt for the money to Alabama. We put it in the family bible and it’s somewhere between Alabama and here with my folks!” Amos stood up and paced toward the doorsteps and leaned against a post. He put both hands behind the bib of his overalls. “You know, Jack, Garrison will say I never paid those taxes and he’ll try to take this farm! I knew, the minute you told me he was in charge of those Yankee troops here that we were in big trouble. He’s a rogue, Jack. The worst kind.”

“When do you think your family will arrive, Amos?” Jack asked.

“Any day now. Of course, it could well be after Garrison tries to take the farm, though.” Amos replied.

“Well, he’ll be after mine, too,” Jack said, rising from his chair. “The taxes aren’t paid on mine, for sure, and,” he chuckled, “I don’t have the money to pay ‘em, either.”

“Jack, we’ve got to stop Garrison from taking our land! Not just ours but all the farms around here. It’ll ruin the county if we don’t! I’m not going to stand by and lose mine to that sorry son of a bitch!” Amos was angry now. “Jack, I’ll shoot him out of the saddle before I’ll let that happen!” Amos was red-faced angry by now. He pushed his old black floppy hat back from his forehead and mopped his brow with a large blue bandanna from his hip pocket. “You have any suggestions to offer on how to solve this problem?”

“Not yet,” replied Jack. “I think we landowners in the county should have a meeting out of earshot of Garrison and decide on a course of action. Jack pushed his hat back too. “I’ve warned him this might happen if he didn’t back off. By God, he’s in it now! I’m gonna stop by the Campbell place on my way home and see if my brother, Luke, is up to riding a while. If he is, I’ll let you know...then, I’d like you, Willie, Luke, Ellie Grace, and myself to have our own little meeting to decide how to get the word out to all the others. I’ll get word back to you today, somehow. That all right with you?”

“Yep, sure is. The sooner we get started, the sooner we can get rid of that scum!” replied Amos.

Jack stepped down the three steps to the ground, walked over to the well and mounted the Bay. Amos followed him.

“You’ll hear from me, hopefully before sundown today,” he said to Amos.

“I’ll be waiting,” Amos replied.

Jack pulled his hat back down low on his forehead and touched the brim in a salute of farewell and nudged the Bay in the ribs and began his ride to the Campbell Farm.

Amos stood by the well for a long time thinking. There was no way he was going to give up this farm without a fight. “I’ll kill that bastard first!” he muttered to himself through clenched teeth, as he wheeled and strode back to the house.

The high humidity from the rains of the last evening had made for a hot, sticky day. As the sun reached its zenith, Jack was well on his way to Ellie and Luke. It was about to get even hotter!

### **You Have a Plan?**

Jack rode the Bay right up to the front of the Campbell house, stepped lightly from the stirrup onto the porch. Just as he tied the Bay to a corner post, the door flew open and Ellie came racing down the porch and into his arms. Their embrace was long and warm. Her lips reached hungrily for his and found them. They kissed for a long while. Finally, ending the kiss and pulling back, Jack held Ellie at arms length and asked, “You all right? I mean, I don’t remember ever being greeted like that before! I’m not complaining; understand, but Miss Ellie, you surprise me! Truly, you do!”

Ellie was red-faced. She dropped her eyes demurely and wrung her hands gently at her waist and said, “I don’t know, Jack. I think it was seeing you come down that road the way you did. I have stood there day after day and watched that road for your return from the war and didn’t see it...until today. I guess I just reacted to a dream.” She brushed an unruly strand of hair back from her forehead and continued, “Have you had dinner? Momma Nan and I were just cleaning up the dishes. Come on in and have something to eat!”

“I’d love to,” Jack said. He plucked his hat from his head and slapped it against his thighs to knock the road dust off his trousers. There wasn’t much. The drenching storm of the past evening had settled the dust, temporarily.

Momma Nan had a plate heaped high with home cooking ready and placed it in front of him as he seated himself at the table.

Ellie, pouring a cup of hot coffee, said, "Sorry about the coffee. We haven't been able to get any good coffee for a while now. Mr. Bowen said he felt sure some would be coming up-river before long... now that the war is over."

Jack was consuming his meal when Luke entered from the back door. "Hey, brother! When did you get here?" He pulled a chair from its place under the table and seated himself across from Jack. Jack took a long swallow from his coffee and wiped his mouth with the cotton napkin Ellie had produced from somewhere when he first sat down.

"I need to talk to you...to both of you," Jack said. "I'll talk with Willie when I get home." He took a sip of the strong, black coffee and continued, "We've got trouble coming and we're gonna get ready for it."

Jack took his time and filled them in on everything he'd learned in town the previous day. He told them he had been to see Amos Keifer and that he had ridden directly to the Campbell place to recruit them.

"What are you proposing, Jack?" asked Luke. "You have a plan?"

"Nothing so well constructed as to be called a plan...yet."

Turning to Ellie, who was now seated at the table, he said, "Ellie, I need the use of your barn."

"You're welcome to it, Jack." Ellie replied. "What are we gonna do?"

"We're going to have a meeting," Jack said. "Ellie, I want you and Luke to ride to every farm you can this afternoon... and tonight ...if you have to. Tell them what's happening and tell them we are having a meeting, here, at your place, tomorrow night an hour after sundown. Tell them I'm sorry for having the meeting at night and on such short notice, but I believe we have to work fast and as unseen as is possible for us. Tomorrow night, here. Got it?" They nodded and got up from the table.

"Luke, would you mind riding double with Ellie over to the Keifer farm... well, it used to be the Roberts' place," he paused, ..."Ellie will fill you in. Tell Amos about the meeting and ask to borrow his horse for the rest of the day. I've talked to him. I'm sure he'll let you have the horse." Jack stopped and rubbed his chin, then looked up at Luke and said, "Luke, I'm sorry! Do you feel well enough to do this?"

"Actually, I feel pretty good! Besides, I need to get back in the saddle."

"All right then lets be about it." Jack pushed back his chair, laid his napkin down on the table beside the plate he had cleaned, and looking to Momma Nan with a twinkle in his eye said, "That sure was good, Momma Nan! I didn't know I was that hungry! I swear, you cook just like my Momma!"



Momma Nan, protested, “Aw, shaw, Jack Knight, nobody cooks as good as a boy’s Momma! Everybody knows that! But, I thank you anyway.” She hastily picked up his plate, walked to the back door and scraped the tidbits of food left on it onto the ground for the chickens. They came running in search of the feast!

By the time Jack reached the front porch, Ellie and Luke were on their way past the house toward the River Road. He waved to them and called after them, “Ya’ll be careful now, you hear?” He untied the reins from the post, mounted the Bay and set out for home. The Bay fell into an easy gallop. As he turned off the River Road onto the wagon cut that led to their cabin, he could see Willie at the corncrib. He was dressing a deer, which was hanging by its rear legs from a horizontal support beam of the corncrib.

Willie looked over his shoulder at the sound of the Bay’s hooves and saw that it was Jack. He continued to work on the deer carcass.

Jack dismounted and led the Bay into the stable. He went around to the crib and gathered an armload of fodder and returning to the stable, he placed it in the feed trough in front of the Bay. The big horse began immediately to munch and grind the fodder with his teeth. He went to the well and drew a bucket of cold water and carried it to the water trough in the stable. Now that his animal was cared for he could talk with Willie who was still gutting the deer.

“Need any help?” Jack asked.

“Naw. I got it,” Willie replied.

Jack filled Willie in on the plans for the meeting the next night. Willie continued to work as Jack talked. When Jack finished, Willie looked up from his squatting position at the carcass and said, “Well, it’s started.”

“What do you mean?” Jack asked.

“Well, Capn, I knew from the first moment I saw you and that Yankee colonel butt heads a fight was coming! It was as plain as the nose on your face. That’s the reason I stuck around.”

“What about Miss Deborah?” Jack asked, grinning.

“That, too!” said Willie, reflecting Jack’s grin.

“What do you aim to do, Capn?”

“I need to find out what kind of support we have among the other farmers in the county. Then we need to see what we have in the way of arms and supplies, and so forth, in the event things get ugly. I hope it doesn’t come to it, but we have to be prepared for a fight. There are a number of veterans in the county. There is a question as to whether or not

they are prepared to go fighting again! The truth is, I won't blame them if they ain't. I thought I was done with this!" Jack kicked the corner post of the corncrib out of pure frustration. "Willie, I just want to be left alone."

"I know, Capn, I know," said Willie.

Jack turned and walked to the stump by the well and sat down. A moment later Willie glanced over his shoulder and saw him sitting there staring off into the far distance as though peering into a dark and dangerous future.

The sun was starting its slow settling in the west as the shadows began to lengthen. Willie began to smile as he thought of the possibility of seeing Miss Deborah. "Tomorrow", he thought. "Tomorrow, I'll likely see her". His smile broke into a full-fledged grin. His eyes fairly sparkled in the fresh twilight.

### **...There's Going to be a Fire...**

The morning had begun, as usual, with Deborah running the errands necessary for a family business to remain viable. Her visits to the mercantile were, for the most part, enjoyable. Today was different. She had other things on her mind.

Deborah's concern showed as she left the mercantile on her way home. It had been some time since she'd seen Luke and come to think of it, Jack and Willie, too. She shifted the parcel she was carrying from her left to her right arm and continued on down the sidewalk. She was on her way to Doctor Brown's office to enquire as to whether he had heard from Luke in the past few days. She was preoccupied with her thoughts and didn't see the soldier in blue approach her until he was right beside her. She gave an audible gasp when she realized she was no longer alone.

"A pretty little thing like you ought not be carrying such a heavy burden as that," he said. He reached for the parcel. Deborah snatched the parcel from his hand and said, "Leave me alone!" "But Ma'am, I was only trying to...". "I know what you were trying to do!" she spat back. She grasped the parcel again on her right side and sped up. The soldier sped up, too. As she opened the door and turned into the doctor's office, he turned to his left, dropped off the sidewalk and continued on to the Mule auction. As she stood in the doorway looking after him, he looked over his shoulder, puckered his lips, and mimed a kiss in her direction. She slammed the door!

Doc Brown was in the storeroom when he heard the door slam shut. He heard the crash and he could hear the little thread-wrapped loop at the end of the shade's pull string slapping against the glass pane in the door.

Deborah went to the single rocking chair in the office and flounced down into it. She carelessly dropped her parcel on the floor beside the chair.

Doc came out of the storeroom, stopped for a moment and looked about the office. The little shade pull was still dancing at the end of its string and Deborah was sitting with her head in her hands in his rocker.

“What’s the matter?” Doc asked.

It’s those soldiers!” she said. One just tried to... well, he tried...”

“I can imagine,” said Doc. “I swear, I wish those people would just pack up and leave! If they keep on causing sparks, sooner or later there’s going to be a fire and they will have started it!”

“Doc, it’s so bad, I’m afraid to leave the house unless Daddy is with me!” exclaimed Deborah. I don’t know where they come from. It’s like they’re waiting for me!” She began to weep. Doc retrieved his handkerchief from a pocket, held it out to her, and then changed his mind. He went to a chest of drawers against the wall of his office and got a fresh, clean one. He handed it to her. She daubed her eyes with a corner of the handkerchief and took a deep breath.

“Doc, have you heard from Luke lately?”

“Not directly, no.” he said. “Jack and Willie said he was much better when they were here a couple of days ago. I know Jack wouldn’t have said that if Luke wasn’t doing just fine.”

“I ... I...don’t know...” Deborah mumbled through the handkerchief. “I haven’t seen him or heard from him, directly, since he went home... I mean... to the Campbell place. She stood up and straightened her dress. “If it weren’t for those Yankees, I’d go rent a buggy from Mr. Carnes and go out there and see for myself!”

“I don’t think that’ll be necessary,” Doc said, nodding toward the door.

Framed in the glass of the door was Willie Jordan. He had stopped long enough to look at the Mule Auction and the soldiers milling about outside. He had seen the Colonel and Major Benson ride out toward the west as he came into town from the opposite end of the street. He wondered if they were taking the long way ’round to visit their friend down on Water Street. He hefted the package he was carrying to ease the strain on his arm and then opened the door.

“Hello, Doc...and ...Miss Deborah!” All of a sudden his tongue was like lead! His throat was dry and he couldn’t speak a word. He reached up with his free hand and snatched his hat off and held it by the crown across his chest. Doc looked at him and

then glanced at Deborah who was staring at Willie with a strange sort of gleam in her eye. "Here, let me take that" he said to Willie.

"Y...Yes, sir." Willie stammered. He handed the package to Doc. Doc felt the soft moistness of the package and asked, "What's this?"

"Venison," Willie managed to say without taking his eyes off Deborah for a single second. "I killed a deer this morning and I thought I'd bring you a shoulder." He was surprised that he had managed to put an entire sentence together! "Miss Deborah, how have you been?" He bowed slightly as he spoke directly to her. She smiled brightly. Her dismay at the behavior of the Yankee soldier a few moments ago was completely gone. She said, "Why, just fine. Thank you for asking, Mr. Jordan! You're looking well."

"I am...I mean... I am well!" Willie replied. He was embarrassed by his mental failure and the color of his face turned to crimson.

"Mr. Jordan, may I call you Willie? Mr. Jordan sounds so...so... formal. I don't think friends should be so formal, do you?"

"No. No, I don't think...I mean, yes, call me Willie, please!" He was really embarrassed now. Doc was thinking somebody ought to just shoot him to put him out of his misery.

"Willie, how's Luke? We're both wondering." Doc said. Willie strained to take his attention away from Deborah and fix it on Doc. "He's well," he said. "As a matter of fact, I came to bring you a message." We're having a meeting tomorrow night."

"A meeting?" asked Doc, his eyebrows rose. "What kind of meeting?"

Willie explained to Doc what the meeting was about and where it would be and at what time. Doc rubbed his chin and said, "I might be able to make it, if that Simmons woman doesn't decide to deliver, that is!"

"If you mean Nancy Simmons, Doc, she won't be ready to deliver for another week, at least," assured Deborah.

"That's what they all say!" said Doc. "Willie, would you mind seeing Miss Deborah back to her place. It's not like you don't know the way!" he grinned.

"Yeah, sure. You ready, Miss Deborah?"

"Yes, Willie, I am." She stooped to retrieve her parcel by the chair. Willie saw it and stepping forward said, "Here, let me get that." Then he stepped gallantly to the door and opened it.

Deborah said, "Thanks, Doc."

“For what”, Doc asked.

“For giving me a safe haven,” she answered.

“You’re more than welcome, my dear,” Doc said. He took her hand and escorted her to the door. She leaned and kissed him lightly on the cheek. “Thanks again, Doc,” she said. Then she went through the opened door onto the sidewalk. Willie closed the door behind them. Deborah slipped her arm through his and they began their slow walk back to the bakery.

Willie’s heart was singing! It was also pounding in his ears! So totally absorbed was he in this beautiful woman he was so lucky to be escorting that he didn’t see the two men in blue watching from the shadows between the buildings. One had the double stripes of a corporal on his sleeve and the other had the plain sleeve of a private. Both men watched, like hungry wolves, every sweep of Deborah’s dress and the movement her hips beneath it. As the couple moved out of sight, the soldiers turned to each other and grinned. In the shadows their bared teeth gave each of them the appearance of a death’s head.

A sudden gust of wind drove directly down Main Street engulfing the couple in its dusty currents. Neither of them noticed.

### **William Jeffers from over near Piney Bluff**

Jack was standing at the door to Ellie’s barn as the first buggy arrived. In the distance he could hear the harness noise of a second wagon, or carriage of some kind, on its way to the Campbell place. The sun had gone down and it was just full dark. Willie began to show some the attendees into the barn as more folks arrived. In a short time the posts on the Campbell front porch had become hitching rails for a host of buggies, horses, and mules. Those there weren’t room for tied up at any scrub, bush, or tree they could get reins a round. One or two single riders even hobbled their mounts in the yard. In thirty minutes or so Jack decided those who were coming were either there or were close enough that their arrival was imminent and he called the meeting to order. Soon, he had laid out the problem with all the details he was privy to. Discussion began from the floor. Voices were raised in anger, others in despair. A few even sounded resigned to what appeared to be their fate. While still others were ready to take up arms...again!

Doc Brown had, indeed, made the meeting. He had arrived a few minutes after the meeting started but Willie had filled him in on many of the details, at his office, earlier in the day, so he was not at a disadvantage.

Jack allowed the discussion to roll on for a few minutes while he and Willie kept a close eye on the crowd to insure that none got out of hand, then he banged a hammer from

Ellie's father's tool box on the old work bench they had dragged out into the middle of the floor to serve as a lectern. He had to bang the hammer several times to finally get the attention of the angry crowd of farmers and some businessmen. Finally, he had their attention.

"All right gentlemen, we have a pretty good idea what's coming, now do I hear some suggestions as to what we can do about it?"

"Run 'em outta town!" came from the back of the crowd. "Lynch 'em," also came from the same general direction. "You can't lynch soldiers!" Another joined in, "You gotta fight 'em!" Still another, "I'm all for that!" Then a cheer went up.

Jack banged the hammer again, several times. Finally, when the noise dropped to a manageable level, he spoke. "Until we know exactly what we're up against, I don't think we want to be too overt with our opposition." He thought a moment. "Maybe a diversion... a continuing diversion, would be in order. While they're busy taking care of the trouble, caused by the diversion, we can be digging into their real reason for being here. A diversion will also buy us some time. I don't know much... actually nothing," he said with lowered head, "about this new Military District the Colonel is so fond of reminding us about. I want to learn more about that." He looked up, out, and over the group of men in front of him. "Anybody planning a trip down to Wilmington anytime soon?" A hand shot up about midways of the crowd.

"Yes sir. Who might you be?" Jack asked.

"I'm Dabney Caines, Capn. I'm going to Wilmington two days from now to check on a sister of mine. I'll be staying over for a couple of days. What is it you want to know?"

"I'd appreciate it if you could ask around and find out all you can about the Military District we are in. Who the commanding officer is, and who his boss is. I guess, Mr. Caines, find out everything you can about what is going on...what has happened to us since the war ended." Jack shook his head from side to side. "Damn it!" He swore. "We don't even have a working telegraph!"

"Capn, I'll find out ever thing I can. I swear!" Mr. Caines was vehement.

"Thank you, Mr. Caines." Let me know as soon as you return, please."

"Yes sir, Capn!"

"Capn?"

Jack looked to his left and saw a middle-aged man in overalls and tattered blue shirt nervously twisting his old black hat by the brim. He was standing out, slightly, from the group. "Yes sir?" He asked, and nodded in the man's direction.

“Capn, I’m, Jim Evans. I come from over near the Dark Swamp community. I was wondering, Capn, what kind of diversion it was you were talking about?”

“Good question, Mr. Evans.” Jack answered, thumbing back his hat. “Any ideas? Any one?”

“Capn, I’m William Jeffers from over near Piney Bluff. Capn, how many soldiers are we talking about here, anyway?”

“About thirty, give or take two...three.”

Jeffers continued. “How do they get their supplies? I mean the ones they don’t steal from us?” A roar came from the men.

“Settle down! Settle down!” Jack ordered in a raised voice. The men stilled themselves once again.

“Frankly, I hadn’t thought about it, Mr. Jeffers.” Jack said, “What do you know that I don’t?”

“Well, Capn, my brother-in-law works on the river. He’s got a fishing boat down there and he travels up and down the river nearly every day. He told me he’s seen their supply boat come up river once a week for the past tree weeks. When they first got here, they foraged. I guess we all know that.” Mr. Jeffers said with a grin. “Now, they’re getting everything up-river from the port at Wilmington. Now, Capn, I reckon, if their supplies was to get, oh, say borrowed, a few times, that might get their attention!”

A rustling sound spread throughout as the men began to express their feeling about the disappearing supplies. Jack stood quiet for a moment. Then he said, “How many men can you get together. Men with experience on the river, and, who have had combat experience?”

Mr. Jeffers stepped out from the crowd, turned and began to point and count with his right index finger as he stood on tiptoes. He was a rotund man, maybe five feet seven inches tall and bearded. But he had a presence about him. He was not a man to be trifled with. After a moment he stopped counting and said, “I got six... right here... tonight, Capn. I can get more”.

Jack turned and went back behind the workbench. “I like it,” he said. “Mr. Jeffers, set it up. Keep me informed though. There will be other...uh, accidents; we’ll need to coordinate the handling of the missing supplies.”

A big man stirred from the shadows and stepped into the pool of light near the workbench. A quiet came over the group. “Men, I’m Amos Keifer. I’m new to the area. I inherited the Roberts place just down the road, there. I’m not new to fighting Yankees though. I’ve been at it since the early days of the war down in Alabama. My family is on

the way up here now. I just want you to know, I've got the same concerns and worries you do. I'll be glad to help you anyway I can, but there is one thing I want understood right now. If that lowdown scoundrel, Garrison, lays a hand on my farm, or my family, he's mine! Is that clear? I don't want anybody to make a mistake here tonight. Garrison is mine! We go back a LONG ways. I aim to see the end to his story." Without another word, Amos turned and went back to his perch in the shadows of the Campbell barn.

The meeting went on a while longer. After agreeing to stay in touch with ideas and news, they began to filter out into the darkness to their animals.

Amos and Willie stayed in the barn with Jack until everyone else had gone. Then Amos said, "Well, Jack, how'd you think it went?"

"I don't know, Amos. The spirit they showed tonight surprised me. Maybe it comes from losing the war. I don't know. I guess it'll take a little time to see who will stick and who won't. Another thing worries me, though."

"What's that?" Willie asked.

"Well, we don't know, for sure, that there wasn't a man in here tonight who will be reporting directly to the Colonel!"

"Damn!" said Willie. "I hadn't thought about that."

Jack went on. "Amos, I think it might be a good time to visit your brother-in-law again. See if Farley will let us know about any locals who visit his establishment to do business with anyone there but him."

"Amos nodded. "First thing in the morning, I'll see to it."

"Jack, when's the supply boat coming up river again?" asked Willie.

"Jeffers said he thought in the next couple of days. He's to get back to me tomorrow and let me know for sure," Jack said rubbing his eyes. "It's been a long day."

Amos and Willie looked at each other and Amos said, "Jack, I gotta be going. I'm still not all that familiar with that road home at night." He looked up, "the moon seems bright enough. I'd better get started, though."

Jack slapped Amos on the shoulder and said, "Thanks for coming Amos. I'm sure we're gonna need your help in the days ahead."

"You're mighty welcome, Capn!" He swung up onto his horse and nudged it into motion. He waved over his shoulder and said, "See you boys soon." With that he merged into the blackness of the night.



Willie yawned and stretched and said, “Capn, I’m gonna git on to the cabin. You coming along later?”

“Yeah, later.” He looked at the darkened porch of the Campbell farmhouse and saw a dim outline of Ellie standing alone in the shadows.

Willie finally found the black horse in the darkness and called out as he rode off up the wagon road toward River Road, “Good night all!”

Jack smiled in the darkness and went up the steps onto the porch. Ellie met him at the top step with a warm embrace and a lusty kiss. His arms enfolded her and lifted her from the floor. Their lips never parted as they sidestepped into the darker shadows at the end of the porch.

### **You’re THAT Captain John Knight?**

William Jeffers rode into the yard of the cabin about mid-morning. He dismounted and led his horse to the water trough by the well. The door to the cabin opened and Willie stepped out.

“Good morning, Mr. Jeffers!” said Willie with a grin.

“Good morning to you, sir.” replied Jeffers walking toward Willie with outstretched hand.

Jack was in the stable. He saw Jeffers ride up and now he was coming toward the two men in the yard. “Mr. Jeffers. I didn’t expect you this soon!” said Jack, as he closed the distance between them.

“Neither did I!” said Jeffers, again stretching out his hand to shake. Jack took it and the men shook with vigor.

“Come on in and have a cup of coffee. It’s cold by now but we can heat it up in two shakes.” Jack said.

“Might as well,” Jeffers said, both eyes twinkling, “I got nothing better to do for a while.” All three of them went inside. They left the door open for ventilation.

“I take it you bring some news, sir.” Jack stated.

“I do,” Mr. Jeffers replied. He pulled out one of the benches Luke had made and seated himself at the little table in the middle of the single roomed cabin.

“What of?” asked Jack still standing but leaning on his hands, both of which were placed on the tabletop. Willie placed the coffee pot onto a flat stone in the edge of the still glowing coals left over from the breakfast fire. He stood and walked over to join the other two men at the table. He pulled out the bench on the opposite side and he, too, sat down.

“The supply boat, Capn, is due up river tomorrow!”

“Good!” said Jack. “That’s good! We can get plans laid to destroy those supplies or, at the very least, disperse them!”

“Disperse them?” asked Willie.

“Yeah,” said Jack. “It depends on what they are. For instance, if there is gunpowder and shot in there or cartridges, we can use that. We don’t have to destroy it. The main thing is to give them a problem to try to solve while WE get to the bottom of their reason for being here. Mr. Jeffers, can you get enough men together to undertake that mission tomorrow?”

“Yep, Capn, I sure can. One thing, Capn. Please call me Bill. I’m just not comfortable with people calling me ‘Mr. Jeffers.’ That was my Daddy!” He laughed.

“O.K. Bill. That’s fine with me.” Jack went to the fireplace to touch the coffee pot. It was warm, but not yet hot. “So, we can expect the supply boat to steam into trouble tomorrow then?”

Willie asked, “What kind of trouble?”

Jack started to answer but was interrupted by Bill who said, “I don’t think you want to know that, sir.”

“Why not?” asked Willie, beginning to feel the stirrings of irritation. “Besides, it’s Willie!”

“All right, Willie. The fewer people who know about it the better. I don’t even know, at this moment, what we’re going to do! The men will be gathered and then we’ll all get the word at once. Then we’ll move. No wasted effort. No time to spill the beans, so to speak, or to deliberately tell the Yankees. The fewer the people who know; the smaller the margins for error. It’s that simple.”

“Uhhh”, said Willie, slowly nodding his head in understanding as he rubbed his chin whiskers.

Jeffers looked to the coffee pot. Jack saw him and picked up the pot. He took a cup from the mantle and carried it to the table where he poured a cup of coffee for Mr. Jeffers.

Jeffers took it and immediately took a swallow. "That's good," he said, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. Jack and Willie gave each other looks of astonishment! The coffee was several hours old. It had been strong at breakfast! Jack returned the pot to the hearth beside the fireplace.

"Mr. Jeffers...I mean, Bill, were you in the war?" Jack asked without turning around.

"Yes sir, I was, Capn. I was a Captain in the infantry. I fought with the South Carolina infantry."

"Why South Carolina troops?" asked Willie.

"Well, I was there when the war broke out in earnest, so I followed my relatives down there into the army. Went in as a private. By the time we got to Gettysburg, I was a Captain. Hell, everybody else had been killed off. I was IT!" He grinned. "Anyway, I served 'til the end as a Captain."

"What regiment?" asked Jack,

"17<sup>th</sup>," replied Jeffers.

"Good outfit!" said Jack. He paused for a moment then said, "I was with Wade Hampton!"

"My God!" exclaimed Jeffers. "You're THAT Captain John Knight?"

"I don't know about being THAT John Knight, but I am John Knight, and I DID serve with Wade Hampton."

"Assigned to J.E.B. Stewart?"

"I was," said Jack

"Oh Lordy," said Jeffers. "I had no idea. I mean...I just didn't make the connection!" He stood and stretched out his hand again and said, "Capn, I want to shake your hand. You people did miracles. That ride around the Yankees was just marvelous! Yes sir, just marvelous! Folk's were cheering in the streets when the word got out! Why, my own troops were celebrating!"

Jack reluctantly took Jeffers hand a second time. He held it for a moment, looked Jeffers in the eye and said, "We didn't do you much good at Gettysburg, I'm afraid."

"Capn, I wouldn't know about that. I heard y'all were late getting there, or something, but hell, you DID get there! I mean... we were whupped before we started across that field with Pickett. Ole Pete Longstreet was the only one there who knew what was gonna

happen and he tried to tell General Lee. But, the old man had his Irish up and wouldn't listen. I swear, Capn, I had no idea! Wait'll the men hear!"

Jack turned toward the door and said, "I'd just as soon you let it lie. The war's over. I'm home and, here, I'm just Jack Knight. I'd like to leave it like that." He had reached the door and was leaning against the doorframe staring out into the yard. "I had hoped it was over, really over. I wanted to come home and start living again. I didn't expect to find this...this...mess!" He angrily stepped out into the bright sunshine. Jeffers turned to look at Willie. Willie pushed back his bench and stood. Jeffers did, too.

Outside Jack had walked to the well and was patting Jeffers' horse on its neck and clucking soothingly to the horse. The horse was standing quietly, allowing the attention.

Jeffers and Willie walked up behind Jack. Jeffers said, "I'm sorry, Capn, if I stirred up something here. I didn't mean..."

"Naw, Bill, it's not your fault. It's just me. I'm gonna have to learn to accept whatever each day brings, I guess, and start dealing with it all over again. That's how I got through the last four years in one piece. I had hoped to lay that down and just be... normal, again. I don't suppose that's going to happen." Jack held the horse's reins out to Jeffers. He took them and swung easily into the saddle. He moved with the grace some "ample" people seem to have.

"Capn, you'll know, I expect, if the raid is successful. On the other hand, I expect you'll know if we aren't, too!" Jeffers smiled, touched the brim of his hat and rode away down the wagon road toward River Road.

A breeze had picked up and dark clouds were peeking over the tall pines bordering the new ground near where the logs for the cabin had been felled. It was the season for storms to come out of the south.

### **The Betty Louise and the Round Man**

The river steamboat, *Betty Louise*, left Wilmington on its run up river. The small crew of six men waved goodbye to their loved ones as the boat huffed and puffed its way back from the pier, headed down the waterfront, and then turned upriver. The single side-wheeler pushed against the black waters racing toward the sea in its attempt to forge a path for itself against the contrary currents. They would reach the town of River Bluff by nightfall and unload. They would tie up there and wait the night, then leave for the return trip to Wilmington the following day. The trip wouldn't take as long going downriver with the current.

Captain P. Ross Jernigan was in the wheelhouse puffing on his old brier pipe. The puffs of tobacco smoked mimicked the puffs of smoke from the single stack of the boat's wood-fired steam engine. They would have to stop a couple of times to take on enough wood for fuel to complete the trip. That was not a problem as the banks of the river were thick with hardwoods. Good men with strong backs would have the wood box filled in no time. As the city faded from view behind them, Captain Jernigan settled down on his stool behind the wheel and began to scan the surface of the water searching for snags and floating debris. Occasionally, there was a shifting sandbar, but very seldom. He was content. The war was over, his son was home in one piece, and commerce was beginning to return to normal for his boat, the *Betty Louise*. This would be a fine trip. The government would pay well for his services, and the Lord knew, he could sure use the money. Yes sir, it was a fine day to be on the river.

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About twenty miles east of River Bluff eight men rode in silence. At a predetermined point, the men turned off the road and threaded their way carefully through the trees and vines to within fifty feet of the river. There was a clearing with stacks of wood, all cut to a uniform length. There was a chopping block and two axes. One had a broken handle; the other seemed to have been left as the result of an oversight made in haste. It was a fueling stop for the river steamers. Here the men dismounted and tied their horses to the nearest tree. A short, rotund man appeared to be their leader. He motioned for all the men to gather around him. When they did, and had settled down, some kneeling, others sitting on the thick carpet of leaves and pine needles; he began to speak in a low tone of voice. He was aware of the tendency of sounds to carry well over water. He wanted no one to hear, save THESE men.

“That boat'll be coming soon enough.” He cast a glance over his shoulder to the east. “I'm told it's the *Betty Louise*. Now, I want to make it perfectly clear...I don't want anybody hurt here today! We're not here to hurt anybody, or get hurt, for that matter. We're just gonna see that the boat's cargo is dumped over the side. Then we'll release everybody and be gone before they know it. If our luck holds, we'll be in River Bluff waiting on the pier for them when they arrive! I'd like that, I surely would!” He chuckled.

There was a slight bend in the river east of their position, just where the river made a shallow turn to the south. The bow of a steamer could be seen just edging around that bend.

“All right, men, let's get ready. When I give the signal we'll move forward and take over the boat. Does everyone understand what he is supposed to do? Any questions at all?” There were none. Jeffers reached into his inside coat pocket and removed a small, white, cotton flour sack, which had been washed a number of times. The sack now had eyeholes cut in it. As he looked around the circle of men, they all had put on similar sacks. Each man had his own weapon. They waited quietly in the thick foliage for the boat to pull into the landing.

As Captain Jernigan nosed the craft into the landing, Sonny Davis leapt from the bow with a line and made it fast around a large live oak, well back from the bank. Rob Anderson quickly slipped a gangplank across the bow and onto the dry land. Then, he too, left the boat.

Anderson went directly to the woodpile. He looked over the stack of pre-cut wood and turned to yell his estimate back to the Captain. That was when he felt the cold of a gun barrel against the nape of his neck. He froze. "Just be still and you'll not be hurt!" a voice from behind him directed. He stood stock-still!

Sonny Davis had tied the line well and now he, too, was interested in loading the wood. As he came around the end of the woodpile closest to the river, a man wearing a flour sack and carrying the biggest Colt pistol he had ever seen in his life met him! The man in the sack said, "Don't say a word. Do as you're told and nobody gets hurt." Sonny nodded his compliance.

Aboard the *Betty Louise*, Captain Jernigan had disengaged the wheel and now it slowed and stopped. The pistons of the steam engine could still be heard, but for all practical purposes, the engine was in neutral. The engineer opened the boiler to add wood to the fire. As he turned to the wood box, there stood a man with a rifle pointed directly at him. The intruder was wearing a flour sack over his head. The engineer thought how funny that would look under different circumstances! The man with the rifle motioned for him to sit on a stool by the wood box. He did so and offered no resistance.

Captain Jernigan decided to go take a look at the woodpile himself. As he climbed down the ladder from the wheelhouse, he was stopped at the bottom rung by a rather heavy-set man with a flour sack over his head, holding a sawed-off twelve-gauge shotgun. The "round" man said, "Captain, sorry about this. We're not here to hurt anyone. We're just gonna lighten your load a bit." The round man turned to someone out of sight of Captain Jernigan and nodded. The Captain heard the main hatch cover being raised. In moments he heard splashes as cargo was thrown overboard.

"What are you doing?" Captain Jernigan asked pleadingly.

"Just what I said we were doing, Captain. You've got a load of supplies for the Yankees at River Bluff. We can't allow those supplies to be delivered... that's all! I would suggest that we retire to your cabin but, hey, wait, at the rate the boys are going, I expect we'll be through here in minutes... so we'll just wait right where we are."

In exactly eight minutes the last splash was heard from the water. The round man said, "Sir, I do believe we have completed our task here. That being the case, as indeed I am told it is, we will take our leave." He turned from Captain Jernigan and walked down the deck across the gangplank and gracefully hopped onto dry land. He motioned toward the trees where Sonny Davis and Rob Anderson appeared from behind the woodpile. The two men marched to the gangplank and boarded, pulling the plank up just as their feet

touched the deck. The round man then went to the big live oak and loosed the line, which secured the boat to the riverbank and tossed it in the direction of the boat. Then he did a peculiar thing: He came to parade ground "Attention," switched his pistol to his left hand, and with his right, removed his hat and made a sweeping bow toward the boat. Then he replaced his hat and grinning broadly, he faded back into the woods.

The steam engine continued to chug, drowning out a lot of the profanities coming from the boat.

### **The Small, Pink Parasol**

It was around four-thirty in the late afternoon when Deborah heard the commotion from Water Street. She had heard the whistle of a river steamboat as it approached River Bluff. It was a not an unfamiliar sound as steam riverboats had come up-river daily before the war. Their schedules had been interrupted by the hostilities and now, even though the war was over, their visitations were still rare enough they drew on-lookers at their approach.

Deborah had been standing on her balcony when she heard the shrill blasts from the boat's whistle. She saw a few people in the street pause at the sound and some even turned toward Water Street. She went back inside her room, got her hat, which she perched on the back of her head and fastened with a large hatpin. She opened the door and was about to leave when she remembered her parasol. She hastily ran to fetch it from her closet and then, with a skip in her step, returned to the door, closed it and went downstairs. She told Rebecca where she was going and pecked her father on the cheek as she was passing.

"I thought you were afraid to go down there!" Rebecca stated quizzically, her eyebrows lifting as she did so. "I am!" said Rebecca, but, Momma, I have just GOT TO SEE what the boat is bringing to River Bluff!" Then she was out the door and gone.

The sun was bright as Deborah walked across Main Street toward the little path that would take her down to Water Street and the waterfront. She opened her parasol and placed it on her left shoulder between the sun and the delicate skin of her face as she hurried toward the noise.

As Deborah turned the corner to her left and went up the steps to gain the wooden planking that stretched the length of Water Street, she could see the noise was coming from the just tied-up steamer *Betty Louise*. She continued her approach. As she drew nearer, she heard male voices raised in anger and punctuated with vile curses. When she reached the little crowd of onlookers: businessmen, fishermen, and a few watermen; she

could hear enough of the boatmen's complaints to realize the boat had been robbed! How could that be, she thought? Who would want to rob a riverboat... and why?

Deborah milled about at the back of the crowd, which had grown quite large, until she got most of the story being circulated by the boatmen. She learned that a group of hooded men had come aboard the boat at a fueling stop and tossed all the cargo into the river while holding the boat's crew at gunpoint, then went ashore and disappeared.

Mrs. Mattie Hinson, standing beside Deborah, asked, "How can this be?" It was a rhetorical question.

When the crowd learned the fact that the cargo had been bound for River Bluff and, in particular, the Yankee troops, it began to dwindle until only a bare handful of interested people were left on the dock. Deborah decided she had heard enough and that she would move on, too.

A shadow had crept along the docks and the wooden sidewalk as the sun began to dip below the trees along the river. Deborah was ambling along, looking in the windows of the various shops along the street as she slowly made her way back home. It had been a while since she had visited the shops on this side of town and she was glad to see that the inventory of those stores had begun to climb back up to pre-war levels. She was particularly happy to see that Pearl Matheson's dress shop had several bolts of new material in stock that she would have a look at on another day. As she reached the western end of the street she finally noticed it was almost twilight. There was still a good half-hour of daylight left; however, she thought she'd better hurry on home or she would miss supper. Rebecca would be upset with her if she did. She turned and began to walk east toward the little path that would take her back to Main Street.

The boats were particularly beautiful, tied up at the dock, as the setting sun lighted their paint and brass fittings making golden flashes as it streaked through the tree branches along the bank. The sparkle of the fading yellow sunlight off the water was hypnotic. She was amused by the little black dots dancing before her eyes when she would turn her gaze from the water to what lay before her. She paid no particular mind to the alleyway, which ran between the fishing supplies store and the large seafood warehouse next to it.

As she came abreast of the alleyway, she was rudely snatched sideways and a rough, calloused hand was clenched over her mouth and nose. Her parasol went flying! Her hat was crushed against the back of her head! Deborah was forced into the shadows, deep down the alley, away from the street. She was kicking and wriggling, as both her feet were clear of the ground. A man, a large man, was carrying her. A second man tied a dirty bandanna over her eyes and she was carried even deeper into the alley.

