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An End to Chivalry: the War for a Sovereign Missouri

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements of the degree of

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in

Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts

by

Brian D. Bywater

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University of California, Riverside

To Patty

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## **AN END TO CHIVALRY Prologue**

The homestead was a flat black shadow against the night sky, hard as schist, with clouds of flint sailing overhead. The trees rose in dark silhouette, their ragged tips pointing to the intermittent stars. Great drops began to patter the leaves. The head of the storm was coming. The men wrapped their pistols in oilcloth and proceeded up the drizzled path.

William held out the flat of his hand and the men stopped. They crouched down behind the scrub at the edge of the treeline. Waiting at the edge of the clearing, William listened. The clouds sailing steadily over, the thin crescent of the Cheshire moon smiled and blinked out. The air bristled, electric.

Slow heel-to-toe, William did the Indian-creep across the clearing. He glided over the gray tufts of grass, gleaming wet. He waited with his boot on the first wooden step. Shifting his weight, he eased across the wooden porch. Shadow in shadow, William stood at the door with his hand on the handle and listened. The deeper blackness opened and after a few slow beats he waved a white handkerchief, almost iridescent in the night. The air crackled and flashed and the thunder rolled, almost instant.

The men followed across the clearing and the dark erupted into blinding white. The windows flung wide and flashed. The barn doors swung open and a brace of shotguns blazed away. The whole courtyard lit up like morning, there was a crushing



roar. And in the hush of sudden darkness, ringing air all around, the men stood together over the tangle of bodies with smoke coming off their shotguns.

William stepped from the doorway still holding his handkerchief. He walked over to where the men stood and looked down at the heap of bodies. One of the men stirred. There was a sudden gasp, then a hiss between clenched teeth. His eyes rolled open and he looked up at William who stood with his hand on one hip and his other arm straight down at his side, holding the kerchief. William brushed back the flap of his overcoat and reached in. "You weren't at Cottonwood, Seth, so this is nothing personal. But try and understand, I have a very great need to keep you quiet until I finish my mission." He leveled his Navy Colt at Seth's face and pulled the hammer back. It made a heavy double-click. Seth gasped and heaved beneath the tangle of prone bodies, an oath clenched in his throat, he was choking and spitting blood. "Say hello to Jesus for me," said William. There was a flash and a report. The sky rumbled.

"Death to all Jayhawkers," said the gray-haired old man standing next to William. The sky crackled and the clouds opened and down came the rain. The wind whipped through the trees and the trees swayed with oafish limbs. The sky poured out and the lightning flashed white and yellow and red.

## **AN END TO CHIVALRY Chapter 1**

Mizzled and wet, the light of day came slow. A pitter of rain rolled down the roof and dripped from the shingles. William sat in the porch swing with his legs outstretched and his ankles crossed. Morgan, the gray-haired old man, sat on the thatched edge of his rocker. Deep in thought, he absently rubbed his chin. William listened to the rain and waited.

William was of medium height and slight-of-build, his body compact and wiry. Twenty four years of age, unassuming and handsome, his light brown hair parted to one side and neatly combed, his thin blonde mustache meticulously trimmed. He had a Roman nose, a noble brow and prominent cheek bones, his face was sculpted and angular. His light gray eyes changed color with his moods, some people said, like the changes in the weather.

His long Union officer's coat was open, showing his custom-made holster. He wore two .36 caliber Navy Colts, one on his hip and one suspended from a shoulder strap across his chest, very business-like. He held his hat in his hand and he turned it by the brim and set it on the swing beside him. Flexing his knees, gently rocking back and forth, he cleared his throat and said, "May I have a word with you about Andrew? Are you two speaking?"

“I wish you’d take off that infernal coat,” Morgan said abruptly, “I hate the sight of it.” Morgan leaned back and took a cob and reed stem out of his leather pouch. He pressed the stem into the cob and blew air through the bowl. He took a pinch of tobacco and was about to press it into the bowl when William pulled two cigars from his inside jacket pocket. He held them out with a flourish.

“Virginian,” he said, “I didn’t forget.”

The old man held the cigar under his nose and sniffed the length of it. He held it between his teeth. “It’s been so long,” Morgan said with glee. He rolled it in his mouth, bit the tip, and tasted the end. “Sweet,” he said with a sigh.

William smelled the length of the dark rolled leaf, “May Virginia always remain proud and free.”

“Amen,” said Morgan.

William took a wooden match from his vest and reached down to strike it. There was an old Indian grindstone beside the porch swing that had been found down by the river years before. William flicked the match against the stone and it flared and sputtered. He started to touch it to the tip of his cigar.

“Wait!” Morgan cried, “For mercy’s sake! It’ll ruin the flavor.” Morgan picked up a twig of kindling he kept in a pile by the pot-bellied warmer, lifted the iron latch with a forked stick and opened the grate. He held the end of the twig over the flame until it caught and handed it to William.

“Much obliged,” William said. He drew deeply, the red end glowed and he let the wisp of smoke curl around his face. He smiled with satisfaction and handed the burning twig to Morgan. “Sweet leaf,” he said, “sweet as molasses.”

Annie, Morgan’s oldest daughter, came through the door and laid a napkin in William’s lap. She held a deep-dish platter in her mitten and carefully set it down. “We are having fried corn fritters in bacon gravy with bacon and eggs and baked apples in cinnamon,” she said.

“Thank you,” William said, overwhelmed, looking at the steaming heaps of food poured over with juices. Annie turned and hurried into the kitchen. She returned with cider and coffee.

“Milk’s still warm,” she said, “If you want I’ll get you some.”

William looked up from his plate. He had known Annie since she was a spindly little girl. She had changed. Fetching and womanly, she was a golden-blond with bright blue eyes. He couldn’t help but notice how her calico dress was gathered at the hips and pulled tight at the waist. She was buttoned to the neckline and her white cotton chemisette frilled softly at her wrists and beneath her chin. He noticed how the darts of her dress curved to the swell of her breasts. William met her eyes. She held his gaze without blinking. “Do you want some...?”

He cleared his throat. “Milk?” he asked, “yes please.” A slow smile curled on her lips. She turned and went into the house.

“My baby girl,” Morgan said, “she’s growing up fast.” He puffed his cigar and waited for his plate. “So much like her ma at that age. Fellers have started showing up on my doorstep, hair slicked back and smelling of lilac. I could weep from worry.”

Annie came out onto the porch carrying a cup in each hand, her face lit with a smile. She turned to her father, “Here Papa, where do you want these?” Morgan took the cider and sipped it. He placed it on the barrel next to his rocker. Then he took the coffee. Annie tossed her long hair as she skipped back through the door. She emerged with a steaming deep-dish, shook out a napkin and handed it to Morgan who laid it across his knees. She gingerly set the dish down and said, “Don’t let it get cold, Papa.” She hurried back into the house and turned to smile at William before she disappeared through the door. Between bites, the two men puffed long plumes of smoke. They hummed with satisfaction. “Mmm-hmm. This is delicious,” William said.

Andrew Walker, Morgan’s oldest son, clomped onto the porch wearing his best English riding boots. He stood with cape draped back, sporting four pistols in his custom holster, a wide-brimmed hat, button-up vest and gloves. He removed his hat in respect to his father.

“Father, the pigs are eating those Kansas boys,” Andrew said, “may I have your permission to bury them?”

“Of course,” Morgan said, “I was waiting for the rain to stop. And, if I may ask, what are you all dressed up for?” Andrew shifted his weight and looked over at William.

“Have you not spoken with him?” he said.

“Not yet,” William said, “I was working up to it.”

Andrew stiffened. "I am going with William, father. We are to enlist with the Confederate Army under General Price."

"Not yet," William said, "not just yet. I have business to attend before I am free to enlist."

"Captain Perkins is it?" Morgan asked.

"Captain Perkins is planning a raid along the border. On the sly, he has incited the slaves to steal their master's goods, horses, wagons, guns, blankets, and whatever else they can carry. The Captain has offered them freedom, given them powerful incentive." Andrew stood poised and Morgan sat holding his cigar, a thin twist of smoke wavering above him. "The problem is," William continued, "the slaves will arrive without bill-of-sale and will not be able to prove ownership of all they've stolen. All they have brought with them will be confiscated. And after the Captain has collected the goods, he will sell the newly freed slaves on the auction block in New Orleans, or he will relegate them to the corn fields of Kansas, forcing them to harvest crops. Or, he might just ransom them back to their former owners. They have been promised their freedom, but freedom will not mean their situation will improve."

"Quite the contrary," Morgan interjected, "they will lose their families and be separated from those who have cared for them all their lives."

"And..?" Andrew said, not interested.

"And if I have not returned in three days, I am dead." His statement hung in the air for a solemn moment. Just then Annie burst through the door, light-hearted and brimming with laughter. William sat helpless with a fork in one hand and a smoking

cigar in the other while trying to balance a plate on his knees. She held a glass of milk with both hands, and seeing he needed some assistance, stood close and held the rim of the cup to his lips.

“It’s good,” she said, “It’s still warm.” He drank and he looked up at her and felt the heat of her next to him. She set the glass down and wiped his mustache with a napkin. She shined a bright smile, “I am baking, I have to go check the oven.” She tossed her hair and skipped inside.

“Pardon me, gentlemen, for sounding so theatrical,” William said, obviously distracted, “I will return in three days. The Captain needs killing. I will kill him quickly and return to you, and Andrew, if you can convince your father in that length of time that he should let you go with me, we will find Price and enlist with the Confederacy.” He looked from man to man, from father to son. He sipped the end of his cigar and blew a long plume of smoke. He dabbed a bite of fritter in gravy, and chewing it, he hummed. “Captain Perkins led the attack at Cottonwood Creek, but it is Jim Lane that gave the orders.”

“The Kansas Senator? That Jim Lane?” Andrew asked.

“The same. He claimed to be a Colonel way back when. Now he claims to be a General. He talks a tall tale, but he’s never had any military training. He’s the man I’m really after. He has been the head of the Jayhawkers since the start of the war with Kansas and is responsible for most of the raids into Missouri. He is not like Jennison and the others. He profits, but he is not in it for profit. He loves having god-like power over other people’s lives. He is a coward who feeds on the misery of others.”

Morgan said, "He needs killing."

"Truth be told," said William. He finished his plate and set it aside and settled back to finish his smoke. "I almost had him once. I planned and was patient and I laid in wait for my opportunity. I received a letter granting audience at his headquarters in Lawrence. When I arrived I noticed the absence of any bodyguard, no soldiers anywhere to be seen. I thought that this must mean the Colonel has taken me into his confidence, and consequently, I would find him inadequately defended. I presented my letter to Lane's clerk, an oddly effeminate little man, and I waited while he read it. 'Mister Lane is not here,' the little man said and handed me the letter again, 'he has just left. He was called away on urgent business.'" William smoked his cigar as he ruminated on the event. "That day he eluded me. And devilish luck it was. But I will have him, of that I am certain."

The rain had stopped. The clouds parted, towering white cumulus stood on the horizon. The sky above showed mostly blue and a blustery wind swayed the trees. Up at the main gate by the road, a little black boy turned in and came running up the lane. He had on a straw hat. His shirt had been made from an old flour sack, tiny blue flowers printed on white cotton. His feet were bare, and he wore his pants rolled up just below his knees. The boy stopped at the first step and waited to catch his breath. When William looked over at him, the boy grinned.

"They're coming," he said, breathing hard.

"Who's coming?" asked William.



“They’re coming. All of them.”

“Who, you say?”

“The town. All the town folk is coming. Maybe not all, everyone, but a passel lot is coming.” The boy pointed up the lane, “I beat them all, I’m the first one here.”

“I told you to give a message to the Sheriff. How did everybody else find out?”

“Dunno,” the boy said and shrugged his shoulders. William flipped him a nickel.

Some more boys came running, white and black. All were yelling and talking at the top of their shrill voices, jumping and splashing in puddles, a tumult of mischief and revelry. Horsemen turned into the lane.

Morgan looked concerned, “Are we about to have trouble, then?”

William was still. He watched. “I think not, sir.” He stood and removed his coat, folded it in two and placed it on the porch swing. William tucked in his shirt tail and tightened his belt. He stepped into the sunlight and stood with both thumbs hitched above his buckle.

Wagons turned into the lane. The first carried six men with two older boys sitting on the jobber’s box behind the driver’s seat. The second wagon was filled with women dressed in gingham with fancy hats and parasols. They were talking and excitable. A lovely parade, William thought.

Morgan stood to see, and noting his shotgun against the rail, picked it up by the barrel and walked it into the house. Andrew removed his coat, resting his palm lightly on the hilt of his sidearm. He leaned his shoulder against the post, rested one boot on the rail.

A third wagon turned in, with two men up front, two in the back. The fourth wagon was empty except for the driver. There followed after two black carriages with magnificent horses, groomed and bobbed, shiny in the sun. William smiled.

The leading horseman stepped down. He wore a tan hat with a narrow brim, a brown and tan striped shirt with a tan vest, unbuttoned. On his vest he wore a tin star. His bushy mustache, curled at each end, covered his upper lip. His chin showed morning stubble. Looking over at the tangle of bodies, the Sheriff said to William, "Are these the men you wanted to see me about?" Can you identify them?" He looked to William again, "I beg your pardon. Horace Creeley. I am sheriff, a member of the town council, and owner of the Dry Goods at the corner of Third and Church Streets. You know me by name, I reckon. You're the only one here I haven't met, so I assume you must be William Quantrill...?"

They shook hands. "Pleased."

"Pleased also. Now, before I am able to exonerate you, I need to take your account of events, make a report, and corroborate your testimony by questioning the available witnesses."

"That would be Mister Walker and son Andrew, together with some of his neighbors, most of whom I have just met. You might want to talk with Mister Tatum and Mister Kroger."

"I'll have that from Morgan himself, I just need your view of what happened here." The two men walked over to where a crew of townsmen were separating the tangled bodies and propping them up on flat boards they had leaned against the side of

the barn. A photographer set his camera on a tripod and began directing the arrangement of the bodies. He instructed his assistants to position the dead men's hands to their sides and pry their eyes open. Another assistant held a black umbrella over the apparatus while the photographer made an elegant gesture with his arm indicating the angle of the sun. The townspeople gathered around to watch.

“The first thing I need to tell you is; At most times, in times of peace, I am loathe to take men's lives, but I have acted in the best interest of the commonwealth of the sovereign State of Missouri...”

“No need to pontificate. You're not running for office, are you?”

“No sir.”

“Keep it straight and simple. Speak clearly so that my man here can write it all down.”

Horace Creeley gave a nod to his fledgling clerk, a college graduate, neatly dressed in eastern fashion with oiled coif and wire-rimmed glasses. Horace watched him while he made preparations. The eager young man unfolded his table and unpacked his instruments, unstrung the black satin ribbon that tied his black leather ledger, looked to the Sheriff with his pen ready. Horace turned back to William, “Proceed sir.”

“You see before you men of Lawrence, Kansas, all members of the Liberator Club. Their mission, according to their club constitution, was to free all the slaves of Missouri. I joined this little coterie at its conception, and in fact, my name is on the list of its founding members. I joined that I might keep an eye on their activities. When the club started, it was a liberator club in sentiment only. They held prayer meetings. They

held potlucks. They had guest speakers down at the Grange Hall. Eventually however, there emerged from among their number those members who argued that all the prayer in the world availed nothing if they did not back their sentiment with militant action. But mind you, these men were not altruists, they were privateers. They joined the abolitionists not because they were opposed to the institution of slavery, quite the contrary, they joined because they needed a way to finance their diabolical schemes.” William noticed some of the town folk had gathered within hearing distance. “These men were resolved to attack homesteads east of the river. Travel by night. Attack in the wee, quiet hours. Theirs was no mission of mercy, they came to steal and destroy.”

“Will this take long?” the Sheriff asked.

“My apologies sir.” William turned to the gathering town folk and made a grand gesture, “Ladies and gentlemen, the Liberators have been liberated!”

There was an utterance of approval and light applause. William pointed to the first dead man, “May I introduce you to Edwin Morrison. Late from Leavenworth. Late from Lawrence. He’s been raiding along the border since ’55. Claimed to have been in on the Pottawatomie Creek raid. Claimed to have been with John Brown at Palmyra. I know for a fact he was at Cottonwood Creek. That’s reason enough, wouldn’t you say?”

There was a murmur of agreement from among the folk. The Sheriff looked up from the ground and scratched his chin, “Cottonwood Creek. You were there?”

William nodded, “Yes sir.”

“I always wondered how the marauders got the drop on all you all. Perhaps you can shed some light on the matter?”

“Most certain. They came to us cordial-like, with hat in hand and asking for directions. We invited them to supper. They sat down with us. When we bowed our heads to pray, they pulled their pistols and started shooting. My brother died instantly. They shot me twice and left me for dead. I was shot in the right lung and in the left leg, mid-thigh, just missed the bone.” He pointed with two fingers, holding his cigar. “I will show you my scars later Mister Creeley, if you require it. But for the sake of the ladies present, I would rather not expose myself in public.”

“Later then.”

“I thank you sir.” William pointed to the dead men, “Morrison was at Cottonwood. Southwick was there. Chalkie was there also. Out of the original thirty that made the Cottonwood raid, there are only a few left alive. Captain Perkins led the raid. Jim Lane gave the orders. Those two and a few others are all that’s left of the marauders. I’m certain that if they’d of known I would live, they would have shot me a few more times. They took our horses and mules, went through all our goods, burned our wagons. They took our traveling companion, a black man by the name of California Freeman. He made up that name for himself. Best farrier there ever was. He might still be alive, though. If he were a white man they would have shot him right off.” William looked at the woman standing nearest. She was fanning herself, all aflutter. “The women, I found out...” William paused to consider his words, “I will not offend your delicate nature, ma’am. The women were taken, suffice it to say. The young girls were sold to the Mormons out in the territories.”

The woman blanched white and chirped a note of distress. She looked as though she would faint, leaning helpless on her man's shoulder. Her man, a gentleman, in black satin hat and ribbon tie, held her and consoled her with soft words.

"Believe me when I tell you, these men deserved what they got."

"Sounds to me," the Sheriff said, "they deserved much worse than what they got."

"I was near death, at the very precipice. When I came to, I thought I must be at the edge of the creek because my face was wet. I kept drifting in and out of consciousness, dreamlike. As it turns out, I was lying in my own blood. I awoke the next day at first light and I could hear the sound of wings. At first, I thought it must be angel's wings. It was turkey vultures eating the dead. I tried to fend them off, kept them off as long as I could, but I did not have the strength, I could not stay awake. At one point I awoke so parched I thought I would tear my throat if I tried to swallow. I thought I might die if I did not reach water. I crawled to the edge of the creek. It took hours and I kept stopping to rest, drifting in and out, as it were. That's the last I remember. Next, I awoke in the lodge of an old Shawnee medicine man by the name of Golightly Spybuck. He told me later, after I'd recovered, that when he found me I was face down in the water and would've drowned if he hadn't come by when he did."

William turned to look at the dead men and took a drag on his cigar. It was out. He tapped the ashes, placed the stub in his vest pocket, and turned to the people standing there. "You want to hear more, or am I boring you?"

"Please go on," they murmured.

"Yes. Please continue," the Sheriff said.

William pointed, “John Dean convinced these men the risks were minimal, the distance not too great, and the time was opportune. The plan was to camp within striking distance of the Walker’s farm, rest the horses a day while I reconnoitered the territory, since I was the only one of their number who had ever been to these parts, hereabouts. On the excuse I was informing the field hands of our plans and urging them to prepare themselves for exodus, I made excursions into the countryside. What I was in fact doing, was attempting to contact Andrew Walker, with whom I had had business dealings in the recent past, unbeknownst to these here men, in an attempt to inform the Walkers of their impending danger.” He pointed to one of the men leaned up on a board, his nose missing, his eyes vacant. The blood on him was dark and crusted, pink at the edges where it had run down his white shirt in the rain. “May I introduce you to John Dean? Late of Lawrence, late of Springdale, Iowa, a member of Lane’s Loyal Leagers. Founder of the Destroying Angels.” William pointed to the men one at a time, one after the other, “This is Seth Latham, late of Lawrence. Charles Ball, Chalkie Lipswigger, and Albert Southwick, late of Pardee. And this man...” he stood pointing, “this man...I have no idea who this man is.”

Several of the boys approached the dead men on display, to have a look. One of them cautiously reached out his hand and made as if he would touch the body. William leaned in behind him and said, “Boo,” and the little boy jumped back. The townspeople murmured a laugh. “You’re not supposed to touch a dead body, son. Do you know why that is?”

