

**A
FATHER'S
LOVE**

Sacrifice and Service

Jean DeFreese Moore

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Thanks to my Lord, who is always faithful, and
with my hope that each of my grandchildren will
follow the Lord God with all their heart.

Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

—Matthew 20:26b–28



JUNE 1917

“You did what?”

“I signed up for military duty,” James said. “I’m to report to Camp Funston on the fifteenth.”

James had never heard his father raise his voice like that. Now his father sat staring at him, and his breathing was getting heavier. James knew a coughing spell was coming. He could see it brewing inside the man.

“Curt’s number was called up,” James explained. “Because he’s in medical school, they let him voluntarily sign up for the medical corps. Clay knew he would have to go too, so he went ahead and signed up. His letter came last Thursday. Noah decided to sign up now instead of waiting to get called in two years. This way, they can stay together and choose where they serve. I signed up with them. They said we can all stay together, and it lets us be involved, but we won’t have to fight.”

Reid covered his face with his hands, leaning onto the table with his elbows. “It’s not a game, James. You can’t just choose a team and watch from the sideline.” Reid coughed gently.

“I know, but it’s going to be exciting. We’ll get to go on a ship across the ocean and see another country. All I’ve ever seen are Kansas and Denver,” James told his father. “When we come back, we can finish school and pick right back up where we left off.”

Reid nodded his head. He wanted to say, “If you get back,” but he held his tongue. There was nothing he could do or say that would make a difference now. It was done. He coughed again. “Did the others come home with you?”

“Yes, sir. We came home together, and we’ll leave for camp together next week,” James responded.

“Okay. Let me tell your mother when she gets home. Please don’t tell anyone else until she knows,” Reid said, sounding drained. He coughed again several times and then asked, “Would you get me some coffee?”

Coffee was Reid’s drug of choice. It stimulated his brain and allowed him to function at a higher level. The old injury to his head caused his mind to work sluggishly. Although surgery had stopped the debilitating headaches he had suffered for years, his thinking process remained slow without the stimulation. No one noticed the small scar on his lip or his eye anymore. They were both overshadowed by the prominent surgical scar at his right temple.

James got as far as the door and then turned around to look at his father again. “I did pray about this. I’m at peace with my decision.”

Reid nodded, and James disappeared around the corner.

James had left for school exactly one year ago this week. Reid had expected his older cousins to take care of him, not entice him into an adventure that could kill him.

Reid had seen the country’s involvement in the war coming. He had kept up with the news, both national and international. He had read about the volunteers needed and had watched the numbers of those who volunteered appear in the newspapers. There hadn’t been enough. Selective Service had been enacted, and Reid was thankful that all of his sons were too young to register. Reid prayed the war would be over before they were old enough.

The federal judge had watched as the first group of volunteers from Harris had gotten on the train headed for the training camp. The thought had never crossed his mind that one of his sons would sign up voluntarily. James’s signing up would put the thought in the other’s minds. Reid knew this. He’d have a talk with Stephen and Blade soon, just to make sure they understood the dangers and to ask them to wait until they were older.

The Spirit spoke to Reid. *Where can (he) go from (my) Spirit? Where can (he) flee from (my) presence? If (he were to) go up to the heavens, (I am) there; if (he were to) make (his) bed in the depths, (I am) there. If (he were to) rise on the wings of the dawn, if (he were to) settle*

*on the far side of the sea, even there (my) hand will guide (him), (my) right hand will hold (him) fast.*¹

“The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him,” Reid said out loud, “to the one who seeks him, it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young.”² Reid coughed again.

A response came from the Spirit, *Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*³

“Yes, Lord. I’m not to be afraid for his body. He will go to you, and you will keep him, either on this earth or in your arms,” Reid consented. “I fear for his heart, Lord. War does things to a man’s mind, and that affects his heart.”

*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*⁴

Reid nodded. “It’s up to him, isn’t it? His faithfulness will keep his heart strong and pure, won’t it? I gave James to you just like I gave you Matt and the other children. He is yours to use as you desire.”

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.*⁵

“Yes, Lord, I trust you.” Reid picked up his Bible and opened to the book of Psalms. Reid finished the chapter that appeared on the page, then went back to reread a verse that had caught his attention.

He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is
firm, trusting in the Lord.⁶

No, he wasn’t afraid; he trusted God. Reid’s spirit was calm and at peace.

¹ Psalm 139:7–10.

² Lamentations 3:25–27.

³ Matthew 10:28.

⁴ Romans 12:2.

⁵ Proverbs 3:5.

⁶ Psalm 112:7 (ESV).

There was a box on the desk, and Reid reached into it to pull out a bottle of pills. He dumped a few aspirin into his hand, then put the bottle back and closed the box. He threw the pills into his mouth and coughed gently as he swallowed. Then he took a bite of food from the plate on the table.

James came back into the room with the cup of coffee for his father. Reid picked up his cane and, using the table, pushed himself to a standing position.

Reid patted his son's shoulder and said, "Why don't you take that and get yourself one? I'll meet you on the porch. We can sit there and wait for your mother."

Sarah and Thomas sat on the sofa holding each other. That's all they knew to do.

They both remembered the war they had grown up in. The soldiers, the wounded, and the fear. Thomas had seen it while growing up in St. Louis, and Sarah had experienced it on the mountain.

Now their son was going to war. He was going into a medical company, just like Papa had done in the Civil War. Curt thought it would be safe, but they knew better. They knew what Papa had gone through and what he had done to survive. They knew how memories of the war still disturbed him, fifty years later.

Curt thought he knew what had happened to his grandfather during the war. He had read the book written about the man. But this war would be different. Medical care was more advanced, along with weaponry, technology, and communication. And it wasn't being fought on American soil. Curt wouldn't have to worry about his family's safety.

Curt's parents didn't understand why their son had done this. This was a different war, more devastating. They had read the news too. The suffering was more widespread and the carnage nonstop. Those fighting lived in the battle constantly. The weapons were more advanced, more deadly.

Curt watched his parents. He should have waited until his brother William got home before he told them. He realized that now. William had written him over and over that their father's heart was weak. Curt now realized his father was an old man. He wasn't the same vibrant healthy man Curt had left at home eight years ago when he had gone to Denver for school. He noticed the pale discoloration of his father's face and saw the old man's eyes lose focus.

"Father?" Curt leaned forward in his chair to put his hand on Thomas's knee.

Thomas forced his eyes toward his youngest son's face. He opened his mouth, and Curt waited for the words to come; but his father just looked at him, moved his mouth a few times, and leaned his head back against the sofa, closing his eyes.

Curt's excitement about this new adventure was suddenly squelched. His mother's silent tears just added to his disappointment.

Sarah reached to take her husband's limp hand that lay on her leg. "Thomas? Thomas, are you okay?" she asked, turning to her husband. She could see the image of him leaning back on the sofa, and she now heard him try to take a deep breath.

"Curt, go tell Bonnie to find William," Sarah said. She put an arm around her husband and began pulling him toward her. She slid over so he could lie down with his head on her lap. She could hear his breathing becoming heavy, but it was steady. That was good. He was trying to calm himself.

By the time Curt returned, his father was lying quietly beside his mother. He could have been asleep. She was gently stroking his hair. Curt reached for his father's wrist to take his pulse. It wasn't strong, but it was steady. His father's other hand lay half covered by his wife's hand. Their fingers entwined perfectly.

Looking at his father's hands, Curt saw the precision of healing that those fingers had brought to many people. His father had been a prominent and sought-after physician in Denver. Curt still thought of him that way. His father had worked hard after they moved to Harris too. He took care of the town, the miners, and the surrounding area. People would travel from nearby towns to seek his advice and care.

Now he was just an old man. His hair was thinning on top, and all of it was silvery white. The lines on his forehead told of worries both past and present. They told of the seventy-plus years he had traveled this earth. Father had always said that aging was a gift, a gift that a person gave to their loved ones. A gift of wisdom and knowledge, of skills, stories, and love passed on to their family.

William and his family were the only ones here to receive the gift that Thomas offered. He was the only child still in Kansas.

William had finished medical school and moved west, into California. He returned to Harris after he was injured in a fire, seeking to recover his health. He had experienced recovery, found a wife, and been there to take care of his father when he got sick.

Curt wondered if William thought their father's age was a gift. If Father was in such poor health, as William had told his siblings, was he able to share his gift with anyone?

Curt hadn't been home since he left for college. He hadn't seen his parents in four years, not since his father had gotten sick and stopped attending the board meetings of the hospital he owned in Denver.

Curt looked to his mother. Love still flowed from the aging woman. But she didn't look old. No one would be able to guess her age, but Curt saw it in her hands. They had not only worked to raise her own eight children; they had also cared for her six younger brothers and sisters through the years. Her heart was always warm and open to them. They all sought solace in her arms. She held them all with such reassuring love that it never mattered to any of them that she couldn't see.

Sarah had been blinded during the Civil War. Her father was away when renegades had attacked their home. Her mother and two brothers were killed, and the house had been destroyed by fire. Sarah was caught in the cellar when the house collapsed.

She was a beautiful woman, but her true beauty was inward. It shown through her soul, onto her face, and through the caring touch of her hands. The hands now looked rough and wrinkled, but they still expressed her love.

Bonnie came into the room carrying a baby and was followed by a three-year-old. "William's on his way. Can I do anything?"

Sarah shook her head gently. "No. We'll just let him rest until William gets here. Curt, I'm glad you got to come home before you leave for training."

The tears came again, and her face tightened, trying to hold the tears in as she continued to caress her husband's face.

Cleve was standing at the front window when he saw William leave the medical clinic in a hurry. The Oldsmobile passed the house, picking up speed. This wasn't the casual manner in which the young doctor usually headed home.

"Curt must have told Thomas," Cleve commented. Clay and Noah were waiting for their father to say something, anything, but this wasn't what they expected.

Cleve had been standing at the window a good five minutes. The silence in the house was deafening. Their mother still sat in the chair. Her eyes went from her sons' faces to her husband's back with a confused and frightened look in her eyes. She was waiting too—waiting to see how her husband would react.

The boys were hoping for a slap on the shoulder and an "I'm proud of you." But so far, it didn't look like that was going to happen.

The attitude about the war was different at home from what it had been at school. At the university, the atmosphere was celebratory. There was music, parades, and men marching off to fight for freedom. Patriotism ruled the land. Here in Harris, they had seen only one poster giving recruiting information at the railroad depot. Beside it was a poster offering war bonds and one encouraging the farmers to grow more produce. Their mother had written them that there were no parties. No one celebrated.

"Dad, don't you see?" Clay tried again to get his father to understand. "If these empires with these czars and emperors are taken down, democracy will take over. Nobody will have to worry about war anymore."

“President Wilson warned the Germans,” Noah added. “We can’t back down now. We have to make them pay. And if Mexico gets into this and decides to attack us—”

Cleve finally turned around to look at his sons, interrupting. “I don’t want to hear anymore,” he said calmly. “There’s nothing that can be done about it now. What’s done is done. You’re going to be home a few days, and I want to enjoy the time we have with you. Not another word about the war or the army or you going anywhere.” As he walked to the door, he added, “I’m going for a walk. When I get back, I want all talk of war out of this house. Jenny, do you want to come with me?”

Jenny stood up and went to kiss both of her sons, then she turned to catch up with her husband as he made his way down the steps of the porch.

William walked into the parlor and smiled, surprised that his brother was home. He patted his little brother on the shoulder as he passed to care for their father. He didn’t know what had happened to cause his father’s weak spell. Sometimes, it just happened; he knew that.

The young doctor listened to his father’s heartbeat and felt his pulse. He spoke to his father for a few minutes about how he felt. Then William helped his father into the bedroom. Sarah followed and lay down beside her husband. He slid his arm around her and drew her onto his shoulder. William knew something was wrong, but now wasn’t the time to ask. William walked back into the hallway to see his uncle Cleve coming in the door.

“How’d Thomas take it?” Cleve said.

William looked at his uncle questioningly. “He’ll be okay. We’re just going to keep him in bed the rest of the day.”

“Can I talk to him?” Cleve asked.

William nodded. “What happened?”

“You better go ask Curt,” Cleve replied, dragging his wife by the hand as he entered the downstairs bedroom just off the entry hall.

By the time Cleve finished talking with Thomas and made his way to Reid’s house, Chipeta had come home and been told the news. She took it like a trooper, the same way she had received news of their oldest son’s death.

Reid knew that their son’s enlistment was on her mind and they would talk about it when they were alone in bed tonight. The two of them probably wouldn’t sleep much. They would tell the other children at supper, and Reid would talk to Stephen afterward, advising him to wait and talk about it further if he felt the desire to enlist. Stephen had just graduated high school and would be leaving for school in Denver in a few weeks.

There wouldn’t be anyone else in the townhouse, just Stephen. The whole family used the townhouse Thomas and Sarah owned. All the children who had gone to school in Denver had lived there.

Reid tried to think of the number of children who had been through that house—Sarah and Thomas’s eight children, him and five of his brothers and sisters, five of Cleve’s children, his sister Naomi’s daughter, and James.

Since Thomas got sick and money had gotten tight for the old doctor, those who had children living in the house had shared the expenses. That was more than fair. Thomas had paid the entire cost for years.

Last year, Thomas, Marvin, and Reid had each paid a sixth of the cost. Cleve had paid half. Cleve had two sons and a daughter there. The daughter had gotten married a few months ago, leaving Ruth alone with the four boys and the caretakers. Now Ruth had finished and come home.

Reid would need to pay the entire amount next year. He’d have to sit down and figure out how to do this.

Tomorrow, he’d drive out to the ranch and have the same conversation with his son Blade that he would have with Stephen

tonight. Reid didn't think he had to worry about Blade enlisting. Blade was a loner, and Reid didn't think he even knew what was going on in Europe. Reid would also tell his sister Naomi and her husband, Marvin, about the boys.

Joey probably needed to know too, along with Naomi's daughter, Ruth. Joey and Ruth were planning to get married soon. Ruth had gone to school in Denver and was the first of Travis's grandchildren, except for William, to come back to Harris.

Joey had proposed to her in a letter a few years ago. She had told him if he really loved her, he would wait for her. He'd waited, and now they were going to be together. That's why Reid wasn't worried about Joey going anywhere; he loved Ruth too much. Joey wouldn't mess that up.

Joey McCain had been raised by Reid's father, Travis. He would be old enough to register for selective service in just a few months. But if he was married when he registered, he would be pushed into a higher tier on the list. There would be less chance that he would have to go. Reid hoped they didn't need to worry about him volunteering with a new wife.

Reid's immediate concern was his father. At somewhere in his early eighties, Travis was still strong and active. But he was slowing down. Reid knew how the talk of war disturbed his father. The old man didn't want to listen to it. Talk of this war brought back memories of Civil War battles that his father didn't want to remember.

Travis had been remembering more of the past recently. It seemed that almost anything could trigger a memory, and Travis would talk about it when he was alone with Reid. He didn't seem to do it with anyone else.

Cleve was now ranting about the situation, but nothing he said was helping anyone who was listening. It was just helping Cleve by letting the frustration out. Jenny and Chipeta had gone inside the house, and James had walked away, not wanting to listen to his uncle's wild ravings any longer.

Cleve had done more ranting recently than in the past, but thankfully, he usually did it when he was alone with Reid or Luke. He hadn't done it in public.

Cleve finally quieted. "Well, aren't you going to say anything?"

"It's their decision, Cleve. What's done is done. We can't do anything about it," Reid advised.

"That's what I told my boys," Cleve said. It seemed like he wilted into his chair. "And there lies the problem."

"No, it's not a problem," Reid replied. "When we sent them to school, we told them we trusted them. We raised them the best we could and gave them to God's care. James told me he prayed about this. It's in God's hands now. We need to pray for them and trust that they listen to God's leading. 'Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.'"¹

Cleve quietly said, "I'm tired. I really thought when the children were out of the house, life would get easier. I thought I'd quit worrying about them when they left home, and I didn't know what was going on. But I don't. They still write us about their problems, and I can't help them. Most of the time they only give us part of the story, and that makes me worry even more. Emily will go to Denver in two years, and I don't want her to go. I want to keep her here under my protection."

"That wouldn't benefit any of you. You know that," Reid said.

Cleve nodded. He knew Reid was right, but it didn't stop him from wanting to protect her.

Reid changed the subject. "I need to go tell Dad. I'll try to get him to come back here with me for supper. Somebody needs to stay with him until he has time to think about it and gets it straight in his mind. I'm probably going to hear about his war before the night is over."

Cleve said, "I'll come with you."

"Cleve"—Reid shot his brother a look of warning—"if you can't keep yourself under control, you need to stay away."

Reid really didn't think their father would get upset. He seldom got upset when bad news arrived. But when Cleve or Angus started ranting about something, their father would shut down and tune

¹ Hebrews 4:16.

them out. Then when he was left alone, whatever was said would replay in his mind over and over. He would want to talk about it, and the conversation was usually with Reid.

Cleve nodded again. "I know. I'll stay calm." Cleve began to stand up.

Reid stopped him. "Cleve, I mean it. You can't say anything that will bring more grief to Dad. With all this talk of war in the news recently, his mind has already been on the past war. We don't need to make it worse than it has to be."

Cleve nodded again. He knew Reid was right. He had seen their father struggle as he read about the war in Europe in the newspaper. They had discussed what was happening, and Cleve heard the distress in his father's voice and saw it in his eyes. Cleve had seen Travis read the paper, then get silent and stare into nothing. He'd sometimes rub the shoulder that had been injured during the war or move it in an awkward manner, remembering the pain.

Other times, their father would put a hand to his ear. Travis never spoke of the injury to his ear, but Cleve knew the noise in it was a constant reminder to his father of battles fought in the past. Years ago, his father had said the noise sounded like drums beating and miniballs whizzing past his head. Sometimes, the noise was so loud Travis had trouble hearing with that ear. It seemed to be affecting him more in recent months. The old man was showing his age, both in his body and his mind, but his faith was still strong.

Cleve realized he had turned to his little brother for reassurance and advice again. He had done that more and more recently. Cleve thought that backward, Reid should be coming to him. Yet Reid was such a stable force in the family it just felt good to hear his reassuring words.

Cleve was in his midfifties and sixteen years older than Reid. He held prominent offices in the local and state government. He had been the town's attorney for decades and had been elected state representative for the area repeatedly. He not only upheld the law. He made the law.

Some of his associates had been trying to talk him into running for governor. He was considering it.

Cleve had six beautiful children and a loving, caring wife. Two sons and a daughter were married and living out west. Two sons were now leaving for war; but his youngest, Emily, remained. She would be gone before he started his gubernatorial campaign. With no children at home, Jenny would enjoy moving to Topeka.

His family would be proud of him if he was elected governor. But he knew nothing would top the day Reid had been sworn in as federal judge. The whole family had celebrated, probably more than Reid did himself.

As a child, Reid had been elusive to Cleve, shy and quiet. Reid had never spoken of his desires or his needs growing up. He stayed out of sight and out of Cleve's thoughts.

Reid had been left alone and in need of many things as a youngster. Their father's job as federal marshal had taken him out of town frequently.

Their father had also concentrated his finances on the education of the five older children. Reid had to hunt, grow, and cook his own food. He'd stayed alone at the farm often, but he had never complained.

Cleve knew that their father loved Reid, probably more than any of his other children. Reid was his baby, the child of his old age. After their mother's death, Travis had been both mother and father to the boy.

Cleve was living in Denver, with his older sister, Sarah, and her family, when Reid was born. He had only seen Reid once, when Reid was just over a year old, right after their mother died. Reid was ten the next time Cleve saw him. But he really didn't see his little brother. The child stayed out of the way as he grew and then left for school in Denver without a word to Cleve.

Reid had worked his way through the university too. All of them had worked off and on through college, but Reid had made a career of it. He worked the same night job through four years of school. After law school, he had gotten married and brought Chipeta home just as quietly as he had left for school.

Cleve never thought of Reid or his wife until Chipeta was attacked and lost the baby she was carrying. That's when Cleve

learned that Reid wasn't working for the law firm out of Topeka. He was doing undercover work for the Department of Justice. Just a few months later, Reid vanished. Reid's supervisor had contacted Cleve in person and told Cleve of his brother's disappearance.

Weeks later, Reid was found severely injured and close to death. He had recovered, but the injuries had left his body broken. He had to rely on his family to do many things for him.

Cleve's position as lawyer had been needed then. He had taken Reid's deposition for the courts and had witnessed Reid's testimony at the trial of top men in the human trafficking syndicate Reid fought against. Cleve had also written reports for Reid and had finally gotten to know his little brother.

Cleve had watched Reid struggle through years of recovery too. His body still fought against him, but Reid was determined not to let the syndicate win. The injuries they had inflicted on his body and onto his soul would not be victorious against this strong, determined, godly man.

Their brother, Luke, had always been close to Reid. Luke was three years younger than Cleve and had been the one Reid had turned to as a child when their father was unavailable. Luke was also the one who saw his brother's needs and tried to fill them. He'd done the best he could to provide clothing and needed food when the marshal's paycheck went to pay for Cleve's law school and medical school for their older sister Mary.

Travis had done the best he could for his family, but a widower caring for six children had a difficult task, especially with a job that took him out of town often. But Travis was committed to giving the children a good education. Mary went to medical school, Cleve became a lawyer, and Luke went to college and then was elected sheriff.

While this was happening, the two older children at home took care of themselves and ignored their little brother, who was four and five years younger than them. When Luke returned home, he noticed this. He had taken Reid and tried to make up for the actions of the other children and the absence of their father. Now Luke was as

proud of Reid as a brother could be, and he loved him more than he could express.

Luke had been the town's sheriff for more than twenty-five years. Everybody liked Luke. He was warm and outgoing and always had a smile on his face. He had been known to visit with a few women in his life, but he'd never gotten married. He was married to his job.

Their brother, Angus, had returned to Harris as an engineer and now managed the town's electrical power plant, line construction, and telephone exchange. He was also the only source of gasoline for the automobiles in Harris. He was a busy man.

Their sister Naomi was married to Marvin Wells. He managed the Double R ranch outside of town. Mary, their older sister, was a doctor and worked at a hospital in Chicago. She had not been back to Harris since she left for medical school when Reid was six.

The two brothers walked the road slowly. Reid held to Cleve's arm to help keep his balance on the uneven ground. They weren't speaking now but contemplated their previous discussion. They prayed silently for their children and for the conversation they would soon have with their father. Jenny was walking near them, intent on continuing home to start supper.

They cleared the trees and saw Travis sitting on the porch with Bandit lying close by. The old man had taken in the large black and white dog four years ago.

Bandit was a stray that had attacked Thomas. Travis had rescued his son-in-law who lay injured on the porch steps. He had taken the stray dog home, cared for it, and trained it. Well, his old dog, Bella, had trained it. Bandit learned how to guard the livestock at night and was now a trusted and loyal companion for the old man.

Bandit growled softly. "Hush," Travis told the dog. "Ya know 'em." Travis scratched the dog's head.

"Hi, Dad," the greeting came from Cleve before the men got to the porch.

Travis waved and looked at his sons curiously. “Ya look like ya up ta somethin’,” Travis said. “I know there’s trouble when the two ya come ta see me ’gether.”

“Yes, sir.” Reid smiled. “We’ve got something to tell you and we’re not happy about it. We know you won’t be either.”

“Well, out with it,” Travis said.

Cleve began. “Dad, do you remember seeing the newspaper article on the military selective service?”

Travis nodded.

“Curt and Clay have to go,” Cleve said.

Travis sat staring at the trees. “When do they leave?”

“Next week. Noah and James decided to go ahead and volunteer so they could serve with them and stay together.” Cleve stopped and looked at Reid, wondering if he needed to continue or if Reid wanted to say anything.

Travis nodded again, still looking at the trees. He hadn’t stirred, but Reid saw his bottom lip moving slightly. His father always chewed on the inside of his bottom lip when he was thinking hard about something.

“What ’bout Ed? Ain’t ’e right there with ’em?” Travis said.

“Ed’s in class 2 because he’s married,” Reid said. “He’s just finished his internship. He’s going to work for the war department as a civilian doctor at a hospital outside DC. He’s got until the end of summer to get there. I think they call it Walter Reed General Hospital. It used to be—”

Travis interrupted. “I’s stationed at Armory Square at the end a the war.”

“I don’t think that’s the same place.” There were a few moments of silence, then Reid continued, “Ed’s taking his wife with him. It sounds like he just plans to move there for good. Adam was given an exemption because of his job. The ones leaving next week are going into a medical unit.

“Curt’s enlistment could have been delayed, but he chose not to. He told James he’d never get an opportunity like this again, to learn true emergency medicine. He says he’ll learn more in the army than he would in medical school.”

Cleve said, “Dylan and Ryder are both class 4 because of their families. Thank God, they won’t have to go unless things get really bad.”

Travis’s hand went to his lip and he rubbed it. “Where’s the boys ’eaded?” he asked.

“They’ll report to Camp Funston first. That’s just north of us, still in Kansas,” Reid said. “I guess when they finish their training, they’ll be given their orders. I think almost everyone’s being sent to France.”

“Is we gonna get ta see ’em ’fore they go?”

“They all came in on the afternoon train. They’ve got about a week here,” Cleve said.

“How’s Thomas?” Travis asked, still looking at the trees.

Cleve answered, “I checked on him. William has him in bed. He says he’ll be okay. He’s trusting what God told him four years ago. Thomas should have eleven more years before the Lord takes him home. He could outlive all of us.”

Travis nodded again. “We’ll pray far ’em.” Then he sighed. “That’s all we can do.”

Reid and Cleve looked at each other. Their father was taking this well. But then their father usually took things calmly. Travis took what happened in life and just rolled with it. Reid didn’t know why he thought this would be any different.

“Dad, Chipeta’s making pepper steak and creamed potatoes for supper. She’s got some more field peas from last summer she’s trying to finish off. Why don’t you come to supper and see James?” Reid said.

“That’d be good.” Travis smiled sadly.

Harris hadn’t changed much in the last fifty years. The marshal’s office was in the same location it had been when Travis came to town and began working as a deputy in 1868. The hotel remained unchanged, as did the mercantile and the Buckskin Saloon. The mercantile and the Buckskin had both changed their names, though.

The saloon was now known simply as the Buckskin. It served the cowboys as a hangout for card games and, because it operated as a private club, was allowed to continue with low-stakes gambling. Prohibition was in effect state wide so there was no alcohol, but the Buckskin now served food.

The town did have electricity, but only businesses and the wealthy had been connected. Most of the roads were still clay and gravel. The only paved road was Main Street, where brick had been installed four years earlier. Sidewalks that remained in front of businesses were still wood plank and were provided by the business. The courthouse at the end of Main Street had a small shaded area with a worn path from the street to the door.

The livery stable did a good business, and the public bathhouses did as much business now as they had done twenty years ago.

The one thing that had changed recently was the addition of grocery delivery. The new grocer at the far end of town was offering order and delivery. He would send out his wagon every morning to go from house to house taking orders. This gentleman would then return to the store to pick up the merchandise and that afternoon would make his rounds again, delivering the goods.

This new store was not only attracting the older shoppers who didn't want to carry their purchases home. But it was also attracting the younger clientele with its more contemporary atmosphere. It was patterned after the new supermarket in Toronto, Canada, which was featured in all the modern magazines. A shopper could enter the store, pick up a basket, and choose for themselves from whatever was on the shelf.

Luke walked in the direction of the mercantile. No, Cecil Montgomery didn't call it that anymore. He had changed the name and put up a new sign which read, "Montgomery's Market."

He probably had to do it in order to keep some of his business. Cecil Montgomery had his old faithful customers, though, and he believed in personalized customer service. He had told Luke he hoped to be able to hang on a few more years but didn't mind a few less customers. He was getting old and was having some health problems. He needed to slow down.

Luke tipped his hat toward the lady standing at the window. "Good morning, Mrs. Leachman."

The woman sneered. "Morning."

"Oh, come now, you can do better than that. We're almost family. Give me a warm friendly greeting." Luke smiled, stopping beside the woman.

Luke's nephew William was married to this woman's granddaughter, and for the last four years, they had both attended family functions together.

Della Leachman seldom talked to Luke but liked to try to start arguments with Reid. She would criticize something he said or question him to no end about a biblical belief that he held. Reid remained polite and always had an answer to her often-obstinate questions. She usually left frustrated, not succeeding in her quest to get a rise out of the judge.

Bonnie's grandmother would seek out where the federal judge was sitting and put on a friendly act for the others, but everyone knew what was going on. Her daughter Kathleen, Bonnie's mother, had talked to her about this. Mrs. Leachman would insist she was doing nothing wrong. This just seemed to be her way, but Reid would always be the one that had to put up with it.

Luke had decided to win her over. That was now his mission. Few people could resist his boyish charm, and he knew it.

Luke looked into the window. He didn't see anything interesting that might be holding her attention so intently.

"Good morning, Luke," she said, sarcasm dripping from her words.

"That's better," Luke said. "Window-shopping this morning?"

"No, I came to get some thread," she replied.

"Well, let me open the door for you," Luke offered, smiling. He turned the knob and swung the door open, stepping back and holding his hand out, indicating for her to enter.

Mrs. Leachman gave another sneer and walked into the store.

Montgomery was unpacking a box and examining the content. A silver tea and coffee set. It looked to be quite expensive.

The store owner looked up and smiled. "Good morning, what can I do for you?"

"I'm going to look for a few minutes. Take care of him," Mrs. Leachman said bluntly, throwing her thumb into the air in the sheriff's direction.

"Yes, ma'am," he offered. "Okay, Luke, what can I get you?" Montgomery walked away from the box and moved behind the counter.

"I came with a list," Luke said, and he slapped a scrap of paper onto the counter, turning to look into the store.

Montgomery glanced at the paper briefly and began gathering items as he made conversation. "Hey, Luke, come look at this. I just got it in. Have you ever seen anything like this?"

"Well, would you look at that?" Luke admitted. "I've never seen anything like that. Look how it fits together. What are these?"

"Lincoln Logs," Montgomery said, smiling.

"Gosh, Saamel and I could have fun with these." Luke and Cecil continued to build with the Lincoln Logs, paying little attention to Mrs. Leachman.

Two more ladies came into the market, and Montgomery rushed to complete Luke's order. Then he moved to help the other two women.

Luke took his purchases and returned to his daily activities at the sheriff's office.

He picked up breakfast for a prisoner and delivered it to the jail along with his purchases. Then he went to the post office and collected the mail. He stopped on the street to talk with the federal marshal and then walked with the marshal toward the courthouse.

The sheriff stuck his head in Reid's office to say good morning. Cleve was in the judge's office, so Luke walked in and interrupted, looking over their shoulders to see what they were involved in.

Cleve put one hand down in the middle of the papers and the other hand on his brother's chest, pushing until he had backed the sheriff all the way out the door. Cleve told him to go away and shut the door in his face.

Luke yelled through the closed door, "I'll find out what you're doing. You know I will." He could hear his brothers laughing. He smiled and left the courthouse, heading back to his office.

When Luke arrived, Cecil Montgomery was pacing the boardwalk in front. "Luke, where have you been? I've been robbed!"

"What? What happened?" Luke asked, opening the door to his office and throwing a large envelope onto his desk.

Montgomery was already telling him. Words were tumbling out of his mouth almost too fast to understand. "When you left, I had a rush. Seven, eight, nine, people came in one after the other. A bunch of children and people just tagging along with the person wanting something. A couple of big orders and someone wanting to look for something in the catalog. When I got rid of everybody, I went back to the box I was working on when you got there. It was gone! I had Mrs. Langston's great-great-grandmother's silver tea set sent back east for repair. I had just gotten it back from the silversmith and was checking the job when you came in. It was in the box, right there on the table. Somebody just walked out with it."

Luke was listening to Montgomery with his hand on Cecil's shoulder, pushing him from the boardwalk and heading down the street toward the market.

"We've got to find it, Luke. That thing's worth a lot. She said she was giving it to her son's new wife on their wedding day. That's just two weeks away. She's been pestering me about it for a month now. I know everybody that came in this morning. None of them would have done that. I didn't see anybody I didn't know."

"Okay, Cecil. Let's get back to the store. We'll go over exactly what happened and who came in. We'll find it," the sheriff said.

Luke walked up behind Kathleen Avery before she got to the church steps. He stuck his chin right over her shoulder and whispered, "Good morning, Kathleen."

She jumped and grabbed her throat. "Oh, you scared me!"

"I didn't mean to, I'm sorry," Luke offered, smiling.

Della Leachman sneered.

“Good morning, Mrs. Leachman.” Luke was going to win this woman over even if it was the last thing he did.

Mrs. Leachman huffed. “Morning.”

Luke turned toward the two young people near their mother.

Nathan smiled. “Hi, Sheriff.”

“Hey,” Rone said, not paying attention to Luke but keeping his eyes on a pretty girl far to his left.

“May I escort you in?” Luke offered his arm to Kathleen.

“Thank you,” she said, nodding her head and taking his arm.

Luke turned to offer his other arm to Mrs. Leachman. She sneered again and walked up the steps to go inside. She moved to the pew where she usually sat. Luke and Kathleen followed.

The two women sat on the outer edge, near the back. Luke scooted onto the seat in front of them, turned around to look backward, and continued talking with the ladies.

Alexander Langston saw them and moved quickly toward the sheriff. Without so much as a greeting, Langston asked loudly, “Have you found anything yet?”

“No, Mr. Langston.” Luke turned to the man. “I haven’t. I’m still talking with people, but so far, no one remembers anything. I’ll let you know as soon as I discover something.”

“You’re running out of time. I told Lydia not to trust Montgomery with something that expensive. I told her to take it to Kansas City and get someone there to handle it,” Langston began to rage.

“Mr. Langston, I understand this is upsetting to your whole family.” Luke stood up. “But Mr. Montgomery did nothing wrong. Someone, we don’t know who, walked off with it. We’ll get to the bottom of this, and when we do, we’ll recover the tea set. Please be patient.”

“Somebody’s going to pay for it! That was antique silver and stamped by the most prominent silversmith of the colonies in the 1600s. It was over two hundred years old and has been passed down in my family for generations, from the mother to the oldest son’s wife. It’s not going to end with me. Do you understand that?”

“Yes, sir. I understand. We’re looking for it. I haven’t quit, and I’m not going to,” Luke reassured the man.

“You better not. I’ll have your job over this if you don’t take care of it, you fool,” the man roared.

People were beginning to turn and look in their direction. Luke had dealt with men like this before—men who thought they had more power over people than they did have, people who wanted something and wouldn’t take no for an answer. Luke wasn’t intimidated; he knew how to handle them.

But Alexander Langston was a different breed. He marinated in his anger constantly. You could see it in his eyes and in the tense muscles of his neck. His hands stayed in fists until he reached out to take what wasn’t his. That was the only time he opened his hands. Even then, his words were often more damaging than his actions.

Scripture came to Luke’s heart. *An unfriendly person pursues selfish ends and against all sound judgment starts quarrels. Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions. The mouths of fools are their undoing, and their lips are a snare to their very lives.*¹

Everyone in the church could hear the anger in Langston’s booming baritone voice.

Alexander Langston’s wife was prim and proper. She never raised her voice, but she felt she was entitled to something better than she had. She had been brought up to think she was more worthy than everyone else. She convinced her husband of this, and his anger bowed to her wishes. The one advantage a person had when they talked with Lydia over her husband was that she could be reasoned with, where Alexander couldn’t.

Luke wondered if the only reason they came to church was for the prestige. Lydia didn’t have any friends, and coming to church gave her the opportunity to talk with the other ladies and actually show them she had more than they did, including a rich and powerful husband who would bow and scrape for her.

Deacon Wayne Hammons walked over and put a hand on Langston’s shoulder, reaching his other hand out in greeting. He

¹ Proverbs 18:1–2, 7.

moved the man easily away from Luke and back to Lydia and her daughter. Then he stood talking until the piano began to make music.

Pastor Greg Sutton stepped to the pulpit. He had heard the disturbance all the way to his study in the back of the building. Now he forgot about the sermon he had planned to preach and wanted to deal with the immediate disruption in his congregation.

“Good morning, fellow Christians,” he said happily. “Have you thought about that word, *Christian*? Do you know what it means? If you call yourself a Christian you are saying that you are Christlike, a follower of Jesus, the Son of God. Do you act like a Christian? Do you act like Christ?”

Sutton left the question hanging as he invited the congregation to open the hymnbook. Songs were sung, and prayers were offered to the Lord. “Let’s stand for the reading of the scripture.

“My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.¹

¹ James 1:19–25.

“Today you’re going to participate in the service. Somebody, stand up and give me another verse on anger.”

Pastor Sutton did this often. He liked to hear from his congregation and wanted the people to answer his questions out loud. He was more of a teacher than a preacher, but he got his point across. He served his flock well. While he would often step on people’s toes, he never let them go home without hearing how they could be redeemed.

“Anyone, come on. Any scripture you can think of concerning anger.”

Cleve stood up. “Ephesians 4:31–32.

“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

Cleve was often the first to speak. He told his family it started the ball rolling and cut the tension for others so they wouldn’t be the first to volunteer.

“Good. Anyone else?” The pastor knew what to expect. One or two of the deacons would stand, and then a few of the Britts might quote a verse or two. If things moved slowly, he would call on Travis or his son Reid. Neither of them volunteered, but everyone knew they both had a big part of the Bible memorized and, between the two of them, could recite any verse or subject requested.

Wayne Hammons stood. “It’s in Ecclesiastes, but I can’t remember the verses.

“Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools.”¹

¹ Ecclesiastes 7:9 (ESV).

Pastor Greg lifted his head to look toward the back where the former marshal sat beside his youngest son. “Marshal Britt, where is that found?”

The answer came softly, “Chapter 7, verse 9.”

“Any more?” The pastor waited, then looked back toward the Britts. “How about one of you six young men?” Sutton was looking at Reid’s sons and Joey McCain sitting in front of their father and grandfather. “No, all of you stand up. Each one of you, think of one.”

This pastor would call on people out of nowhere. He said he expected everyone in the church to know the answer to a question when he called on them. People would get nervous when he started doing this, but somehow, he seemed to know who to call on to get the right answer. Occasionally, someone would say, “Please ask someone else,” and that was all right. The pastor had often told his congregation to say this if they didn’t want to talk. The pastor never embarrassed anyone, and people always left the service encouraged.

The boys looked at each other while everyone in the church waited. Fourteen-year-old Esa finally said,

“A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.”¹

Esa sat down with a smile. He finished first. He wouldn’t let his brothers forget.

Saamel and Joey both started to say something, but Joey quickly backed off and told the eleven-year-old to go first. Saamel started talking.

“Fools give full vent to their rage.”

He finished the verse from his seat,

“But the wise bring calm in the end.”²

¹ Proverbs 15:18 (ESV).

² Proverbs 29:11.

“In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

“Ephesians 4:26–27,” Joey said quickly, and he sat down too.

“Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil.

“Psalm 37:8,” Stephen said.

James continued, “Matthew 5:22.

“But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be answerable to the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘“You good-for-nothing,’ shall be answerable to the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.”¹

Many of the women gasp at the intensity of his words “fiery hell.”

The last young man standing looked at the pastor. They knew each other well, but Blade wasn’t the type to speak in public. His face could have easily shown his disapproval at being called upon, but it didn’t. Blade had never lost that wild look that he had when he came home with Reid four years earlier. Now, at around age seventeen, he still looked like an untamed Indian. But his manner had changed.

The room was quiet, waiting for the only young man left standing to voice scripture. Greg Sutton nodded at Blade to continue.

“Psalm 30:4–5.

“Sing the praises of the Lord, you his faithful people; praise his holy name. For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime;

¹ Matthew 5:22 (NASB).

weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.”

Blade spoke in a loud clear voice. He held the same arrogant tone in which he had always spoken, but people had come to know him as a gentle, hard-working soul. He had strength that could match anyone, even most of the ranch hands that were years older. He stayed out of people’s way, and he didn’t like contact with those outside his family. So he stayed out of town and off the streets.

He was living at the Double R ranch but would come into town for church on Sundays and stay with his family until midday on Monday. Then he would return to the ranch. He could work with other men easily, and even though he was young, they listened to him when he told them what needed to be done. His suggestions always solved a problem. Everyone at the ranch knew Blade was capable of doing anything well. He left the other ranch hands alone and minded his own business unless he needed to intervene. He was perceptive and understood human nature well. Marvin already knew that he would be foreman one day; he was that good.

Four-year-old Aponi was sitting on Reid’s lap. Reid smiled slightly and nodded his head. He felt a hint of pride—he had trained his sons well. Reid looked down the row, past his wife, to three of his daughters, and over his shoulder to Winona and Abigail sitting on the row behind them. He was proud of all his children.

The pastor expounded on the scripture that had been quoted, and the service ended.

Outside, the Langstons left quickly with no word to the sheriff or to anyone else.

The entire Britt family was headed to the Stewart home. They would have lunch together today, before the boys left for Camp Funston on Tuesday. Reid looked up from his conversation with Dan McClelland to see Luke walking away from the church with Kathleen Avery on his arm. Her mother and two sons were following. Reid smiled. His brother was getting friendly with the woman.

While Luke denied any involvement with her, Reid knew that Luke was smitten with their nephew’s wife’s mother. It had taken a

while. It had been almost four years since William and Bonnie were married and probably more years than that since Luke had met the widow of the former railway warehouse foreman.

Reid left Luke alone about the relationship, but their brother Cleve picked on Luke constantly. “When are you going to pop the question?” “What did you two do last Saturday night after the boys went to bed?” “Have you taken her by to visit Dad yet?” Cleve just wouldn’t shut up.

The train platform was crowded, and it was mostly the Britt family. They had come to see the boys off. Jenny clung to Clay’s arm. Time slowed for her. She would hold one son and watch the other. Then she would hug the other son and watch the one she had just let go of. She needed to remember them, to feel their touch.

This wasn’t like sending them off to school. This was releasing them into a dangerous unknown. She was afraid she would never see them again. She hoped and prayed they would remain safe and come home to her.

Curt stood with his arm around his mother and a smile on his face. He talked with his brother William casually. First about the weather and then the land and his memories of farming, of hunting, and of the horses. He turned to his father, sitting on the bench behind him, and tried to include him in their conversation.

Thomas wasn’t talking. He seemed distracted, weakened by the morning’s casual but unusual activities.

The day had begun differently. Sarah had made a large almost-party-like breakfast. She said she wanted their last meal together to be a happy, memorable occasion. William, Bonnie, and the children had kept the atmosphere lively.

Grandpa had been invited, and he sat next to Thomas with a peaceful smile on his face. A stark contrast to the almost-deathlike expression of his son-in-law.

Three-year-old Norman climbed in and out of his great-grandfather’s lap as Travis fed him part of his breakfast. Then he would

run back to their mother and get something else from her. Next, he would go to their father. The child had made a game of getting food from everyone at the table, including Curt. He went to everyone except Thomas. Curt wondered why he didn't include his grandfather in their game.

Bonnie kept reminding her son that this was the only time he would be allowed to run loose in the dining room. At the next meal, he would sit down and behave.

Reid stood leaning against the wall of the train station.

James stood in front of his father, holding Abigail's and Jeannie's hands. They were teenagers now and didn't need to hold anyone's hand, but he wanted to hold theirs anyway. He wanted to remember their touch. His beautiful little sisters were now so prim and proper. Such pretty young ladies. They had grown up so much in the last year, since he had been in Denver. By the time he finished his military service, Abigail would be ready for college. He put his arm around her and gave her a squeeze. James smiled. He could return to Denver with her and show her the town.

James awoke that morning to find his father sitting on the foot of his bed praying. He didn't know how long his father had been there, but he lay still until his father stirred. Then he sat up and moved to sit beside Reid. They had hugged each other, and his father had told him about something that had happened soon after James and his brothers and sisters had come to live with him.

Their mother had been killed, and their father had abandoned the children. Reid and Chipeta had taken the five children home with them and had raised them. They were eventually adopted when their father was convicted of murder and sent to prison.

"James, do you remember the fight you had at school when you were in third grade? Somebody hit you in the head with a rock." Reid reached up and ran his finger along the scar under James's hair.

"When Thomas brought you home that day, I was so worried about you. You had a head injury, and I knew what that felt like. I was in the wheelchair, and Thomas put you in my lap. I didn't ever want to let you go. I took you to bed with me and held you all night.

The next morning, you got up and walked away while I was still asleep.

"Then when Matt was shot and I was holding him there on the ground with him bleeding, I didn't want to let him go either. But I knew I had to. There was nothing I could do to stop it.

"I don't want to let you go now, but I'm going to, and I'm going to do it willingly. God told me he was 'gathering the people of Israel from among the nations and bringing them home from around the world to their own land, to unify them into one nation. One king shall be king of them all.'¹ He's using this war for his greater purpose, and you're going to be a part of it."

Reid hugged his son again, then put his hand on James's face, and looked into his eyes. "I'm praying for you, every moment of every day. You go do God's work, and do it well."

Now remembering that conversation while waiting for the train, the Spirit spoke to James. *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*²

"Yes, Lord," James said softly, "I will."

James turned toward his father. His grandfather had come to stand next to him with Bandit right on his master's heels. Both men stood shoulder to shoulder, the older and younger version of the same man. They looked so much alike, and both of their spirits were in tune with God's.

James smiled. Neither man looked disturbed. Neither showed worry or concern. Not like Uncle Thomas and Uncle Cleve. They both let their concern escape to their face, and their emotions were out there for everyone to see. Neither of James's uncles seemed at peace, but his dad and grandpa were.

James stepped to them and put an arm around each of their shoulders and drew them toward him. He was almost a full head taller than either of them. "Thank you. Thank you for teaching me God's ways. He'll be with me. He'll take care of me."

¹ Ezekiel 37:21b-22a (TLB).

² Colossians 3:17.

James let go of them and took a step back.

Travis said, “May God be gracious to (you) and bless (you) and make his face shine on (you)—so that (God’s) ways may be known on earth, (his) salvation among all nations.’¹ Ya goin’ ta ’nother country, an’ ya can be our ambassador far Jesus ta ’em.”

James smiled and nodded.

They heard the train coming in the distance, and Curt let go of his mother and turned to sit beside his father. He put his arm through his father’s arm and said, “I’m going to be all right, Father. This war has been going on a long time now. When we get over there, it’s going to give the allies a boost, and we’ll be able to knock the Germans back quickly. It’ll be over in just a few months.”

Thomas was saying nothing. He reached over and grabbed Curt’s hand, twisting his body so he could throw his other arm around his son. He buried his face in Curt’s shoulder and held him, still saying nothing.

Clay and Noah began saying their goodbyes, and James moved to hug his little sisters. Then he moved on to his brothers and aunts and uncles. James’s mother hadn’t come to the train station. She had hugged him just after breakfast and told him she wasn’t going to see him off. She wasn’t going to show her tears to strangers. She hadn’t cried at home before he left, and James wondered if she was at home weeping now.

Travis called all four boys to him and said, “Let’s pray.” The entire family gathered around and bowed their heads as others on the platform quieted to listen too.

“Lord God Almighty, author a’ peace. Ya’ve told us, ‘When you go to war against your enemies and see horses and chariots and an army greater than yours, do not be afraid of them, because the Lord your God...will be with you. Do not be fainthearted or afraid; do not panic or be terrified by them. For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory.’² Keep these boys steady, Lord. Set their eyes firmly on ya.

¹ Psalm 67:1–2.

² Deuteronomy 20:1, 3b–4.

“Let ’em ‘be strong and courageous. Do not (let them) be afraid or terrified because of (their enemy), for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.’¹ ‘The Lord will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life.’² ‘For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’³ Protect ’em Father, keep ’em in ya care, an’ bring ’em home ta us. Let ’em serve ya an’ their country well.”

Travis stopped speaking, and the entire group gave a collective “Amen.”

James hugged his father one last time, and the four young men got on the train. Their grandfather immediately turned and began walking away. He left the other members of the family on the platform to watch as the train jolted to a start and began picking up speed.

As the train disappeared in the distance, Cleve heard the Spirit speak. He had never heard the Spirit speak directly to him before. He accepted that God spoke to his father and two of his brothers. He had even heard a few of his nephews say that God had spoken to them, so he understood what was happening when the spirit said, *(Your) sons are far from safety... And there is no one to save them.*⁴

“Father,” Cleve said softly, not wanting the others to hear, “what am I to do?”

*Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always.*⁵

¹ Deuteronomy 31:6.

² Psalm 121:7.

³ Psalm 91:11–12.

⁴ Job 5:4 (NASB).

⁵ First Chronicles 16:11.



JULY 1917

Camp Funston was a different life—something the young men didn't expect. It was a small city within itself but larger than Harris. It was also crowded. There were more buildings in the process of being built than there were buildings already constructed. Hundreds of men were packed into barracks in tight living quarters while many of the troops were sleeping in tents on wooden platforms.

The boys learned early that their day started when the bugler blew reveille at 5:45 a.m. and ended with taps at 11:00 p.m.

Weekdays were all the same. From 7:00 a.m. to 10:45 p.m., the infantry was drilled in mobility exercises, looking to produce strength and endurance in the young men. They would plunge bayonets into sand- or straw-stuffed sacks, run the obstacle course, and push their bodies until they were ready to collapse. Physical exercise was the call of the day with no rest. One activity moved straight into another, and meals were just as fast. Drills in mock combat situations lasted for hours, regardless of the weather. In rain, mud, or dust, they would run, march, and crawl for miles.

The only time they were still was when they lay on their stomachs at the rifle range. All four of the young men had been taught by their grandfather, and all were proficient with the rifle. The drill instructor questioned them daily, asking over and over where they had learned to shoot. Curt was convinced the sergeant was waiting for one of them to slip up, hoping to catch them in a lie. This drill sergeant looked for a reason to yell, and he wasn't finding a reason when these four men were at the firing range.

The only free time the troops had was on the weekends. Then they were encouraged to participate in baseball, football, boxing, or volleyball.

They had no time to read their Bibles, so when they dropped into their bunks at night, they would often recite scripture to one another.

James would usually start by saying, "You know Grandpa is praying for us."

To which another one would respond, "Yeah, we know Uncle Reid is too."

"He'd tell us to stay grounded in God's Word," someone else would say.

"You go first," one of them would say, talking to no one in particular.

James usually started, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."¹

Noah always went next. "With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall."²

One of the other two would add, "It is God who arms me with strength and keeps my way secure."³

Whoever was left would be forced to say, "The Lord lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be my God, the Rock, my Savior!"⁴

By the time the second round of scripture was started, the soldiers near them had quieted to listen. Before the third round began, someone was asleep, and they would begin skipping over that person until they were all asleep, and there was no one left to speak.

"Luke, the town council wants to see you at the meeting this afternoon," Cleve said, sticking his head into the door of the sheriff's office.

"Why are you telling me?" Luke asked.

¹ Joshua 1:9.

² Second Samuel 22:30.

³ Second Samuel 22:33.

⁴ Second Samuel 22:47.

"I don't know. Mayor Brayden just called and asked me to tell you," Cleve responded. "Strange, he's never done that before, but it's not something I'm going to question."

"Yeah, I guess not." Luke yawned, stood up, and stretched. He moved from his desk and picked up his hat. The two brothers walked the three blocks to the courthouse and entered the conference room on the second floor.

Luke stopped just inside the door. Alexander Langston sat at the table with the council members. He had a menacing snicker on his face. His presence didn't seem to bother Cleve, so Luke followed him to the two empty chairs, and they sat down.

"Luke, I'm glad you could make it," Mason Brayden began. "We've been sitting here, hearing about your inability to find a thief. What seems to be the problem?"

Luke had been asked about crimes in town before. This was nothing new.

"I assume we're talking about the Langstons' silver tea and coffee set?" Luke began. "There were no witnesses. Several people seem to remember seeing it in a box on a table at Montgomery's place, but no one saw it leave. There was probably about fifteen to twenty minutes after it was last seen before it was discovered missing. I've talked to everyone that was there that morning and have nothing to go on. Everyone knows we're looking for it. Someone will slip up at some point, and we'll get word of it. It'll show up eventually."

"See?" Langston broke in loudly. "He's not doing anything. Just sitting back waiting. My poor wife has taken to her bed because of the embarrassment. We told our son's wife that she would get that tea set on her wedding day. It didn't happen because of him"—Langston pointed at Luke—"and that old man that runs that store—"

Kendall Norris broke in. "Mr. Langston, we understand this was upsetting to your family, but it looks like the sheriff has done all he can until something else presents itself."

"He admitted seeing it himself." Langston continued to get louder. He stood up and started toward Luke, pointing his finger in Luke's face. "You're going to find that silver, and you're going to get

it back to us if it's the last thing you do. I'm not going to let you get away with your lazy, self-serving attitude—"

"Mr. Langston." Cleve broke in. "There's no need to make threats. I'm sure the sheriff is doing everything—"

"Of course, you are. You cover for him at every turn. It wouldn't surprise me if the two of you ain't in cahoots with Montgomery and whatever he's done with it. You and your partners probably sold it! You mark my words. You'll find it or you'll pay!" Alexander Langston stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

"Luke," Brayden said, "he's going to cause trouble. You know that."

Luke looked at the man talking to him, "If I knew of anything else to do, I'd do it. I've talked to everyone that was in the store that morning, including the ten-year-old Waithe boy. Everybody saw it. It was in the box on the table in front of the counter. Then it wasn't. Cecil has offered to pay Lydia Langston whatever she thinks is a fair price for it. He's also offered a reward for finding it. He's as upset about the theft as she is. He told me he's never had anything like this happen in all the years he's been running that store."

"Well, what do you think happened?" another council member asked.

"I think somebody saw it there and just took advantage of the people and Cecil being distracted and just picked it up and left. They can't use it. The whole town knows it was stolen. If they wanted to sell it, they would have to go out of town. I've put the word out for fifty miles. I've notified Stafford at the train station, and I'm there almost every time a train comes in. No one has tried to ship a box that big, and no one has carried one onto the train. Nothing has gone out at the post office either," Luke explained. He'd been questioned like this before. This was nothing new to the sheriff.

"Okay," Brayden said. "You've done your job. I just don't want to see this build into something the you can't deal with."

"If I don't deal with it, who is?" Luke asked, shrugging his shoulders.

"Okay," Brayden said again. "You told us what we wanted to know."



SEPTEMBER 1917

Fall came, and Stephen left for Denver. He had assured his father that he would not enlist before he came home.

Stephen would be the only student living in the townhouse. This was the first time this had happened. Thomas had told him if he found a good Christian boy to live with him, it was okay. But he was not to turn the townhouse into a rousing fraternity filled with wild young men or into a party house. He was not to have multiple visitors and disturb the caretakers, Mr. and Mrs. von Bernd.

Mr. and Mrs. von Bernd had been the caretakers for many years, and Thomas considered the townhouse as much theirs as it was his. But without any of his children living in it now, Thomas was thinking about selling it. He probably would, if it weren't for the von Bernds.

Reid and Chipeta were left at home with Esa, Saamel, and the six girls.

Winona was now a young lady. She was a beautiful girl with a sweet personality but remained quiet and stayed away from people, especially men. She listened when others talked and held her emotions as if they were a fragile thing. She would sit with the other ladies in the family when there was a gathering, and she seemed to like Bonnie and Sarah, but Chipeta was the one and only person she turned to for friendship. She would, however, sit with Reid quietly. She trusted him and seemed to enjoy being with him. If they were in public, she might hold Reid's arm or to Travis. She always stayed close to her family but seldom talked to any of them. Reid thought she was probably still traumatized by the ordeal she had suffered as a young girl.

Winona had been forced into slavery and prostitution near the age of ten and for nearly four years had worked for the sadistic man who also held her mother. Her mother had died during captivity; but

her brother, Blade, and three younger sisters had escaped this same fate by hiding in the badlands, away from civilization. Winona was rescued when the camp where she was held was raided by federal agents.

Blade had lived with Reid's family until just a few months ago. He quit school and went to work at the Double R ranch full-time. Reid wasn't happy that he dropped out of school, but he couldn't stop it. Blade really wasn't learning anything, anyway. The teachers had taught him how to read and count. He could do simple arithmetic, but he didn't care about learning anything else.

The little girls Aiyana, Kimi, and Aponi were seven, six, and four years old. Although, no one knew for sure when any of their birthdays were. They did know that Aponi was just over a week old when they had come home with Reid following his abduction by the bank robbers.

The bank robbers had abandoned Reid, injured, in the middle of nowhere. Blade had found Reid and taken care of him. Then Reid took care of the little girls until they were found and Reid returned to Harris. He had brought the four Indian children with him.

Aiyana was shy and loved her adoptive parents. She was smart and made decent grades in school.

Kimi was quiet and clung to her father. She said very little and was hard to understand when she spoke. William had examined her several times and had tried to work with her to improve her language skills, but she refused to try. Because she didn't try, she seldom talked. Kimi had just started school, and Reid prayed she would do well.

Aponi was just the opposite. She was outgoing and didn't shy away from anything or anyone. Everyone was her friend. She would start school in two years.

Jeannie was about to turn thirteen, and Abigail was fourteen. They were lovely young ladies who loved their little sisters. Both were doing well in school when they studied. Abigail didn't mind studying, but Jeannie had to be pushed just to do her homework.

At home, Abigail took control. Chipeta usually let her, saying it was a relief to let someone else see to everyone's needs.

Jeannie didn't try to take care of anything unless she was told to, but she loved her grandfather and her father. She catered to them both.



OCTOBER 1917

Ruth and Joey had waited for cooler weather to get married. Ruth definitely had her own idea of how things should be done. But so did her mother.

Now the day had arrived. The wedding would take place at the Double R ranch, and Reid would officiate.

A big part of the town was present. The Britt and Stewart families and most of the church members, along with both Ruth and Joey's classmates, were present. Most of the ranch hands were also there. Everyone Joey and Ruth knew had been invited and were told to bring their families and guests. Naomi was making this a large affair.

Joey had told everyone that Blade would stand with him, but no one expected Blade to appear in a suit. His coat was buttoned smartly and his braided hair, never seen before, hung from both sides of his head. He made everyone's head turn, and ranch hands quietly commented to each other about his appearance.

Blade acted like he had not changed anything. His rigid, solemn facade still showed his aloof nature, but his presence and his clothing showed his love for the couple. Ranch hands and others outside the family saw him interacting with his little sisters for the first time. They began to realize he wasn't as distant from others or as detached from his family as everyone thought he was.

Reid moved to stand at the edge of the veranda, under an archway covered in brightly colored fall leaves. Blade and Joey stood beside him.

Ruth entered on her father's arm. Her ivory dress had an open scooped neck and caped sleeves. The limp, flowing skirt blew in the breeze that cut across the open land. The skirt ended a few

inches above the ankle. It was embroidered with a delicate yellow-red-orange-and-brown floral pattern that was complemented by the autumn foliage. She wore lace on her hair, gathered on the sides in a most unusual pearl headband that dipped over her forehead.

Everyone knew that Naomi had spared no expense in giving her oldest daughter the most beautiful and stylish dress available in the Denver shops.

While Naomi considered fashion a must for her daughter's wedding, the family knew Ruth was down-to-earth and practical. She had gotten a dual college degree, studying English and literature along with home management, sewing, cooking, and child-rearing.

Since her return from school, Ruth's strong-willed personality had dominated the wedding preparations. She had worked circles around both her mother and the housekeeper, straightening, cooking, and cleaning so that her wedding would be exactly what she wanted, except for the dress and the large gathering. Those were the two concessions she had given her mother.

The sun was setting behind the couple as they stood in front of Reid. The guests could look at a backdrop of the open country and the colorful sunset in the western sky.

Reid welcomed the guests. "Friends, we are here tonight to celebrate the marriage of Ruth Wells and Joseph McCain. Marriage is a covenant in God's sight. This covenant is not to be entered into lightly but with reverence, love, and joy. We can be honest with ourselves and know that there is no true marriage unless there is a bond of honesty and truth living in the hearts of those taking their vows. Tonight, we will witness the creation of an outward marriage while God will witness the creation of their inward marriage in their hearts. Their souls will be united as one.

