

Dr. Obersteen picked up Newsom's chart and looked at the time.

He hesitated then he opened the chart and across the first page who wrote in big bold lettering, "DECEASED".

He flipped to the last blank page, that he had just added and wrote in big bold lettering, "DECEASED."

Dr. Obersteen was so angry with Jerome J. Newsom that all those mighty soldiers moved at his way.

He slung Newsom's chart across the tent and it went outside.

Roger stood by Andrew and bent over he tried to catch his breath.

He looked at Dr. Obersteen and stood and walked outside for and stood and exhaled.

The soldiers looked at Roger.

Roger looked at the soldiers and said, "Private Jerome J. Newsom passed this life ten minutes ago. Cause of death unknown."

The soldier that hollered at Angelica very sadly said, "Tired. He was tired of living this life."

He held his head down and shook his head.

The soldier standing next to him patted him on his back.

Roger looked at the soldiers and knew God had to intervene.

Roger started looking around the tent and one of the soldiers pointed behind the tent.

Andrew walked out the tent.

He looked at the cute house and started walking to the house.

He looked back at the tent as he stepped on the porch and saw Dr. Obersteen walk out.

He assumed he just stepped out of the tent to breathe.

Danny and Adam were in their hidden positions.

They saw Andrew looking at somebody.

He turned and watched Dr. Obersteen pass his usual seat on the front porch.

The soldiers watched Dr. Obersteen.

Dr. Obersteen walked out the tent and started walking down the dirt road.

Andrew jumped off the porch and ran behind Dr. Obersteen.

Danny was about to run behind them.

Adam held out his hand to Danny to stay.

Danny stood still.

Adam walked fast up to the front and turned as a perfect soldier.

He saw the soldiers were watching him.

He knew they were upset about Newsom.

Andrew did not know what to do.

He ran in front of Dr. Obersteen and walked backwards so he could face Dr. Obersteen.

Andrew said, "Dr. Obersteen I don't know what to say to you or to anybody."

Dr. Obersteen continued to walk down the dirt road.

It was getting dark.

Adam stood at the beginning of the entrance to the governor's tent and watched the shadows move on the dirt road.

Adam wondered how his mama and grandma were doing.

Adam became full.

He wanted to retire but he then had to get something else to keep his mind busy.

Learning to listen to sounds and studying what the sounds are and what makes the sounds has made him an expert and he could tell when an enemy is near or when something is out of place in part of the state.

The twelve trust each other without any doubt.

But Tony never knew what to think about Adam.

None of them discuss their personal lives.

Everyone knew Tony and Chester are twins and Tony is married to a black woman and has two blonde boys with green eyes that look like their father.

Tony's heart is to teach the soldier how to survive and live.

Skip likes that about Tony.

But Tony watches Adam and wonder what type of person he is.

Adam never talks about his family or girlfriend.

The twelve knew about Steve's girlfriends.

They were very violent.

Steve liked women who like to fight.

His last girlfriend broke Steve out of that wanting that stereotype.

Whenever Skip needed them and they had to go to Steve's home, they would be running and ducking and hiding with Steve.

One time Skip sent Chester and Adam to pick up Steve.

When they got to the area to meet Skip.

Skip and the rest of the group stared at Adam, Chester and Steve.

They all had bruises, bite marks, knots and scratches.

Steve had hair missing and Adam had part of his mustache missing.

Chester loved his hair and his beautiful teeth and he would have nothing to touch them.

Skip did not know whether to send those three on the mission or not.

He knew it had to be one of Steve's girlfriends that kicked and beat up his three best fighters.

Skip said, "Do I need to hire her and drop you three?"

Danny laughed and held his side and fell to his knees.

He could not get up but continued crying tears.

No one else laugh.

Skip cut his eyes at Danny and pointed at him and said, "No."

Danny used both of his hands and covered his mouth.

But each time he looked at the dumbfounded Tony who could not contain himself.

Danny dismissed himself.

He picked up his bag and walked to his horse.

Danny did not have enough strength to put his bag on his horse. He kept dropping the bag.

He finally put the bag on the horse and laid against his horse and when he thought he was calming down.

Calvin mouth was opened all the time and he finally mustered, "You'll could not duck?"

Danny fell by his horse on his back.

Tony was so disturbed by how bad the three looked.

Skip was furious.

Skip said, "Come on and get the details of this mission."

Danny was calming down.

Skip looked back and saw Adam, Steve and Chester limping.

Danny flipped over on his stomach to get up and looked at the group.

Skip said, "What?..."

He threw down his papers onto the ground and screamed.

Danny thought the three were hurt.

Skip said, "All three of you let her bust?..."

Danny screamed.

He rolled over on his back and kicked his heels up in the air.

Skip cancelled the mission because he needed all twelve soldiers.

Skip said, "Go to your assigned post. You three take two weeks off and heal. Get Danny up."

Everyone mounted their horses.

Skip drove the wagon with their supplies.

He kept that particular wagon at his home in a secured area.

Charles and Calvin mounted their horses and waited until Danny began to calm down.

Charles said, "Get up Danny so we can go. We are out in these woods and you who be out here."

Danny did a spread eagle on the ground.

Calvin and Charles heard noise in the bushes and pulled out their guns.

Danny jumped from the ground and ran to his horse and grabbed his rifle.

Charles said, "Let's go."

Calvin and Charles rode off.

Danny followed them.

When Danny got back to headquarters, he received his room assignment.

He went to his room and then to the showers.

He saw Steve letting Chester shave his head.

And Adam was in the mirror shaving off his mustache and beard.

They all looked at Danny.

Danny knew not to say anything because the mission was scrapped because of them.

Danny liked the excitement and danger of the missions.

He knew all three would jump him, but he would them.

Skip did not let anybody know what he was doing.

The governor would meet with Skip secretly and tell him what the problem was and what he needed .

Then Skip would up with the plan.

Adam had a permanent scar.

Months later Steve was shaving and looking in Adam's face.

Adam looked at him.

Steve hit Adam on his back and said, "Sorry brother. The boyfriend is suppose to carry the permanent reminders."

A week after the mission was scrapped Skip called the three into his office.

He chastised them very hard.

He told them they could have died or been permanently damaged.

Skip said, "Steve you need to ask God why you desired to be hurt. Now you are subjecting your fellow soldiers to this abuse."

Skip handed each of them a jockstrap.

The three of them sat and looked at Skip.

Skip said, "Go and figure how to use it."

They looked at each other and was about to walk out the office.

Skip said, "In exactly seven days at the same place at the same time."

Adam was thinking over some of the missions, the failures, near failures, the improvising and successes and then the much larger successes than what they expected.

He turned his eyes back to the dirt road and said, "God I don't want to be lonely like Newsom. I want to know what you will have me to do."

JESUS watched Adam.

HE read Adam's book where on that day, at that time, and under those circumstances he would ask GOD that question.

Dr. Obersteen continued to walk fast.

When they reached the command post.

The sentries said, "Who is it?"

Andrew quickly said, "Commander Costner and Dr. Obersteen."

Sentries knew something was wrong to see the doctor.

Andrew pointed to the office tent.

The second in the command was sitting in front of Skip surrounded by three armed sentries.

Skip had the second in command in his office and asked why he dis-obeyed the command of Jake.

The second in command, had not eaten nor drank water in four days.

Skip looked through the sentries and saw Dr. Obersteen and Andrew.

His heart nearly stopped.

The soldiers in the office saw Andrew and figured something was very wrong.

