

From The Ashes

By David Michael Karder

Chapter One

The Meeting

Vernon Shields, Writer, Journalist.

Manuscript entry:

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Bisbee, AZ.

Two shots fired, one man standing.

The Glory of the Western Frontier, travelers arrived by horse, wagon train, stagecoach, boat, and the steam engine locomotive. From all over the world they sought to find their land, stake their claim, and build their own future. It was a time of great fortune and great cost. At the beginning of the 1900's another transformation had begun to take place. The invention of the horseless carriage was the talk of the day. Still rare on the open frontier, however everything was changing. For instance, the wild riders and gunslingers were becoming legends of the past. Tombstone's silver mines nearly abandoned since they flooded. The trains and industry brought law to the land of the lawless.

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Bisbee Arizona 1907, I generally gravitate to Bisbee, Tombstone, and Tucson, for the most part, because it is a Pinal territory and the stories are grand. Since the copper find of 1884, Bisbee has grown rapidly in size. Some say there are more than fifty thousand here. Stories come third hand, second hand and even a couple I have witnessed.

As a writer of Wild West Short Stories, I have seen and taken account of many events. The efforts of the hard working good, collide with the pillaging by the less honest. It might be a high-risk train robbery, a stagecoach heist, day light bank robbery, or an action packed middle of the street gunfight. However, the tall tales are another thing fading into legend. I find myself lately gazing at the sky, contemplating what would be next for me. Maybe a book, maybe something deeper, what have I accomplished, what will be my next step?

This story began as such; recently I had met a certain individual first hand.

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When in Bisbee I must stay at the New Grand Hotel, I just believe the beds are the most comfortable in Arizona. The entertainment is also a motivation for return. Catherine, sweet Catherine Callahan has been for years the main attraction of the Grand Hotel and Bisbee. A heavenly singer, such beauty and talent truly belong in New York, brunette hair, long, flowing, always perfect. Her smile melts steel, eyes, a beautiful deep brown, the finest dresses sewn by her own hand. Married a couple times, from what I hear and buried both of them, not by her hand though, that is just part of living in this area. Men get dead, mining accidents, fights, gambling, drink, and guns fast and slow. Her etiquette, true perfection, a shining light, a breath of fresh air, a touch of high society in this copper mining town.

After taking time to admire her, it was time to proceed with the day and get some breakfast. Out on the walkway I headed to a little place I enjoy at the end of the row.

Every town has a General Store, but this proprietor has breakfast at seven o'clock on the dot everyday and it was the best coffee, fried eggs, bacon, and toast in the world. I cannot help but drop in occasionally right at six fifty five. Jim and Joan Simpson bought this place six months ago and have had good success with it. Greeting me warmly as always and acting surprised. They know, how else can you explain the extra plate? Jim gave me a hardy handshake followed with a bone-jarring smack to the arm. Joan provided me with a wonderful motherly hug.

Jim was in the mine for years but always wanted to be his own boss. He was a big man with broad shoulders, shaved head and a big western mustache. The coffee, ready to pour, hint of nutmeg and fresh dairy, one to Jim, one to me, served with one of the biggest smiles possible. The sizzle of bacon and eggs just washes all worries away. Fried eggs always taste better when you can hear the chickens in back. The meal placed before us, Joan sat, closed her hands and rolled out grace, a woman of strong faith.

Jim asked if I saw Johnny on the way over, I shook my head no, not wanting to let the flowing yolks on my plate cool. Johnny, their only child, eighteen I believe, troubled boy though. Jim worked in the copper mine when Johnny was growing up so as one may preconceive, Johnny had a bit too much freedom on his hands. Both excellent parents however, this is a tough place and a young individual with nothing to do will find the wrong things to do. Johnny fancied himself as a gunslinger. Like in a circus act, he could spin it, toss it, and slide it back into the holster. However, it was a different story when it came to hitting the target. His gang would always give out a "good shootn' Johnny," reason being, Johnny was short tempered. He was not

as large as his father was but he was still a strong healthy boy, and well able to throw the fists around.

I was sure Jim asked about his whereabouts because Johnny had just returned three days ago, from an extended stay, under the hospitality of the Arizona Territorial Corrections Facility in Yuma. As a matter of fact, it was his bad shooting that won him the free stay. At a card game the sheriff was sitting in on, he drew his weapon. Did I mention Johnny was a dim light? Anyway, it was a Friday night, always a good time for poker and a place to collect tall tales of the previous week's adventures.

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Drinking into the night, off duty Sheriff Jones entered with a friend who was visiting from out of town, they both sat down at Johnny's table. It was not really clear what transpired in that three minutes it took Johnny to flip out; details were fuzzy when people are that drunk. Well, he drew on the guest, squeezed off a round, and as usual missed braking the mirror over the bar, nearly getting Claude the bartender. He then proceeded to punch Sheriff Jones in the mouth, breaking his tooth, all while the Sheriff attempted to disarm him. During the scuffle, Johnny threw his beer mug at the visitor, splitting his head open.

After spending the night in jail to sleep it off, the charges started out as disorderly conduct and the sheriff was willing to let it go. However, Johnny wanted to be the star and proceeded to kick the sheriff in the family jewels. Down the sheriff went; back to jail Johnny went. That was not enough for Johnny, oh no, he was eating up all the attention. When he went before the judge, he spit an enormous wad of chew on the shirt and face of the judge. That earned him a free, escorted stagecoach ride to Yuma.

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I was ready to dig into a second helping of beautiful fried eggs. Out on the street was a ruckus. I turned my head to see what it was. From right outside the door we heard a little boys' voice, "Mr. Simpson! Mr. Simpson!"

We stood and one of our local youngsters, Billy, who knows everything, blasted through the door.

Winded, he yelled out again, "Mr. Simpson!"

Jim tried calming him down and asked, "What's the commotion about?"

In his excitement all he could yell out was, "Johnny... aaaat tttthhhe saaaaaallllooon."

Out the door we went. The Saloon Johnny normally attended was three doors down. Jim got through the door before me, all I heard was, "SON, NO, DON'T!"

Through the door I stopped, and not more than two feet in front of us, we witnessed Johnny enraged and grabbing at his six-shooter. Jim's call out was enough to get Johnny's attention and the gun slipped back into his holster.

Standing at the bar, the obvious target of Johnny's rage, was a drifter. I say obvious because when an opportunity of a gunfight presents itself, those individuals who are not involved tend to maneuver in such a way to provide a clear path for those who are involved.

Now, I had written many accounts of shooters on the frontier, also witnessed a few first hand, I was sure this individual was a shooter. Calm, left hand on the bar, his right hand placed the beer

he had just sipped, back on the counter. It was obvious Johnny intended to draw on him and shoot him in the back.

Black hat with lots of miles, diamondback rattlesnake headband, partial beard, long hair, rugged, traveled. Grey shirt, red bandana around his neck to protect from dust when riding. Black vest, with what I could swear from my distance looked to be two aged bullet holes. Dark grey pants, black boots and spurs strapped with leather and snakeskin. The saloon was on the south side of the street and fairly well lit in the morning.

The stranger did not flinch. He calmly set the beer down, surveyed the room from left to right, and back to the left where Johnny, Jim, and I stood. The spectators were a good three feet from us. The stillness was eerie, the tension heavy, what was going to happen next? Johnny paused, slid his gun back into the holster and looked at his dad. He had this lost look on his face, as if back when he was a child and looking to his dad for comfort. That moment gave way to the Johnny of today. The look of insanity came back to Johnny's face, I glanced right to see what the stranger was doing. Taken back by his action, there he was left hand on the bar and right hand providing lift to the glass in route to his mouth. However, this time his back was more at an angle towards the wall with the left shoulder angled in our direction.

I pulled back; Jim made a step towards Johnny, with a single word plea, "Noooooo!"

When he yelled, Joan came through the door to witness Johnny draw his weapon. A quick draw, an impressively quick draw, hammer cocked, released, a blast of gunpowder, and with a flash of light the mug shattered in the travelers hand.

Yet again Johnny missed, not by much, but still a miss. Joan screamed; Jim leaped at Johnny while he cocked the hammer a second time. The click of the hammer and his mother's scream

was the last sound Johnny ever heard. The click of the hammer completed, a blast of gunpowder erupted, however, this time it was not Johnny's gun. Jim reached his son just as the bullet tore through Johnny's forehead.

Jim caught his son and cradled the body. Johnny's body struggled to fight death, he whimpered, went limp, and the final exhale left his bloody face. I turned right to look at the gunslinger; his gun held by the left hand, at his waist, pointing down, blood poured from his face, made by the shattered glass. He walked over to Jim, who was still holding his son.

The stranger said, "I heard you yell, Son."

Jim reacted in sadness, "Yes. He is my Son!"

The stranger holstered his weapon, looked at Jim, then Joan, who was now on the floor in tears, "I am sorry for your loss." The stranger put his hand on Jim's shoulder. Pulled it back, wiped blood from his face, and then headed for the door. I noticed he headed towards the hotel. This shooter was different; he did not yell and holler. He did not look for accolades; he waited to the very last moment to react, took care of the situation and truly showed remorse.

After helping Jim and Joan, I went to the hotel and saw another side of Catherine, the field surgeon. The shooter took a swig of gin and Catherine started stitching his face. He did not flinch, not once. She completed the last stitch, leaned forward so slowly, slight grin on her face, she kissed his cheek then bit the thread. He still did not flinch he even smiled. She grabbed his hand pulling him up; they walked out the back and up the stairs. I have written numerous stories; I have seen many individuals but not anyone like this.

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The next morning I sat down to have a word with Catherine. “Hey honey, *she smiled so nice*, can I talk with you for a minute.”

