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## Historical Fiction Manuscript as a Master's Project

Audrey Deppe

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1989

Approved by the Department of the Department of the Department  
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Requirements for the Master of Arts in Education degree

HISTORICAL FICTION MANUSCRIPT  
AS A  
MASTER'S PROJECT

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BY  
AUDREY DEPPE



Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Master of Arts in Education degree  
Lindenwood College  
May, 1989

Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Education,  
Lindenwood College in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Master of Arts in Education degree.

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Advisor

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Reader

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## CHAPTER ONE

## Justification for writing historical fiction

This manuscript is a historical junior novel based on events in the lives of a family during the early years of the Civil War. The story should have appeal for young readers between ten and fourteen years old.

"That the future may learn from the past", is the slogan carried on official publications of Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia. This spirit, committed to perpetuating a deepened awareness of what has gone before, belongs not only to Mr. Rockefeller and others who have created such living history "museums", but to writers of historical fiction. This genre goes a step beyond physical restoration of buildings and gardens, shops and farms. It recreates the essence of the lives of real people by transporting the reader back in time via imagination inspired by recorded history.

History is people---not dry facts, dates, and names. Children relate to people. Lockhead (1969) writes:

The question of what heroes and heroines and the common people of history were like, especially when young, of what they wore and what they ate, how they talked

and what games they played--- all that must always interest modern children of any intelligence and curiosity.(p.243)

There is some concern among educators, librarians, and even writers of historical fiction that such stories have been losing favor with young readers (Trease, 1977). A recent British survey seems to bear this out (Taylor, 1982). Young readers between 10 and 14 years old indicated on a survey questionnaire listing books of various kind and quality their favorite stories. Modern adventure stories and mysteries ranked highest, with historical fiction near the bottom. Trease (1977) observes that many young people regard historical thinking, and historical fiction in particular, as irrelevant to modern life. He answers the disenchanted with this: "Are such stories relevant? Let another schoolgirl, writing to me from the Pacific coast, have the last word: 'The setting of Message to Handrian is old, but the story relates to battles of today'." (Trease, 1977, p. 28).

Mary Woodruff, (1984), believes that children who are nine to eleven years old find history difficult to comprehend because so much of their conceptual ability is

tied to the present. Concepts of time, both past and future can be developed as each child is exposed to a variety of experiences through the reading of historical fiction. She has developed follow-up activities to reinforce these experiences. She believes that historical fiction offers children a way to relate experiences of characters in the stories to similar ones of their own---"a way to take the facts and chronology of history and integrate them into concrete schemata already assimilated." (p.3)

Teachers of older readers in secondary history classes can use historical literature to vitalize their lessons (Brown and Abel, 1982). Learning activities involving historical literature can provide a broader context than sterile facts. Students gain insights about food, clothes, housing, habits, values, and attitudes of a given period, allowing them to visualize an era. Adolescents can react to the circumstances which the characters experience and can empathize with them. Students can compare their own values with those of the society about which they are reading.

Well authenticated, well written fiction offers children a reflection of attitudes and ways of life of an earlier day. While filling in for them ordinary details of day to day

living, these stories give young readers a feeling of orientation in time and place (Frank, 1969)

Living an adventure in the past vicariously, witnessing historical events, meeting historical characters, and assimilating the flavor for an era can deepen and broaden a child's experiences. (Georgiou, 1969)

Historical fiction that involves characters who come alive and deal with universal human dilemmas against a backdrop of times past can help young readers see their own lives in clear perspective. Jacobs(1961) expresses this thought quite eloquently, "For a child, through fiction, to feel his place in the great sweep of human destiny, and to link it with others now gone is a big, big experience, one that both enlightens and matures the beholder"(p.192).

## CHAPTER TWO

## A Review of the Literature

Focus and Coverage in Fiction  
for  
Middle Grades

Historical fiction for the middle grades most frequently focuses on the familiar territory of our own country's past, although there are many notable works set in other time periods and other locations such as the middle ages and early England. The themes in many of these books are those dealing with courage and problem solving. (Sutherland and Arbuthnot 1977)

One book set in early England is Marguerite de Angeli's, The Door in The Wall. Set in the thirteenth century, the story tells of the crippled but strong-willed Robin and his friendship with Brother Luke. Brother Luke and the other monks at the hospice teach Robin about books and a great deal about courage. The situations in this book are frequently of great interest to children. (Sutherland and Arbuthnot, 1977)

Children in the middle grades are beginning to acquire some sense of the past. Historical fiction can stimulate their lively curiosity, leading them to conjecture about people of

other times, while satisfying their appreciation of action. However, middle-grade readers still have a confused sense of the past. They find gas lights and horse-and-buggy travel as mystifying as candlelight and canal boats. Periods of American colonization are more picturesque than more recent periods of history. Laura Ingalls Wilder, with her Little House Books, helped to bring the humdrum struggles of frontier life into focus and make it come alive for young readers. Her books "grow up" with the reader to give children a sense of continuity and progress. The resourcefulness of the Ingalls family, the descriptions of homey sights, sounds, and aromas, the family's warm relationships, and the ongoing family traditions bring to young readers a sense of comfort and security. (Sutherland and Arbuthnot, 1977) Family struggles with the frontier environment are met with courage and conviction. The entire series projects values from which children can draw conclusions for their own lives.

Jean Fritz is another writer whose books can help children identify with earlier times. One of her earlier books, The Cabin Faced West (1958), treats the problems of childhood loneliness and making adjustments. Lonely Ann Hamilton misses family and friends back east, but finds

special meaning in simple surprises such as when her mother took time to join her in a tea party in the woods, or when General George Washington stopped at their cabin one evening for dinner. She also learns about commitment when her father explains to her that they have faced the cabin toward the west so as not to look backward. (Huck and Young 1961)

The Courage of Sarah Noble (1954), by Alice Dalgliesh, is another example of a story about long ago whose theme is one of personal character. After eight-year-old Sarah travels with her father into the wilderness she must "keep up her courage" when her father must leave her with Tall John, a friendly Indian, while he travels to get the rest of their family. This story is both interesting and inspiring to young readers. (Sutherland and Arbuthnot 1977)

Marguerite de Angeli has also written historical books with settings in early America. Their themes are often about religious and regional minorities. Elin's Amerika (1941), describes the life of a Swedish settlement in Delaware in 1648. Thee Hannah (1940), is about a little Quaker girl helping a slave to escape. Huck and Young (1961) write this about her, "No matter what period or place Marguerite de Angeli describes, she makes history live for her readers."

(p.223)

Focus and Coverage in Fiction  
for  
Upper Grades

Readers in upper grades can comprehend the complexities of social movements and relationships that existed in a range of time periods just as they do today. They can move from one cultural pattern to another. They can understand divided allegiance, comprehend the implications that past events have for the present, and enjoy the rich tapestry of intricate patterns of action in unfamiliar settings (Sutherland and Arbuthnot, 1977).

Novels That Focus on War Settings,  
Specifically Civil War

In many historical novels for older children and young adults, war is part of the setting. Moral themes find their way into stories along with others that have already been mentioned. War brings about changes, not just political and economical changes, but changes in the soul and moral fiber of those whose lives it touches either directly or indirectly. Children have to grow up very quickly, and ordinary men and women may do things they would not

do under less difficult circumstances.

About war novels, Rudman (1976) says, "... an effective book dealing with war should present some indication of the difficulty of viewing any conflict in absolute terms. When only one side is right, the story becomes a piece of propaganda that is usually less powerful than its author intended" (p.114). She adds, "It is important for students to compare different accounts of battles, causes of war, and issues in order to begin to construct a balanced, informed view" (p.125).

One novel which must be included in any analysis of such works is Johnny Tremain (1943) written by Ester Forbes. Inspired by the author's research for her adult biography of Paul Revere, this story tells of a young silversmith's apprentice whose conceited, cocky attitudes lead to a tragic injury that cripples one hand and prevents him from working. Young Johnny's character is strengthened by the events that follow as he becomes involved in pre-revolutionary activities. This book is acclaimed as historic fiction at its best. Its message is one of fortitude and courage (Huck and Young 1961). Georgiou (1969) says that in this story young readers can identify not only with Johnny's personal problems, but with the

variety of historical characters while living through stirring moments of American history. Sutherland and Arbuthnot (1977) say that this book is no one-sided account. The British are presented as amazingly human in their forbearance, and the colonists' confusion and uncertainty are frighteningly real.

#### Analysis of Focus on the Civil War

Since the focus of this manuscript is concerned with the Civil War, the remaining analysis in this section concentrates on novels of that genre. The Civil War presented unique problems for young people of that day. Not only were they victims of the hardships that war places upon innocent civilians, they were faced, in many cases, with divided loyalties and allegiances that they found extremely difficult to sort out.

Two major award winning novels about the Civil War present viewpoints of both sides. In Harold Kieth's Rifles for Watie (1957) a Cherokee Indian, Watie Stand, and a young runaway from Kansas take part in both sides of the struggle. The evils of war, and the nobility of men, both Union and Confederate, are revealed to the young runaway.

The other book is Irene Hunt's Across Five Aprils (1964). This is a novel of a 10-year-old boy whose family is

torn by the war. Although he has no direct part in the fighting, he has to take on a man's role on the farm and the impact of the dissention in his family causes the reader to feel the strain the war had on the nation. Rudman (1976), says of this novel, " Irene Hunt's Across Five Aprils handles the rarely considered issue of what happens to the people who are not actively involved with the war, but who nevertheless suffer."(p.125) As this story progresses, there are discussions and arguments about the impending war and its causes. Arguments for and against are mounted on all sides of the issue. Slavery is considered to be only one issue; industrialization is considered to be a cause of problems also. The reflections of the older brother, Bill, who eventually join the South while another brother fights for the Union, help the reader to understand that what the history books tell us was the cause is not so clear-cut and simple after all. (Rudman,1976)

Another novel that is of special interest to this project because it focuses on the divided loyalty theme is William Steele's The Perilous Road (1958). The story portrays young Chris Babson who lives in Tennessee and is caught in the middle of divided loyalties. He discovers both decent and loathesome qualities in people on both sides of the war. His

father tells him, "Like I told you before, war is the worst thing that can happen to folks, and the reason is it makes most everybody do things they shouldn't." (p.188-189).

Peter Burchard has written and illustrated three Civil War novels. Two of them, Rat Hall (1971), and North by Night (1971) are both exciting novels about Yankee prisoners escaping from Confederate prisons. North by Night is based on the war experiences of Mrs. Peter Burchard's grandfather. The third is Jed (1962), a story about a 16-year-old Yankee soldier who finds a small boy who has been hurt and takes him back to his Confederate family. As in all his writing of historical fiction, Burchard lets the ethical implications of the boy's conduct make their own impact on the reader. (Sutherland and Arbuthnot, 1977)

George and Red (1946-69) by Elizabeth Coatsworth is set in the area near Niagra Falls during the Civil War. Two boys, one the son of a southern sympathizer and the other the son of an abolitionist become caught in the middle of a great controversy. Both viewpoints of the war come into play in the episodes in this book.

Two books are of interest to this manuscript because of their focus on the displacement of people by a war that does not directly involve them. Trella Dick's The Island on

the Border (1963), is set on the peninsula of southern Missouri between the confederate states of Arkansas and Tennessee. The family in this story is alone while the father is away fighting for the Union and must hide from the Rebel forces patrolling their land. The other novel is First Crop by Gertrude Bell (1973). This story tells of fifteen-year-old Brose Patton who, after his father and uncle leave to fight on opposite sides of the war, struggles to work their small Missouri farm. He is just beginning to see promise in his first crop of corn when it is devastated by Union troops who have been ordered to burn out all property along the Kansas-Missouri border to free the area of Quantrill's raiders.

#### Approaches Used in Writing Historical Novels for Youth

There are several common threads which run through literature written about approaches to writing juvenile historical fiction. Many are the same as for any kind of fiction, while others are somewhat unique to historical fiction.

### A Good Story

The story must be a good one that will captivate young readers' minds. Sutherland and Arbutnot (1977) say that historical fiction aims to tell a story set in a past time, a time about which most of the story's readers have little or no knowledge.

### Accuracy

Just as modern fiction for children is required to depict life honestly and accurately, so it is with historical fiction. Accuracy is even more important with historical fiction. Children must rely on the author's accuracy since they bring to historical fiction little or no knowledge of particular periods of history. (Sutherland and Arbutnot, 1977). Georgiou (1969) stresses that historical stories for young readers must have graphic and authentic details of time, place, and social order to provide a truthful picture of history. These details are only a backdrop however. They serve to bring to the reader a feel for the period, a sense of "being there". The writer must convey a sense of place and time, striking a careful balance between spending too much time building setting and bewildering the audience if not enough background is presented. Plot

The story's plot is another special element of historical

fiction that requires a special approach. The plot is a direct outgrowth of the period described. Georgiou (1969) points out that in well written historical fiction, major facts of the times in which the story is set are adhered to scrupulously in order that the story will ring true. However, minor details may be imaginative creations woven through the facts of history. These two elements of the story's plot fit together naturally to make cold facts come alive and leave an impression of the historical period. Sutherland and Arbuthnot (1977) make another point about the plot of historical fiction. They say that one test of historical fiction is that the story is one that could have taken place at no other time in history. The social conditions of the times must have impact on the characters. The story could not just as well be happening today.

#### Current Point of View

#### Characters

Characters in historical novels must be receive special treatment. They must reflect the spirit of the times and still convey universal human feelings. Many of the characters in these stories take on heroic proportions and still remain convincing as human beings (Georgiou, 1969). The conversatons of characters must seem natural. The writer must use dialect and language of the times carefully

and still not use language that is so contemporary that the mood of the story is destroyed. (Sutherland and Arbuthnot, 1977)

### Important

### Theme is

Possibly the most single differentiating element of historical stories is theme. The theme of a historical novel carries the broad central idea that is basic to human nature. It is what gives the young reader a sense of the significance of the story. Themes may stress dignity and worth of a person. Causes in support of civil rights, abolition, triumph over handicap, tyranny, or injustice are among the broad themes stressed in historical stories. (Georgiou, 1969). Georgiou uses the theme in Johnny Tremain as an example of how themes such as personal worth run concurrently with the broader theme of a story.

### Current Point of View

Sutherland and Arbuthnot (1977) point out another fact of which successful historical fiction writers must remain aware. Historical point of view changes with time. Treatment of characters and fact is affected by the way they are viewed in the period in which the author is writing. The writer should understand that treatment of women, blacks, and Native Americans, for example, have

changed drastically in the past two decades.

The inspiration and background for the story came from a brief diary written by the subject's great-grandfather describing events in his own childhood and his family's flight from Lithuania after their father left to join the Union Army. A fictionalized account of their persecution by neighbors, search for their father after being driven from their home, and eventual flight as refugee orphans is set against the background of larger events during the early war years.

Although the author's initial goal was to tell a story about real people who lived through a part of history, other themes emerge. The struggles of a twelve-year-old attempting to assume adult responsibilities in his father's absence, while confused and puzzled by the perplexity of situations created by adults, is not unfamiliar to today's young readers. Family issues, growing up, the threat and fear of war, are all themes with which adolescents and even pre-adolescent readers can identify. This manuscript is aimed toward an audience of older children and young

## CHAPTER THREE

## About the Manuscript

How the Manuscript is Unique

The inspiration and background for the story came from a brief diary written by the author's great-grandfather describing events in his own childhood and his family's flight from Alabama after their father left to join the Union Army. A fictionalized account of their persecution by neighbors, search for their father after being driven from their home, and eventual plight as refugee orphans is set against the background of larger events during the early war years.

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adults.

This manuscript is different from most junior novels written about the Civil War because of its focus on Unionist refugees and the effects of their displacement on the course of their lives. The review of related literature revealed no works which have had quite this same approach or coverage.

Beyond the research of documented history on the subject, this novel draws from a personal diary, oral history, and local newspapers. Although other novels have used such resources, the basis for the characters is personally unique to the author.

#### Outline of Manuscript

Title: Stars to Steer By

A. Chapter One: Spring of 1962

1. Twelve-year-old Jake Richards' family attempts to remain neutral as their state of Alabama becomes increasingly embroiled in the Civil War.

2. Father, along with others, has stated his position in favor of preserving the Union.

3. Because of a conscription act being enforced by the State of Alabama, Jake's father

2. and uncle decide to find a way to enlist in the Union Army.

#### B. Chapter Two: The plan.

1. Union sympathizers in the community meet to make plans for enlistment in the Union Army.
2. Confederate soldiers arrive to arrest those avoiding conscription.

#### C. Chapter Three: Hiding out.

1. Jake's father and uncle, and another Unionist hide in a cave near the family home waiting to join the Union Army.
2. The farm is watched by suspicious members of the "Home Guard".
3. Instructions arrive from friends in the north, and Jake's father and uncle leave to enlist.

#### D. Chapter Four: Jake's family carries on.

1. Neighbors begin to harass the family.

2. Mother and children struggle to care for their crops, expecting Father to return in the fall "when the war is over".

E. Chapter Five: The family becomes victims of war.

1. They are terrorized and their crops are burned.
2. Leaving their livestock with friendly neighbors, the mother and four children set out northward with their wagonload of belongings.

F. Chapter Six: The road north.

1. They are joined with other Unionist refugees fleeing harassment and persecution.
2. As the families travel northward in search of Union lines, their wagon and belongings are confiscated by Confederate Troops.

G. Chapter Seven: Rescue.

1. The stranded refugees send two young women ahead to locate Union lines and

bring help.

2. Part of Jake's father's unit comes to rescue their party and take them to a small town outside Corinth Mississippi.
3. Jake's father is ill and in a field hospital, but is given leave and sent with his family to stay in Union occupied Corinth.

#### H. Chapter Eight: Corinth.

1. Jake's father recuperates.
2. The family lives in quarters provided by the army.
3. After being sent back to duty, Jake's father suffers a relapse and dies.
4. Jake's mother suffers an emotional breakdown and Jake and his sister must look after her and their two little brothers.

#### I. Chapter Nine: Refugees again.

1. Because Jake's mother is unable to cope with their circumstances, the family is sent by train to a refugee camp in

Jackson, Mississippi.

2. At the refugee camp, they find old friends, the slave boy Daniel and his mother.
3. Daniel's mother nurses Jake's mother back to health.

J. Chapter Ten: Refugee life in Jackson.

1. Jake and his sister and brother attend refugee school.
2. Jake makes friends with a soldier in the soldiers' camp.
3. Word arrives that Uncle Ben had died while on patrol back in Alabama.

K. Chapter Eleven: Northward again.

1. Ma is eager to leave the crowded refugee camp, so they join the hundreds being sent by train to Memphis.
2. Once in Memphis, they fail to locate friends they expected to find there, so they are shuffled onto a riverboat full of refugees headed for Cairo, Illinois.
3. Completely at the mercy of the refugee

movement, the family is herded onto a boxcar headed for Central Illinois.

L. Chapter Twelve: The last refugee camp.

1. This time things are better.
2. Things are better too late---Mother and Baby Brother die from the hard trip.
3. Jake and his sister and younger brother are offered a home on a nearby home by an older couple who work with the refugees who are flooding their county.
4. The orphaned refugee children have a and a new life.

## STARS TO STEER BY

by  
Audrey Deppe

## CHAPTER ONE

Jake turned over on the cornhusk mattress and rubbed his eyes. An uneasy feeling gnawed at him through his morning hunger pangs. What was it?

He stared at the faint square of early morning light showing through the open cabin window above his head, and tried to clear his mind by watching a spider balance along the window sill. Something had been troubling him before he fell asleep last night.

Across the loft, James and Mandy were sleeping in their bunks like two kittens curled up among the patchwork quilts.

At little James' feet, the old hound dog Gus was stretched out, chasing rabbits in his sleep.

Jake rolled out of the big double bed he shared with his uncle Ben, stood up and stretched to his full height. Ben's side of the bed was already empty. Jake pulled on his homespun breeches, tucked in his shirttail, and tied the rawhide string that held up the slightly-too-big

pants. He was small for his age, but his wiry build and early summer tan kept him from looking frail. His shiny brown hair usually looked ruffled no matter how many times Ma made him brush it.

Outside, their rooster Bartholomew crowed his greeting to a new day. Jake reached over and shook Mandy gently. She sat up, and without a word, climbed down from her bunk above James' bed.

Jake stood by the window staring thoughtfully down at the yard below. Wrapping herself in her favorite crazy quilt against the morning chill, Mandy joined him to see what was so interesting. The only movement in the farmyard below was Pa's tall lean form carrying milk pails toward the springhouse. He was whistling some vague tune as he disappeared down the path leading to the creek. "Caw, Caw". A crow, startled by the slamming of the springhouse door, rose from his treetop perch along the ridge.

Jake watched uncle Ben lead Pa's riding mare and Ben's new chestnut stallion to the pasture and felt a pang of jealousy. Ben had worked all year for Mr. Johnson, to earn enough money to buy the wonderful horse. Jake wished silently that he could be eighteen like Ben.

Jake and Mandy remained at the window, side by side, taking in the sights and sounds of the beautiful June morning.

The two children could have passed for twins with their matching brown hair, eager green eyes and long dark lashes. As he glanced sideways at Mandy, Jake felt his growing irritation at their closeness in size. He was nearly twelve and she was only ten. Was that what was bothering him this morning? He didn't think so. Hadn't Pa told him just the other day that he shouldn't worry, "Some day you'll shoot past her like a sky rocket."

That was it! Sky rocket! Sky rockets were used in war. Now Jake knew why he felt uneasy. The war was coming closer. At first he had thought of it as an exciting adventure, like the stories his teacher, Mr. Riley, told them in history lessons at school. But lately, things had been happening that frightened him.

Suddenly his stomach growled so loudly that Mandy squealed with laughter. Jake's face turned red and he yanked one of her pigtails. "C'mon, get dressed," he snapped, "Ma needs help."

"Don't you hurry ME, Jake Richards," sassed Mandy, "I gotta fix my hair and get little James dressed."

And she began unbraiding her pigtails with obvious deliberation.

Jake shrugged and lowered himself through the square opening in the loft floor. His bare feet carried him silently down the pegs that formed a ladder along the inside of the cabin wall.

He jumped from the bottom peg and landed catlike in the large room that served as kitchen, parlor, workshop, and parents' bedroom.

The wall opposite the only door was the fireplace wall built entirely of stone. The large hearth held the necessary kettle rack and spit on which Ma prepared all their meals. Copper kettles of various sizes hung on hooks to either side of the fireplace, and Pa's Musket hung over the mantle. The rest of the room was built of logs. It was sparsely furnished with items Ma had lovingly watched over during the familys' move to Alabama from North Carolina not long after Jake was born. Among her most prized possessions was a heavy wooded cupboard filled with lovely china that her great-great-grandmother had brought from England before the War for Independence.

Ma was seated on the edge of the bed, rocking Baby Will's cradle with her foot while she put up her hair.

Her face was still young, not tired and worn like some of the women her age that Jake had seen at Johnson's store or at church.

"Mornin' Jake," called Ma cheerily, securing the final comb holding the roll of auburn hair at the back of her neck.

"Mornin' Ma," replied Jake sleepily. "I'm hungry."

"You need to fetch some water before we can have breakfast, and you'll need to bring some milk and butter from the spring house too." Ma urged as she stood up to tie a calico apron over her faded blue dress.

Jake took the wooden bucket from its peg and sauntered through the open cabin door and down the path toward the spring house.

Their log cabin was built on the banks of a creek which ran along the bottom of a steep limestone bluff. The springhouse was built of the same stone and was situated a few yards upstream from their cabin, on the opposite bank. The tiny structure's three thick limestone walls surrounded crag in the bluff where clear spring water trickled steadily from between the layers of rock and into a trough where milk was cooled.

Jake crossed the footbridge built across to the doorway. With considerable struggle, he opened the heavy plank door and entered the little house's dark cool cavern. Jake placed the bucket under the stream of water. While he waited for the bucket to fill with spring water, Jake had time to think about the whole event that had troubled him since yesterday.

The commotion begun during church meeting just after the sermon. Jake could still hear the preacher's clear strong voice ringing in his memory.

"Our beloved Alabama has torn itself from the very Union that our forefathers struggled to create. Now we are being consumed by this terrible war between men who were once citizens of the same great nation, founded to establish freedom for ALL people." The young Methodist minister gestured broadly toward the section of slave pews partitioned off at the rear of the church.

A flutter of whispers drifted over the congregation, while the Reverend Bob Watkins continued to speak. "The states which seceded last year and formed this new Confederacy are waging war against the Union. And now, men of conscience, who neither own slaves nor wanted secession from the Union, are

being conscripted to fight for a cause they do not hold."

Jake nudged Ben to ask what 'conscripted' meant, but Ben just frowned and shook his head, motioning for Jake to be silent. The slender pastor had adjusted his spectacles and gazed intently at the congregation. His eyes scanned the pews filled with farm families wearing drab homespun and faded calico, finally focusing on the face of a rotund man, conspicuously garbed in a splendidly tailored velvet waistcoat. The pastor's gaze remained fixed on the wealthy man and his voice lowered with intense conviction as he spoke.

"If slaveowners who own more than twenty slaves are exempt from serving in the Confederate Army, then why must ordinary farmers, who do not own slaves, be forced to defend an institution in which they do not believe, and fight under a flag toward which they feel no allegiance?"

The man's already angry face and bald head turned red with fury. He fidgeted with the beaver hat resting on his knee and wiped his brow with a linen kerchief from the pocket of his elegant brocade vest.

Pastor Bob Watkins brushed away the shock of straight brown hair that always fell down over his eyes,

leaned forward

over the pulpit, and continued his plea.

"We ask no more of the leaders of the Confederacy than to allow us to make our own decisions. This new government claims to want each state to make its own choices. That is all that we ask---to choose not to bear arms against the flag of our fathers. We have sought neutrality, and now we are being forced to the side we would not choose."

The pastor called for prayer, and all heads bowed while he prayed for God to heal their land...for President Lincoln and Mr. Davis to find a way to end all the killing and bring the nation together again. A few voices had called out, "Amen". Jake wanted to peek to see the faces of those who agreed with the pastor, but he had been in trouble for "gawkin' around at prayer time" too many times before.

After service, while the people filed out of the church and down the steps toward their wagons, the mumbling became a hum of angry voices. Some folks, including Ma and Pa and the Johnsons, stopped to shake Pastor Watkins hand. Others talked angrily among themselves as they hurried toward their wagons and

buggies waiting under the grove beside the church.

By the time Jake's family reached the grove, Mr. Johnson and Col. Devereaux, the mill owner, were standing near the wagons arguing. A red-faced Col. Devereaux was shouting, "That tory preacher better mind his tongue!"

Sadie Devereaux tried to quietly urge her husband toward their buggy, but he ignored her and continued, "He's got his nerve, talking like that after I donated this land and paid for most of this fine church building. He's just like all those abolitionists with their criticism of what they call our 'peculiar institution'. They make us look like monsters. Slaves built this land, and there's no way we can produce cotton for the whole world without them!"

The angry mill owner bellowed on, "My slaves were all born on my place, and three generations of the Devereaux family have treated them fairly. I know how to handle darkies, and what I do is not the business of some big government or any skinny little Tory preacher!" The Colonel shook a jeweled fist in Mr. Johnson's face as his anger mounted. "That little twirp had better watch out or he'll end up wearin' tar and feathers!"

Jake remembered watching the growing fury on Mr. Johnson's face while everyone listened. The two men

moved closer together, standing face to face like two tomcats quarreling in the moonlight. The tall lean store keeper grabbed the miller's overstuffed brocade vest, and with teeth clenched, Silas Johnson spoke softly but deliberately.

"How dare you threaten our pastor that way! He is speakin' the truth! No man has a right to own another human being! Men like you have gotten rich off of that 'peculiar institution' of slavery and from the sweat of plain farmers like Jim here who have to sell their corn to you for whatever you offer."

His memory echoed with Mr. Johnson's angry voice. "You're not in a very big hurry to fight in this war yourself, are you Colonel? Those thirty slaves and a fancy title in the home guard give you all the excuse you think you need to sit back and let the poor people do the dirty work!"

Mr. Devereaux became uncontrollably angry as he grabbed Mr. Johnson by the collar and shook him. "Why Johnson, you ungrateful fool! You wouldn't even HAVE a store if I hadn't let you build on that land before its all paid for!"

Pa tried to separate them, causing Mr. Devereaux

to turn on him.

"And you, Richards! " he snarled, "I know you're one of these unionists too! Just don't you forget that I loaned you the money for that pasture land you bought. That measly corn crop you put out last year just barely made the last payment.!"

Colonel Devereaux then turned to the group of men behind Pa and shouted, "You can't stay neutral now. You either gotta fight to defend the Confederacy or the army will come and get you. Without a reply, Pa quietly helped his family board their wagon, and drove slowly away from the angry Colonel Devereaux. Others had done the same, leaving Devereaux shouting after them. Mr Johnson had taken Mrs. Johnson by the arm and walked slowly away toward their store diagonally across the crossroads.

Jake's fear, already instilled by the miller's angry words, grew when Mr. Devereaux's overseer and some rough looking friends watching the fracas started shouting as the wagons rolled away.

"Oughta hang a few of these Tories!" yelled one of them.

"Send 'em up to ole Abe on a rail! " sneered another.

"I could show 'em their place!" Gridley the overseer growled, waving his bullwhip. "See how they like wearin' tar an' feathers if'n they don't like our uniform."

Their jeers and hoots rang in Jake's ears nearly all the way home. Remembering those hateful words made a chill run down Jake's spine. Just then Ma's voice called him from the direction of the cabin door. "Jaaaaake, Oh Jake!"

Jake jumped at the sound of his name! Startled back to the present, he looked down at the overflowing bucket and wondered how long he had been standing there.

He picked up the pail and struggled back uphill toward the cabin, trying his best to hurry and still not slosh too much water out of them.

When Jake entered the cabin, he smelled breakfast cooking. The aroma of the boiling coffee and the ham sizzling in the three-legged skillet over fireplace coals made him more hungry than he was when he awoke. His stomach growled again, but this time Mandy was too busy setting the table to hear it.

Ma was settling the baby into his cradle. Five-year-old James and the dog were tumbling around on the floor.

"Heavens, Jake, what took you so long? I'll never

get the grits cooked now. It's a good thing Mandy fried potatoes with the ham, or we wouldn't have much breakfast at all. Mandy can run down to the springhouse for the milk and butter while you go fetch Pa and Ben."

Mandy gave him one of her 'high and mighty' looks and flounced around the plank table as she finished placing a tin plate at each place. She picked up the milk pitcher and tossed him another smug look as she swept out the door.

Jake was considering tripping her when Pa bounded past her through the doorway. "Mornin' all," he drawled. "How's everybody doin' this fine day?"

Although Pa's cheerfulness threatened to spoil Jake's little feud with Mandy, Jake answered anyway, "Fine, Pa, I was just comin out to get you."

A squealing James tackled Pa's leg while Gus barked excitedly. Undaunted by so much admiration, Pa managed to settle himself at the table.

Pa winked at Ma as she miraculously produced some leftover cornbread to replace the absent grits. A cool pitcher of old Betsy's milk and a crock of sweet butter delivered proudly by Mandy completed the meal. Ben bounded into the cabin just in time. The Richard's family

held hands around the table while Pa asked the blessing and Jake silently searched his memory for where he might find a nice fat bullfrog to sneak into the water pitcher beside Mandy's bed.

Later that morning, Ben had been gone for about an hour. He rode his new stallion to the crossroads every day to work at Johnson's store. Jake had just finished feeding the chickens and was filling his arms with wood from the woodshed, when he heard a wagon rumbling up the lane from the main road. As the rig drew closer, he recognized Mr. Johnson's beautiful draft horses. Jake knew every horse in the county. In fact, Pa always said that Jake knew horses better than most grown men.

As Mr. Johnson's wagon drew closer, Jake could see that it was Ben at the reins, and beside him sat Mr. Johnson, a shotgun across his knees. Both of them looked solemn, but the way Mr. Johnson held the gun made him look even more grim.

As the rig bumped over the ruts in the lane, Jake dropped his wood and ran toward the barn where Pa was hitching the ox team to finish clearing the new pasture.

"Pa! Pa! Ben and Mr. Johnson's a comin!"

As the wagon rattled to a stop in front of the

cabin, Pa and Jake rushed out to meet it. Jake grabbed the bit of the lead mare and began to pat her nose to settle her, saying "Ho, Dolly, easy there Dolly." He stepped between the two horses, talking to each one and patting them. "Hey there Rosie, how're ya doin?"

As Jake paid little attention to the conversation of his elders until he noticed the urgency in their tone. Mr. Johnson's voice had a strange hoarse quality as he removed his hat to wipe his brow. He was talking about 'conscription' again and about Confederate Troops. Jake had been seeing soldiers for some time now as they passed through Johnson's crossroads. Some units were smartly outfitted in crisp gray onsaburg uniforms and mounted on handsome horses. They were the ones who had ordered Mr. Johnson to take down the Stars and Stripes which flew from the front of the store and replace it with the new Confederate flag. Other soldiers were rough-looking men in ruffled homespun. Their mounts looked hungry and poorly cared for. Pa had told him that these were part of the home guard just returning from their one year of duty.

Now Pa was saying, "It looks like there isn't much choice, is there, Silas? It's just that I don't know what to

do about---", his voice trailed off as he glanced anxiously in Jake's direction.

"Jake, you'd best get that wood in to your Ma. She's gonna need it to get her chores done." Pa called.

"Rats!" thought Jake, "Just when I was gonna find out what this is all about. Ben always gets in on all the good stuff. They think I'm just a kid."

It wasn't wise to argue with Pa, so Jake walked slowly back to the woodshed, straining to hear at least a word now and then. From inside the woodshed he could hear little except muffled voices and an occasional whinny from one of the horses.

Jake quickly piled a few small logs in his arms and took his time walking toward the house. His father and Mr. Johnson were standing facing each other, arms folded and bowed as if in prayer. Ben was still seated on the wagon seat, his legs hanging off the side of the seat as he listened intently to the conversation.

As Jake sauntered toward the cabin, he was so busy gawking at the men that he stumbled over the forgotten wood he had dropped earlier, sprawling on his belly and sending his new load of wood flying. After recovering his pride and brushing himself off, Jake looked

upon this mishap as a stroke of luck. Now he had an excuse to hang around a little longer, and his father was too preoccupied to notice him.

As the two men shifted positions occasionally, he caught phrases, like 'hide out till things cool off' and 'catch up with the Federals'. Jake's uneasiness mounted. He felt more and more confused as he tried to guess what it all meant and why everyone was being so secretive.

Jake saw Pa turn and look his way, so he hurried into the house with the wood.

Ma was standing at the front window watching her husband and the visitor. Jake knew that she couldn't have heard any more than he, but he sensed that she knew more about what was happening than he did. She was standing with her arms crossed, wrapped around herself as if hugging an invisible person, the way she did when she was worried. Come to think of it, he had noticed that same worried look on her face an awful lot lately. She always made some joke, or made up some silly thing to be worried about, but she hadn't fooled him.

As Jake filled the woodbox, he watched her. She kept walking to the table where she was mixing corn bread, stirring the batter a little while, walking back to the

window to stare anxiously at the men, and then back to the table to give the batter a few more licks with the wooden spoon.

"Ma," "Why are you watchin' Pa and Mr. Johnson?" Jake asked when Ma noticed him watching her. "Is there somethin' wrong?"

Ma began beating the batter vigorously. "I was just wonderin' Silas and Ben were goin to stay to lunch." Ma said quickly and began singing a lively hymn. Lunch wouldn't be ready for hours. Jake could tell that Ma just didn't want to discuss what had everyone so concerned.

By the time Jake could get back outside to try to hear more, the wagon was circling and heading back toward town. The sun was just peeking over the top of the bluff, so Jake figured it was time for Mr. Johnson to open the store and for Ben to be getting to work.

As Jake took the rest of the wood into the cabin, Pa strode thoughtfully back to the harness shed attached to the barn. Ma was putting the iron skillet full of corn bread batter over the coals to bake, and Mandy, seemingly oblivious to the whole incident, was rocking Baby Will while James played in the yard trying to persuade a disinterested Gus to be his horse.

Confused and worried, Jake went back outdoors and sat down on the porch. Something was wrong! So wrong that Pa didn't want him and Mandy to know about it.

Ben knew what was going on. It had something to do with secession and the war, but that seemed to be all Jake knew for sure. What was that new word? Conscription.

