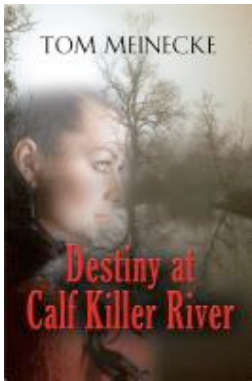


TOM MEINECKE

**Destiny at
Calf Killer River**



Destiny at Calf Killer River, set in Sparta, Tennessee, revolves around finding a map to a hidden silver mine, a 200-year-old unsolved murder of an Indian Chief, and romance between a Houston investigative reporter and his beautiful female partner who he meets in Sparta. Twists and turns involving other mysterious murders related to the map and silver mine create a novel of mystery, romance, betrayal, revenge, and redemption.

Destiny at Calf Killer River

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DESTINY AT CALF KILLER RIVER

Tom Meinecke

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ONE

CHIEF CALF KILLER

Chief Calf Killer pushed the flap of the wigwam aside and stepped into the brisk autumn morning. Dressed in his resplendent tribal chieftain headdress adorned with white and dyed red and blue eagle feathers, he made a regal appearance in his finely-made, beaded tan deerskin shirt, pants, and moccasins. Normally, Chief Calf Killer wore his everyday headdress with a pair of white and gray hawk feathers and a plain deerskin shirt and pants. Today, however, he and the lesser chiefs would meet to begin preparations for the upcoming winter.

The sun began to spray the sky with light pink and blue against the mist rising from the river flowing next to his camp as he offered his morning prayer to the East. From the highest limb of a nearby tree a lone mockingbird trilled his mating song, and the chief smelled the smoke of breakfast fires.

Many moons ago Chief Calf Killer's father, Black Fox, led his band of Cherokees to this beautiful country. Black Fox lived a long and fruitful life before turning over the leadership to his son just before his death.

It had not always been so peaceful. Early pioneers claimed lands too near the band's hunting grounds. Black Fox exacted revenge by raiding the pioneers' farms and stealing their cattle and driving them across the river onto his own land. Some of the calves drowned. The pioneers began to refer to the river as Calfkiller River and when the son of the old chief took over; he became known as Chief Calf Killer by the pioneers. Soon the band adopted the name, too.

More recently white settlers, taking a lesson from their predecessors, made a peace treaty with Chief Calf Killer. In it, they

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agreed not to hunt on or claim the land near the Cherokee hunting camp.

There was ample food for everyone. Buffalo grazed on grass that grew as tall as six feet. Numerous deer and bears provided meat, bear grease, and skins for clothing. The river and ponds teemed with otters and fish. Rabbits and squirrels were abundant. In addition, berries, nuts, and plants provided food and medicines.

Standing alone taking in the glorious morning, Chief Calf Killer felt all was well with his world. The spirits had been good to him and his band.

A squaw, returning with an armload of firewood, came upon the chief's body. Her screams raised the alarm and the band gathered around their dead chief. He lay face down; an ax plunged halfway into the back of his head. A trail of blood showed he had tried to reach the river.

Why did he make his death steps toward the Calfkiller River? Was he trying to reach the healing spirits of the river?

The inside of the chief's wigwam was in disarray. Only the chief's footprints were found. The white man's marshal came and investigated, but found neither the reason for the murder of the chief nor the identity of the killer.

The following spring the Cherokee tribe, saddened by the loss of their chief, moved further south to establish a new camp and hunting ground.

TWO

HOUSTON, TEXAS

It was a typical humdrum Monday afternoon under a murky gray Houston sky, so common in February in the Bayou City. The temperature was in the low sixties, humid, with a fifty percent chance of rain, which meant it could rain somewhere in the Houston area half the time or not. I finished the last touches on my latest assignment, an investigative report on funds missing from a local charity that feeds the homeless, and e-mailed it in from the nearby Wi-Fi-equipped coffee shop. Finding such graft in this noble charity disgusted me. Several administration members had diverted money meant for the homeless to pay for expensive trips and other, even less noteworthy, perks for themselves. In essence, they took food from the mouths of homeless, starving people to enhance their own lifestyles. My article should burst their deceitful balloon.

I wore my usual attire: black Levis, a sports shirt and black, low-heel boots. All in all an appropriate dress code for working out of my house or the nearest café with Wi-Fi.

As I drove around the corner that damn' Charlie scooted down the tree near my apartment, ran into the street, and sat on his haunches in the middle of the street. He dared me to run over him or swerve. Does this squirrel have a death wish? Every few days he does this little dance with me. I swerved left and Charlie ran left and then sprinted right as I slammed on my brakes. I'd be mad, but Charlie is the closest thing I have to a pet in my lonely life.