Deborah tried to scream! She couldn't. Her mouth was held shut. She could only make stifled noises, which were not nearly loud enough for anyone to hear. Suddenly, she felt herself lifted even higher, and then thrown to the ground. The impact winded her and for a moment she was still. She was not unconscious, but nearly. She felt the weight of a



man on top of her as both her arms were grabbed from behind and held in a vise-like grip. She could barely move at all. A hand grabbed the high collar of her visiting dress and she heard a rip and the front of the dress was torn away. She felt the cool air against her warm flesh. She knew her breasts were exposed! She tried to scream but that big hand again, smothered her attempts! She could only emit a gurgle. She jerked her head from side to side and for an instant was able to clear her mouth from the clutching hand. She screamed! Only, it wasn't a scream. Her throat was so dry from fear, she could only croak. The big hand returned to her mouth. She tried arching her back to slip from under the man's weight. It didn't work. Then she felt another hand under her clothing! Her petticoats were ripped! She could feel the tearing and hear the fabric protesting, as her under things were shredded by the grasping, clutching hands! She was still snatching her head back and forth, left to right! Again, she pulled her mouth free! Again she screamed! This time she did manage a sound! It was then she was struck, hard, in the face by something, maybe a fist, and she slipped from consciousness altogether.

After a few minutes the big man, with the sergeants stripes, and the smaller man, with the corporal's stripes, switched positions. They continued in this way for some time. Once, Deborah moaned and lifted her head an inch or two, then fell back and her head rolled to the left, deep in unconsciousness.

After a while the two men picked themselves up, brushed the dirt from their uniforms and then off each other. The big man slung his arm over the shoulders of the smaller man and they walked to the end of the alley opening onto Water Street. By now it was dark. The small man stayed back in the shadows as the big man peered around the corner of the building. Seeing no one, he motioned for the smaller man to join him. He did, and the two of them walked west, down Water Street into the darkness.

In the quiet darkness the rhythmic lapping of the water against the pilings was almost a lullaby. The boats rose and fell as the swells of the river lifted and dropped them. The ropes creaked in protest as the knots tightened and loosened at each rise and fall of the boats at the opposite end. The frogs were beginning their nightly chorus and the moon was just showing above the eastern tree line.

Down by the edge of the wooden sidewalk in the dirt of the street lay a small, pink parasol. It had folded. Its tiny little blue flowers, circling the outer border, stood out boldly on the field of pink in the soft light of the moon.

In the darkened alley lay the crumpled, partially nude body of a lovely young girl, beaten, bruised and defiled! Her left eye was swollen completely closed. A huge, angry, bruise was spreading around her mouth. Congealed mucus had formed in her nostrils and the corners of her right eye. Her chest was a mass of blue and purple, her dress was bunched and wadded-up around her waist, and her high collared blouse was stripped from her body and lay to one side in tatters. Her little hat was crushed and partially hidden beneath her body. Her arms lay outstretched as though begging for mercy. In the open palm of her left hand with her fingers curled protectively around it, lay a swatch of dark

blue, woolen, cloth. Robbed of her beauty, her grace, her promise, and her happiness. Her innocence was gone...forever.

In the warm quiet of the southern night two worried parents began the search for their daughter. Their fear was a palpable thing in their breasts. Their search would continue until the morning light.

### **Doc, Somebody's Hurt!**

Ned Plyler and Fred Sims were on their way to work on the river. It was barely light. They took their usual short cut through the alley as they did every morning. This morning, however, was different. When they saw the girl, they were startled. Her breathing was so shallow they weren't sure she was alive. Fred stooped down beside the battered body and felt for a pulse in her throat. He found it. As he stood, Ned removed his denim coat and spread it carefully over her naked body. It would warm her and return a portion of her dignity. Fred said, "Ned, you stay with her! I'm going to get Doc Brown!" He took to his heels back up the alley toward the doctor's office. In moments he was banging on Doc's back door with his fists.

"What?" called Doc from inside.

"Open up Doc. It's Fred Sims. Doc, somebody's hurt. We need your help...now!"

The door opened slowly as Doc peered around it at Fred. "Who's hurt?"

I'm not sure doc. She's beat bad!! Doc, I think it might be that Jewish girl, you know the baker's daughter...Goldberg!"

"Oh, my God! They've been looking for her all night. Just left here! Lemme get my bag. I'll be right with you."

In half a minute Doc was closing the door and the two men were in a run toward the alley. As they turned into the still dim alley Doc came to a halt. He stood still for a moment and stared at the suddenly small body under the denim coat. Finally, as though dreading what he might find, he walked over, knelt down beside her and felt for a pulse. Then he gingerly lifted the coat from her badly beaten body. He swore furiously! "What kind of scum, what kind of... jackal would do such a thing?" He spat the question out.

"Ned, I want you to go to the bakery, right now, and get Mr. Goldberg. Now, mind what I say! Mr. Goldberg! Under no circumstances are you to bring Mrs. Goldberg! If you do, I'll have two people to tend to and this girl is going to need all my attention if she's to live. Now, get going!"

"Yes sir, Doc," Ned said, and he sped off in a dead run for the Bakery on Main Street.

Next, Doc turned to Fred and said, “Fred, get out there on the street and see if you can find me some strong men. Doc motioned toward Water Street. He continued, “ We’ve got to get her to my office. I’ve got to get her warm again as fast as I can!” Fred tore out down the alley toward the street.

Doc knelt, again, beside Deborah and took her hand in his to console her. He just wanted to make a connection for her to reality. Something for her mind to hold on to. As he opened her hand a torn piece of dark blue cloth fluttered to the ground. He picked it up and looked at it. As recognition dawned, he swore again. Then, he placed the torn piece of evidence in his inside coat pocket for safekeeping.

“Don’t you worry, now Deborah. It’ll be fine. Everything thing will be all right.” He crooned to her as he waited for Ned’s return.

After what seemed an eternity, he heard the sound of numerous footsteps hurrying toward him from the street. It was Ned and several men from the fishing boats. Ned was in the lead. “Look what I found, Doc! It was lying at the edge of the sidewalk!” His outstretched hand held Deborah’s little pink parasol with the blue flowers on the border.

“It’s hers,” Doc said. “I’ve seen her carry it many times. Yes sir, many times....” His voice trailed off. He was holding her hand and gently rubbing her wrist. He seemed lost in this inconceivably harsh place.

Nobody moved for a moment, then Doc stood and said, “Men, I need y’all to pick her up like you would a baby...gently. She may be broken up inside. I don’t want us to hurt her any more than she already is. Understand?”

The men nodded. Four of them stooped to gather her up. Suddenly Ned said, “Wait! I saw a pushcart on the pier back there, Doc. Why don’t we put her in it?”

“Go get it!” ordered Doc.

In a moment Ned was back with the pushcart, and again, the four men stooped, and this time, they gently lifted Deborah’s battered body and laid her as gently as a baby in the floor of the pushcart. Then they started toward the doctor’s office. As they reached the end of the alley, they were met by Fred and Mr. Goldberg. Doc reached for Jacob’s shoulders and stopped him.

“Now, Jacob...we’ve found her. She’s alive...but she’s not good. I want to get her to the office...”

“Let me see her, Doc!”

“Jacob, why don’t you wait...?”

“No! I want to see my Deborah!” Jacob demanded. Doc stepped back and released his shoulders. For just a moment Jacob didn’t move. His eyes swept the denim coat that covered the joy of his heart. Then he hesitantly stepped forward and gently lifted the coat. He choked back a sob. Then, he screamed! It was a scream of fury, of terror, of rage, of hate and revulsion. It was primordial!

Doc reached for Jacob’s shoulder and squeezed it. Jacob whirled around! “Why, Doc? Why?” He pleaded for an answer. “Why my sweet Deborah, why did they do this to HER?” He was weeping openly. Unfathomable sadness flowed over him. He leaned forward drawing his elbows in toward his middle as his shoulders drooped. He was folding in upon himself seeking consolation from within. It wasn’t there.

Doc stepped forward and guided Jacob’s head toward his breast. He wrapped his arms around him and let him sob against his chest. “Don’t worry, old friend. Help me get Deborah to my office where I can do something for her. Please, Jacob,” Doc said quietly in Jacob’s ear. “You have to stay strong. Rebecca can’t carry this by herself. You have to help her. I promise, we’ll find whoever did this and they’ll pay. Believe me, they’ll pay. Come on, now. Let’s get her to the office.”

Jacob straightened up and tried to speak and found he couldn’t. He nodded and Doc motioned to the men at the pushcart and the little caravan continued toward Doc’s office.

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Jack and Willie had been up and about for an hour or so. The sun was now completely above the trees on the eastern horizon. They had finished breakfast, fed the animals, and now they were saddling them up for a ride into town. Jack had decided it was time to speak again with Mr. James Cole and he wanted a few minutes alone with Farley Carnes. Amos Keifer was to join them on their visit to town. Since Farley was Amos’ brother-in-law, he felt, reasonably so, that a visit to Farley from him would not be looked upon in the same light as a visit from Jack would be.

As the two men swung into their respective saddles, they saw a figure on horseback approaching down River Road from the east. It was Amos. He pulled up and waited as Jack and Willie rode out to meet him. The three men joined up at the intersection of their wagon road with River Road, or Knight’s Crossing, as Ellie Grace had taken to calling it. It would appear the name had stuck!

After greetings all around, Amos said, “What a beautiful September day it is!”

“Naw, It’s not September...is it?” Willie asked with raised eyebrows.

Amos looked at Jack as if to say, “surely he’s joshing!”

“Well, Amos, we don’t have a calendar in the cabin,” said Jack with a chuckle. “Is it September?”

“Yep, it sure is! He leaned forward in the saddle, toward Willie, and said, “I DO have a calendar!” Then he rocked back and laughed. They all laughed. Urging their mounts forward the three men rode toward River Bluff at a leisurely pace and as men do, they swapped stories and yarns as they went. The sounds of the hooves on the soft, loamy soil was punctuated with laughter as the riders closed the distance between themselves and trouble.

Above the passing riders a bright red cardinal perched on the branch of a dogwood tree was singing his heart out. His jubilation at just being alive overflowed in his song. What a joyous day this was!

### **She was Raped, Jack!**

Deborah was resting in the bed in Doctor Brown’s office. It was the same bed Luke had been in a few weeks earlier. She had not spoken since she had been found in the alley. Her breathing was regular, and so far, she had no fever. Doc had allowed as to how that was good. Her left eye was still swollen closed and her face was a mass of bruises. She had bruises all over her body. She had to be in a lot of pain. But, she had yet to complain. She was in shock. Doc had found no broken bones. He did suspect she had a few fractured ribs. There was no question she had been sexually assaulted. It was clear to Doc; Deborah had been physically assaulted and raped.

Rebecca had come right over when Doc sent for her. She collapsed as soon as she realized this was her Deborah. Her legs simply refused to hold her up and she went straight down. Jacob was standing directly behind her, in the event this happened, and he caught her as she went down. He laid her gently on the floor of Doc’s office. Doc had her moved immediately to his bed. She was there now.

Doc went to each of the men who had helped move Deborah from the alley to his office and thanked them, shaking the hand of each as he did so. Jacob especially thanked Ned Plyler and Fred Sims. Doc told Jacob these two men might have saved Deborah’s life. They were the last of the men to leave. As they did Jacob, again, thanked them profusely. They protested that they had done only what anyone else would have done. No matter, Jacob thanked them again.

Finally, the little office was quiet. Everyone was gone save for Doc, Jacob, Rebecca, and, of course, Deborah. Jacob went in to check on Rebecca. She was sobbing quietly into Doc’s pillow. He sat for a moment on the bedside and laid his hand on her shoulder. He leaned and kissed her, then gingerly got up from the bed and returned to the office where his beloved daughter lay. Doc was at the little table that served as his desk writing some notes. Jacob went past him to the bed. He saw there was no appreciable change in

Deborah. He stood for a moment with his head bowed and his eyes closed. Then he backed away from the bed until the backs of his calves felt the seat of the rocking chair and he sat down. The old chair creaked and protested, but it held, and again, offered its comfort. Doc looked over his glasses at the badly abused body of the beautiful young woman and the broken heart of her father and slowly shook his head from side to side. Then, he turned again to his writing.

At the eastern end of town three mounted men were just coming into sight. They were in good spirits, laughing and talking, as they entered the city limits of the little town. When they came abreast of the Mercantile, one of the riders split off and rode on down the street to the Mule Auction.

Mr. Bowen saw Jack and Willie dismount and tie up their horses. They stopped for a moment and looked the street over. Then he saw them head toward the entrance to his store. The little bell over the door jangled their entry. Mr. Bowen came from behind the counter to meet them about midways of the store.

“Good morning, gentlemen. It’s good to see you again,” he said, a half smile on his face. Jack took Mr. Bowen’s out stretched hand and they shook. Then it was Willie’s turn. Mr. Bowen’s half smile had not escaped Willie. He asked, “Anything wrong, sir?”

“No. Well, I mean...uh...I guess you heard. You must have! That’s the reason you’re here. Right?”

“Hear what?” Jack asked.

“Oh, my!” Said Mr. Bowen. He was looking at the floor now. “I guess you haven’t heard! Oh, Lordy!”

“What’s the matter, Mr. Bowen?” Jack asked, stepping forward.

“What IS it?” insisted Willie.

Mr. Bowen turned and went back behind the counter as if placing something between them would make his chore easier. It didn’t. The two men followed. They stopped at the counter and neither said a word. Finally, Mr. Bowen gathered himself and said, “It’s Miss Deborah.”

“What about Miss Deborah?” asked Willie, raising his voice to pressure Mr. Bowen into getting on with his information.

“She’s been hurt, Mr. Jordan.” Mr. Bowen blurted out.

“Hurt? How?” Jack asked, staring intently at Mr. Bowen.

“I don’t think I should say any more. She’s at Doc Brown’s Office. Maybe you should go there!”

Without another word, the two men spun on their heels and went out the door. The little bell jangled furiously as they unintentionally slammed the door. The few people on the street parted and made way for the men as they marched to Doc’s office. When they reached the office, they went right in.

It took a few seconds for their eyes to adjust to the dim light in Doc’s office. Then they saw the battered body before them. At first they didn’t recognize Deborah. Then their minds denied what they were seeing. Willie looked away, first, and saw Jacob sitting in the rocker and then the full impact of what he was seeing hit him with the force of a sledgehammer. His Deborah! His beautiful Deborah! Oh My God, what have they done to you? He hadn’t spoken a word; yet, his mind was screaming the question! He snatched his hat from his head and clutched it across his chest. The horror was taking the breath out of him.

When Jack finally took his eyes off Deborah he, too, looked to Jacob. He saw that Jacob was quietly sobbing. He stepped past him to Doc, still sitting at his little table and watching the scene unfold before him.

“She was raped, Jack! Raped and beaten! It’s the worse I have ever seen!” Doc didn’t wait to be asked. He removed his spectacles and flung them onto the tabletop.

Jack’s jaw dropped. He had heard of this sort of thing...but, never here! Never in River Bluff!

Willie heard Doc’s remark and he came, now, to join them.

“What are you saying, Doc?” Willie asked, leaning forward.

“What I’m saying, Willie, is some low down son of a bitch has raped and beaten that poor girl ‘til she’s damn near dead! THAT’S what I’m saying!” Doc leapt from his chair and ran his hand through his thinning hair in rage and frustration. “I can’t tell you how she looked when I first saw her! Nobody deserves to be treated like that! NOBODY!” Doc thought for a moment, then said, “Jack, Willie, come with me.”

Doc led the way to his storeroom. Once inside, Doc closed and latched the door. He removed his coat from the peg on the backside of the door and reached into the inside coat pocket. He removed something and then replaced the coat on the peg. Turning to Jack and Willie, he said, “I haven’t shown this to ANYBODY. I’m showing it to you two first before anyone else knows about it. He held his hand out, palm up. His fingers slowly opened to reveal a swatch of dark blue cloth. It appeared to be wool.

Jack said, “Where’d you get that?”

“Deborah was clutching it in her left hand when I got to her.” Doc said.

Willie reached out and took the cloth from Doc’s hand. He held it up to the light. “This is a piece of a Yankee uniform!” he said. He handed the little piece of cloth to Jack. Jack rubbed the cloth between his index finger and thumb. “Feels like wool uniform cloth, too”.

“I think she tore that piece of cloth from the uniform of the bastard who raped her!” said Doc. “You find the uniform that piece of cloth came off and inside it will be her rapist! I’m sure of it!” Doc was visibly angry. He was shaking with fury.

Jack placed his hand on Doc’s shoulder and said, “Whoa, Doc. Calm down now. I want to know...is she going to be all right?”

“If she lives!”

“What do you mean? You think she could DIE?”

“Jack, she has got to WANT to live! Right now, I wouldn’t give you a plug nickel for her chances!”

Willie said, “Doc, you can’t let her die. You can’t!”

Doc looked up at Willie and said, “I know, son. I know.” Then he turned to Jack, “Jack, find him! Find him and see that he pays!”

“I will Doc. I promise, I will!”

“No!” exclaimed Willie, shaking his head from side to side. “No! WE will, Doc. WE will!”

### **Please, Don’t Kill Them in MY Place!**

The two men walked across the street side by side. There was purpose in their stride. They had just left the beaten, battered Deborah in the doctor’s office, and now they were looking for justice. As they approached the Mule Auction a private in blue suddenly stepped in front of Jack. The private had his weapon at port arms across his chest ready to use if it was needed.

“Halt!” he said sternly.

Jack stopped. There were only inches dividing the two men. They glared at each other.



“I’m only going to say this once,” said Jack. His voice was cold and VERY serious. “Get out of my way, soldier!”

The private didn’t move. Then he heard the double click of a pistol’s hammer being thumbed back into full cock. His eyes flickered and he looked down and to his left. There was Willie’s VERY big Navy Colt aimed right at his belly!

“What’s the matter, boy? You don’t hear well?” asked Willie, in his most intimidating tone of voice. This time he was not faking.

The second private, standing guard at the right of the big barn doors, began to move toward them.

“It’s all right, Johnny!” the first private called out. “Stay where you are. I’ll straighten this out.” He returned his attention to Jack. “Captain, we ARE going to straighten this out, aren’t we?” His eyes went, again, to Willie.

“Just as soon as you get out of the way!” Jack’s eyes never left those of the private.

“What, exactly, is it, you want, Captain?”

“I intend to speak to Colonel Garrison, private... and right now!”

“I’m afraid that’s impossible, Captain. The Colonel isn’t in his offi...uh...the barn, right now.”

“Then where is he?” demanded Jack.

“Sir, I think you’ll find him at the boarding house down the street.”

“Private, I’m going to the boarding house and if you’re lying to me, I’ll be back!”

“I’m not lying, Captain. He’s there, I swear!”

Jack spun on his heel and started toward the boarding house. Willie stood for a moment, his pistol still covering the private. Then without taking his eyes from the face of the private he lowered the hammer and returned the pistol to his belt. Then he slowly turned and followed Jack.

The private returned to his post at the left side of the big doors. He hoped Johnny didn’t notice the tremble in his trouser legs.

Jack, with Willie trailing, marched right down the middle of the dirt street. Their boots kicked up little puffs of dust as they marched.

Bea was shaking out a throw rug on the sidewalk when she looked to her left and saw the men coming her way. She dropped the rug and went inside locking the door behind her.

Jack and Willie reached the boarding house at the same time. Willie's longer legs helped him make up the distance between the two as they walked. Simultaneously they stepped up onto the wooden planks of the sidewalk in front of Bea's. Jack reached for the doorknob and turned it. It was locked. He stepped back and raised his right foot and smashed the door open! It splintered and swung furiously to the inside, against a little table with a crystal oil lamp on it. The table skidded backwards down the wall and the crystal lamp went crashing to the floor! A woman screamed somewhere inside the house! Instantly the room was filled with the odor of coal oil. There were shards of glass all over the floor. Jack drew his pistol from the waistband of his trousers. Willie already had his out and cocked. Jack went through the door. Willie was right behind him!

The first thing the two men saw was Bea. She was standing in the doorway leading to the dining room. Both hands were at her mouth and she was sobbing and shaking her head.

Jack said, "Where are they?"

Bea continued to sob, a little louder. Jack said again, "Where are they, Bea? I mean to know!" He was nearly shouting.

Bea's breath caught in her throat and she stopped sobbing instantly. She lowered her hands from her mouth and said in resignation, "They're upstairs, Jack. Please... don't kill them in my place!"

Jack didn't answer. He turned his full attention to the stairway. Willie stood back a ways, covering Jack as he began to climb the stairs slowly, one step at a time.

Suddenly the door to James Cole's room burst open and Cole, himself, came charging out, pistol in hand. He quickly raised and pointed the pistol in Jack's direction. Willie shot him right through the heart! Cole's lifeless body flipped over the rail of the landing and plunged to the floor below. He landed in a crumpled heap at Willie's feet. Willie's pistol barrel was smoking. He had not, for a second, taken his attention away from the door to the late Mr. Cole's room. The ear splitting boom of the big handgun had completely erased his ability to hear. As a result, he couldn't hear the agonizing screams coming from Bea in the dining room doorway. She was hysterical now! The smell of cordite mixed with the odor of coal oil, filled the room and the fog of gun smoke was heavy in the air.

Jack charged up the stairs and through the open door of the room. In what appeared as a single fluid movement, Willie quickly went up the stairs, across the landing, and through the door into what had, a short time ago, been Mr. Cole's room.

Jack was standing in the middle of the room with his weapon trained on Colonel Garrison. Garrison was sitting in a small rocking chair by the little writing table with an

oil lamp on it. The lamp was sitting primly on a stark white doily. A glass, with a dark amber liquid in it, rested beside the lamp. The Colonel sat, not speaking, staring at Jack and Jack's pistol. He shifted his gaze to Willie's pistol and saw a wisp of smoke come from the barrel. He raised his eyes 'til they met Willie's and asked, "Is he dead?" Willie nodded. "Umm", said the Colonel and then he raised the glass and took a deep draught from it.

Jack looked around the room. He found another glass with amber in it on the table beside the bed. An open bottle sat beside the glass. He checked the wardrobe and found nothing but a shirt and a couple of pairs of socks. He lowered the hammer of his revolver and placed it back inside the waistband of his trousers. Then he sat on the end of the bed nearest Colonel Garrison. Willie continued to stand in the doorway with his pistol in his hand.

"Colonel, one of your men raped and beat a young girl in this town last night. She's at the doctor's office near death. I want that man, Colonel!"

Garrison raised his glass toward his mouth and said, with a half smile, "Really?"

The glass suddenly fragmented and the amber liquid flew in all directions as the ear-splitting boom of Willie's big revolver again robbed everyone of hearing! The Colonel's face went white. Little trickles of whiskey ran, hesitantly, down his forehead and cheeks. A drop fell from his chin. His fingers sang in numbness and he tried to flex them. He silently counted them, just to be sure. He sat perfectly still, fearing that any movement might bring the bullet that would kill him.

Jack waved the gun smoke away from his face and cleared his throat. He opened his mouth wide and moved his lower jaw from side to side in an attempt to restore a part of his hearing. Willie stood silent, counting his rounds. He had three left in the cylinder. Again, smoke wafted upwards from his pistol.

Jack stood and walked to the window. He could see soldiers running down the street toward the boarding house. He cleared his throat again. The ringing in his ears was constant, but he found he could hear his own voice.

"Colonel, I want your cooperation, and I want it NOW. Your troops are coming down that street. In a moment they'll be here. We'll be dead for sure. But, Colonel," and Jack stooped to the Colonel's eye level, "Please understand, sir, I intend to kill you, myself, before your men come through that door... if you don't cooperate with me. IS THAT CLEAR!"

For a moment Garrison didn't respond. Then he sighed and straightened his coat, then said, "What do you want?"

"I want the man who attacked and raped Deborah Goldberg! THAT'S what I want!" Jack was right in Garrison's face now.

“How do you know it WAS one of my men?” Garrison asked.

Jack held out the little piece of blue wool cloth Doc had given him. Garrison took it. Jack said, “It was in her hand when Doc found her.”

Garrison held the piece of cloth up toward the light and rolled it about in his fingers. “It looks and feels like uniform cloth,” he said.

“It IS uniform cloth, Colonel!” Jack exclaimed.

Heavy footsteps could be heard coming up the stairs. Jack slipped his Colt out of his waistband and cocked the hammer. Colonel Garrison saw the weapon pointed at his left temple.

Garrison called out. “Major Benson?”

“Yes, SIR!” came the reply from the landing.

“It’s all right Major! These gentlemen and I are having a discussion. See that we are not disturbed!”

“Yes, SIR!” again came from the landing. The sound of movement from the landing and stairway halted.

“What, Captain, do you propose to do with this piece of cloth?” Garrison asked handing the swatch back to Jack.

“Colonel, I’m convinced the man who raped Deborah is missing this piece of cloth from his uniform. I want your help in finding him. I want to inspect your troops, sir!”

“You’ve got a lot of brass, Captain. A rebel Captain inspecting Federal troops!” Garrison chuckled. “You must be joking!”

“No, Colonel, I’m dead serious.” Jack let the hammer down on the Colt. The Colonel caught the movement. Jack slipped the pistol back behind his waistband. “Colonel, I want you to see something. I think you ought to see the girl. As a matter of fact, I insist upon it! Get up”

“What?” Garrison protested as Jack grabbed him under his armpit and lifted him from the little rocker. “What are you doing?” the Colonel demanded.

“I’m taking you across the street to see what your man did. I want you to see, for yourself, Colonel. THEN, I want you to tell me you won’t cooperate. I promise, Colonel, it will be the last words you ever utter!” Jack threw Garrison, bodily, toward the door!

## **Where is Your Love for God's Children?**

The three men went out the door. Garrison led the way with Jack directly behind with the barrel of his pistol tucked tight against the small of Garrison's back. Willie came last with his back toward Jack's. His pistol was out and he was brandishing it from side-to-side as he walked backwards, his head continuously moving left to right. It was slow going down the stairs as they took one step at a time. The soldiers on the landing and those on the stairway pressed themselves against the wall and the banister railings. They went at an agonizing pace. Finally, they reached the ground floor. They held their positions and made their way across the living room floor and out the front door. Once in the street most of the soldiers were left behind. Jack breathed a bit easier. Willie continued to walk backwards and he continued to swivel his head as they progressed slowly toward the doctor's office. They used the middle of the street. Everyone on the streets and in the stores immediately dropped what they were doing and watched the odd little group of men. It was a captivating sight.

Doc had heard the shots, as did everyone else in town. When the soldiers went running past his office, he went outside to look for himself. He was still standing there when the three men came out of Bea's. He stood watching now as they approached.

"Well, I'll be..." he said.

Garrison stepped up onto the sidewalk with Jack still at his back. Willie glanced over his shoulder then he, too, stepped onto the wooden walkway. Doc still stood with his arms akimbo and watched as Jack prodded Garrison in the back with the pistol indicating that he should enter Doc's office. He did. Jack and Willie followed. Doc entered last, closing the door and pulling the little shade down.

For a moment nobody moved and nothing was said. As his eyes adjusted to the difference in the light, Garrison saw Deborah. There was an audible gasp. His hasty intake of breath hissed between his teeth. "My God!" He groaned. He stepped closer. He leaned over the bed and looked intently at Deborah. Her right eye was open but showed no recognition of anyone's presence. Behind him sat Rebecca in the rocker. By the side of the bed stood Jacob.

Garrison looked up and into the eyes of the heartbroken father. "I'm sorry. Mr....Goldberg," he said.

"It is not to me you should say this thing... but to Deborah." Jacob shook his head. "What kind of people are you, that you treat young women so? Huh? Have you no shame? Have you no respect? Where is your love for God's children? Where, Colonel? Where?" Jacob was overcome. His head slumped to his chest. He said no more.

Garrison turned to face Rebecca. She sat staring at her folded hands in her lap.

“Mrs. Goldberg, I’m sorry. I know that doesn’t mean much. I...ah...I have been told by... these men...they can prove one of my men did this. Well, ma’am, if they can, I promise you he WILL be punished! I know that doesn’t mean much, either. But, ma’am, it’s all I can do. And, I WILL do that!” He drew himself up and looked at Jack. “Captain, when do you wish to inspect my troops?”

“As soon as you can arrange to have them ALL present, Colonel”, replied Jack.

“Very well, I’ll arrange it.”

Jack let the hammer down on the Colt and replaced it in his waistband. Willie still held his at the ready.

“Colonel, you may go. I await word from you.” Jack stepped closer. “I would also ask, Colonel, that you have men standing by ready to take the rapist into custody.”

“I’ll see to it.” Garrison went to the door and turned the knob. He paused and turned to those in the little office. He said, “I am, truly, sorry. The United States Army does not make war on women! I’m... ashamed!” Then he opened the door and left.

Willie watched him as he walked across the street to the Mule Auction. He continued to watch as the soldiers slowly trekked back to the big barn. After a few moments he exhaled, let the hammer down on his pistol and dropped his arm. The gun hung from his limp fingers. He thumbed his hat back from his forehead and turned to Jack. “He didn’t say a word about Cole.”

“No, he didn’t,” replied Jack.

“What’s he gonna do about it?” Willie asked.

I expect he’s gonna do nothing. He knows that we know what Cole was. I also believe Garrison thought as much of Cole as we did!” Jack smiled.

“I don’t know,” said Willie dubiously. “They were thick as thieves.”

“Let it go, Willie. You did the right thing.” Jack slapped Willie’s back approvingly. “There’ll be plenty of...”

The scream caught them all totally by surprise! It began low in Deborah’s throat and climbed the entire scale of her voice. It was piercing. The hair stood on Willie’s neck. They all turned in unison toward the bed. Deborah was sitting bolt upright, her head was thrown back as she continued the long drawn out scream. As she exhausted a breath, she paused long enough to refill her lungs and the scream began all over again. The men

were frozen to their respective spots. Rebecca leapt from the rocker to the bed. She wrapped her arms around her child. She clasped Deborah with all her strength. Deborah continued to scream. Then she began to rock back and forth as she screamed. Rebecca held on. After a while Deborah's voice began to fail. It started slowly at first and then very quickly, her voice was gone. She continued to throw her head back and open her mouth to scream, but they were silent screams. Finally, she stopped.

She sat still for a moment and then as if spent of all her energy, she sank back against the pillows sobbing. A flood of tears came but her sobbing was silent. She had no voice left. Just tears. Her right eye finally closed as the salt in the tears began to sting. Rebecca held her and crooned to her, as she slowly, very slowly, began to cease the sobbing. Then, it was over. Her breathing became deep and regular.

Doc rushed to the bedside. He felt her pulse, silently counting the beats. Then he lifted her right eyelid. He gently let it back down. He stood, sighed and said, "She's asleep! Thank the Lord! She's asleep!"

"That's good, Sam?" Jacob asked it of Doc.

"It's good Jacob. It's good, indeed!" Doc said smiling at his old friend.

### **God go with You Son.**

The soldiers were lining up in front of the big barn. Three ranks. Each rank a single squad of eight men.

Colonel Garrison was mounted on his horse sitting patiently in front of the doorway. Major Benson, standing beside him was deep in conversation with Captain O'Malley. Sergeant Jennings was busy getting the men into "dress-right-dress" formation.

Nobody saw the lone figure of a man slip out the back door of Farley Carnes' house and make his way silently to the back of the barn. There he grabbed hold of a rope rigged to a pulley at the peak of the roof and dangling to the side of the little door that led to the hayloft on the second floor of the barn. This little door was a mate to the one in the front of the barn. The man held a Henry repeating rifle, which had a loop of twine tied to the stock and to the barrel. He slipped the twine over his head and allowed the new rifle to rest across his back. This freed up both his hands. Now he used the rope to pull himself up, hand over hand, until he reached the little door on the second floor. Once there, he quietly swung himself through the door and onto the hay of the loft. Moving stealthily he quickly reached the front of the barn. Being careful not to be seen, he settled himself where he could see the entire formation of soldiers below him. He had an unobstructed view of the entirety of Main Street. He slipped the rifle from his back and checked the magazine to be sure a cartridge was chambered and it was ready for use. It was. He laid the rifle across his thighs and leaned back against the hay to wait.

Below him Sergeant Jennings gave the order to count off. The men began counting from left to right: “one-two-three,” and so on until all the men had been counted. The last number called out matched the number of men in the command. Sergeant Jennings did an about face and called out, “Captain O’Malley, Sir?”

“Yes, Sergeant?”

“All present and accounted for, SIR!” exclaimed Sergeant Jennings in the proper military form.

Captain O’Malley turned to Major Benson and said, “The company is formed, SIR.”

Major Benson turned to Colonel Garrison and said, “The company is formed, sir. We await your orders!”

“Thank you, Major,” said Colonel Garrison. Garrison shifted his weight in the saddle and crossed his hands on the pommel. “Major, would you be so kind as to have Sergeant Jennings go to the doctor’s office across the street and inform Captain Knight that I await his pleasure?”

Major Benson squinted up at Colonel Garrison and said with incredulity, “Sir?”

“You heard me, Major!” Garrison snapped.

“YES, SIR!” Benson said with the proper salute. He spun on his heel and marched directly to Sergeant Jennings and relayed the Colonel’s order. Captain O’Malley looked on in disbelief.

Sergeant Jennings, used to taking orders from superior officers, saluted smartly, exclaimed, “Yes, SIR,” did a left face and walked at “double time” to inform Jack the Colonel was ready.

Amos Keifer, above in the hayloft with his rifle, watched all the activity below in silence.

As he hurried across the street toward the doctor’s office, Sergeant Jennings thought to himself how crazy officers were! You never knew what they were going to do next! He broke into a jog. His canteen clanked against the hilt of his bayonet in its scabbard attached to his belt as he ran.

In the doctor’s office Willie held the little shade on the front door back with his left index finger. He said, “Here comes that Sergeant, Capn.” Jack went quickly to the door and looked out. The he turned and said. “Nobody goes but Willie and me! Understood?” They all agreed. Deborah was still sleeping. Her breathing was deep and regular. Her right eye could be seen moving rapidly back and forth and up and down behind its lid, indicating deep sleep. “No matter what happens you all stay put!” Again they nodded.



They heard the clump of Sergeant Jennings boots on the wooden sidewalk as he approached the door. Then he knocked. Willie opened the door.

“A message for Captain Knight,” Sergeant Jennings told Willie. Willie opened the door wider so Sergeant Jennings could see Jack standing next to him

“Colonel Garrison’s compliments, sir. The company is formed, sir, and the Colonel awaits your pleasure, Captain Knight,” Jennings said saluting Jack.

“That salute isn’t necessary, Sergeant.” Jack said.

“Thank you, sir,” said Jennings, dropping his hand.

“You may return to your men. I’ll be along shortly,” said Jack.

“Thank you, sir,” said Sergeant Jennings. He turned and started back across the street, again at double time.

Doc said, “What are you going to do, Jack?”

“Hopefully, find the rapist in that bunch over there,” said Jack, nodding toward the soldiers across the street. He lifted the revolver from his trousers and rolled the cylinder checking to be sure it was fully loaded. He lowered the hammer, carefully, onto an empty chamber for safety. When he next pulled the hammer back, it would roll a cartridge under the hammer, making it instantly ready for firing. Willie had already re-loaded his Colt from spare cartridges he carried in his pocket. He, too, was ready.

Jack reached for the doorknob. He felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned. It was Rebecca. She had tears in her eyes. She said, “God go with you son.” She shifted her gaze to Willie and said, “and with you.” Willie suddenly felt a lump in his throat. Jack said, “Thank you, Mrs. Goldberg.”

Then they went out the door... careful to close it quietly.

### **Where’s that Rifleman?**

As the two men began their trek across the dusty street, they could see the soldiers lined up facing the barn. The soldiers could not see them as they approached.

Willie asked, “What are we gonna do, Capn?”

“We’re going to find the rapist, that’s what!” replied Jack.

“How?” persisted Willie?

“Just like Doc said,” Jack answered. “We’re looking for the soldier with the piece of cloth torn from his uniform. That’ll be our man!”

They continued their walk toward the big barn.

In the hayloft, watching Jack and Willie approach, was Amos Keifer. His rifle at the ready, he waited patiently for whatever was about to happen and whenever he might be needed. He had heard from Farley about Deborah. He had not heard about the little piece of blue cloth. He knew with certainty, Jack would be looking for the man who had done that to the young woman. So, he took the initiative and settled himself where he could do some good, if needed. If he were not needed, well, there was no reason for anyone to even know he had been here, he thought.

Jack and Willie stopped in front to Colonel Garrison’s horse. “ Well, Colonel, we’re here,” Jack said.

Garrison nodded and then slipped off his mount to the ground. “All right, Captain. If you’re ready, then we’ll inspect the troops.” As he turned toward the company, Sergeant Jennings called out: “Atten-HUT!”

There was the single sound of all the heels in the troop coming together at once. It was almost a CRACK! The officers walked to the left end of the first rank. Garrison led the way followed by Jack, then Willie, and finally Major Benson. Captain O’Malley maintained his post at the front of the company facing the troops. He, too, was in a full brace! Garrison stopped at the second man. This allowed Jack to square off with the first man in the rank. Jack looked him over from head to foot. He was looking for anything. Scratches would be a good indication. But he didn’t expect to find any. If Deborah’s arms had been held from behind, as he suspected, there would be no scratches.

They finished the first rank. They began the second rank at the right end and worked their way toward the left. At the end of that rank, they had found nothing. Willie was beginning to think, they were on a fool’s errand. They began at the left end inspecting the third and final rank and worked toward their right. Jack became even more observant. So did Willie, looking for anything. Nothing. They found nothing.

“Well?” asked Colonel Garrison. “What now?”

Jack rubbed his chin for a moment, deep in thought, and then looking up he said, “Their shirttails! Have their tunics taken out of their trousers, Colonel!”

“You sure about that?” asked Colonel Garrison.

“Yes. Yes, I am,” said Jack. “I want a look at those shirttails.”

Garrison, nodded to Sergeant Jennings who called out the order for the soldiers to remove their shirttails. There was some muttering from the men as they did so, but in a moment the shirttails were out.

Jack returned to the first rank. Garrison led the way as they started down the line of men once again. About halfway through the first rank there was a flurry of activity from the second rank. A soldier broke free from the standing men and ran. He was headed down Main Street at a dead run. Garrison ordered, "STOP THAT MAN!" Sergeant Jennings broke his posture and started after the escaping soldier.

Willie's big Colt thundered, yet again, this day. The round struck the fleeing soldier in the right calf. He hit the ground and tumbled to a stop on his back. By the time Sergeant Jennings reached him he was sitting up holding his right leg, drawn up at the knee, rocking to and fro, howling in pain.

"Captain O'Malley, take over!" Ordered Garrison. O'Malley cried, "Yes, SIR!" He took three paces forward and ordered, "Eyes front!" Every head in the company turned toward Captain O'Malley.

Jack was kneeling at the side of the wounded soldier. Sergeant Jennings was inspecting his leg. Jack was looking at and running his hand around the end of the Corporal's shirt. "Here it is!" he said. "This is the man I want!"

The Corporal howled again. "No! No! It was Sarge. It was Sarge, I tell you. I just held her, that's all! I just held her!" He was crying now, in fear, as much as in pain.

"Get to your feet Corporal Payne! NOW!" Sergeant Jennings ordered.

"I can't Sergeant, I can't!"

"Yes, you can, damn you. I said get UP!" With that Sergeant Jennings snatched Corporal Payne straight up by his left armpit. Payne screamed in agony as he came to his feet. He slumped against Sergeant Jennings.

