

LAST GHOST AT GETTYSBURG

A T.J. JACKSON MYSTERY



PAUL FERRANTE

Last Ghost at Gettysburg
A T.J. Jackson Mystery
by Paul Ferrante

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Table of Contents

[Dedication](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

["Last Ghost at Gettysburg"](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Chapter Fourteen](#)

[Chapter Fifteen](#)

[Chapter Sixteen](#)

[Chapter Seventeen](#)

[Chapter Eighteen](#)

[Chapter Nineteen](#)

[Chapter Twenty](#)

[Chapter Twenty-One](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Two](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Three](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Four](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Five](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Six](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Seven](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Eight](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Nine](#)

[Chapter Thirty](#)

[Chapter Thirty-One](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Two](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Three](#)

[Authors Note](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Previews](#)

*For Maria
who believed
And Caroline
who dreams*

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Last Ghost at Gettysburg

Paul Ferrante

High school freshman T.J. Jackson thinks his summer will be a drag when his widowed dad dumps him off for a vacation with his Uncle Mike, a park ranger at the Gettysburg National Battlefield, Aunt Terri, and his geeky adopted cousin LouAnne.

But T.J. is in for a few surprises. For starters, Gettysburg isn't the boring Civil War town he expected. A ghostly Confederate cavalier has been terrorizing nightly visitors to the

battlefield. And LouAnne isn't so geeky anymore—she's become a sassy beauty who leaves him breathless.

Things escalate when the cousins, aided by T.J.'s quirky friend Bortnicker from back home in Connecticut—who also has his eye on the lovely LouAnne—attempt to solve a murder mystery that has the local police, park rangers and paranormal investigators in a panic. Because how do you stop an undead killer from 1863 from wreaking havoc in the 21st Century?

Prologue

It was dark in the cemetery, especially when the full moon ducked behind the gray, patchy, late-spring clouds. Storm clouds. But Lenny Moziak and Brian Murphy didn't mind in the least. No, although it was past midnight and the cemetery had been officially closed since dusk, they were deep within the labyrinth of tombstones that constituted the national burial ground, removed from any interference by patrolling police or park rangers. Markers and monuments were everywhere, from elaborate angels and crosses to simple marble and granite

obelisks to white squares marked “unknown” set in the finely manicured turf in sweeping semicircles. And of course, there were the cannon and military plaques that noted the spots from which artillery gunners had sent cannonballs soaring into Confederate infantrymen on Day Three.

A weird place for a party. But that just made it funkier for these midnight ramblers, who’d just seen their first year—a complete disaster—end at Gettysburg College. Although they would probably be thrown out when report cards came back, Lenny and Brian were in a festive mood. The plan was to pack up Murph’s old van and boogie down to Florida for a few weeks of

R&R and then play it by ear. Like everything the boys did, it was Lenny's idea. Murph was little more than his wingman, but happily accepted his role. Tonight was a night for kicking back and mapping it out—and for getting stinking drunk.

“I must say, Murph, we've got style,” giggled Lenny as he swigged from a bottle of Jack Daniels. “On this hallowed ground, which has spawned the institution from which we are flunking, we do find this truth to be self-evident: Every man has the God-given right to party hearty!”

“No question, Homes,” said Murphy, lighting a Marlboro.

Lenny handed the bottle to Brian, who drank deeply. He looked around, shaking his head. “Lotta residents here, man.”

“Yeah,” replied Murph, running a hand through his shoulder-length kinky hair. “And d’ya know what the spooky thing is? Nobody even knows who a lot of ‘em are. Lookit this one here.” He pointed to a marker between his outstretched legs. “‘Unknown.’ That’s it, man. Great way to end up. A brick in the ground. Not me, man, no way. If the Prez doesn’t end this war in Afghanistan, I’m booking. Canada, Mexico, it don’t matter. I’m history.”

“I concur.” Lenny nodded, his blond

ponytail bobbing behind him. “Hey, how are we stocked for beverages?”

“Enough to get us down to Daytona, son.”

They passed the bottle back and forth, occasionally emitting a loud belch. Time passed. 12:45 A.M. became 1:30 A.M.

Murph was draining the last of the amber liquid when he heard—or felt—a pounding noise. Far off. Rhythmic. It lasted fifteen seconds, twenty seconds then stopped. Their gazes met.

“Lenny, you hear that?”

“What?”

“That sound. You mean you didn’t hear it?”

“No.” But he had heard. Murph could

tell.

“Lenny, let’s boogie.”

“C’mon, Murph, let me finish this cigarette, at least. Just keep quiet. It’s only police or park rangers patrolling, and we’re a ways from any of the paths. They won’t drive in here.”

“That wasn’t no car, Lenny.”

“Listen, numbskull, I—”

Hoof beats. Strong, then fading out. Then coming closer. Borne on the wind that blew the clouds which obscured the moon, blacking out the cemetery. Although the revelers were only a few feet apart, the glowing ember of Lenny’s cigarette was the only visible thing in the area.

“You there, compadre?” Murph’s voice was a little shaky now.

“Yeah. I think we’ve partaken a bit too deeply of the demon rum.” He was speaking in a dramatic baritone but it was a weak attempt at humor. He was scared stiff. “How far to the van, Murph?”

“About a hundred yards away, near the cemetery entrance. Man, it’s dark.”

“Well,” said Lenny, starting to push himself upright, “I say it’s about time we ease on down the road and—”

“Halt!” A voice, no more than a few feet away. Guttural. Threatening. “Who goes there?”

All Lenny could manage was a

feeble, “What the—” That was when the smell hit him, a sweetly putrid stench carried on the wind that brought him back to a childhood incident, the time he’d found a dead squirrel in the hollow of the big oak tree in his backyard. It was in the advanced stages of decay, crawling with maggots. Lenny, who not for a few years would adopt his angry cynicism and general disregard for life, had begun to cry for the poor dead animal. A sudden flash came to him, jolted him back. It was the image of himself decaying, the whitish slugs roiling within his flesh. He squinted, hard, but could see no one.

“State your name and regiment.” The voice, distinctly Southern, directly in

front of them now.

“What—who’s there?” burbled Murph, trying to rise.

“Sit down and identify yourselves!”

The two boys plopped down immediately, like they’d fallen through a trap door. Then the clouds parted and they were struck rock-rigid.

The man, or apparition, loomed over them, bathed in moonlight. He stood at least six feet in his knee-high black boots, which were mud-spattered and spurred. Though his uniform was gray it appeared off-white in the moon glow. The breeches he wore had a smart yellow stripe down the side; the tunic, with two rows of vertical brass buttons

across the chest, was nothing short of beautiful. Stained white gauntlets led to gold braid, which curled up his forearms to the elbows. The high collar displayed a gold star. A saber hung from his thick leather belt, its scabbard inlaid with intricate designs. But two things in particular stood out, riveting the boys' attention.

The first was the man's face, framed by shoulder-length black ringlets of hair. His beard and mustache were well-trimmed and highlighted striking, almost feminine features. The eyes, though, those eyes! They bore into the young men, black and hard and intense. The plumed black slouch hat that failed to obscure them seemed out of place. In

fact, the entire uniform was almost comically theatrical—but the eyes made it all credible. The other thing that made it credible was the pistol.

Held at arm's length, it was no more than two feet from the teens. To Murph, it seemed like a cannon, and indeed, the Colt .44 was a formidable weapon. Nearly a foot long, this 1860 army piece, standard cavalry issue, was deadly at close range, and though Lenny and Brian knew nothing about firearms, they did know they were in deep trouble.

“State your business here.”

Lenny tried desperately to down-shift his addled mind out of overdrive and get them out of this mess. This...person had

confronted them, gun in hand, gold braid all over...Southern accent... Hey, he had no more right being there than they did, but why did he seem like he belonged? Oh man, why did they have to come here? They weren't supposed to be in the park after dark and this maniac was gonna make them regret it. He cleared his throat and croaked, "We don't want no trouble, man. What are you, anyway? One of those reenactor dudes? 'Cause if you are—"

"State your business here." Cold. Uncompromising.

"Please don't kill us!" wailed Brian. Lenny's head snapped around.

"Shut up!" he hissed. But it was out. Lenny felt the lukewarm spread of

wetness on his thighs. Murph began to cry.

“I’ll not ask you again,” the man said in perfectly measured tone. “Tell me why you are here.”

Lenny swallowed hard. “We’re partyin’, man.”

“Please explain, suh.”

“You know, drinkin’. Kickin’ back. Listen, if you let us go we’ll never come —”

“You desecrate this soil.” The words came in a snarl.

“Hey, now, wait a second, man,” Lenny whined, desperately trying to scramble to his feet.

The muzzle of the Colt was no more

than twelve inches from his head when it went off with a thunderous BOOM. Murph gasped, hysterical. "Please, please d-don't nonono!" he babbled, hands crossed in front of his face like a battered boxer.

"You leave me no choice. I am sorry." And with that, the party was over.

The soldier turned on his heel, strode to a clump of trees. "Brutus," he called softly. A horse appeared, purple-black, save for a white triangle between its eyes. He reared and his nostrils flared.

"Easy, easy old friend," the soldier whispered, soothing the powerful steed. He grabbed the pommel of the saddle and effortlessly mounted. The sound of a

motor came to him on the wind. There would be more of them, and soon. No time for the dead. Must leave now. Duty done tonight. He spurred the horse and galloped off along Cemetery Ridge toward Little Round Top and the cover of heavy woods. Halfway there, he faded out completely.

* * * *

Patrolman Rudy Herzog was jolted from his fragile catnap by the first explosion. Shaking the cobwebs quickly from his mind, he clearly heard the scream and the second shot, like the M-80s he used to light off as a kid. Rudy fumbled for the ignition, at the same time raising HQ on the radio. He was glad

Vic Spence had desk duty tonight. Spence was a thirteen-year veteran and would know what to do. “Central, central, we have a disturbance in the cemetery. I’m investigating, over.”

“Where are you, Rudy?”

“Near the Codori Farm off the Emmitsburg Road. Over.”

“Rudy, any idea what it could be? Do you need backup? Over.”

By now Herzog was speeding in the direction of the noises, his lights flashing. “Oh, yeah, I need backup. I heard two shots, louder’n all get-out, Spence. Like...CANNON, man!”

“Okay, okay, Rudy. Stay calm. Maybe it’s just some knucklehead tourists. Proceed cautiously. Keep in

constant touch. Reggie Peterson is clear on the other side of the park. I'll get him over to you pronto. Over."

Rudy stepped on the gas and took off along the twisting one-lane road that meandered through the ten square miles of Gettysburg Battlefield Park, past muted parrot guns and memorials, stone walls and Virginia fences, fields of flowing wheat once trampled flat under the heels of men at war. He reached the cemetery from the rear entrance, the familiar 1800s archway flying by. Heart racing, he jumped out, barely taking the time to put the cruiser in park, and pulled his Glock. He'd never been so scared in his life. Four years on the

force and the only thing that had ever happened were a few rowdy disturbances in frat houses on the nearby college campus. That and the typical nonsense involving the days surrounding the annual commemoration of the battle, when tourists and reenactors swelled the town's population enormously and anyone who was not directly involved with the festivities or the town's commerce went on a cruise or to the Jersey Shore. Rudy flicked on his high beam flashlight and crept among the gravestones, finally making out two sack-like forms that were strewn across military grave markers. He knew at once they were dead. But still, he had to look. It was his job.

Herzog reached Lenny Moziak first and turned the light full on his face...except there wasn't much left. He sank to his knees and vomited, again and again, until he was retching air. He barely heard the car radio crackle to life.

“Rudy? Rudy! What’s out there? Come in, Rudy!”

Herzog staggered to his feet, cast a quick glance at the other corpse (no reason for examination there) and stumbled to the cruiser. Breathless, weak and nearly blacking out, he clutched the mike. Depressed the button. “Vic, this is Rudy. Over.”

“Rudy, what the devil’s going *on*

over there? Over!”

“Two kids...teenagers...male Caucasian, dead.”

“You sure?”

“Spence, they have no faces! Their faces are shot away! Get somebody OUT here, now!”

“Okay, sit tight. Peterson is on the way. It’s gonna be all right, Rudy. Just stay cool. Over.”

Spence sat back, exhaled deeply. What in the Sam Hill had Herzog run into out there? He was an excitable kid, sure...rah-rah high school football star a few years back...but this was unlike anything Spence had heard of in all his years on the force. Not ever. He looked at the wall clock. Two-twenty in the

AM. “Ah, jeez,” he sighed, and dialed up the chief’s home number.

Chapter One

“I can’t believe this is happening.”

T.J. Jackson sat on the edge of the couch, slumped over, head in his hands, elbows propped on knees. “How could you do this to me?” When T.J. raised his head, he knew his blue eyes were red rimmed and his longish brown hair was fanned out in all directions from running his hands through it.

“Son, you’ve got to cut me some slack here,” said the man who sat in a chair facing the boy. “I have a chance to begin a new chapter in my life. I know you don’t particularly care for Wendy —”

“C’mon, Dad, she’s young enough to be your daughter!” T.J. blurted.