“No sir.”

“If you touch a dead body, the ghost of the dead man might follow you home.”

William leaned closer, “You might wake up in the middle of the night and see him standing right beside your bed. He might be waiting for you in the closet.”

The boy was uncertain.

“It’s true. You don’t believe me?”

“No I don’t. You’re just making it up.”

“There’s just one way to find out, young sir. Go ahead and touch him. See what happens.” The boy hesitated. “Well?”

“I’m still deciding.”

William laughed and clapped his hands. “That’s good. It is always best to be cautious, son. Tell you what...” William looked around and found a thin branch about three feet long, “Here. Take this. You can poke him all you want, just don’t touch him with your hands. Do you hear?” Several of the boys picked up sticks to have a poke. One of the boys started throwing rocks.

“No rock throwing, now. Someone’s liable to get hurt.”

The photographer shooed the boys away. He was a tall fellow with a short stovepipe hat and ribbon tie. He was still wearing his black coat and vest, though the day had grown hot and exceedingly humid. He was a sophisticate from South Carolina.

“Pardon me, gentlemen,” he said as he approached, tipping his hat, “after I have photographed the dead men, I would be honored if you were to pose with them so I may take your portrait.”

“The Sheriff and me together, or do you want us separate?”



“Together,” he said, “and I would like to have Morgan Walker standing with you.”

“Absolutely not,” came a voice from the porch.

“Andrew Walker, then?”

“Absolutely not,” came the voice again.

Andrew sauntered up to the circle, “Why yes, I would be delighted. Where do you want me to stand?”

“Next to the dead Jayhawkers.” The photographer made a motion and the Sheriff stood between the two. Horace Creeley looked around and noticed William wore a pistol on his hip and one on his shoulder strap, while Andrew fairly bristled with a pistol on each hip, two on his shoulder strap, a concealable under his left arm, and a knife handle sticking out of his right boot. The Sheriff was looking from man to man and William said to the photographer, “Hold on just one minute, if you please.”

William walked through the gathering of menfolk, talking politely, and brought back a pair of short-barreled shotguns. William held out the two shotguns and said, “Here Sheriff, hold these,” and handed them to him and then smiled at the photographer, “I think we are ready now.”

“Hold very still.”

“These men are starting to decay,” Andrew said, trying not to move his lips.

“It smells like,” William said, trying to keep still, “they were rolling in buffalo dung before they were ever shot.”

The photographer slid the photo-plate into the camera box and removed the cover, “Are we finished talking now?” The men were rigid. “Take a deep breath and hold it.” The photographer removed the cap from the aperture and watched the second hand of his watch. “Steady. Steady. Hold still.” He placed the cap over the aperture and said, “Done!” Thank you, gentlemen.” He bowed. The townspeople gave him a light pattering of applause.

“Who would like to have a keepsake memorial photograph of themselves taken with the Kansas marauders?” Several of the townsfolk eagerly responded, talking excitedly, they lined up with script in hand.

A wrangling bunch of boys flew by screaming at the top of their voices, flailing at each other with their sticks. “Hold on, hold on!” William said as he grabbed up two of the boys. He set them down and took their sticks away, the boys protesting loudly. William pointed the sticks at the other boys. “Hold I say! Drop your swords! Do as I say, you scurvy dogs!” They desisted, but they did not drop their sticks. “Pirates, is it?”

“Arg, matey!” one of them cried out, and the others yelled, “Arg!”

“Well, simmer it down a little, someone is liable to get hurt.”

“We’re just having fun,” the oldest boy said.

“It always begins as great fun, but it always ends in tears. Just like life.”

He handed the sticks back to the two boys who were jumping around in spasms,

“Why don’t you boys play something harmless like marbles or mumble-peg or something?”

“That’s for kissy boys!” they screamed as they ran off to catch the others, brandishing their imaginary weapons.

A well-dressed woman walked up to him, “You are very good with children,” she said. William noticed she wore a bustle and thought to himself, what good is a contraption like that? It isn’t flattering, and a man would have to get her naked before he’d know what she really looks like. He tried his best to avert his gaze. She had long, wavy black hair, pale skin and dark eyes. She wore a satiny-black and maroon striped dress, gathered at the waist, her cuffs and bodice panels trimmed in black satin fringe. She wore a tiny felt hat, maroon, with black glass beadwork and black feathers. As he squared himself to get a better look at her, she began spinning her parasol on her shoulder. She swayed a little. She smiled for him.

William touched the brim of his hat and nodded politely, “I’m pleased to make your acquaintance, miss...”

“Eleanor. But you may call me Ellie.”

“Miss Ellie.”

She tilted her head and presented her gloved hand. William thought to himself, Charming. Old fashioned, but charming. He bent to kiss her hand.

“William Quantrill.” It was Annie. William straightened himself. “Who is this lovely creature I find you fraternizing with?” She turned to her well-dressed guest and smiled pleasantly, “Most of us around here consider it is fairly indecent for a woman to speak to a man she does not know and to whom she has not been properly introduced.”

“Fraternizing? That does sound indecent.” William tipped his hat, “I’m going to let the two of you get acquainted, pardon me.” He walked away. William sidled up to the photographer, busy at his craft. “Pardon my intrusion. May I ask? When will you have developed these photographs?”

“By day after tomorrow, I expect.”

“May I suggest, for the sake of discretion, it will take a week or longer.”

The photographer paused, nonplussed, until he could decide William’s meaning. “Well…” he said, “due to my workload, I might be away from my laboratory. And if I discover I am out of the proper chemicals, I will have to order more and wait to have them shipped.”

“That would be splendid, and I will make it worth your while.”

“I do not require recompense, sir,” he leaned in and said in a quieter tone, “I am a patriot. I will not release said photographs until you have come to collect your copy.” He handed him a business card.

William looked the card over, “I may call on you at this address?”

“You may.”

William handed back the card. “I will remember. If I am apprehended, you do not want the enemy to find this card in my possession. I am much obliged to you, sir. I will call on you as soon as I am able.”

They shook hands and exchanged appreciative looks. “I am pleased to make your acquaintance,” said the sophisticate.

“Very pleased. Until next we meet.”

“Soon I hope.”

“Soon. I promise.”

Annie came to him, genteel-like.

“So the two of you are best friends now, I take it.”

Annie smiled a pleasant smile and said, “Friends? Not hardly. Do you have any idea who you were consorting with?”

“Consorting? I was doing no such thing.”

“Flirting, then.”

“I was not flirting. I was being sociable. I was just trying to engage her in polite conversation.”

“Well, you’d better not engage her in anything, mister, she’s already engaged. She’s to be married come early spring. Her fiancé is a Yankee from St. Louis, a lieutenant out of the academy. How do you know she’s not a spy? One thing I know for certain, if she were respectable she would remove her glove so that the menfolk around hereabouts would know she’s spoken for. She should not be gallivanting about the countryside unchaperoned and unescorted. That’s how rumors are started.” Annie turned to walk away, and looking over her shoulder she said, “Oh, and Mister Quantrill?” she pulled the bunting of her dress tight so William could see the full, round shape of her, “Do you think I should wear a bustle? I noticed how much you seem to like them.” She walked away, swishing her skirts.

A businessman approached William with some trepidation. Short and stocky, he was overdressed for the weather, still wearing his coat and oilskin slicker, sweating

prodigiously, fanning his face with his hat, his hair plastered to his forehead, “I have a business proposition for you,” he said, “if you are inclined to hear it.”

“I am so inclined.”

The businessman handed him a card. “Have you decided what you will do with the bodies of these Kansas men? I’m sure you are aware it will be expensive to bury them.”

“I am giving it some thought. None of them had a bounty, I am told. Several claimed to have been wanted criminals. One of the...dispatched...claimed to be worth five thousand dollars this side of the border. When I gave the Sheriff’s clerk the name, the Sheriff said, ‘Who? Never heard of him.’”

“It is a considerable sum to have them buried in a respectable, Christian manner...”

“Well,” William interrupted, “These men were not Christians and they were in no way respectable. I am fairly certain they are burning in hell as we speak.” William looked at the card the man had given him, “You’re a doctor? Doctor Rosenbaum. These men are already dead. Why do we need a doctor?”

“I am not he, I am here to represent his interests.”

“Now you sound like a lawyer,” William laughed, “at first, I thought you were an undertaker.”

“I am. An undertaker.”

“I don’t think we need an undertaker. We can just dig a ditch out there beyond the trees, cover them over. They will never be found, and it will cost nothing.”

“If I may be allowed to explain...” the man nonchalantly turned to look behind him, then turned back to William, “the very distinguished gentleman standing behind me, if you look over my left shoulder, is Doctor Rosenbaum.”

William looked over the man’s shoulder to see an elegantly dressed elder gentleman in a taupe-colored suit with matching vest and spats. He wore kid gloves and carried a silver-handled cane. He had white hair and a long white mustache curled at each end. The gentleman looked over and nodded, touching the brim of his hat in acknowledgement. The doctor turned and drifted away through the milling of townsfolk.

“He directs a very exclusive practicum for surgeons. He is in need of fresh specimens for his classes at the university and he is willing to pay cash on the barrelhead...”

“Silver? Not script?”

“Gold if you like.”

“Can you pay the equivalent in lead?”

“Lead? If that’s what you want.”

“I like lead better than gold. Put your last dollar on salt beef, beans, and lead, I say. It will prosper you. At the very least, it will keep you alive.”

“I think I see your point.”

“So. The good doctor is in need of bodies...”

“Specimens.”

“Beg a pardon. Specimens. Which the doctor needs to teach his classes. Tell me please, what is the good doctor willing to pay?”

“I am authorized to offer five dollars per specimen.”

“Let’s say six dollars then,” William said and extended his hand, “they are exceedingly fresh. Does that sound fair?”

The business man paused, working out the sums and percentages in his head, “That is...That is within reason...” he turned his face to William and grasped his hand, “yes. That’s fair. Agreed.” The man dabbed his forehead with a kerchief, and smiled his undertaker smile.

“Tell the good doctor I’ll take payment in lead. And powder. And two jars of canned peaches.”

“Splendid. I’ll tell him.”

Three riders came up the lane toward the house. Andrew came over to where William was talking with the undertaker. Andrew leaned in and spoke in low tones. William gave back the business card and tipped his hat.

William told Andrew, “Casual-like, circle around and flank these men while I have a talk with them.”

Andrew walked off. William stood and waited. The men rode up, dismounted. They walked over to where the bodies were on display. The young man in front was talkative and animated. Well-dressed in brown leathers, he wore a bright blue calico shirt with little yellow flowers and ‘bird and heart’ designs embroidered in yellow thread. His Remington .44’s had ivory handles. He had long brown hair and brown eyes and a thin mustache, nicely trimmed. The young man to his left resembled him both in dress and feature, except he wore a brown calico shirt with little white flowers. The young man to



his right was tall and lean and tawny, and had short-cropped black hair. He had the fierce eyes and hungry look of a predator. William noticed at a casual glance that the wooden handle of his gun had twelve or fourteen notches. William stepped in the clear to look them over. He liked their arrogance.

The young buck in the blue shirt marveled at all the dead men. He took long, deliberate strides. His silver spurs clicked and jangled with every step. He extended his hands in mock amazement. “We missed all the killing,” he said to his companions and then looked around at the people. He turned. William stood in the yard with his thumbs hitched in his belt.

“You killed all these men?”

“Not hardly. The one I shot was already as good as dead, I just ended his suffering.”

“So, you didn’t kill these men?”

“That’s a matter of perspective.”

“Perspective? It’s a yes or no question. Simple as that. Yes or no.” The young man squared himself. He flexed his gun hand.

William smiled. “Don’t get your hackles up, young man. You don’t have to smart off or work yourself into a tizzy. If you want to draw on me, just say so. Simple as that. Yes or no.”

.The young man stood firm.

“Do you want to go one at a time or all three together?”

“You seem cock-sure of yourself.”

“You seem to be taking your sweet time.”

“What?”

“We could have already pulled our pistols, and all three of you could be lying dead in the dirt, and I could already be sitting on the porch swing having a smoke. Instead, we’re just standing here wasting time.”

“That’s mighty arrogant, mister.”

“No. Arrogant is when you can’t back it up. The word is confident. I am mighty confident.”

The young buck started to open his mouth and William pulled two pistols faster than the young man could follow. “See? You talk too much.” The young men were stunned. “Let’s try this again,” William said and put his pistols away. The young men started to make a move and to their right flank came a click and it was Andrew walking straight through the crowd looking down the barrel of a scatter gun, he rested the barrel on the shoulder of the tall man with black hair, and William pulled two pistols again, holding them dead-to-rights.

“Bang. Bang. Bang,” he said, slowly and deliberately, “you’re all dead.”

Slowly, the young buck with the blue shirt raised his hands, and with thumb and forefinger pulled a white kerchief from his inside vest pocket and waved it in the air, “We surrender,” he said. The men burst out laughing except for Andrew who was flushed and angry.

“You were joking?!” Andrew fumed, “I could have killed somebody.”

“Calm down. I apologize, Andrew, I didn’t know who they were at first, having never met them. I know them by reputation, and I have their description. This is John Jarrett, his brother James, and the tall one would be George Todd.”

“You play a mighty dangerous game.”

William put his pistols away and said to Andrew, “If I were to hold my life as something dear, I would have lost it long ago. But since I hold it not with the slightest regard, I cannot give it away.”

## AN END TO CHIVALRY Chapter 2

Late night under starry skies, along the road that curves through the thick of trees as it crosses the border from Missouri into Kansas. William walked Captain Perkins over to a spot by the road where he left the dead men lay.

William peeled back the tarp as Captain Perkins held a lantern over the bodies. Both men had small caliber holes in the center of their foreheads. Their blank faces shone like blue-edged marble in the moonlight.

“Any idea who did this?” the Captain asked.

“Ruffians, maybe,” William replied, “or slave-traders. It’s hard to say. When I got to the campsite these two were dead and the rest were missing. I did a wide-around for about a mile and a half and didn’t find a thing.”

The Captain leaned closer. He pressed the tip of his finger into the hole in the dead man’s forehead. It didn’t push through. He wiped the crust of black blood on the dead man’s vest. “Thirty-six caliber Navy Colt, I’d say.” He checked their pockets and found only a few copper coins. Their cash was gone. Their watches had been removed as well as their gunbelts. He noticed, however, they were still wearing their boots. Captain Perkins stood over his men for a long moment. Then he gestured with a wave of his hand, meaning that William should cover them. “We’ll bury them at first light,” he murmured. The Captain walked into the shadow of night’s forest. With his lantern held

at arm's length, he stepped over the trunk of a fallen tree and stood before the red glow of a low fire. He turned the key and dimmed the lamp. He blew out the flame. The air was cool and still. William squatted beside the coals and started to feed twigs and pine needles into the fire. "What puzzles me," the Captain said as he shook out his bedroll, "is how a man gets close enough to catch Jack and Eugene unawares and shoot them both."

"It means there was probably more than one shooter," William said, "or it means they knew their killer and wasn't expecting it."

"Dwight carries a Navy Colt," the Captain mused, "and Dwight is missing. But I've known Dwight nigh on to two years..."

"Dwight kill Jack and Eugene? I doubt it. And would he ransom the slaves? By himself? I don't believe he is that ambitious. Him or the other one... what was his name?"

"John. John something. I forget his last name. What does John wear?"

"If I am not mistaken, he wears an Army Colt .44 caliber. Model 1860. He also keeps a scattergun in his saddleholster. Side-by-side with a carved maple stock, very old, made in Pennsylvania I believe."

"And you wear a Navy Colt."

"I do," William said, "as do nine men in our Company."

"Do you think Dwight is fast enough to face down Jack?"

"Doubtful."

"Are you fast enough to face down Jack?" the Captain asked.

“Me?” William asked, “I believe that I probably am.” He stopped to look at the captain across the light of the fire, “but I would need a damn good reason.”

The Captain nodded, then looked away. The Captain mused to himself. After a long interval he said, “That makes twelve so far.”

“Beg a pardon?” said William.

“Twelve men who have died in just the same way,” said the Captain, “Twelve men we found with bullet holes in the middle of their forehead. It’s somebody from the inside, but I can’t think who or why.”

William said, “What you mean to say is, twelve men from our company. Every other week Fort Scott loses the outermost watchman. Montgomery lost two scouts and a man, Company A lost three men, and a conductor from the underground was found dead and all the niggers gone. All died from a single shot to the forehead, and all from a Navy Colt. The ones we found, anyway. There’s a few that’s still missing.”

“I can’t think who,” the Captain said, “it seems to me the men of our company are, all of them, faithful to a man.”

William began to break small sticks and feed them into the fire. “Any man may swear an oath, but you can’t ever see what’s in a man’s heart.” William propped his leather pack against the fallen log, lifted its flap, and pulled out a tin percolator pot wrapped in cloth. It was dull gray and burned black on the bottom. It had a glass bulb at the top for a handle to see the coffee bubble up as it steeped. He wiped the insides out and assembled the stem. He walked in the dark down to the edge of the stream, listened to the chime of the moving waters among the rooted stones. William dipped the pot into

the stream to let it fill, swirled the water in the pot, felt its measure, and spilled some back into the stream. He wobbled back up the muddy bank in the dark and made his way back to the fire, pulled a brown paper pouch from his pack, unfolded it, and sprinkled the dark grinds into the basket. He put the assembly together and slid it into the blackened pot, arranged the stones at the edge of the fire and piled on more wood, then balanced the percolator between two stones over the glowing flame.

“Would you like some coffee, Captain Perkins?” William asked.

“That would be capital.”

Both men heard a sound in the distance and William put his hand to his pistol, slid it out, and stood listening. The Captain crouched behind the downed trunk of the tree. He reached around slowly and slid his pistol from its holster and leveled it at the road. Both men looked into the darkness. They listened to the rasp of the crickets. Instantly, the crickets stopped. The men cocked their hammers back and waited.

William cat-stepped to the first large tree and hid in its shadow. He crouched down, disappearing into the dark. He slowed his breathing and waited. A horseman approached at a canter and slowed to a halt. The shadow of a man peered into the trees, looked up and back along the road to fix his bearings. He swung his leg over and stepped down, leading his horse behind him. He walked cautiously from the slope of the road to the line of trees, stopping to notice the tarp. He bent like he would raise the edge and have a look, then straightened again and walked to the amber glow among the trees.

“Cap,” the shadow-man whispered, “Cap’n Perkins.”

The Captain waited until the man's face was illumined by camp light. The man walked up, leading his horse behind, his hand resting on the butt of his gun. When he saw the Captain, his face beamed a grin beneath his grizzled beard.

“Dwight,” said the Captain, “where have you been?”

“Don't move,” said William from the shadows. He stepped forward with his gun leveled.

Dwight froze where he stood, turned his palms up and said, “William Quantrill, you son of a she-dog, you wouldn't shoot a man in the back, would you?” Dwight beamed a smile.

William walked up behind and said, “I might if you keep talking bad about my mama.” William reached under and pulled Dwight's pistol, held it up to his nose and sniffed the cylinder. “This ain't been fired anytime recent, Captain.” He smiled up at Dwight and put Dwight's pistol back in its holster. “It's nothing personal,” William said and put his own pistol away, showing the palms of his hands.

“Hold on now,” Dwight said as his smile faded, “what's this all about?”

“Relax, Dwight,” the Captain said, “We just had to make sure of something. Have a seat and we'll have some coffee when it comes ready and I'll fill you in on all the particulars.”

Dwight frowned and nodded like some big dumb bear. He walked his horse over to a low branch next to the other horses and wrapped the lash around. He felt in his saddlebag to find his tin cup, all the time looking over with a puzzled look. William



broke some small branches and laid them crossways over the coals. The flames flared up a bit, then settled. The coffee pot was steaming and began to percolate.

Dwight said, “Just tell me what you’re on about.” William sat back on his heels and rested his back against the fallen tree. The Captain stood with his thumb hitched to his belt and his empty coffee cup held down to his side, tapping his leg. Dwight looked around at the tarp by the road and said, “Who died?” The Captain turned to face him, his expression set. Dwight blinked twice.

The pot gurgled.

“Jack and Eugene. Shot in the head. The horses and niggers gone,” said the Captain.

“Robbery, then?” asked Dwight.

“We don’t know that it was robbery,” said William, “It’s the same mark the killer leaves, a hole in the center of the forehead. But sometimes the money is left, sometimes the horses come back, sometimes not. Sometimes there are slaves like this time but most times not. To my mind, it’s about revenge.” The pot gurgled.

