

# One Man's Ride through the American Civil War

in the State of



**Johnny Jackson**

I certify, or swear, That I, \_\_\_\_\_, do hereby certify the above-named Volunteer, previously to his enlistment, and that he was subject to the duties of a \_\_\_\_\_, which would in any way discharge him from the duties of a \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



*Prepare yourself for a long and dangerous ride through the Civil War with Ben, from his Ohio homestead to Appomattox, and then the long ride back home. Ride with Deputy Marshals while chasing counterfeiters. Experience the unbelievable carnage during those awful battles. Share the emotions and hardships these men suffered, but managed to see through to the end, without complaining. That would be a sign of weakness.*

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## **Chapter 1**

### **The Blizzard**

**Drake Homestead Near Woodsfield, Ohio, January 1860**

**B**en woke to a loud crowing coming through his bedroom window. Homer, a Rhode Island Red rooster, had once again taken his stately position atop a corner post near Ben's window. Crowing with all his might. "Cock-a-doodle-do, Cock-a-doodle-do." Ben, stumbling around in the pre-dawn darkness, began to think unkind thoughts about Homer—like ringing his neck. But, on second thought, every living thing must have a purpose. Homer was just doing his job, earning his feed.

Ben was still feeling tired and grumpy from the night before. One of the young milk cows was having trouble giving birth to her calf and before the young farmer had solved the problem, it was long past midnight. Ben examined mom and found the calf's head was turned to the side. He knew if he could not bring its head around in alignment with its forelegs, he might lose both cow and calf. Several hours passed as Ben tried unsuccessfully to reposition the calf's head. He was exhausted and about ready to give up when the little head finally moved into place. Ben was then able to pull the calf out. The

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cow cleaned her calf by licking the after birth away. When the little heifer found a tit and began nursing, Ben knew all is well and he could finally hit the sack.

One good thing about all this, Ben thought, as he walked back toward the cabin in the unusually warm night, it's warm. Warm southerly breezes don't last long during the month of January in southeastern Ohio. Following the last blizzard, Ben found what was left of a newborn calf, frozen to death. Being born in sub-zero temperature is often fatal. This little heifer has a good chance.

The weather, as always, changed a few days later. A northerner blew in dropping the temperature forty degrees. Heavy snow with howling winds continued for the next five days, covering the Drake homestead with snowdrifts four to five feet high and freezing the stock pond. This meant a lot more work for the caretaker. Ben placed the newborn calves in the barn, after allowing them to nurse, and gave the rest of the herd plenty of hay. Cattle can live in extreme cold temperature if their bellies are full and if they mill around together in a herd, providing body heat to each other. But, calves need a helping hand. The horses were fed and let out of their stalls. They immediately began running and bucking, as soon as they felt that cold wind and run all the way to the back fence. And then they turned around and with nostrils blowing steam ran back to the barn and into their stalls. Even with their long winter coats they knew where they wanted to be. The cattle just gathered around Ben and patiently waited until he broke enough ice, so they could drink.

Ben's father, Tom Drake, was a Deputy U.S. Marshal. Tom and two other deputies, Jim Riley and Bill Cook, were on the trail of three counterfeiters who shot and killed a town Marshal in Charleston, Virginia during a jailbreak. Counterfeiting was a big problem at the time, because currency was easy to duplicate. Southern Ohio was a hotbed for counterfeiting. Ben took care of their place while Tom was on these trips, which often numbered twelve or thirteen per year. Tom had said they needed the extra money. This time Ben had that deep down feeling that something was very wrong. Thirty-one days had passed, since Tom rode out with those two deputies. Ben had spent Christmas alone. All three were very capable, tough men that know

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how to take care of themselves—but how could anyone survive in this weather out in the open, without shelter?

Ben woke the next morning, shivering. Sometime during the night the fire had gone out. The water in the oak bucket was frozen. He quickly got the fire going again, melted some snow for water and ground two dips of coffee beans with his hand crank bean grinder and boiled a pot of coffee. Just in case Pa comes riding in he thought, at least the coffee would be made. Ben fixed himself a quick breakfast of day old, warmed over biscuits with butter and blackberry jam, and black coffee to wash it down. When he started on his second cup, Ben made his way to the small window and looked down the lane towards the road. No sign of riders, he thought. At least the storm seemed to have let up a little. They must be holed up somewhere.

A whiney from one of the horses reminded Ben that he had chores to do. So another day began. The hard work didn't bother Ben; it was the boredom, and the not knowing about his Pa that was beginning to take its toll on him. Cabin fever was setting in. Ben had a strong feeling that he must break out of here—*do something, Go somewhere*—but first, he must take care of the stock. Iron bars did not bind Ben, but something just as strong did. It's called *responsibility*.

Ben bundled up good with overcoat, scarf and gloves to protect him from the cold wind and made his way through the snowdrifts to the barn. The horses were fed, watered and let out of their stalls. The cows were content to fill their bellies with hay and wait for Ben to break the ice once again, so they could drink. The spring fed pond was frozen over again.

Ben grabbed a pickaxe from the tool shed and chipped away at the ice, now about six inches thick. He broke the ice over a large area at the south end of the pond and stood by until all the stock drank their fill. This took about two hours and by that time, the pond was almost frozen over again. Ben knew he would have to repeat breaking the ice again by late afternoon. The stock would have to drink again. With the chores all finished outside, Ben returned to the cabin as fast as he could. His boots were wet and his feet felt like they were frozen, so Ben was soon off with the boots, and putting another log on the

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fire in an attempt to try to thaw out. Pinto beans and a ham hock were waiting in a cast iron pot, left over from yesterday. Ben swung the pot over the edge of the fire and waited. Soon, the aroma of ham and beans filled the cabin. Nothing better on a cold day than warmed over beans and cornbread. Beans seem to taste better the more they were cooked.

Ben could control his anxiety as long as he stayed busy. Just sitting there in front of the fire with a belly full of beans somehow didn't fit. He felt anxious and guilty. These thoughts prompted frequent trips to the little four-pane glass window, so he could look once again down the lane, expecting to see riders coming. But, Ben saw nothing, nothing, but more blowing snow and snowdrifts.

Ben's Mother passed away from a hemorrhage while giving birth to Ben twenty-three years before. The Drake homestead was, so far out in the frontier no doctor was within a hundred miles. Ben had a tintype picture of his mother and father taken at their wedding back in England. She was a petite, beautiful lady that stood about five foot two. Her maiden name was Hanna Browning. Tom told Ben that he just called her Sugar and he really never got over losing her. Knowing how difficult life on a homestead would be, Tom was very reluctant about bringing Hanna this far out on the frontier. Hanna ended that discussion by saying, "I go where my husband goes." During these long lonely waiting days Ben looked at that picture often and thought for several minutes wondering what she was like and wishing she were here.

Boredom and guilt was gnawing at Ben's guts again. Talking to himself out loud, Ben said. "Too late to do any thing today. It's almost time to do the chores again. I'll get up early tomorrow, do my chores and if Pa still isn't here, I will ride into town, blizzard or not, and check with Marshal Wilson to see if he has heard anything. As for now, I think I'll have another bowl of beans."

Ben picked up the gourd dipper and filled his soup bowl. The beans were too hot, forcing Ben to slow down and start thinking rationally. Town was three hours away and nothing is colder than being on horseback in a blizzard for three hours. That was three hours in, one hour in town, and then three hours back home. That was a



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total of seven hours. He would have to leave no later than eight thirty to get back in time to do the chores before dark—but what would he ride? Two horses are coughing and wheezing. That leaves me one three-year-old rough broke, Dunn mare that is rank even in good weather. This mare has not been rode more than two or three miles. Ben said a small prayer out loud, “Lord help me. My options are running thin. Amen.”

The next morning Ben got an early start. He made a quick breakfast, washed it down with black coffee and completed all the chores. The young mare was fed, watered and given a good rub down. Ben thought that might gentle her some, and then he put the bridle and saddle on and cinched it down tight. Ben took two deep breaths and got mounted. His worst nightmare came true. The Jezebel jumped ten feet in the air, fishtailed and hit the ground with her nose between her fore legs. Ben was yelling, screaming and scratching for leather. He did not relish plowing that frozen ground with his nose. Soon, the hard bucking slowed to a cow hop. Ben was eternally grateful and turned the young mare's nose towards town. He left a map he had drawn which described the road to town, with an X on each end of the trail. This would inform Tom as to where Ben was if he returned before Ben. Ben could not read or write.