“Of course, Sweetie, tell me, are you working on any new stories?”

“Funny you ask. That is what I wanted to discuss. Do you think you could get me in with the traveler you sewed up yesterday?”

“David?”

She sat down and the server poured us both a coffee.

“I guess. I never heard his name until right now.”

“I don’t know, Sweetie, but I could find out.” She grabbed her cup, took a sip and winked at me. “I’ll go see how he’s doing.”

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The Proposition

Catherine & the Gunman

“David, time to get up.”

“Not now, Catherine?”

“Well, Sweetie, I thought you might be interested in a little therapy.”

“Really, you did, and what might that be?” Her dress fell to the ground.

“Well, Catherine, if you really think it will help, I will do my best.”

“Oh I’m not worried about that, Sweetie, now stay perfectly still.”

Gently she pulled the sheets down and slowly she straddled his hips. A slow clinch, she leaned forward, her perfect breasts pressed against his chest as she leaned in to kiss his cheek, then the ear lobe, a kiss became a nibble, her legs squeezed tighter. Pleasure blanketed his body, a chill from head to toe, she smiled, sat up, stretched her arms, head back, she shifted, a slow glide, her hands fell to each side of his head, her hair covered his face, another smile, a kiss rendered him defenseless.

At the completion of the therapy session, Catherine got out of the bed, opened the patio curtain and door to let in some fresh air. Naked she stood in front of the door, sun glistening off her slightly sweat covered body.

Catherine took that opportunity to inquire about getting his story written. “Sweetie, I know you’re looking for a rest. I may have an idea that can get you some real time to rest and reflect.”

“Reflect? What do you mean, what does that pretty little head have cooking?”

“There’s a writer in town, a good writer, he has done many stories, is respected and wants to write your story.”

“What, are you off your rocker? I know sex has gotten your head all fuzzy. You should put your naked body down in that chair. I wouldn’t want you to lose balance and fall off the balcony.”

“David?”

“Stop, Catherine,” He could not help but stare at that beautiful body.

“No. Listen to my idea.” She began getting dressed. “I have a cabin outside of town up the hill. It’s secluded and you could truly get some rest and best of all we could continue our therapy sessions.”

How could a man resist such an offer?

He responded, “Let me think about it, Ok?”

“Fair enough, I’ll see you later.”

The door shut, he considered her suggestion. A secluded cabin sounded good, but he was not sure about someone doing his story? Reliving everything, who would want that?

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Payback

Vern picks up the conversation with Catherine.

I wiped my mouth and placed the napkin next to the empty plate, breakfast was complete; *I wonder if Catherine will be able to set up a meeting, it could be a great opportunity for me.* I heard a door upstairs close. Catherine emerged from the hall at the top of the stairs, she sauntered entering the main room.

“Well, Vernon, I tossed the idea to him, for right now you need to wait. He said he would consider it but I would not hold your breath. He has been through a lot.”

“I understand, thank you, Catherine. I’m gonna head over to the saloon to see if there are any new stories going around.”

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Out on the street I saw Jim and Joan in their wagon, they said they were heading to the cemetery. Changed my intended destination and asked if I could join them. Joan cried, Jim tried to control the reins and comfort her, “Jim, let me drive, you help Joan.”

“Thank you, Vernon.”

Only a few individuals acknowledged the ceremony, mostly Johnny’s gang, the priest, and a couple locals. Johnny did not have any friends outside of his crew. The ceremony, quiet, Joan kept it together, Jim hugged her the whole time. At the conclusion we slowly headed back to the wagon, Jim and Joan were well ahead of me and the gang was behind me.

I could hear the boys. “We need to make this right for Johnny. The killer that took him out is still here, walking the streets, as if nothing ever happened! How can we let that go?”

Clearly agitated, the same individual punched one of the others in the arm and continued. “Just because the Sheriff won’t do anything doesn’t mean we have to let it go.”

One of the younger boys spoke out, “Come on, he’s a real shooter. Johnny was the best out of us and he lost.”

That did not sit well with the instigator, “Johnny is gone, and we no longer have to pretend he knows how to shoot. He never hit his targets, not once. I might not be as fast but I can hit what I shoot at. Besides, I am not talking about a head-to-head quick draw. There are many ways to do this. It will hurt him, maybe kill him.”

Not once did I look back, but I heard every word. Stopped at the Sheriff's office, it was a necessity to inform him of what was in the works. It was his opinion that there was going to be more deaths this week by the gun of the visitor.

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The time came to take to the streets and find a quiet place to sit and observe; tensions were surely building. Johnny's gang numbered about twelve; I did not think any of them were over twenty. None of them was really a qualified gunmen or criminals; they would cause trouble but nothing serious.

I tend to drift off in my mind, writing can consume me and the next story was always brewing. That day was no different; I stared out at the street, considering the wording for what I currently knew and what was to come.

An individual took a seat next to me and startled me; it was the gunman that orchestrated the demise of Johnny. "Sir?" I got out with a shaky voice.

In a low controlled tone, the gunman I knew as David responded, "Didn't mean to startle you, sorry."

"No it's ok; I'm in my world thinking about the next story."

"Yeah, I understand you want to write my story."

"I would be honored, Sir. However, you see, I normally write short stories, tales if you will, some fact, some tall tales. However, I really want to get to the next level. Be part of a true story of someone with character, a real individual, and not a glory hunter. What I hear about you, Sir,

is that you tend to be an enforcer. No real job or title, getting shot at because of past involvements, but beyond that I really don't know much more."

He shook his head and grinned. "That was a mouthful. How do you know I fit that description? Do you really know what I can do or have done? This may not be what you're lookin' for and I don't know if I can trust you to tell the story, as I tell it."

"That is true, Sir, I don't know you; you don't know me. Catherine is our go between. If we sit down and do this, you are free to stop at any time and end the whole thing."

He turned his head and looked across the street, then back at me. "I've looked at some of your writin' you're skilled. I read one of your stories about a drifter accused of ridin' with the James Gang. The story was in Kansas. You wrote about a young man that allegedly came back after the robbery of the fair tickets. The James Gang stole eight thousand dollars. Do you recall that one? Were you there first hand or what was your source?"

That shocked me, he knew of my writing; pleasantly surprised at best. "Well, I was looking for stories related to the James Gang, I'm sure you understand anything written about the James Gang sells."

"No. I understand, but I'm curious about that story, about that individual."

"Well, I was outside the jail collecting detail about the robbery. Two elderly individuals, a man and a woman, came to the jail as alleged witnesses, for this kid scheduled to hang for the robbery. It was a big story, though it was very hard to get two people with the same account. As many of my investigations go, I tread through all the stories and form one. This was a weird one though. The gallows were fully tested and a crowd was forming with no trial. The two witnesses

supported the kid's story and the sheriff had to release him. The kid was beaten pretty bad, face messed up, could not recognize him. The accused was set free and the sheriff lost the next election. Apparently, the kid was a hand working for the two elderly individuals and was falsely accused. I wrote it down how I heard it. It wasn't a big part of the story but I felt it was good to include, keeping true to the events."

The shooter turned to me, "Vernon, you can do your writin. I will have Catherine contact you when the arrangements have been made."

What had I done to earn his faith?

Just then a shotgun blast rang out, pellets tore up the wood in front of me, blood splattered across my leg, my shins experienced a new pain, *I've been shot*. David hit the deck on his right shoulder, rolled to his back and drew both guns. Blood was accumulating on his left shredded pant leg. One of Johnnie's boys stood off to the right reloading his shotgun.

The fool boy looked up, oh the look on his face, his failure was clear and he knew that he was about to pay the ultimate price. The two barrels of the traveler's guns were steady. The boy stared right into the nickel-plated barrels as they released their deadly artillery.

The two guns flashed, two slugs tore into the chest of the one provoking the gunfight. The saddest look came over the boy's face and he fell backward.

Someone to the left yelled, "NO!" A gunshot rang out and put a hole in the wall behind us. Two more of Johnny's boys were in full stride with guns drawn, running straight at us. In clear pain, the gunman turned left and got to his knees, guns ready, hammers locked, no hesitation, two shots fired. The boy in the lead took one square in the neck; belly flopped to the ground, and

skidded to a stop, no longer moving. The second twisted to the impact of the bullet to his left shoulder and stumbled. Instantly the traveler locked the hammers and released another two rounds. The still standing gunman received two more pieces of lead, one in the right arm and the second in his right ear. Blood scattered out the opposite side of his head no more than three feet from us.

For an instant silence reined on the street, panning left to right the gunman assured the attack had ended. The remaining attackers hesitated at the demise of the first three.

Not sure, what their next move was going to be, David stood, his left leg bloodied, “Well! Got no balls, you just gonna stand there?”

He holstered the gun in his left hand. Took aim at the nearest remaining gang member, he cocked the hammer and held it steady. The target froze, his pants moistened, liquid ran to his boots, hands shook, gun twitched, his gun fired into the ground. David fired and tagged the wet one in the left knee, his body responded by flipping to the right and on his back. The wet one started crying when his intended target walked down the steps and stood over him.

Catherine yelled from the balcony across the street. “Stop, David. It’s is over they’re not shooting at you anymore!”

He looked up at her, holstered his gun, stood down, and walked up the stairs backwards to my position. Catherine made her way to the stairs at the end of the balcony.

Stupidity was the next course of action. The two remaining boys standing behind the position of the wet crying one made a move and announced their intentions with a yell out. “YOU ASSHOLE, JOHNNY IS DEAD. NOW YOU’RE GONNA DIE, LONGHAIR!”