Foster recognized Dr. Obersteen.

Skip could barely talk and said, "Take him and feed him and give him water and put him in a separate tent from the female prisoner."

He looked at the second in command and said, "maybe tomorrow you will talk to the commanders who will arrive."

The sentries picked up the second in command and walked out.

Everyone was on edge to see the son and the doctor.

They were hoping Bruce was not dead.

The sentries stood outside the tent with the second in command, Ferguson, so they could hear.

Ferguson was hungry and wanted food he said, "Why are we standing here? He said give me food."

One sentry nodded and the other two took Ferguson to the dining tent.

Skip and the soldiers heard Ferguson.

Skip sat and said, "Dr. Obersteen why are you here?"

Dr. Obersteen said, "Newsom is dead."

The sentry outside the tent heard Dr. Obersteen when he said that Newsom was dead.

He jumped and was hitting the air with his rifle.

The other sentries saw him and knew it was death.

The two sentries taking Ferguson to the dining tent stopped and looked back.

One of the sentries at the beginning of the post rode to the sentry and whispered, "What?"

The sentry calmed down and said, "Newsom. He's dead."

The sentry said, "Damn."

He rode back and told the other sentry.

The sentry walked to the other two sentries and exhaled and said, "Newsom is dead."

The sentries pushed Ferguson into the dining tent.

The office soldiers held their heads down.

Skip took a deep breath.

He stood up and said, "I spoke to Newsom today. He appeared to be on his way to recovery."

Dr. Obersteen began to cry and said, "He was fine. There was no reason why he died."

Skip walked from around his desk and walked to Dr. Obersteen.

Skip said, "I know you did all that a human can do. Newsom made up his mind when he got everything right with God he would be ready to go."

Foster looked at Skip and thought, "That makes sense."

The noise travelled through the camp quick of Newsom's death.

Skip heard murmurings and he knew the news was out about Newsom.

He looked at Dr. Obersteen and said, "What do you need?"

Dr. Obersteen said, "Brandy."

Andrew looked at Dr. Obersteen.

The office soldiers looked at Dr. Obersteen.

Skip said, "No."

Andrew looked at Skip and thought, "He only wants a strong drink."

Dr. Obersteen said, "I need help."

Skip said, "Who?"

Dr. Obersteen said, "Get Peter Mc Larin here. I taught him at the medical college. The other young doctor I don't know."

Skip thought about the superb doctors Wes and Dr. Obersteen are. He knew they are the best in the state and probably in the country. He could only think of another doctor and he was not as half as good as Wes and Dr. Obersteen.

Skip had come to trust nobody but Dr. Obersteen.

He did not say it, but Andrew felt it.

Skip was in the hospital in the big city he knew something was wrong about Dr. Obersteen.

He sent Andrew to go and investigate.

Andrew came back with his report that the doctor the governor fired as head of the hospital called a board meeting and had Dr. Obersteen fired.

Andrew told Skip that his uncle was on the board and voted against Dr. Obersteen.

Andrew told Skip not only did they fire Dr. Obersteen they already sent the paperwork to have his license revoke and have Dr. Obersteen never practice medicine again. To make him poor and to kill his spirit.

Skip said, "Why? That does not make sense Andrew. Why are they trying to take over a state hospital?"

Skip thought about that and Dr. Obersteen's situation over the past month.

He contacted the head of the governor's security and he brought his next in command.

Skip brought Harold and Arnold they met secretly.

The governor's two top security men pondered the situation.

The governor's lead security man said, "When I was a soldier and we fought the enemy the enemy wanted to take over the hospitals, the doctors, the businesses that made the medical supplies and the companies that shipped the supplies."

He pointed to Skip and said, "Your family empires."

Skip met with Michael and told him the conspiracy theory.

Michael became vigilant over the companies.

He began noticing accidents on their business properties.

He met with his other brothers and they became ruthless.

Michael put out an ad he needed to hire extra security.

He and Skip knew the ad would draw the culprits.

Skip met with Shirley's brother on a secret and told them he had about a year to live.

Percy said, "Andrew told us."

Bruce said, "And we will fight you for Shirley's house."

Skip as a soldier knew he was out gunned.

He said, "I really don't have anything to give Sheryl but my pension."

Andrew had gone to Michael and complained about Sheryl and how she thought she was a lady and would be prancing through his mother's house.

Percy was ruthless, even Shirley was scared of him but loved him.

He would let nobody take a piece of his family's legacy.

Percy said, "We will release the interest from Shirley's trust and you can that wife a good

Thomas said, "We investigated her ten years ago when you brought her into our lives."

Skip looked at Thomas in surprise and said, "Thomas, Et tu?"

Thomas looked at Skip with a hard look that his mother said he got from their black grandmother who had to become very hard to keep her husband and protect her family and children.

Thomas said, "Skip I will do everything to protect my sister's children and their money."

Thomas said, "What you don't know Skip Shirley had a larger portion of the family fortune than us. We all are fine with that. Our grandparents set it up that way because of all of Shirley's abnormalities and sicknesses, they knew she would require constant care. Until she married you..."

Shirley's brothers looked at Skip.

Skip was baffled at what they were saying.

Thomas said out of all the fortune Shirley had thirty percent of everything."

Skip mouth flew opened.

Percy said, "Right. Therefore, Bruce and Andrew nearly have the same amount of shares as we."

Skip had to catch his breath at the amount of money they were saying his sons had.

Michael said, "Andrew keep in touch."

Shirley's brothers laughed.

Thomas said, "Shirley would bring the boys when we had family meetings about the businesses. Momma and daddy would show Bruce and Andrew the money and explained it to them. Bruce wanted to play but Andrew grabbed the money."

Skip thought you may think you know my sons. Bruce is much worst and harder than Andrew ever could be. He especially guards anything that pertains to his mother and her money.

Percy said, "The syndicate is not going to destroy this honest American business."

Bruce said, "How is my namesake?"

Skip could not say anything.

Shirley's brothers looked at Skip.

Percy said, "You are fighting on one end. We will fight on the other."

Shirley's brothers sat and mapped out a strategy of how to uncover the person behind the attempt to take over their business.

They bought some of the medical supply and disturbing companies before they folded.

They paid a lot of companies to go out of business.

They hired snitches on their properties to tell them of other employees' behavior, that caused harm to the workers or to their businesses.

Percy said, "I will not pay no death benefits. The workers have a right to work and make a living for themselves and their families."

Thomas said, "Right. God made us overseers of these businesses to help others. Let's not fail Him."

Shirley smiled. She knew her ruthless brothers would help uncover this massive plot.

Michael said, "Let's have all of our employees re-do their job applications."

Skip said and especially their beneficiary information.

Percy would spend two hours each day reviewing the applications and the updated beneficiary information. He found out of their fifteen hundred employees that two hundred used the same address for the beneficiary.

Michael said, "Can you link those employees to the accidents of our workers?"

Thomas said, "I can do that."

Michael said, "Thomas legally. I will meet with Skip tomorrow to finish his will and share this with him."

Percy said, "Tell him to look for his wife a house we will give him the money to buy it."

Thomas said, "She is a fake."

Bruce said, "Skip needed a woman after Shirley passed and he and Andrew stopped playing with Betsy."

Michael laughed and said, "Skip will surely die if he knows we know."

They laughed.

Skip met Michael and looked over his will and the house went to Andrew and Bruce. His pension went to Sheryl."

Skip was satisfied.

Michael looked at Skip and saw he was satisfied,

Michael could see why he loved Shirley and why Shirley loved him.