Dwight looked from William to the Captain. The Captain looked over at William and asked, “When will the coffee be ready?”

“In a bit,” William said, rubbing out the insides of his cup, “the assassins, however many, all use the ’51 model Navy Colt.”

“That don’t help us much,” Dwight breathed, “lots of men use that exact same pistol.”

“That’s right, it doesn’t tell us who,” said William, “but knowing what the dead men had in common might tell us who’s gonna be next. If you check the listings of the men assigned to certain raids... you keep records, don’t you Captain?” The pot gurgled and hissed.

“All assignments and general planning are kept in my personal ledger,” the Captain said, shifting his weight, “along with a list of noted participants, confiscated goods, etcetera.”

“Well, there you are,” William said, “if you look in your book and find the engagements in which a goodly number of the murdered men were present, I suggest, we can move to protect the remaining men.”

“Maybe even lay a trap,” said the Captain. He ambled to where his horse was tied under the trees. He unbuttoned the flap on his saddlepack and fished through its contents with a blind hand. Feeling the ribbed spine of his ledger, he lifted it out and carried it with him to the firelight.

He sat close to the fire and flipped pages, tilting the flat of the page to the light so he could see. The percolator hissed and shot steam. “I can hardly read my own writing,” the Captain said, flipping through pages. William crouched down to check the coffee. He took his riding gloves from where he had them folded in his belt and pulled them on. The percolator spit and gurgled and shot out a plume of steam.

“I think that’s black enough,” William said. The Captain propped his ledger open. Still reading, he took his riding glove from his belt, and pulling it snug by the cuff, he worked his fingers into the handle of his cup. William tipped the pot and carefully

poured a thin stream of black coffee into it. A slip of steam rose up, wavering in the air. William stepped over to where Dwight stood, holding the percolator. Dwight extended his cup. "This here's hot," William said, "you're gonna need a glove."

Dwight looked at his cup, then over to where his horse was tied. Dwight looked back at William.

"Here," said William, "use mine." He bit the tips of his leather fingers to pull his glove off and gave it to Dwight. Dwight pulled the glove on, then worked his fingers into the handle. William poured. Dwight watched until the coffee reached the rim.

"Much obliged," Dwight murmured.

"Mmm-hmm," the Captain murmured as he raised the cup to his lips and lightly blew across its surface. He took a sip. He flipped through pages. He stopped to run his finger along the lines and leaned into the light. William placed the percolator at the edge of the coals and removed his other glove.

"Ain't you having any?" asked Dwight.

William looked at Dwight and said, "When I'm ready."

"At Independence..." the Captain read aloud, "...at Independence... advanced guard went before the main column, burned all the houses... Colonel Jennison led the assault... Fletcher was there, he's dead... McDonnell, Quinn, Carter...still with us...John Adams Smith dead, John Turner Smith still with us, the Frenchman dead. Dead. With us..." he flipped the page, "with us. With us. Wish he weren't, but still with us..." the Captain laughed a bit, and reading on, laughed again, "Might kill him myself..." the Captain looked from William to Dwight. The men laughed.

“Who?” Dwight said, “Theodore?”

“Not long for this world,” William said in the same tone as the Captain, and the others laughed. The Captain sipped his coffee and turned pages.

“Let me see here...” said the Captain, “Westport... Osceola...”

“I was at Osceola,” Dwight said.

“I remember. Jim Lane led the assault. We came on them like the wrath of God. Death and Revelations and the end of days.” The Captain paused. “Hmmm.

Cottonwood Creek. Dead. Dead. Dead. Dead. Dead. Most these men are dead.”

“I was at Cottonwood,” Dwight said.

“I know,” said the Captain, “I remember.”

“I was at Cottonwood,” said William.

“You are mistaken,” said the Captain, “you hadn’t enlisted by then.”

“I remember Cottonwood,” William said, “it was seven families in a wagon train come through Kansas on their way to California. You and the men caught up to them down by the river-crossing just before suppertime. The men were invited to dinner and they sat down among the folk. When everyone bowed their heads to pray, they pulled out their pistols and began to murder them all. Every man, every male child. I remember, Captain.” The two men stood in the circle of firelight. William looked from Dwight to the Captain and said, “I was there. My brother was killed there. I was shot twice and left for dead.”

The Captain stood slowly, his coffee cup in his hand. Dwight realized he could not pull his gun with his right, his fingers being stuck in the handle of his cup, and he could not reach around with his left. He stood like the big dumb bear he was.

William did not hurry. He slid his pistol from its holster, cocked the hammer back, took aim and pulled. The pistol bucked in his hand. A black spot instantly appeared in the flat of Dwight's forehead. Dwight's head jerked back and his mouth fell open and the entire heft of him crumpled into the dirt. The Captain stood holding his cup, his jaw was set and his teeth were clenched. William leveled his gun at him.

"Cottonwood was a mistake, William..." the Captain started, indignant.

"The mistake of your life," William said. He clicked the hammer back and dropped it down. The pistol bucked in his hand. The Captain's frame stiffened and he stumbled back. He fell. A thin ribbon of blue smoke rose in the still air.

William sat between the prone corpses. Half-cocking the hammer of his pistol, he turned the cylinder to the empty chamber. Cradling it in the palm of his hand, William swabbed it with the cotton cloth, clicked the cylinder over, swabbed the adjoining chamber, and inserted cartridges made from cigarette paper. He dropped a ball in each and pressed the lever down, then took a pinch of goose grease he kept in a tin box clipped to his belt and sealed the chambers. William felt in his belt pack for two copper percussion caps, placed them in the cap groove, slid them down, one and then the other, and pressed them to the nipple with his thumbnail. William eased the hammer down. Brushing back his overcoat, he slid his pistol into his belt at the small of his back.

William went to where the horses were tied and retrieved Dwight's bed roll and the extra blankets. He positioned the Captain's bedroll a few feet from the fire. He rolled the body of the Captain onto the spread and rolled one of the blankets into a tight bundle and placed it under the Captain's head. He folded the Captain's hands across his chest, interlacing his fingers. He crossed the Captain's feet at the ankles and placed the Captain's hat over his face. He laid out Dwight's bedroll. William tried to roll Dwight on his back. Straining, breathing deeply, he finally turned Dwight over. Dwight's head was back and his eyes were fixed. William positioned the body and locked his forearms under Dwight's armpits and with a groan he heaved him step by step and inch at a time over to where Dwight's bedroll was spread. He pulled the blanket up under Dwight's chin. He pulled Dwight's hat down over his face. William wiped the moisture from his brow with the cuff of his sleeve and took a deep breath.

"Good night, pard," he said.

William reached under and removed Dwight's pistol from its holster. He held it in the dim light, half-cocked the hammer so he could spin the cylinder and inspect the chambers, easing the hammer down, he slid it into his holster.

William followed the trail in the dark that led up to the road. He folded up the tarpaulin that covered the bodies of Jack and Eugene. Kicking Jack's feet apart, he hitched him by the heels and dragged his body just past the line of trees, dropped him in a shallow ravine.

"Sweet dreams," he said.

William dragged Eugene's body to the ravine and dropped him down. Cutting branches, he covered the men over.

"Nighty-night, gentlemen," he said as he walked away.

William returned to the fire and looked around for his coffee cup. Seeing the Captain's ledger lying in the dirt, he picked it up, flipped through the pages, and brushed dust from the cover with the cuff of his sleeve. He decided he should keep it.

William sat by the fire reading the Captain's ledger while he waited. He poured himself a coffee, took a sip. The circle was a red glow. Tossing in the last of the wood, William watched as the fire flared up.

William woke suddenly, the edges of his mouth were moist, the book open on his chest. He heard a noise down the way, along the road. With ease of motion he put the Captain's ledger in his leather satchel. William traipsed up the night-path toward the road, gathering sticks as he walked. He stood by the side of the road holding his bundle under one arm as the horseman rode up.

"Whoa," said the rider, emerging from the shadows.

"John," William said, "I was just about to turn in. The Captain and Dwight are already asleep. It were best you be real quiet coming into camp. The Captain said he was not to be disturbed."

"Understood," John said, "did Jack and Eugene get back yet?"

"Not yet," William said, "we're still waiting on them."

"Is there anything to eat?"

“No. But there’s coffee in the pot,” William told him, “won’t take but a few minutes to heat it up, if you like.”

John dismounted and led his horse to where the other horses were tied. He uncinched his bedroll and walked toward the glow.

William said in a whisper, “Try not to wake the Captain.” John tip-toed around Dwight and the Captain, and laid his bedding alongside the fire. He sat down and worked his boots off.

William said in low tones, “Did you want some coffee, or not?”

“No. None for me, thank you,” John rasped.

“Shhhh,” William whispered, “try and keep it down.” John nodded and looked over at the Captain. He took a small wooden hunter’s pipe from his vest pocket, flipped back the coverlet, bent down to look for a twig. John leaned forward and held it in the circle of fire until it caught a flame, then held the pipe to his lips and waved the flame over the bowl. Lifting his chin, he blew a plume of smoke. He set the pipe down and took a flask from his inside coat pocket, wrung the cork out of the bottle with his teeth, and took a long, slow drink. His Adam’s apple rose and fell and rose again. John sighed and wiped his brow.

“Ellen is it?” asked William.

“She refuses all my advances,” John whispered, “my head feels like it’s going to explode.” He pushed the heel of his hand into his temple and pressed hard. He sighed, “Perhaps I’ll have to marry her.”

William almost felt pity for him, “Who else is due in tonight, do you know?”



“Let me think,” John said and took another swig.

William took a bundle out of his leather pack, untied the leather strand, unrolled his cleaning kit and laid it out. He took the tin bowl and brushed out the insides. “Might I have a touch of that whiskey?” he said in a low tone.

John looked at the dingy bowl. “You going to drink out of that?”

“It’s not for drinking.”

John nodded and poured a short measure of brown whiskey into the bowl.

William pulled Dwight’s pistol from his holster and disassembled it. Tapping out each ball, he worked the bores, spreading the powder on a paper leaf with the tip of his finger.

William asked again, “Who’d you say was due in later tonight?”

“Besides Jack and Eugene?” John thought hard and rubbed his brow, “Just Jack and Eugene I believe. Dom and Fletcher and that nervous kid from Indiana...What’s his name..?”

“Theodore?”

“That’s who,” John took another drink, swallowed hard, “They’re coming in the morning, just about breakfast time.”

William tore a swath of cotton rag, dipped it in the bowl of whiskey, and swabbed each part. William wondered if John had ever suspected him in his duplicity. Busying himself with the cleaning of Dwight’s pistol, William pretended distraction as he rubbed down the outside of the gun and reassembled it.

John, in his fever of unrequited lust, steadily tipped back his bottle until it was empty. Groggy and dull, with heavy lids, John eased back on the fallen log. Still holding the empty bottle, he began to snore.

William watched him drift off and decided it would be less than valorous to kill him while he slept, and it would be rude to wake him. He almost laughed. The next morning John would wake up sick to his stomach and with a splitting headache, the sun would be up and John would find himself surrounded by dead men.

William carefully slid John's pistol from its holster and stepped away.

John continued to snore. William piled more wood on the fire and watched the moon in its downward arc as it dropped through the tangle of trees. The planets hung heavy in the still air. The fire crackled and popped. Red sparks rose, wavering skyward. William watched them blink out one by one among the overhanging stars.

William closed his eyes and listened to the night. Frogs croaked. Insects thrummed, incessant. A hoot owl called, lonesome in the top of a tall pine.

In the faint glow before dawn, the last few stars fading, William opened his eyes. Horses were coming up the road. John was snoring like two lumberjacks working a cross-cut saw. As the men walked into camp, William yawned and stretched his limbs, flexed his fingers. He pulled back his woolen blanket and rose, fully clothed and with his boots on, still wearing his pistols.

Fletcher walked up followed by Dom and Theodore.

"Why ain't you made breakfast?" Fletcher asked, surly and scowling.

William smiled, "I will forgive you your black mood this morning."

"How come that is?" he said, sarcastic.

"It's a great day," William said, still smiling, "a great day to be alive."

"Huh? What're you on about? Why ain't breakfast made?"

William stopped smiling. "Because today is judgment day."

The men went for their pistols. William fanned his hammer and both Fletcher and Dom fell back. Theodore had forgotten to release his hammer guard and was still trying to yank his pistol from its holster. William put his pistol back in its holster, folded both hands over his buckle and waited. He pointed. "Release your hammer guard."

William looked over to see John flailing in his blankets, looking for his weapon.

"Give me a minute, John, I'll be right with you."

Theodore unhitched his hammer guard and stood with his hand above his pistol grip, swooning from fear.

"You ready now?" William asked.

Theodore slowly lowered and raised his chin, his eyes wide.

"Try and make it count, son."

As Theodore touched palm to pistol, William shot him through the forehead. Jerking back, Theodore crumpled to the dust.

William looked over. John stood in his stocking feet.

"John," William said, "I have a small favor to ask of you."

John tried to look calm, but he was starting to shiver.

“First of all, I want you to put your boots in the fire.” John did as he was told.

“Captain Perkins is dead. Dwight’s dead. Jack and Eugene are over there, dead in the bushes. I am taking your horse. I’m taking all the horses. I want you to walk back to Lawrence and I want you to tell Jim Lane I am coming to kill him. Tell him to expect me, I am coming.”

### **AN END TO CHIVALRY Chapter 3**

The sky blazed hot and blue with towering white cumulus. Birds soared and swung above the trees, trilled the sweet high song of early summer. A drowsily plodding William on horseback clopped along the dirt road. He stopped, swung his leg over, and stepped to the ground. He nuzzled his horse and walked ahead of her, the reins hanging loose over his shoulder, his horse following. William ambled to the side of the road and slunk down in the tall grass. “Isabella, my love. Wake me if you hear someone coming.” She flung her head and blew as if she understood him. “That’s my darling.”

His chest and pits were moist, and his hair. William removed his hat and duster and unbuttoned the two top buttons of his shirt. Lying on his back, he looked up at the sky and listened to the rustle of leaves, the twitter of birdsong. He felt himself grow light and he began to drift.

There was gunfire off in the distance. First one pop, then several more, followed by the crackle of many guns. William opened his eyes. He sat up. Another pop. He mounted his horse and looked around but could see nothing for the trees. William came to a low rise along the road where he could look out over the treetops. The gunfire had ceased and he could see a black column rising some miles to the north-east.

He continued his horse at a brisk walk down the road. Isabella tossed her head and whinnied. William pulled her to one side and turned to wait, looking along the road

he had just come. Two riders were coming hell-bent and roaring. They pulled up hard when they saw him, skidding their horses and kicking up a cloud of dust.

“Stand and deliver!” the burly man in front commanded, dust rising around him.

“Stand and deliver what?” William asked in an affable manner.

“Who are you and what is your affiliation?!”

“My name is Charlie Hart,” William said, “And to whom do I have the pleasure of speaking?” William smiled politely.

“Are you Union or Seccesh?” the burly man said, frothing with anger.

“With all respect, sir... I don’t think that’s any of your business.”

With a growl the burly man reached for his pistol. Just as it cleared leather, William shot him. The man clinched, convulsing, and shot his own horse in the neck. The teetering quiver of flesh collapsed and horse and rider slapped the hard ground together. The dust went up. William fanned the air in front of his face, “Pity that.” He looked at the remaining rider. “Now, young sir. You are not from these parts. You are trespassing, in violation of the laws of the sovereign state of Missouri.” The rider was skittish and undecided. William leveled his Navy Colt at him. “I will spare your life if you do exactly as I say. Understand me?” The young man nodded assent, in a sweat of fear. William cocked the hammer back. “Put your hands in the air.” The young man put his hands up. William nudged his horse closer. “Hold steady,” he said and fired his pistol. The young man screamed shrilly and grasped his hand, his hand flowing bright red. “You flinched,” William said, “I was trying to shoot off your trigger finger.” The young man cried and cursed between clinched teeth and cupped his red hand and rocked

back and forth, crying. William sidled him close and said, "I'm taking your weapon. Don't make a move." William removed his pistol. "Dismount. I'm taking your horse."

The young man looked up through his agony, still holding his hand. "Damn you! Damn you! God damn you!" he said, listing and spitting in his anger and pain.

The youth's vehemence made William calm. "One day you'll bless me. Now. Step down." The young man held the horn of his saddle with his left and slid to the ground. He stood pitifully in the road, rumped and streaming red. "You'll live," William said, "turn around and start down the road you came." The youth started to turn and hesitated.

"How do I know you won't shoot me in the back?" he asked.

"I told you I would let you live. I gave you my word. Besides, if I wanted to kill you, you'd already be dead."

William waited until the youth was half way down the road. Watching him in the distance, perched on his horse, William fished the stub of a cigar from his vest pocket. He flicked a wooden match on the horn of his saddle. It sputtered. William lit the blackened end of his stub and spit, blew smoke. The acrid end stung his tongue and lips. He spit.

Sitting motionless, he listened. He blew smoke. How does a man know everything he needs to know just to live from day to day? he thought. Perhaps he had made a mistake. Should he have questioned the youth about the marauders roving to the northeast? Does the boy know them, does he report to them? William considered he should have killed the boy and left him dead in the road. He blew a plume of smoke and

listened to the simmer of leaves in the gentle wind. No. That would not be decent, he thought. Better to be merciful. The merciful will obtain mercy, he had heard it said.

William stepped from his horse to retrieve the dropped pistol. He looked over at the dead man's face. There was a small black hole in his forehead, and running down, a thin stream of red edged in garnet. His wide staring eyes, blind to the light, were covered with a film of dust. William watched as a blowfly landed on the dead man's cheek and walked into his open mouth. William took the dead man's silver watch and fished through his pockets. All the while, he talked softly to the young man's horse, a chestnut mare with white patches. He approached her, held out his hand, brushed her neck, soothed her with soft talk. He took the reins and walked her over. He stepped into his saddle and turned his Isabella in the direction of Morgan's farm, leading the chestnut behind.

William turned down the long dirt road that curved through the hills tangled with basswood and smoketree and cypress. As he passed the white-washed fence that led to the farm, Morgan's youngest boy stepped from behind the trunk of an old-growth oak. The tussle of his toe-blond hair fell over his ears and over the collar of his white muslin shirt, rolled up at the sleeves. He wore suspenders that buttoned to the front of his dark brown trousers, the legs of which were stuffed into the tops of old mule-skinner boots that looked to be at least three sizes too big for him. The boy planted one of his great big boots on a stump and propped the butt of a Sharpe's carbine against his thigh.



“Afternoon,” he said, then recognized the rider. “William! Where have you been?

You’re a long time overdue!”

“It’s only been a few weeks,” he said, “how’s everybody?”

“Fine and dandy.”

William nodded his head. “Good,” he said, “that’s good. Glad to hear it.”

“Except Annie is upset and Father keeps telling her not to worry so, because if you were dead he’d know it in his bones. Some such like that.”

William nodded again. “Guess I have some explaining to do.”

“Except you didn’t hear nothing from me.”

“You are a fine picket and an even better scout. I’m obliged to you, young sir.”

William saluted and started to wheel his horse and stopped, “Oh wait, I nearly forgot! I’ve brought you something.” He reached behind him, feeling inside his saddlebag, “Do you own a watch?”

“No sir.”

“Perhaps you’d like this one,” he said. William dangled the watch by the chain and fob, he held it out to him. “Solid silver. Seventeen-jeweled Swiss. If you pop open the back you can see the little gem stones.” The boy held it with awe. He pressed the stem and opened the cover to look at the dial. “It should keep pretty good time. I figured you needed one. How else will you know when your picket is over?”

“Thank you William,” he said, genuinely pleased.

“You’re very welcome.”

William started down the road leading the chestnut behind him. He turned and said over his shoulder, "Will I see you at supper?"

"I just started my watch."

"We'll talk later, then." He touched the brim of his hat and continued on to the house. As he approached the front porch, Annie came running in her bare feet. She looked up at him with her big blue eyes, brimming with tears.

"Oh William!" she said, "you've been gone so long! I've missed you so! I've been praying for you and worrying for you all this time!" William swung his leg over, stepped down, stepped his boot from the stirrup. Annie threw her arms around his neck and said in a breathless whisper, "I love you William. I think I am in love with you."

William placed his palms lightly on her hips as she kissed his neck and ear.

"Little darling," he said, "I think your father's coming."

