

Historical novel, late 19th Century America, focus on the life of Andrew Still and the establishment of osteopathic medicine. Well researched, little known facts of Still's life and struggle are embedded in reflective romance, Civil War drama, and organizational intrigue.

Fire on the Prairie

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Fire on the Prairie:

**The life and times of
Andrew Taylor Still,
founder of Osteopathic Medicine**

Zachary Comeaux

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Chapter 1: The Appointment

THE MORNING SUN GLINTED on the hand polished top of John Freeman's cane as he gimped along the Harrison Street in Kirksville, Missouri. The town was bustling and there was considerable buggy traffic on the street this morning. The date was May 2, 1899, a Tuesday. Restless with anticipation, brushing his coat aside, he pulled a tethered watch from his trouser pocket. 9:18. The appointment ticket drawn from his shirt pocket read 10:00 AM. At the top were printed the words "A.S.O. Infirmary". Finally he had an overdue engagement with Andrew Still at his American School of Osteopathy.

A stocky man, too proud to let go of the farm back in Kansas, Freeman relied heavily on family to feed livestock and plant corn. The work was hard on everyone; something needed to change, so he had overcome his pride and had come. His hobbling gait spoke of his back and hip pain.

Freeman's spirit stirred with a mix of emotions as he anticipated the encounter with the Old Doctor as he had come to be called. Prophet, miracle worker, fanatical lunatic - Still had been called all those things. Preachers at home, hearing of the intended trip, tried to discourage him from coming to "parley with the devil's servant" as they described it.

To John the situation looked hopeless. But others, tired of seeing the pain of that game leg, the despondency, the farm going down, and the years of doctoring with opium and "corn licker", encouraged him to seek Still's help. John had his own misgivings about the idea, but he had come. Yes, he was desperate but dare he hope? And like thousands of others, osteopathy seemed to hold out this last hope. But the leg injury of long ago carried a greater burden

than the pain and limp. This deeper wound festered even after all these years. Would Still be accepting of this secret part of the “medical history”? The question, and a sense of shame, gnawed at John’s soul.

His heart full of trepidation, Freeman approached the Infirmary. It was more striking than most frontier buildings as he beheld it. And as he drew near, the surrounding macadam surface felt unusual under his feet and the smooth levelness of it made walking so much easier. Someone knew what they were doing in designing this place, he thought. At home, his world consisted of wheel ruts on a prairie pocked with gopher holes. Was he entering a new world?

Inside, the newly oiled woodwork and tall windows gave an aura of brightness and freshness. And electricity, and hot and cold water in all the rooms – it was a pinnacle of modernity. All this despite the presence of so many ill. His spirits felt a bit lifted as he walked through the lobby.

Families on benches in the waiting rooms, patients assisted to rooms, or in wheelchairs – it was apparent the purpose of their visits. It was serious business, though many like Freeman harbored doubts along with their hopes. Medicine was still at a very primitive stage. The microscope was now generally in circulation but diagnosis was made by physical signs and symptoms.

Traditionally, medicines were few, and little advanced from herbal cures. After the war between the states casualties and disabilities were many, and morphine seemed an advance over opium. But the same dependency applied, enslaving many who had fought over the slavery of their fellow man. The promises of medicine were many, the comforts few. And many died under the knife.

But here they said a different approach was taken. Folks were talking about “bloodless surgery” and “using the body’s own chemicals to heal”, surgery as a last resort to save life. These audacious claims flew in the face of mainstream medicine. But still, the Wabash Railroad brought hundred daily in hope of relief if not cure.

“John Freeman? Mr. John Freeman!?”

Freeman nodded in acknowledgement to the woman behind the registration desk.

"Yes, please come to the desk." Sally Taylor asked in a pleasant voice.

"That will be nine dollars deposit for the first three treatments, the first week. After that, treatment is twenty-five dollars a month. If you decide to stay, the deposit will be deducted from your first month's fee. You may stay at the Poole Hotel, as you are, or consider a boarding house, which will be quite practical should your stay go a bit longer than you expect. Ma Scott's is as good as any, if she has room. The hotel'd cost you ten dollars a month; Someone's spare room or a boarding house will cost you three to five dollars. So, make your choice. You've got time to make up your mind. But for now, let me take your information and deposit."

After the transaction Sally continued, "Thank you, then, here is your receipt; this young lady will take you where you need to go."

"Good morning, Mr. Freeman; please come with me. I am your nurse, Miss Shreve."

Nurse Shreve, accustomed to the efficient bustle and daily rhythm of the place, led Freeman down the wide hallway to a consultation room. First he sat in the chair and surveyed the place. Beside the two chairs and a writing desk, the room was dominated by a large window, filling the room with air and light. Although it let in the breeze and a bit of the bustle of the town, it was high enough above the street for privacy.

The examination table seemed clear in its purpose, and the small stool, but lastly there was a strange contraption. It appeared to Freeman to be part chair and part mouse trap with some sort of adjustable pads along the back.

The nurse noted his curiosity. "Don't worry it won't bite and it's not used as a form of torture. It's a special chair devised by Dr. Still to put corrective force directly where it's needed. If he uses it, the Doctor will explain it all to you. Now, we have some forms to fill out before the Doctor comes in."

The nurse reviewed a form with standard questions about the complaint, other possible diseases, diet and previous medical

attention, then asked in a firm voice, "Is there anything else we should know about your medical history?"

Hesitating, beginning to perspire, Freeman answered, "There is one other matter, but I will discuss that with Dr. Still."

"Please, Sir," cajoled the nurse, "it is helpful for the Doctor to have all your information ahead of time."

Beginning to mutter, Freeman replied, "I think this best discussed with Dr. Still."

"But sir..." began the nurse in rather stern tones.

Dropping his town manners, resuming his tone for overseeing farm hands, Freeman affirmatively, near aggressively, raised his voice and asserted, "I know the matter at hand, Miss, and I know my mind...I think it best discussed with Dr. Still directly!!"

With that the nurse timidly added, "Well, yes, as you wish." She directed the patient to disrobe behind the screen and trade his street clothes for the examination gown on the hook. She then turned, rang the service bell, and scurried to the door.

Freeman, now in a sweat, sat in the nervous silence for what seemed like an hour. After several minutes, a lean, trim, nearly six foot Dr. Still, similar in age to the patient, entered.

"Good morning, Sir. Mr. Freeman, I hear."

"Good morning Doctor. Yes, Freeman, John Freeman."

Still took a seat at the writing desk, stroked a scraggly beard, and briefly reviewed the nurse's notes.

"Well, let's see here...hip and back, humm..."

The Doctor paused, and looked long at the man before him. Freeman was impressed by the strength of gaze, the power behind those piercing grey eyes.

“So, this started with a problem with leg pain from a fall some years ago, I see. But there is more on your mind, Brother; what is it that troubles you?”

After years of anticipating this moment, Freeman was at a loss as to where to begin. Yes there was the pain, the frustration with youth and manhood lost, but deeper down the wound seethed. “Doctor, I need help with my leg but there is another matter to discuss first, another wound before you can help me with the leg?”

“Yes, Brother, what is it?”

“Before you call me Brother you should know we have met, at Little Blue. I fought with Price.”

Time stopped for a moment and each man retrenched into his private thoughts. Time went back thirty years to their youth. Little Blue, a muddy stream south west of Westport, south of Kansas City on the Missouri side.