The weather turned from bad to worse about an hour into the ride. More heavy snow, and then the wind picked up, making the going miserable. Small ice crystals carried by the wind were hitting Ben in the face, stinging. Visibility was poor and the mare slipped and almost fell, but recovered and continued on. For a moment Ben contemplated giving up and returning home, but the thought of another day in that cabin seemed worse than dealing with the blizzard. Ben took a woolen scarf from his saddlebags, wrapped it around his neck and face, pulled his hat down tight, and continued on. Another mile and Ben was talking to himself. “Why didn't Pa homestead in Florida, Texas, or some other state where the winters were not so severe? On the other hand, those Southern States have extremely long, hot summers. Maybe there is some place where it is springtime all year long, but if there is, I ain't ever heard of it. Nah, I

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guess our homestead is as good as any. This blizzard won't last forever and I don't like working in the hot sun."

Two and one half hours later, the town of Woodsfield came into view and not a moment too soon, Ben was so cold he felt numb all over. Still, he was eager to talk to the Marshal—but first things, first. Taking care of his transportation was number one. Ben dismounted in front of the livery stable and discovered his legs did not want to work at all. They were stiff as a board. Eli, a freed slave that worked at the livery stable, recognized Ben and his distress and offered, "Sir, let me help." Eli took the bridle reins and led the Dunn mare inside and into a stall. Ben slowly followed them in, trying to get circulation in his legs. It was notably warmer inside, because Eli had a cast iron wood stove that he used to warm the place and keep a pot of coffee hot. Eli removed the mare's saddle and bridle; soon, the ice melted from her main and tail. Ben walked around inside the warm stable until his legs felt normal again. And then he asked, "Eli would you take care of my mare, she's had a hard ride coming in trudging through all that snow? And we have to do it again after lunch." Eli replied. "Don't you worry none sir, I will take good care of her."

Feeling confident the mare was in good hands and his legs were working again, Ben made a beeline to Marshal Wilson's office three blocks away. Marshal Wilson was a tall, lean man with a large mustache that he kept waxed on the ends and curled up. Wilson had a deep gravelly voice and eyes that could look straight through you. His cold piercing stare calmed many a ruffian and if that didn't work he was very good with his Navy Colt. Nate Wilson had been town Marshal so long nobody remembered when he first came to Woodsfield. Everyone knew Marshal Wilson was not someone to trifle with. Ben opened the door to the Marshal's office and stepped inside.

Marshal Wilson was sitting at his desk. When he saw Ben he looked up and exclaimed, "Good God, Ben! What you doing out in this weather?"

Ben explained his concern about his Pa and the two deputies. Nate knew Ben since he was born. Ben and Nate rode together a year before tracking down four Indians that had kidnapped two young

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girls. The Indians were killed and the girls were freed unharmed. Ben explained that he was worried sick. "Thirty-one days and no word. This blizzard ain't helping either. They may need help. Maybe we could form a posse or a search party?"

Marshal Wilson, in a very calm voice, replied. "Ben, I'm sure they are holed up somewhere; and besides, you'd never find anyone in this blizzard. You know your Pa knows how to take care of himself and that old gray horse will always bring him home."

"I hope you are right, but it's just the fact that they haven't been gone this long before."

"Sometimes I question Tom's brains, but never his wisdom. They're holed up somewhere. Hey, you had lunch? Maebell's special today is chicken potpie. It ain't always chicken—it might be pheasant, grouse or whatever a hunter brings in, but it's always hot."

After that long, cold ride Ben was ready for anything hot even if it was mystery meat. "Believe I'll take you up on that, since you're buying. You see I left my money at home."

Nate was ready for it. "I think I heard that one before—from your Pa. I have a running tab. You can buy next time."

Maebell's was usually a quiet place, but was crowded when they arrived with a lot of noisy nervous chatter. Ben asked. "Folks getting in out of the cold?"

"Yes." The Marshal replied. But, that nervous chatter your hearing is, because of what they're reading in the paper." Nate looked at Ben for a moment, and then said. "Say, how long has it been, since the last time you rode to town?"

"Well, I think it was last November, but I don't remember for sure."

Marshal Wilson's expression changed from jovial to dead serious. "Let's get some food coming and I'll bring you up to date." Maebell was a heavyset woman with a voice that could be heard over all that noise. She yelled. "What'ya boys having?"

"Two specials and two cups of hot coffee." Nate then nudged Ben in the direction of a sign and read, "NEVER TRUST A SKINNY COOK," out loud, because he knew that Ben could not read. Nate assured Ben that Maebell was a good cook and could make a gopher

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taste great. While filling their stomachs, they had a brief discussion about what they were eating. Not being able to identify the meat they both agreed to call it, the *mystery meat special*, with no intentions to press the issue.

His mood once again changed from laughter to serious, as Marshal Nate Wilson filled his pipe and lit the tobacco with a burning twig from the fireplace. “Ben, our country is about to erupt into a God-awful Civil War. I’ve seen it coming for the last ten years. I have kinfolks over in Virginia who are large landowners and have many slaves; this anti-slavery abolitionist movement is really stirring up trouble. Many slaves have been set free, like old Eli, and earned their freedom. But, there are thousands more sorely needed to harvest crops. These large plantation owners have a lot of money invested in slavery and they don’t want to lose their slaves.

“But, we don’t have slaves,” Ben interrupted. “We don’t believe in slavery.”

“Yes I know. They live in a different world than what we are used to and have lived in that environment for two hundred years. Slavery, until now, was an acceptable institution all over this country; but, with the addition of new territories like Kansas and Nebraska that want to remain free states, and President Lincoln determined to keep them free, the South is seeing its representation in Congress dwindling.

The Southerners’ complaint for many years has been what they call economic sectionalism. They say it was the South that supplied the bulk of exported products. Free the slaves? They say that would cause their economy to collapse. Another thing that’s made them absolutely furious was an import tax on goods shipped in from Europe. The purpose of this tax according to our Federalist Government was to encourage the Southerners to buy American made goods made in the factories up North—inferior to European. The Southerners say it is a colossal transfer of wealth from the South to the North. The market for foreign exchange is in New York City. The Southern farmer has to go through a broker who has ready money to purchase goods at a reduced rate, and then sell to foreign markets at an inflated rate. This middleman reduces their profits. The long and

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short of it is that the South is feeling squeezed and isolated. An explosion is about to come, because politicians can't reach a compromise; and you know when that happens, men have to go to war."

Ben sat motionless for a few moments, not knowing what to think, and then said. "I love my country Nate, and I don't want to see it collapse from within. You know, I was thinking about the last time Pa and I made a trip to Virginia. There was some talk about all this, but I didn't think it would come to all out war."

"This war has been going on for several years now out West in Kansas. Folks are starting to call it bloody Kansas. It's between Missouri slaveholders and Kansas Jayhawkers (gorilla style fighters) who are determined to keep their state free. Lawrence Kansas was burned to the ground and all the men were shot, because Lawrence is a hub for the underground railway, which as you well know, is helping slaves escape. Slave owners didn't appreciate that."

"Whoa," Ben interrupted. "No slight intended, but I am surprised at how well read you are on all these changing events. On the other hand, I know you have a lot of time to just sit around, drink coffee and read the paper."

"Aw, you young whippersnapper!" Nate snapped back in reply. "You should just try to keep up with this old lawman."

Ben laughed. "I wouldn't even think of trying."

Marshal Wilson continued trying to drive home the point that storm clouds were gathering. Ben's mind was wandering back and forth. He was trying to be polite and concentrate on what Nate was talking about, but he was more concerned about where his Pa and those two deputies were and if they were all right. Somehow trouble brewing hundreds or even a thousand miles away was put on the back burner. There really wasn't anything he could do about all this mess anyway, but the Marshal continued to hammer away. "Look at the headlines of this paper. Secessionism is spreading;" Nate held up words Ben couldn't read and he didn't get the point

"What is secessionism?" Ben asked.

"Secessionism means that Southern states will be dropping out of the Union. Look at this! It has already started. South Carolina seceded

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December Twenty Seventh. January Third Rebels seized Fort Pulaski. January Ninth it's Mississippi. January Tenth Florida secedes. January Eleventh Alabama secedes with more slave states promising to follow. The only slave state governor that has a lick of sense is Sam Houston, Governor of Texas. Listen to what he had to say while speaking to his cabinet in Austin.

‘Let me tell you what is coming. After the sacrifice of countless millions of treasure and hundred of thousands of lives you may win Southern independence, but I doubt it. The North is determined to preserve the Union. They are not as fiery and impulsive as you are, for they live in cooler climates; but when they began to move in a given direction they move with a steady momentum and perseverance of a mighty avalanche.’

Governor Houston was promptly removed from office.”

A tall gentleman seated near Ben and Nate, stood up and spoke out in a loud voice, “If those Southern hot heads want war, then war is what they will get and it will be over in ninety days.”

“Do you think it will be over in ninety days?” Ben asked Nate. The wise old Marshal just shook his head, “No.”

“Ye see Ben, it’s like this. The shootin’ starts when men get tired hollering at each other. The shootin’ has already started. Both sides are gearing up for war. Abraham Lincoln said in one of his speeches that he would rather be assassinated then lose one star from our flag. Ben, the time for talking has passed.”