She stepped back and brushed the tears from her cheeks and checked her breathing. Her hands folded, she said curtly, "So, mister Quantrill, do you think you will be staying for dinner?" Morgan walked up to them, and when he was within earshot she said, "Tell papa if you plan to stay and I'll be sure and set a place for you." She turned and went inside the house.

Morgan looked at William. He patted his shoulder and said, "Good to see you, William. What news?"

"Captain Perkins is dead."

"Good news. He needed killing."

“And I brought you a gift. Several gifts, in fact.” William went to his saddle bag and pulled out a leather book and a wrapped bundle. “Here’s the Captain’s journal. Informative reading. Lets you know who of your neighbors is working for the Union. And here is a prize,” he handed him the wrap, “a new model Colt. 1860 Army. It’s been fired maybe sixty times in practice and in war.” Morgan turned the book in his hands, thumbed the pages, folded it under his arm. He unwrapped the bundle. The brass and blued steel dazzled in the late afternoon sun. Morgan turned it over and brushed the tips of his fingers over its oiled surface, touched the smooth lacquered wood. He felt the weight of it in his palm, released the cylinder, thumbed it and let it spin, looked into the open bores, oily smooth.

“A thing of beauty,” he said.

“May I stow the horses in your barn, Mister Morgan?”

“Of course you may,” he said, still looking at the pistol.

“I should tell you, I killed a jayhawker on the road about twelve and a half miles south of here. Killed one, wounded one. They tried to rob me. There’s a large band of marauders operating to the east of here. They’re coming, it’s only a matter of time. General Price is moving against the Union at Carthage. I’m thinking to join him. I can’t stay long and I don’t want to bring you any trouble. I need a bath and a night’s sleep and some supplies is all.”

“Don’t worry about the particulars. We can smoke and talk awhile.”

“Suits me, sir. Thank you.”

“Take your boots off and rest a spell. I’ll have someone fill you a bath.”

“And have we decided that matter over Andrew? Is he coming or staying?”

“We’ll talk over dinner.”

Reba, the house slave, brought the spare lamps into the dining room and polished the hurricane glass shiny-bright. A cheerful light filled the room. She set lamps the length of the table, then placed a lamp at the center of each sideboard. Dishes of delicate white porcelain were brought in from the kitchen. When Reba lifted the lids, puffs of steam curled in the air, some sweet and some spiced, filling the room with a heady aroma.

She set to the center a platter of roasted game hen and a serving-bowl of heaped dumplings with strips of wild duck, and to one side, a boat of creamed duck and cherry gravy. All present hummed and cooed their delight. Morgan took his place at the head of the table and William stood by him to his left. The chair to Morgan’s right was place-set but empty to honor his departed wife, gone these many years and dearly missed.

Andrew arrived all swagger and ceremony with apologies for being late. He handed his riding cloak to Amos Moses, a servant standing by, and removed his gloves and hat. Andrew stood by his place at the far end of the table opposite his father. Amos Moses took Andrew’s gloves and hat and waited for him to remove his gunbelt. Andrew removed the pepperbox he kept tucked behind him, extending the butt first. He bent to untie the leather thong, unbuckled the belt, and held it out to Amos without looking at him. Andrew’s brothers and sisters waited for him. Ephraim stood at his place next to Esau across from Annie and little Adeline. “Be seated everyone,” Morgan said, “I’ll say

the blessing.” Everyone sat down. They bowed their heads and clasped their hands, the tips of their fingers touching lip and chin. Morgan closed his eyes and cleared his throat, “Thank you, Jesus. For our many blessings we are deeply grateful. Amen.”

They all said, “Amen,” and began the cheerful murmur of conversation.

“Father doesn’t believe in long-winded prayers,” said Andrew.

“I believe,” Morgan said as he speared a game hen with a long serving fork, “it is a sin to make hungry people wait. The mealtime prayer should be short, to the point, and over with while the food is still hot.”

“Amen and amen,” William said and looked around at his choice of steaming dishes.

Annie stood to speak and blushed to see she was still wearing her apron. She untied it, wiped her hands with it, dropped it beneath her chair. She looked at William with a sideways smile and began to show him the dishes she had prepared. “I’ve made you Oxtail soup with collard and corn and okra. I heard it was your favorite. I’ve made you sweet potatoes with maple buttersauce and a pinch of nutmeg, and for dessert, I’ve made you rhubarb and brambleberry pie with pecans and sorghum.” He looked at her as she explained all the things she had made.

“You made all this yourself?” William asked.

“Reba helped me in the kitchen, but I cooked it all myself. They were my mother’s recipes.” William felt honored at all the attention given him. He was impressed. William thought of his life and the pain and ache of having nothing. No

family and nothing to offer a woman. No prospects. Only the war and endlessly the war. He was already weary of it.

He smiled for her. Annie took his plate and piled it high with roast hen and dumplings, more than he could eat. She poured him gravy and neatly placed his potato to one side and cut it for him as if he were a child. She ladled the maple sauce into the cut. William could smell a hint of rose water as she stood next to him. He could smell the clean sweat of kitchen steam, the scent of her skin. The rest of the clan passed the bowls around the table with a clatter of dishes and conversation.

Reba came out of the kitchen to start clearing the dishes. Morgan dismissed the children and Reba shooed them out the back door. Andrew pushed his chair from the table and leaned back, waving his fork in the air as he talked. William took bites as he listened, leaning over his plate, his brambleberry pie oozing a lordly purple. The men chewed and nodded and talked between bites. Morgan pushed his plate away, leaving nothing but the piled bones and potato skins. As Reba went to the kitchen carrying a stack of dishes, Morgan called for a bottle of late autumn wine he had been saving. “My last bottle,” he said. Small round glasses were set before him and the bottle uncorked. He carefully poured. The wine was sweet and heavy, a honey-amber edged in pink that shimmered like a gem in the lamplight. The men raised their glasses in unison. William touched the rim to his lips and tasted it on his tongue. “Perfect with pie,” Morgan said. The men hummed in agreement.

“Annie is trying her best to make you notice her,” said Morgan with a gleam and a smile.

William hummed his acknowledgment, “Here you have me in a quandary,” he said, setting his glass down, “if I say I haven’t noticed I am either a liar or I am less than a man, and if I say I have noticed, I risk offending you.”

“She’s mighty sweet on you, I’m sure you’ve noticed. Everybody else has,” Andrew said and murmured a laugh, “I feel sorry for you, once Annie has set her mind on something she is powerful hard to dissuade.”

William twisted his neck in his collar and tugged at the top button. He cleared his throat and parted his lips to speak. No words came. He unbuttoned his top collar button, his Adam’s apple rose and fell, “Well gentlemen, at this juncture of our friendship it would be impolite for me to stand on diplomacy...” he ventured a smile and shifted in his seat, “I want to assure you... about my intentions... well first, just let me say...”

Annie came into the room to douse the sideboard lamps and she stopped and looked around at the men sitting there, poised and suddenly silent. “Am I interrupting something? Shall I leave the room so you all can talk about me some more?”

“Nothing of the kind,” Morgan said, “we were talking about the war. Andrew thinks he’s old enough to go. I think he should sit out one more season. William was just about to speak his mind, I believe.” Morgan looked over at William.

“Yes,” William said and cleared his throat, “that’s right.” He paused, looked across the table at Andrew. William held his gaze, unblinking. “I’ve been giving it a great deal of thought. What I’m about to ask you isn’t easy. I know it’s not what you

want to hear.” Annie sat down at the table. William’s lips pressed thin and tight, he weighed his words as he said them, “What the Walker family needs, what I need, and what the war requires, Andrew, is that you stay here and guard the homestead.”

“But I want to go with you to Carthage. I want to enlist with Price,” Andrew started in.

“No.”

“I can fight. I am good with a gun.”

“Even so. You are needed at home.”

“But the war will be over, everyone says the war will be over before...”

“No. Listen to me. The war will not be over. I don’t care what anyone tells you, it will not be over anytime soon. Now listen. Even if we beat the Federals they will come again. We are still at war with Kansas. My word on it, the war will not be over.”

Andrew looked at his father, “So the two of you have decided?”

“We had not the chance to discuss it, son, but William speaks my mind and I agree.”

“Andrew,” William said, “you will have your call to action soon enough.”

“And too soon,” said Morgan.

“Do you remember that band of Jayhawkers we made disappear a short while back? There is another and larger band roving to the southeast of here. They are coming. They are murdering boys and old men and burning homesteads. They are doing much worse to the women.”

Morgan looked over at Annie, “I’m sorry, my dear, that you should hear this.”



William looked at her. Her eyes were wide, unblinking. Her small white hands covered her mouth. “She needs to hear. They are coming, without a doubt. You all need to know there is much worse coming. The Federals have a diabolical plan. While our boys are in the field fighting the chivalrous fight and thinking this to be a war of honor and nerve, the Federals are sending another army to attack the home front. When I was at Fort Scott I learned they have opened up the prisons and the asylums in New York and Chicago and paroled the criminals, the murderers, and the sodomites. The Federals have put them in uniform and armed them and sent them along the back roads behind our lines. They are called Redlegs. You will know them when you see them because they wear red stockings and red sashes. They are vermin. They mean to exterminate innocent civilians. They are lawless men, they are Godless and cruel. They have no code of honor.”

“Men without honor are worthy of death, even damnation,” Morgan said.

“Look for them. They are coming,” said William. Andrew groped for words in the uneasy silence that followed. William said, “It has occurred to me we should build fortifications and blinds as we would at the battlefield. We know the war is coming here. What you need to do, Andrew, is dig a trench just beyond the far line of trees and dig it deep enough and wide enough to hide ten or a dozen horses and lace it over with limbs for cover and plant vines all around. I think that is your reasonable service, do you agree?” Andrew nodded. “You also need to dig two separate caches for arms and ammunition and two separate caches for canned food and dry goods. The reason you need two caches for each, is just in case one cache is found or you are tortured to reveal the whereabouts of your stores, you will not give them everything and you will have kept

some in reserve. The lives of your loved ones depend on this.” Andrew was stunned into silence. “War is not glamorous and there is no glory in it.” William patted Andrew hard on his back and squeezed his shoulder. “You must dismiss your boyhood notions. It is a nasty, gruesome business. It is butchery. You become the butcher or you are butchered. Nothing I can tell you... there is nothing I can say that will...” he paused, not finding the right words. He cocked his head and looked Andrew eye to eye, “it is a hard business, very hard. I hate it. I hate the sight of blood. I tell you the truth, if it were not for this damnable war, I would be a school teacher.” William managed a thin, hard smile.

Morgan cleared his throat and said in solemn tones, “It’s not all flags and banners, son. If you go off to war you will not be the same person when you come back. It will change you.”

“You always tell me to be a man. A man knows when it’s his duty.”

“Son, listen here. If you go off to war you might not come back. You might get killed.” Morgan’s eyes welled with sudden tears. “You are my oldest and all I have is yours.” He dabbed his eyes with the heel of his hand, “I only have a few good years left. If you are gone who will run the farm? Who will look after your brothers and sisters?”

William drew a cotton kerchief from his breast pocket and held it out to Morgan.

Morgan took it and dried his eyes, started to fold it, then brushed back fresh tears. He squared his shoulders and lifted his chin. “Your first duty is to your family. You should know that in your heart if you are a man. You should know it without me telling you.”

Morgan held out the cotton kerchief to William. William said, “Keep it. You might still need it.”

“No,” Morgan said, “I’m done crying.”

The men sat at the table. Annie quietly came around and picked up the few dishes that were left and went into the kitchen. William shifted in his seat. They waited for Andrew to make up his mind. The tick-tock of the clock clicked off the seconds in slow increments, and after some length and lull Andrew stood, pushed back his chair.

Andrew walked to the archway and turned. Amos Moses, the manservant, was suddenly present with Andrew’s things. Andrew took his gunbelt, buckled it around his waist and bent to tie the leather thong. He waived off his pepperbox. Andrew took his hat and absently turned it by the brim, fixed the contours with the edge of his hand, tweaked the feather, and adjusted the brim before he fit it to his brow. Standing in the arch of the entryway for a long moment, Andrew looked over at William, a serious look on his face. “School teacher?” he asked, feigning incredulity. He clicked his tongue and shook his head as he left the room.

Annie carried a pillow as she walked beside William. “It will be more comfortable for you if you sleep in the parlor,” she said, “I can make a bed for you. It’s much warmer inside.” William carried sheets and blankets and a brass candlestick balanced on a copy of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. The air was crisp and cool and the old trees swayed gently. There was a thin mist and a high veil of clouds in the night sky and almost no stars.

“The barn is fine. It’s warm enough. It’s dry.”

“There’s a halo around the moon,” she said looking up, “it’s going to rain.”

“I’m used to sleeping out-of-doors. The barn is a palace compared to some of the places I have slept,” he smiled at her, “besides, Isabella will be lonely without me.”

“Suit yourself,” she said as if she didn’t care. William turned to Annie at the barn door to take the pillow from her. She shoved it roughly into his arms and he nearly dropped the candlestick. There was a genuine flash of anger in her eyes and she punched the pillow hard with her little white fist. She glared at him.

“Little darling,” he said with mild astonishment, “what on earth have I done to deserve your wrath?” He didn’t know whether to laugh or be serious.

“You know!” she exclaimed, “You know very well! I poured out my heart to you this afternoon and I didn’t mean to say it, I was thinking it and I didn’t mean to say it out loud but it just came out and I have been so worried and embarrassed all day about what you might think of me. I do love you, but I didn’t mean to say it! And all evening I’ve been waiting for you to say something, to give me some kind of...” she started to cry, which made her furious.

“Little darling...”

“I was so happy to see you and I didn’t know if I should tell you and it occurred to me it didn’t matter what I felt about you if you didn’t feel the same way about me, and now you have me at a complete disadvantage!”

“No. You have me at a complete disadvantage. You wonder what I might think of you? You know your heart. You say what you feel. I find that admirable.” She waited. “You’re a marvelous cook.” She crossed her arms and waited. “You want the God’s-honest truth?” She softened. Self-consciously, she nodded. “I find you very

beautiful. You walk into the room and I forget my business. I forget what I am talking about. It should be obvious to you how I feel. I shouldn't have to say it."

"Perhaps I need to hear."

"You know, don't you, without my saying?"

"I need to hear it."

"And if I am not ready to say it?"

"When do you think you'll be ready?" she said and she held him steady and even with her big blue eyes, "how long do you intend to make me wait?"

William smiled in spite of the serious nature of the conversation. She was like a force of nature. "If I ever speak the word," he said, "it will happen of itself. I can't plan it. I can't force it. If I did, it wouldn't be honest. Out of the overflowing of the heart a man speaks. That's in the *Bible*. That's exactly what I mean to say. It will happen of itself."

"So you're saying it will happen?"

"I'm saying you'll have to wait."

She stood in the dim and mist of night's quiet shadow. Hurt and want showing in her eyes. William stood helpless clutching his sheets and pillow, his back to the barn door. She stepped into him and laid her head on the pillow he held pressed to his chest. "I hate to wait," she said. They stood together. She looked up at him. She took the book from him and held out the candlestick. Still clutching the bundle, William felt inside his vest pocket for a match. He struck it to his raised heel and held the match to the wick. It flared out. A thin ribbon of white smoke whipped between them. He tried another match

and it flared out. She reached around him and pushed the barn door open. She guided him with her hand and together they stepped into the waiting dark, out of the wind. He struck another match, it flared, and he held the tip of flame to the wick until it caught fire. She smiled up at him in the golden light. "I mustn't stay," she said, and handed him the candle. She stood on tip-toes and kissed him a quick peck on the cheek. She leaned close, laying her head lightly on his shoulder. She was breathing through parted lips and he could feel her warm breath on his neck. As Annie pulled away William leaned in to kiss her and she thrust the end of his book against his sternum and held him off. William stood there with a burning candlestick in one hand and his clutch of bedclothes in the other. She wouldn't let him any closer. Annie said demurely, "You'll have to wait." She put the book on the top of his pile of bedclothes and left him standing, awkward and stung.

## **AN END TO CHIVALRY Chapter 4**

William Quantrill finally caught up to General Price and his men twelve miles southwest of Springfield. They were camped under the trees all along the banks of Wilson's Creek. William rode into camp sporting four Navy pistols in his custom-made belt and he wore a bright red shirt with rows of pockets sewn in front, his sleeves rolled up to his elbows due to the heat and humidity. He wore a gray, wide-brimmed hat with a shiny black oriflamme of ostrich feather sticking from the black satin band. Listening to the steady clip of his horse's hooves, William looked around as he rode along the dirt road, edged in mud, and followed the road as it meandered down by the river through sprawls of lilting green. He listened to the hiss of simmering leaves, the chime of moving waters, the buzz of insects, the murmur of drowsy conversation. There were men sleeping in canvas dog tents, men smoking and fanning cards, men speaking softly to their horses as they brushed them. There was the musk of men and acrid sweat, the smell of refuse and horse manure. There was the occasional wafting of pine, and further on, the sun-sweetened grass, and as he approached the camp kitchen, the smell of beans with garlic and fresh griddled cornpone. William drifted over to ask directions. He dismounted, stretched his legs, and waited for the camp cook to notice him standing there. The cook was a spirited old man with a bald pate and flying white hair by the name of Jacobo. William watched him busy about the kitchen stirring pots and lifting

lids. William waited. The old man sang a chantey of the wild Irish seafaring sort and talked to the air like he was having a friendly disagreement with one of the saints.

Jacobo wiped the bowl of a long-handled spoon on his smeared and spattered apron and skimmed the surface of the bubbling pot. He carefully walked the steaming spoon over to where William was standing, blew lightly over the surface and said in the thick, throaty brogue of the immigrant, “Do me the favor, lad, of having a little taste of this here and telling me what it be needing, will you? I’ve been tasting all day, I think me taster’s broke.”

“Certainly,” William said. He carefully took the spoon and blew the wisp of steam away. He tasted it. “Mmm,” he said, “that’s really good.”

“There be not too much garlic, then?”

“Just right by me.”

“Can you be tasting the onions?”

“I can,” he said and tasted it again, “I think it may need...” and thinking it is always best to be diplomatic when dealing with the Irish, he said, “it is only my personal preference, you understand, and tell me if you think otherwise, but I think it may need a touch of salt. Just a touch, mind you.”

Jacobo took the spoon and touched it to his lips. He took another sip and decided, “Thank you, lad, I think ye may be right.” He went to the pot and measured an amount of salt in his palm and put it in, then repeated the motion. He stirred it in with his long-handled spoon, brushed his palm off on his apron and said to William, “You’re new. Where do ye hail from?”



“Jackson County, Missouri.”

“Near Kansas City? Near Independence?”

“Closer to Blue Springs. Sni Country.”

“Can you ride?” Jacobo asked. William looked over at his horse and back at the Irishman. Jacobo raised an eyebrow, “I am meaning, at a full gallop with the reins in your teeth and a pistol in each hand...?”

“I am the best rider in this camp,” William said in a modest tone and with such sincerity that Jacobo did not think to doubt him.

“Very well, then. Let me offer you a bit of information,” Jacobo pointed up the road and made a gesture with the flat of his hand, “you see this road? If you follow it straight as it goes along you will find yourself signing up with McCulloch’s Texans. But just up a-ways, if you follow the road to the right as it goes through the thick of trees, you will find yourself in Old Pap’s Guard. That is, if you’d rather be with the Missouri boys. Sign in at the first wall tent on your right. Is that a bit of a help to you, lad?”

“Most certainly. I am much obliged,” William said and touched the brim of his hat, “thank you.”

“Are you hungry?”

“I am famished.”

“Here. Have some griddlecakes, take them with you. They’re burnt black about the edges but they’re soft in the middle,” he said and handed William two small cakes of cornpone, “come back later when the beans are done.”

“Once again, thank you.”

As William turned he nearly bumped into a man who was standing directly behind him. A line of men had formed, each holding a tin plate and bowl, and as William walked over to his Isabella he heard the old Irishman say to the men, “You’ll have to wait a bit on the beans, unless ye like them crunchy.” William chewed the griddlecakes as he walked. They were soft in the center as the man had said, and a little sweet. He saved the end pieces for Isabella. He took off his glove and held them out to her and she nuzzled his palm.

He walked her along the road to the right through the thick of trees. Down by the creek the trees grew so tall they almost blocked out the sun. There was a lavish shade, and thick tufts of grass grew alongside the waters. The foliage muffled the voices of the men and the clatter of camp. Woodsmoke wafted through beams of filtered light. William thought of angels.