"The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.' Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;

she shall be called “woman,” for she was taken out of man.’ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.¹

“God told us that a husband and wife are to unite with each other and leave your parents,” Reid smiled. “Parents”—Reid looked at Naomi and Marvin—“they are going to be living close, here at the ranch, with you. Leave them alone, and let them get to know one another. You may feel like they are still your children, and they are. But they are responsible to each other first.”

Naomi looked away from Reid. She knew she was too involved in her grown daughter’s life. Her little brother was reminding her to back off. She wondered if Ruth had asked him to do this.

“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another.”²

Reid continued the ceremony quoting scripture after scripture, advising the couple to stay in God’s Word together and put God first. When the vows were completed, Reid introduced the couple as husband and wife.

Marvin had created a true ranch experience for their guests. Beef had been turning all day on a rotisserie over hot coals in a pit.

¹ Genesis 2:18, 22–24.

² Romans 12:9–16a.

Fresh baked bread, campfire beans, and every kind of pie imaginable were available for the guests to choose from.

The celebration lasted long into the night.

Curt, Clay, Noah, and James climbed onto the troop train and filed into their seats. They had gotten their orders, Second Army Base Hospital 7, attached to the American Expeditionary Forces in France.

Someone had passed tobacco and chewing gum around, and everyone was settling in for the long journey to New York. They had to do something with the dull hours spent on the train, so the four men joined in singing with some of the other soldiers. The man in front of them was trying to get a game of craps going and had asked Curt and the Britt boys several times if they wanted to play. They watched but didn’t participate.

In every town they went through, the troops would gather at the windows and hang out, waving and yelling at the people. Crowds would stop and wave back, cheering their troops on to victory as the young men left for war.

As the train moved further east, crowds lined the tracks. They passed through towns and cities where women would run up beside the train and throw kisses. The onlookers passed flags, flowers, candy, cigarettes, and gum to any soldier they could reach. There was singing and laughter and revelry. The people in the cities were more connected to the war effort than those in the smaller towns of the Midwest.

At some stops, the Red Cross would come through the train selling donuts to the boys. At others, the Salvation Army would come through the cars passing out free coffee.

Girls ran to the railroad cars, and soldiers would hang out the windows with someone else holding onto their legs so they wouldn’t fall. The girls stretched to hug and kiss the boys. Some would pass a soldier a scrap of paper, giving her name and an address, asking to receive letters from the young man.

Clay tried it. He hung out the window with Noah and Curt hanging onto him and got an awful good kiss. The girl passed him a photo with her name and address on the back. In the next city, Noah tried it. He got a kiss but no picture and no name.

They arrived at their destination just after dark and marched a distance through semideserted streets to a warehouse where they received a portion of their gear and were told to bed down for the night. The next few days were long and dull. They were issued more gear and given another physical examination. Then they were marched through the streets in broad daylight, headed for the docks at Hoboken.

The soldiers were loaded onto the *Susquehanna*, a German cruise liner seized in an American port at the beginning of the war in 1914. The ship had been quickly converted for use by the troops when the United States entered the war the previous April.

The boys stood on deck with the rest of the troops waving to anyone they saw, yelling and whooping as if it were a party. They were assigned accommodations on the second row from the deck; and tonight, for the first time in a little more than a week, would have a mattress to sleep on.

About four o'clock, the ship pulled away from the dock, and the troops were fed. Just after dark, Curt, Clay, Noah, and James stood on deck watching the lights of New York fade into the distance.

Clay said, "There's no turning back now."

Noah laughed. "I think you lost that opportunity weeks ago."

"I'm scared," Clay said.

Curt, the oldest, commented, "We all are. We can pretend all we want, but none of us know what we've gotten ourselves into. I'm glad we're together."

"God tells us not to be scared. 'For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control,'"¹ James said. "I talked to Grandpa. He says not to pay any attention to what's going on around us. To stay focused on our job, and we won't have time to be scared. He said he was never scared during the battle."

¹ Second Timothy 1:7 (ESV).

"He actually told you about the war?" Curt asked in amazement.

"A little. He said he never got scared when he was busy. But when it was over and he was finished working, when he was safe and it was quiet and still and he had time to think, that's when he would sometimes feel like his insides were jumping around. He said his body reacted to being scared, but he kept his mind on Jesus and never felt like he was scared."

Noah commented, "I wish I had been there to hear him. I never thought to talk to him about it."

"He told me the minute I stop to rest to start talking to God. Not to let a moment pass. Not to let my brain be idle, that's when the feeling of fear would come. He said he wished he could read back then. All he had was his memories of scripture, and sometimes he couldn't remember them. If he'd been able to read, then he could have focused his mind better." James smiled. "He said we were blessed to be able to read and have scripture available."

James reached into his pocket and pulled out a folded sheet of paper. On the paper, he had copied scripture.

"I wrote down verses that he said helped him—verses he remembered that he used during the war. They're going to stay in my pocket."

James passed the paper to Clay, who unfolded it to see what scriptures were written down.

Clay read the first scripture out loud, "Praise be to the Lord my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle. He is my loving God and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield, in whom I take refuge."¹

Noah said, "But he can read."

"Not back then. He didn't learn to read until your dad was almost grown," James explained.

Curt asked, "You didn't read the book?"

Clay looked at Curt, a question on his face.

Noah asked, "What book?"

"The one that was written about Grandpa," Curt responded.

¹ Psalm 144:1–2a.

“You’re kidding me! Somebody wrote a book about Grandpa?” James said.

Curt looked at him. “There’s one about your father too—about what he did before he was hurt and how he got injured.”

James had been leaning on the railing looking at the water. He stood up, continuing to watch Curt, stunned. He softly asked, “Why didn’t he tell me?”

“Well, the way I understand it, Grandpa let them write the book about him because God told him to. God wanted his story told, but Grandpa is bothered by some of the things he did in his life. He’s ashamed of them,” Curt explained. “I don’t know why Uncle Reid let them write his story, but Mother told me not to ever talk to him about it. She said it was a bad time for him, and he doesn’t want to remember.

“I can understand that. I was thirteen when they brought him home. It took all of us to take care of him. Somebody had to be with him constantly. He couldn’t move he was hurt so bad. You had to listen hard to understand what he was saying. He’d talk to us, but he never told any of us what happened,” Curt explained. “The day the people came to talk to him about it, Father sent us boys and Mother over to Uncle Cleve’s house. We stayed there three days while the lawyers talked to him. Uncle Luke, Uncle Cleve, Grandpa, and Father all got to hear it, but nobody else did. They did let Aunt Chipeta listen to some of it.”

Curt finished talking and leaned over the rail, staring at the water below the ship.

James waited for Curt to say more. When it didn’t come, he said, “Tell me. I want to know what happened to Dad.”

“And I want to know Grandpa’s story. What could that sweet man ever do that he was ashamed of?” Noah asked.

Curt nodded. “We’ve got the whole trip. We’ve got plenty of time.”

Curt looked over and saw men engaged in a craps game. This game seemed to be really popular with the boys from the big cities. As he turned to enter the door in the bulkhead, he found men on the floor of the walkway playing poker. He stepped over them, and they

didn’t seem to notice. They kept on playing. Clay, Noah, and James followed him.

Reveille was early the next morning, as usual. The boys stepped onto the deck to find two other ships near them and several destroyers chugging around with smoke billowing from the funnels. There was a dirigible overhead, along with two seaplanes.

“What are they doing?” Noah asked, pointing toward the sky.

Curt responded, “Watching for German submarines. We could get sunk before we even get there.”

That was a sobering thought. The four ate breakfast in silence. By midday, none of them were thinking about eating again. *Sick* wasn’t a strong enough word. They all ended up on their berths for the rest of the day. As each got accustomed to the ship’s rocking, he was forced into his military role. The days were filled with watch duty and lectures. Lectures about the country they were entering. Lectures about procedures and battle readiness. Lectures telling them what to expect and how to act when they hit French soil. First aid lectures and demonstrations were a daily occurrence. Lectures, lectures, and more lectures.

If one of them was lucky enough to get watch duty at night, the others took advantage of it and slept on deck. Sleeping below usually caused Noah and James more seasickness in the morning. The air was stagnant and stale below deck, and nobody wanted to stay down there for long.

They were all stretched out on deck one night when they were awakened by an alarm. Grabbing their bedding, they headed quickly for their berths, as ordered to do when under attack. The guns of the destroyers began to pound the water, and the sound was deafening. After a short time, the guns stopped.

The next morning, they found out they had been attacked by a porpoise that had been spotted beneath the water. It wasn’t a submarine. Mistaken identity, the watchman said.

“Luke.” Cecil Montgomery walked into the sheriff’s office, looking gloomy. “Do you have any more ideas?”

Luke looked up from what he was doing.

“No, I’ve talked with everyone that was in the store and then some. I don’t know what else to do,” Luke responded, watching Cecil. The man looked beat. He was never this down. He kept a smile on his face most of the time. Montgomery had the inner peace that came from knowing Jesus and had always been grateful for the blessings God had given him.

Now the storekeeper looked dejected. “I paid the Langstons what they said the junk was worth, but they’re still going on about it. People are beginning to ask me questions. MacPherson says there’s a rumor going around town that I stole the tea set.”

The Spirit spoke to Luke. *People with no regard for others can throw whole cities into turmoil.*¹

Luke heard the Spirit, but he wanted to comfort Montgomery. “Yeah, I’ve heard it. Nobody believes that.”

“I don’t know. I’m getting some mighty funny looks from some of the ladies. I don’t seem to have as many people coming into the store either, and nobody’s paying me cash. Everybody wants to charge for the stuff they get.” Montgomery sank onto a chair. “There haven’t been many payments this month either. I can’t operate like this. The Langstons have everything I had in reserve. Isn’t there anything we can do?”

“I could search your place to reassure the Langstons that you don’t have it, but I think that would just make other people think that I believed the rumors.”

Cecil nodded. A search would probably reinforce the gossip. “I had to let Mrs. Markle go. I can’t afford to pay her anymore.”

“That bad, huh?” Luke wished he could think of something that would help, but he was out of ideas. The wedding had passed months ago, the tea and coffee set had been paid for, and still the Langstons wanted retribution. Luke understood wanting the silver back, but at some point, they would have to let it go.

¹ Proverbs 29:8a (GNT).

“Langston was here again last week. I tried to talk to him but didn’t get anywhere,” Luke offered.

Montgomery put his head in his hand. “I had to tell him I wouldn’t sell to him anymore. He’s run up a huge tab and says he won’t pay until I cough up the silver. I’ve paid him for it! What does he want me to do?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know what else we can do. Did you get a receipt for what you gave him?”

Montgomery nodded.

“Well, if he doesn’t pay you soon, you can file for payment of the outstanding bill,” Luke offered the only option he could think of.

“That will cost me money, filing fees and court costs. I’m going to have to file for a lot of unpaid bills. Then I may as well shut down. There won’t be anything left. Besides, you know that ‘If a wise man goes to court with a fool, there will be ranting and raving but no resolution.’”¹

“Yeah,” Luke said. “I know.”

The two men sat together in silence. Luke didn’t have anything else to offer, and Cecil had run out of money.

The ships arrived in Brest, France, during the night, but that didn’t stop the calls and greetings of the men on boats already anchored in the harbor. And women, there were also women manning some of the boats. They could hear the shouts of “Le Americaine” coming from a crowd of Frenchmen at the dock, but they couldn’t see anyone. It was too dark.

Everyone disembarked before daylight. By midmorning, they were on the dock in full pack, lined up in row after row like little olive-colored ducks waiting for mama duck to move.

A train came onto the wharf. The wounded were removed and loaded on the ship they had just gotten off. About half of them were suffering from gas poisoning. They had been lectured about this—

¹ Proverbs 29:9 (HCSB).

drilled over and over on how to put on the respirator and how to watch the next man to make sure it was correct. Everyone had a partner, and everyone would get to know his buddy well, from the respirator on their head to the trench foot check beneath their boots.

James watched these men closely. Their skin was yellow and blistered, and their eyes were covered. Many had amputated feet and legs. The gas settled low to the ground, and if you stayed in it, the gas would eat away at your skin. A few were Germans, and James heard someone yell to put them in the lowest ward, below the waterline.

Now that it was daylight, James could see past their ship to the harbor. It was crowded and busy. Warships and transports lay anchored throughout, and hydro aeroplanes scattered the waterways.

James fully expected to board the train that had brought the wounded, but the troops weren't that fortunate. They were marched six miles to a holding area.

As they marched, they passed tired British soldiers, dragging and limping, off step with one another. James saw a group of French troops, all with their bushy mustaches, so much like Uncle Luke's. Another group stepped to the side, stood straight, and saluted. They were all smiles and clean-shaven. James realized these were Canadians. Even through the smiling faces, he could see the exhaustion the men had experienced.

They passed German prisoners being taken to and from work. They were dirty, and as James watched them, he realized they were watching the Americans too. He had no thoughts of them, one way or the other. He was just trying to size up what they had been through and what the German people's thinking was in fighting this war. Then he wondered what they thought about him and his comrades.

The column was turning down another street. He saw the men turning in front of him marching with a calm awareness of self-respect and energy in their stride. They looked taller and stronger than the men lining the street in other uniforms. The Americans marched in such a precise rhythm everyone was turning to watch the parade.

More people came to witness the entrance of their rescuers. There were soldiers from other countries, ragged women, dirty children, and bent old men. No boys were older than the early teen who

stood on the base hugging the lamppost to see over the shoulders of the old men. There were no men younger than the old men in front of the boy. There was no one James's age out of uniform, except the ones with missing legs or missing arms or missing eyes.

James realized, if this were at home, Grandpa and Uncle Thomas would be the only ones standing on the street. His father would be with them, only because he was crippled. Saamel might be there but just for a short time, and then he would be gone too.

James wondered how long it would take the Americans to begin looking like all the other people he saw.

Kathleen Avery had invited Luke to dinner again. Luke was getting friendly with this woman and her two youngest sons. Here he was fifty years old, and for the first time in his life he was really interested in a woman.

There was nothing about her that would have attracted him to her. Her hair was salt-and-pepper and stayed pulled to the crown of her head. Her clothes were neat and clean but plain and worn. Her hands were rough from years of hard work. She wasn't overly beautiful, nor was her personality one that would draw him to her. But she was hardworking and loving to her family. She took care of her responsibilities and quietly went about her modest life. Her children were well-behaved and her cooking excellent.

A woman usually considered a few evenings together as the beginning of a relationship, but Kathleen didn't seem to feel this way. At least she didn't act like it. Luke saw no indication that she thought they were more than just friends—friends who had gotten to know each other through her children and his extended family. They both just seemed to go with the flow of activity and had gravitated toward each other when the married couples paired off.

Then he had carried an armload of vegetables home for her after a family gathering. Since then, they had seen each other often, but they never had time alone. She had two teenage sons who always

seemed to be around and a mother who kept herself involved closely in her daughter's life.

They could only get to know each other over time. They were comfortable together, though, and neither of them seemed uncomfortable with the older woman present. If Luke couldn't think of anything to talk about, he would just turn to the boys and ask about school. That didn't happen very often.

Tonight, as he headed to the Avery home, he took a bunch of collard greens from his family's garden, along with a bunch of onions and a couple of small pumpkins. He was looking forward to the pie that she would make.

The sheriff stopped at the edge of the porch and wiped his boots off on his pant leg. Kathleen opened the door. "Good evening."

"Hello, Kathy," Luke gave a greeting. "I brought you some stuff from the garden." Luke handed her the sack he had over his shoulder.

"Thank you. You and William are both so good to us, keeping us supplied with vegetables. How in the world do any of you find time to garden?" she asked as he entered the tiny room that was used for everything in the house except sleeping.

"Dad and the children usually keep it going, but Dad's beginning to slow down. Reid hired a sharecropper to help. Dad still thinks he has to supervise, though. That man can't go out there to work without Dad watching from his porch." Luke laughed.

Luke kept talking as Kathleen put the finishing touches on the food. The family sat down, and Luke offered to bless the meal. "I don't get to do it with the others very often. Cleve, Thomas, William, or Angus usually do it. Reid always lets the kids do it at his house." Luke turned to look at the two boys. "Does your mom let you pray at meals?"

"Sometimes," Nathan said. "We usually just grab something when we're ready."

"Shh," Rone said. "You're not supposed to tell people that."

Luke smiled and looked toward Kathleen.

"I'm sorry." She looked away, a little embarrassed. Then she turned back to her guest. "We have gotten a little relaxed around here lately."

Luke prayed, and the family had an enjoyable meal. Luke and the boys talked about going hunting together when the weather got a little colder. Della Leachman talked about needing more scraps for a quilt she was making, and Kathleen told the others about her day.

When they were finished, Kathleen and Luke left the others to clean the kitchen. Luke helped Kathleen put her coat on and watched as she wrapped a light scarf around her head. Then they headed out the door for a moonlight walk in the cool evening air.

When they returned, Kathleen's mother invited them to have a warm cup of tea or coffee before Luke left for his rooms behind the jail. Luke smiled warmly at the woman. This was the friendliest gesture she had ever offered him.

He and Kathleen sat down as the older woman left to retrieve a couple of mismatched coffee cups and saucers. She turned to the kitchen area again and came back carrying a shiny sterling silver tea and coffee service. The set included a hot water kettle, coffeepot, teapot, sugar bowl with a lid, creamer, waste bowl, sugar tongs, and teaspoons on an oval serving tray. The teapot, coffeepot, kettle, and tray all had wood tip handles.

Mrs. Leachman set the tray down on the table in front of Luke.

Kathleen said, "Oh, Mother! You did such a good job cleaning these up. If I didn't know better, I would have thought you had them professionally cleaned."

Luke looked at her and breathed a sigh of relief. Kathleen's comment made him feel better about the situation. This looked exactly like the set that had been stolen from Montgomery's Market. But Kathleen knew her mother had cleaned it.

"I am proud of it," Mrs. Leachman said simply. "I've waited a long time to get my hands on this."

She poured Luke's coffee and picked up the creamer. "Would you like some milk?"

Luke shook his head gently. "May I get a little sugar?" he asked.

"Of course, help yourself," she replied.

Luke picked up a spoon and opened the sugar bowl. He wouldn't have normally taken any sugar. He took his coffee black, but he wanted to examine a piece of this set up close.

He added the sugar to his coffee and stirred. As he took the spoon from the cup, he moved it closer to his eyes to look at it in the dim lantern light. He was looking for the maker's mark.

"Is something wrong?" Kathleen asked him.

"No, I was just admiring the craftsmanship on this piece," he replied. "What kind of shape was it in when she got it?"

"I have no idea. She wouldn't let me see it until she cleaned it up. But it's beautiful now, isn't it? This was my grandmother's," Kathleen said. "She left it to Mother when she died, but Mother's sister hid it and wouldn't let Mother have it. The sister died a few months ago, and their brother sent it to Mother. She's so happy to finally have it."

"I'm sure she is," Luke said as he took another sip of coffee. He hadn't seen a maker's mark, but it looked like the back of the spoon had been filed smooth recently, and it wasn't done by a professional.



DECEMBER 1917

James had been at the aid station for weeks, and the cold was beginning to wear on him. His toes were frozen, and his breath was a smooth floating fog that rose to blend with the wintry haze. But he was thankful he wasn't in the trenches.

When he wrapped himself in his blanket on the cot at night, he took sanctuary in the warmth of scripture. That's really the only time he could get comfortable, when his mind was focused on the love of God.

He now understood why his father stayed in the Word so much. His father allowed himself to focus on his home in heaven instead of the pain of this world. James had never known scripture to be this comforting in the past, and he was glad his father had instilled it into his heart.

Just last night, Jesus had comforted James with, *I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*¹ Jesus had overcome the world. This war and this cold were nothing because Jesus had already conquered this world and everything in it.

While the cold weather affected James, he was comfortable with the work he was doing. He spent his afternoons and evenings at the decontamination post, assisting the soldiers who had come in contact with poison gases used by the Germans. His unit would be in a different location every day, moving to be closest to where they were needed.

This afternoon, they were lugging their supplies a little further to the north east. He had a pack on his back and was leading a team of mules pulling a water wagon needed for the cleansing process.

¹ John 16:33.

The frozen ground was covered with a light dusting of snow. No grass could be seen because there wasn't any. The shells and trampling of the troop's boots destroyed everything. Small ridges and valleys were carved into the ground where shells had hit. There was a road that wound its way through the tree stumps and craters. The countryside was desolate.

In the mud, James could see lost boots, equipment, clothing, old bones, and even parts of the recently dismembered and deceased. As if the sight of things wasn't bad enough, the stench of battles past remained in the area.

Abandoned trenches were filled with water, waste, and filth. The sides of many had collapsed. If the fighting moved this way and the troops expected to use these, they would have to be cleaned out and reinforced.

The trenches seemed to be a permanent line for both sides, but the fighting had recently moved in a northerly direction. The allies were making slow progress.

James worked just behind the lines where he could hear and see the battle in the distance. But so far, he hadn't been sent to retrieve the wounded from the trenches or battlefield.

A shell whistled overhead, and he ducked. It fell nearby. The blast of the explosion knocked James to the ground. The mules pulled and swayed as the echoing hush rolled across the earth. It brought with it pressure in his ears that pushed the world into silence.

He'd heard his grandfather talk of an explosion near him that had knocked him off his wagon, causing him to lose his balance for days. He couldn't stand and blood had run out of his ear. But there was no help for him, and he was the only one available to help the wounded on the battlefield, so he kept working. James wondered if his grandfather had heard the cannonball coming at him.

The British troops had told the Americans that they would learn to distinguish the sounds of the different shells and know where it would hit. He was learning, but he didn't think he would ever get accustomed to the noise. He began to stand, still holding the mule's reins, allowing both himself and the animals to recover their bearings

before they continued down the road. The column he was following was still in sight, and there were a few stragglers behind him.

Clay came running up behind James, slamming his hands down on James's already burdened shoulders. James almost lost his balance again.

"Hey, cuz," Clay said loudly as he grabbed at James to help him keep his balance. He was laughing.

"Private, why don't you find someone else to terrorize? The Germans are right over there." James pointed toward the front lines. "Go pester them."

Another shell passed through the sky, and they both threw themselves to the ground. The shells were screaming ominously overhead, and their cries seemed to have a devilish roar, warning of impending doom. They were falling deeper into the allied lines with each shot.

Clay got up, laughing. "That one scared you. Admit it."

Suddenly, James heard three separate sounds in slow motion. The distant firing of a rifle, the whine of the bullet, and the ping of a projectile piercing metal. He was familiar with these sounds from his childhood. He'd heard them all as his grandfather taught him and his brothers how to shoot. He watched as Clay's eyes went big, and his face froze. Then Clay slowly fell forward onto James.

Clay had let his fear turn him into a practical joker. He had laughed and mocked James for the caution he showed. James was careful. He saw the perils everywhere, and God was talking to him, cautioning him as he moved through danger and to safety in the Father's arms. But Clay had shown foolhardy carelessness as he went about his business.

This carelessness worried James, and he had tried to talk to Clay, but his speech fell on deaf ears. James had talked with both Noah and Curt about Clay's behavior too. Noah could do nothing. Clay wouldn't listen to his little brother. Curt had tried to talk with Clay one night as they went to bed.

Clay had responded by ranting for all to hear, "You have no idea what it's like near the front! Your insides start jumping because you're scared, and you're running to get where you need to be before you get shot. Those trenches are tight and nasty and smelly. Sewage and rats

run everywhere. Men's guts are puked all over. The bodies are pushed up to use for protection from the machine guns, and shells just keep coming. The gas is rolling out from every explosion—"

Curt quieted, allowing Clay to tell him everything he saw and felt as he retrieved the wounded and dead each day. Clay was right, Curt knew nothing about the front. He had never even been to the aid station where the wounded were first cared for. Curt remained safe at the evacuation hospital. He saw the injured and the sick, and he cared for the wounded before they were shipped on to the base hospital far away from the fighting. Curt listened to Clay until Clay collapsed on his bunk, his emotions paralyzing his already tired physical body.

Curt moved to sit on the edge of the cot with his cousin. He put a hand on Clay, trying to comfort him. Clay had begun to shake gently, the fear he had known just a few hours ago returning to visit him. Curt saw this often in the patients he cared for. The men would remain controlled and able to function until they were out of danger's path. Then their bodies would retaliate.

Curt pulled a blanket from his own bed to add to Clay's covering, trying to stop the shaking and comfort his cousin.

"Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle."¹ Curt recited scripture, looking for comfort himself.

"God's not in these battles," Clay said softly. "He won't go anywhere near that place."

Curt sat with Clay until he fell asleep. The Stewarts' youngest son was still awake when James arrived following his shift, well after midnight. The two had talked and prayed for Clay. When they went to sleep just before dawn, they had agreed to continue praying for Clay, but they would leave Clay in God's hands and not try to intervene.

Now James thought Clay was joking again. He pushed Clay's shoulder. Clay's body jerked slightly, but he still lay on James heavily.

¹ Psalm 24:8.

"Come on, Clay, get off," James said, grabbing Clay by the shoulders to push him away.

Clay's eyes remained open and frozen as his head bobbed backward, his weight pulling away from James. Blood ran down the side of Clay's face from below his helmet. James knew that Clay was dead, and he guided his cousin's body as it collapsed onto the ground. James knelt beside him.

"Aww, Clay," was all James could say.

The early winter wind brought a chill that woke the few trees around town with a gentle procession of chattering dead leaves. Luke had just passed Tendal's Grocery and pulled his collar up to deflect the breeze that came around the side of the building.

Michael and Angela Tendal stopped Luke as they passed each other on the street.

"Good morning, Sheriff. We've got some new and unusual merchandise in. I think you would be interested," Michael said.

"Really! You know me too well. I can't resist all the new gadgets." Luke smiled.

Angela asked, "How's Mr. Montgomery doing?"

Luke looked at the couple questioningly, wondering why they were asking. The smile left his face. "He's fine."

"I mean with the store. I know he's had some problems since that tea set was stolen," Angela said. "People talk. We hear things."

"Struggling," Luke admitted. "He did nothing wrong, but people seem to think the robbery was his responsibility."

Luke didn't mind talking with this couple. They had a nice Christian family, and he had gotten to know them well since they began attending church after moving to Harris. They weren't trying to take business away from Cecil Montgomery; they were just trying to make a living themselves.

"I just can't believe someone in this town would do something like this," Angela said.

“That’s the problem,” Luke agreed. “I can’t think of anyone in town that would. I mean, we’ve got some nasty folks, and some a little dishonest. There’s a few that have a cruel streak, but a tea set? I just can’t see it.”

“I only know of a few ladies in town that own one,” Angela said. “To keep those things nice, you have to polish them often.”

“That’s what I’ve been told,” Luke said. “How much do you know about silver tea sets?”

“A little,” Angela replied. “My mother and grandmother both had one. There was a silversmith that lived down the road from us when I was growing up. My mother was friends with his wife. I’d play with his kids. They always had several sets sitting around that he was working on.”

“Can you tell me about them? Everything you know. They’re pretty, but I just don’t understand the attraction to something you seem to have to work so hard to keep nice,” Luke said.

“I’ve got some pieces. Why don’t you come inside and I’ll see what I can tell you?”

Christmas was upon them, and Luke and Kathleen waited for the right moment to announce to their family that they were getting married. The holiday celebration was at the ranch this year. The open rooms awarded more space for the large gathering to meet together. Other rooms were available for the children to use, and if the weather was good, the outdoor veranda had an excellent atmosphere for visiting.

The group had been sitting around talking and telling of Christmases past when Luke stood up.

“Kathleen and I would like to make an announcement—”

“Well, it’s about time,” Cleve said as he grinned at Luke from the seat next to him.

“If you don’t hush and let me talk, I’m not going to make it,” Luke said, eyeing his brother hard and smacking him on the shoulder playfully.

“Kathleen and I have talked about it, and we’ve decided to get married when warmer weather gets here. We’d like to have the ceremony, if you are willing”—Luke looked at Reid and Chipeta—“on your front porch. And we would like you to officiate. Kathleen and I would be honored if all of you would attend.”

Reid looked at Mrs. Leachman. She didn’t look happy, but her face was far from disapproving. He commented, “He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord.”¹

Handshakes, hugs, and kisses were passed around as a jumble of people swarmed the couple offering congratulations and best wishes.

“Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife,”² Cleve said in response to the scripture Reid had recited. He meant it as a joke, and a few people did laugh, mostly just to be polite.

Luke ignored the comment but not Reid. Corrective scripture wasn’t something to laugh at. It wasn’t a joke. His next response was directed toward Cleve. “Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”³

Cleve wasn’t paying attention; he was still playing with Luke. “An excellent wife who can find?”⁴

Reid was looking toward his oldest brother with reproach in his eyes. He raised his voice slightly to make sure Cleve heard him. “Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”⁵ ‘Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that

¹ Proverbs 18:22.

² Proverbs 21:9.

³ First Peter 3:7 (ESV).

⁴ Proverbs 31:10a.

⁵ Mark 10:9.

his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect.”¹

Everyone had turned to listen to Reid this time. Cleve now heard the rebuke and turned to face his brother. Reid finished speaking by saying, “That’s enough.”

Cleve would submit, but he wouldn’t leave it alone. He gave a sarcastic “Yes, Father.”

Travis spoke, the first time since the group had finished eating. “And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”²

Sarah and Marvin both chimed in, “Amen.”

The conversation was over. The children had been reprimanded.

Luke began to chatter excitedly again, and everyone turned their attention back to him. Kathleen seemed embarrassed by the attention she was getting, or maybe the exchange between Cleve and Reid.

She was a quiet woman, and Reid had not gotten to know her very well. He watched and saw the easy interaction between Luke and Kathleen. He was happy for his brother.

Reid stepped out into the cold December evening and closed his eyes, letting the fresh calm air wash over him like a soothing wave. He opened his eyes to study the golden horizon. Just being surrounded by the frigid peace in this open country brought him a feeling of sweet surrender to the Almighty, vibrant but relaxing.

The Spirit spoke to Reid in the quiet. *Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.*³

Reid acknowledged with a smile; he understood. He needed to be gentler with Cleve. He could hear the faint laughter and talking from within the house and enjoyed listening to these large family gatherings from a distance. He did love his family, all of them.

The Spirit was also talking to Cleve. *No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.*¹ *My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.*²

Cleve understood that he had used God’s Words in a playful manner and he had offended Reid by doing so. He needed to apologize or at least let Reid know that he wasn’t upset by the correction.

Cleve walked outside to look for his little brother. “What are you doing out here, Reid?”

Reid turned and smiled at Cleve. “Just enjoying the peace.”

Cleve stood beside Reid in silence for a few moments and then asked, “Do you think the boys get a break for Christmas? Will they have peace for a few days?”

Reid knew that Cleve’s mind had been on his sons lately. His brother had made other comments about the boys. Reid’s heart had been there too. He missed James and had been thinking about him, but he trusted God for whatever happened. It was the unknown that bothered Reid.

Cleve wasn’t as certain of God’s providence, and Reid knew it. Every time they discussed the war or their sons, Cleve would voice his concern for Clay’s and Noah’s safety. Cleve never came right out and said it, but he implied that he believed his sons would never make it home.

“I like to think so,” Reid said. “You know, a few years ago, the men in the field stopped fighting on Christmas Day. The two sides sang songs together and exchanged trinkets and food. They celebrated Jesus’s birth.”

Reid quieted for a few moments. When Cleve didn’t say anything, Reid continued, “I don’t think the men fighting on either side really care about why they’re fighting. They’re just following orders.”

¹ First Timothy 3:2–4.

² Colossians 3:14.

³ Hebrews 12:14–15.

¹ Hebrews 12:11.

² Hebrews 12:5b–6.

Reid leaned his cane on the nearby table before turning to the man standing beside him. He put his arms around his brother to hug him. "I love you, Cleve. Merry Christmas."

"I love you too, Reid. Merry Christmas."



JANUARY 1918

"Hey, sweet girl." Luke gave a greeting and kissed Bonnie on the cheek as he stepped in the door. "Can we sit down and you answer a few questions for me?"

"Sure, come on in. We're all in the parlor." She smiled at him.

"I'd really like to talk to you alone, or maybe just William if you want him there. Can we do that, or do I need to come back some other time?" Luke asked.

"Well, sure. I can get Mother to keep an eye on the children for a few minutes. You go on into the kitchen, and I'll get William."

Luke said hello to the others as he walked past the parlor door and entered the kitchen. He stopped at the sink, looking out the window at the setting sun. He didn't want to ask these questions, and he didn't want to give anyone the idea that he thought Bonnie's grandmother had the missing tea set. But Langston just wouldn't shut up, and the town council was after Luke to do something about Langston or the silver, preferably both. Luke's mind questioned itself constantly. He needed answers, and he wasn't getting them from Kathleen, so he was turning to Bonnie for advice.

William and Bonnie walked into the kitchen hand in hand. Luke smiled. They were still in love five years and two children after their marriage. He hoped he and Kathleen would be this happy.

"Uncle Luke, what's so serious?" William asked.

Luke sat down like he was sitting at his own desk and indicated the chairs on the other side of the table to the couple. William and Bonnie sat facing the sheriff.

"I don't know if you can answer my questions, but if you can, it will save a lot of uncomfortable conversation between me and your mother," Luke began, looking at Bonnie.

William smiled, and Luke saw it.

“It’s not what you think.” Luke smirked playfully at William and continued. “The town council is giving me flack about not being able to find the Langstons’ silver. I was at your mother’s a few months ago, and your grandmother brought out a tea set that she said had belonged to her mother, and her grandmother before that. She said her sister died, and a brother sent it to her. Do you know anything about this?”

Bonnie shook her head slowly. “Not much. I know she has always said her sister cheated her out of the only thing her mother had of any value. It was a tea set. It caused an argument between them, and Grandmother quit talking to her sister because of it. Mother told me Grandmother has it now. Mother says she’s babying it like it’s the most important thing in her life.”

She turned to look at her husband, explaining to him as much as she was to the man asking the question. “I’ve never seen it, but Mother said she received it a few months ago from her brother. Their sister was a widow, and the children all moved away. Their brother was cleaning out the sister’s house and knew Grandmother had always wanted it, so he sent it to her.”

“So all you know is what your mother told you?” Luke asked.

Bonnie nodded. “Except for Grandmother’s ranting about not getting it when she was supposed to.”

“What’s the problem?” William asked.

Luke was looking at the table. “Langston won’t let the matter drop.” He looked up at William. “You would think this was a matter of life and death for him. He’s pestering the town council saying Cecil did something with the set that was stolen and I know what he did. He says I’m hiding the truth. That puts pressure on me to prove what he is saying didn’t happen. Then I saw your grandmother’s set. It looks awfully close to what the Langstons’ set looked like. It looks brand-new. The Langstons had just sent theirs back east to be professionally cleaned, and some dings repaired, so it would have been really clean when it came back here. And the maker’s marks are missing from your grandmother’s set. They’ve been filed smooth. Recently.”

“Oh,” Bonnie said, alarm showing in her face. “I don’t know. I know Grandmother is a nasty person, but I don’t think she would steal something like that.”

Luke shook his head; “I don’t think so either. But she was there the morning it went missing. She and I went into the store together. She said she was after thread, but Cecil later said he didn’t remember her buying any. Neither of us saw her leave.”

William asked, “Do you really think she took it?”

“Like I said, I don’t want to believe it, and I don’t want to go accusing her of something she didn’t do,” Luke explained. “I’d like to get Mrs. Langston over there to look at it, but if I do that, your mother and grandmother are going to think that I believe she stole it. I don’t know what to do.”

“Wow! I don’t know what to tell you,” William said. “Have you tried talking to Mrs. Avery?”

“I tried, twice. It didn’t go well either time,” Luke told him. “She came right out and asked me why I wanted to know so much about the silver.”

“What did you tell her?” Bonnie asked.

“I told her I was just trying to learn more about sterling silver tea and coffee servings, that maybe knowing more would help me find the missing set faster,” Luke answered.

“Sounds like you’re going to have to let Mrs. Langston see it just to ease your mind,” William said.

Luke nodded. “I know. But Mrs. Leachman is going to get mad at me no matter what Mrs. Langston says. And that’s going to cause problems for Kathleen and me.”

They sat together a few minutes. Then Luke said, “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”¹ I’m going to hope she didn’t do it and wait for the right time to talk to Mrs. Leachman and Mrs. Langston. And I’m going to pray about it until that time comes.”

¹ Romans 12:12.

Near the end of the month, Cleve and Jenny received a letter from James telling them of Clay's death. James told them that he died suddenly and without warning by a sniper's bullet. He hadn't suffered at all. Cleve seemed to accept it as if he knew it was coming. He grieved for his son, but he remained strong for his wife and daughter. Just a few days later, they received the death notice from the War Department.



MARCH 1918

"She said her brother sent it to her. I have no reason to doubt it," Kathleen said.

"I understand, but I had to ask. That set looked very similar to what I remember Mrs. Langston's set looking like. I didn't get a real good look at it the morning I saw it, but the pieces seem to be the same, and the lady I've been talking to about tea sets says the number of pieces is unusual. And both sets seem to have the same number of pieces. The wooden handles are apparently out of the ordinary too."

"You can't think Mother stole it?" The look on Kathleen's face hurt Luke. He never wanted to believe Della Leachman would have stolen the sterling silver tea set from Cecil Montgomery's store, but there were too many similarities and too many questions.

"I just want Mrs. Langston to look at it and tell me it's not hers. Kathy, I don't want to do this, but I have to," Luke said. "If anyone else sees your mother's set, they're going to think it's the one that was stolen, don't you see? I have to do this to protect your mother. You don't want people to think she's hiding it."

"She'll never forgive you for this, you know that," Kathleen said in a strong whisper. "And I may not either." Kathleen turned around and stormed back into the house, slamming the door behind her.

Luke stood on the porch looking at the door. He was doing all he knew to do. He was being pressured by the town council and the Langstons, keeping the matter alive in his mind. He couldn't go on trying to convince himself that this was a different tea set. He couldn't drink coffee from it and not know the truth.

Two days later, Luke spotted Mrs. Langston in town. He followed her until she stopped and got out of the buggy.

"Good morning, Mrs. Langston," he said in greeting.

“Sheriff,” she replied, “have you found it?”

“No, ma’am,” Luke admitted. “But I would like for you to come with me to look at a set. It seems similar to yours, and I’d like to know what differences there are, so I know exactly what I’m looking at.”

“Well, I have shopping to do right now.”

“I’ll wait for you. It won’t take us long to see it, I promise you,” Luke reassured the lady.

He waited at the door of Tendal’s while Lydia Langston took her time and looked at everything in the store. As he stood in the doorway, he prayed, “Father, I’m looking for the truth. That’s all I want. These things mean nothing. Neither of these women have a pleasant attitude. Neither have a reputation for showing mercy or grace to anyone. Keep lies and selfishness away. Just the truth, please, Father.”

The Spirit spoke. *Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.*¹

“Yes, Father, these fleshly desires have no place in your kingdom, but truth does. Help the truth to come out.”

Mrs. Langston walked past Luke and climbed into her buggy, laying a small package at her feet. She looked at the sheriff. “Well, come on.”

She sat in the buggy without picking up the reins. Luke wasn’t sure what she expected of him, so he climbed in beside her. She turned her head toward the road with her chin raised. “Go on. Take me wherever it is you want me to go.”

Luke took the reins and started the horse moving.

They stopped in front of the Avery home. Mrs. Langston’s lip and chin curled. “You don’t expect me to go in there?”

She eyed the house with disgust. One door and one window stood under the porch of the small shotgun home. The bare wood walls were unpainted, and the rusty tin roof sagged.

“Yes, ma’am. I’m afraid you’ll need to go inside to see the tea set. It won’t take long. Please. This will help me so much.”

¹ Romans 8:5.

Luke stepped out of the buggy and put his hand out toward the woman. From the look on her face, you would have thought she was going to throw up. Luke watched as her facial expression changed before his eyes. She pushed Luke’s hand away and got out of the buggy. Resolve was now set on her face, and she moved through the gate like she owned it. She would enter and be in control.

Luke trotted to catch up and got to the door first. He raised his hand to knock, but Mrs. Leachman opened it before he had the chance.

“Sheriff, you know Kathleen isn’t here right now.”

“Yes, ma’am, I know. I came to see you.” Luke smiled.

“Really! Whatever for?” Della Leachman asked, a little surprised and eyeing the woman on her porch.

“This is Mrs. Langston. Do you know each other?” Luke began.

“I’ve seen her around,” Mrs. Leachman said arrogantly.

“She has a tea set that is similar to yours. Would you let her see it? I’d like to know what differences there are in the two sets,” Luke explained.

“Hers was stolen last summer,” Mrs. Leachman said. “I heard about it. I’ve been keeping mine put away. I’m protecting it. I don’t want it stolen too.”

“Yes, I think everyone knows about the theft. It would really help me if you would let us see yours. It’s so pretty, especially the way it’s polished. You did that yourself, didn’t you?” Luke hated offering flattery to the woman and putting on a show for people. But if flattery and pride were what it took to get the tea and coffee set out in the open, that’s what he’d have to do.

Mrs. Leachman smiled. “Come inside. I’ll have to get it.”

The tea pot, coffeepot, water kettle, creamer, sugar bowl, and tray set on the table in front of Mrs. Langston. She looked at them intently but didn’t touch them. She looked from the side and from the top. She leaned over and examined the handles and the scrolled flowery engraving. Then she picked up the coffeepot and felt its weight. She never looked at the bottom where the maker’s engraved their marks.

“It’s very similar. Very close. The shape is the same. So is the engraving. I think mine was heavier, and the wood was darker. I’m

not sure. I had let mine get so tarnished I don't really know what it would have looked like polished up. My water kettle had a dent right here." Mrs. Langston ran a finger across an area near the bottom of the spout. "My daughter was playing with it and dropped it on the edge of the table. That's one of the things that was being repaired by the silversmith."

She set the coffeepot down and looked at Luke. "That could be it, but I really don't think so. Like I said, this pot's not heavy enough, and the wood's too pale. This is a cheap replica."

She turned to walk out the door.

Luke smiled, happy to know this set wasn't hers. But when he turned toward Mrs. Leachman, he saw the anger in her face.

She spoke through gritted teeth. "This is not a cheap replica. This is sterling silver." Della Leachman was watching the other woman walk away with daggers shooting from her eyes. Turning back to Luke sharply, she said, "Of course, it's not hers! Did you think it was?"

"We know it's not. Don't worry about her. Can I ask you just one more question?" Luke dismissed the other woman. He felt much more comfortable asking about the silver now that Mrs. Langston had said it wasn't hers. The matter was settled, and Luke could relax.

"What?"

"What happened to the maker's marks?" Luke asked, turning the teapot upside down.

"My sister had her initials engraved right next to the marks. I wanted them gone." She looked at Luke. "You did think I stole her silver."

"No, I didn't. But I wanted her to see this so there would be no question in anyone's mind. She said it's not hers, and that ends the matter. Thank you for letting us see it. This gives me a much better idea of what her set looks like." Luke leaned over and kissed the woman on the cheek. Then he turned to follow Mrs. Langston outside.

Mrs. Langston climbed in and picked up the reins before Luke got to the buggy. She drove off without another word to anyone.

Word spread in town quickly—influenza was ravaging the military training camp.

William got the notice from the US Public Health Service soon after he heard about it through the gossip. This strain of the flu seemed to have started right here in Kansas, but when it reached Camp Funston, it spread like wildfire.

The army camp was the country's largest training facility for the troops headed to Europe. Soldiers came from all over the Midwest to be trained here. The barracks were packed with men living in drafty buildings and close quarters. Hundreds of men slept in one room, making for easy exposure. Other men slept in cold tents, exposed to the harsh weather. The long grueling hours of training, little rest, and fatigue made all the men susceptible to the disease.

Recruits were being sent across the country by the thousands on overcrowded trains and then sent overseas on packed troop ships. The disease was traveling with them, spreading, growing as it devoured new territory and lives. But no one knew this. The newspapers weren't writing about the disease, and public health was calling it a normal flu season.

"James, you can't! You can't go back out there!" Curt yelled.

James stopped to look at the burnt-yellow cloud rolling toward them at a distance. "I have to. They're going to die if we leave them there. Go on, get these guys to safety." James flung his hand toward the injured men who were being evacuated from the field hospital.

Curt watched as James pulled the respirator's mask over his face and slammed the helmet back on his head. He climbed into the truck and revved the engine as he put it in gear and started moving.

James looked into the murky haze with his heart pounding. The truck was picking up speed quickly as he shifted, one gear to the next. It was just him, nobody else. He was alone, and he was the only hope those men had. He slowly began to recite scripture, trying to calm himself as the truck bounced and swayed over the rough battle-hardened terrain.

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.”¹ The truck hit a hole, and the wheel jerked to the left. James pulled hard to get the truck moving back the way he needed it to go.

“He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.”² James’s thoughts went back to the quiet river where he fished with his brothers and Grandpa. He wanted to do that again. Just one more day of the quiet tranquil spirit that surrounded his grandfather on that riverbank. A shell hit beside him, and it rocked the truck. James fought to keep the truck on its path.

“He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”³ Keep me on this path, Lord. Let me make it to them.

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.”⁴ You are with me, Lord, you are with me. I’m not alone. Stay with me, help me get them out, ‘your rod and your staff, they comfort me.’⁵

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;⁶ my enemies are all around me Lord, protect me, ‘you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.’⁷ Let your mercy dwell on me now Father.”

He entered the fog, and it was so thick he couldn’t see the front end of the truck. James strained his eyes beneath the goggles of his mask as the fog enveloped him and the vehicle he was driving. Horses frantically pulling at a wagon with no driver suddenly appeared; and James slammed on his brakes to avoid the collision, downshifted, and then took off again. He had to be near the men. Where were they?

Shells continued to fall, and the yellow haze got thicker. He heard the big guns, 420-mm siege guns, deadly, pounding the earth

¹ Psalm 23:1 (ESV).

² Psalm 23:2 (ESV).

³ Psalm 23:3 (ESV).

⁴ Psalm 23:4a (ESV).

⁵ Psalm 23:4b (ESV).

⁶ Psalm 23:5a (ESV).

⁷ Psalm 23:5b–6 (ESV).

around him. He had been so naïve. War wasn’t glory and honor; it was survival. It was a foreshadowing of hell.

“Lord, I can’t find them. Let me see them!”

The next shell resounded close to him, throwing the truck in a different direction, and the yellow vapor dissipated for a moment. There they were; he saw them now. Ahead at two o’clock and about twenty yards out. James turned the truck sharply and gunned it before he skidded to a stop. He jumped out and ran toward the troops.

“Let’s go! Move!” he yelled, grabbing a soldier by the arm and slinging him toward the truck. He screamed louder, trying to yell over the noise so the men could hear his muffled voice from under the mask.

Gun fire came at them, and some of the men hit the ground, while others kept moving. James saw a few men collapse, hit by the spray of bullets. He picked up an automatic weapon lying beside a dead soldier and fired back in the direction of the enemy’s barrage. He chambered round after round and kept firing.

He screamed, “Move! Get in the truck!” He wasn’t sure anyone heard him over the gunfire and pounding of the shells. He began to move backward toward the cab, still firing the weapon. At the edge of the truck bed, he dropped the gun and pushed a few more soldiers on top of the ones that were already there.

“Hang on!” he yelled.

He knew that the only thing keeping these men on the back of this truck were the tall wooden planks wedged into the flooring. They would just have to hold on to each other. He began praying they could make it out of the poison without a shell hitting them.

He trusted his senses and hoped upon hope that God would guide him through this mist of unrelenting poison they had to travel through. He knew they weren’t far from the aid station, just a few miles. But the aid station was evacuating. If they could just get there in time for someone else to help, that’s all he wanted.

He caught a glimpse of troops moving to his left. More men in this gas.

It seemed to take hours, but he knew it was only a few minutes when the fog began to thin out. He still couldn’t see. His eyes were pressing together against the sting of the gas that had pushed its way

beneath his mask. James ripped the mask off, breaking it from the attached hose, and flung it across the cab of the truck beside him, hitting a soldier who didn't respond. James glanced over. Was he dead?

James reached up to rub his eye but stopped as the back of his hand touched his brow. "No, don't rub," he told himself. "Don't rub. It will make it worse."

There they were, the line of men he was looking for. Injured men who could walk were moving away from the aid station. Trucks, wagons, and carts full of the injured were moving south, following the road away from the approaching mist. James blew the horn in a long, mournful bellow to move men aside and get the attention of those who could help him. He saw a break in the line and slid to a stop, turning the truck completely around headed back in the direction he had just come from.

"Out! Everybody, out," the young corporal choked out at a roar. He began pulling the men from the truck. Other injured men came to assist, and several of the medical aides brought cleansing agents to help those who had just evacuated from the poison.

James climbed back into the truck and pushed the dead man beside him out the missing door. He revved the engine again and began moving back toward the mist.

"Lord, again," he prayed, "let me do it again!" He didn't know how, but soon after he entered the fog, more men appeared at his truck. He got them loaded with the shells still falling around him. The truck began moving back toward the evacuating troops and help.

James continued to drive, unable to see where he was or where he was going. His eyes were swelling, but the truck kept moving. The Lord was guiding him, telling him when to turn, when to speed up, and when to brake. This was it. This was all he could do, he knew that.

He couldn't see anything. He couldn't feel his hands, except for the itching and burning. His palms were sweating, and he knew this wasn't good. Moisture just spread the poison and opened his pores to let the poison penetrate easier. He couldn't wipe his hands on his clothes either. His clothes were covered with the toxic vapor. James felt the bugs crawling all over his body, but he knew there weren't

any. It was just the sensation of the gas penetrating his clothing onto his skin. He wanted to take deep breaths, to be able to breathe, but he knew that would just pull more gas into his lungs. He wouldn't live through this, and he knew it, but he kept driving. The men in his truck might survive. He could get them help. Where was help? Where was the road?

The next thing James remembered was being pulled from the truck by two men dressed in protective gear. Somehow, he had made it.

The men began stripping his clothes off and spreading protective ointment over his body. Then they began washing him, scrubbing his skin painfully as they rubbed the soap into his neck, face, arms, and chest. His pants were cut off, and he was stripped naked. They rolled him over and continued washing his back and legs. He was pulled to a sitting position as the men began drying him. Now they were washing his eyes and were trying to give him a drink.

"Rinse and spit," someone said.

James turned his head and let the liquid run down the side of his face. Someone wiped it off.

A crayon cross was drawn on his forehead. He knew this identified him as a gas patient; he had marked other men's foreheads himself.

"What's your name, Corporal?" The question came from a woman.

"James Britt," he replied. He didn't know if this person could understand him. His tongue and lips felt numb. He didn't know if anything moved except maybe his jaw.

"Unit?"

"Battalion, medical," James replied.

"Okay, let's get him moved out," the voice sounded distant. Someone picked up the stretcher he was lying on, and he felt movement. The movement stopped suddenly, and his head was lifted so his eyes could be wrapped. He coughed gently, and the movement began again.

“James? Can you hear me?”

James tried to nod his head but wasn't sure if it moved or not. His eyes were bandaged, and his naked body was loosely covered with a thin sheet.

“James, it's Curt. You did good, kid. You got a bunch out. You may get a medal for this. They're going to take you to the hospital in Vichy. I'm going to get down there to be with you as soon as I can. You hang in there. I'm praying for you.”

Curt quit talking, and James knew he was alone again.

Another voice with a thick French accent said, “Son, I'm a priest. Would you like to hear scripture?”

James pushed out a yes, but it sounded more like air blowing through his teeth.

“For who is God besides the Lord? And who is the Rock except our God? It is God who arms me with strength and keeps my way secure. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he causes me to stand on the heights. He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You make your saving help my shield, and your right hand sustains me; your help has made me great. You provide a broad path for my feet, so that my ankles do not give way.”¹

“Stay strong, my son. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

James wanted to say, “Wait, come back,” but he had no voice.

Another man cried out in pain, and the priest moved away, asking another soldier if he wanted comfort. James was used to the sounds of suffering. When he drove the ambulance, the men he transported would sometimes moan, cry, or scream. Others never made a sound. Pain was so personal. Each person handled it in his own way.

¹ Psalm 18:31–36.

Pain took over the brain and stole a part of a person. He'd seen that with his own father growing up. James remembered the headaches his father would get before they were stopped by surgery. James would sometimes sit with him and watch as the man slept. He could see the struggle within the man, even asleep, to regain the sense and function of his mind, trying to get himself under control and to wake up without screaming. It often took hours.

James also remembered a time when his father had not been able to control the pain.

His father had been taken hostage by bank robbers and had spent almost three weeks alone in the open country with four Indian children. He returned home sunburned and injured, with his back and head hurting. Both had been ongoing problems for him, causing pain that he had lived with for years.

A few days after his return home, his father had taken medicine, trying to stop the headache. He took the medicine for a full day and into the night, trying desperately to stop the pain. But the medication hadn't worked. The headache stayed. Weeks later, William had done surgery that had stopped the throbbing in his head, giving him much-needed relief and allowing his mind to function again.

His father always came through the pain to perform at a high level of self-control and peace. Self-control and peace, two traits that didn't always seem to go together while experiencing pain. But they did go together. Both came from God. James knew that.

James knew that God would give him peace. God would give him self-control.

Scripture, he needed scripture to guide him, but his mind wouldn't work. All he could think of was the pain and the cold. He was cold. His body was shaking, and he couldn't do anything about it. After several minutes, he heard a voice. “Get a blanket over here.”

The blanket that was laid on top of him scratched even through the sheet, and it was heavy. It pressed in on him, making it harder to breathe. He tried to tell them to get it off, but he couldn't get words out. He knew what was going to happen to him in the coming weeks. He didn't want to go through the agony of having the blistered skin

clipped away and the raw surface cleaned, dried, and treated just to die of suffocation in a few months.

“End this, Lord. Just take me!” his spirit cried out.

James heard another voice. *For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, “Do not fear; I will help you. Do not be afraid...for I myself will help you.”¹ If the righteous are barely saved, what chance will the godless have? So if you are suffering according to God’s will, keep on doing what is right and trust yourself to the God who made you, for he will never fail you.²*

James’s heart calmed. “I trust you, Lord. I trust you. Whatever you want for me, I will accept.” He’d heard his father say that many times from his bed. Now James understood why his father would often speak as he slept. The Spirit spoke to him in the quiet of his mind. He wanted his own mind to quiet; he wanted that peace that unconsciousness brought.

Slowly, the voices in his head quieted, and his spirit began to calm. Nothingness descended into his consciousness.



APRIL 1918

Luke stood before the town council again. He seemed to be making regular appearances before them and each time he was questioned about the same unsolved crime: the silver tea and coffee serving.

“Is there an update?” Mayor Mason Braydon asked.

“No,” Luke answered simply. There was no point in telling the council anything. All they wanted to hear was that the thief had been captured and the silver returned to its owner.

“We’re starting to get questions from outside our community,” Kendall Norris said. “Last week, the comments came from someone in Saline. That’s too far away for them to even know about this. We can’t let the reputation of our town suffer because you can’t find a stolen tea set.”

“What would you like me to do?” Luke asked.

“I don’t like having to do this,” Braydon said. “It’s not our job to run the sheriff’s office. But I’ve been told you found the silver and you’re refusing to arrest the woman.”

Luke looked at the mayor questioningly. “No. I haven’t found it. And what woman are you talking about?”

“Your girlfriend’s mother!” Norris jumped in.

Luke turned to Kendall Norris. “No. She has a set similar to the Langstons’. I had Lydia Langston look at it. She said it wasn’t hers.”

“Well, Alexander Langston says it is theirs, and he said he told you so,” Braydon said.

“No, he didn’t tell me, and I wasn’t aware he had seen it.”

“Langston told me he has two witnesses to the conversation. Do you still deny it?”

“Yes, I deny it. There has been no conversation where Alexander Langston told me that set belonged to his wife,” Luke assured the council. “When was this conversation supposed to have happened?”

¹ Isaiah 41:13–14a.

² First Peter 4:18–19 (TLB).

“Luke, it doesn’t matter. What matters is you did nothing when you should have,” Perry Pesnell said.

“I’d like to know who your witnesses are. I’d also like to know how Alexander Langston knows that it is his wife’s, when his wife says it isn’t. As far as I know, he hasn’t even seen it,” the sheriff added, ignoring Pesnell’s comment.

“I didn’t want to have to do this, Sheriff, but you’re leaving me no other choice,” the chairman said. “Ben, go get Langston and the others.”

Luke stood watching as a council member opened the door and waved to someone. Alexander Langston and his teenage daughter walked in with the deputy sheriff. Luke kept watching, waiting for another person, another witness; but no one else entered. Deputy Frank Ramsey closed the door behind him.

“Sheriff, this young lady and your own deputy have told us that you were told by Mr. Langston here that the tea set, said to be owned by Della Leachman, is, in fact, owned by Lydia Langston. I’m asking you here in front of all these witnesses to go and collect the set and arrest Della Leachman.”

Luke looked from one council member to another. Then he looked at his longtime deputy and friend. Frank wouldn’t look at him. He kept his eyes on the floor in front of the councilmen’s table.

The council had waited until Cleve was out of town, at the state capital, to do this. Luke was sure of it. Luke had no one to speak up for him.

“No,” Luke said strongly. “I won’t do it unless Lydia Langston stands here in front of us and tells me why she has changed her mind.”

Alexander Langston spoke up. “She’s not coming. I won’t allow it. She’s been through enough, and I don’t want her put through any more of your shenanigans. You’ve made a mockery of this town and of justice. Your incompetence has caused my family more grief over this one event than we have had our entire lives. My poor daughter here has cried over this every time we talk about it. It ends now!”

“Mr. Langston, we are taking care of the matter,” Braydon assured the man. “Luke, I hate to do this. You have been an outstanding law officer until now. But I can’t let your new love affair or this

woman’s mother affect how you handle justice. Consider this your verbal notice of termination due to nonfeasance in office, effective immediately. Your official notice will be with your final paycheck on Friday. Please give your badge to Frank. You will have till the end of the week to clean out your rooms.”

Luke looked at each councilman’s face as he took in what had just happened. Most of them weren’t looking at him. The former sheriff turned to his friend. Or was he Luke’s friend? Luke felt the betrayal. He felt the knife in his gut being twisted, and Frank’s hand was on it. How quickly friendship can end.

“A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends,”¹ Luke said softly.

Frank looked up at his boss. He had heard Luke’s words and knew their friendship had ended.

The deputy had never seen Luke break friendship with anyone, not even those he had arrested. Frank had hoped Luke would forgive him quickly, and they could remain friends. But Luke’s trust in Frank was now broken. Frank immediately regretted what he had done.

Luke wanted to question Frank to find out what Langston had said or done to cause Frank to lie for him. But instead, Luke said, “Not all of you are clean.”²

A few of the councilmen began to murmur among themselves, but Luke wasn’t paying attention any more. His heart hurt too much. He reached for the badge and unclipped it from his vest. But he wouldn’t give it to Frank. He slammed his hand on the table in front of the mayor and turned to walk out the door, leaving the badge resting on the table.

Luke went downstairs and entered the judge’s office. He stopped at the second door, calming himself. Then he knocked and opened the door slightly, sticking his head in.

¹ Proverbs 16:28 (ESV).

² John 13:11b.

“Reid, can I come in?” he said gently.

The judge looked up. “Sure.”

Luke’s hard, set jaw and mournful eyes told his brother that something was wrong. Then Reid noticed the badge missing.

“They fired me. They said I wasn’t doing my job. Frank was in on it,” Luke said, still standing at the door.

Reid pushed himself to a standing position and began making his way around the desk, holding to the edge. “For what reason?”