Catherine cleared the stairs and stopped, she was fully aware of what was going to happen next. It was like the fourth of July. The two drew on their intended target, David shoved me so hard I left my feet and hit the ground hard on my left side. I looked up to see something I had never heard or seen before. This stranger stood still while the boys emptied their weapons. The wall behind him splintered, the glass window shattered, twelve times they fired, all hip shots, he flinched as one round found its way to the outer part of his left shoulder, tearing his shirt and skin. The noise stopped as fast as it began, yet the finale had not yet taken place.

The two had done all they could, not taking the time to aim had cost them greatly. I swore I could hear their hearts. I looked at David, his guns were still in the holsters, and blood was running down his side. He held a tomahawk in his right hand, his left foot stepped forward and he threw that hatchet like a rock. It landed in the chest of the man on the right, the blade sunk into his flesh all the way to the handle. With a look of amazement, the recipient fell to his knees trying to pull it out. It would not release, it was too deep in his chest. Crying while wrestling the handle of the tomahawk he fell to his side, breathing became sporadic, blood exited through his mouth, he was bleeding out, a cough, a deep inhale and he died.

The remaining individual continued reloading, the gunman known as Longhair stood still both guns remaining in the holster.

He allowed the fool to reload and fire one round, unfortunately another missed hip shot. Patient no more, in a very smooth move he drew, raised the gun to eye level, hammer lock, trigger, the shot hit his adversary in the jaw, square in the chin. So much blood splattered, looked like a melon exploding, the last attacker fell straight and flat on his back. Dust blew from his

landing; Catherine ran to David, he sat back on the bench that started our meeting. Visibly drained and with the gun still in hand it clearly agitated him.

He had come to Bisbee to rest, not running, not evading the law, just wanting to take time to relax. He turned to me while I tended to my wounds. “The doctor will take care of you, Vern. You sure you want to do this, writer. This shit follows everywhere I go, no matter what I do or don’t do.”

I responded with a positive nod, he shook his head.

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A couple days later Catherine called on me to get my things, it was time to go for a ride. In a carriage with the windows covered, we headed west out of town, approaching a fork in the trail she reined in the horses.

“Vernon, we are going into hiding. The topic of your book wants to be left alone, he is making every effort to relax, and does not want to be concerned with the need to kill someone. Therefore, what we will do is, I will take you to him and in a couple days, bring you back. Two days on and two days off, you will have time to do your thing and David will be able to rest. I will be the only one who knows where he is.”

“I understand, Catherine, let’s continue.”

About an hour later, she let me open the curtains. “Sorry, Vern, but I had to make sure you had no idea where you are.”

We came through a group of trees to a small cabin. David was sitting on the porch in a rocking chair, left arm in a sling, his left leg wrapped similar to mine. “Greetings, Vern, how’s the wounds to your leg?”

“About as good as your leg I suppose, Sir.”

“Can the sir shit for starters, been shot before, Vern?”

I looked to my bandages, and shook my head no. “First time, and if you don’t mind, I would like it to be the last.”

David laughed. “We will do what we can. You ready to get to work?”

“Yes, Sir, I mean, David.”

“Well, get comfortable, the open bed is yours.”

He grabbed Catherine’s hand and she leaned over to kiss him. “Catherine, you have a fine spot here. Thank you.”

“For you, Honey, I’ll do anything. In a couple days we’ll get Vern out and I’ll get you set up with some more therapy.”

“Yes indeed, Catherine.”

With a wink and a smile, sweet Catherine rode away. David started a fire, poured a couple whiskies, handed me one and sat down across from me.

The following collection of Wild West Adventures is that as told through the forty plus years of the life of a gunman, David Murphy aka “Longhair.”

Chapter Two

I was seven in 1861

My Dad was a Civil War veteran; we lived in Chicago. I was seven years old when he went to fight the southern confederates' in 1861. I remember standing in front of our house; we lived on Pine Street, north of the river going right into Michigan Ave. It was a strange time; we were entering into a war in which we were going to be fighting our own people. The color of a jacket determined what side one fought. Many of Dad's friends were from the south and had left earlier to join the confederacy. They were preparing to fight people whom they had been working with months before. Side by side, they built the city, homes, sidewalks, businesses, and steel for the trains. Chicago was huge; growing so fast, it was a great place to be. However, all that was changing, the heartbeat of the city changed. Leading up to the war, the truth was the women and children had to pitch in and help at home while the men went to defend the freedoms all people were to have.

A carriage arrived, a cross between a covered wagon and the new stagecoaches. Four horses pulled the carriage, a regiment of men and horses to the front and rear. All sat proud, everyone was sure that this was going to be handled quickly and the nation would be complete again. Already loaded with men, more coaches came from the blocks parallel to Pine. Everyone was out in the street that day. Some were yelling, just proud to be a patriot, others crying because their loved ones were leaving. Dad stepped towards the coach, Mom grabbed his arm and gave him the biggest hug, Dad grinned, and then she kissed him good-bye. He grabbed a couple of lilacs

off the bush next to the stairs; put one in her hair and kept one. “I will always love you, my sweet cherry blossom!”

To this very day, the smell of lilacs brings me to that time. Dad then turned towards me, messed my hair, bent to one knee, smiled and nodded. “David, you keep things straight here and I will do so out there. Don’t forget to fix that first step, it’s loose again and get a haircut.”

“Yes, Sir!”

He climbed into the carriage; it rolled down Pine Street and headed south across the river. In front of Dad, Mom never shed a tear, but when he was gone, she cried for days. Lincoln had declared freedom for all slaves and the south was not happy. It was going to get nasty and Mom was so scared. So many of our friends went through the same thing, it was hard to understand. All I knew was that hundreds of thousands were going to war to make things right.

Now it was my job to be the man; after school, I worked whenever I could. The city was chaotic, growing like crazy. We lived in the German district. It was a hard working core of people; all the construction that was going on meant a lot of work all the time. I worked building the stockyards, seven years old when I started but I had to do what I could; that was how it was.

Knowing my way around tools, I became very skilled at building. The years rolled by, letters continued coming from Dad. Every weekend we walked to the post office. Mom would not open the letters until we got home.

To my Love:

The day turns into night

As the sun sets

As a flower wilts
My soul longs for you
In the blood and coldness of war
My love for you warms my soul
I close my eyes and see your face
I breathe deep and smell the lilacs
You are the anchor of my soul
Without you tomorrow has no value
My thoughts of you are the heartbeat of my soul
I long for your touch, your beauty
The smell of your perfume
Your kiss, your hug
You are the anchor of my soul
I will always love you.

Kiss, Kiss, my Cherry Blossom, I will see both of you soon!

Mom so wanted us to be together again. Dad only wrote about the good things, he would tell of his friends, the laughs they would have around the fire, how bad the food was, sleeping under the stars and so on. He would mention the battle, only in the fact he was always running the rebels back. I thought it was the greatest.

Another letter arrived.

To My Love:

Since that day I met you; my heart has been yours!

The golden lace on your white dress

The deep red of your lips

Your gorgeous deep brown eyes

Your hair, your lovely, lovely hair

Your soft skin, the skin of an angel

These are the thoughts that cleanse my soul.

Today I saw Ben from the lumberyard, he is still wearing grey, across from our position I could see him manning the cannon. It is quiet today, no bloodshed, and no hatred. I do not know if Ben saw me but I know I hope our paths do not come that close again during this war. It will never be too soon for this war to end.

I remember the day I met Bill. He moved from Arkansas to find work in the big city. He never let that accent go. It's funny how we remember certain things.

Tell David I acquired a new Henry Rifle, accurate as hell.

Kiss, Kiss, my Cherry Blossom, I will see both of you soon!

I kept some letters and later in life, I learned what it was really like. I had the greatest respect for Dad. There was no need to provide the full detail, the pain, death, cold, starving agony. No, that was not his way. He made us feel safe, those of us at home, simply waiting, longing for the day.

Always excited at letter time, it was wonderful, like he was with us.

To My Love:

Sweet dear, you consumed my thoughts today. They granted me a two-day leave. I got a bottle, loaf of bread, bag of jerky, and headed for the river. I found a weeping willow sat down, closed my eyes and went right to the State Fair.

You were so cute sitting with your friends at the ice cream stand, vanilla ice cream, cherry on top. Remember when we met? I walked up nabbed your cherry and you looked so upset. You were at my side every moment from then on. We walked that fair all night. Your smile was so intoxicating. I can see it right now. We finished that night with more ice cream and that time you got the cherry.

You have been part of my soul every day since.

When I get back, we are going straight to the lakefront, to soak up that fine fresh lake air.

Page two is for David, Babe, I miss you.

Kiss, kiss, I will see you soon, Cherry Blossom!

Dear David:

I had a wonderful memory of one of our days fishing. While I was on leave, I got to sit down and do some fishing on the Mississippi. When the line hit the water, it took me back to your fifth birthday. Do you

remember that trip? We loaded up the wagon; camping gear, wood, both horses, you, Mom, and I. You caught your first everything that weekend. Sunfish, Bass, Trout, and the biggest Catfish we ever saw.

Your Mom cooked that fish to perfection, lemon, garlic, a loaf of sour dough bread, some butter and we were in heaven.

Remember when you fell in the river? You were so angry at the time but at the fire that night, we laughed and laughed. Your Mom laughed so hard milk shot out of her nose. She won't admit it but we know the truth.

Love you both!

Mom cried while she folded up the letter, that got me crying, emotions conflicted, we missed him so much.

A letter came that worried us, it was not the content but it looked like it had blood splatter.

To My Love:

My friends and I went hunting for squirrel and rabbit today. We just couldn't take the military grub anymore. I miss your cooking, baby, your ham, mint leaves, pineapple and sweet potato. Oh my, I can taste it right now.