Jake didn't know anything about it. He'd ask tonight at supper. Secession was a puzzle to him too. He sometimes thought growups acted worse than little children. If some governor doesn't like what the president does or says, then instead of talking sense with each other, the governor just takes his state and joins sides with some other governors who are mad too. It sounded just like the boys at school playing marbles.

The war wasn't a secret. It had been going on for almost a year now. They had heard about battles in places like Fort Sumter, Bull Run, and Fort Donelson. All the battles seemed to be in such far away places. Pa had said that he wanted to stay neutral. Unless the fighting came to their land, he aimed to work his fields and tend his crops, and "let those fools fight it out".

They all knew that the war was getting closer. Just a few weeks ago some rich folks from Huntsville in a fancy

toward springhouse to get the rich cream Pa had separated from this morning's milking. As she skipped away, Mandy called over her shoulder, " You'd better get movin'!"

Mandy's bossiness got under Jake's skin. What did she know anyway! Something big was brewing, and all she worried about was who did the most work!

As Jake stood up, he yanked his crumpled hat from the pocket of his baggy pants and crammed it on his head. The old tomcat, Jehosaphat, preening himself on the stoop next to Jake, made a tempting target for an angry jab with Jake's big toe. The startled cat bristled, looked around in bewilderment, and took refuge under the lilac bush.

Jake grumpily sauntered around behind the cabin to the fenced-in garden. "Shoo!" Jake shouted to the hens scratching around the gate. He latched himself inside the enclosure. "That Mandy thinks she's the boss around here," Jake muttered to himself. She gets all the easy jobs and I have all the hard ones." The hoe stood waiting against a fencepost, and Jake halfheartedly carried it to the row of polebeans at the far end of the patch. When he began hoeing, he soon discovered that hacking at the moist reddish brown earth gave vent to his frustration with Mandy and the events of the morning.

carriage had stopped at the crossroads. They were traveling with what appeared to be everything they owned loaded on eight wagons. The wagons, driven by negro slaves, were loaded with fancy furniture, a piano, wardrobe trunks, barrels of flour and sugar, and even coops full of chickens and turkeys. Behind the wagons were more slaves riding thoroughbred horses with goats and ponies tethered behind the horses. Mr. Johnson had told Ben that the lady in the carriage said she was the wife of a Confederate officer and had fled the city when her husband sent word to her that a column of Federal troops was seen moving in the direction of Huntsville.

Jake was wondering what it must be like to have to pack up and leave your home, when Mandy bustled through the cabin doorway lugging a large wooden butter churn. She immediately began fussing at Jake.

"Jake! Ma thinks you're out back weedin' the garden. I gotta make the butter and shell the peas, and you sit here mopin'. You'll be beggin' me to help you finish your weedin' after lunch 'cause you won't have it done in time to help Pa with the evenin' chores." Mandy dragged the churn out to the shade of the apple tree and sat it next to the bench. She took off down the path

Jake worked for a while under the increasingly warm morning sun, the scratch of his hoe keeping an uneven rhythm against the hum of bees in the nearby blossoming plum tree. Occasionally a Jenny wren would warble her fluid song as she tended her nest among the frothy white branches.

Jake began to wonder how long it would be before Ma would be calling them in for lunch. Halfway through the potato patch, he stopped working, wiped his forehead on his sleeve, and surveyed the straight green rows yet to be hoed.

"A cold drink from the spring would taste mighty good", Jake said aloud to himself. He dropped the hoe between the rows of potatoes, left the garden and walked to the creek. Sliding down its bank, he followed the edge of the stream toward the little stone house against the bluff.

When Jake reached the cedar footbridge, he climbed its supports, opened the wood plank door and entered the small room. The sweet aroma of the milk permeated the cool dimness. Small openings in the stone walls just under the roofline allowed air to circulate, but let in little light. Icy springwater trickled into a wooden trough containing stoneware jars of fresh milk. Jake reached to the shelf

above the water trough, and found a tin cup among the baskets of eggs and crockery bowls containing butter and cheese. As he drank the refreshing water, Jake heard footsteps in the gravel below the footbridge.

Thinking Mandy had come to hound him, Jake dipped the tin cup into the trough, stepped through the doorway, and flung the cold water over the side of the bridge toward the footsteps.

There was a shriek from below. Jake peered over the side of the bridge floor and came face to face with Daniel, the slave boy from the Devereaux place.

"Hey, Dan, I'm sorry! I thought you was Mandy." Jake extended a hand toward the brown one reaching upward and gave Daniel a lift onto the bridge.

"Tha's alright, Jake. Ah ain't gwine melt. Yo jes skeered de daylight's outa me", grinned Daniel.

The boys sat on the bridge with their bare feet dangling over the side. They had been friends for as long as either could remember, fishing and exploring the woods and hillsides along the creek. Their favorite place was a 'secret' cave hidden behind a thick clump of scrubby cedar trees growing at the base of the bluff about twenty yards upstream from the springhouse. As far as Jake new, his

family and Daniel were the only ones who knew it was there. There were caves similar this one scattered all over the hill country of Alabama, but this one had something special... a rear passage, wide enough for a man to walk upright, that emerged from a large vertical crack in the bluff immediately behind the springhouse. Because the springhouse was built around the entire opening, it provided a perfect secret passageway for the imaginary pirate adventures.

"Where you been, Dan?" asked Jake. "I been lookin fer ya ever day since school let out. We never see each other while school's a goin'. It ain't fair that the Colonel don't allow his slaves to go to school." Jake's throat tightened at the very mention of the pompous landlord.

"Massa don't let us go nowhere no more," answered Daniel. "He say he's 'fraid we gonna run off lak dey's doin' some places back in Virginny"

Daniel's eyes grew wide as he talked. "He done tol Mistah Gridley ta keep an extry sharp eye on all o' us."

"Donno whar we'd go," puzzled Daniel. "Mammy say we ain' gonna leave de onlyest home we ever knowed, 'specially us bein' house niggers and allus havin' it so good. Dat mean ole Mistah Gridley never had no say over us

house niggers."

Daniel took a handful of pebbles from his pocket and began tossing them one by one into the water below as he continued to talk. "Miz Devereaux, she allus had de say 'bout us. Ony now de Colonel say iffen he ketch us leavin' his proppity, he gonna han' us over ta Gridley." Daniel shuddered and threw his entire handful of pebbles as far as he could throw them.

"Golly, Dan, then you oughtn't be here! The property line follows the ridge all the way to the river. You don't want to git a whippin' with Mr. Gridley's bullwhip." Jake winced at the thought, but Daniel seem unconcerned.

"Neva yo mind Jake. I's not a worryin'. Dat ole scounrel, he lef las' night fo up ta Decatur, gittin' supplies offa de railroad train das s'pose ta be comin in. He ain' gonna be back 'til after dark t'morra night. Y'wanna play 'pirate treasure' in the cave?"

"I gotta finish my weedin' first." answered Jake regretfully, "How 'bout tomorrow after chores?"

"That be fine" nodded Daniel.

With that issue settled, Jake and Daniel lay back on the rough cedar planks. They were silent while they



watched the treetops sway in the light breeze and listened to the soft sounds of the running water and the rustling leaves. Then, from below them came the unmistakable low croaking sound of a bullfrog.

The two looked at each other and whispered in unison, "Bullfrog!" Jake punched Daniel's shoulder playfully and said, "Help me catch him, Daniel. I got a use for him tonight."

Jake shared his plan with Daniel, and the snickering pair of experienced frog catchers joined forces against one unsuspecting frog. Jake was soon returning home with a huge, slippery, green bullfrog swimming in an empty tin pail the boys found in the springhouse. Jake punched a few holes in the lid with his pocket knife, hid the pail under a bush and headed for the garden.

When Jake rounded the corner of the house, he knew he was in trouble. Ma and Mandy were frantically shooing chickens out of the garden. He tried to duck behind the house, but Ma spied him.

"JACOB PAUL RICHARDS! Come here and see what's happened! I came out to call you for lunch, and found the gate open. The chickens have scratched in the rows of sweet corn I planted the other day, and it looks like they

ate nigh onto half the seed. Where have been?"

"Ma, I'm awful sorry. I just went to the spring for a drink. Guess I forgot to latch the gate."

"Pa's goin' to hear about this! Now, just to help that memory of yours, take this hoe and finish your work before you get anything to eat." Ma stood sternly at the gate, holding the hoe out to him with one hand, and shaking her finger at him with the other. "And after that, you can get busy plantin' more sweet corn in nice straight rows like I had it!"

"Yes Ma'am", replied Jake humbly. He entered the garden obediently, latched the gate, and began to hoe. He hadn't worked long before Mandy came to the fence with the basket of lunch she was taking to Pa in the field.

"You're sure gonna get awful hungry 'fore you get any of this," she taunted as she pulled the cloth back to reveal fried chicken, biscuits, and Ma's fresh-baked rhubarb pie.

Jake glowered at Mandy and stuck his tongue out at her as she flounced away. "Aw shut up!" he muttered, but she didn't hear him. By the time Mandy had rounded the corner of the barn, Jake was grinning to himself in anticipation of the sweet revenge waiting in the tin.

Jake finally got his lunch, which he ate ravenously.

His afternoon was spent replanting corn, and then it was time for evening chores.

Pa was very quiet while he milked Betsy and Jake filled the manger with hay and corn. Pa's silence made Jake worry about the trouble he might be in for leaving the gate open. It didn't occur to him that Pa might have other problems on his mind.

"Pa, I'm fearful sorry about them chickens eatin' Ma's corn." offered Jake. "I didn't mean to leave the gate open."

"I know, Son," answered Pa, "That was a mighty careless thing to do. Your Ma counts on her garden to feed the family. The important thing now is that you learned from your mistake."

"Yes, Sir." Jake nodded. "I reckon I have."

Pa nodded, "That's what counts, Son. Learn from yer mistakes and make good for 'em if you can. Now let's clean up for supper."

They ate supper while the last soft rays of twilight lingered over their valley. A beeswax candle burned in the lamp hanging above the table. The meal of crisp fried salt pork, cornbread and gravy, fresh spring greens, and dried apples cooked in cider was one of Jake's many favorites.

Ma ate quietly, lost in her own thoughts. Her face had that same anxious look that Jake had seen so much recently. She automatically reached over to help James with his plate occasionally, but she didn't seem to be really thinking about what she was doing.

Pa and Ben discussed the family's finances. They were buying more pasture land immediately to the south of their farm from their neighbor Zeke Hensley. It was their dream to breed horses and sell them to the wealthy landowners in the county.

"We should have enough money for our last payment when we sell this year's corn crop." Pa speculated.

Ben nodded in agreement and added, "The litter of pigs we sell to Mr. Johnson for butchering this fall should be enough to buy supplies for the winter. If fall comes and we're still not ba..." Ben stopped in mid sentence and glanced first at Margaret and then at Jake. He cleared his throat and quickly dug his fork into the steaming cornbread and gravy on his plate.

Jake leaned forward to hear what Ben would say next, but Ben kept stuffing his mouth. Ma looked up from wiping James' gravy covered chin and stared at her

husband. The silence was broken by Ma's Carolina mantel clock striking the half hour.

Mandy seized the opportunity to turn the conversation toward her own interests. "Ma, is my new dress you're makin' from your old calico gonna be finished by meetin' next Sunday? I can sew the buttons on by myself." Ma answered her with a preoccupied, "That'd be a big help, Mandy, I'll get it ready for you tomorrow," watching Pa and Ben as she spoke. They continued to devour their food, keeping their eyes on their plates to avoid her questioning look.

Jake had been eating with the hearty appetite of a growing adolescent, nearly forgetting about the mysterious visit from Mr. Johnson, or the ominous presence of the war. He had even forgotten to ask what "conscripted meant". His thoughts soon turned to his vengeful plan against Mandy.

After supper, Ma said, "Jake, you take James out to the wash stand and get him cleaned up for bed. Mandy and I will clear away here."

"Yes Ma'am," answered Jake. He didn't mind that job a bit. Mandy always got so bossy with him and he could have a grand time splashing about with little James

while they scrubbed their faces, hands, and feet with water from the rainbarrel.

While James was engrossed in the lather he could make with the homemade lye soap, Jake retrieved his frog from under the bush and stuffed it into his pocket. From that point on, it was easy to complete his plan. Not even James need know how the slimy creature appeared in Mandy's pitcher.

When James was scrubbed and tucked into his bunk, Jake joined the rest of the family on the porch where Pa had carried Ma's rocker. She sat humming and rocking the baby while Pa sat on the steps, leaning against a post. Ben and Mandy had spread a quilt on the grass, so Jake stretched out beside Ben.

Somewhere up on the bluff, a whip-poor-will called, and in the barn one of the cows lowed softly. The sweet smell of hickory smoke from the fireplace hung in the air, and the smoke formed misty halos around the treetops.

"It's so peaceful, it's hard to imagine that somewhere today men have been killing one another". She stared up the steel blue sky freshly dotted with the evening's first stars. "And what makes it even harder to imagine, is that they speak the same language, and

worship the same God--- some of them might even be blood kin."

Pa murmured, "It does seem wrong, don't it." and drew pensively on his clay pipe, blowing smoke rings into the darkness. He nervously patted his foot on the step.

Ben got up and walked out into the darkness to stare up at the stars. Returning, he sat on the step next to his brother and said, "John, we have to make our plans tonight."

Ma's humming trailed off. Pa savored one last puff of smoke, and knocked the ashes out against the porch post. He stood up and began to pace. He spoke with a voice that was firm but emotional.

"Margaret, Silas Johnson tells Ben and me that the newspaper in this morning's mail from Montgomery carried a copy of that proclamation we been hearin' about. It said that any man between 18 and 35 years of age who doesn't report for duty in the Confederate army before the end of the month will be arrested." Pa continued to pace.

"Would you be put in jail if you don't go, John?" Ma asked. Her voice quavered slightly.

"I don't know." Pa answered flatly. "Most likely they'd just slap us in their infernal army anyhow." His

arms flew outward in a gesture of futility.

"That must be what they mean by 'conscription'" thought Jake, "to go to war when you don't want to." He was pleased with himself that he had pieced together bits of information to answer his own question, but very unsettled by its implication.

Ben spoke next as he jumped to his feet. "Well, I say we take off and head north 'til we find some Union outfit that'll let us join up with them. If we gotta fight, I'd just as soon go with Ole Glory wavin' over my head!"

"Now Ben," cautioned Pa, "we gotta think this through. We have think about the rest of the family. A man just can't walk away from his responsibilities without makin' some allowances for how his family's goin to fare."

Pa stepped onto the porch and knelt down beside Ma's rocker. "Maggie, do you think you and Jake could take care of things 'til fall? Ben and me finished the corn plantin' this week. Jake and Mandy are gettin' old enough to help you with the pickin' if we don't get back b'fore harvest."

Ma was slow to answer. She hugged Will closer to her, her voice sounding thick and quavery as she spoke. "Well John, I s'pose that'd be better'n havin' you throwed

into jail, but it looks like you'll have to fight in a war no matter which side you choose."

"That sure is how it looks Maggie, but it wouldn't be right for me to fight against what I believe. I think Ben is right. We'd better find ourselves some Union troops to join up with. The sooner we get this over with, the better."

"Jake, you can help your Ma, can't you?" Pa reached toward Jake. Jake walked over to his parents and held Ma's hand.

"Y-Yes sir." were the only words Jake could manage.

"I kin run the house and take care of Will while you and Jake do the field work, Ma." Mandy chimed in, ready to take charge as usual.

Jake couldn't think of anything else to say. His heart felt like a bag of stones. Pa's voice continued the discussion, but Jake wasn't listening. His head was spinning with too many questions. What if Pa and Ben got caught? What if they were killed in the war? He didn't want to think about Pa's dying! Jake had wondered for a long time what they would do if the fighting came to their farm, but he had always been so sure that Pa would always be there to take care of them. Now things were different.

he had always been so sure that Pa would always be there to take care of them. Now things were different.

Pa and Ben were both pacing now, and Ma was carrying Will into the cabin to put him into his cradle. Pa was saying, "We'll talk to the others at the meetin' at Johnson's store tomorrow night. They're goin' to make plans for contactin' the Federals. We all have to stick together in whatever we do."

"Time for bed now," declared Pa, "we'll have to have chores done early tomorrow."

The whole family went indoors, bolting the oak plank door behind them. Jake and Mandy climbed into the loft to their beds, but Ben stayed downstairs to sit around the table with his brother and sister-in-law quietly discussing their dilemma far into the night.

Jake stared at the moonless night sky through his window. All the stars were shining brightly, and in the northern sky the great dipper looked close enough to touch. The slaves called it the drinkin' gourd. The whip-poor-will out in the woods continued his incessant call. Whip-poor-will, whip-poor-will, whip-poor-will. Across the darkened loft Gus snored. Jake listened to the muffled voices from the room below, and finally drifted into a restless sleep

## CHAPTER TWO

Just before daybreak the next morning, Jake was tossing in a dream-filled sleep. He dreamed that Colonel Devereaux and Mr. Gridley were peeking into all the windows. Then he dreamed of soldiers in Confederate uniforms riding toward the cabin from every direction while Pa and Ben were being scooped up by a huge water dipper swooping down from the sky. His dreams began to run one into another, he dreamed that he had left the gate of a large pen open and soldiers with bayonets were streaming out of the gate. One of them was grabbing him and shaking him and screaming his name. Jake! Jake!

Jake sat up in bed, jolted awake by Mandy's screams. She was bent over his bed shaking him by the shoulders as hard as she could while screaming his name.

"Jake! Jake Richards! You wake up right now! You're a skunk! And a rat! And a weasel! You put that horrible thing in my wash water! Wake up and get it outa there right NOW!"

"What in thunder!" exclaimed Ben, sitting straight up in bed. "Mandy, what's the matter? What's goin' on?"

James began to cry. Gus woke up growling and

began to bark. Pa's voice shouted from the bottom of the ladder. "What in blue blazes is goin' on up there? What's the matter with Mandy?"

"S'alright, John," answered a dazed Ben, "I think she's just havin' a nightmare. I'll settle her down."

Ben pried Mandy's hands loose from Jake's shoulders and carried her back to her bunk. James was also wailing by this time and Gus was barking loudly. "Gus, hush!" commanded Ben. Gus added a half growl, half bark and cowered apologetically.

Jake recovered his senses while Ben was calming Mandy and quickly fumbled for the pitcher in the semi-darkness. He grabbed its handle and shook the contents out of the open window. After deftly placing the pitcher back on the nightstand, he lifted James and carried him to the double bed.

"Ever'thin's fine now, James," assured Jake.

"Mandy's just been havin' a bad dream. You're alright. Get in bed with me and go back to sleep."

Mandy was cradled in Ben's arms, sobbing softly, "I woke up and couldn't go back to sleep, so I thought I'd get dressed early so's I could be ready to help Ma with breakfast, and when I tried to pour water into the basin,

not much come out. I reached into the pitcher and there was somethin' all cold and slippery in there." She shuddered at the very memory. "I just know Jake put it in there. He's been real ugly to me lately."

Ben reached for the pitcher. "Well, lets just see about this."

He carried the pitcher to the window and, holding its spout toward the early light, peered into the container.

"Nothin' in here but a dribble 'r two o' water, Mandy. You was dreamin' just like I said. Now settle yerself, and lets git dressed." He pulled his trousers on over his long nightshirt, fished his boots from under the bed, and descended the ladder with Gus draped over one arm.

Jake was glad that it was still dark enough to conceal the guilty look on his face. He suddenly felt very ashamed of himself. He knew that a trick like that only upset things for everyone. Jake hoped that Mandy and everyone else would forget the whole incident.

\* \* \*

After a hearty breakfast of bacon, eggs, biscuits and gravy, the entire family busied themselves with daily

chores. The day's work had to be done early so that the family could eat an early supper. Pa planned to be on the way to the meeting by nightfall.

Ben left for the store early that morning, planning to return some books he had borrowed from Mr. Riley on the way. The young school teacher lived in the rear of the schoolhouse that was part of the cluster of buildings which sat facing the junction called Johnson's Crossroads. Ben would take supper with the Johnsons, and join Pa at the meeting.

Jake was assigned some of the morning chores Ben usually performed, one of which was to feed the stock and curry the horses. He had fed the stock many times, but currying the horses was a rare privilege. The thrill of grooming the the beautiful bay mare and the handsome chestnut stallion made Jake almost forget the problems facing his family.

Later in the morning, Jake and Pa worked cutting hay to be stacked later. The heavy scythe made blisters on Jake's hands. His back ached, but he did his best to keep up with Pa. He didn't want to give Pa any doubts that he could handle a man's work. Once, Pa stopped to rest. Leaning on his scythe, he surveyed the field of

newmown hay. Jake stopped cutting and inhaled deeply to savor the aroma of the freshly cut clover and timothy.

"Let's rest fer a spell, Jake." They stood their scythes against the rail fence and sat down on the grass. Pa tapped Jake on the arm. "You remember how we build haystacks?" Pa asked. Jake hesitated, then nodded. Pa pulled up a small amount of grass and built a miniature hay stack, explaining how to construct it so that it would not topple or let rain soak in. Jake had watched this process every season for as long as he could remember, but he watched Pa attentively as if he had never seen a haystack before.

When father and son began work again, they were silent for a while, then Pa said, "Jake, I want you to come to the meetin' with me tonight. You're goin' to be the man around here for a while, so you have a right to know what's goin on."

Jake nodded, pleased that he should be included in such matters. They stayed in the field until mid-afternoon, lunching on a light meal of cheese and biscuits washed down with cold milk. Mandy brought the meal to them halfway through the morning, along with some dried apples and an extra jug of water. Jake felt a pang of

remorse as he watched her return to the cabin. Maybe he should apologize to her about the frog this morning. He would think about it. She would probably tattle on him if he confessed to her.

With the day's work finished early, Ma served them the kind of supper usually reserved for company. There was chicken and dumplings, creamed peas with tiny spring onions, cooked turnips from the root cellar, hot biscuits with plum jelly, cold milk, fresh wild strawberries with cream, and hot coffee.

The conversation around the supper table was a continuation of their discussion of the previous night. Pa and Ma were making plans about how she was to spend the money from the corn crop she and Jake were going to harvest.

"If this year's crop is better than last year's, we might be able to have enough money to finish paying Mr. Hensley for the land and still have enough to carry us through the winter. Then you could use the money from the pigs to buy that extra milk cow you been wantin'." Pa instructed Ma. His voice sounded no different than any other evening, but his eyes told Jake that he was very worried.

Ma answered, "Don't worry about us, Jake and I will manage." She smiled at Jake and squeezed his hand encouragingly. Margaret could tell that Jake was doing all he could to hide his apprehension.

Jake tried to give the delicious meal the attention it deserved. He wondered if Ben was having a meal this good at the Johnson house.

Later, when Jake was dressing for the drive to the crossroads, his thoughts were entirely about what might be ahead for their family. It sounded pretty sure that Pa and Ben were going to have to leave, at least for a little while.

As much as Jake wanted to do a man's work, he had doubts about how well he and Ma could manage alone. Of course he wouldn't admit that to anyone, not even Ma...especially not to Ma. She was going to need all the cheering up he could give her. It would probably be a help if he could get along better with Mandy. If only she weren't so all-fired bossy!

"Hey Jake!" Pa called from the kitchen. "C'mon and help me hitch the team."

Jake scurried down the ladder and out to the barn. While he and hitched the horses to the wagon, Ma and Mandy settled themselves and the little ones in the wagon.

Jake sat up front with Pa. Ma and the rest sat on benches fastened along the side rail behind the drivers seat. As their wagon bumped down the rutted lane, the western sky faded from pink to lavender to grey. By the time they reached the main road, darkness was settling around them.

"I hope we don't meet up with any Rebs," Pa mumbled to Jake. They had been bouncing along for a while when Jake thought he heard wagon wheels somewhere behind them. He looked back, saw nothing in the fading light, and decided that it must be the echo of their own wheels. Through the early June night sky an almost-full moon peered like a golden ball over the top of the ridge. Suspended ahead of them the "drinking gourd" was barely visible, hanging over the roadway as it seemed to direct them northward to the crossroads.

As they approached the store, its windows were dark. There were no rigs tied to the hitching post in front. Jake was puzzled. "Are you sure there's a meetin', Pa?"

"Shhh, just ever'body keep still." was Pa's answer. Pa drove the wagon past the store turning east at the crossroads as if to head toward the mill three miles away. They had hardly rounded the corner, when Pa turned

again and pulled the team into Johnson's barn lot. A shadowy figure emerged from the darkness and reached for the horses' bits while Pa reined the team to a stop. "Whoa, whoa," Pa called softly. Pa stepped down and approached the vaguely familiar form that stood holding the horses. There was a brief, muffled conversation. Pa returned to the wagon and said, "Everybody get down and go into the back door of the store." He helped Ma and the rest climb down from their seats. Then the shadowy figure led their team into the darkness beneath a large clump of trees behind the barn.

Pa took Ma's arm and guided the family up the steps of Johnson's back porch. They entered the dimly lit kitchen with its hanging lamp and huge walk-in fireplace. The aromas of freshly boiled coffee and tobacco smoke mingled with woodsmoke and lingering cooking odors. At the large table sat several of the women they knew from church. Among them was Sarah Watkin's, the pastor's young wife, nursing her newborn baby. Some of the women knitted or pieced quilt blocks by the light of extra candles on the table. Nancy Johnson and her grown daughter Abigail were busy setting out freshly baked pies and pouring steaming mugs of coffee. Except for the strain

and apprehension on the faces of the women, the gathering resembled many others in Jake's memory...husking bees, church socials, house warmings.

Along one wall was a long bench where another woman and a young woman about Ben's age sat. They were the blacksmith's wife Ellen Whitfield, and her daughter, Henrietta. In a large rocking chair near the two shuttered windows across the room Grandma Whitfield puffed away on her pipe.

Pa removed his hat and stuffed it under his arm. Everyone smiled courteously while Ma shook hands around the room and settled herself and Wil on the bench. Mandy and James found places on the floor at her feet.

Instead of remaining in the kitchen with Ma, Jake followed Pa on into the dining room where the menfolk were gathered. A haze of pipe smoke filled the room, drifting into a halo around a large brass lamp hanging above the heavy oak table.

Jake scanned the room looking for Ben. Mr. Johnson stood beside the stone fireplace, resting one elbow on the mantle. The taller man standing beside him was gesturing angrily with large brawny hands. It was Joshua Whitfield, the blacksmith whose shop occupied the corner

across the road to the north of the store.

"Seems to me, Silas, we shouldn't have to leave our families to fend for themselves while we go off and fight in this rich man's war." Mr. Whitfield was saying, "After we do the fightin' for their infernal slavery, then our carcasses can rot for all they care."

Mr. Johnson nodded in agreement. "That's the way it looks, Josh. Not one of us owns slaves, or would if we could afford 'em, so why should we fight the Union. We tried to stay neutral-- even tried to stop Alabama from secedin'. You remember when Young Riley an' me went to that meetin' over in Winston County where they sent some school teacher friend of his to the secession convention to vote against pullin' out of the Union."

"Didn't do no good, did it!" exclaimed Joshua Whitfield. "Seems like we lose either way. If we leave, we risk losin' everything, and if we stay, we'll be forced to fight or maybe be hung. I heard from a fella that came through here last week that some Union people were hung by a mob over in Winston County. Accordin' to him, six brothers got caught by the home guards and before anybody know'd it they'd strung 'em up."

Jake's eyes grew wide with apprehension as he

listened to the man's tale. Pa steered him to a corner of the room near the kitchen. The other men standing and sitting around the perimeter of the room were talking excitedly in small groups of two or three. Pastor Watkins and Mr. Riley sat at the table earnestly studying some maps and newspapers spread out before them. Old Grandpa Whitfield sat opposite them, puffing away at his pipe and tipping back in his chair from time to time, eyes closed, apparently in deep contemplation.

As Jake and Pa located themselves in their corner, Ben stepped into the room. Only then did it occur to Jake that the shadowy figure out in the barnlot had been Ben's.

Ben strode across the room to Mr. Johnson and whispered something to him. Mr. Johnson glanced anxiously, first at Ben and then at Mr. Whitfield, before stepping to the table to quietly repeat the message to the Pastor and Mr. Riley. Overhearing, Grandpa Whitfield sat up straight in his chair, opened his eyes and leaned forward.

The young schoolmaster rose, his chair grating against the pine floor alerting the entire group that he was about to speak. His athletic frame lent an air of authority to his scholarly manner. The room became suddenly silent

as he began. Even the ladies in the kitchen suspended their conversation to hear what he was about to say.

"Gentlemen, our friend Ben has been serving as lookout for us. He has just observed what he believes to be a large unit of cavalry approaching from the south. Possibly these are Confederate troops riding by night to reach lines of combat north of here. This is the very reason we have hidden your rigs. I'm sure the officers in command have the power to arrest any able bodied man who appears not to have responded to the conscription act. If they should find us meeting here, arrests will most surely be made."

Mrs. Johnson had been bustling about the room, filling coffee cups for her guests. The seriousness of the young scholar's words prompted her to rush to each window to check if the shutters were closed properly. Someone in each room snuffed out the extra candles, and everyone sat quietly, listening. Now that the rooms were silent, Jake could hear the low rumble of approaching wagon wheels accompanied by jingling spurs and rattling sabres. The silent gathering sat nearly motionless, waiting for the troops to pass by.

When the sounds seemed to be loudest, Jake heard

shouted commands from out front. "Companeee---halt!"

"Who-o-oo!" They were stopping! Everyone froze!

The Johnson's living quarters were arranged across the rear of the rectangular stone building, with the store occupying its front half. A front porch, matching the one at the rear, ran the width of the building.

Jake shivered a little and touched Pa's arm for reassurance. The pine porch planks echoed with the sound of heavy boots and brass spurs.

Thud! Thud! Thud! No one moved. The knocking came again.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Mrs. Johnson went to her husband and calmly whispered something. When he nodded, she gathered her full skirts and, taking the small candle with her, she swept past her guests, through the curtained doorway leading to the parlor and into the store beyond.

Everyone sat frozen, listening. The tiny bell on the front door jingled when Nancy Johnson cautiously opened it a short distance as if she were there alone.

"Evenin' Ma'am. I am Cap'n Thomas Spafford, Army of the Confederate States of America, and this is Lieutenant Wilson. May we come in?"

"Gentlemen, the store is closed. If there is anything you need, please leave a list and I'll have it ready for you in the morning." Mrs. Johnson stood planted firmly in the doorway, clearly not inviting the two young men to enter.

"No Ma'am, we're not here to buy anything. We wish to speak with Mr. Silas Johnson." The captain's voice was polite but brusque, "I understand that he is proprietor of this establishment, is he not?"

"Yes he is, but he's away on a buying trip. I don't expect him back for a day or two." Nancy Johnson's voice remained steady, never betraying the uneasiness she shared with the listeners beyond the curtained doorway.

"Well, Ma'am, we'll not disturb you any longer this evening. My company will be billeted for several days at the Devereaux Mansion. I plan to send Lieutenant Wilson back tomorrow with a small contingency to set up a recruiting center here at the crossroads. Since your husband serves as postmaster, I was hoping for some assistance from him. We have been ordered to search the area for men who might be avoiding conscription."

As the Captain's words carried into the rooms beyond Nancy Johnson's staunch figure, the occupants exchanged stunned looks. Sarah Watkins cradled her infant

while she blinked back frightened tears. Jake could see Ma through the kitchen doorway. Her face was ashen, her eyes closed.

The Captain continued speaking as he turned and peered through the moonlight at the other buildings across the intersection. "That schoolhouse over there would be a suitable building for our purpose. Where does the schoolmaster live?"

Without hesitation, Nancy Johnson abruptly replied, "He lives in the rear of the school, but he went with my husband to buy supplies for the school."

"What about the church?" the young officer pursued. "Doesn't the parson live in that house next door to it?"

Before Nancy could respond, Captain Spafford went on, "Well, no use to disturb the preacher now, it appears that he has retired for the night. I can select a location tomorrow." He graciously tipped his hat, and turned to leave. After he and the lieutenant descended the steps, he stopped and took a step back toward the porch. In a tone that seemed to indicate he knew more than he had revealed, the Captain added, "I assume your husband and his friend plan to enlist just as soon as they return, don't

they?"

Without waiting for a reply, he turned, mounted his horse, and signaled the column to move forward. Mrs. Johnson stood in the doorway, watching the long parade of cavalry and foot soldiers pass. Only when the last of them had rounded the corner did she shut and bolt the heavy door, and only then did she allow herself to tremble, leaning against the door. She stood there for a moment, her eyes closed, brushing back wisps of slightly grey hair from her forehead as if to wipe away the tension of the moment. Her husband strode through the darkened rooms, reached for her hand, took the candle from her, and put his arm around her plump shoulders.

"Nance!" he said softly, "You did yourself proud!"

"Oh Silas, I don't know when I've been so nervous." sighed Nancy. They returned to a houseful of friends who were silently grateful for her cool head and quick thinking.

Everyone sat in stunned silence until the rumble and clatter of the military column had faded into the distance. Silas Johnson broke the silence, his voice tense, but strong. "That pretty well decides the issue for us. We have to act tonight. It would be too dangerous for all of us to take to the roads in a group. Jack and I have been

talking about a plan for several days. I'll let him tell you about it."

Jack Riley rose to speak once again. Running the fingers of both hands through his thick red hair, his steady green eyes scanned the tense faces of his friends and neighbors while he spoke.

"I've had several letters from my older brother who is a lieutenant with Grant's army in Tennessee. Grant's army has recently fought a bloody battle against Beauregard's forces at a place called Pittsburgh Landing in Southern Tennessee. Although Grant's army did not totally defeat Beauregard, he pursued Beauregard southward to the city of Corinth, Mississippi, and after a brief siege, Rebel forces evacuated during the night. Grant was able to occupy the city without firing a shot."

"I've heard of Corinth," one of the men remarked, "It's not very far across the Alabama line."

Jack Riley nodded and continued, "Now that Federal troops control this strategic railroad center, they most surely would be sending patrols along the Memphis & Charleston RR lines between Corinth and Huntsville. I plan to leave immediately, riding only at night, traveling north toward Huntsville and then westward along the rail lines

until I make contact with Union forces.

"How does that help get the rest of us out of joinin' the Rebs?" Joshua Whitfield wanted to know.

"As soon as I contact my brother, I can ask him to seek permission for a group of Unionists to be organized into an authorized cavalry unit. If that permission is granted, arrangements can be made for anyone wishing to join the Union Army to enlist at an appointed location, probably somewhere in northern Alabama or southern Tennessee."

"Are you goin' to come back to get us?" Ben asked.

Jack Riley shook his head and nodded toward Mr. Johnson. "Once all the arrangements are made, I will send a coded message to Mrs. Johnson by messenger for the others to join me at a designated spot. This would mean that any man wishing to come north would need to hide out from the Confederates until that message arrived. Mrs. Johnson would then relay the message to each man."

As the group listened, there were nods of approval. Occasionally someone had a question, but everyone trusted the well educated young man from Chicago. When he finished, Brother Watkins spoke up.

"Regardless of how much I dislike what is planned

happening to our country, as a minister, I have to conscientiously object to serving in any army. Surely the good captain Spafford will have to accept that. It is a chance I have to take."

Although many in the group expressed concern for his safety, no one objected to his decision. Encouraged, the young pastor's resolve was strengthened and he continued.

"In staying here, I can help Mrs. Johnson contact each man when the time comes, and after you have gone, be of some help to your families. The choice you have been forced to make will put them in an unpopular light and they will need someone whose sympathies are with them."

Many of the men expressed relief that their families would have some kind of male leadership in their absence.

When it was agreed that the pastor would stay at Johnson's Crossroads, and all other plans were completed, Ben was sent outside to make sure no one was approaching from any direction. Amid tearful goodbyes and handshakes, one family at a time slipped out to their wagon and drove quietly away into the moonlight.

The Richards family waited to be last to leave so that Ben could ride home with them. Mr. Johnson planned

to ride to their place on horseback before dawn and hide in the cave with Pa and Ben until word arrived from Mr. Riley.

With Ben riding beside Pa, Jake and Mandy stretched out beside a sleeping James in the straw-lined bed of the wagon. The moon was low in the west as their wagon turned southward toward home. All the way home, Jake watched the stars brighten. He kept his eyes on the "drinking gourd" behind them and somehow sensed that it represented the drastic changes that were disrupting their lives.