Tom Jackson, Sr., undeterred, continued, “Our age difference isn’t what’s important here, T.J. What’s important is that I begin living again. It’s been three years since your mom passed and I’m, well, lonely.”

“But we get along fine!”

“That we do, but you’re old enough to understand that a man needs female companionship. And I also believe you want your old man to be happy. Don’t you, son?”

“But *Paris*? You have to take her to *Paris* for the summer?”

The senior Jackson sighed, running

his hand through his stylishly cut gray hair—which, by the way, was looking a little darker lately, his son noticed. “T.J., we’ve been over this. I have a great opportunity to design a state-of-the-art shopping complex that will open up new opportunities for my company worldwide. The Paris people want me to oversee the early stages of the project before I hand it off to their reps. Wendy is merely coming along so we can get to know each other better. And you told me you would have no interest in going. Am I right?”

“What would I do all day, Dad? Throw on a beret and paint sidewalk scenes? Eat croissants at some chic bistro?”

“Exactly. Which is why I’ve arranged for you to spend the summer at your Uncle Mike’s in Pennsylvania. Fresh air and home cooked food!”

“Yeah, but I’ll still miss captain’s practice for cross country. You know I want to make the team as a freshman next year. I’ll have no shot if I’m away all summer.”

“T.J., you’ll have miles and miles of quiet country to run through, and I’ll tell you what. I’ll call Coach Autieri over at the high school and explain the situation. I’ll tell him you’ll be training on your own and to send over a workout program. That way he’ll remember your name come fall.

“Son, you’ve gotta help me out here. You know Uncle Mike and Aunt Terri would love to have you, and you’ll get to spend some time with your cousin LouAnne—”

“Who’s not even my cousin!” T.J. hissed, grasping at straws.

“Whoa, c’mon, that’s not fair. True, she’s adopted, but Uncle Mike’s raised her like his own since she was a baby. You guys are around the same age. You can hang out.”

“And do what? Milk cows? Plow the fields? While you two are gallivanting around the Eiffel Tower?”

“One question, T.J. Have I tried my best to give you a good life? You live in

a huge house with every possible convenience. The two of us do loads of stuff together. I let your friends come and go every weekend. But now I need you to do this for me. I don't ask for much, son."

T.J. was dead in the water and he knew it. His father *was* the best guy in the world, and had worked his butt off to make a good life for them after Mom had died from ovarian cancer.

"Okay," he muttered. "This one time."

His father came over, sat beside him and draped an arm around his shoulders. T.J. could smell his Cool Water aftershave. "I'll be back before you know it. Thanks, son," he whispered.

Now both of them were crying.

Chapter Two

“As *The Dan* once said, ‘you’re looking bad, my funky one. Has your superfine mind come undone?’”

“You could say that,” said T.J., rummaging through his dresser.

“What I wouldn’t give to trade places with you, ya lucky dog,” Bortnicker said with a sigh as T.J. tossed a pair of athletic socks into his suitcase. “I mean, a whole summer to explore Gettysburg! You’ve stepped into it, man.”

“Yeah, well, I’ve stepped into *something*.” T.J. looked across the room to where Bortnicker perched on his

haunches atop T.J.'s computer desk chair. That was just one of Bortnicker's quirks. He didn't sit. He perched. Like some squirrel up a tree. Or maybe an owl, with those Coke-bottle glasses and scraggly, unkempt hair that drooped into his eyes. No, wait. He was too skinny to be an owl. What was he, then?

A guy so weird that the nerds at school wouldn't even hang out with him. Who didn't watch TV at all except for the History Channel. Whose sole hobby was his humongous model train set. Who quoted obscure lyrics from Steely Dan songs to fit every conceivable occasion.

As neighbors from across the street since they were toddlers, T.J. and Bortnicker had grown up together, if you

could call it that. Bortnicker was floating somewhere between perpetual childhood and senior citizen sensibility. The guys at school ragged on T.J. for being his friend. Girls mouthed, “He’s s o *weird*,” behind his back. Teachers would either sigh with exasperation or rolled their eyes when Bortnicker went off on one of his tangents in class. He was at his most deadly in social studies, where he relished debating virtually every point the teacher made. This past year had been especially trying, with Mr. O’Neill literally cringing every time Bortnicker’s hand shot up and he uttered his dreaded prologue, “I have TWO questions.” To T.J., whose personality

was so reserved that it bordered on timid, Bortnicker could be flat out uncomfortable to be around.

But it was Bortnicker who had talked him down from the ledge when T.J.'s mom had been diagnosed, and then died, all within a hellish six months. Bortnicker's own parents had split when he was only two. He lived with his mom, Pippa, who counseled upscale housewives in converting their homes into harmonious havens of feng shui. And they paid her big bucks for this! In fact, if Bortnicker wasn't happily accompanying her on a weeklong feng shui seminar in Boston the next few days, T.J. had actually considered staying with him for the summer, to

which Bortnicker would have gratefully agreed.

“So when do you leave?” asked Bortnicker, cleaning his fingernails with T.J.’s letter opener. Yuck.

“Tomorrow. Dad and *Wendy* are driving me down to my Uncle Mike’s, dropping me off, and flying to Paris out of Philly.”

“How many hours from here?”

“’Bout five or so from Fairfield.”

“Wait a minute!” shouted Bortnicker. He frantically plopped down onto the chair and his fingers flew over the computer keyboard. “Yep,” he said with satisfaction, “Just as I thought. I *love* MapQuest!”

“What?”

“Well, if you take the Merritt Parkway south, cross the New York border and pick up 287 West, go over the Tappan Zee Bridge to Jersey, take the Garden State Parkway to the Jersey Pike to the Penn Pike, you’ll pass through Lancaster County on the way!”

“So?”

“The Strasburg Train Museum’s there! One of the best model train exhibits in the world!”

“I think I’ll pass on that. Besides, Dad and *Wendy* have a plane to catch. I’m wondering if they’re even gonna stop the car to drop me off at my uncle’s or just open the door and push me out.”

“You’re being too harsh, Big Mon. You just don’t realize what a great opportunity this is. And what did you say your uncle does down there?”

“He’s a ranger at the Battlefield Park.”

“Too cool! You’ll have the run of the place.” He raised an eyebrow. “And wasn’t there the mention of a young female?”

“You mean my cousin, LouAnne? Please. I haven’t seen her since Mom’s funeral, but I can tell you, she’s about as geeky as—” He stopped short, aware of his face reddening.

“As me? As geeky as *me*, T.J.?”

“Nah, man. That’s not where I was

going.”

“It’s okay. I just have this feeling that you’re gonna have a great time. Remember to bring your laptop so we can stay in touch. Hey, did you know that in the Battle of Gettysburg the Confederate Army approached from the north and the Union Army from the south?

“How could you possibly know that?”

“*Civil War Journal*. Great show.”

T.J. filled his cheeks with air, blew them out. Tossed a pair of track shorts in his suitcase. “This is gonna *really* suck,” he muttered.

Bortnicker shook his head in disagreement, then smiled and offered,

“Remember what *The Dan* said. ‘If you’re a Major Dude, you tell your friend that if his world breaks apart, it’ll fall together again.’”

“Profound,” T.J. replied as he rifled a running shoe at Bortnicker’s scraggly head.

Chapter Three

Jamie Weeks adjusted the knobs on his metal detector and repositioned the cushioned-fit earphones over his camo cap. Man, this Coinstar 4000XL model was worth the \$750 he'd shelled out for it. If there was any precious metal between here and *China*, it was going to show up on the screen. His 'phones' had been pinging like crazy for the past half-hour and he'd dug some neat stuff with his army surplus collapsible spade. Though it was pitch black in the woods near Spangler's Spring, he could make out one of the items he'd unearthed—a Georgia state button from a Confederate

soldier's tunic. It was hard to determine the condition because, well, it was half-past midnight. And he was here at half-past midnight because he was committing the illegal act of hunting for artifacts on protected national park grounds. There was always the chance he'd get caught by the police or park rangers or whoever patrolled these woods after dark, but what the hay. Jamie was on a personal treasure quest.

Since he'd been laid off at the fertilizer plant back in Columbia, South Carolina where he'd toiled for the past ten years, Jamie had realized a lifelong dream: to acquire the best possible metal detector he could afford, load up his battered black Explorer, and hit all

the major eastern battlefields between Charleston and Philadelphia. Already, he'd conducted stealth missions at Petersburg, Appomattox, Chancellorsville, the Wilderness, Fredericksburg and Manassas. Gettysburg would be the final, and hopefully the most lucrative, stop on the treasure trail. By his reckoning he'd found enough buttons, artillery shells, weapons parts and assorted accoutrements to finance his trip and still have an ample pile to display and trade with the other members of his club, who had shortsightedly restricted their expeditions to smaller regional (and legal) areas like farmers' fields, snake-

infested swamps or forests which bordered the sites of Civil War conflicts. Not that there were a lot of them left. Suburban sprawl was turning former battlefields of the South into Wal-Mart megaplexes and gated townhouse communities at an alarming rate.

Jamie felt that some of the guys went a bit too far—spending hours at local libraries or historical societies delving into dusty military archives to calculate troop movements, campsites and other such stuff. B-O-R-I-N-G. Weeks considered himself a man of *action*, and there were many collectors or Civil War buffs that would pay some serious coin for his finds. But he had to work fast,

figuring he had two more hours max before he'd have to hightail it out of there. A patrol car made the rounds here and there, but he'd always see the headlights coming and lay flat in the military night camos he'd ordered online. It was part of the thrill he experienced every time he 'went digging.'

It was probably this extreme focus that prevented him from sensing the man standing behind him. Instead it was the smell, as he furtively dug on his knees for some trinket that tipped him off. Something like a dead animal that'd sat in the woods for a while. He turned and looked up—and smiled with relief.

“Lord, son, you had me spooked!” he said, shifting to a sitting position and removing his headphones. “I thought you were the Federales or somethin’. Say, that’s some uniform. What’s your outfit?”

The soldier’s eyes narrowed. “I beg your pardon?”

“Your regiment. What unit you supposed to be with?”

The cavalier stood erect. “I serve with Hampton’s Legion, under the command of General Stuart.”

“Wow. Very authentic, right down to the material. Or is that a *real* uniform?” He let out a low whistle of approval. “Boy howdy, that must’ve set you back a

pretty penny. Most reenactors just buy the repro duds and such. You look...totally realistic. But I gotta tell you, man, that uniform *stinks*. Maybe you can air it out or treat it with some of that Fabreze stuff you buy at the Winn-Dixie.”

Suddenly a whinnying sound cut the air. Weeks peered into the gloomy woods. “You’ve got a *horse*, too? I’m impressed!”

“State your business here,” the soldier said evenly, seeming ten feet tall in his spurred boots as he towered over the sitting poacher.

“Well, heh, I’m kinda in the same boat as you, son, someplace I’m not supposed to be after nightfall. Just

digging some artifacts, not bothering anybody.”

“Artifacts? What artifacts? Please explain yourself.” The soldier’s smell was becoming annoying, and it was reflected in the tone of Jamie’s reply.

“You know, buttons, bullets and whatnot. *Artifacts*. What I really want to find is a CSA belt buckle like the one you got there. Primo piece. How much that set you back?”

“You are excavating this ground for the personal effects of dead soldiers?” The cavalier looked both amazed and disgusted.

“Well, you don’t have to put it *that* way, man. I mean, I don’t begrudge you

the right to parade around in that uniform in the middle of the night. Whatever turns you on, son. It's cool with me. Now, why don't you just jump on your horse and get back to camp or whatever and let me get in some more work before it gets light?"

"That isn't possible," said the soldier, drawing his pistol.

"Whoa, now, podna, you got no right to be pullin' that piece on me. I got just as much right to be here as you."

"I hardly think so," the man answered. "In fact, your actions are despicable and disgust me to the marrow. The men whose effects that you turn the earth for died for a cause you could not possibly fathom." He cocked

the hammer of the pistol with his thumb.
“And a man of the South as well. My
Gawd. It is a pleasure to cleanse this
sacred ground of scum like you.”

Jamie Weeks never had the chance to
ask if the Colt .44 was a repro.

Chapter Four

Chief Al Warren raised himself up, slowly and painfully, from the knee he'd taken next to Jamie Weeks' splayed corpse. It was still an hour or so till daybreak, and the CSI team had cordoned off the area with plastic yellow tape while Doc Lamberg, the Adams County coroner, went about his business. This wasn't good at all. Three murders in two weeks, and the summer season was just kicking into gear. Warren brushed off his pants leg and shuffled over to Rudy Herzog, who was leaning against his cruiser, shakily smoking a cigarette.

“Okay, Rudy, so let’s go over this,” grunted Warren, tipping back his hat. “You were about a half mile north of here and heard a gunshot. And then?” Warren’s meaty arms were crossed against his barrel chest as he held himself in the chill.

“Chief, I radioed in the report of shots fired. Then I backtracked along this trail till I found the victim. I checked his vital signs, but he was gone. I mean, no duh, half his head is shot off.” Herzog pressed his eyes closed at the memory, exhaled, then faced the shorter, blocky chief again. “It was 12:47. I radioed Spence for backup and searched the area. It was clean. Nothing. Except...

uh...”

