Emma dressed and especially touched her hair.

Her hair was not beautiful like Betsy’s and Mattie’s it looks nice.

She would not think about Bruce.

She pushed him out of her thoughts.

Emma stood in the middle of the living floor and looked around.

She bent down and pick up her quilts and folded them over her arm.

She held her head down.

She was so ashamed for being a failure.

She failed her family.

Emma failed Joshua.

She failed Mattie.

Dare she should said it, “Bruce!”

Emma’s lips started quivering and tears began to roll down faster than she ever remembered.

She walked through the lovely cottage, that stole her heart from a child until now.

She loved coming there and helping her grandmother plant spring flowers and watering them.

She had the best time of her life there.

Her grandmother died a widow when Emma was ten.

Emma’s heart was shattered.

Bill came along and was her playmate and later her husband.

Her grandmother left the cottage to Emma.

Emma’s father and mother rented the cottage out until they died.

Emma could not go back to the family farm so she moved into her grandmother’s cottage at seventeen and lived there until now.

As she walked through the two room cottage she rubbed her hands over the wallpaper she and her grandmother painted and hang. It took them the whole summer but it has lasted these twenty years.

She walked to the front door with her head down in shame.

Bruce begin to cry.

Dr. Obersteen was sitting and trying to keep his mind on his patients and reviewing their charts and making notes.

Bruce’s lips begin to quiver.

Dr. Oberseen exhaled and looked around the room at his patients.

Terry was sitting with Newsom and reading the comics to him.

Chester was sitting on his cot.

Dr. Obersteen saw Bruce’s lips quivering.

Dr. Obersteen jumped up and ran to Bruce.

Terry stop reading to Newsom and watched Dr. Obersteen.

Chester looked at Dr. Obersteen as he ran to Bruce.

Bruce was crying.

Dr. Obersteen looked at Bruce’s IV and wounds.

Dr. Obersteen said, “Bruce why are you crying?”

Bruce whispered, “Emma.”

Dr. Obersteen patted Bruce on the shoulder.

Chester looked at Bruce.

She could not hold her head up because she was ashamed that she was selling the last thing she ever love and her grandmother wanted her to have it forever.

Emma covered her mouth and cried to the door.

Bruce called her again, “Emma.”

Dr. Obersteen sat in his chair and cried.

He shook his head and tears fell on the patients’ charts.

Bruce whispered, “Emma.”

Chester heard Bruce.

Terry heard Bruce.

They knew it was the woman he loved. They did not know if Bruce was just calling her name or whether he needed her.

Chester looked at Dr. Obersteen who was emotionally overcome.

Emma lifted her eyes and saw the pot belly stove.

She remembered the eggs that were boiling and the skillet belong to Mattie.

She did not want to leave the skillet in the house.

Emma placed the tin tub at the back door to deter any one from coming in the house.

She took the skillet and ran to the front door with the hot cast iron skillet.

She put the skillet on the front porch and locked the front door.

Emma put the blankets in the wagon.

She walked back to the porch and used her coat sleeve and picked up the skillet and poured out the water and used her coat sleeve to dry the cast iron skillet.

Hen she turned she looked in Mattie’s face.

Emma reached Mattie her cast iron skillet.

Mattie was a very clean person and did not like Emma drying her skillet with her coat sleeve.

Mattie reached for her cast iron skillet and reached Emma an envelope.

Emma looked at the envelope it was addressed to Betsy.

Emma looked at Mattie and said, “What am I to do with this?”

She reached the envelope back to Mattie.

Mattie turned and walked away.

Emma was angry.

She ran off the front porch and grabbed her chest.

Mattie stopped and looked at Emma and thought, “That bitch better not die before me. I would have shot myself this morning but Betsy’s check came. Mine’s should be coming so I can leave it… What’s his name. My son.”

Emma stumbled to Mattie with the envelope reached out to her.

Mattie said, “What’s wrong with you?”

Emma said, “My chest hurt.”

Mattie exhaled.

Emma said, “Am I keeping you from something?”

Mattie turned her head.

Emma looked at Mattie up and down and saw she had her best dress and shoes on.

Emma thought, “She’s going to kill herself. What have I done?”

Mattie said, “Do you want to go to the big city hospital with Dr. Obersteen or take your chances with Wes.”

Emma said, “Mattie. Why?”

Mattie knew what Emma was talking about and said, “Why you have a choice.”
Emma said, “You have a choice also. I pray you chose to live and not allow Bill, Wes nor me take your life. You are young, beautiful and brilliant.”

Mattie turned her head for a minute and looked back at Emma and said, “You nearly had me. Nearly Emma, Nearly.”

Mattie walked out the front gate.

Bruce whispered, “Emma.”

Emma was devastated.

She could not cry anymore.

She could not stop Mattie from committing suicide.

Emma just stood in the walkway to the cottage she helped her grandmother make.

She could not cry anymore.

She turned around to watch Mattie for the last time.

Mattie was walking back home, her navy dress and hat and her red hair in a long ponytail down her back.

Emma turned and looked.

She knew she heard her name.

She walked out the yard and looked at the envelope which they believed contain Betsy’s insurance check.

Emma had the envelope and hit her other hand with it.

She thought, “Should I wait or let the town’s people bury Mattie.”

Emma walked around the back and got in the wagon and pulled out the yard.

She looked down at Mattie’s house and rode to the town’s center and stopped at the well where all of this got started.

Emma turned and rode out the town.

Mattie had walked home.

She shut the door behind her and fell back on it and took a deep breath.

Her eyes roved over her house.

She thought, “Would he …”

Mattie went blank.

She stood there for a long time before her mind came back.

Mattie looked around and wondered what she was suppose to do.

Mattie went to her desk and sat she forgot what she was sitting there for.

She sat there for hours.

Emma planned to go straight across and over to the capitol.

She sat there and her eyes fell on Betsy’s check.

Emma thought, “I will never see her again. My Joshua. Angelica.”

She finally turned the wagon and drove the horses very fast and made it to the new settlement before dark.

She knew she had to stop at the soldiers’ post.

She slowed the horses.

The soldiers looked at her.

They remembered she was the crazy woman they would see walking for days. And sat out in the dirt road.

The soldiers stopped her and stared at her.

Emma looked at them.

A soldier finally said, “State your business.”

Emma reached and picked up the envelope and said, “Give this check to Betsy Ross. She is Wes Ross’ wife.

A soldier said, “We know who she is,” the soldier reached for the check.

Another one said, “We can’t take that check.”

The soldier who reached for the check said,”You take the check to her and come back here.”

Emma said, “I can’t. I am going to keep riding. I am moving.”

 She looked behind her and said, “There are times you have to leave things behind and not return for them.”

The other soldier said, “Let me ask you something?”

Emma looked at the soldier who moved over to her side of the wagon and said, “We have watched you for weeks. Running and walking and stopping and sitting in the road. What were you doing and now you appear sane?”

Emma took a deep breath and tears filled her eyes and said, “Sometimes we love that one person and that person is taken away from us. It makes you lose it for a moment. You will never be the same and life will never be sweet again.”

Emma held her head down.

Tears flowed off her cheeks.

Another soldier yelled, “You’ll better let her through. That‘s the one who did the backflip and grabbed the shovel and beat that gangster woman with it.”

The soldiers said, “Go through but check out with the post at the beginning of the town.”

Emma pulled off and cried.

The soldiers watched her.

Her chest still hurt.

The angel assigned to her was riding in the passenger seat with his right foot on the footrest and leaned back with his arm folded.

The holy angels in the new settlement watched the grieved Emma.

Emma passed the residents of the new settlement and continued to the cute house.

Emma pulled up to the house.

The soldiers surrounded her.

Danny said, “Who are you?”

Emma said, “I am Emma.”

She reached Danny the envelope.

He looked at Emma and saw she had been crying.

He said, “Are any kind to Wes?”

Emma said, “No. Please give that to Betsy. It is a check that she is waiting for.”

Danny said, “She needs it now.”

Emma was holding the envelope for Danny to take it.

Danny said, “She needs to see a familiar face.”

Dr. Obersteen walked out the governor’s tent and stretched.

Emma saw him and she threw the envelope on the ground and walked away.

Danny looked at Emma.

He picked up the envelope.

Dr. Obersteen heard the wagon pulled off.

He turned to look.

He looked at the wagon and thought.

He heard Bruce whispering, “Emma.”

He wondered, “Was that Emma?”

Dr. Obersteen walked fast to the end of the yard.

He looked in the night and barely could see the wagon.

He looked at Danny he saw the envelope in Danny’s hand.

He said, “Was that Emma?”

Danny said, “Yes.”

Dr. Obersteen turned around and around with his hands to his head.

All the soldiers stared at Dr. Obersteen, because they thought he lost his mind.

Danny leaned back to Dr. Obersteen and said, “Do you need her?”

Dr. Obersteen could only nod his head.

Danny said to the sentries, “Go and get her and bring her back.”

The sentries jumped on their horses and flew down the road and caught Emma.

Emma kept on riding.

The sentries made her pull over.

Emma was still crying.

The sentries looked at her and said, “You are to come back with us, now.”

Emma shook her head for yes.

But she sat there for a little bit and wiped her eyes and blew her nose.