Luke stepped forward and sank into one of the chairs near the large oak desk. Reid pushed on the other chair till it faced Luke and then sat down too.

“Because I refused to arrest Mrs. Leachman. Langston said she stole their silver. Frank and Langston’s daughter claim he told me and I did nothing.” Luke looked at Reid. “He never told me. And I wouldn’t believe him if he did. His wife said it wasn’t theirs. I’d have to hear it from her.”

Luke slumped down in the chair and leaned his head back. “What hurts the most is Frank’s betrayal. He claims he heard Langston tell me.”

“A false witness will not go unpunished, and whoever pours out lies will not go free,”¹ Reid said softly. “What are you going to do?”

“Go get my stuff and move in with Dad I guess,” Luke responded. Luke said nothing else, and Reid sat with him in silence.

After several minutes, Reid asked, “Did the whole council vote to terminate you?” Reid knew all the councilmen. Some were even deacons at the church. Reid didn’t think they could all believe these lies.

“They apparently voted before I got there. They planned to do this. Frank, Langston, and his daughter were all there waiting for me to deny it.”

Reid knew Luke all too well. Luke was simmering; his emotions would come out soon. He had to be angry; anyone would be. Reid asked, “Who are you mad at?”

¹ Proverbs 19:5.

“Nobody,” Luke responded. “I just feel whipped. I’m trying to keep this simple in my mind. It’s nothing but a lie. ‘In return for my friendship they accuse me, but I am a man of prayer.’¹ I’m going to go get my stuff and go to Dad’s. ‘I will call on God, and the Lord will rescue me. Morning, noon, and night I cry out in my distress, and the Lord hears my voice.’² I’m going to sit on Dad’s back porch and pray about it.”

“Good. That’s a good way to deal with it,” Reid agreed.

“I need to go warn Kathleen and her mother, but Kathleen’s already mad at me. She hasn’t talked to me in almost a month. And I don’t have the energy to argue with her again. She’s going to blame me for this. I just know it,” Luke said. He put his hand over his eyes and squeezed his face tight.

“All my enemies whisper together against me; they imagine the worst (of) me. Even my close friend, someone I trusted...has turned against me. But may you have mercy on me, Lord; raise me up. I know that you are pleased with me, for my enemy does not triumph over me. Because of my integrity you uphold me and set me in your presence forever.”³

“The Cadillac is right outside. Let’s get it and we’ll go get your stuff,” Reid said, pushing himself to his feet.

Reid had bought a new automobile two years earlier. It was larger and held his growing family easily. But the major reason for the purchase was the new electric start. Since the judge’s return following his kidnapping, he had been unable to handle the crank starter of the Ford. The Cadillac was easy to start, with the push of a button.

Luke stood, his eyes glazed over, waiting for Reid to get his cane. Reid came back around the corner of the desk, and they began moving out the door together.

¹ Psalm 109:4.

² Psalm 55:16–17 (NLT).

³ Psalm 41:7a, 9–10a, 11–12.

Luke took his few possessions to his father's house and dumped them in a pile on the bedroom floor. Then he sat down to tell his father what happened.

Two hours later, Travis stood at the door between the kitchen and the back porch, watching his son. Luke had always been a man with strong emotions. While Travis was usually able to hide his feelings from most people, Luke's were out there for everyone to see. Only those people closest to Travis had seen him upset or in pain, but Luke was different. Everyone saw and experienced his joy, and everyone knew when he was hurting.

Travis knew the only hope Luke held to right now was the Lord. He had lost the job that meant the world to him. His reputation was tarnished, and it had all happened because of a lie. A lie no one should have believed. A lie that went on too long and couldn't be stopped.

It looked like he had also lost the only woman he had ever hoped to marry. She wasn't talking to him and that had left his emotions raw and open for injury from other places. He felt the betrayal of his longtime friend and coworker too.

Luke wasn't getting mad at anyone. He wasn't ranting or seeking vengeance. His heart was just broken.

Travis saw and felt the hurt his son was experiencing. Luke's pain was festering, and this needed to stop. Travis tried to think of something that would get Luke's mind off what had just happened to him. He needed to find something else to occupy his time and his thoughts. Travis walked onto the porch and said, "Let's ya an' me go fishin'."

Luke shook his head. "I don't feel like it, Dad."

Travis sighed loudly. "I ain't been in a while. I thought today'd be a good day. Weather's perfect."

"Wait till school's out and see if Esa or Saamel want to go," Luke offered.

"They're not strong 'nough ta get me on a horse," Travis said as he sat down.

Travis couldn't get on a horse without assistance. With old injuries to his left hand and right shoulder, he couldn't pull himself up.

But Travis knew he could go with Esa's help. Luke had built a platform at the barn for Travis to stand on to mount the animal, and there was a stump near the river that he used when he went fishing with the boys. He was just making an excuse now, trying to get Luke to leave the porch.

The old man looked over at his son. Luke looked pale, and his eyes seemed tired.

Travis slid forward and turned to look closely at his son's face. "Ya gettin' sick?"

"I don't know. I've got a headache," Luke explained. "I'm really tired."

"Ya feel like eatin' somethin'?"

Luke shook his head. "Dad, please, just leave me alone."

Travis stood up. "Okay." He patted Luke on the leg and was walking down the steps as Luke began praying again. That's all he had done since he came home. This was good, but he needed to hear from God, to be comforted. Apparently, God wasn't talking to him right now, or maybe Luke wasn't listening.

"Listen to my prayer, O God. Do not hide yourself from what I ask," Luke prayed out loud. "Hear me and answer me. My thoughts trouble me and I have no peace, because of the voice of those who hate me and the power of the sinful. For they bring trouble upon me, and in anger they keep on having bad thoughts against me.¹ 'Though I cry, 'I've been wronged!' I get no response; though I call for help, there is no justice.'²

Travis turned to disappear around the corner of the house. As he walked the road headed for Sarah's, the Spirit spoke to him. *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*³

"Lord," Travis said, "I 'ave ya peace. Luke is the one who needs ya peace right now. I know that ya take care a' us. Why would I be afraid?"

¹ Psalm 55:1-3 (NLV).

² Job 19:7.

³ John 14:27.

*The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace.*¹

The old man continued walking and checked the stables to make sure the boys had been doing what they should be doing for the horses. He kept on walking and stopped at Sarah's house. Thomas was on the porch, and they visited for a while before Travis went into the house.

William's sons, Landon and Norman, were playing in their blanket fort in the dining room. Travis sat down to watch.

William came in the door. "Hey, Grandpa. What are you doing here?"

"Waitin' for ya."

William suddenly realized his mistake. "Oh, I'm sorry, I was supposed to come see you last night. I'm sorry, I got involved in something and forgot. I can take care of your shoulder right now," William offered. The doctor worked with his grandfather's shoulder periodically to increase movement and relieve some of the pain.

William's eyes showed his apology. The doctor's face was expressive. His deep-set eyes showed both tenderness and strength. Many of his patients had commented that the look in his eyes and the gentleness of his hands gave them more comfort than any medicine could do.

"No, I'm okay. But I need ya to do somethin'," Travis said.

"Sure, what do you need?"

"I think Luke's gettin' sick," Travis explained. "E's at my house. Can ya come by later an' work on me then? Look at Luke while ya there."

"I can do that," William said, giving a nod. "I'll be over there after we have lunch. Do you want to eat?"

Travis shook his head. "Naw. I'll go sit with Luke."

Luke went to the stable and saddled his horse. He rode to Kathleen's.

¹ Psalm 29:11.

Her day started early. She went to work before sunup and got home in the middle of the day. She should be getting home from work about now, and he would try to catch her before she went inside. She still wasn't talking to him, and he worried that she wouldn't open the door when he knocked.

He waited but decided either she was late coming home, or she was already in the house. Luke was tired and ready to go home himself. He decided to try the house and knocked on the door.

Rone opened the door but didn't say anything. "Hi, Rone, may I see your mother?"

"She doesn't want to talk to you," the seventeen-year-old said.

"How about your grandmother?"

Rone looked at Luke with exasperation. "Really?"

"Please, Rone, either one of them," Luke said.

"Grandmother's not here, and Mother doesn't want to talk to you," the boy said.

"I need your mother to tell me that," Luke said, his eyes pleading with the boy.

Rone shut the door in Luke's face. Luke knocked again and yelled, "Please, Kathleen, talk to me."

Kathleen flung the door open, showing her anger and stared at Luke with vicious eyes that Luke had never seen before.

"Kathy? I need to tell you something. Can we talk for a minute?" Luke asked.

"What could you possibly have to tell me? What else could you possibly do to me?" Contempt was dripping from her lips.

"Kathy, I should have come by earlier—"

She interrupted. "Don't call me that. My name is Mrs. Avery, and I expect you to address me that way."

Luke nodded. "Okay. I'm sorry. I wanted to tell you that Mr. Langston—"

She interrupted again, screaming, "I don't want to hear that name! How can you come here being all friendly and sweet and have anything to say to me after what happened this morning? I can't stand to look at you!"

She slammed the door in his face.

He was too late.

"Kathleen, I'm sorry. Mrs. Avery, did they arrest your mother?" Luke asked loudly.

Kathleen swung the door open violently, and it slammed against the wall, making the window rattle roughly.

"Yes! They took her silver away, and then they grabbed her by the arm and drug her out the door and down the street. You can't treat an old woman like that, and you know it. She did nothing wrong! She's been happier the last couple of months than I have seen her in a long time, and then this happens. What's going to happen to an old woman in jail? How could you!" She screamed and slammed the door in his face again.

Luke stood at the door with his eyes closed, and his face twisted, trying to understand what Frank had done. He couldn't stop the picture that came to his mind of the old woman fighting Frank as he tried to take her precious sterling silver tea and coffee service.

Luke spoke loudly again. He knew the woman inside heard him. "Kathleen, I had nothing to do with it. They fired me. I couldn't stop it."

Luke waited, but she didn't come back outside.

"I'm sorry," he said, turning and moving down the steps to his horse. At the road, he turned to look back at the house, then left dejected and more tired than he had ever felt.

William drove into the yard and saw Travis sitting on the back porch. He got out of the car and gave a greeting.

"Hey, Grandpa, you ready?"

Travis said, "Luke ain't 'ere. I don' know where 'e went."

"Well, let's look at your shoulder. Maybe he'll show up in a few minutes," William said.

Travis went into the house and sat down at the kitchen table with William following. William pulled and twisted on the shoulder a few times holding to the old man's arm. Then he released his grandfather's arm and began pushing on the shoulder with his fingers.

"Grandpa, you need to move this arm more."

"I know. I just don' see the point anymore. I ain't doin' anythin'," Travis said.

Travis had sold the gun shop, and he didn't go into town very often. He piddled in the garden, played checkers with his grandchildren, leafed through the newspaper, read his Bible, and prayed. Occasionally, someone would bring a rifle or shotgun to his house, and he would clean and repair it at the kitchen table. When Blade or Esa was available, one of them would go fishing with him. Travis mostly did what he wanted to do.

"But you don't want it to freeze up where you can't move it," William advised.

"I know," Travis said, brushing off his grandson's concern.

William reached to the shoulder and began pushing it up and down and then rolling it. "But you're not going to, are you?"

Travis smiled. "It don' hurt."

"Okay," William said softly, sitting down beside his grandfather. He'd let the old man have things his way.

The doctor took his grandfather's hand and put his thumb between the fingers to gently open the hand as far as it would go. He pressed his thumb lightly into the palm and rolled his thumb in a circular motion. William knew this probably didn't help his grandfather's hand any, but it allowed him to assess the hand and know what condition it was in.

The hand had been injured years ago in a fight. Scarring had pulled the fingers until the hand was twisted and hard to move. Travis got little use from it, and it pained him if he tried to do too much. William stood up, kissed his grandfather's forehead, and pulled a bottle of aspirin from his bag.

"Let's get the swelling down," William advised. He opened the bottle and dumped a couple of pills onto the table.

"When did you last eat?"

"I 'ad a late breakfast," Travis said.

William checked the coffeepot and found recently made coffee, poured a cup, and set it in front of his grandfather.

"Thanks," Travis said, smiling at his grandson.

William walked outside to sit in one of the rocking chairs, leaving the bottle of pills on the table. Travis followed.

It wasn't long before Luke came dragging around the side of the house. He kept walking, keeping his eyes on his father and nephew. He didn't want to talk to them; he just wanted to be left alone.

William and Travis hadn't been saying anything, but when William saw Luke, he thought he needed to talk. He didn't want Luke to think he was just sitting around waiting for him to get home.

"It's warming up," William said, turning to his grandfather. "Evenings are getting more comfortable. I'm ready for winter to end, but I sure don't like seeing the hot summer get here."

Neither Travis nor Luke gave a response. Luke stopped at the bottom of the steps. William glanced at his uncle. He was always friendly and talkative but now seemed reserved. Thomas had told him Luke had lost his job. William knew Luke would be upset and probably depressed because of the firing. That was probably why he was so quiet.

Then William looked hard at Luke's face. "You okay, Uncle Luke? You look pale."

Luke shook his head gently and started up the steps, swayed slightly, and grabbed for the porch column. William got up and rushed to help Luke just as the big man caught himself on the post. Leaning against the column, Luke closed his eyes.

The doctor put his hand against his uncle's cheek and then moved it to Luke's forehead. "You've got a fever. Let's get you in the house," the doctor said. "Lean on me. I'll help you keep your balance."

They made it to the bedroom, and William retrieved the medical bag from the kitchen. He took his uncle's temperature, then helped him into bed.

"How do you feel?"

"Weak, dizzy, I've got a headache," Luke responded.

A chill ran down Luke, and he shivered in response.

"You're getting the flu. I've seen a lot of it the last few weeks. It won't last long if you take care of yourself," William told him.

The doctor went back to the kitchen and dumped some aspirin into his hand from the bottle he had just given his grandfather. He returned and piled the aspirin on the table beside the bed and said, "Two or three every four hours. I'll find somebody to come take care of you and give them instructions. You listen to them and behave yourself. I'll be back in the morning."

He walked from the room and came back with a glass of water. "Drink it all."

William turned to his grandfather and put a hand on the old man, pushing him out of Luke's room. "Grandpa, stay away from Luke. He has the flu. At your age, you don't need to catch it. I'll get somebody to stay with you and take care of him."

Travis closed his eyes and leaned against the nearby wall. "I understand now, Lord. I trust ya."

"Grandpa, what's wrong?" William asked.

Travis shook his head and turned to go outside to his rocker. He sat down and leaned back in the chair, closing his eyes. He began rocking gently as he took a deep breath.

"This flu's bad this year, ain't it?" Travis asked.

"Yes, sir. It's been bad. It seems to be attacking everybody equally. It's not just the old and the young this year. Luke will be okay, though. He's strong," the doctor reassured his grandfather.

Travis looked like he was grieving. William didn't understand. "Grandpa?"

"Luke's mama died a' the flu. So did my baby girl," Travis remembered.

"Grandpa, don't think about that. Luke will be fine. I'm going to take care of him."

"We didn' 'ave a doctor in town then. Old Doc Cooper had died. I did the best I could, but Brenda got sick fast. I's takin' care a' the baby. Me an' Angus was both sick too. I didn' even know Brenda died till I went ta check on 'er." Silent tears began to run down the old man's face as he remembered that day. "We didn' even get 'er outta the house 'fore my baby girl died in my arms. Luke was there. It's cold, but 'e was sleepin' in the barn. We was tryin' ta keep 'im

from gettin' sick too. 'E had ta deal with both a' 'em dyin' 'lone. 'E buried 'em, an' I won' with 'im. 'E's just fourteen."

"Aww, Grandpa." William squatted beside him. He took the old man's hand in his.

A stillness seemed to come, washing over Travis. He took a deep breath and slowly lowered his head to rest on his chest.

"God's taking care of him now," William said.

Travis nodded and reached down to pet the dog that had ambled over to sit in front of him.

"William," Travis said calmly, "when it's time far me ta go, let me go. Don' try ta stop it."

This comment was a little shocking. William's grandfather was still healthy; William hadn't seriously considered the man dying.

"We don't have to worry about that for a long time," William said, standing up. He pushed his grandfather's hat back on his head, kissed the old man on the forehead again, and pulled the hat back into place. The doctor headed for the Oldsmobile.

Winona showed up at her grandfather's house just before supper, bringing something for all three of them to eat, along with a basket of food. She had her instructions from William.

Travis ate what was put on his plate, but Luke ate nothing. Winona rummaged through the kitchen as she put things away. She was making herself at home, but she hadn't said a word to Travis. The old man finished eating and went to his room. When he came out, he walked toward the back porch and stopped in the kitchen behind Winona. He took her by the shoulders from behind to hold her still as he leaned over her shoulder, kissing her on the cheek. Then he grabbed his coat and continued to his rocking chair on the back porch. She smiled in response. She seldom talked to him, but he knew she would come sit with him when she was finished with her work.

Early the next morning, Reid entered the sheriff's office and asked to speak to the prisoner. He was all business today, no small talk with the acting sheriff.

Cleve was out of town, still at the state capital for the legislative session. He wasn't available to give Della Leachman council. The judge had not done legal work for anyone in years, but if what Luke said was true and Reid had no reason to believe differently, then someone had to help this woman. He knew there was no one to do it except him.

He was allowed to enter the jail area. Mrs. Leachman sat on a straight back slat bottom chair in the corner of the last cell. Her eyes moved up from the floor to drill into him.

"Mrs. Leachman, I've come to offer to represent you at the hearing on Thursday," Reid said.

"Why? Why would you want to do that?" Her voice showed both the fear she felt and the anger she held.

"Because Luke doesn't think you stole the silver. He said Mrs. Langston told him that it wasn't hers. He doesn't know what happened. He doesn't know why the story has gotten twisted or why lies are being told. But he is convinced you did not steal the silver that you had," Reid explained.

"I don't have any money. I can't pay you." The anger could still be heard in her voice.

"I don't need to be paid."

"It looks like I have no other choice," she admitted.

"Okay. I need you to tell me what happened when they came to your house. First of all, who came?"

"That man out there." She stood up and pointed toward the front office. "And another man. A big guy with fancy boots and a flour sack. He put the silver in a dirty flour sack! That man out there"—she pointed to the front office again—"called him Al. I wouldn't tell them where it was, so they tore the house up, throwing things all over the place. There was no reason for that! Al walked off with the silver and that guy"—she pointed to the front office again—"grabbed my arm and just pulled me out the door. Look at this." She pulled her sleeve up to reveal a large area of bruising on her arm.

Reid nodded. "Okay, I'm going over to the city magistrate's office and see about getting you out of here. If I do, you're going to have to listen to me and do what I tell you. Can you do that?"

“I probably don’t have any choice. If I don’t, that guy”—she pointed toward Frank, who had come to stand in the doorway—“will probably come after me again.”

“You’re probably right,” Reid said, turning to look at Frank. “Do you need anything now?”

“I need a bed and a comfortable chair and another blanket. It got cold last night. And that thing!” She pointed toward a bucket in another corner. “That’s just horrible! There’s no privacy at all in here!”

Reid nodded again. “I don’t know what I can do about that” He nodded toward the bucket. “But I’ll talk to Frank. And I’ll see what I can do about a more comfortable chair and another blanket. There’s nothing I can do about the cot. I’m sorry this happened.”

“Where is that brother of yours, anyway?” She snapped. “Is he scared to show his face to me?”

Frank turned and left the room.

“Luke was fired because he wouldn’t arrest you. He told the town council he thought you were telling the truth and Al Langston was lying. They removed him from office.”

Della Leachman sat heavily onto the chair, looking at the floor. “I’ve been sitting here cursing him for lying to me and for doing this to me.”

“But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips,”¹ Reid said. “Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.””²

Reid reached into the satchel thrown over his shoulder and pulled out a Bible. “I brought you this. I thought you might like to read since there’s nothing else to do here.”

She took the Bible through the bars and looked into Reid’s face. There were tears in her eyes. “Tell Luke I’m sorry. What’s he going to do?”

¹ Colossians 3:8.

² Philippians 2:14–15a.

“I haven’t talked to him since yesterday morning. He was sitting on Dad’s back porch, rocking. I don’t think he has any other plans.”

Reid left the jail and headed for the post office. He picked up his business mail and the family’s personal correspondence and stuck them both in his satchel without looking at any of it. The city magistrate never got to his office before midmorning, so Reid went to his own office and sat down to open the mail.

There was a letter from Curt. This was odd, and it also scared Reid a little. Reid looked at it again. Yes, it was addressed to him, not Curt’s family. He remembered James’s letter to Cleve, telling his aunt and uncle that their son had been killed. Reid’s chest began to tighten as he opened it and took out the short note.

Dear Uncle Reid,

I am sorry to have to write this, but James has been injured. He was evacuated to the hospital in Vichy to begin his recovery. It’s bad. They will ship him back to the States when he is able to travel. I don’t know how he is doing right now because I am some distance away. I requested that he be sent to the hospital where Edison is. I don’t know if that will happen or not. You should be notified when he gets to a hospital on your side of the water.

We were evacuating wounded as the Germans advanced toward us. James took a truck and went into the battle to rescue soldiers who were being bombarded by poisonous gas. His protective gear was damaged, but he continued to return for more wounded. He has severe chemical burns over his hands, face, and neck,

and minor burns over other parts of his body. He breathed the gas.

The French are giving him a medal. I think our country probably will too.

Curt

Reid sat still, feeling his chest tighten more. He read the letter again and again and again. *Injured. Poison gas. Chemical burns. He breathed the poison.* Reid closed his eyes, unable to think, unable to pray. He felt paralyzed, unable to do anything except hear those words over and over in his mind.

He needed someone to guide him into the scripture, to draw him away from his fear for his son and back to God. He wanted his father. But he needed to quit relying on his father so much. The old man needed his help now. He needed to be strong when he told his father about James. He needed to be strong when he told his wife and children too.

Scripture came to his heart. *In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.*¹

Reid began to calm. His heavenly Father would always be there to comfort him.

Reid was still struggling, though. He didn't know enough about poison gas, only what he had read in the newspaper. Who should he call? Who could tell him? He couldn't think.

He looked at the coffeepot. He hadn't made any this morning, hadn't had any since breakfast. That was before daylight, hours ago. He hadn't even put any wood in the stove this morning. He needed coffee.

There was a knock on the door. Reid looked to the door but said nothing. It started to open, and a head came into the room. Reid felt weak with relief. William! It was William!

¹ Romans 8:26.

His nephew could pull him back from this spiral he felt himself falling into. William could pull him back toward God. Reid had been thankful many times for this man, and today, he thanked God again for bringing William back to Harris.

Reid still couldn't say anything. He was concentrating on his breathing, still trying to calm himself. His brain wasn't working.

William saw the troubled look on Reid's face. "Reid, what's wrong?" William asked, entering the room and moving toward his uncle.

The judge shook his head and held up the letter for William to read. William started reading and sat in one of the chairs across the desk from Reid.

The doctor looked up at his uncle. "Poison gas," he said softly.

"Can you explain that to me?" Reid said, almost at a whisper.

William shook his head. "Only what I've read. It could be one of a couple of types of gas. If he had burns, I guess it had to be chlorine, phosgene, or probably sulfide. They'll all cause blindness, burns, respiratory and digestive problems. It will just depend on how much he came in contact with."

Reid was calming. "Well, he's alive. At least he was when Curt wrote the letter."

"If he gets to Ed, Ed will contact us. You know that," William said.

Reid nodded. "Lord, help him."

William began to pray, still watching his uncle, "Father, James talked to you before he signed up. You told him to go. I have to believe he served you well. We know, Lord, that 'neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'¹ Take care of him now. He is your child."

William added, "The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him."²

¹ Romans 8:38-39.

² Nahum 1:7.

Reid nodded and smiled at his nephew, giving a silent “Thank you.” He had calmed, but he felt weak.

William saw the look in Reid’s eyes. He had learned what *that look* meant. Reid’s brain ran on coffee, and William knew it.

William went to check the pot on the woodburning stove that heated the office. Empty. He opened the wood box and moved a few pieces into the stove, lit the fire, and made the coffee. He knew where everything was. He’d made coffee here before. As he worked, he talked to Reid.

“Did you see Grandpa last night or this morning?”

Reid shook his head.

William said, “He’s talking about dying.”

Reid nodded. “He’s been doing that. I think he’s ready to go.”

William watched Reid, trying to decide if there was anything else he could do for his uncle, but he was also thinking about his grandfather. Reid didn’t seem to be concerned about him.

“Why do you think he wants to die?” William asked.

“He’s been thinking about the ones he’s lost,” was all Reid said.

“Luke’s got the flu,” William continued. “Winona is taking care of him.”

“Is that where she’s been? I didn’t ask,” Reid said softly, staring at his desk. “I had my mind on Mrs. Leachman.”

“Luke said you’re going to represent her. Did you see her this morning?” William asked.

“Yeah.”

“How’d it go?”

“It went well. I’ve got to talk to Magistrate Sparks when he gets here. Then I’ll go tell Chipeta and Dad about James.”

“Do you have court today?” the doctor asked, concerned that Reid might have trouble concentrating.

Reid shook his head.

The judge wasn’t doing much talking, and William knew that his mind was somewhere else. The coffee would need time to work, then Reid would be able to process what had happened to James. He’d feel better then. William turned to hand Reid the cup.

“Well,” William said, “you watch yourself for the next week or two. You were with Luke yesterday. You could have caught the flu from him.”

Reid nodded, and William left, shutting the door behind him. He’d check on his uncle again in a couple of hours, after he got over the shock of the letter, and after he had his coffee.

Reid entered the courtroom and sat down without looking to see who was there. Kathleen got up from her seat and came to him. “I hope you’re going to do a better job of defending my mother than your brother did of protecting her. I don’t know why in the world Mother is letting you work for her. She’s never liked you or your family, and I’m beginning to understand why. Luke is such a hypocrite. He talks about love and justice and forgiveness, but then he stabs you in the back! Are you like your brother?”

She turned and moved to sit further away from him without giving him a chance to respond to her comments. Kathleen Avery wore a scowl on her face that resembled the one her mother often wore. She sat just as the magistrate entered the courtroom and had to immediately stand again. Court was called to order.

Acting Sheriff Frank Ramsey brought Mrs. Leachman from the jail, and they sat against the far wall. There were several other short insignificant hearings, and Reid thought the town council and the magistrate were probably putting off Mrs. Leachman’s hearing on purpose. Neither Alexander nor Lydia Langston were present.

Just before lunch, the Langstons walked in. Magistrate Roth Sparks looked up briefly and then lowered his eyes back to the paper he had been looking at. Everyone was waiting to hear the next case being called. Magistrate Sparks finally spoke. “Well, now that all the parties are here, we can begin.”

Sparks handed a paper to the bailiff.

“*Langston v. Leachman*,” a court official called.

The attorneys moved onto the court floor. The acting sheriff held Mrs. Leachman's arm as he walked her across the room and pushed her toward Reid.

"I have the report here and have been looking it over. Do both of the attorneys agree with everything written?" the magistrate asked.

"Yes, Your Honor," the prosecuting attorney said. Reid didn't know this man and thought the Langstons had probably hired him from out of town.

There were two other lawyers in town. Both were in the courtroom, and Reid had anticipated Langston hiring one of them. He knew them both well and could work with either of them. Neither, however, would be his choice if he were on trial.

"No, sir." Reid stood up. "There are some inconsistencies in the report and a few questionable statements."

"Let's hear them."

"Thank you, sir. In the second statement, it says that Mrs. Langston filed the theft report. It wasn't. I have a carbon copy here. It was her husband. In the fourth paragraph, upon seeing the silver tea and coffee service the defendant supposedly owned, Mr. Langston stated, 'My wife told the woman it was hers.' I have a witness that says this was not the case.

"Paragraph seven states the Langston child saw the silver before it was confiscated. There is no record of this in any other place, and my witness says she was not there. And now, the silver is in possession of Mr. and Mrs. Langston. It cannot be admitted as evidence because it was removed from the scene of the arrest by Mr. Langston and not by an officer of the court. No record of its description has been documented."

"Is your witness here?" the magistrate asked.

"No, sir. He is at home with the flu," Reid replied.

"Is there any other information I need to know about this case?" Roth Sparks asked.

"Yes, sir," Reid said. "I would like to make it known that Mr. Langston received payment from Cecil Montgomery for the silver. I have the receipt here showing the amount. Mr. Langston is now in possession of both the payment for the silver service and the service

itself, if the one taken from Mrs. Leachman's home truly belongs to the Langstons."

Roth Sparks responded, "You do realize this is a matter between Mr. Langston and Mr. Montgomery and that if Mr. Langston does not return the money voluntarily, Mr. Montgomery will need to file for court action?"

"It has been filed. But I was sure the court would want to hear this information since they do not have the paperwork available at this time," Reid advised.

The magistrate offered a "Thank you" and then turned to the other lawyer. "Mr. Prosecutor, are you seeking bail if I decide to let this woman out of jail before the scheduled court date?"

"Yes, Your Honor. This was a blatant premeditated act. It has caused irreparable damage within this family. The set was a valued heirloom that was not passed to the next generation as it should have been," the lawyer said.

"Your Honor"—Reid broke in—"the family is now in possession of a silver set. It has not been determined yet if this is the Langstons' heirloom silver or if it is the Leachmans' heirloom silver. But the Langstons do have a set in their possession, and it has also been paid for. This woman"—Reid indicated Mrs. Leachman beside him—"is no threat to anyone. Her home is here in Harris. She has no family except those here, and there is no risk of her disappearing. There is no reason she cannot be released until the trial."

"Your point is taken, Counselor," the magistrate said.

Reid sat down.

Roth Sparks took several minutes to look at something on his desk, made a few notes, and then said, "Mrs. Leachman, you are being released into Mr. Britt's custody. He is responsible for you. I suggest you don't do anything to cause him any problems. Mr. Britt, I hope you know what you're doing. See the bailiff."

The magistrate called for lunch, and everyone stood, preparing to leave. Mrs. Leachman turned to Reid. "Now what?"

"Now we prepare for trial. You need to stay close to home and not interact with other people any more than you have to. I would suggest that you not go into public unless someone is with you. Any,

and I do mean any, disagreement, argument, or ugly words with anyone will cause you more grief at the trial. I can assure you your opponent will bring it up and that lawyer will try to make people think that you are a mean, hate-filled person who only wants to cause problems for other people.” Reid grinned. “They don’t know you like I do.”

The paperwork was filled out and signed in front of the bailiff, and Mrs. Leachman left the courthouse with her daughter headed home.

Reid returned to his office to find William waiting for him.

“I guess you’re here to find out what happened in court this morning?” Reid said.

“Well, yeah, I want to know. But I came by for another reason.”

Reid stopped moving toward his desk and turned, waiting for William to explain.

“I know Cecil Montgomery is kind of involved in what happened to Bonnie’s grandmother. I thought you would want to know. He had a stroke early this morning,” William said. “He died a little while ago.”

Luke sat on the edge of the bed with his head in his hands. He wanted to get out of bed, but he didn’t think he had the strength. He didn’t have anything to do, anyway.

“Are you supposed to be in here?” he asked his father, who was standing in the doorway.

“Ya ain’t contagious anymore,” Travis said, moving to sit next to his son and putting a hand on his back. He rubbed Luke’s back lovingly.

“Kathleen won’t talk to me. What am I going to do, Dad?” Luke had been lying in bed for almost a week suffering with fever, as well as the anguish within his soul. Thinking about the situation constantly had fueled his misery until it grew into a choking vine that wrapped itself around his heart.

Luke slid over until he was propped on his elbow and leaned into his father with his head against his father’s arm. “I’ve got nothing to do. No reason to leave this room.”

Travis moved his hand across Luke’s back to hold his son gently.

“It’s hard ta lose somebody. After I left Sarah in Chicago, I came west. I could only find short jobs, an’ then there’d be nothin’ else. I’d ’ave ta move on. That first winter I spent ’lone, just me an’ God in a line shack I found. I ’ad a few traps an’ was trappin’, tryin’ ta make some money ta pay that doctor. But the winter was cold an’ hard. An’ God an’ me wasn’ talkin’ ta each other. I spent most a that winter on the floor in front a’ the cold fireplace. I didn’ ’ave an ax. I couldn’ even chop wood ta keep warm. But we got each other, an’ we got this land ’ere. Ya can get out there an’ work. Work’ll make ya feel better. Ya got nobody ta answer ta now but God, so work ta please ’im. ‘Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ,’”¹ Travis said.

“Those who work their land will have abundant food,”² Luke responded, almost to himself. “Has Reid talked to that sharecropper yet?”

“No, an’ ’e ain’t gonna,” Travis said. “The man died a’ the flu last month.”

Luke sat up straight and looked at his father. “What’s his family doing?”

“I don’ know.”

“Well, we’ll have to grow enough to give them a share,” Luke said. “I don’t know if I can do as good a job as he did. He put in a lot of work last year, and I haven’t done any farming since before I became sheriff.”

Travis nodded. “Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else.”³ Ya be fine.”

¹ Colossians 3:23–24 (ESV).

² Proverbs 12:11a.

³ Galatians 6:4.

Luke sighed. "I guess it's time for me to do my share. Tell Reid I'll take care of the farm this year."

"If ya gonna do it, ya need ta go 'head an' start spreadin' fertilizer an' get it tilled into the ground. We a' little behind this year."

"Grrr," Luke growled, indicating his displeasure of the manure that he would have to shovel.

"The new plow is in at the feed store. It needs ta be picked up," Travis said.

Luke let himself flop back onto the bed, and it shook roughly as the springs groaned their displeasure in agreement with Luke. "I don't wanna go into town," Luke admitted.

"Take care a ya business, Luke," Travis said. "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you."¹

Luke said, "I guess I'm free to do things the way I want to."

"Give ya'self a couple a' days ta get over bein' sick. Then take care a ya business. 'You...were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"²

Luke nodded. He continued to lie on the bed as he took his father's twisted hand in his and closed his eyes.



MAY 1918

The doctor had the bearing of a soldier. Every action he took was defined and focused, his eyes cold and detached. James watched the doctor's face throughout the examination as he gave sharp commands to someone else, his movements precise but unfeeling. The nurse was hovering two feet behind him; her expression appeared as a grim slash for a mouth and knitted brows in a sea of haze. James couldn't see her face clearly. She was too far away. This was the first time anything made sense in his mind, and it still didn't make sense.

The probing ended, and James felt relief. He dropped his eyes from the man's face and suddenly saw the mask across his own face. His hands grasped at the cold linen searching for anything to grab and felt heavy, scratchy fabric on the back of his left arm.

"Get it off," he tried to yell. He looked up and found no one there. There was nothing in the distance but gray fog that moved with a variant of color. He couldn't see far enough to find anything in his field of vision. He was trapped beneath the mask, and he didn't want the gas.

James could feel his heart pounding stubbornly. Why didn't it quit? He just wanted his heart to quit beating.

He moved his hand to his chest. The skin on his chest felt sensitive and fragile against what was touching it. It felt like the skin on his chest could rupture from the softest stroke, but he couldn't find anything with his hand. He couldn't find the mask either. He couldn't get his hand to his face.

He couldn't focus his eyes and moved them randomly, from one spot to another following the movement of color. His eyes searched for anything that would tell him where he was. The poisoned fog was thick, blocking his vision.

¹ First Peter 5:6–10 (ESV).

² Galatians 5:13–14.

“Calm down, James. Breathe slow. The oxygen won’t do you any good if you don’t slow down,” Edison said, moving toward his young cousin.

They had brought James in two days ago, and he hadn’t had a peaceful moment since. His lungs were so badly damaged he could hardly get air. He struggled constantly, and his body was tired from the fight. The burns on his face and hands had healed enough for the bandages to be removed, but he had little feeling in them. The less severe burns on the rest of his body had been replaced with tender new skin. He lay naked under the sheet.

James’s eyes were healing, but the doctor didn’t know how much more was possible without surgery. That would come later. His eyes hadn’t been tested yet either. It seemed he could see a few feet in front of him and to the left. That gave the doctor hope they could improve his vision.

Edison hadn’t been able to talk to his cousin yet either. The medication caused James to sleep most of the time, and when he was awake, he didn’t seem to understand what was being said to him. The doctor saw a lot of patients in this condition.

Every time James woke up, he would fight the oxygen mask, but he had never stayed awake for long. Ed knew the mask must be uncomfortable for him. It was tight across his face where the burns were healing. Ed took the mask off and moved the injured man into a more upright position, holding him. Ed had discovered early that this calmed James. Whether it was the sitting position that gave James’s comfort or the human touch, the doctor didn’t know. Ed held the mask in place just above his patient’s mouth and nose.

Every breath was a struggle; his lungs were desperate for oxygen, but his body wouldn’t cooperate. A string of harsh coughs shook his pale and fragile form, leaving him weaker than he could have ever thought possible. James gripped a handful of white hospital sheet and pleaded for the agonizing pain in his chest to stop.

The oxygen steadily flowed onto his face and into his nose, but he didn’t understand what it was. Tears blurred what little vision he had, and he shut his eyes, hoping this would keep himself from

screaming. He didn’t want to make any noise, but he didn’t know why he wanted the silence. James’s body began to shake gently.

James knew he had to get the mask off. The gas was inside the mask, but he couldn’t get it off. James relived that day in the truck over and over. He kept feeling the respirator on his face, and he remembered the damaged equipment that had let the gas in under the mask. Why couldn’t he get the mask off this time?

“Lord.” James’s words came low and mumbled, but Ed understood him. “My heart is in pain within me. The fears of death have come upon me. I have begun shaking with fear. Fear has power over me. And I say, ‘If only I had wings like a dove, I would fly away and be at rest. Yes, I would go far away.’”¹ Lord, I told you I’d take what you gave me, but do I have to do this? Father, let me breathe! I’d rather die than live like this.”

Ed rested James against his shoulder, holding the oxygen mask with the same hand. He picked up the Bible beside James’s bed and began reading softly.

Ed remembered reading scripture to James’s father. Ed was only fifteen when Reid had been brought to their house injured. Ed had read to him, and it had calmed Reid. Now he was reading to Reid’s son. Scripture seemed to comfort James too.

“May you have loving-favor and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is our Father who shows us loving-kindness and our God who gives us comfort. He gives us comfort in all our troubles. Then we can comfort other people who have the same troubles. We give the same kind of comfort God gives us. As we have suffered much for Christ and have shared in his pain, we also share His great comfort.”²

¹ Psalm 55:4–7a (NLV).

² Second Corinthians 1:2–5 (NLV).

James was calming. Ed saw James's eyes open, looking at him for the first time since he was brought in. Ed wanted to see recognition in his patient's eyes, but the cloudy eyes stared at him blankly. His eyes didn't even look green anymore.

The doctor smiled at James and continued the scripture,

"If God comforts us, it is for your good also.
You too will be given strength not to give up...
Our hope for you is the same all the time."¹

James lay quiet against his cousin, listening, gaining comfort from the words he read, from his touch, and from the familiar face.

"The load was so heavy we did not have the strength to keep going. At times we did not think we could live. We thought we would die. This happened so we would not put our trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead. Yes, God kept us from what looked like sure death and He is keeping us. As we trust Him, He will keep us in the future... Many people thank God for His favor to us. (You are) an answer to the prayers of many people."²

"James, can you hear me?" Ed asked softly.

James gave two jerking nods of his head.

"You need to stay quiet. Does the mask hurt your face?"

Ed wasn't sure, but he thought James shook his head.

"This is oxygen. It's going to help you breathe." Ed began pulling the straps back around James's head.

James began to shake his head, and his breathing got faster. He softly said, "No, no, no."

Ed pulled it away. "Is it the mask? You don't want the mask on?"

¹ Second Corinthians 1:6b-7a (NLV).

² Second Corinthians 1:8b-11 (NLV).

The doctor saw the answer in his patient's eyes this time. Ed saw fear in them as they stared at the mask.

"Okay, we'll do this a different way." Turning to a nurse nearby, Edison said, "Let's get an oxygen tent over here. I think he'll be more comfortable with it. He doesn't want the mask."

Luke didn't have anything else to do, so he worked the land. He plowed more, he planted more, and he prepared for the harvest. The children were coming to help when they weren't at school, just like they had done in years past when his father had worked the fields. Luke knew it was his job to teach the children, but he would have preferred to do this alone. The solitude helped him think. It calmed him and allowed him to focus on much-needed prayer and on what he was doing.

He had to think about the farming. He hadn't done this in close to thirty years. He kept forgetting things. When he remembered what he failed to do, he had to go back and repeat what he had already done. Being alone helped him remember. He'd go to the fields alone every morning, before the children left for school, to work the field alone. But someone would always show up to help him in the afternoon.

When the children were with him, there was always talking, giggling, and joking. He loved Reid's and Angus's children, and he loved being with them but not this much. He tried to outwork them and move forward without them, but they seemed to enjoy the challenge and kept pace with him. They would sometimes leave gaps in their work that he had to repair.

School would be out soon, and the children would be there all the time. He would have to monitor the children's work every day. He didn't want to do that. He didn't want to do anything that involved other people, especially children.

Today was Saturday, and they weren't in school. Luke went out in the heat of the day, knowing that he would get cooked by the sun. He was hoping he could be there alone. He took the horse and

plow to the far end of the gardens and began plowing a new field. He wasn't sure what he would plant, but he'd have the field ready when he decided. He got to the end of the row and turned the horse, looking at the plowed earth.

He didn't move. He wasn't thinking. The depression he had been fighting had finally won. All he wanted to do was stand there.

*I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve.*¹ Luke heard the scripture in his heart.

He laughed out loud. "Is this what I deserve?" He dropped to his knees, tired and wanting a release of any kind. He wanted to cry or scream or hit something, but he couldn't. Everything was captured inside, held tightly within his body.

*A false witness will not go unpunished, and whoever pours out lies will perish.*²

"It's too late. Cecil's dead, and I've lost my job. Even if someone comes forward and tells the truth, my career is over. What am I supposed to do?" Luke asked his Lord.

*Let the morning bring (you) word of (my) unfailing love...put (your) trust in (me). (I will) show (you) the way (you) should go...entrust (your) life (to me).*³

¹ Jeremiah 17:10.

² Proverbs 19:9.

³ Psalm 143:8.



JUNE 1918

Reid received a letter from Ed. James had arrived at Walter Reed General Hospital and was in serious condition. The burns on his body had healed to the point the doctors were no longer worried about infection, but he was badly scarred. His lungs were severely damaged too, although his mouth, nose, and bronchi seemed to have miraculously escaped with little damage. He was being given oxygen on a regular basis and couldn't be without it for very long. His eyes had been burned, but his vision seemed to be clear at a short distance. Surgery would help, but the surgery would probably need to be repeated several times. The surgery would need to be postponed until his lungs improved, though. There was really nothing they could do for him, except wait. Ed told Reid if he wanted to see his son, he needed to come soon.

Reid drove out to the Double R ranch. First, he would talk to Marvin, and then he would find Blade. He knew Blade wouldn't want to do this, but he needed someone who would leave him alone. Someone who would be able to help him if he needed it but not follow him around and hover over him. Not someone who might want to sightsee or talk all the time.

Reid knew that Luke would go, but for this task, he didn't want Luke's constant chatter.

Luke had been quieter lately. He probably did need to ask Luke. Luke hadn't been his chipper self for months, and Reid knew Luke would benefit from getting out of Harris. Maybe he would ask Luke, anyway, but Reid still wanted Blade with him.

Reid sat on the veranda with Marvin and Naomi. No one was talking. Reid had explained everything to his sister and her husband, and there just wasn't anything left to say. Marvin had sent someone to get Blade, so Reid waited.

Blade could be seen coming across the open pasture. Such a handsome figure moving toward him on the horse. The young Indian sat tall and straight on the animal. He moved with the animal in perfect rhythm. Blade still wore his hair long and loose. He was proud to be Cheyenne.

Neither he nor his older sister had allowed themselves to be adopted by Reid, but Reid still felt Blade was his son. He knew Blade thought of him as his father too. Blade called him Dad, like the other children did, and Reid was his legal guardian. But Blade and Winona remembered and loved their own father, and they didn't want to replace him. Blade and his older sister had accepted Reid in every other way, but they wouldn't accept Reid's name.

Marvin and Naomi got up to leave as Blade approached. They knew the two needed to be alone.

Blade got off the horse and tied it to the iron horse-head-hitching post at the edge of the flower bed.

Reid smiled at the young man sadly.

"What do you want?" Blade said as he approached.

Anyone else would have thought Blade was irritated or rude to be greeting someone this way, but Reid knew Blade well. It was just his manner. There was no disrespect meant.

"I need to ask you something," Reid began. He would get right to the point. There was no reason to make small talk with Blade.

Blade leaned on the edge of a wrought iron table, looking at Reid. He stood on one foot with the other leg crossed and the side of his raised foot resting on the top of the one that was against the ground. His arms were crossed on his chest, and the muscles of his upper arm bulged where his shirt sleeves ended. He preferred to go shirtless in warm weather, but Marvin wouldn't allow it at the ranch house, so they had compromised.

Blade wore a Jim Shirt. It was tight across his chest and slightly off-color white, until it became stained from the dirt and sweat of

ranch work. Then it looked brown from a distance. There were no buttons, and the sleeves were short. Most upper class men wore these under their other clothing until they went to the sports field. That's where these skivvies were usually seen, either on the sports field or on naval ships.

None of the men at the ranch made mention of Blade's fashion. He responded to no one's kidding. The few men who would force their comments on Blade would be stared down quickly. His set jaw and hardened muscles caused anyone challenging him to back down. He never fought because of something said. But he had won every fight he had been in, mostly defending another man against bullying.

Everyone also knew Blade was the boss's favorite. Marvin trusted him for loyalty, honesty, hard work, and respect. Even if the respect did come in its own form. There were few other characteristics that described the young Indian. Blade backed away from nothing and exhibited fair and just dealings with the other men but said very little.

"We got a letter from Edison," Reid continued. "James is at the hospital near Washington where Ed works. He's in bad shape. Ed says he doesn't know how he survived the trip across the ocean. I want to go see him."

Blade continued to watch his father, but he said nothing, and he didn't move.

Reid hesitated. He didn't like asking people for things, especially something as big as this, but he had to if he was going to visit James.

"Would you go with me?"

"Train?"

"Yes," Reid replied. "It'll take about a week to get there." Watching Blade think wasn't like watching Thomas or Cleve. You could see their brains working. But not Blade's. His eyes didn't move, and his brain worked so silently that you couldn't distinguish it at all.

"I haven't been on a train since I left the reservation," Blade admitted. "I have never been to a city."

"I have, and I'll need you to stay with me," Reid said. Now he would admit his weakness to Blade. "You know I can't do this alone. I need somebody to help me. Blade, I need to go see James."

“When will you go?” the young man asked.

“As soon as we can. If his health is as bad as Ed says, I don’t want him to...” Reid wouldn’t say “die alone,” because that might happen anyway. Reid knew they may not get to Bethesda in time. But Reid wanted to try.

He couldn’t stay at the hospital waiting for James to die either, even though he might want to. Reid had other family members he was responsible for, and he had to get back to the office. There were too many things pending that needed to be completed before a preset date, including Mrs. Leachman’s trial. If he had time to finish these before he went to see James, he might be able to stay longer. But that would take too long. Reid was hopeful that if Blade saw his brother, he would be willing to stay with him.

Blade said, “I will go with you.”

“Thank you. Marvin and Naomi can help you pack what you need. I’ll go make the arrangements and let you know when we’ll leave. It shouldn’t be but a couple of days.”

Blade gave one nod of the head. The entire time Reid had been talking to him, Blade’s eyes never left Reid’s face. Reid knew Blade understood what he wasn’t saying.

When Blade looked at someone like that, his gaze would penetrate all the way to a person’s soul, leaving them feeling exposed and vulnerable. Reid felt that way right now.

Blade had one of the most discerning minds Reid had ever seen. God had truly blessed him with wisdom and an insightful understanding of people in general. But it was wrapped up in a soul that wouldn’t acknowledge fear or pain or love. Blade certainly understood those emotions, even if he didn’t express them.

Reid stood up and moved toward Blade. The young man straightened up and accepted Reid’s hug, wrapping his own arms around the man he loved as his father.

Reid sat on the porch with Travis. He had just told his father that he was going to see James. Travis was thinking; Reid could see it.

The old man was chewing on the inside of his bottom lip. The dog sat between Travis’s legs, desiring attention.

“How long will it take ta get there?” Travis asked.

“It will probably take about a week, depending on the train schedule and route.”

“Which way does the train go?”

“We’ll have to go through St. Louis, probably Cincinnati and Parkersburg, West Virginia, then on to Washington. I’m not sure,” Reid replied.

“Who’s goin’ with ya?”

“Blade.”

“How long ya gonna stay in Washington?”

“I don’t know, a couple of weeks maybe. It depends on how James is doing. But I need to get back here for Mrs. Leachman’s trial at the end of August,” Reid said.

Travis got quiet again. He eventually said, “I wanna come with ya.”

Reid wasn’t expecting this. He thought about his own need for help. His aging father would need help too. Blade wouldn’t be able to take care of both of them properly. His father didn’t need to spend his days at the hospital or in the hotel alone. And he didn’t need to be traveling the unknown streets alone either.

“Dad, that’s going to be a long trip, and I’m going to spend all my time at the hospital. I need Blade to stay with me. You don’t need to be sitting at the hospital like that, and you don’t need to be traveling alone.”

Travis said, “I’ll take Luke.”

“What are you going to do in that city?” Reid asked.

Travis didn’t speak for several moments. His eyes looked worried, and his forehead furrowed under his hat. Reid had a sudden thought and realized what his father wanted, but he waited patiently for the old man to tell him.

“If that train’s goin’ through Cincinnati an’ Parkersburg, it’ll probably go through Weston an’ Elkins. Them’s my moun’ins. I wanna see ’em.”

“Do you want to see them, or do you want to spend time there?” Reid asked.

Travis nodded. “I’d like ta see James, but ya gonna be with ’im. ‘E needs ya. If Luke goes, I can stop an’ see the moun’in ’gain. I ain’t been there in fifty years. I’d like ta find Ruth’s an’ the boy’s graves, make sure they’s taken care a’.”

“You’ve been wanting to go back there for a long time, haven’t you?” Reid asked.

Travis nodded.

“Do you think you can find them? The land has probably changed since the war.”

“I can find ’em. If I find the river, I can find the moun’in,” Travis assured his son.

“I’d like to go with you,” Reid said.

Travis turned to look at Reid.

“I know, I can’t. I can’t sit a horse, and there is no way I could hold on going up and down those mountains. If they’re anything like the ones around Denver—”

Travis interrupted. “They ain’t.” He studied the trees behind his house again. There was a longing in his eyes. “They’re not as rocky, not as steep. They make the land roll. The rivers runnin’ through ’em is gentle”—Travis laughed slightly—“until the spring floods. The water that run down the moun’in is as clear as glass. The trees is thick an’ green an’ as old as the moun’ins ’emselves. They’s more beautiful.

“Ya can stand on the moun’in in front a’ the house an’ look out over four moun’in ranges in the distance. As far as ya eyes can see is the trees. In the summertime, the sun comes over the ridge early an’ stays long ’ours. Ya wouldn’ know what ta do with ya’self far all them ’ours. Work would be done, an’ there’d still be daylight.”

Reid saw the yearning in his father’s face. Reid had heard him talk about the mountains often through the years, and Reid knew his father missed them. In his younger days, Reid never understood why, when Travis left Sarah in Chicago, he had not gone back to the mountain. But as he had gotten older, Reid thought he understood. While Travis loved the land, he had loved his family more. There was no one left on the land. Without the people, the land was empty and useless.

His father had talked more about his first wife over the last year than he had Reid’s entire life. His father was now associating the mountains with the wife of his youth, remembering her love and loving the mountains in return.

“Okay. Let me talk to Luke.” Reid stood up with his heart full of sadness. He knew his father wanted to be with those who had died. He was ready to go home, not to the mountains but to be with the Lord.

Reid didn’t want to lose his father, but he knew the past had been on his father’s mind. The old man had been reliving his life in his memories. Reid could see the melancholy wrapping his father like a warm blanket. Travis wanted the memories, both the sad ones and the happy ones. He wanted to relive those days. Reid knew it was hard for him to want something so much and know he couldn’t have it. Now here was the opportunity to give him what he wanted. His mountains.

They wouldn’t be the same, and Reid knew it. It had been more than fifty years since Travis and Sarah left their home. His father had told him how hard it was to get to a town from where they lived. The mountain was steep and rocky. It was cut off from everyone in the springtime by floods and by snow in the winter. There were no roads and only a few horse trails leading through the woodland. Yes, railroads had probably been built, and they probably ran closer to where his home had been. There might even be a few roads and bridges. But could he find what he was looking for? Would he find peace?

The first leg of the journey went smoothly. Harris to Wichita to Springfield to St. Louis. Reid had checked their original plan’s route, and it didn’t go where his father thought it would. So after they took a night to rest in St. Louis, they changed routes and boarded another train. Reid and Blade would spend an extra day on the train, but Travis would get closer to where he wanted to go. Reid would have the trip broken again and have another night for his back to rest in a

bed. He might even get to see more of the mountains that his father loved so much.

The second portion of the trip ran from St. Louis to Louisville and Lexington and then to Huntington and to Charleston, West Virginia. Here, they changed trains again. Now they were stopping at every little town along the rail until they got to Galore. They spent the night before Blade and Reid prepared to leave the other men and continued on to Washington.

Travis and Reid sat on the porch of the hotel, looking toward the mountain in front of them.

“How close do you think you are, Dad?” Reid asked.

“Just a couple a’ days,” he responded. “If I’s younger, I could probably be there ’morrow night. I been wantin’ ta see ’em far years. Thinkin’ ’bout ’em, they don’ seem real anymore. Seems like a dream when I think ’bout Ruth an’ the boys.”

Travis smiled. “Sittin’ ’ere, lookin’ at da moun’in, dough, I can ’ear the chil’en runnin’ through da trees an’ the sound a’ da river splashin’ below da rocks after a full night a’ rain.”

Reid sat silently, letting his father enjoy his memories. He watched his father’s face and knew the man had already received the peace the mountains brought to him. Looking toward the expanse of the mountain, more green hues could be seen than Reid could have imagined. The land did roll, just like his father had said, and time seemed to have stopped years ago. The rutted road disappeared over the horizon and into the trees, a new discovery all its own awaiting the traveler.

Reid really wished he could go with his father into this land that his father dreamed about. It was so unknown to Reid and drew his imagination.

A fiddle faded into the silence from the distance.

“Ya ’ear dat?” Travis asked. “Papaw’d play ever’night, just ’fore da sun went down. I thin’ ’e playe’ dat song.”

Travis’s speaking had gotten rougher the last few years. His pronunciation wasn’t as clear, and his grammar wasn’t as good as it had been in years past. Reid had wondered why, especially considering his singing voice hadn’t changed. But his speech changed quickly as

he sat on this porch. He had reverted, back to the slow mountain language he had been so accustomed to here. Reid knew his father was unconscious of this.

Travis began to softly sing the words to the song being played. Reid closed his eyes and rested his head against the chair, listening.

Luke and Blade came down the street, disrupting the quiet.

“We got supper,” Luke said loudly before he reached the hotel.

Neither Travis nor Reid responded. The nostalgia Travis was enjoying and the discovery Reid was making were too comfortable and more important than the food.

Luke left the hotel early in the morning to find what he needed—a livery stable and supplies. When he picked his father up at the hotel a few hours later, they said goodbye to the younger men and headed into the wilderness.

The two men rode out of town moving up the road that Reid had watched the night before. Luke could feel the excitement in every movement his father made. Luke, however, was a little apprehensive. He didn’t consider himself a city boy, nor did he think of himself as overly protective. He was comfortable with danger from criminals and disappearing into the open Kansas landscape for days at a time. But heading into these thick forests and its unknown dangers were a little unsettling.

Maybe it was still the depression working on him; he didn’t know. His confidence was wavering. While he had slept more than usual while at his father’s house, he hadn’t slept much at all on this trip. He was tired.

He really had no interest in going into these mountains. He was only going because Reid had asked him to. He also knew his father wanted to go. Luke sighed. That was reason enough.

But now he questioned the entire trip. Could he take care of his father? What would happen if his father didn’t find what he was looking for? Could his father remember enough of this life to get them where they needed to go and back again safely?

Trying to keep up with his father, he talked himself into the journey quickly. He really didn't have a choice. He certainly wasn't going to let his father go alone. He would have to do it, regardless of the depression he still felt. He couldn't stop his father now, or even slow him down. Despite what had happened to Luke in Harris, he trusted God and he trusted his father.

All Luke could hear was the sound of the leaves under the horse's hooves. No birds, no animals, not even the horses snorting. The undergrowth was thick, and the horses were moving slowly through it.

"We ought ta be comin' up on that river soon. The man said it was a half-day's ride," Travis said.

Luke didn't answer him. His thoughts were far away. How could Kathleen have turned into a different person so fast? She had always been so sweet and kind. Her humble life told of the pain of losing her husband and of the struggles she had raising her children alone. She went to her job every day and paid her bills. She lived on what she made, meager as it was. She attended church and made sure her family did too. Her children were all well-behaved and polite.

She had never talked about her faith, but she seemed to agree when Luke talked about his.

Travis stopped suddenly. "There it is."

Luke moved his horse to the edge of the cliff beside his father and looked down the steep slope. At the bottom of a deep gorge covered in nothing but green flowed a beautiful blue-and-white ribbon with the sun reflecting off the calm areas and an occasional rapid. That had to be eight hundred feet down there.

Looking up to the ridge across from them, Luke could see a steep rim that held no vegetation. It looked like a hat sitting on top of the trees. But next to the river, at the bottom of the gorge, another ribbon ran almost parallel to the river. It was hidden by the trees and only seen as a separation of the tree tops.

Travis was looking downriver. "We gonna camp up 'ere on the ridge an' follow the river an' make our way ta the bottom 'morrow. See that ridge?" Travis pointed across the gorge and downriver. "Once we cross the top, we should be able ta see my moun'in."

Travis turned the horse and continued.

A short time later, he found a small clearing near a rocky outcropping and stopped his horse. He sat on the horse looking at the rocks.

"Do you want to stop here?" Luke asked.

"It'd be a good spot, but I ain't sure I want ta camp near a cave," Travis said, not looking at Luke.

Luke followed his father's gaze and saw a dark area beneath the rocks.

"Bears?" Luke asked.

"Could be, but I'm more concerned 'bout the white thin' than anythin' else," Travis said.

"White thing'? What's that?" Luke asked.

"Just a creature that lives in the moun'ins," Travis explained. "It usually stays 'way from people, but I don' wanna get too close ta its home. It might not like it. Let's keep movin'."

There was the far off sound of a steam engine's whistle, and they both turned to look down the gorge. Coming around the mountain, deep within that ribbon that ran parallel to the river, a continuous stream of smoke could be seen rising through the trees. It passed an area where the trees were thin and a steam engine could be seen slowly pulling car after car of coal ore, the black snake slithering beneath the shadow of the mountain. They both watched until the smoke disappeared behind another ridge and the red caboose trailed the snake through the opening in the trees.

Travis turned and moved on without a word. He found another small clearing surrounded by trees. There was a cushion of pine straw on the ground, and Travis decided it was a good place to camp.

Luke cleared an area, built a small fire, and made some coffee. "It's been a long day. Seems like we've been on the horses longer than we have," Luke said.

Travis chuckled. "Ya been on it longer than ya think ya 'ave. Days is long 'ere. Got more work ta do on the moun'in, so God gives us more sun ta get it done." Travis pulled his watch out of his pocket and opened the cover. Eight-forty. He passed the watch to Luke, who saw the time and looked at the sun and then at his father questioningly.