David:

Remember when you shot your first squirrel? What a shot, you smiled so big. It was a fine shot. Make sure you keep that muzzleloader oiled and clean, we are going hunting as soon as I get back. I hope you kept up practicing.

Sorry to cut it short but gotta go.

I hope both of you are well, I miss you guys so much.

Love you both!

Mom and I were so worried, no kiss, kiss, Cherry Blossom, we had no idea what happened and could only wait until the next letter. However when the next one came he gave no indication to why the last ended like it did. However, this one made me so proud of my Dad.

To My Love:

Oh, what a story I have for you guys this time. I know how you like rubbing elbows with the who's who. Our regiment had some guests today. Lt. General Sheridan and President Lincoln. Yeah, the president! They walked through the whole camp and shook hands with everyone. The dinner that night included our guests, but wait, it gets even better. Our commander picked six soldiers to have a competition. The prize was a seat at the head table. Get your attention, David? Guess how they determined the winner? Ok I'll tell you, a shooting contest. Lincoln and Sheridan were the judges. Long rifle, handgun, discharge, reload, discharge, target stationary, target moving, quick draw and accuracy. I took all categories! That's

right; I sat at the Presidents table. We talked all night; once dinner was over; we sat and talked even more over brandy. The president knew of a few of our missions, and shared his views and hopes.

It was a great night, many of my cohorts were harassing me the next day but that didn't matter.

I wish you guys were there.

Kiss, kiss, Cherry Blossom, see you soon!

Then the best letter came.

Honey, be happy and tell David. I'm coming home, the North has won!

Yes! Dad was coming home! However, the price was great. Many lost their lives; several of my friends never saw their dads again. Mom's friends met regularly. They continually took care of those families that were never going to see their loved ones again. The neighborhood grew so strong during that time. It was patriotism at its finest.

I remember Mrs. Rose next door, she was elderly, and her husband passed about ten years earlier. Mom was there at least once a day, and I did everything I could to help. The prize for all that work was the best apple pie I ever had.

~*~

In 1865 Dad came back from the war, Mom cried for days, she was so relieved and happy, so much pressure waiting and waiting for that day. They sent me to Mrs. Roses for two days, we ate

so much pie, at that time I had no idea why I needed to stay next door, but today I fully understand.

When Dad said it was ok to rejoin them, we headed right to the Lake Front. Together again, nothing could ever come between us. Some of my friends however did not have it so lucky, their dads never came back home. So much had changed, but for me, I was a lucky kid.

In December of that same year, the stockyards opened. It meant huge money for the city, they expected hundreds of thousands of livestock to pass through, and Dad was there to enjoy the festivities. Dad came home the same as I could best remember, maybe with a little more intensity. He became a tracker and a weapons expert during the war. At the time, I had no idea what he really went through and he never talked about it.

~*~

By 1869, all ten railroads converged in the city linking Chicago from coast to coast. We worked together at the stockyards and rail yards. During the nights, he taught me everything about shooting. On weekends, we went out to the country and Dad taught me tracking.

One night, a very special night, he gave me a box. “David, before you open this box I want you to focus on all you have learned. You are smart, and have been working very hard, you have become a fine young man, and you deserve this.”

I opened the box and there it was, my first Colt Peacemaker revolver; black steel, maple handle, single action cartridge revolver, just like the army used. I knew my way around all the black powder guns but this was new, a cartridge, just put it in and it was ready.

“Wow, Dad, this is mine, for me?”

“One more thing, Son,” he handed me a bag. Inside was one of the finest black leather belt and hip holster I had seen. Dad did not care for the holster on the thigh; the hip draw was all I knew anyway.

“Now, David, we can’t wear these in town but when we go out to the country this weekend we can have some fun. You’re confident that you have become a fine shot with the muzzle loaders and the black powder hand guns; you think you can handle this Colt?”

He smiled and pointed to the targets he had already set up. Dad did not like shooting bottles, he hated the clean up and frankly so did I, especially since I was the one who had to clean them up. The targets were playing cards and as usual, the aces were always the furthest away. We practiced out behind the tool shop at the stockyards. Normally I would take two aces and let Dad have the other two, but not today. Six cartridges in, six rounds fired, four aces dead center, a king and queen missing a head.

“Well that was very impressive, Son, remember this,” he put his hands on my shoulders and looked me straight in the eye. “You’re not a trained killer! You’re a trained marksman and a highly skilled survivor.”

In that Moment I heard for the first time, real images of the war he was in. “David, I became good to survive! In battle, the dead soldiers were the scared and unskilled. I learned under fire from every direction. A calm hand and a calm head will survive. You stay calm, pick your mark and deliver with total accuracy. Hesitation will make you second in gunfire, second is the first to the grave. David, this country is growing, the frontier is expanding and there is a lot of danger out there. Keep these things I taught you, keep them to survive, but never use them to become the evil that is out there.”

I really didn't understand at the time but I loved being with him. He took the Colt from my hand loaded it and blasted six rounds so fast. I looked down at the other end, six cards dead center, and right next to each other.

He looked at me. "You're not the only ace in town, young one."

~*~

During that time, Mom worked at bookseller's row on State Street just north of Madison, a magnificent five-story marble decorated building. It was one of the major retail businesses during the 1860's; from Lake Street to State Street, it was the best! She loved that job, she seemed to know everyone; Mom and Dad were invited to everything in the city. I could tell my Dad didn't like the life, but he loved Mom so much he did anything and everything for her. I will never forget that day with the lilacs; the smell will remind me always.

This socializing brought different opportunities for Dad however. I remember one night in 1871, they were going to the Palmer house, it was big for Mom; she even got a new dress. She was so beautiful; her hair tied in a big bun and a grand green and blue hat with matching umbrella. The dress was blue with green all through it. One of our German neighbors was a dressmaker and had a store in the same building, so when I say got a new dress, which meant they worked hard and made it from scratch. Dad wore his dress blues, it was a big deal, and everyone who was anybody was going to be there. They were honoring Lt. General Sheridan's promotion of the command of the Army. The Army headquarters changed from St. Louis to Chicago and his command extended to the Rockies and from Canada to Mexico.

He was as big as they came. Another person attending was a man known as William Cody (Buffalo Bill). Mr. Cody was a serious tracker; he led hunting expeditions for the rich. Gold was

a hot topic for many, but for others it was hunting big game. They were rubbing elbows with the best.

I went with some friends out to the street so we could spy. I was well skilled in tracking at that point, and one major aspect of tracking was going undetected. It was hard with my stumbling friends but we enjoyed our night of observation. I took them through the underground entrance and up the back. When we got over the ballroom, I could see the whole event. Everyone dressed in his or her best. I saw Mom and Dad dancing arm in arm. The way they looked at each other; nothing could ever tear them apart, the smiles on their faces, a gentle kiss to Dad's cheek, a close hug. They stayed together constantly, over to the bar, then to the table arm in arm. The room was huge, very high quality craftsmanship. Wood trim, oak and maple everywhere, red carpet and curtains tied back with blue and gold tassels. The tables covered in red cloth, flowers in the center of every table. It was a high-class event in every way. We had the best seats and no one knew we were there. Well I thought so at the time. However, when the night was over and we were at home relaxing, Dad made mention that I needed to be much quieter. He smiled and smacked me on the back of the head. He was the best.

~*~

It was a hot July; the Independence celebration was always a great time. More parties for Mom and Dad meant more covert operations for my friends and me; we were at all the parties in one way or another.

Chapter Three

The Hunt

I was seventeen in 1871; Dad and I took an opportunity to work as hands on a hunt with William Cody in late September. It was good money, many people wanted to live the frontier life without the danger and work. The most popular way to do this was hunting parties or wagon trains. For six years I had trained under Dad, I was confident, educated in scouting, weapons, and working side by side with Dad.

Lieutenant-General Philip H. Sheridan, along with a group of New York and Chicago Newspaper editors hired Cody for a hunt in Kansas. Dad and I were the scouting group. Really, that meant scouting for Indians and bandits keeping the party of frontier novices safe. Keeping them alive was our assignment. What excited me the most about this adventure was the train ride; it was my first time on the train and we were going in class, Chicago to Kansas City Missouri, then on horseback to the open Kansas range. This was no small event, the participants of high stature and national reporters meant every minute was going to print. Dad got on the train in his Military Blues, I think it was more about the publicity but he looked good. Myself, I followed the traditional dress of the cowboy and even had my side arm holstered loaded and visible. Some time back I chose a gambler style flat top hat, black with a black leather band. Mom gave me a gift when I left but she did not want me to open it until the train was on its way. Dad wanted her to come with but she had zero interest in the frontier. Being with her friends at the merchandising strip was her desire; it was the only place she wanted to be.

At first, I was alone on the train, Dad sat and talked with Mr. Cody. Unable to wait any longer, my curiosity was burning, what did mom give me? I opened the gift. It was a new headband for my hat, snakeskin; a rattlesnake headband with a real piece of backbone, it was great. I took the leather strap off my hat and put on the snakeskin.

“That’s what a hat should look like,” I heard someone say.

I looked up and Dad was standing there with Mr. Cody. Bill asked if he could see it, I handed it to him; he took a good look and handed it back to me. “Well, Son,” Cody said, “your father is the best gunman I know and he tells me your better.” I smiled so big.

“Well, Son,” Cody continued, “I am honored to have both of you helping make this adventure as safe as possible. I look forward to riding with the both of you.”

“Thank you, Sir.”

~*~

The train was well clear of Chicago, we were on our way and I tried to stay near Dad. This time there was no need to spy; I was part of the plan, but everyone wanted to talk to my Dad and there was not a lot of room on the train. I sat a row behind when Dad began talking to three writers. Lt. General Sheridan kept making reference to an operation that seriously handicapped the rebels in the Mississippi Valley. Dad gave in and accepted the pressure to tell the story. My ears perked up. I sat forward with great anticipation and listened.