"Get off me! Jennings snapped. He shoved Payne away from him. Finally, Payne steadied himself. He was upright. His leg hurt like blazes!

Colonel Garrison demanded, "Corporal, what's the Sergeants name. I want the name of the man who helped you!"

"He didn't HELP ME! ...I HELPED HIM!" Corporal Payne cried!

"Helped WHO?" demanded Garrison.

"Thompson, Sergeant Thompson, Colonel, It was him, I swear it! It was..."

The pistol shot took everyone by surprised. A crimson rose suddenly bloomed on the front of Corporal Payne's tunic, just over the heart! His head fell forward and his legs bucked at the same time. He was dead! Jack and Sergeant Jennings were holding the lifeless body between them.

The four men whirled toward the sound of the gun. It was Sergeant Thompson. He was holding the pistol he had used to kill Corporal Payne. It was still smoking. He was crouched, leaning forward like a wild animal about to spring. On his face was a vicious grin! His crooked teeth were exposed like the fangs of an enraged beast.

He snarled, "I told you not to tell, Tommy boy! I told ya! Don' tell, I says. Don't tell or I'll kill you, I says! Yes, sir, I told you Tommy, I told ya! It weren't nothin' but a piece of Rebel fluff, that's all! Nothing to it! Weren't hardly worth the trouble! But you had to tell, Tommy boy! You had to tell!"

Willie brought the Colt up to fire and was instantly hit by the second bullet from Thompson's gun. Then, Thompson's head exploded. His twitching fingers squeezed off two more shots, which went wild, before his dead body flopped to the ground. The BOOM of the rifle reverberated off the storefronts of Main Street. Echoes of the stray pistol shots followed it.

Willie was still on his feet. He was bleeding from his left bicep. He was still holding his Colt in his right hand. His face was pale but he was standing... and he was alive! Jack dropped his half of Corporal Payne's dead body and looked to Willie. Sergeant Jennings cursed and dropped his half. Everyone else, including Captain O'Malley, had his eyes trained on the door to the hayloft. Framed in the little door was Amos Keifer. He was holding the Henry rifle to his shoulder, sighting down the barrel as though looking for his next target! Nobody moved.

Garrison said to Willie, "You all right?"

"Yeah, I'll make it," replied Willie.

"Sergeant, get that man to the doctor's office, right now!" Garrison ordered Sergeant Jennings!

"Yes, sir," replied Jennings and to Willie he said, "Come on Mr. Jordan. We'll get you patched up!" He took Willie by he right shoulder and steered him across the street toward Doc Brown's office.

Colonel Garrison shouted to the figure in the hayloft, "You, come on down from there!"

"Not just yet, Colonel." Amos shouted back. "Not 'til you order your men not to shoot! Then, I'll come down!"

“All right. Captain O’Malley, I’m ordering you men not to shoot at... that man!” Garrison looked back at the hayloft door and said, “Satisfied?”

“Yep, satisfied!” Amos took the rifle from his shoulder and turned toward the inside of the hayloft.

Garrison turned to Jack, “You all right?”

“Well, I’m not hit, if that’s what you’re asking!”

“Well, yes, that ...and ...the rapist. Did this...” Garrison swept the area around the two dead bodies with his eyes... “satisfy you?”

“I suppose it’ll have to, Colonel. I believe we got the right men.” Jack looked about, “I’m surprised though. I didn’t expect TWO men! It just didn’t occur to me there would be two of them.”

“Yes, It surprised me, too!” Garrison said. “Where’s that rifleman? Major Benson, go see what’s keeping him. I want to talk to him. Go get him, Major!”

“Yes, sir!” and Major Benson was off to the barn.

“Well, Captain, I expect, you’ll want to get on over to the doctor’s office to see about your friend. Oh, one more thing, Captain. You wouldn’t happen to know anything about a steamboat shipment from Wilmington earlier this week, would you?”

“Why no, I wouldn’t, Colonel. Why do you ask?” Jack looked genuinely surprised by the question.

“Oh, no reason. Just curious, that’s all. Somehow, Captain, I suspect our business isn’t done yet.” Garrison looked quizzically at Jack.

Jack took a step closer to the Colonel. “Colonel, if I had any advice to give to you... I’d advise you to get your men, mount up, and get out of River Bluff just as fast as you can...with all due respect, sir!”

“Can’t do that Captain,” Garrison said.

“Then our business is not over, Colonel!” Jack spun on his heel and started toward the doctor’s office.

Over his shoulder he heard Major Benson shouting from the big doorway of the barn...”Colonel, he’s gone, sir! He’s not in here! The barn’s empty, sir!”

Garrison spat out, “What the hell...!”

Jack smiled as he continued toward Doc's office and his wounded friend.

### **Willie, You Ready to Ride?**

Willie was sitting on the corner of Doc's desk as Doc wrapped a bandage around his left bicep. After a couple of layers of bandage, the pink showing through disappeared. Doc tied it off and stepped back to admire his work.

"That ought to do it. Let me see it in a couple of days and I'll change that bandage." Doc said.

"Thanks, Doc." Willie said reaching for his shirt.

The door opened and Jack came through it. He looked for a moment at Deborah and then walked over to Willie and Doc. "How's he doing, Doc?"

"Willie? Oh, he'll be all right. It'll take more than a barking to stop this ole boy!" Doc slapped Willie on his back and chuckled.

"How do you feel Willie?"

"A little shaky and this arm hurts like the dickens, otherwise, just fine."

"Any change in Deborah, Doc?"

"She's still sleeping. She'll probably sleep until tomorrow. She's exhausted. Her body has taken a terrible beating, not to mention the damage to her mind!"

Jack lowered his voice and asked, "The Goldberg's... are they going to be all right?"

Doc looked over his glasses at Jacob and Rebecca standing by their daughter's bed and said, "I think so, Jack. I'm going to insist they go home and rest a while. They were up most of last night and then..." Doc waved his hands about, "...this! They have to be dead on their feet. I'll get them out of here in a bit."

"O.K.," said Jack. "Willie, you ready to ride?"

"Yeah, I'm ready." He stopped short and turned to Jack, "Did they find our friend in the hayloft?"

Jack laughed and said, "From the sound of the cursing, coming from the barn, I'd say absolutely not!"

Willie finished buttoning his shirt and stuffed the tail down in his trousers. He picked up his Colt revolver and tucked it into the waist behind his belt. His hat was hanging on a peg by the door. He shuffled over and retrieved it and tugged it securely onto his head, the brim low over his eyes. He stepped to the bed where Deborah lay. He reached out his hand and laid it gently on Deborah's, just for a moment. Then he drew it back. Jacob and Rebecca didn't miss the care with which Willie touched their daughter.

Rebecca said, "Thank you, Mr. Jordan, for all you have done. God will bless you for it, I know He will!" She took his hand as she spoke.

Jacob reached across the bed and laid his hand on Willie's shoulder. "Son, I'll never be able to thank you enough".

Willie felt a lump suddenly develop in his throat. He bowed his head in humility. He couldn't speak. Then, he turned to Jack as he slowly withdrew his hand from Rebecca's and said, "Capn, I ready!"

Jack shook hands with Doc. The two men left the office. They mounted up and rode out of town toward the east. They had gone only a few miles from town when another rider slowly pushed his way through the shrub between the woods and the roadside and fell in beside them. It was Amos. He had been paralleling their ride since they had left the city limits.

"You all right, Amos?" Jack asked.

"Yep. Them Yankees couldn't find their behinds with both hands and a bird dog!" All three men laughed.

They rode on toward their farms.

As they rode toward the east, a wagon was closing the distance from the east. It turned left into the little wagon road leading to the farm that had formerly belonged to the Roberts. Now it was the property of the Amos Keifer family. Finally, they were home!

## **Our Home**

Frank Keifer pulled back on the reins ...hard! The two mules reluctantly came to a stop. Buckets continued to bang about against the walls of the wagon as the old wooden frame, now loosened by the long trip from Alabama, settled down and stopped. For a moment it rocked from side to side then that, too, stopped. Eighteen-year-old Frank sat on the driver's seat. He was a tall lanky young man. He had a ruddy complexion with reddish

brown hair. The hair needed cutting. There had been few barbers along the way. His green eyes, flecked with brown, were sharp and bright.

Sarah, Frank's mother, sat to his right. She was a handsome woman. Her complexion was dark. She had coal black eyes. Her hair was raven black and pulled into a tight bun at the nape of her neck. She wore a long dress, as was the custom, mostly covered by a long apron with strings that went over her shoulders and crisscrossed on her back. The ends were tied in front. Her shoes had high tops and showed evidence of having seen a lot of wear.

Joseph, age fifteen, his head sticking out the canvas cover of the wagon right between his mother and brother said, "Is this it?"

"Yep," said Sarah. "A little worse for the wear, but this is it. Our home!"

Joe slipped past his brother's back, stepped onto the top of the right front wagon wheel and leapt to the ground. He stood with hands on hips looking things over. He was a tall lad, as was his brother. Joe's hair wasn't reddish brown, nor even brown. Like his mother's, his hair was black. His dark brown eyes flashed fire. His skin was fair. Joe was a headstrong young man, one to be reckoned with.

On the tailgate of the creaking old wagon sat a solitary figure - a young woman of surpassing beauty.

"Annie, let's go have a look!" called out Sarah, as she struggled to get down from the wagon without tripping on the hem of her dress. She managed to touch the ground with her dignity in tact.

Annie Sue McKane stepped lightly off the tailgate and stood to her full height of five feet and eight inches. She was tall. Annie's complexion was smooth and...dark. Her skin, tanned by the sun gave a glow of good health. Her blue eyes highlighted her blue-black hair. Her naturally red lips shone from her tan face and signaled a passion for life. She was nineteen and wise for her years.

Annie was the last of her family. Just days before the Keifers started out on their long trek to North Carolina, Annie's mother followed her father in death. Annie was left alone with no one to care for her and no one for Annie to care for. Sarah had helped Annie tend her mother in the last weeks of her life, even reading quietly from the Keifer family Bible to Sybil who was slowly passing away. Sarah was with Annie when Sybil McKane asked her to take care of her daughter. Sarah promised Sybil she would see to Annie's welfare. It was the Christian thing to do. Thing was...Sarah meant it! So...when the Keifers packed up everything they owned on the old two-horse wagon and struck out for their new home in North Carolina, Annie was hustled aboard with the few clothes she owned piled atop the Keifers. Annie was now a member of the Keifer family. Amos was yet to know any of it.



Annie came from behind the wagon and the two women went up onto the porch of the "A" frame farmhouse. The front porch went only across the front of the building, as the name implied. The front door was centered with one window on either side of the doorway.

Sarah turned to Frank, still on the wagon seat and said, "Frank go to the well and get the key!"

"Yes'um," said Frank, as he wrapped the reins around the brake handle and jumped to the ground. When he reached the well he moved the wooden bucket to one side and removed a curbstone. There, beneath the flint rock, was a key, THE key to the Keifer's front door. He hurried over to his mother and Annie with it. Sarah inserted it into the lock and opened the door. Without hesitation she stepped into her new home. Annie followed, then Frank.

Joseph was still looking over the outside, especially the barn. It was big. It was just right for their three animals and, he hoped, the milk cow, Pa was sure to buy, once they settled in. He could taste the fresh milk, even now. He looked over the barn and the stable with the fenced-in feedlot just outside. There was a water trough and a feed trough. He went back inside the barn and found the crib. Sure enough, there was fodder in it. He took an armload and dumped it into the feed trough. Then he went to the mules, Jenny and Franny. He unhitched them from the wagon and led both of them to the feedlot. They went straight to the feed trough. Joe slipped the two rails that made-up the gate back into their slits and went to the well. The slats of the wooden bucket, which had been shrunk and separated when Amos arrived, had now swelled until they made a satisfactory seal. He slowly lowered the aged bucket down into the well, checking the rope as it passed through his fingers. It was good. He allowed the bucket to gently touch the surface of the water and then he felt the weight pull it over onto its side and he felt the tug as the bucket sank beneath the water's surface. He gently hauled the bucket; hand over hand, up the shaft of the well and out of the water. Finally, it reached the top. Water was sloshing over its rim. He knew he would be able to get water to the mules with it for a good many years to come. He found he had to make three trips to the well with the sloshing bucket to complete his task. Finally, he was finished! Then Joseph went to see his new house.

The Keifer house had three bedrooms, a kitchen, and a living or, as more commonly referred to, the "sitting room." There was a big, long table in the kitchen. The kitchen would double as a dining room. There was a hallway running through the middle of the house. It ran from the front door to the kitchen, which spanned the entire width of the house. There was a big fireplace in the middle of the back wall. The fireplace had been bricked up and a big, wood-burning stove now sat in front of it. The stove's pipe reached up, then turned about six feet from the floor and entered a flue in the front wall of the chimney. It was a warm, friendly looking room. This room would be the center of the Keifer family life.

There was a noise from the front of the house. As the Keifers turned to the sound, they were greeted with, "SARAH! It's YOU!" Amos, his hat clamped in his hand and his big arms as wide as he could get them rushed into the room and wrapped them around Sarah, lifting her from the floor. Amos kissed his wife, resoundingly, on the lips and then spun around a couple of times before returning Sarah to the floor. She was red-faced as she brushed loose strands of hair from her face. "Amos, you shouldn't," she said.

"Shouldn't what, Sarah?" He reached for her hands and held them. "I'm so happy to see you. I've been worried nearly to death the last ten days or so. Where have you been?"

Sarah, nodded toward Annie and said, "Amos, I'd like you to say hello to Annie Sue McKane! She's your new daughter."

Amos saw Annie for the first time since entering the house. He looked startled for a moment then said, "Well, I'll be...!"

### **There is no Law, to Speak of!**

Bess came to a halt in front of the Knight cabin. Ellie Grace and Luke were riding double. Luke slid off the hindquarters of the big mare then turned to help Ellie down. The door to the cabin opened and Willie came out shielding his eyes from the bright morning sunlight.

"Hey, Luke. Didn't expect you home today. Good morning Miss Ellie." Willie said, still squinting into the sun.

"It's Ellie, Willie," said Ellie. Please drop the Miss. There's not THAT much difference in our ages!" Ellie laughed.

"Yes'um! I'll do it."

"Figured I'd better get on home and see that you and my brother stay out of trouble." Luke said. "Where IS Jack, anyway?"

"The Capn rode over to Amos Keifer's house early this morning. I figured he'd stop by the Campbell place on his way home."

"We didn't see him on the road. That's funny," said Ellie.

"Well, it was early when he left," said Willie looking puzzled. "Come on in and have some coffee. I brewed a pot this morning."

"It's probably eaten through the pot by now," Ellie said with a chuckle.

“Well, it WILL wake you up and get your heart pumping!” replied Willie, laughing as he stepped through the door followed by Ellie and Luke.

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William Jeffers was leaning against an oak tree not far from the river’s edge. His horse was tied to a blackjack not far away. Jeffers held a Henry rifle in the crook of his arm. He was gazing out across the black waters of the river. He watched as a floating pinecone went sweeping away toward the ocean. He wondered where it would wash up. Jeffers reflected that often he felt like that pinecone...being swept along with the current, never sure of just where he would wash up! His wife and family were gone. His farm was gone. Most of his friends were gone. A number of them killed in the war. He wasn’t sure why he was sticking around. He’d heard of opportunities out west in the Indian territories where a man could start over. Maybe when this was settled he would just move on. Maybe it was time.

Jeffers’ horse whinnied and shied. Its ears went straight up and turned back toward River Road. Jeffers pulled the hammer of the Henry back with his thumb and stepped backwards until the oak tree hid him. He stood, concealed that way, with only enough of his head exposed to allow him to see who was approaching. He could clearly hear a horse coming toward him through the under brush. In a moment the brush parted and Jack Knight and his big bay stepped into the clearing. Jeffers stepped out from behind the tree.

”Morning, Capn Knight!”

“Morning, Captain Jeffers,” Jack said, as he stepped down from the saddle. He drop reined the bay and walked toward Jeffers with his right hand extended. The two men shook hands.

”You have information?” Jack came right to the point.

“Yes, I think I do,” said Jeffers. “First, let me ask if you are aware of the steamboat’s misfortune?”

“Yes, I was...uh...informed by Colonel Garrison,” Jack replied. He turned his head away as he smiled.

“I have reason to believe Captain, the boat will meet with the same misfortune next week as well. I expect it will be in a different location, but, rest assured, Captain, the boat will be considerably lightened by the time it reaches River Bluff.”

“I look forward to it,” said Jack. “What else?”

“Captain, remember Dabney Caines...from the meeting, the other night?”

“The fellow with the sister in Wilmington?”

“Yes, that’s the man. Well, I spoke to him late last night. He has been to Wilmington and while he was there, he had the opportunity to mingle, somewhat, with the occupation troops billeted there. You know, in the taverns and such. Anyway, he picked up some information I thought might be valuable to you...to us.”

“Like what?” Jack asked.

“Well, for instance, we’re not in a Military District. In fact, there are no Military Districts as yet. There has been some talk of that sort of thing from Washington, but the President won’t allow it. Some of the Generals are very angry with President Johnson. They want to really bear down hard on us. Johnson doesn’t see it that way. He feels we can better be brought back into the Union with open-armed kindness. The military is having none of it. There is a great deal of contentiousness in Washington City right now over just what to do with us. In the meantime, we are left in some sort of limbo, not state, not territories, not military districts. Nobody knows WHAT we are. There is no law to speak of. The only authority is that of the military officers on the scene.”

“What about Colonel Garrison? Any news of his mission here?”

“None," said Jeffers.

Well, what’s he doing here?” asked Jack.

“Nobody knows,” replied Jeffers. “If they do know, they’re not talking.”

“Anybody mention a Daniel L. McGinnis?”

“Caines did not mention it, if they did.”

Jack looked at the swift moving water as he pondered the information Jeffers had brought him. “All right, then. Let’s plan to meet again next week. Keep your men moving about and reporting anything the troops are doing. Sooner or later they’ll set a pattern. When they do, we’ll know what they’re up to.”

The two men shook hands again then each mounted his horse. Jack called over his shoulder, “Good luck on your river boat venture. They’ll be expecting you next time.”

“I know, Captain. We’ll take precautions.”

Each man threw a mock salute toward the other as they parted. The river rushed onward toward the ocean. Its movement timeless. Sunlight reflected off its surface onto the overhanging branches of trees growing along its banks. A leaf broke away from its

mother branch and floated downward to the river's surface where it was clutched by the water and swept away. Fall was coming.

### **Willie, Where are You?**

Luke tied Molly to the rail by the watering trough near the Mule Auction then walked quickly across the street to Doc Brown's office. He stepped up onto the wooden sidewalk then across it to the door. He opened it and went in.

Luke was stunned when his vision adapted to the dimness of the office. He couldn't believe the person before him was Deborah. His mind refused to accept what his eyes were seeing. He looked about the office and saw Rebecca sitting in the little rocker by the bed and Doc at his desk.

Doc looked over his spectacles at Luke. He didn't speak. There were no words. He sat for a moment, then slowly got up and went to Luke placing his hand on Luke's shoulder. Luke turned away. He was having trouble grasping what was before him. Jack and Willie had told him, but somehow, what they told him did not conjure up pictures nearly as vivid as the real thing! This was beyond horror! Anger flooded over him. He could feel the rage feeding his emotions. The bitter taste of revenge was in his mouth! He wanted to rip and tear...but, there was nothing...no one, to take his revenge on. They were dead.

Luke turned to Mrs. Goldberg, "I'm sorry, Ma'am. I'm...sorry."

Rebecca said, "I know, Mr. Knight. I know."

Doc had gone back to his desk and again was busy writing something. Luke walked across the room to where Doc sat.

"Doc how is she?"

Doc looked up. He glanced toward Rebecca, then back to Luke. "Physically, she's in bad shape, Luke. It'll be weeks, probably months, before she's healed. Mentally... I don't know... I just don't know. My guess is she's hiding somewhere in her mind. She has gone into that hiding place we all have and she has closed herself off from the world. It's a way to defend herself. At least... her mind thinks so. I don't know how, or if, we can get her out again. It may be that we can do nothing but wait. If her body heals, she may feel safe enough to come out again. But, Luke... I just don't know."

"Thanks Doc." Luke felt a presence and turned. It was Rebecca. "Mr. Knight, I hate to ask but if you are going to be here for a little while, do you think you could sit with

Deborah? I need to see to Jacob. He has to eat and I expect he isn't. Maybe if I go home long enough to prepare him something, he'll eat. At least, I need to try."

"Yes ma'am. I'd consider it a privilege to sit with her. You go on and see to Mr. Goldberg. Don't worry."

"It's all right, Rebecca. I'll be here. If she needs anything, I'll see that she gets it." Doc said, rising and escorting Rebecca to the door. Rebecca stopped and stood for a moment looking at her daughter. Tears sprang again to her eyes as she opened the door and left. Doc stood near the door and watched her cross the street and enter the bakery. Doc lowered his eyes and slowly shook his head from left to right.

Luke sat in the rocker by Deborah's bed. He placed his hat on the floor beside the much-used little chair. Doc returned to his desk and busied himself there. Luke watched the steady rise and fall of her abdomen with her breathing. He asked himself, time and again, why any one would do this. What motivated people to do this...this...evil? He reached out and took Deborah's hand. He gently squeezed it, and then relaxed his hand. He thought he felt a movement. After awhile he decided it was his imagination. He squeezed her hand again. This time there was movement! He looked up, her lips were moving! She was trying to speak!

"Doc, Doc, get over here!" Luke called out. Doc got up and started toward the bed.

Deborah's voice cracked; her throat was dry from dehydration, but what she said was plain to Luke and Doc. "Willie? Willie? Where are you Willie? Help me. Willie...? Please, help me! Willie... where are you?" Then, Deborah lapsed back into silence.

Luke was thunder struck! He sucked in his breath. Doc quickly reached for Deborah's wrist and felt her pulse. It was slightly elevated but she was, unmistakably, at rest. Doc stood by the bed, his back, deliberately, toward Luke.

Luke had sunk back into the chair. He couldn't believe what he had heard. His Deborah...calling for another man??? How could this be??? Had he heard her ask for Willie? HAD HE???

Luke slid forward in the little chair. "Doc, did you hear?"

"Yeah, I heard."

"What did she say, Doc?"

"You heard her, Luke. Don't make me repeat it!" said Doc gruffly.

"Doc, WHAT DID SHE SAY?" Luke demanded!

Doc spun toward Luke. “Luke, she was calling for Willie! WILLIE, Luke! She called for WILLIE!” Then Doc lowered his voice. “Son, don’t do this to yourself. You heard what she said.” He turned back to the bed. “Willie looked after her all those weeks you were laid up. He walked her to and from her home to visit YOU! I guess Deborah learned to rely on Willie. I guess....”

“She’s in love with him, Doc!”

“I wouldn’t say tha...”

“You don’t have to Doc. Like you said, I heard for myself!”

Luke leaned over and grabbed hold of his hat. He stood. “I’m...” he tried to say. Then he strode to the door and left. Doc walked over and watched Luke cross the street, untie Molly, mount-up, and ride east on Main Street. As he passed the bakery, Rebecca stepped from inside and watched him go by. She glanced at the doctor’s office, then back toward Luke. Doc stepped out and waved to Rebecca to assure her Deborah was all right. Then he went back in, sat in the rocker, and leaned back.

“Deborah, child, you have just wounded a good man. He’s really hurt. I hope nobody else gets hurt. Oh, Lordy, what a mess! What a mess!” muttered Doc as he leaned his head against the high back of the chair.

About a mile east of River Bluff, down by the water of the river a young man sat leaning against an old persimmon tree. He held the reins to a mule in his left hand as he wiped the flood of tears from his eyes with the other.

High above the trees a hawk circled lazily in the sky. His keen eyes were sweeping the forest floor, the surface of the water far below, and even the air below him. His wings suddenly caught a thermal and he was lifted even higher into the sky. His eyes, never for a moment, left the area of their search. He was looking for a kill.

### **It’s Nature’s Way**

Jack’s big Bay was in the stable lean-to as Luke rode up to the Knight cabin on Molly. He slid off the mule near the well. Molly turned to the smell of water and instinct forced her to go to it. Luke strode to the cabin door. He paused only a moment, and then barged through it into the cabin. Jack was at the fireplace lighting a cigarette from a smoking splinter he had drawn from the still glowing embers. Willie was seated at the table in the middle of the room cleaning his Colt revolver. Luke went straight to Willie. Without breaking his stride he hit Willie on the right cheek with all his might. Willie was lifted from his seat at the table by the force of the blow. He fell backwards against the bottom

bunk at the rear wall of the cabin. The cylinder of the revolver he had been holding struck the floor near him and rolled under the bunk. Luke's punch had been so sudden, so unexpected, Willie's brain was having difficulty concluding what had happened. He sat for a moment, perfectly still.

Jack was shocked into immobility. His brain didn't believe what he had just seen! When it finally decided what he had seen actually had happened, Jack dropped the splinter and the cigarette and rushed to Luke. He grabbed Luke from behind pinning his arms to his sides.

"What the HELL are you doing, boy?" Jack demanded, nearly screaming the words in Luke's ear! "What's going on?"

"Ask Willie that!" Luke replied, as he tried to twist himself free from his brother's arms. "Go ahead...ask him!"

Willie was shaking his head and running his fingers through his shaggy hair. The bells were still ringing in his ears and he was still seeing little sparkles of light dancing before his eyes.

Jack demanded, "What about it, Willie? What's this all about?"

Willie was struggling to pick himself up from the floor. Once he almost made it, only to fall back against the bottom bunk. This time he managed to get to his feet. He swayed, reached out his hand and grabbed hold of the top bunk and steadied himself. Then he tried very hard to focus his eyes on the two men before him.

"What about it?" Jack demanded.

"Capn, I don't know what's going on. I have no idea why he did that! My God! I feel like I been kicked by a mule!" Willie wiped mucus dribbling from his right nostril. He looked at it and decided it wasn't important, since it wasn't blood.

"All right, Luke! Start talking. Right now, you're the only one here who knows what the hell is going on. Start talking...RIGHT NOW, BOY!" Jack shook Luke from side to side for emphasis!

"All right, all right!" Luke protested! "He stole my girl!" Nodding toward Willie, Luke continued, "That lowlife over there stole my girl! That's what this is about!"

"What?" Jack wasn't sure he had heard correctly. "He did WHAT?"

"He stole my girl! He DELIBERATELY went behind my back and stole Deborah away from me! That's what he did!"



Then Luke went limp. He just folded in on himself. Jack held him up and practically dragged him to the bench by the little table. He sat him down. Luke's head went forward onto his forearms, resting it facedown on the table.

Willie said, "Capn, I don't know what he's talking about. Yeah, I was sweet on her, but so is half the county! She's the most beautiful thing I have ever seen! But, I swear, Capn, I didn't try to steal her from Luke. I wouldn't do that! Fact is, Capn, I don't even know HOW to steal another man's girl!"

Jack stood for a moment looking from his brother to Willie, then back again. Then he sighed and said, "Willie, would you mind stepping outside for a moment. I need to speak with Luke... alone."

"Yes, sir, Capn." Willie stooped down and retrieved his pistol's cylinder from beneath the bunk, then he picked up the remainder of his broken down Colt from the table in front of Luke's head and walked, a bit unsteadily, out of the cabin.

Jack went to the fireplace and shook the coffee pot sitting on the hearth. There was coffee in it. He poured two cups of the warm, strong liquid and placed one cup in front of Luke as he sat down across the table from him with the other cup.

"Now, let's get one thing straight. That man, you just damn near killed, is the best friend I have on this earth! He has saved my life more times than I care to remember! He has fought with you, and for you...and Luke, I'm only going to say this once...you're a damned FOOL if you think he'd do what you just accused him of doing! Now, I don't know what set you off, but I think you'd better explain yourself... right now!"

Luke didn't speak.

"Speak up, son! We've got to settle this, right now! The three of us can't live in this little hovel with the kind of hatred I'm seeing here today! Now, YOU START TALKING!"

Luke finally stirred himself. He raised his head and saw the cup of coffee in front of him. He reached for it and took a sip. "She told me, Jack!"

"Told you what, Luke?"

Then Luke told Jack all that had happened earlier at Doc Brown's office.

"Oh, my Lord!" exclaimed Jack. "No wonder you were so upset!"

"I wasn't upset! I was mad as hell!"

Jack said, "Now you listen to me. That man didn't try to steal your girl! Like he said, Luke, He wouldn't know how, if he DID want to steal her!"

Then Jack told him of the care Willie had taken of Deborah while Luke was bed ridden at Doc Brown's office, and the care he took of her and for her while Luke was laid up at the Campbell place. Then he summed it up by saying, "It was all for YOU, Luke. Willie took care of Deborah...for YOU!" He reached out his hand and patted Luke on the forearm. "It never entered his mind to try to steal her from you. He's just not that kind!" Jack paused for a moment, "I think, maybe you'd better discuss this with Deborah... when she's feeling up to it. I think you'll find this will probably fall under the category of a woman's right to change her mind! That's her prerogative, Luke. If she wants somebody else, there's nothing ANYONE can do about it! It's nature's way." Jack picked up Luke's cup and handed it to him. "Here, drink this... and then...I think you need to go outside and apologize to that man. Good men, like Willie, are few and far between. We can't afford to lose a friend over a thing like this!"

Luke turned the cup up and downed the contents in one swallow. He got up from the table, pushing the bench back with his calves and strode out the door. In a moment, Jack, too, got up from the table and walked to the door. He could see the two men by the well deep in conversation. After a while Willie slung his big right arm over Luke's shoulder and pulled Luke toward him in a distinctive sign of male friendship.

"Whew!" sighed Jack.

The hawk, still circling high above, looked down in approval. Then he folded his wings back and dived down at a remarkable speed toward a hapless fish swimming too close to the surface of the river. In a moment it was over. The troubled water smoothed out as the ripples reached for the shore on each side of the black ribbon on its way to the Atlantic.

### **Just looking at a Yankee**

Frank and Joe Keifer, Amos' sons, rode into town with a list of things needed for their new farm. Amos had thought it better if he did not make himself available to Colonel Garrison, just yet. Both the boys rode mules. They rode slowly down Main Street and then turned at the western end, went towards the river, and walked the mules back up Water Street to its eastern end. They dismounted and walked the mules to the water's edge and looked over the boats. It was still early and many of the fishing boats had left at dawn for their run to their favorite fishing grounds. Some of the boats were brightly painted and appeared to be toys bobbing on the river's surface. Most were drab work-a-day boats used until they leaked too much, then dragged ashore and destroyed. It was

exciting for the young men from the farm lands of Alabama to see a way of life they thought of as fun turned into work. Fishing for them was fun, a way to relax! Here it was a job! Somebody was going to have to explain this one to them!

The boys walked their mules up the path from Water Street back to the Eastern end of Main Street and then casually walked them down the street, again, until they reached the Mercantile. They tied the mules up and entered the store. Joe stopped to watch the little bell above the door jangle its two-note melody until it slowed to a stop. Frank went immediately to the balding man with the white apron on behind the counter.

“Can I help you?” asked Mr. Bowen.

“Yes sir,” replied Frank. He unbuttoned his left shirt pocket and lifted a folded piece of brown paper from it. “Here’s a list of things Pa wants,” he said, handing the list to Mr. Bowen.

Mr. Bowen took it, scanned it, and then said, “All right. It’ll take a bit to get this together.”

“That’s all right,” said Frank. “We’re going across the street to visit our cousin, Billy.” “We’ll be back in a while.”

“Billy Carnes?” asked Mr. Bowen. “Is Billy Carnes your cousin?”

“Yes sir, he sure is,” answered Frank.

“Then you must be the family at the old Roberts place,” Mr. Bowen stated.

“Yes sir, we are.” Frank stuck out his hand. Mr. Bowen took it and they shook.

“Mighty pleased to meet you....?”

“Keifer,” said Frank. “I’m Frank Keifer and this is my brother, Joe. Our Pa is Amos Keifer. Pa is riding over the farm today and he told us to come pick this stuff up. Hope you got everything.”

“Yep, sure do. Mr. and Mrs. Roberts your kin?”

“Yep, Aunt and Uncle. They left the farm to Ma and Pa. Looks like a nice place. We haven’t seen much of it...yet. Been too busy getting the house livable...at least to suit Ma.” Frank grinned. “Pa’s riding the property lines today. He said he wanted to be sure what was his and what wasn’t.”

“Well, I’m glad to meet you. Hope y’all have good luck with that place. It’s a nice farm. I’ll get your stuff together.” Mr. Bowen immediately went to the shelves and began pulling items down for the Keifers.

Frank turned and started for the door. He missed Joe and turned to see him staring at a jar of licorice twists. Frank ambled over to Joe and said, "All right! Sir, could we have two of these and put 'em on our bill?"

"Yep! Help yourselves." Mr. Bowen called from somewhere toward the other end of the store.

The Keifer boys left the store with a licorice twist each as they started for the little house beside the Mule Auction. Frank bit a piece off his twist and stuffed the remainder into his pocket. Joe was trying to get the whole twist in his mouth at once. He had never met Billy Carnes, but he felt pretty sure that when he did, if he still had any licorice left, he'd be obliged to share it with him. He didn't want to share his licorice with ANYONE! So, he chewed as fast as he could and swallowed. Repeatedly.

The Keifer boys saw the blue uniformed soldiers standing silently at either side of the big doors that opened into the Mule Auction. This was as close as they had been to Yankees. They'd heard of them. They'd seen damage to farms attributed to them, but they had yet to see any honest-to-goodness Yankees...until today.

Frank slowed as they neared the barn. He was looking intently at the soldier on the right side of the door. He looked to be about as old as Joe. The soldier looked back. He wasn't glaring, exactly, just looking intently. Joe was still headed for the little house. Suddenly he missed Frank, stopped, and looked back. He saw Frank and the soldier standing and staring at each other. Joe stood still for a few moments and just watched to see what was going to happen. When nothing did, he walked back to Frank and said, "Whatcha doing?"

Frank was slow to answer. Then he said, "Nothing. Just looking at a Yankee."

"Don't look like much to me," said Joe.

"Me neither," said Frank and they continued toward the little house. As they passed the corner of the barn, the soldier turned to look for a long time at their departing backs.

When they stepped up onto the front porch, the door opened and Farley stepped out. "Yeah?" he said.

"Uncle Farley...?" asked Frank tentatively.

"What...wait a minute?" Farley snapped his left thumb and middle finger. "You must be Sarah's boys!"

"Yes, sir. I'm Frank and he's Joseph. We just call him Joe." Frank turned and slapped Joe briskly on the back three times. Joe had a bit of licorice "semi-lodged" in his throat

as a result of his intention to eat it all before Billy showed-up! He coughed a few times... then croaked, "Hey, Uncle Farley!"

Farley stifled a laugh and called back over his shoulder into the house, "Billy, get out here! It's your cousins... come to visit!" There was the scraping of chair legs on a wooden floor and suddenly Billy appeared in the doorway. He was a miniature copy of Farley. There was no mistaking his parentage.

"Billy, this is Frank and Joe." Farley said, pointing to each of the Keifer boys as he called their names. "These are your Aunt Sarah's boys! They've come to visit. Say hello!"

"Hey," said Billy. He stepped out onto the porch.

Farley said, "Why don't you boys go on inside and visit for a while. Get acquainted. I'll be right back. I have something I want you to give to your Pa, Frank. Don't leave 'til I get back, now. You hear?"

"Yes sir," said Frank. The boys all went inside.

Farley headed for the barn. He went through the big front doors and continued through the dimness to a corner very near the back where he opened the rounded top of a huge toolbox that sat on a pair of saw horses. It was an old box. It was scraped and scratched...but it had a big hasp and padlock on it. Farley fished around in his pocket until he produced a key to fit the lock. He opened the box. Then he cast a furtive glance toward the front of the barn. Seeing no one paying particular attention, he extracted a folded piece of paper from the box and hurriedly put it in his pocket. He closed and locked the box. Then he walked to the forge, squeezed the bellows a few times and headed for the door. In a moment he was outside moving toward his little house. He saw Colonel Garrison and Major Benson riding up to the barn from the west as he stepped onto his porch. He stood for a moment and watched as the two officers dismounted and turned the reins of their mounts over to the soldiers at the door. Then they went inside. Farley turned and entered his home.

Frank and the two younger boys were seated at the table in the little kitchen. Joe was watching as Billy chewed a piece of licorice Frank had stuffed into his pocket earlier. There was lust for the licorice in Joe's eyes. Frank had turned toward the front of the house when he heard Farley open the door. Farley appeared in the doorway between the kitchen and the front room. He motioned for Frank to join him. Frank pushed his chair back and went to the darkened front room. The shades were pulled and the front door was closed.

Farley said, "Frank I have something I want you to give your Pa." He produced the folded piece of paper he had retrieved from his toolbox in the barn. He handed the paper to Frank. "It's important you get this to Amos. He'll know what to do with it. Just don't mention it to anyone...not now...not ever! Understand?"

“Yes sir!” Frank nodded as he slipped the paper into his right front pocket. He patted the pocket to assure himself and Uncle Farley it was, indeed, safe. Then he called to Joe. “Come on Joe. We gotta go to the store and then get on home.”

As Joe came into the front room, Farley said, “Sure glad you boys came by. Tell Sarah I hope she can come by soon. You see what I have on my hands right now”; he motioned toward the soldiers at the barn... “I don’t know when I’ll be able to get out your way.”

“We’ll tell them, Uncle Farley.”

The two Keifer boys set out for the Mercantile. As they passed the big barn door, the young soldier in blue watched them intently. “Don’t look like much to me!” he whispered to the soldier on the other side of the door.

“Me neither!” came the reply.

### **Gotta See a Man!**

Frank and Joe approached their new home just before dusk dark. Amos was working in the barn repairing a couple of stalls. Each of the boys took care of his mule and then turned them loose in the stable lot for some fodder and water.

Joe said, “I’m gonna go see what Ma has for supper!”

“All right. I’ll be along in a minute. I gotta talk to Pa a minute.”

Joe was off, sprinting toward the house. He’d completely forgotten the burlap sack of goods from the Mercantile. Each boy had had a sack tied across the rump of his mule on the way home.

“Joe!” Yelled Frank. “Your forgot your sack!”

“I’ll get it in a minute!” replied Joe over his shoulder as he ran!

“Joe, get back here and get this sack...NOW!” Frank was used to dealing with Joe firmly.

Joe stopped, turned around, and slowly returned to Frank. Frank pointed toward the burlap sacks sitting on the ground near the drop rails that led to the stable lot. Joe reluctantly chose one and hoisted it to his shoulder. He looked up at Frank, stuck his tongue out, and then, turned for the house. Frank mock-kicked him in the seat of his pants as he marched, resolutely, toward the house. Frank then turned to the barn. He could hear his father working in there. As he approached Amos had a one by ten pine board, about eight feet long, lying atop a couple of rickety sawhorses and he was sawing about six inches off a split end. The saw had seen better days. It was slow going. He continued without looking up until he had successfully removed the split piece of pine from the board.

When he did look up, little rivulets of sweat dripped from his ear lobes and from the end of his nose. His face was red from the exertion of handling the very dull saw and leaning over the sawhorses to do it. He was in no mood for foolishness. He took the board over to the stall he was mending and held it in place to judge the length. Satisfied, he took it back and laid it again across the sawhorses. Then he turned to Frank.