"Sun'll go down in maybe a 'our, 'our an' a half," Travis said. "It'll come up early in the mornin' too. Get some sleep."

Luke helped Travis to the ground, and Travis pulled his rifle beside him. Luke noticed he hadn't taken his gun belt off either. His father pulled a blanket over himself. "Get ya' cover. Night'll be cool. Better keep ya' gun close."

Sunrise came as a golden tunnel between the peaks, welcoming a new day. It hit Luke in the face, and he woke to the blinding sunlight. He stood up, stretched, and then looked across the gorge. A soft white mist was moving across the ridge, diffusing the sunlight to a gentle haze. It rolled over the base of the mountain in the distance. That one bridge of the sun's rays was disappearing quickly as the fog took over. Rounded peeks seemed like islands sticking out of a sea of calm gray-and-white waves. It was the most beautiful sight Luke ever remembered seeing. He was mesmerized. The fog seemed to be growing swiftly too. Spreading, moving toward them, blinding them to the world outside the hilltop they were on.

"Luke, give me a 'and," Travis called.

Luke turned quickly to help his father from the ground. The old man was moving slow, the chilly morning affecting his aging joints. The cold ground and the cool mountain air seemed to slow Luke's movement too. Luke was a little stiff himself.

"We gonna 'ave ta be careful movin' down the side a' the hill. That fog's gonna blind us ta what we could see if the sun was out. Cool as the air is right now, it's gonna be with us a ways."

Luke took a couple of stale biscuits from his pack and handed his father one. They packed the horses and began moving down the slope, closer to the river.

The going was slow, but they made progress. Luke looked up at one point and saw the mountain looming above and disappearing into a cloud. He hadn't realized they had come this far. He looked toward the river, and they still had a long way to go. He didn't like this narrow trail his father was making. If the horse stumbled, the horse and rider both would go tumbling down the side and into the water.

His father hadn't said anything since they had started moving. Luke didn't know what his father expected to find out here. He hadn't told Luke where he was going either. All Luke knew was what Reid had told him.

The night before they left Harris, Luke had asked, but Travis had given him a forlorn look, and tears could be seen in the old man's eyes. Maybe it was the way Luke had asked, "What are you looking for out there, anyway? Did you lose something?"

His father had seemed hurt by Luke's question. Luke had hugged his father and said, "I'm sorry. You know I'll go anywhere with you. You don't have to explain a thing."

His father hadn't explained either. Travis had taken a walk with Bandit, and Luke had found them both sitting on the steps of the front porch later that evening. The look on his father's face disturbed Luke. The old man looked like he had just buried someone he loved.

Luke had tried to make it up to him the next morning, preparing his father's favorite breakfast.

"This will be the last good breakfast you'll have until we get back," Luke had joked.

Travis had smiled at Luke and eaten in silence. Then he packed his saddlebags and his rifle case, filled his canteen, put on his gun belt, and moved onto the porch to wait for Reid to pick them up. Luke got his things together and sat down beside his father, praying that when they got to their destination, his father would find what he was looking for.

They were nearing the river, and it didn't look like there was any ground for the horses to move along the edge. Large sharp rocks jutted from the shallow water. The side of the hill above them seemed to be broken off in places, and half dead trees lay in the water. Maybe a recent landslide had done this.

The river seemed to drop off deep at the rock's edge. Luke had to trust his father and continued following.

A little way down the side of the river, Travis turned into the water. Luke didn't like the look of this. The river was more narrow here than it had been, but the water moved more swiftly. Large rocks stuck out of the water randomly most of the way across, and a couple of eddies swirled on each side downriver. Luke had been on the water enough with his father to think this might be a fun ride going downstream in a canoe but not crossing on a horse.

Once again, he had to trust his father, so he followed the old man into the water.

"Stay close ta the rocks," Travis yelled back to his son.

Luke watched the water. To his right, there was a ledge of dirt, not too rocky, about two feet under the water. To the left, he didn't see the bottom. He continued to move slowly across, staying close to the rocks, with no problem.

Travis stopped on dry land. "Horses is tired. Let 'em rest. We gonna be goin' uphill next. They gonna need strength."

Luke stepped off his horse and helped his father down.

"Looks like a good spot to wash up," Luke said.

Travis nodded to an area downstream. "Might get a little fishin' in too."

Luke reached for the supplies. "I'll make some coffee."

Luke and Travis were moving again and had made it to the top of the ridge. The trees were thick and the undergrowth dense. Neither of them could see beyond the rocky area directly in front of them. Travis led the way. "This is Deer Rock. Best trappin' in these mountains is right over there." Travis pointed to a gully that cut through

the trees. "It'll wash ya 'way during flood season, though. Got ta 'ave ya traps out a there 'fore the snow starts meltin'."

They rounded a small grouping of dead trees, and Travis stopped suddenly. Luke could see the sky beyond him and thought he had probably sighted the mountain he was looking for. But as Luke drew beside his father, he froze too.

Across a small valley and about halfway up the next mountain, the trees stopped. The top of the mountain was bald. A railroad track was easily visible as it circled the bare land. A black snake, thundering smoke, was moving down the grade being pushed by dozens of cars hauling coal. It looked like the train they had seen the previous day.

A little higher up, a couple of steam shovels snorted and puffed as they bellowed more smoke. They dug into what was recently virgin land and threw their scooped gruel past a short barrier and let it fall and slide down the mountain side, wrapping the trees as they disappeared from sight beneath the dirt. The bare gray-and-red earth shown in the sunlight. Just above, a black ribbon wrapped the mountain. There was another steam shovel puffing away as it tore into the black gold. It was all so out of place amongst the lush green giants of the forest.

Travis wasn't moving, and Luke pushed his horse a little closer to his father. He could tell the old man was disturbed by this sight. Maybe in shock.

"Come on, Dad. Let's move on," Luke said gently. He pushed his horse again and bumped the other horse who stepped to move out of the way. Luke grabbed the reins of his father's horse, near the bridle, and gave a tug as he moved past. Travis nodded and turned to continue following.

They made camp early. Travis hadn't said anything since sighting the strip-mining operation, and now he seemed tired. Luke made some coffee, and they opened a couple of cans and ate their supper cold. The sun was still up, but it was casting long shadows on the ground.

The horses suddenly began pulling and snorting, disturbed by something. Luke and Travis stood up, watchful as they scanned the area.

Out of the corner of his eye, Luke saw movement. He turned sharply, disturbed by the sight of a strange creature standing not far away, almost hidden by the undergrowth. He could only describe it as a large dog. Was that a white wolf? But was it a wolf? Its head was thin, from what Luke could tell, and its nose long and pointed. Its body was thin too, with a bushy tail like a fox and long thin legs. The animal was covered with rich white fur. Luke saw it almost at the same time his father did.

“Don’ move, Luke.” Travis said quietly but firmly. “Luke, look at me.”

“Dad?” Luke didn’t know what this was. Why did his father want him to look away?

“Look at me, Luke,” his father repeated, a little louder.

Luke turned his head slightly, but he couldn’t take his eyes off this beast in front of him. The horses were still snorting and pulling.

The creature moved, and Luke jerked his head back toward the animal.

The thing bounded toward him in one giant leap on all fours. Luke went for his pistol, but he wasn’t fast enough. The creature pounced on him, biting and clawing at him ravenously. The pistol flew from Luke’s hand. Luke knew he would be torn to shreds. He punched and kicked, but he didn’t seem to be hurting the creature, and he didn’t seem to be hitting anything but soft fur. His strikes passed through thin air and struck the soft cushioned pelt without phasing the critter. They weren’t affecting the creature at all.

Luke felt its weight pushing against him, its fur against his skin, its powerful limbs striking him. Striking him but not hurting him. Luke was on his feet but stumbled backward and fell over a fallen tree.

The creature was almost silent. No roar of anger, no threatening growl. Then as suddenly as it had attacked, it was gone.

Luke remained on the ground, searching the nearby trees for any sign of the creature.

“Ya aw’right?” Travis asked. He hadn’t moved, hadn’t made a sound through the whole attack. He still didn’t move.

Luke threw his legs over the log he had tripped on and rolled in his father’s direction, still breathing heavily from the exertion of the battle. “I think so.” He looked himself over, confused about what had happened.

The creature had sent an outstretched claw straight down Luke’s chest, but there was barely a mark on him. His shirt was ripped slightly, but not torn to shreds. Luke had been knocked in the head, but his head didn’t hurt. There were only a few shallow scratches, reminding Luke of a mark a cat might make, but there was very little blood.

Luke looked to his father. “What was that?”

“The white thin’.”

“It was like it wasn’t real,” Luke said, puzzled by the animal. “I felt the fur, but I couldn’t feel anything under the fur. It was like wrestling with a big playful dog.”

“I’ve never been this close ta it,” Travis admitted. “I seen it a bunch a’ times but aw’ways from far off. I seen it rip a man’s ’ead off ’is body once, an’ I ’ear’d stories a’ it tearin’ cabins up. People says it only ’urts bad men. Good men it leaves ’lone.” Travis smiled. “Ya must be good.”

“Aww, Dad, a legend? A myth?” Luke couldn’t fathom that his father believed such things.

Luke suddenly remembered believing a myth himself, but he was only a child. He had heard noises in his house one night and had woken his older brother. Cleve told him it was the ghost of their dead father coming back to make sure the children were behaving themselves. Cleve had also told him that if the ghost couldn’t see him in the dark, he was safe. Luke had believed his big brother and for years slept with the covers over his head to hide his sins.

Luke now laughed to himself. He had believed this until he had begun to read the Bible and found out that the spirit of a dead person didn’t walk the earth. Other things did, demons and fallen angels, but God’s angels were also there to protect his children. The spiritual battle was real but not ghosts of dead people.

Then Luke had read about the ghost that the witch of Endor had conjured up. He still remembered the dead prophet Samuel's words to King Saul. "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?"¹ That had troubled Luke too. Luke, only eleven years old, had asked the preacher about this.

The pastor had explained to Luke that fallen angels sometimes present themselves in a way that makes people believe they are something they aren't, to deceive God's people. The ghost had come from the ground. Samuel's spirit would have been with God, not in the ground.

But as Luke got a little older and read more of the scripture, he still wasn't sure what had happened in First Samuel. How could a fallen angel know what was going to happen, that Saul and his sons would die the next day. Why would a fallen angel take God's point of view and tell Saul the truth, that he had done something wrong? Luke still didn't understand what the truth was about the dead prophet.

"Ain't a legend if it's real. Ya seen it. Ya felt it," Travis was saying. "Don' ever look it in the eye. If ya see it, turn ya' 'ead 'way. It'll leave."

Luke stood up, checking again to make sure he was okay. Then he began moving around the area looking for footprints or any sign that the creature had been there. A few feet past the log he had tripped over, Luke found a small tuft of fur hanging on a thorny vine running up a tree. Underneath it, embedded in the soft dirt, one large clear paw print.

He pulled the fur off the vine and held it in his hand. It was real all right. It smelled a little more musty than a wet dog would have.

Luke looked up. "Dad, I don't understand."

"I don' either," his father said. "All I know is it's been 'ere since I's little. I seen it the first time the day my pa drowned. It was on t'ather side a' the river, watchin'. I've wondered if it was a wild animal that was tame' by somebody, then it got loose, or a tame animal that went wild. I even thought far a while that it might be a Indian spirit come ta watch over me. It's never come close ta me, 'til now."

¹ First Samuel 28:15.

"Let's get out of here," Luke said. "I don't want to spend the night here."

Travis continued talking with that crooked smile on his face. "Niko used ta tell me that thin' would folla' people. That it'd pick who it liked an' who it didn'. It'd folla' some ta kill 'em, an' it'd folla' others ta protect 'em. If it's folla'n us, we'll see it 'gain."

Luke realized his father didn't believe any of this. He was playing with Luke, telling him the legend of the mountain.

Then the smile left his father's face, and his tone got serious. "Don' look at it if ya see it. Keep ya eyes 'way."

"I guess this is just something I have to accept and not understand," Luke said. "Like the ghost of Samuel."

Travis's eyes narrowed as he looked at his son, not understanding what Luke was talking about but realizing he didn't need to understand either.

"Yep," Travis agreed. "There's a lot a thin's I don' un'erstand."

They hadn't been on the horses very long the next morning, maybe just over an hour, when Travis stopped, looking to his right. He seemed to get a longing in his eyes. "Luke, we're there," he said almost reverently.

Luke looked, but he didn't see anything.

Travis pointed. "Right over there. See that chimney stickin' up from the trees? An' downhill some, see that clearin'?"

Luke saw it now.

The land was open among the trees here and much easier to move the horses through. Travis began moving again with the energy of a younger man.

At the hospital in Bethesda, Reid waited to talk with his nephew, Dr. Edison Stewart, before going to see his son.

Reid and Blade were seated at a junction in the hallway. At the end of the hall, to the left, were double doors, painted navy in color, with large dull-gold-colored handles. The building was fairly new, in comparison to other buildings around the area. It was built maybe ten to fifteen years earlier. It was scrubbed and polished, nicely painted and clean. There were several buildings comprising the complex, and they sat in one of the larger structures near a grouping of trees that formed a small park.

Reid would look at the doors and then move his eyes back to the highly polished tile floor. His gaze followed the floor around the corner, and then the tile seemed to stretch forever in front of him. Hallway after hallway intersected. He watched people move through the maze, obviously familiar with the passages.

A nurse came through the double doors and called, "Mr. Britt, come this way."

As Reid pushed himself to his feet, Blade reached to take his arm. Reid had been having trouble walking since they had gotten off the train a couple of hours ago. Too much sitting did that to him.

By the time he and Blade began moving, the nurse had disappeared behind the door. Blade pushed with his body weight, and one of the doors swung open soundlessly. A draft of stale air hit them in the face, warm and with a bleached scent. Ahead of Reid lay magnolia walls, decorated with black-and-white photographs of hospital staff, most likely heads of departments or other groupings of doctors. The hall was narrow, and the two men would have to stop and step sideways to let others pass.

The corridor turned and disappeared around another corner. Their steps seemed to measure out an equal distance between doors with signs holding the names of the hallways: Outpatient; Physical Medicine; Pharmacy; Radiology; Heart and Lung; and Eye, Ear, Nose, and Throat. Reid thought the entire hospital must have signs in this manner.

The nurse waited for them at the next door. Reid and Blade were ushered into a large brightly lit room full of patients, staff, and noise. Tables and chairs were tightly packed, and Reid was having trouble moving through the cramped space following the nurse. From the

distance, Reid saw the nurse stop at a table across the room, and a man turned to face them.

Edison smiled, but Reid saw the sadness in his eyes. Ed's chiseled features looked so much like his brother William. Ed had the same caring expression his brother showed too. The depth of his dark eyes reminded Reid of Sarah. Ed's eyes looked just like William's, but Reid had never noticed the similarity to their mother's eyes before. Reid was glad Edison was caring for his son.

"Uncle Reid," Ed called above the noise. "Wait, I'm coming that way."

Ed walked slowly down the hallway with his uncle and the cousin he just met. They found three empty chairs and sat down.

"I want you to know James has made great improvements since I wrote you that note right after he got here. He's alert and moving around. He's off the oxygen some but still has trouble breathing. He's still coughing quite a bit too. He's got congestion from the poison, and his chest is scarred inside. I don't know if any of it will clear up." Ed hesitated, watching Reid. Reid wasn't responding to what he was saying.

Reid sat staring at the floor. His son was alive. He was relieved, happy. James was getting better. That's really all he heard Ed say.

Reid still gave no response to Edison's words. His thinking was slow, and he had a mild headache. He needed some coffee. He hadn't had nearly enough coffee the last few days.

"Uncle Reid, you've got to understand he's still in a seriously fragile condition. He can't move around without getting short of breath, and that makes him cough. When the coughing comes, it takes what little breath he does have and affects his whole body. If he were to get sick and the illness affected his lungs, it would probably kill him."

The day was hot, but Reid felt the cold silence hanging in the air. The hush when Ed quit talking seemed to cause a chill, and Reid could hear his own heart pounding in his ears. Terror suddenly moved through his body, bringing a stillness to his brain. He had come to the hospital thinking James was either dead already or dying.

Now he was being told James was alive and doing better. But he was still in serious condition, and the possibility of death still hung over them. Reid's mind was switching directions quickly, and his brain wasn't able to keep up with the change. He needed to see James. He needed some coffee.

"Is there anywhere I can get some coffee?" Reid asked softly.

"Sure," Ed called to an orderly nearby and asked him to bring a cup. Ed kept on talking, telling Reid more of James's condition.

The man returned quickly, and Reid was handed the cup. He took a sip and then hurriedly downed the drink. Ed quickly realized Reid didn't enjoy the coffee. It was just a means to the end of a headache.

Ed asked, "How much coffee do you drink in a day?"

Reid shrugged. "A lot."

The doctor smiled. "How long does it take to work?" Ed remembered the effect caffeine had on Reid.

"Not long. Can I see James now?"

"Okay." Ed stood up. "Don't be shocked by what you see. His face is scarred by the burns. So are his hands. He's handling it pretty well, though. He's not shying away from people because of the scars. That may change when he leaves the hospital, I don't know. He's blessed, considering the disfigurement some of the other men face."

Ed reached his hand out to Reid and assisted as Reid stood.

"Some say that the face is the home of our personality," Ed explained. "The way we look affects our emotions, our identity, and our romantic attachments. The war has taken that away from a lot of men. It's caused isolation and depression in its victims. James doesn't seem prone to this, but we'll need to watch him closely and pray his faith holds him steady."

They walked slowly down the hallway as Ed continued to tell Reid of the problems James might face in life.

"I had one of the nurses take him outside. It'll give you more privacy. The ward is full of men, and nobody has any space to talk or do anything else. We won't be able to keep James outside very long. We're going this way." Ed pointed down another hallway.

Reid saw his son across the lawn. He would recognize James anywhere, even scarred and in this vast field of soldiers. He sat on a bench with a nurse. A wheelchair set close by.

Reid moved toward his son slowly. Blade and Ed set their pace with the man between them. Ed supported his uncle and wondered if Reid had this much trouble walking all the time.

Ed looked toward Blade. The young Indian his uncle had adopted seemed to be devoted to him. He hadn't said a word yet, but he seemed to know what Reid needed and how to help him.

Reid stopped a few feet away. "James."

The man sitting on the bench turned slowly, and Reid saw his eyes searching for the source of the sound. His eyes looked reddened, swollen, and cloudy. They seemed to melt into his scarred face.

Ed softly said, "He probably can't see you. His field of vision is getting wider, clearing up, but it's still limited."

Reid took a few more steps, and James found him and focused. Reid saw the recognition register as James's body language changed. But his face showed no expression. James tried to smile as memories of his father came to him. But the smile inside of him never made it to his face.

James stood slowly and stepped toward the three men but kept his eyes on his father. Then James recognized Blade and reached a hand out. His brother took the damaged hand without hesitation, clasping it gently within his strong fingers.

James put his other arm out toward his father. Reid took another step toward his son and pulled away from Ed. He wrapped his arm around James, comforted by his son's touch, knowing for certain that his son was alive.

Reid said, "Let's go sit down." Ed watched as Blade moved with them. Reid and his two sons sat down on the bench. Ed saw the easy interaction and love passing between the three men, and they weren't even talking.

James turned to look at his father's face. Not being able to see at a distance, he held to anything within his vision, longing to feel, to touch whatever it was he saw. He could touch what he was looking

at, but his hands were marred, and the nerves here were damaged too. Nothing felt like he remembered.

James held his father with his eyes. His father's eyes were soft. James saw the person his father was: strong, determined, disciplined, and in control. In his father's gaze, James saw the promise of protection—the promise of love regardless of the scars and struggles. James also saw home and family. He saw his mother reflected in his father's soul. The woman was so much like his father. He could trust her to love him too.

James also saw Jesus. Everything he knew about God's son, everything he remembered from scripture, was wrapped up in the eyes that looked back at him now. The compassion that Christ showed, his father also showed. The Spirit reminded James, *he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*¹ James's father had always given his children direction, like that shepherd.

Love and forgiveness were also seen in the eyes that looked back at him, along with a servant's attitude. The spirit spoke again, reminding him even more of his father's similarity to the Savior. *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*²

His father was gentle, patient, and committed to God. His quiet, humble way of life controlled his every move. James laughed inwardly; his father was also protective and wouldn't back down from a fight. And the man talked to God every moment of every day.

James wanted to be held by the person he knew was most like God's son. He leaned over onto his father's shoulder. Reid put his arm around James and gently drew him close.

Luke helped Travis from his horse. Travis took a few steps and then stood, surveying the overgrowth. You couldn't see where the

¹ Matthew 9:36b.

² Mark 10:45.

outbuildings had been, but there was an impression in the ground pointing you to the cellar. The rock chimney stood erect, leaning slightly, and the rock foundation of the porch was still intact.

Travis walked to the edge of the indentation where the cellar had been and looked down. There was growth on the dirt floor; but portions of large blackened joists could still be seen through the green blanket, the dirt, and rock that had fallen in. On the far side stood a small opening in the rock wall.

Travis's vision stayed at the bottom of the imprint. Luke moved to stand beside his father. "What's down there?"

"I hewed them joist by 'and," Travis said. "Done all a 'em myself."

Travis pointed to the scorched logs at the bottom. His voice almost choked. "That's where Papaw found my little girl, under that big 'un."

Travis turned around and moved about thirty feet away. "This is where the barn was." Travis took three steps. "This is where Ruth was found."

Travis continued to stand in that spot, looking at his feet. His memories were pulling him back in time, back to 1865 and his return home. Back to the story his grandfather had told him about finding his family. Travis could see his young wife. His beautiful Ruth lying bloody and bruised on the ground just inside the barn door, her dress torn to pieces. Travis closed his eyes and turned sharply, not wanting to see the image any longer. He swayed slightly, and Luke reached to steady him. But Travis wanted to feel the pain. He wanted to remember. The old man pulled away and walked to where the woodpile had been, looking at the ground. Pine straw, leaves, and thick green moss covering a decaying tree limb that had fallen across the spot. Travis could see his sons too. Their twisted bodies and bruised faces. He had developed this image over time. Papaw hadn't told him how the boys died, but he had thought about it often. He wished he knew; maybe the image wouldn't be as bad.

The first time he saw the boys in his mind's eye, they were lying on their backs, neatly positioned on the ground. The next time, they were lying twisted in the snow, and each consecutive scene got

more disturbing. Travis held to a sapling as he lowered himself to the ground. He brushed pine straw away to put his hand on the bare earth, touching where his sons lay.

Luke watched and was silent. He didn't know what his father was looking at now, but he knew he needed to leave his father alone. He found a downed tree and sat on it, watching.



JULY 1918

Reid had gotten to the hospital early and now sat beside his son's bed. A nurse had told him that James had had a rough night. He had coughed and struggled to breathe for hours. James was still asleep this morning, despite the noise of two dozen men moving around and talking near him.

Reid wasn't sure what he needed to do. There was a ceremony at 10:00 a.m., and Reid was told James had to attend. But Reid wasn't going to wake his son. He was sleeping peacefully right now.

Blade stood in the hallway outside the door to Ward 9, looking out a large window. He stood perfectly still. If he had been turned the other way and in front of a cigar store, people probably wouldn't have known he was human. Reid smiled. He'd never been able to understand how Blade could remain motionless for these long periods of time.

"Hey, mister." A voice behind Reid spoke.

Reid turned around to sit in the chair sideways. "Good morning."

"You his father?" the man asked.

"Yes."

"Well, I want you to know how much I admire your son. I've been in the bed next to him since the hospital in France. He's taken everything the doctors have thrown at him, and he hasn't fought them. The rest of us have all gotten tired of what they put us through. We've all cried and screamed, and we've all been ready to give up at some point. But not him. He's taken everything they've done to him, and he's never said a cross word."

Reid smiled at the young man. "That's good to know, thank you."

“My name’s Ben Wakley.” The man put his hand out. It was scarred, almost as bad as James’s hands were, and his feet had been amputated. Reid took the hand.

“Reid Britt. Where are you from Ben?”

“Jersey. You know, James said you would come. He was convinced of it, been waiting for you,” Wakley said.

Reid smiled again. “I got here as fast as I could.”

“Who’s your friend?” Wakley asked, pointing toward Blade.

“Another son.”

“Hmph.” The man grunted. “He said there were a bunch of kids in his family, but he didn’t say any of them were Indian.”

“My wife is Indian.”

James began to cough, and Reid turned back to his son. He moved to sit closer, reaching for his son’s hand. James grasped his father’s hand tightly. The man in the bed pulled himself toward his father. His eyes were still closed, and he didn’t know whose hand he held, but he would take comfort anywhere he found it. As James pulled on his father, Reid leaned toward his son and put his other arm around James, supporting him as James sat up and pulled himself over.

“Easy, easy,” Reid cautioned his son. James leaned into Reid and seemed to collapse onto his father’s lap as he continued to cough. He was nearly off the bed with his head and shoulders lying on his father’s legs. Reid held his son tightly.

The federal judge looked around, searching for someone to help, and found the few nurses in the room occupied with other patients. He saw no one that could help him.

Reid didn’t know what to do to comfort his son, so he did the only thing he knew to do. He began to sing,

Happy are those who are concerned for the poor;
The Lord will help them when they are in
trouble.¹

¹ Psalm 41:1 (GNT).

Several of the men around them quieted and turned to listen. Reid didn’t think his voice was nice, like it had been before his injuries. But he could now carry a tune, and as long as he wasn’t getting very loud, his voice didn’t break with the words like it had done in the past.

James was still coughing, although not as hard. None of the staff seemed to be paying attention.

Blade came back into the ward, sitting on the foot of James’s bed. He put a hand on his brother’s leg, listening to his father’s song and praying for his brother.

The Lord will protect them and preserve their
lives;
he will make them happy in the land;
he will not abandon them to the power of their
enemies.
The Lord will help them when they are sick
and will restore them to health.¹

The whole room was now quiet. Patients and nurses had begun moving closer to hear better. A few people came into the ward from the hallway. Reid didn’t notice; he was focused on his son who had now quit coughing but seemed to be struggling for air.

James gripped his father’s arm more firmly as the pain in his chest grew.

All my longings lie open before you, Lord;
my sighing is not hidden from you.
My heart pounds, my strength fails me;
even the light has gone from my eyes.²

“What’s going on?” A loud and harsh voice spoke from the doorway. Men and nurses looked toward the man entering, and many of them began to move back to their own areas.

¹ Psalm 41:2–3 (GNT).

² Psalm 38:9–10.

Blade looked up to see a large man in a military uniform under a lab coat standing ominously just inside the room. Blade didn't like the look of this man and got up to move beside his father in a protective manner.

James still lay in his father's lap, weak and limp, gasping for air.

Reid acted like he didn't hear the man; he kept on singing and stroking James gently, focused on only one thing—comforting his son.

But I trust in you, O Lord;
and you, O Lord my God, will answer me.¹
Do not abandon me, O Lord;
do not stay away, my God!
Help me now, O Lord my Savior!²

The man came to the foot of James's bed with his eyes on the patient and the man whose lap he lay in. Blade stood perfectly still, guarding his father.

The man interrupted the singing again and sternly demanded, "Who are you?"

Reid looked up and stopped singing. "Reid Britt. I'm his father." Reid reached his hand toward the man in greeting. The whole room was watching.

"General Harold Salts," the man said loudly, taking Reid's hand. "This man should be dressed by now. Nurse, get this man ready."

"Ready for what?" Reid asked as he looked down at James. His son seemed to be semiconscious. His breathing sounded like cracking twigs under footsteps on a dry summer path. His abdominal muscles were doing most of the work his lungs should have been doing. Reid put a hand on his son's chest. He could feel slight movement within, but his lungs didn't seem to be taking the air.

Reid grew concerned quickly. He turned from the man at the end of the bed to the nurse who had appeared on the other side of James.

¹ Psalm 38:15 (GNT).

² Psalm 38:21–22 (GNT).

"I don't think he's breathing. Is there anything we can do to help him?" Reid asked.

She touched James's neck to take his pulse and then moved her hand to his chest. She turned to another young woman nearby. "Nurse Noggin, get Dr. Stewart."

She wanted to put this man under oxygen, but she had been ordered to get him dressed. She began taking the needed clothing from a trunk she had pulled from under the bed.

Ed arrived quickly, and it took a total of three seconds for the doctor to know what to do. He ordered medication and moved James back onto the bed. The doctor began to pull the oxygen tent into place, but James continued to hold his father's jacket tightly. Medication was administered, and Ed began forcibly massaging James's chest.

Reid moved to sit on the edge of the bed with his son. It seemed James wanted to cough but couldn't.

Reid grabbed at Blade's hand, afraid for one son and seeking comfort from the other. He began to softly pray for James.

James began a weighty cough, and Ed rolled him onto his side. He continued to cough and heaved a small amount of thick yellow substance into a bowl that Ed held, then quieted. He was finally able to breathe. He rolled onto his back and opened his eyes briefly to look at his father as he drew in much-needed air. The corner of one side of his mouth turned up. Then he closed his eyes again and returned to his sleep.

General Salts had stood watching and now spoke with a single purpose. "Okay, get him ready."

"No." Ed stood to face the general. "He's not going anywhere. This man is in no shape to be moved."

"I'm not talking about moving him, Doctor. He'll stand up and receive this award like all the other recipients are doing," the general demanded.

"No." Ed stood his ground. "He's not leaving this bed."

"I will not have your insubordination, Doctor."

"I will not have you endangering my patient, General," Ed retorted.

"You are on thin ice, young man," Salts bellowed.

"What are you going to do, *fire me?*" Ed spoke loudly. He wasn't worried about being fired. The hospital was short on doctors, and he had been commended several times for outstanding work. He'd also stood up to this man in the past. They had a history of conflict, often in front of the troops. Ed's position seemed to be backed by the hospital's medical board, though, and Ed knew it. This man wasn't going to be around much longer either, and Ed knew that too.

General Salts turned and left the ward with the anger boiling beneath his starched military collar and ribbons.

A group of men at the far end of the room began to clap and shout praises to the doctor who remained. Ed spun sharply and gave them a stern look. They quieted quickly.

Ed turned back to his patient and his uncle, already forgetting about the clash between himself and the hospital administrator.

"He needs to sleep and get some rest. You can stay with him. It'd be good for him if you were here when he woke up."

"What was all that about?" Reid asked.

"They're giving out medals in the auditorium this morning. James is in line for a few. He'll still get them, even if he's not there. Salts just likes the military show. Don't worry about it." Ed brushed off the importance of the ceremony. He got up and moved to talk with a patient a few beds away.

Thirty minutes later, Ed was still making his rounds of patients in the room. A man in uniform came and talked with one of the nurses. She pointed toward James. When the soldier reached them, he addressed Reid.

"Sir"—the young soldier spoke loudly—"the general has requested that you attend the awards ceremony in lieu of your son. I am here to escort you."

Reid looked at the boy and offered a nervous laugh. He wasn't going anywhere, and this young man would probably suffer for it. "I'm sorry, but I'm not leaving my son right now."

Reid could see confusion in the young man's face. He didn't know what to do; he had expected compliance. "Sir, I have been

ordered to escort you to the administration auditorium for the ceremony."

Ed walked up, addressing the soldier. "What's wrong?"

"Sir"—the young man turned and snapped his heels with military precision—"I have been ordered by the general to bring a member of this soldier's family to the ceremony at the auditorium. This man refuses to come."

Reid smiled. "A member of his family, huh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Blade, would you represent *your brother* at the ceremony?" Reid asked.

Ed jumped in. "You don't have to say anything. Just stand there, and take the medals when they hand them to you."

Blade stared at his father.

Reid said, "Only if you want to. Nobody's making you."

Reid moved his eyes from his son to the young soldier standing next to him. The soldier's face showed anticipation. He wanted this. If he didn't bring someone back with him, he would have to answer to the general's wrath.

Reid looked at Ed and knew the doctor saw the humor in this too.

Reid could see what would happen in his mind's eye: a meticulous line of men in military uniforms stretching across the floor and a wild Indian dressed in dirty buckskin standing in the middle of them. The general would be outraged.

Would Blade get his feelings hurt if something negative or insulting was said to him? Reid didn't think so. Blade was as tough as his name. He probably already saw the humor in this too.

"Your choice Blade," Reid said.

The corners of Blade's mouth turned up slightly, and his eyes narrowed. "I will go."

Reid broke into a wide grin. Blade was perceptive; he knew what was going on.

"I'll wait right here," Reid said. "I want to hear about it when you get back."

The soldier turned and walked out the door with Blade following. Ed started to laugh out loud. "I can see it now! Oh, what I wouldn't give to be there to watch this. You are a hoot, Uncle Reid."

Blade followed the soldier into another building and into an auditorium filled with seats and people. A grouping of soldiers stood near the steps to a platform, and another group was seated near the front. The soldier escorted Blade to a seat behind the second group of soldiers.

A few eyes turned to look at Blade, but no one came to talk with him.

The ceremony started and speeches were made. Then the general stepped to the podium. The soldiers seated in the front were asked to stand and move to the platform beside the general. Blade and two other men were escorted to stand with them.

Eyes and heads turned toward the end of the line where Blade stood stone-faced, tall, and proud.

General Salts now saw the Indian too. His face turned scarlet as the tone of his speech became harsh.

The general began calling names, ranks, and the decoration being awarded. Distinguished service medals and crosses were awarded along with commendations and wound chevrons. Each man received his award and then returned to his seat. Now only two men remained on the platform. James's name was given, and Captain Wade Keller was introduced to the gathering.

Another man stepped to the podium and began a short speech giving Captain Keller's achievements in France. It looked to Blade like a special award was hung around the man's neck. Blade understood most of what the man was saying about Keller and agreed that this man deserved a distinguished medal for his bravery.

James's name was given, and a short speech describing his actions was also offered. The man giving the speech moved toward Blade.

"You're not Sergeant Britt, are you?" The man smiled.

"No. I am his brother," Blade said without expression.

"Where is Sergeant Britt?" the man asked.

"He does not feel well today," Blade answered.

The man smiled again. "Is he a patient here?"

"Yes."

The general sat at the side of the platform, fuming. This Indian was making a mockery of the ceremony. How could he have let this happen? Somebody was going to suffer for this. He didn't know who, but it would probably be the hotshot doctor who was always getting in his way.

The man speaking returned to the podium and ended his talk. Then he turned back to Blade and said, "Take me to your brother."

Blade began walking, saying nothing, and a small trail of men followed.

General Salts moved to his aide. "Get over there before they do, and make sure everything is in order."

The young soldier turned to exit through another door, and General Salts followed the assembly of men toward the building housing the gas and burn patients.

The day was getting hotter, and even though the windows were open, there was no breeze to cool the room. Men were being stripped down to their skivvies as the hospital staff tried to keep them cool. A young lady was moving among the patients with water, and ceiling fans ran throughout the room. The heat was causing discomfort for many of the patients, and the nurses were working hard to relieve what suffering they could. Both the men and the nurses were hot and sweaty.

One of the nurses had given Reid a bowl of water. Reid was patting his son's face and neck gently with the damp rag in an attempt to keep him cooler and more comfortable. Reid had removed his jacket, and it lay across the back of the chair behind him.

The young soldier who had been there earlier entered the room quickly. He stopped, looking as if he had just lost a contest with an obviously inferior opponent. Reid saw him throw his hands into the

air, and they dropped to his side. He shook his head, uncertain of what to do next. The soldier spotted a nurse and moved to her. She was shaking her head, determined not to do what the soldier was asking.

Then she called to another woman a few beds away. “Go get Dr. Stewart.”

Several men entered the room and slowed to look around as Blade continued to his father. Reid looked up and saw the men following Blade. Then Reid thought he recognized one of the faces from a photograph in the newspaper. Reid reached for Blade’s arm, and Blade helped his father stand.

Others moved out of the way as the man approached. The men with him surrounded James’s bed.

Reid nodded. “Good morning, Mr. President.”

President Wilson put his hand out to Reid. Reid extended his hand, and the president took Reid’s hand in both of his, holding it as he spoke. “I assume you are Sergeant Britt’s father?”

“Yes, sir.”

The president looked at James sleeping under the oxygen tent. “I’d like to thank you”—his eyes moved back to Reid—“on behalf of a grateful nation, for the service your son has given to this country. Please sit down.”

Reid continued to stand, holding to Blade. It wasn’t proper to sit in the presence of the president of the United States unless the president sat too. Someone brought the president a chair, and Reid sat with him.

The president asked, “How’s he doing?”

Reid looked back to his son. “I don’t know. We just got in yesterday, and he seemed okay then, but this morning has been rough.”

“Well,” President Wilson continued, “why don’t we pray for him?”

Without hesitation, President Wilson closed his eyes and raised his face toward heaven. “Lord God, we stand on your word. You said, ‘Behold, I will bring to (him) health and healing, and I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security.’¹ By

¹ Jeremiah 33:6 (ESV).

the name of Jesus, our Savior and your Son, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, I ask that all forms of sickness in this soldier’s body be removed. Heal him by your strength, and restore his health. Jesus called his disciples, and ‘he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.’¹ We are your disciples. We call on that power now. Sergeant Britt is healed, Lord, by your power.”

The president turned his attention back to Reid. “Are you a believer, Mr. Britt?”

“Yes, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.’² Everyone in our family believes, from my father to my youngest daughter,” Reid replied.

“How many children do you have?”

“Eleven,” Reid said.

“And this is one of them,” President Wilson asked, looking at Blade, who stood behind his father.

Reid reached his hand to Blade, and Blade took it. “Yes, this is one of my sons. This is Blade.”

There was no comment, no indication that the man saw an Indian; he was simply Reid’s son.

“Well, young man, what do you think of your brother’s bravery?”

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.³ It is what we are taught by God, to help others,” Blade said with no expression.

“Oh, that all of our soldiers would hold to these beliefs. These boys have given much.” The president stood up and looked around the room. “If I were not a Christian, I think I should go mad, but my faith in God holds me to the belief that he is in some way working out his own plans through human perversities and mistakes.”⁴

¹ Matthew 10:1b (KJV).

² Acts 16:31b.

³ Philippians 2:3.

⁴ “The Religion of Woodrow Wilson,” Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library and Museum, Staunton, Virginia; presidentwilson.org. Originally published in *Woodrow Wilson: An Intimate Memoir*, by Dr. Cary T. Grayson, 1960.

Another man handed the president a small box. President Wilson opened it and took out a medal attached to a blue ribbon. "I understand that your son's protective gear was damaged, but despite this, he entered the poison gas three times with his truck to rescue men who were trapped. In doing so, he saved forty-six lives. For this act of bravery, on behalf of the United States Congress, I am pleased to award him the Medal of Honor." He handed the medal to Reid. "Would you place it on your son's neck?"

Reid lifted the edge of the oxygen tent and laid the medal and ribbon across James's chest. He turned back to the president and extended his hand. "Thank you, sir, for this honor and for your prayer."

The two men shook hands again, and the president turned to Ben Wakley. "What's your name, son?"

Cleve walked into the courtroom and saw Mrs. Leachman and Mrs. Avery already seated in the gallery. He had reviewed the case and had talked with Mrs. Leachman. The trial had been moved up. Luke wasn't in town to testify, and Reid wasn't in town to represent her. Alexander Langston and the town council were doing everything imaginable to convict Mrs. Leachman of the theft of Mrs. Langston's silver.

Cleve sat his case down on the floor beside the table, but before he could stand up, Kathleen Avery was speaking. "Well, did you find him?"

Cleve faced the woman. "No. He's somewhere in the mountains of West Virginia. Reid doesn't know where, and there's no way to find him."

"I should have known he would do something like this," Mrs. Avery said with a nasty attitude.

Bonnie and William walked up behind them. "Mother, you can't blame this on Uncle Luke. He didn't know they were going to move the trial date forward," Bonnie said.

"Well, he knew it was coming. He shouldn't have left town. He didn't even tell us he was going." Kathleen's snide attitude sounded so much like her mother's had in the past. Bonnie cringed.

"Mother, he didn't need to tell you," Bonnie pleaded. "He thought he would be back in plenty of time."

"I just wish we could afford to hire a real lawyer, not this town puppet," Kathleen told her mother. Then turning to look at Cleve, she said, "He works for the town. What good's he gonna do?" She sat down with a huff and threw her arms across her chest.

"Mrs. Leachman, come with me," Cleve said. His tone remained pleasant. He wasn't disturbed by Kathleen Avery's obvious distrust of him. He knew he couldn't stop the conviction with the evidence that was now available, or not available; but he would do everything he could to get her a light sentence or, hopefully, release on probation.

Cleve knew the magistrate well. They worked together often. He was a fair and honest man. But with what had gone on within the town council in the last few months, Cleve hoped Roth Sparks had remained a decent and honorable man. But he had his doubts because of this schedule change.

Cleve pulled a chair out at the defense table to allow Mrs. Leachman to sit.

"All rise."

The courtroom stood.

"Be seated."

Everyone sat.

The magistrate made some opening remarks and then asked, "Are both parties ready?"

Cleve stood. "No, Your Honor."

"What seems to be the problem?"

"Due to the schedule change, our primary witness is unavailable," Cleve said.

"When will he be available?" the magistrate asked.

"In about a month."

"Why wasn't this addressed sooner?" The magistrate leaned back in his chair.

“Because the notification of schedule change was sent to the counselor that handled the hearing in April. He didn’t respond to the notice because he is also out of town. When Mrs. Leachman received the summons to appear today, she contacted her granddaughter, who contacted me. I found the court notice on Judge Britt’s desk with the other unopened mail. The deadline to contest the date had already passed.”

“Just out of curiosity, why hasn’t Judge Britt’s clerk been handling the mail?”

“He was out for two weeks with the flu. The notification came during that time.”

“I see. This does present a problem,” the magistrate said.

“Your Honor”—the prosecution lawyer stood up—“we recognize that the defense witness is not available, and we are willing to forego our witnesses also and proceed on evidence alone.”

“This is highly irregular, Your Honor.” Cleve would protest this move on the part of the prosecution to streamline the trial. Cleve didn’t understand why the Langstons were so set on convicting Mrs. Leachman. They had their silver back.

All Cleve knew was what Mrs. Leachman had told him, and he wasn’t sure how reliable this information was. He had been in Topeka when she was arrested and the hearing was held. His wife and daughter had joined him when school was over for the year. They had all stayed in the state’s capital until the legislative session was complete. He hadn’t talked with Luke or Reid either. They left town with their father a few days before his return.

“Let me take this into consideration, and we will meet back here at one o’clock,” Roth Sparks said. He stood up.

“All rise,” came the call.

After the magistrate left, Cleve turned to Della Leachman. “This is not going to go well. The fact that he is even considering continuing with this trial tells me he’s going to allow it to happen. Without witnesses, there is no one to say who the tea set belongs to. And without the tea set, there is no evidence. All they can do is look at the report. I read the hearing transcript, and Reid objected to the report, but it still hasn’t been changed. So we’re starting this trial with

lies. You’re going to be convicted. I want you to prepare yourself for it. But we won’t stop. We’ll file an appeal. That will take us out of town and away from these people that seem to be in cahoots with one another. Reid and Luke will be back by then.”

Mrs. Leachman listened to Cleve, and he thought she might be in shock. She stared at him but said nothing. She wasn’t scowling the way she usually did either. Her manner seemed nervous but at the same time calm.

“How’s the boy?” she asked.

“Excuse me?”

“Reid’s son, how’s he doing?”

“Last I heard from Reid was that he was better than Reid anticipated but still in bad shape,” Cleve answered. Since when did this woman care about anyone besides herself?

“That sounds encouraging,” Mrs. Leachman said. “I’ve been praying for him.”

“I’m sure they appreciate that,” Cleve said, a little confused by this woman. “Let’s go get some lunch and talk about what’s going to happen this afternoon.”

Cleve picked up his case and took the woman by the arm, leading her out the door. “We’re going to make an appeal to the magistrate’s mercy. You’re not a threat to anyone. We’re going to ask for probation and when the appeal comes...”

Travis had found the cemetery and had begun pulling weeds and saplings. Luke was helping cut the larger growth with a hatchet. They were slowly making progress. There hadn’t been much talking since locating the graves.

Travis felt a tranquil connection to those buried here. It was a place of reflection, feeling the deep innocent love and emotions of the past. A place where the earth accepted to herself the remains of the dead.

All that remained of Travis’s family was right here, in this cemetery. He had left this home with his daughter, Sarah, and it had torn

his heart out. He missed the ones buried here and longed to be with them again. To see and to remember.

But now, even in this serene place, this family seemed all the more distant to Travis. He had other family whom he loved, other family who had taken the place of these people. Travis looked at Luke and felt the love that he had for his son, for all his children.

Travis pulled at a clump of brush. It didn't move, and he prepared to pull again. Luke moved beside his father and took hold of it below his father's hand. Together they pulled, and the plant ripped from the ground easily.

Travis stopped to rest and smiled at his son. He moved to a nearby tree and leaned against it. He began talking, "Way back when I's young, I's strong. I could climb that hill." Travis looked across the valley to a steep rise with sharp rocks. "I put one foot in front a' t'ather an' could cover them miles easy. The cold an' snow would cover ever' thin', an' the wind blew through ya' coat like ya didn' 'ave one on. It didn' bother me a bit. I carried traps an' carcasses with me, an' I 'ad me a good huntin' dog. She could track anythin' an' weren' scared a nothin'."

Travis stopped suddenly and began sliding down the tree to sit on the ground. Luke reached out to grab him, guiding him more gently.

"It feels like I'm talkin' 'bout somebody else," Travis said. "That was a long time 'go." Travis closed his eyes. Luke smiled, knowing his father would be asleep soon.

Luke knew the condition of the cemetery was distressing for his father. The individual graves couldn't be distinguished one from another. The rocks that had covered the graves were scattered, and undergrowth covered the area.

Luke wanted his father to feel better. His father hadn't seemed happy all day. Not like he had been coming up the mountain. He'd found what he was looking for, and Luke didn't understand the change.

Luke continued cutting at the undergrowth. He pulled up a bush and found a gravestone, worn by almost a century of weather. It had sunk into the soft soil, and the engraved words were barely

visible above the level of the ground. Luke rubbed his hand over the worn letters.

Loretta Britt
Died 1838

Was this Dad's mother? Luke couldn't read the name on the stone next to hers, but the date was 1840. This was probably his dad's father. There was nothing left of their lives but these stones. Luke had never heard his father talk about his parents, except for the few comments about their deaths for the book.

These stones in front of Luke represented an ordinary life with nothing to show for it except a worn-out stone. His own mother's gravestone had more than this. It had the year she was born and said that she was a beloved wife and mother.

Luke heard the Spirit speak. *This will...serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, "What do these stones mean?" tell them... These stones are to be a memorial to the people... forever.*¹

"Yes, Father," Luke said quietly. "I respect them. They were Dad's family. I didn't know them, but he loved them."

Luke looked at the man napping against the tree, and he realized there was something left of them. Their son, his father. His brothers and sisters were also a part of these people. Luke suddenly realized that's why Reid had been so interested in coming here. They were his brother's people too.

Luke wondered what the stone would say above his father's head when his time came. His name would be there, and the date he died. No one knew his birthdate. They wouldn't be able to put that on his stone. Luke couldn't imagine what else would be carved, but he knew how he felt about the man.

Luke heard the spirit speak again. *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.*²

¹ Joshua 4:6-7.

² Psalm 116:15 (ESV).

"Yes, Lord, but don't take him yet. I need him right now," Luke prayed.

This man had always been Luke's hero. He lived in a way that set an example of integrity and sacrifice for others. His tombstone would mark the passing of a person who was loved by many, a man who left a legacy that made the world a better place.

From Luke's first memory, his father had been there, but he wasn't his father then. He was his father's friend. Luke didn't even remember his blood father. The man had died when Luke was young. But Travis had been there helping at the farm, and then he was there all the time. Luke loved this man.

The Spirit spoke again. *As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.*¹

All Luke could do for him now was to help his father find what he had lost. The love held within his memories.

Cleve Britt and Della Leachman stood outside the courtroom with Kathleen Avery.

"It happened just like you said it would," Mrs. Leachman commented.

"At least you won't have to go to jail," Cleve said. "Stay home and stay out of sight. If they are going to review your probation in six months, don't do anything that will cause them to question your actions."

"I understand. I'll do what Reid told me to do in the beginning," Mrs. Leachman said.

"This just isn't right," Cleve said. "I'm starting on the appeal tomorrow. Reid should be home before I get it done, and he'll sign it too. That should give more endorsement and cause the appeals court to accept it more readily."

¹ Psalm 103:13.

"You do everything you can, do you hear me?" Mrs. Avery yelled. "This has been the biggest pile of rubbish since it started. Luke should have never let this get this far—"

"Oh, now, Kathleen. Luke didn't do this." Della Leachman tried to calm her daughter.

"He could have stopped it!"

"Mrs. Avery, you have to understand—" Cleve tried again to explain that Luke was fired, but Kathleen Avery just wasn't listening.

"I understand enough! Your brother started this when he brought that woman to my house. No! He started it months before that, when he questioned me about that silver..."

She kept talking as her mother put a hand to Kathleen's shoulder and turned her around, pushing her toward the door.

Mrs. Leachman looked back at Cleve. "I'm sorry," she mouthed.

Cleve turned around to go the other direction and saw the mayor and town council chairman standing in the hallway.

"What were you doing defending that woman?" the mayor asked.

"Trying to uphold the law," Cleve replied.

"As the town's lawyer, you don't need to be involved any further," the council chairman said.

"As a private citizen and a lawyer with a private practice, I have the right to defend whoever I choose," Cleve told them.

The Spirit spoke to Cleve. *In every case that comes before you from your people who live in the cities—whether bloodshed or other concerns of the law, commands, decrees or regulations—you are to warn them not to sin against the Lord; otherwise his wrath will come on you and your people. Do this, and you will not sin.*¹

"Not when it affects this town," the mayor was saying. "Your position as this town's attorney has been terminated."

Cleve spoke what the Spirit said to him. "But you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil, you have eaten the fruit of deception."² Cleve pointed his finger at the men. "Do not be deceived:

¹ Second Chronicles 19:19.

² Hosea 10:13a.

God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.”¹

The mayor huffed as he turned to leave.

The Spirit spoke to Cleve again. *For not knowing about God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.*²

The ground was clean of saplings and pine straw, of dead leaves and undergrowth. The tombstones had been propped up, supported by rocks. Travis just seemed to know where each grave was and who was in it. His grandparents, three aunts who had died young, an uncle who died while still a baby, and his parents were gathered in a tight grouping in two rows. His wife and two sons were on the right side.

It took several days, but rocks were now neatly stacked over each grave. A low rock wall surrounded the small plot of land. Travis sat on the wall as Luke straightened a few rocks. Then Luke sat down beside his father, putting his arm around the old man.

Travis didn’t seem to notice Luke was there; at least he gave no indication of it.

The old man looked toward heaven and began to pray softly, “All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.”³ ‘Show me, Lord, my life’s end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Everyone is but a breath, even those who seem secure.’⁴

¹ Galatians 6:7–8.

² Romans 10:3.

³ Hebrews 11:13.

⁴ Psalm 39:4–5.

Luke listened to his father’s prayer and wondered if his father was ready to die. Did he want to go here, with this family? Did he want to be buried here? Luke didn’t want to believe this.

Scripture came to Luke’s mind. *However many years anyone may live, let them enjoy them all. But let them remember the days of darkness, for there will be many.*¹ Luke realized his father was just remembering. His father had good memories, but he had dark memories too. Reid had told him that their father had been living in his memories recently, and Luke had seen this since they had been on the mountain.

Travis stood up and walked to the middle of the cemetery. He raised his hands toward heaven and began to sing praises to his Lord.

Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever;
wisdom and power are his.

He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings
and raises up others.

He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to
the discerning.

He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows
what lies in darkness,

and light dwells with him. I thank and praise
you, God of my ancestors:

You have given me wisdom and power,
you have made known to me what we asked of
you,

Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever.²

Luke listened to his father, and a peace washed over him. His father wasn’t asking to die; his father was asking how long he had left. Luke stood and moved to his father, putting his arms around the old man to hug him. Travis reached around his son, returning the hug.

Travis turned and said, “Look at that beautiful sunset.”

¹ Ecclesiastes 11:8a.

² Daniel 2:20–23a, 20a.

Luke looked behind him, to the west. He had looked this way before and saw range after range of beautiful mountains. But now, the sunset in the sky was bold as the blazing fire in a winter hearth. It seemed to settle Luke's heart further, like poetry from God across a flame of red and gold.

"Dad, I'm glad I got to come with you."

Travis smiled. "Luke, I'm tired. I'm wanna sit 'ere with Ruth by myself far a little while. I'll be back ta camp in a little bit."

"Okay, Dad."

Luke moved down the hill toward the location of their camp, at his father's grandfather's farm. Luke realized he was happy. His spirit felt fresh and new, surrounded by this unknown world his father seemed so comfortable in. For the first time in months, both his body and his mind were relaxed.

Luke built a fire and started cleaning the squirrels he had shot earlier in the day. It wouldn't take long to cook them, and they would be ready to eat when his father got to camp.

When night fell, it came across the mountain like a pair of shadowy wings. You could see the darkness descend from the trees. The forest seemed deeper than it had been the last few nights. The black wrapped the clearing like a slow-growing cocoon of protection. Luke felt at peace.

The big man heard a noise and looked up to see two yellow eyes in the covering. They were haunting, disturbing. Almost at the same instant, he heard his father coming through the brush. His father's shirt caught a reflection of the firelight, and Luke turned to look. Then there was movement just to his father's left, and Luke thought he saw a white animal moving through the undergrowth.

"The white thing," Luke told himself softly.

Luke picked up his rifle and ran toward his father. He looked to the area where he had seen the white animal and saw nothing. His eyes scanned the darkness back to where he had seen the yellow eyes. Nothing there either.

"What is it?" Travis asked, raising his rifle and turning to watch with Luke.

"Yellow eyes," Luke responded. He wasn't going to admit that he had seen the white animal again.

In an instant, there came the sound of two animals fighting not far away. The two men froze, watching the shadows. Just as suddenly, all got quiet. They stood listening, watching.

"Well, it's gone now," Travis said calmly, turning back toward the camp.

They ate supper in silence and then relaxed. Luke leaned back against his saddle.

In the deep night came the serenade of a single owl accompanied by the scratching of unseen animals. The leaves and pine straw rustled as something moved across the ground. Luke sat up, scanning the area with his eyes and his ears. The clouds that covered the sky moved eastward at a steady gentle pace. Occasionally, the star light would shine through. The silhouettes of the trees against the sloping ground gave a rippling effect.

The night began to seem darker to Luke than it should have been. The soft sounds of the nocturnal ghosts were released in Luke's mind. The shadows and movement of invisible creatures making their way through the night began to disturb Luke. He looked to his father. Travis didn't seem to be alarmed.

"Relax," Luke told himself. "There's nothing there." He lay down, propping his head on his saddle again. The wind shifted. It was quiet now. The soft breeze blew through the leaves as it sounded a melody, soft and comforting, calming Luke's heart.

There was a rustling behind Luke, and he jerked around, ready to reach for his gun. Something was moving slowly. He smiled as the moonlight broke through the clouds, and Luke caught sight of a young doe coming into the clearing at the side of the house. Luke felt like a tenderfoot, disturbed by every noise. He relaxed, offering a quick prayer of thanks for keeping them safe. Then there was a far-away scream that brought a chill to Luke's spine. He bolted upright.

His father noticed Luke's disturbed movement. Travis said, "'E's a long way off. 'E's got what 'e's lookin' far tanight. 'E'll spend the rest a the night eatin' 'is supper. Then 'e's gonna be too lazy ta wanna go anywhere else."

Travis was sitting on a stump but struggled as he got to his feet. He moved to sit on the sagging steps of his grandfather's house. Luke watched his father's slow guarded movement in the dim moonlight and wondered how his father was feeling. Luke knew his father would never complain. He probably wouldn't tell Luke the truth if he asked. Luke knew his father had used his shoulder too much the last few days and it was probably bothering him. He needed to care for the old man instead of being disturbed by every sound. He moved to sit next to his father.

"I's sittin' right 'ere when Papaw told me 'bout Ruth," Travis began reminiscing quietly. "I spent most a' my life right 'ere in this house, sittin' right 'ere on this step 'til the war came. It don' feel like 'ome anymore."

Travis began to think of Kansas, Sarah, and his other children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. He was ready to go home, ready to get back to Harris and be with his family.

"I wonder 'ow James is doin'." Travis smiled. "Ya think Blade's got ever'body at that hospital scared a' 'im yet? I think that boy likes ta do that ta people." Travis began to chuckle thinking of the boy he had grown so attached to.

The hospital had an agreement with a few of the railroads to transport their patients home. Edison had gotten the transportation clerk to make the arrangements. Then Reid had sent a message to Luke at the hotel in Galore, telling him they would meet in Morgantown, at the Lotus Blossom Hotel, near the river.

Reid, Blade, and James made the trip and arrived three days early to find Travis and Luke were already waiting for them. Ed had contacted a local doctor, and James was provided oxygen while they waited for their train.

The Summitt Express had changed its route and was making a special stop, just for them. It would run straight through to Denver, except for stops along the way to pick up supplies and fuel. The group would change trains in Saline for the last leg home.

The five men had passes for a chair car. A private party on the train had agreed to share the car with the returning war hero and his family.

The train got into town early and was waiting at the station when the Britt's arrived by taxi. Two railroad employees quickly took the Britt's few belongings to load on the train. A smartly dressed older gentleman stood near the steps at the rear of the car with a scowl on his face. Reid saw him watching them.

They had the look of an odd crew—big brawny boisterous Luke and an old man who looked more like a mountain man now than when they had started their journey several weeks ago. Reid displayed the small quiet man who struggled to move. The trip had been hard on him, as he knew it would be. He was accompanied by his sons Blade and James.

Blade made everyone's head turn. He was tall and broad shouldered with tight muscles. His long black hair was topped with his signature leather headband. A stern stoic expression stayed on his face continually, making him look like he was mad at the world. He was dressed in a faded red work shirt, waist overalls, and a stained buckskin jacket, which he didn't need in July. Both he and Reid had on identical moccasin boots, although Blade's showed more abuse. But James was the most distressing to look at. He was required to travel in uniform, so he was sharply dressed, but the soldier was underweight and moved cautiously. His face was pale and scarred with an array of ugly red-and-gray markings with patches of skin that looked to display no color at all. His hands were red and rutted with the ends of a few fingers missing. The Indian catered to him.

Seeing the gentleman's face, Reid commented softly to the others that they had irritated their host by making him wait.

Luke, being the friendly gent that he was, waved a greeting and voiced a loud "Good afternoon" and then began to help his father up the deep steps of the train's car. He returned to help Reid. By the time James was seated, the man had moved into the chair car. He continued to watch them from his seat at the far end of the car.

The chair car was larger than most of the other train's cars, and plush. It was much nicer than the Britts had expected. Not many people rode in chair cars. Tickets were expensive and rare to find.

It was a long car made of metal siding instead of the wood the older cars were made from. Thick dark-blue carpet covered the entire floor; and large cushioned swivel chairs, also blue, lined each side of the car next to the windows. Small stationary tables spotted the area between the chairs. There were five chairs on each side of the door. Each side of the car also had a sofa near the middle. The same seating was available on the other end of the car. The two sections were separated by small enclosed washrooms on either side. A walkway lay open down the middle of the car.

Reid would have gone to introduce himself and thank the man for being so patient, but he was afraid the train would begin to move while he was standing. He didn't want the jerking of the train to cause him to land in the man's lap or on the floor, so he waited.

He had made the right decision. Connectors and couplings began to moan, and rattle as the cars were pulled into motion. The car began to pitch and sway.

When Reid thought the forward motion was consistent, he and Blade made their way to the group of four men and two ladies seated at the other end of the car.