Thomas was paying all the expenses for Shirley's house out of her interest.

Skip protested.

Thomas, Bruce, Percy and Michael showed Skip a document Shirley left for him and her sons to stay in the house. She said, even if Skip remarries and bring a woman in the house for it to be a show place for her family. She demanded the interest from her trust would go to update and modernize the house.

Because she and their mother and their wives would travel the world and bring back treasures for everybody.

Shirley brothers knew each one of them had a year to travel with their wives as they redecorated and hosted teas, luncheons, dinners and balls.

Shirley loved to have her clothes couture.

Even if she could not go, she would send Andrew and Bruce.

They would spend the night with their grandparents or with Michael and his wife.

Shirley became very angry after a niece's birthday party that Andrew and Bruce were to spend the night over Percy's house with his three boys and wife.

Michael and his wife went to Percy's house the next day to pick up Andrew and Bruce.

Andrew and Bruce were badly beaten by Percy's three bigger boys.

Michael's wife was aghast and yelled, "What happened to them?"

Percy had not looked at the boys.

He was standing in his foyer stirring his tea.

He turned and looked at Andrew and Bruce and could not drink his tea.

Michael bent down and Andrew and Bruce ran to his opened arms.

Percy was perplexed.

Michael looked up at Percy.

Percy stepped forward and looked at Andrew and Bruce.

Percy's wife walked into the foyer and stood by her stairwell next to their boys and shrugged her shoulders and exhaled and said, "Boys will be boys," and grinned.

The butler and two maids were peeping around the corner and pointed to Percy's bad boys.

Michael and his wife were the godparents to Andrew and Bruce.

They could not have children and they were fun to be around and loved each other very much.

Michael's wife was not from money, but from the bad side of town.

Michael was lost one night and several men approached him to beat and rob him.

Michael's wife saw the men and as she walked out of the restaurant she washed dishes.

She was putting on and tying her hair bonnet and stood on the restaurant's step and looked at Michael and said, "Come on. I ready to get something good to eat. I want somebody else to cook for me."

Michael brushed passed the would be robbers and extended his arm to her.

He saw the restaurant workers with meat cleavers standing behind the door.

She grabbed onto his arm and they walked to his house.

She never looked back at the hard work and the neighborhood.

A month later they were married.

Eleanor, Shirley and all their cousins worked on the wedding.

Michael's girlfriend ran to Michael crying because she never saw such beautiful things.

She did not want her restaurant friends. Her neighbors and family to be out of place.

Michael took her to Eleanor and Bruce that day.

Bruce looked at Eleanor.

Eleanor was angry.

Michael knew his mother and father.

Whatever they say go.

They enjoyed family and friends.

They like a good party and good food.

Eleanor said, "Young lady. You are not going to think you are coming into this family and change our lifestyle. Everything we do is grand because you only live this life once and enjoy what we do. And because we can do whatever we want to do."

Michael was scared of Eleanor, but more of his kind father who makes a decision and put it in writing.

When he did not like their reports from school he would write and tell the teachers what wanted and signed his name.

Michael's girlfriend looked at him for support.

Michael was quiet trying to anticipate his own welfare.

Eleanor said, "Why are you looking at Michael? He knows he better not open his mouth and say anything. I will kick him out of this family and have him disbarred and he would be washing dishes next to you. I am surprise he challenged me by bringing you unannounced to my home. I guess you poor people just 'visit' because you don't have anything else to do."

The butler stepped in the room to announce dinner was served.

Bruce said, "Michael are you and your fiancé staying for dinner?"

Eleanor looked up at Bruce.

Bruce looked down at Eleanor and said, "Snob."

Eleanor said, "Absolutely."

She rolled her eyes at Michael and then she turned and looked at Michael's girlfriend.

Eleanor said, "We have five children. Three married ladies from some of the most outstanding families in our great state. Shirley our oldest married a soldier. We love him. Right."

Bruce and Michael nodded their heads in agreement.

Bruce said, "We accept who our children say they are in love with and want to marry. Young lady we will not tolerate anyone who thinks they are going to bring us down from our high perch so they can be

comfortable. WE either learn to climb up the ladder or go by your business. We don't tolerate drop bys or bad clothes and shoes."

Michael nodded his head.

Bruce very stern said, "Michael has accepted you from the bottom and we have embraced his decision to marry you. You and he can have whatever type of life you can muster, but you will not embarrass our family and friends with a poverty wedding and bad manners."

Michael was sitting with his mouth open because Eleanor was over all the money and she could take his portion from him.

Michael could not think. He liked money and he wanted his money.

He loved his girlfriend but he was thinking is she worth him not having money.

Bruce and Eleanor looked at Michael.

His girlfriend looked at him.

She saw Michael was trying to make up his mind.

She had gotten use to the money and not working hard,

Her eye filled with tears because she knew Michael was going to make his mind to stay with his family.

Bruce did not say anything.

The butler looked at the woman.

Eleanor looked at the young woman.

Michael said, "Can we stay for dinner?"

His girlfriend giggled and wiped her eyes with her hands.

Bruce twisted his mouth, because he wanted her gone.

Michael saw his father's facial expression.

Eleanor said, "Fine."

Michael's girlfriend stood to go into the dining room.

The butler bucked his eyes.

Bruce and Eleanor cut their eyes at Michael.

Michael jumped up and caught his girlfriend's hand and held her back to allow Eleanor and Bruce to walk into their dining room.

The butler was pissed because now he has trained her etiquette.

She stood and looked at Bruce and took his arm and they walked into the dining room.

Eleanor and Bruce sat.

Michael and his girlfriend sat.

His girlfriend picked up her fork and beginning with the mashed potatoes.

She said, "Joey's mashed potatoes is better than these."

Michael watched his mother and father and the servants who had bowed their heads for grace.

Bruce just saying the grace.

Michael touched his girlfriend's hand.

She looked at him, he bowed his head.

She looked around at the staff who was standing looking at her.

Eleanor paid her twenty house workers well.

The house workers sent their children to trade schools, colleges and overseas boarding schools.

Some of them returned home and some married the upper crust and stayed in Europe.

Eleanor did not believe in generations working in as household workers.

Eleanor's family prided itself on helping their workers to advance.

Most of the workers throughout their businesses liked their jobs and stayed until they retired or died.

Eleanor had enough of Michael's girlfriend.

Eleanor said, "Since you do not have manners to know that grace is offered before each meal. Grace is to tell JESUS, who is God since you do not know that, you are thankful HE gave you food to eat and health to get it and enjoy. We do not complain about our food but get it right the next time. We do not criticize each other young woman..."

Michael, Bruce and the staff heard Eleanor tone changed with the woman.

Michael's girlfriend tried to interrupt but Eleanor.

Michael touched her but she kept talking.

Eleanor kept talking, "That's why we enjoy everyday and we enjoy our time together with our family and friends. We send messages asking the other party what day and time would be good for a visit, since we don't wash dishes and go and guzzle down a pint."

Eleanor was very angry.

Michael sat silently.

His girlfriend jumped up from the table and ran out the house.

Eleanor said, "Michael you have always disrespected this family. WE loved you and prayed to God that He would help you."

Bruce said, "She takes the cake."

Michael looked at the staff who were shocked and stood still.

The butler walked to the door and looked out and returned.

Bruce looked at the butler.

The butler said, "She has driven off."

The butlers said, "Sir Michael do you want Ralph to drive you to your apartment?"

Michael said, "Yes please."

Michael, "Mother, Father I do love her."