“Everything all right, boy?”

“I don’t know, Pa. The town sure is pretty. It was quiet today. Not many folks around. Those soldiers sure do stick out! I mean, Yankee soldiers in the South. It don’t seem right, Pa!”

“Well, Frank, they won. It’ll have to be right! How were your Uncle Farley and Billy?”

“Just fine. As a matter of fact, Uncle Farley gave me something for you. He said I was to never, ever, mention it again...to anybody!”

“Where is it?” asked Amos.

Frank ran his hand into his front pocket and extracted the folded piece of paper and handed it to his father. Amos carefully unfolded the paper and held it toward the light from the barn door. There was not enough light.

“Frank, I think I saw a lantern near the back of the barn. Get it for me... and see if there is any coal oil in it.”

Yes sir!” Frank said, as he headed for a long shelf that ran the length of the barn against the back wall. Sure enough, there was a lantern on it, and as he shook it, he could hear there was fuel in it. Frank unscrewed the cap from the fuel tank at the bottom of the lantern and sniffed the fuel. It was coal oil.

When he returned to his father, Amos already had a match in his fingers. He had wiped the sweat from his face with his sleeve. Frank saw the long damp streaks down the right forearm of the blue work shirt. He handed the lantern to Amos. Amos rolled the wick up until the tip was exposed. He struck the match against the sole of his shoe and lit the fuel soaked wick. It caught and began to smoke. Amos quickly dropped the glass chimney down and trimmed the wick until he had a steady glow and no smoke.

“All right, let’s see what this says.” Amos carefully unfolded the paper, which turned out to be a letter. At least at first glance it appeared to be a letter. Whatever the message was, it was on the letterhead of a Mr. Daniel L. McGinnis. Amos slowly read the letter over once, then again. He did not offer to share the contents with Frank. Frank did not ask because he knew if his father felt he needed to know, he would tell him. He didn’t need to know.

Amos looked up from the letter and said, “Frank, go tell your Ma I won’t be here for supper. I have an errand to take care of. Gotta see a man,” he said, as he started toward the stable to saddle his horse. “Tell her not to worry, I’ll be back before too long.” He quickly saddled his horse and rode out the long wagon road to the River Road and turned west toward the Campbell farm, and farther on, the Knight farm. It was just dusk dark. A breeze had sprung up from the north. The air currents came across the surface of the river about a hundred yards to his right. He could hear the frogs tuning up as his horse set itself into a ground-eating gallop down the soft loamy surface of the road. The moist air felt cool against his skin. As he passed the turn-off to the Campbell place, he could see soft light filtering out of the window of what he took to be the kitchen. He continued on toward Knight’s Crossing.

### **The Agent of Mr. Daniel L. McGinnis**

Amos could smell the aroma of frying meat as he turned off River Road onto the wagon road at Knight’s Crossing. There was light spilling from the open door of the cabin and the aroma of cooking meat was even stronger the closer he got to the little house. He pulled up and dismounted at the well and started for the door when a shadow fell across the pool of yellow light.

“Who’s there?” a voice demanded!

Amos looked up to see a large silhouette of a man framed in the doorway. “It’s me. Amos Keifer,” he replied.

“Amos...Come on in! We ‘re just about to sit down to supper!” The figure stepped back to allow Amos to enter. Amos removed his big hat and slapped it against his trouser legs out of long habit. Then he stepped into the Knight’s cabin. Willie was standing at



the door with a cup of steaming coffee. It had been Willie who challenged him when he first dismounted. Jack was seated at the table, as was Luke. Jack got up and leaned across the table and extended his hand in greeting. Amos took it. As he and Jack shook hands, Luke stood and offered his. They, too, shook as well.

There was fried venison on the table and another slab of the nearly fat free meat was ready to be turned in the cast iron skillet on the open flame in the fireplace. It sizzled quietly as it cooked. His mouth watered. First, though, he had business with Jack.

Jack seated himself and offered Amos a bench at the end of the table nearest the fireplace. Amos took it. Willie still stood near the door as if standing sentry duty.

Jack said, "Luke, how about getting Amos a cup of coffee."

Amos said. "A cup of coffee would be appreciated. I missed supper tonight."

"We can fix that in a hurry!" laughed Jack! "Willie, throw another slab of that deer in the skillet!"

"Sure thing, Capn," answered Willie.

Luke sat a steaming blue enamel cup filled to the brim with steaming coffee on the table in front of Amos.

"Much obliged, Luke." Amos slowly lifted the overfilled cup and sipped carefully from the brim. He sat the cup down and said, "Now, THAT'S coffee!"

Jack pushed his plate back and said, "What brings you to our palace this evening, Amos?"

Amos quickly filled the three men in on what had happened at Farley's house earlier and the piece of paper Frank had brought from Farley.

"Do you have the paper?" Jack asked.

Amos nodded and produced the folded piece of paper. He handed it to Jack. Jack unfolded it and skimmed it lightly. Then he rose from the table and went to the fireplace. He stooped down and used the light from the fire to read the contents of the letter. After a couple of minutes Jack rose and walked to the door. He didn't speak. He stood for a moment looking out into the darkness. Then he returned to the fireplace and picked up an old brier pipe on the mantle and filled it from a metal can of tobacco sitting on the mantle. He leaned over and picked up a lighted splinter from the fire and drew the flame down deep into the bowl of tobacco. It caught and soon there were billows of aromatic blue smoke swirling around Jack's head and a minute later there was a layer of smoke about four feet off the floor floating in the cabin's atmosphere.

Nobody spoke.

Amos sipped his coffee. Luke cleared his throat and Willie stood silently in place.

Jack walked back to the table and sat down. He leaned forward on the table and laid the unfolded letter on the table. "This," he said, pointing at the letter, "is a Letter of Authorization. This letter authorizes James Cole to act as the agent of a Mr. Daniel L. McGinnis in all land acquisitions. The letter is on the letterhead of Daniel L. McGinnis. The address shows the office is in Washington City. It is signed by Daniel L. McGinnis and E.D. Gant, a lawyer in Washington City, notarized it. The date is June 1, 1865." He took a draw from the pipe. It produced more aromatic smoke.

"So...what does that tell us, Jack?" Amos asked as he raised his coffee again.

Luke leaned forward, elbows on the table. Willie remained by the door.

"I'm not sure," said Jack. "I mean I know what it says. I'm not sure I know what it SAYS, though!"

"What do you mean, Jack?" asked Luke.

I mean...we know that James Cole was the purchasing agent for this McGinnis fellow in land transactions. We don't know WHY he was buying land, and for what purpose. We also know James Cole is dead! Where does THAT leave this...McGinnis...fellow?"

"What about Garrison, Jack? Where does he fit into this?" Amos asked.

Willie finally spoke. "He was in it... with Cole and McGinnis."

"What do you mean?" asked Luke.

Willie continued, "Well, look at it this way: Garrison places a lean against the property for back taxes, real or imagined. Then he confronts the landowner with the bill for the taxes. The landowner doesn't have the money. Hell, nobody does! When the landowner can't pay, Garrison throws him off the land and takes possession of it for payment of back taxes."

Jack picked up Willie's train of thought and continued... "Then along comes the now deceased Mr. James Cole who offers to buy the land, for which the military has no use, at what appears to be a fair price. Garrison turns the ownership of the land over to Mr. McGinnis' agent. Now... McGinnis owns the land, for which he has paid practically nothing. He pays a percentage to Cole for acting as his agent. To Garrison, he gives, oh say... the amount of the taxes owed by the original landowner, for making the land available.

Willie finished it with, “Keep in mind, the higher the taxes owed, the more money Garrison makes!”

“But what does McGinnis want the land for?” asked Luke.

Nobody spoke for a minute for two. Amos got up and walked to the fireplace and poured a second cup of the hot black coffee. He sipped it. Then he said. “A railroad.”

“We have a railroad!” said Luke.

“No! We HAD a railroad!” said Jack. Have you seen what the Yankees did to the roadbed, the ties, and the rails? Have you seen the Sherman Bow Ties along the tracks?”

“You mean the rails heated and twisted around those trees?” asked Luke.

“Exactly!” said Jack.

“He’s going to buy the land and lay a new roadbed and new tracks, ties and everything! He’s going to do it dirt cheap, too!” exclaimed Amos. “I knew it. I told you Garrison was a snake!” He walked to the door and tossed the remainder of the coffee out into the yard. He came back and reclaimed his seat at the table.

“It would seem so, Amos. It would seem so.” Jack muttered.

“Can he do that?” asked Luke?

“If we let him!” answered Willie.

“How are we going to stop him?” Luke persisted.

“I don’t know...yet!” said Jack, taking a deep draw from the pipe. “Now that we know what the plan is, we can come up with a strategy to stop him. I don’t know what it’ll be...yet, but we’ll come up with something.”

“There’s another problem, Jack,” spoke Amos with a note of somberness in his voice, which had not been there a moment before.

“What is it, Amos?” inquired Jack.

Amos inhaled deeply then settled forward onto his forearms, which were folded on the tabletop before him. “I don’t have the receipt for the taxes on my place,” he said.

There was silence in the little cabin.

“What happened Amos?” asked Jack.

“It was in the family Bible when I left Alabama. Sarah helped care for a dying friend and the Bible was used in the funeral services and ...and... somehow it, well, it was left in Alabama. We searched the wagon and every box and crate the family brought from Alabama. It’s just not there.” Amos wiped the back of his big right hand across his eyes. It was a gesture of weariness.

Nobody spoke for a moment. Then Jack said, “ We’ll work around it...somehow. Dabney Caines will be going to Wilmington. Amos do you have the lawyer’s name?”

“Yeah. That much I still have.” He smiled.

“Then don’t let it worry you. We’ve come too far to be turned back now. We’ll get through this, Amos.” Jack reached out and laid a comforting hand on Amos’ shoulder.

Amos turned from one face to the other in the small cabin; then he leaned back and placed his thumbs in the straps of his overall just over the bib and said, “That venison still hot?”

Willie laughed and served up the slab of venison to Amos on a blue enamel plate.

A hoot owl called from the edge of the woods and was answered from somewhere in the loft of the corncrib. There was the sound of mice scurrying around beneath the corncrib. No matter. The owl was patient. He would have his supper.

### **The Round Man, Again!**

The *Betty Louise* backed away from the dock on the Wilmington waterfront. The stack belched black smoke as her churning paddle wheel suddenly stopped turning counter-clockwise. The small river steamboat continued to push backwards with its stern for a few seconds, and then the big wheel began to turn in a clockwise direction. As the big blades caught a purchase in the black water, the steamboat turned its bow up river.

Capt. P. Ross Jernigan stood in the wheelhouse. He was not at all pleased with the prospects of this trip to River Bluff. One reason for his discomfort was the load of military supplies he had aboard bound for the Yankee troops at River Bluff. The other was the fact they had been raided on their last trip to River Bluff. Well, that was not EXACTLY true. It was the last trip they made WITH military supplies aboard! The *Betty Louise* HAD, in fact, been back to River Bluff... but WITHOUT the Yankees cargo aboard! She’d had no trouble on that trip. That seemed to mean, to Capt. Jernigan, someone on the docks was getting word to the hijackers when he was loaded with the

Yankee cargo! That, or perish the thought, someone on his crew was leaking that information intentionally to the raiders!

Below, on the main deck, he could see four additions to his six-man crew. They were Yankee soldiers. They had been ordered aboard by their commanding officer to see to the security of the cargo bound for the troops at River Bluff. The soldiers, obviously infantry, were very uncomfortable with the movement of the deck. The shallow draft, flat-bottomed boat was as stable as a riverboat could get. But the flat bottom tended to cause the little watercraft to sway a bit, from side to side. It was a slow, continuous movement, soon gotten used to by the boatmen; however, the soldiers were definitely not sailors!

Capt. Jernigan let go of the wheel with his right hand and reached down to heft the leather holster hanging from a wide leather belt wrapped uncomfortably around his waist. The holster he had borrowed from a former Confederate Officer who happened to be a friend. It had a flap with a snap to fasten it closed over the weapon it contained. Inside the holster was a big cap and ball revolver. He didn't know the brand. He had borrowed it, too, from his brother-in-law who had several pistols. He DID know it was heavy. The weight caused the belt to slip, imperceptibly, downward as he moved, so that, quite often, he had to stop everything and heft it back up into place...or trip over it! He sighed and again grasped the wheel with both hands as the *Betty Louise* chugged upriver against the current.

Several miles up river as they were approaching the fueling station where they had been raided the first time, he hove to and ordered two men over the side into a rowboat. They were to row to shore then make their way, by foot, up the river to the fueling station. They were to make sure the raiders were not lying-in wait for them again! They were to return and signal from the bank. Upon receiving the "All Clear" signal, the *Betty Louise* would once again get under way and put in at the fueling station for the required replenishment of her bunkers.

Capt. Jernigan waited anxiously until he received the "All Clear" signal. He got the *Betty Louise* under way and slid up to the bank near the fueling station with no problem at all. The Yankee soldiers stood guard at both the bow and stern as the *Betty Louise's* crew hurriedly carried the wood on board. Capt. Jernigan never left the wheelhouse. The moment he received the word the bunkers were filled, he shifted the big wheel into reverse and quickly backed the steamboat back into the channel and continued up river. He breathed a lot easier. He had only one more fueling stop to make before they made port at River Bluff. That station was close enough to town; there should be no trouble.

As the day wore on the *Betty Louise* chugged on toward River Bluff. The Capt. and crew had begun to relax. The bright sunshine of September and the gentle rocking of the boat had a lulling effect. The little side-wheeler was making steady progress toward its intended port of call on the river. Capt. Jernigan's wife had insisted he get some of that

delicious bread from the Baker in River Bluff. He figured he'd have time to do that while the crew off-loaded the cargo. Normally, he'd make this an overnight trip. Not this trip, though. He wanted to get back to the safety of his berth at Wilmington!

Ahead he could see the marked trees along the north bank pointing to the fueling station ahead. This station was indeed on the north bank of the river.

Several hundred yards down river from the fueling station, Capt. Jernigan hove-to again, and over the side went the same two crewmembers as before with the same instructions. The *Betty Louise* sat rocking gently from side to side as the rowboat made its way to the north shore. Capt Jernigan watched intently as the men disappeared into the dense underbrush along the high bank of the waterway. In a few moments he saw one of the men return to the bank and wave the "All Clear!" He immediately brought the *Betty Louise* up to speed and aimed her for the last fueling station. He nudged the boat's bow against the soft bank and held it there. The crew dropped a gangplank across the bow and onto the riverbank. Members of the crew started immediately to leave the boat and hurriedly returned with armloads of wood.

About halfway through the refueling Capt. Jernigan noticed a crewmember limping back to the boat. The crewman was having a difficult time carrying the armload of wood and favoring his right ankle at the same time. As he stepped down onto the main deck, his ankle gave way completely. The crewman fell to the deck, scattering wood in all directions. He managed to pull himself up into a sitting position and was rocking back and forth as he held his right ankle. The Captain could clearly see the crewman pleading with the Yankee soldier on the starboard side of the bow to help him to his feet. The Yankee was clearly torn as to where his duty lay. To help his fellow man in trouble or stand his post as ordered. Finally, his humanity took over and he propped his weapon against the starboard rail and leaned over to help the injured man to his feet. As he stood, lifting the injured crewman up with him, the crewman lost his balance and stepped backwards to steady himself. As he did, the back of the calf of his GOOD leg struck the top of the starboard rail and the crewman flipped over the rail into the river. Unfortunately, he took the soldier with him. The second soldier rushed immediately to the aid of his comrade who was floundering about in the black water known to be populated by fearsome 'gators!

Capt. Jernigan watched the whole incident. He stood a moment longer watching the soldier on deck make a valiant attempt to rescue his brother in arms from the water. Finally, he dropped a rope loop around a spoke in the wheel and tuned to go down from the wheelhouse to lend assistance. THAT was when he saw the smiling, round man with the big pistol aimed at his face!

"Damn!" said Capt. P. Ross Jernigan!

## I'm Annie Sue McKane

Annie Sue McKane sat along side Frank Keifer as the old wagon bounced along River Road. The two mules were setting a slow, sure pace. But, they were mules and mules have their own ideas about, well, practically everything. In this case they had decided theirs was the pace to get them where the humans, sitting in the wagon, wanted to go. That was all there was to it!

Frank finally sat back and relaxed...as much as the bouncing wagon would allow. He glanced over at Annie. She was looking toward the river. Occasionally she could see a glimpse of it through breaks in the trees between the road and the water. Frank noticed how the sunlight on her hair reflected the color blue. Her hands were relaxed in her lap and she seemed completely at ease. Frank felt some sorrow for Annie. She had lost everything...her home and her family. He almost wished he could feel love for her. She was a beautiful young woman, no question. But they had grown up together, played together as children, attended school together and their attitude toward each other was that of a brother for a sister and vice versa. One thing was for sure, Frank thought, the man who sets his cap for her would absolutely require his approval! He clucked toward the mules and snapped the reins against their rumps again but to no avail.

They had passed the Campbell place a while back and in the distance he could see a line of blue smoke hugging the treetops. He expected that smoke to be from the chimney at the Knight's place. He had heard his father speak of the Knights. He spoke highly of them. A fellow had to go some to obtain Amos Keifer's approval. The Knights must be something, he thought. He would soon know. He and Annie were on the way to the Knight's farm now. Their mission was to invite the men to supper tonight. Amos had spoken so favorably of the Knights that Sarah suggested the invitation so she could meet them. That was all it took! Amos had good naturedly order his eldest son to go deliver the invitation as early as possibly. Frank had asked Annie if she would like to ride along and, after asking permission from Sarah, she climbed aboard the old wagon and they were off.

Frank could now see from the River Road the cabin, the stable lean-to, and woodshed. He was a little taken aback by the Spartan nature of the Knight farm. He guided the mules onto the wagon road, which led to the front door of the cabin. He saw Annie lean forward to get a better look at the cabin. From the look on her face, this was not what she had expected either.

The mules plodded on to the cabin. The door opened and Jack stepped out. He had a rifle lying in the crook of his arm. He stopped just outside the door and waited. Frank tied the reins to the brake on the old wagon and climbed down. He walked around the mules speaking soothingly to them as he went. He stopped in front of Jack Knight and stretched out his right hand. "Captain Knight? I'm Frank Keifer, Amos' eldest son. I'm pleased to meet you, sir!"

Jack held the rifle securely with his left hand and reached for Frank's offered hand and shook it. He said, "Pleased to make your acquaintance, son. Amos told us you were here." His eyes went past Frank to the beautiful young woman seated in the wagon.

Frank saw he was looking at Annie and said, "This is Annie Sue McKane, Captain. She's living with us now. Lost her family and her home."

Jack said, "I can understand that!" And he walked past Frank to the wagon. He held his hand up and said, "Pleased to meet you Miss McKane. May I help you down from there?"

"Why, thank you, Captain!" Annie said, a bit flustered. She took Jack's hand and stepped to the top of the wagon wheel, then to the hub and, finally, she was on the ground. She released Jack's hand and hurriedly shook the skirt of her long dress out and patted her hair down.

"Who's here?" called Luke, as he came from the woodshed and turned the corner of the cabin to see the wagon up close for the first time. He also saw Annie Sue McKane. He dropped the armload of firewood against the side of the cabin and brushed his palms against his trouser legs and turned again to Annie. He started in her direction. He remembered his hat and snatched it off his head. He ran his fingers through his hair in a vain attempt to bring some order to his tousled mop. He stopped directly in front of Annie. "I'm Luke Knight, he said.

"I'm Annie Sue McKane," said Annie, lowering her eyes. Her face was so red she could feel the heat! She saw Luke had his hand out and she took it. There was a gentle up and down movement, but the vigorous shake she had received from Jack Knight wasn't there. This was a tender touch, a respectful greeting. She slowly looked up and met Luke's eyes. They were intense. She tugged gently on her hand and Luke reluctantly released it. It was his turn to be embarrassed. He shuffled his feet in the dust, completely disgusted for making such a fool of himself.

Jack came to the rescue. "Please, come in and sit for awhile. I'm sure Willie will want to meet you, too. He's out hunting this morning. I heard a rifle fire about a half an hour ago. I expect that means we'll have venison for supper!" He laughed and turned to lead the way into the cabin.

The austere furnishings of the cabin struck Annie. Luke raced before her to pull a bench from the table and offered her a seat. She thanked him and sat down. Jack motioned for Frank to take a seat and then both Knight men sat down at the table.

"Would you folks like some coffee?" asked Jack as he stood.

Frank said, "No, Captain, that's not necessary. Besides, we won't be here long. We came to extend an invitation."



“An invitation?” asked Luke.

“Yes sir!” Frank answered. “You see, sir...”

Luke protested, “Call me Luke.”

“Thank you, Luke,” replied Frank. “As I was saying, Ma has heard so much about you fellows she asked Pa to invite you to supper tonight!”

“Well now, that’s unexpected,” said Jack approvingly. “What do you say, Luke?”

“I say YES! I could sure use a home cooked meal!” He smiled at Annie. She blushed again and returned his smile.

Frank was grinning from ear to ear. “Fine! Well,” he said standing, “we’ll get on back and let Ma know so she can get started on that ‘home cooked supper’ for Mr. Luke here!”

There was a scuffling sound at the door. Everyone turned at the sound and there stood Willie. He was scuffing the dirt from the soles of his boots. He had dropped the carcass of a buck just outside the door. He stepped inside and stopped when he saw Annie. “Howdy, Miss,” he said.

“Willie, this is Miss Annie Sue McKane and Frank Keifer,” said Jack.

“Pleased to meet you,” said Willie, removing his hat and approaching Frank. He took Frank’s hand and then he turned to Annie. “You must be a niece.” Willie said to Annie.

“No, I’m afraid not. I’m... well, the Keifer’s were kind enough to take me in when my mother passed away a few weeks ago,” said Annie.

“I’m sorry for your loss, Miss Annie,” said Willie. “I’m sure you miss her.” He walked to his bunk and slid a flat-topped trunk from underneath it. He removed a favored skinning knife and returned the trunk to its spot beneath the bunk.

“You see, Annie, Willie has lost his entire family,” said Jack. He hastened to add, “They just up and moved away before Willie got home from the war. Nobody knows where they went. So, Willie has thrown his lot in with ours.”

“If ya’ll will excuse me, I’m going to skin this deer.” Willie stepped out the door, slung the deer carcass over his shoulders and went to the corncrib. He hung the deer up by its hind legs and began his task.

Back at the cabin, Frank and Annie were boarding the wagon.

“Please tell your Ma how much we appreciate this,” Jack said.

“Sure thing!” said Frank. “We usually eat about six. We’ll look to see you this afternoon, then.” He snapped the reins over the mules’ rumps, circled the cabin, and started out the wagon cut toward River Road. Jack waved once to them and re-entered the cabin. Luke stood for a long time watching the wagon, or more specifically, Annie Sue McKane’s back, until she was lost in the distance.

When Luke failed to immediately join him in the cabin, Jack went back to the door. He arrived in time to see Luke jump straight up and click his heels together. He smiled and quietly slipped back into the dimness of the cabin.

### **I Am McGinnis**

At the waterfront in Wilmington two men stepped off the gangway of the ship onto the dock. Their attire set them apart from those around them. They were gentlemen. The first off the ship wore a black frock coat over a golden brocade vest with a white shirt and a large bow tie. His trousers were tan with a waistband that tapered toward the front. The trousers legs tapered toward the ankles, were straight, and held in place by a pair of gold colored braces. On his head was a top hat. This top hat, however, had the more popular six inch crown and rolled brim. On his feet was a pair of highly polished black Wellingtons. The boots were obviously hand made and were slightly lower at the front. In the waist band of his trousers was a watch pocket, which contained a gold watch. A beautiful gold nugget watch fob draped downward from it. He carried an ebony cane with a silver knob at the top. On his hands were kidskin gloves dyed a beautiful tan to match his trousers.

Following him off the ship was another gentleman. He, too, was dressed in the latest fashions. He, however, wore the “sack” suit later to be known as the “business” suit. He wore a bowler on his head and a string tie made of a black ribbon. His shirt was a stark white. He, too, wore Wellingtons. A pair of round, gold-rimmed spectacles were perched on his nose.

The first gentleman removed his watch and looked, ostentatiously, at it and then announced to the be-spectacled man behind him, “Well, we just made it!”

“To be sure, sir” remarked the man in black.

“I do wonder where Sinclair is?” The man with the cane pondered.

The docks were awash with soldiers and horses. There were a few carriages around, but no one who could possibly be Sinclair.

Then, from the crowd, pushed a figure also dressed in black. He was a gangly young man. He rushed to the first gentleman and asked: "Excuse me, sir. Might you be Mr. McGinnis? Mr. Daniel L. McGinnis, sir?"

"Not only MIGHT I BE, damn it, man, I AM McGinnis!" He shouted. Whereupon, Sinclair shrunk back as though struck by the ebony cane.

"Elliott, get down here and get these bag," directed McGinnis.

Elliott Helms silently cursed his proximity to McGinnis. He knew his boss was a spoiled brat, now gown into a spoiled man!

"Mr. Sinclair, sir, would you be so kind as to direct me to the carriage?" asked Elliott.

"Certainly, Mr...? " the young Sinclair asked, is eyebrows arching as he did.

"Helms," said Elliott.

"This way, sir." Sinclair set off through the crowd of soldiers, pushing and elbowing them a path as he went. Elliott Helms and Dan McGinnis followed closely in his wake.

In a moment they were clear of the bulk of milling soldiers and close to the buildings that lined this part of the waterfront.

John Sinclair led the way as the little caravan of men and luggage made their way to a red brick building where Sinclair halted them, then peered around the corner as if looking to be sure the way was clear before motioning them to continue. He promptly disappeared from sight as he rounded the corner. Without hesitation, Helms went next. McGinnis, on the other hand, wasn't paying close attention to Sinclair and Helms. He was watching the soldiers as they laughed and talked, bought and sold, and all the things that soldiers do on a busy waterfront. When next he did turn to Helms...Helms wasn't there. Nor was Sinclair! They had vanished! He cursed himself for the fool that he was and rounded the corner instantly where he met, head-on, John Sinclair, who was returning to try to locate Mr. McGinnis. McGinnis went backwards and landed on the cobbles of the sidewalk, on his posterior! Sinclair was hovering over him offering his hand to help McGinnis up from the street. McGinnis refused the assistance and scrambled to his feet. He hastily brushed off the seat of the tan trousers with the kidskin gloves he was wearing and straightened up. He pulled himself up to his full height and said, "Mr. Sinclair, your employer will hear of this and I expect you will shortly be in need of a new situation! Now, where is that damned carriage?"

"Right this way, sir," replied Sinclair. "It's just around this corner, sir." This time, Sinclair stayed with McGinnis rather than lead the way from out front. Around the corner sat a black carriage of considerable size with upholstered seats facing fore and aft.

“Mr. Gram is waiting at his summer house near the ocean, sir. He said I was to come directly there.” He helped McGinnis up the two folded-down steps and saw to it that he was seated comfortably. Helms got himself into the carriage along with the two bags, which belonged to Mr. McGinnis. John Sinclair, on the other hand, was tucking the single bag of Mr. Helms into the rather large trunk mounted at the rear of the carriage above the axle but between the huge leaf springs. He hastily closed and latched it. Then he threaded the leather straps through their buckles and securely fastened them as well. Then he raced around the left rear corner of the carriage and climbed aboard. He seated himself on the left hand side of the driver’s seat. He untied the reins from the brake handle and pulled them back enough to take the slack out of them. He turned and asked, “Are we ready?”

McGinnis, his arm outstretched with his palm down, waved him on and said, “Go! Go! We’ve wasted enough time as it is!”

With that, Sinclair delivered a stinging blow to the rumps of the matched pair of black geldings with the blazed faces and stocking feet. The geldings snatched the carriage forward in a jerk and sent Mr. McGinnis slamming backwards into his seat and Mr. Helms forward into the seat next to Mr. McGinnis! Helms recovered quickly and returned to this seat directly behind the driver and facing the rear of the carriage.

Soon the carriage had left the town proper and had entered the countryside. There was white sand everywhere. The aroma of the longleaf and loblolly pines lent a tangy fragrance to the moist ocean breeze wafting up from the water to meet them. The big wheels of the carriage swished through the white glistening sand as the blacks trotted onward toward their destination east of North Carolina’s largest city.

***\*\*\*Dear Reader: Until the early 1900’s Wilmington was, by far, the largest city in North Carolina.***

### **Everybody Has a Right to Earn a Living**

Jeffery Gram, a man who took every opportunity to make money, was waiting for McGinnis to arrive. He was a wealthy man. He had made a sizable fortune from private blockade-runners. He, and some businessmen in London with whom he was closely allied, purchased some specially built ships even before their keels were laid in Scotland. They had used these low slung, low profile, ships, some powered by stream engines and side wheels, to run contraband past the Yankee blockade just outside the mouth of the Cape Fear. The guns of Fort Fisher would open up on the Yankee ships in pursuit of the

blockade-runners as soon as they came into range. If a blockade-runner was fortunate enough, or her skipper was seaman enough and daring enough, he could run the Yankee blockade and make a fortune selling the contraband goods. Many did. Some failed. The beach was littered with the remains of those who didn't race fast enough or for a myriad of reasons simply didn't make it. Bodies washed ashore near the Fort and were buried, some with honors. One of the more famous, Rose O'Neal Greenhow, was buried with honors in Oakdale Cemetery in Wilmington.

Jeffery Gram had simply added the fortune he made from the ships to his already considerable portfolio of funds. Now, he was looking to enlarge it again with the help of some northern businessmen and with a little help from the Union Army, but not necessarily with the Army's knowledge!

A new railroad was needed. The war had laid waste to the existing rail systems throughout the south and these systems were necessary to get the goods from the port to the interior. It was another chance to make a killing. First, though, he had to acquire the land. That was being taken care of.

He was waiting now to meet, face to face, with the man who would make the land acquisition possible. Daniel L. McGinnis had assured him he had contacts within the military authority to handle such matters with little notice by the civil authorities, of which, there were few left.

Even though the war had been lucrative for him, he was glad it was over. His two sons, Josiah and Judson, had fought with the southern troops. He constantly worried for their safety. Even after the surrender at Appomattox, he worried until the two were home safely. They had borne their share of wounds and spilled their blood with their comrades at numerous battles. They were in Gram's mind, heroes. They always would be.

Gram had no difficulty compartmentalizing his mind. He saw no conflict with his morals in acquiring land in disreputable ways. It never crossed his mind that this was unpatriotic, not to mention, flat out theft! He saw it simply as a business deal...a way to make money. In Gram's case...more money. He would have been flabbergasted had he been taken to task by a fellow southerner for his underhanded dealings. It was business! That's all! Everybody has a right to earn a living! That's the way he saw it.

He was about to wade even deeper into the river of greed. He heard the plodding of the oncoming horses and the swishing of the carriage wheels in the sand of the road, which ran to his door. He tossed back the remainder of the brandy he had been nursing and retrieved a perfectly creased handkerchief from inside the cuff of his left sleeve and wiped the palms of his hands. He stepped to the hall mirror and straightened his tie and tugged down on his lapels, then turned to the door.

Mr. Sinclair was removing luggage from the carriage's trunk. Inside the carriage sat two gentlemen he took to be Mr. McGinnis and his executive assistant, Mr. Helms.

“You! Sinclair! Get us down from here, you useless lout!” The man in the tan trousers was leaning forward with both hands resting on the silver pommel of the cane. “Damn it, man! Get ME down from here, FIRST!”

“Oh, yes,” muttered Gram with a frown. “That is McGinnis!”

### **A Four-year Nightmare**

The crickets were chirping loudly and vigorously as Annie Sue McKane and Luke Knight sat in the swing hanging at the north end of the porch of the Keifer farmhouse. They were barely moving, although, the chains creaked against the eyebolts twisted into the framing of the porch’s ceiling.

Annie had been quiet as they left the kitchen. The entire Keifer clan, as well as the Knights and Willie Jordan, had put away a sumptuous meal prepared by Sarah Keifer, Amos’ wife, and Annie. During the meal Amos noticed the electricity between Luke and Annie and he exchanged glances with Jack. Amos saw confirmation in Jack’s eyes...and approval. That was enough for Amos.

After the meal the men went outside to look to the stock and to talk of the things men talk about. The ladies put away the dishes. Luke had been waiting on the porch for Annie to appear. When she did, he took her by the arm and directed her toward the swing. The men, watching from the feedlot were pleased to see the two young people getting to know each other. Luke and Annie were out of earshot, but not out of eyesight, of the responsible men in both families. This was in accordance with the times.

All three men were puffing on cigars. They talked in hushed tones as sound carried farther and clearer in the stillness of the dark.

“What do you expect they’ll do next, Jack?” Amos asked.

“I don’t know, Amos. It appears they have a plan of action. Why else would Colonel Garrison and Major Benson ride out as often as they do and for what purpose? I suspect they’re looking at property along the proposed right of way of their railroad.”

“Do you think we ought to have them followed to...be sure?” Amos twirled the cigar between his thumb and forefinger and looked intently at the glowing tip as he spoke. “I could have Frank tail them and report to me where they go and what they do ...and I’d relay it to you. What do you think?”

“I’d rather not get Frank into any trouble, Amos.”

“Jack,” Amos propped his foot up on the edge of the watering trough as he spoke, “Frank served as a messenger between the regulars and we partisans during the war. He’s used to being cautious and careful not to be seen. I expect he can spy on the Colonel without placing himself in danger.”

“What would Sarah say?”

“Sarah’s not going to be any happier over this than she was over his service during the war! Sometimes, you just have to do things. This is one of those times!” Amos removed his hat and ran his fingers through his thinning salt and pepper hair. “Hell, Jack, we can’t allow them to take our land! I just brought my family hundreds of miles to settle down here on this place. I won’t let it go without a fight. No siree!”

In the darkness Amos could see the beginnings of a smile on Jack’s face. “I know, Amos. I know.” Jack said. “How are we going to set it up?”

“Well, I figured Frank could go to Farley’s for a few days and just watch. When the Colonel and Major ride out again, he could follow. Then ride out here, after dark, and fill us in.”

“How soon, do you suppose we could set it up?” Jack asked, thumbing back his hat.

“How about tomorrow?”

“Sounds good to me.”

Willie, who had been standing quietly to the side, spoke up, “If it’ll make Mrs. Keifer feel any better, I can keep an eye on Frank.”

How’s that?” asked Jack.

“Well, I was planning on going into town tomorrow...to check on Deborah...and I’ll probably stay awhile... a few hours, anyway. I can keep a watch on the Auction and Farley’s house from Doc’s office. Of course, I can’t be with Frank when he leaves town. He’ll be on his own then.”

“Well, that makes ME feel better!” said Amos.

Jack looked toward the porch and saw that Luke was animatedly talking to Annie about something or other. Annie seemed to be drinking it in, hanging on every word. That just encouraged Luke. Jack chuckled.

Amos chuckled, too. Then he asked, “Jack, what about you and Miss Campbell? If I’m not out of line, what are your intentions?”

Jack dropped his head and stared at the ground. “There’s a lot to think about, Amos. I expect we’ll get married...sometime. Truth be told, Amos, I don’t know if I’m going to stay here!”

“You mean in River Bluff? In the county?” asked Amos startled.

“I mean, I’ve been thinking about going out west to the Indian territories. There’s land...lots of land...for the taking. A man could stretch out, way out there, and really build himself a future. Leave something for his kids, you know?” Jack paused...“I don’t know, Amos, It’s just something I’ve been thinking about, pondering on, since, well, way back during the war. That land is not stained like this is.” He dug his heel into the black soil of the lot. “No war has been fought on it. It’s clean!” He paused and sucked in a deep breath. He looked up toward the sky and the billions of twinkling stars and then back to Amos. “I don’t suppose you suspected I was a dreamer, did you Amos?” Jack smiled in the darkness as he directed his question to Amos.

“Some dreams can turn out to be nightmares, Jack”

“Yeah, I know,” answered Jack. “I just finished a four-year nightmare. It started out as a dream, too.” He thought for a moment, then said, “I’d appreciate it if you wouldn’t say anything about this...at least for a while...”

“Yeah, sure,” replied Amos.

The three men stood quietly enjoying their cigars in the warmth of the southern night. The night creatures had begun to move about. An owl was calling down by the river. The moon had just risen above the horizon and the stars sparkled against the blue-blackness of the night sky. Lightening bugs came swarming up from the undersides of the Queen Anne’s lace, where they found refuge from the brightness of the now ended day. Their calls flashed to one another in brilliant strobes of light. The day was a memory. The night was, yet, a promise.

### **Those Men are Killers**

As Frank and Willie approached River Bluff, Willie suddenly reined-in Blackie and stopped. Frank’s mule went on a step or two before stopping as well.

“What’s the matter?” asked Frank.



“Nothing,” said Willie. “I just don’t think it’s a good idea to be seen riding into town together...that’s all. Either let me go in first and then wait a few minutes before you come in or you go in first and then I’ll come in later. Which do you want to do?”

Frank sat his mule as she sidestepped a pace or two and thought. “O.K., I’ll go in first. I won’t stop at the doctor’s office. I’ll go directly to Uncle Farley’s house. How’s that?”

“Sounds good to me. Frank?”

“Yes, sir?”

“Frank, be careful. Don’t take chances. Those men are killers. They’re in too deep to care about a murder or two. They’ll kill you in an instant!”

“Yes, sir. I understand.” Frank nudged his mule and she started her prancing walk toward town. Willie guided Blackie off the road and into the trees on the side toward the river. He sat there quietly observing those who passed.

After twenty minutes or so the only passerby was Father John C. Davis, rector of the small Anglican Church on the western outskirts of River Bluff. He rode by in his buggy headed toward town. He’d been out visiting parishioners, no doubt. At least, that’s what Willie thought. Not a church going man himself, never the less, Willie had great respect for folks’ religion. He waited a bit longer until the Rector was well into or maybe even through town.

The underbrush parted and Blackie with Willie aboard emerged from the underbrush and leapt upon the road. Willie turned Blackie toward River Bluff. The horse fell into a slow walk as they approached the town. Willie settled into the saddle in that peculiar slouching posture which marked American riders the world over. It was a posture born of days and weeks in the saddle. Southerners were born to the saddle. A boy grew into manhood with an animal under him. During the war the most feared Confederate fighting units were Calvary Units. The Union Army, on the other hand, had had to train Calvary troops. Often teaching recruits how to ride. The South only had to call them together and arm them. They came with their animals and often with their own arms and the ability to live in the saddle and fight in the saddle, and yes, sometimes to die in the saddle. Willie had never ridden with the Black Horse Calvary but he had seen them. They were something else!

As he neared town his eyes swept back and forth, up, down, and across the street, left and right. They were in constant motion. One or two people even stopped to watch Willie pass. He had become something of a local legend after the story got around about his dispatch of James Cole, the carpetbagger. Willie actually saw Bea Weatherby pull the shades of her boarding house at his approach. He smiled. He stared at the Mercantile as he passed and thought he might catch a glimpse of Mr. Bowen. No luck. Finally, he came to Doc Brown’s office. He reined-in Blackie and sat for a moment looking in the direction of the Mule Auction. The two sentries were in place at either side of the big

doors. As his eyes wandered toward Farley's house he saw Frank's mule tied up to a porch post. He had arrived as he was supposed to.