The sentries stood and watched her and waited.

Emma took a deep breath and exhaled.

She turned the wagon around and slowly rode back to the cute house.

One sentry was in front of the wagon and one in the back.

Danny and Dr. Obersteen stood at the entrance of the yard and they heard the noise of the wagon coming back.

Dr. Obersteen reached over and shook Danny’s shoulder.

Adam was walking up to see what was going on.

Danny looked and saw the wagon and the sentries and said, “See all you had to do was ask.”

Danny patted Dr. Obersteen on the shoulder and walked to Adam.

Danny said, “The woman name Emma came and wanted us to take this envelope to Betsy and she threw it on the ground and pulled off when she saw Dr. Obersteen. Dr. Obersteen was out here turning in circles…”

The soldiers started laughing.

Adam looked at the soldiers.

The soldiers stopped laughing.

Danny said, “I asked him did he need the woman. He said yes. I sent the sentries to go and bring her back. There she is.”

Adam and Danny turned and watched Emma.

Dr. Obersteen walked to Emma with his head down and said, “Let me help you out the wagon.”

Emma said, “No. Wes said, I am not allowed on this property.”

Dr. Obersteen looked up and said, “Where is Mattie?”

Emma said, “She is probably dead by this time.”

Dr. Obersteen stared at Emma.

Emma was staring off in the distance.

Dr. Obersteen said, “Have you heard?”

Emma said, “Heard what?”

Dr. Obersteen said, “Emma I am going to ask you again. Where is Mattie?”

Emma turned and raised herself and got in Dr. Obersteen’s face and looked him in his eyes.

One soldier said, “He’s getting ready to get his butt whipped.

The soldiers started snickering.

Adam looked at the soldiers and they stopped snickering.

Adam and Danny begin to walk in sync to Dr. Obersteen and Emma.

The soldiers saw Adam and Danny turned and walk in sync.

One soldier said, “That’s weird.”

Another soldier said, “I’m tired of them looking at us like we are stupid.”

He turned and walked to the brook.

Emma said, “Let me say it again Dr. John Obersteen, she may be dead by this time.”

Emma turned around and grabbed the horses’ bridle.

The sentries were still looking.

Dr. Obersteen grabbed Emma’s hand and said, “Please. Please. Wait please. Give me a moment to get my thoughts together. There’s a lot going on.”

Emma exhaled and turned her head.

A soldier yelled, “Sir.”

Everyone turned and saw Bruce.

He was naked and stumbling out the tent.

Dr. Obersteen was trying to think.

Adam and Danny ran to help the falling Bruce.

The soldiers picked up Bruce and carried him back in the governor’s tent.

Emma saw something out the corner of her eye.

The sentries were looking at Bruce.

Emma turned and saw Bruce.

Dr. Obersteen turned and saw Bruce.

Emma jumped out the wagon and was running to Bruce.

Dr. Obersteen tried to run to Bruce.

Emma pushed Dr. Obersteen out of her way.

Dr. Obersteen tried to catch his balance.

He caught his balance and continued to the governor’s tent.

Joshua and Angelica were sitting and looking out the window.

They saw Dr. Obersteen talking to someone.

When Emma jumped out the wagon and run, Joshua and Angelica said, “Whoa!”

Betsy was sitting on the sofa crying and shaking her head with her arms folded around her body.

Joshua jumped and ran out the house and yelled, “Momma!”

Joshua pushed Dr. Obersteen out of his way.

The soldier who was mad was walking back to the front and saw everyone running.

He ran to the other soldiers and said, “What? What?”

One soldier said, “Captain Bruce wobbled out the tent naked and all of this pointed…”

The soldier was pointing to the private area, ”…all that was showing. The woman jumped out that wagon and ran faster than I ever saw a person run and went in the tent.”

Another soldier said, “I heard about Bruce but whoa.”

Angelica crawled out the chair and out of the front door and was about to try to climb down the steps.

The mad soldier said, “That’s what I get for getting mad. Where is the cripple girl going?”

He yelled,”Get back in the house.”

Angelica started crying.

The soldiers said, “Why you made her cry?”

The soldier said, “Because I am not going to see about her.”

The sentries were watching everything.

They were not saying a word.

Angelica sat on the steps and hollered.

Betsy could be seen, sitting and rocking on the sofa.

Adam and Danny put Bruce back on his cot.

Emma was at Bruce’s cot and Adam and Danny looked at Emma.

Adam said, “You’re fast.”

Emma grabbed Bruce and put the sheet over him and she kissed him.

Bruce said, “Emma.”

Joshua ran into the tent and ran to Emma and held her by the waist.

Emma looked at Bruce.

Bruce was asleep.

Emma looked down at Joshua.

She held Bruce’s hand and held Joshua by his shoulder.

Chester, Adam and Danny looked at Emma, Joshua and Bruce.

Chester thought, “That looks like a family.”

Dr. Obersteen ran into the tent.

He walked over to Bruce.

They heard the soldiers hollering at Angelica and her crying.

Chester said, “Go and get her and bring her in here.”

Adam walked out the governor’s tent and he looked at the soldier that hollered at Angelica.

The soldier turned and walked back to the brook.

Adam walked to the crying Angelica and picked her up.

Angelica grabbed him by his neck.

Adam felt genuine love from the little girl.

Terry watched Emma.

Chester and Danny watched Emma.

Dr. Obersteen was very gentle around Emma.

He checked Bruce’s IV and wounds and vitals.

Bruce was mumbling, ”Emma.”

The governor was in the bedroom and heard the commotion.

The first lady was coming in and out of consciousness.

Dr. Obersteen very softly said, “Emma I need space.”

Danny snickered.

Adam walked in with Angelica.

Angelica reached for Emma.

Emma turned Bruce’s hand loose and moved her hand from Joshua’s shoulder.

Dr. Obersteen looked at Chester and mouth, “I don’t know how to tell her.”

Joshua was watching Dr. Obersteen.

Emma held Angelica and kissed her on the cheek.

Joshua said, “Where’s momma? I did not see her.”

Dr. Obersteen looked at Emma.

Emma said, “I don’t know Joshua.”

Joshua said, “You two are always together.”

Chester said, “Ma am.”

Emma looked at him.

He said, “We have sad news to tell you.”

Emma looked at Bruce.

The only sad news would be about Bruce and she was looking at him and saw he was not dead.

Chester watched Emma and said, “Wes is dead.”

Emma woke up on the floor.

She had passed out.

Dr. Obersteen caught Angelica.

Danny grabbed Emma.

Joshua ran to Emma and was bending over her and he begin to cry.

Dr. Obersteen said, “Joshua, she is ok.”

He handed Angelica to Adam.

Angelica looked at Chester and said, “Hi.”

Chester said, “Hi.”

He wondered what was going to happen to Angelica now that Wes was gone.

He thought he and Clara could raise her for however long she lives.

Angelica looked back at Chester.

Adam looked at Angelica and then Chester.

Chester looked at Angelica.

Chester thought, “I know she did not hear that.”

Dr. Obersteen picked up his stethoscope and looked at Joshua and said, “Joshua.”

He pointed at his stethoscope.

He bent down to Emma and he grinned and started listening to Emma’s heart.

Danny was smiling at Joshua, then he saw Dr. Obersteen stopped smiling.

Joshua said, “Dr. Obersteen you stopped grinning.”

Chester and Angelica turned and looked at Emma.

Dr. Obersteen looked at the other cot and said, “Let’s put her on the cot.”

Terry ran over to help them.

Joshua started hitting Dr. Obersteen in his back.

Chester stared at Joshua.

Joshua said, “You said she is alright. I can’t take any more.”

Dr. Obersteen said, “Ouch. Ouch.”

Angelica started crying.

Adam held her and he felt her back and looked at Chester.

Chester did not say anything but continued looking at Joshua.

Chester said, “Joshua. It’s not Dr. John’s fault.”

Terry caught Joshua and held him and his fists.

Joshua said, “Let me at him. I can’t fight JESUS. Dr. Obersteen is the closest to me.”

Terry grabbed Joshua and held him tight.

Angelica was crying.

Andrew and Tony walked into the governor’s tent.

They saw Dr. Obersteen working on a woman.

They saw Adam holding a crying Angelica.

They saw a crying Joshua being held by a soldier.

They did not move.

Chester said,“Emma.”

Andrew was flying through the towns and cities.

Tony sentries saw someone around six am riding fast.

They rode back to camp and told Tony alone rider was about an hour away.

Tony thought.

He was in his office going over training and plans for the troop with his second and third in command.

Tony stood up and said, “That sounds like someone from headquarters.”

He stood up and walked out his tent and mounted his horse and rode to the end of the road.

He had his gun ready.

The sentries stood behind him.

The second and third in command rode up behind Tony.

The rider approached.

Andrew saw Tony and yelled, “It’s me, Andrew.”

Tony rode next to Andrew.

They rode in complete silence because the situation was serious.

The troop at the beginning of the town saw them riding ferociously.

They knew it had to be someone from headquarters.

They moved out of Tony and Andrew’s way and saluted.

There were so many assassins’ bodies everywhere.

The soldiers were still separating the assassins from the real soldiers.

The hundred soldiers at the lake killed over two hundred assassins.