“I was thinking about the last time we were drinking coffee and you reading the paper. You read about fist fights breaking out on the house floor and one senator picking up a spittoon and flinging it at another.”

“That’s right,” Nate replied. “When Senators can’t work out a compromise, men have to go to war.”

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Ben stood up and shook hands with Nate. Told the Marshal how much he enjoyed the time they spent together, but he must get back home to break the ice, so the stock could drink.

Nate nodded. "If I hear anything about your Pa I will get word to you."

"Much obliged." Ben responded politely and headed out the door for the stable.

Ben found the Dunn mare warm and in good shape. She had been fed watered and brushed. Her coat was dry. Ben thanked Eli, paid him for his service and got mounted. No pitching or bucking this time. Maybe she just needed to be ridden more. Ben had a lot to digest on the way home. Marshal Wilson had been very convincing that the United States was coming unraveled like a cheap suit. Somehow, the ride home wasn't so long and cold. Before Ben realized how far they had traveled, the exhausted mare turned left up the lane and stopped at their barn. A quick check revealed his note was still on the door.

Ben talked to the mare while getting her feed and water. "Looks like we made a long hard ride for nothing and just between you and me, I think it might be best not to know about all the problems of the world."

Ben arrived back home with just enough daylight to do the chores. Snow was coming down real heavy again. Ben reckoned that it would be pitch black dark in about thirty minutes, so he did the chores at a jog. Even with all that running night fell before he could finish. He was forced to light the kerosene lantern in the barn just to find his way. An hour later, with all the animals cared for, Ben made his way towards the cabin door. The wind was howling fiercely now and the snow was being blown so hard it was stinging Ben's face.

After shoveling snow just, so he could get the door open, Ben stepped inside. He was wet, cold, exhausted and hungry, but he was inside. He lit the kerosene lamp on the table and turned to the fireplace. A few glowing embers were still there, so he built the makings of a good warm fire by placing a split in half log in the back with smaller logs in front. Soon, flames began wrapping around the logs in front and the backlog was glowing red. Ben sat down in the rocking chair and wrapped himself in a heavy woolen blanket,

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removed his wet boots, and for the first time today, his feet began to warm. Steam was drifting from his wet socks. As he watched the flames, his mind wander back to Woodsfield and how serious Marshal Wilson was about this upcoming war. One thing Ben had learned about Nate Wilson through the years was that when the Marshal spoke, folks listened, because he was always right on target with his views. It was still hard to believe all out war in this country. Americans killing each other like it was a foreign country. Hope this time Nate is wrong.

Ben ate a bowl of bean soup from the cast iron pot in the fireplace. It was filling and under normal circumstances, falling asleep would not be any problem at all. But, he couldn't get the thought of this coming fight among fellow Americans out of his mind. Often times, when Ben could not go to sleep he would find something to do like looking at his mother's picture. He looked around and found the family bible on the table. He casually opened the bible and Deuteronomy, 31 was at the top of the page. Ben couldn't read, but he recognized Verse 6 as one he had memorized with the help of his Aunt Mattie a very long time ago. Ben went over verse 6 over and over in his mind as he remembered it, and then recited it out loud. "Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord thy God, he that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee."

Ben repeated this verse out loud to the crackling fire three times and by the third time he began to relax and felt warm. Moments later with the wind howling outside, he drifted off into a restful sleep.

Morning found Ben stumbling around in the dark, shivering from the cold and trying to get the fire going again. He heard a faint meow just outside the door. Well, lo and behold! It was none other than Leo! Leo was a large yellow tomcat that just showed up one day many years ago not much more than a kitten. He had a rounded nose and a head that resembled a lion, so Tom christened him King Leo. Leo kept the mice out of the grain bin and cabin when he stayed home. But, Leo would often leave home for two or three weeks at a time. Just when you figured a varmint got him, he would show up again. King Leo with his majestic mane did not look so majestic. Leo



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had been in a fight and it looked like he came out on the short end of the stick. He had patches of hair missing, one eye swollen shut, one ear torn and a bloody paw. Ben spoke to the sorry cat. “Leo have you been up in those rocks fooling around with that family of bobcats again?”

Leo sheepishly looked up with his one eye and answered with a “Meow” confessing his sins. Ben folded an old quilt and placed it on the hearth for Leo and fed him a piece of cooked venison. Soon, the ice melted from his coat and the King was sound asleep. Leo stayed around long enough to recover from his battle wounds, and then disappeared again. Ben found the remains of Leo a few months later while hunting next to the remains of an Eastern diamondback rattlesnake. He just shook his head. “That crazy cat wouldn’t back away from any fight.”

Ben settled back in the rocking chair with one of yesterday’s biscuit—or was it the day before—when he last made biscuits? So much had happened he couldn’t remember for sure, but with a warm up in the cast iron skillet—adding butter and blackberry jam—made them edible. This was a time Ben could have his coffee moment before doing chores—a time to just sit back and meditate. Watching the flames wrap around the logs his thoughts drifted back to the time when he and his Pa built their twenty by twenty four foot log cabin with a tool shed out back and a cover for fireplace wood. He remembered using the team of draft horses to drag the heavy logs up to the elevated spot Tom had selected as the best building site. He remembered Tom saying. “Just in case of floods, it’s always better to build on higher ground” Worn stones for the foundation support and the fireplace were gathered from the creek bottom and hauled by wagon to the building site. The logs were cut to the correct length with a cross cut saw some months before, so they could season, and then notched out with a broad axe, so the logs would be locked together as they were stacked. The next task was the chinking between the logs. Ben remembered saying at that time, “This cabin will never get completed.”

Tom replied with, “Always do the job right the first time and you won’t have to come back later to make corrections. Nah, we’ll take

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our time and build our home right and it will be standing a hundred years from now.“

Ben looked around, counting his blessings. Pa was right, he thought, our home is top rail. “No telling when Pa might come riding in.” Ben was talking to himself out loud again. “I’d better see how much wood is left.” Tradition in these hills is to never let the home fire go out. He counted the wood stacked neatly in rows. Eight cords should be enough to get us through till spring. Next he checked the smoke house. Two smoked turkeys, salt pork, two smoked hams, two shoulders and a side of sow belly. Next, Ben checked the root cellar. Still plenty of potatoes, apples, dried wild plums, sweet corn, turnips and onions. Ben really didn’t know why he had this sudden urge to take inventory. He just wanted everything to be in order when his Pa came home. Ben gathered several potatoes and an onion in a pail, peeling potatoes to make potato soup. Nothing better on a cold day than hot potato soup, he thought, and it should be ready in about two hours.

Next, Ben went outside and did all the chores. He noticed the wind had died down some, but it was still very cold and he couldn’t get back inside the cabin soon enough, so he could stoke the fire and check on the potato soup. Before long, all seemed quiet and still. All the work was done. Nothing more to do now except wait and worry. But, worry never accomplishes anything. Pa always said the way to deal with worry is to do something, take action, and analyze your fear. See if it is real or just in your head.

## Chapter 2

### For Counterfeit Money

**B**en sat down in front of the fireplace to thaw out and dozed off. *Suddenly*, he woke up and jumped to his feet, thinking he heard something and made a beeline to the front window. He looked out and thought he saw something, but his breath fogged the glass. He quickly grabbed a face towel and wiped the window clean.

*“Whoa—wait a minute!”* Ben shouted out loud. “Thank God, it’s Pa and old Dan!” Tom was slumped over and old Dan was walking very slowly. Ben ran out to greet them, but the closer he got the more he felt a lump in his throat. He had never seen both man and beast so completely exhausted and frozen. Ben helped his Pa out of the saddle and noticed that he couldn’t straighten all the way up. With Tom’s arm around his son, they slowly made their way together to inside the cabin. Ben helped Tom remove his hat; scarf and coat then removed his boots, rubbing his frozen feet. Tom said. “Never mind about me, son. I’m all right, take care of old Dan.”

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Ben looked up from his Pa's feet and tried to make light of the situation. "You look like a Christmas tree with icicles hanging off your head like that."

Tom did not respond to that smart remark, he just hollered, "*Hand me that blanket!*" Ben wrapped Tom up good in a wool blanket and went outside to tend to old Dan.

Old Dan was standing rigid with his legs slightly apart to give himself some stability. Ben slowly led Dan into the barn and into his stall. And then, Ben removed the tack and wrapped Dan's legs with feed sacks with the hope that keeping the old horse's legs warm might keep him from getting so stove up. If Dan got down now, he wouldn't be able to get back up. Next, Ben placed a horse blanket on Dan to keep him warm. "Looks like you have earned some good feed today, Dan," Ben murmured as he filled Dan's water bucket and mixed his favorite feed. Old Dan liked his oats, barley, and ground corn with a tablespoon of molasses all mixed together. He nibbled at part of his feed, and then drank a half a bucket of water. The other horses stood like statues looking at old Dan, wondering why he is getting so much attention. Ben also placed a good-sized block of hay in Dan's manger and stood back just to look him over.