“Except *what*, Rudy?” Warren hated being awakened in the early hours of the morning, and this was becoming a habit.

“Except I smelled horse.”

“Like maybe the shooter was mounted?”

“Yeah. Now, Chief, I understand it’s dark, but even with the searchlight I couldn’t find any tracks. I know it’s been dry lately, but there should be some trace of hoof prints, right?”

Warren nodded. “We’ll conduct a more thorough search after daybreak. Soon as they get the meat wagon out of here.”

As if on cue, Doc Lamberg came up behind Warren and broke into the

conversation. Lighting the briar pipe he always smoked on such occasions, the spry old gent, who always wore a shirt and tie, offered his opinion. "Well, time of death was around twelve-thirty, give or take, like Rudy said. This man was shot point blank, between the eyes, with a large caliber weapon. Just like those two kids over at the cemetery." He snapped his lighter shut as the tobacco caught, filling the air with its sweet smell. "Looks like you've got a killer on the loose, Al." Behind him, a police photographer snapped away.

"So you think when the ballistics report comes back from Harrisburg it'll match up?"

“Oh yes.”

Warren cursed his luck. He'd retired as a captain from the Philadelphia PD to what he thought would be a cush job as chief in a small tourist town where the greatest danger was some overzealous reenactor blowing out his eardrums from getting too close to an artillery battery during the yearly battle commemoration, or maybe some rowdy students over at Gettysburg College getting beered up and trying to hijack a cannon. And the first seven-plus years had worked out perfectly. *Now this*. He had three murders, a deputy who was quaking in fright, and a Chamber of Commerce who would have his hide if he even suggested

cancelling the weeklong yearly commemoration of the battle, which involved thousands of reenactors, tens of thousands of tourists, and millions of bucks for the local economy.

“Little over a month,” he muttered.

“Beg pardon?” asked Lamberg as he watched the EMT zip Weeks into a body bag.

“Nothing. I just wonder why grown men like Weeks would risk getting arrested and fined just to dig up old junk.”

“Well,” answered Lamberg, “I’m no psychologist, but I guess there’s a little Indiana Jones wannabe in all of us. I just don’t think our friend here counted on this.”

“What I don’t get is, there’s no motive. I mean, we found his wallet on him with a couple hundred bucks and some credit cards. Why would someone just execute the guy? Or those college kids?”

“You’ll figure it out, Al,” said Lamberg drily, knocking the dottle from his pipe against a tree trunk. “That’s why they pay you the big bucks.”

Chapter Five

“Okay, we’re here,” said Tom Jackson, turning off the ignition. “We made great time. I’ll pop the trunk. T.J., grab your gear while I see who’s home.” With that, Jackson, Sr. and his girlfriend approached the pale yellow Victorian down the street from the dormitory buildings on Seminary Ridge. The Lutheran institution had served as a makeshift hospital during the battle, as had most buildings in and around Gettysburg, and the cupola of its main building was used as an observation tower.

“Hey, Tom,” Mike Darcy said as he

opened the front screen door and warmly embraced his brother-in-law. Still in his khaki park ranger uniform, he was as broad and burly as T.J. remembered him, with a graying blond military flattop and neatly trimmed goatee. “And this must be Wendy. Welcome!”

Tom’s girlfriend, a shapely redhead with friendly green eyes, gave a quick wave before she, too, was engulfed in a Darcy bear hug. “You didn’t tell me she was a movie star, Tom!” crowed the ranger as Wendy, visibly relieved, allowed herself to be crushed.

All of which was making T.J. want to retch as he hefted his suitcase and gym bag with his running stuff over his shoulders. But then Mike was making a

beeline for him like a linebacker—which he had been at Michigan State—attacking a power sweep.

“T.J.! My favorite nephew!” Mike stopped short and held the teen at arm’s length. “Oh boy, you look...” he started tearing up... “more like my sister every time I see you.” This, of course, was followed by another crushing hug. Uncle Mike was, T.J. remembered, one of those touchy-feely people. “Terri!” Mike called out, “The gang’s all here!”

T.J.’s Aunt Terri, a tiny, dark woman with a cheerful smile, emerged from the house, drying her hands on her apron, smelling of apple pie. “You’re just in time for dinner,” she said, offering quick

hugs. “Let us feed you before you scoot off to the airport.”

“Sounds great,” said Tom. “What do you say, babe? Our last American meal for a while? Terri’s an amazing cook.”

“Sounds great,” parroted Wendy and they all went inside.

Mike pointed T.J. up the stairs. “Guest room’s the second one on the right, big guy. There are two beds, pick the one you want. You can throw your stuff in the bureau later on. Let’s eat!”

By the time T.J. washed up and made it back downstairs, the dining room table was awash with conversation and food: fried chicken, mounds of mashed potatoes, fresh vegetables from Terri’s garden, and dinner rolls hot from the

oven.

“So, Wendy,” Terri said as she passed the pitcher of iced tea, “you must be so thrilled. I mean, Paris!”

“Yes, it’s pretty exciting,” Wendy agreed, barely containing her enthusiasm.

“It’ll be a great trip,” Tom said, placing his hand atop hers on the checkered tablecloth. “But I’m not sure you’ll keep T.J. busy here.”

“No problem with that,” Mike said, beaming as he shoveled a forkful of green beans into his mouth. “He can help Terri out with some of the chores and all, but there’s lots to do in town. We’re approaching the height of the tourist

season and the annual battle.”

“Battle?” asked Wendy, frowning.

“Oh, yeah, every year we have the commemoration of the Battle of Gettysburg. Hundreds of Civil War reenactors from all over the world take part. I mean, there are entire units, both Union and Confederate, from various states and they come in big old trailers with artillery, horses, wagons, you name it. There are events every day of Commemoration Week all over town. The armies have designated camps where they stay, but for a week you have all these guys—and women—roaming all over town in their 1800s garb. Of course, these events draw tourists by the thousands, so the motels, campgrounds

and restaurants are mobbed beyond belief. You can't find a parking space anywhere in town."

"And where's the battlefield?" asked Wendy innocently.

"You're on it," said Mike with a wave of his fork. "This whole area, over six thousand acres including the center of town, was a battlefield from July 1 to July 3, 1863. In three days, more men died here—"

"Mike, you're not giving a tour," chided Terri.

"Sorry. You're right, hon. Force of habit. Anyway, even residential areas like this sit right on the site of the battle, side by side with official national park

sections. You can't get away from it. It is what it is."

"Hey, Uncle Mike, where's LouAnne?" asked T.J., totally annoyed at Wendy's ignorance of American history.

"Oh, my! I never mentioned LouAnne! What a lousy host I am. She works over at the Charney House Inn downtown. See, the Charney House is an original building from the Civil War era that served as a temporary Union headquarters during the battle. It changed hands a few times—as did most of the buildings in town—and got pretty shot up, but it survived and today is a restaurant and B&B. Everything there—the stuff on the menu, the furniture, the costumes of the wait staff—is just like it

was in 1863. People like to eat there to get a real feel for the era, instead of Mickey D's and KFC.

“LouAnne plays the part of a young girl who was there during the battle, and after dinner she has a setup in the attic where she tells the story of the citizens during the summer of 1863 and how Confederate snipers shot at people from that very space. And I have to say, she's pretty convincing. LouAnne's too young to be formally employed, but she makes a lot of tips from tourists. Last year she made enough in one week to buy herself an iPod.”

T.J. tried to imagine his homely cousin in period garb, and the image

wasn't appealing.

"I can run you over there after dinner, T.J.," said Mike. "See her do her *schtick*."

"Sure thing," said T.J., chewing a delicious drumstick.

The after-dinner goodbyes were brief and awkward. Both father and son promised to call or email as often as possible, and Wendy even gave the boy a hug and a peck on the cheek. "Stay out of trouble!" were his dad's last words as he backed the car out of the long driveway. And then, with a wave, they were gone to Philly.

T.J. suspected his uncle could sense his uneasiness by the way Mike playfully cuffed him on the shoulder. "Hope

you're not down over getting stuck with us," he said with mock seriousness.

"Nah, it's okay, Uncle Mike. I just hope Dad doesn't do anything crazy."

"Like what, T.J.? Fall in love? Sometimes you just can't help it, my friend. After all, he fell in love with my sister once upon a time. Your dad deserves to be happy. I'm sure you told him that."

"Yeah, well, of course," T.J. mumbled.

"So let's go to Charney House. Have you there in a flash."

Indeed, it was just a few minutes' drive from Seminary Ridge to the historic section of town. T.J.

remembered from an early childhood visit the blocks of row houses on Baltimore Street, invariably Pennsylvania red brick or clapboard, most sporting American flags and window baskets brimming with flowers. The entire town, in fact, was well kept. Private residences mingled with souvenir shops, museums, eateries and motels from 1950s style motor courts to modern chains. Some areas were getting a bit too commercial for T.J., but there still existed sections where, if one closed his eyes and imagined, he could hear the bullets ricocheting off brick facades and shattering windows. Though it was early summer, tourists strolled about in the twilight, individually or in

groups, sporting golf shirts and Civil War-themed tee shirts, Bermuda shorts, jeans and sundresses. Some of the children wore cheap replica kepi-style army caps, both blue and gray, each topped by imitation brass crossed swords. Others brandished plastic cavalry sabers and pistols. T.J. couldn't help but chuckle to himself.

As if reading his mind, Mike said, "Yeah, summer gets crazy here. It's kind of like a Civil War theme park. I mean, you get the scholarly types who show proper reverence for the battlefield and the town, but then you get a lot of yahoos with no real sense of history, which they pass on to their kids, like for example

that one little guy across the street slashing his buddy across the neck.” He sighed. “And then there’s the reenactors. Man, some of those guys are so hardcore, so into character, they don’t even use real toilet paper when they camp out! Parade around town in their uniforms, march into the Waffle House or Friendly’s with full backpacks on, that sort of thing. Don’t get me wrong, I’m not ragging on what they do...they seem to have a real appreciation for history...but *come on*. It’s 2010.”

The truck pulled up outside a two-story brick house with stone steps leading to a first floor entrance. Surrounded by an ornate wrought iron fence, it was the very essence of pre-

Civil War architecture. Warm light emanated from the first floor dining rooms, and conversation mixed with occasional laughter wafted into the front yard. “T.J.,” said Mike, “we’ve reached our destination: Charney House, circa 1810, and pretty much intact. Tell the hostess who you are and she’ll direct you to where LouAnne is in the garret.”

“The garret?”

“Oh yeah, forgot to tell you. The dining room and kitchen are on the first floor, the second floor has four rooms, so it’s like an inn. Then, on the third floor you’ll find LouAnne doing her thing. See, during the battle it was occupied for a time by Confederate

sharpshooters. You can see bullet holes all over the outer walls, and the garret, uh, attic, was a good spot to hide out and pick off Yankees in the surrounding area. Tell LouAnne to call if you guys want a ride home.”

As T.J. mounted the steps with slight trepidation, he tried to imagine himself a young man in 1863 calling upon a chum or a young lady perhaps. As Mike predicted, the hostess, a plump college-age girl in full period garb, amiably directed him to the stairs.

“You should get there just in time for the eight o’clock performance,” she said with a wink.

Indeed, when T.J. reached the garret most of the dozen or so straight-backed

wooden chairs were taken. He eased into one of the rear seats as the speaker, who was looking out the window behind her, turned to face the audience, causing T.J. to do a double-take.

It wasn't LouAnne...or was it? Through the filmy candlelight he saw not his mousy, painfully skinny cousin, but a beautiful young girl with long, honey-blond hair pulled back and fastened with a blue bow that matched her bulky, high-collared dress. Even so, there were the unmistakable outlines of an athletic, yet feminine figure. And her face...gone were the Coke-bottle glasses he remembered, replaced by piercing green eyes and skin of a tawny brown hue that

reflected an outdoors healthiness. She was breathtaking, and all T.J. could think of was Katie Vickers, the prettiest girl in the eighth grade at Bridgefield Middle School, whom he'd pined after, but who would barely acknowledge his existence though other girls thought him "cute." In fact, his late mom had playfully called him "my little Beatle Paul," for his resemblance to a young Paul McCartney.

LouAnne blew Katie Vickers away. No contest.

Suddenly snapping out of his reverie, T.J. realized he'd missed the beginning of LouAnne's presentation. He tuned in, his attention riveted to the stunning girl who held her small audience, especially

the males, in a trance.

“I was only thirteen when the War Between the States came to Gettysburg,” she said. “My family had lived in the area for generations, and my father was a local boot maker. Sadly, I had lost three siblings to disease...one was just a baby. But my older brother had survived, a strapping young man who was among the first to enlist in the 72nd Pennsylvania Infantry. I had not seen him in two years, and of course Mama feared the worst. But we persevered, and I helped out around the house as much as I could. We all hoped the war would end, and had no idea it could spread this far north.

“But then we heard rumors. General Lee’s forces were on the march towards Washington...then they were in Maryland. The word was that they were deathly in need of shoes, and were looking for a factory or warehouse to outfit their horribly equipped men.” She paused for effect, glancing out the window before locking onto the audience again.