Willie turned Blackie toward the doctor's office. He threw his weight to the left stirrup and stood, throwing his right leg up and over the big horse's rump and stepped down to the street. He tied the reins to a hitching post and, out of long habit, brushed the road dust from his trousers. He removed his hat and slapped it against his thighs twice on both sides. Then he returned it to his head. Now presentable, he stepped up onto the wooden sidewalk and crossed it to turn the knob of Doc Brown's office door.

As Willie's eyes adjusted to the dimness of the office, he saw her. Deborah was smiling at him. At least she was trying to! Even through the ugly bruises on her face, her beauty shone. As Willie approached the bed, Deborah lifted her right hand and held it out to him. Willie removed his hat and went a little closer.

"Come here," said Deborah. At least he THOUGHT she said it. She had. She repeated. "Willie, please come here."

"Yes, ma'am," replied Willie, as he stopped at the side of her bed.

"Thank you, Willie. Thank you for getting them for me. Where's Jack? I want to thank him, too."

"Jack's at the farm," Willie said.

"Momma told me what the two of you did. I can never thank you enough. I thought they'd get away with it. I was so scared. I was afraid they'd get me again!" A tear trickled from her right eye onto the pillow. Willie leaned and with the tip of his finger, gently wiped the wet streak from her bruised cheek. Deborah felt the love in that touch. She felt the tenderness in this man's hands and in his heart.

Willie's anger flared again when he saw the angry bruises around each of her wrists. Deborah saw the anger in his eyes. "It's over, Willie. They're gone. They can't hurt me again." She saw him visibly relax. She smoothed the sheet with her bruised hand as if wiping away the bad memory.

"When are you going home, Miss Deborah?" Willie asked.

"Willie, please, it's not MISS Deborah. It's Deborah to you...always!" Her eyes flashed. "Doc says I can go home in another day or two. He said I'd be all right...in time.

"That's good news!" declared Willie. At the same moment he heard the sound of horses in the street. He turned to look out the window. As he did, he saw Colonel Garrison and Major Benson mounted on their horses talking to the two sentries at the barn doors. Then the two officers rode off at a gallop toward the west.

“Willie?” Deborah called.

Just then Willie saw Frank come out of Farley’s house and mount his mule. He rode east on Main Street away from the direction the officers had taken. Willie knew Frank would double back at the eastern edge of town and catch up to and fall in behind the two officers in a few minutes. Their plan appeared to be working.

“Willie?” Deborah called again.

Willie turned from the window. Deborah had her arms raised in a pleading gesture. “Willie, don’t leave me!” He was startled. “Come here, Willie.” Deborah pleaded.

Willie quickly crossed the floor to Deborah’s bed. She reached for him again. “Don’t leave me, Willie. Don’t ever leave me!” She had begun to weep.

Willie took her hands in his and sat on the side of the bed. “Oh, Lordy!” He thought. “OH, LORDY!”

### **The Surveyors**

Frank’s mule nosed her way through the dense underbrush laden with fallen pine needles. The fallen carpet muted the mule’s hoof steps. He had fallen in behind the two Union officers about a mile outside River Bluff. They had not been out of his sight since. Now, they had stopped and were peering south across an open field. It was a fallow field allowed to rest a few seasons. It would be returned to the farmer’s service soon.

Frank halted the mule and sat quietly watching. He wasn’t close enough to hear the conversation between the two officers. He figured if he was close enough to hear them, then they could surely hear him. After a time, Colonel Garrison rummaged in his saddlebag and produced a small brass telescope. Then he pulled it out to its full length and held it to his right eye. He scanned the area beyond the field first, then slowly swinging left to right and back, he scanned the field itself. Then he handed the telescope to Major Benson who did the same thing all over again.

Frank continued to watch as Garrison dismounted and walked to an old rail fence that lined the southern side of the road. He propped his right foot on the bottom rail and leaned his forearms on the top rail. Then he half turned and said something to Major Benson who also dismounted and joined the Colonel at the fence. The Colonel stretched out his right arm with his palm to the ground and his index finger extended. He swept the area, pointing with his outstretched arm as he did so. He seemed to be concentrating on an area just to the west of a copse of trees several hundred yards out into the field. Benson apparently said something the Colonel didn’t like and suddenly Garrison became

very animated, waving his arms about with gesticulations. He appeared to be angry, very angry. Major Benson appeared to stand easy and let the Colonel's vituperation just wash over him.

Suddenly Colonel Garrison returned to his horse, mounted up and waited for Major Benson to do the same. Then they rode west again on River Road.

Frank urged the mule on. They remained in the tree line and followed at a distance of several hundred yards. Occasionally, he would lose sight of the Union officers, but not for long.

About three miles farther on they came upon a wagon. It was a closed wagon with wood panels and a wooden roof rounded so the rain would run off. There were two men with the wagon. One was sitting on the driver's seat. The other was leaning against the trunk of an old oak tree near, what Frank took to be, a spring. There was a white canvas tent, large enough for a man to stand up in, pitched just beyond the spring. A small table with a washbasin on it and a small mirror propped against a book of some kind sat just outside the flap of the tent. The Union officers dismounted and began the ritual of shaking hands all around. The man leaning against the oak joined the little group and they began an intense conversation. There was an occasional shaking and nodding of the heads. There was some pointing to the south and the east. Then they would turn and there would be more pointing to the south and west.

Frank maneuvered the mule closer. He still couldn't hear the conversation, but he caught sight of some sort of three-legged instrument. It appeared to be a brass telescope. Frank had never seen one mounted on legs! There was a string hanging down from under the telescope directly centered between the three legs. A shiny brass ball with a point on it hung on the end of the string. It was poised just above the ground. Frank had a feeling this was important! He sat his mule patiently and watched as the little meeting continued.

Some thirty minutes later, the little meeting broke-up. The officers mounted up and turned toward River Bluff. Frank sat quietly watching the men with the wagon for a few minutes, then he, too, struck out for town. As he rode, he thought about what he had seen. He wasn't sure about what it all meant, but he knew it was important.

When Frank felt the Union officers were far enough ahead, he guided the mule from the trees onto the roadbed where they could make better time. Just west of town, he re-entered the woods and went around the town, remaining in the trees the entire way. Once past River Bluff, he again brought the mule out onto the road and started for home.

The mid-afternoon heat of the September day beat down on Frank as he urged the mule on. Finally, he realized his efforts at speeding the mule up were futile; so he sat back in the saddle and let the animal have its head. After a while the mule settled into what it thought was a good-enough gait and it plodded its way for home. After all, there was fodder there and water!

### *Don't Wait Supper for Him*

When Frank reached the Keifer farm, Amos was just leaving the barn. "Wait a minute, Pa!" called Frank.

Amos stopped in his tracks and waited for Frank to close the distance between them. Amos had an arm full of fodder and he was on the way to the feed troughs in the lot when he saw Frank approaching. He held on to the fodder as Frank dismounted and came to him.

"Pa, I followed those Yankee officers today and I don't know what to tell you!" said Frank.

"Well, what happened?" asked Amos

"Well sir, they rode out several miles to the west. They dismounted there and looked over a field. I couldn't get close enough to hear what they were saying, but they had an argument about something, though."

"What makes you think that?" asked Amos.

"I could tell the way they were talking to each other. The Colonel was giving the Major what for!"

"What happened after that?" asked Amos.

"They mounted up and rode on west for three or four miles. Then they came upon a wagon. It was a covered wagon Pa, but not the kind we usually see. This one had wooden sides and a wooden top. There were two men with it. They had pitched a tent near a spring out there." Frank lowered his head, "I'm sorry, Pa, I couldn't get close enough to hear what they were saying. But, I did manage to get close enough to see something I think might be interesting!"

"What did you see?" asked Amos

"I don't really know, Pa. Whatever it was...it looked like a telescope mounted on three legs. It had a string hanging down between the legs with a brass ball on the end of the string. I've never seen anything like it."

"I have," said Amos. "It's called a transit. Surveyors use those things to lay out right of ways." He walked over to the feed troughs and dropped in the fodder. He leaned against the top rail with both elbows and thought about the times he'd seen the surveyors before.

“Frank, go in the house and tell your Ma that I’m riding over to the Knight place. I don’t know exactly when I’ll be back. Tell her not to wait supper for me.” Amos headed for the barn.

“All right, Pa.” Frank took off at a trot for the house.

Sarah stepped out the back door as Frank approached. She said, “What’s your hurry, son?”

“Ma, Pa said he’s going over to the Knight place and don’t wait supper for him!”

Just as Frank slid to a stop in front of his Ma, Amos burst from the barn on his horse at a dead run toward the Knight farm. Before Sarah could shout to him he was half way to River Road. Sarah shook her head from side to side and said, “Mercy me!”

As he rode toward Knight’s Crossing, Amos thought about the last time he had seen surveyors. They were surveying a right of way for the new railroad in Alabama. That was before the war. He understood it was the first step in a long process, which would ultimately lead to a railroad. Garrison would soon have all the land he needed for the roadbed. At no cost. And besides, he would make a bundle on the land himself. They had to stop him!

When Amos turned off the River Road onto the wagon road at Knight’s Crossing, he could see a wisp of smoke rising from the chimney of the cabin. Willie was approaching the house from the south woods carrying a brace of rabbits. “There would be rabbit stew for supper tonight,” Amos thought.

Amos dismounted at the well and tied his horse to one of the uprights, which supported the pulley. There was water in the trough and the horse immediately helped himself.

The door to the cabin opened and Jack stepped out, followed by Luke.

“Amos! It’s good to see you!” said Jack, laughing as he approached with outstretched hand.

Luke said, “Hey, Amos! You’re just in time for Willie’s famous rabbit stew!”

“Yeah, I saw Willie coming in from the woods. I figured that would be supper tonight!” grinned Amos. “Jack, I need to speak with you.”

“Sure Amos. Come on in the house and grab a cup of coffee. We’ll talk while Willie and Luke skin those cotton tails!” He was grinning from ear to ear as he slung one of his arms across Amos’ wide shoulders. The two men walked to the cabin that way. Each man would trust the other with his life. And did!

Luke joined Willie at the corncrib. They stooped down to begin their task of skinning and gutting the rabbits.

A few night animals had begun to peak out of their darkened holes and corners waiting for full dark before they emerged for their nightly forays into the country side. Two foxes, from a distance, were watching the two humans reduce the size of their food larder. Along the riverbank, a raccoon stepped daintily onto some stones protruding an inch or two above the surface of the water. She was searching the shallows for a crayfish or two. In a moment her search was rewarded. She clutched the wriggling treasure and stepped back onto the river's bank and began her supper. Dusk dark was near.

### **The Schonfeld Brothers**

Dawn was later in September than it had been in August. Benjamin and Charlie Schonfeld lay wrapped in their blankets beside their campfire. They were sleeping soundly. They would spend a hard day surveying the right of way for a new railroad through this county. It would be a long day, and a hot one, in this part of the state. They were looking forward to the money Colonel Garrison had promised them when he hired them for this job. He had given each of the brothers a hundred Yankee dollars as a down payment on the remainder, which would be due when the job was completed. Yes, sir, this was a sweetheart deal. Benjamin snuggled down deeper in his blanket to ward off the pre-dawn dampness.

Three men crept quietly through the underbrush, their footsteps muffled by the thick bed of pine needles on the forest floor. Their horses were left tied up about a hundred yards west of their prey. As they came near the edge of the campsite, they stopped in the undergrowth for a time to satisfy themselves the two men wrapped in the blankets were, indeed, asleep. There was a wisp of smoke rising from the smoldering coals of last night's campfire. The smoke formed a flat layer in the air about a dozen feet off the ground.

Finally, the larger of the men stepped out of the brush and into the clearing. The other two followed him. The first man walked softly to the sleeping man nearest him. He stopped at the head of the prostrate figure. The shorter of the other two did the same with the sleeping figure nearest him. They knelt so as to be behind and above the sleeping men.

The larger man spoke. "Hey! Wake up!" The sleeping men stirred but neither gained consciousness. The big man spoke again. "I said WAKE UP, DAMNIT!"

The figure at his feet struggled to consciousness, flailed his arms about, and started to rise. The large man laid the barrel of his rifle across the forehead of the rising man. The touch of the cold steel stopped him.

“Don’t get up! I only want you awake.” The rising man stopped and lay flat on his back with his blanket laying half on him and half on the pine needles. The big man looked over at his partner who was, as well, kneeling in the same position: behind and above his formerly sleeping man.

The big man said, “Well, I see you are both awake. That’s good! Now, I can talk to you. You are to keep quiet and listen. Listen good, ‘cause I’m only going to say what I came to say one time.

He stood and moved backwards out of view of the two men. His partner did the same. A taller man stood just inside the clearing with a very large Navy Colt aimed in the general direction of the two campers. They could only see him out of the corners of their eyes.

The big man spoke again, “Now listen. You two men are to pack up all this surveying equipment and everything else you brought with you and head west as fast as you can. I don’t care how much Garrison is paying you or how scared you are of him. I’m telling you, you’d better heed what I’m saying. If you don’t... next time we won’t even bother to wake you up. We’ll just let Saint Pete shake you!” He paused for a moment to let what he’d said sink in. Then he said, “One more thing...Don’t EVER come back to this county...EVER! If you do, you’ll stay! You’ll have a permanent home...six feet under the dirt you’re lying on right now!”

There was nothing said for a moment. The big man’s voice had awakened a number of the small animals of the woods and they were moving about in search of their breakfast. One or two birds called to their mates and flew up from the branches of the pines in a flash of movement and color.

“We’re going to leave you two fine, young gentlemen now. We’re going back the way we came, as quickly as we came. Don’t try to follow us. You could get very dead that way. Just mind what I said, and pack up and get outta here!”

The big man stepped backwards toward the low underbrush behind him. The shortest of the three followed him. The tall man stood for a while with his big revolver pointed as it had been all along...generally, in the direction of the Schonfeld brothers. Finally, he too, faded away in the underbrush.

The brothers lay very still until they could hear no noise coming from the woods behind them. Then Benjamin sat up. He looked over at his brother, Charlie, and Charlie sat up. They sat still for another moment... and then they stood, rolled their blankets up and tossed them in the back of the wagon. Benjamin went to get their horses, which were hobbled a short ways from the camp. While Benjamin went to fetch the animals, Charlie struck the tent they had decided not to sleep in the previous evening because it was hot.



As soon as the tent was flat, Charlie tossed the pegs, ropes, and the two center poles in the middle of the pile of fabric and rolled it all up. He then tossed the roll into the back of the wagon. As Benjamin hitched the animals to the wagon, Charlie poured a bucket of water on the campfire and checked to be sure their transit and chain were safe in the wagon. He placed the bucket in the bed of the wagon near the door in the rear panel and then he climbed up to sit beside Benjamin who was already on the driver's seat with the reins in his hand.

Benjamin clucked to the two horses and turned them hard right and up onto River Road... headed west. The horses struggled to get the heavy wagon onto the roadbed but at Benjamin's urging, snapping the reins across their rumps, they did it.

It had been six minutes since their visitors had backed away into the underbrush near their campsite. They were headed west with everything they owned as fast as the two horses would carry them. The first rays of the morning sun were clutching at the dark blue sky behind them as they raced west. Neither man had spoken a word!

### **It's Coming Together, Ain't it?**

The hub on the left rear wheel creaked about every third revolution the slender spoked-wheels of the big black carriage made as it sped west on River Road. The swish of the wheels slicing through the loamy soil of the roadbed was almost pleasant. Two gentlemen sat in the carriage, one facing forward and the other facing backwards. The matched horses pulling the big carriage bespoke wealth.

The gentleman facing forward was puffing on a very large cigar. He seemed to savor the taste of the fine tobacco and the mild aroma of the smoke. He would inhale deeply from the cigar then lean his head back and slowly blow the smoke upwards into the air currents rippling above the carriage. The plume would be whipped backwards away from the carriage to dissipate in the pine scented Carolina air.

Daniel L. McGinnis was taken by the work that had been done on the farms lining the road since hostilities had ended. Fence repairs along the road were all but completed. He was especially taken with the farm where the big man with overalls and large black hat stood at the entrance road with his repeating rifle lying in the crook of his arm. He thought to himself what a well-kept farm this was. It reminded him of the farms of the Pennsylvania Dutch he had seen on his trip down here. He dutifully tipped his hat to the big man with the rifle. The carriage swished on.

The woman on the horse astounded him! He had heard there were such women, but he had never encountered one. It was the next farm down the road past the big man with the

rifle. This ...this...woman...was sitting ASTRIDE a horse! McGinnis couldn't believe his eyes! But, there she was... at the end of the wagon road leading to her farmhouse. She sat proudly, much as a man might sit. As the carriage approached McGinnis recovered and leaning slightly forward at the waist he tipped his hat to the lady...the woman!

The hub continued to creak. "Elliott, when we get to...where is it we're going?"

"River Bluff, sir."

"Right...River Bluff. Never mind! When we get to River Bluff, Elliott, you make damn sure somebody gets some grease on that hub. It's driving me completely crazy! "

Yes, sir. I'll see to it, sir," answered Elliott.

Elliott Helms was leaning back against the seat with his feet propped solidly against the floor of the carriage. His right hand was busy holding onto his hat as the wind whipped past the driver sitting on the driver's seat behind him. "My God, he thought. We must be doing ten, maybe twelve miles an hour." All the speed was frightening to Elliot. He had spent nearly his entire life in the city. There were no open country roads to allow the horses to gallop or trot. There was an acceptable walking speed for dray animals in the city. Elliott was used to that, not this hell-bent-for-leather breakneck speed of twelve miles per hour! He gulped once and clutched his hat even tighter!

Off to his left McGinnis could see another wagon road turning almost due south. He could make out what appeared to be a cabin set near a well and some out buildings. As the carriage got closer he saw three men at their chores in and around the buildings. They never looked up.

"Well, I'll be..." said McGinnis.

"What, sir?" asked Elliott.

"Nothing! I just never saw men so backwards they didn't even TRY to, at least, glimpse quality as it approached!" He sniffed.

"Comfort yourself, sir. From the looks of that hovel they're living in, they must be the dumbest ne'er-do-wells in the county!" Elliott was proud of himself for coming up with that line. He took great pride in polishing his employer's self esteem! Besides, it didn't cost Elliott much. Just the pride he once had in himself. That was gone now. It had been for a long time.

Behind the dusty black carriage, Willie Jordan looked up from the chopping block and the piece of stove wood he had been breaking up and shouted to Jack across the lot near the stable. "Who do you think that was?"

“Can’t say for sure!” replied Jack. But, I’d give odds it is Mr. McGinnis. Mr. DANIEL L. McGinnis!” Jack smiled towards Willie. Willie’s sun darkened face broke into a big grin. “I expect you’re right!” he called back.

Luke came around the corner of the cabin from the direction of the woodshed.

“Anybody see that big black carriage that just went by?” Luke asked.

“Yeah. We saw it,” Willie answered. Jack barely looked up from the plug he had cut and fitted into a hole in the watering trough. It had finally gotten his attention. Now he was repairing it.

Luke continued to advance until he was standing by Willie. “Anybody know who it was?”

“Your brother thinks it was McGinnis,” said Willie.

“McGinnis? You reckon...?”

Jack stood and brushed the palms of his hands against his trouser legs and picked up his awl, mallet, and jack knife. He carefully folded the knife and put it in his pocket. Then he started toward the other two. He saw a figure on horseback turn off River Road toward their place. He continued toward Willie and Luke.

“Well, here comes Amos!” exclaimed Luke.

Willie looked up in the direction of the wagon road and Jack said, “I saw him.”

Amos Keifer rode up to the three men and dismounted. “Morning all.” He said. “I guess ya’ll saw that carriage go by? They all nodded. “You suppose that was McGinnis?”

“I’d bet on it,” said Jack.

Amos smiled. It’s coming together, ain’t it?

“Yep!” said Willie. “It’s beginning to look that way.”

“I’d sure like to see his face when Garrison tells him the surveyors quit!” said Luke. “I wonder what made them leave like that?”

The three older men glanced at each other. Neither said a word.

The hawk had strayed a bit south of her usual hunting grounds up and down the river bottom. She sailed now, high above the four men standing in a group near a stable. One of the men lifted his face to stare at her for a moment. He seemed to marvel at the majesty of her flight. Then he dropped his head and rejoined the conversation. The hawk

sought a thermal to gain height and survey a larger portion of this rich land. She was patient and sure. She would wait until the prey was totally exposed. Then she would dive at an astounding speed, straight down, only to flare at the last second and grasp her prey in her talons.

Although, they hadn't thought about it, the four men standing below her outstretched wings had much in common with this majestic bird of prey.

### **Momma Nan**

Momma Nan was pulling fodder to be stored in the crib for their animal's food for the winter. She carefully went from cornstalk to cornstalk and removed any remaining ears of corn, most of which had dried now to a golden orange. The leaves of the corn were a raspy beige and ready to be pulled. They were dried and felt to the touch like parchment. After the ears were removed Momma Nan would grab each stalk at the top most leaves and strip them downwards until they had pulled almost away from the stalk. At the approximate middle of the stalk she would wrap the leaves around the stalk and tie them there with a simple knot. They would come later and cut the stalk below the tie. This was a difficult job. At the end of a days work pulling fodder the hands would be red and scratched and, more often than not, bleeding. But, it was necessary in order to feed the livestock. The hand-cranked corn-sheller was near the crib. She would shell some of the dry corn to make chicken feed for their chickens. In turn the chickens would produce eggs. It was a symbiotic relationship, as all farms are. Some of the corn would be taken to the mill and ground into corn meal.

Momma Nan had seen the black carriage go by. She had not stopped her task to actually peer at it to see who was in it. The fact that a big black carriage passed meant that somebody of importance had just passed her farm. She DID wonder who it might have been.

She heard Bess approaching with Ellie Grace aboard. Ellie had been to the river to check their fish baskets in hopes of finding a few catfish for dinner today.

Ellie Grace rode Bess on to the barn. Then she dismounted. As she slid to the ground she held tightly to a string, which held six fat catfish anywhere from six inches to eight inches long. Ellie could hardly wait for dinner today. Catfish was her favorite meal. She took the fish to the corner of the barn and dropped them, still on the string, into the rain barrel. She then tied the string to a nail protruding from the wall just above the barrel. It would keep them alive and, therefore, fresh until time to skin and gut them for dinner!

Momma Nan would fillet the fish and fry them in the big cast iron skillet on the stove. Her mouth watered!

She put Bess away inside the stable lot and carried a bucketful of water from the same water barrel and poured it into the water trough for Bess. Then she returned the bucket to its place in the barn. She looked out across the wide expanse of the cornfield and she could see Momma Nan's head bobbing, as she would stoop to pull an ear of corn then straighten-up to grasp the uppermost leaves on the stalk. She watched for a moment then she turned to go to the house.

As she walked, she wondered who the two men in the carriage were. They certainly were dressed like gentlemen. The man with the cigar had tipped his hat at her! They acted like gentlemen. She sighed. Most likely they were carpetbaggers from up North, or scalawags, looking for something left to steal! It was sad.

Ellie opened the door leading directly from outside to the kitchen and went immediately to the peg that held Momma Nan's big black cast iron skillet. She took it down and placed it on the stove. Then she took several pieces of stove wood from the wood box and opening the door to the firebox on the wood range, put the stove wood inside. She looked for the gallon-size can of coal oil and sprinkled a little of it on the wood and then reached for an old catalog lying on the floor beside the wood box. She tore one page from the half used publication and twisted it tight. Then she reached for a box of kitchen matches on a shelf to the right of the stove and taking one match from the box, she struck it on the side of the stove and lighted the twisted paper. She tossed the lighted paper into the firebox. There was a satisfying "WHOOSH!" as the coal oil caught and soon thereafter the wood was afire. She closed the door to the firebox and adjusted the damper on the stovepipe and stood back from the stove.

That done, Ellie decided it was time to clean the fish. She got her favorite cleaning knife from the drawer where Momma Nan kept all the eating utensils. Then she headed for the barn. She could check on the progress the fire in the stove was making by the color of the smoke rising from the chimney. As she strode toward the barn she glanced toward the cornfield. She didn't see Momma Nan. She walked on. After a few steps she turned again to the cornfield. She still didn't see Momma Nan.

"That's funny..." She muttered to herself. She looked harder, shading her eyes against the sun with the palm of her right hand. She stood looking out over the cornfield. Then she began to walk slowly toward the field. She called, "Momma Nan?" There was no answer. She speeded up. As she walked she called again, "Momma Nan?" Still, no answer. Then she was running. She ran straight toward the last stalk of tied fodder. Her heart was pounding. The loose leaves slapped against the legs of the denim trousers she wore.

Then she found her.

Momma Nan was lying prostrate on the ground, her head resting on her stretched-out right arm as if she had been reaching to strip a cornstalk and fell.

Ellie Grace stopped, kicking up a little cloud of dust as she did. She caught her breath. Her left hand involuntarily clutched her throat where her pulse was plainly visible. She approached Momma Nan's body slowly. She called out again, tentatively, "Momma Nan?" No answer. No movement. Nothing.

Ellie Grace stooped down beside Momma Nan. She brushed back the few strands of gray hair that had fallen across her face when she fell. Ellie saw that Momma Nan's eyes were open... but not seeing. She closed Momma Nan's eyes and began to weep. The tears flowed in torrents as she sat on the ground beside the body of her dead mother.

The hawk, making lazy circles above, suddenly felt the sensation of a strong torrent of wind beneath its wings. It soared upwards toward the unclouded blue of the Southern sky. Momma Nan was reaching for the welcoming arms of her husband.

### **Tricks Fate Plays**

The dusty black carriage creaked into River Bluff and rolled to a stop in front of the big doors of Farley Carnes' Mule Auction. The driver hopped down and went inside in search of a smith to do something, anything, about that creaking wheel!

"Elliott, get down and go see if you can find Colonel Garrison," said McGinnis.

"Yes, sir." Elliott stepped from the carriage, straightened his vest and checked his ribbon tie, then disappeared inside the darkness of the barn.

McGinnis sat in the carriage alone. He could feel the eyes of the town's people staring at him as he sat. He began to feel uncomfortable and finally, unable to sit still a moment longer, he too, got out of the carriage. He walked over to the sentry on the right side of the doors and asked, "Where's Colonel Garrison?"

The sentry answered, "He's out of town, sir."

"What do you mean he's out of town?" McGinnis asked, his irritation showing in his clipped manner of speech and the rising timbre of his voice.

"I mean, sir, he's out of town!" The soldier repeated. "The Colonel and Major Benson rode out early this morning toward the west. I have no idea when they will return...Sir!"

“Oh, this is good! This is just great! Here I come three hundred miles and he’s out of town!” McGinnis was shouting now.

Elliott reappeared from the interior of the barn.

“What’s the matter, sir?” He asked McGinnis

“The Colonel is out of town!”

“That’s what they told me inside, too.” Elliott shuffled his feet, head down, saying nothing as he waited for his employer to respond.

Finally, McGinnis said, “I guess we wait then. Where’s the best hotel in this town, soldier?”

“There ain’t one, sir.” Replied the soldier waiting for McGinnis’ explosion. He didn’t have to wait long!

“What? No hotel? Where do people stay...and eat...and such?” choked McGinnis.

“At Bea’s Boarding House, sir!” The soldier said. “The boarding house is right down the street, sir, about a block. It has a sign out front. You can’t miss it.”

The driver re-emerged from the barn followed by Farley Carnes. “Sir, Mr. Carnes, here, says he can fix that wheel but it’ll take awhile. He says he will have to remove it and re-pack it with grease.”

“Well, tell him to do it then!” McGinnis never looked at Farley at all. “Driver, get those bags and come along. Looks like we’re staying at the boarding house!” McGinnis started walking briskly east on Main Street towards Bea’s. Elliott was tagging along at a respectable distance of some three or four paces.

Farley said, “Driver, why don’t you take the carriage on up to Bea’s and unload the baggage and then bring it back here. You’ve come this far on that wheel, I don’t think another 200 yards is going to hurt it much!”

Smiling the driver said, “Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr....?”

“Carnes.” Farley replied.

“Thank you, Mr. Carnes!” the driver said shaking Farley’s rough, stained hand briskly. The he climbed back onto the driver’s seat, turned the matched horses around and headed up the street toward Bea’s.

The carriage caught up with McGinnis and Elliott when they were about three doors west of Bea's. McGinnis stopped and glared at the driver as the carriage passed. The driver was already carrying baggage into Bea's when the two travelers arrived.

"I suppose YOU'RE proud of YOURSELF!" McGinnis spat out with both hands planted firmly on his hips!

"Beg Pardon, sir?" the driver asked. His face was a complete blank.

McGinnis looked at that innocent face and said, "Never mind!"

The Driver continued to haul baggage into Bea's. He saw McGinnis and Helms talking with Bea. He supposed they were arranging their stay with her. They were. Actually, McGinnis was explaining to Bea how she would kow-tow to him during the period of time he deigned to allow her establishment to serve him! That was the McGinnis way of doing things! Anything!

Down the street the Driver had returned the carriage to Farley's and was standing by as Farley removed the wheel.

As they chatted, Farley soon understood the driver's reluctance to stay under the same roof with McGinnis. So, he offered the driver a bed for the night. The driver immediately accepted Farley's offer and with a grateful grin clasped Farley's hand in a gesture of profound thankfulness!

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Ellie Grace had ridden to the Knight's cabin and told Jack, Luke, and Willie what had happened to Momma Nan. They immediately mounted up and rode back to the Campbell farm with Ellie. The three men managed to gather the body of Momma Nan from the cornfield and, with as much dignity as they could, carried it to the Campbell house. Ellie had cleared the kitchen table and there they laid the body of Momma Nan.

Luke carried the news to the Keifer farm. Mrs. Keifer and Annie came as soon as they could get the mules hitched to the wagon. Amos rode over shortly after the women. He left Frank in charge of the farm...and his brother!

Willie was detailed to ride to town and inform The Rev. Father John C. Davis. The good Reverend assured Willie he'd be along as soon as he could. Willie stopped by Doc. Brown's office and told him and by the Mercantile and told Mr. Bowen. The he walked across the street to the bakery and told the Goldbergs about the death of Momma Nan Campbell. Jacob and Rebecca urged Willie to go upstairs to speak with Deborah...and he did. He explained that he only had a short time and had to return to the Campbell farm soon as possible. Still bruised badly, Deborah assured him she understood and painfully leaned forward and kissed him on the cheek. His spirits lifted instantly! He rose and started for the door, paused, turned and returned to Deborah. The disheveled gentleman



leaned down and tenderly kissed Deborah on the lips. Without saying a word he quickly went out the door, down the stairs, through the bakery, mounted Blackie and rode east out of town. Deborah was still trying to catch her breath!

As he rode past Bea's Boarding House he noticed two gentlemen leaving. They appeared to be the two men from the carriage, which had passed Knight's Crossing earlier in the day. Willie took a good look at them. Both of them.

McGinnis and Helms didn't even bother to look in the direction of the man who would play such a large part in their futures. They strode west toward the Mule Auction completely unaware of the tricks fate plays on mere morals.

### *The Funeral*

The two gravediggers climbed out of the new hole in the cemetery adjacent to the yard of the Little Anglican church just west of River Bluff. They had arrived at dawn to do the work and now it was complete. They picked up their shovels and their picks and tossed them into the bed of the wagon parked alongside the grave. The noise startled the mule, hitched to the wagon, and she whinnied and stepped backwards one step, which pushed the wagon backwards and caused the edge of the bed to strike one of the diggers in the stomach. He muttered a curse and continued loading the tools. Soon they climbed aboard the wagon seat and snapped the reins across the rump of the mule and drove the wagon, creaking and groaning, from the graveyard and back towards town.

Some early morning fog still hung in cottony wisps in low-lying patches around the graveyard and the church. The mule plowed right through them and continued on her way.

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As the sun cleared the tops of the trees at the eastern edge of River Bluff, a small party of people rode from the west into town. There were four riders and a wagon with two women and a young man on the seat. In the bed of the wagon was a lone woman sitting beside a prostrate figure covered by a blanket. A single hand protruded from the blanket. The young woman sitting by the figure held that hand in hers.

Frank Keifer drove the team of two mules with Sarah, his mother, sitting beside him. Annie Sue McKane sat on Sarah's right. Ellie Grace sat in the bed of the wagon by the body of her dead mother, Momma Nan Campbell. On the right side of the wagon rode Jack Knight nearest the wagon and Luke Knight to the right of Jack. On the left side of the wagon rode Willie Jordan nearest the wagon, and to his left rode Amos Keifer. Nobody spoke. It was a mournful group.

The town's people were beginning to stir and merchants were about the business of opening their stores for the day. As soon as the funeral party was noticed, even as they approached the edge of town, everything in River Bluff stopped. Men removed their hats and stood respectfully as the little party with the body of Momma Nan passed. The shopkeepers came out onto the wooden sidewalk and stood respectfully. Doc Brown actually walked out into the street in an implied question as to the need for his services. Jack shook his head from side to side in an almost imperceptible manner. Doc saw it, nodded once, and went back to the sidewalk. Mr. Bowen placed his right hand over his heart. Bea leaned against a post in front of her place and allowed the tears to rise up, and occasionally, trickle down her cheeks. Even the soldiers at the Mule Auction stopped their horsing around and stood respectfully when they realized the mission of the approaching group. Farley and Billy Carnes walked out, hand in hand, to the edge of the dusty street and stood respectfully, heads bowed, as the wagon passed.

As they approached the little white clapboard church with the steeple and bell, the Rev. Father Davis stood solemnly in his vestments on the topmost step, just in front of the church doors. He held the Book of Common Prayer and a Bible in his hands as he waited. As the wagon and riders drew nearer, he stepped down the steps and approached Jack. "Mr. Knight, may I speak with you, sir?" Father Davis asked. Jack stepped down from the Bay and handed the reins to Luke. He walked over the few steps to Father Davis.

"Yes, Padre?" Jack asked.

"Mr. Knight, I hope the family won't be upset with the church, but we've taken it upon ourselves to have Mr. Fred Lucas, a carpenter, make a coffin for Mrs. Campbell. It's not fancy, but it's functional and... well, it's just something the church wanted to do for one of its own. I thought, if you gentleman wanted to do it, you could...maybe...take her body inside and place it in the coffin now while my wife has Ellie into the rectory for tea and rest before the service."

Jack was genuinely taken with the kindness of the church and the rector. He said, "Thanks, Padre. I'm sure Ellie will appreciate it. I'll get the other men and we'll take care of the rest. Thank you."

As Jack walked back to the funeral party, he saw Mrs. Davis, the Padre's wife, escorting Ellie into the little rectory beside the church. When Ellie was safely inside, he spoke to Amos and Amos spoke to Frank. In a moment the wagon was turned around and taken to the opposite side of the church where there was a side door. The men then removed the body of Momma Nan, carried it inside, and respectfully placed it in the newly made coffin. Jack straightened her dress and made sure the lace at her throat was properly in place and then he stood back.

Amos said, "Jack, somebody ought to tell Ellie Grace about the coffin."

“I know.” replied Jack. “I’m going to the rectory right now.” He went down the aisle toward the church door. Amos, Frank, Luke, and Willie sat on the front pew, hats in hand. They said nothing. Each had his own thoughts.

A few moments later Jack returned with Ellie Grace and Mrs. Davis. When Ellie saw the new coffin, her hand went to her mouth and she began to quietly weep. Jack held her to his chest and let her cry. Soon her trembling stopped, she raised her head from his chest and wiped the tears away with a wadded-up handkerchief and asked if she could be alone with her mother for a few minutes. Jack escorted her to a seat on the front pew and then spoke to the others and they all left the building leaving Ellie, as she wished, alone with her mother.

The service was mercifully short and Father Davis led the party to the graveside. Frank, Amos, Luke, and Jack served as the pallbearers. They carried the coffin on their shoulders with hands on the sides to stabilize it. The graveside service lasted only minutes. Father Davis told Ellie he was available to her any time she needed him and Mrs. Davis hugged her tightly for a moment. Then the Padre and his wife left the cemetery. Ellie held a single dried rose bud. It had been in her mother’s Bible. Momma Nan had told her many times it was the flower her husband, Ellie’s father, had given her the first time he came calling.

Ellie stood and walked to the very edge of the grave. She carefully dropped the little dried bud onto the top of the coffin and blew a kiss toward it. Then she turned and held her arms open to Jack, he stepped into them and she folded them around him. He, in turn, folded his arms around Ellie. They stood that way for a moment. Then Jack escorted Ellie to the wagon. The funeral party mounted up and prepared to depart. Jack was already aboard the Bay when he said, “Just a minute, Frank.” Then Jack turned the Bay toward the rectory. He knocked and went inside. He was gone only a couple of minutes. When he came back out, he mounted the Bay and rode up beside the wagon. “All Right, Frank. We can go, now.” Frank snapped the reins across the rumps of the two mules and the old wagon rumbled down the rode toward town. The outriders followed along behind.

A breeze had picked up from the North. A few drops of rain struck them and the little squall was gone. Later, Ellie would remember thinking, “even the sky wept today.”

*Somebody’s Got to Gather the Fodder*

The wagon rumbled to a stop in front of the Campbell farmhouse. No one moved for a moment. Then Ellie slowly stood and began to step down from the wagon seat. Jack quickly dismounted and raced to her side and gently helped her to the ground. Then Annie stepped over the wagon side onto the right front wheel and Luke was there to help her step safely on the hub and then to the ground.

Ellie Grace climbed the steps to the front porch and seated herself in Momma Nan's rocker. She began rocking to and fro and staring out across the cornfield where she found the lifeless body of Momma Nan.

"Somebody's got to gather the fodder," she said in a monotone voice.

"Don't worry about that now, Ellie. It will be taken care of," offered Jack, in a comforting tone of voice. "The folks here in this county will see to anything you need."

Annie said, "I'll go start some coffee." She went inside the house to the kitchen and Jack could hear pots and pans rattling about. When the noise stopped, Jack decided she had found the coffee pot. In a moment Luke went in after Annie.

Amos stepped down from his horse and climbed the steps to the porch. "Miss Ellie," he said, "If there is anything that I or my family can do for you, just let us know. In the meantime, Annie has asked to stay a few days with you...if that's all right. She can be a big help 'til you get back to your old self."

Ellie nodded and said, "I'd like that. Annie is a fine young woman. Yes, I'd like to have her stay for a while."

"Then it's settled," said Amos. He shook Jack's hand and said, "I'm going to get the family on back to the house. Can't leave Joseph alone for too long. That boy can find all sorts of trouble to get into."

"Thanks, Amos. You and your family have really been helpful. I can't tell you how much we appreciate it." Jack said sincerely.

"Well, that's what friends are for, Jack!" Amos slapped Jack on the shoulder in a gesture of friendship. Then he retreated down the steps and mounted his horse. Sarah called from the wagon. "If you need us Ellie, you just holler, you hear?" Frank got the team of mules started and turned a circle in the yard and headed back out the wagon road.

Willie was still mounted on Blackie at some distance from the house. He sat quietly in the saddle not intruding on the Ellie's grief and mourning and Jack's comforting. He sat just within reach in the event either needed him. Willie was always there. Just at the outer periphery of other people's lives.... like a guardian angel...he hovered, but out of sight.