Old Dan was not what folks called a good looker even when he was well rested. Now he looked like a bag of bones ready to collapse. Old Dan's head was a little too big, his neck was long and skinny, and he was sway-backed, but Tom said Dan had more heart than any thoroughbred in Kentucky. "Looks like I have two old horses to worry about," Ben muttered to himself, and then hurried back inside to check on Tom.

The ice on Tom's hair and beard had melted when Ben got back inside, stomping the snow off his boots. Tom was drying his face with a towel. As soon as Ben opened the door, Tom asked. "How is old Dan?"

Ben gave Tom a run down on all he had done. "That old horse will be all stove up by morning and I'm afraid if he ever gets down he won't be able to get back up. That means one of us will have to shoot him."

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Tom countered that thought. "Don't count him out yet, Dan has come through some tough times before,"

"Enough about that old horse." Ben interrupted, " You look worse than he does and you smell like last month's laundry."

"Well you know," Tom, replied, "There weren't many places out there to get a hot bath."

Ben laughed, but noticed Tom grimacing when he tried to laugh. Ben helped his Pa get out of his wet clothes and saw bloodstains on his right side. On further examination, Ben found a gunshot wound that entered the right side of Tom's rib cage and exited out the back. A musket ball had passed clean through. Ben described the wounds to his Pa as two large holes about one-half inch across. Coagulating blood had filled the holes resulting in very little bleeding. "How do you figure that?" Ben asked.

Tom explained that the extreme cold probably saved his life. "My body was half frozen. If it was hot summer time, I would be in big trouble."

"If you want my opinion, you *are* in big trouble *now*. Two bloody holes and, I think, that rib is broken. Have you ever thought of another line of work?"

Tom replied. "Yes, all the way home."

The sight of bloody wounds did not bother Ben. He had seen blood many times before, patching up his Pa. And, about a year before, his neighbor, Mack Hogan, had accidentally shot himself in the leg while hunting rabbits. Folks out here on the frontier just have to do what they can to help each other no matter what the problem is. Another neighbor, Sam Hoffman, accidentally cut his foot while trimming tree limbs with his axe. The axe ricocheted off the limb and hit his foot. Sam's wife rode ten miles to find Ben and take him back to their place where he stitched Sam up. Ben didn't know these people well, but that didn't matter, when a neighbor needs help, good neighbors come running without question.

Ben prepared a wash pan with warm water, so Tom could clean himself and filled a bowl with hot potato soup. Next, he tore strips of linen to wrap around Tom's chest. Tom instructed as Ben worked.

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“Not too tight; that side is really sore and my lungs have to expand, so I can breathe, but tight enough to hold that rib in place.”

Next Ben found a pair of last year’s store bought long handle underwear that was clean. Ben asked. “If you can get into these by yourself I will see if the soup is cool enough to eat?” Tom had a second helping of soup, and then painfully stretched out on his bed. Ben covered him with a hand-stitched quilt of his mother’s and put another log on the fire.

Tom drifted off into a deep sleep and slept straight through for twenty-four hours. Ben sat for a long while just looking at his Pa lying there snoring like a lumberjack, as if nothing had happened, amazed at how much he had aged in thirty days. Pa is getting *old*—he thought; he will die some day and how will I handle that? No point worrying about something that hasn’t happened yet. Will cross that bridge when I come to it.

Ben spent the rest of the day and into the next morning quietly keeping the home fire burning. He would do half a chore outside, and then run back to the cabin to make sure it was still warm inside, and then run back outside again to finish. The wind had died down some and it was no longer snowing. Ben thought—maybe this storm is finally breaking up. He put another log on the fire, gathering Tom’s dirty laundry. It was really stinking up the place. What can I do about this? Ben thought, I can’t leave the door open to air the place out, it’s too cold outside and the stench is overwhelming. Ben was standing there scratching his head and holding his nose, when his deep thought was interrupted by a sharp knock on the door. Ben opened the door and *Halleluiah!* It was Aunt Mattie. Aunt Mattie was Tom’s brother, Frank’s, widow. Frank had passed away following a stroke two years before. Almost immediately, Mattie took on the responsibility of taking care of her boys, Tom and Ben. Tom had said some time ago that she had to do something to cope with the loss of her mate and the loneliness that followed. Whatever the case, her boys were always glad to see Aunt Mattie.

“Aunt Mattie, Ben whispered. Come in out of the cold.” Aunt Mattie started in, but stopped abruptly.

“*Phew-ee* what is that awful *smell?*”

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“Oh, I reckon that would be Pa’s dirty laundry.” Ben quietly brought Aunt Mattie up to date on Tom’s condition and that he had been sleeping for twenty-four hours.

“Are you sure he is still alive?” Mattie questioned. “ Anything that smells that bad at my place... I *bury* it.”

Ben answered with a giggle. “Well, I don’t think he’s ready for the meat wagon yet. I’ll start worrying about that when the snoring stops.”

Aunt Mattie just shook her head and started picking up dirty laundry. She ordered. “Ben, get a fire going under that cast iron pot out back. This laundry needs to be boiled with plenty of lye soap.”

Ben followed her instructions to a tee. He got the laundry water boiling, put her sled horse in the barn with feed and water, and then carried a covered box from the sled that had some fine aroma coming up through the table cloth. Ben had been carrying out Aunt Mattie’s instructions for as long as he could remember. Aunt Mattie had tried to get Ben to slow down enough to learn his A B Cs, too, but there never seemed to be enough time.

“Boy, something sure smells good. What have you got in that box, Aunt Mattie?”

“Help me set the table and you’ll find out.” Aunt Mattie replied. Shortly thereafter, Ben was feasting his eyes on a table fit for a king. Smoked ham, yams, green beans, fresh baked bread and a cinnamon apple pie.

Ben stopped talking for a moment and looked around as if he was listening for something, saying, “The snoring’s stopped.” They both rushed around the room divider curtain to see Tom sitting up, blinking his eyes and twitching his nose.

Tom exclaimed. “Either I have died and gone to heaven... or Mattie’s here.”

Aunt Mattie admonished. “Get yourself dressed and get over to the table before these vittles get cold, and tell us what excuse you have for staying gone so long.”

”Be glad to, just as soon as I eat. I’m so hungry I could eat the south end of a northbound mule!”

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With that, Ben and Tom sat down and ate to their fill; they ate until they just couldn't fit another bite. Ben just had to say, "Aunt Mattie, you are the best cook in the whole world."

Aunt Mattie shook her head and declared. "I swear if I didn't check on you two boys once in a while, I think you would starve to death. I saw you draggin' by my place, all hunkered down in the saddle, without even stoppin' to say, 'Hello,' and figured you was hurt from that posse and needed some vittles and help. I waited for the snow to let up, cooked this up, and came over."

Both Tom and Ben nodded their heads up and down in agreement. They wanted to make sure Aunt Mattie felt needed and appreciated. Ben agreed. "You may be right, Aunt Mattie, I was sure getting tired of my bean soup. Man cannot live by beans alone."

Tom picked himself up painfully from the table, carefully settled into his rocking chair in front of the fireplace, filled his pipe with Virginia tobacco, lit it, and took a deep draw to begin to tell the story. "We tracked those varmints for a little over two weeks; and then along about noon, we realized they had run into a box canyon. We stopped to survey the situation and all agreed that they would have to be in there somewhere. The tracks indicated their horses were worn out by the way they dragged their hooves. We knew they had been pushing their mounts hard. In the canyon, they were on foot—cornered and dangerous. I decided to be the decoy and ride out front, instructing Jim and Bill to tie their horses, climb into position, and watch for the smoke from the muskets if they fired at me, so we could locate them. Jim went to the left around the end of the low side of the canyon and Bill worked his way close to the steep wall on the right. I waited until I saw Jim up on the left, looking down and started slowly in along the creek.

As luck would have it, they all fired at me at once and one shot hit me in my right side knocking me off my horse. Jim and Bill returned fire. Jim aimed at one man's head and he fell."

"Bill yelled. 'One down and two to go.' Holding up two fingers.

"I was numbed by the shot for about two minutes, and then my side began to burn. Bill crawled about fifty yards to a line of boulders that gave him cover from the outlaws' fire. Jim gave them an



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opportunity to give up by shouting in a loud voice. 'You two can go back and stand trial or you can go back strapped across your saddles! It is up to you, it don't matter to me!' From above, Jim had the drop on them.