“Oh, why did they have to come here, to our sleepy little town? Was it because we stand at a crossroads? Was it because of our abundant farms whose grain and livestock would fill their stomachs? Or were we just chosen by God to bear the horrible burden of

destiny?”

She's really got them, thought T.J. *Some of the women are starting to tear up!*

“And so,” she continued with a sigh, “the two great armies collided. For three bloody days we townsfolk hid in our cellars as the village streets changed hands. Why, this house alone came under both Yankee and Rebel occupation. After the battle we found blood on the floor of this very garret where a Johnny Reb had been winged while sharpshooting with a long distance rifle at Union soldiers on the neighboring fields.

“When it was over, the poor citizens of Gettysburg emerged from their cellars

to find the streets awash in blood and filth and the surrounding fields littered with the corpses of men, horses and cattle. Only one of our citizens had been killed—poor Jennie Wade, who was shot in the back with a stray bullet while baking bread in her kitchen—but we might as well all have been dead, as the stench of carnage and decay hung over the town for weeks afterward. Our homes all became makeshift hospitals for hundreds of wounded, mutilated men, and it seemed like forever until the thousands of dead were finally laid to rest, and the animals burned in huge pyres.

“As for my family, we were never

the same. Daddy took sick shortly afterward, and was gone by October. And we never heard from my brother again.” She stood up, looking directly at T.J. “But, thank God, my cousin Thomas has come, from the great state of Connecticut, to help us put our lives back together!”

At that, the entire assemblage turned and gaped at T.J., who managed a weak wave while detecting a wry smile creep across his cousin’s lips.

“That ends our presentation, ladies and gentlemen, if there are no questions. Thank you so much for your patience. You’ve been a wonderful audience. Tips are appreciated.”

Satisfied, the people applauded

politely and filed out, dropping change and small bills into a labeled ceramic jar by the garret door. When the last person had exited, LouAnne glided over and gave T.J. as much of a hug as she could manage over her cumbersome hoop skirt.

“Not bad, Cuz,” said T.J. “You almost had me bawling there.” The smell of her lilac perfume was intoxicating in an old-fashioned way.

“Ya think? Let’s see how much the touristas loved it.” She dumped the contents of the jar onto a barrel top and quickly counted it. “Twenty-one fifty? That’s all? Sheesh! I bared my soul to those people!”

“Well, I thought you did great.”

“Yeah, well, I didn’t see *you* throwing any dinero in the jar.”

T.J.’s eyes widened. “Well, uh...” he stammered.

She laughed. “I’m just kidding, T.J. It’s great to have you here. Welcome to Gettysburg.” She gave him a quick peck on the cheek and he felt his face flush. “Now sit right back down, my darling cousin. I’ve got one last tour group coming up the stairs.”

So T.J., his head spinning, reclaimed his seat as a new audience filed in and took their places before the girl who was looking forlornly out the window.

Chapter Six

“Are you sure you want to walk home?” T.J. asked. “You’re not tired?”

“Nah,” said LouAnne as the last group made their way out of the garret and down the wooden staircase. “Just let me change downstairs and give Dad a ring to tell him we’re walking. I’ve been cooped up all evening in that room and could use some fresh air. Besides, it’ll give us a chance to catch up. It’s only a mile and a half. You can wait outside the Inn. I’ll just be a minute.”

As T.J. stretched his legs out front, he noticed that by 10:00 P.M. the town had quieted considerably, save for

clusters of tourists being led on some kind of walk by guides dressed in period garb who held antique lanterns. A few early summer fireflies danced in the small side yards of houses.

“Okay, ready to go,” said LouAnne, bounding down the steps in faded jeans and a Beatles “Abbey Road” tee shirt that made him think briefly of his mom. Her hair swung behind her as she hit the sidewalk. “All in all, a successful night,” she said, fanning the greenbacks she’d earned in tips. “Some of this goes to the college fund, some for spending. My goal this summer is to get myself a laptop with all the bells and whistles.”

“Cool,” said T.J. as they started up Baltimore Street. He wondered how

much Uncle Mike made from his park ranger salary. He also realized that he'd stupidly forgotten to bring his laptop down to Pennsylvania. Oh, well. "You were pretty convincing back there," he offered. "How many of those talks do you do a night?"

"Depends. On the weekends and during Reenactment Week it seems I'm doing fifty in an evening. And it does get a little old at times. Some nights I end up changing my story around, adding characters to my family, blah, blah, blah. Once in a while, if tips are slow, I'll even kill myself off, you know, die of disease a year or so after the battle. Overall, it's a good gig. For the most

part, the people are really nice. Of course, you get some guys who maybe have a couple drinks too many with dinner and try to be smart-alecky, trip you up with questions or make inappropriate remarks. Then you have some of the reenactors who show up in their uniforms and try to take over the show by quizzing me. But I know my stuff. You can't go to school in this town without having the history drilled into you. I handle them okay. The worst are little kids. Man, some of those rug rats can't sit still for a minute! Of course, back in the 1800s they'd just get slapped, but that's politically incorrect these days. Not that I haven't considered it," she added with an impish smile that

made his heart jump. What was up with *that*?

“What about that dress you have to wear?” asked T.J. “Doesn’t it get hot in the summer?”

“Hot isn’t the word,” she answered. “‘Cause there’s a lot more that you don’t see. First, I slip on a chemise and drawers. On top of that is a corset. Then comes an under petticoat, also called a privacy petticoat because you wouldn’t want anyone to look up your skirt when you’re going up the stairs, would you?”

“Guess not.”

“Then comes the hoop, followed by more petticoats to hide the boning, under sleeves and a collar, and *then* the dress.

And, of course, socks and shoes, which you have to get on before the hoop or you'll never reach 'em."

"You *have* to wear all that?"

"Yeah, if you want to be authentic. Mom made a lot of the stuff for me, but things like the hoop, you have to buy from one of the reenactor supply places in town, and let me tell you, it ain't cheap."

"I never realized you had to go through so much to be realistic."

"T.J., we're selling the past here. People expect that."

They stopped abruptly on Chambersburg Street as a white and blue police cruiser flew by. "There's something you don't see every day,"

murmured LouAnne, and she watched the vehicle until it was out of sight.

“Pretty quiet here?”

“Quiet’s not the word, Cuz. Except for the high season. But something’s going on around here. Even my dad’s been a little on edge lately.”

“But he likes being a ranger, right?”

“Oh sure, though in a way it’s the same deal that I have at the Charney Inn. He conducts special tours or talks around the battlefield for visiting dignitaries or ‘people who know people,’ if you get what I’m saying. Much better than the generic tour busses you’ll see all over the place. And let me tell you, it gets *steaming* on the grounds

during the summer, same as it was during the actual battle. But Dad loves history, and he loves the outdoors. Do you know he has a few buddies he goes shooting with and all they use is Civil War style rifles and pistols? You know, sticking the bullet down the muzzle, using a ramrod, the whole deal. Comes home with black powder all over his face. No, thank you. But he's like an expert at it."

"So, how long has he been a ranger?"

"Well, he retired from teaching five years ago, but he'd started learning the ropes as a seasonal ranger a couple years before that. Technically, he retired because of disability. He ruptured a disc

in his back while breaking up a fight, but teaching twenty-five years of high school industrial arts, or what you'd call shop class, was enough. He does miss coaching football, though."

"Did he have some good teams?"

"Too many to count. Football's real big here in Pennsylvania, you know. Dad was never a head coach, didn't want the headaches, he'd say, but he loved coaching defense. You're aware he was All Big-Ten linebacker at Michigan State. D'you know what his nickname was?"

"Nope."

"Maddog Mike. See, his idol growing up was this guy Mike Curtis

who played for the Colts back in the day when they were still in Baltimore. This guy was a maniac. Used to try to rip guy's heads off and whatnot. So, Dad became "Maddog" Mike Darcy. Wore Curtis's number thirty-two and everything. He had a bunch of his college buddies over once and they told me some pretty wild stuff, both on the field and off. As you can see, Dad's calmed down a lot. You'd never know he was this crazy football guy. But his legend lives on. I mean, I'd hate to be some guy coming over to pick me up for a date and have Dad giving him *The Stare*."

"He'd do that?" said T.J., imagining Uncle Mike in "Maddog" mode.

“Of course, silly,” chirped LouAnne.
“I’m his baby!”

“But your mom is so laid back.”

“Well, as they say, opposites attract. She’s not at all into the history thing like Dad. Just putters around the garden when she’s not volunteering at the hospital or the library. Sometimes I need a buffer between me and Dad. He’s *so* protective!”

“So, uh,” ventured T.J., “does that mean you have a boyfriend?”

“Not at the present time, and it’s not because of Dad, either. Just nobody around here who’s worth the trouble. Ninth grade guys are such dorks.”

Then T.J. remembered that although

they were the same age, his cousin was a year ahead in school because she'd skipped a year in elementary school early on. Yet she seemed so much older. He was caught totally off guard when she suddenly asked, "And what about you? Lots of females chasing you through the hallways?"

T.J. panicked. Yes, there were some girls at school who thought he was cute and all, and he always showed good manners, unlike most of his male classmates. So far he hadn't mustered up the courage to approach them, let alone ask them out. But he didn't want to look like a loser...

"Well, there's this girl I'm kinda going out with. Katie Vickers."

“Katie Vickers,” LouAnne said slowly, letting the name roll off her tongue. “Sounds pretty.”

“Yeah, she’s all right.” Desperate to get off the subject of his nonexistent love life, he decided to impress her. “I’m going out for cross country next year. The coach at the high school gave me a summer workout program and everything.”

“Great!” said his cousin. “We can train together!”

“What?”

“T.J., I was on the freshman cross country team at my school this year!” She regarded his look of disbelief and added, “What, you think your mousy

little cousin can't be an athlete?" She shot him a definitely un-mousy look.

"No, no, it's not that—"

"I just didn't want to do the typical girly sports like field hockey. Or even soccer. I mean, *really*—running up and down the field and sometimes never touching the ball. I prefer track. Just being alone with your thoughts...relying on your own ability and all."

"Me, too."

"Problem is, I would actually rather train at night during the summer, when it's cooler, but I can't on nights I work. See, at the Inn I alternate with a boy over at Gettysburg College who plays the part of a Confederate soldier. He's pretty authentic, if I do say so myself, but no

way does he makes the tips that I do. Anyway, I'd like to get a track scholarship to college, help my parents out with the expenses. If I'm good enough."

"You will be," offered T.J.

"You're sweet, Cuz, but it's gonna take a lot of work and I'm gonna have to lay off the partying. Man, at my school it's like every Saturday there's a kegger somewhere. You'll see when you get to high school."

For some reason that remark made T.J. feel terribly young, and LouAnne, sensing his discomfort, quickly righted the ship. "But I bet you're a good runner. I can tell by your legs. I can see your

thighs and calves are cut up right through your jeans.” *Which embarrassed him even more.* What was it with this girl? Even when she was being friendly she made him feel so off-balance.

“So, you wanna run tomorrow morning?” she said with one eyebrow raised.

“Okay. Like, seven o’clock?”

“Too hot. Make it six. You’ll end up thanking me. And here we are.”

T.J. looked up, amazed. They were back at Uncle Mike’s house. Had they really covered all that distance? It had flown by.

“I was about to come looking for you guys.” Mike pushed open the front door, concern etched upon his face.

“Oh, Daddy, puh-leese,” said LouAnne, disarming her father with a peck on the cheek. “I had T.J. to protect me. And, guess what? He’s doing cross country, too! We’re running the battlefield tomorrow morning.”

“That’s fine, as long as you stay to the paved surfaces. But let’s lay off the night runs for a while.”

“How come?”

“Well,” said Darcy, measuring his words, “there’s been some mischief going on lately in the woods.”

“I knew it!” cried LouAnne.

“No, you don’t,” cautioned Mike. “Not the half of it. So, I want you to lay low for a while. Get your track work in

during the morning, before it gets hot. And, T.J., watch out for your cousin. She talks a good game, but she sometimes suffers from overconfidence.” Then his frown melted into a smile. “I have no idea where she gets it.”

“Me neither, *Maddog*,” said LouAnne, and with a toss of her hair she was off to her room down the hall from T.J.’s.

Watching her leave, the elder Darcy turned to his nephew and, placing a meaty hand on his shoulder, whispered, “Don’t ever have girls.”

As T.J lay in the dark guestroom, serenaded by an army of crickets outside his window, he reviewed the events of the day and concluded that perhaps this

trip to Gettysburg might not be so boring after all.

Chapter Seven

“Okay, let’s go over this one more time,” said a weary Al Warren as he sat across from the abject figure slumped in an office chair before him. “You want a cup of coffee?”

“Not strong enough,” murmured the thirtyish man dressed all in black. His short, spiky hair was styled in the popular “just rolled out of bed” coiffure and his toned arms bulged from the two-sizes-two-small tee shirt with the letters GGC stenciled across the front in a ghostly silver scroll.

“And how do we know you haven’t just been drinking? The patrolman

whose car you almost ran into said you were babbling like a crazy man.”

“So breathalyze me.” His eyes glowed with disdain.