When I was a kid we had a squirrel living in our yard that I'd named Charlie, so I named this one Charlie, too. The first Charlie would come to me, take a pecan out of my hand, run, and bury it, unless I had cracked it. In that case, he would sit on his hind legs and

eat the meat of the nut right out of my hand. He was so unafraid of people that he stuck in my mind, even after all these years.

I parked in my slot, picked up my loose papers and open briefcase from the floorboard, stuffed the papers inside, and snapped the briefcase closed. I locked the car and climbed the stairs to my small, sparse apartment. Another night of checking e-mail to see if anyone sought my services and watching the same television shows and reruns. As I put my key in the door, I noticed the edge of an envelope peeking under the bottom of the door. Did I forget my rent again? My landlord is quick on his eviction notices as of late. Forgetfulness has marked the continuing downhill spiral of both my personal and professional life since what happened to Susan.

Had it really been two years? It seemed like yesterday. Maybe time heals all things, as I had often heard, but it hadn't so far. I opened the door and picked up the envelope, not the usual white, cheap one that my landlord leaves. This envelope was small and light blue, with Jim Templeton clearly lettered in neat letters. Well, that's me. As my fear faded that it was my landlord's technically-worded threat of eviction, my worries shifted to the thought that it might be a letter of recrimination from a female companion I met one night and then forgot to call.

Not that I am some kind of Adonis but I still have all my teeth and can carry on a decent conversation with humor, traits which put me in some demand with the other sex. No, it couldn't be that. It had been weeks since my last visit to Chances Are (Bar and Meat Market) for a drink and possible female companionship. My mind had become so muddled that this envelope could mean anything. I carefully opened the light blue envelope and saw the matching light blue stationery inside. The single page, written in the same neat lettering as the envelope, read:

Your life and the Templeton legacy
are in immediate danger. You must come
to Sparta, Tennessee as soon as possible.
Go to the White County Court House in

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Sparta and to the Archives Department. The Archivist, Joy Nelson, will have an envelope with your name on it that I gave to her to hold for you. It will explain more.

A Friend.

for God's sake - hurry.

In shock, I tried to think of what I had in common with Tennessee, much less a town called Sparta. When I was a boy, I'd heard my grandfather speak of his ancestors in Tennessee. My father, James A. Templeton, committed suicide when I was just ten, and my mother and I had almost no contact with his family after that. My mother died a few years ago without mentioning the Templeton family again.

Then I remembered that a few days before the tragedy of two years ago, a lawyer from White County, Tennessee, had contacted me. He told me that he had been trying for some time to locate me on behalf of the county to advise me of an inheritance of a parcel of land outside of Sparta, Tennessee. He said that I was the last person of the heirs-of-law under the Tennessee statutes of descent and distribution of that land. The last Templeton to own the land, Asa Templeton, died several months before, and the lawyer had been searching county records since that time to find the heir. When he didn't have any luck there, he traced the line through the genealogical records he found on the Internet.

The fact that my family had moved to Texas complicated the search, but some of the older townspeople in Sparta remembered that my grandfather, Samuel, moved to Houston years ago. After searching through deed records for Templetons in Houston and finally the telephone book, he found me. The lawyer said he could send me an Affidavit of Heirship to fill out, have notarized, and send back to White County to claim the property.

“Just how much land are we talking about, where is it located, and what is it worth?” I’d asked the lawyer during our phone conversation.

“It’s fifteen acres of undeveloped land in Quebeck, Tennessee, just outside of Sparta, which is the county seat of White County, Tennessee. It mostly is made up of a part of a large mountain surrounded by a forest of dense trees. There’s little land left for farming, so I would say it might be worth an amount from one to two thousand dollars per acre.”

“So the fifteen acres would be worth between fifteen and thirty thousand dollars, it seems. Well, that is not a lot, but better than never inheriting anything,” I’d replied.

“Oh, by the way, there are delinquent taxes on the property of a little over seven thousand dollars,” the lawyer added.

That cuts the value down a lot I thought, but it could help Susan and me with our upcoming expenses, one of which would be large. I told him my address, and asked him to please send the paperwork. I remember thinking that I needed to go there someday and see what this mountainous parcel of land looked like.

Then my world fell apart. I don’t remember the papers coming, but I do remember receiving notices about taxes on the property being overdue a couple of times in the following months. I ignored them as I did many other things while I was in the depths of depression over Susan’s murder.

This letter must have something to do with that parcel of land, as I knew of no other connection I had in Tennessee. I certainly could use the money if I could sell it, since I was working as a freelancer. Also, the letter intrigued me and made me uneasy by saying my life was in danger. How could my life be in danger over such a small section of land?