## CHAPTER THREE

Once again Jake awoke with the sense that all was not well. It was a feeling he was to experience often in the days to come.

This morning, the reason for his unease was clear to him from the moment he opened his eyes. Ben was already up, and there was only a hint of light showing at the window. The old whip-poor-will was still calling from the woods.

Faint candle-light glowed on the ceiling, shining through the floor-opening from the room below. The familiar smell of coffee and frying bacon teased Jake's nose. He could hear the quiet voices of his parents talking with each other in urgent tones that gave him an eerie feeling. It was that urgency which transformed the otherwise comfortable scents and sounds into the atmosphere that made his stomach feel so hollow---not the hungry kind of hollow, but a churning that made his throat tighten until he could barely swallow.

A noise outside drew his attention. Stepping to the window, he could see lantern light streaming from the barn door, and hear Ben's voice gently soothing their cow

Betsy as he prepared her for milking.

Jake shivered, not so much from the chilly morning air, as from the strange uneasiness that had come over him. He dressed hurriedly and lowered himself into the warmth of the kitchen.

He felt even more uneasy at the unfamiliar sight of his parents lingering over breakfast. The demands of their small farm never permitted such dalliance, even on the Sabbath. Instead of hanging in its accustomed place, Pa's old musket stood by the door with Ben's new breech-loader gleaming beside it. Saddle bags and bed rolls were piled around to the guns.

"Mornin', Jake." Ma tried to sound her cheery self, but her apprehension was difficult to mask. "Want some breakfast?"

Jake shook his head, "I ain't hungry just yet, thanks." He went to the kitchen wash stand, poored some water into the basin, splashed it on his face and dried with a rough muslin towel. He buried his face in the familiar lye-soap-and-sunshine scent of the towel, savoring the reassurance he found there.

Hoofbeats pounded up the lane. Gus stood on the porch barking at the early morning intrusion. Nervous

glances were exchanged briefly, until a single set of hooves gently trotted past the dooryard into the barnlot. Pa stood up and calmly opened the door, peering out into the pale light.

Soon Silas Johnson stood on the porch, saddlebags slung over one shoulder and a rifle on the other. Pa stepped onto the porch and the two men talked quietly for a while.

No, Silas hadn't met anyone on the road. Yes, Nancy knew what to do when she heard from Jack Riley. She would send Brother Watkins with instructions as soon as the message arrived. No thanks, he wasn't hungry, Nancy had fixed his breakfast at home.

Pa returned to the kitchen and gathered his family about him. His voice was gravely serious as he spoke, "Now Margaret, even though Ben and I will be hiding in the cave, you must carry on as if we were miles away from here. The Reb's will probably send the home guard to bring us in to enlist, so you have to pretend that we are nowhere around. Do you understand?"

Ma nodded. "Yes, John. I'll bring your meals after dark. Jake and Mandy and I will do the chores just as if you are off on a hunting trip."

Pa hugged her and Mandy, and gave James and Will each a loving pat on the head. He turned to Jake and said, "Well son, looks like you are the man around here for a while. Take care of your ma and do what she says."

Jake could only stammer. "I-I-I'll try, Sir." The lump in his throat kept him from saying any more." It felt so strange to be saying goodbye to Pa when he was going only a few yards away."

Ben and Pa gathered their gear, and the three men walked down the path toward the springhouse, looking more like three friends leaving for a hunting trip than for the uncertain ordeal ahead.

The following few days went more quickly for Ma, Jake and Mandy than they had expected. Although the demands of running the farm alone began to immediately press upon them, it was reassuring to know that Pa was as close as the cave if problems needed solving.

Mandy took over the housework while Ma and Jake cared for the animals and hoed the corn. All three of them helped with the garden. Jake had to admit that Mandy was a very good cook. She managed the household with efficiency beyond her ten years. "Of course," Jake thought to himself, "she always has been good at bossin'

people around".

The cave was well stocked and comfortable. Pa had lined the floor of the cave with clean straw. They had a lantern for light, the springhouse provided water, and Mandy or Jake carried breakfast and lunch to them in empty water buckets.

Each evening after dark, the three men would sneak into the house for a good warm supper and a short visit with the family. Jake and Mandy took turns on the porch as lookouts in case Captain Spafford and his men might come looking for Pa and Ben after dark.

After three days had passed, Jake was beginning to wonder if the Rebs were going to come after all. Maybe Pa's and Ben's names were, by some miraculous mistake, missing from the census list. Or maybe the soldiers had been called away to battle and would forget all about Johnson's crossroads.

One morning Jake and his mother were raking hay in the field along the main road, when a small party of gray-uniformed soldiers approached from the north. The woman and boy stopped working to watch the procession, sheilding their eyes from the midday sun.

Cantering along at a very business-like gait, the

soldiers halted at the head of the lane and dismounted. Climbing the rail fence, two of the men, in what appeared to be officer's uniforms, crossed the field toward Margaret Richards and her son. As the two soldiers walked briskly toward her through the hay stubble, Margaret stiffened, smoothed back a wisp of hair from her forehead, and placed a gentle hand on her son's shoulder.

"I wish we could warn the men," she whispered through a forced smile.

Jake could feel a lump forming in his already dry throat. He was grateful that they were way out here by the road instead of at the house where voices might be heard echoing inside the cave.

"Mornin' Ma'am. Howdy, Son." greeted one of the officers tipping his hat and bowing slightly. Jake recognized the voice of Captain Spafford. He could only guess that the other man was Lieutenant Wilson.

The captain barely waited for Ma to respond with her faint "Mornin".

"We are here on business of a very patriotic nature," he informed them almost apologetically.

"We have come to escort all able bodied men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five to the

recruiting office to be sworn into the Army of the Confederate States of America." announced the Lieutenant mechanically. "Do one John James Richards and one Benjamin William Richards reside on this farm?"

Ma answered stiffly, "John Richards is my husband and Ben Richards is my brother-in-law." Her strict Methodist background made it extremely difficult to lie.

"Well, Ma'am, would you be so kind as to announce our presence to them?" The captain's quaint aristocratic manner seemed quite foreign to Jake. Had he not been so frightened that these men would take his pa away, he would have been overtaken by a case of giggles.

Ma took her handkerchief from an apron pocket, and wiped her brow. Jake knew that she was struggling to make the lie she must tell sound convincing.

Jake broke in. "They's gone off huntin'. Won't be back fer days." He couldn't tell if the officers believed him, but Ma's expression didn't betray him. She nodded and added, " They're usually gone for a week or more."

"Well, Ma'am, it is my duty to advise you that you must inform them the minute they return, that they are bound by law to report the the nearest unit of the Army of the Confederacy, specifically, our contingency at

Johnson's Crossroads, immediately. I will be sending patrols throughout the area on a daily basis to enforce the Conscription Act without exception." Captain Spafford's tone had shed its cordiality

"Good day Ma'am" he snapped curtly, tipped his hat, backed away a few steps and stalked back to the fence. Lieutenant Wilson followed him, glaring suspiciously at Ma as he turned away. Margaret and Jake looked small and forlorn standing in the middle of the hay field. They watched the soldiers disappear into a cloud of dust on the northern horizon. Soon the smell of dust and the sound of hoofbeats were replaced by the sweet smell of clover and a meadowlark's happy song.

"I think Pa needs to know about our visitors right away. I don't think they believed us." Ma's hand trembled as she took Jake's hand.

Leaving their rakes waiting against a haystack, they hurried to the springhouse cave to report the incident to Pa and the others.

As the circles of light from their lanterns danced around them, Jake and Ma \* \* \* perform the morning chores. Pa or Mrs had been seen slipping out of hiding before daylight each day to help that

That night after dark, Ma took supper to the cave instead of serving it to the men in the cabin. She had been extremely nervous all afternoon, and had made frequent trips down the springhouse path to confer with Pa.

Jake was instructed to saddle all three horses and hide them in the woods near the cave opening. With his slight build, lifting the heavy saddles onto the horses' backs was difficult, but when the task was completed, he felt proud of how he had managed the job without any help.

The next morning was Saturday. Ma, determined to keep everything running normally, began her weekly baking before breakfast. She woke Jake and Mandy well before the great dipper faded in the first grey light. Leaving James warmly snuggled in his bunk, they sleepily struggled into their clothes and, like a pair of blinking sloths, inched their way down the ladder. Neither the golden glow of the candles nor the crackle of the newly kindled fireplace compared with the warmth of their snug beds in the loft.

As the circles of light from their lanterns danced around them, Jake and Mandy trudged to the barn to perform the morning chores. Pa or Ben had been slipping out of hiding before daylight each day to help feed

the animals and do the milking, but today, Jake and Mandy were on their own. It was impossible to predict when the soldiers might come riding up the lane.

Jake and Mandy shared the work in silence for a while. They had worked together all week without getting into a spat. There had been so much hard work to do that Jake hadn't had time nor energy to think up ways to tease his sister and for some reason, she didn't seem so bossy anymore.

They had climbed into the loft to drop down hay for the cow, when Mandy suddenly crumpled onto a bale of hay and began to sob. "Jake, I don't want Pa to go away. He might get killed and never come back."

Jake found himself seated beside his sister, his arm around her shoulder trying his best to comfort her.

"Mandy, he can't stay here, the Rebs would put him in jail or maybe hang him." Mandy cried even harder. Jake felt like crying himself, but managed to keep from it by thinking what Pa would want him to say to Mandy.

"Mandy, we just have to do our best to help Ma and pray every day that Pa and Ben will be alright. Pa says that this war can't last very long. He thinks they'll be home before harvest" Jake wasn't sure that he sounded

very convincing, but Mandy's crying sniffled to a stop as she wiped her eyes on her apron.

Jake patted Mandy's shoulder the way he did James' after a tumble. Mandy gave him a weak smile, and said, "Do you think so, Jake?" Jake nodded and answered, "Pa don't say what he don't mean." He only wished he could convince himself that Pa knew they'd be home that soon.

Reassured, Mandy filled the feed boxes with hay and dried corn, while Jake milked Betsy. Both children were hungry, so the warm sweet milk streaming into the bucket was a temptation too strong to resist. Jake squirted the milk first into Mandy's mouth then into his own. The delicious warmth of the fresh milk soothed their hunger and warmed them from within.

Revitalized, Jake carried the pail of milk outside toward the path leading to the springhouse. Mandy carried a smaller pail filled with cracked corn for the chickens. Golden pink light was flooding the sky above the ridge, birds were calling from the woods, and a hawk circled high above the treetops. The children stopped to watch the great bird, never flapping its wings, but drifting as if suspended by some giant invisible string.

and Mandy scurry off in opposite directions, she closed her eyes and whispered a prayer. "Oh Lord, please see us through these terrible times."

Pa was reasonably sure no one knew about the cave except their family and the slave boy Daniel. Still there was no way of being certain. Pa, Ben, and Mr. Johnson took turns sleeping so the cave entrance could be watched at all times. The horses were brought into the cave during the day.

For the next few days things went along quietly. Jake and Mandy helped their mother keep the little farm running as normally as possible. Mandy cared for Will while her mother and Jake attempted to do the work of two men. Even James was learning to help with many of the chores that were once Mandy's.

No one went to the cave during daylight unless it could appear to be a normal trip to the spring.

On Sunday of that week, Ma decided not to go to church services. Leaving the farm might provide Gridley with an opportunity to venture onto their land unnoticed. The week rolled by. Jake settled into his new routine... morning chores, a trip to the cave, breakfast, field work, lunch, more field work, evening chores, supper, and then

answered, "That was Mr. Gridley, wasn't it?"

Both children were talking at once by the time they reached the porch. Margaret shushed them the instant she had the slightest idea what they were saying. "Shhh! The sound of our voices drifts up toward the top of that bluff like smoke," she cautioned softly. Pulling them into the house, Margaret continued. "He might be sittin' back just over the ridge to hear everything we say. If he sees or hears the men, or even suspects that they are hidin' somewhere around, he is sure to tell that army captain." Mrs. Richards bit her lip thoughtfully. "For all we know, that captain sent him to spy on us. I told you he didn't seem to believe what we told him yesterday."

A fearful thought struck her! What if Gridley started nosing around the foot of the bluff and found the cave. "We have to let your pa know about this right away! Jake, you take that milk on down to the springhouse and warn Pa and the others while you're there. Come right back and tell me what they say we should do. Mandy, you go on and feed the chickens just like nothin's any different than any other day."

Margaret followed them as far as the porch, cradling the baby against her breast. As she watched Jake

A loud snap resounded from somewhere along the ridge, followed by the sound of rustling leaves and a flutter of startled birds. In unison, Jake and Mandy looked in the direction of the sound. There atop the bluff, silhouetted against the glowing colors of the sunrise, stood the figure of a man wearing a wide-brimmed hat. He wore heavy boots reaching nearly to the knees, and carried a long bullwhip in one hand.

The children stood frozen, staring open-mouthed at the figure. The man's facial features were not visible against the brightening morning sky, but Jake recognized the form. He was sure it was Gridley. The man did not move until Ma's voice called from the cabin doorway.

"Mandy! Jake! Hurry and finish up now. Breakfast is gettin' cold."

The dark form quickly turned and disappeared beyond the ridge. Margaret Richards, with baby Will astride her hip, impatiently stepped onto the porch. "Land o' mercy! What's got into you two?" Unable to see the ridge from where she stood, Ma was surely convinced that her children had lost their senses.

Mandy Jake looked at Mandy. "Did you see who I saw?" he gasped hoarsely. Mandy shuddered slightly and

serving as lookout so Ma could take supper to the cave. By bedtime, Jake was exhausted. Each night he fell into deep sleep only to awaken long before dawn, usually by some sound such as an owl making its kill, or the rumble of distant thunder. Then Jake would lie awake and think.

Jake thought about Pa and Ben and Mr. Johnson. He wondered how they could tolerate just sitting and doing nothing night and day. It almost seemed like they were in prison. He wondered how long they would have to hide. He wondered what would happen if they were caught. Would they go to jail? Would they be hanged? Would they be taken away never to be heard from again? Why were people angry enough to tear up everyone's life and shoot at each other? They were all Americans. It wasn't like they were mad at somebody who lived across the ocean and spoke a different language, or dressed in funny clothes. Every night Jake sat in the middle of the big empty bed staring out his window at the stars, searching for answers to his questions.

At least once each day, at various hours, Gridley was seen watching them from somewhere along the ridge. Mandy said he had watched their house for almost an hour one morning while Jake and Ma were in the field.

Another time, James was playing in the rocks along the creek just after supper, when he was frightened by "a bad man" hiding in the trees along the ridge. Other days Gridley just appeared briefly somewhere along the top of the bluff and then turned away toward the Devereaux fields beyond the ridge.

Late Thursday afternoon Jake was helping Ma in the garden. Jake was hoeing the potatoes, while Ma and James watered the young cabbage plants with a bucket and large gourd.

"Sure is hot today, Jake," commented Margaret. "If we don't get rain pretty soon, the garden's gonna dry up."

"Sombody's been gettin' rain." Jake responded, "I been hearin' thunder way off to the north pert near every mornin'."

Jake stood up to scan the northwestern horizon for any sign of rain clouds and noticed a dust cloud moving along the main road from the north. Very shortly, the cloud turned into their lane, and Jake could tell that it was a horse and buggy hurrying toward them.

Jake recognized the rig as that of Pastor Watkins. Ma had recognized their visitor too, and sweeping James

onto her hip, rushed to greet the pastor as he pulled his horse to a stop in the front yard. "He must be delivering Pa's instructions from Mr. Riley," thought Jake. He watched Ma and the Pastor shake hands warmly and begin conversing in hushed and anxious tones while the pastor hitched his horse to the post near the big oak tree.

Ma motioned to Jake to come into the cabin with them. By the time Jake joined his mother and the pastor, they were seated at the kitchen table. The cabin, shaded by several large oak trees, felt cool to Jake after working in the hot sun all afternoon. Mandy was busily preparing supper and James sat playing with Will on a pallet.

"Jake, go fetch some water from the spring, and tell Pa that Pastor Watkins is here with word from Jack Riley." Margaret Richards' voice rose with excitement, but it carried more than a hint of apprehension.

Once inside the springhouse, Jake hung the water bucket under the water spout and left it to fill. He raised the trap door and climbed down the ladder into the root cellar, following the narrow passage to the cave beyond. He could see faint light coming from the front of the cave, and he could hear muffled voices echoing through the passage. Once inside the cave itself, Jake found Pa and Ben sitting

at the opening of the cave, talking softly while they stared out into the woods. Mr. Johnson lay sleeping in his bedroll near the center of the cave.

Jake relayed his message, and Pa responded, "Tell your Ma that we are comin' up to the cabin just as soon as there's full darkness. You and Mandy can take turns bein' lookout for us while we talk the preacher." Pa tried to make it sound like a big adventure, but Jake thought he sounded just as scared as he was.

"Well, Ben, this is it, I reckon" Jake heard Pa say as Jake made his way back through the passage to the springhouse.

The sun was just sinking below the trees along the main road when Jake entered the cabin. Ma and Mandy were setting the table to include the pastor and their own menfolk tonight. By the time the meal of ham, fried potatoes, and fresh greens was ready to serve, Pa and Ben and Mr. Johnson were sitting themselves down at the table.

While the food was passed, Bob Watkins reviewed the instructions. "The plan is for you to ride, at night of course, and meet Riley at the natural bridge up in Winston County. From there you will ride in small groups to join

at the opening of the cave, talking softly while they stared out into the woods. Mr. Johnson lay sleeping in his bedroll near the center of the cave.

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Union patrols headed for Huntsville."

"Is Huntsville in Union hands now?" asked Pa as he buttered a thick slice of warm bread.

Pastor Watkins nodded, "Yes, according to Riley, Grant is now firmly entrenched at Corinth, and occupies much of northern Alabama.

After hearing the plan, Jake's appetite was gone. He went out to the porch to relieve Mandy on lookout. As he sat on the front steps, tears began to form and his throat tightened. He rubbed away the tear angrily. Jake knew he had to be brave. He was going to have to take care of Ma and Mandy and the little boys. Pa never cried, no matter how bad things got.

The voices in the cabin grew a little louder as the pastor rose to leave. After shaking hands all around and promising to keep their entire family in his prayers, the young minister boarded his buggy and wheeled off into the darkness. The moon had waned to a thin sliver hanging overhead. Jake was grateful that the moon was no longer full. Pa and the others might be more easily spotted some night patrol of the home guard if the night was bright.

A very short time after the pastor rode away, Ben kissed Ma and the baby, gave James and Mandy his

beggest bear hug, shook Jake's hand and followed Mr. Johnson down the path toward the cave. Pa lingered behind to embrace his family once more. Ma and Mandy cried, and so did James, but Jake forced back his tears. He wanted Pa to know that he could behave like a man.

"Take care of yourselves," Pa told them, "I'll be back home before harvest, just you wait and see." He turned quickly and followed the path into the darkness.

Margaret Richards gathered her children around her on the front porch of the little cabin and held them close. They listened to the splashing sound of the three horses walking away northward along the creekbed, toward the place where it would cross the main road just across the county line.

Jake didn't go to sleep easily that night. He tossed and turned until he finally, he sat up to look out at the sky.

"Jake, can't you sleep either?" Mandy's voice sounded small as she crossed the dark loft to sit beside him. "I wish he didn't have to go," she blurted, suddenly in tears again.

Jake held his sister in his arms and rocked her like he would little Will. "Don't cry Mandy, Pa said he'd be



## CHAPTER FOUR

The Richards family carried on with their lives just like they had for more than a week. The strain of hiding their menfolk was gone, but the even greater burden of waiting added itself to the backbreaking labor of running the farm. They no longer had Pa near them down in the cave to guide them and cheer them on.

Just after lunch, Jake was in the barn busily cleaning stalls when he heard a sound overhead in the loft. He stopped working to listen. There it was again---a gentle thump and then a rustling-- like the sound of a person or animal moving around in the hay. Jake shoveled a while and then stopped to listen again. Nothing. After listening several more times, Jake decided it must be Mandy's cat, Tansy getting unusually rambunctios chasing mice.

Jake finished Betsy's stall, and was on his way out to the strawstack for a wheelbarrow full of clean straw. The moment he reached the doorway, it was blocked with the form of a tall bulky man. The wide black hat nearly touched the top of the door frame; wide muscular shoulders spanned the width of the opening. Beneath the barrel-shaped body, heavy black riding boots met black leather riding breeches at the knees. The unpleasant smell

of whiskey and tobacco mixed with sweat and dirt was overpowering, even amid the odor of fresh manure.

Jake froze. His heart leaped to his throat. Gridley just stood there holding that fearful bullwhip he always carried.

"Howdy," squeaked Jake. Gridley's beady eyes stared from beneath bushy black eyebrows that formed a continuous line below the brim of his hat.

"I come here to talk to yer Pa." growled Gridley. There were bits of hay clinging to the black hat and to his stained shirt. Jake's pulse pounded wildy. Gridley had been hiding in the loft, probably all night!

"My Pa's gone huntin' up in the hills." Jake blurted. "Won't be back fer days." He drew himself up to his full height.

"Then go fetch yer uncle, I'll have a word with him" Gridley looked Jake up and down, more than likely enjoying the way his presence unnerved the boy.

"H-He's gone with him." Jake stammered.

Gridley sneered at Jake and laughed mockingly. "That story don't wash, Boy. Farmers don't take off huntin' fer days at a time in the middle of the plantin' season."

Jake's eyes bugged out and he tried to swallow the lump in his throat. He gripped the handles of the wheelbarrow so hard his fingers went numb.

Gridley stepped around the wheelbarrow and grabbed Jake's shoulders. "Where's your tory Pa hidin' out?" growled the burly overseer. He shook Jake, lifting him off the ground and dangling him in the air. Jake kicked and clawed the air, screaming in rage at his attacker.

A snarling brown blur appeared from nowhere leaping for Gridley, arm. Gridley roared with pain, releasing Jake who fell backward onto the dirt floor. The big man lashed at the old hound with his whip, but Gus hung on, sinking his teeth deeper into Gridley's flesh. With Gus hanging from one arm, the enraged giant stumbled backward into the barnlot only to find a shrieking, clawing Mandy mounted on his back. While Gridley whirled in one direction and then another in his attempt to free himself from Jake's defenders, Jake picked himself up from the dirt floor and lunged through the doorway tackling the heavy black boots at the ankles. Like a felled oak, the huge man toppled face forward into the dirt, cursing wildly and carrying his tenacious attackers with him. The

ominous bullwhip went flying across the ground out of reach. Jake sat on Gridley's legs while Mandy remained astride his broad back, flailing the huge man's head with her fists. Gus never let go, growling and tightening his jaws at each attempt to wriggle free.

With all the cursing and growling and screaming, the uproar brought Margaret running to the barnlot. She stood riveted at the sight. She screamed, "Stop it! For heaven's sake, stop! Gus! Heel!" Gus reluctantly released the arm, but stood over Gridley fiercely growling and bearing his teeth.

Jake obediently stood up and pulled Mandy off Gridley's back. While Mandy backed away cautiously toward her mother, Jake retrieved his pitchfork from inside the barn and pointed it like a gun at Gridley.

"Jake, what happened here?" demanded his mother.

"Ma, he was hidin' in the barn. He's lookin' for Pa and Ben. And when I told him they ain't here, he picked me up and started shakin' me and hollerin' at me. That's when Gus came after him and then Mandy got into it." Jake breathlessly tried to explain.

"Lady, your dog and your kids attacked me. Call

off that mongrel before I break his neck." Gridley had rolled free of Gus and was now standing, menacingly facing Mrs. Richards and her two feisty children.

"Mr. Gridley, you've been spyin' on our place all week long. Now my son finds you sneakin' around our barn." There was fury in Ma's voice that Jake had never heard before. "If you have business with my husband, you can wait to talk to him." Ma bluffed, "When he finds out you've been botherin' his family, he'll most likely come after you with a gun."

Gridley dusted himself off, picked up his hat and whip, and shouted. "I know your menfolk are hidin' somewheres. The Army's left the Colonel and the home guard in charge of roundin' up all the Yankee-lovin' traitors in the county." He stalked away toward the creek, stopping to turn and shout back at them, "I'm goin' to tell Colonel Devereaux that I need some men to search your place read good."

Margaret Richards stood with her children huddled against her and watched Gridley lumber away downstream toward the place where the ridge was low enough to climb up to Devereaux property. Gus sat possessively at their feet, occasionally emitting a low throaty growl at the

threatening figure as it climbed the bluff and vanished over the ridge.

Margaret shivered a little and took the pitchfork from Jake's grip, standing it against the barn. Without a word, she led Mandy and Jake into the cabin where James and Will lay napping on a palette. While her two older children watched, gaping, she knelt beside the bed, reached under the straw mattress, and withdrew a long musket. It was even older than Pa's, but the barrel was polished and the wooden stock looked freshly rubbed like the front of Ma's walnut cabinet.

"Now!" said Ma emphatically. "We'll be ready if Mr. Gridley comes back to bother us again." She carefully loaded the gun the way she had seen her husband load his old musket, and ever so cautiously hung it above the mantle.

Once Jake recovered his composure, he recognized the gun as Ben's old musket, inherited from his grandfather who fought in the War for Independence. Ben was proud of that old gun, and had always kept it polished and cleaned as beautifully as his new rifle

On Sunday, Ma decided that they would go to church. Gridley hadn't been seen snooping around since Thursday, and Ma said that the family needed to be in the Lord's house. So, Jake hitched the ox team to the wagon, tucked the old musket under the front seat, and with everyone scrubbed and combed, they were off to Pastor Watkin's Crossroads Methodist Church.

The families Jake had seen at the meeting at Johnson's store were the only ones there. The Devereaux household and others loyal to the Confederacy were shunning the tory preacher and his church.

Pastor Watkins conducted a brief prayer service instead of preaching a sermon. Prayers were offered for the menfolk gone to war and for God to bring his healing mercies to the nation. The tiny congregation stood about inside the church after the closing hymn, sharing words of comfort and concern for one another.

Mrs Whitfield, her tiny form reminding Jake of the little wren in the pear tree, flitted from family to family, inquiring how each was managing.

"Wouldn't you feel safer if you brought your family to the crossroads and stayed with us, Margaret?" She

fretted as she greeted Ma. "We could make room for you and the babies with us, and maybe the older children could stay with Sarah and the pastor." She smiled inquiringly at the pastor's wife standing nearby.

Sarah Watkins nodded in agreement as she bounced her infant on her shoulder. "Oh yes, Margaret, Mandy and Jake would be no trouble for us. They would be a help instead of a burden."

"Thanks, just the same, but we have to keep the farm goin' for John 'til he gets back home." Ma answered. "I just pray that this war is over with before our men can get into the fight."

Mrs. Johnson joined the cluster of women and children, greeting Ma with a warm, ample hug. "Margaret, will you and the children at least stay and eat Sunday dinner?"

"Why, that would be very nice, Nancy," accepted Ma. "I have our dinner basket in the wagon. We were goin' to eat on the church lawn before we headed home."

"That is a very good idea. We can just all have dinner on the grounds!" exclaimed Mrs. Johnson. "Sarah, Ellen, why don't you bring your victual out and we'll all eat together."

"Good idea!" chuckled Mrs. Whitfield.

"A picnic is just what we all need to take our minds off our troubles." Sarah Watkins laughed.

So, the four families gathered on the church lawn for a Sunday picnic. All the food set out on blankets and tablecloths for all to share. Grandma and Grandpa Whitfield were provided with chairs from the parsonage while everyone else sat on the grass. The young preacher and his tiny flock of women, children and oldfolks lingered most of the afternoon, eating and chatting as if it were a holiday.

The meal was delicious, and Jake found that his appetite had returned. He ate three helpings of the fried chicken along several helpings of fresh greens and cooked apples. He would have had a second piece of custard pie, but he noticed Ma giving him her "watch your manners" look.

The big meal made Jake very sleepy. While their wagon bumped homeward over the ruts in the dirt road, he could hardly keep his eyes open. He longed to stretch out on the cool grass under the big oak tree. They were almost home, when Mandy let out a screech. She pointed ahead to a large group of men on horseback riding away

from their house. The men turned out of the lane toward the wagon and galloped past it on both sides, shouting insults and lashing at the oxen with their whips. Riding at the very front of the pack was Gridley's hulking form topped with that huge black hat.

"Hurry, Jake, let's get home," shouted Margaret.

"That was Gridley with his search party!"

Everything was a mess! Every gate was open. Animals wandered everywhere. The door to the house hung from its hinges. Inside, dishes and clothing were scattered about, and the bed was overturned. Ma's rag rug was thrown in a heap in the corner of the room as if someone had been looking for a trap door in the floor, and corn husks from the mattresses upstairs were heaped on the floor beneath the ladder. Jake checked the springhouse and found that door also broken down. Milk was poured on everything, eggs lay smashed on the floor. Worst of all, poor Gus lay bleeding and unconscious in the creek bed where he had been thrown or kicked from the footbridge.

"They weren't just here to search; they wanted to destroy." Ma muttered, mostly to herself.

Jake thought Ma would cry, but instead, she just sat on the front steps and stared, snuggling her babies

against her. Mandy and Jake gently revived Gus with cool creek water and bandaged his wounds. They made a sling with their hands and gently carried the old hound to a bed of straw in the barn. They rounded up all the animals and chased the chickens out of the garden.

By the time that was done, Ma was beginning the cleanup inside the house. It took all of them the rest of the day to straighten up the rest of their things.

"I've never seen such a mess," Ma moaned. "Thank goodness they left before they got to the china Grandma left me. I guess they were too busy lookin' for a trap door to notice the corner cupboard."

"I think I can mend the chairs with some twine and nails. Jake, Ma," offered Jake, "and maybe you an' me can lift the door back onto its hinges while Mandy nails the hinges back in place."

"That would work, Jake, but the bolt is broken and will have to be fixed by a blacksmith." Ma observed. "With Mr. Whitfield gone away, it can't be fixed."

Jake remembered how the wooden latches on the barn doors worked. "I think I can make a wooden latch with some boards from Pa's lumber pile that will hold the door almost as good as the bolt."

"Fine, Son, after we get this mess cleaned up, we'll work until we get something rigged up."

Margaret Richards slept with the old rifle under her pillow that night and for many nights afterward. The thought of strangers invading her home was at the same time infuriating and unnerving.

Life settled down a little bit over the next few weeks. Poor Gus recovered enough to limp along behind James nearly everywhere he went. Gridley and his thugs didn't return. ] Margaret Richards and her children were able to concentrate on the back breaking tasks of hoeing corn, stacking hay, feeding animals, and generally keeping food on their table. The three of them dropped into bed at night exhausted. The dry spell seemed to be broken because they had several good rains. The sprouting corn in the field between the barn and the main road was soon knee high.

Daniel never came around anymore. Jake guessed that Gridley was doing a good job of keeping the slaves in line.

Pastor Watkins came to visit regularly, occasionally bringing Sarah and the baby with him to help Ma "put up" vegetables from the garden while the pastor helped Jake and Ma in the fields.

With nearly every visit, Bob Watkins brought news of the war, but never a letter from Pa. None of the families had heard from their men. The Union still occupied most of the northern part of the state allowing them to control of many of the rail lines in southern Tennessee, northeastern Mississippi, and northern Alabama and to make raids deeper and deeper into the state. Jake realized now that the rumbling sound he had been mistaking for distant thunder was probably the sound of battle.

Many times, Bob Watkins described the increasing flow of refugees through the crossroads.

"They seem to be trying to take everything they own with them even though they have no idea where their destination is," observed the pastor. "Some of them are camped out on the Devereaux place"

"I heard that Sadie Devereaux has taken in some of her relatives from Virginia and Carolina." added Sarah.

"We have noticed that there seems to be wagons going past on the main road." Ma told them. "The corn is so tall now that all we see are dust clouds."

One day late in September, the Watkins arrived for one of their visits. There was still no letter from Pa. The news they did bring was very disturbing.

"Colonel Devereaux has foreclosed on the land where Mr. Johnson's store is built," announced Bob Watkins. "He evicted Nancy and Abigail so that a family of rebel refugees could have the living quarters."

"We invited them to stay with us in the parsonage and store their things in our carriage house." Sarah said as she sat rocking little David in Ma's big rocker.

"Ain't the store open any more?" asked Jake.

"Oh it's open alright," answered the pastor bitterly. "Devereaux has Gridley's wife running it and has posted a notice that the families of Union sympathizers would not be served in the store any longer. Since the North has cut off supply lines, things like salt or coffee and tea are scarce."

"He's getting even and making sure that what's left in the store goes only to Loyalists," put in Sarah. She got up to put her baby down in Wil's currently unoccupied cradle. Straightening up and smoothing her apron, she added, "Not even the rebel families can get shoes and yard goods because those things would have to come from factories up north."

"Devereaux has changed the name of the crossroads to Devereaux Junction and has taken over the school. His

daughter is in charge of classes for 'Loyalist children only'."

"He even had the gall to claim that Mr. Whitfield still owed him money too and took over the blacksmith shop," fumed Sarah.

"He put one of his own blacksmith's in charge and he won't do any work for Unionists either."

Bob Watkins shook his head in disgust. "I'm amazed that the old scoundrel didn't kick Whitfield's wife and daughter and his poor old parents out of their home also," he marveled.

"I bet that's why we ain't gettin' Pa's letters," Jake cautiously ventured into the adult conversation.

"You're probably right, Jake," responded Bob Watkins. "It would be just like Devereaux to intercept letters when they arrive at the post office, now that he has control of it." I'm sure he's gotten himself appointed postmaster by someone in the new government."

"But we have to remember," the pastor continued, "your Pa might already be with the Union army, and mail just isn't getting through from the north anymore."

The rest of that day they picked corn. Jake and Ma each took a turn steering their ox-drawn wagon along

the rows of rustling stalks, while the other helped Pastor Bob pick the golden ears and toss them into the wagon. James rode along on the wagon or followed along behind, picking up ears that had missed the wagon.

At noon, Mandy and Sarah and the babies brought lunch. They spread a quilt under a tree at the edge of the field and filled it with delicious food---corn muffins with summer sausage, yellow slices of cheese, tart pickles from Ma's pickle jar, and spicy squash pie. There were jugs of chilled cider and pitchers of milk fresh from the spring. Everyone ate and talked, enjoying the picnic-like atmosphere. Jake stuffed himself until he couldn't take another bite. He stretched out on the grass, sleepily watching a hawk circling above the cornfield and only half listening to the conversation. Mandy lay dozing beside him.

Suddenly, from somewhere beyond the ridge, the sound of rifles crackled like a string of firecrackers. Another round of shots sounded just over the ridge, closer this time. Shouts and screams pierced the air. Jake's mother and Sarah instinctively reached for their babies. When three men carrying rifles scrambled over the ridge behind the cabin and tumbled down into the creek bed, the

two women wasted no time getting their children, including Jake, into the cover of the woods. Bob Watkins followed close behind them and took shelter behind shelter behind the tree nearest the field. Shots rang again, this time from the top of the ridge. Gunfire answered from somewhere behind the cabin, back and forth, each time the shots from below came closer and closer.

"Everyone down!" shouted the preacher. He crawled to a fallen log at the edge of the woods and continued to watch the battle. Jake and Mandy huddled together behind a tree and listened, wide-eyed. The gunshots echoed across the little valley, sounding louder with each exchange. Jake could tell by the location of the shots that the pursuers had descended the bluff and were closing in on the three men. It sounded like some of the shots were coming from the barn now.

As abruptly as it had begun, the firing stopped. The sudden stillness lay over the valley like a fog. Even the birds were silent. Then a blue-jay's alarm call pierced the silence, "Thief, thief." Muted voices floated from somewhere among the farm buildings, followed by the rustling sounds of several people climbing through the brush at the shallow end of the bluff, and then quiet again. The quiet

was immediately broken again by blood-curdling yells emitted from the very top of the ridge. "Yeeeeee-Haaa, Yeeeeee-Haaa. Another of the fearsome yells sounded farther beyond the ridge.

Everyone lay motionless until, after what seemed to Jake a very long time, Bob Watkins crawled from his hiding place and joined the women and children. His face was pale and his voice was raspy. "Well my dear ones, it appears that the war has literally come to our doorstep. From what I could see, the three men who first appeared over the ridge were dressed in the blue uniforms of the Federal Army."

"Were they bein' chased by Indians?" asked Mandy.

"More than likely they were members of the home guard." the pastor continued. "I'm reasonably sure that I recognized one or two of them---one, I'm positive, was the Devereax's overseer, Mr. Gridley. The three Yanks were so outnumbered, I would guess that they are lying dead out there somewhere.