"Good afternoon," Reid offered a greeting. "May I ask who our host is?"

The nice-looking older gentleman turned their way and answered, "I'm Anthony Rosenberg, vice president of the railroad."

Reid moved to stand near him with Blade holding to Reid as the car shook and wobbled. Reid repositioned his cane and held out his hand. "I'm Reid Britt. I'd like to thank you for allowing us to tag along. This will be much more comfortable than the passenger cars. We'll make it home much sooner and with more ease than I anticipated. This is one of my sons. We call him Blade."

The man, and everyone else, stared at Blade curiously. Blade stood stone-faced, his eyes fixed on the man in the seat, but he didn't offer a greeting. The man nodded his head.

"Odd name, I must say," the man commented.

"Yes, it is, but it fits him well," Reid replied, smiling. "Another of my sons is with us, along with one of my brothers and my father."

Rosenberg nodded. "I understood it was just you and two sons coming out of Washington."

"Yes, sir, it was," Reid replied. "My father and brother were visiting in West Virginia and joined with us in Morgantown. I didn't mean for there to be a misunderstanding about this. I'd be happy to pay their way."

The man nodded again. "What do you do, Mr. Britt?"

"I'm a federal judge."

"Interesting," was all the man said.

"Well," Reid said, "I'll leave you alone, and I'll get back to my end of the car. Again, thank you. Let me know what I owe you."

With that, Reid turned to Blade, and they began moving slowly back to the others.

The trip continued uneventful. Both parties stayed at their own end of the car. But when James started coughing, Luke noticed they had attracted the attention of the others. Travis moved to attend James. When the coughing stopped, Blade helped James to a couch, and James lay down, struggling to breathe. Blade sat on the carpet beside him.

A service attendant appeared and lay blankets and pillows on the other couch. "Is there anything you need, sir?" the man said, looking at Reid.

"No," Reid replied. "Thank you for those."

"Would you like some dinner when it's ready?" the attendant asked.

"That'd be nice, thank you," Reid said. Food was something they had not expected. They had packed a few items in the bag and had canteens of water that would last the trip if they were rationed properly. Both were in the storage compartment beside the door. A short time later, the steward arrived with coffee, stuffed bell peppers, and baked apples for each of the men.

As the day continued, it seemed that any service they needed arrived without being requested, but there was no contact between the two groups of passengers.

Night fell and the gas lamps in the car were lit. The people at the rear of the car enjoyed themselves. They laughed, talked loudly, and played games as they traveled. They didn't stop their fun until well into the night.

In St. Louis, the train pulled onto a sidetrack, and the two ladies and two gentlemen got off the train and climbed into a taxi.

The railroad vice president and another man talked quietly for a few minutes and then moved toward Reid and his family. James was lying on one couch asleep with Blade sitting motionless on the floor beside him. Reid was in the nearest chair. Travis lay sleeping on the other couch, taking his usual early afternoon nap. Luke sat beside Reid.

"May we join you?" the vice president asked.

"Please." Reid indicated the two chairs beside Travis.

"How's he doing?" the other man asked, nodding toward James.

"He's okay. He's just tired," Reid replied, knowing this was not the truth.

"My wife always has to stop at Leicester's when we're in St. Louis. We just left New York, and we've got all sorts of nice shops in Denver, but that one store just calls to her." Rosenberg laughed. "Does your wife have that one store that she loves?"

The man seemed different now without the others. He was friendlier and more outgoing.

Reid laughed. "No, she makes her own clothes."

"Really! Lucille made hers when we first started out, but now she thinks she's too good for handmade dresses." Anthony Rosenberg laughed again.

"Your wife doesn't keep up with the latest fashion?" the other man said.

Reid reached his hand out to the other man. "Reid Britt."

The other man stepped forward, shaking Reid's hand, and then reached out to Luke. "Donald Cryer."

"Luke Britt."

"To answer your question, no, she doesn't. She cares nothing for fashion." Reid smiled.

"You are a lucky man," Rosenberg said. "Half of my free time is spent waiting for my wife as she shops."

"Where are you from?" Cryer asked Luke.

"Harris, Kansas," Luke replied.

"Ever been to Denver or Chicago?"

"I went to school in Denver. Visited Chicago once," Luke said. "I've got a sister that lives there."

"A sister, huh? I've been trying to figure out where I know you from," Cryer glanced around at Travis and then looked at Luke and moved his eyes to Reid again. "Is your wife an Indian?"

"Yes," Reid responded. This could be an obvious assumption since he had an Indian son.

Cryer nodded. "You were a lawyer, worked for the Department of Justice."

Travis had been awake and listening. He now sat up, paying close attention to the conversation.

Cryer pointed at Reid. "You're Red Crowder."

Reid watched the two men with no change of expression on his face and said nothing. Luke stood, moving to stand beside Reid in a menacing manner. Blade saw Luke's posture and stood up too, knowing that something was wrong and danger was present.

Cryer saw the protective stance of both men. "Oh no, no! Don't worry." He put his hand out, reassuring everyone that there was no threat. "I respect what you did. That trial in Kansas City ended my career with that law firm out of Denver. I was basically blackmailed into defending those guys. I swore I'd never let myself be put in a position like that again."

Reid still said nothing.

Travis spoke, moving to sit on the edge of the chair Luke had just gotten out of. "We trust ya ta keep this ta ya'self. That was a long time 'go, but there may still be folks out there that would be bent on revenge."

"Oh, I understand," Cryer said. "Threats were made. I heard the talk. Those are not the kind of people to forget."

Reid picked up his cane clumsily and pushed himself to his feet. He moved out the door to stand on the portico, looking into the train yard.

"I'm so sorry," Cryer said. "I didn't mean to upset anyone."

Blade began to follow his father, but Travis stopped him. "Blade, ya stay with James. I'll see after ya' pa." Then turning to the two men, he added, "Reid don' talk 'bout it. I'm askin' ya not ta either."

The two men didn't move but continued to watch as Travis walked out the door. Then they turned their attention to Luke and Blade.

Travis stopped behind Reid and put a hand on his shoulder. "But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."¹ Travis said, "It was a long time 'go. Ya need ta farget 'bout it."

Reid nodded. "Well, I've forgotten. I don't remember him." The younger man was silent a few moments and then added, "The prudent see danger and take refuge."² I've hidden myself in Harris for years. I feel safe there, but I need to 'Be alert, stand firm in the faith, be brave, be strong."³ If that man remembers, other people do too."

"Whoever goes to the Lord for safety, whoever remains under the protection of the Almighty, can say to him, 'You are my defender and protector. You are my God; in you I trust.' He will keep you safe from all hidden dangers,"⁴ Travis said.

Reid turned toward his father.

Travis wrapped his arms around his son as he continued, "He will cover you with his wings; you will be safe in his care; his faithfulness will protect and defend you. You need not fear any dangers at night or sudden attacks during the day."⁵

Reid hugged his father in return and nodded. Reid continued the scripture. "(I) will look and see how the wicked are punished. (I)

¹ Philippians 3:13b-14.

² Proverbs 22:3a.

³ First Corinthians 16:13 (GNT).

⁴ Psalm 91:1-3a (GNT).

⁵ Psalm 91:4-5 (GNT).

have made the Lord (my) defender, the Most High (my) protector, and so no disaster will strike (me), no violence will come near (my) home."¹

Travis continued to hug his son. "That's right son, 'God will put his angels in charge of you to protect you wherever you go.'² Ya can 'andle those men." Travis took a step back to look at his son's face. "They're no danger ta us. Let's go back inside."

Reid nodded and smiled sadly at his father, a little embarrassed that he let his fear get the better of him.

The two men returned to find Rosenberg and Cryer in a discussion with Luke. All three were laughing. James was sitting on the couch beside Blade. The Indian had a rare, happy look on his face. The soldier looked pleased. It didn't show in his face, but Reid recognized joy in his son's body language.

Luke was good at distracting people from their problems and turning their attention to something pleasing. This trip had been good for him. Luke didn't seem as depressed as he had been when they left Harris. The laughter made him seem like his old self.

Reid sat down beside Cryer without a word. There was a soft shyness to his presence. The judge had the look of a warm soul, searching for a friend. Cryer acknowledged Reid with an easy welcoming smile.

Luke said, "Dad, tell them about that train robbery near Meade and those stupid outlaws that tried to hide the loot on the same train that they robbed."

Travis smiled his crooked smile. "Us marshals was called in after we got the report from the railroad 'bout a missin'..."

Late in the afternoon, the women returned with boxes and boxes of purchases. Two stewards gathered the packages and disappeared to put them away.

¹ Psalm 91:8-10 (GNT).

² Psalm 91:11 (GNT).

The engineer waited for another train to pass and then pulled onto the main track just as dinner was being served.

As night fell, the evening got louder at the rear of the car. Portable chairs and a game table were moved into position. The six occupants got involved in a rowdy and competitive card game as they drank from small delicate glasses. The men at the front of the car got quiet. Luke turned the lamps down, and their end of the car remained dimly lit by one lamp.

There was no point in trying to talk over the noise of the competitors. There was nothing to say, anyway. There was no use in trying to sleep either, but four of the men tried to make themselves comfortable, anyway. Blade walked out onto the portico to sit on the steps in the dark.

Luke sprawled out in the middle of the carpet with a pillow and was soon snoring, despite the noise. Reid lay down but got up when James began to cough. Travis heard his grandson too. He stood up, heading that direction when he saw Reid moving toward James. Travis joined Reid to help him move across the swaying car and then retrieved medicine from a bag before heading to the couch Reid had just vacated. Reid sat in the corner, next to the washroom wall, hidden in the shadows with James's head on a pillow against his leg.

Reid knew what it was like to struggle to breathe. That was a memory that didn't go away and a concern he still held. Reid also remembered what it was like to want to cough all the time. The comments made about Red Crowder just made Reid's memories and fears more vivid. Although Reid's and his son's injuries were different, the effect on their bodies was similar, except James's cough was much deeper and stole his breath.

Reid stroked his son's head gently and held to his shoulder as his coughing continued. When it finally stopped, James was exhausted and lay limp on the couch, gasping for air.

Reid realized the other end of the car had gotten quiet and seemed to have settled in for the night. Travis lay down to make himself comfortable on the other couch. The rhythm of the train's wheels and the rocking motion were lulling them all to sleep. The car was now peaceful, and the only noise came from the clicking of

the wheels against the track and the squeaking of the car's joints. But Reid could hear his son's thick breathing over the noise.

"It feels like...my lungs aren't there... I can't find them...can't get air to them." James's broken words came softly.

"My ribs feel like they're...collapsing." James gasped. "They keep on hurting even after I stop coughing. Is that what you feel like when your throat bothers you?"

Reid's eyes moistened. He hated seeing his son in pain, but hearing him talk about it was even worse. Reid knew James's mind had been on his own injuries, wondering if he was going to get better. But he now realized James was thinking of him too. His son understood the effects of their injuries were similar.

"Yes, it does. Only I can get some air, just not enough. I get dizzy and want to sleep. The pain in my ribs comes on slowly. It might take a couple of hours, but then it stays."

"I always took breathing for granted." The soldier sucked in air with a force that pulled at his seared lungs painfully. Then he couldn't seem to let it out. He clutched at his father just before a hard cough came. Agonizingly, the urge to cough eased in intensity and passed. Now there was no air left. Reid held to his son. They both knew James could have trouble on this trip, and Ed had cautioned them about it. But James had wanted to go home. Ed had reluctantly agreed, hoping and praying James was well enough to make the trip.

James's eyes teared just as he took in a short gasp and began breathing again.

After a few minutes, James said, "Ed said this may not get any better."

"I know," his father replied, "he told me that too. But the doctors don't know for sure. They're just guessing. It's all new to them. We're not giving up, though. God can do wondrous things in the human body. Neither you nor I should be alive, but we are."

"Dad, did Matt know he was dying?" James was letting his fear ask questions in the dark that would never have been asked in the light of day.

"Yes, he did."

"Clay didn't know. It caught him by surprise," James said.

“I know. Uncle Cleve let me read your letter,” Reid said. “It was nice of you to write what you did. It was a comfort to him and to your aunt Jenny.”

“Do you think I could die and not know it was coming?”

Reid hugged his son gently. “It doesn’t matter. We’re both prepared for it, just like Matt and Clay were. You accepted Jesus as your savior. ‘For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.’”¹ Tears came to Reid’s eyes again. “This is not our home. ‘Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.’”²

James was quiet for a few minutes, and Reid thought he might have fallen asleep, but then James spoke again. “What am I going to do? I can’t go back to school like this. I can’t work the ranch. I can’t even go to the gardens. All I’m going to be able to do is sit on the porch and look at the trees.” He laughed sadly. “I won’t even be able to see the trees. They’re too far away.”

“‘The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame.’³ God will tell you what you need to do when the time is right. He won’t abandon you. ‘The steps of a man are established by the Lord, when he delights in his way.’”⁴

“Dad, do you think—” But another cough interrupted James.

Reid held to James, praying for his son as the coughing continued almost to the point of choking. Reid saw his father’s eyes open, watching. James rolled further to face the floor, afraid his insides would come up. Ed had told Reid it was good when James coughed something up. It cleared the soldier’s lungs of unwanted fluids and matter that obstructed his breathing. Even a small amount of blood could mean healing.

¹ Second Corinthians 5:1.

² Philippians 3:20–21.

³ Isaiah 58:11a.

⁴ Psalm 37:23 (ESV).

Reid began rubbing his son’s back. Ed had also told him to do this. It helped to move the matter around in the soldier’s lungs, breaking it up so that a cough could expel the blockage. The coughing began to slow and eased in intensity. James quieted and rolled back toward his father, sweat covering the injured man’s brow. James looked up at the man caring for him, his eyes silently pleading for help that he knew was unavailable. He needed oxygen.

Watching his father’s face, James felt the love being offered. He continued to struggle for breath and slowly closed his eyes. If he was going to die, this was where he wanted to do it—in his father’s arms.

Cryer stepped to Reid and offered him a damp bar towel.

“Thanks,” Reid said, taking the towel and dabbing the sweat from his son’s face.

Cryer sat down on the floor at Reid’s feet, leaning on the wall of the washroom. “Sounds like he’s having a rough time.”

“Yes, he is.”

“Who was Clay?” Cryer asked.

Reid realized Cryer had heard the whole conversation. Reid didn’t want to talk, but this man was trying to help, offering his friendship. “A cousin. Four of them enlisted together. He was with Clay when he died.”

“That’s rough.” The man hesitated and then asked, “Who was Matt?”

Reid took a deep breath. “My oldest son. He died about five years ago.”

“Were you with him when he died?”

“Yes.”

“What happened to him?”

“He was shot.”

Cryer grunted in response.

James’s thick frothy breathing could easily be heard over the noise of the train when the men quit talking. Reid looked at James’s face and saw the perspiration and pained expression, even as he slept. Reid wiped his son’s face again and then his neck, pushing the damp cloth inside James’s shirt to wipe his shoulders and chest too. Reid put his fist against his son’s chest and rubbed it hard with his knuckles.

James rolled his head slightly, and his breathing began to slowly calm. A deep guttural snore gradually took the place of his hard breaths.

“What’s it going to take for him to get better?” Cryer asked.

Reid hesitated, trying to decide how much to tell the stranger. No secrets, he reminded himself. God had already dealt with him about this. He didn’t want any more of God’s discipline.

“Time. The doctors don’t think he’ll improve much, but we’re going to show them differently. He’s going to make it.”

“He doesn’t sound too sure of it,” Cryer offered, nodding toward James.

“He will. ‘Certainly the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret plan.’¹ I was with James at the hospital in Bethesda when ‘Jesus told (me), ‘Go back home. Your son is healed!’”²

“God talked to you?” Cryer questioned.

“Yes. He’s going to heal James. He won’t let him die like this. God has other plans for him.”

“Do you really think you heard from God?” Cryer asked.

Reid gave a soft chuckle. “From ancient times no one has heard, no one has listened, no eye has seen any God except You, who acts on behalf of the one who waits for Him.”³ Reid looked up toward heaven, no longer talking with Donald Cryer but talking to God. “Yet Lord, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You are our potter; we all are the work of Your hands.”⁴ Lowering his head, Reid said, “God talks when you listen, shaping our lives and instructing us in his ways. You just have to be focused on him.”

Blade spoke from the nearest chair. He had entered without either of the men realizing it. “See to it...that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.”⁵ ‘If you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.’⁶

Cryer seemed bewildered as he looked at Blade. These were the first words he had heard the young Indian speak, and he spoke with authority, so sure that his words were true.

The railroad’s lawyer continued to sit with James and Reid, talking about nothing in particular. When he stood up, he said, “Do you need anything?”

“No,” Reid replied. “Thank you.”

“Yell at me if you need anything. I’m going to try to sleep,” Cryer said. “You going to sleep?”

Reid shook his head. “Probably not.”

“Well...” Cryer wanted to say, “Good night,” but couldn’t bring himself to do it. These two men wouldn’t have a good night, not if the young soldier continued to have trouble breathing. “I’ll see you in the morning.” He nodded to Blade, then turned around, and headed back to his end of the car.

¹ Amos 3:7a (NASB).

² John 4:50a (TLB).

³ Isaiah 64:4 (HCSB).

⁴ Hebrews 3:12.

⁵ Hebrews 3:7b–8a.

⁶ Hebrews 3:15.



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The Summitt Express pulled onto the sidetrack. They would have a short wait for the approaching train to pass.

The afternoon had been hot, but the shade from the surrounding trees and the breeze that flew in the open windows cooled the air, keeping the occupants comfortable most of the day. Now that the train stopped moving, it got hot quickly. Tomorrow would be worse as they moved into the bare Kansas countryside where the sun beat down on the land and reflected back to give a person a double dose of the heat.

Thankfully, the sun was now setting, and the temperature would begin to drop. The sun cast a beautiful orange glow across the western horizon.

Blade and Reid went onto the front portico with James, watching in the distance as the town to the north closed its businesses and began to slow to a restful crawl for the evening.

James was unable to see the town and looked into the nothingness that his eyes saw. "I don't know if I can take the quiet," James said jokingly. "There's nothing to look at and nothing to listen to."

Reid smiled. "You'll get used to it, and maybe even learn to appreciate it."

The approaching train whistle caught their attention, and they turned to watch the other train whiz past just a few feet away. Over the noise, they could hear the fireman begin scooping coal and throwing it forward, causing a banging against the metal siding of the tender.

Reid saw James's eyes moving, watching the cars of the passing train.

The rhythm of the fireman's shovel stopped abruptly, and Blade noticed. Then they all heard the shots just as the other train's caboose passed.

Reid said, "James, get Luke."

James turned to go into the car. "Uncle Luke, Dad needs you."

Luke stepped out the door to see Reid and Blade both on alert.

Softly, Reid said, "There was gunfire toward the engine."

"Get inside," Luke instructed.

Luke followed them in and reached into the storage compartment to pull out two soft-sided rifle cases and a suitcase. He passed a rifle case to Blade, who immediately unlatched it and loaded the rifle, putting several rounds in his pocket. The other case was passed to Travis.

Blade turned toward the men at the other end of the car. They didn't seem to be paying attention.

The young Indian walked toward Cryer and Rosenberg. "There is trouble. Do you have a gun?"

His words were so abrupt and shocking that they simply turned and looked at him.

Blade continued, "If you do not have a gun, I suggest you move to the floor in the center of the car." Even though he was a young man, he spoke with the authority of someone that knew his business and expected people to obey.

With these words, Blade walked through the group and cautiously looked to either side of the platform before moving to the car behind them.

Cryer, Rosenberg, and a third man turned to look toward the other end of the car. Luke was leaving through the door, tying the holster to his leg. Travis had a rifle out and was pulling his gun belt from a suitcase. Reid moved toward James with a shoulder harness on, the gun clearly visible in the attached holster.

When the shock wore off, Rosenberg got up and moved quickly toward Reid.

He asked, "What's going on?"

"There were gunshots near the engine. I think you're being robbed," Reid said quietly. "Move everyone to the floor right here."

Reid indicated the area around the washrooms, the same area where Blade had told them to go. "Leave a path. Get low."

Rosenberg did have a gun, and he returned to the storage compartment at the other end of the car to retrieve it. He moved the others to obey Reid, and then he began to move out the door. They all heard a single shot.

"Stop," Reid called. "Let the others check this out. Is there anything of value on the train?"

Rosenberg responded, "Robbers always go after the registered mail bag. I don't know what's in it. There's a safe in the car behind us."

"Well, unless you're good with that gun and know what you're doing," Reid said, "I suggest you stay here and let the others take care of this. Are there any guards on the train?"

"One, in the car behind us."

"How many attendants?" Reid asked.

"Three."

"Anyone else?"

"Conductor, engineer, fireman, brakeman. Oh, and there's a postal clerk."

There was gunfire near the front of the next car, and the cars jerked as they began to move forward, the couplings rattling.

A bandit appeared from between two boxcars just behind the tender. He swung at Luke, but Luke saw him coming and threw himself to the ground under the train. The bandit went after Luke, firing his gun around the wheels Luke had disappeared behind. But Luke had made a full circle around the wheels and came at the man from behind, pulling him from under the train by the legs and slamming the man's head against the rail. The man was out cold.

Luke pulled the man again, and he flew past Luke to land near the weeds at the side of the tracks.

Luke turned back toward the engine as the train began to pick up speed. He ran for the ladder on the side of the tender and grabbed to pull himself up.

Blade moved across the first platform to the service car. He opened the door carefully to find one attendant unconscious and two others tied and gagged. A man stood in the doorway at the other end

of the car, looking out. Blade began moving that direction carefully as the two men on the floor watched. Blade reached into his boot and pulled out a knife.

The man at the door turned to look back into the room, and Blade quickly flipped the knife and threw it at the man. It lodged in his throat as Blade ran at him, catching the outlaw as he collapsed onto the floor. Blade dragged him into the car and pulled the knife out, wiping the bloody blade on the man's shirt. He placed his knife back in its sheath. The young man peeked around the edge of the door to find another man standing on the platform. He backed up slightly, preparing to attack the man from behind when the train lurched forward. Blade stumbled, banging the door, but he remained on his feet. The outlaw turned to see what caused the noise behind him and came at Blade.

Blade sprang at him, and the force threw them both from the train. The man hit the ground on his back, breathless, as Blade landed on top of him. The butt of the rifle slammed into the man's head, and the man was knocked unconscious.

Blade jumped up and ran for the caboose that was moving away.

Travis raised his rifle and opened the door to the mail car to find a single man going through the desk. The man looked up and quickly raised the pistol in his hand. Travis fired, and the man was knocked to the floor. The former marshal moved forward and stepped on the man's gun hand, reaching for the gun with his twisted hand. Using his authoritative marshal's voice, Travis said, "Don' try it."

There was a ball of twine on the desk in the mail car. Travis had the man use it to tie his own feet to a stud in the car's wall, and then Travis tied his hands to another. The wound wasn't serious if he got medical attention in time. That all depended on the other outlaws.

Travis began moving forward to the next car but found the postal clerk on the floor behind a stack of mailbags. He was dead.

There was no end door to the adjoining car. A ladder hung on the end leading to the roof, but with Travis's bad shoulder and deformed hand, he knew he wouldn't be able to climb the ladder, and he was too old to crawl across the roof of a moving train. This was as

far as he could go. He turned back into the mail car, headed back to his son and grandson.

Blade was making his way back through the cars and passed his father and the others without saying a word. He got to the mail car door as Travis was coming out.

“Luke’s headed far the engine,” Travis yelled. He watched as Blade disappeared through the door on the other end and jumped for the ladder.

The train was entering a large open curve, and Travis stopped on the platform to see if he could spot Luke at the engine. It was getting dark, and the interior cab was shrouded by shadows. He saw nothing.

“Keep ’em both safe, Lord.” Travis spoke out loud.

Inside the chair car, another man entered, unnoticed by the group. The wall of the washroom and Rosenberg standing beside it blocked Reid’s view of the door.

The man quickly came at Rosenberg from behind and knocked him in the head with the butt of his gun. Rosenberg dropped the gun he was holding and collapsed as the man turned the gun on the others. One of the women screamed softly and buried her face in the other woman’s arms. Reid had no time to draw his pistol.

The frightened woman was grabbed by the shoulder and pulled to her feet. The outlaw wrapped his arm around her and pointed the gun at her side, holding her between himself and the others. He looked at Cryer and said, “You, get the guns,” indicating Reid and the gun on the floor. Then the outlaw spotted James in the corner and seemed to freeze for several seconds, staring at the scarred man.

Travis appeared in the doorway and raised his rifle to point at the man’s head, that cold hard stare in his icy gray eyes. The woman on the seat gasped.

Anyone else would have put their gun down when they saw the outlaw holding the woman hostage, but not Travis. He had never dropped his gun for anyone.

The outlaw began to back up, stepping across Rosenberg again as he dragged the woman with him. Reid reached down and grabbed at the man’s leg. The outlaw stumbled and lost his balance. A knife

was drawn from the sheath in the judge’s boot as Reid grabbed at the man again, this time gripping the man’s belt. He pulled and the man fell toward Reid and James, startled, unconsciously releasing his hold on the woman. The gun in his hand went off—*pow*—and it seemed the sound was held in the air of the enclosed space of the car.

As the man came down against Reid, the judge wrapped an arm around the outlaw and put the knife to his throat. Everything stilled.

Luke made his way over the edge of the water jacket and turned to crawl toward the engine, trying to stay out of sight. One of the men turned and saw him. He swung the shovel he was holding, and Luke moved to the edge, avoiding the man’s swing. The other man turned and pulled his pistol, firing. The bullet grazed Luke’s shoulder.

A shot came from the top of the boxcar behind Luke, and the outlaw holding the gun went down. The man with the shovel went at Luke again, but Luke grabbed the shovel and pulled. The outlaw dug his feet into the coal as Luke was pulled from the water jacket and landed on top of the man, knocking him onto the platform. Luke rolled over him and across the gap onto the cab’s floor. The outlaw came at Luke and grabbed for his gun, but Luke held tight. They rolled across the floor and slammed into the front of the firebox.

Both men let go of the other. The outlaw stood quickly and came at Luke again. He leaned over with his hands outstretched toward Luke’s head just as Luke rolled and saw the outlaw coming at him. He grabbed the man by the arms and was able to push his opponent up and over his head using his leg. The man flew out the opening and off the train.

Luke pulled himself up quickly to see Blade coming down the pile of coal to join him.

They looked at each other for a moment and Blade smiled gently. The two men turned to look at the engine’s controls.

Blade said, “How do we stop it?”

Luke grinned widely. “Let’s see. The engineer sits here.” Luke sat down and leaned out the window the way he had seen the engi-

neers doing when the trains came into Harris. "So to stop it..." Luke stretched his arm to see what he could reach. There was a lever within his grasp. The lever was attached to a gear sticking out of the floor. "Let's try this."

Luke squeezed a handle and pulled at the lever. The train lurched.

Everyone in the chair car grabbed at something, and Reid lost his grip on the outlaw beside him. Those seated were thrown violently forward and then backward again. The outlaw was thrown to the floor on top of Rosenberg and his wife, who sat holding her husband. Reid slid on the couch and slammed into James. Travis stumbled forward and dropped the rifle, catching himself on a chair that swiveled and turned to drag Travis with it.

The outlaw snatched Lucille Rosenberg away from her husband as he rolled away from Reid. Reid stood up and threw himself at the man, landing sideways on top of both the outlaw and Mrs. Rosenberg. Then he rolled to the floor grabbing at the man's head with one arm. Reid sharply twisted the outlaw's head to the side, bringing the man's face down against the carpet as he put the knife to the man's ribs. The man screamed. Donald Cryer and Travis both regained their footing and grabbed at the man to hold him down.

Reid let go of the knife and rolled to the side. He looked to Rosenberg, who had regained consciousness. The railroad vice president was propped on one elbow, holding his head with the other.

"Sorry about the mess," Reid said, rolling onto his back and letting his head drop to the carpet.

Rosenberg just looked at Reid. He wasn't fully aware of what had happened or what Reid was talking about.

Travis looked at the third man. "Get me a towel or somethin' ta stop this blood. An' somethin' to tie 'im up with. Reid, ya all right?"

"Yes, sir," Reid answered, but he remained on the floor with his eyes closed and his breathing heavy.

"James?" Travis looked to his grandson.

The train lurched again and began to slow.

"I'm...I'm okay."

"How 'bout the rest a ya?" Travis asked, looking around the car.

The others nodded and said they were okay too. The woman who had first been held by the outlaw was still crying.

The train came to a stop, and Luke and Blade climbed down from the engine and ran toward the back of the train. It was dark now, but the moon gave the clear night a yellow glow.

The two men entered the chair car and stopped to look at the mess of tangled people between the two couches.

Mr. and Mrs. Rosenberg were still on the floor holding each other. The other couple held each other on the couch with the woman crying. The unnamed gentleman with them sat staring at the men on the floor while the other man stood against the windows. One steward sat in a swivel chair. The other was disappearing through the door at the other end of the car. James was on the floor beside his father. Reid's eyes were tightly closed. Donald Cryer sat beside a man bound and bleeding from his side. Blood soaked the carpet.

Travis stood in the middle. The cuffs of his sleeves were wet with blood. He was wiping his hands on a towel. Looking at the two men coming in the door, Travis calmly asked, "Did ya get 'em?"

"Yep," Luke replied, looking toward Reid.

Blade moved to his father and knelt beside him. He looked at James without a word.

James answered Blade's unspoken question, "He says he's okay."

"Do any of you know how to drive this thing?" Luke asked.

The lawyer shook his head and threw a hand in the air. He didn't know. The man on the sofa and the one by the window both shook their heads too. The steward said, "I've seen it done."

Rosenberg spoke up. "I know how."

"Okay," Luke said. "You and you two, come help me." Luke pointed at the steward, the man by the window, and the one on the couch. Then he looked at Rosenberg. "I'll give you a few minutes to get yourself together, and then I'll be back for you, Mr. Vice President, sir. Right now, we're going to gather the thieves that are left on the train and tie them up."

Luke got as far as the door and turned around. "What's in those boxcars?"

Rosenberg looked at Luke, trying to decide if he should tell him or not. But this man had saved them all; he had to trust him. "Weapons and ammunition for the military cantonments in California and Washington."

"And what's in the safe?" Luke asked.

Blade broke in. "The guard is dead."

Everyone turned to look at Blade. They seemed to stare at the young man every time he spoke.

"The safe?" Luke said.

"Payroll for both camps," Anthony Rosenberg answered, turning back to look at Luke.

Luke took Rosenberg's hand and pulled him the last few steps into the cab of the steam engine. He had to be hurt. His eyes weren't focusing well, and he was having trouble keeping his balance. He sat down in the engineer's seat. The steward who had said he had seen an engine operate followed them.

Luke watched Rosenberg as the man tried to focus on the instruments in front of him. Rosenberg put his hand to his eyes and squeezed. This pain in the back of his head and behind his eyes was stopping his brain from working. He'd feel dizzy occasionally and felt like he might vomit.

"Okay, move over. Get over here." Luke took Rosenberg by the shoulders and helped him to the other side of the cab. Then Luke smiled. "I've always wanted to drive one of these things."

The steward started shoveling coal into the firebox as Rosenberg slowly told Luke what the gears, gauges, and knobs were. When the instructions were complete, Rosenberg said, "Move us out slow."

Luke laughed. "I hope everybody in the back is sitting down." He pulled the rope above his head, and the whistle gave a sharp sound.

The brake was released; Luke set the Johnson bar and reached for the throttle. The train jerked and crawled backward.

At the back of the chair car, Blade sat propped on the railing of the portico with his foot wrapped around a bar in the railing and the rifle butt against his thigh. He had all the doors open to the car in front of him and behind him, watching for danger. They hadn't been able to find the conductor or the brake man.

Blade had gotten his father onto a couch, and Reid lay semi-comfortably as the train rocked and jolted backward. James was straining for breath, and Travis sat with him on the other couch. The others were in the chairs nearby with Donald Cryer sitting near Reid. No one was talking.

Reid had kept his eyes closed for almost an hour after Blade moved him to the couch. Cryer noticed his eyes were now open. His head was turned, watching his father and son.

Cryer said, "You and your family are handy to have around."

Reid gave a grunting laugh but said nothing.

"You said you were a judge. And your father used to be a marshal, but what does your brother do?" Cryer asked.

"He's a farmer right now."

"Does the Indian go to school?" Cryer said.

Reid cut his eyes disapprovingly at the lawyer. "*My son* works at a ranch outside town."

Cryer heard the reproach in Reid's voice. "Sorry. He's young to be doing that, isn't he?"

"He's been working there since he was about thirteen. Ranch Manager says he's as good as any of the experienced hands," Reid advised. "Probably better than most. He does his job, leaves the others alone, and stays out of trouble. That's what everybody wants in an employee."

Cryer nodded; that was true. "And your brother is a farmer?"

Reid nodded.

"I don't believe you. He doesn't act like a farmer." Cryer leaned toward Reid.

Reid tilted his head toward the man he was talking with. "He was sheriff for twenty-five years. He quit doing that last winter."

"I knew it!" The lawyer leaned back in his chair, slapping his own leg, proud that he read Luke right.

The train gave a few gentle jolts and rolled to a stop. Cryer looked out the window. "Well, we're back where we started. Before we get off this train, I want to know one thing."

Reid nodded.

"I know you said you didn't want to talk about Red Crowder, but I've got to know something. What did the two lawyers with me have against you? It seemed like there was some kind of personal vendetta going on."

Reid closed his eyes. Cryer thought he might have to ask again. It didn't seem like Reid was going to answer. Just as he began to open his mouth to ask the question again, Reid sighed and explained, "Ross Carranza was one of my instructors at the university. I think he didn't like me answering his questions in class. He tried to stump everybody and make them feel stupid. Made him happy when a student couldn't answer his question. If I could answer them, he obviously wasn't as smart as he thought he was."

"What about Porter?"

"Leonard Porter and I got into a fight. I was defending my wife from his abuse. We were all in law school together, and I think he took offense that she's Indian." Reid hesitated. This was over fifteen years ago, and Cryer really didn't need to know. But if he was going to get past being afraid at every mention of Red Crowder, he needed to be open about his life. He didn't need to keep secrets. Well, not as many.

"I hit him in the classroom and got sent for a disciplinary review. Carranza was on the review board. I got a slap on the wrist, and I don't think Carranza liked that either. He wanted me expelled."

"You know they're related," Cryer said. "I think Ross is Leonard's uncle or cousin. It's a close relationship. There was some connection between Ross and one of the defendants at that trial too. He

just wasn't good enough to handle the trial himself. That's why they blackmailed me."

"I didn't know they were related," Reid said. "How were you blackmailed?"

"My daughter went to school in Chicago. One of their guys had gotten close to her. She was threatened. I didn't have anyone in Chicago to look after her."

"Did they hurt her?" Reid asked.

"Just her feelings," Don Cryer explained as Reid closed his eyes again, ending the conversation.

Most of the others had gotten off the train. Reid opened his eyes and looked over to see James asleep on the couch alone.

Reid turned his head toward Donald Cryer, who was still sitting in the same chair.

"Where's my dad?" Reid asked.

"He's on the deck with your son," Cryer replied. "Do you need him?"

Reid closed his eyes again. "No."

Cryer stood up. "One more question, and I'll leave you alone."

Reid nodded.

"How many children do you have, and why are some Indian and some not?"

"Fifteen. My wife and I had five. Two of the boys are the only ones still alive, twelve and fifteen. James and his two brothers and two sisters came to live with us when James was six. Matt was the oldest. He was eight, and the youngest four months. Blade and his four sisters have been with us for a little over five years. The youngest girl was about a week old when we got them."

Luke stuck his head in the door. "Reid, you and James okay?"

Reid looked toward the other couch again. James was unconscious, unaware of anything going on around him. "Yeah, we're good."

"I'll be right outside if you need anything." Luke turned to leave.

"Hey, Luke," Cryer called, putting a hand on Reid's shoulder and squeezing gently. "Wait up."

The train sat on the side track while a marshal was brought in from the nearby town and statements were taken. The dead were removed, and those tied up went to jail. A search party was sent out to look for the missing conductor and brakeman along with the two men Luke had thrown from the train.

Travis bandaged Luke's shoulder, and everyone, except Luke and Blade, was taken to the hotel in town. The two men stayed with the train overnight at Rosenberg's request.

When the town's doctor finished patching up the prisoners, he checked on Rosenberg, who was advised to lie down and stay there. The old doctor was sent to look in on Reid and James. Reid told the doctor he could do nothing for him but asked about oxygen for James. The small-town doctor didn't have any but spent time with the two men, trying to make them comfortable. Then he sat down with Travis. Cryer joined them, and the three men sat talking with Reid as James slept.

A new railroad crew was brought in the next day, and late that afternoon, the train left on a new route. They would deliver the Britt's to Harris themselves before continuing to Denver.

Cryer hired Luke as guard for the remainder of the trip. He tried to hire Blade too, but Blade was ready to get back to the ranch. He had no desire to see more of "this great country," as Cryer put it.

Having something to do made Luke happy; the others could tell. It had been good for Luke to get out of Harris for the last few weeks, and it was good for him to have a purpose again.

Luke could stay at the townhouse with Stephen while in Denver and be back in Harris in a little over a week.

Reid returned to Harris to find Mrs. Leachman's trial had already taken place. She had been convicted and was put under house arrest, unable to go anywhere. Reid visited with her and with Cleve. Together, the brothers filed their appeal, and Reid filed a complaint with the state attorney general concerning the way the trial had been

handled. A message was sent to Luke in Denver telling him the trial was over and he didn't need to hurry back.

Luke stepped off the train to find people sparse at the station. This was good; Luke didn't want any contact with the townspeople. He didn't want to make any excuses about where he had been. This past spring, when he was in town, there was always someone saying, "I haven't seen you around. Where have you been?" He'd have to tell them he had been farming. Farming wasn't bad. It was good honest work. But it wasn't for him. It never had been, even when he was a boy helping his father on the farm.

The townspeople knew he had been fired, and Luke didn't understand why they were asking him where he had been. The question just fueled his depression, but it gave the people in town something to talk about. Gossip was a fundamental part of this town's survival. Without it, the people would have nothing to say.

He hadn't felt the depression or thought about Kathleen since the first few days he had been in the mountains with his father. Now it hit him hard. But it wouldn't last long; Luke knew that. He wasn't going to be doing any more farming, and he wasn't going to stay in Harris.

He walked to his father's house and found the old man on the back porch. Travis saw him coming before Luke said anything. He got up to greet his son.

"Welcome 'ome, Luke," Travis said from the top of the steps.

Luke took a giant step from the ground to the porch, avoiding three steps, to hug his father. "Gosh, it's good to be home."

"Well, ya can relax now. Cleve can tell that sharecropper ya back, an' ya can take care a' the fields 'gain," Travis said.

Luke smiled. "No, I can't. I'm leaving again tomorrow. I just stopped off to check on everyone and pick up a few things. The railroad hired me as an investigator. I have to go to Topeka to get sworn in."

"Railroad investigator, is that like Pinkerton?" Travis asked.

“Yeah, it is. I’ll be sworn in by the state of Kansas, but the railroad will pay me. I’ll have jurisdiction anywhere in the state. I’ll be traveling most of the time, but I promise I’ll come home as often as I can.”

Travis nodded. This would be a good job for Luke. It would get him out of Harris and away from memories of Kathleen and his former job. Traveling would allow him to meet new people, and this new job would give him something to do that he enjoyed. It would keep him busy. Travis would miss his son, though. He had enjoyed having Luke in the house.

“So,” Luke said, “tell me what’s going on around here. How’s James doing?”

“Bout the same. ‘E stays at ‘ome. ‘E’s still coughin’ a bunch. William got ‘im some oxygen, an’ Reid says it ‘elps. People still got the flu ‘round ‘ere, an’ William told me ta stay ‘way from town an’ not ta get ‘round the chil’en when they start back ta school. ‘E’s scared I’m gonna catch it. I go over an’ sit in the yard with Thomas most ever’ day. Reid comes by in the afternoons. William an’ Bonnie is gonna ‘ave ‘nother little one ‘round Christmas. That’ll be a good present. I like rockin’ them babies.”

Travis kept talking. Luke thought his father seemed happier than he had been in a long time. When Travis finally got quiet, Luke told his father a little more about his job, and then he got quiet too.

That was all there was to be said. They sat on the porch in silence.



SEPTEMBER 1918

It seemed the virus was changing, mutating from the disease that had begun last winter. It was hitting people with more severity, and it was becoming more lethal. The very old and the very young were being affected, but so were young healthy adults. People were dying.

Cities had begun closing churches, schools, theaters, and dance halls—any public place where large numbers of people gathered. Makeshift hospitals were being set up in every town, concentrating on the one disease—influenza.

Medical personnel around the state were cautioned of the quick onset, rapidly declining viability, and false recovery. People were being struck suddenly with dizziness, weakness, or pain while walking the street or on the job. It was said that a strong, healthy person could feel fine one moment but the next moment would drop, too weak to walk.

Normally, patients would recover from the flu after a few days of high fever and coughing. People were recovering from this disease, but a few days after the fever left, they would begin to have problems with their lungs. The real danger of this disease came from the secondary infection of pneumonia or bronchitis. The pneumonia would come after a short period of normal temperature. Then the person’s temperature would spike, and the patient would begin coughing up blood.

The fatal cases came when the infection spread in the bloodstream. And it spread fast. Reports out of the hardest-hit areas were saying a person could be alive and well when the sun came up and dead by sundown. But this wasn’t being widely publicized. Nothing was written in the newspapers, and the public health service was

being quiet. Gossip, however, moved across the country as quickly as the people did. But now there weren't as many people traveling.

Nobody wanted this deadly disease and the families in Harris had been staying away from one another, trying to avoid spreading the flu to anyone else. Travis, Thomas, and James were all at high risk to die from the disease if it were to be contracted. Bonnie was pregnant and was at risk too. William had also cautioned Reid because the extent of his throat injury was unknown.

Luke and Jenny had gotten the flu early in the year, while Angus and two of his children had it during the summer. Winona had been working with the sick since Luke was ill, but she had not fallen victim to the disease.

William had a short bout with it soon after Luke was sick. He'd stayed home a few days and then continued caring for others with no lingering effects.

While everyone was talking about it, there was nothing said in the newspapers. There was no information offered to the communities, and reports coming from the public health service continued to be sketchy.

The doctor didn't know how it was spreading so fast. No one went into town. The streets were deserted, and the school was closed. Everyone was avoiding contact with other people. Most people were wearing masks, and no one went into another person's house.

William was doing everything he could to help the sick and combat the disease. Winona and a few of the Harvey girls were helping him. The restaurant had little business now and didn't need all of its employees. As the sickness in town spread, William saw that more was needed.

Arrangements were made to use the church on the outskirts of town as a hospital. Pews were quickly removed and stacked in the basement. A telephone line was installed in the pastor's study at no charge. William would be able to use it to make private calls to the undertaker and to inform families of their loved one's progress or passing.

William spoke with the town's newspaper publisher, and an announcement ran in the next edition:

Anyone exhibiting flulike symptoms should come to Rock Corner Church to be cared for. Bring your own bedding and clothing. Donations of food, blankets, and towels can be dropped off at the medical clinic.

The sick were lined up on the church floor to be cared for. The church pastor, Gregory Sutton, and one of the church members, Dan McClelland, were helping William with the ill. They were living in one of the newly added Sunday school rooms, and William was staying there too. He wasn't going home.

The young ladies were living in another room. Food was being prepared by the Harvey House and being left outside the church building. Few of the patients were eating, and the food was going mostly to those working and to the patients who were nearing recovery.

Everyone in town was using Tendal's grocery delivery, and the newspaper was going out to the townspeople with the groceries. The *Harris Weekly* was the only source of information for the people isolated by the illness. It gave news of the war, a report from Dr. Stewart on the town's overall condition during the sickness, and advice on what to do if someone in your home became ill. The newspaper also included announcements of those from the area who died in the war and of those who had died from the influenza.

William had forbidden Bonnie to leave the house. Bonnie was pregnant, and he didn't want her infected. While his mother was a healthy woman, she was getting along in years, and he didn't want her to catch it either. William trusted that his father would live, even if he contracted the flu. The fifteen years God had added to Thomas's life when he had first become ill with the weakened heart weren't up yet. But none of them wanted to test God.

Public health was still calling this an ordinary flu season, but William knew it wasn't. He had noticed in several of the public health

communications that a particular act in congress was mentioned. At first look, it seemed to have nothing to do with the sickness. But when William saw it the third time, he asked Cleve to find out what this was and to get more information on it. He wanted to know what this law had to do with the public's health.

There was no word from Cleve, and William thought the lawyer had forgotten about it. Then one evening, weeks after his talk with Cleve, the telephone rang. William was called into the pastor's study.

"Yes, this is Dr. Stewart."

"William, this is Cleve. I have that information you wanted on the Espionage Act."

"Great, explain it to me," William said.

"The Espionage Act was passed just after we entered the war. It makes it a crime for anyone to give out information that would interfere with the war effort by the United States. Then the Sedition Act was passed this past spring. It put in place penalties for anyone found making a false statement that interferes with the war effort or talking against the US government, the flag, the Constitution, or the military in a negative way. It supports punishment against anyone causing trouble with the production of war materials or recruiting or anyone defending these people. Basically, anyone or anything that obstructs the war effort. These laws have been put in place in other countries too."

"What has this got to do with the flu?" William asked.

"Well, then the Committee for Public Information was created by the president. The person who oversees the committee said, 'Truth and falsehood are arbitrary terms. The force of an idea lies in its inspirational value. It matters very little if it is true or false.'¹ So those who have control are saying this is the ordinary flu, because to say how bad it is would interfere with support, recruitment, and the production of war materials. They're saying it doesn't matter if it's true or not if it promotes their agenda. They're letting war rallies

¹ Dayhoff: "Government Censorship Made the 1918 Spanish Flu Even Worse," *Carroll County Times*, baltimoresun.com. Original statement by George Creel, head of the United States Committee on Public Information, created by President Woodrow Wilson during World War I.

be held, and people are coming in contact with each other in large numbers, and they're getting sick. The military isn't talking about this virus because they don't want people to know that it's affecting the troops. Our soldiers are sick, and they're dying too. This disease has moved from Kansas, across the country, and then to Europe with our boys. This disease is worldwide now."

"Well, do you think—" William began, but Cleve kept talking.

"Wait, now listen, William. This past summer, the disease changed and became more deadly. Some of the British doctors are cutting the soldiers open after they die and are saying their lungs look like the lungs of the soldiers that die from the gas used by the Germans. "The doctors studying this know what's going on, but they can't say anything because of the war. If they were to say something, they could be convicted and put in jail for resisting or going against these laws. Some have already been jailed for trying. It's being called the Spanish flu because Spain is neutral and they don't have censorship laws in place. They were the first to publicly report how bad the disease is."

"How did you find that out?" William asked.

Cleve explained, "My sister Mary, she's at that research university, and they're studying the disease too. They have contact with several hospitals around the world and are compiling their results, looking for a cure."

William said, "Well, I'll call Mr. Carmichael at the newspaper tomorrow and tell him—"

"No, William! You can't! They'll lock you up. It's against the law. You can't say anything, truth or a lie, if they even think it will affect support for the war," Cleve advised strongly. "Several people have already been prosecuted and jailed. They are stopping any talk really fast."

William was angry. People were dying because no one was telling them the truth. He was thinking, reasoning what he should do.

"William, are you still there?" Cleve asked.

"Yeah, I'm here. Cleve, can I tell people how to protect themselves?" William asked.

“I guess. As long as you don’t say anything that will cause people to turn on the government or the war effort.”

“This isn’t right,” William said.

“I know. But it’s the law.”

The conversation ended, and they hung up the telephone. Something had to be done.

William fell to his knees in front of the open window, praying to his Lord, “They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.¹ Father, you told us to ‘Submit (ourselves) for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by (you) to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.’² Father, this is foolish. Will you punish those in authority for their wrongdoing? Will you show mercy to those who are affected because of these lies? Help those that are being punished for telling the truth. But I know that ‘The Lord Almighty has a day in store for all the proud and lofty, for all that is exalted (and they will be humbled). The arrogance of man will be brought low and human pride humbled; the Lord alone will be exalted in that day.’³ ‘All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to (you) Lord...for dominion belongs to the Lord and (you) rule over the nations.’⁴”

All William could do was try to let people in Harris know how to protect themselves. About half of the town had already had the disease. Several people had died last spring and more during the summer wave. Now they were having three or four deaths every week.

William began to write down what he needed to tell the newspaper in the morning. He would tell people they needed to use camphor extract to try to ward off the illness. They needed to rub it

¹ Ephesians 4:18.

² First Peter 2:13–15.

³ Isaiah 2:12, 17.

⁴ Psalm 22:27a, 28.

below their nose and on their chest so they could smell it. Hopefully this would kill the virus before it entered the body.

They should gargle with saltwater; wear a mask; and eat fruit—pears, apples, berries—whatever fruit they could find to get the proper nutrients to guard their bodies. Fresh air and sunshine were a must. They needed to stop kissing their children and not get in each other’s faces. And they should stay away from people not in their own family as much as they could.

William had read about the new medicines that were being used in the hospitals, but they all seemed to have little effect on the disease itself. He didn’t have access to any of it, anyway, because the hospital in Denver was using everything it received. Aspirin was in short supply, so the old remedy of cinnamon mixed with fresh milk would have to be used to reduce a person’s temperature. William knew that his patients only hope was to build their immune system to fight the disease itself. He began asking the local farmers to share fresh vegetables and fresh milk with those who needed it.

Because the flu had been so bad in Harris, the school was closed. Rock Corner Church wasn’t meeting because the building was being used as a hospital. William would call the other pastors and ask them to begin meeting outside in small groups. People still needed to gather for encouragement and worship, and the town needed prayers. The people just needed to keep their distance from one another.



OCTOBER 1918

A wagon pulled in front of the church, and a man jumped to the ground to ring the church's bell near the front steps. This was the signal that someone else was being brought in. William and Dan McClelland moved out the door and down the steps to help the ill inside.

William wasn't paying attention to who was in the wagon. He took a woman's hand and pulled her to a sitting position. He helped her slide across the rough wood floor of the wagon and put an arm around her, headed for the church steps.

"William." The voice came softly, and the doctor turned his head to see who called him. It was Della Leachman.

Dan came to help the woman William was with, and William returned to assist his wife's grandmother.

"Mrs. Leachman, here, let me help you down," he said, reaching to help her from the wagon.

"Thank you, dear," she offered and began to cough.

William could feel the fever radiating from her body as he held her.

"Kathleen didn't want me to come, but I needed to get out of the house. I don't want her to see me die. She's got such a bad outlook on life right now. Watching me suffer isn't going to help her at all," Mrs. Leachman said.

"Well, we're going to take care of you. No more talk about dying. That's not in our plans." William tried to reassure the woman.

"You're sweet, William. But I know what's coming, and I'm ready."

William helped her to a pallet on the floor and grabbed a blanket to cover her. Someone called to him from the other side of the room.

"We'll talk in a few minutes," he told her and turned around to find who had called him.

"Mrs. Leachman?" William called her name, and she responded weakly without opening her eyes.

"William, I need to ask you to do something for me."

"Yes, ma'am, what is it?" William said.

"Would you apologize to the judge for me? I've been awfully hard on him," she said. "He hasn't been able to enjoy any of the family activities since you and Bonnie got married. I've stayed on him all the time. Tell him I'm sorry. And tell him 'thank you.' He has shown me more peace in the last few months than I've known most of my life."

"I'll tell him, but you can do it. You don't need me," William said.

"Please, William, just listen to me. Tell Luke I don't hold him responsible for taking my silver either. It just happened. Probably because I was so selfish with it. I just hate that he lost his job and that he and Kathleen aren't getting married now. I did like him. I had to work hard not to smile when I was around him."

"He does make people happy, doesn't he?" William commented, smiling.

"Yes, he does," she said. "And, William, tell Kathleen to read the Bible in the top drawer of my bureau. Reid gave it to me, and tell Reid he was right. It did help. I guess I just had to get past my pride and get to a point in my life when I needed a savior. I couldn't live by myself anymore."

"Reid gave you a Bible?" William asked.

"Yes, when I was in that horrible jail. He told me I had nothing else to do, so I should read. It took me a full day to start, but when I did, I didn't want to stop. I think my favorite verse is Romans 3:23:

‘for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.’ I’m not the only one. That makes me feel better. Maybe I’m not so bad after all.”

“No, you’re not bad.”

“Quit lying to me, William. I know what I’ve done. I’ve made everybody miserable. Kathleen and her family and my son and his family. Especially his wife. I tried to break up their marriage. And I should never have fought with my sister the way I did. She cared for our mother all those years, and all I was concerned about was the silver Mother told me I could have.”

She gave a big sigh, and William heard the rattle in her chest. He pulled the stethoscope from around his neck. The doctor put it to his ears and the drum to her chest. She was getting worse fast, and there was nothing he could do for her.

“William, I do love my family, and I love you too. You’ve been a good husband for Bonnie, and you’re a good man.”

“Thank you.”

“Dr. Stewart,” the call came from the doorway, “out here.”

William leaned over and kissed the woman’s forehead before he moved toward the door.

Almost an hour later, William made his rounds of the patients. He came to Mrs. Leachman and knew she was gone. He picked up her hand to take her pulse but didn’t find one. He put the stethoscope to her chest but knew there would be no heartbeat.

Scripture came to William’s heart. *He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.*¹

“Yes,” William said softly, “her heart wasn’t broken anymore. Her heart was full of love.”

The doctor sat silent for a moment, then he realized Pastor Sutton had begun reading. The doctor leaned against the wall to listen.

“Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, ‘I have no

¹ Psalm 137:3.

pleasure in them’; before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain, in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed, and the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low—they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets—before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.”¹

Noah had been assigned to the battlefield. This was not the first time. He had been there over and over, retrieving the wounded and getting them to the aid station to be evaluated and sent on somewhere else.

He moved through the trenches slowly. You had to move slow. Filthy water was knee-deep and teeming with frogs swimming about looking for slugs and beetles. There were plenty for the frogs to find. Noah didn’t know which he wanted to get rid of more: the frogs that ate the beetles or the beetles that ate the lice. If they could get rid of the lice, the other two might go away on their own.

¹ Ecclesiastes 12:1–8 (ESV).

Noah kept his head down. Anything that stuck up above the rim of the trench would be shot.

In front of him, he saw a young boy. Strange to think of him that way. Noah was only twenty, but this boy was green and inexperienced, probably fresh off the farm. The boy put his hand on the ledge to hold on as he made his way over a muddy area on a thin board bridge. Noah's eyes went wide, and he ran for the boy but didn't get there in time. Just as Noah yelled and leaped to tackle the soldier, a shot rang through the air. The whiz came with no sound of impact as the bullet took the boy's fingers and knuckles and then continued into the dirt on the other side of the trench.

Noah hit him low. They both went down into the mud, splattered with the blood and mush that used to be the boy's hand. The boy screamed, and Noah held him tight as he grappled for what remained of the hand in the sludge of the trench. Noah pulled the hand out of the mud and poured water over it to wash the filth away. Then he wrapped it tightly. Noah was fast. After more than a year in this war, he knew what he was doing and wasn't shocked by the gore anymore.

The boy was shaking and seemed to be in shock, but he could walk. "Get back down the line," Noah firmly told the boy. It didn't look like he was listening. Noah jerked him around and grabbed his face to force the young soldier to look at him. "Get back down the line!" Noah told him again, distinctly pushing out one word at a time.

The boy nodded slightly, and Noah trusted he understood. He turned the boy around and pushed him in the direction he was to go.

Noah spun quickly and moved on through the muck.

He passed two men with their boots off and saw their swollen feet. Trench foot. He dug a couple pairs of dry socks out of his pack and handed them to the men along with a bag of foot powder. "Get your boots back on, and get to the aid station." Lucky saps. They would miss today's fight. "You're done for now." He moved on.

The call came, and the men around him stood up and prepared to move over the edge. Noah prayed for their courage and for their strength. He couldn't bring himself to pray for their safety anymore.

These men were to be sacrificed for a piece of land, and he knew it. Most of them would die. Some would survive with injuries so cruel they wouldn't want to live. A few would survive to tell stories to their children, but the stories wouldn't be about this day. No one would talk willingly about this battle.

Noah saw the same thing happen in the trenches and the battlefield day after day. It was nothing new to him.

There was movement to his left, and he turned to see a couple of cat-size rats run along a ledge just above the water. They attacked a man's pack with such vicious force that it fell from the spike it was hanging on. This soldier wouldn't have any food left if he made it back. He probably wouldn't have a pack left either.

A whistle blew, and the men swarmed onto the open ground above them. The German machine guns let loose with a wall of bullets. The noise of the battle came instantly: the machine-gun fire, the yelling and screaming, the shells whizzing, and the thundering explosions near the trench. The noise was so thick you couldn't hear your own voice if you spoke to yourself. Men started going down. Noah caught one as he slid back into the water. Dead, he didn't need to worry about this one.

He moved two steps and pulled another one down. This one had a bullet high in the chest, but he was still breathing. Noah shoved a wad of gauze into the man's shirt and grabbed an arm, twisting his body and pulling the man onto his back. Noah began making his way back down the trench the way he had come, headed for the aid station.

He got to an observation post and glanced out the tiny slit between the boards toward the battle. The troops were being cut down like wheat hacked by a scythe. Noah had become numb to this. He heard his grandfather's prayers within his heart: "Let 'em 'be strong and courageous. Do not (let them) be afraid or terrified because of (their enemy), for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."¹

"Clay said you're not here, Lord," Noah prayed. "But I know you are. I trust you."

¹ Deuteronomy 31:6.

The spirit spoke to Noah's heart. *Don't be afraid. We have more forces on our side than they have on theirs.*¹ Noah had never heard God speak to him in words before. He was surprised and unsure of what was happening, but he kept moving, kept praying.

"Father, I'm sure there are men in that army that love you too." Noah was confused; he had been confused for months. Why were these two armies fighting? This war just didn't make sense anymore. It was nothing but survival. "How do you decide which side wins?"

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.*²

"Then let us win, Lord. Why does the fighting have to go on? Why do we have to continue killing? End this war!" Noah pleaded.

The Spirit spoke again. *Lord, please open his eyes so that he may see.*³

So the Lord opened the servant's eyes and let him see. The mountain around (Noah) was full of fiery horses and chariots.⁴

Noah saw the army of the Lord and relief came to his soul. "Thank you, Lord. Thank you. You are here."

He kept moving.

¹ Second Kings 6:16 (GW).

² Romans 1:18a (ESV).

³ Second Kings 6:17a (GW).

⁴ Second Kings 6:17b (GW).



NOVEMBER 1918

The report came. The war was over. Murmuring moved through the wounded and the medical personnel. No one in authority was saying that the war was over, but spirits were lifted. Anticipation hung in the air. Shouting could be heard outside the hospital, and the boys in the beds began whooping and hollering along with those in the street. Outside the window, flags began appearing everywhere. More people were coming into the street, meeting, exchanging what they heard, and sharing hugs. Spirits were high here too.

The city became a flurry of activity as night fell. Parades formed and moved through street after street, growing as those celebrating wound around buildings and through parks. Well after midnight, the activity calmed, and the streets became quiet again.

Then morning came, and the real news hit everyone hard. Last evening's report had been false. There was no treaty, no peace. Spirits inside the hospital sank, and the sick seemed to get worse.

Curt had believed the promising news, that his hope had become a reality. Yet in this disappointment, he realized there was another hope. He had always been at peace within. Curt spoke scripture out loud. "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...and be thankful."¹ I am at peace within, Lord. Thank you." Curt hesitated and then decided to continue out loud for all around to hear.