Still recalled that day. His unit, the 21st Kansas Militia, had been called out to assist Union General Totten in making an army of 35,000 men to face Confederate General Price. Prior to this, Still’s abolitionist neighbors were organized loosely under the banner of James Lane and had mostly been engaged only in preparedness, defensive intimidation of the majority of pro-slavery neighbors, and responding to the guerrilla tactics of Quantrell’s Army, especially after the latter burned Lawrence, a nearby community which was an abolitionist stronghold.

Although the 36th parallel, (the southern Missouri border) had been set as the northern most border of the slave south, Missouri was later admitted to the Union in 1820 as a slave state, a compromise intended to balance the admission of Maine as a free state. In 1855 the Kansas-Nebraska Act abolished the inviolability of the 36th parallel

opening the Northern Territories to slavery. In 1862, the issue remained alive.

Settlers of both persuasions, pro-slave and abolitionist, had invested their lives anticipating, hoping, that politics would fall on their side. Tensions rose. Skirmishes among neighbors along the Missouri/Kansas line were frequent and daily chores required vigilance. Still recalled uncomfortable moments coming upon Confederate units drilling in the woods.

A whirlwind of ideological, political and practical undertones was fanned to a white heat by religious fervor. Preachers like John Brown and Henry Ward Beecher stirred the abolitionist minority into a crusade. Beecher even preached to raise funds for rifles, which were called Beecher Bibles. Brown put kin and neighbors on the ground armed as fighters.

Still has received the "calling" to higher values including freedom for all God's creatures from his father, Abram Still, a circuit riding Methodist preacher. The senior Still's convictions made him unpopular with the majority in his Methodist charge and they had moved to Baldwin, Kansas, to a community of like minded individuals for safety. However the safety was relative. Missouri and Kansas became a chess board for national political interests.

Passions simmered on both sides as prairie colonists were men of character, stamina and vision. William Clarke Quantrell, reflecting the will of the majority in Kansas, began a campaign and in August of 1855 burned and pillaged the free-state community of Lawrence, just north and east of Baldwin. Brown organized a response from his followers and massacred pro-slavery families along Pottawatomie Creek, dragged the unarmed inhabitants into the night, and brutalized them with cavalry swords.

Such were those times. Wounds healed slowly and for years many men writhed in agony many a night, unable to express their disturbing memories to those resting beside them.

Both Still and Freeman continued to search the face of the other, recognizing the disciplined coldness of repressed memory.

Still had been commissioned as Captain and Assistant Surgeon. His unit of volunteers, more accustomed to engaging similar small

units, succeeded in pressing the enemy immediately before them, but in doing so, they found themselves advanced beyond the front lines of the larger retreating Confederate army. They were cut off from the main body of the Union force.

Fighting was fierce and both Drew and his mule dodged grazing bullets. Several rounds pieced his coat, but flesh was spared. Then, through deference, chance or ineptitude, his opponent had shot his mule rather than the rider and as the animal dropped it rolled and pinned Drew beneath. As he lay in pain and the senseless stupor, he knew he was in no position to defend himself. Companions had left him for dead and to death he may be going. But to struggle during this exchange of lead would certainly draw attention of blade or bullet. In this state of shock, and desperate indecision, Drew's mind drifted into timeless unconsciousness.

"Everything will be all right, just come home," a soft voice whispered in the quiet of his soul.

"Mary?"

The spirit of his deceased first wife seemed to comfort him.

Drew lay still and stunned in the dark, wondered why. The crackle of gunfire and smell of burnt powder, mud, sweat and blood pervaded his senses in a swirl of hazy consciousness. The enormous weight of the mule pressed him to the ground as a hot searing feeling crept like a fire down his right leg. As the volleys became less intense and less frequent, Drew began to piece things together.

"Am I shot? Who is winning?" he asked himself. It became evident that, as he lay, there could be no sure answers.

The heavy stillness has descended on the clearing. "Drew, get up, save yourself; you have things to do yet." Again, a familiar voice roused the weary man, but as he looked around, no one so near his ear. Was it his wife, his dear deceased; was it Mary? But she certainly was not here; was it shock and craziness? The voice sounded so clear. As Drew continued to listened, the scene around him was sobering.

Only the groans, moans of the dying now replaced the whistle and crackle of gunfire. The smoke of battle has given way to the mist of twilight. Drew realizes his lapse into reverie and the coming of night. The grimness of his predicament became clear; he began to rally to survive. Now is the time to move. Drew seemed to hear the voice of his father: "You have to do for yourself, my man." Thankfully Drew was pinned in the muddy field under the softer flank of the mule and was able with tedious effort to work first shoulders then chest, pelvis then legs, out from under the limp beast.

As he rose, his injury became apparent. Luckily he sustained bruises rather than fractures or gunshot wounds. A dull pain in his groin later proved to be a hernia. Although they prevailed in driving Price to retreat, there was a cost paid by many. Companions around him were not as lucky as Drew in receiving a grazed coat. Recognizing a few neighbors, among both the abolitionists and the confederated regulars, Drew saw none for whom his assistance could now make a difference.

Less time had lapsed than he had thought. His men awaited an order. He called for the bugler to reassemble the troops and resume closed ranks. They assembled some enemy horses. A soldier brought Still a horse and he mounted. They rode to follow the retreating army, but did not press to engage them. After camping for the night, the pursuit resumed in the morning with skirmished through the day. Point having been made, the enemy were allowed to escape.

As he sat on the infirmary exam table, Freeman also reflected on that day. He and his neighbors had sympathized with Quantrell and the Confederate cause. Most had moved to the West for freedom, the freedom promised by the country's founders that seemed to be eroding in the East under the intrusion of State then Federal government. In part, the arguments for Negro inferiority played second fiddle to the issue of states' rights. Stephen Douglas in Illinois cried "Let the People Rule." Nowhere was the tension over the issue of slavery more acutely felt than in Kansas territory.

Abolitionists, or free-state men, were seen as fanatics, a threat to the way things had been, the way they needed to be. Their fire could not be quenched but by powder and lead.

John Freeman also reflected as their eyes remained locked on each other. On that day in May, Freeman and two of his brothers had joined in with a militia band loyal to Quantrell as part of the army of Generals Shelby and Price at Westport on the Missouri side. They met a formidable resistance from the Union regulars and assorted militias. Through the afternoon they dodged in and out of alder thickets engaging the enemy along a line between Westport and Little Blue Creek.

Occasionally, the enemy amounted to recognizable neighbors from the Kansas side, fighting likewise for what they believed. But fighting for their lives, in the heat of the moment, fire they did. Freeman was astonished at one point to find his sights fall on the mounted figure of Drew Still, the respected physician from Baldwin. Distracted by the dilemma, he hesitated to squeeze the trigger long enough to miss his best shot, but still he fired and saw mule and rider fall. The action progressed rapidly and in the gun smoke haze his bugler called retreat and he moved further east with General Price's army. For months he wondered with mixed emotions over the outcome of that shot. Somehow it brought the horror of war to the forefront of his mind; and all too often to his disturbed sleep.

In the examination room, Freeman was the first to break the silence.

"Doctor, Major, Sir, I was a bad shot that day. I aimed at a man, I brought down a mule."

"I see," replied Still in deeply sonorous, serious tones, now looking down. The significance of the patient's reserve came to him. After a long pause, the Doctor looked up, "Bad days they were, brother against brother and neighbor against neighbor. But for some higher reason it had to be. We each done what we thought we had to do....Well, there was a higher purpose in your missing the mark there that day, wasn't there? Now let's see that leg."