The soldiers in the town killed over three hundred assassins.

Jake and Chester’s troop killed over three hundred and fifty and the soldiers at the cute house killed one hundred and three.

The number that was wounded and alive was forty seven, the false soldiers twenty eight and the fifteen contractors and the one woman lead.”

Jake lost five soldiers.

The cute house lost six soldiers and Wes.

The brook lost no soldiers.

The town lost Barnes and Waters.

Laura was devasted and she screamed and hollered for days.

The lake area lost ten soldiers.

The troop at the beginning of the town lost the three soldiers who had the battery gun.

The numbers were coming in while the headquarters was traveling to get there.

Skip was getting madder and madder.

The soldiers driving Skip kept pushing the horses.

They gave the horses a two hour break each day.

The soldiers driving Skip did not want Skip to die on their watch.

Andrew had enough strength to look around the room.

He saw Newsom was asleep.

He walked to Bruce and finished covering his legs.

He touched Bruce’s face and held his hand and whispered in his ear, “I’m here”

Bruce whispered, “Emma.”

Bruce began to cry.

Andrew looked over at Dr. Obersteen.

Andrew saw Angelica and Joshua being restrained and said, “Emma is here.”

Tears continued to flow out of Bruce’s eyes.

Dr. Obersteen looked back at Bruce and said, “That’s unheard of.”

Andrew looked at the crying Bruce.

He looked at Emma and said, “True love.”

The governor said, “Whose out there?”

Tony walked over to Chester and looked at him.

He looked at Danny and Adam.

Tony looked at Angelica and said, “You’re the little angel.”

Angelica looked at him and primped her mouth.

Tony looked at Angelica.

Tony sat on Chester’s cot and leaned back and looked at his bandage.

He said,”The bullet exited, that was good and it did not hit no arteries nor any major muscle. There was no doctor here to operate on you. You would never had made it to the big city hospital. That’s GOD. You’ll be healed in thirty days.”

Chester said, “She shot me.”

Tony said, “She! Chester, not a woman that shot you? Where is she?”

Adam said, “She is chained and under guarded at the command post.”

Danny was standing by Emma and he looked down and still had Betsy’s envelope in his hand.

Andrew looked at Tony and nodded his head towards the governor.

Tony and Chester looked at Andrew and knew he was still mad with the governor because he lost a swimming match to him.

Tony stood up and said to Andrew, “You need to let it go.”

Chester laughed. And said, “OU!”

Dr. Obersteen looked at Chester.

Chester saw Dr. Obersteen watching him.

Chester said, “Doc I am ok.”

The governor looked at Tony and said, “I don’t know you, do I?”

Tony said, “No sir.”

David stared at Tony and said, “Your name.”

Chester and Adam looked at the door.

Adam continued to pat Angelica.

Terry was holding Joshua tight and crying.

Joshua said, “John, Get this man!”

Dr. Obersteen heard Joshua, but he was concerned about Emma’s heart.

Joshua was struggling to get free from Terry’s grip.

Chester and Danny looked at Joshua.

Tony said, “Sir, my name is Tony Brown.”

Tony looked at the governor who was going to sleep.

The first lady said, “Did they get her?”

Everyone turned and looked towards the room.

The first lady yawned and was falling to sleep and said, “I told Wes.”

Joshua was mad and said, “Well Wes is dead! And this man is crying more than me. Get him!!!!!”

Andrew looked and said, “Soldier let him go. And you go and sit down.”

Joshua pushed Terry.

Danny started laughing.

Chester was thinking, “Get these kids out of here. I want these kids out of here. What kind of father will I be? Oh God, I don’t want to be bothered with children. Does Clara want children. Yea she does, because she is a school teacher. I am screwed.”

Joshua walked over to Emma.

Angelica tried to turn and looked at Adam with her big brown eyes and said, “Please sir.”

She batted her eyes.

Adam smiled and walked her to Emma.

Joshua said, “Angelica, Wes told you batting your eyes don’t work.”

Angelica said, “I’m here.”

Andrew looked at the children.

Chester looked at Joshua.

He thought, “He needs to be in the military academy.”

Danny held his head down and laughed.

Tony looked at Thelma and walked from the door.

Steve heard Tony in the room and said, “You’ll like it here.”

Tony turned to go outside to Steve and he looked at Chester, Adam and Danny and said, “Did you’ll tell her a woman was involved?”

They said, “No”

Tony walked out the tent and walked around the tent and sat next to Steve and they laughed and talked for a good while.

Dr. Obersteen kept checking Emma’s heart.

Joshua said, “Why you kept doing that? “

Dr. Obersteen said, “Shush.”

Joshua said, “What that means?”

Danny was laughing so hard at Joshua he had to turn his back.

Andrew looked at Joshua.

Dr. Obersteen said, “Hush Joshua.”

Angelica put both her hands to her cheeks and said, “He needs to hear Aunt Emma’s heart.”

Joshua said, “Angelica you be quiet.”

Angelica threw her hands up in the air like fine.

Danny kept his head turned.

Andrew looked at Chester and said, “Where’s Betsy?”

Chester looked at Danny.

Danny said, “In the house.”

Angelica turned to look at Andrew.

Andrew caught Angelica looking him up and down.

Angelica wanted to know who was this strange man asking about her momma and did he mean her any harm.

Danny turned his head again and laughed.

Adam looked at Angelica.

Chester watched everybody.

He did not think having children in the room was funny.

Terry was over in the corner by Newsom, crying.

Dr. Obersteen said, “Joshua.”

Joshua said, “I was quiet what you calling me for?”

Danny nearly hit the floor.

Andrew looked at Danny.

He felt Bruce move a finger.

Andrew looked at Bruce and said, “Bruce what is it?”

Bruce was trying to whisper but nothing was coming out.

Chester, Danny and Adam were watching Bruce.

Andrew leaned his head down and said, “Who?”

Tony was walking back in the tent.

He saw everyone was looking at Bruce.

He stood still.

Bruce went back to sleep,

Dr. Obersteen said, “You want to hear your momma’s heart.”

Angelica yelled, “I do.”

Dr. Obersteen said, “You too.”

He put the stethoscope in Joshua’s ears and place the metal part on Emma’s chest.

Joshua said, “Whoa.”

Angelica said, “Me. Me.”

Adam walked a little closer.

Joshua said, “Shush Angelica. I can’t hear.”

Angelica looked at Joshua and begin to cry.

Joshua said, “Theatrics.”

Dr. Obersteen said, “Now Angelica.”

Angelica stopped crying.

She leaned her head forward and Dr. Obersteen put the stethoscope in her ears and the metal part on Emma’s chest.

Chester looked at Angelica’s facial expression.

Angelica’s eyes popped big and her mouth flew open.

Emma said, “I am fine.”

Dr. Obersteen grabbed Angelica and Joshua and flew out the tent.

He was going to the house.

Danny was crying tears of laughter.

He said, “That’s like Steve and Monica.”

Chester, Adam and Tony laughed.

Steve said, “I can hear you know. I don’t ever want to run into her nowhere.”

Tony covered his mouth and nearly hit the floor.

Steve said,”She had the nerves to tell me that my momma said I better not put my hands on her any more. I told her one day, but yeah my momma did not tell me not to shot your butt. She packed and left in a hour and I thought why didn’t I tell her that years ago.”

Adam shook his head.

Danny went to his knees.

Tony knees went weak.

Chester said, “She was behind Steve so bad one day that we ran. Right Danny?”

Danny could not talk but shook his head for yes.

Adam looked at them because he already thought, “He would had buried her somewhere.”

Dr. Obersteen was near running with the Angelica and Jason.

They saw Emma’s wagon and Joshua said, “Can I sleep with Emma?”

Dr. Obersteen walked to the wagon and pulled back the flap and saw all her stuff and said, “No.”

Dr. Obersteen thought, “I have to talk to Emma about Mattie. God, I hope she didn’t kill her.”

Joshua said, “Kill who?”

Dr. Obersteen knew he did not say anything out loud and said, “What Joshua?”

Joshua said, “I don’t want to sleep in the house.”

Angelica said,”Me too.”

The cook was coming to get the dinner tray.

The cook said, “Dr. Obersteen did you eat?”

Dr. Obersteen was walking up the steps with Angelica and Joshua, and said, “No.”

Emma sat up and button her dress.

Tony jumped off the floor and tried to straightened out his uniform.

They forgot she was on the cot.

They cut off their laughing and looked at Emma.

Emma heard them talking but her mind was only on Bruce and Joshua.

Dr. Obersteen walked in the house and carried the children into the bedroom and put them to bed.

He put Angelica in the bed with a lot of pillows to support her back.

He straighten Joshua’s mat and put him to bed.

Dr. Obersteen looked at Betsy’s mat.

Chester said, “Tony, that is Terry one of Bishop’s adopted sons.”

Tony looked at the crying Terry and said, “Hello.”

He needed to talk to the gang and said, “Terry you need to rest. We all do. Come back in the morning.”

Terry said, “Wes always wanted someone here.”

Tony said, “I understand. It’s a lot of us in here.”

Tony stared at Terry.

Terry sat for a minute.

Then he realized they wanted him to leave.

Emma said, “Wait, before you talk I don’t want to hear anything. I’m leaving to.”