"He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many

¹ Colossians 3:15.

will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.¹

“We pray for peace, Lord. Our hope for peace is in you and in you alone.”

Curt heard many of the men near him respond with a soft “Amen.” The hospital ward was full, and the prayer seemed to belong to everyone. The “amen” continued to move around the room.

It was encouraging to Curt that so many men would acknowledge their combined hope in God. Some of these men had avoided preachers, the Bible, and anything that smelled the slightest of scripture when at home. But here in the middle of battle, men sought the Creator and Sustainer of life. They were brought face-to-face with their own mortality.

Curt used this to his advantage in speaking with others about Christ. He had helped dozens, maybe hundreds, find the Savior. He had held men’s hands as they died and pointed their souls toward heaven. The men knew him as much as the preacher man as they did their caregiver. He helped heal their bodies and their souls.

Curt thought of the story he had read about his grandfather’s military service during the Civil War. He was doing the same thing now that his grandfather had done then. But times were different. While the patients seemed to respond to his grandfather’s care and the words from scripture, his grandfather’s coworkers had ridiculed and despised him. They had made fun of him, abused him, and neglected his needs. He had suffered double during the war, both from the enemy and from his allies. Triple because of what had happened to his family while he was gone. But the man was now an anchor to those who knew him. Nobody ridiculed him; nobody despised him. People admired the man.

Curt wasn’t suffering for his beliefs. He was encouraged by them. Curt understood what had kept his grandfather moving, though,

¹ Second Corinthians 1:10–11.

beyond the abuse and killing—his faith in God. Curt wanted to be like his grandfather and have that kind of faith.

Noah had brought wounded into the aid station in a wagon. He jumped from the seat, and when he hit the ground, his legs buckled.

“I’m okay,” he told the man who ran to help him up. He pulled himself to his feet and moved to the back of the wagon to assist with the wounded. He was cold and wet. This was his fourth trip bringing men from the front today. This was easier than being in the trenches, but for some reason, he was having trouble.

His head was pounding, and he couldn’t seem to focus on his work. He’d been shivering most of the day, but that wasn’t unusual. The temperature had been dropping for a couple of weeks, and it was getting colder. Being wet, too, just made a person miserable.

Noah grabbed the end of a stretcher and followed the man with the other end into a tent. They set the wounded soldier down. Noah turned around and moved out the tent flap, blinking his eyes, trying to clear his head.

He had the sudden urge to throw up and turned to the side of the tent. He staggered around the corner, leaned over, and retched near the side of the canvas. He tried to stand up but got sick again. Noah wiped his mouth on his sleeve, got light-headed, swayed, and fell onto the ground, unconscious.

Four days after the false report of the war ending, Curt received new orders. He was moving out with the troops in the morning. He’d never been to the front, but now he was ordered to attend the wounded on the battlefield. His stomach was in knots. He climbed into his bunk late but was still wide awake. Everyone else in the room slept peacefully. They would remain at the hospital.

He closed his eyes, but sleep wouldn’t come. He thought of Clay’s fear and the words his cousin had spoken just a few weeks

before he died. “God’s not in these battles. He won’t go anywhere near that place.” Curt knew Clay was wrong about this and that God would stay with him as he tried to help the wounded.

But fear still gripped him, not fear for his own safety but fear of his own actions. Would he react like Clay? Clay had done his job, and done it well, but his horseplay had made others uncomfortable. Would fear control him too? Would he be like many of the soldiers he cared for, paralyzed by what he would see and what was happening around him?

Scripture came to his heart. *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*¹

“I will not fear, even though I walk through death,” Curt reassured himself. “I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.”²

After Clay was killed and James was shipped back to the States, Curt had sought the Lord more diligently. Noah was working a different shift, and the cousins didn’t see each other very often. Curt had felt alone and had begun following Grandpa’s advice.

Curt remembered what James had told them on the boat, what Grandpa had said to do. Every time Curt had a break, he would read scripture. It had helped. It had kept his mind free from visions of the wounded and sounds of their suffering. Now it would hold him firm as he faced death himself, just like scripture had held James.

Curt wondered if James was still alive. He had done the unimaginable, returning again and again into the gas to bring men to safety. James had never let his fear show, if he had any fear.

The Bible was lying beside Curt’s bed, and he picked it up to read.

“(Jesus) took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, ‘My

¹ Psalm 23:4 (ESV).

² Psalm 34:4.

soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.’ Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.’”¹

Jesus didn’t want to face his darkest hour either. He asked God if he had to do it, if he had to face a horrible death, and then he submitted to the authority over him. Curt would submit too. He didn’t want to go into the battle, but he would face death head-on.

“Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. ‘Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?’ he asked Peter. ‘Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.’

“He went away a second time and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.’ When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.”²

Curt read his Bible long into the night and fell asleep with the Bible against his chest and the lamp still on.

The next morning, at ten forty-five, Curt was lined up with the others. His medical supplies were on a mule’s back and his personal supplies in the pack on his own back. The line started moving.

At eleven o’clock, the church bells in the distance began ringing. Normally, Curt would have ignored them. They rang on the hour, every hour throughout the day. But something was different about

¹ Matthew 26:37–39.

² Matthew 26:40–44.

them this time. They kept ringing, and they were ringing loudly, clearly, and continually.

“The war is over!” someone in front of him yelled. “Headquarters got the word. The armistice was signed!”

Shrieks of joy and shouts of praise filled the air. They could go home.

Thoughts of warm beds, home-cooked meals, and loved ones filled the minds of the soldiers. There were visions of transport ships turning around and headed back to America. Images of trains arriving in the hometowns of the boys dressed in olive and khaki filled the soldiers’ minds. The Yanks were going home!

But not yet. The men were ordered back into line, and the formation kept moving forward. As the troops got to the edge of the city, companies were separated. Some were sent back into the city. Others, including Curt’s, continued toward the battlefield. They had orders to clear the field of wounded.

The battleground was quiet. Eerie quiet. Everyone remained where they had been that morning while Curt and his coworkers searched for wounded out in the open for everyone to see. The enemy could be seen easily beyond the barbed wire barricades. A German could have raised his rifle and quickly put a bullet in any one of them.

Curt found a wounded soldier near the river. He had been shot through the hip and exposed to the cold for quite some time. Curt dressed the wound and wrapped a blanket around the man. With his partner’s help, Curt rolled him onto a stretcher.

They moved toward the trenches, calling to the men nearby for assistance to get the man up a steep hill. Two soldiers climbed out of a hole, slinging their rifles over their shoulders, and came to help. The medics made it to the aid station; and Curt turned around, took his end of another stretcher, and returned to the battlefield to look for more wounded.

He found American, British, French, Australian, and German soldiers. He took them all to the aid station, and he kept looking; mile after mile of battlefield lay before him. By late afternoon, they could find no more wounded and began moving the dead off the

field. Others came to help. He looked up at one point and saw a German soldier working to help move a French officer. The man’s eyes met Curt’s, and Curt nodded a thank-you. Yes, the war was over.

The next afternoon, Curt’s company marched back into town. The celebration had been going on all night, and it was continuing. Allied flags were everywhere. A band was playing poorly, somewhere in the distance. The tune could loosely be recognized as the “Star-Spangled Banner.”

Old men, women, and children crowded the streets and welcomed the soldiers into town with the same enthusiasm in which the American’s had been welcomed to France when they got off the ships over a year ago. French and British soldiers wandered the streets and gave Curt’s company a salute as they passed.

Curt watched the people who had endured four years of war. Four years of misery. The people around him would have to continue to endure what remained of the war. There were children without fathers and wives without husbands. The impoverished buildings and towns were torn up by the fighting and filled with war-ravaged men. Farms had been destroyed, and the land wouldn’t be able to grow crops for years.

They got to the hospital, and Curt finally felt the war was over. His body suddenly felt tired, more tired than he had ever felt. But it was a good tired. He had been here fourteen months, and he was glad he would be able to go home soon.

The people at home would celebrate and welcome their soldiers back. Curt smiled as he thought of his mother and his father. He would stay with them for a while before he went back to school. He needed time with them.

Then the smile left his face. How would Uncle Cleve and Aunt Jenny feel with him coming back and their son gone? No, he wouldn’t worry about Clay. They would be happy Noah was home.

What about Uncle Reid and Aunt Chipeta? What would they think about him coming home healthy and strong if James was still struggling just to survive? But as he thought about it, reassurance came to him. They would both be happy he was home safe. But James, he would have to spend time with James if he was still alive.

Now, though, he needed to go check on Noah.

Noah had been admitted to the hospital with a fever a few days ago. Curt couldn't go into the building housing the influenza patients. The area was quarantined. He could, however, talk to one of the nurses caring for Noah.

Curt went to the door and stuck his head in. "Hey, Rosetta, how's Noah doing today?"

"Oh, I'm sure he's fine, Curt. He wasn't too bad yesterday. Let me go check on him."

Curt waited. He leaned on the doorframe and looked into the street. Flags still hung from windows in nearby buildings, and more people than usual seemed to be walking around, but the hospital area had calmed from the excitement of two days ago. Curt leaned his head back to rest and closed his eyes. He was so tired. He could go to sleep standing right here.

"Curt." Curt jerked his head around, and Rosetta was standing next to him. Maybe he had fallen asleep.

"Noah died last night."

"Mother, what am I going to do without William here? I haven't seen him in seven weeks. It's too early for this baby to come," Bonnie cried.

Sarah was doing everything she could to calm her daughter-in-law's fears. The baby was coming early, and William was still at the hospital with the sick. But women had babies all the time without their husbands around and without doctors.

They had a doctor, though; Thomas was there. They had discussed this when Bonnie had first said she was in labor. They wouldn't call William yet, and Thomas was resting until they needed him. Sarah had called Chipeta, and she was coming soon. She was bringing the two older girls with her, and they would take the boys home with them.

Sarah reached to her daughter-in-law. "You'll be fine. Thomas is going to take care of you. We'll call William when the baby gets

closer and let him know. There's no reason for him to have you on his mind for hours. There's nothing he can do but worry. We talked about this, remember? We don't want to expose you or the baby to the flu."

"I know, but I want him so bad," Bonnie said. "I've missed him so much. I had no idea he would be gone this long when he told me he was opening the church for the influenza."

Sarah touched Bonnie's forehead lovingly. Because of her blindness, she often touched those she loved. It allowed her to see them more clearly.

Bonnie felt warm to the touch. Labor could make her warm, but this was different. Sarah got concerned. This felt more like a fever. "You be still. I'm going to check on the boys, and I'll be right back," Sarah said.

She did check on the boys; they were playing in their room and were fine. Then Sarah talked to Thomas. She told him of her concern, and he went to check on Bonnie. She had fever. He was sure of it. He took her temperature, and it was high. If the fever continued, it would cause weakness. She needed to have this baby soon, but there was nothing he could do to speed things up.

He checked to see how far along she was and reassured his daughter-in-law that she and the baby would both be fine. Chipeta came and she and Sarah returned to attend Bonnie. Thomas lay down again, now alarmed by Bonnie's condition. He was trying to think, trying to remember his training and experience. What could be done for his daughter-in-law?

Chipeta had been gone all day, and it was now well into the evening. There had been no word from his wife. Reid tried calling the Stewart home on the telephone, but no one answered. He was concerned. This wasn't like Chipeta. She usually checked in with Reid if she was away from home for very long.

The children went to bed, and Reid drove to the Stewart home to see how things were going. He arrived to find Sarah standing

on the porch. The cold late November wind swept across the open land with a daring honesty, brutally carrying a chill that went right through to the soul.

“Sarah, what are you doing out here?” he asked.

“Reid.” Tears were in her eyes, and she reached her hands out to her brother. He took one of them as he pulled himself up the last step, and then she fell into his arms. “I’m scared.”

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“Bonnie’s been running a fever all day. Thomas thinks she may have the flu. She hasn’t got any strength left, and Thomas is tiring.” Reid could barely understand Sarah’s frightened words as she cried with her face buried in his shoulder.

“Have you called William?” Reid asked.

“No. We talked about this weeks ago and decided not to tell him if she went into labor. We didn’t want him to worry about her when he needed to be thinking about other things.”

“Well, I think he needs to know,” Reid said. He pulled away from his sister and went into the kitchen to use the telephone. The phone rang at the other end, but nobody answered.

“Keep trying,” Reid told the woman at the switchboard. “Let it ring until somebody answers. Then ring back here.”

Reid sat down at the kitchen table. He didn’t lower his head or close his eyes. He didn’t look to heaven, but he prayed, “Thank you, Father, that Christ is the good shepherd¹ and that in him we have life.² Thank you that Jesus gave his life so that we might have fullness of life.³ Thank you that he is the one who cares for each of his children⁴ and that there is nothing that can take us away from him.⁵ Nothing is too hard for you.⁶ I come to you asking for strength—strength for Bonnie to continue, strength for Thomas to endure,

¹ John 10:11.

² John 14:6.

³ John 1:16.

⁴ First Peter 5:7.

⁵ Romans 8:38–39.

⁶ Jeremiah 32:17.

strength for this child to live. I plead with you, Father, asking for health and healing—”

The telephone rang, and Reid jumped, startled by the unexpected sound. He pushed himself to his feet and moved to answer it.

“William?” Reid asked with anticipation.

“Reid? What’s wrong?”

“William, you need to come home. Bonnie’s having the baby, and there’s a problem,” Reid said.

“What is it?”

“Thomas thinks she has the flu, and she’s been in labor all day. Sarah says she’s too weak. Your father is getting tired too. They need help.”

“I’m on my way.” That was the last Reid heard. “I’m on my way.”

He went back onto the porch, but Sarah wasn’t there.

Reid found a seat in the parlor and waited. The house was silent. He was listening, listening for any sound to come from the rooms upstairs—any sound that would let him know what was happening.

He remembered waiting for his own children to be born. He had stayed with Chipeta until close to the birth, and then Thomas had forced him to go outside. He never went further than the porch, with a single wall between him and his wife. There he had sat, listening to the sounds, the words spoken, and the moans. He had sat praying and listening and praying more.

Now he sat doing the same thing. But this time, it was for another man’s wife and child. The man who had helped him past his injuries and given him a new life in a worn-out body.

Reid had gotten close to William. Even though William was dealing with his own recovery from burns, he had helped Reid recover from his experience at the hands of outlaws. After almost three weeks, Reid had returned home to find Thomas sick and unable to help him with the pain caused by his injuries.

William had just returned home and was unsure of his abilities following his own injury. He took care of those he could and tried to build a new life. But God was directing him. The young doctor had cared for Luke following a gunshot wound, and he had cared for his

own father's failing heart. Then he had stopped years of suffering for Reid when he did surgery, ending Reid's headaches.

But Reid had helped William too. William had watched Reid's suffering and had admired Reid for his devotion and trust in the Lord. Reid had never doubted that God was with him. Not during the worst of the pain caused by his injuries nor from the heartache of losing his eldest son, not even when the children he had brought home had been taken from him. Reid had remained steadfast and unwavering in his trust in God. Reid had encouraged William to hold to the Lord too.

Reid wanted this child to live. He knew the pain that came when a child died. He and Chipeta had lost four children. Two were born prematurely and had not survived. One, born sick and weak, had died in Reid's arms after just a few days of life. And Matt. Matt had died in his arms from a gunshot wound. Reid didn't want Bonnie and William to experience that pain.

Reid suddenly thought of Bonnie. She had the flu. Sarah had said she was weak. He had come close to losing Chipeta twice. Once, when he was away doing undercover work for the Department of Justice. She had been attacked, causing labor to begin. The baby had died, and she had struggled for life. He almost lost her again when Esa was born. He feared losing her with each pregnancy that followed. But God had been gracious. While they had lost three babies, God had allowed Chipeta to stay with him.

Now Reid sat in the silence. He began to hear little sounds penetrating the hush—the ticking of the clock that sat on the mantle, the creaking and groaning of the house as the wind blew past it, and the crackling of the fire in the fireplace.

"Lord, they are all in your hands. Take care of them, and let us accept whatever you have for us," Reid prayed. "But I'm asking you, Father, let them both live."

Scripture came to Reid's heart. *Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything*

*good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*¹

Reid's spirit calmed, but an uneasy feeling remained. Whatever happened would be God's will. Reid knew that he would be there for William, to rejoice with him or to grieve with him.

*Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*²

"Yes, Lord," Reid responded to the Spirit. He would help William rejoice and give thanks.

William came in the door suddenly. Reid hadn't heard the automobile; the wind was blowing too hard, making too much noise against the house.

He stopped, looking at Reid, questioning Reid with his eyes.

"I haven't seen any of them since I talked to you," Reid said.

William rushed out of the room, saying, "I've got to wash and change clothes."

Reid heard a door close, and a short time later, he heard another. Then another. Something was happening. Thomas came downstairs alone and collapsed onto the sofa near Reid.

"Thomas?" Reid didn't know what to ask, but he wanted to know what was happening.

"The baby's here. It's a little girl," the old doctor said softly. "She's small, but she's breathing."

"And Bonnie?"

"She's weak and still running a high fever. Her lips are starting to turn blue, and that's not good. She's not getting enough air to her blood. I'm glad William made it home."

Thomas let himself fall over to lie on the sofa, trying to relax. He closed his eyes.

¹ Hebrews 13:20–21.

² First Thessalonians 5:16–18.

Reid had been praying, but he wanted to do something else, anything. He asked, "Do you want some water? Coffee?"

"Can you get me some water?" Thomas asked.

"We'll find out," Reid teased. Thomas smiled, grateful for Reid's attempt at jest.

Thomas sat up enough to take the drink. Then he let the glass fall to the rug. He lay back on the sofa. "The Bible is in my room. Can you get it and read?"

That he could do! Reid went to the bedroom and, after a short search, found the Bible. Returning to the parlor, he began to read.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.¹

Sarah came into the room holding the baby wrapped in a blanket.

"Reid?" she called.

"I'm here."

"Can you hold her? I'm still helping William."

"Bring her to me," Reid said. Sarah put the tiny child in Reid's arms. "Okay. I've got her."

Sarah turned toward the kitchen, disappearing around a corner.

This child was so small. Reid thought she was even smaller than Esa had been. Esa had fought for life, but he had survived and was

¹ Matthew 5:3–8.

now a healthy sixteen-year-old. Reid prayed this child would live and grow strong too. He picked up the Bible again and continued to read.

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden."¹

Reid held William's baby girl. He looked at Thomas a few times. The old doctor was lying on the sofa, staring at nothing. Reid wasn't sure he was listening anymore, or maybe that's all he was doing. Reid continued, receiving comfort from the scripture himself.

"Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations."²

Over an hour later, Reid still sat reading the Bible. His eyes hurt. He needed coffee, and he wished he had his glasses with him.

Sarah had come through the room several times carrying water and towels back and forth from the upstairs bedroom to the kitchen and then back upstairs. She finally came into the room and stopped in the doorway.

"Thomas?" she asked.

Thomas had been lying on the sofa with his eyes closed. Reid thought he was asleep, but he now sat up and asked, "Is it over?"

She went to him, and he took her into his arms. Reid knew that Bonnie was gone. He looked at this tiny baby in his arms. She

¹ Matthew 5:13–14

² Matthew 12:18.

would start life without a mother, struggling to live and longing for her mother's love.

William didn't return to the church to care for the influenza patients. He let the others do it. He had to grieve and bury his wife. He also had a new little girl to care for.

The grave diggers were doing all they could, but the going was slow in this cold wet weather. The undertaker had hired extra help, and the bodies were being buried without ceremony. Reid wouldn't let this happen to William's wife.

The undertaker called Reid and told him that Bonnie's body had been placed in the ground. Reid drove to pick up William and his parents, leaving Chipeta with the baby and the two older boys. The four went to the graveyard beside the church and entered together.

Reid said, "This is certainly not the way we want to say goodbye to anyone, especially a sweet soul like Bonnie. But we're going to say goodbye, and we're going to leave her to rest in God's arms. We'll go back to our daily activities, and we'll think she is there with us. We'll hear her voice, and we'll see her face in everything she did for us, and we'll learn to do it ourselves. Let's take comfort in the scripture."

"I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then

the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'

"Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

"The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."¹

"Bonnie is with God now. She's not flesh and blood anymore. She's a beautiful spirit. She's not sleeping here but alive in another place. We don't understand why this happened or how she can leave us so fast and then live somewhere else without us. But someday, when the trumpet sounds, she will walk this earth again in a new resurrected immortal body. There will be no more crying, no more death. God will give us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Until that trumpet sounds, we will all face death, both for loved ones and for ourselves. We'll cry for those we love, we'll miss them, and we'll have to work hard to continue to live without them. But we'll do it. We do it because we love our families and because we love God. He is our hope. One day,

"God's dwelling place (will be) among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."²

"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is

¹ First Corinthians 15:50–57.

² Revelation 21:3b–4.

seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”¹

Reid kissed his sister, hugged his brother-in-law, and then reached out for his nephew. Reid was only a few years older than William and almost a foot shorter, but Reid still drew the man into his arms as if William were his own child. William hugged Reid briefly in return and then tried to pull away. But Reid held on, waiting for the release that hadn't come yet.

It came slowly. First came the silent tears, and then William's chest began to shake, and the sobs grew. William held onto his uncle and cried until there were no tears left. It ended as slowly as it started. But when it had stopped, William continued to hold Reid. Reid knew that William didn't know what to do, where to go, or who to turn to. He was lost. It was now Reid's turn to point William toward God. Reid began to softly sing,

The Lord is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of
whom shall I be afraid?²

Reid continued to hold William as the song came, soft and low, speaking of healing, of faith, and of trust in God. Reid could feel William's body growing in strength and resolve as Reid patiently sang and waited for William to find the dawn.

I remain confident of this: I will see the
goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.
Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and
wait for the Lord.³

¹ Second Corinthians 4:17–18.

² Psalm 27:1.

³ Psalm 27:13–14.

William backed away from Reid and smiled sadly. “Thank you,” he said and turned to hug his parents.

Reid began to make his way back to the automobile. He would wait there until they were ready to leave, then he would drive them home.

Chipeta would continue to take care of the boys, and Sarah would care for the newborn. No one questioned this. They all understood this was the way things would be.

William, always the caring doctor, warned Reid again to watch for symptoms of the flu.



DECEMBER 1918

This was the first Christmas the children had spent without the entire family together. The world was changing, and their family was changing with it.

Winona had matured during the months she had been helping William with the sick. She had learned compassion and enjoyed helping others. She wasn't the shy awkward girl she had once been. She continued going to people's homes and helping those who had the flu. When she arrived at the temporary hospital in September, she had taken control, having been around the influenza and knowing what to do for the sick. Then she had been the last to leave the church, staying with the pastor and Dan McClelland to clean as the two men reinstalled the pews.

Winona had come home after almost a year of working with William. She seemed to be lost and was having trouble finding something interesting to do. Winona had only gone to school a few years and was unable to help with the children's studies, so she cooked, and she cleaned.

Winona hadn't seen James much since he had come home and now found him a curiosity. She watched him but kept her distance. She had never had much to say to him. The two had seldom interacted before James left for Denver. It was easy not to talk to each other with eleven children in the house.

They had lived together less than two years after she arrived and before he left for the university. They had both experienced a lot since then and had grown up.

The family wasn't as worried about spreading the disease as they had been in the previous months, but the cold weather was keeping them indoors and isolated from their extended family. The flu was

still hanging on, even though the new cases had tapered off. While there weren't as many getting sick, everyone was being cautious.

Travis stayed to himself most of the time, sitting on his back porch bundled in his coat. When he did venture out, he would visit either James or Thomas. He seemed to have an uncanny ability to know who needed his company the most. He played checkers with Reid's children and told stories to William's boys. He rocked his great-granddaughter when at the Stewart home and prayed for her.

Cleve and Jenny received a letter from Curt and a telegram from the war department on the same day. They both told of Noah dying from the influenza the day after the war ended. Jenny was in deep mourning. Noah had survived the war, but he wouldn't be coming home.

Jenny spent most of her days in her bedroom. Losing two sons a year apart was more than she could take. Emily sat with her in the beginning, but after a few weeks, the teen moved on. She was taking care of the house, cooking the meals, doing the laundry, and doing her schoolwork alone.

The month of December was a blur for the family. They weren't celebrating Christmas. They were just going through the motions.

Emily felt isolated from her parents and would often visit with Abigail. Reid heard Emily talking about her parents' grief and how they were ignoring her heartache and knew he had to help.

Reid visited with Cleve soon after and told him of Emily's perceived isolation and loneliness. Cleve hadn't realized his daughter felt this way and appreciated Reid's council. Emily's father began to spend more time with her, listening to her and trying to care for her needs.

He seemed to have gotten past the open mourning for his sons. But he was melancholy, needing rest and comfort himself. They always seemed to be just beyond his reach. He spent time with his father and sought Reid's counsel often.

William was silently grieving for Bonnie, but he was doing it as he worked. Sadness seemed to be his constant companion as he continued to care for the sick, the dying, and his children. He also sought his grandfather's and Reid's company.

William was concerned about his new daughter too. She was almost six weeks old and hadn't gained much weight. Nor did she respond to her caregivers the way a child this age should. Thomas was also worried. He and Sarah held the child habitually, knowing that human touch and love brought life and healing.

The two little boys didn't understand what had happened to their mother and continued to ask for her. They spent their days with Chipeta. William would drop them off when he left home each day, and if he didn't come back to get them, Reid would take them home before supper in the evenings. If William was late getting in, Sarah would put them to bed.

Having the two little boys in the house had cut into Chipeta's time with her own children. Since there was still no school, she was trying to teach all seven of the children at home. Their studies had slowed with William's children in the house. The older children read and studied independently but the added noise was a distraction. Chipeta often needed the older children's help in caring for the younger ones too. Chipeta wasn't able to spend as much time with her own younger children either. She was depending more on James, Esa, and Abigail to teach the three youngest girls.

James worked with Aiyana and Kimi, but he could only sit with them a short time before his eyes would begin to hurt. The coughing wasn't coming as often but seemed to happen almost every time he lay down. He couldn't rest without a struggle first.

James was also having problems with his memory and his temper. When he returned to teaching after letting his eyes rest, he would forget what he had been doing. Someone would have to look at what he had done and help him get started again. As hard as he tried and as much as he wanted to, he didn't have the patience to listen to lengthy directions or to the young girls reading. He would get upset, and that would cause his breathing to become harsh. His parents and the doctor were concerned about this. William speculated that James

just wasn't getting enough oxygen to his brain. But he didn't know what to do to improve this, short of keeping James in the oxygen tent all the time. An oxygen mask would have allowed James to sit with the others while using the oxygen, but he was still refusing to use the mask.

Caring for James also interrupted the children's studies. Chipeta would have to stop what she was doing several times a day to care for him.

If the flu continued to decline, school would start at the end of next month. Chipeta was ready. If her children were at school, she would be able to care for William's boys better. Maybe James would stay calm, and he wouldn't have as many coughing episodes.

Saamel came into the bedroom and woke Reid. "Dad, something's wrong with James," he said, shaking Reid's arm.

"Okay, I'm awake," Reid said, pushing himself to a sitting position and turning to look at Chipeta. She could get to him much faster than he could, but she wasn't in bed. "I'm coming."

Reid turned the lamp on and reached for his cane. Saamel helped him stand. His first movements after rising were always slow. When he was on his feet, he and Saamel started for the door.

Reid said, "Go find out where your mother is, please."

Reid made his way toward his son's bedroom as fast as he could. There was a lamp on in the room, and Reid thought Saamel must have turned it on when he got out of bed. But as he rounded the corner, he saw that Winona was sitting with James, holding him as he took short gasping breaths. He was out of the oxygen tent and sitting up.

"Lay him down, Winona," Reid said. "Let me sit on the bed with him."

She laid him down and moved out of the way. Reid reached for the medication on the table beside the bed, gave James a dose and then began to massage his chest. It wasn't long before James's chest seemed to collapse and he began to cough.

“Help me roll him over,” Reid told Winona.

They got him almost onto his stomach, and Reid began rubbing his back as James continued to cough. He gagged, and Reid moved a cloth to James’s mouth as he vomited lightly. James put his arm across his chest and moaned. He turned his head to look at his father and nodded his head in thanks. Reid pulled the oxygen tent back over James.

Saamel was watching.

Reid turned to the thirteen-year-old and said, “He’s okay now. Thanks for waking me. Did you find your mother?”

“She’s in bed with Kimi,” Saamel said.

Reid shook his head. “I don’t know what we’re going to do with her. She’s waking up every night. Go on to bed, Saamel. Get some sleep.”

Reid looked toward Esa. He was still asleep. That boy could sleep through anything.

Winona asked quietly, “What about James? How often do you do this?”

Reid looked at James and knew he was already asleep. He would always pass out after an episode like this. “Not as often as we did when he first came home. I’m just praying there will always be someone around when he needs help.”

“Teach me,” the girl said.

“You sure?” Reid asked.

Winona nodded her head.

“Okay. When I get home tomorrow afternoon, I’ll explain everything to you and show you how to use the oxygen. Why don’t you go back to bed? You get some sleep too?”

“I cannot sleep after hearing the voice of God,” she explained.

Reid smiled. “What did he say?”

“Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God.”¹

The smile left Reid’s face. “Do you know what you’re not doing? What your unfinished deeds are?”

¹ Revelation 3:2.

Winona looked unsure of herself as she pointed to James. “If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you.”¹ ‘At the beginning the Creator “made them male and female,” and said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”’²

Reid continued to watch Winona, now unsure of what she was saying. “Tell me how God talked to you,” Reid said.

“For three nights I have had a dream. James and I are living in another place. Ruth, Joey, Stephen, Emily, Abigail, Jeannie, Saamel, and Esa are all there, with one of Sarah’s sons and Molly’s boys. They come and go in my dream. Then they all leave us alone. And there is an older man and woman that I do not know that stay with us. He shows me this in every dream. He had just said the same words again when he told me to wake up.”

Reid didn’t have any idea why this grouping of young people would be together away from Harris, but he trusted Winona, and he trusted God. It sounded like she had truly heard from the Lord.

“I understand, but this is a message for you. Don’t say anything to James until God tells him. Okay? You know what the future may hold, and you can prepare for it, but God must prepare James’s heart,” Reid advised.

Winona nodded.

“I’m going to sit with James for a little while. You go on to bed,” Reid said.

Winona left, and Reid sat on the edge of the bed watching his son, remembering Winona’s words. He prayed that Winona was hearing correctly or that God would speak and straighten her out. He wasn’t going to discourage Winona and tell her she had not heard from God. It sounded like she had. But any woman who married James in the condition he was in would suffer too.

¹ Leviticus 25:35 (ESV).

² Matthew 19:4b–6.

James was sleeping good now, his breathing calm and steady. Reid's eyes were beginning to droop. He reached for his cane, preparing to return to his own bed, when the Spirit spoke. *It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.*¹

Reid smiled, submitting to the Lord. "No, Father, it's not good for him to be alone. Winona has a good heart. She would be a good wife."

*She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life.*²



MARCH 1919

"Did my arithmetic book get mixed in with your stuff yesterday?" Abigail whispered to Patricia Langston.

"Yeah, I found it when I got home," she responded in a hushed voice.

"Did you bring it back today?" Abigail said.

"No, I forgot it. It's in the barn," Patricia replied softly.

"Well, can I share with you today?" Abigail asked. "I'll go home with you and get it after school. I couldn't get my homework done last night because I couldn't find it. I've got to make it up."

Patricia pushed her book to the edge of her desk, and Abigail leaned over to look at the problem the class was working on.

After school, Abigail found her brothers and sisters and told them she was going to Patricia's house to get her book. Esa knew their father wouldn't want Abigail walking home alone, so he decided to go with her. Esa handed Saamel his books, and Abigail handed hers to Jeannie. Esa told the others to go straight home and tell their mother where they had gone.

One of the Langston employees was waiting outside the school with a buggy. The girl climbed in, excited that she had something to tell the man.

"Good afternoon, Missy," the man in the buggy said. "Did you have a good day at school?"

She ignored the question and responded excitedly, "I've got friends coming home with me today."

"Hello," the man said, watching as Abigail climbed into the buggy beside Patricia. Then he felt more movement and turned to see a young Indian boy sitting beside him on the front seat. "You're coming too?"

¹ Genesis 2:24 (NLV).

² Proverbs 31:12.

Esa nodded.

Patricia chattered the six miles to the Langston home. She was talking about nothing, and Esa was ready to get out and walk, but he needed to stay with Abigail.

“You know, I think Hiram likes me. He picked my pencil up off the floor five times today.” Patricia smiled. “I kept dropping it on purpose to see if he would keep picking it up. Then he told me I’d better hang onto it. It was going to get broken on the floor. Tomorrow I’m going to break it and see if he’ll give me one of his. I just can’t stand that Ponder girl. She’s always hanging around him, asking him for things. She brought him a cookie and gave it to him at lunch. I’m going to have to tell Mrs. Winemiller to make some cookies so I can take him some too. I’ll give him more than just one, though.”

Esa had to tune her out; he turned to the man beside him and asked, “Does this horse take a saddle too?”

At the Langston home, they were greeted by another ranch hand. Patricia said, “Let me go get us something to eat, and we can go into my room in the barn, and I can show you the doll Mother brought me from St. Louis last month.” And with that, she disappeared into the house.

Abigail and Esa stood in the space between the house and the barn, watching as a few men moved around doing their work. Esa said, “We can’t stay. It’s a long walk back to our house.”

“I know,” Abigail said. “But she’s going to get mad if we don’t stay a little while. I need my book. We’ll have to stay long enough for me to get it.”

Patricia came out the door carrying a tray with a plate of bread and cheese, a pitcher, and three cups. Three red checkered napkins were tucked under her arm. “Come on, we’re going this way.”

Esa and Abigail followed her into the barn and up a narrow set of stairs. At the top of the stairs, there was a closed door. Patricia stopped suddenly and turned around. The tray swung near Abigail’s face, and she flinched, stepping backward. Her foot missed a step but caught on the one below it as her shin scraped the edge of a step.

“Here, hold this,” Patricia said. Abigail reached to take the tray, a grimace appearing on her face.

Patricia fumbled with a key in the door’s lock. Esa took the tray from Abigail as she turned to sit on the step. She pulled her skirt up and her sock down to look at a scraped, reddened shin. She looked to Esa with an irritated frown on her face and pulled her stocking up, saying nothing.

They followed Patricia into the room and looked around. It was a large room with a table and two chairs. A lantern hung over the table from the ceiling. There was a mattress on the floor against the inside wall. It was covered in flowered sheets with a colorful patchwork quilt wadded at one end. Several brightly colored pillows and a few dolls were strewn about. Crude still life paintings covered the walls. Two windows in the corner of the room displayed ruffled lace curtains. A thick bright-green Persian rug covered most of the floor. Under the windows sat a large, elaborately furnished dollhouse. Another wall was covered in shelves that held toys and books, and Esa’s eyes froze on what he saw—a finely engraved but badly tarnished silver tea set with many pieces.

“Come on, Esa, have some tea,” Patricia told him.

Esa moved to stand beside the table where the two girls sat. He drank a cup of tea and ate a piece of bread with cheese. Their hostess kept talking. She was showing Abigail a doll that her mother had bought her on her last trip to St. Louis. It had a glass head and glass hands and legs. It was dressed in a frilly pink satin dress with a thin shimmering pinafore over it.

“Patricia, where’s Abigail’s arithmetic book?” Esa asked.

Without looking, she flung her hand in the direction of the shelves, waving her fingers, and said, “It’s over there.”

Esa went to the shelves and started looking. He picked up one book about the right size, but that wasn’t it. He reached for another beside the silver. Instead of picking up the book, he picked up the creamer and turned it, looking at the carving, and then saw words engraved in the bottom. He took a step toward the window to get better light. The letters were small, but he could read it clearly, “F. W. Drum Sterling,” inside a double rectangle. He placed the piece back on the shelf and picked up the book that was sitting next to it. The arithmetic book.

"We've got to go," he said.

"Oh, not yet," Patricia pleaded. She wasn't through telling Abigail about her latest painting.

"We've got to. It's a long way home," he insisted, moving toward his sister and taking her arm to lead her to the door.

Abigail and Esa walked the dirt road and could see Harris in the distance in front of them. They had passed no one on the road when an automobile appeared in the distance coming toward them. As the car got closer, they realized it was their father.

He stopped the Cadillac, and they ran to the other side of the vehicle. Esa opened the door, and Abigail slid in beside her father. Esa followed to sit next to her.

"Are you two okay?" Reid asked.

"Yes, sir, we're fine," Abigail said. "I did scrape my leg."

She pulled her skirt up and her sock down to show her father.

"We'll take care of that as soon as we get home," he said. "Did you get the book?"

"I've got it right here," Esa said.

"Good." Reid gave a sigh of relief. He didn't like them going out to the Langstons'. He just didn't trust the Langstons to take care of his children.

Reid turned the Cadillac around, and they headed home.

"How did she end up with your book?" the children's father asked.

"My books were on the corner of my desk when we were getting ready to leave yesterday," Abigail explained. "They must have been hanging off the edge. Patricia bumped into them and knocked them off. Then she leaned over to pick them up, and she dropped some of hers. They all got mixed together. The man that picks her up was in a hurry and came in looking for her. She grabbed a bunch of books and ran out the door. I picked up what was left, and my arithmetic book wasn't there."

"Well, you've got it back now," Reid said. "Anything interesting happen at school today?"

"No, sir," Abigail said. "Same stuff."

"Esa?"

"No, sir."

They drove on in silence until they got to the edge of town. Then Esa's questions had to be asked.

"Dad, when was it that Mrs. Langston's tea set was stolen?"

"Oh, goodness. That had to be close to two years ago," Reid said.

"Did you ever see it?"

"No, but Uncle Luke did."

"Do you know what it looked like?"

"Well"—Reid smiled—"it was silver." He looked at Esa, but his son didn't seem to be amused by his joke. "The report said it had floral engravings and wood handles."

Esa got quiet again.

"Why are you asking?" Reid asked.

"Patricia has a room upstairs in the barn. She's got lots of junk up there," Esa said.

"All kinds of junk." Abigail broke in, her eyes going wide. "And she's got this glass doll. It's so pretty—"

"And she's got a silver tea set," Esa injected. "What happened to Mrs. Leachman's tea set?"

"Her tea set? It was taken away, and I was told Mrs. Langston gave it to her daughter-in-law," Reid replied.

"Then why is one sitting on the shelf in their barn?"

"Did it have wood handles?" Reid asked.

"Yes, sir, and there were lots of pieces—a big pot and two small ones, but they were different shapes. There was a really little piece with a spout and another with a lid. And a bunch of little spoons, and it was all on a big oval tray. The bottom of it has the words 'F. W. Drum Sterling,' with a box around the words."

Reid didn't speak. He was thinking, trying to remember what the markings were on the Langstons' tea set. He remembered Luke telling him that Mrs. Leachman's set had the markings filed off.

As they drove into their own yard, Reid told the children, "Please don't mention the silver to anyone. I'm going to check on it, but I need to talk to someone else first. This will be our secret, for now. Do you understand? 'Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends.'¹ We don't know if there is anything wrong, but until we know for sure, we keep it to ourselves."

"Yes sir," offered Abigail.

"Okay," Esa said. "I won't say anything."

It was all waiting. There was nothing else to do. Curt took care of the wounded, and he shipped them home. Now there was nobody at the hospital. He searched the battlefields for dead, and he waited some more.

The military had brought in a whole library of university and trade books. They were being offered to the men who remained in France, awaiting their turn to go home. The advanced medical textbooks that Curt requested had finally arrived, just as the army loaned him to a children's orphanage. He took the books with him to review, preparing to return to medical school.

Once at the orphanage, though, he didn't have time to read. The children were war orphans. Many of them had injuries from the war, and some had been affected by the poison gas that both sides had used. Curt found himself working with the little ones, some not even a year old. It was heart-wrenching, but it filled his days and left little time to read or do anything else.

¹ Proverbs 17:9 ESV.



MAY 1919

Reid had filed a complaint with the state attorney general's office months ago, concerning both the hearing and Mrs. Leachman's trial. But when the attorney general's office found out Mrs. Leachman was deceased, they closed the matter. Reid had filed a second time but had not gotten a response.

Now Reid wrote a letter. This time he named names and included statements made in the arrest report and in court transcripts. Then he delivered the correspondence to the attorney general's office in Topeka himself. It was hard for the state attorney general to deny a federal judge his due process. Reid then moved on to the Department of Justice. Because the judge was a federal employee, he was allowed to use federal marshals in his investigation.

Reid and three federal marshals arrived at the Langston home just before school was out for the day. Reid stood at the automobile, never entering the house or the barn.

Mr. Langston was indignant. This was just another act of the conspirators to mistreat his family. He ranted, and he threatened, and he boiled like a pot simmering on a hot stove. White knuckles clenched into fists as he hissed through gritted teeth at the injustice taking place at his own home, his sanctuary.

He came at Reid, pushing him in the shoulder with his outstretched arm. Reid fell against the side of the automobile. He dropped his cane and drew the pistol from the shoulder harness as he slid down the side of the Cadillac and came to rest on the running board.

Alexander Langston had no time to respond. He froze. "Draw a gun on me, will you? You will regret this to the day you die!"

One of the marshals had been standing at the door to the barn and saw it all. He walked up behind Langston and grabbed an arm.

“You have just made a mistake. You assaulted and threatened a federal judge. I’m arresting you, and you can cool off in jail.”

“You’ll never get away with this,” Langston bellowed.

“Well,” another marshal said, “you didn’t get away with this either.”

Everyone turned to look at the marshal standing just outside the barn holding a badly tarnished but complete sterling silver tea and coffee set.

“That’s it,” Lydia Langston said, moving toward the marshal. “That’s my silver!” She picked up one of the pieces and turned it over to look at the maker’s mark on the bottom. She turned to her husband. “This is it. Look. I told you that piece of junk wasn’t mine.”

“This was in your barn,” the marshal said. He could tell the woman was shocked to see it. She didn’t know it was there.

Her husband was obviously surprised too. He had quit yelling and stared at the silver with his mouth open.

Reid put his pistol away. “Why don’t we wait until Patricia gets home and ask her about it?”

Reid pulled himself to his feet, opened the Cadillac’s door, and sat down inside, waiting for the girl to get home.

Patricia saw the men in her yard and approached cautiously from the buggy. Her father stood still, quietly watching his daughter approach with a stern, annoyed look on his face. Her mother stood beside a man she didn’t know. They were all watching her. She stopped near the front of the two automobiles. “What’s going on, Mother? Who are these men?”

Reid spoke. “Patricia, come look at the seat here beside me.”

The girl took a few steps and stretched her neck. Then her eyes widened, and fear escaped onto her face.

“Patricia, this was found with your things in the barn.” Reid spoke softly. “Where did you get it?”

Patricia looked to her mother and then quickly to her father, but she didn’t speak.

“Patricia, tell us where you got this. Otherwise, we have to assume your father put the silver in the barn, and he’s going to have to go to jail.”

Her face got angry. “You can’t take him to jail. That’s our silver.”

“Not really,” Reid explained. “You and your father both swore that the set your mother gave to your brother’s wife was your mother’s set. If this is yours, then your father stole the other set. He also received money from Mr. Montgomery to pay for this silver. When he did that, this tea set became Mr. Montgomery’s. By having this silver here in his barn, we can charge your father with fraud. Do you know what that means?”

She was still mad. Reid could see it in her face. But she slowly shook her head, admitting that she didn’t know what fraud was.

“It means your father cheated someone else out of money or something of value, like Mrs. Leachman’s silver and the money he got from Mr. Montgomery. He deceived other people into believing a lie and made unjust claims about other people.”

Patricia still stood, staring at him, but her face was softening.

“Do you realize what damage has been done because of this?” Reid asked.

The girl shook her head again.

“Mrs. Leachman lost her silver and her freedom. Her reputation was tarnished. The Bible tells us that ‘A good reputation is better than expensive perfume.’¹ She did nothing wrong, but people in town think she stole something. She’s dead now, and nobody will ever be able to tell her they’re sorry.” Reid waited, watching the girl. There was still no response.

“Mr. Montgomery gave your parents a lot of money for this tea set. Because of the lies that were told about him, people stopped paying him the money they owed him. It was wrong to lie, and it was wrong not to pay him.” Reid looked at Alexander Langston. “He had to close his business because he couldn’t afford to keep it open. His good reputation was destroyed, too, because of a lie. Now he’s dead, also, and no one can tell him they’re sorry. No one can give him the money they owe him.” Reid stopped, watching the girl for a reaction.

“It must be remembered, of course, that laws are made, not for good people, but for lawbreakers and criminals, for the godless and

¹ Ecclesiastes 7:1a.

sinful, for those who are not religious or spiritual, for those who kill their fathers or mothers...for those who lie and give false testimony or who do anything else contrary to sound doctrine.”¹

The girl was still not responding to his words.

He continued, “The sheriff lost his job, and the town’s attorney lost his job, all because of lies being told about this silver. Was that good? Did those lies help anyone? For two years, people believed something that wasn’t true, and all that time you had the silver service in the barn. Why did you lie?” Reid waited for an answer that didn’t come.

“How did you get it?”

Still no answer.

“Why did you hide it?”

The child just wasn’t talking. Reid didn’t want to, but he would have to try something else.

“Patricia, you lied in the statement you made to the sheriff’s deputy. So did your father. That statement was admitted to a court of law as the truth. Lying to a court of law is a crime. You could both go to jail,” Reid explained.

“Wait right there,” Langston thundered. The marshal near him pulled on the handcuffs hard, and Langston shut up.

“Patricia, what happened?” Reid asked again.

Patricia looked down at the front of the automobile. She started slowly. “Mother sent me into town to pick it up from Mr. Montgomery.” Her eyes moved to look at the judge. “There were a bunch of people in the store, and Mr. Montgomery was busy. It was sitting there on the table, so I just took it. I didn’t want to wait.” She stopped talking.

“What happened next?” Reid asked.

She looked away, off into the open field behind the corral. Her face was hard. “I’ve played with that tea set since I was a little girl.” She jerked her head around to look at her mother and fiercely yelled, “It’s mine! You were going to give it to Rachel!” Tears began to roll down the girl’s face.

¹ First Timothy 1:9–10 (GNT).

“What happened next?” Reid asked calmly.

“I took it into the barn to use it one more time before she gave it away.” Patricia looked at her mother again with belligerent eyes. “Then I dropped a piece, and it rolled out the door and fell onto the barn floor. I went to get it, and it was under one of the milk cows, so I pushed the cow to make her move, and she stepped on it. It broke the handle off.”

Reid held up the sugar bowl. “This piece?”

Patricia nodded.

“Then what happened?”

“Well, Mother had just sent it away to get it fixed, so I couldn’t give it back to her with a broken handle. The box was open at Mr. Montgomery’s. He knew it wasn’t broken. I couldn’t give it to her broken. She’d know I was playing with it again.”

“So you hid it from her?”

Patricia nodded, a satisfied look on her face. “I told her Mr. Montgomery didn’t have it.”

“Then what happened?”

Lydia Langston stepped toward Reid. “I can tell you what happened.” She sighed. “I went to Mr. Montgomery’s looking for it. When I got there, he told me it had been stolen. I came home upset and told Alexander. He said he’d find it and left the house. And then he caused all that trouble. I didn’t mean for any of that to happen. Then the problems he caused just kept getting bigger and bigger, and I couldn’t stop it. He wouldn’t let me leave the house. Every time we discussed it, Patricia would get upset too. I thought she was upset because I was upset. Now I realize the guilt she held.” She looked at Patricia sadly. “She could have stopped this at any time just by showing us the silver.”

The disappointment showed in Lydia Langston’s face. Then she reached her arms out and moved toward the girl. “I still love you, but we’re going to have to learn to talk to each other. We’ve got to make some changes around here.”

“For the love of money is the first step toward all kinds of sin. Some people have even turned away from God because of their love

for it, and as a result have pierced themselves with many sorrows,”¹ Reid said, looking to Alexander Langston.

Patricia’s tear-filled eyes looked toward her mother, and she began to cry. “I’m sorry.” She reached out to her mother and accepted the love being offered.

Reid turned to Patricia’s father. “Mr. Langston, how do you propose we solve the problem that exists now?”

“What problem?”

“Well, let’s see. The tea set your daughter-in-law has isn’t hers. She could be charged with possession of stolen goods. You took the set from Mrs. Leachman without authority. You could be charged with theft. You owe Mr. Montgomery’s estate for the silver he paid for. You could be brought up on libel charges, depending on what either estate administrator decides. The sheriff and the town’s attorney have lost their jobs. The former sheriff could charge you with slander. There could also be extortion charges. The town councilmen could be charged with conspiracy to commit fraud. I wonder why they were so willing to follow you. My goodness, the acting sheriff will be investigated too, and the city magistrate. I have to wonder why they allowed the arrest record to stand when objections were made about its validity. And why did the magistrate allow a trial to take place without witnesses present and without evidence?”

“I would think a misunderstanding about a tea set could be overlooked, except an innocent woman was convicted of wrongdoing. Mr. Langston, I can assure you there will be an investigation and the truth will come out. I’m leaving you with the marshals.

“If anyone sins and is unfaithful to the Lord by deceiving a neighbor about something entrusted to them or left in their care or about something stolen, or if they cheat their neighbor...or if they swear falsely about any such sin that people may commit—when they sin in any of these ways and realize their guilt, they must return what they have stolen or taken by extortion, or what was entrusted to them, or the lost property they found, or whatever it was they swore falsely about. They must make restitution in full, add a fifth of the

¹ First Timothy 6:10 (TLB).

value to it and give it all to the owner on the day they present their guilt offering.”¹

“What are you going to pay for your wrongdoing, Mr. Langston?” Reid asked.

Reid turned to Mrs. Langston and Patricia. “This could have all been avoided if you had just done the right thing and given the tea set to your mother like you were instructed to do. Even after it was broken, if you had told your mother what happened, this wouldn’t be happening now. Mrs. Langston, I am sorry.”

Reid pulled his feet into the automobile, closed the Cadillac’s door, and started the engine. One of the marshals took the sterling silver tea set and placed it in a box in the back seat of his automobile.

Reid started for home.

¹ Leviticus 6:2–5.



JUNE 1919

Reid was sitting in his office in the back of the house going over some papers on the large table his father had made years ago. His eyeglasses sat low on his nose, being held on by just one arm. A half-eaten plate of food sat beside him. He looked up to see James standing in the hallway, looking sightlessly into the room.

“What’s the matter, son?”

“Dad, I have to find something to do. I’m going bonkers,” James said.

“What do you want to do?” Reid asked, looking over the top of the glasses.

“That’s the problem—I can’t do what I want to do. I can’t go back to school. I can’t go to the stables. I can’t even walk over to Grandpa’s without coughing so much I can’t breathe,” James explained.

“Is that what you want to do, go back to school?”

“I’d like to, but I’d never make it. I couldn’t walk from one building to another without getting out of breath. I can’t write well enough to take notes that I could read later.” James lifted his scarred hand, with part of two fingers missing, to look at it.

James had been sullen and especially quiet the last few weeks. Reid had already noticed. He had discussed his son’s problems with William and knew what needed to be done. But Reid didn’t want to initiate the conversation. He wanted James to make the first move toward helping himself.

“Why don’t you come sit down? Pull the chair over here to the table with me.” Reid indicated the end of the table. He took off his glasses and picked up a stack of papers, moving them in front of him to give James a clear spot to sit. He then pushed a book toward the wall.

Reid rolled his chair to sit closer to his son.

“Have you been reading your Bible? Have you been praying?” James’s father asked.

“Yes, sir. But it’s not helping. I keep waiting for God to talk to me, but I’m not hearing him,” James responded, sucking in air noisily.

“Are you just reading and talking, or are you truly seeking God?”

“I don’t know. I read, but my eyes get so tired looking at that tiny print. I think I’m only talking to God when I get frustrated because I can’t do something. Seems like that’s all the time. I’m tired of asking him the same thing over and over. I’m just tired of not being able to do anything.” James closed his eyes and put his hands over them, leaning on the table with his elbows. “I’ve got nothing to do.”

“The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged,”¹ Reid advised his son. “This is just a season of rest. Something better is coming.”

“I hope so. I keep telling myself that, anyway. I told God I would take what he gave me, but I’m having a hard time doing it,” James said, sucking in air again.

“Nobody told us it would be easy. ‘The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride.’² ‘When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider this: God has made the one as well as the other.’³ Reid sighed. “And I do understand. There’s a lot of things I couldn’t do when I was first hurt. There’s still a lot of things I can’t do. You have to learn to live the way God made you, and it’s hard. But you’re doing better now than when you first got home. You’re breathing better. You can see better.”

James nodded and coughed gently a few times.

“Can you do something for me?” Reid asked.

“What?”

¹ Deuteronomy 31:8.

² Ecclesiastes 7:8.

³ Ecclesiastes 7:14a.

“Search the scripture. Write down every promise God made to his people, not the Israelite people but us—believers. ‘So I turned my mind to understand, to investigate and to search out wisdom and the scheme of things.’¹ Write down the promise and where you find it in scripture too.”

James seemed confused. “Why am I doing this, Dad?”

Reid didn’t answer but instead asked again, “Will you do it?”

James nodded, and his father answered, “I’m asking you to do it because I want you to see that God keeps his promises. He said he would ‘never leave you nor forsake you.’² He never does, and I want you to see that. You do it right here, on the end of this table. There’s paper, and there’s the pens.” Reid pointed to the paper, pens, and ink. “How long can you read before your eyes get tired?”

“Maybe a half hour, sometimes longer,” James said.

“Okay, you figure out when you’re going to study. Do it for at least a half hour. Try to do an hour. Then take a break. Once in the morning, once in the afternoon, and once after supper. That’s three hours a day. You keep your schedule every day, you understand?” Reid instructed. “Same time every day. I want the date and time on every page you write. You start at the beginning of the Bible, and you keep going till you get through Revelation or until I say you’re finished. Do you understand?”

James nodded again. He understood. He should never have told his father he needed something to do. He wouldn’t make that mistake again.

Reid said, “‘Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.’”³ The judge stood up, kissed his son on the forehead, and stopped on his way out the door to pick up the plate. He looked at his son, wondering if James would do this.

James coughed, and his hand went to his chest. He closed his eyes, and his face tightened. He tried to take a breath, but Reid could see him struggling.

¹ Ecclesiastes 7:25a.

² Deuteronomy 31:6b.

³ Psalm 37:4.

Reid asked, “Does your chest hurt?”

James nodded. “I can’t breathe.”

Reid set the plate down. “Come on, you go lie down. Let’s see if we can make you feel better.”



JULY 1919

Curt stepped off the train. He hadn't told anyone he was coming home. It's not that he wanted to surprise anyone; he just wanted to slip into town quietly and not have anyone slap him on the back. He'd seen other soldiers along the train's route come home to bands, speeches, and parades. He didn't need or want that.

He had left with the family's prayers and the solemn hug of his father. He wanted to come home the same way. And then he wanted to sleep. Do nothing but sleep until he was ready to get up. Then he wanted to see James.

He had stopped in Washington to visit his brother Edison. They had talked about James and about Uncle Reid's visit. Curt was told of the president's visit, and they had laughed about Blade's appearance at the ceremony. Then Ed had explained James's medical condition to Curt. There were still patients at the hospital, and Ed had taken Curt there, explaining procedures and therapies. Curt had followed his older brother through the outpatient clinic for a few days, becoming familiar with some of the patient's long-term problems. Then Curt had left for home.

Harris was quiet. Hardly anyone was at the train station. He picked up his bag and began walking, first across the track to avoid town, and then he cut across the field toward the stables. At the stables, he skirted the outside of the corral and saw his mother hanging laundry on the line. He was home. He started running but stopped as he got to the edge of the yard. Tears were in his eyes as he called her name, "Mother."

Sarah looked up and listened. Curt began moving closer. He was just a few yards from her.

"Mother, I'm home."

"Curt!" she yelled and reached her hands out to him. He fell into her arms, hugging her and holding her, not wanting to let her go.

She put a hand to his face and looked deep into his eyes. It was sunny here in the yard. He knew she could see him. Her smile grew as the happiness spread across her face moment by moment, like a flower opening in spring. Curt could see the tears coming from deep inside her, and when they came, he cried too.

"Come on inside. Let's go tell your father you're home," she said, taking his hand. The door was open, letting as much of the breeze into the house that the hot summer would allow. She led him to the bedroom downstairs where Thomas lay on the bed with his arm around Bonnie Grace.

At first, Curt thought Thomas could be asleep. But he heard his father's soft voice as he talked to his granddaughter. She lay with her head turned toward her grandfather, listening as she sucked on her fist.

"Thomas. Thomas," Sarah called.

Thomas rolled his head. "What is it?"

"Hello, Father," Curt said.

The smile spread across the old doctor's face. "Curt!" He started to sit up. "I was beginning to wonder if you were coming here."

"You couldn't keep me away. I've dreamed about this place for almost two years," Curt said as he reached for his father.

Curt walked to his grandfather's house and found Travis on the back porch, right where he always was. His grandfather gave him a warm welcome. Curt sat down and talked for a few minutes. Then he excused himself, saying he was going to visit James.

The soldier walked into the judge's office in the back of the house and found James sitting at the far end of the table. Curt stood in the door. "Hello, James."

James looked up and blinked his eyes several times, squeezing them together for a moment. "Curt?"

“Hey, kid. How ya doing?”

“I’m okay. Drag Dad’s chair over here so I can see you better,” James said.

“What are you doing hiding back here in the corner?” Curt asked.

One side of James’s mouth turned up, and he laughed slightly. “Dad’s given me work. I don’t even know how to explain it, but that man baffles me. I tell him I can’t see, and he tells me to read. I tell him I can’t write, and he tells me to make him a list. I tell him I’ve got nothing to do, and he puts me on a schedule. I feel like I’m back in grade school.”

Curt smiled. “And you don’t know why he’s doing this?”

“He told me he doesn’t want me to forget God’s promises.” James laughed again. “He’s trying to give me a reason to get out of bed.”

“Your brain’s not working, is it?” Curt asked.

“What?” James didn’t understand what Curt was talking about.

Curt thought his cousin looked drowsy or maybe doped. Curt didn’t know which. He would have to learn how to read James’s scarred face.

“That’s hooley. You honestly don’t see what he’s doing?” It was so obvious to Curt.

James shook his head, not sure he wanted to admit to Curt that he truly didn’t understand. James coughed, trying to hold it under his breath. He put his head in one hand, squeezed his temples, and briefly closed his eyes. His head was swimming, and his eyes did hurt. The pressure caused by the coughing made them hurt more. Curt heard a pulling of hollow air in his chest.

“He’s doing rehabilitation therapy on you. He’s pushing you. Making you do what’s hard so you’ll get better,” Curt said. “Like a coach training his team.”

James gave a huff and a small laugh. “Well, I can’t concentrate. And I can’t see.” James closed his eyes again. He had said he was okay, but Curt knew he wasn’t.

“You could if you had the right light in here,” Curt said. “Tell you what. I’ll come back in the morning and get the light fixed for

you. Then I’ll stay and work with you. I see what Uncle Reid is trying to do, even if you don’t. It may be hard, but it’ll help you.”

James coughed again and then gasped as he began to draw in air noisily.

“Have you got oxygen?” Curt asked.

James nodded. “In the bedroom.”

“You need some right now. Come on, show me where it is.”

Curt got his cousin situated under the oxygen tent and sat talking. James needed help, both physically and emotionally, and Curt saw this. It sounded like he needed spiritual help too. He’d forgotten where his hope lay—in God’s son. That’s what his father was doing by making him search scripture, showing James the way back to the Savior.



AUGUST 1919

them too, discussing possible therapy. Then the two doctors and the medical student implemented their plan to help the child with muscle development, language recognition, and controlled movements. They hoped to see slow progress as time passed.