Jake's heart began to pound wildly; his stomach seemed to flip-flop inside him. "Three men in Federal uniforms," he thought. "No! It couldn't be!" He tried to push away the thought that these men might be Pa and Ben

and Mr. Johnson trying to sneak back home. Jake's face went pale. He hoped that the same notion hadn't occurred to Ma. He glanced cautiously at her. She was still huddled protectively over the squirming bodies of James and Will, but she seemed to be relatively calm.

They sat listening until it seemed likely that there would be no more shooting. "All of you stay here while I go see what the situation is," announced the preacher.

"Please be careful, Bob," pleaded his wife.

"I have a rifle hidden under the seat of the wagon," Margaret offered. "I don't set foot outside my door without it since Gridley threatened us. Please take it with you."

"I'm not sure I'd be able to use it, but I'll carry it for show" grinned pastor Watkins over the top of his spectacles.

"Let me come with you," Jake requested. He looked to his mother. "Ma, I gotta be a man now. Remember how I stood up to Gridley?" Tears filled her eyes, and she nodded reluctantly for him to go.

"Stay here, ladies, and don't come out until we call you," instructed the preacher.

The oxen had remained hitched to the wagon in the middle of the corn field, peacefully munching corn stalks as

if nothing had happened. With his heart pounding in his throat, Jake retrieved the musket from the wagon and followed pastor Watkins toward the barn. Gus came slinking timidly toward them from beneath the corn crib, his courage totally undermined since the night of the raid. With extreme caution they approached the barn. Just inside the barn door, sprawled face down, lay a young soldier, possibly 17 or 18 years old. A splotch of blood oozed from a hole in the back of his shirt. Just beyond him, draped over each other beneath a window, were the forms of two men who appeared to be several years older. Jake couldn't move another step. He had never seen a dead person, and his worst fears seemed to be coming true. He forced himself to watch as his friend gently turn the young man's body over. There, staring blankly up at them was, not Ben, as Jake had feared, but a young stranger, someone else's uncle or brother.

Jake crumpled to the ground in a flood of tears so overwhelming that his sobs seemed to choke the very breath out of him. Bob Watkins bent over him, gently lifting and guiding him out into the sunlight.

"I thought it was Pa an' Ben", he sobbed.

"No, no, Jake, these poor souls are a long way from

home, I fear" said the preacher. "I only pray that they knew the Lord."

A search of the bodies provided no clues to their identities. Their killers had taken everything including their rifles. Jake and Bob Watkins cautiously explored the house and other buildings. They were undisturbed, except for the chicken house. Bullet holes riddled one corner of the building, and two hens lay dead near the fence.

Jake and the pastor returned to the woods to tell the women that it was safe to come out. They carried what was left of their picnic into the cabin and the women put the babies to bed. Jake unhitched the ox team, leaving the wagon sit in the field. The harvest would have to wait until morning, there were graves to dig.

It was nearly sunset when Pastor Bob Watkins cast the last handful of earth into the last shallow grave and prayed for God's everlasting mercy over the souls of the men whose bodies lay there.

The Watkins family stayed for two more days to help finish with the corn harvest. By the evening of the last day, the corn crib bulged with yellow ears of husked corn and a wagonload of the golden harvest sat in the barnlot, waiting for Jake to drive it to the mill.



## CHAPTER FIVE

At dawn the next morning, Jake hitched the ox team to the wagonload of corn for his trip to Devereaux's mill. Considering the stand that the Colonel had taken about Unionist families, Jake had no assurance that the mill would accept his corn. The man who managed the mill for Devereaux had always been very friendly toward Pa, and with the closest mill besides Devereaux's fifteen miles away, Jake had to try. Ma was very nervous as she watched Jake climb onto the wagon seat. She had packed a basket containing apples and cheese for him in case he got hungry along the way. Jake felt very grown up as he gave her a kiss and urged the lumbering oxen down the lane toward the main road.

As he drove along northward, he wished that he were driving the spirited team of horses that Pa and Ben had ridden away on. He would be to the mill and back in half the time it took these plodding beasts to make the trip. If Pa were home, he would be sitting on the wagon seat with Jake and he would be so proud of Jake and how well he managed the wonderful horses.

But Pa wasn't here. There hadn't been any word from either Pa or Ben since they rode away that terrible

night in June. Surely Pa would find some way to let them know that he was alright. What if he were hurt?

Wouldn't they hear from Ben? Maybe both of them were hurt. How could they get any message to them if they were with the the Union Army.? What if they were dead? That just couldn't be.! He just wouldn't let himself think that!

Jake's imagination had gone too far! Tears were burning his eyes. Ahead of him was the crossroads, its familiar church steeple rising above the treetops. Jake dried his eyes on a shirt-sleeve and pulled into the church yard. He jumped down from the wagon and tethered his team to the hitching post in the church yard.

Not until he stood on the parsonage porch, waiting for an answer to his knock, did he notice how different the cluster of buildings looked. The Devereaux name was everywhere. "DEVEREAUX STORE AND POST OFFICE," read the sign across the wide porch of the

stone building across the street. Above the schoolhouse door, in fancy letters, was a sign that read, "Miss Gertrude Devereaux's Academie for Young Ladies and Gentlemen". Even the name above the door of the Church was changed to Devereaux Junction Southern Methodist

Church."

Sarah Watkins answered the door. Her face was pale, and there were dark circles under her eyes. Untidy wisps of hair curled around her tired face. "Oh, Jake," she sighed, "Bob has gone to Ridgeton to fetch the doctor. When we got home last night, we found Mrs. Johnson and Abigail terribly ill. They must have been sick all the time we were gone, but hadn't been able to get help. They both have terribly high fevers, and have pains in their backs and legs. We worked with them all night, but nothing seemed to break the fever. Bob thought he had better get a doctor to come and see what is the matter. You'd better not come in. Do you think you can manage things at the mill alone?"

"Oh, yes Ma'am," answered Jake confidently, "Don't you worry, I'll be fine."

Jake's confidence plummeted as he climbed aboard the wagon and guided the oxen around the corner and drove eastward toward the mill. Would Mr. Finch, the mill manager, remember him? Would there be enough corn to sell to make the loan payment on the pasture land and still have enough to trade for cornmeal? What if Gridley should show up at the mill and start pushing him

around again?

Jake's stomach fluttered. He munched on one of the apples to settle the butterflies inside him while he drove the three miles to the mill. Once the mill came into view, with its familiar waterwheel splashing lazily in the creek, Jake felt more secure.

He steered the oxen up to the weathered millhouse, and backed the wagon through the wide open doorway. He summoned his confidence, hopped down from the wagon seat, and peered through the dimness expecting to find Mr. Finch's jolly round form. He could see no one, and was about to go out the back door to look for Mr. Finch, when an old man, a stranger to Jake, hobbled into the building.

"I'm lookin' for Mr. Finch." Jake announced in a very businesslike tone. "I got a load o' corn to sell."

The old man looked at Jake with mild amusement and said, "Well now, Sonny, George Finch ain't here no more. He's gone and gined up with the Army. He's probly marchin' with ole' Beauregard by now." He looked Jake square in the face and asked, "Whose boy 'r' you? Don't b'lieve I rekonize the face."

Jake hesitated, then, encouraged by the twinkle in the old man's eyes, answered proudly. "I'm Jake Richards,

John Richard's boy." The old man's face changed in an instant. He glowered at Jake and clenched his fists.

"I got instructions not to trade with tories nor any o' their kin." The old man's eyes squinted hatefully. "You jest git your wagon outa here. I ain't doin business with you!"

Jake's heart pounded and his mouth went dry. He pleaded, "Mister, please buy the corn. My Ma and me're tryin' to run our farm by ourselves, and she needs the money to pay for my Pa's new pasture land" The old man stubbornly shook his head and motioned for Jake to leave.

Jake tried to appeal to the old man's heart. "If you won't buy any corn, then let me trade it for some meal. We won't have enough to eat this winter if you don't. I got a little sister and two baby brothers."

Still the man refused, and walked toward the back door shouting, "You better git goin', Boy, I'm goin' ta report this to the colonel. He'll prob'ly send Gridley tah confiscate yer corn fer feedin' the horses of the home guard."

The old man turned toward Jake once more, and shouted, "Now git goin'! Yer plain lucky I don't jes take yer corn, wagon an' all." His face softened a bit, and Jake realized that the old man was trying to warn him. "Ya

better hightail it back ta yer Ma an tell her tah pack up her younguns an take off up ta Yankee territory. We don't need no traitor's brats ta feed. Food's runnin' as it is."

Without watching to see if the old man left the mill or not, Jake jumped onto the wagon seat, and urged the team to back the wagon out of the big door and back onto the road. The oxen traveled much too slowly to please Jake as they plodded toward the crossroads. Jake kept turning around to see if anyone followed him. The road behind him remained empty, and by the time he reached the crossroads, he had calmed down enough to stop at the parsonage to report his experience to the Watkins.

The pastor had not been able to persuade the doctor to come to the parsonage to examine the Johnson's. Word had already spread throughout the county that the men of Johnson's Crossroads had run away to fight for the Union. He did, however, give the minister some medicine and advice on how to care for the women.

Bob Watkins talked with Jake on the parsonage porch for a few minutes, and Jake related his experience at the mill. He told his friend what the old man had said to him and that he felt it was a warning. "He seemed like he wanted to help me, but was afraid to," said Jake.

"I believe he probably was afraid, Jake" responded the preacher. "I think you should hurry home and tell your mother exactly what the man said to you, and tell her that I think she should consider doing just what he said to do."

The pastor looked very worried. "After what the doctor told me about the way folks around here feel about Unionists, I'm ready to pack up and get my family out of here too."

"But we can't leave until we hear from Pa," protested Jake. "Ma won't leave until she knows where he is."

"Just tell her what I said, and that I'll ride out to see her tomorrow if the Johnson's are showing improvement."

Once more Jake urged the lumbering oxen onto the roadway. He tried to hurry them along toward home, his wagon still filled with corn. It seemed like the road stretched longer and longer ahead of him into a never-ending ribbon. He finished the last of the apples and cheese to soothe his patience more than to ease his hunger. The sun was nearly setting by the time Jake turned into the lane and saw Ma standing in the cabin doorway.

She rushed to meet him, not even noticing that the wagon wasn't empty. "I was so worried about you," cried Ma, as she rushed to meet him.

Jake told her about everything that happened--about the old man at the mill, about his warning, and about what the pastor had told him. Ma sat down on the porch steps, hugging her own shoulders the way she always did when worried.

"We can't just leave," she said. "Pa wouldn't know where to find us, and we have no idea where to find him." She buried her face in her hands, rocking gently back and forth in frustration.

"Ma, what if the colonel decides to take our corn the way the old man said," asked Jake, "He might send Gridley to get it." Jake shuddered at the thought of the the cruel man.

"Then we'd just have to manage without it," answered Ma. Her voice had that tone of resolve she used when there was no use arguing with her. "We can make do with the food we have until we hear from Pa. Then maybe we can pack up and go up north to find him." The issue seemed to be settled, at least for the time being.

Mandy had supper waiting for Jake. He had eaten

nothing since breakfast except the apples and the cheese, so he ate with an appetite that was ravenous even for him.

After supper, Jake pulled the wagon, still loaded with corn, into the barn. Ma had an idea that maybe Mr. Hensley would take some of the corn as part of their payment for the pasture land. She and Jake would drive the load of corn over to his place tomorrow afternoon to see if they could deal with him.

Jake went to bed that night exhausted but unable to fall asleep. The nights were very chilly now, so Jake rolled himself in an extra quilt. He lay staring into the darkness, listening to the night sounds of the early autumn. Gus' snores were no longer accompanied by the constant call of the Whip-poor-will. Instead, hundreds of Katy-dids chanted their testimonies from the treetops -- - Katy-did, Katy-did, Katy-didn't---over and over until dawn. The crickets no longer chirped lazily among the grasses. Their call had become an urgent call to harvest and store the summer's wealth. In the tall weeds beyond the garden, throngs of buzzing and clicking insect creatures echoed the call.

He stared out the window at the stars. The Great

Dipper hung there in the blackness, its handle in a lower position now, as if some giant hand were turning it slowly upside down. Jake wondered if Pa were looking up at the sky somewhere tonight too. Was he safe? Why hadn't they heard from him? Exhaustion finally overtook Jake's restlessness, and he fell asleep, still thinking of his father.

\* \* \*

The riders came before dawn, galloping out of the darkness, over the fields and into the farmyard, circling the great oak tree in front of the cabin. Jake, startled awake by the rumbling hooves and angry shouts sat upright in bed. He could see an orange glow reflected against the treetops along the bluff. In terror he shouted, "Ma! Mandy! Wake up! Fire! Fire!"

Jake jumped from bed, dragged a sleeping James from the upper bunk and slung the little boy over his shoulder. He used his bare foot to poke Mandy, shouting at her to wake up. Jake led a dazed Mandy quickly down the ladder, to find Ma, holding baby Will in her arms, peering fearfully up at them as she descended.

"They've set fire to the haystack!," cried Ma. "You

children stay back from the windows!" she ordered.

"Mandy, hold the baby." After herding her family into a rear corner of the cabin and fastening the wooden shutters over the interior of each window, Margaret Richards snatched the ancient musket from its place over the mantle, stationing herself protectively just inside the heavy oak door.

Seven or eight riders converged in front of the little cabin. Margaret pointed the loaded rifle toward the bolted door. With no rear door through which to flee, they were trapped.

Heavy boots thundered across the porch. An angry fist pounded at the oak door, rattling the latch with each blow. Margaret stiffened her body, poised like a lioness ready to defend her cubs.

"Hey, Yankee-lovers!" Gridley's raspy voice growled from beyond the bolted door. "We come to give ya fair warnin'. Ya better git yerselves outta here!" Jake and Mandy clutched their little brothers and stared at each other in terror.

Rocks began pelting the front of the house. Jake pushed the other children down closer to the floor. He heard his mother shouting, "Go away! I have a gun and I'll

shoot right through the door."

There was silence, followed by retreating footsteps. Gridely's voice shouted from somewhere out by the oak tree. "We'll be back one of these nights, and if you ain't gone, we're gonna board up your house and burn it down with you an' those brats inside! Mark my word, we'll be back!"

More rocks hit the house and angry voices hooted and jeered as the riders rode off through the clouds of smoke. As the rumbling hoofbeats faded into the distance, Margaret Richards and her family huddled on the porch watching their fields burn. The haystack was blazing wildly, and across the lane, the rows of corn shocks burned like dozens of torches.

"Ma!" screamed Mandy. "The corn crib is on fire!" Flames lapped furiously around the bottom and sides of the little structure.

"Stay with the babies, Mandy," ordered Ma. "Jake, come help me!" Desperately, Margaret and Jake tried to save the corn crib, carrying water two buckets at a time all the way from the creek, but the fire spread quickly. Soon flames were licking at the barn. Jake rushed inside to lead the oxen and the precious milk cow to safety.

Again riders approached---four of them this time. Jake rushed to the porch and ordered Mandy to take the boys to the springhouse and hide there. He grabbed the rifle Ma had left leaning against the cabin and pointed the weapon in the direction of the approaching horses. The glow of the flames soon revealed that these riders were not Gridley and his men, but old Mr. Hensley, his wife, and two grown daughters.

No time was wasted getting a bucket brigade formed to drench the sides of the threatened barn, saving it from being destroyed. The two families fought the blaze for more than an hour, passing buckets of water along a human chain from the creek to the barn, the last person in line dousing the flames, passing the empty bucket back down the line in exchange for the next full bucket handed along the line. The sun was peering through a smoky haze above the ridge when the weary firefighters finally gathered on the porch of the Richards' cabin.

"I'm much obliged to you folks for comin' to help us. We would have lost everything if you hadn't showed up." Ma told her neighbors wearily.

"It's a good thing we were up early," said Mrs. Hensley. "Zeb saw the glow from the fire when he went to

behind the driver's seat, straw mattresses, stripped from their crude beds and covered with a patchwork quilt, were piled to make a pallet for the children. Jake even found two large pieces of canvas in the barn to stretch over the wagon in case of rain.

It was late afternoon when Jake hitched the ox team to the bulging load. With Ma and James sitting on the seat beside him, Jake turned the creaking wagon northward. James cried bitterly when he discovered that they were leaving without Gus. Jake tried his best to explain that Gus would be happier chasing rabbits in his own fields than having to ride in a crowded wagon for miles. James was not consoled, and cried himself to sleep on Ma's lap.

Mandy sat on the mattresses with little Will cradled on her lap. "Ma, when will we come back? I don't want to leave our little house." she sniffled.

"I don't know, Child," Ma answered over her shoulder, "We can't think about that now. We just have to face whatever is ahead of us the best we can." Her eyes never left the road ahead. The look of determination that Jake knew so well masked any fears and doubts she might be feeling.

After everyone had scrubbed the soot from their faces and hands, Ma fed them a hurried breakfast. Soon the "loyalist" Hensley family was helping the "tory" Richards family pack their belongings.

Jake and Mr. Hensley emptied the wagon into a feed bin in the barn and lined the wagon bed with fresh straw. Mrs. Hensley and Margaret gathered up all of the food on hand, including the last ham from the smokehouse, and the cheese and eggs from the springhouse. They placed the baskets, jars, and boxes of provisions under the wagon seat along with all of the small cooking utensils. The large pots and kettles from the fireplace were hung along the sides of the wagon with lengths of rope. Mr. Hensley helped Jake lash a barrel to one side of the wagon, and the girls filled it with buckets of drinking water carried from the spring.

Margaret lovingly packed her china dishes into a flour barrel lined with straw, and nervously supervised while Jake and Mr. Hensley loaded the barrel and the rest of the family's most valuable possessions--- a trunkful of quilts and clothing, a crate filled with her husband's tools, the walnut cabinet, Will's cradle, and her rocker--  
- carefully into the rear of the wagon. In the space just

do the milkin'. Lord a' mighty, I just don't understand what makes people treat other folks so mean." She shook her head and raised her hands in despair.

"We don't hold with the Union in this war, but then, we don't feel like John's a traitor neither," remarked Mr. Hensley. "I have a brother up around Huntsville who's joined the Union Army too. Every man's got to do what his conscience tells him to do."

"We're goin' to leave," announced Ma. "I'm not sure where John is, but we're not goin' to stay here and be burned alive."

"Where will you to go, you and all these young'uns?" Mrs. Hensley worried.

"I'm not sure, but I'll find John somehow," answered Ma. "If we head straight north, we'll come the the railraod lines. From what I've heard, the Union has forces all along there. I'll just find some Federal soldiers and ask them to help me find John."

Mr. Hensley agreed to accept the wagonload of corn as final payment for the pasture land and to take the pigs and chickens in exchange for looking after their property until they could return. He was also willing to give Gus a good home until they could come back.



## CHAPTER SIX

When they arrived at the crossroads, Jake stopped the wagon at the parsonage. Bob Watkins was just hitching his horse to the buggy when he saw them pull up to the house. He couldn't help noticing how much his friends resembled the hundreds of families he had watched pass through the crossroads in recent months. Their wagon seemed to be piled with everything they owned, including Betsy, their milk cow reluctantly in tow. The faces of the woman and her children had already bore the weary, bedraggled sadness he had seen on the faces of so many as they passed his door.

The pastor rushed to meet them. "Margaret, I was just on my way to your place," he called. "I see you have decided to take my advice."

"Oh, Brother Watkins, you don't know the half of it!" Ma exclaimed. "We had a terrible thing happen this morning." Her eyes were wide with the terrifying memory as her story came pouring out, "Gridley and his hooligan's rode in this morning and set fire to our fields and the corn crib. They threw rocks at the house and yelled terrible things. They threatened to come back and

burn us up in our house if we didn't leave." Margaret's voice trembled with fear.

"Is everyone all right?" Bob Watkins asked scanning the family anxiously.

"No one was hurt, thank the Lord, but I've never been so frightened in my life!" Margaret held Will against her as she climbed down from the wagon. The pastor lifted James and Mandy down while Jake tied the oxen and continued the story.

"All of our harvest is gone and we would have lost the barn too if it hadn't been for the Hensley's seein' the fire and helpin' us put it out." Jake stood beside his mother looking older than his years. James began to cry, so Jake picked him up

She went on to tell pastor Watkins about the kindness of the Hensley family--- about how the Hensleys and their daughters had helped put out the fire, and how they had helped her pack her things and promised to look after the farm. "But what touched me most Pastor, was that they hold no hatred--- not even toward Ben and Jim for joinin' the North."

Pastor Watkins nodded, then shook his head saying, "I know, Margaret, but you have just witnessed how

Continuing northward along a road unfamiliar to them, Margaret Richards and her family had just joined the hundreds of Americans, mostly women, children, and elderly were wandering across the land. They were refugees.

\* \* \*

Eager to be out of the reach of Gridley and his ruffians, Margaret drove all night, using only the faint light from the stars and her trust in the gentle oxen to keep them on the roadway. She and Jake took turns between driving and sleeping.

Jake was driving when the first morning light appeared in the east. His mother, asleep on the straw pallet in the wagon bed with Mandy and the little boys, awoke and slipped quietly onto the seat beside him.

"Look how the land has changed since we left home, Ma" commented Jake. Instead of following along the bottom of a wide valley with steep ridges on either side, the road now snaked in and out among gently rolling hills.

"Looks like the land might be better than ours---

not so rocky." responded Ma. "It still has that rusty red color though." There were fewer trees than on the steep ridges back home, but cedar trees of various sizes dotted the pastures and were clustered with oak and pine trees along the shallow creek beds.

As the light grew brighter Jake noticed that many fields were burned like their own had been. "Look, Ma," Jake pointed to the charred ruins of a barn sitting next to a deserted farmhouse. "We ain't the only ones been burned out."

They stared in bewilderment at the increasing devastation as they bumped along northward. Occasionally a house was occupied, and dirty, skinny children gawked at them from behind the fence.

Ma shook her head in dismay, "How can people hold so much hate in their hearts that they would tear up their own country and make people live this way?" Knowing there was no answer to her wondering, she continued. "Jake, we have to find your Pa and Ben and then we can all go somewhere up north where there isn't any fightin'."

Jake nodded and looked at his mother's face. She looked more tired than he had ever seen her look before.

He couldn't help wonder how they were going to find anyone with the countryside so torn up and people all so suspicious of each other.

The sun rose in a clear sky that morning, but clouds moved in early to cover it with an even grey curtain. By the time they stopped for breakfast, a chilly wind stirred the trees. Quilts were pulled from the trunk on the wagon and Ma found her wool shawl among the clothes she had stuffed into a large reed laundry basket.

While the animals grazed along the roadside, Margaret fed her family from the supply of food beneath the wagon seat. Cheese and cold sausage with cornbread filled their empty stomachs, and the fresh warm milk from Betsy, tasted good to the shivering children.

"When we goin' home, Mama?" whined James "I wanna go home."

"I don't know, Darlin', Ma answered, pulling James close to her as she sat huddled against a wagon wheel nursing Wil. "I'm afraid its goin' to be a long time." She rocked both children, swaying back and forth, humming softly.

The wind whipped the tall grass around them while they piled back onto the wagon and started on their way

again. The road seemed bumpier than ever. Jake began to worry again. He looked at his mother struggling to steer the oxen around the deepest ruts in the road. Behind him on the pile of straw in the bed of the wagon, baby and James were both crying. Mandy was valiantly trying to comfort them by singing every song she knew.

"Ma, I don't see how we're ever gonna find Pa. Looks like the army's already been through here. We can't just go around askin' people if they seen him or Ben."

"I don't exactly know, Jake. We'll just have to trust the Lord to lead us to the right place and to the right people."

Jake rode in silence for a time. He wished he knew how they would be able to tell where the Lord wanted them to go or who to ask.

Jake's full stomach and the strain of the long night soon caused him to nod sleepily as he rode beside his mother. She gently nudged him. "You crawl in back and get some sleep, Son. I'll wake you if I need you." Margaret urged.

Jake willingly obeyed. Once curled up with Mandy and his brothers on the soft straw under the warm quilts, he was almost immediately lulled to sleep by the rumble of

the wagon wheels.

Jake slept nearly all morning as they lumbered ever so slowly northward. War's devastation scarred the land on either side of the road. The countryside seemed deserted, but that afternoon, while the family rested beneath a big oak tree near the road, another wagon approached from the north.

This wagon was loaded with possessions in much the same manner as their own. The old couple riding on the wagon stared curiously, possibly wondering why this woman and her children were apparently headed north toward the fighting instead of south to the safety of Vicksburg or Mobile. Jake and his mother nodded to the old man and woman and Jake called out a friendly, "Howdy," but the couple stared in cold silence as their wagon passed by.

Later, as Jake rode along staring ahead at this strange road, he suddenly realized how desperately he wanted to see his father again; to hear the quiet firmness of his voice, or hear him whistling one of his aimless tunes while he worked.

Jake didn't want Ma to see his eyes filling with tears, so he feigned a yawn and crawled into the back of

the wagon.

\* \* \*

That evening about dusk, they came upon a burned out house near the road. Although the roof was almost entirely gone, three of its stone walls still stood. The fourth wall, on the north end, was crumbled away.

"That looks like good place to camp tonight," said Margaret. "We can pull right inside where the wagon won't be seen from the road, and there's a good place to build a fire."

Jake swung the team around, steered the wagon through the gaping hole and into the enclosure. He unhitched the oxen and tethered them and the cow near a stand of grass behind the house. Margaret organized her family like a general.

"Jake, you make a fire in the fireplace, while Mandy and I fix a place for us to sleep," directed Ma. Mandy, lets clear a place for the straw mattress next to the wagon for you and me and the baby. We can drape that big canvas over the side of the wagon, down to the floor to make a kind of lean-to above the mattress."

"Jake, after you make the fire, cut some saplings and we'll build a little quilt tent over the pallet in the

wagon for you and James."

Soon, warmth from the fireplace radiated into the house and supper was ready. Chunks of their precious ham simmered in a kettle of black-eyed peas. The tantalizing aroma blended with the golden scent of cornbread baking in the heavy iron skillet and the fragrance of coffee boiling in Ma's familiar old coffeepot, luring the hungry children to the fireside. Sitting there near the fire eating his meal, Jake closed eyes and imagined himself back home in their own little cabin.

"Ma," Jake mused, "What if Pa is already back home lookin' for us?" thoughts of his father and uncle frantically searching for them suddenly loomed before his eyes.

His mother was silent for a while, and then she answered slowly. "I've thought about that too, Jake. We have no way of knowin' where they might be until we find some Union troops."

"How do we know that he ever found the Union Army? Maybe they were already chased back up north by the Rebs." Jake's fears mounted as he put them into words.

"Well, Son, I'm not ready to turn back yet. We're

still in Alabama, as far as I can figure. Let's wait and see what tomorrow brings." Margaret stood and began to clear away the supper leftovers. Jake knew his mother's mind was set and there was no use questioning any more.

With supper finished, the food and utensils were packed in the wagon. "Let's not waste our drinking water washing dishes," Margaret said to Mandy, "pack them in a cloth until morning. We'll look around to find a creek or spring to get fresh water. Let's use just a little water to wash faces and hands."

After scrubbing James and himself, Jake stretched out beside his little brother in the wagon, his body aching. As he lay there staring out of the crude tent into the cloudy darkness, his last waking thoughts were of his father. Would they be able to find him? Where would they begin? It seemed an impossible task.

\* \* \*

The rain fell gently at first, silently soaking the makeshift tent. Jake and his little brother were rudely awakened when the water-logged quilt fell in their faces. James shrieked and wailed. Jake carried him to the

comparative dryness beneath the wagon where the two of them huddled with Mandy and Wil trying to keep warm.

The rain fell in torrents. The partial roof overhead provided little protection. Wind ruffled the canvas, blowing the rain inside the shelter and soaking its occupants. Margaret and her children sat shivering on the rainsoaked mattress until the rain gradually stopped shortly before daylight. Gradually the color of the sky changed from pewter to gold. And then, small patches of blue grew larger and larger, letting shafts of sunlight filter down.

Jake crawled out from under the wagon and examined what was left of their fire. "The coals are dead, I'm goin' to have to find some dry tinder somewhere to start a new fire," called Jake to his mother.

Armed with Pa's axe from the toolbox, he explored the gloomy woods directly behind the house and found a small shed that had served as a chicken house. Inside its musty walls Jake found nesting boxes still lined with straw. With some amount of effort, the scrawny boy managed to pry the nesting boxes from the wall and chop them apart with the axe. He stuffed his pockets with the straw, and with the dry strips of wood mounded so high he could barely peer over them, Jake carried his treasure

proudly back to camp.

Ma rushed to help him as he approached the house. "Oh, Jake,!" she exclaimed, "you are a wonder! I didn't think you'd be able to find anything dry after all that rain."

Jake could hardly contain his pride as he knelt beside his mother to help her start a new fire. While she struck the flint and steel to make sparks near the straw, Jake blew life into the flames as the sparks caught the straw afire. When the the straw began to blaze, he piled the dry wood from the nesting boxes onto the flames and the fire was soon hot enough that even wet logs caught fire and crackled merrily.

Jake grinned up at his mother as they stood arm in arm watching Mandy and the little ones warming themselves by the fire.

Jake and Mandy went to work spreading the quilts and mattresses in the sunshine to dry. The canvas tied over the furniture and other items on the wagon had kept them reasonably dry so Ma's old trunk produced a change of dry clothing for everyone, and even a pair of Pa's boots for Ma to wear while her own shoes dried. Jake and Mandy usually went barefoot all summer, getting new

shoes when school began in the fall. There would probably be no new shoes if the war didn't end soon. There was an old pair of Jake's outgrown shoes that James could wear, but Ma decided to save them until he really needed them this winter. He wouldn't need shoes riding in the wagon.

Ma was warming last night's beans when she heard the sound of a horse's hooves splashing along the muddy road from the south. Approaching carriage wheels churned through the mud closer and closer until they suddenly stopped. Jake peered over a window ledge to discover a black carriage stopped in the road directly in front of the house. Black leather curtains covered the sides of the carriage, and many bundles were strapped onto the rear. Jake could hear voices coming from inside the buggy. A man stepped down from the driver's seat and began walking toward the house. He was wearing a long black cape and a large black hat, its wide brim pulled down over his eyes.

Jake was sure that the occupants of the carriage could not have seen the wagon from the road. As a precaution, Jake took the musket from under the canvas and motioned for the rest of the family to hide behind the wagon. He positioned himself just inside the doorway and

waited.

The man approached the house, stepping carefully through the high grass. As soon as he stepped through the doorway he noticed the wagon and began walking toward it, apparently to investigate its presence there. Jake summoned his most manly tone and commanded, "Stop, Mister! Stay away from that wagon." Jake's knees felt like jelly. His hands trembled. "Turn around and tell me what you're doin' here," he ordered.

Before the man could turn around to face Jake, Ma stepped from behind the wagon. "Put the gun down, Jake," she said, rushing toward the man with outstretched hands. "It's brother Bob."

Ma shook both of the pastor's hands at once and beamed with joy. "Thank the Lord it's you." She said. "I'm so happy you got away from there."

Limp with relief, Jake stood the gun against the stone wall and greeted his friend with a hearty handshake. Mandy ran out, carrying baby Will and leading James by the hand. Bob Watkins stretched his long slender arms around the three children and swung them around in circles.

Jake and his mother bombarded their friend with

questions.

"Did you have any more trouble with Gridley?" asked Margaret.

"No, he rode past the house yesterday, but he just stared at us with that mean look and went on his way." Bob Watkins answered.

"Has Pa come back lookin' fer us?" Jake wanted to know.

The pastor shook his head, "Not that I could tell. I rode out to your place the next day after you left, and Mr. Hensley was there boarding up the place. He would have told me if your Pa or Ben had been been there."

"Where are Sarah and the baby?" Mandy chimed in. Rev. Watkins motioned toward the wagon, "They're out in the buggy and Mrs. Johnson and Abigail are with us." He offered, anticipating the next question.

Turning to Margaret, the young man continued to answer questions before they were asked. "The Whitfields should be along any minute. They're traveling with a buggy and a wagon which prevents them from traveling as fast as I can. Mrs. Whitfield let us put some of our things on her wagon, so they have quite a load. It's a good thing they have those fine draft horses of Mr. Johnson's

to pull the wagon."

"Did you drive all night in that terrible rain?" asked Margaret. "No, the Lord provided, and we were fortunate enough to find an abandoned barn about three hours back down the road." Not many barns are still standing anymore, but this one appeared to have been used as a military command post. All the hay and grain had been used, and there were hundreds of boot tracks all around the place. Grandpa Whitfield said that the hoofmarks all around the barnlot were made by military horses." The young pastor was obviously grateful to be reunited with these members of his flock.

Just then the sound of the baby's crying reminded the pastor that his passengers were still unaware of the discovery he had made. Together with Margaret and her entire family, Bob Watkins rushed toward the buggy shouting his news.

A stranger observing this joyous reunion would never have guessed that these friends had parted company only two days earlier. There were tears and hugs and more tears, then laughter and more hugs and tears. Everyone talked at once while the two babies were passed from woman to woman, and the young man played

riotously with the children.

In just a little while the Whitfield's buggy pulled up behind the Watkins rig and the reunion began anew.

A table was improvised from an old door, and spread with a fresh white cloth. Each family contributed a portion of its store of rations, and everyone gathered around while their pastor thanked God for His loving care and bountiful gifts. For one brief hour, this little gathering of refugees resembled a Sunday school picnic more than a band of homeless wanderers.

For the rest of that day, the three families rested while the Richard's possessions dried in the sun, and the newcomers made camp for the night. The next morning a small caravan of an wagons and buggies splashed and rattled northward along the muddy road.

At lunch time, they stopped beside a little creek to eat and let the animals graze. Bob Watkins pulled a map from his black leather valise and began to study it.

"I think this is the creek that is flowing past us," he said pointing to a certain wavy line on the map. "If we camp tonight at the spot where the road crosses this creek again," he pointed to another location on the map, "we should be within a few miles of the Union lines by noon

tomorrow."

Jake became impatient just thinking about the possibility of being that much closer to finding his father. Maybe Pa would be in the very first unit of soldiers they met. His heart began to pound. His eyes filled with tears.

\* \* \*

At midday the clouds moved in again and it began to rain. They slogged onward, determined to reach the chosen campsite by nightfall. The drenching rain tapered to a steady drizzle, and by mid afternoon, the outline of a large covered bridge poked through the mist ahead of them. "I believe this is the place," called the pastor, motioning for the others to pull off the road. "We can drive under the bridge and make use of its shelter. We'll have plenty of time to set up camp before dark."

Suddenly, materializing out of the mist, six mounted soldiers appeared ahead of them, emerging through the entrance to the bridge and blocking the road in front of the group of refugees. For the next few moments there was silence. No one moved. Then, an officer edged his mount forward and rode alongside the

three vehicles, eyeing the occupants of each one. As he passed, Jake recognized Captain Spafford, the officer who came looking for Pa and Ben and the others. Jake detected an expression of recognition on the captain's face.

The other riders followed the officer and soon encircled the small caravan.

"Well, well, well, boys, we've gone and caught us a bunch of sneakin' Tories tryin' to slip away to their Yankee friends up nawth," drawled the Captain. He trotted his horse smartly up to the pastor's wagon at the lead of the group and spoke again. "Aren't you the preacher from back at Devereaux Junction?" he asked Pastor Watkins. The pastor nodded.

"I must respectfully inform you, Rev'rend, that we are under orders to confiscate all goods and equipment which might prove useful to he enemy. I'll have to request that you and your party step down from your vehicles so that we may carry out our orders."

Reverend Watkins stared directly into the captain's eyes and said, "We have small children and an elderly couple with us. I cannot obey such an order."

"Then I have no choice but to take your entire party prisoner and conficate all goods besides." replied

Captain Spafford sternly.

The pastor looked at his wife and child, then back at the other families. "Please leave us enough food for the children and old folks and one buggy so that we can continue our journey."

The captain rode the length of the caravan again peering into each vehicle. He returned to the pastor's buggy and drew his horse alongside so that he could speak in softer tones. "Very well Rev'rend, you may keep whatever food you have , but I cannot allow you to keep any conveyances or animals."

He tipped his hat and abruptly ordered his men to unload the wagons.

Each family obeyed the captain, huddling together in the chilling drizzle, watching in stunned silence while their belongings were thrown off into the ditches on either side of the road.