Andrew looked at Emma.

He thought, ”She is smaller than the last time I saw her.”

Emma slipped off the cot.

Andrew said to Emma, “Hello. How is Mattie?”

Emma was still dazed and said, “Dead.”

Andrew turned quickly around and looked at Emma.

Emma walked to Bruce and kissed him on his lips.

She said, “Bruce come back to me.”

Danny reached her the envelope with Betsy’s name.

Emma took the envelope and continued out the tent door.

Andrew was stunned.

Terry picked up his comic books and walked out the tent.

Andrew said, “Bruce gave me a name, but I did not understand the name.”

Tony said, “Chester was the woman familiar?”

Chester said, “No.”

Andrew said, “Malcolm said he was having lunch with Donovan and some more and the first lady walked in and sat at a vacant table. She was watching someone at the table in front of them and got up and told them she knew they were conspiring against the governor and there was a woman at the table.”

Chester said, “So the first lady would know.”

Danny said, “The first lady is messed up.”

Andrew said, “Where is Wes’s body?”

Chester looked at Danny.

Danny said, “Wes and the sixteen soldiers are at the command post and they would be ready for burial tomorrow. But most of the families sent telegrams back and asked for their bodies. We got thirty two drivers ready to leave in the morning to take the soldiers home. But we have no info on Wes.”

Andrew said, “How did Wes die?’

Chester turned his head.

Danny said, “She shot him. Straight through the heart. I have never seen anything like that.”

Andrew said, “Why kill the doctor?”

Tony said, “The doctor takes care of the patients.”

Andrew said, “Have you a count of the enemies?’

Adam said, “Nine eighty five are dead.”

Tony bucked his eyes and said, “What?”

Adam said, “Yeap.”

Tony said, “Any prisoners besides the woman?”

Adam said, “Ninety.”

Tony said, “What the f---k? Where are they?”

Tony was thinking they all need to be killed including the woman.

Adam said, “In the camp. Surrounded by the sentries.”

They all stood in silence.

Andrew said, “The headquarters will be here tomorrow.”

Tony said. “This is going to be strange for the next few days.

Tony pointed and said, “I’ll take that cot.”

Chester said, “I don’t want to hear your snoring. Go and sleep with mom and dad.”

Tony said, “I need to ask you about that.”

Steve said, “Night.”

Adam and Danny walked out the tent.

Andrew looked at Bruce and put his hand on his chest and pulled the sheet up to Bruce’s neck.

He walked out the tent and saw Betsy walking with a quilt on, towards the cooks.

Andrew thought, “I haven’t had any food for nearly three days.”

He followed Betsy.

Betsy walked to their tent and fell on their bed.

Andrew walked to the tent and said, “Betsy.”

Betsy had pulled her quilt over her head.

She recognized the voice and sat up and reached out her arms.

Andrew ran to her.

He held her forever.

Andrew said, “Betsy, father will be here tomorrow. We will help you financially.”

Betsy shook her head for yes.

The cook walked to the tent door and said, “Sir, does she need anything. I’m cleaning up.”

Andrew looked at Betsy.

He looked back at the cook and said, “She hasn’t eaten?”

The cook said, “No sir.”

Andrew said, “Scrambled a few eggs and some toast.”

Andrew remembered his mother would always ask for eggs and toast when she was able to eat something after her bouts with her sickness.

Emma stood on the front porch to the house.

Dr. Obersteen was very hungry he had not eaten in a couple of days.

He looked at the spot where Wes was.

He ate the fried veal and beans.

He sat in quietness and ate the meal, he nodded his head and said, “It’s pretty good.”

Dr. Obersteen looked at the place Wes died he said, “They cleaned it up nicely.”

He was thinking, “We don’t have no information on Wes. Those project people should have some information because they sent telegrams to Wes’ dad to come here and work.”

Tony pulled off his boots and his coat and walked and got a blanket and a pillow from the supplies and went to sleep.

Dr. Obersteen cleaned up the food and walked out the door and saw Emma standing on the front porch.

Dr. Obersteen walked to Emma said, “I need to talk to you.”

Emma rolled her eyes at Dr. Obersteen.

He said, “Please.”

He walked off the porch with the food tray.

Joshua was standing in the door and watched Dr. Obersteen take the food tray to the cooks.

He looked at Emma and ran and hugged Emma.

Emma hugged her Joshua.

Angelica was asleep.

Emma said, “Joshua it is still freezing here. Let me put you to bed.”

They walked in the house.

Dr. Obersteen was waking back from the cooks.

He saw Joshua pointing in the living room.

He knew Joshua was telling Emma where Wes died.

Emma said, “Joshua I am so sorry that you and Angelica had to go through that.”

Joshua said, “I don’t want to sleep here.”

Emma said, “You will be in here with Angelica.”

Dr. Obersteen walked in the house and sat on the sofa.

Emma put the covers on Joshua, she put more coal on the fire and closed the bedroom door.

She walked out the room.

Emma saw Dr. Obersteen sitting at the end of the sofa.

Emma walked out the front door and went to her wagon.

She got her quilts and walked back in the house and said to Dr. Obersteen, “Move.”

Dr. Obersteen moved and sat in one of the chairs next to the window.

Emma put her quilts on the sofa and pulled off her coat and boots.

She sat on the end of the sofa away from the spot Joshua pointed to.

She took her hair down.

Dr. Obersteen said, “Mattie?”

Emma said, “When I left this morning, she was dressed for her funeral…”

Dr. Obersteen frowned.

Emma laid down on the sofa.

Dr. Obersteen said, “They have no information on Wes’ family.”

Emma yawned and said, “I have something out in the wagon.”

Dr. Obersteen said, “Thank you.”

He exhaled and giggled.

Dr. Obersteen said, “Emma had you been to the doctor later?”

Emma said, “No.”

Dr. Obersteen said, “Your heart weak was very weak when I first listened. But it got stronger the more I listened. Have you been overexerting yourself?”

Emma turned over and said, “You mean fighting. Yeah the other night. I won.”

Dr. Obersteen shook his head and said, “No doubt.”

Emma went to sleep.

Dr. Obersteen walked to the bedroom and checked on Joshua and Angelica.

He saw Joshua was awake and said, “ Joshua, I know it is difficult but try to sleep.”

Joshua said, “I can’t.”

Dr. Obersteen closed the bedroom door and walked out the house.

He looked back at Betsy’s tent and thought he saw Wes and he stopped.

Then he realized it was Andrew.

He thought, “Andrew don’t sleep in the tent.”

Dr. Obersteen continued to the governor’s tent.

He washed his hands and put on his gloves and went to attend to Newsom.

Chester was tossing and turning on the cot because Tony was snoring.

Steve was outside snoring and Chester could hear him.

Dr. Obersteen checked Bruce.

Dr. Obersteen said, “Chester you’re ok.”

Chester said, “No. I can’t sleep.”

Dr. Obersteen said, “Do you want some herbs for sleep.”

Chester said, “I want Tony to sleep somewhere else. I know he snored in the womb, but nobody believes me.”

Dr. Obersteen said, “Fraternal twins?”

Chester said, “Yes.”

He rolled over and threw his blanket over his shoulder.

Dr. Obersteen pulled off his gloves and washed his hands and went into the governor’s room and check on them.

He walked back in the tent and picked up his quilts and carried them in the governor’s room and fell on the quilts and sleep hard for four hours.

He woke up and the patients were quiet.

He fell back and went to sleep until six am the next morning.

Dr. Obersteen got up and washed and shaved.

He came back in the tent and attended all his five patients.

He washed and cleaned them all but Chester.

Dr. Obersteen went to the black pot and took Chester’s wash basin and got hot water, soap and shaving kit and took it back to Chester.

Chester was sitting on his cot and rolling his eyes at Tony.

Dr. Obersteen said, “I wonder where Terry is?” I’m going to get you and the governor’s breakfast?”

Tony woke totally refreshed.

Chester rolled his eyes at Tony.

Tony said, “Are you finished with that water?”

Chester said, “What? It is dirty.”

Craig walked in the door of the tent.

Tony and Chester looked up at the same time.

Craig was shocked to see Tony.

He said, “Hey boy!”

Tony said, “Hey pop.”

Craig was peeping around.

Tony and Chester looked at him.

Tony said, “Pop are you ok?”

Craig said, “Damn. I was looking for Wes. He had so many rules about this tent. I am going to miss him. He is as nosey as your momma. Damn.”

Craig ran to Chester and got his wash basin and said, “Give me that.”

Tony looked at his father.

Craig said, “Come Tony and let me show you where everything is and what to do.”

Tony said, “The headquarters will be here about now.”

Craig said, “You need to be presentable.”

Dr. Obersteen walked in with the breakfast tray and said, “Good morning.”

Tony grabbed a piece of toast from the breakfast tray and walked out the tent door with Craig.

Craig said, “You know your brother hates for you to do that.”

Tony laughed and said, “I know, but I love doing it to get underneath his skin.”

Craig tried to smile and looked back at the seething Chester, who was sitting on his cot rolling his eyes at Tony.

Craig turned his head and let go of the tent door flap.

He and Tony walked to Wes’ tent.

They saw Andrew sitting outside Betsy’s tent.

Andrew was in deep thought.

