

*Changes! Life before and after
WWI.*

Goodbye, Belvidere - I Much Love You

by Joyce Wheeler

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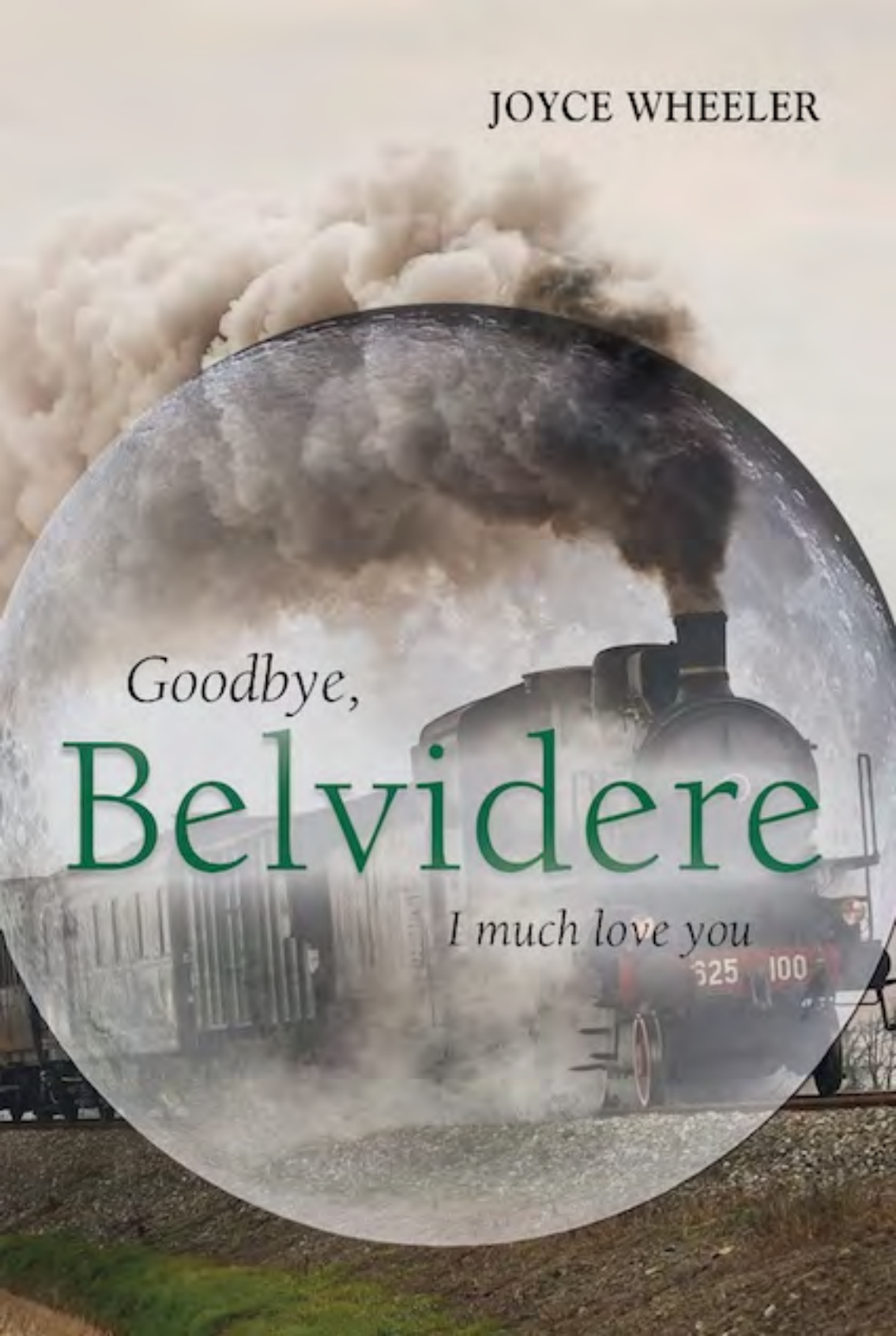
JOYCE WHEELER

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Belvidere

I much love you

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Scripture quotes from KJV.

May 2016

Dear Readers,

This book is the conclusion of the Belvidere series, and it introduces several interesting characters while keeping its focus on the Crezner family.

Little Frank and Antonio's family and their house grow, and yet prepare yourself for the ending. Their family story ends in tragedy. And why would I write it that way? Because Little Frank and Antonio are, in real life, my grandparents. I have wanted to write about them for a very long time, and have enjoyed re-creating their time line and their days in the Belvidere community. The tragedies that occur in this book are the same tragedies that occurred in their life. It was, for sure, hard times.

But lest we get drowned in our tears, Willow and Heather, the fictional Crezner twins, keep things lively, and then there are CJ's driving episodes, and even our beautiful Southern belle, Deborah Lynn, tries her hand at the gas monster and dodging the Pierre traffic. (Or maybe to be more correct, the Pierre traffic dodges her.)

Once again it's been my pleasure to weave actual history and its characters in this last *Goodbye, Belvidere* book. And, once again, a great big thank-you to all who have shared wonderful stories and history and family pictures. I so appreciate it.

I hope you enjoy reading this as much as I've enjoyed writing it!

Sincerely,

Joyce Wheeler

1910 RAILROAD MAP



★ - Swanson/Crozier Ranch
- Winn's Ranch

1898 Map



* - Swanson/Creeger Ranch
- Winn's Ranch

1

March 19, 1917

Omaha, Nebraska

Dear family,

By the time you get this letter, I will be on board a ship heading to Europe. Even though the United States isn't officially in the war, they are sending some of us to France.

The British have developed an airplane called the De Havilland DH-4. They're fast, and they are rugged. I guess their down side is that they catch fire in combat pretty easy. They've been working on bombers since 1914 because of the war necessity. The U. S. of A. is a long ways behind Britain and Europe in manufacturing a good fighter airplane, but we're learning!

I hear a lot about the trenches and the battles that take place there. I also hear a lot about the gases that are used. I hope we can help end this war soon. I would imagine my job will be as mechanic for the airplanes.