Curt worked with James and saw gradual improvement, both in James's attitude and in his physical ability to do what his father had asked him to do. His thinking process got better, and he wasn't as impatient as he had been the past several months.

Both the men were learning from the scripture too. Occasionally, when Winona was home and not helping William, she would join them. She would sit quietly listening to them read and discuss the scripture. She never joined in the conversation but watched the two men as James grew in strength.

Hope was also growing inside James. He was beginning to talk about leaving the house, but school still seemed elusive to him. James was hopeful that God would give him a purpose, and he was looking for that purpose.

Curt helped James focus on the possible and kept watch for breathing problems. Both James and his family had gotten used to the struggles. His family took care of James the best they could, but Curt knew what to watch for. He saw the subtle changes that were screaming for help and was able to direct the use of the oxygen and chest massage better. With Curt's help, James was able to function for longer periods of time, with his mind clearer and his chest hurting less. He was becoming more patient and wasn't getting upset as often. When he did get upset, Curt was there to calm him, just like his father did. Curt was helping James become stronger.

Bonnie Grace was also receiving attention from Curt. Thomas had been researching how to help with her developmental delays. He had written to numerous specialists across the country and had gotten books and materials offering advice. Curt and William studied



SEPTEMBER 1919

The investigation into the Langstons' silver and into the conduct of the Harris town council and city magistrate were completed by the federal marshals. The mayor and three of the town councilmen were found to have taken bribes from Alexander Langston. The mayor and two councilmen had resigned. The third was hanging on, hoping that people would forget the matter quickly. All had charges against them that would take them to court in another district.

One councilman had been blackmailed. It had been rumored that when Perry Pesnell was elected to the city council three years ago, the ballot box had been stuffed with unauthorized votes. Several people reported seeing voters putting between three and six ballots in the box at one time. There were other people on the ballot that day, including the mayor, two other councilmen, the city magistrate, and Luke Britt, along with candidates for four state positions. Luke, the magistrate, and the mayor all ran unopposed. Cheating could have been for any of the others.

Ballot monitors who kept watch had stated there was no cheating. Pesnell was a well-liked and seemingly honest man in the community, but so was his opponent. It was a tight race, but no one was surprised when Pesnell won.

Now with the investigation by the marshals, word came out that Langston had threatened Pesnell with another lie. If Pesnell didn't vote the sheriff out of office, Langston would spread the rumor that those "extra ballots" were for him and that he had won the position illegally. Pesnell knew Langston was capable of this. Langston had already launched a campaign of lies against the sheriff, Cecil Montgomery, and Della Leachman. Perry Pesnell believed Luke Britt's side of the story. But when the other four councilmen voted

to dismiss the sheriff, there was no reason for Pesnell not to vote the same way. Luke was out, no matter how Perry Pesnell voted. So he voted with the others to avoid a scandal directed at him.

No charges were brought against Perry Pesnell, but he knew when the truth about his cowardly act was revealed, he would never get another vote.

The fifth councilman had been threatened and was swayed easily on the advice of the other members of the town council. He had voted to dismiss Luke, again, because it really didn't matter how he voted. No charges came here either.

The acting sheriff was arrested on multiple charges from accepting bribes to lying before a court of law. The guilt had been working on Frank since Luke's words to him before the town council the day Luke was removed as sheriff. Frank had lost his friend, and he had taken a bribe from Langston. He had to continue doing Langston's bidding, or blackmail would follow. Frank began drinking soon after that and now didn't care what happened to him as long as he could find another mason jar of moonshine.

When word got out and the truth was told, the town was in an uproar. Those who believed Luke was innocent of the accusations pointed fingers and loudly voiced their disapproval of those who had spread the lies about Della Leachman, Cecil Montgomery, and the sheriff. Those who had repeated the rumors and believed the gossip stayed quiet and tried to keep to themselves, ashamed of what they had done.

The investigation had also shown inconsistencies in the town's budget. Further investigations had revealed the mayor and one of the council members had been skimming funds from town projects, like the brick road that had been put down six years ago and the town's new water well. This explained why few construction projects in town had stayed under budget. The investigation also exposed money given to the accountant who had done the yearly audits. This bribe guaranteed the approval of the town's financial records. Marshal's auditors found the discrepancies easily.

Mrs. Avery read the story of the investigation and arrests in the newspaper. She was in shock. Even when the man she had hoped to

marry had told her he was not involved with her mother's arrest, she had chosen to believe a lie that she told herself. That it was Luke's fault.

Before her mother left for the temporary hospital at the church, she had told Kathleen to forgive Luke. She had said that her problems hadn't been Luke's fault. Della had also told the pastor on her deathbed that Kathleen should read the Bible. Kathleen had been too angry to read the Bible when her mother died. Angry at Luke, angry at William, angry at the Langstons, and angry with God. Her anger seethed within her soul, and her loathing for the man she thought she loved had grown until it had changed her personality. She had become her mother, a hate-filled, detestable woman who found nothing good about anyone or anything. Her sons had begun to avoid her but had also picked up some of her disgusting behavior.

Rone had left town soon after he finished school to join his older brother in Kansas City. He hadn't written her since he left.

Her youngest son, Nathan, kept his distance from her and had begun to avoid their home. He stayed with friends whenever he could and no longer told his mother where he was going. Kathleen felt her son's actions were a result of the lies being told about his grandmother. Kathleen blamed the separation from her sons on Luke too. She knew Luke could have stopped the lies and the arrest if he had wanted to.

When Bonnie died, Kathleen had lost control. She screamed and ranted and threw things in the house. She attacked William with her fists. William had accepted her attack and had stood with tears in his eyes and a pained, injured look on his face as she hit him over and over again. Then she had stormed out of her own house and ended her rage at William by throwing a rock through one of the windows at the Stewart home. She hadn't visited her grandchildren since.

His mother's behavior had gotten so bad that Nathan had jumped a train headed for his brothers in Kansas City. The railroad police had caught him and returned the youth to his mother. Kathleen was so distraught by his actions that she cried for days and wouldn't let him out of his bedroom. She blamed his behavior on Luke too. Then she found the Bible lying where she had thrown it,

against the wall of her mother's room. She sat down and began reading, hoping to find another lie to get mad at. But she didn't find one. Instead, she found a desire to continue reading. As the weeks and months passed, her spirit calmed, and now she just felt the guilt of all the horrible things she had said and done. She knew that everyone she should have loved, everyone she could have gone to for comfort, was alienated by her actions. She had so many people she needed to apologize to, beginning with her sons, William and his family, and Luke.

But she hadn't done it. She hadn't apologized to anyone. Now this newspaper article set in front of her on the table, reminding her of the honest, caring man she once loved—the man she still loved—and the guilt she held inside ate at her soul.

Kathleen knocked on the Stewarts' door. In the past, she would have just opened the door and called, "Hello." But she wouldn't do that anymore. Her daughter didn't live here, and she knew she wasn't welcome.

Thomas opened the door. "Kathleen, can I help you with something?"

Well, at least he didn't shut the door in her face.

"Hello, Thomas. Is William home?" she asked timidly.

"No, he's not. I don't know where he is," Thomas said. He assumed the woman had stopped by the medical clinic first or had seen that the Oldsmobile wasn't around. She knew he wasn't at either place.

"Can I talk with you and Sarah?" Kathleen asked softly.

Thomas looked at her, trying to decide whether to allow her into his house or not. Neither he nor Sarah could defend themselves against a vicious attack like she had made against their son on her last visit. Kathleen had quit coming to church when her mother was arrested, and they hadn't seen each other since Bonnie's death. She seemed calm right now, though. He decided she could come in, and he stepped to the side of the door, allowing her to enter.

“In the parlor,” he said.

Kathleen entered the room to find Sarah in a rocking chair holding Bonnie’s ten-month-old baby against her chest.

Kathleen smiled. The child’s hair was a lovely shade of yellow, just like her own daughter’s hair had been. It was also curly, like Bonnie’s. She hadn’t expected this because both of the boys were dark, like their father.

“Good afternoon, Sarah. Are the boys around?” Kathleen asked.

“Hi, Kathleen,” Sarah said. “They’re with Chipeta.”

Kathleen nodded. She understood. Her grandsons would be three and five years old. A blind woman and a man with heart problems would have a hard time keeping up with them.

Kathleen sat down near Sarah, watching the child who lay motionless on Sarah’s lap. The little girl was staring blankly into the room. Kathleen thought the child might be going to sleep.

“What did William name her?” Kathleen asked.

“Bonnie Grace,” Thomas said.

“Can I hold her?”

Thomas sighed loudly, and Sarah didn’t move. She gave no indication that she would let go of the child.

“Bonnie Grace has some developmental problems,” Thomas began.

Kathleen turned from the child to look at the man who sat on the sofa across the room from her.

“You know she was born early,” Thomas said. “That sometimes causes things to happen.” Thomas was choosing his words carefully. Kathleen could see that.

“She doesn’t have the muscle tone she should have at this age. She simply isn’t developing the way she should be. You can hold her, but keep her head supported, and don’t be surprised if she tries to throw herself from your arms,” Thomas explained.

Kathleen sat in shock for a few moments and then nodded her head. Sarah slowly stood up to pass the child to the other woman. Kathleen wrapped her arms around her granddaughter for the first time and felt the child’s limp body, like a warm rag doll, against her chest.

Sarah moved to sit beside her husband, putting an arm through his and sliding her fingers into his hand. He closed his fingers around hers.

Kathleen held the child, watching and feeling the baby’s soft face. She held the child’s hand but got no response from the child. The little girl wouldn’t even look at her. Tears began to trail down Kathleen’s face. She looked at Thomas and Sarah.

“You’ve been taking care of her?” Kathleen immediately regretted asking such a dumb question. Of course, they were. The baby looked well cared for, and the old doctor and his wife were loving, compassionate people.

Neither of them said anything. The question had already been answered.

Kathleen hugged the child gently. “I came to apologize. I have acted horrible this past year. I’ve blamed everyone for things in life that just happened. The people I blamed weren’t at fault. They’re not responsible. It just happened, and I know that.”

Neither Thomas nor Sarah made a comment. They were simply listening.

“I’m going to ask William for forgiveness, and I’d like to ask your forgiveness too. I miss Bonnie, but she can’t be here. I want her children in my life, even if she’s not here anymore. Would you forgive me?”

Thomas and Sarah still said nothing.

“I know I don’t deserve your forgiveness. I hurt you, and I hurt William at a time when you were already hurt. I wasn’t here to help the boys after their mother died. I should have been. I should have been here for them and for William. He was always such a good husband, and he’s been good to me. I’d like to start over and be a better grandmother and a better mother-in-law.” Kathleen didn’t know what else to say.

Sarah’s face showed a sad love for the woman apologizing, but Thomas sat with no expression. He was contemplating how to respond. *The mind of the righteous person thinks before answering, but the mouth of the wicked blurts out evil things.*¹ He was holding his

¹ Proverbs 15:28 (HCSB).

tongue, not saying what he wanted to say. What he wanted to say almost a year ago—“Get out of this house, and never come back.”

But with the passing of time, Thomas had calmed down. He was going to forgive her, but the person he had seen in her the day after Bonnie died remained in his memory. He was treading carefully, making the conscious choice to forgive.

Thomas suddenly remembered the anger he had thrown at William soon after his son came home. He had been just as sinful and ugly to William as Kathleen had been, and his son had responded with love. He had also allowed Reid to suffer for no reason, refusing to treat Reid's back, simply because his pride had been assaulted. He had asked forgiveness from both, and it had been granted instantly. Thomas knew he needed to do the same.

“Of course, we forgive you,” Thomas said. “As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, we are to ‘clothe (ourselves) with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if (we have) a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.’¹ As for what relationship you can have with the children, that's up to William.”

“Thank you,” Kathleen offered. She held Bonnie Grace a few minutes and then handed the child back to Sarah and said goodbye.

Kathleen left the Stewart home and headed to Luke's father's house. She was numb. She had reacted to Bonnie's death with hatred and violence toward her daughter's husband. She had blamed him for her daughter's death, just like she blamed him for her mother's death. Now she had discovered the granddaughter she never bothered to get to know had something wrong with her. Her emotions were open and raw. She was feeling deep sorrow and regret.

So many questions came to her mind. Did William blame himself for Bonnie's death too? How long had he grieved? Had William known there was something wrong with his daughter when she had

¹ Colossians 3:12–13.

attacked him the day after his wife died? Her own husband's death had changed her; had Bonnie's death changed William?

William had been upset. Kathleen remembered that. She had seen his strained face and his red eyes. She remembered him standing in the middle of the room alone as she bombarded him with hateful words and blows to his chest with her fists. He had stood perfectly still, accepting what she put on him. Did he feel he deserved it? She had even criticized him for not responding to her attack. She knew she had hurt him.

Tears came to her eyes as she walked the dirt road past the stable and gardens. These gardens had offered her family so much over the five years Bonnie had been married to William. They had provided needed food and provision in abundance, and she and her sons had never lifted a finger. No one had ever suggested it.

She knew the other children in the family had provided for her needs by working this ground through the hot dusty summers. She remembered seeing them carry water back and forth from the creek to keep the plants watered during the dry season so that the family could continue to have food. She never thought to have her sons help.

She sighed, more guilt for not doing what she should have done.

She remembered also, after Luke was fired, that he had worked the land. Her mother had told her this. And someone had still brought them produce. It had never slowed. Even after Bonnie died, processed game and vegetables would just appear on her porch. She knew where it came from, and she considered it payment for the family's sins. She had used it without a thought of forgiveness to the ones who she felt had wronged her or the ones who had provided for her.

And William. William had paid off the loan on her house. He was the one who gave her a home without a mortgage.

Now she felt disgusting and shameful. Her guilt-ridden mind just wanted to find a corner and hide. She stopped just outside Travis's house, wondering if she had the strength to even try to talk with Luke.

She hadn't seen him in town, but then she hadn't talked to any of his family. She hadn't talked to anyone. Angela Tendal had said something about Luke one day last summer, and Kathleen had screamed at her for everyone to hear, "Don't talk to me about that coward! I don't want to hear his name!"

That's when people had stopped talking to her about anything. She had become the subject of the town's gossip. She became isolated from others, and she had liked it that way.

Travis came onto the porch. "Kathleen, what's ya doin' 'ere?"

His voice was kind, like it always was. She lifted her tear-streaked face to look at the old man. She had trouble speaking, but Travis stood, patiently waiting. She finally said, "Is Luke here?"

"No," the reply came.

"Do you know where I can find him?" she asked.

"Uh-uh."

Her chin quivered. "I want to apologize to him. Do you know when I can talk to him?"

"He got a job with the railroad. He's been workin' far 'em since last summer. I ain't seen 'im far a couple a' months. I don' know when 'e'll be back."

Travis's steel gray eyes were drilling into her. She felt like he was seeing into her soul. She and William's grandfather had never talked. They were both quiet and never had anything to say to each other. But she always felt he knew more about her than she did herself.

She was embarrassed and didn't know what to do. Her tears turned into sobs right in front of this man. She felt she was falling through the abyss of her own sorrow.

Travis moved down the steps toward her and took her in his arms. The warmth and empathy she felt from his touch removed the veil of obscurity she had always felt around the old marshal. He seldom spoke and seemed aloof at family gatherings. Now in his arms, she felt his unconditional love and safety.

"Come on up ta the porch. Tell me what's wrong," he said, moving in the direction of the house with his hand on her shoulder.

She poured out her heart and soul to him. She told him of the guilt she felt and the hatred she had held. She told him of the prob-

lems she had caused for her sons and of the feelings she had allowed to take over her life. She cried, and he held her more.

As her sobs slowed and she began to quiet, Travis asked, "Do ya know Jesus?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I thought I did, but with the way I've acted, I'm not sure. How could I act like I have and be a child of God?"

"We can make sure ya know 'im," Travis said. "Do ya want ta be sure?"

She nodded.

Travis explained, "Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear¹ ya prayers. God's 'eyes are too pure to look on evil; (he) cannot tolerate wrongdoing.'² We's separated from God, an' we can't do anythin' ta make it right. 'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.'³ But God made a way far us ta be with 'im 'gain. 'God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.'⁴ 'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.'⁵ 'Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.'⁶ 'If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.'⁷

"Kathleen, do ya believe?"

"Yes, I do. Now I truly do."

"Then pray, pray that God will accept ya," Travis said.

It sounded like an order. Kathleen hesitated. She wanted to do this, but she had heard this man pray in church. There was no way

¹ Isaiah 59:2.

² Habakkuk 1:13.

³ Ephesians 2:8–9.

⁴ Romans 5:8.

⁵ Second Corinthians 5:21.

⁶ John 1:12.

⁷ Romans 10:9.

she could offer a prayer to God the way he did, with confidence, boldly before God's throne.

She took a deep breath and bowed her head. "God, I believe in you. I believe your Son, Jesus, died for my sins, and I have many. I don't want to sin anymore. Take my sins away. Come live inside me and be my Lord. Take away my guilt. Send the Holy Spirit to guide me and help me. Help me to fix the relationships in my life, and bring me peace. Forgive me, Father. Forgive me. Amen."

Travis stood up and reached his arms out to her. She accepted his embrace and hugged him back. Travis kissed her forehead and said, "When I see Luke, I'll tell 'im ya wanna talk ta 'im."



OCTOBER 1919

State election officials came into town and arranged for a special election in January. They were overseeing this election to fill the vacant openings in the mayor, city magistrate, sheriff, and town council positions caused by resignations and arrests following the marshal's investigation.

No one seemed to want the jobs.

A meeting was held by a select group of men from three area churches. They decided the corrupt town government was at an end. Those who had run the town for years were out; and people wanted new, honest, law-abiding community leaders—leaders who had their minds set on the best interest of the town, not themselves.

The men had asked Cleve to run for mayor, but he refused and gave them no reason. He had not run for representative in the last election and had given no reason for this either. Most people thought he was still grieving for his sons, and he was. But he was seriously contemplating running for governor in the next regular election. He didn't want any conflicts if he decided to do so.

Everyone wanted Luke back as sheriff, but no one knew where to find him. Several letters were written and sent in care of the railroad, but Luke didn't respond. Someone asked Reid how to get in contact with him, but after sending a message in care of Donald Cryer, Luke still didn't respond.

Luke arrived in Denver following an extended assignment in the northern part of the state. He found all the letters waiting for him at the office. He responded as soon as he got them. But his message to the committee saying that he would not run for sheriff had been lost when a postal car caught on fire. Luke had even investigated the fire, not knowing that his own letter was destroyed.

People began to talk, telling each other that the town didn't deserve to have these men working for them. They had both been treated poorly. Everyone was now talking of the wrong that had been done to these two, yet no one had spoken out to defend them when they were dismissed.

Reverend Gregory Sutton had finally agreed to be the group's candidate for mayor. He stood before his congregation the following Sunday and told them a story.

"One day the trees went out to anoint a king for themselves. They said to the olive tree, 'Be our king.' But the olive tree answered, 'Should I give up my oil, by which both gods and humans are honored, to hold sway over the trees?'

"Next, the trees said to the fig tree, 'Come and be our king.' But the fig tree replied, 'Should I give up my fruit, so good and sweet, to hold sway over the trees?'

"Then the trees said to the vine, 'Come and be our king.' But the vine answered, 'Should I give up my wine, which cheers both gods and humans, to hold sway over the trees?'

"Finally all the trees said to the thornbush, 'Come and be our king.' The thornbush said to the trees, 'If you really want to anoint me king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, then let fire come out of the thornbush and consume the cedars of Lebanon!'¹

"Fellow citizens of Harris, if we do not have honorable candidates to govern our town, we will be slaves to those that rule over us. We must not settle for thornbush candidates that will choke the life out of our town and out of good people. We must seek out and elect people of high moral standards and godly ways.

¹ Judges 9:8–15.

"Being a leader in this town will be a thankless job. I don't expect any of you to come pat me on the back and tell me you like something I did. But you will come to me and complain when I do something you don't like. That's the way it is, that's the way it has been, and that's the way it will always be.

"There may be many people here in this congregation that will leave this church because they don't like my politics, but I'm telling you right now, I will follow scripture. 'Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.'¹ Everything I do will honor God.

"I will stand firm and be watchful as scripture calls me to be. 'Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong.'²

"We represent Christ to those in darkness, and all of us, as individuals, will stand before God one day. We will each give an account of our own actions or inaction. We must all pray and stand strong on biblical principles.

"Good, qualified leaders must withstand the pressure and answer the call to step forward and show that you are not afraid of possible failure. You are not afraid to make mistakes or be ridiculed, you are not afraid to serve your community, and you are not afraid to make sacrifices. You must trust and honor God.

"And the rest of you, encourage those you know and trust. Don't laugh them off when they ask if you think they could do the job. Let them know honestly what you think and why. It's much easier to step forward on faith when you know other people support you. Friends and supporters make a world of difference.

"We will all need to 'be alert and of sober mind.' Because we know that our 'enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.'³ He has already devoured many in this town. A thornbush choked out some good men in our own congregation, but we will 'follow justice and justice alone, so that (we)

¹ First Corinthians 10:31.

² First Corinthians 16:13.

³ First Peter 5:8.

may live and possess the land the Lord (our) God is giving (us).¹ The town of Harris.”

Three men came forward that day. They met, they prayed, and they discussed their beliefs and the responsibilities of office. Then they agreed to run for the town council positions together. Dan McClelland, Wayne Hammons, and Marvin Wells became the only candidates to fill the positions left open by the resigning councilmen. All three men were well respected both in their personal lives and in their business life.

Dan McClelland was a valued teacher in the community, respected for his intelligence and his people skills. Wayne Hammons owned and managed a large farm with several full-time employees and he treated his seasonal employees fairly. He understood the need for a budget and good financial management.

Marvin Wells ran the Double R ranch. He was known to be compassionate and dependable. He was a man of his word who also understood the principles of good finance. All three men had superior leadership skills.

The four men went to Reid and to the federal marshal, Vince Putman, seeking their advice. Without a town attorney, the two men agreed to temporarily serve as legal advisors.

Councilmen Perry Pesnell and Clark Sadler remained on the council but were getting little support from the public. The remaining councilman, Wade Broussard, was removed by law when he was convicted of having taken a bribe from Alexander Langston.



JANUARY 1920

Election day had arrived, and there weren't many on the ballot. Just the four men. They had found no one to run for the sheriff's position and no candidate for city magistrate.

Even though they were unopposed, the candidates were encouraging people to get out and vote. Wayne Hammons had stood before the church and told those present that a vote meant the people had confidence in them and a vote not cast showed they were not wanted. Like everything else that happened in Harris, the gossip traveled around town, and it wasn't long before everyone was talking.

What if the people in town didn't show support? What if the new councilmen felt abandoned by the town's people? Would they abandon the town next fall and leave Harris open to dishonest government again?

Now election day was here, and everyone waited to see how much confidence the town had in these men.

James sat in Reid's office just after breakfast, studying God's Word. Reid came in and sat with his son. James didn't look up; this often happened. The two men would work side by side and never say anything. But today, Reid didn't reach for his work.

“What have your studies shown you?” Reid asked.

James looked at his father, and the corner of his mouth turned up slightly.

“I found out you're smarter than I give you credit for,” James said.

¹ Deuteronomy 16:20.

Reid continued watching him and gave no change of expression, uncertain of what James meant.

“You put me on a schedule that made me learn self-discipline. I’ve always done things because I had to. I went to class when they were having class, I ate meals when they were served, I went to bed when it was time to go, and I got up to get ready to be somewhere on time so I wouldn’t be late. This, the scripture, I had to make myself do. I didn’t want to do it when I started, but I told you I would, so I had to do it. You made me really search God’s Word to find what I had forgotten, God’s promises. Then when I started seeing them, I wanted to find more. That gave me hope. Hope that God wasn’t finished with me, and that gave me a reason to get up in the mornings.”

Reid smiled, and James saw the love in his father’s eyes “And what did you find?” Reid asked.

“I found in Isaiah 41:10 that God will strengthen me and help me. He holds me in his hand.” James was speaking with energy. He sounded excited about what he had learned. “In Isaiah 26:3, I saw that God will give me peace when I keep my mind on him, when I trust him. In Psalm 32:8, he said that he will teach me and counsel me and he’s always watching me. In Matthew 11, Jesus said that even though I’m tired and burdened, he will give me rest. Second Corinthians 12:9 says, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness,’ and the very next verse says that I should ‘delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.’¹ God gives me strength. God has a plan for me. He told me so. “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”² Something else is coming. I’m going to be patient and wait for God to show me.”

“Good.” Reid nodded. “Now find the first page you wrote.”

James shuffled through a stack of papers clumsily, his fingers not able to handle the individual sheets easily.

“Here,” he said.

“And get the last page you wrote.”

James picked up the whole stack and flipped it. Then he slid the last page off. He set it beside the first page.

“Read the first page to me,” James’s father said.

James looked at the page and took a deep breath. “Okay—”

“Wait.” Reid stopped him. “Look at the last page. Is it easier to read?”

James looked at the two pages laying side by side, and again, the corner of his mouth rose slightly. He looked at his father, and Reid knew he realized why he had been told to write the promises. Reid saw the amazement and joy in his son’s eyes. The clouds were still there, but James’s eyes were becoming more expressive.

“I can read it,” James said excitedly. “My handwriting has gotten better.”

“Do your eyes still get tired when you read?”

“Not as much. Curt brought this lamp and adjusted it for me. He taught me that with the right lighting, my eyes won’t hurt as much. I’ve been doing two and sometimes three hours lately. I quit when I notice I’m starting to get tired,” James said.

“You’re getting stronger, son,” Reid said. “You’re stretching yourself to do more, and you’re getting better at what you can do. Don’t dismiss school yet.”

Reid smiled and added, “I’m going into town to vote. Do you want to ride with me?”

“Yes, sir,” James said. “I’d like that.”

James sat in the automobile as Reid entered the courthouse to cast his ballot. At age twenty, James wasn’t old enough to vote yet.

There were quite a few people in town, and several stood on the courthouse lawn visiting. James had stayed out of town until now. He had also stayed away from the church, afraid that he would begin coughing or have trouble breathing during the service.

Everyone in town had heard he was home, and everyone had heard about the medals he was awarded.

¹ Second Corinthians 12:10b.

² Jeremiah 29:11.

When he first arrived home, someone in town had suggested a parade and street party, celebrating his bravery. But with the flu running rampant across the country, they decided to delay the celebration until people were healthy. Then they learned of his injuries and had dropped the matter. The young man didn't need to be around other people. The town was content to keep him hidden while bragging about the town's Medal of Honor winner.

Few people had come to visit with James at the house. Of those who came, most would have been there for one reason or another, anyway. The pastor, Dan McClelland, and Wayne Hammons came to visit Reid often. Family members came, and the marshal came to take care of business when Reid worked from his office at home. They all stayed a while longer, just to talk with James. The returning soldier had not been seen by very many of the town's citizens.

His family was used to the scars and no longer thought about them. James was just James, the same son, grandson, brother, nephew, and cousin they had always known. He just looked a little different and couldn't do quite as much as he had done before.

People noticed James in the car and whispered to each other. These murmurings caused many heads to turn, looking at his disfigured face. But the scars were as much a part of James now as his dirty-blond hair. Both blended smoothly into his face while his green eyes remained dull and foggy, overshadowed by the marks of suffering. His face and eyes displayed to everyone where he'd been and the anguish he had endured. They were the mark of a hero, quickly pushed aside by the world.

But when you walk with suffering on a daily basis and call to the Lord, then healing comes.

James's spirit had called to the Lord night after night from his bed at the hospital in France. His soul had cried from the bed on the hospital ship, and his heart had pleaded with the Lord while at Walter Reed Hospital. He continued to beseech his heavenly Father from his bed at home. "Lord, heal me! 'Lord my God, I called to you for help, and you healed me.'¹ I trust you, Lord. I trust you. I call to you again and again. Don't make me live like this."

¹ Psalm 30:2.

He knew God would answer him. He remembered the story of the unjust judge and had confidence that what the Bible told him was truth.

In a certain town, there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, "Grant me justice against my adversary." For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, "Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly."¹

As James had arrived at home with the continued pain, coughing, and shortness of breath, he had become disheartened. The reassurance he received from his prayers when he was first injured had diminished with time, leaving him troubled and feeling forgotten by God. After he came home, he prayed not because he expected answers but out of habit, out of compulsion.

But since James had been searching the scriptures, the reassurance had returned. The Spirit had spoken to him saying, "*I will restore you to health and heal your wounds,*" declares the Lord, "*because you are called an outcast.*"²

James's spirit had calmed, and he was receptive when God spoke. *My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words.*

¹ Luke 18:2b-8a.

² Jeremiah 30:17a.

*Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to one's whole body.*¹

James knew that God was going to heal him, and this outing was his step of faith back into the world of the living.

People on the street, however, were making him feel uncomfortable, and he didn't like this. He was feeling like an outcast, so he decided to change the atmosphere. When someone he knew came close to the Cadillac, he waved and said, "Good morning, Mr. Paul."

"Mrs. Carmichael, how are you?"

Some might nod and say, "Hello." Others looked away quickly or turned to stare at him as they passed without a word. Occasionally, someone would answer him with more than one word, but no one stopped to talk.

If someone he didn't know came near him, James would say, "Good morning, beautiful day, isn't it?" There were a lot of people he didn't know.

James was looking toward the door of the courthouse and somehow knew the shadow exiting was his father.

Reid stepped out the door and stopped to talk with a man who was entering. James's vision was still foggy at a distance, and he could only see the color variations through the haze. But James was also aware of someone standing at the edge of the courthouse steps. This person had been sitting on a bench near the street when they drove up. He was turned away, and James had not gotten a good look at him. Then he had gotten up and followed Reid to the steps when the judge entered the courthouse. The man had remained there the entire time Reid had been in the building.

The young man felt danger present. He was accustomed to following his senses as he helped the wounded and now felt that same apprehension cautioning him that there was a threat.

James got out of the Cadillac and started toward the steps where his father stood. Something was wrong, he could feel it, but he didn't know what it was.

¹ Proverbs 4:20–22.

Reid began moving down the steps slowly, watching his feet, careful not to fall. He didn't see James coming toward him. As Reid left the steps and his foot touched the ground, the man waiting spoke quietly. "I can't believe my luck. Red Crowder."

Reid looked up to find Mickey Sullivan standing just a few feet away. Reid froze, not knowing what would happen with this man. But whatever was going to happen, Reid knew it wasn't going to be good.

Mickey Sullivan was a high-level human trafficking operator within the organization that Reid had taken down more than fifteen years ago. He was responsible for Reid's injuries and for abandoning him in the tunnel beneath the city of Chicago. Luke and Cleve had been looking for Reid when Luke had put a bullet in Sullivan during a fight. After Reid was found and recovered from his injuries, he had testified in court, and Sullivan had been sent to prison for life.

Now here he was, standing in front of Reid.

"I came here looking for that brother of yours that put a bullet in me." Sullivan laughed. "I had no idea I would find you."

Reid knew it was a stupid thing to say, but for lack of words, he said it, anyway, "You should be in jail."

"I escaped. Just walked out when no one was looking." Sullivan laughed again and then he got serious. "I lie. I had to kill three guards to get out. But I swore before they caught me, I would get either you or that brother of yours. Maybe I can get you both."

He began to pull his coat back, revealing a pistol strapped to his belt.

Reid had his shoulder harness on, but holding to the cane presented a problem. He needed to move the cane to the other hand. Could he get it there without Sullivan realizing why he was doing this?

Other people noticed the man's gun and the look passing between the two men. They began moving away quickly. But James kept moving forward.

Sullivan went for his gun. Reid didn't think he had a chance, but he went for his too. James jumped to his father, throwing himself

on Reid, clutching him, and knocking him onto the steps just as Sullivan's bullets struck James in the back, once, twice.

Another shot sounded from the street, and Sullivan went down, a bullet through his head.

Reid pushed James off and rolled him onto the ground. Even as the words came from his mouth, "No, Lord, no. Not this way," his spirit desperately prayed that his son was alive.

Blade and others arrived beside the men on the steps. Reid looked up. "Blade, he's alive! Get him to William!"

"You?" Blade asked as he leaned over to pick up his brother.

"Don't worry about me. Take care of James."

Reid continued to lie on the steps, vaguely aware that other people were around. He watched as Blade put James in the Cadillac. He was followed by Dan McClelland. They drove off together. When they were out of sight, Reid leaned his head back onto the steps, closing his eyes. He ignored everything around him and prayed frantically for his son.

"Reid?" Marvin spoke. "Are you okay?"

Reid nodded, took a few deep breaths, and opened his eyes. Wayne Hammons knelt beside Reid's brother-in-law.

"Who is that guy?" Wayne asked.

Reid shook his head. He wasn't going to explain. "An old enemy."

"He said he was after Luke?" Marvin asked, putting a hand toward Reid to help him up.

Reid nodded again. "His enemy too." Taking Marvin's hand, Reid also reached toward Wayne.

The two men pulled Reid to his feet, but they could tell he was hurt too. His movements were stiff and slight. Wayne reached to put an arm around his friend and said, "Let's get you to the clinic."

At the medical clinic, William was already at work on James. Curt rushed in a few minutes after Reid arrived and joined William without so much as looking to the others.

Reid lay on the same bed he had lay in following the surgery six and a half years ago. Marvin had gone to get Chipeta. They took William's sons to their grandparents before heading to the clinic. Winona and Thomas entered the clinic with them and went into the exam room too.

Travis entered a few minutes later to join those waiting.

"Did ya pray?" Travis asked.

"That's all I've done," Reid responded with a soft laugh.

Travis acted like he hadn't heard Reid's response and started praying himself. "Lord, ya created James in ya image.¹ Ya made 'im. Ya knit his innermost parts.² Ya brung 'im through the war an' brung 'im home. Ya is the God that heals. Ya tell us that ya'self.³ We waitin' far ya ta heal 'im. Through Jesus's death an' by his blood, heal James.⁴ Protect 'im from more hurt."

Travis turned to look out the window, still talking to God.

Travis didn't stop when Blade spoke. "Therefore all who devour you shall be devoured, and all your foes, every one of them, shall go into captivity; those who plunder you shall be plundered, and all who prey on you I will make a prey. For I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal, declares the Lord."⁵

Travis kept praying. "Lord, in the name a' Jesus, protect 'is body. Heal 'im accordin' ta ya' righteousness. Jesus is Lord. Ya 'ave exalted 'im, an' every knee bows ta 'im. 'E is the name 'bove all names."⁶

Reid now spoke. "Lord, you said, 'See now that I myself am he! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand.'⁷ Take care of him, Father."

¹ Genesis 1:26.

² Psalm 139:13.

³ Exodus 15:26.

⁴ Isaiah 53:4-5.

⁵ Jeremiah 30:16-17a (ESV).

⁶ Philippians 2:9-11.

⁷ Deuteronomy 32:39.

Travis continued, “Lord, ya told us that ya’ grace is sufficient an’ where ya’ grace rests, power is also present.¹ Use ya’ power, Jesus. Save James. Let James live.”

Travis continued to pray, and as scripture came to someone else’s heart, they spoke the Word of the Lord too. Occasionally, someone would voice their own prayer.

Pastor Sutton came into the clinic and joined them, offering his encouragement and prayers also.

Hours passed before William finally emerged from the exam room. “He’s alive. We got the bullets out. I’m sure glad that was a low-caliber gun. Even at that close range, it didn’t do a whole lot of damage.”

Reid breathed a sigh of relief.

“But we’re not out of the woods yet. One of his lungs has collapsed. The other one’s having problems. I’ve got him on oxygen, but I don’t know how much he’s actually getting.” William looked at Reid. “Curt said he’s been using the oxygen more the last few weeks?”

Reid nodded. “Yeah. He doesn’t seem to be struggling or coughing as much, but he’s been using the oxygen more. I thought the increased oxygen was probably doing him some good.”

William agreed. “Probably was.”

Reid was still lying on the bed. He hadn’t moved since William had come into the room. The doctor asked, “How’s your back?”

“I’ll be okay,” Reid responded.

“Reid!” William looked at his uncle and shook his head. “Don’t do this. Answer my question.”

Reid hesitated. William wouldn’t let him get away with vague and indirect answers like Thomas would. William demanded a straight-up complete answer when he questioned Reid.

“It hurts. I landed on the steps with James on top of me. I don’t think it messed anything up. I think the fall just hurt.”

William nodded. “Okay, everybody, out. I want to look at it.”

Others left the room, leaving William, Reid, and Chipeta alone. William shut the door and helped Reid sit up and take his shirt off.

¹ Second Corinthians 12:9.

“Exactly what happened?” William asked. “Blade said someone shot at you, but he didn’t know why.”

“Someone that I put in jail years ago escaped. He tried to shoot me, but James grabbed me and knocked me down. He took my bullets,” Reid said, feeling the guilt of his son’s injury. “Blade killed the man.”

William didn’t respond to what was said, but Reid knew he heard every word. The doctor’s hand was moving across Reid’s back as he continued the examination.

William said, “It’s not your fault, you know. He pulled the trigger, not you.”

“I know.” Reid sighed. He knew it was true. He hadn’t caused James’s injury. But it didn’t stop the responsibility he felt or the pain of watching his son suffer.

“You’re bruised bad,” William said. “Your whole back is blue. You must have hit hard. You need to be still and take it easy. I want some x-rays, just to make sure you didn’t do something that you’re not feeling. You’ll probably feel worse tomorrow.”

Chipeta reached over to take her husband’s arm. Reid patted her hand, reassuring her that he felt her love.

It was getting late in the afternoon, and William thought James should be awake by now. The doctor sat in the waiting room with the others talking quietly, waiting, and keeping his worries about James to himself.

Reid moved back and forth between the bedroom and the waiting room in the wheelchair. William kept telling him to get still so his back could recover, but Reid couldn’t. He couldn’t get up and pace the floor. He couldn’t sit and watch his son sleep. He couldn’t even stay focused on the conversation. He tried to pray, but it felt like he had said everything. There was nothing left to say to God. He needed coffee but was too distracted to realize it.

Travis sat on the porch alone, praying silently. Reid wanted to talk to his father. His father could lift Reid’s spirit and calm his

fears. But Reid wouldn't disturb him. James needed his grandfather's prayers more than Reid needed his father's calming presence.

Curt and Winona sat on opposite sides of the bed, saying nothing to each other. Curt started talking to James just before dark and kept talking, telling him to wake up, reciting scripture to him, and questioning him.

"What did you think you were doing? Are you trying to be a hero again?" Curt asked loudly.

"The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed."¹

The others could hear Curt from the waiting room.

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you."²

"James! Wake up!"

The marshal and Greg Sutton came back into the clinic. They stopped a moment, listening to Curt.

"Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God."³

Winona looked at Curt, remembering when God had told her this and remembering God's promise to her. She knew James would live.

Reid heard Curt from the other room. He remembered that verse too. Also remembering the night he and Winona talked, the night God had spoken to Winona. Reid smiled, reassured that his son wasn't finished with the work God had for him. Reid calmed. James would be okay.

"How's James?" Sutton asked.

"Alive," was all Travis said from the doorway.

Reid added, "He's going to be okay."

"Good." Sutton's eyes moved around the crowd in the room and finally came to rest on Dan, Marvin, and Wayne. They sat together

¹ Romans 13:11b.

² Isaiah 60:1.

³ Revelation 3:2.

in a corner. Dan's chair was leaning back against the wall, and Sutton thought he might be asleep.

"The election is over," the pastor said. "Probably the best turnout the town has had in quite a while. It's done. We're in, at least until the next election. But we still don't have a sheriff or a magistrate." Sutton indicated the man who had entered the room with him. "The marshal here says that we can appoint both."

Dan gave a loud sigh without opening his eyes and began speaking. "And you, (pastor), in accordance with the wisdom of your God, which you possess, appoint magistrates and judges to administer justice to all the people of (Harris)—all who know the laws of your God. And you are to teach any who do not know them. Whoever does not obey the law of your God and the law of the king must surely be punished by death, banishment, confiscation of property, or imprisonment.¹ Any ideas on who you're going to appoint?"

"Yeah, I've got one. The name came to me this afternoon," Sutton said. "I'm calling the first town council meeting on the porch in two minutes. I'm calling Perry and Clark, and if they don't get to the meeting in time, they won't get to vote. Doesn't really matter, anyway. If the four of us agree, their votes don't matter."

Sutton hadn't been sworn in yet but was already taking control. He had studied the town's bylaws since he registered for the election three months earlier. He was observing the guidelines and regulations literally. Nothing in the town's bylaws said an elected official had to wait until he was sworn to begin his job. They had ten months to rewrite the bylaws, and Mayor Sutton was keeping notes on what needed to change, but until they were changed, he would enforce what was currently written.

Pastor and Mayor Greg Sutton moved to the telephone in the exam room and made the calls. He walked back through the room and said, "They both declined to attend. Come on. Marshal Putman, would you attend to advise us, please?" Sutton motioned to the four men, and they convened their first meeting on the porch of the medical clinic.

¹ Ezra 7:25–26.

The meeting took about ten minutes. The council and the marshal returned, and all except Sutton had an odd smirk on his face.

Sutton began, “We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.”¹

Sutton turned to look at Blade. “Son, you are the only person we feel is capable of doing this. ‘For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good. . . if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God’s servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.’² We’re asking you to be God’s servant to this town by becoming our sheriff.”

Blade looked at him with astonishment. Reid didn’t remember ever seeing that look on Blade’s face before.

“I know nothing about law,” Blade said.

“But you know right from wrong, and you know people,” Sutton explained. “The marshal is willing to help you. It’s just until November. There’ll be another election in November, and that will give us time to search for another candidate.”

Blade said nothing. He looked straight at Reid, and their eyes met. His gaze didn’t leave his father.

“It’s up to you, son,” Reid said. “I think you can do it.”

“Would you give us a week or two to try it out?” Sutton asked. “Just try it. Hang out with the marshal, and see how you like it. He’ll tell you what to do.”

Blade looked to Marvin.

“It’s okay with me. I think you’ll be good at it too,” Marvin told his best ranch hand. “You know your job at the ranch will always be there waiting for you.”

¹ First Timothy 1:8–11.

² Romans 13:4.

“Let me pray,” Blade said. He turned and left the medical clinic, walking into the open field.

Sutton turned to Reid. “Any suggestions for a magistrate? Apparently, we can appoint one of those to fill in until the election in November too.”

Reid shook his head. “You do realize Blade is not old enough for the sheriff’s position.”

“Ah!” Sutton poked a finger into the air. “He’s not old enough to qualify for the election process, but there is no age limit for the position itself.”

Reid looked at his pastor. “You’re going to stretch the rules, huh? He’s not even old enough to vote.”

“I am following the letter of the law.” Sutton smiled. “The only place age is mentioned for a sheriff is in the qualifications for registration. ‘A candidate for the election of sheriff must be twenty-four years old or older.’ Blade’s not being elected. He’s being appointed. A judge?”

Reid ran a hand through his hair and shook his head. “Michael Tendal?”

“Oh! Good idea,” Greg Sutton said as he turned to leave.

Late into the night, after almost everyone had left the clinic, James woke up. Curt and Winona still sat with him.

“Dad? Dad?” James got louder each time he called his father. Reid was in the wheelchair and moved from the other side of the room to be closer to his son. “Dad!” James wasn’t opening his eyes.

“I’m here, James,” Reid said, taking his son’s hand.

“Are you okay?” James asked, sounding out of breath. His breathing had been labored and heavy all night.

“Yes, I’m fine. You saved my life.” Reid stroked his son’s arm.

“I’m glad,” James said, calming. “I’m glad. Dad, my chest hurts.”

“I know. I’m going to stay with you. Curt’s here too. We’re going to take care of you. You go back to sleep. Rest.”

Curt put the stethoscope to James's chest. He had been doing this all night.

Reid asked, "Why do you keep doing that?"

"Something's different. I know I'm just listening to one lung now, but there's a different sound to his breathing. I don't understand it," Curt said. "As soon as William gets here in the morning, I'll tell him."

"Do you think something's wrong?" Reid asked.

"No. It sounds clearer, better," Curt said.

William arrived at the clinic early, and when he put the stethoscope to James's chest, he immediately noticed the difference too.

He told Reid, "I don't understand it, but it sounds like his lungs are clearing up." Turning to Curt, he asked, "Has he been coughing?"

"No, not at all." Curt shook his head.

"Let's keep a close watch on this. I don't know why he would sound better. We'll take another x-ray in a few days. 'You are the God who performs miracles,'"¹ William said, looking toward heaven.

James slept for the next couple of days, waking for only short periods of time. On the third morning, he woke up feeling very little discomfort from the collapsed lung, the damage to his lungs caused by the gas, or the bullet wound. He was still breathing heavily, but that was to be expected.

X-rays now showed clear lungs with minimal scarring. He had been miraculously healed by God, as William had said.



MARCH 1920

Blade stood on the platform at the railroad station as the train was pulling in. He did a lot of standing around but preferred to do it on the open range instead of in town. Blade didn't expect much activity. While travel had picked up as the flu slowed, it didn't look like there were many people in the passenger car today.

Two men stepped off, stopped, and looked around. They spotted the young Indian holding a rifle but ignored him and moved inside to talk with the station master.

"Good morning, we're looking for the Britt family," one of the men said.

"Which one?" William Wyatt asked. "There's several of them."

"A young soldier named James."

"Oh, you want the judge's house," the railroad employee replied. The station master liked to talk.

"The judge?" the other man asked.

"Yeah, James's father is the federal judge. You know, James got shot a couple of months ago, saved his father's life—threw himself over the judge and took a couple of bullets in the back. Some guy from years past broke out of jail and came after the judge, wanted revenge."

"Is James all right?" one of the men asked.

"Yeah, I think he's good now. Nobody ever sees the boy. He never comes into town. He's got a bunch of scars from the war." The man waved his hand around over his own face. "Looks horrible. I saw him when they took him off the train when he first came home. He was a nice-looking guy before the war."

"I don't know what he was doing in town the day he was shot. It was the day of the election. We had a scandal in town last fall. A

¹ Psalm 77:14a.

bunch of the town council, mayor, sheriff, and city magistrate all got themselves arrested. Had to have a special election to replace them.”

The man looked toward the train that had begun to move and saw Blade in the doorway.

Blade stood absolutely still with an uncompromising expression on his face that made the station master hush immediately.

The other two men turned to see what had stopped Wyatt’s gab.

“Sheriff,” Wyatt said in surprise, “these men are looking for James.”

Blade said nothing but continued to watch Wyatt. Blade seldom talked to anyone. The looks he gave people did his talking for him. Wyatt knew he needed to be quiet and diverted his eyes from Blade, returning to the manifest on his desk, a guilty and chastised look on his face.

“What do you want with James?” Blade asked solemnly.

The men assessed the young man’s appearance and saw no badge, but the station manager had called him sheriff. Blade wore the badge inside his pocket. Everyone in town knew he was the acting sheriff, and he didn’t feel he needed to advertise it.

“Well, I think that’s between us and James,” one of the men said.

Without looking up, Wyatt gave them some advice, “You may as well tell him. He and James were both raised by the same man. They’re like brothers, and he’s not going to tell you anything until you explain things to him. He’s really protective of his family.” Wyatt looked up. “He shot the guy that put the bullets in James. One bullet, right through the head from down the street.”

Blade narrowed his eyes and moved them back to William Wyatt. Wyatt shut up again.

One of the men stuck his hand out. “I’m Phillip Bleu, and this is Dorn Franklin. We’re visiting some of the soldiers that fought in France. Just checking on them.”

Blade didn’t take his hand. He continued to watch the two strangers for a few moments and then turned and began walking off.

“You better catch up with him,” Wyatt said. “He won’t wait for you.”

“Mother,” Blade called as he entered the house.

Winona came from the kitchen as Chipeta entered from the hallway.

Chipeta asked, “Blade, what are you doing here this time of day?” The words came before his mother saw the men behind him.

“Where is James?”

“In your father’s office.” Chipeta watched the men, wondering who they were and why Blade had brought them here. She knew Blade wouldn’t volunteer the information.

Blade walked past her and didn’t even look toward his sister. He turned down the hallway.

“Good morning, ma’am,” one of the men said as he passed Chipeta, following Blade.

The other man nodded to both women, removing his hat.

Chipeta followed them into Reid’s office with Winona behind her. James sat at the end of the table, furthest away from the door, studying scripture. His father had given him a new task. He was to list all the miracles God had done throughout scripture.

Blade entered without James seeing him. The young Indian moved quietly and without disturbing anything. He would sometimes enter and exit a room without those present knowing he was there. Blade knew James didn’t see him.

“James,” Blade said as he moved into his brother’s field of vision. “These men want to talk to you.”

“Yes? Who is it?” James responded, looking up from his work. The men were standing too far away, and James didn’t try to look at them. He kept his eyes on his brother.

Phillip Bleu stepped forward and extended his hand. “Sergeant Britt, I’m Phillip Bleu. This is Dorn Franklin. We represent the Veterans of Foreign Wars. We’re a fairly new organization offering service to qualifying veterans.”

James could see him as they shook hands, and he now looked at the stranger's face.

"I remember hearing about it in France," James said.

"Good. We're traveling the state, visiting our injured heroes. We want to make sure that you are aware of the new benefits available to you and that you are being taken care of."

James leaned back in his chair. He quit trying to look at the men. After he had shaken hands with them, they had both taken a few steps backward and were now standing in the glare of the window again. All James saw was their cloudy form. James looked at the table.

"Well, I know about some of them. Exactly who is eligible?" James questioned.

"Any honorably discharged veteran who fought on foreign soil," Bleu said.

James asked, "Blade, where's Mother?"

"I'm right here," Chipeta answered from the doorway.

"Mother, would you call Curt, ask him to come over?"

"I'll go do that right now," Chipeta said, and she left the room.

"Gentlemen, let's go to the front room. There's space for all of us to sit there," James said.

He stood up, and Winona turned around to move out of the doorway and got to the front room before the men. She stood against the wall, waiting. James stopped to look at their faces briefly as he passed and then moved on to the sitting room and offered them a seat.

Chipeta came into the room. "I called your father too. I hope that's okay."

James nodded. "That's okay."

Blade still stood beside James, protectively guarding his brother.

"It won't take them long to get here," James said.

Landon and Norman came running into the room noisily, and Landon flung himself on the sofa beside James. James pulled him close and said, "Have you eaten yet?"

"No, but I'm ready," the child said.

"Come on, boys, let's get you some lunch," Chipeta called the children as she disappeared through the doorway. The two little boys followed. "Winona, come help me," she called from the kitchen, leaving the men alone in the room.

"We heard you took a couple of bullets a few months back," Franklin said. "Are you doing okay now?"

"Still moving a little slow, but I'll be fine," James said.

"You covered your father to save him?" Bleu laughed. "You're just a hero waiting to happen, aren't you?"

"No, sir." James didn't think his comment was funny. "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."¹ I love my father, but Jesus is the hero. He gave his life willingly for all of us. 'Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.'²

"Well, you certainly proved your love for your father," Franklin said.

The VFW representatives asked James how long he had been home and what he had done since his release from the hospital.

Their faces showed their surprise at James's answer, but James couldn't see it. "I couldn't do anything for almost a year. Then I started studying scripture and reaffirmed my dedication to my Lord. When I was shot, God performed a miracle and healed my lungs."

The men weren't sure how to respond, so Bleu asked, "So you're a religious man?"

"Not really," James replied. "But I trust God and his indwelling Spirit. I want to serve and glorify him."

Curt walked in the door, saving the two men from an awkward conversation they were uncomfortable with.

Curt said, "I'm here James."

James turned his head in his cousin's direction but didn't look at him. "Curt, these men are from the Veterans of Foreign Wars. It

¹ John 15:13.

² Romans 5:7-8.

sounds like you and I are both eligible for this, so I wanted you to hear about it too.”

“Did you serve in France?” Franklin asked.

Curt nodded. “Yes, sir.”

The automobile could be heard coming into the yard. Blade stepped outside to assist his father up the steps. The two men came into the house, and introductions were made. Reid sat beside James on the sofa, and Blade stood next to them with a hand on his father’s shoulder.

Dorn explained to the men what the VFW was trying to do for its veterans, making sure medical problems were taken care of and that the veteran was able to support himself.

Franklin then addressed James directly. “We are visiting wounded soldiers in the state, first, to make sure they are getting medical care. We’ve found quite a few that don’t get the care they need. Either it’s not available or they can’t afford it. Are you getting medical care?”

“I could not receive better,” James replied.

“Good,” Franklin said. “Have you heard of the War Risk amendments?”

James shook his head. “No.”

Curt said, “I remember hearing something about it when I was still in France, after the fighting ended, but I don’t remember much. I wasn’t paying attention to it.”

Reid broke into the conversation for the first time. “I read something about it a few years ago. There was an update or correction of some kind made to it.”

“Yes, that’s right,” Franklin said. “The amendment provides for veterans with permanent injuries. They can now receive rehabilitation and vocational training. The Rehabilitation Act of 1918, which is what you probably saw, sir, provides for honorably discharged disabled veterans from this most recent conflict. The act also gives a monthly allowance for veterans who cannot hold gainful employment because of their injuries. The next year, in 1919, another law passed providing medical care.”

The three men listened as Franklin and Bleu explained veterans benefits that were being administered by the Veterans Bureau, the Bureau of Pensions, and the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers. They left forms that could be filled out and mailed to apply for the benefits James was not receiving. They offered to help James fill out the forms, but James declined, saying he was able to do it himself.

Everyone left the house together. Curt took William’s two boys with him. James remained on the sofa, sitting quietly beside his father. Reid could see James’s mind working.

Reid asked, “What are you thinking, James?”

“I don’t want vocational training. I mean, what would they teach me to do?” James held up his hands to look at them. “I want to go back to school. I want a law degree. I don’t know what I’ll be able to do with it, but that’s what I want.”

“Okay,” Reid said, “that’s what you’ll work toward.”

“Dad, do you realize that if I had stayed in school, I would be finishing next month and beginning law school in the fall?”

“No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God,”¹ Reid said. “Don’t look back. You said God told you to join when the others did. Do you still believe God told you that?”

“Yes, I do,” James said.

“Then ‘forget what is behind (you) and do (your) best to reach what is ahead... Run straight toward the goal in order to win the prize, which is God’s call through Christ Jesus to the life above.’”²

Reid smiled at his son. “Let’s go get some lunch.”

¹ Luke 9:62b.

² Philippians 3:13b–14 (GNT).



MAY 1920

School ended, and Esa and Abigail graduated together. Esa was working at the ranch for the summer, while Abigail took care of William's boys and helped Sarah. They were both planning to attend the university in Denver in September.

Marvin had convinced Joey to return to school for a business degree. He and Ruth would be taking their young son and leaving Harris too. When they returned in four years, Marvin planned to begin turning portions of the ranch management over to Joey.

Curt was planning to return to medical school. He had been in contact with the hospital, and they were giving him credit for his experience during the war. He would sit in on a few remedial courses as he prepared to continue his internship.

James had been thinking he might return to Denver also. He could start taking courses slowly and see how things went. Winona had learned how to take care of James and was helping him in a number of ways. They had developed a close friendship the last few months.

Winona was sitting on the front porch putting the finishing touches on a new dress for Aponi. The child was growing so fast they were having a hard time keeping her in clothes. She was almost as big as Kimi. It would have worked well for Ayiana to pass the clothes she outgrew to Kimi, and Kimi to pass hers to Aponi. But it just wasn't working out. By the time the two older girls outgrew a dress, it was in no shape for another child to wear.

James came onto the porch and pulled a chair closer to Winona. He sat down and rocked for a little while before he spoke. "Winona, have you ever thought about leaving here?"

She stopped what she was doing to look at him.

"Well, have you?"

She shook her head. "No."

"I'm thinking about going back to school in the fall," he said.

She continued to watch him, not moving, not taking her eyes off him. When she looked at people this way, she reminded James of Blade and the way he often watched others.

"Would you consider coming with me?"

She was still watching him without talking.

"Winona, I don't know if I can handle school. I don't know what I'm going to be able to do or how much help I will need. Curt's going back to medical school, and he's going to be busy. Stephen's still in school and working. He's not going to have time to help me if I need something. Esa and Abigail are going to have to figure out the new town and new school themselves. I can't ask them to take care of me too. I need somebody that can be there when I need something.

"That sounds selfish, doesn't it? I'm not trying to be. I just don't know if I'm ready for this yet. It's scary thinking about trying new things. But I'll never know if I can do it unless I try. I'll pay you. You won't be doing it for free." James didn't know if he was explaining what he needed in a way that she could understand, but he kept talking.

"You know we've got the townhouse we can live in. There's a really nice couple there that cooks and cleans. You wouldn't have to do much of that. Just your room and my room and our laundry. I need somebody to read to me when my eyes get tired, and I might need somebody to go to class with me to help me keep up with the notes. Curt says the rehabilitation people will send someone to do that, but I'd rather have somebody I know. Somebody I trust."

James looked to Winona to see if there was any response. She eventually said, "I don't read very good."

"I've heard you reading to Kimi and Aponi. You'll do fine."

"It's a big house. There's seven bedrooms and several sitting rooms. We ought to be able to work it out so you could have your own room. You won't have to share with little girls anymore." James kept talking, trying to convince her to do it. She still gave no indication she wanted to.

“Will you think about it? I really think I want to go, and I’d like for you to come with me.” James quit talking and got up. “Please. I’d really like you to come. Think about it.” James left her to consider the possibility.

Esa, Abigail, Joey, Ruth, Curt, Emily, and Stephen would be living in the townhouse with him. Joshua and Joseph lived not too far away. James felt he would have enough support to be able to deal with anything that arose. Joseph had been working with veterans and was familiar with gas injuries like his. He would take over James’s medical care in Denver. James really didn’t know why he wanted Winona to come, but he did.

Luke arrived unannounced on a Monday afternoon. The first place he stopped was Cleve’s office.

The former sheriff found his brother involved with a huge proposal by his campaign committee on how his summer travels to campaign for governor should take place. Numerous people that Cleve didn’t know were involved. Cleve didn’t mind the campaigning; but he didn’t like so many people knowing the inside details of his schedule, finances, and family. His private life was private, and he wanted to keep it that way.

His campaign committee was pushing him to capitalize on his son’s involvement in the war, looking for both the sympathetic and patriotic votes. Cleve refused to do this. The committee was also trying to capitalize on the ousting of the town council and their treatment of Cleve. He didn’t want this either and was vetoing more of the proposal than he was allowing to remain.

When Luke came in the door, Cleve was happy for the distraction. He walked away from his desk, throwing a paperweight on top of the proposal, saying, “If I have to look at any more of this mess today, I may just quit right now.”

Luke put an arm around Cleve and guided him onto the street. “You know you won’t. This is what you’ve wanted for years. You’re going to be elected. You know it. Your opponent doesn’t understand

what ethics means, and everybody knows that too. He’s been on the side of dirty dealing with labor unions and has had so many campaign managers over the last few months that nobody is willing to work with him.”

Luke had his arm around Cleve, pushing him forward, and was patting Cleve on the chest with his other hand.

“You’re known at the capital for your integrity and honesty. People have confidence in your ability and your willingness to stand for what’s right.” Luke threw his hand into the air in front of him. “You see the responsibility this office holds, and you’ve shown leadership in committees within the house and with laws you have gotten passed. You can handle the job, and everybody knows it. Just be yourself and roll with the punches. You’ll get elected.”

Cleve commented, “Why don’t I make you my campaign manager?”

Luke laughed. “Let’s go see Reid. What’s been happening around here? How’s Dad?”

Luke was talking. He hadn’t had anyone he knew to talk to in a while and was happy to be with his brother.

It had been months since Luke was in town, and he’d had no contact with anyone in Harris. He’d stayed at the townhouse while in Denver, and Stephen had kept him up to date on what he knew from the letters he had received.

Luke wanted to know about James being shot and about the man that Blade had killed. He also wanted to know how Blade was doing as the acting sheriff.