Still started to observe, then poke, then feel the surface, nudging here and there about the man's thigh and leg. He spoke as he

worked: "I believe I can recall some Freemans over around Bucyrus. Is that your clan?"

"Yes, Sir, that's us."

"Tell me, how is your brother, Charles."

"My two brothers were both killed in the war."

"And your wife, how is she?"

"Died, too, of the meningitis."

Still commiserated reflectively, "Yes, I lost my first wife two months after our last child, in '59. The meningitis then took all our children save one. Prairie life can be hard on a man. But we must go on."

A knowing and sympathetic silence lingered in the air.

"Now, walk around a little for me; I think I can see where to begin with you. Now you know it has been a number of years in this condition, but I see something we can work with."

As the Doctor moved the patient's leg and hip in various positions, he continued to talk. "Where are you staying? I generally say that it often takes a week of treatment to gain back a year of injury. In your case we might make progress quicker since you have stayed pretty active. You will be seen three times a week, either by an assistant or myself. All are graduates of my school and are excellent operators."

"You can board through the school if you like. At the boarding houses there are baths, hot water of course, and good meals. If you want to talk terms about a package, talk to my son, Charles. The nurse who saw you in will give you a copy of the infirmary rules. Most of all, try to save your questions for the consultation room. If we come across each other in town, treat me like a polite stranger. Also, since each

man is different, please do not discuss your treatment with the other patients. Each man, and woman, is on a different journey. Is that clear? Any questions?"

"No, Major, Doctor, I feel better for the 'consultation'; the wound has started to heal."

The two men looked eye to eye and embraced.

"Remember, John," said Still in his low mellow serious tone, "the past is just that; in the here and now and the kingdom come, we are always brothers. Only the Almighty can make sense of the way things unfold here on this earth. I hold no resentment."

Dr. Still walked to the door; Freeman turned to dress but looking after the Doctor noticed his cane.

The Old Doc continued to see a series of patients, selectively sent to him by his associates of the school. Eventually, duty done, Still walked out beyond the porch into the late morning sun. Retiring to a bench nearby he recalled the outcome of Little Blue, still attached to his conversation with John Freeman.

After collecting their wits Still's reassembled company had ridden to follow the retreating army, but did not press to engage them. The following day they continued pursuit to reclaim territory and put distance between the Confederate force and Kansas settlements but then broke off the chase. Confederate stragglers were allowed to bury their dead. In the process, 140 confederates came under a flag of truce.

"How are you off for grub?" quipped Still, as the men were led to him at gunpoint.

"Almost out, Major," replied a spokes person for the scraggly troop.

"I want you to listen," Still said sternly from horseback, "and don't interrupt me. War is a horrible thing. Partly we are driven by loyalties to kin and the way things have been for as long as we can

remember. Partly we are driven by hunger or ambition, following the lead of those with a need to control our politics. In either case, our deepest intent is not to kill our brother, our neighbor. But blinded by these other factors, we kill. I have known you Confederates to dispatch a number of our Union brethren, regardless of their draping themselves with this white flag. What comes from such treatment; is there joy in such killing?"

"I saw you coming today, and with this in mind, had the intention to shoot you and I think I shall... shoot you with coffee and hot food to turn your grief to joy. Now get out of here; get your filthy carcasses to the commissary and fill up." Sweating brows gave way to smiles of relief from the desperate men.

The next day the troops followed after Price and saw the trailing dust of progress eastward. They followed for some 90 miles back across the Missouri/Kansas line.

Soon, Still received orders to disband his company of volunteers for the time being and send them home for a well earned rest and to consolidate their families, however they might be. On the frontier the war was as much over conserving their lifestyle, of seeing the world as a free place, escaping the agendas of the east or south. The strain on families, even without a war, was enormous. Pushing the men onward, without respite, risked desertion, demoralization, and a violation of the core of what made these frontiersmen the rugged bunch they were. They were fighting for the Union, but they were also fighting for the way they saw the world - free.

He had received the order to disband but Drew's humor and personal style could not immediately execute the order. He assembled the company and challenged them.

"Now I have said that I do not want any one of you to undertake the arduous march ahead of us and to engage further in this terrible conflict who is not equal to this emergency. If any are too sick, faint, or weak to accompany us, or for any cause felt you could not endure the hardship and danger, you would not be force to go. All who would volunteer to go with me through any trial or danger take six paces to the front."

“How many of you are going to follow me forward, how many have the mettle, the determination to see this thing through?”

A hushed, reflective moment followed. Many heads bowed and searched their souls. Memory of family, wounds and fatigue, hunger - tired of killing their young neighbors - many had no heart in it.

“How many! Step forward six paces!”

Silence, hesitation, then one stepped forward, then more; in all, a third of the men stepped forward.

“Very good, boys. But we have other orders; we are to all go home.” Still cracked a big smile which rapidly spread through the troop. Guns shot cracked and hats were tossed in the air, horses wheeled.

Lieutenant Brandon at Still’s side commented, “Well handled, Major,” and rode off. Still reined in his restless mount and for a moment watched thoughtfully as the men departed. Then, with a deliberate tug, he directed his steed westward.

Such thoughts seemed to come back in a flood as Still sat in 1899, enjoying the early May sun. He recalled the voice which brought him that day back to consciousness. “Thank you, Mary, for being there for me that day. Thanks for being here for me, today.” Life is so full and so strange thought Still. After all these year, and his good remarriage to Mary Turner, his first wife Mary Vaughn seemed so very much a soul mate and daily companion. He talked with her often and it seemed quite natural.

Chapter 2: A Golden Morning

BEAMS OF SUMMER MORNING SUNLIGHT streamed through the sieve of leaves. Though familiar to young Drew Still, now seven, the path in the Virginia woods took on a surreal quality this morning. A lingering cool mist diffused the light and gave the forest air a delicate freshness. It just felt magically different. The boy stood in wonderment at the quiet beauty of it all. What a magnificent creation, the hand of an all wise and generous Creator. As he entered the path which led down the hollow to the creek flowing beneath the rock bridge, a path he had trodden with his brothers Edward and James frequently, the place took on a different feeling, a funny kind of feeling. Inside there was a fear, an apprehension, perhaps of the unknown. A real fear - there were bear and bobcat, even cougar, in these parts. But he was drawn onward.

Equally uncertain were encounters with native hunters. The Still family and their neighbors around Jonesville shared the woodland with the Cherokee. The tracks of explorers and "long hunters" such as Daniel Boone and Bigfoot Spencer had led to the creation of a wilderness road to the west in 1775. The Indian homeland was appropriated for white advantage. The community around Jonesville got most of its news from travelers along the road who stopped for a rest and supplies on their way to the Cumberland Gap. There was a tolerance by the native peoples since the wars of forty years before, but growing unrest since the passage of the Indian Removal Act in 1830. What was later to be called the Trail of Tears was immanent but still not foreseen.

But a seven year old is not deterred by such grown up considerations. A curiosity and a rapture induced by the beauty and silence around him edged him on. Usually trips to the woods were

planned and he with his family. But this morning was spontaneous. He wanted to go forward and explore. His feet moved cautiously, eyes and ears tuned to all around. While walking the well trodden path, his fingers brushed against the soft leaves.