Sure enjoyed seeing everyone at Christmas. Thanks again, CJ, for sending me train fare to come home. I really appreciated that. I know I talked your ears off about airplanes! Can't believe how fast the Four are growing. Don't know when I'll be back to see them again, but I have a feeling John and Teddy might be taller than me when we meet again. Would imagine Willow and Heather will write me nice long letters (that's a very broad hint, girls!).

Dad surprised me with a visit a couple of weeks ago. I got to show him all over the base at Omaha, but best of all, he swallowed his fear of flying and let me take him for a little spin. I'm not sure he enjoyed it. When we landed he kept saying, "Boy howdy! Mother Earth sure looks good to me!"

I better quit rambling and finish packing.

Love to all,

Isaac

CJ glanced at Joanna as he slowly placed Isaac's letter on the table. He had read it aloud as the winter storm howled around the corner of the house, and for some reason, the cold outside made the news seem even more chilling.

"Wow!" Teddy let out a long-held breath. "Wow! He'll be on the ocean for months! Maybe by the time he gets to Europe, the war will be over, and then he won't even be able to fight anybody or fly a plane."

"I wish," Joanna murmured softly.

"I wonder why they're going before America is even in the war." At seventeen, John and his friends constantly talked of joining the army and destroying the enemy.

"Daddy, read the part again about Uncle Simon." Willow's eyes danced, and she giggled at her twin sister. "Boy howdy, Heather, land that airplane on good Mother Earth!"

“Uncle Simon is so brave! I’d never want to get in an airplane, even if Isaac was the pilot!” Heather shook her head in wonder.

“I’m going to,” Willow stoutly declared. “Just as soon as Isaac gets home again and brings me a flying machine.”

CJ rubbed his forehead and thought wearily that Willow would probably never be satisfied unless she could fly the contraption herself. Even at nine years old, she was always several jumps ahead of where he wanted her to be.

By the time everyone made their last dash through the storm to the outhouse, the spring snowfall was piling into large drifts. It was difficult to not worry about the cattle and the horses. *Sometimes life in South Dakota seems like a constant trial*, CJ grouched to himself as he checked stoves and doors and prepared to head upstairs to bed.

He was cold. All day he and the boys had worked in the biting wind and light snow flurries. As much as possible, they prepared for the storm they knew would come. They moved the cattle into a better protected area, they fed extra hay, and as evening approached, they put the milk cows and saddle horses into the barn. His Missouri blood ran cold and sluggish, while the boys seemed to have endless energy and sometimes even had their coats unbuttoned.

Isaac’s letter was ten days old, he mused as he quickly slipped out of his clothes and into the warm flannel pajamas Joanna insisted he wear. For once he was grateful for her stubbornness on such matters. He was even more grateful when he crawled into bed and felt the warm brick at the foot of the bed.

“You’re a good wife, Joanna. I think I love you.” He shivered as the wind rattled the windows.

“I think your feet are as cold as ice. Put ’em on the brick and keep ’em away from my legs.” The laughter in her voice mocked her stern words.

“That’s no way to talk to a frozen Southern boy. Where’s the sense of duty you used to feel when you felt my cold feet in your warm bed?”

He heard her soft chuckle. “Silly Southern boy. It’s a good thing you have two stout and hardy Northern boys to help you with all the work.”

He shivered again and reached for her. Holding Joanna close was one of the better moments of his day.

“CJ,” she said after she had arranged herself more comfortably in his arms, “I keep praying God will protect Isaac, but I have this knot of fear in my stomach every time I think of him heading to war. It doesn’t want to go away.”

“I know.” Neither said anything while they listened to the wind howl mournfully. “Oh, that’s it.” CJ broke the silence and then kissed her forehead lightly. “Philippians 4, verses 6 and 7. That’s what I’ve been trying to think of all evening.”

“Tell me. I can’t remember what they say.”

“But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Joanna snuggled closer and seemed to forget his cold feet. “Heart and mind might be at peace, but the knot in my stomach doesn’t seem to be listening.”



CJ’s glance out the frosted bedroom window showed a world of white in the pale predawn hours. By the time he was dressed and had stoked the fires, wispy streaks of pink outlined the eastern sky.

Prince crawled slowly from his hay bed under the porch, as loath to leave the warmth of his bed as CJ had been to leave Joanna’s warm form.

“We’re gluttons for punishment, you and me.” CJ briefly stroked the dog’s loyal head as they stood on the east porch.

That seemed to be the magic phrase that started Prince’s energy because suddenly he raced into the snow drifts with wild abandon, grabbing mouthfuls of white fluff that made him cough and sneeze while he raced to the next drift. When he heard CJ’s muffled laughter, he tore back to CJ with a satisfied dog grin.

Once in the barn, CJ put a smattering of oats in the stanchions for the milk cows and brought in the first six cows to start the twice daily milking chores. It wasn’t his favorite job, but the cream checks were pleasant. He and the boys and sometimes even Joanna and the girls had learned all the tricks of the trade and could accomplish the task in short order.

“Clara, you’re first,” he muttered and gingerly set the milking stool and pail on the barn’s dirt floor before he pushed the locking two-by-four on the head catch into place. Clara always bellowed in

protest when she heard the hollow snap that meant her head was caught in the stanchion.

“Eat your oats.”

“And shut up.” John’s words as he appeared with another milking stool and pail made CJ smile.

“Took the words right out of my mouth.”

“I figured that was your next line.” John was already seated, and CJ could hear the steady flow of milk hitting the sides of the pail.

By the time Teddy appeared from feeding the chickens, the first six cows were milked, and the next six were in place. It was usually a quiet operation until Teddy came. He had all sorts of information and problems he shared with them every morning.

“Dad, I’ve been thinking about this war thing.”

CJ and John groaned. For months, Teddy had been talking about “this war thing” until CJ felt there couldn’t possibly be one other “thing” to talk about.