After spending some time with his two brothers, Luke walked to the telephone exchange. He stuck his head in Angus’s office to say hello, and then he headed home to see his father.

Luke’s father told him that Kathleen wanted to apologize, but Luke needed to wrap his mind around the idea of seeing her again. He had quit thinking about her, mostly, when he was in the mountains with his father. Since he’d been working for the railroad, his thoughts hadn’t turned to her or the town very often. And he didn’t want to see her. There was no animosity or grudge being held, but he didn’t want to open the wound again. It was still tender.

Now that he was back in Harris and he had been told she wanted to see him, she stayed on his mind. He would go, at some point, but he was in no rush. He considered seeing her the evening before he left town. That way, he could leave and get his mind on something else quickly. Hopefully, he could keep from thinking about her too much.

Travis, Luke, and James sat on the front porch at James's home rocking. Luke wanted to talk to James, and Travis had tagged along.

After a few minutes of small talk, Luke asked, "James, do you remember Donald Cryer? He was on the train with us when you came home."

"No, I don't remember much of that trip," James admitted, laughing. "I do remember that guy with the gun and Dad knifing him."

"I wish I had seen that." Luke laughed too. "Well, Cryer's the top lawyer for the railroad, and he lives in Denver. That's where the railroad's western district office is. We've become friends, and I told him you were coming back to school. He asked me to check with you about something."

"What's that?" James waited.

"I told him you were studying law. He's got a bunch of law students working for him. He says they're decent kids, but he's looking for someone with more maturity, someone who can oversee them and keep things moving in the right direction when he's out of town. He wanted to know if you wanted the job." Luke smiled as he looked at James.

It was hard to read James's face. You couldn't see happiness, sadness, confusion, or any emotion unless you were looking at his eyes. Even then, he was hard to read. Right now, Luke just saw a question mark.

"I was thinking about going back to school this fall," James said. "I don't know that I could do both."

"I'm not trying to talk you into this, but I'm just telling you what Don told me," Luke explained. "He said the hours would be short, maybe twenty hours a week. You'd have to know what was going on with his cases and what each of the students were researching. It wouldn't be a lot of reading or paperwork. It's just a matter of learning where to find things and pushing the students to get their jobs done, helping them when they get stuck. He said it would take a while to learn what you needed to know, but once you learned the system, it would all be in your head. You would have access to the law library and could use it when you get to your legal studies. He said he'd even give you the benefits of being a full-time employee, including retirement and shares of railroad stock. Then when you do finish law school, they would just make you full-time and give you additional duties. It sounds like a great setup if you ask me."

"He does know I haven't started my law studies yet?" James asked.

"Yeah, I told him that. He's not looking for knowledge of law, just someone that's responsible enough to oversee the others. He said you'd learn law in the process and it would put you further ahead in your studies when you do get to law school."

"It does sound good," James said. "I just don't know how much I'm going to be able to handle."

"You can always try it, see how you do," Luke advised.

"Okay, let me talk to Curt and Dad. I need to pray about it. I'll let you know," James said. "When are you leaving?"

"Thursday," Luke replied.

"I'll let you know something by then."

The three men continued to sit and rock, talking about the crops, the hot summer weather, and anything that came to mind.

Curt cleared the trees, walking the road toward the house. He was carrying eighteen-month-old Bonnie Grace. He'd brought Bonnie Grace to visit James before.

"Morning," Curt called as he neared the house. Everyone gave a greeting in return, both to him and to the child, calling her by name. She smiled at them.

As Curt got near the porch, he said, "Watch this," and he sat Bonnie Grace on her feet. Curt waited for her to get steady and then took one hand and stepped to her side. She began toddling forward, a big grin on her face.

"Look at that," Luke called excitedly.

Travis had a rare huge smile on his face.

This was something most of the family never thought possible. The child had never tried to pull up or crawl. It had taken months for her to learn to roll over, and she had just recently begun to sit without support.

Curt began working with her at eight months of age, hoping to strengthen her muscles and teach her controlled movements. She had been a year old before she was able to sit in the high chair. Even then, small blankets were stuffed around her to keep her in an upright position. Now she was walking!

Everything James saw at that distance was foggy. He asked, "What is it?"

Travis said, "The child's walkin'."

The corner of James's mouth turned up, and he waited with anticipation for them to get closer. As Curt and Bonnie Grace got near the porch, he could see her moving beside Curt. His mouth parted, and Curt noticed one side of his face creased slightly. James actually had half a smile. Curt's smile grew, another milestone met.

"When did this start?" James asked.

"We've been walking a few days," Curt said, picking Bonnie Grace up to carry her onto the porch. He set her on the floor in front of Travis and sat beside her, leaning back on a support column. Bonnie Grace put her hands out toward her great-grandfather. Travis reached over and held her hands as she stood.

He said, "Strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed."¹

"We've been trying, Grandpa," Curt said. "We've been trying."

¹ Hebrews 12:12-13.

Travis picked the girl up, turning her so she could sit on his lap. She leaned back to get comfortable, looked up at him, and put her fingers to his mouth. He smiled and nibbled on them, making her giggle.

Luke went to visit with the marshal and had gone by the sheriff's office to talk with Blade. Now he entered Tendal's Grocery to pick up a few things. Then he would head back to his father's house. They were going fishing.

"Good morning, Luke," Michael Tendal said. "Are you back to stay or just visiting?"

"Hi, Michael." Luke stuck his hand out. "I'm just here for a couple of days. You've got the place looking good."

Michael shook Luke's hand. "Yeah, I felt like I had to spruce up the place. People are coming into the store again. Couldn't let it look shabby." Tendal grinned.

"Luke." His name came softly from the end of the aisle.

Luke turned to see Kathleen Avery.

"Kathleen, how are you?" He wasn't ready to see her yet, but now here she was.

"I'm good. How have you been?"

"Good. Busy."

"Luke, would you like to get a cup of coffee?" Kathleen asked.

Luke hesitated. He knew he had to do this, whether he wanted to or not.

"Okay, let's go over to the hotel," Luke said.

He turned, and they headed for the door. He opened it to allow Kathleen to go through and then turned and looked at Michael, who stood watching. Luke shrugged his shoulders at the man and gave a half grin, but he wasn't happy.

They walked to the hotel in silence. Without saying a word, Luke pulled out the first available chair for Kathleen to sit. He sat across the table and ordered their coffee.

Kathleen began unexpectedly. “Luke, I’m sorry for everything I said and everything I did. I acted like my mother, and I never wanted to be like her. I’m ashamed of my behavior. Mother found Jesus before she died. She was a different person. She found joy, and she helped me see the ugliness of my own actions. Oh, Luke, I didn’t realize I was acting like her. I was too busy being angry, and it wasn’t your fault.

“The pastor was with Mother just before she died. She said Reid had given her a Bible when she was in jail. She read it. She started when she was at the jail, and she kept on reading it at home. I never saw her reading it. She must have done it when I was at work or when she was in her room at night. But when she died, she left a message for me to read it. I’ve never read the Bible before, and I didn’t want to. I was still angry. All I knew about God was what the preacher said at church.

“When Bonnie died, I turned on William. When the anger left, I didn’t know where to turn. I was hurt. I found Mother’s Bible and remembered that she told me to read it. I finally started reading it. Luke, I’m so sorry. I saw what Mother saw in scripture. God spoke to me through his Word, about what I was doing and everything that happened. I found the Savior too.”

Luke was being silent, allowing Kathleen to express all her feelings and all she had been through. He was still hurt by her rejection of him. He had longed for her comfort when he had been fired and during his illness. The hurt he felt when she wasn’t there had just grown during the time he remained in Harris. Those feelings hadn’t left him until he was out of town and busy with other activities.

Luke had made the conscious decision to forgive her, even though he didn’t understand how she could have believed the lies. The forgiveness was easy, but the hurt was hard to get past.

Kathleen continued, “Mother changed those last months before she died. Having her silver made her happy. But in the end, without the silver, and then finding Jesus, she had real peace and joy. I have peace now, about what happened and about her death. I even have peace about Bonnie’s death. I still miss them both, but—”

Luke interrupted her, leaning forward and taking her hand, squeezing it. “It’s okay. I knew you were upset and hurting. I wasn’t angry with you.”

The waitress came with the coffee, interrupting their talk. Luke let go of her hand and sat back in his chair. When the waitress was gone, he took a sip of coffee.

Kathleen didn’t know what else to say. She wanted Luke to say more. He had always been talkative, but now he was quiet. She felt like she had to say something else.

“Do you think we can start over? Can we be friends?”

Luke nodded. “Of course. I’ve always been your friend, Kathy.”

He called her Kathy! She felt hope that he truly had forgiven her. They could, maybe, work out any problems they had and build a relationship again. But he still wasn’t talking. She felt confused.

“How’s your job?” she asked.

“It’s going good. I enjoy the travel, and the pay’s good,” Luke replied.

“Do you travel all the time?”

“Pretty much.”

“How long are you going to be in town?” Kathleen was trying to keep the conversation going, but Luke didn’t seem like he wanted to talk.

“A couple of days. I have to be in Kansas City by Saturday.”

“What do you do?”

Luke shrugged, brushing off the importance of his work. “Mostly just guard stuff. A lot of sitting around on trains. Some investigative stuff.”

“Is it dangerous?” she asked.

Luke smiled. “Not unless somebody tries to rob us.”

The silence hung in the room. They were the only ones there.

“Listen, Kathy, it was good to see you. But I told Dad I’d be right back. I need to go. I’m taking him fishing. He hasn’t been to the river in months. He’s looking forward to it.”

Luke stood up and added, “It was good to see you.” Luke started to walk away.

Kathleen called, “Would you like to come to supper tonight?”

Luke turned around to look at her again but said nothing. He'd made it through coffee; how could he do supper with her too? She was opening old wounds, and he didn't want that. He had forgiven her, but she had hurt him too deep. He didn't want to get involved with her again. He didn't want her on his mind during the dull boring hours that he worked alone. It would be a distraction, and he would probably want to come home more often. He liked it out of Harris. He didn't think about the people that he loved or the town that he cared so much for.

He had convinced himself that he liked not having attachments and family responsibilities. He loved his family, especially his father and his youngest brother. And Cleve was probably his best friend. But what other reason did he have for being in Harris? He wasn't going to marry Kathleen while he worked for the railroad, traveling all the time. And he didn't want to get involved with her again unless he was going to marry her.

"Can I bring Dad?" Luke asked.

Kathleen nodded her head. "Sure, that'd be fine."



AUGUST 1920

Reid and Curt accompanied James and Winona to Denver, and surgery was performed on James's eyes. A week later, Reid left the others at the townhouse to return home. The surgery had improved James's vision only slightly. Joseph told them that subsequent surgeries would continue to improve his eyesight. A few more, and he would see a substantial difference. Another surgery was scheduled during the university's Christmas break.

The closing date for those wanting to run in the November elections was coming quickly. Cleve had signed up on the opening day, back in May. He had run an aggressive campaign for governor of the state of Kansas and continued his campaign tour as summer came to a close. A lot of time was being spent in Topeka, and Cleve was traveling statewide. He wasn't in Harris very often now, and Jenny was traveling with him.

Two days before the deadline, Luke arrived in Harris. He came in on the morning train and went to his father's house. He stayed a short time and then went to see Reid at his office. They visited and had lunch together. Then Luke entered the town clerk's office and signed the forms registering as a candidate for sheriff.

He went to the sheriff's office looking for Blade but didn't find him and moved on to the train station. Luke sat on a bench, waiting for the afternoon train. He was leaving town without a word to anyone, except his father and Reid, about his candidacy for sheriff. He wouldn't campaign, and he wasn't going to be around to answer

questions. His name would be on the ballot, and if he got enough votes, he would quit his job with the railroad and return to Harris.

Once he had eaten supper with Kathleen and gotten over the uncomfortable tension that he felt between them, he found he still enjoyed being around her. Then he left town and couldn't get her off his mind. He thought again about marrying her, if she was truly following God. But he couldn't marry her and travel like he was doing. That wouldn't be a good marriage for either of them.

If he won the election on his reputation and history alone, he would stay in Harris and get to know Kathleen again. Then if he saw her repentance and saw that she was following the Lord wholeheartedly, he might think about marriage again.

He was a little angry with himself and not as confident as he had been. He thought she was a Christian when they had become friendly years ago. It took their disagreement over the tea set to show him what kind of person she really was. He was thankful he found out before they married.

He knew he couldn't marry Kathleen if she wasn't following God. That would go against scripture and cause problems within the union. He'd have to make sure any deputy that he hired was a Christian too. He reminded himself, "*Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship does light have with darkness?*"¹

His relationship with Frank also made his confidence waver. They had been friends for years and had worked together successfully. Frank's betrayal caused Luke to wonder if he would be able to find anyone to work with, anyone he truly trusted.

Prayers had been offered asking what he should do, but Luke had received no word from the Lord. Things would be different if he came back to Harris. His relationship with the people was different. There was a new mayor and a new town council that had set up new town ordinances. Luke hadn't seen them. He didn't know what laws were now in place, and he had some demands of his own. He needed an automobile for exclusive use by the sheriff's department, better

¹ Second Corinthians 6:14 (HCSB).

pay for himself and a deputy, and he was no longer going to live in the back of the jail.

Now that he had registered, the election was in God's hands. If he lost, he would get on the train, return to Denver, and forget about Kathleen and the town.

Michael Tendal had gotten comfortable with the city magistrate's position and was running against one of the two lawyers in town. People liked Michael, but he knew little about the law. He went to Reid often for advice. The other lawyer was respected in town, but his personality left people distant from him. No one knew how this election would go.

The same men ran for town council, along with a few others. All were members of one of the three churches.

Greg Sutton was running for mayor again, unopposed. Sutton had made his point strongly over the last few months. He had stood on the street at every social gathering and preached biblical self-government until even the youngest child could explain what it was and give an example. Just like in church, Sutton would call names in public.

"Cam Douglas! What do you think the response should be to a man who beats his wife? How should his neighbors respond? Should he be arrested?"

"Zachery Graham! Tell us what you think about the eminent domain proposal by the state to increase public roads? Do we need the roads, or does David Slaton need his land? Would you be willing to sell some of your land and run that road through your wheat field?"

The mayor always demanded repentance when an offense was brought into the open, and he demanded obedience to God. His bold manner expected those who were Christians to behave in a godly manner, using the God-given capacity for self-control and parental discipline.

He warned the people over and over that noncompliance would be regulated and disciplined by the law. Then he preached repentance to those who weren't Christians. Non-Christians didn't like his open boisterous speeches and avoided the man. But there was also

evidence that they were listening. Problems that had existed in the town for years had begun to diminish.

Sutton would always point to the marshal or Blade and speak loudly when he said, “For he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer.”¹

The other preachers in town had picked up on Sutton’s bold and outspoken manner. They had joined him from their pulpits, preaching repentance from sin and offering salvation from the Savior. Every sermon spoke of fair and just actions and of service and sacrifice to others. People were listening, and there seemed to be a revival growing in town.

Most people didn’t know the current sheriff, and many were intimidated by Blade—not because he did anything to cause them to be apprehensive, just because of his manner. Blade was emotionally unavailable for anyone to get close to, and he seldom spoke. He corrected people quickly, walking to stand beside them, unmoving, as his facial expression corrected their behavior.

The people in town knew he was family to the old marshal, the former sheriff, and the federal judge. The fact that he and the current marshal seemed to be buddies and together had taken care of several moonshine operations in the area added to the respect given the young man.

There had also been an attack on one of the Harvey Girls late one night. Blade heard the screams and had run the man down on foot. The attacker was from out of town, and Blade locked him in jail until the next day. The girl wasn’t harmed and didn’t want to press charges. Blade put the man on the first train going out of town. Then he sent messages to the next several towns down the line, informing the law that the man had been identified as a degenerate and had been run out of Harris.

Word worked its way back across the state that the man had reached Oklahoma before he had been allowed off the train. Here,

¹ Romans 13:4 ESV.

railroad security had locked him up because he was unable to pay his way through the last four stops.

People in town told stories and laughed about this, but they respected Blade all the more for it.

Luke heard the stories of Blade’s odd form of justice, and he laughed too.

Blade still wasn’t old enough to run for sheriff, and Luke hadn’t asked who his opponents were. He didn’t care to know. If he was elected, he would return. If he wasn’t, he would take the loss as a sign that he and Kathleen Avery were not meant to be together.



SEPTEMBER 1920

“Mr. Cryer, there’s a young man to see you, a Mr. James Britt,” the assistant said as he stepped back from the doorway.

Donald Cryer got out of his chair as he looked up. “James, it’s good to see you again. I was happy to get the word from Luke that you had agreed to do this.”

He stuck his hand out in greeting to James. They shook hands. It impressed James anytime someone was willing to shake his scarred hand.

“Yes, sir,” James responded.

“Who is this young lady?” Cryer asked.

“This is Winona. She’s going to be with me, in case I need help with something,” James said.

“Good afternoon, Miss Winona.” She looked to the floor.

James said, “You understand this is just a trial. I don’t know if I can keep up with my studies and do this too.”

“That’s what Luke said, and I want to talk to you about that before you start at the university. But we’ll do that later. Come, sit.” Cryer indicated a chair. “I want to get to know you a little better first.”

Winona continued to stand by the door.

“Miss Winona,” Cryer called, “why don’t you take the other chair? James, I understand you saved your father’s life.”

The two talked for well over an hour. Cryer tried to include Winona in the conversation, but she said little, keeping her eyes averted from his face.

Finally, Cryer said, “Okay, James. Here’s the deal. The railroad has decided to give preference in hiring to war veterans. If you qualify, you get the job. You qualify for this job basically because you’re

a law student. As long as you can do the job correctly, you’ll stay on with us. Get the job done, do it right, and you’ll get a regular pay increase. We’ll start your retirement account today, sign you up for shares of company stock, and because you have earned the Medal of Honor, we’re going to pay your tuition at school. Take one class a semester, or take a full schedule. It doesn’t matter. As long as you have passing grades, this will continue. How does that sound?

“Wonderful,” James said. “I wasn’t expecting school to be paid for.”

“Our country honored you for what you did. We want to honor you too. You served your country well during difficult times. We’ll expect the same consideration within the company. Can you do that for us?”

James replied, “God tells us, we should ‘be eager to give (your employer) your very best. Serve them as you would Christ. Don’t work hard only when your (boss) is watching and then shirk when he isn’t looking; work hard and with gladness all the time, as though working for Christ, doing the will of God with all your hearts.’”¹

Cryer smiled, “You’re going to do good here.”

¹ Ephesians 6:5b–7 (TLB).



OCTOBER 1920

The train was crowded. Almost every seat was taken. Luke and Paul Caswell were guarding cargo of unknown value. Caswell was in the express car with the shipment of two large safes which were attached to the front wall. One safe contained payroll for the shipyard in San Francisco. The other was merchandise headed to a jeweler in Portland.

In front of the express car were three freight cars, and behind were a passenger car, a dining car, and a sleeper. The red caboose trailed at the end.

The train had just passed through the small town of Carmine and was headed for a long stretch in the open country. Luke walked back and forth through the passenger car a few times and grabbed a bite to eat in the dining car. He took a sandwich to the platform at the front end of the passenger car and made himself comfortable on the railing.

His shift was almost done. When the train reached Winsprings, another guard would join them, and Luke would be off duty after they crossed the Colorado state line. He would stay on the train, though, and get off in Denver.

He could stay a few days, visit with his nieces and nephews, and check to see how James was doing with his new job and school. Then he would head to Harris for the election.

Luke heard the screech and felt the sharp jolt as the brakes of the train were quickly applied. He was thrown forward as he clutched tightly at the support post. Luke lost his grip as his body was thrown backward into the front wall of the passenger car. He found the grab bar near the steps and felt the next lurch as the engine and tender left the tracks. His body was thrown sideways, and he slammed into the

car again as he jammed his arm between the wall and the grab bar to keep himself from being thrown from the platform. He wrapped his arm around the grab bar and held on.

The tender broke away from the first boxcar, and the wheels of the boxcar dug into the soft earth, bringing the rest of the train to a sudden halt. Luke's arm was wrenched painfully as he was thrown forward, but his body halted movement again with a hard slam back into the wall.

Luke pulled his arm out of the grab bar and quickly tried to move it. It hurt, but he could move it. It wasn't broken.

Luke yelled to Caswell, "Paul, you okay?"

"Ah, yeah," the reply came hesitantly.

"Paul?" Luke yelled again.

"I'm okay." He sounded better this time.

"Keep alert. Stay locked up," Luke warned. Luke looked quickly to both sides of the car and saw no one.

"Yeah, I got it," Paul responded.

Luke entered the chaos of the passenger car. In an accident, Paul's duty was the security of the shipment, while Luke's first responsibility was the safety of the passengers and the crew. There was a swarm of commotion with people yelling and crying as they picked themselves and others up from where they had been thrown.

Luke moved through the car. "Is everybody okay?" He stopped to help a young boy with a busted nose and then turned to help a woman off the floor. There were minor injuries, but it didn't look like anything serious.

Luke moved into the dining car and quickly to the sleeper car. Other railroad employees were helping. Thankfully, there were only minor injuries here too. Luke said a short prayer, thanking God for this.

He jumped from the end of the sleeper and began running back toward the boxcars. Trees were sparse in this area, but the engine had managed to find some. It was now wedged in between several, leaning precariously toward the right. There was a good eighty or ninety feet between the first boxcar and the tender.

Luke was headed for the engine when he spotted the missing rail, neatly moved no more than a few inches from its desired position. This accident was intentional, probably a robbery. He needed to get back to Paul, but he had to check on the engineer and fireman first. As he rounded the tender, he saw the fireman on the ground, and Luke knew he was dead.

The flames were coming out of the open firebox door. Coal had shifted in the tender and was pushed up into the cab. It was all going to be on fire in just a little while. The water jacket was busted, and water was pouring onto the ground.

The engineer was nowhere to be seen. Luke called the man's name, but there was no answer. There was a *whoosh* sound as something else caught fire. This wasn't good. He needed to get away before the explosion came, but he wanted to know where Bill was.

He moved behind the tender and back toward the engine on the other side but still saw nothing. Turning around, Luke saw men moving between the boxcars, and he was certain this was a robbery. He began to run back toward the express car. To his left, Luke saw movement. It was Bill, the engineer. He must have jumped from the engine, or maybe he was thrown clear. He was moving; he was okay.

Luke looked toward the express car and grabbed at his ribs under the arm that had been injured, feeling pain here for the first time. He didn't have time for this and hardened himself to continue running.

There was no sign of a disturbance on this side of the train. Luke got to the cars and threw himself over the coupling between the two boxcars that remained on the track, lost his balance, and slammed into the side of the second car. He stopped to get his bearings and saw three horses standing near the trees a distance away. He continued, pressing himself against the wall of the boxcar as he neared the express car's side door. It was still closed.

Luke heard a sharp pop from the direction of the rear door. He continued to move toward the rear platform when he heard noise inside the car and then a gun blast, followed by three almost simultaneous shots. Arriving at the platform, he found a dead man, shot in the chest. Paul had done his job. Luke quickly looked in the open

door and then pulled back against the side while he processed what his eyes had seen. Paul was unconscious on the floor, maybe dead. Two men stood in front of one of the safes.

Luke looked to the other end of the passenger car. People were starting to exit the train near the dining car. It didn't seem like they had heard the gunshots.

"Please, Lord, keep them toward the back. Don't let anyone come this way," Luke prayed.

Luke heard a man in the express car yell, "Run!"

Luke dropped back to the ground and ducked under the passenger car as two men ran from the car and jumped to the ground. Then the explosion came. *Boom!* The windows blew out, and the side door to the express car flew off its track and landed on the ground. Dust, wood, and other unidentifiable trash flew out behind the door and floated in the air to settle near the car. People near the dining car were screaming and running toward the back of the train.

The two men ran back inside the car. Luke went the other way. He got to the horses and turned two of them loose, slapping them hard across the rump. They disappeared in the distance. Taking the reins of the third horse, he moved around the boxcars and to the other side of the train.

The two robbers came out of the car and headed toward their horses. Their arms were laden with sacks of money. They were half-way to where the horses had stood when they realized the animals weren't there anymore. The men obviously thought they were getting away because neither of the men had their guns drawn.

Luke stepped from behind the boxcar and said, "Okay, guys. That's it. Turn around, and put the money back." One of them was stupid enough to go for his gun. He dropped the bags, but Luke was faster. Luke drew his revolver and shot the man before the outlaw's gun cleared the holster. The bullet hit the robber low on the shoulder. He spun and hit the ground. The second man threw his hands into the air, dropping the bags he was carrying.

"Now get up," Luke ordered. "Pick up those sacks, and put them away." The outlaw who was standing put a hand out to his buddy, pulling him from the ground.

Bill stuck his head around the corner of a boxcar. “Luke?”

“Come on, Bill. We’re good. I got a horse back here. Find somebody to ride back into Carmine, and get some help.”

Boom! One of the outlaws hit the ground, while Luke and the other one ducked, expecting something to fly past them.

Bill calmly said, “Well, there goes the boiler.” He limped past holding to his hip with one hand. The other arm hung limp at his side, probably broken. Luke watched him move away.

“Go on,” Luke told the two outlaws. “Move.”

The man on the ground picked himself up and took two of the six sacks he had dropped. The other man picked up more sacks, and they began moving toward the steps.

Luke had the robbers tied up and the money back in the safe with no door. He and Bill sat in the side opening of the express car, watching the fire burn at the engine and tender. The trees surrounding the fire had turned brown from the heat. A few had caught on fire, but they had burned themselves out.

“You ever been robbed before?” Luke asked, shifting the rifle that lay on his lap.

“Nope, never,” Bill answered. “Been in the cab of a train for more than thirty years. Always been thankful it never happened to me. Guess it was my turn. You?”

“Once, when I was a passenger.” Luke smiled. “My dad, brother, and two nephews were with me. My brother figured out what was happening, and we foiled the robbery. That’s how I got this job.”

Bill watched Luke as he spoke. “Does your face hurt?”

“It’s throbbing,” Luke said. He wasn’t using his arm anymore and was holding to his ribs under the same arm. He thought they might be bruised and hoped none were broken.

“It’s blue. Looks like it’s getting worse,” Bill commented.

Luke looked at his friend. The conductor had put Bill’s arm in a sling, and he sat with one leg outstretched in the doorway and

the other hanging out the door in an odd manner. Luke asked, “You think you’ll be able to walk when someone comes to get us?”

“I doubt it.” Bill laughed. “We’re not going to be doing anything for a while. I guess we get a vacation.”

Luke nodded.

The engineer looked toward the two men tied behind them. “What kind of sentence do you think they’ll get?”

“Destruction of railroad property, train robbery. They killed Paul and Smokey. There’s people hurt.” Luke was listing off what the men would be held responsible for. Then he smiled, thinking of Reid. “You know my little brother is a judge. I know what he’d do. He’d say”—Luke made his voice sound raspy—“men, ‘Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands.’¹ Therefore, I am sentencing you to life at hard labor. ‘But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.’² ‘In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.’³ ‘Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out.’⁴ You are going to be punished on this earth for what you have done. See to it that you don’t get punished in the hereafter too because that will be much worse.”

“Wow.” Bill laughed. “That sounds like a good sermon.”

“Oh, you should hear him preach. He can do that too.”

¹ Ephesians 4:28a.

² Revelation 21:8.

³ Isaiah 30:15b.

⁴ Acts 3:19a.



NOVEMBER 1920

They had begun the day in Harris, at the courthouse. Cleve and Jenny had cast their ballots and gotten on the train headed for the state capital. The election results statewide wouldn't be complete for a few days, but Cleve wanted to be in Topeka as soon as possible. He was confident that he would win the gubernatorial election.

Cleve hated the thought of leaving Harris, but he had to do it. He and Jenny had both changed since the boys had died, and he knew they needed a fresh start. This would provide that opportunity. He would serve his term as governor, maybe two terms. Then hopefully they could return and find happiness in the small town again.

Cleve thought that after two years, they would have forgotten about the death of their sons. Well, not forgotten, but at least be able to move on. He was able to function without thinking about Clay and Noah most of the time, but Jenny was still struggling with everyday activities. The demanding schedule and social affairs in Topeka would be a strain on both of them. But they would adjust, and maybe the busyness would help them forget their loss.

Cleve had said goodbye to his father, his brothers, his sisters, and their families. He wouldn't be back in Harris for a long time, and he wondered when he would see his family again. He missed Luke, and he hadn't seen his three older children in years. He told himself the first thing he and Jenny would do when he wasn't governor anymore would be to travel and visit them. Some of his grandchildren would be almost grown by then. He wanted to see them and now questioned his decision to run for governor.

Luke sat on the train, traveling toward Harris. He was still bruised and sore from the attempted train robbery. While in Denver, Joshua had wrapped his bruised ribs and put Luke's arm in a sling,

telling his uncle to take it easy. His ribs needed to recover, and he didn't need to use that arm for a few weeks. His face would heal with time. That was just a few days ago.

He would arrive midafternoon and go straight to the courthouse to vote. Harris was still his home, and he had returned several times over the last few months for brief visits. But life was different now. He was different. He had spent over two years on his own. He had quit talking as much, maybe because he hadn't had anybody to talk to. While he could still turn on the charm when he wanted to, it was no longer his constant companion.

The train rolled into Harris, and Luke stepped off to find the streets busy. He left his bag at the station and walked toward the courthouse. It was about two hours before voting ended, and it looked like everyone was casting their ballots late in the day.

Luke was stopped by several people saying, "Hello," and "Welcome home." They all asked about his injuries and obviously thought he was home to stay. But he knew he would only stay if he won the election.

He entered the courthouse and found Blade standing near the door. They spoke a few minutes as more people passed, patting Luke on the shoulder and telling him good luck in the election. Luke moved on to vote and then left the building through the back door, near Reid's office. He rounded the corner of the building, intent on cutting across the street and down an alley to pick up his bag. Then he would head across the tracks and past the cattle yard to take the short walk through the open field to his father's house.

As he crossed the street, he heard Kathleen call his name. He turned, looking back toward the courthouse lawn. She moved to him quickly and gasped at his blotched yellow-and-purple face with a reddened eye. She couldn't see the massive bruising under his shirt, but she touched the arm that was in the sling gently with one hand and his face with the other.

"Oh, Luke. What happened?"

"Train left the tracks," he responded simply.

"Oh, you poor thing, how bad are you hurt?" She looked him over, squeezing his arms up and down gently. She hit a tender spot, and he winced. He took her hand to stop the movement.

“Stop, please. I’m okay. Just got to let the bumps and bruises heal,” he replied.

“When did this happen?” she asked.

“About a week ago.”

“Oh, Luke, I’m glad you’re home. You’re going to stay, aren’t you? You’re not leaving again?” she asked.

“Depends on the outcome of the election.”

“You’ve got it. You know that. There are two other guys running. One’s got no experience, and the other was a deputy over in Scott County. He moved here just to get his residence requirement. He’s been living at the boardinghouse, doing nothing. He’s got the experience and a good record, but he’s from out of town, and nobody knows him. You’ll get it. I just know it.”

She seemed like she was going to keep on talking. Luke knew it was just nervousness. She never talked like this when they were together before. If he won, they would both have to get used to being around each other again.

“That’s good to know.” He interrupted. “Listen, I just got back in town, and I’m kind of tired. I’m going to go get my bag and head to Dad’s. I’ll see you later.” Luke turned toward the train depot.

“Luke?”

He turned to look at Kathleen again.

“Can I bring you and your dad some supper?”

Luke hesitated. He wasn’t thinking about eating and didn’t know what plans his dad had. His father usually ate at Reid’s or Sarah’s in the evening, or they would bring him something.

Luke moved the few steps back toward her. He didn’t want much contact until he knew the outcome of the election. If he wasn’t going to stay in town, he didn’t want to get involved again. If he stayed in Harris, he wanted to take it slow and not rush into something that might get him, or her, hurt again.

He stopped directly in front of her to speak frankly. “I’m going home and going to bed. If you want to bring supper, that’s okay with me, but I don’t feel like talking tonight.”

The smile left her face. She nodded. “I’ll have it there before dark.”

Luke nodded, turned, and headed home. He was tired; he wasn’t lying to her. He had spent two days at the wreck, waiting for other investigators to get there. Then he traveled to Denver to make his reports and find out where Paul’s family lived. He had gone to Dighton and spent an emotional twenty-four hours with the wife, children, and parents of the man who died. He hadn’t had time to stop and recover from his own injuries. Over the last few days, the soreness had become a challenge for him, and he felt drained.

Arriving at his father’s house, Luke told of the attempted robbery and train crash and went to bed. He faintly heard Travis and Kathleen talking in the kitchen later that evening but didn’t wake up enough to really acknowledge it in his mind.

Kathleen had gotten to the courthouse early the next morning and hung around, waiting for the final tally to be announced. When the count came, Luke was elected sheriff with an overwhelming 85 percent of the votes. Kathleen rushed over to Travis’s house to tell Luke and found Travis sitting in the sun on the front porch with Bandit.

“What in the world are you doing out here as cool as it is?” she asked, approaching the old man.

“It ain’t that bad in the sun,” Travis replied.

She pulled her coat tighter around her neck. “They have the count finished for the election. Luke won.”

Travis nodded as just a hint of his crooked smile came onto his face. He wasn’t surprised, but he was glad his son would be at home from now on.

“Where is he?” Kathleen asked.

“Still in bed.”

“Is he okay?” Her voice betrayed her concern. She couldn’t hide her feelings for the man. Luke must be hurt worse than she thought. She wanted to go to him, to take care of him. But he wasn’t hers to care for.

“He will be,” Travis said.

It didn't look like Travis was going to talk today. She knew that some days he would talk and some days he wouldn't. She no longer questioned this.

Kathleen had been to visit him often since he had prayed with her. They had become friends.

She was lonely and needed companionship. Her sons had left town, and her daughter and mother were dead. She visited her grandchildren but couldn't seem to get close to Sarah or William. They were nice to her, but her visits seemed stiff and forced. She thought she might be uncomfortable because she was still feeling the guilt of her hateful actions in the past. She continually wondered if they trusted her.

Her visits with the children's great-grandfather were different. She felt no guilt when she was with Travis, and their visits lifted her spirits.

Travis had gotten to know Kathleen well too. He saw the change in her and recognized the sweet spirit that reminded him so much of Bonnie. He knew she was truly repentant.

"Is there anything I can do for him?" she asked.

Travis answered with a simple, "No."

"Would you tell him I came by? I'm glad he won." She smiled, hoping for an invitation to join Travis on the porch.

"Kathleen. Give 'im time. 'Love is patient,'"¹ Travis said. "Ya need ta leave 'im 'lone right now. 'E'll come ta ya when 'e's ready."

Now Kathleen was embarrassed about the way she was chasing Luke. She was acting like a schoolgirl, and Travis saw it.

Luke had always been a happy soul. His joy had bubbled over and tickled her toes until her own soul had felt the joy too. She hadn't seen that joy the last few times she'd been around Luke. She wanted her old friend back.

She watched the ground. "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."² I hurt him bad, and I

¹ First Corinthians 13:4a.

² Ephesians 4:2.

know it." She looked up at Travis. "But I still love him. I've changed, though. I won't ever hurt him like that again."

"I know that, but 'e ain't been 'ere ta see the change in ya. 'E's gotta see it far 'imself."

She nodded to Travis and took a deep breath. "Okay." She turned to walk home, feeling completely alone. But she knew she wasn't alone. She began praying that God would give her strength.

The final election results were in statewide. Cleve had won the governorship and proceeded to make plans for his swearing in and the coming term. He invited the whole family to come to his inauguration in January. Everyone in Harris accepted.

His children and their families were included in the invitation. They all declined, saying the distance was too far and the children didn't need to miss that much school. He understood, but his children had become more important to him recently.

Emily couldn't be there either. The semester would just be starting, and the administration wouldn't allow her to miss class.

Cleve decided he wasn't going to ignore his children any longer. As each had left for university, Cleve had released them to God's care and then had left them alone to build their own lives, just like his father had done. But none of his children had returned home. He decided his children would continue to receive invitations from him, and he prayed that they would invite him and Jenny to more of their celebrations.

When his term as governor was done, his children would become his top priority.

Life was going well for James. He was working at the railroad's law office and learning the system easily. He knew what was going on with the cases and kept the other students directed just by ques-

tioning the status of their project. He was learning the investigative process by following the other students as they did their research.

Winona had stopped going to the law office with him. He could handle this on his own. If he needed anything, the students at the office would help him.

School was a different story, but things had begun to work themselves out. He was only taking three classes. Winona had gone to class with him at the beginning of the semester and helped him learn where the classrooms were located.

James could keep up with his studies and participated in class discussions. He was doing well on exams, on papers, and at home; but note-taking during long lectures was a real problem. He often missed hearing important statements because he was still writing something else. Turning pages quickly was also a problem, along with seeing what was written on the chalkboard. Winona tried to help him with the note-taking, but that hadn't worked out. She didn't understand what notes were important and had trouble with the speed needed to take the notes.

When Curt learned of the problem, he contacted vocational rehabilitation for suggestions. A representative came to talk with James and had gone to the school to visit with the professors. Another student in each class was found and hired to copy their own notes immediately following class. The notes were left at the library circulation desk to be picked up later.

Now Winona went to campus only to pick up the notes left at the library. She would have them home before James got there in late afternoon.

Winona got to the library a little early to meet James, who was doing research. He could have picked up the notes himself, but Winona wanted to get out of the townhouse for a little while. She had little to do and enjoyed the short conversations she had with the girl who worked the circulation desk. Today Winona would pick up the notes, then find James and the two of them could have lunch together before James went to the office.

"Good morning, Lucy," Winona whispered to the girl behind the counter.

"Hi, Winona," the response came quietly. Lucy reached for the papers under the counter. "You're a little early. I've only got one of them. Joe isn't finished yet. I saw him, though. I know he's here."

"Have you seen James? He's supposed to be here too," Winona asked softly.

"I saw him come in," Lucy replied quietly. "But I don't know where he went. Look around. You'll find him."

Winona gave a "thank you" and turned to look into the library. She started moving between the shelves, watching the students studying. A few of them looked up at her. She was looking at the tables that set every few aisles, searching for James. She found him on the second floor and sat down.

"I'm almost finished," he whispered.

She watched the people as she waited.

After a while, she said, "I'm going to see if the rest of your notes are ready yet."

James nodded.

Winona returned to the counter where Lucy was talking with a young man.

"Oh, there she is," Lucy told the man softly.

The man turned around and watched as Winona approached. Winona remembered seeing him too, as she was looking for James. He had looked up from his work and kept his eyes on her as she moved down the row of tables. His stare had been uncomfortable and betrayed his intentions. She was glad she had found James soon after that. He was right around the corner, hidden by a partition full of university notices and a large sign stating library rules. The area the two men were in was in the corner of the second floor, isolated from the main library area.

"Winona, this is Joe. He's taking notes for James," Lucy whispered as Winona neared the counter.

"Hello," Winona offered. No one handed her any notes.

"May I have the notes?" she asked. The young man's eyes gave a look that caused her to feel dirty. She looked toward the floor.

Joe still had papers in his hand. He looked down at them. "Oh, my goodness, I left a page on the table. Come on, it's back here."

He began to walk off with the papers still in his hand. Winona looked at Lucy, feeling uneasy. Lucy smiled. She didn't seem to be bothered by this man.

Joe turned around and called to Winona quietly, "Come on."

Winona hesitated but followed, not liking the man's manner or his vile eyes. They got to the table, and Joe looked toward his stack of books, then grabbed her by the hand and pulled her roughly between the nearby shelves. He pushed her against a shelf and clamped his hand over her mouth.

"Now we can have some fun," he whispered.

She stood perfectly still, frozen in place. Memories of the men she had been with when she was a young girl and the way they had treated her flooded her mind. She didn't know what to do. She was paralyzed with fear as he grabbed a handful of her hair and twisted her head to the side, pulling his slimy mouth across her neck.

James came around the corner of the shelves and saw what was happening. He couldn't tell who this was in the dim light and shadows, but he saw the girl was in danger.

"Stop right there," James demanded loudly.

He saw the man turn to face him and heard a soft masculine laugh. "What are you going to do about it, freak?"

James took a step forward, and the man released the woman, pushing her roughly away from them as she fell to the floor. In his hands, James held the book he intended to place back on the shelf. Joe took another step forward, and James saw who he was. James moved the book into both hands. Joe planned on his own attack and wasn't ready when James swung the corner of the hard-cover book toward his opponent's chin. Joe's head jerked upward, and blood splattered over the book and down Joe's shirt.

Winona jumped up to run for help. She didn't know where to go, where it was safe, or who to look for; so she headed back downstairs to the circulation desk.

"Lucy! They're fighting," Winona said loudly, pointing back the way she had come.

Lucy froze, staring at Winona. She didn't know what to do either.

A man behind the counter with Lucy got out of his chair quickly. "Call security," he told Lucy as he opened the hinged countertop, letting it slam backward against the flat counter with a bang. Everyone's attention was drawn to the girl and the man leaving the circulation desk. A few students followed.

By the time they arrived, the fight was over. Joe was on the floor in a daze. His chin was busted and bleeding, along with his nose. His left eye was turning blue and puffy. James was on the floor beside Joe holding the end of Joe's coat over the bottom half of his face, trying to capture as much of the blood as he could. Joe tried to sit up, and James pushed his head back to the floor. Everyone heard the *bonk* as his head hit.

Winona ran to James and dropped to her knees, throwing her arms around him. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," James said calmly.

Winona began to cry. James let go of Joe's face and wrapped his arms around her. "Are you okay?"

She nodded. "I was so scared."

"You're okay now," James assured her. "He won't bother you again."

The man from the circulation desk helped Joe onto a chair, and they waited for security to arrive.

Security took Joe away, and James took Winona home. She had started shaking while waiting for security to get to them and continued to shake and cry on and off throughout the afternoon. James wrapped her in a blanket as they sat together on the sofa in one of the sitting rooms. She told him of her memories of the men she had been with as a young girl—of how they treated her and the abuse she had endured. James saw her pulling back into herself, the way she had done when she first arrived at their home years ago.

He didn't want to see this happen to her. He reassured her that she was protected and this was an isolated incident that would never happen again. Then he silently prayed that what he had told her was true. He pleaded with God to help her through this and to keep her strong.

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe,”¹ James said. “When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet,”² ‘but whoever listens to (God) will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm.’”³

She relaxed into his arms as he began to tell her about the war and how he held to Jesus to survive. As he told her of the agony of his injuries and recovery, silent tears escaped onto her face. She realized that his fear and pain were as deep as hers, maybe worse.

He had Jesus to hold to, though. She had struggled through her captivity alone, not knowing Jesus until Reid had introduced her to him late one night.

She was waking every night after she arrived in Harris. She’d lie in bed, listening to the silence in the house. A dark quiet house was new to her after years of being at the dirty brothel. The shadowy stillness in the bedroom scared her. But one night, she had heard talking and got out of bed to see a dim light in Reid’s office. She had gone to see what he was doing and found him praying. He took her hand and invited her to pray with him. She had never prayed before. She didn’t even know what prayer was. Reid had patiently taught her as he also told her about Jesus. She had believed, wanting to hold to anything that offered consistent peace and safety.

Reid, Luke, and Travis had offered her protection, as did Chipeta, Sarah, and many others in the family. She knew Blade would protect her too. This Jesus who Reid talked about also offered her protection. She had no memories of her parents’ god, so she clung to Reid’s God with hope. That hope had brought security and a new understanding of love. She had accepted the forgiveness offered by Jesus.

The others living at the townhouse came home and learned of the attack, offering their concern and care too. After everyone else had gone their own way, James continued to sit with Winona. She didn’t want to be alone. She wanted to be with James, her rescuer.

¹ Proverbs 18:10.

² Proverbs 3:24.

³ Proverbs 1:33.

She was curled up on the sofa again, wrapped in the blanket beside him, thinking of how safe she had felt in Harris. Her face was turned away from him when she said, “Maybe I should go home.”

No! He couldn’t let that happen! He didn’t need her to do things for him anymore. James realized that. He was comfortable with others taking care of what she had once done for him. The students James worked with were helping him at the office. There were students taking notes for him in class. He knew his way around campus and the railroad’s complex and could navigate them even with his limited vision. But James wanted her here with him. He felt he needed to protect Winona more and realized he cared more for her than he thought. He loved her.

“You are home. This is our home now. Please don’t leave,” he said.

“You don’t need me here anymore,” she replied.

James blurted out, “Yes, I do. I love you, Winona. I want you with me always. Marry me.”

It was so sudden it left Winona in shock. Then she remembered what God had told her almost two years ago. She sat up as she turned to look at James and smiled. “I love you too.”

“When?” James asked.

“Any time you want to,” she replied.

“Next Friday?” James asked.

“Okay.”

The next week, the school newspaper ran a story on the rescue of an unidentified girl who was attacked in the English literature section of the library. It said the unidentified attacker had been expelled from school. Her rescuer was a veteran who received the Medal of Honor during the war and, more recently, had saved a federal judge during an attack by an escaped criminal. Now he was once again a hero.

No one in the house confessed to having talked with anyone from the newspaper. But when James got to the railroad’s law office

the day after the paper came out, Donald Cryer had a copy on his desk.

“James, they did a great job on this article, didn’t they?”

“You’re the one who talked to them?” James asked.

“Of course, I was. I came in the office that afternoon to pick up something I forgot. I was here when the students from the newspaper came by. Gerald told them you wouldn’t be in, so they asked to talk to your supervisor. That’s me!” Cryer smiled broadly, playing with James. “They told me what you had done that morning. It’s great publicity for the railroad, don’t you think?” he asked with a more serious tone. “A student railroad employee saves a girl from a brutal attack. And you’re in the legal department too. Says so right here in the article.” Cryer held the newspaper up.

Cryer kept talking, getting louder, and showing more excitement with each moment that passed. “Hey, do you know who the girl was?”

“Winona.”

Cryer’s eyes went wide. He seemed amazed. “Is she okay?”

“Yes, sir. It just scared her.”

“Oh, I’m so glad.” Cryer’s voice showed the concern he had for James’s friend.

“By the way,” James continued, “we’re getting married Friday night at the chapel on campus. You’re invited.”

Cryer got up from his desk to take James’s hand, patting him on the shoulder, another wide smile on his face. “Congratulations, son. I’d love to come.”

As if James wasn’t already a curiosity around campus, now he was also a celebrity. Some of the students in his classes were more willing to approach him and somehow seemed more friendly. Three students in the class offered to share their notes with James. Other students just stared at him more.

Winona was now nervous about leaving the house alone. James told her she didn’t have to do anything she didn’t want to do. Joey began picking up James’s notes at the library so Winona wouldn’t have to go on campus.

Friday came, and Curt stood with James as witness while Abigail stood with Winona. It was a simple ceremony. Everyone living in the townhouse was there. Joseph, Joshua, and their families also attended, along with Donald Cryer.

After the ceremony, the party moved to the townhouse as the Denver branch of the family celebrated their union.



DECEMBER 1920

Luke had begun sitting with Kathleen at church, and they seemed to be enjoying each other's company again. Thomas, Sarah, William, and the three children sat down behind Travis and Reid just before the service started.

Bonnie Grace leaned from her father's lap to grab at Travis from behind. Travis turned and reached for the child, pulling her across the back of the pew and into his lap. She made herself comfortable and fell asleep on his shoulder.

The singing ended. During the quiet of silent prayer, Reid noticed his father moaning slightly with each breath.

Reid leaned toward his father and whispered, "Dad, are you okay?"

Travis nodded. "I'm blessed. But this little girl is gettin' heavy. She's growin'."

"Do you want me to take her?" Reid asked.

"Naw, I like holdin' 'er," Travis responded as the preacher began his sermon.

"Let me know if she gets too heavy," Reid whispered, turning back to listen to Pastor Sutton.

The child stayed in her great-grandfather's lap until the end of the service. Her father took her from Travis, and the families headed home.

Lunch at the Britt house was quiet. The children didn't have much to say, and Blade, as usual, said nothing. Travis had been especially docile through lunch, eating little and saying even less.

The dishes were done. Jeannie and the three younger girls disappeared into the bedroom.

Blade followed Saamel to the stable to look at the leg of an injured horse. It was Saamel's favorite animal, and he valued Blade's expert opinion.

The boy's father had given Saamel permission to go hunting with Blade before school the next morning. Saamel wanted to make sure the horse's leg had healed enough to be ridden.

Travis, Reid, and Chipeta were sitting in the front room saying nothing. Chipeta had gotten involved in a book Jeannie had brought home from school and was ignoring the men.

Travis said, "I'm goin' 'ome." But he didn't move.

Reid nodded. "You want me to drive you?"

"No, I wanna walk." Travis got up slowly.

"It's cold out there, Dad. Why don't you let me drive you? You don't want to be freezing when you get home," Reid said.

"Ain't that cold. I'm gonna walk." Travis opened the door to leave. "Bye, son."

"See you tomorrow, Dad."

Reid picked up his Bible, but he couldn't focus his mind. His father never said, "I'm going home." He would say, "It's time for my nap." It was the same statement every Sunday afternoon for years. And he never said, "Bye."

Reid heard the Spirit speak to him. *We love because he first loved us.*¹

Reid knew that scripture. "Yes, Lord," Reid said softly. "You loved us first. I know that."

The Spirit spoke again. *Grandchildren are the crown of the aged, and the glory of children is their fathers.*²

Reid was confused. Why was God reminding him that he loved them? Why was the Spirit telling him of children, grandchildren, and fathers?

¹ First John 4:19.

² Proverbs 17:6.

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."¹

Reid still wasn't sure what the Spirit was trying to say to him. He looked back to the page open in front of him.

Call no man your father on earth, for you
have one Father, who is in heaven.²

Reid's eyes widened as a thought came into his mind. He laid the Bible down and said, "I'm going to Dad's."

Chipeta looked up, a questioning look on her face. Travis had just left.

She asked, "Is something wrong?"

"I don't know," Reid replied as he left the room.

Reid arrived at his father's house quickly. He fully expected to overtake his father before the old man reached home, but he arrived to find Travis already sitting on the back porch with the dog lying against the wall behind him. Reid relaxed and smiled. He had misunderstood God. His father wasn't dead; this was his usual Sunday afternoon routine. Nothing was wrong, except his father wasn't taking his nap.

Reid sat down beside his father, but no one spoke.

Travis was staring at the trees. His eyes seemed to be fixed on something that Reid was unable to see.

"What are you looking at, Dad?" Reid asked.

"Beauty," Travis said in reverence.

Reid turned from looking at the trees to watch his father. "Tell me about it."

Travis described what he was seeing without looking in his son's direction. "The angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the

¹ First Corinthians 15:54.

² Matthew 23:9 (ESV).

river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever."¹

The Spirit spoke to Reid. *The dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.*²

Reid quickly took notice of the Spirit's words this time and realized what the Spirit had been trying to tell him all along. His father was going home, to heaven. Travis had even said so before he left Reid's house. His father knew he was dying. Tears came to Reid's eyes as he pulled his chair closer to his father and took the old man's hand. "Dad, I love you."

The response came softly, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."³

Travis slowly turned his head to look at his youngest son, and a gentle smile grew on his face. "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love."⁴

Travis now had his eyes set on Reid, and Reid could feel the love wrapping him, enfolding around him as his father's arms had held him as a child. Reid didn't move. He didn't want this feeling to go away. He wanted to remember his father's embrace that took all pain away, removing all thoughts of everything except the Father's love.

Travis moved his eyes back to the trees. He sat perfectly still and quiet, rocking gently. He didn't say anything for quite a while. A crooked smile set frozen on his face. He began to shake gently. Reid noticed it almost immediately.

"Are you cold?" Reid asked, reaching over to pull his father's coat closed.

¹ Revelation 22:1-5.

² Ecclesiastes 12:7.

³ Mark 1:11 (ESV).

⁴ John 15:9 (ESV).

“Yeah, I think I am,” Travis responded without moving.

“Do you want a blanket?” Reid asked.

“That’d be good,” his father said.

Reid picked up his cane from the floor and pushed himself out of the chair. He returned quickly with a blanket thrown across his shoulder. He laid it across his father’s lap, tucking the edge around the seat of the rocker and around his father’s legs. It didn’t take long for the old man to stop shivering.

“Reid, I love ya,” Travis said softly. “Ya know that, don’ ya?”

“Yes, sir, I do. I love you too,” Reid replied.

“Ya done a good job takin’ care a ya family. Ya keep on doin’ it.”

“Yes, sir. I will.”

Travis said, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord... They will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.”¹

Reid replied, “We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”² “What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived (are) the things God has prepared for those who love him.”³

“I look forward ta it,” Travis said.

“Me too,” Reid agreed softly.

“Lord,” Travis prayed, “whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”⁴ Reid, ya gonna ’elp the others understand, want ya?”

“Yes, Dad. I will.”

They had been silent a few minutes when Luke drove into the yard in his new sheriff’s car. He spotted the two men and immediately knew something was wrong. Reid had his chair pulled sideways, facing his father. The judge was leaning forward with both hands

¹ Revelation 14:13.

² First Corinthians 15:51b–52.

³ First Corinthians 2:9.

⁴ Psalm 73:25–26.

wrapped around his father’s hand that was resting on the arm of the rocker. Reid was watching the old man intently.

Luke came to the porch and spoke to Reid softly as he got to the steps. “What’s going on?”

Reid looked to his brother briefly, and Luke saw the moisture in Reid’s eyes. “He’s leaving us,” Reid said.

Luke looked confused as he tried to understand what Reid was saying. Then he seemed to realize what was happening and said, “I’ll go call William.”

Moving quickly across the porch, Luke headed for the door of the house.

“No!” Reid said strongly, and then he lowered his voice. “Don’t disturb him. He wants to go. Let him do it his way.”

Luke stopped, his own eyes filling with tears.

Travis didn’t seem to notice what was going on around him or hear his sons talking.

“How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.”¹ The words came softly from their father.

Luke moved to kneel on the other side of Travis and took his father’s other hand. Travis squeezed Luke’s fingers tenderly and continued, “Open for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter. I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.”² Reid?”

“I’m here, Dad.”

Travis softly added, “I don’ wanna leave ya, son, but I see ya’ mother.”

“It’s okay.” Reid’s voice cracked. “We’ll see each other again. ‘We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.’³ Go to her.”

¹ Genesis 28:17b

² Psalm 118:19–21.

³ Second Corinthians 5:8.

Reid wasn't sure his father heard him. The expression on his father's face didn't change, and he gave no response. Silent tears were now rolling down Reid's face. He couldn't see through them and leaned his head down to clear his eyes on his shirt sleeve.

Travis kept speaking softly, reverently. "The music is beautiful. I can sing with 'em. Ruth!" Travis's eyes widened, and a welcoming look of anticipation appeared on his face.

"Mark. Matt looks good, Reid. He's with Mark." Their father's voice was getting softer, his breathing even more shallow. "Colleen. Joshua. There's ya' babies, Reid. All the chil'en is together." There were a few moments of silence. Reid again heard the gentle moaning with each breath his father took. Travis leaned his head back against the chair. The old man's hat shifted as the brim scraped across the top of the chair. Reid reached up to straighten the hat and began to softly sing,

Your unfailing love, O Lord, is as vast as the
heavens;
your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds.
Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
your justice like the ocean depths.
You care for people and animals alike, O Lord.
How precious is your unfailing love, O God!
All humanity finds shelter in the shadow of your
wings.
You feed them from the abundance of your own
house,
letting them drink from your river of delights.
For you are the fountain of life, the light by
which we see.¹

Reid leaned forward to rest his face against his father's shoulder and closed his eyes. When Reid opened his eyes, he sat up and closed the old man's eyes.

¹ Psalm 36:5-9.

Luke got up and went to put his arm around his youngest brother. Reid reached to Luke and returned the hug, leaning into the big man.

"Why don't we leave him here for a little while?" Reid said. "We'll let the others spend some time with him if they want to before we do anything else."

Luke nodded and pulled away. Reid hadn't looked at Luke. His eyes were still on his father. But Reid could hear his brother's soft sobs.

Luke went to the telephone to call Sarah and Angus. He would call the pastor and ask him to go to the ranch and tell Naomi.

Travis continued walking, greeted by a swarm of people. His grandfather, his father and mother, the old Indian he had shared the gospel with in the Dakotas when Mary was kidnapped. Jake Monroe, Nick Gatte, Daniel Elshout, and Elizabeth Kane. There stood the soldier who had died in his arms during the war. More soldiers, so many soldiers he now recognized from both the Union and the Confederacy. Just an hour earlier, he wouldn't have known these men.

Travis saw Christians who had influenced his life and those he had helped lead to Christ. So many people he loved and people he had forgotten. There were people he never knew in life, but he seemed to know them now.

There stood Mr. and Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Nelson, and Mrs. Cooper. Clay and Noah. The Mitchems and Joseph Martin. Bonnie, beautiful Bonnie. There were a slew of marshals he had worked with. People everywhere, all smiling at him and welcoming him home. Such beauty in this place. Such love, such freedom.

Travis turned toward the source of the light and fell to his knees. "My Lord!"

*Well done, good and faithful servant... Come and share your master's happiness!*¹

¹ Matthew 25:23.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Inspired by a home school project, Jean DeFreese Moore began the story of a mountain man for her granddaughter. But God had other plans for the stirring journey of Travis Britt. The story was shared with friends, and these friends encouraged her to continue sharing through publication. Finishing her fourth book, Travis's story comes to a close, but his legacy lives on through the lives of his children and grandchildren.

Moore says, "It's been a remarkable experience. God has shown me so much through the story and has been faithful to give me what was needed to tell the story of his servants to others."

Her first book, *A Father's Love: Faith and Family*, introduces us to Travis Britt, a simple man living in the mid-1800s. He is thrust into the Civil War and loses almost everything he holds dear. But following God, he is able to rebuild his life and leave the gift of faith to his family.

The second part of the story was inspired by a grandson who told her the story of *Faith and Family* needed to continue. His comment brought discussions of obedience to God and the inspiration for *A Father's Love: Justice and Forgiveness*. Travis's youngest son, Reid, is called by God to serve justice within a criminal organization that stretches across the Midwest. *Justice and Forgiveness* is a candidate for the Book Excellence Award for first time authors.

That story continued with *A Father's Love: Joyous Hope*, as Travis, Reid, and the Britt family continue to follow God regardless of the trials in life. Reid teaches others that, despite disappointment and suffering, they are still able to experience God's love and joy.

The fourth book, *A Father's Love: Sacrifice and Service*, takes the family from a local conspiracy to the deadly Spanish flu pandemic

and World War I. Travis returns to his roots, hoping to find something he feels is missing from his life. Instead, he finds his love for his family remains strong.

Jean DeFreese Moore received her bachelor of fine arts degree from Louisiana Tech University. She was one of many contributing artists to paint the entry hall mural at the Lincoln Parish Historical Museum housed in the Kidd-Davis House built in 1886. She also served several years as set designer for a dance academy and has taught art at a private Christian school. Most of her career was spent in Athletic Media Relations at her alma mater.

Jean is an accomplished artist. Her exhibit *The Life of Jesus in Acrylic Pour* was scheduled to be a part of the showing *Risen: An Easter Celebration*, which opened the same week COVID-19 shut down her city. The exhibit was quickly changed to an online exhibit and was viewed over 31,000 times on social media and 1,200 times in video form. The exhibit has now been shown, in full or in part, continually for over twenty-four months in four separate venues.

Moore enjoys painting landscapes, specifically mountains and trees. Most of Moore's paintings are done using the fluid pour method. Her paintings have been used on the cover of all four of her books.

Jean enjoys an active retirement as full-time grandmother to seven. Along with painting and writing, she is also involved in her church's children's ministry and active in her local Painting with Prayer group.