They saluted Andrew.

Andrew saluted and he looked at the time and stretched and stood up.

He peeped at Betsy and saw she was resting.

He walked to the governor’s tent and got a wash basin and soap.

Andrew walked to the black pot and got hot water and went to the wash shed and washed and shaved.

The soldiers in the front of the house feed his and Tony’s horses and groomed the horses.

They fed Emma’s horses and gave them water.

Bruce told the soldiers to help out around the house.

When the soldiers saw Bruce on yesterday they figured he was doing better and would be back to his old self. So they decided to start doing what he told them to do.

Andrew fed Betsy eggs and toast last night and she fell asleep in Andrew’s arms.

Terry finally woke up and washed and shaved.

He went to the governor’s tent and got the food trays.

He heard all the wagons and horses he knew it was the headquarters.

Chester said, “Terry you’re feeling ok?”

Terry said, “I just had a bad night.”

Chester said, “You won’t do that again, especially when Dr. Obersteen really need you?”

Terry said, “I want to leave the military. Bishop helped me decide.”

Chester stared at Terry.

He thought, “Is everyone around here is crazy? Dr. Obersteen needs help and he’s talking about my dead uncle helped him to decide to leave the military. What kind of crap is that? And I am freezing.”

Terry looked around the tent and took the food tray back to the cooks.

He walked back to the tent and cleaned it up and took the items outside to burn.

Andrew sat and drank coffee outside of Betsy’s tent.

The soldiers watched Andrew, they thought he was a commander because he was Skip’s boy.

They begin to see he was organized, determined, focused and self sacrificing.

They knew he fed Betsy and stayed with her until she fell asleep.

He sat outside her tent all night in the freezing cold to watch over her.

Andrew heard the horses entering the command post.

Jake was at the command post.

He wrote many reports base on the information he received.

Jake was angry that he had to bury twenty six soldiers.

He thought back over his career when he had to go to those had families and tell them their love ones would not be returning.

He had telegrammed several casket makers to send him twenty caskets and send him embalmers.

The soldiers were finally identified and moved to the command center.

The first ones were the ones located at the lake area.

The embalmers worked on those ten soldiers first.

The soldiers killed at the house and the new settlement were cleaned and prepared to be embalmed, but were covered and left in the freezing cold to help preserve them.

Jake had them to get the six soldiers from the house.

He went in the tent and watched the embalmers and they brought in the caskets.

Jake made the soldiers to go and get each soldier’s personal effects and bring them and place them by the soldiers.

Jake need some more drivers.

He was counting his supplies he needed the first ten to get home fast.

The remaining ninety troop members were angry and talking about coming to the post and killing the woman and the ninety prisoners.

The wounded assassins were counted as the prisoners.

The soldiers did not tell Dr. Obersteen to check the prisoners because he was grieved over Wes.

William was very upset about Wes.

He was running through the town screaming.

His mother when she thought she heard him would run out the house and tried to catch him.

The two security soldiers at Ida was tired of William running through the town.

He was screaming the town’s people.

Laura was no better.

When she finally got up she ran out the back door and ran to Barnes and Waters post and stood in the road and screamed.

The sentries patrolling stopped and look at Laura.

Then they saw William screaming and running up and down the other streets.

Ida’s security soldiers walked to the end of the street to catch William.

They heard someone else and looked up the street and saw the sentries had stopped.

The security soldiers walked in the street to see who the sentries were looking at.

They saw it was Laura.

They knew Clara, Mellissa, Jason and Alice were at school.

The soldier who Laura took a horse to crawled on his hands and knees and around the corner he saw it was Laura.

He stood up and walked down to Laura passing the sentries.

He held Laura while she screamed.

The sentries looked.

One of the sentries said,”They were planning on killing all of us and taking over this town.”

The soldier, holding Laura heard the sentries.

He walked Laura back to her house.

The security soldiers at Ida was distracted for a moment watching Laura.

Before the commanders entered the town.

Skip had the wagon drivers to stop.

He got out the wagon and got his horse and mounted the horse and rode his horse into the town.

The commanders were entering the town with full power and authority.

The troop at the beginning of the town stood and saluted.

The commanders passed Jake’s place, he looked but knew Jake was at the command post.

William was running and screaming up and down the streets.

Skip looked at the young man and said,”Is that William’s son?”

The commanders looked at William.

But did not say anything.

The security soldiers turned from looking at Laura when they turn and was about to catch William, they saw the commanders.

They stopped and saluted.

Skip said to the security soldiers, “Is that Ida’s son?”

The security soldiers said, “Yes.”

Skip said, ”What is wrong with him?”

One of the security soldiers said, “His friend Wes is dead.”

Skip said, “Go and get him and take him to his mother.”

The security soldiers said, “Yes sir.”

William was passing down the street again.

The two soldiers broke and ran behind William and caught him.

Skip had telegrammed Tony to have ten soldiers to meet them to look for the horses.

Skip had telegrammed before he left the headquarters for the ten soldiers to go with them to the command post.

The ten soldiers were riding behind the wagons.

First it was Skip, then the eight commanders, the three wagons and then the ten soldiers.

Skip said, “I don’t hear any screaming did they get him?”

The ten soldiers were watching the two soldiers and said, “Yes sir.”

Skip looked and saw the soldiers standing on the buildings.

He said, “Huh.”

The soldiers were watching the one that went and got Laura and was walking her back home, they did not see the commanders until they were upon them.

The soldiers tried to jump down.

Ship said, “Too late.”

The sentries were still in the road.

They saluted the commanders.

Skip wondered, “Whether Laura was Chester’s future wife.”

Skip looked at the distraught Laura and they rode hard to the command post.

The command post sentries heard the hard riding and rode to the entry of the command post.

Jake knew it was Skip.

He said, “This is a mess.”

The office soldiers looked at Jake.

Jake put the reports in a folder for Skip to review.

A telegram was coming through. The third in command said, sent it that the troop at the lake was mounting to come and kill the prisoners.

Jake said, “Interesting.”

Todd looked at Jake and said, “Interesting, that’s all you can say.”

The other office soldiers tried to stand up.

Jake said, “Boy give me that telegram coming in.”

Todd frowned up and ripped the telegram off the machine.

Skip and the commanders walked into the office.

They knew something was wrong.

Jake read the telegram and said, “Hey ya’ll.”

The office soldiers stood and saluted.

Skip looked around at the soldiers and saw they were about to break, a sign of trouble.

Jake gave Skip the telegram from the third in command of the planned attack.

Skip said, “Interesting.”

Todd jumped up.

Skip looked at Todd and said, “Sit down.”

Skip reached the telegram to Wallace.

The commanders read it.

Adams said, “What? Are they serious.”

Jake said, “Skip.”

He threw Skip a rifle.

Skip checked the rifle.

Foster said, “Sir I check and re-loaded all the guns this morning, because he told me to.”

He rolled his eyes at Jake.

Skip said, “You are suppose to.”

Jake checked his rifle and walked to Skip and said, “Ready.”

The commanders were walking behind Skip.

Skip said, “No.”

They said, “Sir.”

A sentry yelled and said, “We got company.”

Skip said to the sentry, “Come back in the post.”

The sentries looked at Skip.

Jake said telegram the troop at the beginning of the town to come for back up now.”

Todd made a face and mimicked Jake and said, “Now. Now. Now.”

Skip said, “Ole friend are you ready?”

Andrew and Tony were leaving the house to greet the headquarters’ commanders.

They saw dust on the dirt road.

They did not say a word to each other but flew the mile to get to the command post.

Skip saw the dust from the end of the new settlement and wondered who it was.

Jake looked and kept looking at the ninety soldiers that were thundering towards them.

The commanders were watching Skip and Jake.

The telegram machine was running.

Todd pulled the telegram reply.

The troop said they were on the way.

Andrew and Tony outrode the ninety.

Skip pointed and yelled, “Get in the post.”

Andrew and Tony looked at these two old men and an army speeding towards them.

Jake said, “You heard him.”

Andrew and Tony looked at Jake.

Skip said, “That’s Andrew.”

Jake looked at Andrew and said, “He has Shirley’s cheeks.”

Skip looked at Andrew and said, “You’re right. I never saw that before. You are good for something.”

Tony looked and saw the sentries, his soldiers and the other commanders standing back.

He pulled Andrew’s sleeves.

Andrew looked at Skip and said, “Are you crazy?”

Jake was looking at Andrew and said, “Yeap that’s your boy.”

Instantly without any communication.

Completely in synch as if they were one person with one mind and with one goal, Jake and Skip walked out to the dirt road with their rifles up.

The soldiers looked amazed at the oneness.

Andrew had never seen that side of his father.

He and Tony were awestruck.

They watched these two old soldiers stand in the way of death.

Skip said, “Stop.”

The leader of the pack named Greene looked at Skip and his uniform then at Jake with no uniform.

Greene said, “We want the prisoners.”

Skip said, “I am the commander of the military and I say no.”

Greene said, “I don’t care who you are. We want those killers.”

Jake said, “You need to care who he is.”

Skip looked at the private’s name tag and saw his name was Greene and said is Banger desh your uncle?”

The commanders said, “It better not be.”

Greene looked at Skip.

Jake said, “He asked you a question. I am old and don’t have any patience.”