"The outlaws' answer was musket fire. Jim and Bill had no choice, but to return fire, hitting both fugitives. Bill carefully approached the outlaws' position by circling around—coming in from behind. As he got closer it was plain to see that all three outlaws appeared dead from their wounds. As Jim got close, Bill saw movement and yelled, 'Watch out!' Firing again from above. As the bloody varmint raised a pistol toward him, Jim plugged him between the eyes with his Colt. I saw Jim shiver after that close one. Jim isn't much of a shot with a pistol, but at four feet he couldn't miss.

"Jim and Bill hurried back to assist me. My wound was hurting bad and my side felt sticky all the way down and into my right boot. Jim undressed me down to my waist and wrapped a cloth around my chest to stop the bleeding.

"Bill tried to joke. 'We'd better get this *old* deputy warmed up quick. His teeth are chattering so hard in another thirty minutes he won't have any and you know there ain't nothing growls louder than an old deputy without any teeth.'

"I didn't find that funny at all. 'That's very funny boys, I'm sure you won't mind if I don't laugh.'

"We decided to make camp on that very spot that night, so man and beast could rest and recover. Bill made a big campfire that warmed the whole area. The pain in my side let up some as long as I didn't move. I covered myself with my bedroll. In a few minutes I felt warm and fell asleep.

"Sometime during the night at least a foot of snow fell covering everything with a fluffy white blanket. The deputies were up shaking their bedroll out and trying to get the fire going again. I tried to get up the usual way and was rudely reminded with a sharp pain that I had been shot the day before. The soreness in my side had really set in. I don't mind telling you, at that time I was getting concerned. As far as I knew we were out of grub and a long way from any settlement. And then, Jim surprised us all when he came up with a flower sack half

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full of corndodgers totally unexpected. We each had three or four of those dodgers with our coffee. Our spirits were lifted. Jim fed each horse a double handful and all the water they wanted from the creek. Soon, we were almost as good as new. I felt much better after I got up and was able to mill around some, but then I saw Jim near the corpses just looking at them. I went to him and placed my hand on his shoulder. ‘Jim,’ I said. ‘It’s too bad there is rotten scum in the world like these fellers that won’t give us a choice, forcing us to kill them. They could have surrendered.’

“Jim answered. ‘*Whew*, I know, but I went through their saddlebags and found them stuffed with worthless counterfeit money. Three men—actually four—counting that Marshal in Charleston dead, and we had to kill these three just to stop them from killing again. I know we didn’t have any choice, but I never felt right after killing a man even if he was scum.’

“Those two deputies placed the corpses across their own mounts, tied them down good, and, with some assistance, I got mounted and we started out of that canyon. When we reached the valley, the full force of this blizzard hit us head on.

“Strong head winds and blowing snow made finding our way out of that wilderness next to impossible. We trudged on through that mess in the direction we thought we should be going all day. Along about dark, we decided to make camp under an outcropping of rocks and cedar, which gave us protection from the wind. The horses were spent and we were lost.

“The next morning, Jim handed out the last of the corndodgers. He said. ‘One for each of us and one for each horse.’ I gave mine to old Dan; figured he needed it more than I did.

“We got mounted and Bill said. ‘Which way we going this time?’

“Which ever way old Dan takes us,” I replied. “He has gotten me out of trouble before and I trust he will do it again.”

“Bill retorted. ‘You mean we have to rely on that old ugly gray horse that looks like he is ready to collapse at any given moment to lead us out of here?’

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“That’s exactly what I mean,” I countered. “That’s why I gave him my corn dodger and please don’t say that too loud, it might hurt old Dan’s feelings.”

“Bill, shaking his head, gave in. ‘Knowing that, I’m beginning to feel better already, after you, sir.’

“I gave old Dan a loose rein, his lead and told him. ‘Take us home Dan.’

“Both deputies had serious doubts about old Dan’s abilities, but their attitudes changed abruptly two days later when familiar territory came into view. Both men dismounted, gave old Dan a kiss on his nose and said. ‘Thanks old Dan, we owe you.’

“As Jim and Bill took the left fork towards town with the bodies, I heard Bill say. ‘You know that ugly old horse ain’t nearly as ugly as I thought he was. In fact, he is downright beautiful.’

“I dismounted to spare old Dan and walked for an hour. This is how we spared our mounts—we would ride for an hour—and then walk for an hour. Getting back on board was the most difficult task. I was riding by your place, afraid to stop, because Dan was on his last legs and I wanted him to make it to our barn.”

Following a prolonged silence, Aunt Mattie placed a pinch of snuff inside her lip. “How'd you come by that gray horse anyhow?”

Tom said. “It was about twenty one years ago this spring. I needed a horse, but I didn’t have any money. Mr. Donovan owned a farm about ten miles east of here as the crow flies, so I paid him a visit to see if he had any work for me. Mr. Donovan was known as a penny pinching old miser and he could see that I was desperate. He offered me ten dollars if I would replace a split rail fence across his property. I knew it would be hard money, but I didn’t know just how hard until after two weeks had passed and I was still splitting logs with a long way to go. Let me tell you, I earned those ten dollars. Mr. Donovan—knowing I needed a horse—handed me a handbill that advertised a horse show and sale over in Virginia. He said. “They will be selling a lot of fine horses there, but I don’t think you can get much for ten dollars. Now, if you want to make another ten, he continued. That back forty over yonder needs fencing.”

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“I said. ‘Thanks, but no thanks,’ got my ten dollars, and left—never to return.

“I knew that horse sale was a long way and I knew ten dollars wouldn’t buy much, but I started walking anyway. Two days later, a very pretty countryside came into view. Green pastures with white board fences and black slaves working as stable hands leading the horses out for review. I was looking at some of the most beautiful horses I had ever seen and they were selling for a lot more than ten dollars. As the sale began to wind down I saw the last horse being led away by his proud owner. At that time I thought I had made a long walk for nothing, but that’s when young Dan let out a loud whiney from his stall.

“The buyers were surprised, because they thought all the horses had been sold, so they gathered around the auctioneer again, expecting another fine animal to appear, but when Dan appeared they quickly dispersed in all directions. Dan whinnied again as if to say. ‘Hey, what about me?’ He sure

didn’t measure up to those fine thoroughbreds, but he was sound and come from good bloodlines. Dan’s problem was that he was not a good-looking yearling, especially around such fine animals.

“Fact is, I think the owner was a little embarrassed to bring him out. After some light dickering, he agreed to let him go for ten dollars. I noticed a smile come over the owner’s face as I led Dan away. That Virginian didn’t know what a good horse he had let go, and fact is, I didn’t either—until much later. Beauty isn’t everything, I know beauty is only skin deep; but ugly goes all the way to the bone and Dan fit that later description. Still, I felt I had got my money’s worth.

“Dan was a rough broke colt, so I walked back home leading him behind me. Yep, old Dan and I have been through a lot together these past twenty-one years, but I still consider that purchase to be the best ten dollars I ever spent”

Aunt Mattie had heard that story before and wasn’t impressed. “Maybe its time to retire old Dan, go back to that horse farm and buy another young colt.”

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Ben interjected. "With all this talk of states seceding and Virginia soon to follow, we might not be welcome. Marshal Wilson thinks war is about to break out."

Tom replied. "Yeah, I've read the papers too, and I think you're right. Money brings out the worst in people. You know money is what it's really all about. It will be a rich man's war, but poor boys will have to fight it."

All that talking seemed to have drained Tom's strength. "Think I'll turn in for a while." And then, he slowly made his way to his bed. Maybe it was the talking or maybe he was remembering the war with Mexico, which he often referred to as "pure insanity," or a combination of both, but soon, he was snoring again.

## Chapter 3

### Goin' Courtin'

#### Drake Homestead: Spring 1861

Life ran routine on the Drake homestead for the next three months. Tom's wounds healed slower this time; but, thanks to Aunt Mattie's once-a-day nursing, by April, Tom was finally up and able to do some light work. Aunt Mattie would show up each morning, clean Tom's wounds and replace the old bandage. Next, she would prepare a pot full of vegetable venison stew or ham and beans or something they could eat on any time they got hungry.

Tom often declared. "Aunt Mattie, I just don't know how we would have made it without you."

Aunt Mattie would counter with. "Aw, twern't nothin'. You boys are all I have left to take care of." And then, she would return to her lonely home alone.

Officially, old Dan had been retired since his service in January. Ben removed Dan's worn out shoes and didn't replace them. Both Tom and Ben agreed that Dan should be put out to pasture. Dan had reached the ripe old age of twenty-one and earned his full retirement. The trouble was, old Dan didn't see it that way. He would run back

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and forth along the fencerow whinnying and sometimes pawing at the split rails, each time they rode off in any direction.

Tom observed the old horse's antics. "I guess horses get lonely, too, and have a need to feel useful." He was thinking of Mattie as Ben rode off.

Ben made a daily ride to Aunt Mattie's place to chop wood to fill her wood box and fix anything that needed fixing. Aunt Mattie always offered to pay, but Ben never accepted a cent.