Dad Began:

“It was a full moon that night and I was operating a scouting mission. At my side was Paul Smith, a new guy to my unit, but an experienced mapmaker, and Jim Newton a talented tracker.

Our platoon was working down the Mississippi Valley. We were two days ahead of the platoon clearing a route when we came up on a rebel supply depot; they were utilizing the river to work north. Our position put us between the depot and the regiment.

“The next hour involved a complete recon; the three of us broke up and surveyed the situation. I got up to the river entrance and from my vantage point, I could see across the whole camp. The fence did not seem intended for holding back attack, more like a privacy fence. Their guard was down, I could see the officers’ tent, the flaps were up and they were playing cards. Two guards stationed at the river access, apparently asleep. I saw Jim to the right up in a tree and we acknowledged each other. Paul was at the road entrance just out of view of the two guards there. We re-grouped one hundred yards up the river. The best we could figure, there were nine to eleven rebels, and not one of them was in a defensive position. Two for sure were sleeping while covering the river access.

I was so excited; Dad had everyone’s attention, including mine.

“That was our starting point. I told Paul to run the length of the fence on the inside and wait for the two front door guards to respond to the ruckus. Jim’s assignment was to get a clear shot of the bunker opening. I was to take out the sleepers at the river and head for the officers’ tent. Now I wanted to capture the officers’, it was going to hurt more than killing them. However we could not make too much noise or there was the possibility of being flanked by the missing regiment. We needed to get the officers, torch the supplies and get the hell out.

“Let’s start with the capture. Jim anxiously turned to me and said, I will stay behind, and once you have about an hour lead I will eliminate this location. I acknowledged and we moved in. The

two at the river seemingly cut themselves in the jugular with a bayonet, never shave in the cold shivering with a bayonet.”

The group of writers laughed.

“Paul went to the front gate and Jim had his position before I even got to the officers’ tent. I grabbed a hickory axe handle and stepped into the tent. They appeared to be in shock. The corporal drew first, I swung that handle as hard as I could and that first fella’s elbow exploded. I was not done with that officer, followed that action with a backhand. The club connected with his forehead and knocked him out. I punched the next fella in the mouth knocking him to the ground, with an uppercut utilizing the stick in my hand I caught number three in the family jewels.”

The group listened in anticipation and they all flinched at that one. The General laughed.

“The noise woke no one in the bunker however, the front gate guards noticed. Paul introduced one to his bayonet and using the head of number two, broke the butt off his rifle. I looked back at Jim and it was clear why not one person came out of the tent. He was exiting the bunker cleaning his large hunting knife. We dragged the three officers out to the tree line and tied their hands. Paul kept an eye on them while Jim and I rigged the camp for an efficient dismantling.

“We grabbed as many supplies as we could carry, Paul found a replacement muzzle loader, and I found a new Henry rifle. Paul helped escort our new guests north towards the meeting location of our platoon. Exactly an hour later, a wonderful sound erupted from the forest. Multiple explosions, fireworks of all kinds, light and smoke filling the morning sky off in the distance. We laughed; one of the officers was positive that we were finished; the truth was his

men were closer than ours were. My regiment was nearly two days north, their soldiers, well as far as we knew they could be anywhere east of us.

“I responded clearly to our guest, well that may be the case, Sir, however, I can assure you that if it comes to a fight you will be the first casualty. So, as far as your family ever seeing you again, you best hope they don’t find us.

“We waited an hour and Jim quickly reunited with us, smiling ear to ear I asked him if it looked as good up close. He laughed and said ‘better’! We made our way north keeping close to the river. It was the best way to protect the rear flank and made it so all we needed to defend was three angles. The next night we came close to judgment time. A group of rebel scouts passed us to the east at about five hundred yards. With my new rifle stuck in jabber jaws mouth he found it unnecessary to give away our position. However, this was developing into a bigger situation. They were tracking us, so in effect we were bringing both groups to a meeting. With what we witnessed back at the camp, it was safe to say we would have met each other anyway, but we needed to get to our regiment first.

“We now had rebel scouts between our regiment and us, in half a day our point guard and those scouts would meet. Being five hundred yards out they were practically on the same route we used to enter. By my calculations, we were a day away from a serious battle. We had reinforcements, and their depot was gone. The upper hand was ours, I had Paul and Jim continue north with our guests. I took off for the rebel scouts. If I could not stop them from discovering our position, I could hurt them on their way back to report it. The rebel scouts made no effort to hide their tracks, at a steady jog I had brought myself to one hundred yards behind them. Their

angle had taken them west of the planned position, placing them in between the river and our regiment.

“Following that current course, they would have gone right past the boys. I chose to continue following, but angled slightly more towards the union regiment. It was quiet, but about to get crazy. Off to the southeast I could hear the rebel regiment. It appeared that they were marching northeasterly of the scouts. I continued watching for the scouts and listened for the troops. It wasn't much longer when I met up with the union soldiers running point guard. I got them up to speed and they went back to alert the regiment. Stopping the rebel scouts was my next move.

“Cutting back to the route they took, I caught up with them. It looked like they were huddled making or reading a map. Straight east from that position my regiment was visible. They gathered at a farm in the clearing. I found a spot to steady my Henry rifle, there were five of them, all grouped. I took aim, gave the point soldiers time to get back to the group. When I thought they were clear, I put six rounds into the grey huddle. They all dropped without returning a single shot.

“The next morning the two groups clashed, the battle lasted all day. The rebels were crushed, the supply depot destroyed and we captured rebel officers. The map the rebel scouts had, supplied us with the positions of two additional rebel groups operating out of the depot we destroyed. The next three weeks the army hunted and eliminated the remaining two rebel regiments. The supply depot location was armed by the union and the next two barges of rebel supplies fell under our control.”

Dad stood and tipped his hat; the group clapped and acknowledged his accomplishment. He excused himself to go change, but I noticed he wasn't comfortable. We had the same sleeping quarters so I followed.

"What do you want, David?"

"Something more, I can tell."

"No, that's the story."

"Can I meet them?"

"Who?"

"Paul and Jim?"

"No you can't, Son."

"Why?"

He looked at me with hesitation.

"Dad, I know it wasn't all glory, please tell me."

"The writers never want to hear the other part."

"Finish it for me, Dad."

He began, with his head turned looking out the window. "It was the third assault, the three of us were scouting. Jim was sure he was on to them. I felt we were close but Jim was certain. It turned out Jim was right. Jim and Paul were together, I was off to the right flank about fifty yards behind. We approached a clearing. It was a small grove with a tree line on the far side. When

they stepped out, the far tree line lit up like the fourth of July. Those damn rebels were so quick to shoot. They must have thought a platoon was entering the grove. They fired so much hardware at us. Jim and Paul dropped instantly. I hit the ground rolled in reverse and fell back to a defensive position. We lost one hundred and fifty men in the last two assaults. I stared at the place where they dropped. They never got up and after two days of fighting, it was over.

“I went to that spot and there they were, blown to hell, torn to shit. Every rebel must have keyed on them. I personally buried them and learned a huge lesson. I have to be like the enemy, I have to put myself in their place. If I want to make a stand or an ambush, how would I attempt to deceive the enemy to get them to do what I wanted them to do? That last group had to have gone way to the east to double back, there was no a trace of them on our approach. I never made a mistake like that again. Be humble in your thoughts. Do not assume you have the upper hand, only when you make your assessment from all angles can you emerge successful. In this case, be alive. I will see you in a while, Son, I’m gonna take a nap.”

“Yes, Sir, I will see ya in a while, Dad.”

~*~

I proceeded back to the passenger car where everyone was having a grand time. Someone offered me a drink but I hadn’t started that habit yet, positive that today wasn’t the time to start. I went out to the wood car and climbed on top of the pile. I sat there for hours and it was wonderful watching the country pass by. The whistle got my attention, it was an easy guess we were coming into St Louis. The Mississippi river wasn’t hard to notice. We stopped at that station for about an hour prepping for the next run. I stayed at the train, I wanted to go but Dad

was clear. "Keep an eye on everything here!" Therefore, that is what I did. He came back to the train and tossed a bag to me, "Make it last, Son."

It had jerky, chocolate, tobacco, bread, a map, and at the bottom, a box of one hundred long Colt .45 cal rounds. I was having the time of my life, no longer was I the kid tagging along, but a member of the team, an important member of the team.

"David!" Dad called out.

"Yes?"

"Take your map, ask Mr. Cody for his and make a copy, you and I will be heading out ahead of them, we need to know where he is going."

"Yes, Sir!"

I found Mr. Cody in the passenger car; he gave me the map, "Make sure no one else sees it."

"Yes, Sir!"

I went to my sleeping car and got to work. We were going to be hunting deer and wild turkey, well they were. Mr. Cody planned to make a significant loop through the northeast corner of Kansas. I noticed that the route had no specific landmarks though; it looked more as if he was winging it. In my training from Dad, everything should have landmarks, points that are constant and can be located readily. Who am I to guess? This was Buffalo Bill Cody.

I returned the map. He glanced at it and nodded to me. "Keep us safe, Son!"

He nodded again; I acknowledged and left to look for Dad. Unable to find him, I went to take a nap, and there he was laying down looking out the window.

“Hey, Dad.”

“David, did you get the map done?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Let me see it.”

I pulled it out, opened it partially, and gave it to him. He looked at it and asked. “What do you think?”

“Honestly? It looks random, like he’s winging it.”