Todd was in the back and mimicking Jake and frowning up and said, “Everything is now.”

Everyone heard Todd.

Todd did not know they heard him.

Jake held the rifle on his shoulder and shot at Todd and hit the kitchen tent.

The shot came within an inch of Todd.

Andrew, Tony, the commanders and everyone else ducked.

Todd fainted.

The soldiers looked at Todd and left him on the ground.

Skip said, “You were the one in the lake fishing and I told to bring me some fish and you disobeyed my order.”

The leader of the pack was the soldier in the lake fishing with his bare hands.

Skip said, “I have been a soldier for many years. I know when you need a break from the battle. But I will not tolerate mutiny.”

Greene said, “No way you know us.”

Andrew was losing patience.

Tony looked at Andrew.

Skip said, “That line made no sense. I know you are some kin to Banger desh Greene, a commander in the military.”

Jake said, “He sent a telegram he will be here tomorrow.”

Skip said, “After I left him in headquarters.”

Skip pointed his rifle and said, “You on the third row far right is Wilson, on the fifth row Gibson, last row Matteson, first row by Greene is Reese, second row Tory, Mitchell on fourth row,”

As Skip called the soldiers names they turned and realized they were surrounded by the other troops.

Greene snickered and said, “You can’t know each of us.”

Jake said, “Mole, Bushnell, Barrick, Gillian, Brookstone, want me to continue?”

Some of the soldiers were peeping to see these old men.

Jake looked at one young soldier, they all were young.

Jake pointed his rifle and said,” Minkshale, in the back do you have an aunt name Octavia in Wild town?”

Andrew frown and shook his head and took his other gun out of the holster.

Tony stepped by Andrew so he could see Minkshale.

The young soldier said, “My momma is Octavia.”

Skip said, “Jake.”

Wallace said, “Damn.”

Tony started snickering and walked passed Andrew to his soldiers.

Andrew was confused.

His mind was on he would shoot the back soldiers down.

Skip said, “Shirley told you to leave Octi along.”

The commanders started laughing.

Private Greene said, “What is all of this about?”

Before the private could take a breath, Jake had his rifle at the young soldier’s neck.

Everyone was shocked how fast and without warning Jake moved.

Skip looked at Jake and knew he was upset and said, “Jake.”

Tony ran up to see what was happening.

He hid behind Skip so he could watch Jake.

Andrew stared at Tony and thought he was crazy too.

Jake said, “Boy you know your daddy’s name?”

The young boy said, “I sure do.”

Jake paused.

Tony raised up a little to see the boy.

Minkshale said, “Major J. Bobo.”

Skip said, “Jake. Oh God.”

The commanders hit the ground laughing.

Joseph and Marc saw the crowd by the beginning of the post but they were guarding the prisoners and could not move.

Jake swallowed and said, “What your daddy do?”

Minkshale lowered his head and said, “Momma said, he was a great soldier who died in a water battle.”

Skip looked at Jake.

Tony looked at Jake.

Commander Adams had to walk up and look Jake in the face.

Andrew did not care he got a baby by who. He had to keep his shooting mindset.

Tony looked at Jake and stood and peeped around Skip at the young man.

Skip said, “Tony move back.”

Tony was so involved in this family problem he forgot his position.

Tony turned and calmly passed Andrew who was rolling his eyes at Tony.

Commander Montgomery said, “Tony.”

Tony said, “Yeap. He looks exactly like Jake.”

Jake said, “Where is your momma?”

Tony stopped talking and turned to walk back.

Skip raised his rifle.

Tony stopped and stood by Andrew.

The boy said, “Momma died when I was five and I was passed from family member to family member. When I reached fifteen I joined the military and it is my family.”

Skip saw Jake mind set change.

Skip looked at the troop behind the soldiers he said, “What you have done today is very grievous. You put all of us in danger to be killed, for what? Revenge. The law is the great revenger. All of you would have been killed today because your masculinity was challenged. I am giving you a one time offer. You can quit, you can go back to your post and have a write up in your file for three years which will stop you from any promotions or you can be court martial. I don’t want to bury you today with the rest of the traitors. Make no mistake I will.”

Jake still had his rifle at Greene’s neck.

Skip watched the young men.

They said, “We’ll go back sir. We apologize. And we will take the write up because we were wrong.”

Skip cut his eyes at Jake.

Tony whispered to Andrew and said, Jake still has the rifle at the boy’s neck.”

Andrew stepped out to the dirt road followed by Tony.

Skip held out his rifle and blocked Tony and Andrew and he walked to Jake and whispered in his ear, “Brother come on you have a chance to make it right.”

Andrew was looking at the young men.

They were looking at Andrew because he had on a commander’s uniform and he was no older than them.

Tony whispered to Andrew, “The one that hair looks like yours.”

Andrew said, “Not possible.”

Andrew looked very cooly and saw the boy.

He eased his eyes to Jake, and he could see the strong chin and cheeks.

Andrew thought, “Now. Talking about my cheeks. What are you going to do about your boy?”

Jake put his rifle down.

Jake and Skip stood back watched the troop escort the soldiers back to the lake area.

Skip and Jake walked back to the post into the office.

Jake reached Skip the folder with his reports.

Skip said, “That was fun.”

Everyone looked at Skip.

Jake said, “those were the days.”

Skip looked at the telegram and said, “This telegram came in just before my afternoon tea.”

Commander Wallace said, “What Skip?”

Skip said, “Commanders Greene, Arnold and Harold are on their way here after I wrote orders for them to stay at headquarters. They say the six commanders caught Donovan. Had a shoot out and received minor injuries. They brought Donovan and his wife and put them in prison. He said, Commanders Bronson, O’Hara and Percy will stay at headquarters because they were slightly injured.”

Commander Adams said, “What about prisoners besides Donovan and his wife.”

Everyone looked at Commander Adams.

Commander Adams said, “You said they had a shoot out.”

Andrew could not stand Adams because he was slow.

Commander Montgomery said, “They killed all of the bad guys and took Donovan and his wife as prisoners.”

Commander Adams looked around at everyone looking at him.

Skip was reading the reports.

He said, “Jake how many caskets do we have?”

Jake said, “Seventeen.”

Skip said, “How many have been out for three days?”

Jake said, “The first ten that were killed at the lake.”

Skip looked at Jake.

Jake looked at Skip and said, “What?”

Skip said, “Where is Wes? There is no mention of Wes.”

Andrew stood and looked at Jake.

Jake said, “He’s not military. I had the soldiers to clean the soldiers and prep them to be embalmed. The ones that were in the freezing new settlement I had them to leave them and embalmed the ten from the lake area and then today after the ten were finished I had them to embalm and dressed the five that were killed on the road outside.”

Skip said, “But where is Wes.”

Jake said, “I left him at the house in an isolated area, where no one will know. We had no information on him. I had him cleaned up and prepped to be embalmed.”

Skip held his head down for a minute.

Andrew watched his father.

Jake saw Skip was in pain and said, “Brother. this will pass.”

Skip slowly raised his head and took a deep breath and said, “I want to see the soldiers.”

Jake said, “Sure.”

Skip stood and he and Jake walked out the office and passed Todd who saluted and was walking back to the office.

Skip had his arm on Jakes’ shoulder.

Jake had his arm on Skip’s shoulder they walked to the tent of the embalmers at the back of the camp.

Jake and Skip were walking and talking.

Andrew and Tony were trying to listen and make out what they were talking about.

Tony said to Andrew, “What did Skip just say?”

Andrew very arrogantly said, “I stopped trying to listen.”

Jake stood back.

Skip and the commanders viewed the bodies of the soldiers.

Skip saw a flag not folded correctly, he walked over and re-folded the flag.

He looked down and saw the personal effects of the soldiers.

He knew Jake had them to bring the soldiers personal items. The military made a decision not to give the soldier’s personal items to the family anymore. He was glad Jake made that decision.

Skip said, “I don’t ever want casualties but they were ready to kill all of us.”

The commanders walked out the embalmer’s tent.

They heard the wagons coming in and saw the caskets on the wagons.

Skip said, “Jake, nice caskets.”

Jake said, “They deserve it.”

Jake looked back at Tony and said, “Tell the embalmers to put the first fifteen soldiers in these.”

Jake said, “Oh sir. I am sorry.”

Skip said, “That’s fine. You are finishing your temporary assignment.”

The commanders were satisfied with Skip’s response to Jake.

Tony walked back in the tent and told them the caskets were there for the first fifteen.

Jake said, “Do you want to see the weapons they snuck in here.”

Skip looked at Jake for a minute and said, “Yes.”

The commanders walked to the weapons tent.

Jake had two soldiers posted outside and two at the back and two inside.

The commanders looked at the battery guns and rifles and guns and all the ammunition.

Commander Montgomery said, “Maybe we should have let that troop kill them.”

Commander Adams said, “Whoa!”

Jake said, “All this has been inventoried. I check these battery guns they came from another source. That maybe a lead.”

Skip said, “Thanks Jake, that’s a good angle.”

The commanders walked out the weapons tent.

Jake looked at the commanders and said, “Keep your guns down.”

Jake opened the tent flap.

The commanders walked in along with Tony, the six drivers and Tony’s ten soldiers.