“Okay, okay,” soothed Warren, palms held outward. “From the top, Mr. Weinstein. You’re in Gettysburg...”

“To film a show. It’s called *Gonzo Ghost Chasers*. On the Adventure Channel. I lead a team of four on an exploration of a haunted site. We film over the course of a week and then our editors back in LA put the show together. This is our second year, and it’s a popular series.”

“So where’s your production crew? I mean, I can’t tell you how many supposed ghost hunters and paranormal

experts have passed through here the past few years, and they all have some kind of entourage with them.”

“Yeah, well, see, that’s what makes us so different. It’s just the four of us; me, Caroline, Josh and Nugent with our own hand-held video recorders and EVP equipment.”

“EVP?”

“Electromagnetic voice phenomena. It picks up sounds that the human ear can’t hear.”

“Sounds? Like what?” Warren glanced sideways at Bruce Morrison, head of the park rangers, whom he’d called over from a late meeting down the hall.

“Dude, from the *other* side. You know, dead people.”

“Oh.”

“So anyway, tonight we were just scouting the area. The conditions were perfect, some moonlight, very little wind. What we do that’s different from the other shows is we all go out on our own and individually try to provoke the spirits into responding to us. That’s why we’re the *Gonzo Ghost Chasers*,” he added sheepishly.

“Uh-huh,” Warren replied with a grunt, wondering whether this clown was actually serious about all this nonsense. “Go on.”

“Well, we decided to split up the

battlefield, and I got Devil's Den. I figured I'd check out where that famous photo of the dead Rebel sharpshooter was taken after the battle. We had a local guy drop us off at our sites—"

"Which is illegal after dark," cut in Morrison.

Weinstein held up his hand in acknowledgement. "I was there a little while, and it was really quiet. All you could hear was that little creek nearby. So I turned on my stuff and started recording, provoking the spirit of the dead Confederate."

"By saying what?" asked Warren.

"Dude, it's all on the tape, but I said, like, 'Are you here? I'm talking to the dead soldier in the photo. Are you aware

you died for nothing? Are you ashamed you were fighting for an unjust cause? The bondage of other human beings?' Stuff like that."

"Oh, boy," said Morrison, checking his watch.

"Yeah, you can say what you want, man," Michael Weinstein argued, "but then how do you explain *that* guy showing up?"

"What guy?" asked Warren and Morrison simultaneously.

"The Southern soldier, man! It's like, all of a sudden I caught a whiff of what smelled like, I don't know, something putrid."

"Did you smell horse?" cut in

Warren.

“Horse?”

“Yes, was there the smell of a horse?”

Weinstein’s eyes widened as he recalled. “Yes,” he said slowly, “there *was* a horsey smell in there somewhere. Hey, how would you know that?”

“Lucky guess,” said Warren.
“Continue.”

“Well, then the battery on my EVP recorder died. Just *died*, man, even though I’d changed it that afternoon. That’s what happens sometimes. Spirits drain batteries in order to manifest themselves. It’s happened on other shows, but not like this.”

“Why?”

“Because I looked up and he was

there, man. Not some whitish orb floating around. Not some shadow figure or mist. A real, honest-to-goodness ghost!”

“Describe him, er, it,” said Warren, leaning forward in his chair.

“Well, I was sitting against one of the boulders, looking up at him, but the moon came out from behind some clouds and it was like a spotlight hit him, so I got a good look. We’re talking over six feet tall, with a beard and kinda curly long hair, *in a full Confederate uniform!* Boots with spurs, a big old saber on his belt, gold braid all over the place, and to top it off, a Western style hat with a big plume hanging off it.”

“Was he armed? Besides the sword, I mean,” said Warren.

“Dude, this guy was packing the biggest pistol I’ve ever seen! I mean, bigger than Clint Eastwood’s in the *Dirty Harry* movies!”

“You’re sure?”

“Of course I’m sure! It was an inch from my face!” Weinstein shuddered at the still-fresh memory.

Morrison crossed his arms over his chest and casually leaned against the wall, his salt-and-pepper hair and bifocals giving him the appearance of a quizzical college professor. “What did he say, Mr. Weinstein? Be specific.”

“Well, he asked me what unit I was

with, which at first I didn't get, but then I figured out maybe he thought I was some kind of soldier like him. So I told him about the TV show and all, and he looked at me like I was from another planet or something. Then I guess he didn't get the answer he wanted so he told me I was disturbing hallowed ground or something and that he was going to have to shoot me! Well, the whole time I was slowly reaching down for my infrared camcorder, which I'd dropped, so I could maybe throw it at him or distract him and take off, but just as I got my hand on it he says something like 'I truly regret this, but you leave me no choice,' and he pulls the trigger!"

"But—"

“The gun *jammed*, dude! He tried it a couple times but it didn’t work! So he starts reaching for his sword, but I grabbed the camcorder and bolted. I ran as fast as I could till I found the road, screaming at the top of my lungs for the team, *anybody*, till I saw the park patrol car top a rise and I sprinted for all I was worth. And here I am.”

Warren shook his head. “But how do we know this Confederate ghost soldier isn’t a real human? You know, some nut running around at night in uniform?”

“Well, he has to be on my video recorder. It was on the ground, but it was on “RECORD” the whole time.”

“So let’s see it.”

Weinstein reddened. “Could you ah, um, give me a minute to go to the men’s room? I’ve got to get out of these boxer shorts. And don’t ask me why.”

“Second door on your right,” said Warren, as Weinstein embarrassedly slinked off down the hall.

“*Gonzo Ghost Chasers*. Good grief,” Morrison griped, cleaning his glasses.

“Yeah, Bruce,” said Warren, “but I want to see what this wacko has on tape. This could be a big help. Let us know what we’re dealing with. He’s lucky he didn’t get his head blown off like the others.” Warren paused. “Do ghosts’ guns jam?”

“Search me. We’re in virgin territory on this one.”

Weinstein returned to Warren’s office, obviously relieved. “Okay, let’s take a look at this video.” He hit REWIND, snapped open the viewer, pressed PLAY. Warren and Morrison watched the blood drain from his face as the seconds passed.

“Well, what is it?” asked the police chief finally.

“Look for yourself,” said Weinstein disgustedly, rewinding the tape again.

The perspective was from the ground, angled slightly upward. In the forefront was Weinstein’s hiking boot, but beyond that, nothing but the facing

boulders of the alcove. However, the audio was even more perplexing:

Weinstein: What unit? You mean, like, the army? I'm not with a unit, man. I'm a civilian.

Silence.

Weinstein: I'm lead investigator for the *Gonzo Ghost Chasers*. You've seen us on Adventure Channel? You know, on TV? We're on every Wednesday. C'mon man, you haven't heard of us?

Silence.

Weinstein: What I'm doing is hunting for spirits from the battle. Especially that guy who's in the picture. You know, the Confederate sharpshooter. The question is, who are *you*?

Silence.

Weinstein: What do you mean, disturbing the ground? Who do you think you... now, wait a minute, dude, don't get all worked up over—hey, C'MON MAN, YOU DON'T WANNA—WAIT! PLEASE! DON'T SHOOT! PLEASE!

Then the picture whirled as the camera was apparently scooped up. From then on the only footage was bouncy images of the tops of Weinstein's shoes, the only sound his raspy breathing as he ran for his life.

Weinstein pressed STOP and looked up at his questioners. "So, what are you gonna do about this?" he whined.

"About what?" said Warren. "Even discounting the fact that you were

trespassing on Government property, you got no video, no audio, and a pair of wet underwear to back up your story. Not exactly rock-solid evidence, Mr. Weinstein.”

“I know what I saw. He was a real as you or me, and he—it—couldn’t have been human, or we’d see it on the video! I just don’t understand. I wish the EVP battery didn’t drain, we might’ve caught his end of the conversation.”

“Well, we didn’t, so I hate to tell you, we’ve got squat. Are you leaving town soon?”

“No way. I’m gonna talk the team into hanging around another few days, though we’re supposed to be at the St. Augustine Lighthouse later this week for

our next shoot.”

“Where are you staying?”

“We’ve booked rooms at the Charney Inn. Heard there might be spirits there.”

Warren rolled his eyes. “Okay, Mr. Weinstein,” he said in a measured tone. “We’ll head out to Devil’s Den first thing in the morning and check for footprints and such. If we find anything, you’ll be the first to know. Fair enough?”

“Fair enough,” said the Gonzo Ghost Chaser, extending his hand.

Warren shook it, as did Morrison.

“Ah, guys, we’ll keep the underwear stuff quiet, right?” pleaded Weinstein.

“Wouldn’t look good for me on the show if that got out.”

“No problem,” said Warren, suppressing a smile.

After the ghost hunter exited, Morrison came over and sat on the edge of Warren’s desk. “Think he’s full of it, Al?” he asked, fiddling with the police chief’s stapler.

“*Something* scared him, Bruce. Yeah, he’s a wack job, but I really think he had an encounter with something, or someone, who’s gonna keep shooting people till we catch him. So, I say we step up the night patrols on the battlefield and report even the most minutely suspicious activity. It’s time to let your rangers in on it.”

“Agreed.”

Warren looked at his desk calendar.

“Commemoration Week’s coming fast.
We’re in trouble.”

Chapter Eight

“Ready to rock?” asked LouAnne after she’d poked her head inside T.J.’s guestroom door. “It’s gonna be a hot one so we’ve gotta motor.”

“Just give me a minute. I’ll meet you downstairs,” mumbled T.J. as he shook the cobwebs from his sleepy head.

“You won’t just roll over and go back to sleep?”

“Don’t worry.”

“Okay, see you in a few.” She bounded down the hallway and descended the staircase. T.J. marveled at her energy this early in the morning. Groggily, he visited the bathroom and

then pulled on his track shorts, Bridgefield Middle School tee shirt, socks and New Balance 1220s. As he made his way down to the kitchen he could smell coffee brewing, which made his stomach growl. LouAnne was reading the morning paper, her long blonde hair pulled back in a ponytail. She was outfitted much as he, in a baggy tee with spandex tights underneath her track shorts.

“Anything interesting?” he asked.

“Maybe, but I can’t see a thing,” she laughed. “Without my contacts I’m blind as far as reading, but it’s better than those goggles I used to wear. Remember?”

“Yeah, kinda.”

“Dad had an early meeting this morning so he’s out of here, but Mom should have some suitable eats waiting for us when we’re done. So, Cuz, what’s the plan? You have a workout that you like to do?”

T.J. hadn’t even read Coach Autieri’s printout yet. “I, uh—”

“Wanna do my workout with me? It may not be as tough as yours, but at least you’ll get a feel for the roads around here.”

“Yeah, sure,” said T.J., hoping he’d be able to keep up with her. There wasn’t one ounce of fat on his cousin’s shapely legs, and he hadn’t run in a couple weeks.

The two of them went out into the front yard and thoroughly stretched in the shade. Even at this early hour the humidity was starting to descend on Central Pennsylvania. “Okay, Cuz, my cross country workout calls for five miles, more or less. So what we’ll do is follow Seminary Avenue to Confederate Avenue, which will wind through the battlefield, past where the old Visitor Center was, and down to the new one near the rear entrance of the cemetery. Basically, we’re going to be doing one quarter of the total battlefield area. Sound good?”

“Sure,” he said, inwardly panicking.

“Then let’s get after it!” She sprang

from her hurdler's stretch and sprinted off down Seminary Avenue, T.J. keeping pace. Eventually they settled into a more comfortable gait as parts of the battlefield drifted by.

"Lots of monuments," T.J. panted at length.

"Oh, yeah. They're everywhere. Mostly Union, although we'll be passing the North Carolina and Virginia Memorials. I mean, it's understandable that there would be more Federal monuments, since the battle was a Union victory fought in the North."

"It looks so...placid. Just rolling farmland, with some woods here and there."

"Yeah, that's what the locals thought

in 1863. They figured there was no way the war would ever touch their lives. Wrong!”

By the time they'd gone a mile, just passing Pitzer's Woods, T.J. felt the beginning of a stitch in his side. He loathed the idea of asking his cousin to slow down and fought to stabilize his breathing pattern. But LouAnne was on to him.

“You okay?” she said, looking sideways.

“Yeah, sure, but could we take it down a notch?”

“No problem.” They slowed their pace, and soon the stitch worked itself out. “We're now on Confederate

Avenue, and we'll be making our way towards Little Round Top. See, there were two major hills on the battlefield that were good vantage points for artillery and whatnot. The smaller one, Little Round Top, was actually the better one. Some of the heaviest fighting came when both sides were trying to take it."

"What's 'Devil's Den'?" asked T.J., reading a marker alongside the road.

"This big clump of prehistoric rocks that sharpshooters were occupying during the battle. There's a little creek we'll pass nearby called Plum Run. They say that during the battle it ran red with blood from all the guys getting shot up."

"Wonderful."

“Yeah, it’s pretty grim. Hey, y’know what you should do to get a better idea of the whole thing, stop by the Visitor Center. It was just rebuilt a couple years ago and it’s a real improvement on the old one. They have maps, displays, tons of museum cases. You might even run into my dad if he’s between tours. I’d come with you, but I babysit this little girl down the street from mid-morning to 4:00 P.M. most weekdays. One of my many jobs.”