Ben would say. "No, Aunt Mattie, we couldn't pay you back in a hundred years." He would also get a list of things she needed before the next trip to town.

Mattie would be invited to come along with them, but would always refuse, saying. "That road is too long and bumpy for these old bones, besides I don't know what them city folks are wearing these days."

April 27th came with excitement in the air. Saturday was the day they would hitch up the team to the wagon and head for town to buy supplies and catch up on the latest news. Ben fed and watered the stock, and then harnessed the team. Tom tried to help, but couldn't lift the horse collar. Seeing Tom's struggle, Ben ordered. "Let me do that!" and finished the job.

On the way to town, Tom said. "You know something, I used to mend in three or four weeks, and be back on the trail fully recovered, but now it's been three months and I still don't have my strength back."

"You have to remember that you ain't thirty-five no more."

"I guess you're right. The older I get, the longer I take to recover."

The two men didn't say much more until they got close to Woodsfield and could hear a brass band playing. Ben guessed. "Sounds like *Brothers, Will You Meet Me.*"

Tom asked. "Is this a holiday?"

"None that I know of, Easter is next week."

Ben reined the team in, left turning on Main Street. A large crowd had gathered around the bandstand. A speaker was speaking in a loud

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voice that could be heard for half a mile. Something about patriotism and duty could be heard.

“Our country,” the orator continued, “Needs all its able-bodied young men to whip those Rebels into submission. President Lincoln is calling for seventy-five thousand militiamen, which would swell our regular force to over ninety thousand. It is understood that further calls are to be made upon the states to the extent of two hundred thousand more. Ohio has its commitment and I trust we will carry out our duty with honor.”

And then the band began to play, "*Hail, Columbia*", followed by "*The Star-Spangled Banner*." The crowd was cheering.

A young maiden stood up and started waving her handkerchief, shouting. “I would go in a minute if I were a man.”

Tom said. “This looks like a recruiting rally. I’ve seen this before.”

“You mean back when the war with Mexico started?” Ben asked.

Tom answered. “Yes.”

“If I remember correctly, Aunt Mattie and Uncle Frank were looking after me while you went off to war. I also remember getting word about you getting wounded. ‘Pears to me you have a bad habit getting shot where ever you are.”

“Yes, but back then I could recover in two weeks,” Tom laughed. It wasn’t long before someone handed Ben an enlistment form and pointed to a group of men that were being sworn in.

Tom looked at Ben square in the eyes. “You interested in enlisting?”

“Not just yet,” Ben grinned. “I still have a broken down old lawman to take care of.”

Both men laughed. Tom said. “Lets check in with Nate to see what he can tell us.”

The unmistakable stench of vomit greeted them as they opened the Marshal’s door. Nonplussed, Wilson was sitting in his chair leaned back with his boots on his desk, reading a paper, hot coffee on the desk to his right. Tom noted and remarked. “Son sure looks like this here town Marshal job has its privileges.” Holding his nose.



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"Huh," Nate replied, looking up from being intent on his paper. "You should *try* to keep up with me. I was up all night dealing with some war meeting' drunks in the street trying to convince each other how brave they were. I really don't know if any of them ever served, but to hear them tell it, they won the last war all by themselves. My jail is full of heroes throwing up that rotgut after a night of rehashing old battles. What about you, Tom?" Squinting over his reading glasses. "I thought maybe you were dead and buried, but I can see that ain't the case."

Tom agreed a bit. "No, I ain't dead yet, but I came real close last January. Thanks to Ben's work and Aunt Mattie's cooking, I'm mending."

Ben got to the point of their visit. "Nate, looks like your predictions about a war starting' was right."

Nate handed Tom the newspaper he was reading when they came in. "Here, this tells it all. "It's the latest Harper's Weekly and it's a week old." He pointed to the headline.

"*THE BOMBARDMENT OF FORT SUMTER*" was glaring out with a sketch of General Thomas swearing in volunteers called into service of the United States at Washington, D. C., for the defense of the Federal Capital. "The latest information I have," Nate confided. "It's from this New York City paper. By April 14 and Sumter's surrender, President Lincoln issued a call for volunteers to serve three years unless sooner discharged. Thousands of men volunteered. In fact, a great deal more than they could equip, *Harper's* says. Ben, I see you have an enlistment paper in your hand. If you are thinking about volunteering, you might want to consider a later time. Your Pa needs you much more than the army and besides, they already have a full roster."

Ben, smiling broadly, agreed. "Nah, I wasn't thinking about joining right away, somebody put this in my hand across the street. I'll join when I can get in the *cavalry*."

Marshal Wilson, in his best fatherly style, smiled back and replied. "We all know when the time comes you will serve with honor and never show the white feather." Nate's brows set seriously on his own sage advice.

*Johnny Jackson*

“Thanks, it’s good to hear that from you.” Ben sincerely received Nate’s accolade.

Nate stood up. “Boys, I’ve enjoyed jawing with you, but, as you can smell, these drunks have been throwing up on each other all night. I need to get them processed out, send them home and get someone in here to scrub this place from top to bottom.”

“*Hey!*” Nate yelled as Tom and Ben turned to leave, “Don’t stay gone so long next time.”

As Tom and Ben stepped out into the muddy street, Tom twitched his nose and remarked, “The air is much better out here.”

Halfway to the wagon, a young black boy called out. “Hey miser, yue need a pup?” Ben and his Pa walked over just to have a look at the litter, not planning on buying anything. But, one chubby red haired pup caught their eye. Ben asked. “How much you asking for this pup?”

The boy lit up and offered. “Half a dolla', jus’ fifty cents!”

“Tom bargained. “I don’t believe that is the right price for this pup.”

“I guss I could let it go fer thurty-five.” The boy demurred, looking down.

Tom countered, winking at Ben. “No, this pup is very special. You see that solid red coat, those bright eyes and his teeth coming in good. Nah, this pup should sell for a doller.”

The boy’s eyes got big as saucers and a smile broke out all over his face. When Tom gave him a silver dollar he was so excited the boy left the bitch and her pups and ran off towards the livery stable.

Ben put two and two together. “I know whose boy that is; it’s Eli’s, the black man at the livery stable.” What do you think we should name this mongrel?”

Tom thought a minute. “I used to have a red dog a long time ago. He answered to the name of Red Jack.”

Ben concurred. ”Ok, Red Jack it is.”

An hour later the wagon was full. Loaded to the brim with their list of dry goods and Aunt Mattie’s.

Ben sized up that load. “Hope we can make it up that steep grade?”

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"I think we can if we go back slow and easy." Tom answered. "We'll stop and give the team a good rest at the bottom."

The road back home was long, muddy and bumpy. Spring thaw run off had washed deep ruts across the ungraded road. Tom was holding his prized possession with one hand and hanging onto the wagon with the other. Three hours later, Ben pulled back on the reins and shouted "Whoa."

Both men and little Red Jack had had enough rocking back and forth and bouncing up and down, jarring every bone. The real reason for stopping was that the horses were lathered up and needed a rest before starting up that steep hill.

Tom agreed with pulling up. "Good idea, let the team cool off for a few minutes. This wagon is heavy, that grade is steep, and I have an angry mule."

"Now what is that supposed to mean, an *angry mule*?" Ben asked.

"That means I have a sore ass." Tom winked and tried to look serious.

Ben laughed, shook his head, and still chuckling, stepped lightly down off the wagon, unsteady on his feet from the rocking motion he still felt even on solid ground.

"Guess we had better check the harness and both single trees," Tom offered. "Something coming loose on that grade would be a disaster."

Fifteen minutes later, they had finished making preparations to get up that hill. Tom decided to walk to lighten the load. Ben climbed aboard and got the team started by popping the reins on their rumps and shouting. "Haw, Haw, come on let's go." The team pulled hard getting to the top and was blowing hard again by the time they made it, so Ben pulled back on the reins and yelled, "*Whoa!*" again.

When the team stopped, Ben climbed down off the wagon, stretched and looked around while Tom caught up, wheezing a bit from his recovering wound.

Ben had been looking off in the distance and beckoned. "Pa, come over here. I want to show you something. Do you remember that tornado last year?"

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“Yes, Tom replied. It just missed our place, we were mighty lucky that night.”

Ben pointed to some torn up trees. “It tore a swath over this hill before it got close to us, twisting trees off at the stump and creating this clearing. With those trees gone, we can see our farm from here.”

Tom was intrigued. “How about *that*? You can see our place from *here*?”

Tom reached the top, joined Ben, put his arm around his son’s shoulder, smiled and proclaimed, “You know something Ben, looking down on this peaceful valley, if we didn’t know better, we might think the world was at peace.” Both men paused for several moments just taking in the view, enjoying a serene moment from their hard day’s work. The little valley was turning green. The wild flowers and dogwoods were starting to bloom.