Up the bank and through the parting of trees, he followed the foot trail into camp. William noticed that clouds were gathering in the northeast and the sky was starting to darken. Before him was an open meadow with gentle slopes, a flow of green surrounded by trees and an endless row of canvas, men and horses, the bustle and tumult dotted by rising plumes of smoke. On the right, as he approached, was a sizable wall tent with an overhang of awning. Under the awning were positioned a few upturned boxes and some wooden camp chairs arranged around a blackened circle of stones. William walked up, leading his horse behind. A young lieutenant sat at a portable field desk in front of the fly of the tent. He was mixing ink. William removed his hat as the lieutenant looked up. He extended his hand. The lieutenant stood and clasped his hand and pressed it firmly.

“Welcome. I see you are well armed,” the lieutenant said, looking over, and pointing with the quill of his pen, “you have a splendid horse.” William glanced back at her. She was satin-black and shiny in the sunlight. She did a prance-step and shook her mane. “Can you ride?” the lieutenant asked.

“With the reins in my teeth and a pistol in each hand.”

“Then we are glad to have you.”

“Pleased to be of service. Who commands the cavalry?”

“Captain Stewart.”

“What do I need to know about him before we meet?”

“He is an academy officer, a gentleman. Splendid. Incisive. Cool under fire. Uncompromising. What else? He is lucky at cards.”

“A good quality to have,” William started, “One more question, if I may...”

“Lieutenant, I need your assistance,” came a resonant voice from inside the tent, “Please write a note to General McCulloch and have it say...” there was a pause. General Sterling Price emerged, throwing back the fly, holding a small pair of scissors and a hand-mirror. Looking into the mirror he clipped the edges of his beard and mustache. He turned his head side-to-side and inspected his face. The General was a tall man, and large. He stood six foot, one inch with broad shoulders and a barrel chest. He was heavy, William guessed him to be about two hundred and seventy-five pounds, but there was no overhanging flesh. As he stood in his linen shirt and suspenders, William could see he was well-proportioned and stout, not fat. The General had dark eyes and dark, wavy hair down past his collar and a full beard streaked with white. William knew

him to be a trained orator of the Chautauqua circuit and that he had once been the Governor of Missouri and a State Senator. William had heard him speak in Kansas City a few years before. It was an election year. William had sat in the far back of the uppermost balcony and noted how the rafters shook when the man spoke.

The General waited for the lieutenant to ready his pad and pen. He walked from under the awning and looked up at the sky. The sun was shining where he stood. He looked to the darkness gathering in the east. The temperature was dropping and the wind was rising. "Have it say..," he began again, looking at the lieutenant who stood ready, pen poised above the paper. Seeing him up-close, William thought him gracious and personable. He liked him. The General glanced over at William and said with a polite smile, "Pardon me young man, I'll be with you momentarily," then turned to his lieutenant. He took a deep breath and looked from horizon to horizon, "Have it say... all my men are under your command and I am under your command and I am in agreement with you that we must act swiftly, General. Believe me when I say I am with you: heart, mind, soul and strength, but I implore you to be practical in this matter. We have the advantage in numbers, it is true, but we are poorly equipped and ill-prepared for the coming incursion. We do not want to be at the mercy of inclement weather. It will rain within the hour and should the rain continue we cannot engage the enemy. Few of our men are equipped with water-proof cartridge boxes. We cannot keep our charges dry. You have said: I am too cautious. I respectfully disagree. I am prudent. Lyons will hold up in Springfield to wait for reinforcements. In that event, we must wait until General

Pierce can bring up his Arkansas brigade. We will need his artillery.” General Price looked over at his lieutenant, “Avery, bring me the General’s reply.”

“Yes sir,” the lieutenant said, still writing, “in all post-haste and with due diligence, sir.” He stiffened and saluted. He folded the message and placed it in his satchel. He trotted over to his horse, leapt to the saddle, and wheeled his horse around. Swiftly, he was gone.

General Price turned to William, “How did I sound to you?” he asked.

William said, “You showed constraint. You were a bit formal, but to the point.”

“What of the ‘heart, soul, mind, and strength’ part?”

“A bit much.”

“Agreed,” the General nodded his head, “I must placate McCulloch’s overweening pride in order to provide him with the common-sense solution. General McCulloch thinks of me as a leader of militia, an appointed General.” Price looked pointedly at William, “and he would be right. I would much rather be at cotillion drinking brandy and watching the young ladies dance.” He smiled briefly. “This is, however, my present duty and calling, times being what they are. McCulloch will dismiss my message entirely, but later in the day he will hand down the order like it was his own idea.”

“And he will have the credit.”

“And I will applaud him,” General Price said, a broad smile spreading beneath his beard. The General looked William from boot to brim, “I must say, young man, that is a dapper hat. And may I ask, why are you dressed in red...?”

“I intend to distinguish myself. I want to be noticed on the field.”

“But won’t you make an exceptional target for the enemy?”

“My life is in God’s hands. No man can kill me if it is not God’s will.”

“I hope you are right, son.”

“I know I’m right. I was shot twice at Cottonwood Creek and left for dead, that was two years ago last Spring. An Indian medicine man found me face down in the river and pulled me out. I would have drowned. I’ve been shot six times, five times with a bullet and once with an arrow. In March the year before I was on the Platte River, a man fired on me at nearly point-blank range. I turned and fired my pistol and I struck him smack-dab in the center of his forehead. The bullet should have scrambled his brains and blown them out the back of his head. It did not. It stopped at the flat of his forehead, barely breaking the skin. He was laid out, knocked senseless, but he wasn’t dead. I walked up on him and stood over him and as I cocked my hammer back, I heard a wee voice inside my head say that I should spare him.”

“Was your charge light?” asked the General, incredulous.

“No. By the recoil, the charge was adequate.”

“And you say he fired on you first?”

“Yes sir.”

“At nearly point-blank range?”

“That’s correct.”

“Why aren’t you dead, son?”

“I don’t know. By all rights I should be dead. Maybe he forgot to drop in the ball when he packed the bore. Maybe he was just a piss-poor shot. I don’t know. I can’t explain it and it does no good to speculate.”

“Will of God, then,” the General said.

“Will of God.”

There were horses passing along the road, wagons and caissons, men walking, a constant churning and clatter. A tangle of young ruffians approached on foot and waited at the edge of the road. They were lean and long-traveled and tawny by the sun. They dropped their packs down by the strap and flexed their arms and shoulders. The youngest of the bunch was hatless and shoeless and didn’t have a gun. One of the older boys, matted and scruffy with a hawk-like face, wore a relic old Dragoon in his belt tucked in at the waistline. He rested one palm on the handle like a young tough, but his gun was so heavy he had to keep his other hand behind him hitching up his belt to hold his pants up.

The General noticed the line forming. Others walked up while he looked around for an available aide. He said to William, “Ever since victory at Carthage, men and boys have been coming in multitudes.” He raised the flat of his palm and made a slow wave to a cluster of junior officers seated on a fallen log under some low-hanging branches. One of them jumped to his feet followed by several others, they trotted up, stiffened, and saluted. “Roster should be on the desk gentlemen,” the General said, “Please see to the new enlistees, will you?”

“Yes sir,” they chimed, nearly in unison, and jumped to their task.

The General turned to William again, “You are several years older than the average enlistee and you say you have had some experience? I am thinking of making you a Corporal. You say you were shot twice at Cottonwood Creek, at the crossing?”

“We were ambushed by marauders.”

“And shot four more times, once with an arrow?”

“That is correct, sir.”

“Where did you get shot with the arrow?”

William blinked twice and cleared his throat, “In the right buttocks.”

And the General beamed a bright smile and started to laugh. “I meant...” he laughed until he couldn’t catch his breath, “I meant...” still laughing, “I meant the locale, where were you when you got shot with the arrow, what locus in quo?”

William sheepishly looked at his boots and shifted his stance. He looked up with a tight smile, “It was out on the plains, sir, somewhere out in the territories. No place on a map that I know of.”

The General sighed and wiped the tears from his eyes.

The rabble of enlistees was long and restless. Lined up and waiting, impatient with the frivolity of youth and exuberance. William’s ears pricked up at the sound of one young man’s voice. He was certain he had heard it before. He listened as he talked with the General. William interrupted him, “I am begging your pardon, General sir, I am about to make a play.”

“Someone you know?”



William nodded in affirmation. “Allow me to introduce you,” William said, then turned around, and as he stepped forward he drew two pistols. The one he used for gesticulation and the other he leveled at the man with the brown hat and matching vest, sporting a new Army Colt. “Hello all you all,” he said in a loud voice, “welcome faithful sons of the South. Shhh, shhh. Quiet down now and let me speak.” The rabble quieted their restless stir and listened. “I am Corporal Quantrill and I am pleased to make your acquaintance and I need you to apprehend this man here,” pointing with the end of his gun, “he is a spy, a Kansas Jayhawker. He works for Jim Lane.” The man in the brown hat and vest growled and cursed as the men disarmed him and pushed him down into the dirt. “Please do not kill him, we may need to question him. Thank you gentlemen, now if you’ll excuse me...” William turned back toward the General and holstered his guns. He folded his hands together. “I apologize, sir, what were we talking about?”

## **AN END TO CHIVALRY Chapter 5**

To cover his retreat, Brigadier General Nathaniel Lyons had marched his rear guard all night and posted them within view of the outermost watchfires of the Confederate camp, nearly catching Price and McCulloch by surprise.

Bombardment came at first light. Artillery men had wheeled five light cannon within a hundred and twenty yards of the encampment and placed them on a rocky knoll, hidden from view by the dense undergrowth. A shouting was heard and a rustling through the brush. There came a shrill cry and a scattering of rifleshots, then a crackling, an incessant rattling, then a roar of guns. Three hundred Union infantry came running through the trees, running parallel to Wilson's Creek, they fired on the run and fell back to reload. Smoke hung heavy in the trees and the shot of light canon whistled through the air, crashing branches overhead, the splintered branches shuddering down. Bodies began to litter the landscape. Attacks came in waves, and the tide rose slow. The Confederates surged forward, the men in gray running after through the smoke and ruin. There was a deafening crash and roar followed by relative silence, intermittent shot ringing through the trees.

McCulloch's Texas Brigade and Pierce's Arkansas Brigade were hurriedly posted along the eastern bank of Wilson's Creek to protect Sterling Price's position. The battery fired ball and grapeshot at Lyon's emplacements as the Third Louisiana together with

McIntosh and McRae's regiments advanced to meet the encroaching Union. Men dropped to the ground, some falling like heavy sacks, some wheeling through the air. Men walked dauntless through the whine and flash, the shock of shells, red blooms in splatters and pink mist.

General Price commanded Oak Hill, the highest point in the surrounding wood. Arkansas artillery, commanded by Pierce, lobbed shell after shell into the ranks of Lyon's men. Price called his men to formation, a three-tiered line, the first row lying flat, the second row kneeling, the third row standing. They stood firm and resolute, firing through shot and exploding shell. Flashing muzzle and rising smoke, the smoke hanging thick in the branches of the trees. The men stood firm. General Price rode back and forth along the line, exhorting his men to courage. He rode shouting with his sword raised, shouting above the din.

Lyon's commissioned a rear guard totaling twelve hundred men, desperate fighters, to act as a diversion. They came on at a steady pace. When the first of their formation approached within twenty yards, Price's irregulars, positioned at access points and hidden just beyond the treeline, opened with shotguns, shredding flesh. Men fell steadily. Horses fell, screaming and flailing, trying to rise, slipping on their own entrails. The bodies lay strewn about the base of the hill, the ground soaked in red. Men called it Bloody Hill thereafter.

The sky growled, the bullets pelted the leaves, smacked the trunks of trees all around them. General Price rode along the line with his sword upraised. "Take careful

aim! Aim low! Aim for their knees!” he exhorted them, “when firing downhill you must aim for the knees to strike them in the chest! Aim low!”

The General jerked suddenly, he cried out and slumped forward in his saddle. His horse cantered to a halt as his aides ran to help him. General Price, wincing and groaning, slowly lowered his sword. Avery took his horse by the bridle and led him beyond the trees, out of the line of fire. “I am hit,” the General gasped. Avery held him aloft as others rushed to his side and carefully lowered him onto the grass. They removed his jacket, bundled it, and placed it under his head. They unbuttoned his undercoat and folded it back to expose the wound.

“How bad is it?” the General asked.

The others looked on, their faces rigid with concern. Lieutenant Avery clapped the man’s shoulder next to him and said, “Corporal Ripley, find the doctor. Tell him the General needs him.” Ripley looked to his left and crouched low as he ran off.

The linen shirt was clinging and red just above the belt line. Avery cut the General’s shirt with a penknife and inspected the wound. Avery reached under and felt beneath him. He removed his hand, wet with blood. Avery folded his handkerchief and held it over the wound.

“How bad is it?” the General asked again.

“You have an exit wound. The bullet missed the bone.”

“Good news, then.”

“I am not certain,” Avery said, “your innards may be damaged.”

“It hardly seems fair,” the General said, looking around at the concerned faces of his men, “if I were as thin as that scarecrow Lyons, the shooter would have missed me entirely.” The men nodded and smiled, the youngest through tears. “Avery. Bind me and put me back on my horse.”

“I cannot sir, in good conscience.”

“Bind me, Avery. Put me back on my horse.”

“You must wait for the doctor.”

“You must do as I ask.”

“You may be hurt far worse than you know.”

“But for the moment, I am fine.” Avery hesitated. The General reached up and put his hand on Avery’s shoulder. “I am fine. The men must see that I am fine.” He looked around at those who attended him. “Whiskey, please.” They held a flat tin flask to his lips. “It’s not for drinking. Show me your hands.” Several of the young men held out their hands for him to inspect. He picked the cleanest pair. The General pointed, “Pour some whiskey over his hands.” As they did, he looked the boy in the eyes. “Son, rub your hands together.” The boy did so, dutifully. “I want you to pry the wound open with your fingers.” He looked up at the boy, Don’t concern yourself about hurting me, son.” The boy nodded. The General looked over at the young man who held the flask, “When he opens me up, pour some whiskey in the wound.” The lad nodded emphatically. “Gentlemen, are we ready?” the General asked and looked from one to the other. They were determined and fixed. The boy leaned in and held the flesh open with his thumbs while the young man tilted the orifice of his tin flask, pouring a measure of

dark brown whiskey into it. Diluted blood ran down the General's side. The General gave a long, low moan and sucked air between his teeth. "Yes, my young sirs! Lift me up." They helped him to his feet. He pressed the opening with the palm of his hand, a thin stream of whiskey and blood seeped from between his fingers. "Now Avery," he said, "wrap me and get me back on my horse." He stood bare-chested, his white-white skin exposed, contrasting his sunburned-brown neck and face. They wrapped him in a two inch cotton strip and pulled it tight with every turn, handing the roll around his torso, they snipped the end and tied it. Avery buttoned the front of his linen shirt and laid the bloody flap flat over the bandage and tucked the shirt tails into his beltline. He fastened the General's waistcoat over it, pulled on his overcoat and buttoned him snug. Avery handed him his wide-brimmed hat with the feather. The General gingerly raised his arm, wincing as he placed his hat on his head and adjusted the brim.

Avery straightened and saluted him. "General."

The others straightened and saluted him. General Price looked to the young man with the flask, "I'll have that drink now." The young man gave it to him. He placed a fist on his belt, squared his shoulders. Lifting the flask to his lips, dried blood on his knuckles, he drank as he stood looking from treeline to treeline. Bullets pelted the leaves above them. Artillery shells whistled over. The men stood there together as a shell exploded nearby, there was the shring and the sizzling of shell fragments through the air. The men did not flinch. Smoke curled through the trees. The General drank again and passed the flask back. The General looked over at Avery who was concerned. "I'm fine," he said, "I feel fine."

The men helped him on his horse, handed him the reins. The General indicated the hilt of his sword, "Would you mind, son?" The young man drew the General's sword and placed the hilt of it within easy reach. "Much obliged," he said, taking it in hand. The General turned his horse. He could see through the trees into the distance. In his absence, his men had formed a line along a rough rail fence. He trotted off in their direction. He eased his horse into a canter and then urged her into a run. The men stood for a moment to watch him go.

Corporal Ripley came running up to where the men stood, out of breath and covered with sweat. Wiping his parched mouth with the cuff of his sleeve he said, "The doctor is coming."

Ripley turned to point at the man coming up the slope through the smoke and litter. The Doctor was bald with a long white beard, wearing wire-rimmed glasses and carrying a black leather bag. His white dress shirt was drenched red to his elbows and there were red splatters across his stomach. The doctor came up to the grouping of men, red-faced and dabbing his brow, he said between gasps, "I came... as fast... as I could. Where is ...the General?"

The men looked in the direction the General had gone. Off in the distance, through a break in the trees, they saw him riding fast, sword held high. As they all watched, the young man pointed and said, "There he goes." And the doctor looked up in time to see a big man on a chestnut roan leaping a high rail fence.

The artillery had ceased their rumble. Smoke hung heavy in the trees and wafted across the open clearing. There was a light smattering of flash and shot in the expectant lull, the sun dazzling off the bayonets as the infantry stood in formation. The drums beat slowly and the flags waved in the warm air.

Across the grassy divide, Brigadier General Lyons sat couched on a white horse with flowing mane and long white tail, bobbed with ribbons. Lyons wore his dark blue parade-dress coat with the double row of brass buttons and golden shoulder braid. He placed his hat on his head and bent the brim down. His sharp, dark eyes surveyed the assemblage of men all around him. The Union infantry were outfitted with dark blue jackets and sky-blue trousers. They wore slanted caps. Each man carried a full pack tied with a rolled knapsack, a cartridge box with ball and cap, and a Springfield rifle with bayonet affixed. General Lyons folded back the flap of his holster, tucked it beneath his belt and rested his palm on the handle of his .44 Colt revolver. His white horse cantered in place and shook her mane. Lyons rested his free hand on the scabbard of his sword, pushing the hilt free with his thumb. He reached across and slid his sword out. He looked along its curve and saw the razor sharpness of it shining in the sunlight. He raised it. The buglers sounded the advance. The Confederate forces waited for the sound and movement. They crouched behind their barricade in their light gray frocks, brown trousers of varying hues, some wearing boots, some wearing shoes, some barefooted. They carried sporting rifles they had brought from home, bird guns and squirrel guns. They carried smoothbore muskets. Few of the men had pistols. The Confederate drummers beat tempo, the buglers sounded. As the Union advanced, the barrage of



cannon fire commenced again. In rapid succession the cannons jumped and shot flame, poured smoke. Artillery men loaded their cannons with ball and grapeshot, scrap and nails, small round river rocks. They tore the oncoming men to shreds, cutting a wide swath through flesh and as the men fell, those arrears, marching behind them, filled in their missing ranks as they advanced. Tuft and plume of smoke wafted through, obscuring the lines. General Price rode his great chestnut roan up and back before his line of men, exhorting them to courage, exhorting them to honor, he shouted to them as he held his saber aloft. He called the formation, and the first row knelt on command with their rifles pointed, the second row stood poised. At the shout and waving of his sword, the first row fired and the second row made ready. The kneeling row upended their rifles and began to reload as the standing men stepped forward, knelt, and took aim. They progressed slowly, loading and firing as the bullets whipped all around. The cannon shot ripped through them. Men screamed, flailing, the smoke rising over. Men slumped into the grass. With a wave and a shout, Price urged them forward through smoke and shell. The air groaned and roared, the drifts of smoke wafted across the field, men marching through. And when the smoke cleared, the men were gone, crumpled in the grass. There came a great wailing shriek as the men surged forward, coming in waves, there was a great crash and ringing as the men fell together.

In the clench and grip of ferocious hate, the men grappled hand to hand with knife and bayonet, swinging the butt of their guns like clubs. Those falling were crushed asunder, ground to mush. After an hour the Union troops began to falter and fall back. The Confederates surged forward, chasing the fleeing men through the thick of trees and

dense brush. They crouched behind trees to reload, and firing as they went, they chased the fleeing runners over fence and through tall corn, across fields and pastures, through groves, into the wild growth of the tangled forest beyond.

The noise and tumult died off in the distance. Those prone lay still in clustered heaps, a ruin of flesh. The dead grimaced, caked in blood, gnarled in grotesque poses. Horses lay on their sides across the field their innards exposed, fresh red and the stark white of exposed bone, splintered to the marrow. Some wounded few struggled to rise and could not, flailing their limbs and whinnying.

The orange eye of the sun was slipping below the treeline, the deep blue of darkness gathered in the east.