“Good call, David, good eye. You are right though, it’s random. However, we’re hunting and the game trails will dictate our movement. This map will allow you and me to see the area Mr. Cody wishes to cover. We will keep the game trails in our proximity and maintain a perimeter parallel to that. We need to watch the game trail and the areas where others can watch the trails. Make sense?”

“Yes, we need to be thinking ambush right, Dad?”

“Yes we are. I’m glad, you’re a good listener, David. This is the only time we will get to rest in a bed, so try to sleep all the way into Kansas City.”

“Yes, Sir.”

~*~

“David, Get up!”

I snapped to a sitting position, and clubbed my skull on the bunk above me.

“Well, how’d that feel?”

“Not as good as it looked, Dad.”

“Well get your stuff, we’re going.”

Looked out the window, I asked. “Is this Kansas City?”

“No, it’s the stop before. We’re getting our horses here and heading out ahead of the rest of the hunting party. Meet me at the stable.”

“Yes, Sir.”

This was it; I stepped off the train a cowboy, hat with a new snakeskin headband, boots, chaps and spurs, my Colt and holster in full view. This was everything I had been waiting for. It was time to gather my saddlebag and supplies. I walked around to the front of the train station, and surveyed the area. Across the dirt road was a merchant store, the walkway stacked high with bags of grain and to the right of that a stable. It was not what I was used to, compared to Chicago, but just how I imagined. The telegraph office was in the train station and I guess the mail office also, because, that was the entire town. My first steps in the frontier.

In the stable, Dad talked to the stable hand, well, I should say paying the hand. “That’s your horse over there, David.”

It was a great looking horse, all brown, rich dark brown main, not a white spot on her. A brown bridle and saddle were hanging on the post next to the stall, my bedroll and saddlebags looked so good up on her. I was about to hit the trail, what a feeling.

“Get it saddled and out to the street, Son.”

“Yes, Sir.”

I did so and walked the horse out the front. Dad rode a fine palomino out of the stable.

“You ready?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Let’s go.”

For years my Dad and I had been doing this every weekend, now were getting paid and responsible for everyone else in the hunting party. I wasn’t nervous, and ready to get to it. Training and training and more training had been required, it was to apply everything.

We rode fairly hard to get to the beginning of the trail Mr. Cody intended to use. From there we located the game trail, and a place to camp. For this group we wanted to be out of sight but not out of range. Camp consisted of a large oak tree, a small fire, a bedroll, jerky, a piece of bread and the ground. It was great. Dad surveyed the area, and I thought it was best to follow his lead.

The view was something never seen before, a much grander scale than my trips to the outskirts of Chicago. As far as the eyes could see, rolling hills, tall grass waved side to side, scattered groups of trees, and clear blue sky. The sun paced its way to the horizon and a cooling eastern breeze grew, it was so peaceful. When Dad relaxed, I followed. Head leaned on the saddle; I gazed into the flickering flames between the chunks of a fallen branch, complete relaxation set in. The solitude provided opportunity talk man to man.

“Dad?”

“Yes, David.”

“Do you know what happened to Ben, from the lumber yard?”

He sighed and dropped his head.

“Sorry, Sir, I won’t ask again.”

“No. It’s all right. War is an experience I pray you will never have to live. But it is what it is.”

He sat back on his saddle, shifted to find the comfortable spot and looked right at me. “The day I wrote that letter was an attempt to make sense, put in perspective the reality I was faced with. Writing the good I could conjure up, helped to wash the truth. The letter helped block out what was the reality of the situation. When I wrote, my focus was on you and your lovely mother. It soothed my soul.”

“Dad, you don’t have to continue. I understand it’s beyond terrible.”

“No, David, it’s equally important for you to know. Life is brutal, disgusting, and unfair. You will face decisions that you would rather run from, but you cannot. It’s about survival, you or them, first or the grave.

“The quiet I mentioned in the letter was because the battle had completed. It was time to recover the injured and bury the dead. We took the field that day but it was not easy. Both sides were equal in numbers, firepower, cannons and intensity. It was a chess game those few days. The field had rolling hills similar to what you see here. A group could advance fifty yards, and would disappear from line of sight. In the chess game the cannons were the back row, the killers, our offence could only operate and maintain outside of the cannon range. Advancement would

be swift and strong only until the guys on the big guns could recalculate the yardage and stop the advancement. What's an obvious plan of attack in this chess game, David?"

"Take out the cannons!"

"You are right, Son. But where were the cannons located?"

"At the rear."

"Who are the ones that get to go to the back?"

"The scout's, the recon team, the unseen soldiers."

"Correct again, Son."

"So if you saw Ben that day, that means you made it to the rear flank."

"Correct again. It was our responsibility, six cannons were killing our men, and there were twelve of us. The cannons were twenty-five yards apart on the ridge. Each cannon had four to six soldiers manning it. Loading, packing, wick, ammo supply, and range finder. Ben was a range finder and lighted the wick. I was so close I recognized him. All I could think of was the day I met him, his thick accent and how excited he was in the big city.

"It took a whole day to hike far enough west to sneak up on their rear flank. We easily dropped the rear guard. The rebels were so cocky and generally guarded the rear flank at a minimum. Our choice of demolition was dynamite. One person would line up sniper shots while the other dropped a stick of dynamite as close to the powder as possible. Once the explosion destroyed the site we would put a few carefully placed sniper shots through the smoke, it was

very effective and painful. If shrapnel didn't drop them, then they would bleed out from losing a limb. I was the sniper. Stinky was taking care of the dynamite."

"Stinky, Dad?"

"He never washed, Son. It's a good lesson in understanding wind direction. We had to sneak in and be down wind. You must pay attention to every detail, Son. Your odor or the odor of others can get you killed. That is if your opponent has any talent.

"Never underestimate whom you're up against. Well anyway, I recognized Ben at the first cannon. As I said, dynamite is nasty, unless you can make it a direct hit it's a very slow painful death. Basically, you're waiting to bleed out. I took mercy on Ben. Stinky lofted his throw at the gunpowder and ammo pile. Black powder reacts badly when mixed with a lit stick of dynamite. I took aim, and as I saw the lit stick land, I shot Ben in the left ear. Just as the explosion destroyed the armament, Ben slumped over the cannon.

"Screaming and crying filled the air while the others in my strike team did the same to the remaining cannon locations. Ben never knew what hit him, it just went black. In about twenty-two seconds, we eliminated the cannon line. The union advanced without hindrance. The battle was won and our mission complete. I lost a large part of myself that day, Son. The first shot walks away; the second is buried. Be first! It is what it is."

"I'm sorry, Dad"

"Don't Be. Just learn. I love you, David. I educate you on these things so you will know there are always consequences for every decision you make. Understand your place and be better than those intending to kill you."

~*~

We sat quietly after that, nodded off and woke up all wet. There was a fog and I was drenched by the mist. Dad was off to the west of the camp holding a cup of coffee. I walked over to him silently and we watched four deer make their way into the tree line just west of us. To the east, it was tough to see because of the fog, but when the sun raised the fog slowly burned up. We closed our small camp, mounted the horses and headed southwest.

“Where would you begin, David?”

My Dad asked me, where should we start? “I think we should go around the back side of that tree line where the deer ran. We can flush out the game and get a good view of the game trail on the west edge of the grove.”

“So it is.”

Dad smiled and we headed out. Clearing the west end of that tree line, we could see the wagon train making its way across the area to the southeast. According to the map, they were going to ride out until sunset. Make camp and have a hunt in the morning.

It was an uneventful day, but as Dad put it, “uneventful is a successful day.” We scouted a good campsite for the group. Dad marked it in a way only Mr. Cody could see and we headed out to circle the perimeter. There was a game trail with a fork in it located one hundred yards north of the site. It provided a quality hunting opportunity northerly and easterly. Dad sent me south and he headed north. Our job was to clear a five hundred yard circle around the area. I noticed an abandoned hut looking thing, so I started there. I went inside. Inside it looked like there had been no activity in a while. I did notice that recently there were three horses circling

outside. I would say in the last couple of hours, and heading west. The men were riding side by side.

I turned to maintain a circle. I noticed just ahead, across this flat plain, there was a small lake in view. It could be a possible location to use for the next campsite. Continuing on with my pass it was clear that the hunters were going to have some action concerning wild turkey. An area west of the first designated camp, a whole flock of turkeys made their home. I swung out, keeping my distance to make sure I didn't spook them.

I located a fine oak tree to sit under and it was time to wait. From the south horizon Dad approached, the main group gathered and made camp right where Dad had marked. Ahead at a good distance, I could see the hunting group. My vantage made it possible to overlook the game trail fork and the turkey flock. It was a perfect location to provide visual support. About an hour passed and in the brush behind me someone approached. I Rolled to my belly and crawled into some cover to my right. It was Dad, trying to sneak up on me. Silent and perfectly still was my course of action, until he was right at my location. I grabbed his left foot and charged forward, knocking him on his ass, he responded by punching me in the face. I hit the ground right next to him.

"Thanks for not sticking your knife in me, Dad."

"You're welcome. Good job, I didn't place you in the bush."

A big smile came to my face, "really?"

"Yup, did you see the trail to the south, Son?"

"Yeah, three horses and riders heading due west, what do ya think?"

“Nothing right now, let’s just keep mind of it. This is a fine spot here, at dawn they will start blasting some of those turkeys. I will rest first, wake me in a couple hours.”