Eleanor looked at Michael and said, "After a few hops."

Bruce hollered and said, "Eleanor I had not heard that in decades."

Michael was trying to figure out what his mother was talking about.

Eleanor was furious.

Eleanor said, "I cannot say who you are to love or hop..."

Bruce begin to laugh.

The staff just looked at Michael like he was crazy.

Eleanor said, "She is never welcomed in my house. If we go out to eat. I will not invite her and will not pay. If we have any family function she is never invited. Never come to our home without receiving a confirmation. Your money will be in trust for your life."

Michael's mouth flew opened.

Michael said, "Mother I need a place to live with her."

Bruce said, "So you have decided you want her over your family?"

Eleanor looked at Michael and said, "Over the past week I have spent a small fortune to give my baby son a very memorable wedding."

Michael said, "Mother I will pay you back."

Eleanor said, "And then some."

Michael said, "She is a very simple person."

Eleanor said, "No doubt when you do not have a desire to grow or work hardier to get better. I will take every penny I spent out of your trust fund and send you a bill."

Bruce said, "Take enough for him to buy them suitable housing."

Eleanor said, "No. Let him work and go and buy what he can."

Bruce said, "He is our son. He carries our name."

Bruce was adamant and thrown his napkin in his plate and crossed his legs.

Which meant do what he said.

Eleanor looked at Bruce and then she rolled her eyes at Michael and said, "You find the house and I'll take that money out of your trust fund. You are to maintain the house and your lifestyle from your money. If any heirs they would get the trust fund money. You will be totally responsible for your wedding as of now."

Eleanor said, "Michael we will communicate from now on through messengers and wait for a response."

Michael started crying.

Bruce and Eleanor sat and watched their baby crying out his heart.

Ralph walked in the dining room and said, "Sir Michael are you ready?"

Michael stood and walked out the house.

Eleanor and Bruce completed their dinner and played chess and drank brandy that night.

Michael and his wife were never invited to anything at the 'house'.

Eleanor sent Michael the bill for everything she spent and she sent all of the goods and told him who the merchants were.

Michael and his girlfriend had a simple wedding at her family church and used the items that Eleanor purchased.

Michael invited the whole family.

Everyone attended but Shirley because she was sick and Sip because he was at war.

Andrew and Bruce went with Granma Eleanor and Granpa Bruce.

They had a delightful time.

Michael had Bruce as his best man and his wife had a friend from the restaurant as her maid of honor.

The bride wore the unfinished wedding dress that was still beautiful.

Eleanor paid for the cake and punch.

The caters brought a very nice cake and punch to the church.

Eleanor and Bruce left the wedding and went by Shirley and took her a piece of cake.

They hated to see Shirley in such pain and suffering.

They knew she loved Skip and that Skip loved Shirley.

At first the family thought Skip was trying to get Shirley's money.

Skip was offended and told Eleanor and Bruce, "How dare you call me to your house to call me dishonest and immoral. I may not be the best Christian man, but I am a Christian and a man. You do not want Shirley to live and you do not want her to enjoy this incredible life God gave to her. She is smart..."

Shirley's father nodded his head in agreement,

Skip continued, "...she has a dry sense of humor, she can look at a plain blue sky and see the artistry of God. When I look at Shirley I do not see a deformed and twisted body. I see a winner..."

Eleanor eyes filled with tears and she touched her heart.

Bruce was mad and still did not want Shirley to have a man.

Skip said, "That's what I want a person who want to fight to enjoy this life God to us. I am an only child on both my mother and father sides of the family there are none left. I am alone but not lonely. I greet each day with thanksgiving because God has thought me worthy to live and enjoy his day. I want Shirley to enjoy these few days on this earth with me. I can't make her leave her family who she loves to spend her life with me. Yes, I am a poor soldier but I am a hard worker and have mapped out a military life for me. I will take Shirley from post to post. At least she will have someone who loves her for her bad jokes, loud laugh and her terrible cornbread."

Bruce looked at the soldier who stood and was scolding he and Eleanor.

The soldier's who heart ache for someone to love and enjoy this rough and sad life with.

Skip eyes filled with tears as he was told he wanted Shirley for her money.

Skip said, "What would I do with money. The government provide my clothes and boots. The government provides my rations. The government provide my horse. The government provides my time. The government provides my tent."

Shirley was easing down the stairs from her bedroom, where she had been sick for several days.

She had the butler to open the door and help her get out of bed and put her shoes on her feet.

When Skip said tent Eleanor jumped off the sofa and screamed, "My daughter will never live in a tent."

Shirley leaned on the butler until she nodded for him to run.

The butler ran around the corner and hid with the staff.

Eleanor was so furious and Bruce saw his beloved daughter tenderly walk the stairs to this strikingly good looking soldier.

Shirley had enough strength to lean on Skip's back.

He felt her warmth and closed his eyes.

He turned very slowly and held her for a long time.

The staff was crying.

Bruce held Eleanor's hand and they walked to Shirley and Skip and embraced them.

Eleanor said, "Honey I have always been so jealous over you. I did not think anyone could love you but me and your father. I believe, no I know Skip has proven us wrong."

Bruce pinched Shirley's chin and said, "My beautiful daughter if he is the one I give you my full blessing."

Shirley looked at her mom and dad and said, "Yes he is the one."

Shirley began to slide down.

Skip was holding her and picked her up in his arms.

His eyes and Shirley's eyes were locked together.

Eleanor said, "Robert."

Skip said, "I have her."

Robert showed Shirley's bedroom.

Robert, Eleanor and Bruce watched as this tall and striking soldier carried their daughter upstairs to her bedroom.

The staff was sniffing.

Eleanor held onto Bruce.

She said, "My sins have been forgiven."

Bruce kissed Eleanor.

Eleanor waved her hand for the staff to go.

She and Bruce went and sat underneath the stairway so they could hear what was happening in Shirley's bedroom.

Eleanor and Bruce heard Skip say he would be gone for two months and when he got back they would marry.

Skip said, "With all of these workers I would not mind if you have them to cook us some cornbread."

Robert smiled.

Eleanor and Bruce grinned.

Eleanor said, "Where are they going to live. We can let them have the suite and redecorate it."

The staff liked when Eleanor re-decorated the house she would always give the staff everything.'

The staff never had to pay to decorate their houses.

Shirley just above a whisper said, "Momma. Daddy."

Eleanor and Bruce had trained their ears to hear Shirley's soft voice.

They jumped up and ran upstairs.

Skip said, "Who are you calling? Your mom and dad, I can go and get them. They did not hear you."

Eleanor and Bruce ran up the grand staircase."

Skip looked at them and stood from Shirley's bed.

He realized that most of their time will be he carrying her around he did not mind, because she held his heart.

Shirley said,"See they heard me."

She looked at Skip.

Skip looked at her then he said, "Oh."

He was very nervous and he got on his knees, then he realized he was not to be on his knees with her parents.

Shirley turned her head in laughter.

Her father loved her laugh.

Skip looked at her Shirley, he did not know how to ask for Shirley's hand in marriage.

Skip looked at Eleanor and Bruce and said, "Ma am and sir. I love your daughter may I marry Shirley?"

Bruce was looking at Shirley's eyes how they were lit up.

The deformity seemed to be nothing.

Eleanor and Bruce sniffed their last tear that moment and they said concurrently, "Yes."

Bruce said, "We would love for you to be our daughter's husband. And our son."

Eleanor waved her hand and said, "And we get rid of that Percy."