A shower of chips began steadily dropping through the leaves and hitting Drew's shoulder giving away the presence of a grey squirrel as it nimbly bobbed at the end of a small limb, hugged the branch with its tail and browsed the ripe hickory nuts. Drew could smell the gingery aroma of the torn husks. The gentle rattle of leaves overhead betrayed the position of the furry forager. If he had been here on business, with his gun, the squirrel would be table fare. Drew shifted and dry golden hickory leaves crackled under his shoe. The squirrel startled and leapt to a higher, safer perch. Sensing intrusion, a jay called and its companions responded, distracting the boy as they cruised through the glade. Then silence.

Simple things seemed wondrous this morning. The squirrel had a tail; how useful. Drew felt jealous. Climbing trees was difficult. The squirrel definitely had the advantage. The jay had wings. Drew had plied the flesh of each of these creatures after they appeared in his gun sights. So different live, then dead. Fur and feathers - different for sure; bone, somewhat the same but adapted to the tasks at hand. Each seemed to reflect different whims of the same Creator. How wise.

Drew reached the creek but held tight to the steep bank. His goal was the secret meeting place on the ledge beneath the natural bridge. He followed the creek which murmured gently as it would through the rocks in the green tunnel of undergrowth. Ahead lay the larger pool and behind it the wonder of the natural stone bridge. Drew sat beside the stream on a mossy rock, enjoying the coolness and the echoing sound of the wood thrush in the distance. With a stick he poked through the reflective surface of the pool and overturned small stones in the creek bottom, chasing a crawfish from hideout to hideout as it propelled itself with the flick of its tail. In the profound morning stillness the valley walls echoed the rolling of the rocks and the splashes.

Finally he reached the bridge, the natural tunnel in the limestone, and sat in the shade of the craggy cave. Traces of leached groundwater left curious patterns in the rock, giving him a glance into the world underground. His brothers would tell tales of adventure, of

Indian exploits, the fruits of boys' active imaginations as they huddled above the flow of the stream. There was a mystery about the place.

This morning, in his reverie, exterior space soon became indistinguishable from interior space and the warmth of the sun blended with the warmth of reverent wonder in his chest. He began a verbal dialogue thanking the Creator for all these gifts, this world, himself, his family.

Drew arose and walked further down the path on a loop that would eventually return to the farm on the rocky ridge top. As he walked deeper into the wood he reflected on their life; the absences of his father, committed to "the Word", contacts with the native people, the difficulty of school learning under Professor "Spankenberg". Their life was hard; Drew had his own string of chores: the hoe, feeding the chickens, currying the horse when he was home. Pitching in like the squirrels, he knew he was preparing his family for winter.

He wondered about the adult talk by several families of moving on. He wondered how long these woods would be home for him. The spreading valley between the mountains provided the flattest land in this region, but the thin soil among the limestone outcroppings made raising good crops difficult. His own parents had talked before about going to Missouri, somewhere far west. He wondered about the country there, would there be the squirrels, the rabbits, turkey and deer? Drew had become comfortable in this world of Virginia, the world of Nature as it spoke to him of order and beauty and divine caring wisdom. It was what he knew; it gave him a sense of place, of connection. It promised more to be learned.

For now, he completed his circuit, climbing up to the ridge, left the woods and reentered the farm clearing.

"Pa!!"

To Drew's surprise Abram Still came at a gentle gallop around the curve of the hill toward the house.

"You are a week early! Oh, Pa, I am so glad to see you."

Ma dropped her washing in the tub on the porch and ran to meet her man. Abram dismounted and led his horse to be hitched.

Handing the reins to Drew, he returned his wife's embrace and patted the younger children on the head.

"Y'all been good, helping your mother? Mary, have they been good kitchen help? James, is the homestead in order? You and this place sure are a sight for sore eyes. The road works on a man, his mind you know, never sure about what the day and the miles will bring. Folks have been kind, however, and I fared well. Drew, what you been up to; did you save them chickens from the weasel? Have you been helping your brothers scratching the roots of that corn?"

"Looks good, Pa. Lost only one hen and that was to the bullies in the flock; pecked her, the way they do. The weasel's gotten not a one. We've been having enough eggs extra to sell. We've made four dollars!"

"The Lord's been good to us this year with the farm. And he has been a shield to me from heathen and weather this year on the road. Praise the Lord. Now is there some grub to be found around here for a hungry man?"

"Come in, Pa, and I'll fix you a fine supper," Martha offered.

"Yes, dear, I've got an appetite big as a bear's."

As twilight darkened the corners of the room and the lamps were lit, the family hovered around Pa to hear about his adventures on the road. Drew hung at his father's elbow waiting for him to speak. He knew not to press. Besides weariness, his Pa had to sort out in his own mind what to share and how. He knew father kept secrets to spare his family worry. They all could sense it.

"This time, I must admit, I had a scare. Late one evening I coaxed the horse to cross the river so I could camp on the other side. That done, we were both wet and exhausted. I lit a fire then heard a wolf. Never is there one, you know."

Drew's eyes grew larger as his attention was undivided on his father's every word. Abram continued.

"I was worried; yes, I was scared but had faith. Now wolves do not like fire. So, I lit and tended four fires to create a perimeter of protection. Additionally, I began to sing 'On Jordon's Bank' as loud as I was able to maintain. Needless to say, it was a long night, waiting to see who would be more persistent, me or the beasts. They sang and I sang louder. In the end the good Lord sent the morning light before my energy waned. We rode a few hours and were able to find some sleep and shelter with a good family of long acquaintance."

"Oh, Pa, if such things are to be endured," cried Mother, part serious, "spare us the details!"

"Well," continued Abram, "the boys need to learn of the reality of faith, not in books, even the Good Book alone. They need to learn that faith is something to live by. It fills you, overtakes you."

He directed his gaze toward Andrew. "Drew, a man needs to live his convictions. There is no other way. Life is too short." He paused as if in thought. "I know some of the other folk around here feel my preaching on the circuit amounts to abandonment. I know it puts a burden on you all, I know, but it's something I need to do, a calling. There is a burning voice in me that will not be silenced. It says this world we see, this life of work and worry, is not all there is for us. There's more, there's a hope, there's a hereafter and our Savior tells us the way. He has shown it to me as clear as day; he pushes me to share this with others. Besides, when I ride, I am able to bring some healing to the body, as to the soul, as John Wesley had proposed."

Pa continued, "A man can ignore his inner voice, but then he is dead before his time, a walking ghost of a man. Many never hear this voice. They are yet to be born and so they live a shallow life. Drew, we do not all have the same path, but you must follow that voice within you. The truth is too precious to be ignored. This voice and the grace that comes with it, is to a man just as the rain is to the corn; it sustains us, is life itself. Danger, hardship, is nothing in the face of following that inner voice."

Abram put his arm around his young son. Drew bowed his head sheepishly. The father continued. "I see you in the woods, and in the field. Part of your mind is always watching, wondering how and why about things. Reading Nature you are, reading Nature like a book. That will serve you well."

"A man has to read the wisdom of the Creator in Nature, in the streams and woods and mountains and find his place. If you stay true to yourself and your inner voice, you will do well; you will amount to something and be a help to others. I know this will be true. Now, come on, let's get up and show me that flock of yours. Ma, thank you, that dinner was fit for royalty."

"Well, you are more than welcome; I am glad you liked it." Martha put her arms around her husband's neck. "You know, to me, you are my prince, but I worry about you."