General Price sat slumped in his saddle, hat gone, hair wild, his face pale. He was trying to find his scabbard with the tip of his sword and no longer had the strength to lift it. He felt the edges of his vision going, as if he were looking through a long tunnel of white fog. He dropped his sword to the grass and took deep breaths. Dizzy and weak, breathing deeply, he looked across the field. A short distance away there was a large white horse standing. It jerked its head nervously as his men approached, it flung its tail and stamped. It tried to pull away, but the reins were wrapped around the glove of a man who lay prone on the field. The soldiers approached the horse holding out their hands and talking sweetly. One of the soldiers looked down at the man in blue, a thin man, an officer in blue coat and braid, and turned, waving his handkerchief in the direction of the General.

“We’ve found him,” the soldiers called out.

A Private Pike saw the handkerchief and stepped up to the General’s horse and put the palm of his hand on the horse’s neck and looked up at the General. He said, “We’ve found him, Sir.” The General looked at the soldier. Pike’s face was caked over with ash and mud, a thin trickle of blood coming from each nostril, his teeth pink with blood.

“Are you wounded, son?”

The soldier looked down at his shirt. It was tattered and soaked with red. He looked up at the General, “No sir. It’s not mine.”

The General was fading from exhaustion. He started to swoon and caught the horn of the saddle. Private Pike reached up to steady him. “I am here, sir,” he said, holding him in the saddle.

“Help me son.” Men rushed up to help. Together they eased the General down from his horse and held him until he was steady on his feet. The General took a ragged breath and lumbered forward. He staggered to his right a few steps and caught himself. He tried to unbutton his coat. His fingers fumbled over the buttons. A fresh sheen of sweat precipitated him and his face blanched pale.

“Allow me sir,” Pike said as he removed the General’s coat and vest. The General’s breath was labored. The linen of his shirt was stained in fresh red, his bandages soaked through.

The General stood looking down at the body of Lyons, he leaned over him. For a very long time he observed Lyons’ pale white skin, the stillness of him. Lyons was at

peace. His eyes were closed. A tuft of his brown and silver hair wavered in the slight of breeze.

The men called a stretcher-bearer over and the four of them knelt and gently lifted Lyons and placed him on the stretcher. “Bear him to my tent,” General Price said, “and place him on the spare cot.” Regarding Lyon’s person he said, “Gentlemen, wash his face. Comb his hair. Cross the General’s hands over his chest to cover the wound, where the bullet pierced his heart.”

General Price retired to his tent. He sat on the edge of his cot, unable to move. “Avery. Help me with my boots.”

Avery held a boot by the heel and worked to pull it off without jostling the General. “I’ve sent word to the doctor. He is overwhelmed. But his nurse assures me he will be here as soon as he is able. I fear I will never have that smell out of my nostrils, that of swampy bowels and stewing blood.”

“In truth, it never leaves you.”

“And the sight of severed limbs. Hands and feet and legs thrown together in a pile.”

Avery looked over at the General. Price was looking at General Lyons. The men had placed him on the spare cot as he had asked. They had washed his face and combed his hair and beard. They had covered him with a wool blanket, pulling it up under his chin, so that it looked as if Lyons had drifted into peaceful sleep.

“You will sleep with him next to you in your tent?” Avery had to ask.

“Why not?” the General said, “Why wouldn’t I?”

“Sir. Aren’t you afraid of Lyons’ ghost?”

“Afraid of..?” The General afforded a weak laugh. “I was not afraid of General Lyons while he was alive. Why, in heaven’s name, would I fear him now that he is dead?”

## AN END TO CHIVALRY Chapter 6

Outside of Lexington, on a low rise overlooking the Masonic College, General Price stood, superbly indifferent under fire. He surveyed the entire horizon through his field glasses as the enemy artillery pounded the landscape, dirt flying in spouts, thick trees snapping in half, falling over, smoke rising and floating away. His men surged forward in great torrents, taking cover behind stone walls, wooden rail fences, college out buildings, they moved to completely surround the enemy's entrenchments.

"By the insignia, it is Colonel James Mulligan's Irish brigade. I see flags for two regiments of attached militia." The General lowered his glasses to look, and then raised them to focus on the spot of his interest. Stray bullets buzzed the air.

"Perhaps we should take cover, General," said Lieutenant Avery.

"We are sufficiently out of range."

"Yes sir."

"They are heavily entrenched. They have built a rampart twelve to fourteen feet thick and approximately twelve feet high. There is an irregular line of earthworks and rifle pits protected by traverses and ditches with sharpened stakes."

"Will this be a long siege sir?"

"No. They have already lost this battle. We have won it."

"May I beg an indulgence sir?"

“Of course you may Avery, ask me anything,” the General said, looking through his glasses.

“How can you say we have already won it?”

“Simple deduction,” the General said and handed the Lieutenant his field glasses. He pointed to the sprawling green under the canopy of trees that formed the commons of the campus, “do you not see?”

“What am I looking for sir?” Avery asked as he looked through the eyepiece and scanned the area.

“Keep looking.”

“Ah,” he said, “I see it. When our men approached the fort they forced the Irish to withdraw inside the ramparts. The Irish have abandoned the well.”

“Precisely. They have failed to procure the only source of water available to them. A grave mistake.” General Price continued his survey, “Our first priority is to take possession of the well. Notice, the administration building is four stories of red brick. All windows on all floors, and including the roof, are manned by sharpshooters. Avery, take note. Tell the men I want a brace of cannon along this ridge where we are standing and I want a brace of cannon on the far ridge, there.” He pointed. “Their breastworks are nearly impervious. We will not test them. What we will do, however, is reduce their manor to a pile of bricks. Their only high ground, reduce it to rubble. Take the well. Tighten the noose, as it were. In two days they will be most desperate. In four days they will surrender. As I have said, we have won it. There is an old, old saying Avery. He

who falls on a stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom the stone falls will be ground to a dust.”

“And blown to the wind, as it were.”

“Precisely.”

As the General stood looking, an errant bullet struck his field glasses, shattering them. The General dropped the broken pieces to the ground at his feet. There was a light sparkle of glass on his cheek and in his beard, but no blood.

“Perhaps we should retire sir.”

“We cannot. We must wait here for a few minutes longer.”

“Why sir?”

“A stratagem. The enemy must know that we cannot be intimidated, and our men must know to be fearless in the face of death.”

For two days the Confederates bombarded enemy ramparts. A whistling, rousing cheer went up as the brick structure collapsed into rubble, the last wall teetering and caving on itself with a crash and clatter. A cloud of brick dust rose, wafting over.

The General’s men came on them in a wave of gray and char and butternut, drums beating, trumpets blaring, flags and banners waving. The men poured forth en masse, running full speed and roaring, their bayonets gleaming in the midday sun. And one among their number, riding a splendid black horse, wearing a red shirt and a wide-brimmed hat with a sweeping black oriflamme, was seen in the midst, poised and cool



and deadly, advancing with the foremost, falling back at the last, and always in the thick of fighting.

Colonel Mulligan stood on the bulwark, urging his men to hold fast as the artillerymen poured grape-shot and canister into the oncoming frenzy. Wave after wave came on them until the early evening, the slope piled high and slippery with blood, the hillock bathed in the hoary froth of bitter gore.

The next several days were unseasonably hot. There was an unceasing barrage of small arms fire, from first light to near dark. It became apparent, and the scouting reports confirmed, Mulligan would have no reinforcements. His men were nearly out of ammunition and they were completely out of water. Wretched and failing, his soldiers wrestled over hospital wastewater used to wash the bleeding stumps of amputated limbs, they drank it down with horrible avidity.

An hour past noon a Union nurse wearing a long, plain skirt, a small white hat, and a stained white apron, as befitted her station, came over the rampart carrying two wooden buckets. Down the line of riflemen came the cry of 'hold fire!' and the guns ceased except for a few scattering shots off in the distance. The Missourians began to wave their hats and cheer her, her courage. They allowed her to pass their line and continued to roar their approval as she dipped and filled each bucket. From the ramparts, the Irish Brigade began to shout and whistle, and both sides continued to cheer as she made her way up the slippery, bloody slope, disappearing behind the ramparts. When she was over the rise and safe again, the deadly fire resumed.

Price's scouts had been scouring the countryside for supplies and they found a storage warehouse which contained a hundred and thirty rolled bales of hemp, ready for shipment. The bales were carted to the top of the overlooking hill and thoroughly soaked with water. A detachment of men were assembled in teams along the long, snaky line of bales. Men were instructed to slowly roll the bales forward, while their counterparts took turns firing over the top, and ducking down to reload, making a kind of moving barricade. The movable bulwark slowly approached the Yankee installation. Bullets could not penetrate. Artillery shells struck the bales, shook and quivered them, but they could not penetrate. In their desperation, the Irish Brigade tried shooting red coals and heated shot at them, trying to set the bales on fire. The soaked hemp smoked prodigiously, but would not catch. The men rolled their smoking bales closer to the enemy lines. They began to snicker and giggle, some began to laugh out loud, it was all so funny, the men made giddy with morbid delight.

Panic rippled through the stricken ranks and one junior officer, disregarding the Colonel's explicit orders, tied a white flag to a rifle and began to wave it over the ramparts. Suddenly all firing ceased. General Price halted his advance. With several of his aides, he came to a dusty clearing in the open and waited under a flag of truce. Colonel Mulligan and his men hastily approached. The Colonel saluted, and the General returned his salute. They stepped together and shook hands.

The General asked, "Why has firing ceased?"

And the Colonel replied, "I hardly know, General, unless you have surrendered."

## **AN END TO CHIVALRY Chapter 7**

As soon as William Quantrill crossed into Blue Springs, word reached him that Kansas Jayhawkers were once again attacking settlements along the east bank of the Snibar Creek, venting rage and causing havoc among the populace of Jackson County. Riding fast and flying headlong, William reined his horse to a skidding halt to see Andrew Walker waiting for him in the road with six young heirs, sons of aristocrats. They were resolute, grim of countenance and heavily armed.

“Come on!” Andrew cried, “Lane’s men are burning homesteads just to the north of here!”

With Andrew in the lead, William followed down private dirt roads, disappeared in dense overgrowth, through the trees, over rail fences, across dirt fields. They came to where the roiling black tower of smoke rose above the swaying green of trees.

“It’s the DeWitt place!” Andrew shouted.

Hurriedly the men dismounted, guns drawn, they raced to the farm house by way of the field entrance. The house had been reduced to char and ember several hours before. The barn and stables were smoking char. The fireplace stood, mute sentry of blackened stone. Some of the surrounding trees still burned. As the young men came around to the front garden, they could see Mister DeWitt hanging from a tree. Both his

young sons had been bludgeoned and shot. The youngest was eleven. Mistress DeWitt could not be found.

The young men untied the rope and lowered Mister DeWitt to the ground. They laid him next to his two sons. The men stood over them as they lay together in the grass.

“We’ll come back to see them buried,” John Jarrett said, shaking with anger, “right now we must see justice done.”

The men mounted up, they were waiting for Andrew, who was still looking about. Andrew glanced over at the well and a wave of nausea washed over him. He walked up to the well. Heart pounding, he looked down into the dark water and waited for his eyes to adjust.

“Gentlemen,” Andrew said, “I believe I have found Mistress DeWitt.”

The men rode north together. Astonishment gave way to rage. At a full run with flying mane, overcoats flapping behind, with a fury they came shrieking.

Following the smoke they turned down the path that led to the Stone farm. Their house was still burning. The roof of their barn stove in as they approached and huge flames leapt into the air. The air was roaring fire. A roiling smoke rose steadily.

Strawder Stone lay in the yard, six bullets in his back. His wife, Melissa, lay in the grass with her skirt pulled up over her head. She was naked from the waist down.

“They were newlyweds,” Andrew stammered, “they were married this last June.”

The young men stood seething. William walked over to where the young woman lay. He knelt down. He pushed her legs together and pulled her dress down.

William cried out, "Let's ride!" and leapt to his saddle. The young men leapt up, and shouting, followed. As they turned their horses, William shouted, "Do not let them reach Independence! Ride them down! Do not let them reach Independence!"

Seeing a puff of smoke, they turned into Billy Thompson's place. As they rode up, they saw Billy Thompson dead in the doorway. Through the windows they could see the flames starting to climb. Lane's men were just mounting their horses, they had hitched a wagon loaded with stolen goods and they were leading a long string of horses behind. The young vigilantes rode fast upon them, spurring hard and slapping leather. With a wailing shriek and pistols blazing they raced to the fore, over-running the marauders. The drover stiffened and slumped. Several riders fell from their saddles before they were able to wheel their horses around. The rest of the Kansas marauders took flight, another thirteen men. They rode in a lather toward the town of Independence, nearly seven miles away. Flying swift and lashing hard, with cries and screaming they urged their mounts, spurring them and slapping leather. The young vigilantes rode hard after them. There was Andrew in the lead, John Jarrett close behind, George Todd behind him, then Sheppard, Younger, and Pool. William rode hard on the outside, coming up on Andrew's flank, allowing him hold the lead. Andrew pulled even with the trailing runner who looked back in terror as the flash and report of Andrew's pistol bucked him hard, jerking him from the saddle. One by one the vigilantes rode up behind, shot them close enough to burn them with the flash. One by one the marauders fell,

screaming and flailing. When the young vigilantes had finally spent all their charges, they pulled up, and watched the last rider as he rode off in the direction of Independence.

William pulled hard his reins, Isabella skidded to a stop. He pulled his Springfield rifle from its saddle holster. He stood in the road and drew down. William stilled his breath and sighted down the barrel. The men looked to the rider off in the distance, pell-mell and desperate. There was a sharp crack and the horse tumbled, throwing the rider.

“You got him!” Jarrett cried.

“No,” William said, “but I shan’t miss again.” As the men looked down range, William turned up his muzzle and dropped in a paper cartridge. He dropped in a ball and tamped it down as he kept his gaze afield. Replacing the copper cap, he cocked the hammer back. Down range, the dust had settled enough to show a frantic runner off in the distance. William adjusted his sight, leveled his Springfield, and squeezed the trigger. The man dropped instant.

“Down. Down to hell!” William said, “and say I sent thee thither!”

## AN END TO CHIVALRY Chapter 8

William and Andrew rode on the long path leading up to the manor. The lane was fenced along its entire length and planted with flowering vines and lined with long rows of old growth trees, generations old, thick around and tall and leafless. As they turned along the carriage path the manor came in view. It was white with columns several stories high, sprawling with arched glass and marbled outdoor cotillion.

“Impressive,” said Andrew.

“The man we are about to meet is a Union sympathizer and a slave-holder.”

“He owns slaves?”

“Apparently. According to Captain Perkins’ journal, he is one of the primary regional suppliers of guns, ammunition, horses and sundries for the northern occupation.”

“He needs killing.”

They dismounted and tied their horses to the hitching post and walked up to the front porch, their hard-heeled boots echoed stone, their spurs clicked and jingled. They stood before the door.

“What will I call you?” asked Andrew in hushed tones, unbuttoning his Union-blue riding cloak.

“Captain Montague,” William said, “Montague is from *Romeo and Juliet*. Sounds dignified. Do you like it?”

“No. And my name is...?” Andrew asked, checking his insignia.

“Fontleroy. Lieutenant Fontleroy, as in Little Lord Fontleroy. Has a catchy ring to it, don’t you think?”

“No, I don’t. Call me Augustus. No! Alexander. Like Alexander the Greek. I always liked that name.”

“Lieutenant Alexander?” William said with mild inflection, “sounds like someone made it up.”

“As long as I am making it up,” Andrew said, “I might as well pick a name I like.”

“Alexander then?”

“Alexander.”

Mister Baynes heard the clomp of boots on his front porch and muffled voices. He opened the door just as the Captain had his hand raised, a gloved fist, ready to knock. The Lieutenant snapped to attention. Both men smiled as they stood on the broad porch under the tall white columns and graciously removed their hats. Mr. Baynes, in the doorway, noticed they were wearing the insignia of the 11<sup>th</sup> Iowa.

“Welcome,” Mr. Baynes said, suddenly aware of his vest and shirtsleeves, “I wasn’t expecting you at this hour.” He threw on his coat and buttoned it up, “But please, come in!”



The men entered, formal and dignified. They removed their riding cloaks, revealing that each was equipped with a single sidearm. They removed their gloves. William extended his hand, "I am Captain Montague, and this is Lieutenant Fontleroy."

"Pleased to meet you sir," said the lieutenant with a nod, shaking his hand. He gave the Captain a long look as they stood in the entryway.

"You may call me Erasmus," Baynes said, and called for his manservant, "Tobias!"

"I wasn't expecting you until morning. Is everything going to plan?"

"There've been a few changes."

"Tobias!" A black man appeared, his house coat buttoned over his nightshirt. Baynes turned to the men and smiled, then turned to his servant, "Toby. Bring drinks and prepare the sitting room." The servant disappeared. He reappeared carrying a silver tray with short glasses of cut crystal and a decanter of Tennessee's best brown whiskey. He held the tray with one hand and slid the panel to the parlor back, making an elegant gesture with his free hand.

Tobias set a glass by each man, and coming around the room, he made a slight bow before he poured each glass, and nodded politely when he finished pouring. He looked back at Mister Baynes before leaving the room, and closed the door quietly behind him.

"Have you gentlemen eaten supper?" Mister Baynes asked, "Are you hungry?"

Lieutenant Andrew started to say, "Not especially..."

Captain William interrupted him, “Well, thank you for asking. I am positively famished!”

Mister Baynes lifted a tiny silver bell an inch off the side table and started ringing. Tobias appeared instantly, as if he were waiting just on the other side of the door. Tobias came around the furniture to where Mister Baynes was sitting and stood by him, slightly bent in anticipation, his hands clasped together. “Is Petunia in the kitchen?” Baynes asked, “Please have her send out a platter of that cold duck we have leftover from dinner. We’ll have it on some of her sliced brown bread with butter. Have her check to see if there are any roasted potatoes left, have her warm them, and check to see if there are any olives or pickled okra.” Tobias nodded, made a slight bow and left.

“Does Tobias not speak?” Captain William asked.

“He does,” Baynes said cordially, “but don’t get him started. We will not be able to shut him up.”

“Thank you for your kind hospitality,” Captain William said to Baynes and leaned forward in his chair, his drink in his raised hand, “long life,” he said and touched the rim of the glass to his lips. He did not drink.

“To your health,” Lieutenant Andrew said and touched the glass to his lips.

They looked over, waiting for the old gentleman to make a toast. He paused for a moment with his glass raised like he couldn’t think what to ask for. Finally he said, “Fair weather!” and drank his whiskey down.

“Please don’t think me rude,” Captain William said, “but we must reload our pistols. The night has been damp, and we must check to make sure our charges are dry.”

“That is understandable,” said Baynes, “and necessary, times being what they are.”

“A matter of fact,” William said. The men drew their guns and stepped to the desk. William pointed to the daily paper and turned to Baynes, “May I?”

“Of course sir.”

William spread the paper in the circle of lamplight and he and Andrew unloaded their guns bore by bore as they listened to Baynes talk. Clicking their cylinders around, they replaced the powder in each chamber, wiping each ball with a cotton kerchief, pressed them down and resealed them with grease. Concentrating on their task, neither man said a word in the interim as Baynes talked and gestured with his empty glass, talking as he poured more whiskey. William and Andrew checked the action of their pistols, there was a click and a whir as each man spun his cylinder. They slid their guns into their sideholsters.

Andrew noticed the bottom half of the front page of the paper, the *Liberty Sentinel*, and he began to read aloud, “William Clark Quantrill, the leader of a lawless band of rebel vigilantes ...harbinger of death, chaos, and ruin...” Andrew looked up, “what’s a harbinger?”

“It’s like an advanced guard. A harbinger foretells what’s bout to happen. He brings judgment.”

“That’s certainly true,” said Andrew, “It says here he and his irregulars are wanted men from Jackson and Cass Counties, Missouri, and they are believed to have robbed a train outside of Idelia, Iowa. He looked up at William, then looked down to

read again, "It says here they killed a conductor along with three innocent passengers, including an eight year old girl." William and Andrew looked at each other.

"That is positively tragic. What was the little girl's name?" William asked.

"It doesn't say," said Andrew, flipping the page back and forth, "but I find it a bit odd, considering I was reading in the *Saint Louis Dispatch* just this morning and on that very same day as the Iowa incident, he and his men purportedly burned a boarding house to the ground and killed nine Union soldiers, including two officers, in the town of Baxter Springs, Kansas, right on the main street and in broad daylight. According to the article, they set the two-story dwelling on fire just before the noon bell and shot the men as they came running out. Now, what I want to know is, how can they be in Idelia and in Baxter Springs on the very same day, at about the same hour? They couldn't have done both, and they probably didn't do neither."