Sensing how late it was getting, Tom, now rested a bit, declared, “Son we better get crackin’. Let’s get this stuff home and unloaded. I will put everything away and do the chores while you deliver Aunt Mattie’s provisions.”

Ben, not wanting to leave this golden moment, reluctantly replied. “Yeah, I guess you are right, it’s still a long way to Aunt Mattie’s. I’ll be driving this team home by moonlight.”

When the two men drove away, they could hear someone riding hard up the hill towards them from the opposite direction. When the rider came into view they recognized him as Josh Murdock’s boy, Daniel. The Murdock homestead adjoined the Drake farm on the north side. Mr. Murdock was rarely seen, but Ben knew Daniel very well. Sometimes they went swimming together at Old Blue Hole, a natural pool along the creek with rock ledges on the sides for diving.

Ben stepped down from the wagon and out into the road, waving his arms back and forth, yelling, “Whoa, hold up there! Where you going in such a rush! Is someone hurt?”

Daniel, seeing Ben in his way, pulled back hard on the reins, causing his wild-eyed and wheezing gelding to slide to a stop in a cloud of dust. In a highly agitated, angry voice he yelled, “Get out of my way! I have to get to town, so I can join the Army!”

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Tom, in a calm voice, cautioned. "If you keep riding that horse like that, you won't make it to town. Fact is, I don't think, from the looks of him, your ride can make another mile. Besides, there is plenty of time to get your dang fool head blown off."

"Aw, ain't nothing gonna happen to me; and besides, the war will be over in ninety days." Daniel spit out, assuredly.

Tom countered. "I wouldn't be too sure about that, I think this ruckus might go on for several years; and, according to Marshal Wilson, there has been more volunteers than the Government can provide muskets for."

"You might just as well slow up and give that horse a breather. What do your folks think about you joining, being their only child?" Ben asked.

Daniel, being seventeen and knowing all about everything, snapped back. "I ain't no child, I am just as much a man as either of you two."

Ben agreed. "We don't doubt your bravery, Daniel, we were just thinking about your parents."

Daniel didn't say anything more. He just turned, looking back over his shoulder towards home for a moment, and then spurred his horse forward, this time allowing him a much slower pace.

Tom and Ben watched Daniel until he rode out of sight, expecting him to turn around to wave good-bye, but Daniel showed no interest in what was behind him.

Daniel knew nothing about war, but was stirred by patriotic impulses, as were thousands of other young men all over the country. It was an innocent time, that first year of the war before the slaughters at Bull Run, Shiloh Church and Antietam. Patriotic fever was running high. The beloved stars and stripes could be seen proudly displayed at storefronts and flagpoles. Everyone seemed to own a flag and was eager to display it. This patriotic fever was also gnawing at Ben.

After unloading their dry goods at their place, Tom said. "I've changed my mind, I think I'll go with you and help unload Aunt Mattie's order. That might speed things up a bit."

Two hours later the duo arrived at Aunt Mattie's cabin, in the late afternoon sun. Mattie was sitting in her rocking chair on her front

*Johnny Jackson*

porch anxiously waiting the arrival of her boys. She greeted them as expected. "Climb down off that wagon, boys, I have some hot vegetable soup and corn bread waiting on ya!"

"You sure know the way to a man's heart." Ben exclaimed. And then he jumped down off the wagon, ran up to the porch, and gave her a big hug and a light kiss on the cheek.

Tom concurred. "Sounds mighty good to me, but let's unload your order while that soup is cooling.

Checking her list while Ben unloaded, Tom ticked it off. "Let me see here, you ordered corn meal, flour, coffee, salt, sugar and a little tin of snuff."

Mattie replied. "That's right, just put them in the corner by the pantry. Soup is on the table. When you boys finish unloading, I have a funny story to tell."

"Good," Tom answered. "With all this bad news lately, we would really appreciate a good laugh."

"Well," Mattie began. "Do you remember that circuit-riding preacher named Jackson?"

Tom thought a moment, and then answered. "Yes, if I recall correctly he was a good'n; he knew the Holy Bible. What have you done with our preacher, Aunt Mattie?"

"Yes, that's true; he is good. He was here not more than an hour ago, but he left in a hurry. " Aunt Mattie started laughing before she got the story told and had to stop to regain her composure before continuing. "Well ya see, it was like this," she began again. "Preacher Jackson was sitting here counseling me on the evils of tobacco, when he began reading from the gospel according to Luke. I had a bowl of almonds next to him here on the table. He started eating almonds and reading scripture. The more he read the more he ate almonds until the bowl was empty." Mattie started chortling again, totally out of control, and then she would stop for a moment before beginning her story again. "When preacher Jackson realized he had eaten all my almonds, He said. 'Oh, I am so sorry, I ate all your almonds.'"

"Now I didn't know it at that time, but there was a little tobacco juice trickling out of the corner of my mouth. I said, 'Oh, that's all right, you see I have already sucked the molasses off them.'"

*One Man's Journey*

Tom shaking his head, warned. "Aunt Mattie, You ain't ever going to get to heaven."

Aunt Mattie, still laughing out of control, struggled to reply. "But, honestly I didn't know about the tobacco juice. I was just joshing him. I sure hope he comes back next year."

Tom scratched his head, hat in hand. "Oh I wouldn't worry about that, that circuit riding preacher will have a whole year thinking about how to get you back on the path of righteousness. It's always a pleasure breaking bread with you, but we must get home before dark, so we can do our chores." Both men gave Aunt Mattie a kiss on the cheek and climbed up on the wagon. Ben turned to wave goodbye to Mattie, but was a bit taken in by her look. A moment ago she had been laughing. But, as the wagon moved away she assumed a sad and lonely look. Ben turned back to look again and she had disappeared into her cabin.

When Tom bought the little pup, Ben made a bed for him in an old crate with a part of the blanket the bitch and her pups were lying on to provide him with familiar odors. Little Red Jack was content to be all curled up asleep on that blanket on the wagon until Tom climbed aboard, and then he turned into a bundle of energy, jumping up on Tom's lap and licking his face. Ben said. "Looks like we have a new member to our family. I think he has accepted us."

Tom, placing him back into his crate, agreed. "Yes, I think he will be a good watchdog. Maybe he can keep those varmints away from our chickens. Last year, there were chicken feathers all over the place!" Two hours later, Ben was reining the team to the right to start up the lane to home, when Josh Murdock came riding up on one of his plow horses.

"Have you seen my boy, Daniel?" Murdock angrily ordered. "I had a feeling he was thinking about scampering off somewhere and now I find there are four silver dollars missing with my three-year-old gelding. When I catch up with that boy, I'm going to skin him like a wolf with this hickory stick!" He waved the stick like a saber.

Tom held up his hand and said. "Whoa, Mr. Murdock. Slow down just a little. I don't think you will be able to catch Daniel."

"What do you mean by that?" Murdock snapped back.

*Johnny Jackson*

Tom calmly answered. "Daniel passed us about six hours ago atop that hill. He said he was going to join the Army and he was riding that gelding of yours hard. By now he would be on a troop train headed for an Army training camp. Your gelding would be left at Eli's stable."

Mr. Murdock's face turned bright red, and then pale as if life itself had drained out of him. A few moments before, this raving lunatic was yelling at the top of his voice, but now he became strangely meek and quiet. Murdock didn't say anything more; he just turned his horse around and slowly headed back home. They watched Josh Murdock ride out of sight feeling a little shocked by his angry outburst.

Ben said. "I have a knot in my stomach. Seeing Mr. Murdock waving that hickory stick around caused me to remember something I'd forgotten. Daniel and I were swimming in old blue hole up on spring creek and Daniel didn't take his shirt off. Later, when he didn't think I was watching, he removed his shirt and hung it on a bush to dry. When he turned around I could see red swollen streaks across his back and the back of his legs. When I asked him what had happened, he didn't answer, just quickly put his shirt back on."

Tom obliged. "I have very little respect or sympathy for that man and as for Daniel, I think he is getting out of the frying pan and into the fire."

Days began early for the Drake boys. Up at five each morning, and the work continued all day until after dark. Vegetable gardens had to be plowed and harrowed, including Aunt Mattie's. Aunt Mattie lived off her garden. If rich soil was plowed and harrowed she could take it from there. She would drive wooden stakes in the ground at the end of each row and tie a string to each stake to run a very straight row. She always had the neatest, cleanest, no weed garden in the county. Ben's image of Aunt Mattie in the springtime was seeing her in a long cotton dress, made from flower sacks, topped by a large bonnet to protect her from the sun. Mattie would spend long daylight hours bent over hoeing each row. No weed had a chance in Aunt Mattie's garden.



*One Man's Journey*

When Tom and Ben finished all the plowing, harrowing and planting, they started working on the winter wood supply. They would take the team and wagon into the woods and cut fallen timber—which was dry—into logs. The logs were then loaded on the wagon, hauled to the woodpile behind their cabin to be cut unto four-foot long fireplace wood. This procedure required many trips of backbreaking work. At least eight cords was needed to get through a winter. They also provided Aunt Mattie's wood supply.