Pa pecked his wife on the cheek then took a different tack, "I meant to bring this up later but might speak to it now to get it off my chest. As you know, the church is considering opening up a school, a better more proper school, in New Market, in Tennessee. It will be called Holton Seminary. The Conference board asked if I would work on the committee to get it going. I am considering it seriously. If we do that, it means a move, but better education for the children and perhaps less time on horseback for me. I'd be home more."

Ma listened thoughtfully, "Pa, a move? We talked about someday moving west, but that was someday, not soon."

"I know it is not as simple as it sounds. We will talk. I've not given my decision; I have 'til the end of the month. Let's pray on it. Now, Drew, show me that flock of hens."

Chapter 7: Anatomy, anatomy, anatomy

IN THE STILL OF THE AFTERNOON, with most of their colleagues in the anatomy lab, Celia and Elizabeth stole into the classroom to use the manipulation table. Both were anxious to learn this method of osteopathy, to do it right. Each was differently motivated. Celia's grandmother was desperate with rheumatism. Elizabeth had a younger brother with polio and a small left leg. Each wanted to help.

The two, Celia Bowker and Elizabeth Ewing, were new to the American School of Osteopathy, just in Kirksville for 2 months. Most of the study so far had been on the anatomy. They were in a hurry to get to the practical material. Today they had been given a demonstration of treating the back. How had Dr. Still done it?

Celia settled herself onto the manipulation table, sitting facing the window. Elizabeth stood behind, tracing the spinous processes of the vertebrae and trying to get sense of how to read the spine.

"Now, how did he do it? Am I to turn you to the side, like this?" asked Celia.

"Somehow, it doesn't seem right; try going a little further."

As they sat in their confusion, they suddenly became aware of a presence and turned to see an amused Dr. Still, stroking his beard, standing in the shadows just outside the hall door. The Doctor stepped forward into the light, following his customary path across the front of

the classroom as he walked dragging his large hand wistfully along the chalk ledge.

“So, you ladies seem ambitious, wanting to get ahead. Admirable; your patients are waiting for you. Tell me what’s on your mind and what questions you are asking and maybe I can help you.”

“Dr. Still, you gave us that demonstration on treating the back this morning and we are trying to see if we can do that technique. But I am not sure where to put my hands and how hard to push.”

“My dear, your heart is in the right place, and you are asking where to place your hand. But as you are beginning to realize, there is a lot more to it than where your heart and your hand are. Let me show you something.”

The Doctor stepped forward, straddled the end of the table and placed his left hand on Elizabeth’s shoulder. With his right hand, and gently curved fingers, he began to tap and probe her ribs and spine. He then bent the patient forward and to the left and right, continuing his probing.

“Now she has this stiffness in the right ribs. This poor girl has strained herself sometime in doing chores and sleeping on a stiff bed at her boarding house is not helping. Now how do I know this? I use my mind’s eye.”

“Elizabeth, we start by touching and we end by manipulating but our hand needs guidance. In the end it is where you place your eye, our mind’s eye, that counts. You must see what you are about.”

“If a man wants to put meat on the table, he must have the desire to provide, a good firearm, and finger for the trigger. But it is where he places his eye that directs the shot that brings down the critter. If you want to sew a dress, you need fabric and nimble fingers, but it is your eye that sees the pattern you want to make, threads the needle and lines out the stitches. So in our work, it is our ability to see the anatomy, discover and see what in my patient is natural and right

and what is unnatural and needs correction. We all use many words to describe our diagnosis and our treatment. But in the end, our heart and hands are guided by our osteopathic eye, our inner eye. And that eye needs to see the anatomy. To see the anatomy we must study the details of how God made us, with no end."

"I admire you both for your motivation and sincerity, but today, I am not going to tell you how to treat that back. I am going to suggest you get yourselves back to the anatomy lab and study old Columbus and his friends. Get that eye to where it can see. Then you can begin to know how to guide those hands to do what it is we call osteopathy. There's no shame in trying, but you are not ready yet for good work. You will just be wallowing around like hogs in a pen without any higher purpose. Anatomy, anatomy, anatomy... that's what you need at this point."

"Thank you, Dr. Still, thank you for your words of wisdom and your time."

As the girls departed, Still reflected on the perennial problem of students pacing themselves. Each is anxious in the matter of weeks to master what had taken him now forty years too work out. And each graduate considered him or herself an expert.

Still decided to follow the girls and see how Dr. Bolles was doing in anatomy lab with this class. He stopped at the doorway to observe. All five of the tables were in use in the dissecting room. The air was close; later in the season the wheeled tables could be taken out of doors. The long wall with its series of illustrative plates added interest to the space.

Jeanette Bolles had brought her mother to Kirksville the year before the school opened. Impressed by the improvement in her mother's condition under Dr. Still's care, she had asked if a woman could learn this work. "A woman can learn to do anything a man can do," was Still's reply. Bolles enrolled in the first class and graduated in 1894 receiving the first diploma, later replacing Dr. Smith in the teaching of anatomy after the latter returned to private practice.

“Now you must attend to the particularities of this arrangement,” continued Dr. Bolles. “See how the subclavian artery is situated relative to the first rib and the dome of the lung.... Notice the difference between the right and left sides and their respective lymphatic channels.” Dr. Bolles noted the Good Doctor, with hat brim pushed back, legs crossed, pants stuffed in his boots, leaning against the door jamb.

“Now, dissect a bit further, appreciating what I have just pointed out to you.”

Professor Bolles stepped aside from the students to confer with her mentor.

“So, Nettie, how is this crop coming up? Do they need more sun or more manure?”

“They are doing pretty fair; the same spread. Some feel totally overwhelmed and some know it all after 2 weeks. The clinic will sober them all up. Are you here to give a demonstration?”

“No, not today. Today it’s your show. Tomorrow, though, I’d like to make an appearance, if that’s OK with you. Today I’ll let them get a bit more confident before I turn the hot fired lead of clinical detail flying their way. Good to see things are working out.”

Still turned to go then reeled around. “By the way, come on by the office, say four- thirty or so, for a chat. I have some things to talk over with you. Can you do that?”

“Yes, I will be there.”

The Old Doc valued Nettie Bolles. Anatomy was the core of the curriculum. Still recalled the strange way the American School of Osteopathy had started around the topic of anatomy. By 1892 his skill had grown and with it his practice. Very slowly but progressively he gained the trust of the people. He was as busy as he could be. The Still children learned their father’s trade by apprenticeship. They were at

that point indispensable, yet without medical credentials. Several others had inquired about learning Still's approach but they lacked training or deep insight. Then he had a fortuitous encounter with Dr. William Smith.

The encounter with William Smith was different. Smith's intelligence and candor immediately gained Still's confidence. Smith was a physician with academic credentials. Exploring the frontier of America for its economic potential, he at that point in time, was a detail man for a surgical supply company. Throughout the region he began to hear stories of this innovative and creative healing approach practiced by A. T. Still. He so arranged his sales route to be able to come to Kirksville, Missouri. He first performed his visitations to the town's physicians ostensibly to sell his wares but equally with the intent of learning something of osteopathy. Curiously, although Still had been practicing in Kirksville steadily for five or six years, no physician would admit of any familiarity with Still's approach. To be associated with this pariah was to be ostracized and discredited by the rest of the medical society.

Unable to find out what he needed to know through indirect means, Smith presented himself to Still as he met him in the yard adjacent to the Still residence. Having been invited in, he was able to discuss issues with Still.