“I’m a-thinking that Isaac could be another flying ace like the Red Baron. And he’ll need a crack gunner, and for sure, I’m a crack shot, and why don’t I go over there and be his gunner? You and Mom could sign whatever papers to get me into the war, and Isaac and I could clean up the whole mess and maybe even pull the Red Baron down. And John could stay home and milk cows so’s you and Mom wouldn’t have to do it all by yourselves.”

A whole new set of information and problems. CJ squirted milk at the waiting cat and watched her flatten her ears while she caught the milk in midair.

“Teddy. I just had a thought. Why don’t you let John and me finish up, and you start pumping water? Did you leave the east door open so the old girls could get outside?”

“Uh, I think I forgot. I don’t know if the pump is primed.”

“A top gunner should be able to prime a pump. See if you can get it going, and I’ll be out there in a little while.”

“I’m not quite done with ole Swish. Maybe I better finish her up before I see about the pump.”

“I’ll finish her.” John was almost as weary of Teddy’s “war things” as CJ was.

“I don’t think she likes to change milkers in the middle of the stream.” Teddy hated pumping water to the cattle almost as bad as he hated milking. To top it all off, he and ole Swish seemed to have a camaraderie that allowed only him to milk her easily. She would kick and hold her milk if anyone else tried. For Teddy, she would stand anyplace, but the rest of them made sure she was in a stanchion and had kickers on. The biggest problem was that she was the only cow Teddy milked. He could talk and stall and drive them all crazy with his little must-do jobs that needed to take place whenever milking was in session.

As usual, John finished first and let the cows out. He opened the east door, and as he always did when he was home from school, he started pumping water. Teddy dawdled with old Swish and was reminded several times since he didn’t pump, he was to get the pitchfork and throw out the night’s accumulation of manure.

“Theodore Simon. I’m not repeating myself again.”

Teddy knew when he heard that tone in CJ's voice that he had pushed his father to the limit. He suddenly realized he was done milking and also quickly found the pitchfork to tackle another detested job.

By the time the boys returned to the house for breakfast, CJ had the milk separated, and the pails and separator parts were already upstairs waiting for Joanna and the girls to wash them for evening milking chores.

"I think the war would be better than milk cow chores," Teddy muttered to John while they were washing their hands.

"And I think if you keep pushing Dad to the end of his patience, you'll have war right here on the farm. You know he can get pretty mad if he's pushed too far."

Teddy bristled. "I think, Mr. John, that I'm almost fifteen years old, and Dad sure isn't going to spank me with the razor strap anymore."

John looked at him disgustedly. "Why don't you just do your chores like you're suppose to do? Do 'em right the first time. You just make extra work for everyone else when you slack off." John exited the chilly laundry room where the wash sink was and left his brother smoldering by the small stove that couldn't quite take the chill out of the room in the zero outdoor temperatures.

"Because I'm tired of chores. I'm tired of trying to follow in your perfect footprints, and I'm gonna do something about it." Teddy muttered several other grumbling matters to the mix and promised himself he would do something soon, but for the life of him, he couldn't think of what it was he was gonna do.



Joanna quietly placed the *Belvidere Times* in front of CJ and moved on to her many domestic chores without saying a word. It was an April evening, and spring noises were beginning to be heard. Frogs were visiting with one another on the creek, male birds were singing with all their might to attract lady birds, and nature was trying its best to convince the world that normal rituals could overrule the glumness that permeated the nations.

The headlines of the paper were no surprise. War had been declared on Germany by the United States. Everyone was admonished to back the effort. Frugality was encouraged, and anything that could be done to support the soldiers was a patriotic duty. All of a sudden, Uncle Sam appeared, needing Liberty Loans, junk for America's war industries, money for the Red Cross, and men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-one.

"I guess Teddy is too young for his war thing," CJ muttered as he scanned the rest of the news.

"Teddy is almost fifteen, going on almost twenty, according to his questionable wisdom." Joanna glanced out the window to make sure the girls were actually gathering eggs and not wandering down to the creek again.

"Where did you say he went to after supper? He's been all excited over something."

"I didn't say." The last rays of the setting sun danced over Joanna's hair and caused it to glimmer with red highlights. It held CJ's attention for several seconds until her words penetrated his thought process.

“Well. Where is he?”

“I don’t know. He slipped out like a thief up to no good.” She poured the remaining coffee into two cups and brought them to the table. “His birthday is in a couple of days, and I suppose he’s hunting all over the place to see if we have something wonderful stashed away.”

“Fifteen. He’ll be fifteen, and John will be seventeen this fall, and the girls will be ten this winter. Good grief, Joanna, where does time go?” He took the coffee and gave her a searching gaze.

She shrugged and sat down. “It just disappears. Like Isaac. It seems like only yesterday he was a little boy, bouncing around, lisping about his new friend Thee Jay. Remember how he followed you around when you first came here?”

“Yeah. He was my little buddy. Of course, I was pretty interested in other people about that time.” He winked at her as he took a drink of coffee.

She raised her eyebrows and then made a face at the coffee in her cup. “It looks strong enough to float a battleship.”

“Yeah.” He set his cup down. “Back to Teddy. He’s getting to be a handful. I just have to prod and prod him to get his work done. He’s a schemer and a dreamer, but once he sets his mind on doing something, he carries it out to the bitter end.”

“I worry there’s going to be hard feelings between him and John.” She sighed and twirled her cup on the oil tablecloth.

“John does too much of Teddy’s work. It’s a balancing act between not praising John and not scolding Teddy.” CJ studied his

coffee cup gloomily. Finally he stood and picked it up. “One thing I do know. Your irises need this coffee more than I do.”

Joanna nodded in agreement and handed him her own cup. “I wish kids were as easy to raise as those irises.”

2

April 18, 1917

France

Dear Family,

Happy birthday, Teddy! By the time you get this, your birthday will long be passed, but now you know I was thinking of you on your special day.

There seems to be a bit of confusion about the role of the Aviation Section, Signal Corps here (ASSC). The pilots and the officers are in a minor war among themselves, but everyone is agreed that matters will get straightened out now that General Pershing has arrived. And no, I haven't gotten to even see the good general from a distance yet.