Nothing was removed gently. Margaret's barrel of china was sent crashing to the ground, the furniture hurled into the ditches, and their other possessions strewn through the mud. The soldiers kept Betsy tied behind the wagon as they drove it and the other vehicles away.

"Please! I beg you, leave the cow for the little ones!"

shouted Pastor Watkins. His pleas seemed to be drowned by the clamor and confusion as the soldiers rode past the frightened refugees. Then a young private, his face contorted with anger, steered his mount from its rear guard position and rode forward drawing his sabre. Raising the sword he swooped down on the rope tethering Betsy to the wagon, slashing it with one swift stroke. He stopped momentarily and stared at the pitiful assembly huddled together beside. In that moment Jake saw that his expression had changed from anger to one of pity and compassion. The soldier couldn't have been any older than Ben. Maybe this young man was thinking of his own family. Maybe he had little brothers and sisters at home.

Jake wondered how Captain Spafford would react to the young man's action, but the officer was far at the head of the procession and did not see the act.

The patrol rattled away down the road toward the same direction the folks from Johnson's Crossing had just traveled, and disappeared into the thickening darkness fog. The wet, frightened group stood watching, immobilized by their disbelief until Sarah Watkin's baby started crying. Soon Will and even James were crying.

Jake sloshed out onto the roadway to grab hold of

the rope Betsy was dragging aimlessly around in the mud. He led her under the bridge to tie her there while Pastor Watkins urged the rest of the pitiful clan down the creek embankment to relative dryness beneath the wooden trusses of the bridge.

"What has this world come to?" mourned Grandma Whitfield. "I never heard tell of people being left by the side of the road out in the middle of nowhere----" her voice trailed off as she struggled to find a footing on the rocky creek bank.

"If'n I'd been a younger man, Brother Watkins, I'da helped you take on that smart aleck captain and told him ta high tail it and leave us be."

"Now, Pa, you're talkin' like a fool." fussed Grandma. "How would you and the parson have stood up to six soldiers with guns and sabres. I declare! We're just gonna have ta sit out here in the cold and die. There ain't nobody gonna help us."

"Now, now, Ma." soothed Ellen Whitfield. "Talkin' that way isn't goin' to help our situation any. You came through the mountains all the way from Carolina when all this was just wilderness. At least you don't have to worry about Indians this time."

Jake helped Henrietta Whitfield guide her grandmother along the shallow creek bed toward the shelter of the bridge.

"We'll find some help, Grandma," Henrietta reassured her grandmother. "Just be careful now, and don't fall"

"You know, Pastor, I think those Rebs were retreating," Henrietta said, settling her grandparents on large log left lodged against some large rocks by the last high water. "They wouldn't have been headed south if they were scouting for Union forces."

"Those were my thoughts exactly, Henrietta," agreed Reverend Watkins. "They looked pretty tired and tattered to be fresh troops."

Abigail Johnson joined the conversation. "If they were retreating, then that might mean that we are getting closer to Union lines."

Because the creek bed was wide at this spot, the long bridge span created a roomy shelter beneath it.

"There's plenty of driftwood under here that is still dry. I'll git us a fire started," volunteered Jake pulling Ma's flint and steel from his pocket.

Bob Watkins grasped Jake on the shoulder and gave

him a gentle shake of encouragement. "Thank you Jake. We need to get these folks dried out." Both babies were crying. James was clinging to his mother's skirts, shivering and whimpering pitifully.

"Sarah, you and Margaret just sit tight here while the girls and I go back to the road to see if we can salvage anything. Jake will have a warm fire going shortly." Bob said gently. He urge his wife to sit down on a sandy mound. Ellen Whitfield sat beside them and cuddled poor little James against her ample bosom.

"Henrietta, Abigail, will you come with me?" he asked. "Perhaps we can find some dry bedding and some food in that mess up there. Mandy, do you think you can get Betsy to give us some warm milk to drink?"

"Yes Sir!" chirped Mandy. "I can if you can help me find a cup or somethin'." Mandy took Bob Watkin's hand and trudged alongside him as the four of them set off back up the embankment. Jake had noticed her frightened silence during the entire ordeal up on the road. Now this chance to be helpful had revived some of her spunk.

Not long after Jake finished coaxing a pile of dead grass sticks and driftwood into a crackling fire, Mandy came scurrying down the creekbank laden with articles from

their scattered possessions.

"I found our milk pail and some tin cups. Here are a couple of shawls for the babies, and this tin is the one Ma had the cornbread in. The lid was still on tight, so the cornbread's nice and dry. Miz Whitfield, there was a couple slabs of bacon with your stuff. We can wash the dirt off in the creek and have fried bacon as soon as I go get the skillet and a knife." Mandy chattered as if she had just returned from a trip to Johnson's store. "Oh, I guess I better milk the cow first." She dropped the cups and bacon next to the campfire and skipped away with the bucket.

Jake calmly picked up the bacon and mugs and took them to the stream for washing. Shortly, Mandy returned with the milk and dipped out portions of its warmth to everyone around the fire.

They sat quietly sipping the milk. The only sounds were the trickle of the stream, an occasional blue jay's piercing call, and the faint voices of the pastor and the two young women above them on the roadway talking among themselves while they searched through the wreckage of their possessions.

Mandy finished her milk and darted off up the bank. "I'm gonna fetch the things to git supper goin," she

called back over her shoulder.

Before long Mandy returned, slipping and sliding down again followed by the rest of the search party. She struggled to Jake's side with Ma's largest market basket brimming with cooking utensils and tins of food.

The pastor and Henrietta struggled with two cumbersome mattresses while Abigail could hardly see over the mound of clothing she carried in a large reed wash basket.

"These mattresses aren't too terribly wet," Bob announced, maybe we can hang them from the bridge supports and the heat from the fire will dry them well enough for us to sleep on them."

After the wet clothing had been draped over a few large rocks to dry and their meager meal prepared, everyone settled themselves around the fire, almost too weary to eat. The babies slept peacefully in their mother's arms. James sat on a stone near the fire munching away at a stick of bacon. Jake and Mandy pulled a log into the glowing circle and sat side by side listening to the adults make new plans.

"While we were up there digging through that mess, Abigail and Henrietta came up with an idea that I

think we should talk about." announced Bob Watkins.

Henrietta broke in before he could continue, "Abigail and I can start out in the morning and walk north along the road until we find Union lines---"

"Two young women setting out like that? Its too dangerous!" Ellen Whitfield interrupted her daughter.

"That's right," agreed Nancy Johnson. "Pastor, shouldn't you go with them?"

"We discussed that," answered Bob Watkins, "but there is the problem of leaving all of you here without someone to look after you."

"We think that the Brother Watkins is needed here in case anyone comes along who might cause trouble." Abigail added. "We could keep pretty well out of sight by hiding when we need to. Once we get to a town, we 'll be able to see which side is in control. Union occupation can't be too far north from here from what little we've heard about the war."

Henrietta continued with their plan, "When we find a Union army unit, we can tell them that we are looking for Jack's brother, Lieutenant Riley. If we can find him, then he'll help us find Jack and our other menfolk. Surely the Union soldiers will help us."

"We'll tell them all about what happened back home and how we lost our wagons and animals." nodded Abigail.

"I could go along." offered Jake, standing as tall as he could. "I'd make sure you got through."

"There's no doubt you could, Jake, but I need you here." said Pastor Watkins. "We need to put up some kind of lean-to to keep these folks warm in case it takes a while for help to come."

After some further discussion, the plans were finished. Everyone settled into the most comfortable spots afforded by their meager resources and tried to sleep. No one slept very much. Jake lay curled up with James on a bed of pine boughs and listened to Grandpa Whitfield snore. Henrietta and Abigail sat by the coals long after everyone else retired to talk in hushed tones.

Jake wished he could go along. Being out on the road looking for Pa was better than sitting here waiting for who-knew-how-long not knowing when or if anyone would come to help them.

Several times in the night one of the babies would wake and cry until its mother tended to its needs. One of those times, Jake was lulled into an exhausted sleep by the

sound of his mother's voice humming to the baby.

salvage before anybody comes by and helps themselves. Here, you eat some mush and then run help Brother Bob."

Jake could hear the sound of the pastor's axe coming from down stream. He gulped the hot gruel as fast as he could without burning his mouth and bounded off in the direction of the chopping sounds.

Bob Watkins had already cut a large pile of saplings. He smiled when he saw Jake coming. "Well hello there, sleepy-head. I'm glad you're up. You can help me carry these poles back to camp, and then you can get busy catching some fish for our dinner. I can't hunt any game because the Confederates took all of our guns."

Jake picked up a bundle of saplings and nodded. "I can catch us a fine mess of fish if I can use one of these poles. I remember seein' some store twine in Miz Johnson's things. If she'll let me have a length of it, I can make a hook out of some of those bramble thorns over there."

Once back at camp, Jake wasted no time fashioning his line and pole the way he and Daniel had done dozens of times. He cast his line into the creek time after time, but by the time the sun was nearly straight overhead, he had only a small mound of fish lying on the large rock beside him.

Ma called to him, "Better clean what you have and let's get them cooked. Folks are gettin' hungry."

Obediently Jake cleaned the fish and carried them to his mother. She smiled and said nothing, but set to work cooking them.

Once the meager meal was carefully portioned out, everyone ate hungrily. Their small stock of food would have to last as long as possible. No one knew where or when they would be able to get supplies.

"That's the last of the coffee" announced Nancy Johnson. "I was lucky to be able to hide what I did from Devereau's men when they took over the store."

"Mighty good fish, Jake," Grandpa Whitfield said. "We won't starve with you around."

Jake was grateful for Grandpa's words, but he knew that everyone probably still felt as hungry as he did. "I'll have to build a rabbit trap so that we can have rabbit stew for supper," Jake said.

As soon as he had helped the pastor carry the rest of the poles to camp, Jake began lashing sticks together with twine to fashion a small cage for the trap. Building the trap brought memories of Daniel and the many times the two of them had spent summer days trapping and

fishing along the creek behind Jake's house. That seemed so long ago now...like it happened in a different world. "I guess the world is a different place with this war goin' on," Jake mumbled to himself as he made his way into the underbrush to find a suitable place to trap rabbits.

Jake situated the rabbit trap among some sassafras seedlings where he saw rabbit droppings. He hoped the chunks of precious apple he was using for bait would do the trick and catch a nice fat rabbit.

Jake thought about the hours that and Daniel had spent so many carefree hours just this way. They could nearly always catch a rabbit or 'possum to carry proudly home for the family pot. Memories flooded Jake's mind. He stretched out on a fallen tree where the sun poked through the autumn leaves, and let his memories carry him back to those happier times before the war...to times when his biggest worry was being late to supper or forgetting to fill the woodbox. The soft rustling of the leaves overhead and the sun's gentle warmth soothed him.

Jake's reverie was invaded by a rattling sound. He sat up and listened. He wasn't sure what he had heard. Voices of the folks back at camp drifted toward him through the trees. The voices sounded excited. A crow

cawed harshly somewhere above him. Then Jake heard a different sound...a sound that stirred uneasy memories. It was the sound of heavy wagons and cavalry riders with their jingling harnesses. The rattling sound came again. Wagon wheels and horse hooves clattered across the wooden floor of the bridge.

Jake bounded back to the creek, his bare feet deftly seeking out the sandy places as he scurried upstream toward camp. He found the campsite deserted. Voices drifted down from the roadway above. He cautiously climbed up to peer over the crest of the embankment.

There, sitting right on the spot where their wagons had been stopped by Confederates just the day before, were soldiers dressed in blue uniforms. Union soldiers! Two large wagons bearing military banners and the Stars and Stripes were drawn up near the heap of furniture. Pastor Watkins stood talking with several soldiers, some still sitting astride their horses.

And there were Abigail and Henrietta climbing down from the lead wagon into their mother's arms. Ma and Abigail stood excitedly nearby with Sarah and the rest of their party. Everyone was laughing and talking at the same time.

Jake was dumbfounded. He stood gaping open-mouthed until Mandy spotted him. She scrambled down to meet him, dragging James in tow.

"Jake! Jake! Come quick! Just see who Abigail and Henrietta found," puffed Mandy.

"Come see! Come see!" Parroted James.

"Who is it?" Jake wanted to know. "Have they come to help us?"

"It's Mr. Jack. He's a soldier now." Mandy reported. She and James tugged at Jake's hands, pulling their still gaping brother toward the crowd.

There, sure enough, stood Jack Riley their teacher. He wore his uniform with a new dimension of authority, but the jaunty angle of his smart officer's hat over that red hair was unmistakably familiar.

"Jake! Mandy! James!" shouted Lieutenant Jack Riley. He stepped away from the cluster of soldiers with arms outstretched. The three children ran to greet him. He scooped James up onto one arm reaching out his other hand, first to Mandy, then to Jake.

Mandy bounced up and down clapping her hands with excitement. Jake, still speechless, grinned and shook hands grown-up fashion with his teacher and friend.

"We've come to take all of you and your belongings back to camp with us. We're billeted in a little town along the railroad about twenty miles up the road." Jack Riley told them.

He led the children to the wagons and handed James up to the driver of the first wagon.

"Jack Riley! You are a sight for sore eyes!" Ma greeted the young officer. "How on earth did the girls ever find you?"

"Well, Mrs. Richards, we were out on patrol this morning, we came across Abigail and Henrietta walking along the road. I don't know who was more surprised, the girls or me. Anyway, here we are.

"The Lord be praised!" Sarah Watkins exclaimed. "He has surely heard our prayers."

"That's fer sure! I don't think Ma and me nor those little sprouts could'a made it very long out here in the open." Grandpa added, shaking his head.

"What we have to offer isn't much better, Mr. Whitfield, but at least you will have a share of our rations and the protection of the United States army." Lieutenant Riley assured him.

Jake could hardly wait his turn to speak, "Do you

know where our Pa is, Mr. Riley?"

"Yes, Jake, he and Ben are back at camp, and you'll be able to see them as soon as we roll into camp."

Jake's heart skipped and tears of joy stung his eyes. Rather than cry right there in front of Mandy and everybody else, Jake tossed his floppy straw hat into the air and let out a wild whoop that echoed across the valley and sent an entire flock of startled blackbirds fluttering skyward.

"Praise the Lord!" Ma cried. She hugged her baby to her bosom and wiped her eyes. Mandy danced gleefully around in circles.

"Silas Johnson and Joshua Whitfield are there too. They've all joined the First Alabama Cavalry. It's a regiment of souther Unionists. My men and I are part of a regiment from Illinois." Jack Riley looked back with pride at the soldiers. "We'd better get your things and get on our way before a Reb patrol comes along.

Strong arms quickly loaded the items that could be salvaged from the ditch and helped carry the things up from the campsite. In less than thirty minutes, the wagons, loaded with the refugees and their belongings, were turned around and rolling northward toward Union

territory.

Jake was allowed to sit up front with the driver and Lieutenant Riley rode alongside the wagon.

"Mr. Riley, I-I mean Lieutenant Riley," Jake stammered, "Why aren't Pa and Ben on this patrol with you?" A wave of apprehension came over Jake as he watched the expression on Jack Riley's face.

"Well, Jake, your uncle Ben was out on patrol with his unit when I left camp; so were Mr. Johnson and Mr. Whitfield. Your Pa isn't feeling too well. He's taking it easy at the infirmary back in camp." Riley's tone seemed almost too casual. What was wrong with Pa?

To an uneasy Jake, the ride to the army camp seemed an eternity.

\* \* \*

The town was really only a crossroads like the one at home. There was a store, a church, a school, and a few houses with barns and sheds surrounding them. The school served as a command post with clusters of white canvas tents of various sized arranged in the field beyond. The church had been converted to a hospital, and it was there

that Jack Riley escorted Margaret Richards and her children immediately upon arrival.

Mandy, carrying the baby on her hip, walked on one side of Jake, and James clung to Jake's hand on the other as the children followed their mother and Jack Riley through the doorway. Inside the little limestone church, the air smelled of sickness. Jake and Mandy held tightly to each other and followed their mother timidly between the rows of cots that had replaced the pews. Bandaged, hollow eyed men stared at the children. Others groaned and writhed, seemingly unaware that anyone was near.

Up toward the front of the church, several men were sitting in chairs arranged in small groups. Some were conversing quietly. Others were playing cards, while a few were just sitting there staring into space. One man sat alone, his back to the approaching visitors.

"John," the lieutenant said softly. "John, someone wants to see you."

The man sitting alone turned slowly to face them. It was Pa!

Jake's heart rose and fell in one instant. Pa's face was so thin Jake barely recognized it. His eyes peered in disbelief at the woman and children standing there. His

gaunt face suddenly lit with joy. Struggling, Pa managed to stand, bracing himself against the chair. Tears filled his eyes.

"We're here, John" said Ma softly, her voice thick with emotion. She rushed to her husband, embracing him gently as she eased his fragile body back into the chair. Jake, and Mandy stayed rooted where they stood, staring at this shadow of their father. Only James seemed unaware of the transformation.

"Pa, Pa, we found you, we found you!" James shouted exuberantly. "Now, can we go home?"

James rushed to his father, climbed onto his lap, and hugged him fervently around the neck.

Jake hesitated no longer. He joined the happy reunion, followed by Mandy and Will. At this moment, the fact that their lives had changed so drastically in the past few months didn't seem to matter. The only thing that mattered to the Richards family now was that they were together again.

Doctor Phillips stood to one side with Jack Riley, watching John Richards and his family. Compassion for them in their ordeal brought tears to his weary eyes. Not all his patients were fortunate enough to know what had

become of the families they left behind. He knew that many of these men were unionists from Confederate states or from border states, and their land had become battleground.

The doctor spoke softly to Riley, "I am going to request that

Richards be granted sick leave. I shouldn't have any difficulty persuading the commanding officer to grant the leave, because we have so many men down with disease that we can't care for the wounded."

"That sounds like a good idea," agreed Lieutenant Riley. "But we may be moving the families over to Corinth in a few days. Will he be strong enough to travel with his family that far? They certainly can't go back home."

"I believe so," answered Dr. Phillips. "He has been improving steadily the past week."

Jack Riley smiled. "This is probably the best medicine he could have. If we get them settled here in camp, Margaret's nursing and good cooking should be just what he needs to recover."

"No doubt you are right," nodded the doctor. "If you can get the family settled, I will make the arrangements for Mr. Richards to join them tomorrow." Dr. Phillips

shook Lieutenant Riley's hand and turned away to finish his rounds along the rows of ailing and injured men.

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The tents the army provided for families were in a pasture on the north edge of town. A hay barn nearby served as a supply station where families could get blankets and rations.

"Oh, Jack, do you really think John will be given leave?" Ma fairly bubbled with happiness. She herded her children along behind Jack Riley as he led them to the camp.

"Doc Phillips thinks John will be better off with his family around him and the captain usually goes along with what Doc recommends." Riley told her.

"Well, I know I can take better care of my husband than he was gettin' at that hospital." Ma fumed. "I would have gone to the captain myself if the doctor hadn't."

Jake could see Sarah Watkins waving to them from the front of one of the larger tents as they entered the camp. "Margaret, Margaret, we're over here." she called.

"Oh, Sarah, Brother Bob, we got to see John!" Ma

told her, "He's been very sick, but they're going to give him a leave. He'll be staying with us." She ran toward Sarah as she blurted out her news.

"Margaret, that's just wonderful!" exclaimed Sarah.

"Oh, yes, Sarah, and I think we owe it all to Jack here, he talked to the doctor and to the Captain for us."

Turning to Jack Riley, Ma took both his hands and said, "We can't ever thank you enough for helping us. I don't think our little ones and the old folks would have lasted very long out there under that bridge"

"Well, Mrs. Richards, It was my military duty to bring you to camp, but I would have helped you anyway because you all were so good to me back there at the school." He grinned at her, his green eyes twinkling. "Now you folks try to get comfortable. There are rations and firewood waiting at the barn for you when you're ready for them." He tipped his hat and strode back toward the center of town.

The tent they offered to share with the Watkins family was crowded, but there were a few cots and plenty of blankets. Their possessions were piled in the center of the tent.

Ma quickly put Mandy and Jake to work stacking

straw mattresses and blankets to make a bed for the children while she and Sarah sorted through the clothing and utensils. "When you're finished with the pallets, I want you to carry some wood for the cooking fire." Ma directed them. "We're going to share a cooking fire with the Johnson's and Whitfields. They're in that tent next to us."

Jake and Mandy piled the slightly musty mattresses on the ground and covered them with one of Ma's quilts. They would cover with the scratchy wool blankets that the army had given them. The firewood was next. Jake and his sister set out for the hay barn where they had been told they could find wood. There, piled in a ragged heap behind the barn, was a mountain of chopped wood.

While they filled their arms with small logs, Jake watched Mandy out of the corner of his eye. She looked tired and skinny.

The spunk seemed to be gone. He hadn't been paying much attention, but now that he thought of it, Mandy hadn't been bossy with him since they left home. Jake was probably as homesick as he was.

As if reading his thoughts, Mandy said, "Jake,

wouldn't it be grand if we could just pack up tomorrow when Pa gets out of the hospital and go back home."

"It would be a good thing for sure," Jake answered. "If it wasn't fer that mean old Gridley, we probably could."

"I hope the Hensley's are bein' good to Gus," Mandy said. "Poor little James crys for him every mornin' when he wakes up and Gus isn't sleepin' there with us."

The two children walked back toward their tent. "Mandy, we gotta do like Ma says...don't look back." Jake spoke gently to his sister. She seemed to be wanting him to tell her that everything was going to be all right, and he know what was going to happen.

Jake thought about their house back home and the houses they had seen burned along the road. "Mandy, it could be we don't have a home to go back to." Jake said fighting back a lump in his throat. "Right now this tent is our home and our family's together. That's somethin' to be thankful for."

Ma was waiting anxiously to start the fire. Along with some bacon and flour, the army had given her a box of safety matches. Jake could hardly believe his eyes when Ma set tinder and logs aflame in just a few seconds. It

would have taken nearly half an hour using their flint and steel.

The fried bacon and biscuits were delicious. "I know some apples baked in these good coals would taste right good tonight," Ma said as she served up the last of the biscuits, "but I wanted to save the last of them for tomorrow when Pa gets home".

"When Pa gets home". Ma's words stuck in Jake's ears long after he and Mandy were settled with James on their pallet. He lifted the edge of the tent near his head and peered out into the crisp October night. The Drinking Gourd was hanging there in the northern sky...in a new position now, but still there marking the way north. Jake wondered where home would be now. Maybe they would have to keep following that great cluster of stars until they were far to the north, away from the fighting. What would they do when Pa had to go back to the war? Jake drifted off to sleep staring out at the night sky.

\* \* \*

Long before reveille sounded among the army tents signaling the first military formation of the day, Ma was

up stirring the coals of the fire to make breakfast. As soon as everyone had gulped down their mush, Ma breathlessly bustled around making ready for Pa's homecoming. "Thank you, Brother Bob, for fixing my rocking chair. Pa can sit here in front of the tent and soak up the sunshine.

The sun was barely above the treetops when Ma left with Pastor Watkins and Sarah to bring Pa home.

"Now, Jake, you and Mandy mind James and the babies." Ma called back to them as she hurried away. "We'll be back as quick as we can get your Pa out of the hospital."

Jake and Mandy stood watching their mother and her friends disappear around the last tent at the far end of the pasture.

After what seemed like hours of playing being James' "horse", Jake finally spied his parents walking slowly toward their tent. Ma and the pastor were walking on either side of Pa so he could lean on them. Sarah walked slowly beside them carrying a small bundle. Jake, followed by Mandy and James, ran to meet them.

"Howdy, Pa" James blurted, "We been waitin' fer you." The little boy flung himself at his father's legs nearly knocking him down.

"Ho, Son", chuckled Pa. Ya gotta go easy on me 'til I get my legs back" Pa knelt down to give his small son a warm hug.

Jake and Mandy stood grinning, seemingly at a loss for words. This man looked so different from the man they knew as Pa. He seemed old and more feeble than Grandpa Whitfield. "Hello, Pa." Jake stepped forward offering his father a very grown-up handshake. "We got a place fixed up for you to rest back at the tent."

"That sounds mighty good, Son." Pa said allowing Jake to help him to a standing position as he took his hand.

Beyond Jake, Mandy stood timidly watching. "Hello there, Sissy," Pa said, calling her the pet name he hadn't used since she was no older than James. Come here and give your Pa a hug."

Mandy flung her arm around Pa's waist and burst into tears.

"Well now, Mandy, your Pa needs to sit down, so lets help him to his chair and we'll get some lunch ready." Ma said, trying lighten the mement a bit.

When Pa was settled into his chair with Bob Watkins seated on a trunk beside him, Ma and Sarah

quickly set to work preparing their meal. Mandy and James were sent scurrying for wood and water, but Jake was allowed to sit with the menfolk.

"Well John," the pastor inquired, "how have you managed all these months. It doesn't appear that army life has agreed with you."

Pa chuckled weakly and answered, "That surely is the truth.

We had to hide out in a cave under the the rock bridge down in Winston County for weeks until we got word that the Union Army would take us. About half of us came down with the fever while were still in hiding." Pa began coughing so hard he couldn't talk for a while. Jake ran to get the water jug to give his father a drink, but Pa waved the cup away.

"Water won't stop this cough, Jake," Pa said once the spell had subsided, "The doc says I have lung fever from spendin' so much time in those damp caves. I guess, countin' the time in our cave at home, I spent almost three months livin in a cave. We all shared our rations, but the meals were pretty slim. I was mighty near dead on my feet by the time we were mustered in over at Huntsville the first of this month."

"Then you haven't seen any military action yet?" the pastor asked.

"Not a shot. Right after we were mustered, they put us on this march headed for Mississippi. They say Grant is holdin' there and they need replacements."

"Lieutenant Riley says they will probably move all of us over to Corinth soon," offered Jake. Being included in this adult conversation made Jake feel proud...even a little cocky. "I wish I was old enough to join up. I'd teach those Rebs a lesson." Jake said with a swagger that even he knew was out of character.

Neither Pa nor the pastor made notice of notice Jake's bravado. Pa went on, "We rode in rain all the way. I passed out right on my horse and can't even remember the last half of the ride. I just woke up one day in the hospital. They said I was out of my head with fever for three days."

"You must have been pretty sick" said Bob Watkins, "I'm surprised the army took you. You'll get your strength back now that Margaret will be taking care of you. There's nothing like being with loved ones to help a person's recovery."

"I'm mighty glad you're all here, but Margaret

keeps puttin' me off when I ask her why you folks left home. She just says she'll tell me about it later, that the important thing is she found me." Pa was more than a little curious as he leaned toward the pastor saying, "Please tell me, Brother Bob, what happened back home to send you all on the road."

Bob Watkins gave Pa a brief account of the changes that had taken place at Johnson's Crossroads since the Confederates took over there. He told him about Devereaux's refusal to buy or sell goods with Unionists, and about the terrible night that Gridley and his men set fire to Pa's fields and threatened to burn his family in their house.

"The Lord have mercy on us all!" exclaimed Pa when the pastor finished the whole story. "What is this world comin' to when men even think of burnin' women and children?"

Pa ate reluctantly at lunch, saying that he still didn't have his appetite back after being sick. He sat in the sunshine and rocked all afternoon, staring into space. At supper he had to be coaxed to eat again. Not even James' playful antics could distract him from his brooding for very long.

Gradually, over the next few days, with Ma's hot broth and fresh baked biscuits and the warmth of the autumn sun, Pa finally began to gain strength. By the time Ben returned from patrol with Mr. Johnson and Mr. Whitfield, Pa was able to take short walks with Ma every day.

The three men came straight to Pa's tent the day their patrol rode in.

"John! It's sure 'nough good to see you alive and kickin'." beamed Ben, slapping his brother on the back.

"We were mighty worried about you, John." Silas Johnson gave Pa a hearty handshake. "You just didn't shake that fever like the rest of us did."

Joshua Whitfield stood holding his hat, sheepishly nodding and grinning. "It's shore good to see that yore up 'n' around, John." he said grasping Pa's hand firmly.

Silas and Joshua tipped their hats to Ma and hurried off to find their own families.

Ben greeted Ma and Jake with one sweeping hug, and was immediately tackled about the ankles by James and Mandy. Ben lifted James and flung him squealing high over his head. Mandy bounced up and down clapping and giggling merrily.

"Margaret, I still can't believe you're here!" exclaimed Ben. "John sent you a letter tellin' you that we had got accepted in the First Alabama Cavalry. You must've got it, the way you found us so quick, but what made you leave home? "

"Ben, we didn't get any letter. Mr. Devereaux probably has it." Margaret went on to tell Ben about how Devereaux and Gridley had control of the store and the post office, and even the school.

"And do you know what that bully Gridley did to Margaret and the children, Ben?" Pa's eyes sparked with new life as he related to his brother the story of how the night riders had burned their land and threatened their family. "Margaret says that Gridley himself threatened her and the children right in our own barn lot, and then came back with his mob and tore up the place lookin' for us."

"I'm sure it was Gridley who was leading the gang that burned our corn field and threatened to burn us up in our own house," Ma added, shivering with the memory of that terrible night. "I believe they meant every word of their threat. I just couldn't stay there."

"We were all threatened in one way or another, so we felt we should head north and take our chances trying

to find all of you the best way we knew how." Bob Watkins added.

When Ben heard all that had happened back at the crossroads, he pounded his fist into his palm and stamped his foot in anger. "That Gridley plans to fight his own little war down there. If I ever run into him when we're on patrol, I'll fix him good and proper."

"Don't let your anger turn to hate," warned Bob Watkins. "It is hatred that has turned our whole nation against itself."

Ben nodded, "I know, Pastor, but men like that shouldn't be runnin' loose."

Just then, Jack Riley came riding into the camp and began making his way toward them, stopping at each tent to speak briefly with its occupants. Jake and his family and the others watched curiously as the Lieutenant approached them, dismounted and tethered his horse to their tent stake.

"Hello folks, looks like we have a home town reunion here," Jack greeted them with a warm grin. "I'm glad to see you gentlemen are back from patrol in one piece." He said, nodding toward Ben, Mr. Johnson and Mr. Whitfield. "I've come to tell you about our new orders. All

military families are being evacuated at first light tomorrow."

"Will John have to stay here?" Ma's voice was anxious.

"No, Margaret," Jack assured her, "he is on leave, so he will travel with you and the other military families. The track for the line to the west between here and Corinth has been repaired, so a train will leave in the morning."

"Is our cavalry regiment going to Corinth?" asked Ben.

"Yes, after you complete your assignment here. My regiment is being sent back North," the lieutenant answered, then turned to Bob Watkins. "Pastor, I understand that you and your wife are from Ohio. I could arrange for you and your family to travel with my unit and get you as far as Memphis. I could get you on a train that would take you the rest of the way."

Bob Watkins hesitated for a moment, looking at Pa and Ma and the others. Sarah Watkins pleadingly touched her husband's arm. He looked into her eyes, then at their baby girl, and nodded. "Yes, I must get my wife back to her family. Perhaps I can return to my church when the

war is over."

Jack Riley glanced down the row of tents, his eyes settling on the tent where Abigail and her mother were sitting by the entrance. "I need to finish delivering my message to the rest of the folks," he said, untying his horse. "I'll see you first thing in the morning." He led his horse away toward the Johnson's tent.

"Oh, yes," Jack said turning partway back. "you may take only what you can carry with you on the train. Each family will be allowed a very small space on a flat car for a few household items. No livestock will be permitted, so you will have to turn your cow out to pasture here. Maybe Ben can round her up and bring her along when his unit rides through on the way to Corinth in a few weeks. You will be allowed to keep the blankets that have been issued to you. See you tomorrow."

"Where's Corinth?" asked Mandy

"That's over across the state line in Mississippi," answered Pa. "The Union men fought a big battle there a few weeks ago. Heard it was pretty bloody."

"I hear that General Grant and his men are holdin' that place down good and tight. I guess the First Alabama is gonna be part of Grant's army now. Grant himself has

headquarters right there in Corinth...even had his family livin' there this summer in a mansion captured from some diehard rebel leader." Ben added.

Lieutenant Riley's message sent Ma and Sarah into a frenzy of activity.

"Jake, you and Mandy go fetch some water and fill the kettle over the fire." Ma ordered "Who knows how long it will be before we can wash ourselves again. I want you and the babies to have a good scrubbin' before you go to sleep tonight."

Jake and Mandy obeyed at once, returning with bucket after bucket of water from the creek at the far end of the pasture. It took a long while to fill the large iron kettle hanging over the fire.

The two women rolled what little extra clothing they had into neat bundles and sorted through their sparse possessions, once more deciding what to take with them and what to abandon. Then they set to work making supper, setting aside half of the bacon and biscuits for a hurried cold breakfast in the morning.

While Jake and Mandy were cleaning up after supper, Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Whitfield came over. Mrs. Johnson was particularly excited. "We came to tell you

folks goodbye. We aren't going to Corinth, we're leaving later tomorrow.

"Why, Nancy," Ma said, "Where are you goin'?"

"Well, you know how sweet Abigail and Jack Riley have always been on each other." Nancy Johnson beamed. "He just proposed marriage to her, and she accepted, of course. He's sending her to stay with his family in St. Louis, and wants me to go with her. Silas and I talked about it and he's in favor. They'll be married there the next time he gets a leave."

"Glory be!" Ma cried, hugging Nancy Johnson's plump shoulders. "I always knew Jack would get around to marryin' Abigail some day."

"Jack's regiment take us as far as north as Memphis, where he'll put us on a riverboat for St. Louis." Nancy explained

"Silas will feel a lot better knowin' the two of you are away from the war, I'm sure," Pa added.

"And Ellen and Henrietta are traveling with us as far as Memphis." Nancy offered, taking Ellen Whitfield's arm.

Ellen nodded. "My sister lives in Memphis. Joshua wants us to go stay with her.

"Sarah and I will may be going as far as Memphis too." Pastor Watkins told her. "Jack said we could go to Memphis and get a train to Ohio from there."

His news sent the women into such a flurry of hugging and crying that Jake edged his way around behind the tent. He occupied himself throwing rocks at a stump until he was sure the visitors were gone.

By the time the autumn sun was low on the horizon, Margaret Richards had her family fed, scrubbed, and packed for their second journey in less than two weeks. This time, at least, her husband was by her side.

After dark, Jake lay on his pallet staring out at a patch of stars through the tent flap. He heard Pa and Ma quietly talking by the campfire.

"Margaret, why don't you ask Ellen Whitfield if you could go stay with her and her sister in Memphis." Pa suggested. He paused, waiting for Ma to respond.

"No, John, I won't leave you." Ma's answer was no surprise to Jake.

Pa didn't give up easily. "She's a widow with a big house, and she's a Unionist. You could earn your keep by helpin' her in her seamstress shop. You and the children would have things a lot easier there," he pleaded.

"John, I'm goin' to stay with you as long as I can." Ma's voice was firm. "When they tell me I can't stay, then I'll see if the children and I can get to my aunt Lola's in St. Louis."

The matter was settled. Pa knew when Ma's mind could not be changed.

Jake couldn't go to sleep. He kept thinking of their little farm and how much further they kept moving away from it. He wondered if Pa would have to go back to war. And who was Aunt Lola? Jake couldn't remember Ma ever mentioning her or any other family in St. Louis.

"Jake, are you awake?" Mandy whispered loudly from her pallet.

"Yeah, I'm awake," Jake answered softly. "What's the matter?"

"I want to go home. Why can't we go home?" Mandy asked.

"'Cause Gridley would run us out again. And besides, Pa's still in the army. We have to stay with him now."

"Well, I wish we could just go home." Mandy pouted.

"So do I, but we can't. So go to sleep." Jake ordered.

Mandy sniffed quietly for a while and then fell asleep. Jake wondered if things would ever be the way they used to be. Why did people have to treat each other like they did? He had no answers, so he lay quietly staring into the darkness until he finally drifted off to sleep.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

The morning air was tipped with frost. Jake shivered, rubbing one bare foot at a time against his pantleg to warm his toes. His breath hung in little white clouds. He and his family stood with a group of strangers on the railroad platform, staring down the smooth steel rails at a distant puff of black smoke. Overnight the sky had turned from brilliant blue to dirty grey; the sun was a cold silver light peering from beneath a dark purple blanket on the eastern horizon. From far down the tracks, a train's mournful whistle wailed.

Jake trembled, as much from excitement as from the cold. He had never seen a real locomotive before.