The butler was standing back and nodded his head for yes to get rid of Percy.

Bruce looked at Eleanor because he knew she was serious.

Shirley lifted up her head and said,"Ma am."

Bruce said, "When you want to marry in a year that will us time to plan a wedding."

Skip was puzzled and looked at Shirley.

Eleanor and Bruce saw then Skip was going to let Shirley run the marriage.

Bruce thought he better talk to Eleanor about not interfering with Shirley and Skip and let them feel things out for themselves.

Shirley said, "Two months."

Eleanor stood still for a few minutes.

Skip said, "I'll be back in two months and receive my orders and I'll know where my assignment will be and I can get our wagon together and leave right after the ceremony."

Eleanor was sitting down in their cubbyhole leaning forward looking off in space.

Bruce was standing with two glasses in his hand. One had whiskey and the other had brandy.

Bruce said, "You just could not leave things alone."

Eleanor reached her hand for the glass of whiskey and Bruce drank it in a swallow.

Eleanor stared at Bruce.

She reached for the glass of brandy.

Bruce turned that glass to his mouth.

Eleanor stared at Bruce.

Bruce said, "You go and get your own alcohol to get drink. I'm not sharing."

He re-filled his glasses and walked upstairs to their bedroom.

Eleanor stood and got the bottle of scotch and walked upstairs.

The butler was trying to sneak and get the bottle of scotch for him and two of his maids.

Bruce reached the top of the stairs and looked at Shirley and said, "Goodnight princess."

Eleanor pointed at the butler and said, "You and those other two perverts go to your separate rooms and leave my booze alone. I need it all."

Bruce said, "You sure do."

Eleanor said, "Can I say good night to you Shirley?"

Shirley said, "No."

Shirley turned on her side and thought about Skip.

Michael, Thomas and Bruce peeped around the corner and waited until Eleanor went in her bedroom and closed the bedroom door.

The boys tiptoed to Shirley's room at a time.

The butler stole the rum and turned to run to the female perverts Eleanor sensed he got her booze and opened her bedroom door and yelled, "Robert put it back. I told you I will need all of my booze tonight."

Thomas and Bruce had slipped into Shirley's room and were hiding in the corner.

Michael was trying to make it to Shirley's room.

Eleanor went into her bedroom and closed the door.

Michael ran as possible on his tiptoes.

He was watchman for their mother.

Bruce said, "Ok Shirley you got to give us the short version."

Then Bruce and Eleanor's bedroom flew open and Eleanor yelled at Bruce, "Why you had to drink half my..."

She peeped at the boys' room and ran downstairs and got the brandy and ran back upstairs.

She eased on the other side of her bed so Eleanor could not see them.

Shirley said, "You knew wants to marry me. But mother and father want to give me a big wedding."

The boys said, "Ok."

But Skip said, "No. We can only have what he can afford."

Michael said, "If the government give hm his rations then he can't afford nothing."

Shirley said, "Right."

Shirley said, "Skip and dad were going around in a circle."

Shirley said, "Then momma kept saying, Shirley ain't living in a wagon. I think momma had a nervous breakdown."

Bruce was tall and lanky he stood and said, "Shirley I don't agree with mom and da on anything. But they are right this time. You are rich. That's who you are. Now Skip has to accept that part of you. It's not easy for the poor to see how we live."

Thomas said, "What's going to happen now?"

Michael said, "You can give me your money. Wait a minute. Shirley you need people to help you get up and down and walk. You can't cook. You can't wash clothes in a wagon. You can't drive a wagon to out run the enemy."

Thomas said, "Right. And you can give me your money too."

Michael was very calm and said, "I asked first. "

The children laughed.

Bruce was drunk and sleep and Eleanor was trying to sleep off into a drunken sleep.

She smelled the brandy and then she tasted it again.

She got mad. And laid in the bed on top of Bruce.

Bruce rolled onto his side and pushed Eleanor off him and continued to sleep.

But Bruce was not sleep but he laid awake all night and tried to figure out how to fix this mess.

Eleanor was not sleep, because Robert fixed that.

She thought, "This attractive soldier wants to marry my severely deformed daughter and take her away from me to live in a tent."

Eleanor moaned.

Bruce reached backwards and held Eleanor's hand.

They saw Skip was very arrogant and felt he had done well for himself and by himself.

Bruce got up early in the morning dressed.

Eleanor jumped up because she knew he was going to see Skip.

Bruce said, "No Eleanor. I don't need your help."

Eleanor sat on the side of the bed and moaned.

Skip was a few years younger than Bruce and Eleanor.

Bruce, Thomas and Michael slept in Shirley's room.

Bruce knew they were all in the her bedroom discussing the family problem.

As he walked down the staircase he saw Bruce and Thomas peeping at him from underneath Shirley's bed.

He did not see Michael, who was asleep under a chair near the wall with his legs on the wall.

He had slept like that for years.

Bruce said, "All of you better go to school today."

Bruce said, "Good morning dad."

He and Thomas went back to sleep.

Bruce said, "Damn. I am a bad father, that I did not catch them sooner."

Skip was packing to go to the big city for his assignment. He would be there for two months and then it take a week to ride back and two weeks of training and off again to a three month assignment to where ever.

A soldier walked into the dorm door and said, "Costner. You are wanted in the Commander's office."

All the soldiers turned and looked at Skip.

Skip did not understand why.

He did not sleep at all that night al he could do was to think about Shirley.

Skip walked into the commander's office and saw Bruce.

The commander said, "Come in and have a seat."

Skip was so out done that he did not salute and did not speak.

He was not able to speak.

The commander said, "My family knows Bruce's family. He wanted to talk to you before you left. I am going to give me fifteen minutes and work out your differences."

The commander stood and walked out and closed the door.

He looked at his office soldiers and pointed and said, "Don't let them tear up my office."

He walked down stairs to the cafeteria and got a cup of coffee and sat and drank it.

Later his commanders walked in and sat with him.

Skip was leaving out the building and saw the prestigious commanders sitting and drinking coffee.

He thought, "I want to be a commander. How do I become one?"

He and Bruce argued terribly.

The office' soldiers got up and went in the commander's office and stopped them.

One of the soldiers pulled Skip aside as Bruce was leaving the office.

He said, to Skip, "How come you are fighting him about how his daughter was raised? You want them to accept you as you are. And that's what they have done. Why can't you accept their daughter as she is. If she is sickly she will die out there on the road with you. Sir, do you want that?"

Skip looked off and thought about how he had to carry her upstairs to bed. How she can't do anything for herself.

He teared up and held his head and he looked up at the young soldier that had his hand on his shoulder and said, "What is your name?"

The soldier said, "Harold."

Skip said, "I am Skip. You made a lot of sense."

Another soldier was watching Bruce out the window.

He said, "If you are going to catch him you need to run because he is walking across to his buggy."

Skip stood for a minute.

The soldier said, "Don't be pridefull run out there and catch him."

Skip said, "You are younger than me."

He said, "If it doesn't work out I will give you one lick."

Skip said, "I will come looking for you."

The soldier said, "Arnold is my name."

Skip ran passed the cafeteria and saw the impressive looking commanders.

Bruce was pulling out of headquarters and thought the building did not suit the military.

Then he thought about Skip who said his beloved Shirley would live like this because this all he can do.

Skip was running along side the buggy until Bruce looked and saw him.

Bruce pulled over and looked back and saw Skip had ran a very good distance.

Bruce was so mad with Skip he said, "Sir."