After several weeks of nothing, but work, work, and more work, Ben questioned. "Pa I don't know about you, but this is all s... and no sugar."

"I guess you're right," Tom replied. "Maybe we should back off this daily grind and take a break. How would you like to ride into town tomorrow and let Marshal Wilson know that I've completely recovered? Here it is the middle of July, already, and I've had no assignments. Either I'm being ignored or the world has gone law abiding, which I seriously doubt. Also, while you're at it, pick up a couple of newspapers. The Cincinnati Gazette and the Chicago Tribune should do. You know something Ben, our country could be going to hell in a hand basket and we wouldn't know it."

"Yeah Pa, be glad to, fact is I had a couple of ideas for myself. I think I might go *courting*."

"Really?" Tom conjectured. "If you don't mind me asking, who is the lucky lady?"

"Well," Ben began cautiously, "I haven't exactly asked her yet, but her name is Adeline Underwood."

"Are you talking about the Underwood's that live off to the right just before you get to Aunt Mattie's place?"

"Yes."

"They only have one child and she is a skinny little yellow haired girl."

"Yep, pop, that's her, but you ain't seen her lately. Adeline ain't so skinny any more. She is sweet sixteen and all growed up and... I might add... *all filled out!*"

Realizing that Ben was totally infatuated with this girl, Tom continued to probe. "Well, when did you plan to ask her?"

*Johnny Jackson*

“I thought I would make an excuse to check on Aunt Mattie and at the same time pay the Underwood’s a visit and see if she would like to ride to town with me.”

“You know her Pa might greet you with a double barreled shotgun.” Tom squinted as if taking aim.

“Oh, I think he is a reasonable man and I think he likes me. A while back when you were gone, a bear tore a hole in his rail fence. His cattle and horses were scattered all over these hills. I helped him round them up and mend his fence.”

Tom did not want to add to Ben’s already growing anxiety, so he decided to lighten the conversation a bit. “‘Pears to me you been thinking about this girl for some time, if that’s true, I suggest you go down to the creek and take a bath, scrub behind your ears and see if Aunt Mattie will give you a haircut.”

“Yes, Pa,” Ben replied, with a half smile. “I already planned to do that.”

“Ben... go ahead and make that ride, I can do the chores. If Miss Adeline’s answer is, ‘Yes,’ and if Mr. Underwood approves, most women want at least a day’s notice in advance. But, if all that falls apart, you can leave directly from here in the morning.”

Ben jumped at the offer with, “Thanks Pa,” and left the woodpile, leaving the crosscut saw halfway through a log. The excited suitor wasted no time taking his bath, donning his best, clean clothes, saddling the Dunn mare and riding off towards the Underwood’s.

Tom lit his pipe and watched Ben as he rode out of sight. His thoughts drifted back to old England a long time ago when he was riding towards the Browning horse farm, desperately trying to think of the right words to say to Mr. Browning and his beautiful daughter, Hannah. Tom chuckled a little to himself when he remembered how nervous he was and how mean Mr. Browning looked when he sternly asked. “What do you... *want?*”

Instantly, the over-rehearsed proposal was lost and as Tom remembered, his mind went blank. Hannah saved the day by calling out. “Top of the morning to you, Tom, would you like some tea and cookies?”

*One Man's Journey*

Coming back to reality, Tom declared to the woodpile. "Lord knows I miss that woman so." A tear came to his eye as he finished cutting through that log Ben started. Tom wiped the tear away with his bandana and got back to his work.

Ben slowed the mare to a walk as he carefully rehearsed what he would say when he opened Mr. Underwood's front gate, thinking all three of them would be sitting on their front porch, like they were the last time he rode by and waved cheerfully. It wasn't like that at all. Adeline was riding her newly acquired Pinto gelding in their front pasture. And her parents were bent over pulling weeds in their vegetable garden. When Adeline saw Ben ride up, she spurred her mount into a gallop all the way across the pasture, and then brought him to a sliding stop at the garden gate.

"That sure is a pretty Pinto, Miss Adeline. I didn't know you had a horse?"

"My Daddy gave him to me on my sixteenth birthday," Adeline proudly announced.

Ben lied. "Sixteen, you can't be sixteen already?"

"Yes I am. Just ask my Mother." She flirted.

Ben looked over at Mrs. Underwood with a fake stunned look on his face. Shaking his head as in disbelief.

Mrs. Underwood looked up from her weeding and verified. "Yes, Ben Drake, it's true. Our Adeline is sixteen."

Adeline giggled. "Ben, cut it out... you know my age!" They all laughed except Mr. Underwood. He just stood back quietly observing how Ben and Adeline couldn't take their eyes off each other. He felt a little sad, because he knew that the way Adeline was growing up, some day soon a handsome young man like Ben would ride up and take her away. That's the way the cycle goes.

"Ben Drake. What brings you out this way?"

"I will be riding to town tomorrow. Thought I'd better check with Aunt Mattie to see if she needs anything"

Sensing that the real reason Ben was there was to see Adeline, Underwood said. "I thought you brought supplies to Mattie about a month ago. Could she be running short already?"

*Johnny Jackson*

Ben knew he was backed into a corner, so he decided to fess up. “Well actually...” Ben nervously answered. “You’re right, it was just a little over a month ago, but the real reason was to see if Adeline would like to ride into town with me, being sixteen and all growed up.”

“Adeline liked what he said and pleaded, “Daddy please, *can I go?*”

Mr. Underwood, stern in his words, admonished. “If it was anyone, but you, Ben, I would say, ‘No.’ But, I know you will look after my girl.”

“Ben,” Underwood continued, “This war ain’t going well at all for the Union. First, the surrender of Fort Sumter and now General McDowell’s Army was routed at a place called Bull Run in Virginia.”

“I haven’t heard the latest.”

Underwood relayed the grim news. “It’s in all the papers. Heavy casualties with hundreds of men unaccounted for. I want you to keep a sharp eye out and be careful of strangers on the road. They just might be deserters.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll have my Navy Colt at the ready and I know how to use it.” Ben turned to Adeline. “If we are to get back home before dark, we should leave no later than seven.” “I’ll be ready” Adeline replied.

Ben reined the mare in the direction of Aunt Mattie’s and with a light touch of his spurs, she settled unto a soft canter. Ben could not believe everything had gone so smoothly. He was riding on a cloud and could hardly wait to tell Aunt Mattie.

Aunt Mattie was sitting in her rocking chair on her front porch. She did not take her eyes off Ben as he rode up. Mattie shouted. “What’s wrong Ben, your Pa ailin’?”

“No, Aunt Mattie!” Ben yelled back. “Ain’t nothing wrong. Fact is, everything is all right. Adeline and I are riding into town tomorrow. Her Pa said it was alright.”

Mattie smiled in agreement. “Adeline has become a mighty pretty young lady.”

“You know Adeline?”

*One Man's Journey*

“Sure do, I home schooled her since she was knee high to a grass hopper.”

“I didn't know you were still teaching.”

“I never quit. I still have two students, Joseph and Angie Egan, eight and ten years old. Their parent's drops them off here on Tuesday and picks them up Thursday afternoon. They live about seven miles south of here. Join me in the cabin.”

“Ben,” Mattie continued inside, “If you are going to spend tomorrow with Adeline, we have some fix'n to do.” Aunt Mattie walked around Ben in a circle, looking him over from top to bottom, and then she walked to an old trunk near her bed and opened the lid, removed a long sleeved white shirt that had rows of ruffles down the front and a pair of store bought breaches. “These oughtta fit. You are about the same size as Frank (late husband). Now we've got to do something about that head of yo'rn. Fetch me a bucket full of rainwater from that barrel. There ain't nuttin' better than rainwater for washin' hair.”

After scrubbing Ben's head, Mattie rinsed his hair with more rainwater, and then got the scissors and comb to finish the job by giving his hair a good trimming. Standing back surveying her good work, she declared. “That's better, now, you 're startin' to look civilized.”

Ben was grateful. “Thanks Aunt Mattie, I owe you.”

“Awe twern't nuttin', I just want to see you two having a good time tomorrow. You see, in life you never know what troubles lie just over the next hill.”

“Now Aunt Mattie, let's not start that prophet of doom stuff, because I always try to see the silver lining in every cloud.”

“That's good,” she replied, “but expect a storm cloud once in a while, cause they will surely come.”



*Prepare yourself for a long and dangerous ride through the Civil War with Ben, from his Ohio homestead to Appomattox, and then the long ride back home. Ride with Deputy Marshals while chasing counterfeiters. Experience the unbelievable carnage during those awful battles. Share the emotions and hardships these men suffered, but managed to see through to the end, without complaining. That would be a sign of weakness.*

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