William interjected, "We have it on the best authority. From upstanding, honest Union men like yourself, Mister Baynes...can I swear you to secrecy?" Baynes nodded emphatically. William smiled again in his relaxed manner, "We happen to know for a fact and without a doubt that William Quantrill and Andrew Walker are in Kentucky with some of Andrew's relatives running thoroughbreds. Coleman Younger is presently working as a cowhand on a cattle ranch outside of San Antonio, Texas. No one seems to know where David Pool is. George Todd and William Greg are in Nogales drinking tequila and chasing the señoritas. George Sheppard is in Saint Louis. They are spread to all different parts of the country. They couldn't have possibly robbed that train and killed

those people, or killed those soldiers at the boarding house. It could've been Ruffians or Privateers or even Federalmen in disguise, for all we know."

"It's what we came to investigate," said Andrew, "it's why we're here."

"From everything we've learned, these are not the kind of men who would be so careless as to kill an eight year old girl," said William.

"Or kill innocent bystanders as it says here," said Andrew, rattling the newspaper, "it is highly unlikely."

"They are desperate men," said Baynes, "they are dangerous."

"Very dangerous," said Andrew, "I have heard it said that William Quantrill is a cold-blooded killer and completely without fear. He has had seventeen confirmed kills since the beginning of the year. He has been wounded nine times. Three of those wounds would have killed any ordinary man."

"Andrew Walker, David Pool, George Todd, George Shepherd, Coleman Younger...they are all hell in a skirmish, and hard to the last man," William looked at Andrew and then back at Mister Baynes, "so I've heard."

"They are formidable enemies, true," ventured Baynes, "but they are hardly impervious."

"The authorities mentioned you have a plan?"

"Andrew Walker is with Quantrill in Kentucky, as you mentioned. The Walker homestead is less than four miles up the road from here," Banes went on, "Morgan Walker should be killed and the buildings should be razed and his trees chopped down and his fields plowed under."

“Do have something personal against the man?” Andrew asked, “what has he ever done to you?”

“He has a murdering butcher for a son!” said Baynes, “he is cheek and jowl with every bushwhacker in the territory! He harbors and suckles the enemy, gentlemen!”

“Why has this not been done before now?” William asked.

“The local Militiamen are terrified of reprisals. The regular Federals are too conscientious to kill so prominent a citizen. The Redlegs are purely mercenary and want too much money. The Pinkerton men are incompetent. Why, I could do the job myself if I had the backing of staunch men such as yourselves,” said Baynes, taking a deep breath and mopping his forehead with a handkerchief.

Toby laid a white tablecloth over the broad desk and brought the sliced duck and brown bread on silver-plated trays. A moment later he entered with potatoes, re-toasted in their skins over coals, steaming in the bowl. There was a large pat of butter in the cut glass dish on the desk and Toby brought another bowl made of porcelain, white with tiny pink roses, filled with heaps of pickled okra. The men spread butter on their bread, arranged dark slices of oily meat between two thick slices of bread and paused for a moment to chew their food. The men, including Baynes, ate ravenously. They bit and chewed and swallowed like starvelings, tasting their food, savoring it, breathing deeply. Erasmus Baynes drank big slugs of whiskey between bites. They slathered their potatoes with butter and held them up with forks, the juices dripping down, Andrew wiping his chin on the edge of the draped white tablecloth.

“Delicious,” Andrew said, “I didn’t know I was so hungry.”

“A man must be practical in these unjust times,” William said, half satisfied, “a man must enjoy himself while he can. The world has become increasingly dangerous and we know not when our souls will be required of us. It is always best to be ready,” William looked over at Baynes, “do you agree?”

“To do my duty?” said Baynes.

“To do what must be done.”

“Most certain,” Baynes said, belching politely.

William felt in his vest, then reached in the pocket of his trousers and felt for a coin. He held his hand out to Toby and said, “Here, Toby, for services rendered,” and dropped a silver dime into his palm. “Oh, wait,” William said, “give this to Petunia.” He fished in his pocket again and handed him a broad copper cent with a liberty head, “It’s the kind they made before the war. Tell Petunia she can probably get two cents in trade for it.” Tobias nodded. “Wrap up what’s left over in waxed paper and put it in my saddlebag.” Tobias nodded and quietly left the room. Quite full, William eased back in his chair and wiped his oily fingers on a white cloth napkin. He dabbed his chin and laid the napkin across his finished plate.

Coats buttoned up, the soldiers buckled their gunbelts. They stood armed and ready for war. Mr. Banes showed the captain his hiding space behind the bookshelves and produced a new Enfield rifle from behind a wood panel, a blackened cobalt-blue British-made breechloader, never fired, and he pulled a Navy Colt’s pistol, fully loaded,

from the bottom drawer of his desk and he set them on the polished wood surface with a look of pride.

“Guess you’re ready,” said Andrew.

“Willing and able,” said Baynes. He breathed a sigh, breathed a polite titter of nervous laughter, and poured each man another drink. They raised their glasses. William and Andrew sipped theirs and Erasmus drank his down, then poured himself another one. “Oh I know! To success!” Mister Baynes drank it down. The two soldiers raised their glasses, then set them on the sideboard. Putting on their gloves, they flexed their fingers as they sauntered onto the porch. With clomping heels, a jangle of spurs, they stepped into the iron light with their breath hanging heavy in the still air. There was a mist hanging in the bare branches of the trees, a delicate frost had fallen in the interim to add an edge of sparkle to the night. Brushing back their long coats, stepping boot in stirrup, they swung their legs over. Easing into their saddles, they adjusted themselves. The horses stood in place shaking their manes and stomping their feet.

William said with half a shout, “Can we count on you to join in the fighting, if indeed, there is fighting to be done?”

“Of course, gladly.”

“We’ll need to apprise the rest of the men as to the particulars.”

“Let them know our plan,” said Andrew.

“Of course,” said Mr. Baynes, “how many men do you have available?”



“We have eight of the finest men you will ever hope to meet waiting just up the road a pace. They stand ready,” William said, “and they will be pleased to make your acquaintance.”

“Then, it is best not to keep them waiting,” Baynes said with breathless vigor and an unaccustomed shimmer of sweat. He rode with the butt end of his rifle riding his hip and the barrel pointing into the night sky.

“Best put that away till we get to Mister Morgan’s spread,” said Andrew, “we don’t want to arouse any fears.” Banes looked at the lieutenant, then looked at the captain.

The Captain smiled and said, “Put away your rifle and man your sidearm, soldier!”

“Yes sir! Captain sir!” laughed Banes with good nature. He slid his Enfield into its lambskin holster and put his hand to his sidearm, resting his palm on the handle. They breasted a tall row of hedges as they rode, clearing the orchard gate, they ran along the smooth ruts of the dirt road leading away from Bayne’s estate, they rode with caution past his neighbor’s house. There was the dull ring of muffled hoof beats in that dim hour, past fallow fields, moving swift through sleeping orchards.

“Your men are troopers? Experienced? In what campaigns have they previously fought? Baynes asked in hushed tones, dabbing his forehead, “Where did your men fight?”

“They fought with great distinction at Pea Ridge, and again at Pilot’s Knob.”

“Pea Ridge? That was...where?” Banes said in gasps, out of breath.

“Down in Arkansas.”

“Didn’t the Union lose at Pea Ridge?”

“No. The Union won at Pea Ridge, they lost at Pilot’s Knob.”

“In actuality, that is a matter of opinion,” said the Lieutenant, “because the Union forces were able to retain St. Louis.” He added, “Story is, General Price was so riled that he wasted all his time trying to track down the retreating army. In the meantime, the Union was able to fortify the main city, keep St. Louis. That was an enormous blow to the Southern cause, when General Price failed to take Saint Louis.”

“It is good for Missouri,” Banes said in gasps, holding onto his horse, “Missouri must remain a part of the Union.”

“Missouri never seceded. From all I’ve heard tell, they didn’t vote one way or the other.”

Two miles from Erasmus Bayne’s home, at the main crossroads, the horsemen halted. There was a single old-growth oak at the intersection, with a high, thick branch hanging out over the road. The horses stamped and blew and slung their heads. Their breath hung in the air. William, in his Captain’s coat, whistled at the treeline, a layering dark, mingled shadows of gray and black. The shrill pitch died away. The men waited.

A voice called to them from out of the shadows, “What kept you so late?” the silhouette of a man emerged, still cloaked in black, “we were beginning to worry.”

“We were waylaid by dinner and conversation,” the Captain said, “and quite a bit of whiskey.”

“Well then,” the short man said, riding into the dim gray light, “that’s understandable.” The others rode up behind.

“Forgive my manners,” the Captain said, “these are the stalwart fighting men I was telling you about, let me introduce you...”

“Why are they not in uniform?” asked Baynes.

“They are incognito,” he explained, “on my orders, for the sake of the mission. Allow me to introduce you. He pointed to his men, extending his hand, and they each nodded or tipped their hats as he went around the group. “This is David, John, William, the other John, Richard, and call him Richard, don’t ever call him Dick,” the men stifled a laugh, “this is George, this is the other George, and this is Cole. There are a few others riding arrears, they’ll be along shortly.”

Coming abreast, Baynes leaned in his saddle, extended his hand, “I am pleased to make your acquaintance, gentlemen, I am Erasmus Baynes.” He clasped the hand of the man closest to him.

“Coleman,” the man said, grasping the hand firmly, “Coleman Younger. But you may call me Cole.” And the old man froze in mid-gesture and his eyes grew wide. Cole continued to shake his hand while pointing with his left, “Dave Pool, John Jarrette, William Gregg, ‘other’ John Kroger, Richard, not Dick, Burns, George Todd, and ‘other’ George Shepherd.”

George Todd and George Shepherd started laughing, “Dick burns! That’s funny!” All the others started laughing.

“They’ve got medicine for that!” said Jarrette, and the men laughed some more. All the while Coleman held Baynes hand in his firm grip.

And Colman said, “You’ve already met...what was it again?” Coleman looked at William.

“Captain Montague,” William said, “but really I am just a corporal. Corporal William Quantrill, at your service.” William pointed over to the lieutenant, “This is Andrew Walker who’s daddy you wanted to kill.”

Andrew tipped his hat and said with a broad smile, “Thanks for dinner.”

Erasmus Baynes tried to pull his hand away, but Coleman gripped it tight and reached under with his left hand and pulled the pistol from his holster. There were muzzles aimed at Baynes from all directions, and a noose dropped around his neck.

“Catch the end of this, will you Andrew?” Shepherd said as he tossed the looped bundle of rope over the thick, overhanging branch of the old oak tree. Andrew caught the strand of it and pulled it tight and looped the middle length of it twice around the horn of his saddle and backed his horse until Bayne’s derriere started lifting from his leather seat. Baynes stood in his stirrups, swaying to one side, and choked and gagged and dug his fingers under his neckloop as the rope was tightening. He flailed with wild hair and angry eyes as he slowly lifted from his horse. The men watched his tongue puff out. His arms dropped to his side and he began to sway, twitching.

“Say hello to Jesus for me when you see him,” William said to Baynes as his eyes rolled and closed.

## AN END TO CHIVALRY Chapter 9

That afternoon the men had ambushed a detachment of fourteen Federal soldiers guarding the bridge that spanned the Big Blue River on the main road that led to Kansas City. They sent Todd and Sheppard as decoy, and when the Federals approached them to ask for their papers, the rest of William's guerrillas opened with rifle fire from the eastern banks of the river, and when the soldiers were alarmed to distraction, running and shouting, Todd and Sheppard dispatched the rest of the soldiers with pistol fire at nearly point-blank range. The guerrillas burned the bridge to the waterline and escaped into the countryside.

Night brought sudden cold, a light rain with sleet. William sent an advanced guard up the long road to Tatum's farmhouse. The men sat in their saddles, turned up their collars and blew hot breath into their cupped hands.

Todd rode back from the house, "As soon as I said who we were and that we were coming, old man Tatum started stoking the fireplace and his wife ran to the kitchen and put the kettle on to boil. They are glad to have us!"

"Did you explain we would be sleeping in the barn, out of their way?"

"Yes, and I told them we would be gone at first light."

"Splendid."

“But they would have none of that. They told me to tell you they are honored to have us stay inside and that we can all make due in the front room and parlor. They say they can accommodate all of us, we can sleep in-doors.”

“I would hate to impose. Are they just being polite?”

“They are sincere. I told you so, they are friends of my cousin.”

William posted a sentry and the men proceeded up the path to the house. After they ate supper they removed their boots and warmed themselves by the fire, chatting with Mister Tatum until late, they finally fell to a deep slumber.

The old German clock on the mantle chimed midnight, the fire in the hearth was burning low. The sentry fired a warning shot. Then came a volley. William Quantrill instantly came awake, standing in the living room backlit by the glow of the fire, he stood in his stocking feet with his pistol raised. The men looked to the window to see men moving in the shadows around the house. Quantrill cat-stepped around the room whispering to those pulling on their boots, he whispered imperatives to the men getting ready, bade them to steel themselves. They heard heavy boots clomping up the porch. A man pounded on the door and said, “Make a light!” The man kept pounding on the door with his fist, “Make a light I say!”

Quantrill cat-stepped to the door and listened. He held the muzzle of his pistol to the wood panel and waited. The booming voice came again, “Make a light!” and the man continued to hammer the door. Quantrill moved the muzzle two inches to the left and fired. There was a scream and the sound of a man crashing to the boards. There was a

piteous wail, a weak cry, but the pounding had stopped. Quantrill turned to his men and shrugged and said, "Well, you heard him. He said to light him up!"

The whole yard erupted fire. "Bar the doors and shutter the windows!" Quantrill shouted as he ran, looking from window to window, running up the stairs to look from the second story window, "quick men! We are surrounded!"

The Federals fired unceasing, the fusillade was deafening. Quantrill shouted above the din, "Get Mistress Tatum and the children to the back of the house!" The men pushed the china hutches and cabinets to cover the front windows, bullets shattering glass, flying shards, bullets riddling the wall opposite the windows, breaking plates and splintering furniture. The fusillade continued for twelve straight minutes. The commander could be heard exhorting his men to shoot low and riddle the entire dwelling, him believing the house was made of wood frame and panel. But unbeknownst to the commander, the façade covered brick and stone. His men fired thousands of rounds and never touched flesh. The commander realized this, finally, and called a cease-fire.

In the subsequent lull, Quantrill and his men reloaded, looked to their arms. Quantrill told those huddled near, "Gentlemen, we are in a tight place. We cannot stay here. I, for one, will not surrender. Those who wish to give up without a fight, decide now. All you others, prepare to follow me out."

Mister Tatum spoke up, "Help me get my family out, boys, and I will stay with you and hold the line. Ask them to spare my family."

"You must go with them, Mister Tatum, your duty is to your wife and children." Reluctantly, he agreed to go, though his instinct bade him stay and fight.

Quantrill called for a parlay, waving a white flag through the open door. The Commander agreed to allow the family to leave, including two of Quantrill's youngest, new recruits and mere boys.

"Keep the faith," Quantrill assured them, "we will meet again."

Mister Tatum held the flag and his family lined up for the door, the two boys following behind them. As they walked out into the yard with their hands raised, Federals walked up and shot the old man and the boys where they stood. Mister Tatum slumped to his knees, blood coming in spurts, spattering his wife and daughters. The dead were left in a heap, the wife and daughters whisked away, screaming. The Commander stood over the dead men and shouted at the house, "Death to all traitors!"

"Pity that," William said.

While Quantrill was at parlay and distracted, Federal men at the rear of the house had stacked bales of sweet grass on the back porch, against the door. They lit torches and set the bales on fire. By the time the men smelled smoke and sounded the alarm, the flames had already climbed to the roof, blocking the rear entrance. Several hundred men surrounded the house, guarding every possible exit.

William ran to the upstairs bedroom to have a look from the second story window. The moon had risen, casting a wane light. William could see two officers standing at the edge of the trees, out of pistol range. One officer stood with his arms crossed, firmly planted. The other gestured, speaking emphatically, as he paced back and forth before his superior.

"Can one of you men lend me your rifle, please?" William asked.



William leaned from the window. There were shouts from the yard and bullets began to pelt the frame and wall. "Keep walking...just a bit more..." William said in a hushed whisper, "one more step..." William stilled his breath. He squeezed the trigger. There was a flash and a report, both men dropped. William handed the rifle back to its owner. "Two birds with one bullet," he said.

Black clouds of smoke blew past the windows. Bright flames leapt to the roof, illuminating the yard. Moving through the house, William called the men together. William stood by the front door and said, "Shot guns to the fore." Jarrett, Younger, and Sheppard stood front and center. William fell in behind and held two pistols aloft. He cocked the hammers back. "Fall in behind me, men," he said to them, "it seems we are as good as dead, so let us sell our lives dearly!"

The front door flung open and the guerrillas rushed out with a shrill cry, erupting fire. The Federals recoiled in surprise, their front line faltering immediately, and falling back, they stumbled, crashing into their own ranks. The guerrillas fired at close range and on a full run, fired two-fisted, close enough to burn their assailants by the flash. The guerrillas slid their spent pistols into their holsters as they slid another out in one smooth motion, they fired incessant into the Federal ranks, withering them. Escaping on foot, reaching the wild timbers beyond, they gained a sheltering thicket and stopped to see if the Federals would follow as they reloaded by the light of Mister Tatum's burning home.

## AN END TO CHIVALRY Chapter 10

It took some time to find fresh mounts. But recruits arrived daily, and soon their ranks had swollen to forty men. Quantrill's guerrillas wintered in Texas and arrived outside of Osceola in early spring, the leaves just starting to bud and the bulbs sending up their first tender shoots.

The ground rumbled in the pre-dawn hour, the pale yellow light rising out of the gray mists. Forty horsemen pulled to a halt on the banks of the Osage River. They slowly waded across, bridle-deep in the slow moving waters, holding leather wraps and pistols over their heads, caissons in tow on light skiffs, they cautiously crossed to the opposite bank.

In the stills of early spring, the chill of late frost hung in the morning air, the forest trees just waking from their dormancy, offering their first tender green leaves. Drifts of smoke rose through bare limbs, the fire crackled as the men removed their boots. The camp cook cut the moldy sides off pat loaves of cornpone as the salted pork sizzled in the iron skillet. The cook wiped the grease on his buckskin trousers. With a cotton muff he lifted the enamel pot from the iron grill he had propped up on stones over the fire and poured a thin stream of steaming black coffee into the cups that were offered to him. The cook dished tin plates, a slice of cornpone and a slab of salt pork for every

man, a ladle full of beans, and over all of it he poured a syrup of sorghum thinned with coffee from the day before.

Some men murmured together around the several fires. There was the titter of light laughter and quiet talk. Some men, the first sated, hung their wet clothes on low hanging branches, buckled their gunbelts over their long-johns, and wandering off, they lay flat on their backs, their heads resting on their saddles, their hands folded across their chests or resting on the hilts of their guns. They pulled their hats low over their eyes and dozed. Some dreamed.

A boy of twelve years entered camp with a Dragoon pistol strapped about his waist. It was too much gun for the lad. The boy looked like he was wearing his father's clothes. His belt was too long, looped off and tucked into his trousers. The brim of his hat rested on his ears, sat low over his eyes, so he had to lift his chin to see in front of him. The shoulder seams of his homespun shirt ran halfway down his arms and he had the sleeves rolled up so he could use his hands. The boy carried a wooden box with rope handles and had a canvas satchel slung over one shoulder. The box was heavy. He plunked it down and leaned over it, gasping for breath.

Ollie Sheppard sidled up to the boy and the boy took a folded note from the pocket of his pants and handed it to him. Sheppard read the note and smiled, clapped the boy on the back. The boy unstrung his satchel, set it down, and sat in the rocky sand next to it. He looked up at Sheppard and smiled, shielding his eyes from the rising sun.

“Tell your ma we’ll be delighted to spend the night in her barn,” Sheppard said. He looked from horizon to horizon, “It looks like it wants to rain. It was raining in Texas

when we left, I hope the rain didn't follow us here. We will try and make it soon, tell her. We'll send an advanced runner to say just when."

"Supper will be ready when you get there," the boy said with a grin "she's making sweet-potato pie and rosemary chicken with lemon and butter. She told me to tell you that." Ollie patted his stomach and wiped his glistening eyes, it sounded so good.