"I presume you are the famous Dr. Still of whom I have heard so much, all over the State of Missouri. My name is William Smith; I am a graduate of medicine from Edinburgh, Scotland. I am now selling surgical and scientific instruments for Aloe and Company of St. Louis. I have visited about seven hundred doctors in Missouri, and I hear of you and Osteopathy everywhere I go, and since I have landed in this town Osteopathy is all the talk. I tried to learn something of it from the doctors here, but they could not tell me a word about it. I thought it very strange for the doctors not to know anything of a system of remedies that had been used in their own town for five or six years, and the facts had been reported all over the State of the wonderful cures in fever, flux, measles, mumps, fits, childbirth without pain, reduction of goiters, in pneumonia, sore eyes, and asthma; and in fact, I have been told you can cure by this system any of the fevers or diseases of the climate. As I supply all the doctors of this town with

surgical cutlery, they requested me to come to you and investigate your method. I thought it but honorable to tell you that I was a doctor of medicine of five years' drill in Edinburgh, Scotland." Smith paused then proceeded with a sigh. "Those who sent me told me not to tell you that I was a doctor or you would not talk to me."

Still listened with his customary poker face, lips pursed and with a steely gaze. As Smith stopped his discourse, A.T. rested in this thought. He leaned against a pole which carried the newly discovered power of electricity to his home. Smith was credible and deserved some explanations. Still stroked his beard then began to speak.

"You want to understand the principles upon which Osteopathy is based and proceeds." Another long pause followed.

"Now you are a man of education, and I am an ignorant man of the Western frontier. Tell me, then, what is the use of these two wires in the workings of electricity."

Smith began to explain. He described the underlying principle in direct current systems and the chemical charges, the ionic polarity which develop in the battery, which were the basis of electricity. Then he cited the difference in polarity and transmission of this relationship through the wires to the point of activation of an electrical device such as the illuminated light bulb or an engine.

Still reflected, "Tell me, Doctor, how many types of nerves are there in man?"

"Well", responded Smith, "there are two, motor and sensory."

Still went on, "Well now, where is man's power of action, where is the power generated?"

"Why, the brain? The two lobes of the brain are its dynamo."

"And where," continued Still, "is the engine?"

Smith responded, "The heart is the most perfect engine known."

"Then, what runs the heart?"

"I suppose the spirit of life runs it," responded a slightly flustered Smith.

"Is it voluntary in its action, Doctor?"

"It is involuntary and runs by life's forces."

Still grinned a bit, "Perhaps some electricity helps to run the heart, don't it?"

"Well, I must say the actions and 'whys' of animal life are not yet fully understood. There is much to learn about life's action."

Both men rested a bit, realizing the delicacy of the dance they were involved in. Still smiled and sat on a bench nearby, inviting Smith to join him.

"Well, now. Did you have a beer or two before you took on the 'humbug of the century'?" joked Still. He continued, "Now think about this, Doctor. What would happen with this electrical battery, these vats of chemicals, if you were to drop a cake of soap in the mix?"

"Why it would play hell with it!"

"Well let me know another thing." Still went on. "What would happen to the battery of a man if you were to pour in two quarts of beer?"

Smith smirked and felt foolish, frontier fool indeed! "It would make a damned fool of him. Darn your ignorance of electricity!"

Still resumed with a more lengthy discourse. He explained the misunderstanding most folks had of his methods, concentrating on the

manipulation for its own sake as if in the manner of the traditional bone setters. Rather, the anatomic relationships, the natural ones, represented a balanced system to support the flow of blood, the condition of animal electricity to properly support life in the body. Anatomic distortion, from trauma or strain, threw things off balance, both in movement and in distribution of life force, thus leading to disease and other visible symptoms. The diseases were results, not causes. Most medicine chased the phantom of symptoms. Osteopathy addressed the causes, the interruptions of function, behind the symptoms.

“Doctor, medicine needs to get out of the rut of ignorance instead of pushing pills and the knife. Rather we liberate health when we free up ligated nerves and blood vessels. That is our work.”

For some time the two doctors debated and discussed the relevance of these concepts to various diseases or conditions of limbs and bowels and the nature of fevers.

Finally, Smith declared, “You have discovered that for which philosophers have sought for two thousand years and have failed to find; I am no fool, and as a doctor of medicine I have read all history and know that such philosophy was never known before. Your town has a lot of medical doctors who are as dumb as asses, to live within ten blocks of you and not know the truths of the science you have unfolded here under their noses.”

Smith then politely took his leave but asked about returning in the evening. During the latter visit the two recognized respectfully their complementary strengths. Smith, with his classical training, was so much more organized and articulate in describing the human anatomy. As a result, he and Still conspired to organize an experimental class for Still’s children and a few others to teach the basic principles of osteopathy. Still built a small sixteen by twenty-two foot building for the purpose and the formal teaching of osteopathy had its beginning.

As Still proceeded down Jefferson Street for his final medical appointment of the day, he entered and welcomed the shade of the infirmary porch and proceeded into the foyer.

"Hello, Sally, have we seen Sherman Stow as yet?"

"Yes, sir," she responded with a smile. She recognized a special reciprocal respect with the Old Doc. She enjoyed being part of his enterprise of service. "He is waiting for you in exam room three."

"Good, I shall proceed there immediately."

Sally listened to the diminishing echo of hob nail boots as Still proceeded down the hall and entered the exam room.

Still entered the exam room. "Sherman, good afternoon, and how are you? And how is your Juliet?"

"Oh, Juliet is fine, a fine woman. I wish I could do more to help her out. I feel plumb wore out. My shoulder is doing fairly well but my back hurts most of the time and my legs just don't want to go. I know you saw me once or twice last year and I should have seen you more often, but, frankly, my pride gets in the way, until it hurts too much."

"Understandable, Sherman. You have been one of those brave men who came here and turned prairie grass, dust and timber into a livelihood. As I recall you've turned a lot of horse play into horse power also. Hard work, it has been. I share that with you. Nothing to be ashamed of, thought, needing some maintenance. Like a wagon or a fence, once in a while we need mending."

"Now, let me look you over. I tell my students there is no trick to this. You just have to use your hands, your eye and your mind and look things over. Find what is natural, as God made it to be, and what is unnatural. The unnatural part, we put back in its natural place, along with its neighbors. Just as if we were resetting fence posts, or pounding down shingles ripped up in a storm wind."

“In the Good Book, in Genesis, the writer describes God making Adam out of the clay of the earth. Sometimes it feels like we are just reworking that clay. Like a potter at a wheel, we pat and nudge and change the shape until we get the desired shape and effect. The spin of the wheel and the nature of the material are part of the process but our guiding hand under our attentive eye also assists the process.”

“Seems to me like your ribs are stuck and a number of vertebrae are also stuck in rotation. The base of your spine and sacrum are jammed up and I suspect your psoas muscle is involved to some extent.”

“Doc, where did you learn all this?”

“How did you learn how to raise corn and shoe horses, Sherm?” Doc worked methodically as he talked, twisting and poking, nudging here and there. “You start by watching how someone else approaches the problem, you imitate, then you try to improve things on your own. Some things work, other things fail miserably. But if you stay at it long enough and learn from your own mistakes, things start to fall in line.”

Still had Stow lie on his back, then stomach, then side, sometimes using the legs and arms to get leverage as he corrected the unnatural that he found in the muscles, joints, and other tissues.