I didn’t think about it too long. I made up my mind that I would go to Sparta. After all, I didn’t have that much of a life right now. Following Susan’s death, I lost my job at the *Tribune* as an investigative reporter after months of showing up late for work or not at all. I started my own freelance career after that. Often weeks passed without any new assignments, as was the case now. So, here I was

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with no steady job, no close relatives, no girl friend, and not even a real pet to care for.

I had a nice, but small, cash cushion from selling our house and furniture after Susan's death. The more I thought about it, I wondered if this was the moment the universe chose to set things right.

I called the airline and scheduled a flight to Nashville with an open return for the next day, and reserved a rental car to for my drive to Sparta. According to my Internet map, it would be about a two-hour drive at most. I checked motels in Sparta and found three that I considered: the Ragland Bottom Motel, the Midway Motel, and the Royal Inn. I based my decision on the names. I felt I had already hit my own rag bottom, not knowing that I would soon find out later the real meaning of the name, so that one was out. I had probably already passed my own midway in life. Maybe it was time I felt a little more royal about myself, so the Royal Inn it was.

I wrote a check for the next full month's rent and slipped it under my landlord's door. I enclosed a note saying I was going to Sparta, Tennessee, for business and added my mobile telephone number in case he needed me for some reason. Actually, all I could think of was if the apartment with my few belongings burned, but you never know.

I packed all the clothes I could fit in one large suitcase, and filled my carry-on with my computer, medicine, shaving gear, and a couple of pairs of underwear and socks, a pullover shirt and a pair of jeans.

While I was getting my things together, I remembered the old family Bible that I kept in a large cardboard box with other items of my father's that my mother had saved for me. Along with the Bible were a hunting knife, compass, and old tie-bars and tie-tacks.

I took the Bible out of the box and dropped it in the suitcase. Since I was going back to where my Templeton ancestors had lived, it might come in handy. If there was any doubt about my heritage and rights to the land, the lineage of my ancestors down to my father was listed in the family history section in the front of the Bible. I remembered that from the one time I had glanced at it. My name and date of birth had not been entered. I guess it was not important to my father, but a copy of my birth certificate had been tucked in there, probably by my mother.

My father had no interest in the Templeton genealogy, but I remembered my grandfather telling my father on one of our visits that he should take more of an interest in our history. The Templetons were like many other Scots-Irish frontiersmen who forged into unsettled lands to develop towns and cities.

I was packed and ready for Nashville and whatever awaited me. After setting up the automatic coffee maker, I had a couple of scotch and sodas and watched an old movie until I got sleepy and went to bed.

I have had vivid dreams since I was a little kid. This dream was about my father's life, full of failures and depression. I dreamed of how he ended it. Although I went into a deep depression when Susan died, the thought of suicide didn't cross my mind, at least not more than momentarily right after her funeral.

The alarm ended my dreams at six a.m. Drowsy, I got up and grabbed a cup of coffee made with freshly-ground beans. I called a cab since I had no idea how long I might be in Tennessee and didn't want to have a car in the airport garage, piling up charges. In the old days, I would have had Susan or a friend take me, but that was then. No more Susan or friends in my life now.

I had left out clothes for the next day: underwear, socks, black Levi's, navy blue shirt, and black loafers rather than my boots, so I could slip them off during the flight to be more comfortable. I also left out my reliable old leather jacket to take with me. People don't dress up for travel like they did when I was a kid. Actually, they now dressed more like people taking the Greyhound Bus in years past, if even that well.

The cab arrived at nine, in plenty of time for me to make my noon flight from Houston Hobby Airport into Nashville International Airport. I carried my laptop computer, my Kindle with the latest mystery novel I had started, and my smart phone loaded with game apps to pass the time. I used the phone more for checking email and playing games than as a telephone, although I did occasionally make or receive telephone calls. How unusual, I mused. At the airport I whiled away the two hours before the plane arrived trying to read the

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novel, but my mind kept going back to the letter and what it could mean.

Twenty minutes before the flight was scheduled to leave, we received the cattle call for lining up to board. After my fellow travelers and I blocked the aisles in the plane to jam our carry-on bags into the too-small overhead lockers, we settled into our too-small seats. Luckily, I had an aisle seat, which gave me a little expansion room. A large man had already taken the window seat, and I hoped to have the middle seat vacant for some arm room, but the attendant announced it was a full flight and that everyone should take the first seat available. I tried to not make eye contact with any of the boarding passengers looking for a seat.

My hopes were building up as fewer and fewer passengers were coming down the aisle, but that all went to hell when a three-hundred-pound-plus woman in a red flour-sack dress, which must have been made by Ahab the Arab tent-maker, crawled into the middle seat. She used the expansion for her seat belt as she overflowed into part of my space. I thought obese people were to buy an extra seat, but the airlines seldom applied that rule. Political correctness, I guessed.