The puff of smoke drew closer. Jake watched the black speck beneath it take form. It grew larger and larger until he recognized the nose of the powerful engine.

"Ain't that somethin' fierce, Pa?" Jake shouted as the distant rumble became an earth-shaking, earsplitting roar. He had never heard any sound like it.

Pa nodded, and put his arm across Jake's shoulders. "How'd ya like to drive one of those?" Pa shouted, pointing to the cab where the engineer leaned out watching the

track ahead. Pa's question was lost in the roar as the great iron horse loomed alongside the platform, snorting steam and belching great clouds of black, foul smelling smoke. A torrent of cinders and ash pelted the waiting crowd. The iron bell clanged incessantly.

The engine's whistle pierced the air with a shrill, earsplitting screech. James screamed, buried his face in Jake's shirttail, and clasped his hands over his ears. Mandy, her wide eyes fixed on wheels larger than she was tall, held her ears, then clutched Pa's arm as if she might be swept away by the sheer motion of the great monster. Ma shielded Will's face from the cinders and grimaced, bracing herself as the platform shuddered beneath her.

Great hissing clouds of white steam spewed from beneath the locomotive. With one tremendous shudder and much scraping of metal against metal, the giant wheels came to a groaning halt.

An army officer shouted, "Everyone move to the rear." He carried a large slate which, Jake presumed, bore the names of everyone in their group. "Women and children will ride the passenger car. Men will board the baggage car and the flat car."

When their name was called, Pa guided his family

toward the only passenger car. Jake helped Ma onto the rickety car and lifted James up behind her, while Mandy scrambled aboard. "Pa", I'm gonna ride with you." Jake announced.

Before Pa could overrule Jake's decision, they were swept along with the crowd of men scrambling for a place on the enclosed baggage car. Ma waved frantically, shouting something to Jake, but her words were smothered by another blast of the engine's whistle.

There was no room on the baggage car for Jake and Pa, so they had to climb onto the open flat car. Soldiers tossed piles of baggage and furniture onto the car.

Jake recognized some of their own possessions, which he and Pa quickly piled together for a place to sit. The train lurched and began to roll, faster and faster until the land and trees on either side of the track seemed to be moving.

Pa leaned back against their bundles and closed his eyes. In spite of the heavy wool army coat he wore, he was shivering. The color was gone from his face. "Pa, what's the matter?" Jake cried.

"Oh, just one of those chills comin' back." Pa tried to shout above the clatter of the train wheels. "I guess I

just can't take this cold weather."

Jake opened a bundle of blankets and spread several of them over his father. His own homespun shirt and pants felt paper thin against the cold wind, so he crawled under the blankets with Pa.

The men and older boys on the flat car sat huddled in small groups for warmth. It seemed as if the twenty-five mile trip to Corinth would never end. A steady drizzle began to fall, and continued for the length of the trip. Finally, the train slowed to a stop in the train yards at Corinth.

"Everyone off the train," shouted a rough looking sergeant. He strutted up and down the length of the platform in his heavy rain slicker. "The army ain't responsible fer yore belongin's. Git 'em off the train an' over the the car shed yerselves." he growled.

Jake and Pa struggled to remove their bundles and Will's cradle from the flatcar. Ma's rocker was all that remained on the flat car when the train lurched and began to roll. The rocker crashed to the ground, tumbled under the train wheels and was crushed into splinters. "Poor Ma," said Jake, "She lost her Carolina clock and her fancy china dishes when the Rebs dumped our things in

the ditch. Now her rocking chair is gone."

"Well, Son, considerin' how this country's tearin' itself apart, we'll be lucky to come through this war with our skins," Pa said, dropping in exhaustion on the soggy remains of their worldly goods.

"Pa, are you feelin' worse?" Jake knelt down beside his father. Pa's forehead was broken out with beads of perspiration, even though a chilly wind whipped around them.

"I'll be fine, Jake, just as soon as we find your Ma and get in somewhere warm." Pa insisted through chattering teeth.

Pa seemed barely able to lift the bundles. "Do you see your Ma anywhere?" Pa's glazed eyes scanned the crowded platform.

Jake and his father pushed their way into the crowd. Families gathered in little clutches all around the rail yard, but Ma and the children were nowhere among them. Jake's heart pounded. Where had they gone?

Pa stumbled dizzily, nearly falling into the mud. Jake helped him to a pile of boxes to sit for a while. Looking desperately around, Jake spotted a group of Union soldiers standing nearby. One of them was the sergeant

who had ordered them off the train.

Not knowing what else to do, Jake ran over to the sergeant and asked, "Pardon me sir, do you know where the ladies that got off that last train went?"

Jake's southern accent seemed to anger the burly man. The sergeant glared biligerently at Jake, spat on the ground, wiped the tobacco juice from his scraggly beard with a sleeve, and sneered, "Well, well, Pup, you sound like a little Johnny Reb to me. How do I know you ain't no spy?"

One of the other soldiers smiled in a kindly way, and said, " He's probably from that tory unit from Alabama that's sending us their families and convalescents

The sergeant swaggered over to Pa and glowered down at Pa's rumpled blue uniform. "You belong to that tory unit from Alabama, Private?" the sergeant demanded, rudely nudging Pa with his foot.

"Yes I am, Sergeant," Pa answered, struggling to his feet. "My wife and children got off that passenger car after we pulled in, but by the time my son and I unloaded our things off the flat car, we couldn't find her."

The other soldier seemed more sympathetic. "Sergeant Hawley, didn't you send those women on down

to the train sheds?" he reminded.

"Oh, yeah," Sergeant scratched his head and pulled his greasy cap down over his eyes. He pointed to a large barn-like structure far down the tracks, "I did send a bunch of women down to the train shed. They're processin' new arrivals through there."

"Thank you, Sergeant," Pa said politely.

Jake and Pa gathered their bundles and the precious cradle once more and trudged along toward the long building the sergeant had indicated.

"I don't like him!" Jake grumbled, once they were out of the sergeant's hearing. "He's mean like Gridley."

"That's the way things are, Jake" Pa panted as he trudged along with his load. "There's bad folks and good folks on both sides."

At the train shed, Ma was waiting anxiously just inside the entrance. "John! I didn't know where you went!" She cried, nearly in tears. "The soldiers kept telling us to move along, and wouldn't listen to me when I told them I wanted to wait for you."

"It's all right now, Margaret," Pa reassured her.

"We just have to find out where we can stay and see if we can get some supplies."

Pa stepped up to a table where a young lieutenant sat writing in a large ledger. Pa saluted, produced a small booklet from inside his jacket, and showed it to the officer, motioning back toward his family as he spoke. Jake couldn't hear what Pa said, but the lieutenant nodded and copied something from the booklet into the ledger. He returned the book to Pa, spoke a few sentences and pointed in the direction they had just come. The two men saluted, and Pa walked back to Ma with a pleased smile.

"We will be in the hotel across the street from the depot, Margaret. How does sleeping in a real bed sound to you?" Pa's voice was suddenly stronger, although his eyes still looked glassy and feverish.

"Oh John, a hotel! How did we get put into a hotel?"

"Well, they're puttin' all military families in the hotel, and even though I'm on leave, they'll let us have a room." Pa explained as they made their way through the rail yard and across the muddy street.

The rail yard was a maze of tents, crates, boxes and furniture piled everywhere. Refugee families were actually living right there in the rail yards. Smoke from their cooking fires swirled about on the wind. Tents and makeshift shacks dotted the yard.

Inside the once elegant hotel, weary people sat or stood waiting to be called into a room that had once served as the dining room. There, the tables were piled with blankets, sides of bacon, sacks of flour and beans, tins of hard tack, and strips of beef jerky. When Pa's name was called, he and Ma went into the room, returning after a while with half of Pa's pay allotment in supplies.

"It isn't much, Margaret, but we can make do." Pa apologized.

Ma didn't seem to mind. She followed along to their assigned room, carrying the basket of food as if it held a feast.

The room was a large one at the rear of the hotel, but they were to share it with another family. Cots had been moved in to supplement the two existing beds, and the room was partitioned with sheets hung on wire stretched across the room. A large fireplace opposite the doorway provided warmth. In the center of the room was a square table with four chairs.

Ma greeted a sour-looking young woman seated at the table. "Hello there, my name is Margaret Richards, and this is my husband John. These are our children Jake, Mandy, James, and little Will here."

The woman nodded silently without so much as a smile. She glanced toward a rocker near the window where a middle-aged woman sat mending a blue army jacket. The bed and other furniture were cluttered with clothing, papers. The table had not been cleared of dishes. The floor was dirty, and the odor of stale cigar smoke mixed with cooking odors and the smell of unwashed bodies. The older woman gave them an expressionless nod and continued rocking.

Ma smiled weakly at Pa, and sat the basket down on the table nearest her own side of the room. Jake placed the cradle near the bed so that Mandy could lay Will in it. He whined briefly before comforting himself by thrusting a thumb into his mouth.

Pa spread the contents of their wet bundles over a chair near the fireplace and lowered his exhausted body onto the bed.

"Do you ladies mind if I use the fire to cook supper for my family?" Ma asked the two women courteously. "You're welcome to share what we have if you haven't eaten supper yet." Ma's generous nature dictated that she invite them, no matter how unfriendly her roommates were.

The older woman stared curiously at Ma, then muttered, "No thanks."

"Jake, will you go find some firewood so we won't have to use up what these folks have brought in" Ma didn't want to appear to be taking advantage of anyone.

Jake obediently went into the hallway, found a woodbox full of logs, and brought an armload into their room. Ma quickly built up the fire and fried some of the bacon for her family's meal. The young woman sat there at the table, staring at Ma.

Pa didn't eat much supper. "I just don't have any appetite, Margaret," he told Ma when she coaxed him to eat. Jake could tell that Pa didn't want Ma to know how much worse he felt.

After supper, Jake and Mandy went to the well outside the back door to get water for washing dishes. While they filled their buckets, Mandy said, "I like the idea of sleepin' indoors, but those two women are strange. They give me the shivers every time I look at them."

"Some people just ain't sociable, Mandy." Jake shrugged. "Act polite and let them be."

He led the way back to their room. When he opened the door, who should be standing there warming

himself by the fireplace but Sergeant Hawley... the same grisly man who had called Jake a "pup". Apparently, the two women were his wife and daughter. Now it was Jake's turn to have "the shivers".

Jake stood in the doorway, gaping at the ominous figure across the room. Finally, Ma had to say, "Well, come on in, Son and put the water over the fire so we can get things washed. Jake obeyed his mother, cautiously edging around Hawley's hulking frame.

"Excuse me Sir," Jake mumbled as he placed the buckets of water over the fire to heat. The Sergeant grunted and stepped aside. "Well now," Jake thought to himself, "this sure takes the joy out of gettin' to sleep indoors. I think the snakes out in the pasture would be better neighbors."

With very little talk, Ma and Mandy hurriedly cleaned up the supper things, while Jake put James to bed on the cot the two of them would share. Once the dishes were done and faces washed, Ma drew the sheets across their side of the room and the Richards family slipped gratefully into the soft, warm beds.

Pa was still a little feverish the next day, but Ma began fussing over him with her home remedies. With a

little of the money left over after paying in advance for the room and buying the supplies, Ma was able to buy a chicken and some eggs from a soldier just in off patrol. She boiled the chicken to make a nourishing broth.

"Margaret, that hen was probably taken from some poor farm family that wants no more a part of this war than we did back home in Alabama." Pa lectured when she returned to the hotel room that afternoon. "The Rebs aren't the only ones who take whatever food and equipment they need from civilians."

"I can't think about that now, John," Ma retorted, "My purpose is to get you well and feed our children. If I've learned anything in the past few months, it's that wartime makes people do things they'd never do in normal times."

Jake tried not to think too hard about the source of the chicken either as he savored the chicken and dumplings Ma made for supper that night.

Pa rested all that day, and by the following morning his fever was gone again. The weather was sunny and warm enough for Pa and Jake to go out for a walk through the streets of Corinth. The town had not been damaged much by the battle a month earlier. Most of the

fighting had taken place on its outskirts. Next door to the hotel, was a small shop that had a sign above the door that said, PHOTOGRAPHER.

"Pa, there's a place where they can make your picture." Jake cried. "I read about it in one of Mr. Riley's Chicago papers"

Out in front of the shop, a cavalry officer in full dress uniform stood beside his horse staring toward a man standing behind a wooden box. The box sat on three long legs like a surveyor's tripod. The man had a black cloth draped over his head and seemed to be peering through the box at the soldier.

"Look, that officer is having his picture made right now." Jake said, pointing at the two men.

After several minutes the photographer finally lifted his head from under the cloth and called, "That will be all, Sir. You can come back tomorrow to get your portrait."

The soldier went his way and the photographer turned toward Jake and Pa. "Hello Gentlemen, are you interested in getting a photograph made?"

"No, Sir, we were just curious about that contraption you have there," Pa answered, a little

embarrassed at being caught gawking.

The photographer smiled and pulled a small thin rectangle of metal from his waistcoat pocket. "This is a sample of my work," he said proudly. On the shiney plate was the exact image of the hotel where Jake's family was staying.

"Well don't that beat all!" Pa marveled. "How does that thing make a picture that looks so real?"

Very patiently the photographer explained, "This plate has been treated with a special coating that is sensitive to light. When the light reflecting off of objects enters the opening in the front of the camera, the image of those objects is transferred to the coating on the plate by the affect light has on that coating." the photographer carefully wrapped his camera in the black cloth and folded the legs of the tripod. "Of course I have to treat the plate with chemicals in my dark room before you can see that image," he added.

"That sure is somethin'" Pa reiterated his amazement at this scientific wonder. "I'd like to have you make a picture of my family someday when I can spare the cost."

"Come by any time, Sir. Now I must get busy

processing photograph I just took." the photographer said disappearing into his tiny shop.

"Many thanks for your time," Pa called after him.

"Pa, do you think we could really have our pictures made?" Jake asked excitedly. "We could bring Ma and Mandy and the babies and have one picture made of us all."

"That would be a fine thing. We'll just have to think about that next time I get my pay, won't we?" Pa smiled down at Jake patting him on the shoulder.

They walked for a while along the street that ran beside the hotel. Up the hill from the hotel they turned the corner and passed a large stone mansion with tall white pillars gracing its facade. A wooden sign was posted on the front lawn that read, HOSPITAL, and walking up the front steps and into the large double doors was Dr. Phillips from the hospital back in Glendale.

Pa said half jokingly, "Let's get back to your Ma. I don't even want to be this close to one of those places ever again."

The weather over the next few weeks was unseasonably warm, and each day Jake and Pa took a walk to the soldiers' encampment to find out if Ben and

the other men of the First Alabama Cavalry had returned from their patrols in Alabama. Mandy and James came along a couple of times, and once Ma brought Will to enjoy the sunshine.

Every time they left the hotel, there was the refugee camp beyond the depot across the street. The tents and makeshift shacks housed a strange mixture of runaway slaves following the Union army for protection, and whites fleeing the battle torn areas of the countryside. All of them looked ragged and dirty. Jake felt lucky to have a room to sleep in, even if they did have to share it with that surly Sergeant and his family.

The warm weather didn't last long. Just before Christmas cold winds blew in from the north, bringing freezing rain and snow. The remainder of Pa's leave would be spent indoors by the fire. To the everyone's relief, the Hawleys moved into another room in the hotel allowing the Richards family to have the entire room to themselves. They could not imagine their good fortune when the hotel owner was kind enough not to charge Pa for the extra space.

To pass the long winter days, Ma read to them from the Bible, or drilled Jake and Mandy on their spelling

and arithmetic. Pa whittled out some new wooden spoon for Ma from small sticks of hickory he found in the wood box. Food and fuel were scarce, but being together was comfort enough to keep their morale high. Ma wouldn't let Jake or the other children leave the hotel because they did not own warm clothing or shoes.

Pa ventured out daily to check on the war news. There was still no word from Ben. He did learn that Grant's Armies had made an attempt to capture Vicksburg, but had been turned back by strong Confederate resistance.

By the time the "First Alabama" returned to Corinth at the end of December, Pa's leave was over. He was still permitted to live at the hotel with his family, but he would gone for days at a time when the Regiment began its patrol again.

Uncle Ben came to see them on Christmas. He brought little presents for everyone, mostly things he had made by hand in camp during the lonely hours between patrols. There was a hand carved darning knob for Ma, and a corn husk doll for Mandy. He had made a corn cob pipe for Pa, and a wooden top for James. Jake's present was the best of all. It was a beautiful wooden horse carved from pecan wood. "This is a mighty fine

present, Ben. He looks just like your chestnut stallion. I'm much obliged."

"I'm proud it pleases you, Jake. It's a lucky thing I still have him. You know your pa's mare went lame on the ride to Huntsville, and we had to trade her off so's he'd have a reliable mount."

Then Pa produced a huge bundle he had stashed under the bed. Shoes! Shoes for Jake, Mandy, and James, and warm coats for each of them too. There was a new shawl for Ma and a length of blue linsey woolsey that looked to be long enough to make a dress and two or three shirts. There were four skeins of yarn and several spools of thread.

"John! Where ever did you get all this?"

Pa grinned. "They aren't from me. Yesterday, when I went to camp to hear the war news, the sergeant down there told me there was a package for me. Low and behold, here was this big package with my name on it."

"Who would send all this to us? Where did it come from?" Ma sputtered.

Pa pulled a note out of his pocket and read from it.

Dear John and Margaret,

You are always in our prayers. Knowing

that you lost most of your belongings on our journey, Abigail and I wanted to make sure you have warm clothing for yourselves and the children as winter approaches.

We are settled here in Chicago with the Rileys. They are most gracious hosts. Abigail and Jack were married a week ago while he was home on leave.

We follow the war news daily, hoping for news that may spell the end to this dreadful war. We pray that the Lord will keep all of you out of harm's way until such time. Tell Ben that our prayers include him as well.

Abigail and Jack send their best wishes to you and the children. May God be with you all.

Yours very truly,  
Nancy Johnson

Tears streamed down Ma's cheeks. "Praise the Lord for Nancy Johnson. He's used her to answer my prayers. I've been prayin' every day for Him to see to our needs, and look what He did through Nancy and Abigail.

Later that evening, while the family sat around the fire, Ma said, "This is almost like Christmas time back home," Sleet pellets tapped at the window, and the wind howled down the chimney while the three-legged kettle sitting over the coals sang a steady tune. The two little boys slept peacefully in their parents' arms.

"Why don't we sing some Christmas hymns," Ma suggested, and began singing, "O Come All Ye Faithful". Pa and Ben

joined in, and then Mandy. Jake was usually timid about singing, but he soon caught the spirit and sang along when Pa led into "Hark the Herald Angels Sing."

Jake felt happy and sad all at once. This evening seemed almost like the way things used to be, sitting here in the warmth of the firelight singing Christmas songs with his family, but the reality of how their lives were changing gnawed through the moment to mar its joy.

\* \* \*

About the middle of January, Pa and Ben were sent out on a patrol that took them away for more than two months. The days went very slowly for the Richards family.

Ma sat by the window knitting warm clothing for Will and socks and scarves for the rest of the family. Every day she sent Mandy or Jake to the hotel desk to enquire if there were a letter from Pa, but none ever arrived. On days when the weather was mild enough, she would walk to headquarters to find out if there had been any news from Pa's regiment. No one could tell her anything about their movements.

Jake and Mandy tried to pass the long hours in the dreary hotel room by making up guessing games, or telling James the stories they remembered from Jack Riley's school. They practiced their reading out of Ma's Bible, and even managed to teach James a few words. They taught him how to say his ABC's and to count to 100.

Ma did her best to make their food supply last until Pa arrived back in Corinth to collect his pay. She was running low on nearly everything, but she always managed to have warm soup simmering over the fire. Many times the broth contained little more than a few turnips and some barley, but they always had soup and bread.

"Wish I had some bread dough starter. Some warm bread would fill us up." Ma would say nearly every time they sat down to eat. "We'll just have to eat this fried bread until I can get the right kind of leavenin'."

Word did arrive one day that, because of the length of the expedition on which the First Alabama had been sent, partial allotments would be issued to dependants living in Corinth.

March arrived with its changeable weather. One day the sky would be sunny with a warm southern breeze

flapping the tent canvas, and then the next day dark clouds would cover the sun. Thunder and lightning would rip the sky open releasing a downpour of heavy rain that turned the streets to ankle-deep mud. March turned to April and the days grew gradually longer, but every cluster of warm days was punctuated with a stormy, rainy day.

It was on one of those rainy days, that a bearded stranger in uniform hurried, into the Richards family's hotel room dripping from the rain and caked with mud. Jake jumped from his chair, startled by the intrusion. Who was this stranger who had entered without knocking? Then the stranger spoke and Jake recognized his uncle Ben,

"Margaret! We just rode in, and John has been taken to the hospital." Ben was nearly out of breath. His voice quavered with emotion. "Doc Phillips says he's mighty sick. He wants you to come right away."

Ma's face went pale. She reached for her shawl and said, "Take me to him, Ben, quickly!"

"Jake, you'll have to show your ma where the hospital is. You know don't you?" Jake nodded. "You two can share this." Ben pulled an extra slicker from inside his

own and handed it to Jake. "I have to tend to our horses, then I'll come up to the hospital."

"Mandy you'll have to stay with the babies." Ma called over her shoulder as Ben swept them out of the room.

Ben left them at the corner, sloshing across the muddy train yard toward the army camp. Jake and his mother, huddled together under the slicker, picked their way along through the puddles, up the hill and around the corner to the big stone mansion.

Inside, they stood dripping on the shiny marble floor. Jake stood gawking at the immense and glistening chandelier above his head. On the grand curving stairway just ahead of him, a thick red carpet with elaborate designs climbed its way up the steps and out of sight behind a gleaming white bannister.

A lady in a starched white apron met them just inside the doorway. Ma whispered Pa's name to her and she led them into a large room to the right of the foyer. Another chandelier more beautiful than the first hung from the ceiling. The room's furnishings had been replaced by several rows of cots where dozens of ill and injured men lay. Many of the men were bandaged about

the head or limbs. Nearly all of them lay staring blankly at the ceiling or moaning with pain. Another nurse moved swiftly and efficiently among the cots tending to their need.

Over in one corner of the room, a woman sat sobbing. She was about Ma's age and she held a small girl about James' age on her lap. Sitting beside her, holding her hand and reading from a bible, was an older man, probably in his late fifties. The man apparently a minister, spoke softly in the tones Jake had heard before at funerals.

Jake saw Dr. Phillips. He was bending over one of the men on a cot, listening with his ear against the man's chest. When doctor stood up, Jake saw that the man he was examining was Pa.

Dr. Phillips motioned for them toward Pa's cot. The nurse arrived first and the doctor whispered something into her ear. She nodded and left the room.

"Mrs. Richards," Dr. Phillips extended his hand toward Ma. "I'm glad you are here." He spoke in low tones, guiding Ma and Jake to some chairs along the side of the room. He sat down beside them and said, "Mr. Richards is very ill. I am afraid the fever has settled in his lungs. His

body has not been able to fight it off the way it should have. He has lived and slept out in the weather much too long."

"What can be done to help him?" Ma asked, "Do you have any medicine for him? May I come and look after him?" She looked across the room at Pa's form lying on the cot. His face was flushed with fever. He struggled for every breath.

"We are doing all that is in our power, but he is fighting for his life right now." Dr. Phillips' face was grim. Jake watched the doctor's face. It's kindly, tired eyes looked intently at Ma. Doctor Phillips smiled with compassion at Ma and Jake. "Your presence is the best medicine I can think of right now. Go over and sit by him."

Jake and Ma went over and knelt on either side of Pa's cot. Ma put her hand across Pa's feverish forehead the way she always did when one of her children were sick. "John, we're here." she said softly. Jake took Pa by the hand and just said, "Pa, it's me."

Pa's eyes remained closed, but a hint of a smile spread across his lips. Jake could feel Pa's hand tighten around his ever so slightly.

"He is too weak to speak, but he knows you are

here. That is what matters." Dr. Phillips whispered as he motioned for them to leave. "You may come back every day if you wish, Mrs. Phillips. We are very short of help as you can see. And besides, your presence will do him a world of good. Maybe now that he can stay warm and dry, we will be able to break his fever."

Reluctantly Ma led Jake out through the elaborate foyer. "I will be back as soon as I see to my other children." Ma told Doctor Phillips as they left the room. "Jake here will have to look after them until I can take my husband back to our room to take care of him there."

For days, Ma stayed at the hospital with Pa, coming home only when Dr. Phillips insisted that she get some sleep. Then Jake would sit with Pa until Ma returned to the hospital. Pa's fever raged on unbroken. He tossed and mumbled senseless phrases, occasionally opening his glassy eyes to stare wildly around the room for a few seconds and then close them again and sink back into his tormented sleep. His breathing became more and more labored every day.

Ben came to the hospital every evening to sit with Pa while Ma went home to have supper with her family. One evening Ben said, "Margaret, I'm being sent out on

patrol. I don't know where we are going, but rumors say that its back over into Alabama."

"Oh, Ben you take care of yourself." Ma cried as she hugged him tearfully.

"I hate to be leavin' with John so sick." Ben worried.

"The doctor says he's not gettin' any worse, and I think he tries to talk to me sometimes. Its just that he's so weak. He can't even keep his eyes open." Ma tried to reassure Ben. "Maybe his fever will start to come down."

Ben walked back as far as the hotel and said his goodbys there.

The next evening, Ma came home for supper early. She walked into the room, pulled her shawl from around her shoulders and sank onto the bed. "Dr. Phillips says that Pa's fever is beginning to break. I'm going to sleep here tonight."

"I'll to sit with Pa for you, Ma." Jake said.

"No, Son. You stay here. There's a chaplain up at the hospital that is going to keep an eye on your Pa tonight. His name is Reverend Edwards. You remember seein' him. He's an older man than Dr. Phillips. He was the one who was prayin' with that lady the first day we went

there."

Jake nodded. He went to the fireplace and filled a bowl with hot soup for his mother. After placing the soup on the table, he went to his mother's side. "Ma I dished you up some soup."

Ma was sound asleep. Jake gently removed her shoes and place the shawl over her.

The next morning, Ma was preparing to return to the hospital when there was a knock at the door.

She opened the door to find Dr. Phillips and an older man in uniform. It was Chaplain Edwards.

"Mrs. Richard," said Dr. Phillips softly, "This is Chaplain Edwards."

"How do you do, Reverend," Ma replied. "These are my children, Jake, Mandy, and James. Ma nervously gestured toward her children standing immediatley behind her. "Little Will's over there in the cradle.

"May we come in?" Rev. Edwards asked in a very hushed voice. "We need to speak with you."

"Yes Sir," answered Ma, "I-Is John getting worse?" she asked cautiously.

"I'm afraid we have some bad news for you," Dr. Phillips stepped into the room behind the chaplain and

closed the door. "As you know, your husband's fever appeared to be breaking when you left him last night. In the early hours of this morning, he took a turn for the worse. He had simply grown too weak to fight off the pneumonia. I'm afraid his heart just wore out."

Jake wasn't sure what the doctor meant, but he could see Ma's fists clenching the sides of her skirt. Her entire body was trembling. Something was terribly wrong!

Jake stepped to his mother's side and put his arm around her. "What's wrong, Ma? What is the doctor talkin' about?"

"Hush, Son." Ma said to him. She grasped his shoulder, pulling him close to her. Jake could feel her heart pounding.

"Mrs. Richards, it is with the deepest regret we must tell you that Mr. Richards passed away shortly before dawn." Reverend Edwards said gently.

Jake's heart fell! Ma's arms tightened around him. From somewhere deep within her, came a strange sound...half sob, half moan, and her embrace went limp. Ma's body crumpled, slipping through Jake's arms onto the floor. Jake stood there. His mind and body were still frozen in the moment he heard those terrible words, "Mr.

Richards passed away."

It couldn't be! Not Pa! "I'm going to wake up now." Jake's mind declared. "I'm going to wake up in my bed in the loft, and there will be Ben sleeping beside me. Mandy and James will be on the bed across the room, and Gus will be licking my face." But the nightmare remained. There were the doctor and the chaplain standing grim-faced before him in this hateful room. There was Ma crumpled at his feet.

"She's fainted!" the doctor's voice slammed time back into motion. "Lets get her to the bed!" Dr. Phillips and the chaplain gathered Ma's wilted lifeless body the floor and carried her over to the bed.

Mandy clutched at Jake's arm crying, "Jake! Jake, what's the matter with Ma? What did they say about Pa? Is he dead?"

Jake's throat was knotted so tightly he couldn't speak. Tears stung his eyes. He felt his heart pounding up in his head. No matter how he tried to choke back the sobs, the came out. Mandy's questions rung in his ears. He stood there paralyzed, watching the doctor waving a tiny bottle of something under Ma's nose. James flung himself around Jake's legs wailing, "Maaa-ma, Maaa-ma,

What's the matter with Maa-ma?

The cries of Baby Will, awakened by all the commotion, did far more to bring Ma back to consciousness than Doctor Phillip's smelling salts. She sat up on her bed, and reached into the cradle beside her to scoop her small son into her arms. Without seeming to notice the two men standing over her, she sat gently rocking back and forth, holding her baby close to her bosom. Her eyes were closed and she was humming the melancholy tune she always used as a lullaby.

Jake stood with James and Mandy, sobbing quietly, watching their mother... waiting for her to tell them something...something that would make everything all right again...words that would stop the hurting.

When Will stopped crying, Ma gently placed him back into his cradle. She stood up and walked around the bed to her children. Her face was pale and drawn, but there were no tears. When she spoke, her voice barely rose above a whisper.

"Come here," she beckoned, drawing the three of them close to her on the edge of the bed. James climbed onto her lap and buried his face against her, his sobs dwindling to stifled snubs. Ma drew Mandy and Jake

against each shoulder and began rocking back and forth again.

Chaplain Edwards stepped over to Ma and said, "Mrs. Richards, would you like for me to have a word of prayer with you and the children before I leave?"

Ma looked at him blankly, and nodded. Jake had a strange sense that Ma barely realized what was being said. The chaplain bowed and prayed for God's mercy on Pa's soul. He prayed for comfort and healing for this woman and her fatherless children, left far from home in these dreadful times. The prayer went on and on, repeating supplications for the Richard's family in their time of need. Jake felt as if he were sitting in church hearing prayers said for someone else. These people who the minister was praying for couldn't be his own family.

Jake barely noticed that Dr. Phillips had left the room and returned with Mrs. Hawley. When the chaplain closed his prayer, he stepped over to where Mrs. Hawley stood watching in her customary detached silence.

"Ma'am, would you please look after Mrs. Richards and her children today," he asked. "I will return this evening to discuss funeral arrangements with her." Rev. Edwards' eyes were weary. He lowered his voice and

added, "We are losing so many folks from sickness, that there will probably be several for burial tomorrow."

Mrs. Hawley nodded and sat down, saying nothing as usual.

Dr. Phillips and Chaplain Edwards left abruptly.

Jake and Mandy for sat a while with their mother. James fell asleep, and then Ma said in a toneless voice, "We have to get breakfast ready. You children have to eat. Mrs. Hawley, you don't need to stay, we'll manage just fine. Thank you for comin'."

Mrs. Hawley nodded, rose from her chair, and left without a word.

Ma and Mandy moved about silently, preparing a meal from their sparse rations, while Jake carried wood and water. The three of them went about their work routinely, automatically, not once mentioning what had just happened in their lives. When they sat down at the table to eat, Ma asked the usual blessing, but did not fill her plate. Instead, she sat staring at the empty plate, her hands folded in front of her.

Jake had difficulty eating. The mush stuck in his throat. He chewed the bacon endlessly, swallowing each mouthful with difficulty each time. Mandy stirred and

picked at her food, before forcing it down with as much difficulty as Jake. James was the only one who had any appetite. He seemed to have forgotten that life today was any different than yesterday.

\* \* \*

The funeral was the next day. The morning was cloudy with a wet wind blowing. A young soldier arrived to drive Jake's family to the soldiers cemetery. They rode inside the black ambulance wagon with two other families.

At the cemetery, Jake and his family stood with the other families beside a row of pine caskets while the chaplain read from the Scriptures. The whole experience felt unreal to Jake. The pastor's voice droned on and on. He spoke about a house with many mansions and of a place being prepared for us in heaven. Why did God let Pa die? Didn't He know that Ma and Jake and Mandy and the babies needed a father down here on earth? What were they going to do with no Pa and no way to get back home?

Jake rubbed his eyes and then held Mandy and James even more tightly by the hand. He looked up at Ma. She was staring blankly ahead exactly as she had

done ever since the doctor came with the terrible news. Jake didn't understand why she hadn't cried. She was just going through the motions of living without showing what she was feeling inside. She was like a lantern with the flame burned out.

A gust of wind blew across the pale green landscape, whipping ladies skirts and tugging at men's hats. Jake watched the chaplain toss a handful of earth into each grave and felt a quiver down his spine. Never in his life had he felt so lonely.

## CHAPTER NINE

The wheels of the train made a steady sound...rumble, click...rumble, click...rumble, click. Jake, unable to sleep, watched the pine trees streak past the window as the train rolled southward through the May dawn. He snuggled closer to James, asleep beside him on the hard wooden seat. They had been riding since about sunset and now the morning air felt chilly.

Ma and Mandy sat sleeping in the seat just ahead, propped against each other like two bundles of hay. Will slept peacefully stretched across their laps. The car was filled with tattered, dirty refugee families piled together on the wooden seats and in the aisle.

Jake watched the pink morning sky change to pale blue and thought about the weeks since Pa's funeral. For the weeks, Ma sat reading her bible nearly all of the time. She went through the motions of living; getting dressed, cooking, and nursing the baby, but she spoke very little, never mentioning Pa's death. It was like he was just gone away on patrol, or gone hunting. Chaplain Edwards came to their room about once a week to pray with Ma, but she usually just sat quietly listening while he was there.

Jake wondered if the minister had any idea how Pa's death had affected Ma. There was so much death and suffering around, that she was just another sad face among dozens he saw daily.

"Jake, what's the matter with Ma?" Mandy asked him one day. "She acts like she doesn't know Pa is dead. She just sits and stares."

"I know, Mandy. I guess she got so worn down while she was helpin' take care of him in the hospital that when he died, she just locked herself up with the way she wants it to be." Jake tried to explain what he thought was wrong. He didn't know if it made any sense, but it was all he could think to say.

Jake's efforts to comfort Mandy and James seemed to satisfy them enough to get by, but every evening when he went to bed, Jake's own grief washed over him like a flood. Some nights after everyone was asleep, he wrapped himself in a blanket and went out into the yard behind the hotel to sit and stare up at the stars. There in the northern sky was that giant dipper, hanging in the same position as he had seen it a year ago from his window in the little house by the creek. It seemed more like a thousand years than just one. Now, nothing could ever be

the same as it was then. Pa was gone.

Jake stared out the train window at the moving countryside. His heart pounded as he remembered yesterday when Sergeant Hawley walked right into their room without knocking and make his announcement.

"You folks ain't 'lowed to live in military quarters no more," he blurted. "Ya gotta move to the refugee camp." Jake could hardly believe his ears. Ma was rocking Will to sleep in his cradle and seemed unaware of what Hawley said.

"But, our Uncle Ben Richards lives with us, he's on patrol with right now." Jake protested.

Hawley shook his head. "Don't make no difference. You and your Ma ain't listed as his dependants. I looked it up. Until he declares you as his dependants, you gotta go live in the refugee camp. We need the room for other folks."

Jake turned to his mother and said, "Ma, he's gonna make us go live in the train yard. Tell him he's gotta try to get in touch with Uncle Ben."

Ma looked at Jake, then at Hawley. Her gaunt face seemed puzzled. "Tell him we'll wait and see what Pa says." she said. A terrible wave of fear came over Jake.

"Ma!" Jake cried to her, shaking her arm. "Pa's not alive anymore. He can't help us. Tell the sergeant to send a message to Uncle Ben.!"

Ma continued staring down at Will, humming her lullaby. Jake looked at Hawley standing there, his huge arms folded across his fat belly. "You can't send us out into the cold. Uncle Ben will claim us when he get's here. Just wait until his patrol gets in, please Sergeant Hawley."

Mandy, went over to Hawley and pleaded, "Please, Mr. Hawley, let us stay here until our uncle gets in off patrol. Ma is sick? We can't leave with her like this."