"Your mama is a wonderful cook," he said. The men listening murmured approval, rubbed their hands together. They sighed to think of it. They were ready to put on their boots and ride out to the farm, wet clothes and all.

Ollie Sheppard bent to open the satchel that was set in the sand. He reached in and pulled out weights of lead with metal loops. Looking at them, he felt the heft of them in his hands. Mistress Molly had dismantled the family grandfather clock, the one she kept in the entryway of her home, and removed the lead weights so they could be made into bullets. Ollie held them, one in each hand.

"We were told," the young boy said, wiping the sweat from his brow, "you were running short on lead and powder." Ollie put the lead weights back in the canvas satchel and handed it to one of the men standing by. William walked up as Ollie knelt down and looked into the wooden box. One by one, Ollie lifted each sealed glass jar. Two jars were filled with dry black powder and four jars contained halved peaches in sugar syrup.

"That'd be the last of summer's harvest," the boy said, "the last peaches you will see for a while. Ma was saving them for when you returned." William held them up like precious things. He looked at them for a long moment, then he placed them carefully

back in the box, repacking them with straw. “She’s baking bread,” the boy added, “white bread and corn bread and flat biscuits for later.

“Your mama is a saint,” Ollie said.

William put his hand on the boy’s shoulder, “You tell your ma we’ll ride in about an hour after dark tomorrow night. We must tarry here and wait for some men to arrive. You tell her, me and the men are grateful and looking forward to some home cooking. Cut across the fields and stay clear of the main roads. If you see any soldiers or Union men, avoid them. If they happen on you, you don’t know a thing. Understand me?”

“Yes sir,” the boy said and stood waiting. After a few heartbeats he turned and started to run.

“Tommy, how’s your practice coming?” Ollie asked.

The boy stopped and turned, standing at a distance. He straightened himself and said with a note of pride, “I can hit the eye of a bird in flight.”

“That’s good. Keep practicing,” Ollie said, “just keep in mind, son, birds don’t shoot back.”

After a respectful pause, Tommy looked down at his shoes, “You ain’t forgot your promise, did you?” he asked.

“I remember.”

“I can join up the summer after I turn fifteen, you said.”

“I remember. I said it and I meant it.” He added, “Just do me the favor, don’t you dare tell your mother you are planning to sign up. She’ll skin us both, sure.”

“I know better than that,” Tommy said, looking up.

“Hurry back home,” William said, and the boy turned and ran off.

Along about dusk, deep blue gathering in the east, a fiery red in the west, the men began to gather around the fire, having a smoke and passing a bottle around. William took a cigar from his inside coat pocket, closed his eyes as he drew in its scent, then bit the tip. He held it to his lips.

A man walked into camp. He approached the fire circle where the men were gathered. The stranger stood in the clear and slowly turned his head. The men stopped their banter and watched him. His eyes were red and wild. He was blackened as if he'd come through fire, his clothes torn and hanging off of him. When he came toward the light, he looked more animal than man. Lifting his chin, his breathing labored, he looked around at the men. Kroger rose and offered his seat, then stepped away. The man looked down at the stump, staring blindly. Finally he leaned forward, to collapse on the stump at the fire's edge. Near exhaustion, his shoulders slumped, his hands shaking. Black with char, he was covered in a crust of blood. After a time, breathing hard, he straightened himself and looked around at the company of men. Taking a ragged breath he said, “Blood for blood, gentlemen. I will sacrifice a man for every hair that was on her head.”

The man sat for some time staring at the fire and never said another word. William rolled his cigar between his fingers. He looked into the flame. Someone handed him the bottle, clear glass half full of brown whiskey. It kindled with a fiery light, like a jewel in his hand. He handed it to Andrew. It caught the light when Andrew lifted it to his lips.

For a while there was only the buzz of insects and the crackling of the fire. Then the night grew suddenly still. All at once the insects fell silent and the men listened with their hands on their guns, nearly blind to that dark, to hear if horses were coming in the distance.

There came a whistle. A man walked into camp leading his horse behind. He wore expensive store-bought clothes and had a fancy hat with a wide brim and long pheasant feathers pointing out behind. He had a holster built into his knee-high boot for a pea-shooter type derringer, much like a card player would wear, and a custom rig that held six pistols, having three lined up across his chest, the handles within easy reach. His horse wore a fancy rig with a saddle holster, and there were scalps of human hair hanging from the bridle. The man removed his hat, and waved it with a flourish as he bowed. It was Bill Anderson.

“Glorious evening, gentlemen. A might nippy, but otherwise glorious.” He smiled. He was charming. Devilishly handsome, he had long, wavy brown hair past his shoulders and a goatee, neatly trimmed. His eyes were fierce.

Nine men followed him into camp. They were hard, grizzled men. They were trail-worn and wary. Each of them displayed scalps of human hair from their bridles. They brought a man on a horse to the fore who had his hands tied behind him. Bill walked over and yanked him off and let him hit the rocky ground.

“Tie him to a chair,” Bill said, and sauntered over to the fire. He removed his gloves, all the while smiling like the Cheshire, he removed his wide-brimmed hat, handed

it to his lieutenant. "Pardon me please," he said with an air of gentility, "I must question the prisoner."

His men brought the captive up behind and tied him to a wooden camp chair. Bill slid his Tennessee hunting knife from his boot and waved it before the captive's face. The polished steel caught the campfire light. Bill cut off both ears before he asked him any questions. Bill promised him a quick death if he would just tell him what he wanted to know. He cut the man's nose off, and began to cut the skin off his forearms in thin strips, pulling them off and tossing them into the fire. After about a half hour, when he had got the information he needed, he pulled his pistol and before the man could blink, he fired a bullet into his face. The man fell backward, still tied to the chair, and as a thin curl of smoke rose from the hole between his eyes, Bill leaned over him and said, "You are absolved of all your earthly sins."

Bill holstered his revolver and turned to the men around the fire. His lieutenant handed him back his hat. He fixed the crease of his hat with the edge of his hand and adjusted the feather. He put it on and flexed the brim, and as he stood before the others he said, "We must be as cruel as God if we are to win this war."

Bill tipped his hat and retired.

The men sat in silence. There was the rasp of the cricket and katydid and the occasional trill of the nightbird. The pine wood was still a bit damp and crackled, popping sparks. Men's faces were framed in the circle of amber light and they listened to the night as they warmed their hands, their backs to that darkness.

"Well," William finally said, "now we know why they call him Bloody Bill."



The new recruit sat wide-eyed and awe-struck. All the men around the fire were legend to him. Men he had heard about, honorable men, and larger than life. William looked at him for a long time as the boy sat at fire.

“What’s your name, son?”

“John S. Groom,” the boy said in a high voice.

“What’s the S stand for?”

“Sullivan.”

After a bit of thought, William blew a cloud of smoke and said, “Well, John Sullivan Groom, if you are to join our little army, you must have a nick-name we can call you by. What did your father call you?”

“John.”

“Fine. That’s fine. John is a very good name. Let me ask you though, did you ever play river pirates?”

“Sure I did, lots of times.”

“Good. That’s a start. Now, when you played pirates with your friends, what name did you make up for yourself, you know, your pirate name?” William asked with sincere interest.

“They called me one-eyed Johnny.”

There was a pause before the whole crew burst into raucous laughter.

“What’d I say? What’s so funny?” the boy said, somewhat bewildered.

“I didn’t ask you what you keep in your pants,” William said with a straight face.

The men fell about, they were laughing so hard.

The boy was a bit piqued, his voice was shrill as he tried to explain, “They called me one-eyed Johnny ‘cause I wore a patch over one eye.”

The men couldn’t stop laughing and William couldn’t let it go. “Just keep it in your pants, son, and don’t tell us what you named it. We all got pet names for our private parts, but we don’t like to talk about it in polite society.”

Changing the subject, indicating those around him, William asked, “Do you know who these men are?”

John looked around at those sitting around the fireside. He sat with wide eyes, just listening, too awed to say a word. William motioned to the man sitting to his immediate left. He was smooth-faced and very young with curly brown hair. He had a pleasant smile, and a shy manner about him. He was slight of frame and very short and he wore a light gray hat and a long brown coat with many pockets. The boy could see the hilt of two pistols, even in the dim light. William noticed the boy looking, and said in the stiff manner of feigned etiquette,

“Have you met Archie Clemens?”

Archie, very personable, nodded and tipped the brim of his hat, he smiled with the stub of a cigar in one cheek.

“You didn’t know,” William said, “but sitting right next to you is the hero of the Siege of Springfield. Let me tell you, when the Confederates began to fall back under withering fire of grapeshot and cannon, Archie rallied the men and rode straight into the cannon’s mouth. All the men followed after him, and the Blue Coats threw off their arms and high-tailed it. We routed them that day, and kept them on their heels. We crushed

and demoralized them in the following campaign. Archie, short for Archibald, is a pleasant fellow and good-natured, who was never known to cheat at cards. The very best man you can have at your back in a skirmish. A demon in battle, and the very best of all men.”

Archie smiled politely and extended his hand, “I am pleased to meet you.”

John stood and shook his hand, “I am John Sullivan Groom and I am also pleased to meet you, sir.”

Archie was suddenly abashed, unused to adulation. He looked at William, “And what, pray tell, are you trying to say, I’m short for Archibald?”

William recovered, “Archie is from Kentucky. He stands 5 foot, 2 inches...”

As William said it, Archie stretched his back to appear an inch taller, saying, “5 foot, 3 inches.”

“5 foot, 3 inches,” William corrected himself, “now, I’ll wager he has killed a hundred men, but the thing he would rather you know about him is, he cooked the peach cobbler you had with supper this evening.”

“Delicious,” young John Groom said.

“I used cinnamon and a touch of sorghum in the filling,” Archie said with enthusiasm, “it was my mother’s recipe.”

William stood to stretch his legs, “Archie was a famous jockey before the war, he owned a huge sprawl of land and many stables and he bred the finest horses in the whole western part of the state...”

Archie cleared his throat and William let him continue the story.

“That is, the finest horses in all of Kentucky. The Federals paid a visit one afternoon, they told me they were taking my livestock and horses because they needed them for the Union Army. They said I could donate them in demonstration of my loyalty to the Union cause, or else they would kill me for being a Confederate sympathizer and take them anyway. I didn’t have a choice. I decided I would let them have the horses. I figured it was better to start again than to invoke their wrath. But then, after they had taken everything of value, four or five men held me face down on my kitchen floor and two officers held my wife by her slender wrists and felt her up under her petticoats. They terrified her. She was never the same woman after that. She went to live back east with her mother and father. I am told she has crying spells, not letting anyone touch her. She was always very tender, and she was never the same after that. The farm fell into ruins. It has been fallow all these years. The Union set the slaves free, but later some were found living in the hovel of our old home, very thin, on the verge of starvation.”

Archie looked up, overcome. He had said more than he meant to say, and was somewhat embarrassed.

William looked to dispel the solemn mood, “This is Dave Pool to your left,” catching Dave a bit off-guard. Dave had his hands full, he had been in the process of reloading when someone handed him the bottle. He held the whiskey in his left while trying to balance his pistol on his thigh so he could remove the fat cigar from between his teeth so he could speak. Dave had a thin face and long black hair past his shoulders and a long beard down to his chest. He wore a dark brown hat with a flat top and the brim curled up on either side, like a riverboat gambler. He wore a long canvas duster and an

undervest embroidered with flowers since faded, that had rows of pockets for shot and caps.

“Dave can load his pistol on a dead run, like a circus rider. However, it remains to be seen if he can reload while drinking and smoking at the same time.”

The men laughed. Dave smiled broadly, took a drink and passed the bottle.

“He’s the only man I know who carries two derringers at all times. He even sleeps with them. He has one up his left sleeve, and the other, I won’t tell you where he keeps it. One time we were in the thick of it, and Dave had his horse shot out from under him. He was shooting all his pistols empty and I was counting his shots, thinking he was out of bullets and I’d have to rescue him. Well, he pulls one derringer and keeps firing, pulls another and keeps firing, and right when I’m thinking, that’s it, that’s all, he pulls a pepper-box from somewhere I didn’t even see and keeps on firing. He finally makes it to cover, having held off practically the whole Union Army.”

“He has saved my life several times,” Archie said, and stood to stretch his legs.

“And mine too.”

Dave holstered his pistol, and pinching his cigar between thumb and forefinger, he spoke with an air of gentility, “I am pleased to make your acquaintance, a hearty welcome to you young sir. But, in all seriousness, you need to know, that after you raise your hand against the Union, you can never go home. In all probability you will not have a home to go back to. You might live on the road all the rest of your life. Someday we will bury your body out in the forest without a name on your grave. That is a genuine possibility, I hope you know.”

The young boy, seated, noticed that everyone was standing. He stood and straightened his shoulders. He leveled his chin, "They killed my father..." and his voice broke, "they tied his hands and feet and .. and.. dropped him down a well. I never knew what for."

"This age knows no innocence," Dave said to the men, then turned to the young man and said, "this is an ugly and useless life. Before you join, you need to know what your chances are, baby John," Dave paused, "do you mind if I called you baby John?"

John Groom was perplexed, but willing. He weighed his words and said, "If you must."

Dave continued, "I am not trying to dissuade you, I am merely making a statement of fact. Your chances are slim and none."

Baby John held back the tears, trying hard to be a man, "My daddy used to say, that the slimmest of all chances, is still a chance.."

The men marveled at the boy.

"Just so you know before you take the leap," said Dave.

"You need to look first," Archie added.

And William said, "Once you have set your foot on this path, there can be no turning back, just so you know. We are dead in the flesh when we take the oath."

The boy nodded assent and the men let the silence hang there for a solemn moment.

William introduce another man who sat at the fire to warm his hands, "Baby John, this is Joseph Thrailkill..."

“Please leave me out of this,” said the man in half shadows, his voice rumbled: a deep-throated growl. It was sudden and startling. William hung in mid-sentence, deciding whether to continue or drop the subject. There was a restless quiet in the interim. Joseph Thrailkill suddenly rose and gathered his things to leave, “Excuse my gentlemen,” he murmured, groaning, “I think I’ll turn in.”

The men watched in polite silence until Joseph was out of earshot. William continued in a solemn whisper, the men leaning in to hear. “Joseph is the most dangerous of all men. He is in such mortal pain, he wants to die,” William said with respect, looking directly into John Groom’s eyes. John could not move or look away. “This war has made him a very different man than the man he once was.” William observed Baby John to assess the effect of his words. “Just like you have a story, everyman has his story. Never ask about it, Baby John. Never talk about it after today.”

John was wide-eyed and captive.

“Back before the war he was a famous painter. Even when the war started, and for a long while after, he claimed to be a pacifist. He said that no matter what, he could never lift a finger to harm another person, he didn’t believe in it...well. This is not the age of pacifism. It so happened, he was away in St. Louis at a showing of his art work, and he had big plans for when he returned, he was going to marry a sweet young girl by the name of Lewellen. She had big blue eyes and golden hair. A pretty little thing, it was such a shame...” William said and his voice trailed off.

“What happened then?” John asked with unblinking eyes.

“Well,” William said, taking a deep breath, “he would have taken her with him, but she had to stay and care for her invalid father. When Joseph returned two weeks later, the father was dead and...” William paused again, “are you sure you want to hear this?” John nodded slowly. “They killed her father. He couldn’t walk, he was in a wheelchair. The Federals wheeled his chair into the hot sun and left him till his brains were baked, then they ravaged Lewellen over a period of days. When Joseph arrived to her home, she was very near death. She died in his arms. He took after the men who did it, there were eighteen, and he ambushed them on the road and killed them one after the other. He caught them unawares at first, and cut half of them down before they knew what was happening, and the rest fled, wailing like demons, and he chased them all the way to Ohio and cut the last one down within view of the Union fort, just out of rifle range, but so they could see him butcher the last man.”

“Shot him dead? asked John.

“No. Tied him to a tree, him screaming, and cut off his man parts and fed them to him so he choked to death. He is at the edge of his mind, young sir. Never speak to him unless he speaks to you first. And never let on you know and never repeat what you’ve been told. Promise me?”

Baby John nodded emphatically.

“Raise your right hand,” William said. John stood with heels together and his shoulders square. He raised his right hand. Several of the men followed his motions and mimicked him perfectly. “I solemnly swear...” William began, then paused. The men waited, expectant.



John repeated, along with several of the men, "I solemnly swear..."

"You see that star?" William asked and pointed over his shoulder into the night sky. John was looking for a long while, so he turned and looked for himself.

"Come away from the fire," William said. He walked into the clearing to look up at the night. He motioned for the boy to come over, then held young John by the shoulder and pointed so John could sight along his out-stretched arm. "Do you see that twinkling red star? That is Antares. It is the heart of the Scorpion that always hangs low in the southern sky..."

"I see it."

William turned to the north and sighted along the dipper, "There are those who pledge their loyalty to that cold, white, indifferent Polaris," and turning to the south he pointed to the red star, "and there are those who give pledge to the warm, red heart of Antares. It determines who you are in life. I want you to fix your gaze on Antares and say your oath of allegiance."

"Yes sir, I will."

"Now when I took the oath, my Captain said, as near as I can remember: Our liberties are subjugated, our peace is destroyed, and everything we hold dear is taken from us. We have no choice but to fight. Our love is gone and every hope we ever had is come to nothing."

William had John's full attention. Baby John showed the flat of his hand.

"Keep your gaze on Antares and when I have said the oath, you say, I swear and cross your heart like this." William crossed his heart with two fingers. "Here is the oath:

Of my own free will I promise blood for blood, I will kill without mercy every enemy of the sovereign state of Missouri. I will lay down my life in the defending of the true faith for the sacred cause of freedom. I will follow orders without question. I will never allow the enemy to take me alive, and I will never allow any member of the brotherhood to fall into the hands of the enemy. On pain of torture, I will not reveal the names, or whereabouts, or doings, of any member of the brotherhood. I swear this with my whole heart.”

“I swear it,” Baby John said and made the sign with his fingers.

“I am very pleased and proud, John, you did real good.”

Dave said, “There’s no turning back now, there can be no turning back. He who puts his hand to the plow and looks back, is not worthy.”

“Spoken like a true farmer.”

“That’s just my point. We were meant to take up the plow, live a peaceful life. Instead we have taken up the sword. And he who lives by the sword will die by the sword.”

“There are worse ways to die. Besides, the Bible also says: they will beat their swords into plowshares, they will make war no more.”

“That’s some other world. A better world than this I’ll bet.”

“A world we will never live to see. I am a farmer at heart. I’d like nothing better than to go back to the farm. Plant my crop. Find me one good woman I can settle down with. Have some babies. I would go back to the farm this minute if this war would let me. Live the peaceful life and die of old age in my sleep.”

“No you wouldn’t.”

“I would.” Dave thought again, “I might. Well, it’s a pleasant thought, anyway. I would have liked to have had a say in the matter.”

“I can’t see you as a farmer.”

“I was a farmer when this war broke out. But you. You don’t know any difference because all you ever knew was the war. You were born to it.”

Some of the men had turned in. Baby John couldn’t keep his eyes open. William kept watching the man sitting on the stump, burned and crusted with blood. He kept thinking he knew this man, but he couldn’t place him, he kept trying to remember where he had seen him before.

Andrew sidled next to William. “This is the last of the tequila. I brought this back with me from Texas. All that’s left until next winter.”

William held it up to the firelight and noticed in the swish of green and yellow-tinged swirl, there was a worm. “You know I am not much of a drinker.”

“Even so. This is an occasion.”

William took a sip, wiped his lips with the cuff of his sleeve, and handed the bottle back to Andrew.

Andrew took a long, slow draught. When he brought the bottle down they could see the dead worm dancing on the bottom. In the amber light they watched the dead worm dance.

“To victory,” William said.

“Here, here,” said Andrew. Andrew had the bottle and raised it to his lips.

William looked at the man on the stump. They listened to the crickets. They sat together in the stillness and watched the planets wheel across the night, fall slowly into the shadows of the forest.

Solemnly William said, “I think I know who the man on the stump is.”

“Who?”

“Keep your voice down. I don’t know if he’s sleeping with his eyes open, or trancing. Whichever. Don’t wake him and don’t rile him.”

“Who is it?”

“When I tell you it will amaze you. You will not believe it. I hardly believe it myself.”

Andrew tilted his head back and took the last swallow. You could hear the clench of his throat as he drained the last drop. Andrew waited for the liquor to burn him all the way down, then looked at William with a big grin. He turned his head and spit the worm into the fire. They laughed together and listened to it sizzle. Then Andrew finally said,

“No self-respecting man would ever swallow the worm.”