However, I did go to the Red Cross tent to see about a friend of mine and heard a loud argument between a nurse and a doctor about a patient's treatment. It was a pretty heated argument that caused a lot of unrest among the wounded, and I finally went over and told the doctor that he may as well listen to the lady because Lizzie Tinner was as stubborn as a mule and wouldn't quit until she had her way.

He looked at me in total disgust and then threw up his hands and glared at Lizzie. "If this soldier dies, it's on your shoulders!" he yelled, and Lizzie yelled back. Oh, not at the doctor—at me. "When I need your help, Isaac Swanson, I'll ask for it!" And she bolted out of the tent and headed off to another tent on a dead run.

Who would have ever thought that Lizzie and I would be in France—same place, same time. It's more than scary.

Got to run.

Love all of you,

Isaac

When CJ finished reading Isaac's letter, he started laughing and was soon joined by Joanna. Their children looked at them in disbelief.

"Daddy, what's funny?" Willow finally asked.

"You'd have to know Lizzie to see the humor in this." Joanna drew in a deep breath. "She has always been headstrong, I suppose you'd say."

"I can just see her arguing with a doctor. And chances are, she might be right. She's always had a knack for taking care of animals and people." CJ put the letter down and was mildly surprised to see Teddy frown as he picked it up. His scowl deepened as he scanned Isaac's epistle.

"What's the matter, Ted? You don't seem happy about something." CJ reached over to tousle Teddy's hair and was even more surprised to see his son duck his head in irritation.

"There's a war going on, and all Isaac can write about is a stupid girl?" Teddy's voice was full of incredulity and outrage.

The three females of the household descended upon that remark like a coop full of angry hens. Teddy's face turned red, and he stomped out of the house in full defeat.

CJ followed more slowly. He was lost in thought as he gently tapped his old Stetson over his graying brown hair. The whole matter needed some sorting out, he decided as he stepped outside into the April sunshine.

It *was* a little odd Isaac didn't write more news about the Western Front. They'd all been hearing about that famous piece of ground for months. He hadn't thought about that until Teddy's remark. But what was more sobering was Teddy's behavior the last couple of weeks. He seemed to be nervous and sometimes excited, but always secretive. CJ didn't like it, and with a quick tug to pull his hat down tighter against the ever present wind, CJ resolved to find John and see if he could shed some light on the matter.

He made no effort to find his youngest son. He figured Teddy was sulking in some private spot and wanted to be alone. John had left to check cattle before dinner and before he knew Isaac's letter was in the mailbox. CJ quickly saddled his own horse and decided to allow himself the enjoyment of a spring afternoon on the prairie and a visit with his oldest son.

Within the hour, he spotted John bent over a still little form in a shallow gully, and the little form's aggravated mother was bellowing and throwing dirt in the air with horns and hooves.

CJ rode his horse between mama and baby, and John gave him an appreciative grin as he finished uncoiling a mass of barbed wire that was wrapped around the calf's leg. When he finished, he took his

rope's loop off the calf's neck, and with a pathetic bawl, his patient found his waiting and anxious mother.

“Good thing you're home from school over the weekend and take up the slack, John. I never saw that. Do you think it's been on his leg for a while?”

“It was cutting in a bit. We're not too far from the Tinnners' old place, so I suppose he picked it up there.” John wiped his bloody hand on his jeans and then frowned. “Oops. Mom won't like this at all. I should have wiped my hands on the grass.”

“She'll just be glad you don't have any broken bones. That old mama cow was getting wringy.”

“I know. I was glad to see you coming.”

They talked cattle talk while they continued a swing through the pasture, and then CJ stopped his horse in a ravine where they were somewhat protected from the wind. “John, what's going on with Teddy?”

John gazed toward the creek. For several long seconds he didn't say anything, and then he shook his head. “It might be better if you didn't ask me.”

CJ felt his heart turn over with a resounding thump. “Well. I would imagine in time I'll know. And I would imagine it has everything to do with this war thing he talks about. Or at least he used to talk about it. Now he just scuttles around like he's on a secret mission.”

John turned to look at him, and CJ saw the anguish in his brown eyes. “He’s not told me anything. I just have kept my ears open at school and have a good idea of what’s coming.”

CJ nodded and then gently nudged his horse toward home. He wouldn’t ask John to betray his brother, but he would talk to Joanna, and maybe the two of them could figure out some solution. It would be like Teddy to think he could fight a war singlehandedly and win.



It was almost a relief when the boys mounted their horses early Monday morning for school classes in Midland. There had been an uneasy atmosphere over the entire household during the weekend. Teddy was unforgiving to his mother and sisters and grumpily preferred Prince’s company to all of theirs.

When the girls were loaded on gentle Maggie’s back and headed to Highland Center School, Joanna and CJ looked at each other, and both gave a long sigh.

“Is it against the rules to have one more cup of coffee before I head out to the field?”

“Not if I can have some too. I’m looking at mountains of clothes and haven’t even gotten the water heated yet. And guess what. I don’t care. I’ve been so worried that Teddy will run off and join the army that I can’t think of anything else.”

They walked to the house where CJ found a couple of oatmeal cookies stashed in a hidden container while Joanna poured coffee into Blue Willow cups.

“I’m thinking of my mama this morning,” she explained at CJ’s questioning glance at their coffee cups. “I imagine I was just as hard to raise as Teddy is. What is the saying—‘What goes around comes around’?”

CJ chuckled as he picked up a discarded newspaper and glanced at it. “Mmm.” He scanned several articles and then hurriedly put his cup down. “Well!” He reread an article and sat back in his chair and gave Joanna a long and thoughtful look.

“I take it this isn’t about my Blue Willow cups and my mama.” Joanna gave a nervous laugh.

CJ brought his clasped hands to his chin. “Joanna, who did we name Teddy after?”

She looked at him as if he’d lost his mind. “Theodore Simon was named after Teddy Roosevelt and my brother Simon. You know that, for heaven’s sake.”