The woman was tied up in the corner with metal chains.

She was still hissing and trying to spit.

The soldiers stared at her.

They walked over and saw the twenty eight imposters, the fifteen contractors and the forty seven prisoners including the wounded.

Skip thought and said to himself, “Arnold you are not going to kill me with a heart attack. You are coming so you can kill these contractors.”

They walked out the tent.

Skip said,”I need to get these fifteen contractors out of here tonight.”

He looked around and saw Tony’s ten soldiers and said, “Tony can your soldiers leave tonight to take these fifteen contractors to the capitol?”

Tony said, “Yes sir.”

Skip said, “Telegram ten more of your soldiers to meet them and helped drive. We will put them in the two supply wagons we brought. No stopping only for the horses. Tell your men don’t stop for any commanders.”

Tony said, “Yes sir.”

He walked to his ten soldiers and gave them their mission.

Skip was passing by them and said, “Give them five days off. Even if they go back to the camp. Leave the two supply wagons at headquarters. They have to take their horses.”

The soldiers quickly unloaded the supply wagons.

They went into the prisoners’ tent and picked the fifteen contractors and put them in the two supply wagons.

The cook gave them food and the soldiers filled the water container from the water barrel.

The soldiers left in less than two hours.

Skip sat down and said, “Andrew go to the brook and bring me Captain White.”

The commanders knew, “Everyone considered White as lazy.”

Skip said, “He has three dead soldiers. The report said, They heard all the shooting and got a battery gun found in the sergeant’s tent and pursued after the four hundred assassins and shot them down from behind and they were shot by the female.”

Commanders Wallace and Montgomery said, “Medals.”

Skip said, “I agree.”

He looked at Montgomery and said, “Did you bring all of your stuff?”

Commander Montgomery said,”Sadly yes.”

Skip finished writing his orders for the medals and handed it to Montgomery.

Skip said, “Soldiers Barnes and Waters were telling the sentries not to line across the street, as in the protocol book, but to take cover. They ran on foot and shoot many assassins.”

Andrew was flying down the street and passed Jake’s house and turned and went to the brook.

Skip said, “That protocol book again. Wallace did you and Greene find out who wrote it?”

Wallace said, “Yes. That’s a mess.”

Everyone looked at him.

Skip said, “Barnes and Waters were Bruce and Chester’s soldiers. I speak for them and say medals for Waters and Barnes.”

He wrote the orders and gave them to Montgomery.

Skip went through each of the twenty six dead soldiers and gave them all medals and honors.

The commanders clapped when they had finished.

The office soldiers were glad the soldiers got medals and honors and they all clapped with the commanders.

Skip said, “I need to get that troop at lake out of here for at least a week so we can work and not be concern about a coup.”

Skip was filing out the pension papers for the twenty six soldiers.

Jake was sitting over in the corner.

Jake had placed the telegram from the soldier’s families in a separate folder for each soldier.

Jake said, “Sir, can I say something?”

Skip looked up from the last pension form and reached it to Foster.

Skip looked and saw Andrew walking in the door with a tied and gaged Captain White.

He said, “Commander Andrew did you do that?’

Andrew said, “No. The soldiers did not want me to untie him there and we needed to get back here.”

He walked Captain White to a chair in front of Skip.

Andrew turned to walk away.

Skip said, “Untie him.”

Andrew looked at Skip and then Captain White.

He walked back to Captain White and untie him and removed the gaged.

Captain White said, “Water.”

Skip looked at Todd.

Got up and walked to the water barrel and filled a glass of water and walked back and handed it to Captain White.

Skip waited until Captain White was satisfied.

He put his glass on Skip’s desk.

Jake looked.

Skip said, Captain White, what happened three days ago.”

Captain White said, “I want that Sergeant Pearson to be court martial and be kicked out the military or at the very least be demoted.”

Skip said, “Why?”

Captain White said, “Look at this…”

He pointed to his ties.

Skip said, “That is not a reason to request punishment as severe as you are requesting.”

Captain White said, “He is a beast.”

Tony was listening and he knew Sergeant Pearson was mixed blood. He was listening to see if that what was driving Captain White.”

Andrew was listening to hear what White was really saying.

Skip said, “Captain White, you did not ask about your troop. You did not ask about their welfare. You did not ask about if any of them were injured or dead.”

Captain White sat and looked at Skip.

Skip said, “Captain White I believe in my soldiers. The color of blood is the same. When a soldier dies for us his blood is not black or white it is red.”

Captain White did not say anything.

Tony stood and watched Captain White.

Skip said, “Captain White you are a disgrace to me.”

Commanders Wallace said, “To us.”

Captain White looked at them.

Skip said, “I can’t teach you humanitarianism. But you won’t be payed for being a bigot. I exert my full authority as the commander of the entire military. I demote you to a sergeant first class. I will place this reprimand in your permanent file. You will not be considered for any promotions or any assignments. You can either accept this demotion or submit your resignation.”

Captain White was shocked.

Skip pushed the form in front of him.

Captain White said, “You had this ready. You had made up your mind about me.”

Skip was cold blooded and said, “Your decision sir?”

Captain White said, “I have a wife and children to support. Where would I be stationed?”

He was signing the demotion papers.

Skip said,”With Captain Tony in Pikeville.”

Tony was leaning on some file cabinets and he stood up and said, “Sir.”

Andrew looked at Tony.

He had never heard Tony’s defiant tone.

Skip was kind of surprise at Tony’s tone.

Skip said, “There were only two choices you or Chester.”

Tony said, “Sir, I believe Chester’s troop will be more fitting for him.”

Captain White turned and looked at Tony.

Tony gave Captain White a look that caused him to shudder.

The commanders looked because they knew Tony’s troop was half black and half white.

Skip looked at Tony and he said, “Fine. White pack up and move to the new settlement now. And report to the third in command.”

Captain White finished signing the papers and stood and saluted.

He was walking to exit, he slowed and looked at Tony.

Tony braced and stared at him.

Sergeant White walked out.

Andrew looked at Tony and the commanders looked at Tony.

They heard Sergeant White ride out of the post.

Jake said, “Can I ask you a question kip?”

Skip said, “Yes.”

He was steaming looking at Tony.

Jake said, “Why did you make the decision to what White with Tony?”

Skip said, “Because her has four small children and he would be closer to his home in Alberton. And Tony’s troop is half and half. Half black and half white. He would have to learn to get alone.”

Jake said, “Can I ask Tony a question Skip?”

Skip looked at Jake and said, “Yes.”

Skip was very angry with Tony.

Tony looked at Jake.

Jake said, “Why did you do that? Disobeyed an order from your commander?”

Tony said, “Sir, Skip knows I do not disobey anything he tells me to do. But I did not want that type of person to be that close to me everyday.”

Jake said, “Why?’

Tony said, “Because my wife is black and I have two mixed blood boys that are catching hell in this country. I don’t want anyone around me that thinks they have a right to mis- treat and abuse a black person because of the color of their skin.”

Andrew sat and thought about the stories told of her grandmother Brenda who was black.

Andrew did not know any of Tony’s personal business. He knew he was married, but he did not know he was married to a black woman with mixed blooded boys.

Andrew looked at Tony.

Tony looked at Andrew.

The commanders shook their heads that they understood.

The office soldiers looked at blonde hair green eyes Tony and said, “Whoa.”

Tony said, “Sir, I apologize to you for being disobedient.”

Andrew stared at Tony.

Tony stared at Andrew.

Skip was wondering why Andrew was staring at Tony.

Skip’s anger was slowly being removed.

He understood that no father wants their child to label and abuse.

Andrew said to Tony, ”You married somebody you truly loved and you knew the consequences would hurt you but the love you have is greater than the pain of the consequences of other people’s hatred?”

Skip looked at Andrew.

Tony said, “Yes.”

Andrew turned his head like he was really thinking.

Tony turned and saluted and was about to walk out.

Jake was thinking about his son he saw earlier.

Octavia’s grandmother was black.

Shirley told Jake to leave Octavia not because of her blood but she was using Jake for his money.

Jake was in deep thought.

The commanders looked at each other.

Skip said to Tony, “You are not dismissed. You have to learn that you can’t walk out when you are angry but work out a solution.”

Tony stood still and looked at Skip.

Skip said, “Tony I am not against you. I am a father and have two boys. I had help with my sons, I did not have the problem you and your sons will face. This is a whole new world we have to face with the abolishment of slavery. We can’t do anything about people’s heart only their actions. I am sorry for me not understanding the problems you face.”

Jake said, “Sir, can I say something?”

Skip said, “Yes.”

Jake said, “The military is becoming more and more mixed, because the black men can’t find work. Can Tony, that’s if he agrees…”

Tony stared at Jake…

Jake continued, “…teach a class at headquarters about being civil. Respect, and honor all of that a person has to have. But to teach them about being civil on government property is different.”

Todd was shaking his head for yes.

Skip saw him.

Skip leaned forward and said to Todd, “We have unfinished business.”

Todd turned and looked at Skip.

Skip sat and looked at Todd.