Ellie sat on the porch the remainder of the day until dusk dark. Jack sat beside her. She refused food. She accepted coffee and water. She said nothing. Her mind was burrowing through the dark tunnel of depression. She felt a great emptiness. It was as though a part of her was missing. Indeed it was.

At sunset, Jack gently insisted she come in the house and prepare for bed. At first she refused, then Luke and Annie came out onto the porch and Annie asked her again. Ellie looked at Annie as though expecting to see another face connected to the feminine voice, but quickly realized it was not her mother. Not Momma Nan. She would never hear Momma Nan's voice again. Not in this life.

Ellie rose from the rocker. Annie took her by the arm and guided her to her bed. Annie closed the door and the men all retreated to the porch again.

Willie was now sitting on the edge of the porch floor with his long legs dangling off into space. He lighted a cigarette and offered the bag of tobacco and papers to Jack. Jack gratefully took it and rolled himself a smoke and handed the "fixins" back to Willie. They sat for a while and smoked.

Finally, Willie said, "I guess I'll be going." He shoved off the porch and landed softly, catlike, on the soft earth beneath. "I'll feed and water Molly and see to things around the cabin 'til you get home."

"Thanks, Willie. I expect I'll be along in the morning. I think I ought to stay here tonight, though."

"Yeah, me too. Don't worry about anything. I'll see to it." He swung up into Blackie's saddle and turned the big black horse toward River Road. Walking slowly, horse and rider turned left and were soon lost in the gathering darkness.

Annie returned to the porch. "I've gotten her in bed and I think she's already asleep. She was exhausted." She sat in the vacant rocker. Luke moved from the post he was leaning against to squat beside Annie's chair. Jack could just barely see their hands clasping in the darkness. He smiled.

The lonely sound of an owl came from the river bottom. A few crickets were chirping. Field mice were scurrying about in the cornfield stocking their larders for the cold winter months ahead. The impact of what happened in that cornfield the day before had no effect on them at all. Life went on.

### **I Run this End of Things**

As the sun rose, so did the fury of Daniel L. McGinnis.

“What do you mean, they’re gone?” demanded Daniel L. McGinnis, his voice rising as he glared at the Union officer.

“I mean they’re gone!” Garrison answered. “Just packed up...and rode away. The tracks led west. We followed them for about twenty miles. They didn’t even stop for water! They’re gone!”

“Why didn’t you watch them? Why’d you let them go? Why DID they go?” stammered McGinnis. “You’re a damned fool, Rufus! A damned, STUPID fool!”

Garrison moved like a cat. He grabbed the front of McGinnis’ coat, twisted his fist and snatched McGinnis toward him, almost lifting him clear off the floor. With his face just inches from that of McGinnis, Garrison said, “Now you listen to me, you little pip-squeak! I run this end of things. That’s the deal! It has ALWAYS been the deal. Don’t you come down here and try to tell ME how to run MY business. Is that Clear? Because if it isn’t clear, I can beat it into you if I have to. DO YOU UNDERSTAND?” He released the front of McGinnis’ coat and gave a little shove to push McGinnis away from him.

McGinnis gasped and immediately began to wipe away Garrison’s spittle from his face and straighten his shirt and tie and smoothed the wrinkles in his spotless frock coat. Garrison turned away and took two steps away from McGinnis before he turned and said, “Just because we’re brothers-in-law does not give you any leeway with ME! The quicker you get that through your thick little head the better off you’ll be! And another thing...stop strutting around here like a damned peacock! These people are sick of us anyway! They just lost a war to us and now they’re losing everything else. The last thing we want is to get them mad enough to band together against us! Damn, man! Even you ought to have enough sense to understand that. You be civil to them, especially to their women. You say yes ma’am and no ma’am, bow to them...just show the expected courtesy. I warn you,” Garrison shook his finger in McGinnis’ face, “if you don’t, you’re libel to find yourself deep in one of these swamps with you head tucked neatly under your arm!”

McGinnis gulped. “You mean that?” he asked.

“Yes SIR, I mean it! These people don’t fool around...not when it comes to their lady folk. They’ll kill you in a heartbeat! Now watch your step!”

Garrison strode out of the big barn and mounted his waiting horse, which stood along side the already mounted Major Benson, and the two officers rode east out of town toward Wilmington. The ride would also take them pass Knight’s Crossing, the Campbell place, and the Keifer Farm. All prime property - perfect for a rail bed!

There was another rider on a mule shadowing every step they took as they made their way east. He stayed in the tree line to the south and just back of and out of sight of the Union officers. He noted their every move.

Jack had ridden over to the Campbell place as soon as it was light to check on Ellie Grace. Annie McKane met him at the door when he arrived. She told Jack that Ellie was still in bed. She invited Jack in for a cup of strong black coffee, which Jack accepted thankfully. They talked of Ellie Grace's recovery from Momma Nan's death. She had had a sound sleep, mostly from exhaustion. She would slowly regain her strength and stamina as the days wore on and there was distance from the heartbreak of losing Momma Nan.

Suddenly, Jack pushed his chair back from the big table and rubbed his bearded chin and said, "Annie, you've become fond of Luke, haven't you?"

Annie turned beet-red! She lowered her eyes to the tabletop, but did not answer.

Jack realized he had made a mistake. He said, "I'm sorry Annie. I didn't mean to embarrass you! I'm a clod with the social graces. I'm used to just blurting out what I'm thinking." He took her hand and said, "Please forgive me?"

Annie looked up. She just rolled her eyes up, not moving her head. Jack stared into her deep eyes and understood why Luke had fallen head over heels in love with this southern beauty!

"There's no need for an apology. I'm not just 'fond' of Luke, I love him!" Annie said emphatically. "I'll marry him, if he asks me," she volunteered. Now she was embarrassed all over again.

Jack rocked backwards on the chairs two-rear legs and grinned. "I thought so," he said. Annie quickly got up from the table and went to the stove to get the coffee pot. She came back and poured more coffee into Jack's cup...and hers.

"Annie, Annie! It's all right! If it makes any difference to you...I approve! I think you'd make Luke a wonderful wife and a wonderful mother for his children. You're special Annie! I'm glad you came to this county and I glad you found Luke." Jack let his chair down flush to the full. He heard a rustle behind him and turned. It was Ellie. She was in her gown. She rushed to Jack and threw herself into his arms. She laid her head on his chest and wept. Jack held her and soothed her as the waves of grief and heart-wrenching pain flooded through that emptiness inside left by the death of her mother.

Finally, it was over and Ellie stood. Jack quickly pulled a chair from the table and held it for her. She sat. Annie, still with the big blue coffee pot in her hands, went to the cabinet and returned with a white mug, which she filled with the hot, black liquid and placed in front of Ellie. Steam rose from the cup.

As Ellie sipped from the mug, Annie and Jack glanced at each other, across the table. They both knew the healing for Ellie had begun.

The morning sun was high in the sky as it shone down on two soldiers in the garb of Union officers galloping their horses east on River Road. A little behind them and well back in the trees to the south of River Road was another rider making his way slowly through the underbrush while keeping an eye on the Union officers. He would report to his father, soon, on what he saw. His father would, in turn, report to Captain Jack Knight. The mule's ears flicked and she heaved a heavy sigh but plodded on.

### **The Betty Louise and the Round Man, Again**

As the riders approached the cultivated fields, Frank knew he would soon run out of cover on the south side of River Road. When the two Union officers rounded a shallow curve to the south, Frank expertly guided his mule across the road to disappear in the undergrowth on the north side near the water of the River. From there he could still observe the officers...without being seen.

At the Knight Farm the Union officers pulled up near the charred ruins of the farmhouse and the cabin and sat for a moment just observing. After only a minute or two, the riders moved on.

At the Campbell place they didn't even stop. They did look at the farmhouse and outbuildings as they passed. Frank knew his home was next on River Road.

The sun was high when the lead riders reached the Keifer Farm, reined in their horses and dismounted. They looked intently at the wide, flat fields surrounding the grove of oaks that shaded and protected the cluster of buildings. Frank could clearly see Colonel Garrison pointing to the distant south beyond his home. Garrison spoke to Major Benson as one who had definite plans for that piece of property. For a good half an hour the two men walked up and down River Road and talked, pointed, and nodded toward Frank's home. He was seething with anger as he sat on his mule well back from the road.

Finally, the two officers mounted up and rode on east. Frank waited for them to disappear from sight. Then he guided the mule from the underbrush and across the road and down the wagon cut to his home. He leapt from the mule's back and slapped the reins around a corner post of the front porch. He ran across the eight-foot wide front porch and through the door calling, "Pa! Pa!" No one was in the house. He continued through the kitchen and out the back door where he could see his father in the barn. He raced onward. At the doors to the barn he slid to a halt.



Amos was headed toward him. “What is it, Frank?” Frank told his father what he had seen.

Amos said. “You did fine, son. Now, get on back after ‘em. See if you can catch up...and stay with ‘em. I’m going to the Knight’s place to tell Jack what’s happening!”

Frank clutched his father’s sleeve. “Pa, do you think they’re going to take our place?” There was fear written all over Frank’s face.

Amos paused for a moment and turned to his son and said, “Frank they’re never gonna get this place. I promise you! Never! Now, git!” Frank ran back through the house and leapt from the porch to the mule’s back and took off down the wagon road toward River Road where he turned east and as fast as the mule could go, he began to close the distance between himself and the Union officers who now had a considerable head start.

Amos blasted out of the barn door aboard his horse. He turned left at River Road and headed for Knight’s Crossing. Plans had to be made.

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The *Betty Louise* made it only three miles up river from Wilmington before they were boarded and their cargo, headed for the Union troops at River Bluff, was liberated. The Union troops assigned to guard the steamboat were put ashore with their hands and feet lashed together with ropes in knots that would allow them to escape...after a suitable period of struggle. The men in gray, led by the short rotund man, stole away into the heavy foliage. The whole thing was over in minutes.

One thing was different this time, though. This time, the rotund man ordered his men to carry boxes of munitions along with them as they retreated into the swamps. Lots of gunpowder and shot was toted into the dark green of the marshy swamps along the river. The Union troops who saw it go had good reason to fear that the next time they saw it...it would be headed directly toward them...one 58 caliber piece at a time!

### **They’re Gonna Try to Take My Farm Next**

Bea was pleasantly surprised at the politeness of Mr. McGinnis. Not that the local gentlemen weren’t polite. They were. To a fault. But, McGinnis was different. The day he arrived he was anything but polite. He acted as if he was the owner of the boarding house, not Bea. Now that had changed. It was “Yes, Ma’am,” and “No, Ma’am,” and he was bowing and scraping until it had become embarrassing. This was hard to deal with.

Bea actually liked him better the other way. She couldn't help but wonder what had made him change like this.

She peered out the window to see Colonel Garrison and Major Benson riding into town from the east. Like everyone else in town she wondered what they were up to. Whatever it was, it did not bode well for the people of River Bluff. As she held the heavy drapes back, she saw McGinnis emerge from the Mercantile and wave to Garrison as he approached. Garrison stopped his horse and McGinnis walked nearer to him and they spoke for a short time. Then Garrison continued on to the Mule Auction. McGinnis began a brisk walk in that direction as well. Elliott Helms followed McGinnis at a respectful distance.

Bea allowed the drapes to drop back into place and sat down at her dining room table. She had thought of searching McGinnis' room. But, she didn't know what to look for. She didn't think she'd recognize something important if she saw it, anyway. At least his money was good! Bea sighed as she thought, Lord knows, I sure need the money. She made a mental note, though, to be mindful around McGinnis and Helms. They might say something that would indicate their intentions here in River Bluff. If they did, she would report it to Jack Knight. The decision made, she got up from the chair, replaced it at the table and got on with her dusting of the furniture.

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Amos reined his horse in at the well in front of the Knight's cabin. He dropped to the ground while the little dust cloud was still swirling around his horse's legs. He dropped-reined the horse and started for the door when it opened. There was Willie with a wide grin of welcome.

"Where's Jack?" asked Amos. Willie, recognizing the anxiety in Amos', voice pointed toward the stable and said, "He's there...at the stable".

Amos spun to his left and headed for the stable. Jack was just starting for the house. They met mid-way.

"What's the matter, Amos?"

Amos told Jack of Frank's report of the two Union officers and their looking over his farm. He said, "Jack, I think I'm next. I think they're gonna try to take my farm next!"

"Well, they can try, Amos. It will never happen, but they can try."

"What do you have in mind?" asked Amos.

"Do you think you could find Bill Jeffers and Dabney Caines?" Asked Jack.

"Yeah, I'm pretty sure I can."

“Then get word to them I want to see then right away. And Amos...I need the name of that lawyer in Wilmington...the one you sent your tax money to.”

As Willie approached, he could see the men were deep in conversation obviously planning something. Just as he came abreast of the two men, Amos turned and walked past him headed for his horse.

“What’s got him so fired up? Willie asked Jack.

“The Yankees,” replied Jack.

”They coming after his farm?”

“Looks that way,” said Jack, turning to join Willie and walk back to the house.

“We’re not gonna let them have it, are we?” Willie thumbed his big hat back from his forehead.

“No,” said Jack. “Come on it the house and I’ll fill you in on what’s gonna happen.”

The two men slipped through the cabin door into the cool dimness inside. The door closed.

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Luke was sitting in the kitchen of the Campbell farm as Annie was putting away the dishes from the noon meal. He had helped her with them...if drying and stacking can be considered “helping.” Ellie Grace had joined them for dinner and she had eaten well. She was still not herself, but she was getting there. Luke watched Annie’s slim, lithe body as she moved about the large room that served as the kitchen. He thought how lucky he was that Annie would be interested in him. In a way, they were birds of a feather. She had no family and other than Jack, he had none. If things continued the way they were going, he planned, right then and there, to ask Annie to be his wife. Yes, sir, that’s what he would do. He leaned back on the chair’s two back legs and sipped from his cup of steaming coffee. The farm would be ready next spring for planting and by mid-summer, they would have a producing farm again.

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As the day wound to a close and dusk dark slipped over the landscape, two men on horse back rode up to the Knight’s cabin. They slipped off their mounts and tapped lightly on the cabin’s door. The door opened a crack then swung wide open and the two men slipped inside. The door closed. Dim light splashed out the small window in the north wall and painted the yard just outside a faint orange.

## **I'll Stop Them**

The coal oil lamps burned late into the night at the Keifer home. The family had plans to make. Amos said, "Frank, I want you to choose the fastest, most reliable mule we have. Which one is it, would you say?"

"Ole Jenny, Pa. She's been hauling me all over these woods following those Yankees!"

"All right. Now listen carefully. I want you to take Jenny out back in those woods back there," Amos pointed toward the back of the house, "and hobble her. Is there a place back there you can put her?"

"Yes, sir. There's a clearing about a hundred yards from the house. It's a small clearing with grass and there's a little branch that runs by the western edge of it with clear spring water."

"Sounds good. I want you to take her out there, first thing, at daybreak. Be sure, now, that she has plenty of food. Take some fodder along and I want you to check on her three times a day while she's there.

Amos turned to his youngest son, "Joseph, first thing, after breakfast in the morning, I want you to go down River Road about a half a mile toward town and hide in the woods on the south side of the road. I want you to stay there, all day, if you have to. Your Ma will see that you get your meals. If you see the Yankees coming, I want you to run as fast as you can through the woods to the house and let us know. Then," and Amos turned to his wife Sarah and continued, "I want you, Joseph, AND your mother, to get down in that old root cellar out back and stay there 'til I come and get you. No matter how long, no matter what you hear, you STAY THERE! Is THAT clear?"

Joseph and Sarah nodded.

Amos turned to Frank, "Now Frank, as soon as Joseph comes running with the news, you high tail it out the back and through the woods and get on Ole Jenny and ride to the Knight's place. Tell Captain Jack, Luke and Willie what's happening. They'll tell you what to do from there!"

"But, Pa, you'll be all alone!" exclaimed Joseph.

"Not for long, I won't!" Amos said. "You let me worry about that...you just do as I told you and we'll get through this!"

Sarah said, "What about Annie, Amos?"

“Annie will stay with Miss Campbell. She’ll be all right. If she should, for some reason, be here when the Yankees show up, I want her in the cellar with you and Joseph!”

“Frank, you still have that little thirty-two pistol I gave you?” Amos asked.

“Yes, sir. It’s loaded and under my bed.”

“Get it...and keep it with you! Don’t shoot unless you have to. Then, IF you have to, hit what you shoot at! We’re going to be seriously outnumbered.”

“Sarah, I want you to take the ten gauge shotgun with you into the cellar. It’s a double barrel. It’ll hold two rounds. You don’t have to worry about being a bad shot with that ole gun. You just point it in the general direction of your target and pull the trigger. It’ll do the rest.” Amos thought for a moment, then said, “On second thought, you might want Joseph to handle that gun. It kicks like a mule!” Amos rubbed his chin and looked at Sarah for a long moment, then said, “You two decide on that.”

“One other thing, Sarah, in the morning start taking supplies down into the cellar. Whatever you think you’ll need while you’re there.”

“Pa, You think the Yankees are coming, don’t you? asked Joseph.

“Oh, yeah!” declared Amos.

“Amos, I’m worried about you.” Sarah was shaking her head. “We’ll be all right in the cellar. But, you...you’ll be out here all by yourself. Do you expect them to come in shooting?”

“No, I don’t. But, I expect they’ll be shooting when they leave.” Amos placed his hand on Sarah’s shoulder as he towered above her where she sat in an old rocking chair they had trundled all the way from Alabama. “Sarah, you get in that cellar and you stay there!” He leaned forward and kissed her tenderly on the forehead. “Sarah, I can lose the house AND the land, if I have to, and still survive. But, I can’t lose YOU, Sarah! I can’t lose you or the kids. I’m going to need all my wits about me when they get here. So, PLEASE keep yourself safe and hidden!” Amos dropped to his knees beside the chair and took Sarah’s hand. He clutched it in his hard calloused hands and looked her directly in the eyes. “Please, Sarah, mind what I say on this. This thing is going to be settled, one-way or the other. I want you alive and well when it is!

Frank said, “When do you think they’ll come, Pa?”

“I expect either tomorrow or the next day. In any event, it won’t be long. They WILL come!”

“What if they try to burn us out, Pa?” asked Joseph.

“I’ll stop them!” The determination in his voice led them all to believe he COULD stop them.

“Any questions...from anyone? Now’s the time. Once we get on with things tonight, there won’t be time to have a discussion about anything.” Amos said, his eyes sweeping the room from one person to another. Nobody had a question.

“All right then, let’s be about it!” The Keifer family got busy. An hour and a half later all the lamps went out and the house was darkened and quiet. Each person was absolutely sure what his or her part in the upcoming event was to be. There would be no time for questions later. That was perfectly all right as there would be none.

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Several miles west of the Keifer place the light was still spilling from the window in the north wall of the Knight cabin. A low rumble of voices could be heard from inside. After a while there was the sound of benches scraping on the rough plank floor as the men inside pushed back from the trestle table and stood. They shook hands all around. Willie leaned over and blowing down the chimney of the lamp in the center of the table, he outted it. The room went suddenly dark. The door to the cabin opened and two men slipped out in the night. They mounted their horses and rode to the intersection with River Road. At the crossing, now known as Knight’s Crossing, the two riders stopped. They spoke softly to each other, and then shook hands. One rider turned east and rode toward Wilmington, the other, with a rotund profile backlit by the moon, rode west toward River Bluff. He would leave River Road and disappear into the forest while still a good distance from the town.

Looking down from the limb of an old oak tree covered with Spanish moss gently swaying in the night breeze, sat an owl. Her large eyes soaking in all the starlight they could, stared, unblinking, at the rotund man and his horse passing underneath. Her head swiveled completely around as the rider passed almost directly beneath her. The round man never looked up. His mind was on his mission and the likely consequences. He involuntarily shivered.

### **You be Careful Now, You Hear**

In the darkness of the night, just after midnight, two figures slipped out the back door of the little house beside the Mule Auction. It was the home of Farley Carnes and his small son, Billy. The shadowy figures turned west and crept quietly through the sparse woods until they were a hundred yards or so west of the Mule Auction. Then they slipped across the road toward the north, turned east and crept into the alleyway that would take them to

the back door of Doc Brown's office. There was a horse saddled and tied to a hitching post at the back of Doc's office. Farley tapped on Doc's door. The door swung open and Doc stepped out. The two men spoke in hushed tones for a minute or two. Then Farley hefted Billy onto the horse and he climbed aboard behind Billy. He nudged the horse into motion and they walked slowly and quietly out of town headed toward the east. In a few minutes they were on River Road, east of River Bluff. Farley allowed the horse to pick-up its gait and soon they were eating up the miles.

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The eastern horizon was showing the first signs of light as the horseman and his tired horse clattered on the cobbles of the streets in Wilmington. Dabney Caines steered clear of the waterfront. He feared, and rightly so, the waterfront would be crawling with soldiers...even at this hour. It was. He could hear the clanking and banging of military accoutrements coming from that direction as he wove through the streets toward his sister's house. He had much work to do and a short time to do it in.

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As dawn broke the sky east of the Keifer home, Sarah was clearing the table of the breakfast dishes. Joseph was filling an old confederate canteen with cold well water. His father, Amos, spoke to him quietly and confidently. He laid his big hand on Joseph's developing shoulder and looked him square in the eyes.

"Joe, we're depending on you to give the alarm, now. Don't let us down, Joe. I know you can do this. I know it's a lot of responsibility for a young man, but I also know you can handle it." Amos stepped back and looked at his youngest son from head to foot. "You know, Joe, we had young fellows, not as old as you, fighting with the army against the Yanks. They fought well, too. I know you would have, had you been there. Now, get the sack you Momma has for you in the kitchen and be on your way."

"Yes, sir, Pa!" Joseph turned for the house. Sarah met him at the back door with an old five-pound flour sack filled with corn bread and a slab of shoulder meat she had fried at breakfast especially for Joseph's midday meal. She handed him the sack, then stepped forward and enfolded him in her loving arms. Sarah released Joseph, stepped back, wiped a stray tear from her eye and said, "Go on, Joseph. Go on up there by the road." Joseph started at a run. His mother called after him, "You be careful now, you hear?"

Sarah re-entered the kitchen and began placing food items in an old cartridge box to be taken to the root cellar.

About a hundred yards west of the house, Frank was carrying his third armload of fodder to a pile he was making near the little stream by which ole Jenny, the mule, was hobbled. He would make another trip before he was satisfied. He dropped the fodder onto the growing pile then sidled up to Jenny and stroked the mule's neck and crooned softly to her. She nickered and returned to her grazing. Frank turned back to the house.

Several miles west, at the Knight's cabin, three men sat at the table in the center of the single-roomed house. Weapons were laid out on the table in different states of disassembly. The men were cleaning each part of their respective arms. Luke's small handgun was in two pieces in front of him as he pushed a cleaning rod with an oily patch down the short barrel. The six-round cylinder lay sparking on the table. A double-barreled, twelve-gauge shotgun lay between Luke and Jack. It was opened at the breech and linen swatches lay beside it, black with carbon deposits removed from both barrels.

Jack had his Navy Colt broken down and was carefully cleaning each chamber in the cylinder. He had two cylinders. He would load one and place it in the pistol. The other he would load and carry in his pocket for a fast reload. This was learned behavior, learned from many hot firefights, from horseback, during the war. You couldn't stop to reload a cylinder. His rifle was on the table as well. It, too, sparkled.

Willie sat at the end of the table nearest the fireplace. He had two Navy colts and a short-barreled rifle of the same caliber spread before him. He was busy oiling the trigger mechanism of one of the Colts. Beside the rifle lay his large bladed Bowie knife, which dated back to the late 1830's. It had belonged to his father. He had given it to Willie when Willie went away to war. His father had told him, "Son, when things get REALLY bad, you can rely on this old knife!" Twice, things had gotten REALLY bad and Willie had found himself with nothing left to fight with but the knife. His father had been right! Willie was still here and several of his opponents were not!

Throughout the early part of the day, men would be taking leave of their wives and families. Their families would stand in their yards with their hands shading their eyes from the morning sun, waving to the husbands and fathers who would soon disappear from sight on a mission to help a neighbor. It was understood, by those left behind, that this was necessary. It was also understood that their neighbors would do the same for them if the positions were reversed. By midday the movement of men had ceased. In the underbrush along River Road small animals began tentative movement again. Birds began to flit from tree to tree and the breeze from the east stiffened. There was a sense of impending danger shared by man and animal alike.

Before the first shots were fired at Shiloh, Gettysburg, Cold Harbor, and others, men spoke of their heightened sense of awareness. Sounds were clearer, colors were brighter, sight was sharper, even the food, such as it was, tasted better. It was nature's way of preparing the human mind and body for action. Some would call it the "fight or flee" syndrome. Whatever it was, the citizens of River Bluff and the surrounding environs felt it now.

The hawk, sailing high above, dropped from the sky and, at the last second, flared and settled onto the topmost branch of a lone pine tree struck by lightning many years before. From here she could see for miles. She would have a front row seat. Her sharp eyes detected movement in the trees bordering the river near the Keifer farm. It was



movement only man could make. She settled down onto her talons, which dug into the soft pine of the branch. Her feathers covered her feet completely as she sat...and waited.

### **They'll Come Today**

Farley Carnes, riding double with his son Billy, turned onto the wagon road to the Keifer farm. He had seen Joseph as they passed his position on River Road. Actually, Joseph had seen them first and stepped out into the road to greet them. Then he slipped back into the underbrush and disappeared.

Now, as Farley and Billy approached the Keifer house, Amos stepped from the house onto the front porch. Cradled in the crook of his left arm was his repeating rifle. The hammer was back. As the two riders drew closer, Amos recognized them and he eased the hammer down on the rifle to "safe" it. He stepped from the porch and strode out to greet his brother-in-law and his nephew.

"Morning Farley...Billy!" Amos called. "What brings you out this way...so early?"

Farley said, "We thought we'd come visiting." Farley cut his eyes toward Billy to indicate to Amos he didn't want to talk within the boy's hearing.

"Well, you're mighty welcome. Billy, hop down from there. I expect your Aunt Sarah has some warm hoecake with butter and molasses left from breakfast if you hurry on into the kitchen!" Amos reached out his hand to help Billy down from the horse. No sooner had his feet touched the ground than he tore out for the kitchen and the hoecake and molasses!

When the little boy's pounding feet crossed the front porch, Amos turned to Farley and said, "What's going on, Farley?"

Farley swung his right leg up and over the horse's rump and dismounted. He walked around the horse's head, absentmindedly stroking the animal on the muzzle and said, "They're coming, Amos. I don't know if it will be today or tomorrow, but they're coming." He stared at the ground as he said the last.

"I know," said Amos. "I've had them followed for the last week or so. I knew they had looked at my place and I figured we would be next."

"I guess they figured your place kinda linked every other farm on this side of town. They figured if they could get yours, the others would sell out with no problem. I don't think so, but I'll warrant they did!"

“I think you’re probably right. They apparently hadn’t figured on Jack Knight and the boys living on this side of town.” Amos smiled at the thought.

“I really don’t think it matters to them. They’re intent on stealing this land and they don’t care who gets in the way. They’re rough, Amos. They’re mean!”

“So are we,” replied Amos. “Come on in the house and have some coffee and a bite to eat. You’ll feel better. You must have left about midnight to get here this early.”

“We did. Just after midnight, as a matter of fact. I was a little surprised we were able to just walk out like that,” answered Farley.

“Well, by now they know you are gone. They may not have put two and two together, yet...but they will.” Amos said.

Farley unbuckled the leather strap on his saddlebag and removed a big brass-framed Navy Colt revolver from it. “Got this from one of our soldiers passing through. He stopped and asked me to put some shoes on his horse. I did...and he insisted I take this revolver as payment. I tried to get him to accept the shoeing as a gift...but he wouldn’t. He made me take this.” Farley held the big weapon up for Amos to see. Amos picked it up, hefted it and checked the cylinder for rounds. There were five in it with the hammer resting on a sixth chamber, which was empty.

“Tell you what, Farley. Come on in and while you’re having some breakfast, I’ll clean this thing for you. Looks like a fine pistol. It surely does,” said Amos.

They climbed the steps together and Sarah met her brother on the porch. She hugged him and planted a big “welcome” kiss on his cheek. Then, arm in arm, brother and sister went to the kitchen. Amos opened a trunk and found the gun cleaning equipment he needed and joined them in the kitchen. As the Carnes men ate, Amos cleaned the Colt. He polished the brass until it shone with every touch of light. It was a beautiful weapon.

Down the road a ways Ellie Grace was finishing her chores. Annie had cleared the morning dishes away and she was making the beds.

Ellie came in through the front door and called, “Annie?”

“I’m in here,” called Annie from the front bedroom of the Campbell house. Ellie Grace walked to the sound of Annie’s voice. She found her.

“Annie, I’m thinking of riding over to the Keifer place today. I thought if you want, you could ride back with me.”

Annie stopped tucking the top sheet under the mattress and froze. Ellie Grace saw the reaction and immediately said, “I didn’t mean you had to move back today. I meant you could, well...just ride over with me, ...ahhh...to visit.”

Annie looked up and said, "I don't mind moving back, Ellie. I just...well, I kinda like it here. Before Momma died, it was just she and I. Now here, it's just you and me. Besides, Luke feels free to come over whenever he pleases. I don't know how he'd feel if I went back to the Keifer farm."

"Believe me, it wouldn't matter to Luke. He'll go anywhere to see his girl!" Ellie laughed. Anne smiled brightly.... and finished the bed.

Across River Road from the Keifer farm down by the water's edge men were gathering. Riders were coming in every few minutes from east and west. They tied their animals to tree branches and allowed them to nibble the grass growing along the water's edge. The men formed into small clumps of friends and acquaintances and they're voices created a low hum as they spoke softly so as not to expose their position. Some of them brought food. Some did not. It would be shared as they waited.

Up the embankment a ways stood a short, portly, nearly round man holding his horse's reins in one hand and a brass telescope in the other. From time to time he would climb to the top and peer through his telescope towards the Keifer home. Then he would look west toward River Bluff. Then, he would slip back down the embankment to stand beside his horse.

"They're coming," thought Bill Jeffers. "I know it. I can feel it. They'll come today!"

He didn't see the hawk staring down at him from atop the lone pine tree. If he had, he wouldn't have given it a second thought. The hawk stood erect on her talons, stretched out her wings, gave a shrill cry, and settled back down to wait. Just like the men below her. Her feathers ruffled, a tiny bit, as a passing breeze brushed against her back. About a quarter mile down stream from her, she saw a fish break the water, flip, and drop back in the flowing currents. She made a note of its location then turned her attention again to the men below.

### **We Did Not Conquer These People**

"I want that land!" shouted McGinnis. He was pacing back and forth in front of the table Colonel Garrison was using for a makeshift desk in the barn of the Mule Auction.

Garrison had had enough. "Danny, shut up and sit down!" he commanded.

McGinnis froze. "I guess you're gonna pull rank on me again, huh?" He placed his open palms flat on the table and leaned over Garrison, who was already seated.

“Danny, I’m not going to tell you again! If you don’t sit down, I’m gonna call that big sergeant and have your butt thrown out the door!” As he spoke, he suddenly stood and the chair he had been sitting in tumbled backwards to land on its back in the straw of the barn floor.

“All right! All right!” answered McGinnis. He backed away from the table with his hands up and palms toward Garrison as if to say “enough!”

In a moment the tension subsided. Garrison came around the table and said, “We’re gonna get that farm. I told you that. But, Danny, you’ve got to understand, I cannot go blundering in there like a bull in a china shop!”

“Why not? These people lost the war! They’ve been conquered! We OWN THEM, NOW!”

“Hold on, brother-in-law. You’re making a common mistake. One I made when I first came here,” he paused. “You’re right. We DID win the war. But, we did not conquer these people! Not by a long shot! It wouldn’t surprise me, at any moment, to find myself surrounded with armed Confederate soldiers...all over again!”

“You can’t mean that,” replied McGinnis. “They’re a bunch of...of...rabble!” McGinnis was nearly screaming with protestation.

“I remind you, my beloved brother-in-law, that damned bunch of RABBLE, as you call them, nearly beat us! To tell you the truth...I’m still not sure we DID win!”

“My God! Rufus! You sound like you.... ADMIRE these people!”

“Garrison, raised his eyes from the floor and looked McGinnis directly in his eyes! “I do,” he said.

McGinnis was thunderstruck. “Rufus, you can’t possibly mean that! You fought these people in the war! They killed your men! They’re murderers, they’re killers, they held people in...bondage...slavery! How could you possibly ADMIRE them? How?”

“I’ll tell you how! WE invaded THEIR country! They had the RIGHT to leave the Union, if they wanted to. They chose to leave! We took that right away and tried to keep them by force of arms! They rebelled. In their minds it was a war for Independence. Hell, we fought England for the same thing! They did not murder our soldiers. They fought us, face to face, and beat us time and again! Our Generals were crazy enough to throw our men at them and they did what you or I would have done. They killed them! As far as the slavery issue is concerned...Well, I’m told their constitution made the international trade in slaves illegal. If that’s true, it would have been a matter of time until slavery was abolished in the Confederacy. Besides, the better part of those men we fought, NEVER owned a single slave. They were fighting for their COUNTRY, just like me! Don’t you dare stand there and condemn them! You’re here stealing their land!

How honorable is that, huh?" He glared at McGinnis. "Your make me sick, Danny," Garrison turned on his heel and walked toward the doors.

"What about that farm? When are you going to get it? When Rufus?" McGinnis stammered after Garrison.

Garrison stopped. He turned. "I'll get you that land, Danny. Then, you and I are finished! Forever!" He turned and strode out the doors and toward Farley's little house.

Across the street, Doc Brown saw Garrison leave the barn and enter Farley's house. At almost the same moment there was a knock on the back door of his office. Doc turned just as the door swung in and Fred Simms came through it. Fred had been one of the two men to find Deborah Goldberg in the alleyway. It was Fred who came to get Doc brown.

"Come on in, Fred," Doc said, motioning with his hand for Fred to enter.

Fred advanced into the office shutting the door behind him.

"Fred, I'm gonna need some help in a little while. You interested?" Doc asked removing his spectacles.

"What is it you need, Doc?" Fred asked.

"I need a runner!"

"A runner?" inquired Fred, with raised eyebrows.

"Yep. I'm gonna need somebody to ride to the Keifer farm as fast as he can, to deliver a message." Doc said.

"I can do that!" said Fred.

"You know where Edgar Adams' farm is, Fred?"

"Yes, sir, Doc. I know."

"I want you to get out there, right now, and tell Edgar I want to borrow that race horse of his. You know the one. Sun Fisher, I think is his name. Then get that horse back here as quick as you can. Can you do that?"

"Yes, sir, Doc. I'm on my way, right now!" Fred turned and ran for the back door and slammed it as he went though. Doc could hear the hooves of Fred's horse begin at a dead run toward the west and the farm of Edgar Adams. Doc smiled and returned to his post at the window, which looked out onto Main Street and the Mule Auction.

West of town a cloud of dust followed closely behind a rider as he rode, flat-out, due west. Every few seconds he would sting the horse's withers with the riding crop he carried in his right hand. He was leaning as far over the horse's neck as he dared without falling from the saddle. Horse and rider sped toward the Adams farm.

### *It Begins*

Jacob Goldberg was standing near the large glass window in the front of the bakery. He could see much of the main street of River Bluff. He had his white apron on over his vest and trousers. He had been up early and working in the kitchen to help Rebecca get a faster start on her day. He had been kneading a large lump of dough when Rebecca came downstairs and entered the kitchen. After their morning kiss and Rebecca's morning coffee, she took over and he washed-up. He had dried his hands and unlocked the doors to the bakery at exactly 7:00 a.m. As he stepped onto the sidewalk, he felt a tension in the air. He looked up and down the street and saw no unusual activity, so he dismissed the feeling and returned to the bakery. He couldn't shake the feeling, though. Now, he was again standing in front of the window watching the street beyond. He absent-mindedly wiped his hands on the tail of the white apron as he stared west on the street toward the Mule Auction. He had a feeling, whatever was coming, would come from that direction.

Deborah came down the stairs and entered the kitchen where her mother was hard at work. Fresh bread was sitting about the kitchen still on the large baking sheets used to bake the bread in the huge ovens of the bakery. The aroma of fresh baked bread was over-powering. Deborah singled out a loaf and took it to the table and sliced it. Then she slathered butter on the still steaming bread and poured herself a cup of strong black coffee. Her mother had yet to look up from the dough she was kneading.

"Momma, where's Papa?" Deborah asked.

Rebecca looked up, startled. She had been so absorbed in her work that she hadn't noticed Deborah's arrival in the kitchen.

"Oh", she said. "He's..." Rebecca looked around, "He must be up front." She nodded her head toward the front of the store.

Deborah finished her breakfast and carrying her cup and saucer she went to look for her father. She found him. "Morning, Papa!" Deborah said brightly. Jacob turned towards her. He, too, had been startled by her quiet entry into the store's sales room.

“Good morning, little one,” he said. He placed both hands on her shoulders and planted a kiss on her forehead. Then he stepped back and looked at her. Some bruising still lingered around her left eye and the left corner of her mouth. The high collared blouse she was wearing hid more bruising on her neck and shoulders. She was still sore and areas of her body were still tender, but, all in all, she was much improved. Occasionally, she had nightmares. When she cried out in the night, her parents were quickly at her side and remained with her until her fear subsided and sleep returned.

“What’s so interesting in the street this morning?” she asked her father.

“So far...nothing.” Jacob replied. He turned again to the window and, nearly pressing his face to the glass, he looked again in the direction of the Mule Auction.

“What do you see?” asked Deborah, taking a sip from her cup.

“Just a few soldiers milling about.” Jacob shook his head. “I don’t know what is wrong with me this morning. I can feel something is about to happen, but, I can’t figure out what!”

“You haven’t seen Willie this morning, have you?” Deborah asked.

“No. No, I haven’t” Jacob answered. “That doesn’t mean he’s not here. I just haven’t seen him. That boy moves like a cat. You see him only when he wants you to!”

Deborah smiled over her cup at her father. He liked Willie. She was glad!

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Bea Weatherby was standing on the sidewalk in front of her boarding house looking toward the Mule Auction. She, too, had that feeling of impending danger. Something was afoot. Like Jacob she felt it would come from the soldiers at the Mule Auction. Her guest, Mr. McGinnis, and his cohort, Mr. Helms, had left early without breakfast. Mr. Helms had snagged a single piece of bacon as they passed through the kitchen earlier. She saw them turn toward the Mule Auction when they stepped out onto the sidewalk. Now, she stood wondering what in the world they were doing down there? As she squinted toward the west she saw a rider approaching. He was leading a spirited bay horse behind him. As he reached the far end of Main Street he turned toward the river and disappeared behind the row of buildings on the north side of the street.

“That’s strange,” she muttered. “Wonder what that’s about?” She turned to enter her boarding house. She stopped when she saw Colonel Garrison appear from the direction of Farley Carnes’ house and enter the barn. “Hmmm” she said, and went inside.

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Colonel Garrison strode to the little table he used as a desk. He called out, “Major Benson, Captain O’Malley, Sergeant Jennings...GET IN Here!” In a moment the three underlings were front and center before Garrison’s table.