A few minutes later they came to an area designated “The Wheatfield.” Monuments and markers were everywhere. “Some of the heaviest fighting went on here,” LouAnne said.

Then she added, “Various people have actually claimed to see ghost soldiers marching through this field.”

“You believe in that stuff?” huffed T.J.

“To be honest, I don’t know. See, if you buy into that paranormal stuff, you’ll believe that in places where people’s lives were ended violently and prematurely, restless spirits would remain. Well, this is a primo location for that. There’s been documentaries about it on TV, and there’s three different outfits in town that do ghost tours. You saw some of the groups last night when we were walking home, remember?”

“Yeah.”

“There’s another inn on the same

block as mine that actually has a ‘mourning theater’ in the basement where this husband and wife team in undertaker’s outfits give presentations about all the haunted parts of town. The room’s made up to look like an 1800s funeral parlor. Mucho creepy.”

“Wow,” T.J. replied with a wince, his side-stitch recurring.

“Even my place of employment is said to be haunted. I think a Rebel sharpshooter was picked off up in the garret where I do my talks. Some scientific research team did a black-light analysis of this big old spot on the floorboards and said it was human blood that had soaked in and then dried out.”

“And you’re not scared up there?”

“Of what? It’s not like some ghost is gonna grab me or something, Cuz.” She smiled and readjusted her ponytail scrunchie without missing a step.

“LouAnne?”

“Yeah?”

“Can we dial it down a bit?”

“Sure thing.”

They slowed to a brisk walk. “Put your hands behinds your head and take deep breaths,” she advised. “It’ll open up your airway.”

“Don’t know what’s wrong with me,” said T.J. awkwardly.

“No big deal. The humidity’s a killer. Plus, the terrain here slopes up

and down so gradually that it deceives you.” She smiled, trying to ease his embarrassment.

“One thing I’ve noticed,” he said, breathing more evenly now. “The monuments are all so different. Some are just etched blocks of granite, some have a plaque attached, some are bronze statues of soldiers or cavalry guys on horses, some are big Greek and Roman-looking things. How come?”

“Depends. See, they commemorate different regiments, states, or even generals, some of whom got killed here. In the end, each particular monument’s as big as the state who built it could afford. Most went up in the late 1800s, I think.”

“It seems like they’re everywhere.”

“They are, just like all the cannons that were placed wherever there were artillery units. There’s a cannon or two on my block, if you noticed. I’ll tell you, though...at night, when the sun’s going down, the bronze soldiers seem almost lifelike. It’s spooky.”

“But you’re not supposed to be in the Battlefield Park after dark, right?”

“Technically, yeah,” she said with a wink. “But that doesn’t mean I’ve never gone for an evening jog. It helps if your dad’s a ranger. You feeling any better?”

“I think so.”

“Okay. We’ve just passed the Peach Orchard. Tell you what. There’s a little

over a mile from here to the Visitor Center. Let's make that our goal, and hopefully Dad'll be around to give us a lift home when he has a break. I think he's on cemetery duty today."

"Cemetery duty?"

"The National Military Cemetery, silly. You know... Abe Lincoln? Gettysburg Address? Four score and seven years ago? It's a fairly short walk from the center, though the rangers get to use a golf cart to go back and forth. You up for that?"

T.J. couldn't say no. "Sure, let's do it."

They took off again, T.J. determined to keep pace with his obviously athletically superior cousin. Woods and

fields alternated until they reached Cemetery Ridge, following the Union line of defense. They pounded up the blacktop lane, passing dozens of statues, monuments and cannons laid out in a row, facing back towards Seminary Ridge.

“Stop here,” said LouAnne suddenly. T.J. thankfully slowed to a walk again. “See this little angle in the line? Where those couple of trees are? That’s the point in the Union line where the Confederates almost broke through. You’ve heard of Pickett’s Charge?”

“Yes,” said T.J. uncertainly.

“Well, look out that way toward Seminary Ridge, where we started out

from. Picture thousands of Confederate soldiers, wave after wave, crossing that open space, marching toward this wall, where the Union guys just waited and waited till they got within range and then BLAMMO! They opened up with rifles and cannons and whatnot and just blew them all over the place, but the Southern guys kept coming. Sorry, but I don't think I could show that kind of heroism. Could you?"

T.J. tried to imagine the fear he'd experience marching those farmers' fields, bullets whizzing by his head with screaming, wounded comrades crumpling all around him. "No, I don't think so," he admitted.

"Yeah, well, that about ended the

battle on Day Three, and it was also the beginning of the end for the South. Okay, let's cut diagonally through the cemetery, and we should be at the Center in ten minutes."

They crossed through the now-vacant parking lot to the old Center, entered the main gate of the National Cemetery and kept on the diagonal until they reached the huge new Visitor Center and Museum, which sat on a knoll above terraced lots for cars, tour busses and RVs.

They entered through the park rangers' entrance into the blessed air conditioning and found Mike Darcy pouring over his day's itinerary while

sipping a cup of coffee. He seemed surprised to see them. As if anticipating his question, LouAnne said, "T.J. has to get used to the course. We figured we'd cut it off here for the first day."

"I'm okay," said T.J., though he was obviously quite the opposite.

Mike looked at his watch. "Come on, I have just enough time to drop you home and get back here for my first tour. You guys must be dying for some breakfast."

"Great, Dad." As they hopped into Mike's red Dodge Durango he asked his daughter what she'd be up to that day. "Well, I'm babysitting at Mrs. Spath's at ten. I don't know what T.J.'s got in mind." They both looked at him.

"Um," said T.J., who might've been

perfectly happy depositing his aching body in bed for a few hours, “I think I’d like to come back down to the Visitor Center like LouAnne said and check out the place, get a better feel for the area and the story of the battle.”

“Super idea,” said Mike. “If you want, you can tag along on my noon cemetery tour. And if you’re really adventurous, my friend Arlene is giving a small group of visiting college professors a minibus tour of the entire battlefield at one. This’ll give you a good overview. If anything, it’ll help you lay out some alternate workout routes so you won’t get bored when you run. There are many miles of paved

roads that wind their way through the battlefield.”

“Sounds good,” said T.J., who was just happy to be off his feet for a little while.

Once home, T.J. and LouAnne quickly showered, arriving at the breakfast nook table within seconds of each other. He ravenously attacked Terri’s bacon and eggs, while his cousin settled for a bowl of Total with sliced strawberries from the garden. Then she was off to babysit while T.J., using his aunt’s in-town trolley card, rode over to the Visitor Center again.

“Why don’t you poke around here for a while,” said Mike, who was manning the information desk, “and meet me back

here around 11:45 so we can ride over to the cemetery.”

At last, on his own, T.J. had a chance to wander about the immense facility which had been completely redesigned and rebuilt a few years back. It was, he decided, one of the best museums he'd ever visited, with some twelve galleries loaded with artifacts, interactive exhibits and hands-on displays. He was especially taken with the variety of uniforms of the soldiers from both sides, though he felt the Confederate cavalrymen got carried away at times with the gold braid.

And then there was the firearms display, entire glass-encased walls of

rifles, pistols, and other munitions, many of them recovered from the battlefield in the months and years that followed.

Perhaps the most touching were the personal effects retrieved from the field and the corpses: Bibles, playing cards, love letters to and from those left behind, the slips of paper some soldiers pinned to their tunics before the battle listing their name and home address so that their dead bodies could be shipped home correctly.

But it wasn't until he viewed the cyclorama, a massive 360 degree painting depicting the battle in its entirety, with a lifelike diorama included, that he had a true sense of the magnitude of Gettysburg. In fact, it

almost made him cry, and he didn't cry easily. The contrast between these graphic images and the peaceful fields he'd jogged through this morning was both stark and disturbing.

Finally, he visited the theater and viewed a film about the Gettysburg Address narrated by the actor Morgan Freeman, whom he remembered had a major role in the Civil War movie *Glory* that Mr. O'Neill had shown at school.

There was so much to process that T.J. realized further visits would be necessary. It was clear to him that even if he'd aced O'Neill's Civil War unit he would be woefully uneducated on the subject. You had to *be* here, to see the

actual uniforms, equipment, firearms and artillery, the photos of the devastation wreaked upon the area. You had to walk the fields and get a sense of the magnitude of the battle where eight-thousand lives were lost, all of them American.

“Yo, T.J.!” shouted Uncle Mike from across a crowded hallway. “Glad I found you! I’m meeting a group over at the cemetery. You coming?”

“Sure.”

They took a golf cart for the ten minute ride over to the cemetery’s main entrance, where T.J. fell in behind a bunch of senior citizens from Montana whose tour bus was parked across the street in a lot which had served the

former Visitor Center. Thankfully, the military section of the cemetery was just a short walk from the entrance, but just passing through the high, wrought iron entrance gate was like entering another dimension for the seniors. Their lighthearted, excited air quickly turned somber as they entered the graveyard. Many of the men were obviously veterans; some seemed to go as far back as World War II.

Mike Darcy's many years as a teacher had prepared him well for his current job, and he took it seriously, shepherding his charges across the street and through the entrance, keeping them together as he would a bunch of school

kids. And, although his obvious enthusiasm for his work shone through, he, too, switched from his usual garrulous persona to a more subdued, pedantic tone to explain the surroundings.

“Shortly after the Battle of Gettysburg, with the support of Pennsylvania Governor Andrew Curtin, this site was purchased and Union dead were moved from the shallow and inadequate burial sites on the battlefield to the cemetery. The landscape architect William Saunders, founder of the National Grange, designed the cemetery. It was originally called Soldiers’ National Cemetery at Gettysburg.” He turned on his heel and they followed to

an area of small headstones, set in semicircular rows.

“As you may know, thousands of men died on the fields of Gettysburg, many in horrible fashion. At the end of the third day there began a torrential rain as Lee’s forces retreated back to the South. Thousands of men who could not be transported, both Union and Confederate, remained in makeshift hospitals, churches and private dwellings. The townspeople, whose dead livestock lay decomposing in the fields, opened their doors and their hearts and tried to help however they could.

“The task of cleaning the battlefield

was monumental. Dead horses and cows were heaped into piles and burned, leaving a stench over the town that lasted into the fall. The removal of Confederate dead from the burial plots was not undertaken until seven years after the battle. From 1870 to 1873, some 3,320 bodies were exhumed and sent to cities such as Raleigh, Savannah, Richmond and Charleston for reburial. Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy, took the most. Only a few were returned to private cemeteries.”

As they moved to another area T.J. could see, beyond a chest high wrought iron fence, the civilian part of the burial ground, Evergreen Cemetery, which had witnessed the battle and where

Gettysburg's citizens were still being buried. When the group stopped again, well within the military section, T.J. noticed a short stone that simply said "Unknown. 411 Bodies." As if that weren't chilling enough, it seemed to have been recently cleaned of a material that left a brownish purple residue. He looked up to see Mike eyeing him before he cleared his throat and resumed his monologue.

"William Saunders's design had two parts. First, the Soldiers National Monument was placed at the center, promoting the Union victory and the bravery of the fallen soldiers; second, you will notice that the graves are

arranged in a series of semicircles around the monument, emphasizing the fundamental nature of American society, with all graves considered equal. The stones are grouped by state with two sections for unknowns and one for the regular army. In later years, the dead from the Spanish American War and World War I were added outside the original configuration. Which brings us to the centerpiece of the military cemetery.”

T.J., along with the rest of the group, shielded his eyes from the blazing sun and looked skyward at the marble structure that towered above the graveyard.

“The cemetery was dedicated on

November 19, 1863. Of course, it was here that President Abraham Lincoln delivered his famous Gettysburg Address, which is noted for its brief yet powerful message. The cemetery was completed in March of 1864 with the last of 3,512 Union dead being reburied. In 1872 control of the grounds was transferred to the War Department and it is currently administered by the National Park Service as part of Gettysburg National Military Park. It contains today the remains of over six thousand bodies from numerous American wars.

“This monument before you was the first of any type to be placed at Gettysburg. The cornerstone was laid on

July 4, 1865, and the full monument was dedicated on July 1, 1869. The white, westerly granite pedestal supports a shaft and marble statue entitled *Genius of Liberty*. Four buttresses on the pedestal support allegorical statues of War, History, Plenty, and Peace.

“I hope you have enjoyed our tour, and I will stay behind for a few minutes for anyone who had further questions. Please observe the cemetery protocol of silence and respect as you walk about the grounds. Thank you for your patience on this hot day, and enjoy your visit to Gettysburg.”

A few stragglers stayed behind to ask questions but most moved off to wander about before heading back to their tour

bus. Some of the older men had a distant look in their eyes, perhaps remembering their own battlefield experiences in more modern conflicts.

“So, how was it, big guy? Did I bore you?” asked Mike, putting an arm around his nephew’s shoulders.

“Not at all,” said T.J. “Actually, I’m starting to get into it.”

“Super. You gonna do the bus tour I mentioned?”

“Not today. That might be overdoing it.”