Skip said to Tony, “If you want to teach tolerance, I will agree to that. Because I am getting more and more complaints about racism. Adams is the Commander over the written course work curriculum. I looked at Sergeant White’s soldier write ups. He only wrote the black soldiers up, every day. One he wrote up and it was the wrong person, Sergeant White said, he did not care, because they all looked the same. His troop had a large number of Ku Klux Klan. We just can’t let that grow, we have to contain it. We don’t change people’s heart, that God’s business. What they do on their time is their business. When they clock in with us it is our time and the hate will not be tolerated.”

Tony said, “Sir I will think about it.”

Skip said, “Thank you.”

Skip said, “Jake you were about to say something before the Captain White issue.”

Jake said, “The fifteen soldiers need to leave tonight.”

Skip said, “Yes. I agree.”

Jake said, “I did not have time to finish the other eleven soldiers’ transportation.”

Jake said, “One is in Pikeville, two in Alberton, Five in the capitol, one in the big city and the other six are in Weston and Huntington. That’s six different cities. Can you get thirty soldiers out of that rebellious lake area to take the soldiers home. That leaves sixty of them there. It will give all of them time to think about their actions. The other eleven soldiers I did not finished where they lived. Someone else can complete that and divide the cities up and it maybe a good idea to have a commander to escort the soldiers’ home and give their personal effects to their family.”

Andrew thought, “Mattie.”

Andrew said, “Excellent Idea. I can do the big city and be back to help with Wes.”

Skip said, “So when the other six commanders get here they can go out to the remaining cities.”

Commander Montgomery said, “I can attend the two soldiers’ funerals in Alberton.”

Commander Whatley said, “Weston is my hometown and then I can go back to the headquarters until we go and find out about the horses.”

Skip said, “Wallace can you attend the funerals in Huntington and then go back to the headquarters?”

Wallace said, “Well I wanted to be here to help investigate...”

Skip looked at Wallace.

Wallace saw Skip’s look and said, “…, but I will go to Huntington and then to the capitol. I can attend the funeral of the five soldiers from the capitol.”

Skip said, “Thank you.”

Andrew and Tony snickered.

Jake looked at them.

Skip was writing down everything.

He said, “That gives us three commanders back in headquarters and the three that are there. That is enough to cover the funerals in the capitol.”

Skip said, “Adams, you take Pikeville which is the next city. You will get there tomorrow. Have the beneficiaries to sign the benefit papers. It sound gross, but that will cut down about six months of them waiting for the payment of the benefit checks.”

Jake said, “So the bodies we have identified all a map, a key and a pentagram tattoo. With the number of assassins’ they brought and the weapons, they planned to kill us all and take over the town, but why?”

Commander Wallace, “The railroad.”

Skip said, “We got to that point. When we get answers to some more questions’ we can put more of the puzzle together.”

Andrew said, “Tony let’s go and get something to eat. I haven’t eaten in about four days.”

They waited until Skip dismissed them.

Skip kept looking over some papers.

He said, “I need to get all those prisoners out tonight and on their way to the capitol. I just got a funny feeling.”

Andrew and Tony looked.

Skip said, “How many prisoners at the brook?”

Wallace said, “Three.”

Skip said, “There were ten wagons here. Two wagons to take the fifteen contractors to the capitol. And eight to transport the soldiers’ home. Foster how many wagons are at Chester’s troop?”

Foster ran and got the inventory book and opened it and flipped to Chester’s troop’s inventory.

Foster thought he did a great job.

He looked up all the commanders and Tony were looking at him.

Foster said, “Chester’s troop has four covered wagons.”

Skip looked at Foster and said,“Did you notice how Commander Wallace knew how many prisoners were at the brook, without looking at a piece of paper. You need to know your territory. And when it changed you need to know. Todd send them a telegram to send the four covered wagon and fifty heavily armed guards.”

Skip said, “I counted five covered wagons the other day.”

Everybody looked at Foster.

Skip said, “Todd send a telegram to send the five covered wagons and fifty heavily armed soldiers to transport to the capitol.”

Jake said, “Skip?”

Andrew and Tony looked at Jake.

Skip said, “The two soldiers that shoot Bishop and Harold they were never found is that right.”

Tony looked.

Foster said, “No we haven’t found them.”

Skip said, “Telegram the troop at the beginning of the town to have fifty heavily armed soldiers to transport.”

Commander Whatley said, “I saw a covered wagon when we passed them today.”

Skip said, “I saw the wagons to. Todd send a telegram for them to send fifty heavily armed guards.

And to bring the covered wagons, but to pick up the three prisoners from the brook.”

Skip kept flipping through the reports.

Andrew was looking because he wanted to eat and check on Betsy and get some sleep and leave early the next morning.

The cooks rushed and gave the drivers food bags and the drivers filled up their water containers.

The cooks knew they had to cook a lot of food because of the great amount of activities.

Skip knew they needed food for the soldiers they brought two supply wagons of food.

The cooks were cooking fast. They were cooking rice and beans and corn bread, biscuits, hams and fried chicken, veal and pork chops. They packed bags of fruits of apples and oranges.

Skip said, “Todd you and Foster get every prisoner’s information folder and give it to me. Foster send a telegram to headquarters that the fifteen contractors are on their way to go directly to prison and we are sending forty seven more. Tell headquarters to send five covered wagons now. I need to get rid of the rest of the twenty eight false soldiers fast.”

Todd said, “Yes sir.”

Skip looked at Todd because Skip said, “Now and Todd did react to Skip saying now but only when Jake say it.

Commander was given the telegram and ran downstairs and had had ten drivers and five covered wagons sent out immediately.

The ten soldiers went to the supply room and got their food an loaded their water containers.

The five wagons left in an hour.

Commander O’Hara thought, “I should have sent an extra driver.”

He looked out the window and saw the wagons pulling out of headquarters.

O’Hara said, “Bad decision on my part.”

He sent a telegram to the governor’s lead security man and told him of the prisoners.

Skip said, “Dismissed.
Andrew and Tony saluted and ran to the dining tent.

They got and sat down and ate.

Andrew picked up a bag of food for his travel.

He walked over to his father and said, “Sir. Excuse me. While I am going to the big city is there anything I need to get for Wes?”

Skip said, “No.”

Andrew was walking away, Skip said, “How is Betsy and is Emma there to help?”

Andrew rolled his eyes and walked out.

Tony was standing at the door because he did not want to say anything else to Skip.

It was first dark.

But Tony and Andrew saw the wagons leaving.

They stopped and saluted the wagons as they passed.

They got on their horses and rode back to the house.

They checked on the soldiers.

They saw Wes body very carefully covered.

Tony and Andrew check on the patients.

Emma was leaving.

She spent good time with Bruce.

She helped Dr. Obersteen by getting their food. and helping clean the tent.

Emma brought Chester his hot water for his evening washing.

Emma got up that morning and gave Joshua his hot water and clean cloth.

Dr. Obersteen bathed Angelica and put the herb paste on her back and legs and gave her the physical therapy, which she screamed.

Chester and Adam could not stand to hear Angelica scream.

Dr. Obersteen walked into the tent.

Chester said, “Dr. Obersteen I am freezing. And you need some help.”

Dr. Obersteen said, “I have been thinking.”

Dr. Obersteen was used to sleeping in the warm room.

Chester said, “Doc I will sleep in the house and you can sleep in the room so you can hear your patients. I will help you move this cot.”

Tony walked in the tent and he looked at Newsom and Bruce.

Chester jumped off the cot to help Dr. Obersteen move it into the room.

Tony said, “No Chester move.”

Tony helped Dr. Obersteen move Chester’s cot to the warm room.

That meant Dr. Obersteen was back on the floor in the freezing tent.

Tony told Chester about his tiff with Skip.

Tony pulled off his boots and his coat and got a blanket and a pillow and went solidly asleep.

Emma was working between the house, Betsy’s tent and the governor’s tent.

She slept in the house with Joshua and Angelica.

Emma thought about Mattie through the day. But she allowed work to take over her mind so she would not have to think.

Andrew went to Betsy’s tent and sat with her and had the cook to bring a little soup.

He fed Betsy’s soup and he held her until she went to sleep.

Andrew saw the paper with Wes information on it.

Andrew was going to sleep.

He pulled out his mat by Betsy’s tent.

He gave the information to Danny for him to send a telegram to Wes’ family.

A telegram came for Wes to tell him his father died the same day he did of a heart attack.

Danny walked into the office and saluted Skip.

He said, “Andrew told me to send a telegram to Wes’ father about his death.”

Skip said, “This telegram was just received that Wes’ father died the morning of the day Wes died.”

Danny said, “What to do?”

Skip said, “Send the telegram and asked if there is a family cemetery or if that person knows of any established burial plan for Wes.”

Danny sent the telegram and took the piece of paper.

Skip said, “Good night.”

He walked to his covered wagon and climb up in the wagon and pulled off his shoes and coat.

Skip said, “a short prayer and was thinking about Wes and said, “If Betsy was not pregnant with his twins. That family would not exist anymore.”

Skip fell asleep.

Jake went home and put the horses in the back yard.

He went into his house and looked around and started his fires.

He sat in the living room and fell asleep.

William was back to himself.

The sting of the shock of death was gone and he slept all afternoon into the night.

Laura told Clara she had to take Barnes and Water’s kin their bags and instructions.

Sergeant White rode out of his troop, passed Jake to the new settlement.