Hawley looked at Mandy, at Ma and the baby, and then shook his head. "You won't be livin' out in the train yard, anyways," Hawley grumbled. I got orders this mornin to move all southern refugees down to Jackson this evenin'. I hear they got plenty places for refugees to stay down there. We don't have room here in Corinth."

"But we're Union folks, our Pa was a Union man." Jake continued protesting.

"You have to talk to the folks down in Jackson about that." Hawley chewed on his cigar a few times. "My orders are just to put all southern refugees on the train to Jackson this evenin'. Be packed and ready to leave at four

o'clock."

It was no use, Hawley was in charge of moving all southern refugees, and to him the Richards family southerners.

So now here they were, fatherless and homeless, their mother sick with grief, being shipped to another strange place. The train lurched and slowed down. Jake could see buildings slide past the windows, many of which had an entire brick wall knocked out or were burned to little more than charred rubble.

After the train jolted to a stop, the people began pushing their way off of the crowded passenger car. Everyone was tired and hungry. Babies cried, tired mothers scolded and fussed at their children or argued with each other over their place in line.

Jake waited until most of the crowd had filed off the train and then gently shook Ma and Mandy awake. "Ma, Mandy, the train has stopped. I think we're supposed to get off here.

Ma looked around for a moment, then gathered Will in her arms and followed Mandy off the train. Jake took James by the hand and stayed immediately behind his mother. He was afraid that she would become confused

and wander away into the crowd.

When Jake stepped off the train with his family, a soldier stood on the platform directing them toward a cluster of army tents across the street from the depot. "Keep moving folks, you will need to be ready to take the loyalty oath before you receive any aid.

"What's a 'loyalty oath'?" Jake asked aloud, talking to no one in particular.

A skinny old woman, walking along in the crowd near them, cackled shrilly and spat tobacco juice on the ground. "Well, Boy, you ain't been refugeein' very long, have you? That's when the Yankees makes yah vow that yore faithful to the Union instead o' to the Confederacy 'fore they'll take care of yah." Her crackly old voice was filled with contempt.

The old man shuffling along by her side sneered, saying, "It don't take much to lie about yore leanin's when yore belly's empty."

"Well, we won't have to lie," Jake thought to himself, but he didn't say anything to the old man and woman. He didn't want to have angry rebels turning on him like they did back home.

Jake took Will from Ma's arms and carried him for

her. She had very little ever since before Pa died and seemed to be losing her strength. Jake steered her along with the shuffling crowd, making sure that Mandy and James could keep up with them.

The weather seemed much warmer here in Jackson. The sun was climbing higher into a clear blue sky.

"We mustn't go too far from the train. Pa won't be able to find us," Ma worried. Her eyes looked weary and confused. Jake could only answer, "Don't worry Ma, we won't go any farther than we have to." This was no time to try to explain how things really were.

Up ahead, Jake saw people lined up in front of a large tent with a sign on the front post saying, REFUGEE AID HERE. "C'mon Mandy, lets see if we can get some help over there." Jake guided Ma over to the entrance of the tent.

The young soldier seated at a table near the entrance said, "Ma'am, you will need to take the loyalty oath." Ma stared at him, puzzled.

"She's not feelin' very well." Jake said. "Our Pa just passed away. He was in the Union Army, so we shouldn't have to take any oath, should we?" Jake tried to sound older.

The young sergeant looked suspiciously at their rumpled clothing and their tattered bundles. "Didn't you folks come in on that refugee train from Corinth?" he quizzed. Jake nodded. "Our Pa passed away and they wouldn't let us stay in our room there anymore. The sergeant up there said that we had to leave because we weren't dependants anymore."

"Do you have your Pa's enlistment papers, or any other identification?" the soldier asked. "If you are telling me the truth, then you are still dependants should not have been sent to Jackson."

"I don't know about any papers," Jake answered. "Ma's been feelin' poorly ever since Pa died and I can't seem to get her to understand what happened."

The young man looked at Ma. "Ma'am, do you have any identification papers that belonged to your husband?" his voice carried an edge of impatience.

Ma stared at him and shook her head. "Papers? I-I-I don't know what papers you mean. You-you'll have to ask John. He should be back right away."

"She's been kinda confused ever since Pa died. We need a place to stay so she can rest." Jake's voice quavered.

"Well, I can't help you without the proper identification," the sergeant was clearly suspicious. "Anyway, you would have to go to the commanding officer's headquarters for that."

Jake fought back the tears. He stared at his feet and mumbled, "I guess we don't have any papers."

The young soldier shook his head disgustedly and said, "The best I can do is give you refugee aid. If your ma is well enough to take the oath of allegiance, then you can have some food and blankets and go stay in the tents over there," he pointed to some tents nearby.

"But," Jake protested, "My uncle is in the Union Army too. He was out on patrol when Pa died. He'd claim us if he knew Pa was gone."

The sergeant's lips tightened. "If you want to send a message to him, you'll have to go to the commanding officer. I can't do anything but hand out aid to refugees who swear loyalty."

Jake swallowed hard and said, "If you read the oath, maybe Ma will understand it." Jake turned to his mother and gently touched her hand. "Ma, can you answer this man's question. He wants to know if we're Union folks"

The sergeant read the oath, and to his surprise, the frail, confused-looking woman brightened just enough to answer affirmatively.

\* \* \*

The refugee tents were lined up along the edge of a field near the railroad track. Several families shared each tent, and everyone cooked together. Jake noticed negro families in one section of the camp, while white families lived in another section. Everyone looked hungry and ragged. He wondered how many of the negroes were run-away slaves like the ones Daniel had told him about.

Jake found a tent that appeared to have no one else living in it. He helped Mandy get Ma and Will settled in one corner of the tent and then, taking James with him, set out to look for wood to build a fire. They walked up to a man sitting in front of one of the tents. His chair was tipped back against the tent pole, a battered hat pulled down over his eyes.

"Beg your pardon, sir," Jake ventured, "Could you tell us where we could find some firewood?"

The man peered out from under his hat at the two

boys standing there. "Ya gotta buy it," he muttered.

Jake stood staring open-mouthed, not wanting to believe what he heard. The man tipped his chair forward, stared back at Jake, and growled, "Did ya hear me, Boy? I said ya gotta buy it. There's folks peddlin' it all over town. Now git!"

Jake nodded, grabbed James' hand and took off running back to their tent. "Mandy," he said, "Do you think Ma has any money left? We have to have some to buy firewood."

"Maybe there was some of Pa's money left. Ma's asleep already, but let's just look in her carpetbag.

In the carpetbag Mandy found a small drawstring purse and in it, a few coins. There was some paper money, but it was Confederate money from before they left home. Both Jake and Mandy remembered hearing their parents say that Confederate money was no good in Union territory.

Something else was in the purse too. It was a small black book with two or three folded papers tucked inside. "Pa's enlistment papers!" Jake cried.

"Jake!" Mandy exclaimed. "You can take these to the commanding officer and maybe you can get them to

let us go back to Corinth so we can find Uncle Ben!"

"You bet I will!" Jake nearly shouted. "But first, James and me had better go see how much wood these coins'll buy. We can't cook without a fire."

Once again Jake and James left Mandy to watch over Ma and the baby. They made their way to the street, and for the first time, Jake noticed the devastation around him.

Many of the buildings that had once been warehouses were burned or demolished. Stores and shops were burned-out shells; many homes were burned to the ground.

It appeared that the Union Army had deliberately burned much of the town so that the enemy would not have a reason to retake it.

Jake saw two boys a little older than he playing mumblety-peg in the dirt along the streetside. "Let's ask those fellers where we can buy wood," Jake said to his brother. He dragged James by the hand over to where the boys knelt. Neither of them gave notice of Jake and James standing there watching them play until Jake ventured a timid, "Howdy".

The older of the two boys squinted up at Jake.

"What can we do fer ya?" he asked. His face looked as if it hadn't been washed in days. His tattered outgrown clothes nearly as dirty as his grimy hands and feet.

"Could you tell me where I can find some firewood to buy?" Jake asked? Jangling the coins in his pocket. "I got just a little change here, and I don't know how much wood I can get with it."

At once the two boys stood up and sauntered casually over to Jake and his little brother. "There's lots of folks peddlin' firewood. How much money you got?" queried the younger boy. He was only slightly cleaner and less tattered than his companion.

Jake pulled the coins out of his pocket and held them in the palm of his hand while he counted them once again. James peered intently into his brother's hand watching him count. "I got one dollar and fifty six cents," Jake announced.

Neither Jake nor James had noticed the shorter boy slipping around behind Jake. "Lemme see", commanded the older boy, stepping toward Jake and grabbing the coins from his hand.

With one swift push the bully sent Jake tumbling backward over the back of the second boy, who had placed

himself on hands and knees directly behind Jake. The two thieves ran, but not before Jake grabbed the ankle of the one with his money. The younger boy quickly vanished into the nearest alleyway.

"Give me my money!" Jake yelled, hanging onto the scoundrel's ankle and pulling him to the ground. Jake jumped onto him and began pounding with his fists. "I want my money back! I want my money back!"

James jumped into the fight, sitting on the offender's head shouting, "Give our money back." Their assailant-turned victim grabbed James and sent him rolling across the ground. Jake felt himself being rolled over, the weight of his opponent pinning him to the ground. His arms were held firmly against his sides by the boy's knees astride his chest. No matter how he writhed and twisted, he could not free his arms to defend himself.

Smack! Smack! One punch and then another jolted his jaw sending pain shooting to the top of his head.

Thud! A fist landed on his nose. For an instant his whole face felt numb. Smack! Another punch hit his eye. Tears of pain and anger filled Jake's eyes. Over and over again the punches landed on his head. No matter how Jake tried, he could not pull himself free.

Suddenly, Jake's attacker was lifted off him and tossed like a kitten into the street. A deep bass voice boomed, "You gits outa here, an' don't even look back!"

With the heavy weight lifted off his chest, Jake was free to sit up. He felt warm trickles of blood running from his nostrils. His attacker scurrying scurried away. Jake looked up, and through tears and a half-swollen eye, Jake saw, looming directly over him, the largest, tallest negro man he had ever seen. The man's blue army tunic just barely buttoned over his barrel-like chest. Beneath the familiar Union cap, a smooth brown face with a broad nose and full lips gazed down at Jake with a mixture of compassion and amusement.

"You kin git up now, young feller. He be gone." the rich voice spoke in a kindly tone now.

Jake nodded, reaching an unsteady hand upward. The hand that pulled him up was not the big brawny one Jake expected, but a small hand the size of his own, reaching around from behind the tall brown man.

Jake could not believe what he saw! There, facing him, was his friend Daniel, grinning from ear to ear. Jake was speechless, but James cried gleefully, "Daniel! Jake, it's Daniel!"

"You pert nigh got yo'self in a heap o' trouble, Jake Richards." Daniel drawled. "Good thing Samuel was close by. Ah fetched him when ah seed you was mixin' up wif dem no goods."

"Daniel! Where did YOU come from?" Jake gasped.

"I was waitin' fo Samuel to deliver some papers to de telegraph office when I spied you an' li'l James moseyin' along. I thought I was seein' ghostes fo a minute." Daniel poked Jake in the arm playfully and grinned. "Den I say to mysef, 'Dat's ole Jake Richards fo sure'. So I follered you, and b'fore I c'd ketch up to ya, you was talkin' to dem rascals."

"Boy, Howdy!" I'm mighty glad to see you, Daniel," Jake said, grabbing Daniel and returning the playful punch. He turned to Samuel, who stood beaming at the three boys, and said, "I'm much obliged to you, Mister. That feller was givin' me a trompin'."

"Yore mighty welcome." Samuel said. Then he shook his head, "Dem two are nuffin' but trouble. When Dan'l come tole me they was givin you 'what fer', I come a runnin'."

"Dey beat me up de fust day I gits here. Seems lak dey thinks dey owns de place." Daniel grumbled. He looked

at Jake's bloody nose and swollen eye. "Gloo---ry be! You sho is a mess! Whar's yore Mamma? You needs some mendin'."

"Ma's back at our tent with Mandy and the baby. She's feelin' pretty poorly since our Pa died."

"Sakes alive! Yore Pa dead?" Daniel exclaimed. "Das a pity! Which battle he die in?"

"He never saw action. He took sick before his unit got its marchin' papers. He had a bad setback right after we caught up with him, and he died a couple a days ago."

"Land o' mercy," Daniel moaned. "Well, how come you an' your Mama was trapsin' aroun' follerin' after your Pa anyhow? What are ya doin' way down here in Jackson?" Daniel's aksed.

"You betta git dis young massa back to his mama so's she kin fix him up," interrupted Samuel. "I's gotta git back to my work 'fore de sergeant give me a bawlin' out."

"C'mon Jake, li'l James. Les go see my Mammy fus. She kin take ker o' dat eye. Yore Mamma's prob'ly grievin' too much to see her boy all beat up. We got a spot in one o' dose tents over dere."

Daniel helped Jake steady himself and took James by the hand. Jake told Daniel the whole story of how Pa

and Ben had hidden out until Jack Riley sent word for them to meet him. He told him about Gridley and the home guard burning their fields and threatening to burn the whole family up in the house. When Jake came to the part about Gridley, Daniel's fist clenched and he scowled fiercely.

"Dat ole demon!" Daniel spat out his words as if they tasted bitter. "Devereaux put him over de house slaves jest lak he say he would, an' Gridley, he beat my Mammy jes cause she don't cook ta suit him." Daniel scowled and squinted his eyes. "Mammy, she say dat Miz Devereaux never treat her lak dat, so we run away las summer. Bin follerin' de Yankee solgers ever since."

Daniel and his mother lived in a "tent" that was more shanty than tent. Random lengths of lumber had been fashioned into a shed-like structure, with the canvas from the tent serving as an awning over the cooking fire just outside the entrance.

"Samuel, he builded all dis wif boards he find layin around." Jake explained. "He's sweet on Mammy an' wants her to marry up wif him. She say, 'Mebbe, after de war be over', but he jes keeps on askin' her an' bringin' us part o' his food rations an' fixin' things up so's we be

comf'table."

When the three boys entered the shanty where Daniel's mother, Lyddie was sweeping the dirt floor of the tiny room. One small opening served as a window. On either side of the window were two cots neatly draped with army blankets. Some packing crates stacked together served as a table, with three nail kegs for chairs. An old buggy seat covered with a tattered patchwork quilts provided more seating outside under the canvas.

Jake had met Daniel's mother only a few times, but she remembered him almost immediately. "Jake got his welcome to Jackson de same way as me, Mammy," Daniel explained. He went on to tell her how he had summoned Samuel to come to Jake's aid.

"Mercy chile, you is a sight!" She clucked as she washed Jake's face. "Hows dis baby?" She asked, giving James a quik lookover. "Dey didn't hurt you, did dey, Baby?"

James shook his head, "No Ma'am" he answered politely. "I give him a big PUNCH!" he bragged, demonstrating his 'punch' in the air.

Lyddie chuckled heartily. Jake remembered her as a big woman, but now he could see that she was not much

taller than Ma. Her long brown face with its high cheekbones framed the same laughing dark eyes as Daniel's. "What be you a doin' in way down her in Jackson, Jake? You refugeein'?" Lyddie asked. "I ain't heard of the Yankees takin' territory that far down in Alabam.

Once again Jake told about his Pa joining the Union Army and how Gridley and his thugs had run them off of their land. He told about how Pa had taken sick and died while they were in Corinth, and about Ma being so sick with grief that he and Mandy had to lead her around like a child.

"Yore po mamma," Liddie moaned shaking her head. "I knows what it be lak, losin' yore man. I was jest a young girl wif three babies when Dan'l's pa died from de small pox." Tears welled up in her eyes as she recalled the painful memory. "The Lord spared my baby Dan'l an' me. We never took sick, but both my li'l twin girls died right after their Pa. They woulda been almos' yore uncle Ben's age by now."

Lyddie quickly wiped her eyes on her apron and returned to the present. "The Lord'll take care o' Gridley an' his kind one o' these days. I feels sorry for po' Miz Devereaux with that monster runnin' her place."

Lyddie and Daniel went back to Jake's tent with the boys to see what she could do to help Ma. When they arrived, Mandy was carrying a screaming Will back and forth in the doorway, anxiously watching for her brothers to return. Ma was lying on her cot, staring up at the walls of the tent.

Lyddie took one look at Ma lying there and said, "She grievin' herself to death, an' that poor baby is prob'ly starvin'. If she ain't been eatin', she don't have no milk left for him to nurse."

With the same efficiency she had once managed a large plantation kitchen, Lyddie took charge of the situation. She dispatched Daniel and Jake back to her shanty to get firewood, some cornmeal to make a mush for Will to eat, and some barley to make a rich broth for Ma.

In the meantime, she set Mandy and James to work putting the tent in order, sweeping the dirt floor with bundles of straw from the surrounding field and airing their musty blankets and clothing.

In no time at all, a cooking fire was crackling. Lyddie cooked the mush for Will, who ate as eagerly from a spoon as if he had always done so. After gently coaxing

Ma to drink some of the hot broth, Lyddie and Daniel went home.

The next day they returned with loaves of warm bread baked in the brick oven Samuel had built. Liddie helped Mandy wash their clothing and led Ma outside to sit in the gentle May sunshine.

Each day Lyddie and Daniel visited to bring a share of whatever they had to the Richard's family. Samuel came by occasionally to bring them extra firewood from buildings that the army was demolishing

On one such visit, Jake took out the little book with Pa's enlistment papers and showed them to Samuel. "Do you know who I can talk to so we can see about gettin' back to Corinth," he asked. "Uncle Ben probably doesn't know what happened to us."

Jake explained how Sergeant Hawley had just kicked them out and put them on the train without a chance to get in touch with Ben.

"Ah don't know much 'bout how de army do dese things, but I kin ax my sergeant if'n he'll help. If he say he kin help you, den I'll take you ta see him t'morrow."

The next day, Samuel returned saying, "My sarge, he say you gotta take dem papers ober to de c'mandin'

officer's place an' ax some cap'n 'bout findin' yore uncle. He say fo you to come wif me to his tent and he be glad to take you dere.

So, Jake went with Samuel to the sergeant's tent. The sergeant's name was Sergeant Bridges. He was tall and lanky like Pa and about Pa's age. His light brown hair and mustasche were sprinkled with tinges of gray.

"Hello, Jake," he said stretching out his hand to Jake. "Samuel tells me that you have a problem. Why don't you tell me all about it, and I'll see if I can take you to the right people for help."

His warm smile and easy-going manner put Jake at ease at once. Jake took out Pa's little black book with the enlistment papers inside and handed them to the sergeant. Again he told the whole story of what happened back in Johnson's Corners and in Corinth, and how they came to arrive in Jackson. He told Sergeant Bridges about Ma's not being able to take care of her family and how they needed to find Uncle Ben.

Sergeant Bridges' steady green eyes never left Jake's face while he listened intently to the sad story. He seemed to understand how lonely and frightened Jake felt.

"I'll tell you what, Jake," the sergeant said when

Jake finished his story. "I'll talk to the Captain myself and see if he will send a dispatch to your uncle's regiment to notify him of your father's death and get the necessary paper work started. It may take a little while, but papers can be processed declaring your father's brother as legal guardian for all of you. Then, as his dependants, you can be issued traveling passes to get wherever you wish to go."

"Thank you, Sir, for yore trouble." Jake said, "We'd be much obliged."

"It's no trouble. I have a family back in Indiana. In fact, my boy is about your age. I wouldn't want to see them living in a tent if I could help it. I'll send word with Samuel when I get an answer from the captain."

"Thank you, Sir," Jake repeated and turned to leave.

"And in the meantime," the sergeant called after him, "Samuel will look after you and your family, won't you Samuel?"

"Yes suh. I shorely will!" answered Samuel.

Ma grew stronger each day and each day she came more and more to herself. Lyddie sat with her for hours, reminiscing about Johnson's corners. Jake was afraid all the memories would upset Ma, but they seemed to help

her get used to the idea that Pa was gone.

Ma began reading her Bible again, sharing her favorite passages aloud with Lyddie over and over. Nearly always, the scriptures would inspire Lyddie to burst into a melancholy song that rose and fell over the tent village like some lonely spirit searching for the gates of heaven.

"Lyddie's songs sure are pretty," said Mandy one day while she and Jake listened as they tended the cooking fire. "I think they ease Ma's grief. I hope Pa can hear 'em up in heaven."

"They make me feel lonely," Jake said. "Sometimes I feel like my heart's gonna bust. But if they make Ma feel better, I guess I can stand them."

He was happy that Ma was feeling better, and that they could once more talk with her, but he missed his father. He missed his home by the side of the creek where the birds sang and growing things were all around. Here everything was destruction and desolation.

Mandy and James seemed happy in this makeshift home now that Ma was herself again. Will grew stronger, and as the days turned to weeks, he began to try to walk. Ma acted more and more like her old self. Occasionally something would set her to brooding for a day or so, but

she always perked up again. Jake knew that they still had much to be thankful for, but the lonely feeling never left him.

Samuel came by each evening to see what he could do to help. He always brought a wheelbarrow full of treasures found in the debris of Jackson...scraps of wood, an few old chairs he found in an abandoned house, even extra food from the officer's mess.

Each evening when Samuel arrived, Jake would ask, "Any word from the captain?" and each time Samuel would shake his head and say something like, "De army take it's time 'bout everthin', Jake. Ya gotta learn patience."

One day Samuel showed up early, pushing a wheelbarrow full of bricks. "I's gonna build you a nice brick oven, Miz Richards," he said to Ma. "You seem to be takin' more int'rest in cookin' these days, so I figger ya might want to bake up some bread or some pies."

"Why that's mighty nice of you, Samuel." Ma said. Jake watched the pleased expression on her face. Her eyes looked hollow and streaks of gray ran through her brown hair. For the first time, Jake thought his mother looked old.

Samuel finished the oven that same afternoon, and left saying, "Now you can take some o' dat sour dough o' Lyddie's and bake up a batch o' hot bread first thing in de mornin', Miz Richards."

The next morning Jake got up extra early to help Ma build up the fire so that there would be plenty of coals to heat the oven.

When the bread came out of the oven hot and golden, Ma brought it into the tent and sliced hot steamy slices for them to eat with their fried bacon. The aroma of the hot bread filled the tent, bringing back memories of home to Jake. It's soft warmth filled his mouth with a flavor that he had almost forgotten existed. It didn't matter that there was no sweet butter to melt over the bread, or no sweet preserves dripping off the edge of the crust. Just having Ma's good hot bread again was almost like going home.

## CHAPTER TEN

It had been almost a month since Jake went to see Sergeant Bridges, when Samuel sent Daniel to tell Jake that the sergeant would like to see him.

"I bet he's found Ben for us!" Jake told his mother. "Will you come along? He'll probably have papers for you."

Jake and Ma went right away to the sergeant's tent. Sergeant Bridges was surprised to see Ma with Jake. "I'm happy to see you are feeling better, Mrs. Richards. You have my sincerest condolences on the passing of your husband."

"Thank you, Sergeant," Ma said timidly. "Do you have any news from my brother-in-law? Jake told me that you are tryin' to get in touch with him for us."

"No, I'm afraid not, Ma'am. We received a message this morning that the First Alabama Cavalry has been assigned to General Sherman's Army, and they are out of reach of any communication except those of the strictest military nature. I am not even at liberty tell you where they are at this time."

Ma's face showed her disappointment, but she smiled graciously. "Thank you for all your trouble,

Sergeant. I know that you have done all you can."

"Well, don't give up. Maybe we will be able to reach him in a week or two." Sergeant Bridges encouraged. He shook Ma's hand and walked her and Jake outside. "Oh, yes, I almost forgot. There is something else I wanted to tell you. Our captain has found a teacher for the children in the refugee camp. Don't you have other children of school age?"

"Yes, I do," Ma answered. "Mandy is almost eleven and James is nearly six."

"I'm gonna be thirteen pretty soon," Jake added, throwing out his chest a little and standing as straight as possible.

"The captain wants all school-age children in school beginning the day after tomorrow at eight o'clock in the morning. The schoolhouse is next to the old church across from headquarters. It was pretty badly damaged, but we have it fixed up now...even got the bell hung on a post so the teacher can call his pupils to school."

"I'll see that my children come, Sergeant." Ma promised as she left the tent.

Two days later, the school bell sounded across the war torn city. The Richards children, scrubbed and combed

eagerly answered its call. Daniel went too, along with about thirty other children from the camp. Jake and Daniel were grateful that the two ruffians that had stolen Jake's money did not show up.

The school had originally been a two room building, but damage from the bombardment had left only one room in tact. The plastered walls were cracked, but had been freshly white-washed. The morning sun streamed in through newly glazed windows. At the far end of the room a new iron heating stove poked its black pipe through the ceiling. Jake had seen pictures of these stoves in the newspapers Jack Riley received from Chicago.

The teacher stood behind a large table elevated on a short platform. He was an old man with a sour face. He wore pince-nez glasses fastened to the lapel of his black swallow-tail coat by a long gold chain.

In front of the teacher's desk were four rows of backless benches. Behind the benches six tables with the same kind of backless benches formed three more rows.

"Good morning ladies and gentlemen," the schoolmaster's nasal voice whined. "I am the new schoolmaster, Mr. Chapman. I will be teaching you arithmetic, reading, writing, and geography. We will spend

the first day with each one of you reciting for me so that I may assess your knowledge to this point. We will begin with the youngest children and progress to the oldest."

Jake could not imagine this cranky old man telling the kind of stories Jack Riley had told, or stopping class to read the St. Louis newspaper.

The old man droned on. "No one will speak unless called upon. This is not a blab school. If you wish to be called upon or leave your seat for any reason, you will raise your hand." Mr. Chapman spotted Jake staring out the window and added, "If anyone misbehaves or is not attentive, I will administer the appropriate punishment." He flourished a long willow rod and slapped it on the desk.

Mandy flinched, and James reached for Jake's hand. The room was filled with a deathly hush. Not a single child dared move a muscle.

"Now let us begin with the first recitation. You, young man," the schoolmaster pointed to James. "Let me hear how far you can count." James face turned ghostly white. Jake nodded encouragingly and motioned for him to stand up. James slowly stood and began counting, hesitantly at first, then gaining confidence, he counted all the way to 100.

"How long did you go to school?" Mr. Chapman asked. James looked at Jake. Jake nodded for him to answer. "I-I ain't never been to school, Sir." James stammered.

"Well, that was acceptable then." the schoolmaster snapped.

Jake's and Mandy's recitations were acceptable, and Daniel was able to satisfy Mr. Chapman's standards, but Jake left school that first day wishing they didn't have to go back. The old school master made every lesson a chore. He longed for the schoolroom back home full of maps and pictures of fascinating places. He could not imagine Mr. Chapman spinning fascinating stories about people and places in the geography lessons the way Jack Riley did. Jake wondered if Mr. Chapman ever had spelling bees with his classes.

Each day after school, Jake and Daniel let Mandy and James go on home while they took their own route through the streets of Jackson. Some days they took the way that led through the soldiers camp. The boys liked to watch the card games, something neither of their church-going mothers would even allow mention of.

One day as Jake and Daniel made their way

toward the ring of white canvas army tents, they heard music.

"Hey Jake, dey's havin' a show!" Daniel shouted as he suddenly dashed on ahead of Jake. "Somebody's playin' music"

Jake heard the happy strumming sound of a banjo and the lilt tune of a fiddle. People were clapping in time to the music. As he caught up with Daniel, he heard the jingling rhythm of a tambourine.

"That sounds just like that travelin' show we saw last year back home," Jake told Daniel breathlessly.

A crowd of soldiers encircled the source of the music. Both boys edged their way through the crowd for a better view and found, not a traveling show, but three soldiers playing instruments while a negro boy danced. The dancer's feet flew in time to the music. His entire body seemed to be part of the tune. Folks clapped and shouted encouragement to him as the rhythm quick. Everyone was having a grand old time.

The banjo player switched to another lively tune that got everyone's feet to tapping. Daniel began to imitate the movements of the dancer. He did it so well that men standing nearby stepped aside to watch him

dance.

Faster and faster the music played. The fiddle player's bow fairly flew across the strings. Daniel's feet flew faster and faster. The crowd cheered the dancers as the music speeded up.

"C'mon, Jake," shouted Daniel, "Dance wif me."

Jake laughed and shook his head. "I can't make my feet do that," he shouted above the din. The very thought of attempting such a feat sent Jake into fits of laughter. He slapped his knee and held his side, laughing so hard that tears rolled down his cheeks.

The soldier standing next to Jake shoved him out into the circle and shouted jovially, "C'mon Sonny, give it a try."

Jake shook his head, but other men coaxed him. "You can do it, jest stomp yer feet, Boy."

Jake tried to copy the movements of Daniel's flying feet, but each foot kept going the opposite way he thought it would go. He began to giggle so hard that he crumpled to ground, limber as Mandy's old rag doll.

The soldiers laughed at his antics as if they were part of some comic routine. When the music stopped, the men whistled and applauded, shouting, "Dance some more

boys, dance some more."

The fiddler struck a lilting jig and the minstrel danced again. Daniel joined in, and the tambourine player handed Jake the tambourine.

"Here, Son, try this." he said to Jake, demonstrating the motion that kept time to the rhythm of the song. Jake picked that up easily and was soon playing right along.

The fun went on and on. Jake was having so much fun that he barely noticed that the sun was getting low when Samuel appeared in the crowd, motioning for Jake and Daniel to follow him.

"You boys betta high-tail it home," Samuel told them. Yore Mammy's is plum crazy with worry 'bout where you is."

Jake wasted no time getting back to the tent, and although he knew he would be in for a scolding when he got there, he felt happy for the first time since he left home.

In spite of Ma's warnings to stay away from the soldier's camp, Jake and Daniel found their way there as often as possible.

"Those men will teach you boys all kinds of sinful

habits, Jake," Ma would say. "Lyddie says they gamble and drink hard liquor, and they read wicked books that nice young gentlemen never look at."

Her warnings made the camp all the more intriguing, and did not deter Jake from going there. Jake soon found that most of the men were men very much like Pa or Ben. They had sons or little brothers at home, and having Jake in camp made them feel a little closer to home.

One soldier took a special interest in Jake. His name was Tom Wilman. Every time Jake went to the camp, he passed Tom's tent on the way in. The homesick soldier always greeted Jake with a wave and a smile until one day he called Jake over and motioned for him to sit for a while.

"You sure do remind me of my boy back home," Tom told Jake the first day they talked. "We live on a farm up in Ohio and he is helping his Ma run that farm just like a man. Where you come from, Boy?"

"We used to live in Alabama," Jake answered, "but we had to leave there 'cause my Pa was a Union man."

Jake told Tom all about Johnson's Crossroads and about the trouble their family had been through. Tom

listened, shaking his head from time to time.

"It still is a puzzle to me how this country has gotten into such a terrible fix," Tom said after Jake finished his story. He sat quietly for a while, staring down at the ground, and then abruptly stood up giving Jake a fatherly pat on the back.

"Well now, wondering things like that won't help us get through this war, will it Jake?" Tom chuckled. "Do you know how to shine boots?"

"No Sir, my Pa never had any shiny leather boots until he was in the army, and I never had any either."

"Well, suppose I show you how," Tom offered, "and then you can shine my boots every time you come to camp. I'll pay you three cents a boot."

"I'll give it a try, Sir." Jake nodded. He couldn't refuse a proposition like that. The rations the refugees received were barely enough to survive on. The pennies might buy a little extra flour or milk.

So, nearly every afternoon Jake went to the camp whether Daniel went or not. Tom would have his boots set out for Jake to shine and they would talk while Jake shined boots and Tom cleaned his rifle or mended his uniform. Tom talked about his family back in Ohio,

occasionally reading Jake parts of his letters from home.

Jake told Ma about Tom and always gave her the money he earned shining boots. Once she heard about Tom's family and the letters from home, she quit fussing at Jake for going to the army camp. "I guess the boy misses his Pa," Jake overheard her tell Lyddie one day. "This Tom sounds a lot like John. Jake needs a man's company."

Jake was even able to convince his mother that Mr. Chapman's school had nothing to offer him that he had not already learned from Jack Riley, so not instead of going to school every morning with Mandy and James. Jake spent his days doing chores for Tom and his buddies at the camp, bringing home a pocket full of pennies every day.

One day Tom said to Jake, "You know, Jake, the other day I was out on patrol, and I came across an apple orchard where the trees were full of early green apples. Can your Ma bake a pretty good apple pie?"

"You bet she can!" Jake answered. "She bakes the best pies you'd ever want to put to your lips"

"Well, how about if I bring a saddlebag full of them back with me tomorrow. You take them home and ask her

to bake as many pies as she can get out of them" Tom suggested. "You tell her that you can sell those pies at a good price to the boys here in camp. What do you say?"

"Sure, I'll take them to her. She can use the money I been givin' her to buy the flour and lard from the army supply."

"Of course I'll expect a free pie as payment for the apples," Tom chuckled.

"Agreed," said Jake grinning.

So, the next time Tom went on patrol he brought back apples and Jake took them home to Ma. The minute she heard Tom's plan she clapped her hands and cried, "That sounds like a dandy idea. Mandy, you'll have to help. We can make little pies by foldin' the dough over the apples. I don't have tins to make that many whole pies." Seeing Ma so enthused about anything at all made Jake happy.

The next morning Ma and Mandy set to work early. Jake and James were even recruited for peeling apples. By noon Jake was on his way to the army camp with a basket full of steaming apple pies.

Tom paid Jake for one of them and then called to the men in the tents around his, "Anybody like a taste of

my apple pie?"

Four or five soldiers emerged from nowhere and eagerly accepted chunks of the pie. "Howdeeee! This shore is good pie!" the first man blurted, his mouth still full.

Another soldier wiped his mouth on his sleeve and bellowed, "Where'd you git fresh home made pie, Wilman? D'ya smuggle yore woman into camp?"

"Gents, this young man here has a whole basket full of pies to sell. They're fresh from his momma's oven and he's sellin' them for two cent piece."

"I'll take one," shouted the first soldier. "Me too," replied another and another. Jake was swarmed with men thrusting their money at him. In just a few minutes the pies were gone and soldiers were giving him orders for the next day.

Jake returned home with a pocket full of coins for Ma. When he presented her with the money, she fairly shouted with delight.

"My stars! Who would think you could get all that money for my pies," Ma chuckled with pleasure.

Every time Tom went on patrol, he managed to return with apples or berries to send home with Jake, and each time Ma would turn the fruit into mouth-watering

little pies which Jake sold to his eager customers.

In late June, Daniel and Lyddie came by to tell Margaret and her family that they were going to leave Jackson. Samuel had gone to Corinth to officially join the Union Army. A "Regiment of African Descent" had been mustered in there.

"His Cap'n done give us p'mission to git married" Lyddie announced, "so Dan'l an me's gonna ketch a train t'day and git Sam'l and me is gonna be married as soon as we kin." She giggled like a young girl, nervously adjusting her kerchief.

"Ah's shore gonna miss you, Jake" Daniel said to Jake while they're mother's exchanged hugs.

"I'm gonna miss you too, Daniel." Jake poked Daniel on the arm with his fist. "As soon as we hear from Uncle Ben we'll probably be comin' up there too."

\* \* \*

News of the war was scarce in the refugee camp, but Jake heard bits and pieces on his visits among the soldier's tents. All during the early summer, conversation centered around General Grant's siege of Vicksburg.

"The word is that the General Grant has the whole city of Vicksburg surrounded." Jake told his mother after one of his visits to camp. "If the Rebs don't give up the city to him, they'll starve to death."

Ma shook her head. "There's goin' to be nothin' left of the South when all this is over. I don't see why folks have let their differences come to this...so much dyin' and destruction." Her voice trembled as she buried her face in her hands. Jake was sorry he had upset her with news of the war. Now she would brood for days.

As the Union Army gained control of Mississippi and Northern Alabama, refugees streamed into Jackson. The army shipped them in by the trainload. The Union had all it could do to provide food and shelter for the pitiful, ragged conglomeration of souls that Jake watched stumble from sweltering box cars nearly every day.

The summer and the war grew hotter. About the second week of July, just after word came that Vicksburg had fallen to Grant, news spread through the whole town about the bloody battle at Gettysburg in Pennsylvania. Hundreds of men on both sides had died, but the Union Army had won.

The refugees who were sympathetic with the

Confederacy became increasingly hostile toward the negro refugees and those whites they knew to be Unionists. The number of guards watching the camps had to be increased to prevent violence among the refugees.