“I started to learn ‘medicine’ from my father, who learned from the ways of the ‘old school’. Medicines were sometimes poisons but you needed to know the therapeutic dose. We both learned a bit from the Shawnee and their ways, reading nature, the spirits, and using elements of nature, herbs and such. I took a few classes in Kansas City. Medicine was a necessity of the frontier, and an opportunity passed on to me.”

“Then some of my children died then my first dear wife, Mary. The agony of defeat, the helplessness of those days caused me to question

both God and medicine. I thought hard on the problem and hard on the possibility of new solutions.”

“In those days too much was happening to sort out. The war was brewing and everyday we were in fear of our lives from opposing neighbors. Nature was enough to deal with on its own, with weather and crops. The church was divided and we were involved in its currents. The treaty with the Shawnee made some parts of life more predictable. Kansas statehood was not yet defined, it was a busy time. All this made for a need to stand your ground, develop a strong resolve to survive, tested your mettle.”

“Though I did not serve directly under him in the war, I was familiar with Major James Abbott. As young men, we had been neighbors and fellow members of the Free State Militia. We even served in the Kansas State legislature at the same time. After the war, he became Indian Agent but was also a member of the party assembled by the Methodist Church to establish Baldwin College. Between formal planning sessions, we used to have long conversations on current intellectual affairs, philosophy, spiritualism, new ideas in medicine and such. Abbott was an educated man from the East. He was convinced that the ruling practice of drug treatment would give way to another manner of healing. He felt the time was ripe. He encouraged me in my investigation of human anatomy, starting with the availability of bones from the manner in which the Shawnee buried their dead. He also encouraged me in my thoughts on magnetic healing and spiritualism. Years later, we discussed the work of another army surgeon, Elliot Coues, and his concept of biogen as a life force. Abbot was a friend, yes, more than a friend.”

“Coues was an army surgeon such as I had been. He supported the expeditions which helped civilize the Southwest. He was a bit of a biologist and naturalist. In his study of flora and fauna, he began to describe this life force which made the difference between living and non-living creatures. His concept of biogen, best described in a talk he gave to the Washington Philosophical Society, sums it up best. I saw this idea supportive of my ideas of the special way of recognizing the hand of God in the living man.”

“Two trains of thought seemed to come forth to me at one time in those days. For one, I reasoned that if God was a wise and revered Creator, of both man and Nature, that any improvement on the current state of circumstances could not proceed without due attention to the Creator’s plan. So, I began to read the bones and other anatomy as if reading the Word of God, but in another form.”

“Secondly, mechanical action seemed to have an overall importance in the human person. Herbert Spencer, somewhat popularly read, as I discovered later, by my more literate neighbors, emphasized the importance of ‘Mind, matter, and motion’ as the basis for how the world works. John Neal, a Scottish physician, sent me a copy of Spencer’s *First Principles* after hearing me discuss the importance in biology of motion. I was able to use these ideas to amplify my thought and intuition. Spencer talked about the fundamental role of motion in all of creation, even in social and psychological matters. To me, this seemed to be the connection I needed between the theology I had been brought up on, and the new age, what people have come to call the industrial revolution, the age of the efficient machine. If the mind of man can be turned to create machinery of wood and steel, as the Creator of man worked in muscle and bone, could not one help explain the workings of the other?”

“I experimented and slowly added new concepts to my practice of medicine until in June of ’74 I was confident I had developed a new system, a workable set of ideas. The key ideas were that the body acts as an efficient machine. When efficiency is impaired, proper function can be restored by referencing the manufacturer’s specifications, as it were. Learning the anatomy, we learn the proper placement of the joints as well as the circulatory and nerve function.”

“Some students get overanxious about seeing quick results. I use the examples of man as a machine at a bit of a risk. Many think then that the uniformity of each body is absolute, that the results then, if we treat correctly, should be uniform. But we are terribly more complex in our nature and individuality than that.”

“Have you ever looked into the heavens on the dark night of the new moon? Though we can name a few, the stars are so many they create a felt work of individual points of light. I believe our tissues are as complex. Each atom of blood and tissue has a life of its own, organized in a fascinating way. When we move a part, we are changing the shape of an entire internal universe, sometimes in ways we do not totally comprehend. We hope for the best.”

“However, having raised the flag of Osteopathy, I was slow to get any acceptance for these new ideas. Folks don’t like to take chances, generally, when they are suffering. They want the ‘sure thing’. It took me a long time to convince many more folks than Mother Still that I could do as well, in many cases, as the surgeons and drug doctors of the old school. The rest is history, as they say.”

“I had never a desire to set up osteopathy as separate from medicine, just a better version of the same. I had hoped to convince the skeptics. But things have a way of taking strange turns and twist, however, especially since curing can bring fame and fortune. Folks get greedy and this blurs their reason.”

“So, get up and move around a little and tell me where we need to pay a little more attention.”

Sherman Stow stood up straighter than he had in years.

“What did you do? I feel pretty good. A little achy in the low back but I can really move around. Well, thank you!”

Still admonished, “Now, don’t thank me too soon yet. We ought to work together over the next several weeks to make this stick and change your overall constitution. Trust me, this osteopathy is good stuff but we are still working with human nature and the properties of our bodies. It is not miracle cure. We should definitely work again even though today was a big step in the right direction.”

Still placed his hand on Sherm’s shoulder as the latter reached down for his hat lying on the chair.

“Well, I’ll be. I really feel good”. Sherman remarked enthusiastically.

“OK, then, say hello to Juliet and take her dancing.”

“Dancing? I thought you said you were raised Methodist.”

“That’s right. Preachers know I have reinterpreted the rules on many scores. It’s not egotism or apostasy, just rereading the human condition. Mirth and merriment, a light heart, are part of healing. I’d like to see you early next week.”

After Sherman left, Still noted to himself the peculiarity of the day. Encounter after encounter seemed to be situated to have him recall more of the journey to the present day. His thoughts turned once more to his first wife, Mary. “Thank you for your continued guiding wisdom and companionship, your faith in me. We’ve done good, don’t you think?” Drew felt the warm feeling he generally felt when he was “in touch”.

As he walked past the reception desk, Sally smiled and reminded him of his appointment with Nettie. “Professor Bolles is in your academic office. Will you be joining her or should I notify her you will be a little later?”

“No, no, I will be there momentarily.”

Nettie had been waiting about ten minutes, enough time to reacclimate to the customary smell of leather and cigar smoke which characterized the space. Although the Old Doctor was a hero of feminine equality, the office had a deeply masculine feel. The plain walls, the wainscoting. Peculiar taste: the skeleton, Columbus, and the peacock atop the book case.

She wondered if she had been doing something short of the Doctor’s expectations. Since she had graduated with the first class, she tried to learn everything she could to better present his way of thinking and working. Had she failed? She rose as she heard the fall of the nailed boots and then the cane tip on the door.

"Yes, Doctor, I am here; come in."

"Why hello, Nettie, no, sit down, sit down."

The doctor strolled to the far end of the office ... and automatically lifted the lid to his cigar box, then realized the inappropriateness and deferred.

"Excuse me, but I am a creature of habit." He returned to the desk chair and sat, turning his chair to face his guest.

Two individuals, in the stillness of the late spring afternoon, met; two sets of steely eyes engaged.

"I know you are wondering why I would ask you here for a private meeting, but I have no criticism to make of your performance. I feel you are doing an excellent job, in a correct and professional manner."

Nettie resettled herself as the Doctor went on.