“You’re right, no need to rush all this. If I were you I’d take a stroll around downtown, grab a bite to eat. There’s all kinds of fast food places and

a couple ice cream shops just a block away. A cold vanilla shake would go down nice right about now. Today I don't knock off till five, but you can hop the trolley when you've had enough and it'll drop you fairly near Seminary Ridge."

"Sounds great, Uncle Mike."

"You still worn out from this morning?"

"Well, I've kinda gotten my second wind. Still, it'll feel good to go home later and put my feet up."

"Listen," said his uncle, "don't let LouAnne steamroll you. She can be a handful when she gets going. If you think she's being too bossy or a know-it-all or whatever, give it right back. She

respects that.”

“Will do. See you later.” And with that, T.J. ambled off to see where the day would take him while his uncle downed a bottle of water and steered the golf cart back toward the Visitor Center.

T.J. wandered along Steinwehr Street, the most commercial avenue, ducking in and out of the many shops that filled the gaps between eateries and motels. In some ways they were all the same. There would be a front counter that sold “authentic” Civil War bullets and artillery shells and fragments, right next to the refrigerator magnets and key chains, followed by racks of kiddie plastic guns and swords, much more

realistic, and expensive, replica pistols and rifles for adults, hats, flags, tee shirts, blankets, toy soldiers and cannons, belt buckles, glassware, collector spoons and thimbles, CD's, DVD's and books, a surprising percentage of which that dealt with ghosts and hauntings in the area.

Especially strange to T.J. were the Southern-oriented tee shirts with likenesses of Robert E. Lee and other Rebel commanders with inscriptions like "The South Shall Rise Again" and "Hell, No, I Won't Ever Forget!"

There was also a brisk business in Civil War art (a couple galleries on the street were even devoted to it) with various vignettes or leaders from key

battles being portrayed. Some of it was quite good, while some was downright amateurish and horrible. But no matter the quality, T.J. marveled that *anyone* would frame this stuff and hang it on the walls of his living room. He'd heard that some enthusiasts, especially reenactors, could be Civil War maniacs, but always considered them an exaggerated fringe element. Viewing all of the memorabilia, trinkets and art throughout his Historic Downtown exploration, he wasn't so sure now. This town was "making a mint" as his dad would say. He thought to himself, as he sucked on a truly satisfying vanilla shake, that an 1860s soldier would take a look around at all

this crass commercialism and say, “So *this* is what I died for?”

As he caught the Town Trolley, a plan began to form in his mind. Somehow, he had to catch up to his cousin before she totally humiliated him with her running prowess, and tonight he'd put that plan into effect, no matter how much pain it caused.

Chapter Nine

As he laced his running shoes, T.J. felt a tingling sense of excitement. Mike and Terri were out to dinner, and LouAnne was going to be staying late at Charney House entertaining a large group from the Virginia Daughters of the Confederacy, who had arrived in town via tour bus that afternoon. This would be the perfect time to try out Coach Autieri's workout without LouAnne's scrutiny or the oppressive morning heat. And if he got stopped, he reasoned, he could always drop Uncle Mike's name.

After pulling on his light gray Bridgefield Middle School track suit, he

quickly stretched and then set off on an easy jog in the opposite direction from the first run, crossing the Hagerstown Road toward Reynolds' Woods, where the Union general of the same name was shot from his horse on the battle's first day. He thought it was rather cool that the Hagerstown Road also went by the name of his hometown, Fairfield.

Feeling strong, T.J. spied the outline of the McPherson Farm's barn, which had survived the battle, amid a field of grass that murmured to him in the cool breeze. Why not? He left the pavement and made for the structure, noting the decidedly uneven terrain and wondering if his desire to gain an advantage on his cousin was perhaps foolhardy.

He was within fifty yards of the barn when, almost as if on cue, he stepped into a chuckhole and tumbled forward, his hands outstretched to break his fall. T.J. effected a forward roll and ended up in a sitting position, shaking dirt and sweat from his hair. He tried to stand but clearly wasn't up to it, his right ankle screaming with pain. So he sat back in the long grass and got his bearings. He could make out the Seminary's cupola in the distance from where he'd come, figuring he'd covered at least a mile and a half. What had he been thinking? Now he'd have to get back to Uncle Mike's on his own, where he could hopefully ice his ankle while concocting some kind of

story that wouldn't have his relatives regarding him as an irresponsible jerk. But if he was going to beat them home he'd have to get cracking, bad ankle or no. Taking a deep breath, he gingerly rose, dusted himself off and guesstimated an angle that would get him to Seminary Ridge in the shortest possible distance.

He was approaching Reynolds' Woods when the pain became unbearable and he paused for rest, the stubby obelisk commemorating the fallen general etched against the sky before him. T.J. lay back against a tree on the woods' edge, massaging the tender ankle, and immediately cursed his bad luck. Had he sat in animal droppings? Or

was something dead in his immediate area? He couldn't tell, as the evening was becoming increasingly overcast, but the smell became stronger.

Then he heard hoof beats, unmistakable, mingled with the sound of metal clinking on metal. *What in the world?*

He looked from side to side into the gloom. *Gotta get moving*, he thought. *Suck it up and GO*. But as he rose to his feet a figure stepped from behind a tree, so quickly that T.J., backpedaling, put too much pressure on the injured joint and went down yet again.

The soldier stood before him, feet planted wide, gauntleted hands on hips,

his head slightly cocked to one side. T.J. couldn't tell if this was from amusement or sheer bewilderment at the tableau of the fallen boy.

“Who...are you?” T.J. managed.

“That is NOT your concern,” the man replied. “State your business here.” His dark eyes bored into the boy.

“Well, I, er—”

“Spit it out, lad!”

“I was running.”

The tall soldier seemed taken back. “Running? From what?”

What, indeed? “I don't know,” he said.

The soldier squinted an eye. “Your name?”

“T...Thomas Jackson, Junior, sir,” he

whispered hoarsely, as the realization dawned upon him that this man's uniform matched that of the Confederate cavalry officers on display in the Visitor Center, right down to the plumed hat.

“Thomas Jackson, Junior. Is that a fact?” the man said. “And I suppose this is your uniform?” he added, flicking a finger at T.J.'s track suit.

“Well, yeah, uh, yes, sir. I guess you could call it that.” Even as he spoke T.J. made the connection. Bridgefield Middle School's colors were gray with red and blue piping, the same colors as the Confederate Stars and Bars.

“And am I to believe that you are actually the son of Thomas Jackson?”

“Yes, sir, he’s my father.” What was up with this guy? How could he possibly know his dad? And where was that ungodly smell coming from? He heard the sound of a horse nickering in the woods behind them.

“Brutus, hush!” the soldier commanded and the animal silenced.

T.J. was frightened, yet fascinated. The specter before him was powerful, even regal, though darkly menacing. He felt he must keep a conversation going or this...whatever he was, might cause some serious harm. His mind raced...and then, for some reason he thought, *what would Bortnicker do?*

“I have two questions,” he said,

trying to eliminate the waver in his voice.

“And they are?”

“Well, first, are you real?”

“Do I seem real to you, boy?”

“I guess so. I think. I can see you.”

And I can sure smell you, he thought.

“Your second question.”

“Well, uh, why are you here?”

“It is my home,” he said firmly.

“You live in town, then.” Thank God, T.J. thought, this guy just likes dressing up and riding around at night.

“No,” he said, “I live *here*.” He made a grand sweep of his arm, suggesting that the general landscape was his home.

What the heck? “How long have you

lived here?" T.J. attempted.

"Time has no meaning for me," was his answer.

Back to square one. "Are you going to harm me?" T.J. asked in the most mature tone he could muster.

"I should," the man said evenly. "You have no business being heah at this time. This is sacred ground."

At that moment a passenger jet broke through the clouds above, the drone of its engines barely discernible, its red wing lights blinking. The soldier looked skyward, his eyes widening.

He doesn't know what an airplane is, thought T.J. He took a deep breath and said, "You're right, sir. I don't

belong here. I just stopped because I was injured.”

“You are wounded?”

“No, not like, shot or anything. I turned my ankle a ways back near that barn. I’m trying to make my way back to Seminary Ridge.”

“I see.” The cavalier seemed conflicted over what to do. From the woods came the sound of his horse restlessly pawing the ground. The man took a step forward, causing T.J. to shut his eyes in fear, then dropped to one knee and examined the ankle, his smell eye-watering. He touched the bone, and T.J. almost screamed in fright. It was like being touched by something dead and dark and otherworldly.

“There is no break,” the soldier concluded. He rose and adjusted his gloves as T.J. quietly exhaled. “Well, young Master Jackson, if that is indeed your name, you may carry on. But I warn you, this is not the place to be at night. Other transgressors have paid for their thoughtlessness and regrettable behavior. I would not want to include you among their number. And so, I take my leave of you.” He bowed slightly then strode towards Reynolds’ Woods, his spurs jangling. When he crossed the tree line, the sound faded out with the rustling of leaves. T.J. was left to contemplate his tenuous hold on reality and whether he could even share this

occurrence with another human being.

He slowly pushed himself up and realized that much of the pain in his ankle was gone.

How is that possible? Is it because he touched me?

T.J. tentatively bounced up and down on the balls of his feet. No doubt, he was much better. Not risking re-injury, he began a brisk walk back to Seminary Ridge, hoping he'd arrive before those who would ask questions he could not possibly answer.

Chapter Ten

“Okay, settle down, everyone, I don’t want this to take too long,” Bruce Morrison said, his spectacles reflecting the conference room’s overhead lighting. “Chief Warren wants to brief you about a serious situation we’ve got on our hands, and I want you to understand what we’re dealing with. I apologize for not letting you in on every detail, but that’s why we’re here, to get on the same page. Al?”

The assembled national park rangers edged forward in their seats, including Mike Darcy. There were nine permanent rangers, including Mike, and nine

seasonal rangers who represented a cross section of gender, age, and color, their one true denominator, a love and respect for American History. Rumors had been flying, and they were both relieved and curious as to what was really going on in their place of work.

“Thanks, Bruce,” said Warren, placing his Smokey hat on a nearby table. “Rangers, I’ll cut to the chase. We’ve got a killer loose in the area and we have no leads as to whom he is, his motive for this violence, or when he might strike again.”

An audible gasp came from the assemblage.

“Just listen while I tell you what we know,” said Warren, his hands

outstretched in a calming gesture. “What you’re going to hear will sound bizarre, but I don’t have to tell you that you absolutely must keep this confidential. This town’s livelihood depends on it.”

Many of the rangers, including Mike, nodded, knowing full well the reliance of Gettysburg’s economy on the tourist trade.

“Okay, then. A few weeks ago two Gettysburg College students were shot to death in the cemetery, at night. Both were boarders; one was from Maryland, the other from Idaho. Apparently, they were partying amid the gravestones, oblivious to their setting or anything else, it seems, when someone blew them

away at close range with what appears to be an army issue, 1860 .44 caliber pistol.”

Many of the rangers turned toward each other, eyes wide. Warren paused to let his words sink in. One fortyish female ranger with short brown hair began to raise her hand, but Warren stopped her. “Not yet, Ma’am, let me finish. Unfortunately, there’s more. A couple weeks later we had a relic hunter from down South digging near Spangler’s Spring around midnight, armed with a metal detector, night camos, the whole nine yards. He became victim number three. Same murder weapon. And the bullet matched the other two homicides.”

What Warren had purposely left out, however, was even more stunning. Not only did the bullets from the two shootings match—the State Police in Harrisburg had confirmed it—but *the ammo itself was old, of 1860s vintage.*

Out of the corner of his eye Mike Darcy could see Bruce Morrison giving him a look. Morrison knew that Mike owned the exact pistol being discussed, and that he often went shooting with his buddies. And while it was true that the two rarely saw eye-to-eye because Mike considered Bruce an over-officious jerk at times, he couldn't conceive of his boss having suspicions of him. Or could he?

“Okay, I’ll take questions,” said Warren.

The same female put up her hand and he acknowledged her. “So what you’re saying, Chief, is that we have no witnesses?”

“Not exactly.” Warren looked briefly at the ceiling as if searching for words. “We had one other incident. A man, once again in the park after dark, somewhere near Devil’s Den, was, he says, threatened by a male Caucasian, over six feet, with longish, dark, curly hair, dressed in full Confederate cavalry uniform.”

“WHAT!” burst forth from the mouths of more than a few of the

rangers.

“Please, please people, calm down,” cautioned Morrison.

“This is a positive I.D.?” asked a portly male ranger who resembled the comedian Jonathan Winters.

“Well, near as we can tell,” said Warren, “and he might be...mounted as well.” He paused to let this extra bit of information wash over the gathering. Some just sat there with mouths agape; others were thinking hard, trying to process this incredible revelation.

A young African American female ranger raised her hand. “Does the Mayor know about this?” she asked uncertainly.

“Yes, Ma’am, we discussed the situation in depth just last night and he

asked if we should call in outside help. I had enough faith in my department— and yours—to request that he let us handle it.

“So what I’m telling you folks is this: we all know the high season is here, and reenactment week is coming on fast. My officers are doubling up on nightly patrols and will really, I mean *really*, crack down on anybody entering the park after dark. Be vigilant and professional, and above all, *keep this quiet*. Hopefully this guy will slip up or get spooked when he sees a heavy police presence.”