Skip caught his breathe and said, "You are right I can't take Shirley away from her life. I love her for all of her life. But I want to marry her in two months. You have a right to give your daughter away as you planned her whole life, but not a year but two months."

Bruce was not buying anything he said, "What about her health? She needs twenty four hour care."

Skip said, "I understand that sir. I know I can't be in war and take care of her. I just wanted my family to be with me."

Bruce very sternly said, "Shirley can't live like that."

Skip caught his breathe and saw the soldiers moving out and passing them.

He stood and said, "You all have been taking care of her all of her life and know how to take care of her. Until we workout the housing. I'll let her stay with you."

Bruce said, "Let her."

The sergeant yelled, "Costner let's go."

Skip ran back to the headquarters and got his bags and mounted his horse and flew out of headquarters to catch his troop.

Bruce stared at Skip and decided he did not want Shirley to marry him.

But he will not disappoint Shirley anymore.

Skip looked back at Bruce who stepped out his buggy to let the troop leave.

People were standing on the streets cheering the troop on.

Bruce had never been there before and was not impressed.

He went home and called Eleanor to Shirley's room and told them of his talk with Skip.

He told them skip said he wanted to marry in two months not in a year.

Bruce said, "He thinks that is not enough time to throw a big and fancy wedding. Right Eleanor."

Eleanor jumped and ran into their bedroom and came out with a beautiful wedding dress.

Bruce said, "We have been planning your wedding before you were born."

Shirley begin to cry.

Bruce was sitting on her bed and leaned and kissed her on the forehead.

Bruce said, "He said he will let you stay with us."

Eleanor said, "Really."

Bruce said, "Let her."

He looked at Eleanor and said, "Because of that we will have a bigger wedding. Shirley when?"

Shirley was yawning and said, "Easter."

Eleanor said, "Well dear that's my day."

Shirley said, "I want your heart to shine on me."

Shirley went to sleep.

Eleanor said, "I got her clothes and wedding chest."

Bruce said, "Well Eleanor I want to see you pull this off."

Bruce said, "You know maybe we will have a grandchild by Easter next year."

Eleanor looked at Bruce.

Bruce was looking at Shirley and said, "All things are possible with God."

Eleanor's mind was on a magnificent spring wedding. The ceremony at the church. Have cake and punch at the church. Have her famed Easter egg hunt. A fabulous Easter and wedding feast for a hundred guests and a signature wedding cake, punch and champagne."

Bruce said, "I see your mind is already working overtime."

Eleanor said, "I'll let her sleep, but I need to know the color and the type of flowers so I can order enough."

Shirley said, "Pink, yellow and white roses with sweet peas. Pink and yellow ribbons and an outdoor dinner with a dance floor with me and daddy. I want a carrot cake and much punch."

Eleanor looked at Bruce.

Shirley said, "You and daddy are not the only ones who have been dreaming."

Eleanor said, "Ham, turkey, sirloin roast, baked chicken, stuffing, potato souffle, green beans, vegetable sweet peas and everything else."

Eleanor and Bruce walked out Shirley's room and Eleanor said, "You need a new suit."

Bruce said, "I stopped this morning and was measured."

Eleanor said, "I had my eye on this mother of the bride dress and I will have just enough time for it to arrive from Paris. But just in case I'll have a dress made here along with the hat and gloves."

Bruce said, "Send the boys after school today to be measured for a suit."

Eleanor was about to close Shirley's bedroom door.

Shirley said, "Don't shut the door I want to hear you plan my wedding."

Bruce and Eleanor walked down stairs and informed the staff of the wedding.

Skip looked at Foster and said, "Send a telegram to headquarters and have Peter McLarin to get here now."

Dr. Obersteen said, "What about the other doctor?"

Skip said, "He is a fugitive and I would not want him to doctor a sick snake."

Andrew never hear the venom come out of his father.

He heard people whisper to never make Skip mad.

Dr. Obersteen said, "Betsy and the house needs help."

Skip said, "I know. I am working on that."

Dr. Obersteen said, "I needed Newsom to live..."

Dr. Obersteen begin to cry and he was shaking his fist.

Skip knew he was talking about the doctors at the big city hospital trying to take his medical license.

Skip said, "We are working on that."

Andrew saw how discrete Skip was.

He reached over and touch Dr. Obersteen's shoulder.

Andrew said, "Dr. Obersteen do you have a suit and shoes?"

Dr. Obersteen did not respond.

Dr. Obersteen said, "I am a very good doctor. I have a heart of healing and caring for people. But I want that bitch dead."

Foster and Williams nodded yes.

Skip cut his eyes at them.

Foster sent the telegram.

Skip said, "I promise she will hang."

Williams and Foster felt so sad for Dr. Obersteen.

The telegram machine begin.

Skip said, "We have no wagons to transport Newsom here. I will send the embalmer and have Newsom placed with Wes until we can get everything worked out."

Williams, Wilson, Roberts and Foster liked the fact that Skip addressed Newsom by name that he was a person to Skip and not an unnamed soldier.

Andrew watched the soldiers and he knew that by Skip calling Newsom by his name it seemed that Skip cared about the man.

Foster ripped the telegram message and put it in a folder and stood and gave the folder to Skip.

Commander O'Hara said, "A messenger was sent to Peter McLarin home for him to immediately report to the new settlement."

Skip said. "Fine."

He looked at the tent door.

Skip looked back and said, "Foster, Williams, Wilson and Roberts we have sad news to report to the troops. You stand and follow me and show you support your fellow soldiers."

Skip patted Dr. Obersteen on his back and was followed out the tent by Andrew and the office soldiers.

Skip stopped and looked at the group of soldiers who had gathered.

Skip looked out at the group and said, "Good evening soldiers. I have to inform you one of our fellow soldiers have passed on, Jerome J. Newsom..."

Foster looked at Skip in surprise because he did not know that Skip knew Newsom's whole name.

Andrew watch his father's every move and he saw his father in another light as a true leader.

Skip said, "We will take care of our other fellows tomorrow and gather more information about Newsom's desires and have a service for him."

Joseph said, "Sir, I believe Newsom wanted to buried with Bishop, in this town."

The soldiers clapped and said, "Yea."

Skip held his head down for a few minutes he looked up and said, "You soldiers have been through hell and you care, love and courage have given me strength and I am truly honored at how you care for one another."

The soldiers looked at this great leader, they all knew had a short time to live saying they honored him by their care for one another.

Skip said, "Dis missed."

Skip looked around and held onto Dr. Obersteen's back and said, "I don't see horses, so you walked."

Dr. Obersteen said, "I can walk back."

The wagon carrying the body of the soldier going to the big city was ready to leave.

Skip saw it and said, "Foster go and get the horn and blow it."

Foster ran into the office and finally located the horn and ran out the office.

The sentries shouted.

Skip told the driver to stop.

Every one stood on both sides of the street they made and saluted as the wagon passed.

When the wagon passed out the post.

Andrew said, "I got to go. Dr. Obersteen walk back with me."

Dr. Obersteen said, "I'm fine. Go ahead."

Andrew ran down the dirt road.

Adam saw one figure in the darkness.

Then the wagon passed him.

He and the other soldiers stood and saluted.

Andrew ran into the yard and ran to his horse.

He mounted the horse and said to the soldiers, "Watch for Dr. Obersteen for the family."

Andrew caught the wagon and rode along with them.

The two soldiers were diving fast to get to the cemetery by Friday evening so they could get back by Sunday, because they had to use the wagon for Wes on Sunday.