“This article says Teddy Roosevelt has been planning to gather up another group of Rough Riders and head to Europe. Seth Bullock is recruiting in this region. Wasn’t our Teddy talking about how great Seth Bullock was a couple of weeks ago? Like on his birthday? And didn’t he keep saying ‘Bully!’ until we were sick of it and made him quit?”

Joanna frowned. “I’m not following you. What do you mean?” Before he could answer she tilted her head back and looked at him through narrowed eyes. “You can’t think our Teddy wants to go with Teddy Roosevelt to Europe? That’s ridiculous. For starters, he’s way too young. They’d laugh at him for even asking to join.”

CJ tapped his fingers on the table impatiently. “But what if he and some other boys thought if they got to Deadwood, they could sneak their way into Bullock’s camp? Boys can conjure up all sorts of wild ideas.”

Joanna bit her lip as she twirled her cup. Coffee splashed unnoticed on the oilcloth as she digested what he said. “I can’t believe he’d try a dumb trick like that.”

CJ took a quick sip of his coffee. “Yes, he would, you know he would. If Teddy has an idea, nothing is going to change his mind.”

Her eyes flashed in irritation. “I guess at fifteen, he’s too big to spank with the razor strap. And I don’t imagine a lecture would change his mind.” She looked glumly at him and shrugged. “We have to outthink him, CJ. We may be old, but we still haven’t lost our ability to outthink a kid.”

CJ finished his coffee and stood. “Well, Mrs. Crezner, I’ll go to the field and think, and you tackle your mountain of laundry and think. Maybe we can outthink, outmaneuver, and outdo our outlaw.”

“Boy howdy, what a fine mess this is,” she grumbled, wiping at the spilled coffee with the bottom of her apron.



“I’m so excited I can hardly wait!” Willow was literally bouncing in the buggy as they made their way along the trail. It was the last day of school for the boys, and the family was joining them in Midland for some recitations and the annual school picnic.

Joanna had packed a huge basket of food for the family. CJ glanced at her and noticed the dark circles under her eyes. Neither of

them had slept much the past couple of weeks. Not knowing if Teddy had plans to run away at night, they tried to be vigilant and keep an eye on him. They didn't know if they were irritated because of lack of sleep or because they were disgusted that one fifteen-year-old boy could raise such havoc to their schedules.

They had insisted the boys ride home every night. John didn't care; he liked being home in springtime evenings. Teddy was surly and refused to ride with John. Usually he came trailing in several minutes later and was either nervously excited or in a grumpy state of mind.

CJ bit his lip to keep from exploding with anger. He was going to bide his time, and when he found out for sure what Teddy was up to, he would dispense his punishment.

CJ sighed as he touched the buggy whip to his team's broad backs. He and Joanna had spent hours watching Teddy without being observed. He decided they would make good spies. They gained tidbits of information during the past weeks, which they compared and mulled over. And it became quite obvious their son had made stealthy plans to board the afternoon train and head to Deadwood the last day of school.



Midland was bustling with people who had come to hear the students and also to visit. There were both automobiles and buggies, and while some horses snorted with disgust and fear at the noise of the gas engines, most teams gazed with sleepy eyes at the new contraptions.

When it was Teddy's turn to say his piece, CJ was not surprised to hear him talk about Teddy Roosevelt and the Rough Riders and especially about Seth Bullock.

And when the picnic was over and folks were milling around visiting, CJ was not surprised to see Teddy nonchalantly stroll down the street with a canvas bag slung over his shoulder.

When the train whistle sounded over Bad River Valley, CJ headed to the Midland depot. He leaned against the side of the building and waited while the train crew filled the engine with water and hooked and unhooked various train cars. Finally the whistle blew, and the engine chugged out of the station, pulling its load westward.

Finally he saw the sight he expected to see. A deep sadness settled over his heart. The sheriff was walking along the tracks with two boys in tow. None of the trio was smiling. Neither was CJ.

"Just like you figured, CJ," the sheriff said as they approached. "Both hiding in one of the boxcars. Here's yours." He pulled Teddy forward without further ado and looked across the street as a tall slender man hurried toward them. "And looks like this other young'un's father is coming to claim him."

"I didn't believe it until I couldn't find the rascal," the newcomer said to CJ and the sheriff. "Never thought I treated my son so bad he thought he needed to run away from home. This will break his mother's heart."

With that, the distraught father turned away, and his shamed-looking son followed at his heels. "It was Teddy's idea!" could be heard as they walked away.

Teddy chewed his lip nervously. It always meant trouble, and serious trouble when CJ said nothing. And Nothing was so loud right now, it was deafening.

“Well, no harm done, I guess.” The sheriff looked at CJ questioningly.

CJ gave himself a mental shake. “Thanks for checking this out. I owe you one.”

“Sure. Glad you came to me.” With a nod, the sheriff walked away, and with a curt nod at Teddy, CJ headed toward the livery stable with Teddy silently following a few paces behind.

John had his horse saddled and tied to the hitching rail when they arrived. The buggy was close by, and CJ took the bag from Teddy’s unresisting grasp and gave it a careless toss onto the buggy floor. He noted with grim satisfaction that Teddy’s already-pale face blanched a few shades whiter. Only a fifteen-year-old would pack a jar of pickles and his dad’s revolver in a bag and not consider the possibility of a horrendous mess. CJ had found the bag stashed under the buggy seat and removed both items.

“Oh, there you are,” John said as he led Teddy’s horse from the livery corral. “I was just going to get your horse saddled.”

“Ted can saddle his own horse.” CJ smiled at John to soften his remark. “And I’ll ride home with him on your horse. You, sir John, can drive the lovely ladies, and there’s no hurry to get home and do chores. Ted and I will take care of them.”

John looked from his father to his brother and merely nodded. “I’ll tell the lovely ladies.” With one more searching glance at the two

of them, he ambled away, keeping his thoughts and his questions to himself.

CJ finally broke the strained silence after they had ridden a mile or so out of town. “Where do you think you were going, and what you were going to do once you got there?”