“Sergeant, draw rations and water for one day’s ride for the men. Issue them one hundred rounds of ammunition each.” When Garrison realized Sergeant Jennings was still standing before his desk he said, “NOW, sergeant! Move!”

“Yes, SIR!” called out Sergeant Jennings. He threw a snappy salute, which Garrison returned, then spun on his heel and sprinted for the door of the barn,

It had begun.

### **Fred Simms and Sun Fisher**

As horse and rider sped east toward the Keifer farm, Sergeant Jennings was busy getting his soldiers to fall-in in three ranks. There would be a short inspection by the officers to assure the troops were equipped well. As the Troop had lost its Lieutenant in a skirmish near the end of hostilities, a substitution had not been assigned and therefore, Captain O’Malley would do the honors.

Doc Brown, from across the street, watched the Union soldiers “dress-right-dress” and even their ranks. He watched intently as Captain O’Malley went from man to man inspecting his equipment. Doc rubbed his chin and hoped Fred Simms was making progress toward the Keifer farm. Doc knew the soldiers would be ready to leave in a very few minutes. Any warning he could give to Amos and the Knight brothers would be precious. He had seen Jacob Goldberg standing on the sidewalk earlier. He thought he had seen Bea out in front of her boarding house, too. It was a fact. People felt something coming.

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Jack had been down to the river to look his fish traps and had just climbed back up to the roadway when he heard the sound of an on-coming horse. He looked to his right and he could see, out in front of a sizable dust cloud, a rider, leaning far over the horse’s neck, riding hell bent for leather. As the horse and rider drew nearer, the rider recognized Jack and cried at the top of his lungs as he passed: “The Yankees are coming, Mr. Knight! They’re a-coming!” Fred slapped the horse with his hat and the horse flashed by. In a second Jack was enfolded in a cloud of dust. He looked after the rider for a moment then he started for the cabin at a brisk walk. Willie had heard the horse and he had heard something said, but at that distance couldn’t tell what it was. He stepped from the cabin as Jack approached and asked, “What is it, Capn?”



“They’re on their way. Get ready!” Jack answered, heading straight for the lean-to to saddle the Bay. Luke was carrying an armload of fodder for Molly to the feed trough when he spied Jack. “What’s up brother?” he asked. “They’re on the way Luke. Saddle up!”

Willie had nearly caught up to Jack. They arrived at the lean-to at almost the same moment. Both men began immediately to saddle their animals. Luke dropped the fodder in Molly’s feed trough and as the mule munched, he threw her saddle onto her back and caught the swinging girth strap under her belly and fastened it as tight as he dared. Molly protested but continued to munch the corn. The three men then led their mounts back to the cabin. They went inside to gather their arms. Soon they returned with their respective firearms and tucked them inside their waistbands, behind belts, and in saddle sheaths. Luke laid the double barrel twelve-gauge across the mule’s saddle; there wasn’t a saddle sheath for it. The short, 15-inch barrels would not protrude enough to cause problems in the underbrush and low branches.

Instead of heading for the River Road, Jack turned the Bay toward the forested area at the south side of the farm. He intended to ride to the Keifer place completely concealed the entire way. Luke understood and smiled. Willie trusted the Capn and followed, bringing up the rear as the riders formed a single file. Shortly, they disappeared into the thick woods.

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Dabney Caines looked over his shoulder at the sixty Yankee Troopers behind him. His first thought was that this was the first time he’d had that many Yankees behind him and HE WASN’T RUNNING! He straightened in the saddle and looked to his right. There rode Lt. General Abel Farnsworth. Another civilian rode to the right of General Farnsworth. He was Yancy T. Booker, a lawyer. They rode in silence.

The Troop had left Wilmington at dawn. Although Dabney was in a hurry, he understood this was as fast as this Troop was going to travel. He settled back into his saddle and relaxed as best he could. He had spent much of the day, yesterday, rounding up this lawyer. The remainder had been spent trying to convince the General of the urgency of Captain Jack Knight’s request. Now, he only hoped it wasn’t too late!

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Each soldier stood by his horse, holding the bridle tightly. Finally, Colonel Garrison gave the order: “Mount up!” Twenty-seven men, two officers, and one non-com swung into the saddle. The horses shuffled their hooves a bit, to adjust to the sudden addition of weight on their backs, then all stood still again. Major Benson and Captain O’Malley rode forward to, approximately, midway the distance between Colonel Garrison and the

Troop. They stopped. Then came the order, “Forward.... HO!” Colonel Garrison never looked back. He fully expected the men to follow him unquestioningly. They did.

People on the street stopped and watched as the Troop went by. Shoppers and shopkeepers came out onto the sidewalk to watch. It was impressive. The fact that these were Yankee soldiers wasn’t lost on anyone! Still, precision marching, done by friend or foe, was impressive!

The column moved slowly “at the walk” through the town right down Main Street right past the Bakery. On her little balcony over the porch roof of the Bakery, Deborah watched. She was just close enough to the railing around the balcony to allow her to see the soldiers as they passed. Jacob and Rebecca had come out onto the sidewalk to see for themselves. Anger still blazed in Jacob’s eyes. He would never forget what two of them had done to his Deborah! NEVER!

Rebecca’s heart was in her throat. She knew the movement of so many troops meant they were either leaving town for good or they were on their way to wreak havoc on some unsuspecting farmer. She hoped it was the former. She was afraid it was the latter!

Garrison saw the two bakers standing on the sidewalk as he approached. As he drew abreast of them, he turned in the saddle and saluted. He held the salute until he was some distance beyond. Major Benson and Captain O’Malley gaped at each other as if to ask, “What was that all about?” The men in the ranks thought nothing of it. Officers were strange people!

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Joseph Keifer saw Fred Simms and Sun Fisher flash by at a dead run. He saw the horse and rider slow enough to make the turn onto the wagon road that led to his home. He decided to remain at his post because he had yet to see the Yankees. Besides, he couldn’t reach the house before that rider anyway!

When Fred Simms pulled back on the reins in the yard of the Keifer Farm the horse reared and pawed at the air with her front hooves. When he regained control of the lathered animal, he was staring down the barrel of a new repeating rifle in the hands of Amos Keifer! Fred swallowed...hard!

### **Forces Gather**

“Who’re you?” demanded Amos. The rifle never wavered from its target.

I'm Fred Simms, Mr. Keifer. Doc Brown sent me to tell you the Yankees are coming! He said to tell you they are bringing the entire troop!"

"When did they leave?" Amos asked, lowering the rifle a bit.

"I expect they left right behind me, sir. I rode this horse flat-out all the way here. They'll be coming along at a walk, I would think." Fred still sat atop the fidgeting horse. The hot, tired animal was lathered as if someone had rubbed her down with soapsuds.

"Well, climb down from there and walk that horse 'til she cools off some. There's a water trough by the well." Then Amos asked, "You got a firearm of some sort?"

"Yes sir. I got a rifle that used to belong to my daddy. It's a fifty-caliber. It'll knock down a buffalo!" Fred exclaimed holding the rifle above his head.

"Yeah, and the human behind it, too!" Amos grinned in spite of himself. "You any good with that thing?"

"Well, Mr. Keifer, my family ain't died from starvation yet!"

Amos grinned again. "You'll do." He said.

Fred held the horse's bridle and walked her around the well a few times 'til her breathing slowed and became regular. Then he led her to the water trough and slid his hand down her still wet neck as she drank the cool well water.

"Did you see my boy, up by River Road, when you rode in?"

"No, sir, I didn't. Course, I wasn't looking either."

"Had anything to eat this morning?"

"Had an early breakfast. I feel like that's most gone now, though."

"There's some shoulder meat and a biscuit or two on the stove in the kitchen; go help yourself. It's likely to be a long day." Amos stepped off the porch and walked over to stand by the horse. I'll see to this horse. You go eat!" commanded Amos.

"Yes, SIR!" replied Fred and he started for the kitchen.

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Ellie Grace had Bess fed and watered and had run a currycomb down her sides until her coat glistened. Annie came out onto the porch and asked, "You about ready to go?"

“Yeah, in a minute or two!” Ellie called out. “You ride bareback?”

“Sure. Don’t much like it but I can do it,” answered Annie.

“Well, that’s all I can offer. The Yankees got the saddle and I can’t afford another. I’ve gotten used to riding this way, anyhow. It’s not so bad.” Ellie began to lead Bess to the edge of the front porch. “Close-up the house and let’s go.”

Annie pulled the front door closed and watched as Ellie Grace swung over and onto Bess’ broad back. Ellie made it look simple. But then, Ellie was wearing a man’s trousers. Annie was wearing a long skirt. She thought a moment, then reached down between her ankles and grasped the back hem of her skirt. Pulling it toward her and straightening up at the same time, she made a costume, which looked for all the world like large pantaloons. Holding her skirt thus, she, too, boarded old Bess.

Ellie Grace couldn’t suppress a laugh! “That’s a new one on me,” she said. “Works great, though.”

She clucked to Bess and the big horse started up the wagon road toward River Road. About half way to the main road Ellie pulled back on the reins and halted the big horse.

“What’s wrong? Did we forget something?” Annie asked over Ellie’s shoulder.

“No, I just thought of something. There’s an old spring about a mile and a half back in those woods back there,” Ellie said, pointing to a thick pine forest behind the Campbell farm. “I’ve been meaning to check that spring out and see if it needed cleaning. It’s a great source of water for the animals hereabouts. I think I’ll go that way...and have a look see. We can always follow the little stream to the back of the Keifer’s property. It’ll take a little longer, but it needs doing. How about it?”

“It’s all right by me,” answered Annie.

Ellie Grace turned Bess around and they started for the pine forest south of the farm.

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Colonel Garrison rode at the head of the column. He felt at ease. He was about to seize the best-looking piece of property yet and his bank account would certainly get a growth spurt! Lord knows it needs it, he thought.

The Troop had not yet reached Knight’s Crossing. The soldiers were moving slowly but with determination. They moved like a huge beast. Slow, lumbering, yet unstoppable. They would arrive at their destination, a fighting force to be reckoned with. They had no idea their arrival was expected. It would make all the difference.

## A Tough Bunch

Ellie Grace and Annie, astride ole Bess, pushed aside some low hanging branches of a pine tree and rode into a small clearing in the middle of which was a bubbling spring. Annie pushed backwards, as if to slide off Bess' rump and drop to the ground. Ellie Grace said, "Hold it!"

"What?" asked Annie.

"Somebody's been here." said Ellie. Her eyes had fastened on a pine branch swinging much too rapidly for the near non-existent breeze. She looked to the ground and saw horse tracks in the soft ground by the little stream. Someone had passed here and just moments ago.

Ellie Grace slid her hand into the saddlebag on the right side of ole Bess and wrapped her fingers around the huge revolver she had used to scare off the Yankees. She withdrew the big gun from the saddlebag and holding it with both hands, she clucked Bess into forward motion. She walked the big horse over to the now still pine branch and sat very still on the horse's back. Annie sat quietly as well, not daring to speak. After a few moments Ellie Grace decided that whoever it had been, they were gone now. She assured Annie it was all right and Annie slid off the horse onto the ground. Ellie followed. The two young women walked to the spring, bubbling its clear, cool water up from its underground aquifer, and scooped a handful of leaves from the water's surface. Ellie slipped her palm with her fingers tightly clenched together into the cool water and lifted a handful of it to her mouth. She sipped the waster and said, "ummm." Annie stooped down and did the same. This spring had been here as long as anyone could remember and Ellie Grace was glad to see that it was clear and still running, feeding the little branch that ran away from it toward the southeast.

"If you're ready, we can go now," Ellie said. "The spring is fine." She led Bess to a stump and climbed aboard from the top of the stump. Annie did the same and in a moment they were ready to push off in the direction of the Keifer farm. Ellie guided Bess through the pine branches and soon disappeared into the piney woods.

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At the river bottom near the river's edge, men continued to filter in. There was no talking. A nod of the head, a silent handshake, and the new additions took a seat on the soft ground to wait the order to do what they had come here to do. Every man carried a weapon: a shotgun, a handgun, or a rifle. One had an 1836 big bladed Bowie knife in a homemade leather sheath on his broad belt and slipped around to his right hip. These

were men who had seen combat. They didn't like it.... never wanted to see it again; however, their neighbor needed their help. They were here.

Up the embankment a ways stood the rotund man, Bill Jeffers, a former Captain in the Confederate Calvary. He was chewing on a pine needle and looking pensively towards the top of the rise near the road. He couldn't see the road, but he was close enough to hear anything that moved on it. When Fred Simms flashed by and turned down the road to the Keifer farm, Jeffers had quietly snaked his way to the top and watched the horse and rider as they pulled-up in Amos Keifer's yard. He watched as the horse reared and pawed at the sky with his forelegs. He smiled when he saw Amos meet the young rider with the rifle. When Amos took the horse's reins and the rider went inside the house, Jeffers backed away: back down the hill, to resume his previous position. He looked around at the men gathered in this little copse of woods by the water. They were a tough bunch. They would do for the mission Captain Knight had given them.

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Jack, Luke, and Willie rode quietly on the forest floor's blanket of pine needles as they approached the clearing some distance behind the Keifer farmhouse. They halted while still inside the tree line to watch for a moment. Willie pointed-out the mule hobbled near a pile of fodder. Jack nodded that he had seen it. Luke grinned a broad, knowing grin and the three riders urged their mounts out of the trees and across the clearing toward the Keifer house.

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Doc Brown finished hitching the mule to his buggy and went back inside the office for his bag and any other supplies he thought he might need. He hurriedly returned and placed a small wooden box directly behind the buggy's single seat and strapped it to the floor. In the box were bandages, lots of bandages.

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As the Calvary Troop came abreast of Knight's crossing, Colonel Garrison turned in his saddle and looked intently at the farm as the horses with their riders walked by. Major Benson rode up beside him. "That sure is a beautiful piece of property to lie fallow like that," said the Major.

"Yes. Yes, it is," said Garrison. "I don't expect it'll be that way long, though." He smiled at Major Benson, wheeled his horse, and sped up to return to his place in front of his soldiers.

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Doctor Samuel Brown snapped the reins across the rump of the mule pulling his buggy and they sped east out of town on River Road. Jacob Goldberg saw him. Bea

Weatherby, also standing on the sidewalk, saw the buggy speeding in the same direction as the soldiers and wondered. Jacob looked toward Bea and shrugged his shoulders.

A breeze had sprung up from the west. Not much of a breeze, but it was enough. The soldiers had not closed and locked the big doors to the Mule Auction barn and now the western most door was swinging back and forth in the stiffening breeze. As it did, the hinges creaked loudly for lack of oil. The door flapped and the hinges creaked. It was surreal. Nature, herself, was anxious. Her breeze carried a telling tension on its flowing currents. Death had arrived in River Bluff. It followed closely behind the soldiers and Doc Brown, ready to collect the souls of those whose lives would be spent in a just a few hours. Not a single one of the men about to die knew it. It was a secret kept by the dark angel now looming over the people of River Bluff County. The skulking spirit waited patiently, as he had through the eons, for his sorrowful harvest, which was sure to come this day.

### **You Ever See a Man Die, Son?**

Farley Carnes sat at the wood plank trestle table in the kitchen of the Keifer home. Billy, his son, was in the backyard of the Keifer house investigating the old root cellar. Farley heard the shuffling of feet as Fred Simms shook the dirt from the soles of his boots against the threshold of the front door before he entered. In a moment he appeared in the doorway to the kitchen. Farley stood.

“Don’t get up, Mr. Carnes,” said Fred. “Mr. Keifer sent me in to get myself a slice of that shoulder meat and a biscuit...or two. Fred swallowed hard at the thought of the freshly fried meat and the warm biscuits.

“Help yourself,” said Farley, pointing to the stove.

Sitting to one side on the wood range were two stoneware plates covered by two linen napkins. Fred went directly to them. In a moment he had made himself a sandwich of the meat and biscuits. He turned to the table where Farley and Billy sat.

“Have a seat,” offered Farley. With his foot he pushed a chair out from under the table.

Fred sat down and continued to chew. “There’s some coffee on the stove there,” Farley said, nodding toward the stove again. “It’s cold now, but it would help wash that down.”

“No, sir, I’m fine.” Fred said between swallows. “I’ll get a dipper full of that well water when I’m finished here,” he said.

You see the soldiers? asked Farley.

“Yes, sir. I did.” replied Fred.

“They on the way here?”

“Yes sir. They sure were fixing to come this way. That’s when Doc Brown told me to light out for the Keifer farm. I took off on Sun Fisher, and...well, here I am!” Fred grinned, his mouth ringed by grease from the fried pork.

“You sure you don’t want some of that coffee?” Farley was worried by the young man’s voracious appetite. Not so much that he was hungry as to how fast he was eating. “Did you bring a weapon, Fred?” Farley asked.

Yes, sir. I brought my daddy’s old fifty-caliber rifle. That thing will drop a deer at a mile distance. I’m looking forward to dropping me some Yankees today!” Fred’s grin got wider...if that was possible.

Farley, unsmiling, asked, “You ever see a man die, son? No. Did you ever see a man shot through the gut, die?” He looked intently at the naive young man.

Fred’s face fell. He dropped the chair he was sitting in from its back legs to the floor with a thump. “No, sir, Mr. Carnes. I never seen a man shot to death.”

“Well, you’re gonna see it today! If we live, you and I, I’m gonna take up this conversation with you again tomorrow. I’ll be interested in how you answer then.” Farley pushed back from the table and stood. He placed his hands on his hips and stretched as far as his stomach muscles would allow. “Think I’ll go check out that ten-gauge shotgun Amos says I’ll be using. He strode from the kitchen back toward the front of the house somewhere.

Fred sat unsmiling, staring at the tabletop. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and then wiped the back of his hand against the right thigh of his dark gray trousers. Suddenly, that biscuit he had just eaten felt like a rock in the pit of his stomach!

Little Billy stepped up into the kitchen from the backyard and followed his Daddy. Fred sat alone with his thoughts. The biscuit grew larger with every second.

Amos Keifer, holding the bridle of Sun Fisher, called to his son, Frank, who was near the barn. Frank came running. When he reached his father, Amos handed Sun Fisher’s reins to him and said, “Frank, I want you to take this horse down to the clearing where ole Jenny is hobbled. Be sure there’s enough feed for the two of them. Don’t hobble this animal! This is a thoroughbred. You’ll have to take along some rope and tie a long length of it so he can get to the food and water. Go on....” Amos urged, patting his eldest son on the shoulder, “Take him on down there. Come on back as quick as you can.”

“Yes, sir,” said Frank and he tugged on the bridle once. Sun Fisher followed along as Frank led him toward the woods southwest of the house.



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Three riders were quietly making their way through the low hanging pine limbs and the occasional oleander bush as they plodded on toward the Keifer farm. Captain Jack Knight, Willie Jordan, and Luke Knight rode comfortably through the forest. It was something they'd done all their lives. Jack and Willie sat relaxed in the saddle. Luke was a bit more alert. His eyes were twitching left and right as they scanned the forest before and beside them. The sawed-off shotgun with the fifteen inch barrels was laid across the saddle between the pommel and Luke's thighs. His right hand was wrapped securely around the stock with his right index finger on one of the two triggers and his right thumb against the left hammer. He was as ready as he was likely to get for whatever was coming. His old wound from Gettysburg pained him. He thought he had forgotten it but the likeness of this moment before combat awakened the latent memory of his wound and the moment he received it. Memories were like that. A sound, a sight, a smell would all unleash stored up memories, good and bad. Luke's was not a good memory. His shoulder twinged and he rotated it to ease the pain, found that didn't work, so he just dropped it down and told his mind to deal with it. They rode on, slowly and quietly. They were closing the back door to the battleground just ahead.

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Ellie Grace and Annie, following the meandering stream from the spring, suddenly found themselves in the clearing. They were greeted by ole Jenny. She brayed at the intruders appearing from the woods. Ellie Grace pulled back on the reins and stopped Bess in her tracks. "What in the...?" she exclaimed.

"That's Jenny," said Annie. "What's she doing here?"

Across the clearing the underbrush parted and Frank stepped out leading Sun Fisher. Sun Fisher, startled, reared, and nearly lifted Frank from the ground. Bess shuddered and began to back away. While Frank struggled to get Sun Fisher under control, Ellie Grace was calming Bess. Presently the animals settled down. Ellie Grace and Annie sat still aboard Bess as Frank tethered Sun Fisher near enough to the fodder and the stream where the horse could reach both with no trouble. Then Ellie Grace guided Bess toward Frank.

Annie slipped from Bess' rump and dropped to the ground. "What's going on Frank? Why is Jenny here? Whose horse is that?" It all tumbled out as she approached Frank.

"Wait," said Frank. "Hold on. It's a long story and we don't have much time. I'll try to fill you in." Ellie Grace dropped to the ground and led Bess toward the pair. Frank began filling the two women in on what was about to happen. Annie caught her breath as her hand flew to her throat. Ellie Grace patted the saddlebag where the pistol was hidden. Her mouth set in a grim line causing her lips to all but disappear.

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Colonel Garrison and the Troop were just coming abreast of the Campbell Farm. He couldn't help but admire the house and out buildings surrounding it as they slowly made their way east. He smiled with the knowledge that soon he would be a very rich man!

A cloud slid across the sun bringing a fleeting shadow speeding from east to west down River Road. The Colonel hardly noticed as the shadow seemed to linger over his Command for a second, then speed on its way west.

### **I Ain't Scared, Mr. Carnes**

Farley Carnes snapped open the breech of the ten-gauge and looked intently down both barrels. It was clean. He slammed the gun's breech closed with a hollow "THUNK!" He pulled back both hammers and felt the increased tension on the double triggers. Satisfied, he re-opened the breech and slid two shells into the weapon and again slammed home the breech. The big shotgun was now loaded and very dangerous. Amos had left a wooden ammunition box on the floor by the front door. He went to the box, stooped down, and grabbed a handful of shells from the box and placed them in his trouser pocket. Then he repeated the process. He figured he had twenty-five or thirty shells. He straightened up, laid the heavy weapon across his right shoulder, opened the door, and stepped out onto the porch.

Fred Simms followed Farley out of the house. He paused when he saw Farley leaning against a corner post. "I ain't scared, Mr. Carnes," Fred declared.

"I never thought you were, son." Farley looked Fred directly in the eye. "You need experience to know fear, son. If you live, you'll gain that experience." Farley turned toward Fred. "There are going to be men here in a little while whose sole purpose on this earth today is to make this your last day on earth. They're experienced and they don't care who dies. Understand that, Fred. And, understand this, too.... if you don't kill them, well, you're a dead man. It's that simple, just that simple. Now, go on out there and ask Amos where he wants you. Listen to him. He's a good man. He knows what he's doing. I'm going to be over by the wagon shed." Farley jumped from the porch to the ground and strolled across the yard, pass the well and on toward the wagon shed beyond.

Fred swallowed a couple of times. He was annoyed by the dryness in his mouth and throat. He went to the well for a dipper of water and was surprised again when he lifted the dipper to see his hand tremble and shake. He looked about, trying to see if anyone else had noticed. He didn't see anyone looking directly at him. He released a breath he didn't know he was holding and drank deeply from the dipper. He replaced the dipper on its nail, and then went in search of Amos Keifer.

Frank Keifer had been trying for the last few minutes to get Ellie Grace and Annie to return to the Campbell farm. They would have none of it. In desperation Frank threw up both hands and said, "All right! All right! I've got to get back to the house. There are still some things I have to do. Please stay back here in the clearing. Don't come to the house. There's going to be a fight and Pa would kill me if I allowed you to ride into that mess. Will you give me your word you'll stay here?"

Ellie Grace and Annie exchanged a glance and then nodded in unison. "We'll stay back here, Frank. But, you come get us as soon as it's over, you hear?" Ellie Grace leaned forward across Bess' big neck as she said it.

"I can do that." Frank said. It never crossed his mind that he might not be able to return to the women when the fighting was done. He turned and sprinted for the house.

Ellie Grace and Annie slid from the big mare's back onto the ground and found a shady spot under a long leaf pine and settled down to wait. It would be a long afternoon.

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"Elliott, surely you can find some whiskey, somewhere in this backwater town. Maybe, something they make themselves?" McGinnis raised his eyebrows as he entreated Elliott Helms to intensify his search for an alcoholic beverage.

"No, sir, Mr. McGinnis! I swear, I've done everything but go door-to-door begging. The store doesn't sell it and nobody will tell me who does. I know it's here.... I just don't know where," Elliott protested his employer's entreaty. "I'll keep looking, though."

"Why, thank you, Elliott." McGinnis feigned astonishment at Elliott's offer to continue his search.

Elliott slunk toward the door and was soon out on the street again in front of Bea Weatherby's boarding house.

Bea had seen Elliott come down the stairs and step out onto the sidewalk. She slipped her shawl around her shoulders and followed him out.

"Mr. Helms?" Bea spoke to Elliott. "Is there something I can help you with? I mean, the walls are thin in my old house and I couldn't help but hear your employer's plea for, well, some liquid refreshment."

"Yes, Ma'am, Miss Bea. The boss can get mean, sometimes."

"Tell you what, Mr. Helms. Why don't you go on down to the waterfront. If you take that little path at the east end of town, it'll take you right to the dock area. Go down the dock to the third door on the right. It's an icehouse. You'll find a Mr. Tate Turner there.

Tell him I sent you... for some of his, well, he'll know what I sent you for." Bea smiled at Elliott. He was visible brightening.

"Thank you, Miss Bea." Elliott took off at a near run toward the little path.

Bea looked toward the Mule Auction and saw the door swinging back and forth on its creaky hinges. She wondered why it was not locked, or at least secured. She thought it strange that Farley didn't secure that door. She placed her right hand, palm down, above her eyes, to shade them from the sun, and peered at the big barn at the end of the street. As she looked intently at the swinging doors she spied a two-horse wagon drawn by two haggard looking mules come into view. It appeared the wagon had everything on it that the driver and the woman seated beside him owned in the whole world. She didn't know how right she was.

The wagon continued east up the street and by the Mule Auction. The driver looked to his right at the swinging door as his wagon went by, but he didn't slow down or stop.

Bea, her attention riveted on the wagon, stood stock still as it approached. When the wagon came abreast of her, the driver pulled back hard on the reins and said, "Whoooooa!" The two mules stopped dead still. They snorted and their breath whistled from their nostrils as they adapted to this new experience of standing still. The driver wrapped the reins around the long handle of the brake and climbed down to the street. He walked around the front of the wagon and passed the mules. As he came into full view, Bea noticed his sweat-stained tan shirt was tattered and torn and that one of the buttons on his braces was gone so that only one side of the braces was holding up his dirty old denim trousers. His sleeves were rolled up to the elbows and the sleeves of his long johns, now gray with grime, reached from under them all the way to his wrists. Bea hoped he was down wind of her.

The driver stepped up onto the wooden sidewalk about three paces from Bea. He respectfully reached up and pulled his dusty old, felt, slouch hat from his head. It revealed a thick mat of gray and black hair, oily from lack of a good washing. His face was heavy with mostly gray beard. There were tobacco juice stains at the corners of his mouth. The driver attempted a smile, which turned into a gap-tooth grin. He said: "Ma'am, I'm Tallmadge Jordan and this here's..." he threw a thumb toward the wagon where the woman still sat, "... my wife Pearly. We're a-looking for our boy."

Bea, smiled graciously and said, "Well, Mr. Jordan, I wish I could help. Who is your son?"

"Why, he's Willie, ma'am. Willie Jordan."

**The Keifers are Ready.**

Bea's hand flew to her throat. Her mind was whirling as she filtered out everything but the memory of Willie Jordan unflinchingly firing that single shot into James Cole's heart on the second floor landing in her house. The man was cold. She felt a scream; re-created from her memory, rise in her throat. She swallowed and squelched it right there. She brought her trembling hand back to her waist where the other clutched it.

"Mr. Jordan, I know of a Willie Jordan. I have no way of knowing if he's your son or not. But if you go on out east of town a ways, to the Knight Farm, you might find him there. The last I heard he was working for the Knight brothers."

"Yes, sum, I know where the Knight farm is. Nice place, too. Thankee, ma'am. Thankee very much."

Tallmadge Jordan turned, stepped down from the wooden sidewalk, and scrambled back up onto the wagon seat by his wife, who had not so much as even looked in Bea's direction. He loosed the reins and snapped them across the rumps of the tired mules and they leaned into the harnesses. With a loud creak the wagon began to move east.

Bea stood and watched as it went. She didn't think they would make it out of town, let alone all the way to the Knight farm. She turned when she heard footsteps on the wooden planking. It was Elliott Helms returning from the waterfront. He looked at Bea and smiled as he passed. He also patted his bulging jacket pocket, which, obviously, contained a bottle.

Bea looked once again at the swinging door on the Mule Auction barn, then turned and entered her boarding house.

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Doc Brown pulled back on the reins a bit to slow down the horse pulling his buggy. Up ahead he could see a cloud of dust generated by the passing of Colonel Garrison's troops. The last thing Doc wanted was to catch up to them. If necessary, he would stop for a time to allow the gap between them to grow. After a while he became convinced he was closing the distance, so he guided the horse to the right side of the road beneath the shade of a live oak tree. He stopped it there. Doc tied the reins through the opening in the buggy's dashboard and reached inside his frock coat and removed a long, thick cigar. He fished around in his trousers' pocket until he found a match. Striking it on the sole of his shoe, he lit the cigar and puffed furiously at first. When he was satisfied the cigar was truly lit, he took a long, deep, drag on the aromatic smoke and leaning his head back, he allowed the smoke to escape past his lips and mustache and curl gently into the nearly still air above the buggy. Doc looked at the cigar. It was a Cuban, one of the last to get through the blockade. He reached into his left vest pocket and removed his watch. It was gold and had a spring-loaded snap-close cover over the crystal. He popped it open and looked at the face. It was near eleven in the morning. He ran his fingers, lovingly, down the length of gold linked chain, which was fastened to the hoop above the stem of the watch and ran through the third buttonhole of his vest. There was a little golden acorn,

serving as a fob, dangling loosely on the right side of the vest's closure. The watch had belonged to his father. It was Swiss-made and had been a gift to his father from his father's brother. The watch was made even more precious when his father's brother was lost at sea on a return voyage home from one of his overseas visits to the ancestral home in England. Doc's uncle was never heard from again.

Doc slipped the watch back inside his vest pocket, untied the reins, and clucked gently to the horse. The buggy jerked forward again. In a moment the wheels were whooshing in the soft sand of River Road as it moved east toward the coming battle.

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Bill Jeffers' men were beginning to get a bit restless. He motioned to Jimmy Smith to come to him. The tall, gangly boy with the long legs took two steps and was there.

"Jimmy, I want you to mount up and ride back to the west toward town. Stay in the trees and make as little noise as possible. If you see Colonel Garrison and his men, ride like all hell is after you back here. Can you do that?" The rotund man placed a fatherly hand on Smith's shoulder, which was level with the top of Jeffers' head.

"Yes, sir Capn Jeffers, sir. I can do that!" He was nearly hopping from foot to foot.

"Well, do it. Go. Now. Go!" said Jeffers, shooping the young man on his way.

Smith mounted up, guiding his horse gingerly through the underbrush on a westerly course, he soon disappeared from sight.

Jeffers climbed back up the incline to the road. He peered above it and toward the Keifer house directly across River Road. He saw no movement at all. Apparently, the Keifers were ready. "I hope so. I surely do," Jeffers muttered to himself as he half walked and half slid back down the embankment to his men.

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From her vantage point high in the sky, the hawk gazed down on the follies of the humans below. She could see the troops coming from the west. She could see the men concealed in the trees across the road from the Keifer farm. She could see the troops coming from Wilmington, and she could even see Doc's buggy. She had no idea what was about to happen, but instinct told her it was gong to be bad and there was no place for her here. She searched for a thermal and began to climb. Higher and higher she soared, her wings clutching at the currents, seeking altitude. She would remain here until hunger or darkness forced her down. There was danger below. Up here she was safe. There was no decision to be made. Unlike humans, instinct did it for her. The late

October sunlight glistened off the oil of her feathers as she sailed majestically on the eternal currents of air.

### **They're Coming, Pa**

Joseph Keifer was asleep. The warm October sunshine had lulled him into a slumber filled with dreams. Dreams of fishing in the brand new river, so close at hand, filled his mind. So deep in sleep was he that he nearly missed the Federal troops passing just beyond the low underbrush along the roadway. The jangle of the bridles and bits woke him. He half jerked, then caught himself and remembered where he was. He couldn't, at first, determine what had wakened him. In a moment his mind was racing to catch up and it did. The jangle of the bridles and bits. He went from a sitting position with his back against a pine tree to a low crouch on his hands and knees, peering through the tangled brambles and oleanders between him and the road. Then he saw the passing troops! He whirled about, got to his feet, and began running, as if the devil was after him, toward home. The carpet of pine needles muffled his footfalls as he ran. He was tearing through the trees with branches slapping at his face and legs as though they were demons from hell making a last desperate attempt to stop him, to entangle him in their snares, but he would have none of it.

On he raced. He burst out of the forest about a hundred yards from the house. He lost his footing on the remains of a long neglected furrow and fell. He sprawled onto what was once a cornfield. He struggled to his feet and began running again, shouting as he ran, "They're coming! They're coming!" Head back, arms and legs pumping, he raced into the barn, colliding with his father and nearly knocking them both to the barn's straw-strewn floor.

"What is it, Joseph?" Amos held Joseph by his left bicep. He gently shook Joseph and asked again "What's going on, Joseph?"

"The Yankees are coming, Pa. They're right down the road. They're coming, Pa! They're coming!" Joseph gushed.

"All right! Get to the house, get your mother, and get in that root cellar as fast as you can! Now, go!"

"Yes, sir!" Joseph turned on his heels and sped toward the house. Sarah met him in the yard before he reached the house. She had heard him screaming as he ran and made the deduction that it was time. Together the two walked quickly to the root cellar. Joseph lifted the left door as his mother lifted the right. Sarah went down first, followed by

Joseph, then they stood on the steps of the ladder leading down into the cellar, and reaching out, they closed the two rough-hewn plank doors.

Amos walked quickly to the well, which was in the center of the space between the house, the barn, and the wagon shed. He looked about. Farley waved to him from the far northeast corner of the wagon shed. Farley signaled he was all right and ready. Amos looked toward the house. Frank was standing on the front porch with a shotgun. He was ready for whatever his father wanted him to do. Amos decided it was time for Frank to ride to the Knight place and alert the Knights and Willie. He began walking toward the house.

“Look, Pa!” Frank said pointing toward the woods between the wagon shed and the barn.

Amos stopped turned and peered in the direction Frank had indicated. He saw three horsemen, just clearing the tree line, coming in his direction. He looked closer. It was Jack, Luke, and Willie. “Hallelujah!” Amos grinned and walked toward them.

Frank stepped back inside the house, removed a lamp table from in front of the window of the sitting room, and lifted the sash. He made himself comfortable on the floor beneath the window. This would be his firing position. He hoped this would be as easy as the dispatch riding he’d done during the war. Of course, nobody shot at him then. His breathing had increased noticeably. He could hear his heart beating in his ears. “Not long now. No, sir, it won’t be long now.”

Frank peered above the windowsill and looked in the direction from where he had seen the Knights approaching. His father had reached the three men and was deep in conversation with them. In a moment he saw Captain Knight touch the brim of his gray hat with the tips of the fingers of his right hand. Then all three riders turned and disappeared into the woods again. Amos turned and strode toward his house.

Suddenly, Amos stopped in his tracks. He was facing River Road. Frank shifted his position so he could look in the direction his father was peering. Then he, too, saw it. A dust cloud... A large dust cloud. A sure sign of the movement of a large body of men. It was Garrison’s men. The Yankees had arrived.

Frank slid down the wall beside the window to sit in the floor. Now there was a tremble to his fingers and a large hollow place in his gut. Beads of perspiration had formed on his brow. There would be a fight, he now knew. He would be in the middle of it. He closed his eyes and murmured a prayer. Then, he snapped open the shotgun and checked to be sure both barrels were loaded. They were. He slammed it closed again. A look of firm resolution settled on his face. He took a deep breath and rested the back of his head against the wall.

Down by the river Jimmy Smith had come crashing through the underbrush into the gaggle of Jeffers’ men to report the approach of the Federal forces. Jeffers had ordered the men to prepare. All were now mounted and all had their weapons at various stages of



readiness. The air was electric. Tension rippled through the gathered men. All the men in the river bottom were combat veterans. Everyone knew that in a very few minutes he could be dead. But they would fight anyway. This was a matter of honor and Honor was about all the South had left, and they'd be damned if they'd lose that, too!

### **Soon the Killing Would Begin**

Tallmadge Jordan looked to his right at the stonily silent Pearly Mae. She was staring straight ahead. Pearly Mae had not spoken a word since leaving River Bluff. As a matter of fact, she had not spoken to him since they left Tennessee. She had not wanted to return to River Bluff and had fought unceasingly to stay in Tennessee. But that was not to be.

When Tallmadge and Pearly Mae creaked and groaned their overloaded wagon into the yard of the home of William Jordan, Tallmadge's younger brother, they had not known that William was dead. They learned he had been killed at Gaines Mill. He left his widow with three small children to care for...alone. Tallmadge knew, immediately, they could not stay. They would return to their home in southeastern North Carolina. Their offer to take William's widow and three children with them was declined. Betsy, William's widow, had family nearby. She wanted to stay

Pearly Mae was furious! She would not leave this beautiful, peaceful, mountain home without a fight. So, fight she had, until Tallmadge lifted her bodily and placed her on the wagon's seat and climbed aboard himself. Then she went sullen and quiet. At first Tallmadge was thankful to the good Lord for the respite from the acid of her quick tongue. Now, however, the quietness had begun to nag at him, nearly as much as Pearly Mae's acrimonious mouth had. It wasn't natural. Why, she could peel the bark off an oak tree with the sharp edge of that tongue, he thought.

The wagon wobbled left to right and back again, as each mule stepped forward in the harness, first the left mule, then the right. The trace chains were nearly dragging in the sand of the road. Tallmadge could feel and hear the wagon bed wrench, the pressure shifting from side to side as the mules continued their incessant tugging at the tired old boards. The tailgate board had long since given up and was hanging by a single nail. As the wagon shifted and rolled, the tailgate board would swing from left to right then back again, only to stop when the wagon did.

"Pearly Mae, when you gonna speak up? You ain't said nothing since we left Tennessee. Now, quit your nonsense. Willie's just up the road aways. How's it gonna look if'n his Momma won't talk when he sees her for the first time in nearly four years? It ain't right, Pearly Mae. No, sir, it just ain't right. Tallmadge was shaking his head from left to right. The reins hung limp in his hands. The mules needed no guidance from him. They knew all they had to do was keep pulling.

Pearly Mae turned to look Tallmadge full in the face. She didn't blink. She didn't speak. She just stared. Then she turned again to level her gaze out over the backs of the mules to the middle distance ahead. Tallmadge said, "Damn!" and snapped the reins across the rumps of the mules anyway. They didn't pay him any attention, either.

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Up the road aways, Doc Brown was slowly catching up to the hind-most of the Calvary troops. Once again he slowed the horse pulling his buggy nearly to a stop, allowing the troops to move ahead. Then, he would cluck to the mare and they'd move on. There was a lingering cloud of dust hanging in the air as he trailed along behind the mounted soldiers. They hadn't stopped since leaving River Bluff. They had passed the Knight and Campbell farms and now they were approaching the old Roberts place, now the Keifer farm. Soon they would be there. Doc, again, took his watch from his vest pocket and looked at it. Soon the killing would begin. He thought he'd seen the end of it when the war ended. The events of this day would put that dream to rest.