Andrew and the drivers were passing Betsy's town at daybreak.

They were really riding hard and fast.

Andrew kept looking over at the town and said, "No I need to see about Lulu and make sure Todd has everything for them then I will check on Mattie. I want her to be alive. It's is just too much going on."

Andrew could not believe how quick they made it to the big city.

They went straight to the church inside the city center.

They took Lulu's in the church.

Andrew found the pastor and asked to freshen up.

Andrew viewed the body of the soldier and made sure he was fine.

The pastor and staff watched Andrew.

Andrew sat in the front corner and he watched the mixture of people.

He had the beneficiary papers with him.

Andrew sat by himself.

When the family walked in, he stood.

The soldiers watched Andrew.

Andrew was called to speak sooner than he expected.

He did not hold down his head but stood and walked up front with dignity and pride.

When he was riding coming to the town he wanted to say something the people could remember and feel good and gave his life for what he knew to be the greater good.

As Andrew sat and waited to speak, God brought back to his memory he and Lulu went through training and he beat him in the races.

He remembered Lulu told him his family owned a bakery and he pointed out a fat lady and a slim mean looking lady who were his favorite and God brought to Andrew's memory the funny stories Lulu would tell about Ralph the one legged dog.

Andrew walked to the podium and looked over the sad and angry crowd.

The soldiers had cleaned up and seated on the opposite side of the church from Andrew.

The people said, "Who is this boy?"

The pastor peeped at the congregation.

One man said, "He's a boy with a commander's uniform on."

Andrew looked at the man and said, "Good morning."

The people said, "Morning."

Andrew said, "Good morning Bee and Honey."

The women looked at Andrew.

Andrew said, "I am Commander Andrew Stith Simons Costner. Me and Lulu started out together..."

Todd put in his orders and was told it take three hours to get the food ready.

He asked the people about the soldier's service and where the church was located.

Todd found the church and made it when Andrew started to speak.

Andrew said, to Lulu's family, you might not remember me but Lulu introduced me to you at the week of our commencement.

And cousin Sue found out who my family is and said they paid for me to finish and I said, pardon me ma am Lulu had a better chance of breezing through because my family loves sweets."

Cousin Sue jumped and said, "That's true. I remember. "

Andrew said, "And hit us with a blue fan. You don't have it anymore."

Bee jumped up and said, "She has a drawer full of them. She buys them in bulk."

Cousin Sue stood up and fanned.

Everyone hollered.

Todd was enjoying himself.

The soldiers who drove the wagon was enjoying themselves.

Andrew said, "I have to stay away Aunt Matilda because she carries a pair of scissors and swore she was going to cut my hair."

The family clapped.

Andrew said, "I want you to know Corporal First Class Nellie Armstrong Lulu was a fine man. When we were weak he would run a mile to show us we could do it, when we thought we had completely failed and things could not get any worst he would tell us about Ralph the one legged German Shepherd..."

Andrew paused and held his head down for a few minutes.

He lifted his head up and looked into the faces of his family and said, "You did a fine job of raising Curtis..."

That was the name his father fought to name him.

He had such great morals and I aptitude and was always the leader. He made a decision years ago when he joined the military that it was the way to secure you and protect you. I am glad that God sent me to say bye to a very good friend and role model and to let you know he was not just an uniform but an absolutely brilliant and brave soldier. I am very sorry."

Andrew walked off the platform and Curtis father stood and shook his hand.

The soldiers were honored at how Andrew knew about Lulu and spoke in dept from memory.

Andrew heard some scissors and looked up and it was Aunt Matilda.

Andrew grabbed his papers and ran out he church.

The pastor laughed.

He said, "It is a sad time, but this young commander's comments on Curtis has lifted this heaviness."

Andrew stood outside.

Todd walked out the church and stood by Andrew.

Todd looked at Andrew and he looked at himself and tried to straighten his uniform and clean his boots.

Andrew said, "Too late."

Lulu's mother out first with her husband and looked at Andrew and said, "Sir are those papers for me to sign?"

Andrew said, "Yes ma am."

She reached for the papers.

Andrew gave her the papers.

She read over the papers and said to her husband, "Turn around."

Her husband turned around and she signed the papers and gave them back to Andrew.

Andrew said, "Thank you."

Cousin Sue walked over and said, "The richest boy in the state and you still don't have a ring on your finger."

Curtis mother looked at Andrew and said to her cousin Sue, "Sue!!"

Sue said, "I'm just saying."

Andrew and Todd went to the burial.

They left and fly to the bakery and Aunts Bee and Honey were there.

They did not know who had bought all the bakery goodies.

Andrew paid for it.

Andrew remembered the clothing shop and he went and bought Angelica a white dress and underwear and patent leather shoes and a very nice strand of pearls and earrings and hair ribbons.

The sales' person said, "We have no black, but a lad is suppose to wear navy.

Andrew knew the color and told them to give him a navy suit and tie and socks and boots and two white shirts.

Todd said, "Why two white shirts?"

The sales' clerk said just in case it gets dirty and he needs to change.

Todd at Andrew.

Andrew went back to his stern commander mode.

He said,"I need three navy dresses. But all must be completely different and three pairs of shoes they must be different and a grown man black suit and white shirt and black tie."

The sale's clerks said, "Sir we don't have any black but only navy."

Andrew very sternly said, "Navy. And Why you don't have any black."

One of the sales' clerks said, "A rich woman came in here two days ago and bought all black everything. One of the clerks at another shop said she did the same thing at their shop."

Andrew pulled out his wallet and was counting the money.

The male sale's clerk raised his eyebrows at the money.

The female sales' clerks grinned and said, "Whoa."

Andrew asked for the price and he paid for the clothes.

He said, "Do you have matching hair accessories for the grown ladies. Can I use your dressing room to change my uniform?"

The female sales' clerks said,"Yes."

Andrew helped Todd carry all the items to the wagon.

The chief cook saw Todd had moved the wagon and he saw it parked by the clothing shop.

He had walked out the wiring office.

He had wired his wife and the other cook's wife money.

He ordered his dishes for the restaurant he was starting when he retired in June.

He gambled all night and won enough money to buy his only child a beautiful wedding dress and accessories.

He had enough money to buy her and his wife a dress for his retirement celebration.

The chief cook did not see Andrew standing looking at him.

The chief cook looked at the clothing store he went in yesterday and asked about how much everything would cost.

Todd had moved to the other side of the wagon and pretended he did not know anything.

The chief cook went to the clothing store and the sale's got his packages together and he paid them to send them to his wife in Alberton.

Andrew got his uniform from his horse and walked back in the store.

He passed the chief cook and went into the dressing room and changed uniforms.

The store clerks saw the rich woman's wagon and called Andrew to show it to him but he did not hear them.

Andrew dressed and said, "Thank you."

He walked out the store.

Andrew said to Todd. "You can explain this to Commander Skip. You should have enough money to purchase the food."

The chief cook walked out the clothing store feeling good about his two days.

He looked at Todd and then he looked at Andrew.

He blinked.

Andrew said, "You were the noise I heard the other night running to get in the wagon."

The chief cook did not say anything but stood and looked at Andrew.

Andrew walked away.

He got on his horse and flew out of the big city.

The ride out the big city to Betsy's town was eight hours.

Andrew made it in six hours. It was dark but he rode into the city and tried to remember the street, he knew Mattie's and Betsy lived next to each other and was directly across from Betsy's shop.

He rode slow then he saw the vacant shop.