“Whoever squealed on me must have told you all the details.” Teddy wanted his voice to be firm, but it came out shaky.

“You squealed on yourself. Your mother and I weren’t born yesterday. We know when one of our kids is going to do something stupid.”

Teddy frowned and pulled his cap even farther on his forehead. “I don’t think it’s stupid to want to help our country!”

CJ looked at him with narrowed eyes. “Running away from home when you’re fifteen isn’t considered a patriotic duty.”

“Did you see all the posters in town? Did you see where they said to be a man and enlist? Didn’t you read where they said, ‘Fight or buy bonds’ and all the other things? I wanted to help! I wanted to go to Deadwood and tell Mr. Bullock I was man enough to fight in a war. I wanted to join Teddy Roosevelt and do something. Not just sit home and milk a bunch of stupid cows.” The words poured out as Teddy pounded the saddle horn for emphasis. “And it wasn’t stupid. I planned this for weeks, and you’d of never knew a thing until somebody told you! Who told you? I bet that John knew! I bet that he squealed!”

CJ didn’t answer Teddy’s tirade immediately. It would be hard to talk through clenched teeth. Visions of John always helping Teddy with his work flew through his mind. He should have never allowed

his older son to take up the slack his younger son created. He and Joanna had discussed this many times in the past couple of days. Their plans had been prayerfully and carefully discussed. CJ hoped he wouldn't blow the whole thing off the map by letting his temper get the best of him.

Finally, when he thought he could speak in a normal tone of voice, he said softly, "Ted, get it through your head that no one squealed on you, least of all your brother. He's always been there to help you. Remember that." He directed a chilling look at Teddy as he continued speaking in the same soft voice. "I was of a mind to let you go. If you think acting like a child is going to make you a man, you need to learn some lessons. When I told your mother I was going to let you get on the train and do whatever idiotic thing you had in mind, she begged me to reconsider. Because of your mother, you're riding home with me and not on your great wartime mission. And I hope you give some thought of the anguish you've caused her."

Teddy looked straight ahead and gave no indication of what he was thinking. However, CJ noticed his leg was trembling a nervous rhythm, whether it was from his inkling of receiving a sound whipping or from the unknown punishment, it was hard to say.

"I have a number of grievances against you, boy." CJ stopped his horse in front of Teddy's horse and made eye contact with his son. There was grim satisfaction to finally see a look of apprehension come over Ted's face.

"You stole my pistol. You sneaked and connived and created chaos. You blamed an innocent person, you caused another boy to get into trouble, and you also caused your mother and me to lose a lot of sleep and gain a lot of worry. You think you could have taken care of yourself, that you had a mission. I'm going to give you a chance this

summer to become the man you think you are, and if you want to leave in the fall, you go right ahead. I'm only stopping you this once." CJ turned his horse and nudged him into a trot.

In a short while Teddy was beside him. "But, Dad, by fall I'll miss my chance to go with Roosevelt's unit. The paper said he would be ready to go by June!"

CJ pulled back on the reins so hard his horse came to a grinding stop. He looked at his son in disbelief. Apparently, the only thing that registered with Teddy was the fact he could leave in the fall.

He turned his horse back on the trail and nudged it into a trot. He needed to get his anger in check, or else he'd unleash a torrent of words that would be best left unsaid.

After a mile of silence, Teddy gave a short exasperated sigh. "Anyway, I didn't steal your pistol. I only borrowed it."

CJ didn't look at him. "If you call taking things without asking the owner's permission—if you call that borrowing, we have some serious problems on our hands." Once again his teeth were clenched.

Silence again. A little farther down the trail, CJ stopped his horse. This time he gave his son a slow searching look. He took several deep breaths. "When did you become a spoiled, inconsiderate kid? I don't know you. I don't like who you are today. I don't even want to be around you. And that's saying a lot for a man who loves his kids more than life itself."

"I don't think it's this big of a deal, Dad. You heard the sheriff say no harm done." Teddy couldn't meet CJ's eyes.

CJ once again nudged his horse toward home. He dreaded telling Joanna their second son was more of an outlaw than they thought possible.

3

August 12, 1917

France

Dear family,

This will be short, but wanted to let you know I'm still alive. Ha. We are very short on supplies, so really appreciated the wonderful package you sent. Socks! Wow—mine were mostly threads holding holes together.

Not much flying, however, a lot of mechanic work on the planes. Some come in so shot up, I don't know how they ever flew them.

Lizzie finally spoke to me. Her patient lived, and she claims it was no thanks to the doctor. However, she grudgingly admitted her care was very unorthodox. She almost looks as bad as when she took care of Burr. I don't think she sleeps until she makes sure every patient in the ward is somewhat comfortable. The same doc that chewed her out made her take a day off. He told me when she collapsed on her cot, her snoring made the whole tent shake. She has a huge bunch of grateful soldiers who won't hear one word spoken against her, even if she does yell at all of them.

Too bad President Wilson turned down Roosevelt's offer of Rough and Ready soldiers. We could sure have used them. As slow as the U.S. of A. is at getting men and supplies here, it's going to be a long and hard winter.

Got to run.

Love to all,

Isaac

“I’m not sure if I’m sad or relieved that Isaac isn’t flying much.” CJ’s father, John Crezner, looked across the table and gave Joanna a warm smile.

“I know.” Joanna always sat motionless when CJ read Isaac’s letters. He wondered if it was because she was trying to absorb every word to find hidden meaning.

“Our Lizzie. I still remember her when the rattlesnake bit your dog Burr and how she raced to the chicken house with Teddy in hot pursuit.” Charlotte Crezner chuckled at the memory.

“Well. It was a good thing you were visiting us then. I don’t think the rest of us would have understood the connection between chickens and rattlesnake bites.” CJ grinned at his mother. His parents had arrived the day before for an extended visit, and as always, when it had been a year since he last saw them, he was taken aback to see them look so much older than he wanted them to look. They were enjoying their retirement years, but age was taking its toll.