One night just before bedtime Ma was kneeling beside Will's cradle, when a woman came to their tent. She looked to be middle-aged, and although she was ragged and hollow-eyed like so many of the new refugees swarming into Jackson, she carried herself with the dignified air of a southern lady. Without even asking permission to enter, she walked straight into the tent and stood over Ma, glaring down at her.

"Margaret Richards," she demanded, "Stand up and let me look into your face." The woman's voice seethed with rage. "I want to see what a traitor looks like."

Dumbfounded, Ma stood up and looked into the woman's face. "Ma'am, you can't just come in here..." Ma's voice trailed off for a moment as her bewilderment turned to recognition. "Sadie Devereaux! How in heaven's name...?"

"I saw you yesterday, watching us get off that wretched train." Sadie's voice quavered with contempt. "I wasn't sure it was you then, but I ask some of the folks

who've been here a while and they said your name was Richards and that you and your boy were awful thick with the army." Sadie spat her words in Ma's face. Her face grew more livid as she spoke.

Ma just stood looking at Sadie, staring at her in disbelief while she continued her tirade. "That bunch of traitors that your husband joined raided our place last month. They burned everything, and when the Colonel and Mr. Gridley tried to run them off, those traitors opened fire and killed both both of them."

Her voice broke into sobs. Ma gently placed her arm around Mrs. Devereaux and said, "Oh, Sadie, I'm so sorry. I know how you feel. My John died a while back too."

Mrs. Devereaux stiffened and pulled away from Ma. "Don't touch me! I didn't come here for your sympathy." She wiped her tears on a tattered lace handkerchief and faced Ma squarely. "I came here to tell you that before my husband was shot, he got one for himself. Your husband's brother was killed that day too. His friends carried him away on the back of his horse."

Her words pierced the air like darts. Jake and Mandy looked at each other in horror. Ma flinched, but

faced Mrs. Devereaux squarely. "Sadie, I wish you would leave now. You have said what you came to say, now please go." Ma ordered in a calm, steady voice.

Mrs. Devereaux glared at Ma for a brief moment, then turned abruptly and walked out into the hot summer night.

Once more there was sorrow for the Richards family, but this time Margaret Richards was able to shed tears with her children over the loss of someone they loved.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

After nearly a week of seeing his mother sitting in the stifling hot tent, staring at her open Bible, Jake returned one day to find Ma and Mandy bustling about packing their belongings.

"Jake," Ma announced. "We are leavin' this place. I was called in to see the captain this morning and he has just received official word that Ben was truly killed while on a raid in Alabama. The report included a note from Silas Johnson." She handed Jake the note and continued her packing.

Jake took the note and read the storekeeper's familiar handwriting:

NorthernAlabama  
May 2, 1863

Dear John and Margaret,

It brings me bitter sorrow to send this letter. Your brother Ben was killed yesterday. We have been raiding down close our home territory lately, and Ben and a few other boys took it upon themselves to ride off on their own to settle a score with Colonel Devereaux and his man Gridley.

They raided the Devereaux place. Colonel and Gridley put up a fight, gettin' themselves shot. Ben took a bullet in the head before it was all over.

The words on the page swam as tears filled Jake's

eyes. A lump formed in his throat as he wiped away the tears and continued reading:

I wanted you to know that I got permission from our captain to bury Ben on your land. The house and barn are still standing, so if you ever get back, I marked the grave. It is out under the plum trees.

I want to tell you that Ben was a fine young man. May his soul rest in peace.

Yours Regretfully,  
Silas Johnson

Jake swallowed the lump in his throat, folded the note, and handed it back to his mother. "I guess Ben didn't even know Pa was dead," Jake said softly to himself.

Ma was still scurrying around tying up bundles and stuffing things into baskets. Mandy had her hands full keeping track of Will who was crawling everywhere now.

"Where are we goin', Ma?" Jake finally asked.

"I told you I talked the captain this morning. I've been thinkin', ever since Miz Devereaux told us about Ben, that there's nothin' to stay here for anymore. Pa's gone, and Ben isn't comin' back to us, so it's time I got you children up north to a safer place to live."

"But, Ma," Jake protested, "We're safe here. The army will protect us."

"Now Jake, think about all the angry looks we get from the other refugees and the hateful things they call Unionists. And there are just too many refugees here now." Ma looked squarely at Jake. "We can't stay here, and we can't go back home."

"If we wait here until the war's over, we can go back home. Mr Johnson says that the house and barn are still there." Jake frantically tried to think of ways to change his mother's mind. "Tom Willman says that since Gettysburg, the war can be over in no time at all. Mandy and I want to go back home."

Ma brushed a wisp of hair back from her forehead, placed her hands firmly on her hips and gave her son a long, stern stare. She spoke firmly in a very final tone. "Jake, we don't know what's back there, or when this war will be over. We are goin' north and that is all there is to it! Remember, never look back."

Jake ducked his head. He should have known from the start of the conversation that his mother had made up her mind. He reluctantly began gathering bundles and piling them beside the door of the tent.

Ma worked silently for a while, and then began to calmly explain her plans. "I got a pass for us from the

captain that will get us on a train headed for Memphis. He has a whole trainload of Unionists who want to travel north. When we get to Memphis, we can find Ellen Whitfield and stay there while I get in touch with Aunt Lola by letter."

"Who's Aunt Lola?" Jake broke in. "I never heard of her until you mentioned her back in Glendale."

"She's my mother's youngest sister. We're about the same age. I haven't seen her since I was a girl back in Carolina. We used to write letters back and forth all the time, but I guess we just both got busy with our families. I still have her address in my Bible." Ma chattered like a schoolgirl as she went on about this stranger she wanted to take them to live with.

"Anyway," Ma continued, "As soon as we get an answer from Aunt Lola, if she says we can stay with her, we can use the same railroad pass to go on to St. Louis."

Jake didn't much like the idea, but he knew better than to say anything more against it.

The setting summer sun left its sweltering heat in the cinders along the railroad tracks. Jake helped his mother and their family board the rickety passenger train headed north for Memphis. Jake was glad he wore his

shoes in stead of being barefoot as he usually was in the summer. Ma had made them wear their shoes on the trip so they wouldn't risk loosing them. Their only luggage was a few bundles of clothing and a lunch basket. The cooking utensils and even Will's cradle had to be left behind because the train was so crowded.

The five of them had no sooner squeezed into one of the hard wooden seats, than the train lurched, rolled forward, and rapidly picked up speed. The tents and buildings of Jackson passed rapidly by the windows and behind them into the twilight. The car in which they rode was so crowded that people were sitting on the floor in the aisles. Smoke and cinders blew in through the windows, getting into their eyes, making everyone cough. One of the men went through the car closing the windows, shutting out the smoke and cinders, but the air in the car became stifling almost immediately.

James whined, "Ma, I can't breathe, it's hot in here." He began to cry and was immediatley followed by Will. Jake felt like crying too. Mandy fidgeted, but said nothing.

Ma tried to comfort both boys. "Hush, darlin's. It will cool off in here soon." Jake was sure she didn't really

expect it too, but James and Will didn't know that. Jake tried to console himself with the fact that they weren't in one of those box cars he had refugees arrive on in Jackson.

Finally the same man who had opened the windows had the idea to open only the rear door of the car, letting in air but not smoke. After that the car was relatively cooler and everyone settled in for the long ride to Memphis.

Jake rode along thinking his own thoughts, watching the countryside rush past the windows until darkness blotted it out. How did Ma know whether she could find Mrs. Whitfield in Memphis? He knew they didn't have enough money to get a place to stay.

Jake looked out at the clear night sky shimmering with thousands of stars. There, straight ahead, he could see that old great dipper. It looked no different than it had a year ago when it hung above the trees outside his window. Jake pressed his face against the cool glass of the train window and drifted off to sleep.

Jake's sleep was fitful, crowded there in the hard wooden seat with his family. He woke each time the train slowed for a crossing or for a little town. Once Jake woke once to see a depot slide past the window with a sigh

saying, CORINTH hanging from its eaves. He remember thinking at the time, "I wonder if Daniel is still here?"

The sun woke Jake the next morning, its bright rays glaring through the dirty window glass. Ma was awake, staring out the window while Will slept on her shoulder. James was asleep on top of the bundles at Ma's feet, and Mandy fidgeted in the seat between Jake and his mother .

"O-o-o-oh," Jake groaned. "I hurt all over." Every muscle in his body felt stiff. He wanted desperately to stand up.

"Memphis, five minutes." a conductor shouted as he stepped over sleeping bodies in the aisle.

"Where are we going when we get there, Ma," yawned Mandy, stretching her arms over her head.

"Well, I'm not real sure, Mandy," Ma answered uncertainly. "I guess we'll just have to start askin' around for Ellen Whitfield's sister. I think Ellen said her last name is Logan."

"Didn't Pa say she is a seamstress?" Jake offered information he thought might help.

When the train came to a stop in Memphis, there was the same pushing and crowding to get off that they

had experienced the last trip. Jake was just glad to be able to stand up again.

As crowded as the train was, the depot at Memphis was even more crowded. Ragged, weary refugees were everywhere, sitting or standing in dazed clusters all around the platform and inside the depot itself.

Ma made her family pile their bundles together in one of the few vacant spaces available and sit on them. The morning sun was already blazing hot, but all the shady spots were taken.

"You wait here while I go into the depot to ask about Mrs. Logan." Ma ordered. She turned and disappeared made her way through the crowd toward the small frame building.

James started to cry. "Where did Ma go? I want Ma, I'm thirsty." Jake reached into Ma's carpet bag for the water flask that had belonged to Pa. "Here, take a drink and be quiet."

James took a drink and then Jake gave Will a drink before he passed the water to Mandy. Jake took a drink himself. The water tasted terrible, but it did quench his thirst.

Ma returned looking very disappointed. She sat

down on the bundles with her children and stared at the ground. Jake could tell that she was struggling to keep from crying.

"What's the matter, Ma? Jake asked. She shook her head, blinking back the tears.

"They tell me that we are not allowed to leave the depot area. There has been some mistake." Ma told him, her voice choking on her tears.

"A mistake? What kind of mistake?" Jake didn't understand what could be wrong.

Ma shook her head again. "The Captain was wrong. They're not allowing any refugees to stay in Memphis." She said, breathing deeply between words to keep her composure. "They say that they are too crowded here now."

"Where do they want us to go?" asked Mandy. Her voice trembled with apprehension.

"We will be taken by wagon over to the river and put aboard a steamboat headed for some place in Illinois called Cairo." Ma answered with a heavy sigh.

"Oh, I've heard of Cairo!" Jake cried. "That's not so bad. Its just a way down the Mississippi from St. Louis."

Ma's face brightened. "Jake, are you sure?" she

asked.

"I remember seein' it on a map in Jack Riley's schoolhouse." Jake answered, straightening up and crossing his arms with an air of authority. Maybe we could just stay on the boat and go right on to St. Louis.

"Well, I guess we're takin' a boat ride on the Mississippi," laughed Ma.

They waited in the hot sun for more than an hour before army wagons arrived to take them down to the steamboat levee.

Jake and his family climbed aboard one of the crowded wagons. As cramped as they were, the shade provided by the bonnet-like white canvas covering the creaking conestoga was a welcome relief from the hot sun.

The bumpy ride to the river seemed to take forever, but their wagon finally pulled up alongside one of the docks on the levee. Barrels and crates were piled high up and down the length of the dock. Bare-chested men carried the heavy barrels and boxes up the gangplank of a stately sidewheeler sitting serenely in the water alongside.

"Jake, look at that!" James pointed in awe at the beautiful white steamboat. The reflection of its tall smokestacks and gleaming white gingerbread trim

shimmered across the surface of the river.

"Do we get to ride on THAT?" Mandy gasped.

"I guess we'll find out pretty soon," Jake said, pointing to a harried looking soldier hurrying toward the wagons. The soldier motioned to the driver of the lead wagon to drive down the levee toward the next dock.

The wagons rolled, bouncing and bumping along the cobblestone levee for a few hundred feet to a dock, far less busy than the first. There, tied alongside the dock was a small weathered-looking steamboat. It had no fancy white trimmings or tall smokestacks. Instead of a large impressive paddlewheel on the side, its small wheel was mounted at the stern. Across the peeling side of the boat were faint letters spelling the name, MIRANDA.

"Well, it's still a steamboat, Mandy," Ma said cheerfully at the sight of the run-down old boat. Jake felt a flutter of apprehension in his stomach. He had never been in a boat of any kind, and this one didn't look very sturdy.

"Please proceed to the gangplank for boarding," The wagon driver called out as their wagons came to a halt. Jake and Mandy helped their mother and brothers down from the wagon and gathered their belongings. Following

the bedraggled crowd of refugees, they soon found themselves crossing the gangplank leading onto the old steamboat.

"Let's sit out here where it will be cool," Ma pointed to a place on the deck that was shaded by the already crowded cabin.

They piled their bundles against the cabin wall and settled down in the pleasant shade. Ma pulled a loaf of bread from their lunch basket and broke off modest chunks for each one of them. She passed around strips of beef jerky and pieces of dried apples saying, "This is the last of the food I brought along, I have a little money to buy more when we get to Cairo"

When the last crumb of bread, and the last strip of jerky, and the apples were gone, Ma gave each of them a drink of water from the old flask. "I hope we can find some fresh water there too," she worried.

People kept arriving and boarding the creaky old boat until there was no more room to sit or stand anywhere. The Miranda sat so low in the river that water lapped over her bow, and ran along the deck.

Jake watched a brawny man raise the gangplank, and the boat's whistle gave a series of toots. Jake noticed a

strange sensation. The land appeared to be gliding away from the side of the boat until nearly half the width of the river was between the boat and the shore. Once out in the river, the paddlewheel began turning and the boat turned about to head up stream.

"This is pleasant, isn't it," Ma said. The air feels so fresh coming across the water." Jake nodded. He found that he was enjoying his first boat ride. The constantly changing glided past. At first there were lush green trees clustered along the banks, and then stony bluffs rose high above the water. Occasionally, fields of yellow corn ran almost to the water's edge. At one place, a dusty road ran right along the bank, and a farmer driving a mule-drawn wagon waved his hat at them. Jake and James joined others on the boat who shouted and waved back as if he were an old friend.

The gentle splashing sound of the paddlewheel lulled Jake into a peaceful sleep. When he woke, the sun was going down. With the darkness, a damp chill was settling over the river. Ma began unfolding blankets to cover her sleeping children.

"I'ts gettin' chilly, isn't it Jake," she said. "I hope we get to Cairo soon."

Jake's teeth chattered a little as he nodded in agreement. "We're travelin' upstream, so it might take a spell." He looked up at the sky to find the Great Dipper among the millions of stars poking through the vanishing dusk. The familiar constellation had become the only thing that remained constant in their ever-changing world. Somehow it gave him a feeling of hope when he looked up at night and found it still hanging there.

\* \* \*

Cairo was hot and humid. Clouds of dust hung in the air as wagons and buggies jammed its busy streets. Jake and his family sat crowded together with a dozen or more other refugees and their belongings in the back of a buckboard wagon. The blazing summer sun bore mercilessly through Jake's battered hat as the wagon jolted and bounced along its bone-jarring path through the streets of the bustling river town. Blue-uniformed soldiers and tattered refugees seemed to be everywhere.

Except for the bands of former slaves thrust into a frightening new world, it was difficult to tell what their lives had been like before the war. Considering the direction

they were traveling, it might be safe to assume that they were Unionists, but this was not an entirely reliable clue considering wartime's confusion.

It was nearly impossible to tell who had been rich and who had been poor. Only remnants of their former lives remained in the original quality and style of their clothing, assuming that what they wore was not provided by some charitable source. Their exhausted faces did not reveal where they had lived, or their religion, or whether they were laborers or farmers, or shopkeepers or professional men. Everyone looked equally miserable and pathetic.

Once again Ma's plan to reach St. Louis had gone awry. An ever increasing flood of refugees fleeing the battle-torn states of Alabama, Tennessee and Mississippi streamed into Cairo daily. New refugees arriving in Cairo were being transported farther north by train, for reasons known only to those in charge of providing for the needs of so many displaced souls.

Jake and his mother and brothers and sisters were being herded onto a train for the third time. This time, the ride would be like no other they had taken on their long journey from Johnson's crossroads.

"Ma, how are we ever goin' to get to St. Louis?"

Mandy fretted.

"I'm not sure, Mandy," Ma admitted. "The officer back at the levee told me that we're headed for somewhere in Illinois. He said the place is about one hundred miles from St. Louis."

"Maybe there'll be a train that goes to St. Louis from there." Jake reasoned.

"I don't know, Son, I just don't know." Ma said, shaking her head.

Instead of stopping at the depot, the wagon bumped across three or four tracks and pulled alongside a string of box cars. The driver stopped the wagon, jumped down and opened the heavy doors of the car. Jake peered beyond a swirl of dust and straw through the gaping doorway. The dim, windowless box-on-wheels was lined with dirty-looking, matted straw. A puff of foul hot air billowed out into the sultry summer morning.

"Everybody climb in here," The soldier snarled.

"Hurry up, I have to go pick up another load of folks right away."

"Ma!" Jake cried, "we have to ride in a box car?"

Panic filled Jake's whole being. Thoughts of those pitiful

people he had seen emerging from the boxcars down in Jackson froze him to his spot in the wagon.

"Jake, we don't have a choice," Ma told him. "There's nowhere else to go."

Reluctantly, Jake climbed out of the wagon and into the box car along with his mother and the rest. Inside, the heat was almost unbearable. The smell caught in Jake's throat causing him to gag. He scrambled to sit as close to the door as possible, hoping to find whatever fresh air he could. Ma and the rest of the family piled in beside him while they for another wagonload of refugees to climb aboard the box car. After them, still more came until the car was so crowded that everyone had to sit upright, there was no room to lie down.

A soldier pulled the sliding door part-way closed, leaving an opening of only three or four feet. The inevitable lurch signaled that the train was about to roll.

Will began to whimper, and Ma rocked him ever-so-slightly in her arms.

"Jake," whispered Mandy, "I'm scared."

Jake reached for his sister's hand and held it tight. "I am too, Mandy. Just hand on." No one could have told Jake a little over a year ago that he would be admitting

such a thing to anyone, especially his sister.

"Let's each think about sometin' nice," Jake suggested.

He thought about the meal they had eaten just this morning. They had just been told that they would not be able to travel any further on the boat, but would be fed at the church up the hill from the levee.

In the church yard, tables and benches had been constructed from wooden planks and placed under spreading sycamore trees. Large kettles steamed over open fires and ladies in calico bonnets and freshly starched aprons ladled plates full of beans and ham for the steady stream of hungry refugees.

"This surely is tasty," Jake mumbled through a mouthful of beans and cornbread.

"It sure is," agreed Mandy "I think my stomach was rubbin' together on the inside." She gulped down an entire mug of cold milk, the first she had in a month or two.

The food was the first warm meal any of them had had in days, and everyone ate with relish.

Taking the free meal while she still had money in her purse went completely against Ma's grain, so when

they finished eating, Ma approached one of the ladies serving the meal and pressed a few coins into her hand.

"Please take this to help pay for what my family ate. We're much obliged to you. God bless you." Ma said to the stunned women.

"Well, thank you, Dear. You don't need to pay us. We want to help." she told Ma. "It's only by the Grace of God that we aren't in your place instead. Please take it, you might need..."

But Ma turned and herded her brood away before the lady could return the money.

Will's whimpering began again. Other babies in the boxcar were fussing and crying. The stench of the dirty straw and so many unwashed bodies made thoughts of food a poor distraction.

The stifling heat in the car was nearly impossible to ignore for very long. Jake felt as if he might smother. He wriggled himself closer to the open door, hoping to be able to breathe a little fresh air. He watched the passing countryside with increasing interest.

"Hey, Mandy, Ma, James, look." Jake called to his family, look how much this land looks like ours at home."

The soil did not have the rusty red color of the

land back home, but its rugged hills and limestone bluffs reminded him of the country around Johnson's crossroads. Narrow little creeks, such as the one behind their cabin, cut across rocky fields and along the base of many of the bluffs.

"It surely does, Jake," Ma agreed. "There aren't as many pine trees, but look at all those cedar trees growin' through the rocks. Looks like they can grow a little corn here too," she said pointing to a small field of ripening corn.

The train slowed for a crossing where a wagon carrying a farmer and a boy about Jake's age waited for the train to pass. Jake waved at them and received hearty greetings in return. A small cabin built of logs and stone sat among a cluster of trees in the distance.

The limestone outcroppings became interspersed with hills that were more gently curved. Cattle grazed along the banks of shallow creeks that meandered between the gentle slopes.

"Look at all the apple trees," Mandy said, suddenly pointing to rows and rows of fruit-laden apple trees crowning nearby hillsides. Wagons loaded with baskets of brilliant red apples waited beneath the trees while workers

perched among the branches picking the day's juicy harvest.

Will's whimpering suddenly turned to an ear-splitting cry. His face was flushed and he drew his knees up toward his stomach as if in pain.

"What's the matter with him, Ma?" Jake asked. "He acts like he hurts somewhere."

"I know. I think it's his stomach," Ma fretted. "He didn't act like he wanted to eat this morning, but I thought it was just the heat." A worried expression strained her already tired face. She placed a thin hand across the baby's forehead. Her brow suddenly furrowed. Her gaunt eyes widened with fright. "He's burning up with fever!"

Jake was grateful that he had been able to fill their flask at the church in Cairo. He pulled it out and handed it to his mother. "Here, give him a drink."

Ma put the flask to the baby's lips. He eagerly accepted the tepid water it offered, gulping it rapidly. His crying quieted for a moment, but only a moment. The poor little one fussed and whimpered briefly, and then stiffened. His eyes rolled back in his head and his face turned ghostly pale. The small body lay in his mother's

arm twitching and jerking.

James cried out in panic, "What's the matter with Willie?"

"He's havin' some sort of spell!" Mandy screamed. "Ma, what's the matter with him?"

"It's the fever. We've got to break the fever." Ma's voice trembled with fright. "Mandy, tear piece off that apron in my bag and get it wet." she ordered.

Mandy quickly obeyed, drenching the cloth with water from the flask. Ma took the wet cloth and draped it over Will's brow.

A plump middle-aged woman sitting next to Ma watched with growing interest and concern. "I think he is having a convulsion. You have to hold down his tongue so he won't choke on it," she said with authority, not wasting time with an introduction.

Ma's bewildered eyes stared at her, questioning.

The stranger quickly took Ma's hand in hers and directed the forefinger gently into Will's mouth, forcing his clenched teeth open to allow the finger to lay firmly on top of his small tongue.

"I'm Martha Carter. My late husband was a doctor and I've seen this many times," the woman said, smiling

compassionately into Ma's face. "The convulsion will likely stop in a few minutes. His temperature must have risen rapidly from this heat." Her ragged, disheveled appearance belied the genteel sophistication in her speech.

Mrs. Carter waited with Ma for a few minutes that seemed an eternity. Presently, Will's tormented little body relaxed. His breathing became normal again, and his eyes opened briefly. He stared up at his mother, and, reassured of her presence, fell into a deep sleep.

"The convulsion is past, but his fever isn't broken." Mrs. Carter said, feeling Will's forehead. "We need to keep applying the wet cloth to his head."

Jake and Mandy and James rode along in anxious silence while Ma and this kind new friend watched over their sick little brother. Jake couldn't help noticing how frail Ma had become the strain of their ordeal of the past year was showing. The lustrous brown hair that she had once brushed and nurtured was now dull and touched with gray. Her face was thin, her eyes tired and hollow. Thin, almost bony hands caressed Will's head. Jake felt an ache of sadness deep within him as he watched his mother; an ache that came more and more often on this endless journey.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

The all-too-familiar sight of another refugee camp spread before them. Jake helped his mother and Mrs. Carter off of the crowded boxcar. Will still slept, limp in his mother's arms. Just to be out in the fresh air and able to stand up was an immense relief. Tents were strewn about a barren, dusty field. Tattered laundry hung from tent ropes. Dirty, ragged children played aimlessly among the tents.

Jake's family and their new friend trailed along with the bedraggled band of refugees off of the boxcar until they came to a large building that appeared to be an empty storage shed. The cool shade inside its large open doorway welcomed them in out of the sweltering sunlight.

After Jake's eyes became accustomed to the dimness, he could see that this large room, had a high open ceiling, with lofts on either side like some kind of barn. At the opposite end, large double doors like the ones he had just entered, stood open allowing a cooling breeze to pass through from one end of the shed to the other.

Inside the shed, a long plank table was filled with bowls and platters of more food than Jake had seen on one

table in all his life. There were mounds of fried chicken, bowls mounded with fluffy mashed potatoes, loaves of golden crusty bread, and dishes brimming with every kind of vegetable. Juicy pies and tall cakes lined a smaller table, and yet another table held pitchers of lemonade and milk. Ladies in white aprons bustled among the tables fanning away the flies and helping people fill their plates.

They were greeted by a rotund man with a merry voice. He was dressed in a white linen suit and vest with a gold chain stretched across its expansive front.

"Welcome, good people, I am Eli Bibb. He gestured toward the wonderful feast. "Come, fill your plates and eat all you want, Folks. You are no doubt hungry after such a long trip. Children, eat, eat, eat," the man coaxed. His laughing eyes winked at the children as he patted the little ones on the head. His voice boomed throughout the building.

Jake wondered if he were going to wake from a dream and find himself still crammed into that terrible box car, but the food was too real for it to be a dream. He and Mandy and James piled their plates with some of every delicious dish on the table, and settled themselves with Ma and Mrs. Carter on one of the gaily colored quilts

Jake ate until he could hold no more. The cold, rich milk was refreshing beyond belief.

Ma lay Will on the quilt beside her while they ate. She refused to eat more than a few bites, stroking the sleeping baby's head and arms with a wet cloth.

A tiny woman dressed in a dark grey dress and fresh white apron approached carrying a brimming pitcher of milk. "Is the little one ill?" she asked, filling Jake's mug with more of the cool, white liquid.

"Yes," Ma answered politely, "He's runnin' a fever." "The poor little dear had a convulsion this morning while we were on the train." Mrs. Carter added. "I was just telling his mother-- by the way, Dear, what is your name?" she turned to Ma and asked.

Ma smiled weakly and answered, "I'm Margaret Richards, and my baby here is Little Will. These are my other children, Jake, Mandy and James. Ma gestured toward her family with pride.

"And I'm Martha Carter," their new friend said nodding a greeting to the lady in the gray dress.

"Well, I'm so pleased to meet all of you," the tiny lady said, smiling. "I am Susannah Bibb, Mrs. Eli Bibb to be more proper." Her slender hand reached up to brush a

strand of silver and brown hair back into place. The smallness of her face was emphasized by the way her hair was pulled back into a knot at the back of her head.

"As I was saying," Mrs. Carter said, after having interrupted herself for all the introductions, "I was just telling Mrs. Richards that we need to find a doctor for her little Will here. If his fever goes higher, he may have more convulsions."

"There is a doctor in town who has been treating the refugees, I will send someone to find him. Meantime, I will ask Mr. Bibb to find you a place out of the way where you can get some rest." Mrs. Bibb gathered her skirts and hurried away toward her husband.

She returned almost immediately to announce, "Mr. Bibb has sent a boy to find Dr. Klugman. Until he arrives, you can rest over there where we have some cots that we sleep on when we stay the night." She pointed to a far corner of the building.

Mrs. Carter gathered her ample body and stood up. Jake reached down to help Ma stand up. No sooner than she was on her feet, her face went suddenly pale, her eyes rolled back and she collapsed onto the quilt beside Will.

Mandy and James screamed. Jake knelt at his

mother's side. He took her hand calling, "Ma, Ma, what's wrong?" Her hand seemed very hot to him. He place his hand on her forehead. It felt even more feverish than Will's.

"Mrs, Carter, "Jake cried, "Do you think Ma has a fever too."

Mrs. Carter knelt down and touched Ma's forehead. She frowned and nodded her head. "Yes, and I think it is very high" she answered. "She and the baby may have the same illness." Martha Carter bent down and placed her ear over Ma's chest."Her heart is beating very slowly. She needs a doctor too."

By this time, Mr. Bibb and several others had noticed the commotion and came running. "What is the matter with the little lady and her baby?" he asked breathlessly.

"They are both very sick, Papa," Mrs. Bibb answered. "It's no wonder, the way they were shipped in here like cattle on that filthy boxcar.

Mr. Bibb felt Ma's head. He pulled a small bottle from his pocket and waved it beneath her nose. The smelling salts did nothing to restore her to conciousness. "Henry, bring our buggy around to the rear door," Mr.

Bibb called to a young man in work clothes standing in the crowd that had gathered. "Mamma and I will take this poor lady and her children to our house."

"Madam,' Mr. Bibb said quietly to Mrs. Carter, "When the doctor arrives, please tell him that I, Eli Bibb, have two patients for him at my farm."

Mrs. Carter nodded grimly and helped Jake gather up their few belongings. When the man named Henry pulled the buggy into the building and right up to where Ma lay unconcious, he helped Mr. Bibb and another man lift Ma into the buggy where Mrs. Bibb sat waiting. Mrs. Carter gathered Will into her arms and handed him to Mrs. Bibb. Jake, Mandy, and James climbed into the back seat of the buggy, bewildered and frightened.

Mr. Bibb climbed onto the front seat and grabbed the reins. He steered his sleek team of Percherons out of the barn, away from the railraod tracksand the refugee camp. The shiny buggy wheels whirred along the dusty road westward over the Illinois prairie. The sun sat on the western horizon like a flaming ball of fire.

"Jake, is Ma goin' to die?" James asked, "Is she gonna die like Pa did?"

"I don't know, James," Jake answered turning his

head away to hide the tears filling his eyes.

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Jake sat on the rail fence staring out across the prairie. A meadowlark soared overhead, trilling its melodious song. It had been nearly two weeks since Ma had died. She had lost all her courage when little Will died the night they came to stay with the Bibbs. The baby's fever soared even higher that night, and not even the doctor Mr. Bibb brought in could bring it down. Little Will died during the night while Ma still lay unconscious. Her fever broke the next morning, but the news of her baby's death shattered her.

Ma lay in the big feather bed upstairs in the big white house for days, refusing to take nourishment, never noticing the clean sheets or the lacy curtains at the windows. She just slipped into that empty world where she had lived during the weeks after Pa died. Less than a week after the baby was buried out in Mr. Bibb's orchard, Ma just gave up. She died early that September morning. Jake never had a chance to talk to her... to tell her what he had learned...that you had to keep going no matter what

happened. "We would be a good fit for the others."

He looked out over the gardens surrounded by their white picket fences and watched Eli's horses grazing in the pasture beyond. James was chasing a frog under the grape arbor. Jake felt a terrible loneliness come over him. He missed his parents and the home they had once. He missed his baby brother. It was hard to believe that he would never see Uncle Ben again. He would always wonder what Will would have been like had he been given a chance to live and run and play like other children.

Mandy ran out to him from the big clapboard farmhouse. "Jake, " "Miz Susannah says to come in and wash up. Supper's almost ready." Mandy said climbing onto the fence beside him.

Jake nodded, but made no move to leave his spot on the fence.

Mandy waited, staring out across the prairie. "Jake, Miz Susannah says that she and Mr. Eli want us to stay here with them. They want us to have a home here as long as we want to stay." Mandy said, not really speaking to Jake, but putting the idea into words for herself to hear.

"They have been mighty good to us." Jake

answered. We could be a lot of help to them, their own two sons bein' killed in the war like they was."

"Yeah, an' Miz Susannah says that she always wanted a daughter." Mandy said, "And we never did find that Aunt Lola's address in Ma's bible."

"No," Jake said thoughtfully, "We never knew her anyway, and the Bibbs kinda seem like family already."

Jake was quiet for a long while and then said, "Well, I guess we don't have to decide before supper, do we? "

"C'mon, James, supper's ready." he called. "Mandy, see where he went. He was in the grape arbor."

Jake hopped down from the fence, his bare feet making deep tracks in the dust. He trotted toward the house, through the grassy yard and around to the back door.

In the large airy kitchen, the kettle on the iron cooking stove sang a cheerful tune. The chicken sizzled in the heavy iron skillet. Jake smiled at the Susannah and poured himself some hot water in the basin on the wash stand. He washed quickly before Mandy came dragging James squalling into the kitchen for his scrubbing.

When they were seated around the big oak table

with Susannah and Eli Bibb, Jake looked at Mandy and James. They were clean and well fed for the first time in months. Ma would be happy that they have a good home with these kind people to love them. No one would ever replace Pa and Ma, but here they had a chance to grow up in a real home, not in one of those orphan's homes that he had heard about.

That night in his room at the top of the stairs, Jake knelt by the window and looked up at the Great Dipper. There it hung, never moving from its place in the heavens, no matter what happened down here on earth.

Jake knew that the memory of the his parents and the little cabin by the creek, like the stars overhead, would always be in his memory no matter what he did or where he went. The important thing to remember would be to use that memory as a star to steer by. He couldn't let it keep him from going forward in life. He guessed Ma had been right in a way, take what you can with you and never look back.

## APPENDIX

List of Potential Publishers

ATHENEUM CHILDREN'S BOOKS, Macmillan, Inc., 866 3rd Ave, New York NY 10022. (212)702-7894. Editorial Director: John J. Lanman or editors Marcia Marshall and Gail Paris. Computer printout submissions of letter quality acceptable. Few specific needs. Wants books that are fresh, interestin, and well written. Query, submit outline/synopsis and sample chapters of complete manuscript.

DIAL BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS, Division of NAL-Penguin Inc., 2 Park Ave., New York NY 10016 (212)725-1818. Submissions Editor: Phyllis J. Sogelman. Computer printout submissions of letter quality acceptable. Especially looking for "lively and well writtne novels for middle grade and young adult children involving a convincing plot and believable characters." Submit complete manuscript.

E. P. DUTTON, Division of NAL-Penguin, Inc., 1 Park Ave., New York NY 10016 (212)725-1818. Publisher, Children's Books: Christopher Franschelli. Query first on fiction.

GEMSTONE BOOKS, 242 Portland Abe.S., Minneapolis MN 55415. (612)333-2691. Fiction Editor: Kdarin Shelson. Computer printout submissions of letter quality acceptable. Looking for fiction manuscripts that appeal to young people ages 7-14. Query or outline/synopsis and sample chapters.

HARCOURT BRACE JAVONOVICH, CHILDREN'S BOOKS DIVISION, 1250 Sixth Ave., San Diego CA 92101 (619)699-6810. Attention: Manuscript Submissions. Computer printout submissions of letter quality OK. Query or submit outline/synopsis and sample chapters of complete manuscript.

HARPER&ROW JUNIOR BOOKS GROUP, 10 E. 23rd St., New York NY 10022 (212)207-7044. Publisher: Elizabeth Gordon. Editors: Charlotte Lolotow, Nina Ignatowicz, Marilyn Kriney, Barbara Fenton, Laura Geringer, Robert O. Warren Antonia Q. Markeit, and Pamela D. Hastings. Computer printout acceptable. "Please identify simultaneous submissions." Query: submit complete manuscript: submit

outling/synopsis and sample chapters: or submit through agent.

HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS, 1075 Arrowsmith, Eugene OR 97402. (503)343-0123. Editor-in-chief: Eileen L. Mason. Manuscript coordinator: LaRae Weikert. Computer printout of letter quality acceptable. Fiction: Historical, mystery, religion. Query or submit outline/synopsis and sample chapters.

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN CO., CHILDREN'S TRADE BOOKS, 2 Park St., Boston MA 02108, Contact: Editor. Computer printout of letter quality acceptable. Submit complete manuscript.

ALFRED A KNOPF, INC., 201 E. 50th St., New York NY 10022. (212)751-2600. Senior Editor: Ashbel Breen. Children's Book Editor: Ms. Frances Foster. Photo-copied submissions acceptable. Simultaneous submissions OK (if so informed). Fiction: Submit complete manuscript.

PELICAN PUBLISHING COMPANY, 1101 Monroe St., Box 189, Gretna LA. 70053, (504)368-1175. Assistant Editor: Dean Shapiro. Fiction: Historical, humor mainstream, Southern, juvenile and young adult. Needs very limited. Submit outline/synopsis and sample chapters.

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS, CHILDREN'S BOOKS DEPARTMENT, 866 Third Ave., New York NY 10022. (212)702-7855. Editorial Director, Children's Books: Clare Costello. Computer printout of letter quality acceptable. Fiction: Adventure, fantasy, historical, humor, mysterly. Submit outling/synopsis and sample chapters.

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