~*~

A round of naps, then it was dark. Both of us noticed a fire out by the lake. The water was out of the view of the hunting group but we were elevated enough to see the area ahead. The field was rolling ground, enough to hide riders on approach. We got on the horses and headed to the north side of the lake. It was a good distance so we rode hard. The north side had three very large oak trees and high grass; it appeared the people with the fire were not hiding. However, they thought to be out of the line of sight. We tied the horses at the high grass and walked the rest of the way. It was important to see if we could hear what they were planning. When we got in earshot, we could see they were sleeping. Dad took a large rock and lofted it into the lake. All three jumped with guns drawn. No way they were gonna see us lying on the ground behind them.

They calmed and sat down. “Damn!” Then another one of them said, “Nobody knows we’re out here so let’s relax.”

“Come on Bob,” another spoke up, “that’s Buffalo Bill Cody out there. It’s not going to be walk in the park.”

“Shut the hell up! I knew we shouldn’t have brought you. They’re not taking the valuables out to hunt. All we’re going to do is raid the camp while they’re hunting. The group will slow Buffalo Bill down, tracking us will be impossible. These rich folk are too valuable for him to leave behind. Now stop whining, we’ve been over this a hundred times. You were on the train, not one of them has been out here before. You saw with your own eyes. The two cowboys left

before Kansas City, this plan is perfect. The next leg of the trip will give us cover to get close enough, now get some sleep.”

At sunrise, the silence was shattered. In the distance, we could hear the sounds of the hunting groups’ shotguns blasting away. It was enough to stir our new friends. When they got up, they saw their horses running off, motivated by my incentive. The boys turned to see why, we stood in plain view; slightly turned with our right shoulders facing forward. The three of them stood still.

Dad gave them an opportunity to correct course. “You are free to start walking north, as of right now nothing has taken place to warrant a hanging. Let’s just say we are helping change your choice of work. I hear Kansas City is running short on shit scoopers!”

The rustler we knew as Bob promptly responded by drawing his revolver. We drew at the exact same speed and fire. Two rounds to Bob square in the chest. We were close enough that the bullets went right through him providing a bloody spray out his back. He slumped to the ground firing his revolver into the leg of the man to his right. On the left side of Bob, that guy lifted his shotgun while pulling the hammers back. Dad put a round in his left eye, another explosion of blood out the back of his head. He fell straight back on the ground. The guy shot in the leg begged for his life. It was the whining wimp from last night.

Dad spoke up, “Take your holster off and toss it to us!”

He did so and Dad stepped forward to pick it up. The crying bastard pulled a derringer out of his vest, it misfired and my Colt did not. I fired two rounds; one hit him in the Adam’s apple and the second in the mouth. His head slightly detached plopped to the side and the body followed. Dad finished standing up when he hit the ground. He turned to me and I looked at him.

He asked, "David, when are you going to get a haircut?"

I smiled, and then he said, "Let's go, get the horses."

I returned with the horses, "Hey, Son."

I turned and a Henry rifle flew at me. I caught it with my right hand. It was a nice rifle, finish worn enough to look rugged, but not beat to death.

"Bob doesn't need it anymore. We can work on sighting it in later."

A trophy from my very first action, it was almost like my Dad's story when he got his.

Back to the hunting party we went. While approaching we could see there were four turkeys hanging from the wagon. Dad rode over to Mr. Cody; I guess he filled him in on what happened. In the meantime, the others told of the grand tales of the hunt.

"Let's go, Son"

I looked at Mr. Cody and he tipped his hat, I tipped mine and we rode off.

~*~

The rest of that trip went without incident. Night descended, huddled at what would be the last campfire of that part of the trip; we just sat there and stared at the fire. I don't know what it was, the red-hot coals, the flickering flame, the smell, the popping, I just loved that moment.

Snap! Attention diverted by the stinging impact of a stitch.

"What's that for, Dad?"

"I just wanted to ask you a question and you were daydreaming."

“Ok, I guess, what did you want to ask?”

Vigorously I rubbed the sting out of my arm and my attention was on Dad.

“You killed your first and second man today, you were calm, precise. You showed no anger or regret after. I watched you since and I see no change. What are you thinking, David? What went through your mind during and after?”

“Well, during I thought nothing, read and react. I looked at Bob as the leader, they were all twitching, none were confident. I stayed focused then Bob made his move. There was nothing to think about, first wins, second gets buried.”

Dad smiled.

“Second kill, he brought on himself, it misfired, we lucked out on that. There was no thought in dropping him, it just happened.”

“You’re right, David, I got lucky, but the derringer isn’t reliable. That was my second mistake during a battle, David. I can’t continue to do so. I would’ve taken that damn gun in the face, it was fitting that you removed his face. You did a fine job. Don’t take lightly the action of taking breath from an individual, remember everyone has relatives. That shooting had no witnesses but every gunfight will not be the same.”

“Let’s go back to your mother, what do ya say?”

“Ok.”

“David, don’t tell this story, it will get to your Mom. There’s a reason you never heard anything about the war from me. I never want her to hear the pain, the trouble and the hell I have seen.”

“I understand, Dad, good night.”

“Good night, Son.”

~*~

We made the decision to ride our new horses back to Chicago. No point in putting them on the livestock train car, the weather was great and we were only a few days away. I truly took a liking to the frontier. It was much more dangerous, but I could not deny favoring the life. I’m sure Dad did also but he just couldn’t admit it. Either way it was no matter, Mom would never leave the city life. Heading northeast into Missouri, we caught a trail that angled us west of St. Louis. We stopped along the way here and there to shoot, hone the skills, and get my newly acquired rifle sighted. We practiced with the rifles, drew from saddle position, load and go from prone position. Dad always insisted practice was important. That rifle was powerful and accurate; it was a fine addition to my tools.

~*~

One morning we went off trail to test our tracking skills. We located a game trail running parallel to the original trail. A maze of trees, rock out cropping, and thick bush led us to another regularly used trail. It headed into a gorge; our decision was to take the opposite direction. Not knowing where the gorge would come out it was best to go the other way. We passed two very large rocks; one on each side of the trail, then from behind there was a loud tribal war cry.

Dad yelled out, “HA, HA!” Slapped his horse on the ass and bam, he was off to race speed.

I did not take the time to think, following his lead was the best for the moment. We hauled ass at full speed. The horses stomped the ground with powerful strides, the brush slapped up against the horse’s chests. Didn’t even see what came next. I took a solid branch to the face, in no time I started bleeding pretty good, but there was no stopping. Approached the main trail, a stunning hard right turn was on the menu. Like a rock skipping off the water, the turn executed to perfection.

Right on pace behind Dad, I heard him yell, “Get ready to dismount with your rifle!”

Before I could respond he was braking and on the ground. His dismount was smooth. My attempt, I hit the ground, boots dug in and I did a full flip to my back utilizing every part of my ass to stop. The rifle hit me square in the head and my hat landed on the ground ahead of me. No time to enjoy the follies, we took a defensive position behind a fallen tree. We had a clear view of the trail and a good angle to the area we came from. The group was very vocal but not visible as of yet.

A single arrow dropped ten feet behind our position and Dad yelled, “Get tight to the tree. NOW!”

It rained arrows at that moment, on the tree, and all around us.

“That first one was the range finder, Son. We’re going to stay still, two things could happen, they will leave in victory, or they will come here to collect our scalps. With our rifles and revolvers, we’re plenty armed. The trick is to not waste a single round.”

“David?”

“Yes, Dad?” He had a whole new look on his face, something I had never seen before.

“David, you have the center right flank, don’t miss! Our position allows us to keep them in front of us. Just don’t miss, Son!”

“Yes, Sir”

“David, I place them at about thirty yards out. They are not concerned about being quiet. Their arrogance will help.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“You ready, David?”

“Yes, Sir!”

“On three, Ok?”

I acknowledged.

“One, two, three!” To one knee, we swung to face the wall of Indians. Left elbow on the tree, steady. I stared down the steel barrel of my rifle, sights set on the attackers. Heart felt as if it was shredding my chest, do or die right now, three rapid rounds from each rifle filled the air.

The Indians grouped tight; as soon as the first six dropped, they charged hard. The remaining rounds in the rifles located flesh. With rifles exhausted of ammo, the revolvers were next. Blood, smoke, yelling, the fastest, deadliest, one minute I could imagine.

The last two Indians, separated by ten yards broke our defenses. The first jumped the tree, fully extended, tomahawk in the left hand, club in the right. Dad landed his hunting knife at the

belly button and pushed it straight up to his rib cage, catching him in mid air. In his disappointing descent, I hit him square in the face with a backhand, gun still in hand. I turned; hammer locked, trigger, nothing, empty. The second warrior cleared the tree. He clipped my shoulder with his club but my adrenalin was too high. The impact put my back to him, I responded by kicking him in the rib cage. It knocked both of us on our asses. Rolling in the dirt, I grabbed one round from my belt, swapped it with an empty, hammer back, trigger. The last attacker developed a devastating challenge with the internal contents of his skull releasing from the back of his head. The body fell back to the ground. The Indian assault was over. Simultaneously we jumped to our feet while reloading.

“Nobody left, Son!”

“Nope, not one.”

Dad spun and sat right back down, back to the tree head down, gun still in hand. I stepped out; adrenaline still peaked, grabbed the tomahawk from the corps and stuck it in my belt. Gathered the horses and came back to the tree.

Dad was up again, “Let’s go.”

We mounted and rode away at a rapid pace.

“We need to clean your wound, Son, but let’s put some space between us and them.”

I experienced for the first time his field dressing skills, and it took a couple stitches to close the cut. Dad handed me a bottle, “Take a swig, this next venture will cause a considerable amount of pain.”

Sure as Shit! Started out burning pain, when it was over, I felt sore, and laughed a lot. That was my first drink.

“What am I gonna tell Mom?”

“You’ll figure it out, David.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

That was the first smile Dad cracked that day. “David, I gotta’ tell ya, after that experience, that damn overwhelming odds experience, I would not want anyone else at my side in the face of extreme danger. Your skills are sharp, you dropped all emotions and we dominated!”