“We were just babies when that happened,” Willow informed Heather.

“I know.” Heather usually knew a lot more than Willow gave her credit for.

Joanna pushed a full bowl of unsnapped green beans toward Willow. “May as well keep working at this. We’ll enjoy your efforts for supper tonight.”

“Snapping fresh-from-the-garden beans is something I can help with.” Charlotte scooted her chair closer to Willow and gathered a handful of beans.

“And, Heather, I have some cream for you to churn.”

If either girl wanted to complain, they kept it to themselves. CJ patted Joanna’s shoulder as he and his father headed toward the door. She raised her eyebrow and watched him leave without saying anything.

“CJ, I would have thought you would have needed the boys here to help you. Joanna has the girls, and she is teaching them well, but I sure am surprised not to see John and Teddy here,” his father quizzed him gently.

The walk to the barn was slow in deference to his father’s measured gait. Even so, when they got to the corrals, John Crezner paused and leaned against the poles and took a few deep breaths.

“Actually, John has been here all summer. He and some friends just left a couple of days ago to try their luck fishing in the White River after we had some rains and the water level raised.” CJ looked soberly at his father. “But Teddy. Teddy is another story.”

Briefly he told about Teddy’s plot to run away and his unremorseful attitude. “Even when we got the news that President Wilson refused Roosevelt’s offer, Teddy still seemed to think he could join Isaac and be a gunner. A crazy idea that he just wouldn’t leave alone.”

CJ reached over the corral fence and absently patted his horse's nose. "I was afraid of my temper, Dad. There was no way to reach him, and no matter what Joanna and I done to make him do his share of the work, somehow he always managed to wiggle out of it. I don't know what in the world changed him so much."

"That doesn't really sound like him."

"No, well, maybe. Teddy has a knack for taking the easy road. Like I said, my temper was getting short. Joanna suggested it would be best if we sent him with the cattle to some lease land on the reservation. We have some neighbors who also took their cattle there, and I asked them to keep an eye on him. He was glad to go because our father-son relationship was strained to the breaking point."

His father shook his head sadly. "I'm so sorry to hear that. You've always had a good bond with your boys."

"Yeah. I told our neighbor that ramrods the herd that Ted thought he was man enough to join the army, so I figured he was man enough to do a good day's work."

"Have you heard from him?"

"No. Not one word."

"In my younger years, I would have offered to go find him and talk to him. But now...now I know that there are times when words fail." The older man again shook his head sadly and was silent. Suddenly he looked up at CJ and gave him a gentle smile. "But we can always pray. That never fails."



There were only a couple of August days left on the calendar when young John and his fishing buddies rode into the yard. The three young men were in good spirits and had caught and smoked a nice supply of catfish.

John's grandmother Charlotte was impressed. "How did you learn how to preserve them?"

"Ben Utterbach's mother showed us how," one of John's friends volunteered. "She saw us pulling in quite a few and came down to the river to show us how. We traded fish for advice!"

The young men and John camped in Isaac and Simon's house overnight, and in the cool morning hours, the other two boys headed toward their own homes.

"You must have had a good time," CJ commented as they watched their departure.

John nodded. "It was a good break from work. Thanks for letting me go, Dad."

"I was wondering if you might have headed down to our cattle herd while you were gone."

Another nod and CJ saw a knowing smile creep along the edges of John's lips.

"And I was also wondering if you saw your brother."

"Yeah, Dad. I saw Teddy." John's smile was so like Charlotte Crezner's. "He was glad to see us. Wondered if we had any of Mom's cookies."

CJ cuffed his oldest son affectionately. “Details, John. I want details.”

“He’s grown about three inches, so that makes him skinny as a rail. He looked tired, and he wants to come home, but is determined to stick it out until they bring the herd home in the fall.”

“My next question is what about his war thing.”

“I think he is just trying to survive being a cowboy. They didn’t give him any slack this summer, but I guess you already knew that from talking to some of the neighbors that have cattle down there. I think he’s grown up a lot, and he has a better attitude, especially about his home life.”

CJ lifted his old Stetson with one hand and slowly scratched his head with the other hand. “Well. You better go tell your mother the good news. She’s been worried about him.”

“We’ve all been worried about him.” John looked straight ahead and then turned to face CJ. “You, probably most of all.”

CJ pulled his hat low over his eyes. “Yeah. It’s been a long summer.”



After considerable discussion and planning, it was decided the entire family would take a couple of days and find the cattle herd and visit Teddy. If Reverend and Mrs. John Crezner were a little daunted by a camping trip to the reservation, they didn’t show it. Instead they entered into the preparations with zeal.

The girls had declared at the beginning they would be outriders. When Joanna asked what that meant, they rolled their eyes in disbelief.

“We’ll ride our horses, Mama. That way there’ll be more room in the buggy for you and Grandma.” Willow stopped stirring frosting as she gave her mother that information.

“How much room do you think we need, for heaven’s sake? We’re not that huge, and there are three rows of seats.” Joanna’s face was flushed from baking several cakes, which were now cooling on the table, waiting to be frosted.

“But Daddy said we could ride our horses,” Heather put in anxiously. “You’ll let us, won’t you? Pul-leeze?”

Joanna fanned herself briskly and shrugged. “I’m sure it doesn’t matter to me. My concern is to get the food ready and packed.”

The first weekend in September found the loaded buggy along with three outriders start up the hill from the homestead in the early morning dawn.

CJ gently slapped the lines across the backs of his team and for several seconds allowed himself the pleasure of watching his four bays flick their ears and pull with one accord.

“I’m not an expert on horses, but this team seems to be the best you’ve ever had.” CJ’s father was watching his son’s face with amusement.

CJ grinned sheepishly. “I sort of imagine this could be my last great team. The boys are getting yancy to buy a car. Progress and all

that sort of stuff, and I suppose once we get the hang of the noisy things, we won't want to go back to team and buggies."

"It's a lot faster. Charlotte and I talked about getting one, but then one of our friends wrecked his, and he broke his arm, so we thought maybe we'd stick with walking. I don't know if I told you, but I sold our team and buggy."