Andrew was so excited and he rode to Betsy's house and looked around and he remembered Mattie's cottage was closer to the street.

He walked the horse to Mattie's house.

He did not see any lights at Mattie.

His heart begin to get heavy.

He walked to the house and begin peeping in all the windows.

He was sniffing as he walked.

He thought, "I don't smell a decaying body."

He knocked on the front door.

No answer.

Andrew looked around and he bent over and picked the lock.

Skip told Andrew about breaking and entering.

He did it a lot with his married girlfriends.

He unlocked the door and he sniffed the air smelled brandy and he walked in the house and looked behind him and closed the door.

He started walking in the house and did not see Mattie sitting by the fireplace.

He felt around the kitchen and found a lamp.

He lit the lamp and started back walking through the house and saw Mattie sitting backwards at the fireplace.

Andrew was so scared he jumped.

The light began to flicker. He looked at the lamp.

Only enough oil for a few minutes.

He ran to Mattie and he realized she was in a psychological state he could not handle.

He briefly looked around the house to make sure everything was locked up.

He was very tired.

He picked up Mattie and put her on the b.

He checked on his horse and gave it water and brought his bag with his uniform and Lulu's beneficiary papers.

He went back in the house and laid on the floor in front of the door.

He slept that way to keep Mattie from leaving the house and anyone from coming in the house.

Andrew pulled one of his guns out and slept all night until daybreak the next morning.

He woke and looked around and realized he was at Mattie's cute cottage.

Andrew walked into the kitchen and found no found.

He looked in the second bedroom and realized it was Joshua's room.

He smiled.

He walked through the house and saw paper with Joshua's name.

Andrew said, "She was trying to remember him."

Andrew was thinking and said, "Basic psychology and I can't think."

He looked at the paper with Joshua on the front door.

He checked and made sure the fire was out.

Andrew knew Mattie did not have any oil left.

He sat and went through every piece of her papers and read everything.

He saw her will and her suicide note.

Andrew folded them and put them in his breast pocket.

He sat and was thinking.

Mattie woke and walked to the living room.

Andrew turned and saw Mattie and he jumped.

He looked into her eyes.

He did not see life.

He thought, "Wes did a number on you all."

He stood and looked around for the door key.

He saw a key on the kitchen door.

He walked fast and got the key and tried to lock the door it worked.

He grabbed Mattie's hand and pulled her out the house and locked the door behind them.

He put the key in his breast pocket.

He put Mattie on his horse and he flew out of town.

The neighbors looked.

The sheriff was on the way to breakfast. He watched Andrew ride off with Mattie.

Andrew rode for hours with Mattie sitting on his horse.

He saw Todd in front of him and said, "I really hope he has some food."

Mattie said, "Me too."

Andrew yelled, "Mattie!!!!"

Mattie laughed and laid her head on Andrew's chest."

The chief cook was driving.

Andrew looked and said, "Where's Todd?"

The chief cook said, "Over there by the turkeys. He could not have made this trip by himself."

Andrew knew Todd could not have made the trip alone.

Mattie said, "Ask him for food."

Andrew said, "Do you have something to eat?"

The chief cook looked at Andrew.

Andrew said, "To eat now."

The chief cook pulled over and got out of the wagon and gave him some apples and date bread and some water.

Mattie ate the apple and then the date bread.

They reached the new settlement just before dark and made it to the cute house before dark.

They passed Craig and Naomi.

Andrew felt Mattie tensing up.

He did not know to tell her about Wes or wait.

Joshua and Angelica were sitting and looking out the window when Andrew rode into the yard with a rider.

Joshua could not believe his eyes.

He and Angelica were shocked.

They sat until the front door was opened.

Mattie and Andrew walked in.

Joshua and Angelica looked and said nothing.

Andrew looked at Emma and Betsy and said, "Has anything happened?"

Emma looked up and saw Mattie.

Her eyes got big and she said, "You made it Mattie."

Andrew knew Emma was talking about her mental state.

Joshua got out the chair and walked to Mattie and hugged her.

Andrew was mouthing Joshua.

Angelica looked at Andrew.

Andrew looked at her.

Mattie hugged Joshua and said, "Joshua my boy."

Joshua said, "Wes is dead."

Mattie lifted her head off the top of Joshua's head and said, "What?"

Mattie looked at Betsy.

Emma said, "his service is tomorrow."

A knock was on the front door.

Andrew stepped back and opened the door.

The cook was brining in the packages.

Andrew said, "Everyone should go to bed because tomorrow is going to be a very long day. Mattie you can stay in here with them. I got navy because all black was sold out."

Betsy said, "I thought about that. The colors should have been lighter because Wes was a lively person."

Todd walked in the door with the rest of the packages.

He handed Andrew his change and walked out the house.

Todd got his horse and rode to the command post and wrote his report and went over the list and put it in a folder and placed on Skip's desk.

Foster and Roberts were about to leave and they looked around,

Todd looked at them and said, "What?"

Foster said, "Some more commanders came in on Friday and they proved Ferguson was one of the assassins."

Todd said, "What!!"

Roberts said, "The worst thing is that Newsom is dead."

Todd said, "This is too much."

He got up and walked out with Foster and Roberts.

They passed Skip's wagon.

Skip was awake but was thinking about Betsy. He wondered about Mattie. He will see tomorrow if Andrew got to her and if she is alive and her condition. He thought about the food and if the preacher has his sermon ready and he fell asleep."

Andrew walked the post.

He stopped and looked at the bush.

Roger said, "They moved Wes and Newsom and took them to the command post.

They walked to the area set up for the service and it was.

Andrew and Roger looked around the area and the lake.

Andrew said, "Tomorrow is going to be very busy.

Roger said, Chester's second in command, Ferguson was one of the hidden assassins."

Andrew said, "What?"

Roger said, "We all have to keep our eyes opened."

Andrew walked around the governor's tent and inspected the soldiers.

He went into the governor's tent and his eyes went to Newsom's cot.

Dr. Obersteen was asleep on it.

He walked to Bruce and checked on him.

Tony and Chester were sitting on Tony's cot.

Andrew opened the door to the governor and his wife room and looked at them.

He walked back to Tony and Chester and said, "Anything happened that I should know about?"

Chester said, "Ferguson."

Andrew said, "I heard,"

Tony said and, "Men don't gossip."

Chester said, "Jake came with your father and I asked him if he would ask Clara and her sister to come early in the morning to help Betsy and Emma."

Andrew said, "I found Mattie. She is not in good mental shape but she is alive. So I don't know how this is going to go tomorrow."

Chester said, "The rest of the commanders came but my uniform has to be clean and I have nothing to wear."

Andrew said, "The strangest thing. The sales' clerks said they had no black clothes because one rich woman bought them all. And at the other store. That's weird."

Chester looked at Andrew then he looked at Tony.

Tony said I know that means something but I can't put my finger on it.

Chester said, "They won't come through the new settlement but through the next town."

Andrew was thinking.

Tony said, "Did the sales' clerks give you a description of the rich woman?"

Andrew said, "No, but they were calling me while I was in the dressing room, but I could not come out."

Andrew said, "High Alert. Have a soldier go to the command post and put everyone on high alert. Where is Terry I did not see him at his tent?"

Tony said, "He deserted."

Tony walked out the tent with Andrew,

Tony walked to one of the soldiers and sent a message to telegram everyone know to go to high alert.

Andrew walked to the tent for repass and was satisfied.

He went to Betsy's tent and pulled off his boots and uniform.

He laid on Betsy's side of the bed and went to sleep,