The plane left on time and I hoped the two-hour flight time would pass quickly with the help of a Bloody Mary or two. That, along with the hum of the jet engines, soon had me relaxed, although leaning into the aisle. I tried reading, but eventually put my Kindle down and closed my eyes.

I began to reflect on my life for the first time in months.

FIVE

TEMPLETONS

John Templeton Sr., just twenty years old, immigrated to Philadelphia where he met and married Sarah Wallace, the daughter of another Scots-Irish immigrant family. He worked as a tax collector for the city of Philadelphia until they traveled to Mt. Airy in Rowan County, North Carolina, where they bought a few acres of land. John Templeton Jr., their only child, was born there in 1760, and as he entered his teen years, he joined his father as a member of the local militia in Rowan County. The Rowan County militia, including John Sr. and Jr., joined the Colonial Army and fought in Dunmore's War of 1774.

With the start of the Revolution, soldiers left the Colonial War ranks, which had been formed from local militias to fight the Indians. John Sr., with the rank of ensign, and John Jr. as a private, mustered out, and as most of the other soldiers who were mustered out, went directly into the Continental Army to fight in the recently declared War for Independence.

On October 7, 1780, the Battle of Kings Mountain, a pivotal and significant victory by the American Patriots, found both father and son Templeton engaged in the midst of the battle. John Sr., ensign, was a standard-bearer for his unit and John Jr. was the fifer. While carrying the flag in the battle, John Sr. was shot from under it and died on the spot. His son seized the flag and directed his troops through the British lines to the victory. For his heroic efforts, John Templeton Jr. was awarded a warrant for up to two thousand acres of land in Western North Carolina, which would later be included in the new state of Tennessee.

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After the war, John crossed over the Cumberland Mountains in search of land to claim with his warrants. On the way, he was captured by a stray Indian, who blindfolded John and began turning him around so he might lose his bearings. For several days, the Indian marched John, blindfolded, on toward the Indian camp. Fortunately, the Indian did not find John's money and his land warrant, which he'd hidden in his boots.

One night while the Indian slept, John escaped, but he was lost in the dense, desolate forest. He wandered that night and the next day before coming upon a wild turkey's nest with ten eggs, which he took with him. He allowed himself to eat only one egg a day, not knowing how long he would be lost in the forest. On the ninth day, John came upon a trail and followed it to a house. It was the home of Joseph Hawkins, his wife, and three daughters.

John was weak and filthy from his many days in the forest. The family took him in and nursed him back to health. One of the daughters, Nancy, paid particular attention to John and as he recovered, they fell in love. John asked Joseph for her hand in marriage, and they had a small wedding as soon as an itinerant preacher made his rounds to the Hawkins home.

In attendance were Nancy's sister, Rachel, and her fiancé, John Sevier, a Revolutionary War soldier who later became the first governor of Tennessee. Her other sister, Rebecca, and her new friend, John Crockett, another Revolutionary War soldier, also attended. Rebecca and John Crockett later married and had three daughters and six sons. The fifth son, David, later known as Davy, was the legendary frontiersman, Tennessee legislator, and one of the heroes who died defending the Alamo during Texas's fight for independence from Mexico.

John and Nancy moved on to the central part of North Carolina's territory to what would become eastern Tennessee. John cut his way through the canebrakes of Moore Cove and found a large tract of land at the base of the Cumberland Plateau. John immediately rode to the nearest land office to set his claim for two thousand acres of this beautiful plot of land.

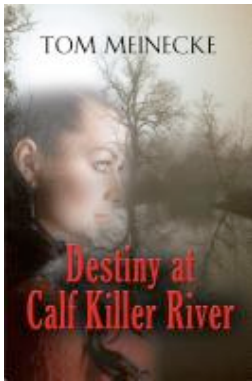
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I had become so engrossed in reading about the Templetons and thinking about how horrible the war experience had been for John Jr. that I lost all concept of time. The next thing I knew, Ms. Nelson was tapping me on the shoulder and telling me that it was noon, and the Archives Department was closing. I had not read nearly all of the genealogy of the Templetons, but I at least knew now why John Templeton Jr. came to Tennessee. I looked forward to coming back later to find out more of the story.

“Feel free to come back anytime, and I will be glad to help you, Mr. Templeton,” Ms. Nelson said.

“Please call me Jim. You have been so helpful, and I appreciate it.”

“And you may call me Joy. It has been my pleasure,” she replied, again with that great smile and soft mellow voice. “It gets sort of lonely working here in the archives, and it’s good to meet people from out of town when they come in.”



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