Wow, I was speechless, what a complement.

“I did what I could, Dad.”

“Hell yeah you did, have another drink, I’ll join ya and let’s go home.”

We did it, and what an adventure, we made a great team. Keeping up a good pace, we headed back to Chicago. By the time we got there, my face was purple and yellow. I had no idea what to tell Mom.

~*~

So happy to get home we just left our stuff at the stable. Hopped on a carriage and headed back to the house. I gazed out the window, watching, people were everywhere, noisy, so very different from the trail. Mom must have sensed our approach; she ran out of Mrs. Rose’s house, Mrs. Rose stood on the porch behind her. Mom had a blue dress on, red cooking apron still on with flour all over it. *Someone was cooking pies.*

Mom and Dad collided with a huge hug; she turned to me, took notice of my face, and looked back at Dad.

“Don’t look at me, Baby, he’s your Son.”

“David? What happened to your face?”

“Well, Mom. We were riding home and this wonderful apple tree jumped out right in front of me.”

“Oh, David, maybe next time you could consider ducking.”

“Yeah, that’s a good idea, Mom.” We all laughed.

“You two, rough riders hungry?”

“Yes, Ma’am!”

“You bet, Baby!”

“I have a roasted chicken cooking, what do you think about making a basket and going to the lakefront?”

I smiled and it hurt, “Let’s do it!”

The stage took us the short distance to the lakefront. It was about ninety degrees that day, dry, as can be, no rain since July. Later a pleasant wind had picked up. Mom had so much to tell us. I sat out in front of them, feet in the water, sun on my back. Dad propped up against a gigantic maple tree, Mom next to him, her umbrella spun away. She was so happy we were back. Talking on and on about the bookstore, all the people she was meeting, and how the train and stockyards

were helping the business boom. Dad just sat there nodding, smiling and drinking. I so wanted to talk about the trip but it was not the topic for Mom.

Hours passed, we ate all the food, Dad knocked off his bottle, and we slowly headed back to the house, the wind picked up more rapidly. Mom and Dad held hands and giggled all the way home. It was almost as if I was not there, just like when he came home from the war.

Back at the house Dad spoke up, "David."

"Yes."

"It's gonna be a good storm, secure the yard and make sure Mrs. Rose's yard is put away."

"Ok."

"One more thing."

"Yes?"

"See ya in the morning. We're turning in for the night."

"Good Night."

I secured both yards, procured a piece of apple pie, and went to my room. It was the first time in my bed in a while. I looked forward to it actually. Down the hall at the end was Mom and Dad's room, it sounded like a party. *Nothing will separate those two.* Sleep took hold of me.

~*~

My deep sleep shattered by ringing bells. I jumped up and turned, not used to being in bed I spun and fell to the floor. That reminded me how much my face hurt, that damn tree.

Next thing I heard, “DAVID, DAVID! Get dressed and I mean, NOW!”

I gagged a bit realizing there was a cloud of smoke in my room. Again, the bells, I also noticed crying and screaming. I looked out the window and smoke was everywhere. Dressed and out the door, the issue was clear, a very big problem! To the south of our house, the city was in flames. The rooftops of our block were on fire and everything south of our block, completely engulfed in flames. Mom came running out of the house across the street.

“David! Take the baby.”

I ran over to her and grabbed a child wrapped in a wet blanket.

Dad followed with two small kids.

“David, stay right here with them.”

A huge crash, two doors down to the south the house completely collapsed, it was nothing but a huge bonfire at that point. The wind of the cave in cleared the smoke for a moment and I could see down to Michigan Ave. The sight was the most terrifying thing ever. As far as I could see, Chicago was burning, flames going so far into the sky.

“DAVID!”

I snapped around.

Dad yelled out, “LETS GO NOW!”

“Wait!” Mom yelled. She ran into Mrs. Rose’s house, “She hasn’t come out yet.”

“BABY!” Dad yelled. “DON’T, PLEASE DON’T, BABY!”

She did not listen and went right into the house. The roof and the second floor was burning, to the right of her house, our house was going down.

“NO BABY!” My Dad shrieked one more time. Then he chased her into the house. The heat was so intense I could hardly breathe standing in the middle of the street. Then it happened, the most terrifying event of my life took place. In an all-consuming ball of flame, Mrs. Rose’s house collapsed.

“DAD!!!!!!!”

“MOM!!!!!!!”

They didn’t come back out!

~*~

Taken with the kids and rushed into a wagon we hustled to a secure location. I cried for the rest of the night. Just like that. *Mom and Dad were gone.*

The destination was a camp well outside of town. There were so many people spread out all over, so much lost. The Army assembled tents off to one side. Other soldiers manned tables and handed out supplies. I stood in place and stared at a soldier handing blankets to an old woman, covered in soot, reality struck me hard.

All that I had was on my back, no tooth brush, socks, clean pants, a shirt, nothing, I had nothing! Apple pies, gone, Mrs. Rose, Mom and Dad, gone. Weeping turned to tears, shaking and lost, my heart broken, emotions raging. In an instant, everything changed and everything destroyed. Now what? In a sea of people, I stood alone.

Everything we had all worked so hard for was gone. I began looking around, faces all the same, free of emotion, lifeless. A priest went from group to group, praying, blessing, hugging, reassuring, and loving.

The priest made his way to me, “Son, are you ok?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Can I pray with you, Son?”

“It’s all gone, everything, my Mom and Dad, what you see is all I have.”

No longer was I able to fight back the tears. My eyes welled up and fluid filled my sinuses. “I have no fight left, Father. What am I suppose to do? Where do I go?” I sat on the ground, crossed my arms, put them on my knees and buried my head.

The priest put a comforting hand on my head. “You face great loss, the city has faced great loss, and you are not alone my son. I know it feels that way, but it will pass, be strong. In your suffering, you will find strength. Be patient and take it day by day. If you continue in need, find me, everyone and no one is alone here.”

I looked up, face soaked, “thank you, Sir.”

He walked away, a breeze picked up. With the wind came a powerful reminder of current events. Ash and smoke rolled through like a cloud, the smell, oh the smell, what a horrible scent. Burnt everything collected in one odor. A soldier handed me a blanket and pillow; another handed me a chunk of bread and a canteen of water. They nodded and continued their work. Feelings were hard to put to words; physically and mentally numb. I ate my portion, a little water, must conserve. With my new pillow and blanket, I made a bedroom. In a former

circumstance, I would be happy lying under the stars. There were no stars that night, only smoke and ash clouds. I fell asleep to the sounds of anguish and crying, so much lost.

~*~

Awoke to the sound of horses in the distance; sat up and rubbed my eyes. Forgetting the condition of my stitches and face, the soot remaining on my hands ground my wound. Reality slammed like a hammer. There was no change in the accommodations, just more people and tents. I gathered my blanket and pillow; dusted off my hat and began to search out the sound of the horses. I slowly made my way through the maze of the lost.

The Army announced marshal law to prevent injury and looting. “No one shall enter the city today, anyone attempting to do so will be arrested. Once the area has been determined to be safe escorts will be provided for groups wishing to enter.”

I continued the walk of the heartbroken. Away from the camp, there was a makeshift stable and I could see my horse. It turned out Victor and the other stable hands were able to evacuate. With a little more searching, I found my Dad’s horse. The saddles and all the gear were still on them. All the guns, food and supplies right where we left them.

“Hello, David,” the stable hand walked up, “You Ok?”

“Yes and no. I got out but my parents didn’t.”

I broke down right then. On my knees, I began sobbing. Allowing me time to collect myself, Victor gave me a bottle of gin.

“Here, David, it won’t bring your parents back but it will get you through the day.”

I took the bottle and sipped it, but after that, I had no desire to drink.

~*~

Once allowed to enter, a group of us went back to our street. All of it was destroyed, piles of burnt wood, coal and ash. Nothing really to indicate we ever lived there. I knew though, I knew where the house had been, where Mom and Dad went in and never came out.

I just could not understand why.

Why? Why them?

No more roasted chicken, no more pie, no more, "get a haircut."

Never will I ride with my Dad again.

A wagon came by, I asked if I could ride, the driver told me they were heading down town and I must stay on the wagon. I nodded and climbed up with those wanting to see the city.

Reporters on the scene had many stories.

One of the stories read:

It was the completeness of the wreck; the total desolation which met the eye on every hand; the utter blankness of what had a few hours before been so full of life, of associations, of aspirations, of all things which kept the mind of a Chicagoan so constantly driven.

We passed the post office and customhouse; it was supposed to be fire proof, not so much today. A grand three story building, outside walls still intact somewhat, but the inside gone. We got to State Street; *I shouldn't have gone on that ride.* Book Sellers Row, the store my mother ran and loved so very much. A five-story building, strong, big, a skeleton remained along the

front facing the street, the rest completely gone. Once white, now a blackened mess. We came to the corner of State and Quincy, the location of the Palmer House, eight stories high reaching to the sky. A few short months ago, I had been sneaking around watching the grand ball where Mom and Dad were dancing. Now completely gone, all that remained was a pile of blackened rubble. Burnt stone scattered all around, thrown from the collapse. I couldn't take it; I sat down in the middle of the wagon, head in my hands. I looked no more, I didn't move until we got back to the camp. Once back, I went straight to the stable and asked Victor if I could take the horses.

“You can but don't go to the city, David. They will shoot.”

“I'm not. I just got back from there. I never want to see it again. I'm done.”

I mounted my horse; my Dad's palomino became my packhorse.

“Good Bye, Chicago.”

“Good Bye, Mom.”

“Good Bye, Dad.”