"I really need your advice, as it were, since you are, outside of the family, one of the earliest members of our organization. I guess from our days in Lawrence, Kansas, you are almost family. You were kind enough to recall my intervention in removing the lead from that bushwhacker's bullet from your dear Pa, and his recovery. Then you brought your mother here to trust us with treating her paralysis. We go back a long way."

"Remember our first ASO class. We did not know where it was going to go. The boys, Harry and Charles, had already been working with me as the practice grew, but they worked without credentials; then Fred, Herman and Blanche wanted to learn more. I gave them a warming up in '91 then in '92 we had the help of Dr. Smith and ran that first class. You were there and you have made the most of it."

"Nettie, working with a lot of smart people is peculiar business. One minute you feel like you are herding a bunch of wily

cats, each with its own knowing way. A moment later, you feel like you are feeding the chickens and that they will run anyway you throw the corn of recognition and gain. Well, I need good people, a strong faculty, to run this school but predicting what the future will be is very difficult."

"First of all, can I count on you for these next several years, and as importantly, can I count on your keeping our conversations confidential?"

"Yes Doctor, on both counts."

"All right, then, here's the business as I see it. We are not running a monarchy here so we have an active Board of Directors as befits any institution of our stature. Dr. Smith, my first scientific faculty member, has for the moment returned to private medical practice as a graduate of the school. Thankfully, he has trained you well to work in his stead. You have not the academic background of some, but are sufficiently trained and highly motivated for the task charged to you. Smith remains on the Board of Directors and had worked cordially with Dr. Hulette, my wife's nephew, as the first dean, taking some of the daily administration of the school from me as it has grown. Dr. Hulette had begun some fine work but decided not to take the daily heat of the job. Couldn't take the sun at noon - decided to farm other fields. So, we have entrusted this job to Dr. Littlejohn, who keeps the responsibility for teaching the aspect of physiology both in the classroom and through his research activities."

"As we all know, Dr. Littlejohn surpasses me in his academic accomplishments, leaves me looking like a tarnished old fool. But science doesn't follow the line of looks or school learnin'. Sometimes he forgets that we did not arrive here, in Osteopathy or at the ASO, by way of academic performance. Rather we came here from the crucible of hard prairie life, and the resourcefulness of survivors who accurately survey the conditions at hand. We have been tireless students of God and of Nature, a well qualified school."

“And so, the role of this institution is unique. It is to promote the care of people in the fashion I have arrived at through years of personal study and reflection, and inspiration. My conclusions are not arbitrary conclusions, the results of professional deliberations and discussions. As my father pursued ‘The Truth’ in his life in the face of privation and hardship in serving men’s souls, so, also, have I pursued ‘The Truth’ through the wilderness of our medical ignorance. And my program and the integrity of this method will be supported by this institution! The future will be the test.”

“I do not wish to be intimidating in my speech but the energy of my statements comes from the passion comin’ from of a life of toil and suffering to get to this point. And I will not yield the ground.” Still placed a tight fist gently on the desktop.

“I value the work of Dr. Littlejohn and would like to count him as a stone in the foundation of our work here. And so, I have encouraged him personally and have encouraged the Board in their decision to have him follow Hulette as the current dean of the institution. What I am unclear of is our future.”

“Smith, now Littlejohn, would have us admit our applicants on the basis of academic credentials, intelligence and past scholarly performance. Their argument is not without merit. They want to see us makin’ peace with medicine. The good state of Missouri has permitted us the ability to grant MD degrees. However, in my eyes, many of our most committed osteopaths have come, as you and I, from the background of deprivation and need to which osteopathy is so sorely addressed. Medicine has betrayed us. We seek to educate our students on a different path. And on graduating, many are prone to wish to return to help their own people. This is the way I would like to see osteopathy spread to the common folk in need. And we will do so as DO’s, diplomats of osteopathy.”

“Furthermore, look to yourself. The institutions of higher learning generally have not recognized nor availed themselves to an equal extent of the talents of women such as yourself. Should we adopt the posture of deference to the previously degreed, we will

likewise be excluding half the population, the female side, from participation in our programs.”

“Now, if we want to become a ‘profession’, creating privileged individuals who will go abroad, preoccupied more with their own prestige and the capacity to acquire wealth, have we served osteopathy? I think not, and I expect you will agree.”

“In particular, although I value his contribution, I do not know if I can rely on Dr. Littlejohn in the long run, either to back my program, or to be satisfied with life here. I suspect his Scottish brothers will keep him restless and prone to move on.”

“So, I ask you, as a person who has come along some of the same road as I have, to share your thoughts on these matters.”

Nettie reflected a bit.

“Well, to begin, I am flattered that you would ask. I see so much of the running of the school taking place in the cloud of masculine cigar smoke. I guess I see the school in a delicate position. It has started as more or less a frontier enterprise, following the rules of doing what needs to be done; progress has been based on the labor of by sweat and blood. Now, look at the size of the student body, the distribution of its graduates. It has become a national, no, an international institution. Different rules will apply.”

Bolles continued, “I think in the case of Dr. Littlejohn, you just need to be straightforward. I know the two of you have differences of opinion on the balance of expression between the roles of anatomy and of physiology as we have discussed at faculty meetings. If Littlejohn decides to leave, you cannot control that. While he is here, you can ask him to remain loyal and consistent in supporting osteopathy the way you see it.”

“I have watched men play poker. There is always more going on than appears in conversation or on their faces. What’s more, a man cannot control what is in another’s hand. You must wait until he plays

his cards. I think the expression, Doctor, is to keep in the game, count your opponent's cards, but keep your cards close to your chest."

"We prairie folk have learned that truth prevails. I have heard you say, 'Give me the age of God and I will give you the age of osteopathy'. I see you fret and worry and your beard grow greyer. You are not alone in this enterprise. I know you know that. As for me and the others you've trained, know that you will always have a loyal team here. We will make it work out, regardless of the circumstances with your men in fancy cuffs and coats."

The Doc seemed visibly relieved, "Well, thank you, Nettie. I have spent so much time by myself that sometimes I cannot tell what is going on inside my head and what is going on outside of it. I just needed to talk about these things a little and you have given me that chance. I am much obliged, my dear."

"I think for the moment I will challenge Dr. Littleton no further. I will give him some space to explore his point of view, his view of science. If he chooses to leave, either Arthur Hildreth or Carl Mc Connell could easily serve as dean."

"Now it has been a long day and I have kept you. Do you have dinner plans? You are welcome to join us at the new house for supper. I am sure Mother Still can find another plate."

"No, thank you," replied Nettie, "I have another engagement. I should like to ask if we can keep the invitation open, however; can we do that?"

"Most certainly, my dear."

Both arose, beaming with relief and hope for the future. Their smiling eyes met as they shook hands. Dr. Still, cane in hand, used his free hand to accompany Nettie to the door. They walked together through the halls, silently, to the infirmary door. A hush filled the halls which were, an hour before, so busy.

“Thank you again, my dear, for your loyalty and assistance.”
Still lifted Nettie’s hand to his bearded lips and gives her a kiss.

“It is very much my pleasure and honor, Sir. Now, you and the missus have a pleasant evening. See you tomorrow in class, then.”

Historical novel, late 19th Century America, focus on the life of Andrew Still and the establishment of osteopathic medicine. Well researched, little known facts of Still's life and struggle are embedded in reflective romance, Civil War drama, and organizational intrigue.

Fire on the Prairie

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