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Colonel Garrison could see the farmhouse, the barn, and other small outbuildings at Amos Keifer's farm. He stopped his horse at the long rail fence that bordered the road and waited. He had ridden fifty yards or so ahead of his Command. Now he sat appraising the flat ground with the rich, black soil. Beyond the house and barn he saw a thick stand of pines and a stretch of hardwoods deep into the pines, which might indicate there was a stream there as well. It was a beautiful farm. One he, himself, would be proud to own.... if, he thought, it were in Ohio! Well, it wasn't and he was never going to own it. At least not for long.

Major Benson reined in his horse bedside the Colonel's. "Beautiful, isn't it, sir?"

"It is that," replied Garrison. Both men sat in the saddle drinking in the picturesque scene before them. "Halt the men here at the wagon road, Major, if you please."

"Yes, sir," replied Benson. Both men were all business now. Benson wheeled his horse and rode the few paces back to Captain O'Malley with the Colonel's orders. In a few more paces the column halted. The horses now used to the endless plodding were slow to recognize the command by their riders to halt. Some bumped the horses ahead. Others protested loudly, swung their heads from side to side and others just stopped. It took about a minute to get everyone's attention. Then awareness rippled through the Troop. They had arrived!

Colonel Garrison rode slowly back to the men of his Command. Major Benson and Captain O'Malley had ridden out three paces from the lead horses of the troop and waited there.

Garrison reined in his horse, stood in the stirrups, and felt the cool air flow around his tired posterior, then sat again on the hot leather of the saddle. He said, "Men, we are here today to collect tax money this family owes the U.S. Government." He let that sink in and then continued. "There's a very good chance there will be a protest. That is why you are here. We will leave here today with the money or the farm. If we have to forcibly put these people off the land, we will do it. If they protest with force of arms we will respond. These people are tricky. Most of you have learned that the hard way...in battle with them. To all of you, I say, BE ALERT. Don't allow yourself to be surprised. Remember, too, the war is over. They may not know it, but you do. I expect you to do your duty today. This land will belong to your government, the U.S. Government. Your job is to seize it and hold it. So, ready yourselves. Prepare your weapons. We will invite ourselves in...in a few minutes." He touched the brim of his hat with the fingers of his right hand. Major Benson and Captain O'Malley saluted briskly and sat a bit taller in the saddle. Garrison turned his horse smartly and rode out again some 25 yards or so and halted. Major Benson said, "Take over Captain," and he rode out to join the Colonel. Captain O'Malley turned his horse and shouted, "Disssss-Mount!" The soldiers swung from their saddle in unison and felt the ground under their boots for the first time in a couple of hours.

Sergeant Jennings looked to Captain O'Malley for orders. O'Malley nodded his assent to the sergeant. Sergeant Jennings shouted, "Check your weapons and gear!" The men did just that, assuring themselves their weapons were loaded and ready for action. Sergeant Jennings handed his reins off to Corporal Tandy and walked through the ranks spot-checking for himself. Satisfied, he returned to the front of the Troop and took the reins of his horse from the outstretched hand of Corporal Tandy. He looked to Captain O'Malley and nodded. Captain O'Malley wheeled his horse and rode quickly to Colonel Garrison and Major Benson to report the men "ready."

The Keifer farm was quiet. The men at their end of the wagon road were ready, too. Across River Road, out of sight, in the hollow by the river's edge, Bill Jeffers' men were also ready. Captain Jeffers' said, "Pass the word, we go at the sound of the first shot." He repeated himself, "The first shot!" Each man passed the word to the man nearest him until the entire contingent of men understood. Now, they waited. Each man, with his own thoughts, prayers and hopes that today would not be his last on this earth.

### **Positions**

In that thick stand of pine trees to the south of the Keifer house and barn, three men sat their horses eyeing every move of Garrison and his troops: Captain Jack Knight, his brother Luke, and Willie Jordan - each held their weapon of choice. Jack had his trusted rifle, which had served him so well during the war. Luke had the sawed-off double-barreled shotgun and a pocket full of shells. Luke was not the marksman Jack was, so he opted for the shotgun, which didn't require a great deal of accuracy. Willie had a brace

of two colt revolvers in his belt. Now, rather than have the hammers down on empty chambers, he had all six loaded in both pistols. Across the pommel of his saddle he held a rifle. It, too, was one of the new repeating rifles he had “liberated” from a dead Yankee near the war’s end. Their pockets bulged with ammunition for their weapons.

In the hayloft of the Keifer barn was Fred Simms. Fred had stacked two bales of hay, one atop the other, just in front of the small hayloft door above the big doors at ground level. Now he sat with his back to the hay with his father’s fifty-caliber rifle across his thighs. Occasionally, he would peer above the hay bales to watch for movement from the Yankee troops now mounted up again but still on River Road.

On the eastern side of the well, behind the wagon shed, was Farley Carnes. Farley had a ten-gauge double-barreled shotgun, which belonged to Amos Keifer. Amos had insisted he use this gun as he had given Farley’s pistol to Sarah to take to the root cellar as protection for her and the kids with her.

In the house was Amos Keifer armed with a repeating rifle and a marksman’s eye. In the same room, sitting on the floor by the window, was his son, Frank. Frank, too, had a shotgun. This would be his first fight.

Out in the backyard in the root cellar were Sarah Keifer and her youngest son Joseph.

In the woods to the west of the Keifer farm near the clearing where ole Jenny was hobbled, were Ellie Grace Campbell and Annie Sue McKane. Ellie had her big revolver, which had belonged to her father before his death. Although they were effectively out of the fighting, it was good to be prepared, just in case.

Amos saw the troops begin to move. He saw Garrison out in front of his men riding tall and straight in the saddle. He watched as the troops turned onto their wagon road that would lead them to his door. He waited. He could clearly hear the jangling of the bridles and bits of the horses as they closed the distance.

No one had yet noticed that little Billy Carnes was not in the root cellar with Sarah and Joseph. He was, in fact, in the back bedroom on the north side of the Keifer farmhouse, sitting on the floor beneath the window. He, from time to time, rose up and peered at the approaching Yankees, then dropped again to the floor out of sight. The window, propped open with a piece of firewood, allowed a gentle breeze to enter the room and caused the curtains to sway from side to side in a slow, lazy movement.

As the troops drew nearer, Amos opened the door and stepped out onto his front porch. He stood for another moment eyeing the oncoming troops, then stepped down from the porch and moved to the center of what served as his front yard. He stopped at a point near the well that was centrally located between the house, barn, and wagon shed. Here he stopped, turning himself so that he presented his left side to the approaching soldiers. His rifle was lying in the crook of his left arm with the barrel pointed directly at Colonel Garrison.

Colonel Garrison clearly saw Amos Keifer standing squarely in the center of his yard. It didn't occur to him to wonder why Amos found it necessary to stand in the open like this, rather than remain on his porch so he could quickly dart back inside for cover. In his arrogance, Garrison only saw a clearly marked target. It would cost him dearly.

Amos slowly raised the rifle to his shoulder and looked down the barrel and across the sight at the far end of the barrel until he had the rifle aimed directly at Garrison's heart. Garrison continued to approach. Amos allowed him to move forward a few more paces then slid the hammer of the rifle back with his thumb. It made an audible "click." All it would take now was a gentle pressure on the trigger and Colonel Garrison would meet his maker.

"That's far enough, Colonel," called Amos.

Colonel Garrison reined-in his horse and held his right hand up to halt the troops behind him.

"Mr. Keifer, sir, I must warn you, sir, you cannot win an engagement with my men. Lay down your weapon, sir, and live. You can always start over...somewhere else." Garrison said, speaking down to Amos from astride his horse.

Keeping the rifle level and aimed at Garrison's heart, Amos said, "Colonel, you listen to me. I'm gonna tell you one time! Take your men and leave my property...NOW! This is my place, clear and free. The taxes have been paid on this property. You'll not have it, sir. I'll see you dead before I allow you to take my home." There was no tremor in his voice. He was as cold as steel and the determination in his voice sent a chill down Garrison's spine.

"You have proof the taxes are paid? Asked Garrison.

"I do," replied Amos.

"Well sir, let me see it," commanded Garrison.

"I can't," said Amos. "I don't have it on me. It's on the way here now from Wilmington. You'll have to wait for it to arrive."

Garrison smiled a crooked smile and said, "You're lying, Mr. Keifer. This is just a ploy to get me to take my men and leave. It won't work." Garrison swung his right leg clear of the right stirrup and swung it up and over the horse's rump.

"Don't!" said Amos. "Don't you set a foot on my land. I'll put a hole through you before you ever touch the ground!"

Garrison was standing with only his left foot in the stirrup, his entire weight on that one foot. He swung his right leg back across the horse and sat, again, in the saddle.

“Mr. Keifer, this is only making things worse....”

“I told you, you’d have to wait for the proof to come from Wilmington. Now, you can wait or you can die. It’s all the same to me. I won’t be pushed by you...again.”

“What do you mean...again?”

“I was in Alabama, Colonel! I fought you there. I know you, Colonel, for the low down thieving snake you are. I saw what you did to folk’s farms back there. I won’t let you do it here. Not now, not ever!”

In that same instant, Private Jim Gant of Connecticut saw movement in the window near the back of the house. Suddenly, a figure appeared in the window with a gun pointed directly at him. There was a “POP.” All in one quick movement, the private aimed and fired his pistol. Little Billy fell to the floor, a growing patch of red appearing on the little boy’s chest. The piece of firewood he had taken from under the window fell to the floor beside his small dead body. The “POP” had been the sound of the window falling into place. Private Gant didn’t know that.

In the same instant, Garrison’s face went white. “You rebel son-of-a-bitch, I’ll ride you down...” He spurred his horse at the same moment the private’s pistol barked behind him. Garrison fought to bring his mount under control. The horse reared, nearly throwing Garrison, but he held on.

Frank crawled to the back bedroom and saw Billy’s prostrate body lying in a growing pool of blood on the pine floor. He screamed. The scream was born in his soul. It clawed its way from his throat and reverberated off the walls of the house and across the yard to his father.

Amos forgot himself for a split second and turned toward the house. Frank ran onto the porch. “They killed Billy, Pa. They killed Billy!”

From the eastern side of the wagon shed Farley heard Frank’s shouted report that his son was dead.

In rage and heart-swelling grief, Farley came from behind the shed, howling as he ran, and emptied both of the shotgun barrels into the troops that were between him and the body of his dead son. He met a hailstorm of lead from the troops as he ran. His body jerked and twisted as the bullets tore through his flesh as if an unseen fist was beating him. He was dead before he hit the ground.

A blood-curdling howl came from the direction of River Road as Jeffers men came out of the trees and barreled, hell-bent-for leather, toward the unsuspecting Federal troops, firing as they came.

The Battle for Keifer's Farm had begun.

### **The Battle of Keifer's Farm**

Garrison looked on in horror as the rag tag group of mounted banshees rode straight into the middle of his Troop. They were firing pistols, swinging sabers, gun barrels, and gun butts, as they deliberately rammed their own horses into the horses of the federal troops. A number of men went down with the initial onslaught of Jeffers' men.

Up in the hayloft of Amos' barn, Fred Simms took careful aim, took a deep breath, let part of it out and held the rest - he fired. The huge fifty-caliber slug hit Garrison's horse in the chest, went through the horse's heart and lungs and exited the horse's belly to lodge in the ground. The big animal grunted, fell straight down, and rolled on her right side pinning Garrison's right leg under her between the saddle and the ground. As the horse's weight shifted, Garrison felt the bone in his right thigh snap. He screamed. Then, he screamed again. The horse was dead. Garrison couldn't get his broken leg from under the dead horse. He was pinned to the ground as the battle raged above him. He turned his head toward the barn and saw three mounted men burst from the woods between the barn and wagon shed. Two were firing rifles and one a shotgun as they roared toward his hapless troops.

Luke leapt from his horse and dropped to the ground beside the dead body of Farley Carnes. He grabbed the body by the forearms and dragged it to the relative safety of the wagon shed. There, he determined that Farley was, indeed, dead. He took cover behind the wagon-shed door and reloaded. He chose his targets carefully, waiting until they ventured close enough so the sawed-off shotgun would be effective, then fired. He brought down three men in a matter of moments. Jack and Willie were embroiled in the melee of twisting horses, shouted screams and curses, pistols shots, and saber clashes. It was like watching a whirling dervish as the group, unknowingly, twisted in a circle around the well in Amos' yard.

Every few seconds the big fifty-caliber rifle of Fred Simms' would BOOM and another blue-coated soldier would be lifted from the saddle by the high velocity and impact of the huge round and then drop to the ground, dead, a few feet away.

Frank Keifer was busy as well. He would stand, choose a target, squeeze off the first barrel of his shotgun, chose another target and fire the second barrel. Then, he would drop to the floor beneath the window and crawl a few feet to the side so as to be out of the line of fire of the storm of bullets, which inevitably crashed through the glass and

chewed–up the window frame and the wall directly across the room from the window. Then, re-loaded, he would stand and fire again.

Amos had been hit when Jeffers' men charged the Yankee Troop. He didn't know where the bullet came from, but it tore the lobe of his left ear completely off. At the same time another round snatched his black slouch hat off as it snapped by. He dove for the ground only to be peppered by sand from bullets kicking up the soil all around him. He half-crawled, half-ran, to the southwestern corner of the wagon shed and began to return fire. He saw Garrison go down, pinned beneath his horse. Amos continued to fire into the Yankees, being careful not to hit Jeffers' men, when Jack, Luke, and Willie flashed by and stormed into the hornet's nest of death, dying, and violence.

Private Gant of Connecticut went down. Thrown from his wounded horse, he crawled to the front porch of the Keifer house and sat beneath the window of the room Frank Keifer was firing from. Neither could hear the other for the noise of the battle.

Sergeant Jennings was shot three times: once in the right thigh, once in the left side where the bullet skidded along his rib and exited, and once through his open mouth. The bullet exited his right cheek. It would leave a permanently visible reminder of this battle. He was still on his horse, firing his Colt and trying, desperately, to re-form his men. But they were beyond his control, now.

Major Benson was out of the battle. His horse had wandered, directionless, out of the fight and was ambling down the wagon road toward River Road. Although Benson still sat, slouched in the saddle, with the reins clenched in his fist, he was unconscious from loss of blood. In a few moments he would be dead. The horse stopped and just stood in the road. There was a look of sheer terror in the horse eyes. Every few seconds a giant tremor would shake the horse's body.

Suddenly, Benson was lifted from the saddle and thrown to the ground by an unseen hand. Then came the BOOM of Fred Simms' big rifle in Amos Keifer's hayloft. Fred did not know Major Benson was already dead before he fired.

Private Gant realized he couldn't stay on the porch. Bullets were snapping past his head and slapping into the walls. He saw the window above him was open. If he could manage to get through that window to the inside, he would be safe. He would have cover. He carefully edged his way the couple of feet to lie directly below the window. Then, he gathered his strength and heaved himself up to step through the window...at the same time Frank Keifer, on the other side of the window, stood to fire his shotgun. They met each other, face to face. Not eighteen inches separated the two young men. Private Gant froze. Frank Keifer fired both barrels of the shotgun out of sheer panic! The violence of the blast tore Gant's midsection completely apart and tossed his body like a rag doll off the porch and into the yard where he died seconds later. Frank dropped back to the floor and vomited.



Captain O'Malley saw the rotund man just in front of him and raised his saber as high as his right hand would go above his head with the intention of decapitating Bill Jeffers. Just as his brain sent the signal to bring the saber flashing down, his right hand disappeared in a cloud of red droplets and pink tissue. He swung his remaining arm, anyway. He was surprised, as it passed his line of sight that his hand was missing. He grabbed his right forearm, just above the severed stump, and cradled it against his chest. It was then that Bill Jeffers tumbled from his horse, shot through the heart. He died at the feet of Captain O'Malley's horse. O'Malley didn't even notice. He tried to turn his horse away from the battle and was hit again in the right shoulder. The bullet slid across his shoulder blade and exited about an inch from his spine. He saw the wagon shed door open and urged his horse to make for the safety of the shed. That was when Luke stepped from behind the wagon-shed door and cut O'Malley nearly in two with his sawed-off shotgun. O'Malley's body tumbled from his horse onto the ground; he was still holding the handleless stump of his right forearm.

Jack wheeled the big Bay and fired at the first blue coat he saw. The next chamber in his Colt was empty. He stuffed the empty weapon back into his waistband and drew a fully loaded one. As he wheeled the Bay once again, he was hit by a ball that struck his forehead, just above his left eyebrow. The lead ball scrapped along his skull, digging a trench that would last the remainder of his life. He reeled in the saddle. He grasped the mane of the Bay with the third and little fingers of his right hand, the hand that held his pistol. He was clinging to the reins with his left and fighting back unconsciousness. The big Bay, with memories of past battles, reared and threw her entire weight into the whirling wall of men and horses. Jack raised his pistol and fired at a Yankee wearing a Captain's uniform. He couldn't tell if he hit him or not. He clawed his way back to full consciousness and brought his pistol barrel down across the skull of a Yankee corporal who slid from the saddle as if pole-axed. Then he looked for another target.

Willie was busy firing with both hands. He had dropped Blackie's reins and sheathed the rifle. He now had a pistol in each hand and was firing, one at a time, as Blackie waded into the smoke dust, blood, and gore of the battle. An electric bolt went through Willie's left thigh as a round pierced the thick muscle. The bullet lodged in the saddle beneath his leg. He saw blood oozing from the wound but couldn't stop to take care of it. He fired, again, at the only union Sergeant he saw. Blackie whirled to his left and Willie sought another blue-coated target.

Jimmy Smith, Bill Jeffers scout, leapt from his mule onto the rump of a Yankee private's horse and grabbed for the soldier's forehead with his left hand. The soldier, completely surprised to have someone mount his horse unbidden, and from behind, was stunned for a moment. In that moment, Jimmy brought up his grandfather's 1837 Bowie knife in his right hand and slit the soldier's throat and jugular. Blood pumped out at an unbelievable rate rapidly soaking the soldier's clothing and Jimmy's left arm. The soldier was dead in a moment. His brain shut down by the lack of blood and oxygen. Jimmy, now covered with the blood of the dead soldier, slid from the horse's back and flopped on the ground. Another soldier, seeing Jimmy rolling on the ground, decided he must be mortally wounded and did not shoot him.

Thus, the battle raged. Most of the antagonists were now nearly deaf from the close quarter firing of the guns. They could hear a low rumble. It was probably just as well. The screams of the injured and dying escaped them. A cloud of gun smoke and dust permeated the scene. Fred Simms was having a difficult time finding targets in the dense fog of battle.

Just over a half mile east on River Road a Troop of Calvary led by Lt. General Abel Farnsworth was approaching the Keifer farm. The sound of the battle reached Farnsworth. He halted the Troop to hear better, then said, “My God! It’s started!” Dabney Caines, to his right alongside Yancy T. Booker, the lawyer from Wilmington, said, “Oh Lord, General, we’d better get a move on!” He spurred his horse on and bolted away from the soldiers at a dead run for the Keifer place. General Farnsworth got his troop moving “at the gallop” and began closing the distance to the farm.

In the distance Farnsworth could see glimpses of the rising smoke and dust from the on-going battle. He prayed they could stop it. He prayed hard!

### **Cease Fire! Cease Fire!**

From his vantage point high up in the hayloft of Amos Keifer’s barn, Fred Sims was the first to see the approaching Federal troops. Thinking they were reinforcements for Garrison’s men he leveled his rifle on the foremost rider, which happened to be Lt. General Abel Farnsworth. It was difficult to maintain his aim as his target was closing on him. Fred found the range was continuously changing, becoming shorter, as the General came closer and closer. Fred decided to choose another target. It was then he heard the bugle call. Farnsworth would never know just how close to death he had come that day.

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General Farnsworth realized the fighting wasn’t stopping or even slacking in intensity as his troops approached. He ordered the bugler to sound, “Re-call.” The bugler blew with gusto...and then repeated the call.

Farnsworth ordered his men to surround the fighting men. The federal troops split as they approached the fight with one file going to the left, the other to the right. They completely surrounded the combatants. Finally, from somewhere inside the melee, someone shouted, “Cease fire! Cease fire!” That someone was Sergeant Jennings. He was bleeding badly from his cheek and was in a great deal of pain.

“Whose in charge here?” demanded General Farnsworth. He had to speak again, and louder.

The combatants looked about, among themselves, in a dazed sort of way. Not quite sure they had survived the fight, then glad they had. A number of groans were heard. As the adrenalin began to subside, the wounded men, and nearly everyone was wounded, began to feel the pain from their wounds.

General Farnsworth was about to repeat his demand for information when a bloody sergeant wove through the silent men and made his way to the fallen, dead horse just to the south side of the well. He reined in and lifted himself up in the left stirrup and swung his wounded right leg over the horse and stepped down. He collapsed at the feet of his horse. General Farnsworth quickly dismounted and went to the aid of the fallen sergeant. Sergeant Jennings was conscious.

“Begging your pardon, sir, I’m Sergeant Jennings. That man over there, under the horse, is Colonel Rufus Garrison, my commanding officer.” Then Sergeant Jennings surrendered to the blackness of unconsciousness.

Lieutenant Jack Pope had dismounted and was beside the General. “Lieutenant, get the surgeon to this man...NOW!”

“Yes, SIR!” Lieutenant Pope spun on his heels and bellowed, “Surgeon, GET UP HERE!”

From back down the wagon road the surgeon, a non-combatant, in his white duster rode to the General and dismounted.

“See to that man, doctor!” General Farnsworth said, pointing to Sergeant Jennings.

Then General Farnsworth walked over to Colonel Garrison. He stopped down and felt for a pulse in Garrison’s neck. He found one. “Surgeon, come here!”

The doctor stood and moved quickly to the Colonel. He, too, felt for a pulse, and then he withdrew a bottle of ammonia from his bag, wet a piece of linen, and held the wet cloth under the nose of Colonel Garrison. Garrison roused, almost immediately. As his vision cleared, he saw General Farnsworth standing above, looking down on him. He struggled to stand, and was knocked back by the pain flashing through his right leg, still pinned beneath the dead horse.

“I expect his leg is broken, General,” said the surgeon.

“Well, get the damned horse OFF of him!” demanded General Farnsworth. “Major Grady, disarm ALL these men!” He made a sweeping gesture with his right arm to encompass all those in the fight.

The General stood patiently as his troops removed the weapons of all the men, civilians and soldiers alike. A small pile grew near the well.

In the barn Fred Simms saw what was happening and decided he didn't want to give up his Pa's rifle, so he slipped down the ladder and out the back door of the barn and into the nearby woods and disappeared. He would return for Sun Fisher later. Much Later!

Luke, still in the wagon shed, stood his shotgun against a corner post in the shed, and then he stepped out into the yard. The newly arrived soldiers immediately covered him with their weapons. He put both hands above his head in surrender and walked to the well.

Amos Keifer appeared from behind the southern side of the wagon shed with his hands already extended above his head. He didn't have his rifle with him.

Frank Keifer yelled from inside the house, "Coming out!" and several weapons were instantly trained on the front door of the Keifer home. Frank came out onto the porch with the shotgun broken down at the breech and held above his head. A soldier took his gun and another bade him join the other men in the center of the yard.

All was still, save for the wheezing and snorting of the horses, still keyed-up from the battle.

General Farnsworth said, "Who, among you, is Captain Jack Knight...and, Amos Keifer? Step forward...NOW!"

### **Sorting It Out**

Dabney Caines, who had been sitting his horse on the wagon road well out of the fray, now walked his horse around the bedraggled men to stop beside General Farnsworth. He sat, saying nothing.

After some moments when no response had come from the dazed, battle weary men. General Farnsworth shouted again, "I want to speak to Captain Jack Knight and Amos Keifer. If you're among these men, step out now. I won't ask again!"

"I'm Jack Knight, General." A big Bay horse wound its way through the other combatants and stepped clear. Jack eased back on the reins and the Bay stopped directly in front of Farnsworth. Amos Keifer spoke up from beside the well. "I'm Amos Keifer, General."

A group of men "volunteered" by the surgeon and Lieutenant Pope were struggling to free Colonel Garrison's leg from under his dead horse. He screamed. The General frowned and shook his head in disgust.

Dabney Caines, from astride his horse, leaned over and said, "That's them, General."

Farnsworth nodded. "Captain Murphy, get that lawyer."

Captain Murphy turned to Yancy Booker and motioned him to come forward and join the General. Booker complied and dismounted beside the General.

"Doctor, you about done with that man?" Farnsworth asked the surgeon.

"The Colonel is in a lot of pain, General. I don't know how much use he'll be to you."

"I don't give a hang about his pain doctor. I need him awake and thinking. Can you do that, yes or no?"

"I can try, General."

"Well, do it then. And be quick about it!"

"Yes, SIR!" The doctor asked his orderly to get the bottle of laudanum from his bag. In a moment the orderly was back with a brown bottle. The doctor said, "Now, Colonel, I want you to take a sip of this...only a sip. It'll help ease the pain and still allow you to remain clear-minded. You understand?"

Garrison nodded he did and took the required sip.

In the meantime, Farnsworth was appraising the condition of Jack and Amos. "Captain, can you dismount...?"

"Yes, sir," said Jack, as he stepped off the Bay.

Farnsworth took Booker by the arm and said, "Mr. Booker, you, Captain Knight, Mr. Keifer, and Colonel Garrison, as soon as the doctor can get him to pull himself together, and I - we are all going to have a meeting to settle this mess! There will be NO MORE KILLING! That's done with! You understand that?" His eyes traveled across the face of all the men standing before him. He turned to Colonel Garrison, now sitting on the ground, his broken thigh bent at an odd angle. "Colonel, did you get that?"

"Uh, yes sir, General. I got it." He didn't sound convincing.

"All right. We're going into Mr. Keifer's house, here, and have a sit-down meeting. Doctor, get Garrison on his feet, somehow, and get him in there with the rest of us, you hear?"

"Yes sir, General. I'll have him there shortly."

Farnsworth turned to Jack, Amos, and Mr. Booker and said, "Let's go". All the men went into the Keifer farmhouse and convened the meeting in the kitchen around Amos'

table. In a few minutes the surgeon and his orderly brought a moaning Garrison into the kitchen and, somehow, managed to get him into a chair by the table. Garrison clenched and unclenched his fists as the pain tore through him.

General Farnsworth was standing at the end of the table nearest the stove. He said, "Now, Mr. Keifer...I'd like you to meet Mr. Yancy Booker, an attorney from Wilmington.

Amos Keifer's face lit up and he smiled for the first time in many days.

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Doc Brown rolled into the Keifer yard. When he stepped down from the buggy, he reached for his bag just behind the seat and went immediately to the surgeon.

"I'm Doctor Sam Brown from River Bluff. I figured you could use some help." The surgeon's face brightened and he shook hands with Doc and said, "You bet. I sure am glad to see you. I've got my hands full here."

"Just tell me where to start," said Doc, removing his coat and draping it over the windless of the well.

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In the clearing where ole Jenny was hobbled, Elli Grace and Annie had become aware that the noise of the battle had stopped and showed no signs of resuming. In a joint decision they decided Frank was not coming back, for whatever reason, and they might as well mount up and go see what was happening. Ellis led Bess to a nearby stump and climbed aboard and helped Annie scramble up behind her. Then they started making their way through the pines and underbrush toward the Keifer house. Both women were silent. Each had concerns for the men of their hearts who had been in the middle of the fight. Where were they? Were they all right? It took all the determination Ellie had not to nudge Bess into a run. Soon they could see the outline of the Keifer house through the thinning pines.

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In the root cellar Sarah was holding Joseph tightly. She hardly dared breathe. She had heard every shot of the battle as it raged in and around her house. She had flinched at each gunshot until they became one long, loud, roar punctuated by the screams of wounded and dying men. Now, the noise had stopped and she still clutched her youngest son to her. She wanted to lift the double doors to the cellar and peer out. But, she would wait until Amos came. He **WOULD** come...she continued to promise herself. He **WOULD** come!

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General Farnsworth took the piece of paper from the outstretched hand of the Wilmington Lawyer and walked to the opposite end of the table and waved the paper in the face of Colonel Garrison.

“This,” General Farnsworth said, “is the piece of paper which could have saved all the blood spilled and the men killed today, Garrison! This is a receipt for all the taxes owed on this farm. Mr. Keifer had paid all of them. He didn’t owe one damn penny!” The general took a step back and got control of himself.

“Garrison, you’re a damned thief! A THIEF, sir! You’re a disgrace to the uniform you’re wearing. As God is my witness, I’ll see you out of it and on the end of a rope, if it’s the last thing I do on this earth!” The General was visibly shaking with rage.

“Where’s McGinnis?” The General bellowed the question at Garrison. “Your low-life brother-in-law? Where is HE?”

Garrison told him. The pain killing properties of the opium had begun to take effect.

The General strode to the back door and bellowed, “Lieutenant Pope!” In seconds Pope was in the kitchen in a full brace.

“Lieutenant, take a squad of men and go on into town. Go to....”

“Bea’s Boarding House, General,” said Jack.

“Bea’s Boarding House,” continued the General, “and arrest that damned McGinnis and his flunky, Helms. I want them brought to me in irons! You understand?”

“Yes, SIR!”

Then be about it man! GO!” The General made a shooping motion with his hands.

“Yes SIR!” Lieutenant Pope spun on is heel and was gone as quickly as he had arrived!

“My God!” exclaimed Amos. He jumped to his feet, knocking his chair over and banging it on the floor. “Sarah!” he cried. He turned and ran out the back door.

“What...?” Said General Farnsworth.

“His wife, General. His wife and son,” answered Jack.

“Oh,” said the general. He strode to the back door and peered out. Just outside the double-doored root cellar stood Sarah and Amos in a full embrace. Joseph was hugging his father and mother, at least, as far as his short arms would reach. General Farnsworth smiled in spite of himself.

## The Living and the Dead

Tallmadge Jordan and his wife Pearly Mae stopped at the wagon road leading from River Road to the Knight's cabin. Tallmadge said, "Pearly Mae, would you look at that! It's a cabin! Where'd the house go? I remember a big, whitewashed farmhouse there. Right there," he said, pointing to a spot very near the cabin.

Pearly Mae turned to look and saw the cabin. "Where's the house?" she asked.

"I betya the damn Yankees burned it to the ground. Probably burned our'n, too," replied Tallmadge. He hadn't even noticed that Pearly Mae had spoken for the first time in weeks.

"Well, I 'spect we'd better go on down there...to the house and see if anybody's home. Don't see no smoke from the chimney, though." Tallmadge popped the reins over the mule's backs and they leaned together into the harness and started the old wagon rolling again. They turned right into the wagon road, which led to the front door of the cabin.

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As Bess stepped out of the pines into the cleared field behind the Keifer farm, Ellie Grace and Annie could see federal soldiers everywhere. There were soldiers in the yard, milling about. There were others in the barn and, especially, up in the hayloft. Ellie could see soldiers in the wagon shed. She saw one soldier hold up a sawed-off shotgun over his head with a triumphant shout. She nudged ole Bess with her heels and Bess slowly began her careful walk across the clearing to the back door of the Keifer house. Annie slid off Bess' big back first, then Ellie. They reached for each other's hand at the same time. Then Ellie said, "I have to know." Annie, nodding her head, replied simply, "Me, too." With that, the two women started for the back door leading into the kitchen of the Keifer house.

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"Well, Mr. Keifer, I guess this will finally settle the problem of a clear title to this farm. I read the will and it was clear that Mrs. Roberts wanted your family to inherit this place and make it a working farm again," General Farnsworth said. He was sitting at the head of the table nearest the stove. Amos, Sarah, Joseph, and Frank were all seated at the table with their backs to the door leading to the outside. Colonel Garrison was still seated at the opposite end of the table from the General, but now his head was down on the



tabletop, resting on his forearms. He was very nearly asleep from the opium the surgeon had given him.

Jack, Luke, and Willie were leaning against the wall near the door that led to the front of the house. Jack could clearly see the two feminine figures silhouetted in the doorway as they stepped into the kitchen from outside.

As her eyes adjusted to the dimness of the inside, Ellie Grace scanned those seated at the table, then those leaning against the wall across the room. "THERE HE IS," her mind screamed and she rushed across the room and into Jack's arms. She wrapped her arms around him and squeezed with all her might. Jack managed to tip her head back to kiss her lightly on the lips. There were tears of sheer joy in her eyes!

Annie had found Luke. She, too, was in an embrace with the man of her heart! Unlike Jack, Luke didn't have a scratch on him!

Willie, feeling a bit uncomfortable with this very public display of affection, turned and walked out of the kitchen and out of the house. He ended up on the front porch where he saw two Yankee soldiers with Luke's sawed-off shotgun. He made a mental note of the faces of the two young soldiers.

There were four Yankee dead: Private Gant of Connecticut was, of course, among them; Corporal Hans Smit of New York; Major Benson and Captain O'Malley, both of Ohio. Their bodies had been laid out in a row by the wagon shed. As death is no respecter of rank, the dead were laid out in no particular order.

There were three Southern dead: Billy Carnes; his father, Farley Carnes; and Captain William Jeffers, late of the Army of Northern Virginia, were laid out on the opposite side of the wagon shed doorway. Those who placed them there were careful to place Billy beside his father, Farley. It would be a sad day in River bluff for those who knew these people.

The wounded were many. Some grievous, others slight. But they all required tending and Doc Brown and the surgeon were doing their best to see to it. Doc had cleaned and placed a bandage on Jack's head where the bullet had slid across his skull.

Doc had cleaned, as best he could, the wound to Willie's left thigh and bandaged it. There was no damage to the bone and it would heal. But it would bring Willie pain for a long time.

Jimmy Smith, Captain Jeffers' scout... not a scratch. He was covered in blood...somebody else's, but on his person, there wasn't a hint of a wound. Doc Brown and the surgeon were amazed. Both thought, from his appearance, he was surely, badly, if not mortally, wounded. Smith was on the front porch of the Keifer house, sitting on the floor and leaning against the wall...asleep!

Sergeant Jennings was another case entirely. He was shot to pieces. The two doctors treated his wounds and hoped he had not lost so much blood he would not be able to fight his way back. It could go either way.

As the two groups of men sat at opposite sides of the yard staring at each other, there was still hatred in the eyes of some. For some families, it would last for many generations. Others would put it behind them and move on. Most, however, would have lasting memories of the battle of Keifer's Farm.

### **Ellie Grace Smiles**

It was mid-morning at the cemetery of the little Anglican Church west of River Bluff. The crowd in attendance at the multiple ceremonies had begun to drift away to their homes, businesses, and such. The blue-coated Federal troops were mounted-up and waiting in two files behind their officers for the command to begin their ride back to Wilmington.

General Farnsworth was standing beside his mount at the head of the troop speaking with Jack, Luke, Willie, and Amos. Doc Brown was, likewise, in conversation with the Troop's surgeon.

Jack said, "Thank you, General for coming, and," he smiled, "thank you for arriving when you did!"

"Just glad I COULD come. We were on the way home. The ship was a day behind schedule arriving at Wilmington, so we were available. We just mounted up and followed that Mr. Caines fellow down the road a ways to put down some trouble." The General smiled.

You mean.... you're NOT the Commandant of Wilmington?" Jack asked incredulously.

"Nope," replied General Farnsworth. That honor and privilege will be for someone else...when he arrives. No, my men and I are on the way home. We are to be off-loaded at New York and immediately disbanded and allowed to go home. We're all very tired of this war."

Willie asked, "Have any idea who the Commandant will be?"

"Not really," replied the General but, I have heard, mind you, only heard, through unofficial channels, the Commandant will be Joe Hawley. That's Brigadier General Joseph R. Hawley. Now, I don't know for sure...but that's what I hear. It really doesn't matter; you folks will be just fine. You've got a lot of work to do rebuilding this country, but, by God, if there's anything we learned from you, it's you don't mind a challenge."

The General laughed and turned to his horse and swung into the saddle. "Captain," he said, "let's get a move on!"

The Captain bellowed, "Forrrr-WARD!" He dropped his upraised hand in an arching motion toward the front and the horses began to move in unison!

Sitting in their beat-up old wagon by the church building were Tallmadge and Pearly Mae Jordan. They had finally met their son at the Knight farm when the Knights and Willie returned from Keifer's farm. There had been hand shaking all 'round and a hug from Pearly Mae, then the catching-up began. Willie and his parents talked late into the night. Finally, they had said all that needed saying and they went to sleep. Now, here they were attending a funeral for people they had never met. It was the "Christian" thing to do Pearly Mae had said. So they came.

Farley and Billy Carnes had been interred in the Carnes family plot. Captain William Jeffers had no family plot, so was buried near the Knight's plot, at the direction of Jack Knight.

The four Yankees...well...that was another story. The townsfolk weren't all that happy about burying Yankees in THEIR cemetery. It took some talking by the rector to get the vestry to relent and allow the four men to be buried...in a plot of their own...away from the rest of the cemetery's residents. That decision made, however, everything went off without a hitch.

Annie was now on Luke's arm and Ellie Grace now stood beside Jack. Willie searched the by-standers along the periphery of the cemetery until he spied Deborah with her Mother, Rebecca, and her Father Jacob. He removed his hat and walked toward them. Deborah broke from her parents and ran to meet him. They joined arms and walked slowly back to her parents.

Jack and Ellie, and Luke and Annie soon joined them.

Jacob said, "Well, I hear there is a big event coming up for you four."

"Yes, sir!" replied Luke! "We're getting married! The four of us!"

"So I hear!" said Rebecca. "When did you have the time to make plans...?"

Jack dropped his head for a moment and then said, "When we had the funeral for Momma Nan, I spoke to the Padre about marrying Ellie and me. Luke just asked last night if it could be a double wedding. Ellie Grace and I agreed. So, it's set. It'll take us a month or so to get things ready, but yes, we are going to get married!"

Jacob looked at Deborah with her arm linked through Willie's and said, "It looks as if we have some things to work out, as well." He was smiling when he reached over and

hugged his daughter. Rebecca kissed Willie lightly on the cheek, and then she and Jacob walked away toward the Goldberg's buggy parked near the church.

Ellie Grace and Jack walked, arm in arm, across the cemetery to Momma Nan's grave. Ellie stooped down and straightened the fresh flowers she had placed on the grave earlier. She spoke aloud, "Well, Momma Nan, things have a way of working out, don't they? You said Jack would be back and here he is. Now, Momma, we're going to get married and bring children, lots of children, to live in your old house. I miss you, Momma." She touched the granite headstone lovingly as she stood and again took hold of Jack's arm.

The couple walked across the cemetery toward their waiting friends and family. As they neared the River Road, Ellie stopped, turned, and shaded her eyes from the sun with her open palm. She looked intently down the road toward the east. A single strand of sun-bleached hair lifted up from above her ear to float on the currents of October air as the season changed in this small southeastern North Carolina town. A golden leaf floated by on its final journey toward the ground. A brisk breeze had sprung up from the west. The cycle of life continued. Ellie Grace Campbell smiled.

*The End*

(A novel by Bill Ghent)