CJ wasn't surprised. His parents were frugal, and horses would be an unneeded expense on their limited income.

Without hurrying, they still were able to cross the White River and continue quite a ways onto the reservation land of the Oglala Sioux and the land of Red Cloud. Rolling grassland and streams from shallow springs dotted the wide expanse of prairie that was buffeted by badland buttes.

John had ridden on ahead of them, and just as the sun was beginning to find its rest in the western sky, three riders could be seen trotting toward them. CJ recognized John's relaxed posture in the saddle but couldn't make out the other two riders until they were quite close.

He heard Joanna gasp from behind him. "Is that Teddy?" The middle rider sat tall in the saddle and had a smattering of reddish whisker scattered across his face. His hair was over his worn collar, and his general appearance made him seem lean and hungry.

"White Man must be lost." His old friend Joker pulled up alongside the stopped buggy and looked everyone over with laconic eyes before giving CJ a brief smile that revealed chipped front teeth.

“Joker! Good to see you.” CJ reached across the wheel to shake hands and knew it would be a bone-breaking grip from his Indian friend.

Joanna didn’t wait to be helped out of the buggy. Her feet hadn’t touched the ground before Teddy swung out of the saddle and picked her up to give her a bear hug.

“I brought all your favorites!” She gasped as she regained her breath. “My goodness, you’ve grown!”

By now CJ was standing beside her, and he reached out to shake his youngest son’s hand. “Good to see you, Ted!”

Teddy ducked his head and couldn’t meet CJ’s steady gaze. “Hey, Dad. Yeah, good to see you too.” His handshake was firmer than CJ expected.

There was a general commotion as everyone wanted to greet the young herder, and as the talk and laughter bubbled and rose, CJ turned to find Joker. The Indian had gotten off his horse and was rolling a Bull Durum cigarette and surveying the mildly chaotic scene with an impassive gaze.

“Did the cattle summer good?”

Joker nodded.

CJ spoke softly. “And did my boy summer good?”

Joker looked past CJ to where the family was standing. “He come knowing everything. Now he not know so much. He caused a lot of fights. Many times he rode with black eye and sore body. Hard summer for that boy, but he learned a lot. Teddy isn’t the fighter his daddy is.”

CJ scowled. “Do I want to know what that means?”

Joker inhaled on his cigarette and blew a vapor of smoke skyward. “No.”



There was a long and somewhat heated conversation between CJ and Joanna that evening on whether or not Teddy should return home with them. CJ thought he should come home with the herd in late September, and Joanna was adamant he come home now and start the fall school term on time.

They finally took the matter to the herd boss, who was also their neighbor. He surprised them by suggesting they ask Teddy what he wanted to do. Teddy somewhat reluctantly thought he should stay and finish his job. He said he could catch up on his classes with extra studying. And having said that, he ducked his head and used the toe of his boot to scuff the dirt around.

“I guess I’m...I’m just sorta glad I can come home this fall. I wouldn’t be able to if I was in the army.”

“Well. We are very glad that you are coming home, Teddy. We’ve missed you this summer.” CJ reached out and clasped his youngest son’s shoulder and noted again how thin he was.

There were several other things he noticed around the camp the next couple of days. As one of the youngest riders there, Teddy had a myriad of chores that he seemed quite capable of handling. He also was the last in line for chow time. He was quiet and respectful and took a lot of kidding from the older riders. But CJ noticed they watched out for him in their own rough way.

“He will have a lot of stories to tell us this winter,” CJ told Joanna when they were alone again. “I’m so grateful to God that He answered our prayers. This has been one long hard summer. I really didn’t know in June when he left if we’d see him again.”

Joanna briefly leaned against him. “Sometimes when I was praying for God’s Will for Teddy, I wanted to sit down and bawl. Our boy needed a lesson, but I was afraid we might have chased him away rather than teach him what he needed to know.”

She reached up and patted CJ’s whiskered cheek. “I still think he should come on home with us.” Suddenly she pulled away and squared her shoulders. “But I had a feeling my men would be stubborn as mules about it, so I brought him warm clothes in case he stayed longer. We have had snow in late September, you know.”

CJ watched her walk away with purposeful steps. He grinned as he caught Joker’s amused glance.

Joker made a sweeping motion with his hands. “Out! Out! Out!” he said, with his strange noise that was supposed to be laughter.

“She’s still feisty, my friend,” CJ said as he walked toward Joker. “Just like the day you surprised her in her house while she was sweeping, and she ordered you out.”

“Many moons ago,” Joker said. “Many moons ago. We’re getting old, CJ. My boy left for war. My woman left to go back to her people on the Cheyenne. And Little Sparrow left to be with your God.” He shook his head. “Time not kind to me.”

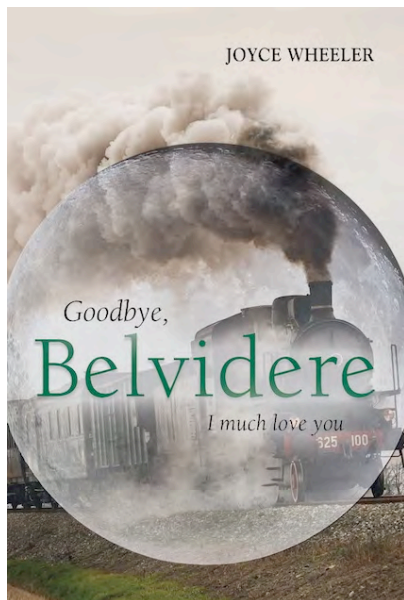
CJ studied his friend closely. Finally he touched the other’s arm and said, “When everyone else leaves us, Joker, we still have God. He

never leaves, He's always there, and He's always waiting for you. I know that by experience."

Joker's face was impassive. "But I don't know if I like Him hanging around. Maybe He see too much."

CJ smiled. "Count on it, He sees everything. He still loves us and is still waiting."

Joker flashed a rare smile. "You should have been a preacher."



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