“Is there anything you’re *not* telling us?” asked Mike.

“That’s all you need to know right

now, sir,” was Warren’s cryptic reply. He reached back for his hat as Morrison said, “Okay, folks, we have tourists waiting. Let’s have a good day out there.”

As they filed out Mike could see Warren and his boss deep in conversation. He hoped his name wasn’t part of it.

Chapter Eleven

The next morning T.J. was the first to awaken. His sleep had been fitful, filled with crazy dreams of cavalry charges and blowing bugles. He gingerly swung his legs over the side of the bed and touched his injured foot to the floor, anticipating a sharp pain, flinching in advance.

Nothing.

Had it all been a nightmare? Had he really gone for the night run, encountered the soldier, and barely made it home to bed before the Darcys returned? T.J. crept over to his crumpled track suit on the floor. The pants were still dirty,

especially in the seat, from when he'd fallen backwards. There was still grass and burrs stuck to the fabric.

It wasn't a dream. It had happened. The question was, *what was he going to do about it?*

He never got a chance to come to a decision because there came the familiar knock-knock-knock and LouAnne's "Rise and shine, Cuz. Time to get after it!"

As they stretched he asked if they could go the opposite way today, basically so he could get a look at last night's route in broad daylight.

"Sure, why not?" she replied. "Besides, you haven't been that way yet."

You have no idea, Cuz, he thought.

They took off, chatting about LouAnne's interactions with the Daughters of the Confederacy, who apparently were poor tippers, and her upcoming day of babysitting. The whole time his mind was elsewhere, retracing his movements of the night before. They passed the monument to General Reynolds, the red barn visible in the distance. It all looked so serene, so...normal.

Do I tell her? And if I do, how's she gonna react? Will she understand? Or think I'm some kinda nutcase?

The last thing he wanted to do with this girl was seem frightened, or even

worse, immature. Uncool.

“This is a nice stretch coming up,” said LouAnne. “We’re gonna follow this to a loop where there’s the Eternal Light Peace Memorial at the top. Then we’ll take it on back. Sound good?”

“Fine. Lead the way.”

They glided through the last mile, T.J. recognizing a minimal improvement in his stamina.

“What’cha got on tap today, Cuz?” LouAnne huffed as they climbed a hill.

“Bus tour, I think.”

“Jeez, T.J., I never thought you’d get into it like you have. I mean, you’re taking tours, hitting all the museums. Dad said you were all over it yesterday.”

“Well, you’ve gotta admit, there isn’t

much else to do here except watch TV. I can help your mom with the minor chores, but that only kills a couple hours. But, hey, I don't mind. I'm learning a lot."

"Well, as long as you're not totally bored. I just feel bad I'm working all the time."

"Hey, you gotta do what you gotta do. Tell you what. I'll come by the Charney House tonight and keep you company."

"Sounds great." They pulled up in the front yard and immediately began their post stretch. The day was again drenchingly humid, the trees barely stirring. LouAnne assumed a hurdler's

position and slowly slid forward, face down, until she had grabbed her front foot with both hands. She held it for fifteen seconds then gracefully switched sides. The morning sun glinted off the platinum highlights in her hair. Could she possibly be more beautiful?

That afternoon he climbed aboard a double-decked tour bus and moved to an inconspicuous railing seat near the rear. Though this would not be the more intimate ranger-led tour he'd skipped the previous day, it would serve as the initial excursion. Since he was a single he'd had no problem just walking on today, but these busses booked up fast. A friendly, middle-aged gent in a white golf shirt manned the microphone and

began his spiel as the bus pulled out of the parking lot and cruised toward the first point of interest on the ninety-minute ride.

T.J. settled back, making note not only of the sites and monuments pointed out by the guide, who'd obviously done this thousands of times, but of any places on the vast battlefield where a horseman could possibly hide. There were old, standing barns here and there, the buildings of Gettysburg College, the Seminary, the numerous farms in the surrounding area. The soldier could be anywhere.

That is, if "he" was an actual human being. But what if he wasn't? What if

T.J. had stumbled upon a genuine ghost? How could he possibly prove this had happened? Well, he'd have to go back. At night. But not alone. *No way, José.* He'd have to tell his cousin. If he broke it to her the right way, she'd understand. Probably. But he couldn't tell Uncle Mike. Not yet. Because his uncle might react badly, and not just yelling at T.J. for being in the woods at night. Maybe "Maddog Mike" would want to go after the ghost. Not good, because as tough as Mike Darcy was, he was no match for a malevolent being packing what appeared to be a very large, mean-looking horse pistol, which T.J. sensed he'd used before.

He'd tell LouAnne tonight at the

restaurant. It was the only way to go. Together they'd figure it out.

As the tour guide droned on, T.J. regarded a little girl across the aisle from him eating a chocolate cone, the sweet goop dripping all over her hand and shirt as she struggled to keep up with the rapidly melting ice cream. She caught him smiling at her and frowned. "It's not funny," she grumbled. But nothing was going to dismay T.J. He had a plan.

Thus, he kept smiling throughout Aunt Terri's spaghetti and meatballs dinner, until Uncle Mike cleared his throat. "Uh, LouAnne, before I take you to work, I've got to discuss something

important. We're having problems in the park."

"Such as?" inquired his daughter, arching an eyebrow.

"I'm not at liberty to say. Not yet. What I can tell you is that it's become downright dangerous at night, and I have to remind you both again to stay away."

"A man of mystery," cracked Terri, attempting to lighten the mood. A sharp look from her husband put an end to any such levity.

"Okay, Uncle Mike, no problem," said T.J.

"Good. At least my nephew understands when I'm being serious." He glanced at his watch. "Let's go, babydoll, you're gonna be late."

They left as T.J. helped his aunt clear the table. “Any idea what’s up?” he attempted, trying to be nonchalant.

“He won’t even tell *me*,” was her answer. “Which is very unlike your uncle. I hope he’s not banging heads with his boss again. Bruce Morrison can be difficult, and your uncle is known to be a bit hardheaded himself, so they sometimes clash.” She sighed as she loaded the dishwasher. “Let’s hurry up, and we can watch *Wheel of Fortune*!”

“Sounds good. Hey, Aunt Terri, I’m going to walk down to the Charney House a little later on, okay?”

“Sure. Just skirt the battlefield, like Mike says. Take an umbrella, though.

They're predicting rain for later on."

"Okay, sure."

They watched *Wheel of Fortune*, and a few more shows as well, Aunt Terri taking breaks from her needlepoint to peer over her reading glasses at the TV. T.J. counted the minutes until he could get out of there. Uncle Mike had returned and was clanking weights out in the garage. No way was he going out there, taking a chance on slipping up and blabbing.

Finally, 9:00 P.M. arrived. T.J. scooped up a blue Totes umbrella and headed down Buford Avenue towards town, almost jogging. Thunder rolled in the far distance. A ghost tour up from Baltimore Street crossed the town

square, a couple of the teenaged girls waving at him coyly as their mothers fanned themselves in the evening heat. Maybe a good rain would cool things off.

He entered the Inn as the last patrons were streaming down the stairs from the garret. LouAnne followed a few steps behind, giving him a little wave. When she reached him she quickly squeezed his hand and said, "I'm parched. You want to have a Coke at the bar?"

"Can we?"

"The place is empty, silly. And I'm pouring. Let's go."

The bar was tiny, more for waitresses to pick up table orders than

for a cocktail hour setup. LouAnne, quickly shedding her 1860s outfit and hanging it in a back room, slipped behind the bar, loaded two glasses with ice, and filled them with cola from a spray nozzle before dumping in a few cherries. They clinked glasses and tipped them back. The moisture was welcoming to T.J.'s throat. He had no idea how to start. But, as usual, LouAnne beat him to the punch when she said, "So what's bothering you, my darling cousin?"

"How do you know something's bothering me?"

"Puh-leeze. Girls know these things. What's up?"

"Something you're probably not

gonna believe.”

“Love problems? That Katie Vickers babe dumping you long distance?”

“What? Who?” T.J. stammered, momentarily off balance. Katie Vickers was the *last* thing on his mind. He couldn’t even believe LouAnne had remembered her name. But he put aside any possible implications of her question and said, “I think I know what your dad was talking about at dinner.”

“How so?” she said, the different colored liquor bottles on the shelves behind her creating a surrealistic frame for her curious smile.

“Okay, I’ll tell you, but please don’t laugh at me.”

“I won’t,” she said, her voice barely a whisper. She reached across the bar and put her hand on his.

T.J. took a deep breath and then, as calmly as he could, told her everything about his adventure in Reynolds’ Woods, right down to the miraculous recovery of his injured ankle. LouAnne listened carefully, chewing on her ice cubes, her brow furrowed, never interjecting, even when he confessed why he was out there in the first place and, thankfully, never laughing. By the time he was finished his tee shirt was soaked, though the air conditioner was cranking.

“Oh...my...gosh,” was all his cousin

could muster. There was the crack of thunder outside, followed seconds later by the beating of rain on the windows.

“The thing is, I don’t know what to do now,” he confessed. “Part of me says to just leave it alone and be happy I got out of there alive. But I also kinda want to know what the deal really is, and if he’s like, a ghost, maybe I can, like, find out if there’s another side.”

“Another side?”

“You know, the hereafter. Heaven. Whatever.”

“Does this have something to do with your mom?”

“I don’t know. Maybe.” He thoughtfully chewed on a cherry. “The other thing is, whether this guy is real or

not, I think he's dangerous. Like, so on edge he could snap at any time. Do you get what I'm saying?"

"I get what you're saying, dude," said a voice in the shadows. T.J.'s head snapped around and LouAnne squinted into the gloom at the rear of the dining area. Under a portrait of General Robert E. Lee a young guy dressed in solid black, his gelled hair askew, sat slumped over a tumbler of amber liquid. As he raised his head T.J. could make out sunken, red-rimmed eyes looking out from his somewhat familiar face. "I know *exactly* what you're saying."

* * * *

T.J. and LouAnne huddled together

under the tiny umbrella, her arm around his shoulder to conserve space, which he didn't mind at all. They'd just left a still shaking Mike Weinstein, who'd finally be joining his film crew in St. Augustine the next day because his flight out of Philly had been delayed due to severe thunderstorms. After their conversation with him, LouAnne had phoned a very concerned Mike Darcy, giving the excuse that the teens had been pressed into service setting up tables for a luncheon to be held the next day.

As the rain pelted down, LouAnne broke the silence once again. "You think he's on the level, Cuz?" she asked. "He was pretty wasted."

"And scared."

“Yeah, that too. It’s funny; I’ve seen the guy’s TV show a few times, and I know reality TV isn’t really real, but wouldn’t you think he could handle the situation better? I mean, I give him credit for being honest, but he was literally quaking in fear. Not exactly the macho image he projects as a *Gonzo Ghost Chaser*.”

“He said he hung around a few extra days to see if anything else went down in the Park, but it looks like I’m it, basically. The thing is, why was the soldier willing to spare me after trying to blow Weinstein away?”

“You don’t know?” she said, blinking away some stray raindrops.

“Cause I’m a kid?”

“Kids your age served on both sides in the Civil War, T.J. No, what saved you is your name.”

“What?”

“You honestly don’t know? What, were you asleep during your eighth grade Civil War unit? Your name is Thomas Jackson, Junior. Well, there was another Thomas Jackson of note. General Thomas Jackson of the Army of Northern Virginia. His troops called him —”

“Stonewall.”

“Ah, maybe you weren’t asleep the whole time after all.” She smiled. “By the time the Battle of Gettysburg rolled

around, Jackson was dead, accidentally shot by his own men during the Battle of Chancellorsville. Maybe our Confederate soldier boy is a history buff who wouldn't dare murder the namesake of a Southern saint. Or, if you believe Weinstein's story, he's a ghost stuck in July of 1863 and he genuinely thinks you may be the son of his fallen leader."

"He did seem confused about how to treat me," T.J. said, shivering slightly as he recalled the soldier's touch.

"Well, there you go." A few blocks away, the headlights of Mike's truck turned a corner toward their direction. LouAnne bit her lip for a second then added, "And that's why you, I mean *we*, have got to go find him again. But we

can't tell my dad, for now. He'd have a canary, and then he'd put us on 24/7 lockdown."

"You got that right."

"The thing is," she said, "I just don't know if we're knowledgeable enough to get to the bottom of this. If we do meet up with this...being, I'm not sure I'll know what to ask him, or if he has questions, what to *tell* him."

"I think I can help on that one," said T.J. as Mike pulled up and threw open the passenger door.

"Hurry up and get in, you two," he said, obviously agitated. "What took you so long to call? I was about to put in a missing person's report!"

“Oh, Daddy,” said LouAnne, disarming him with a kiss on the cheek as she slid into the front seat. “You worry too much.”

Chapter Twelve

“FAR OUT!” Bortnicker cried so loud that T.J. had to hold LouAnne’s cell phone away from his ear. “A Confederate ghost rider, you say?”

“I said I’m not sure.”

“Oh, c’mon, now, T.J., I can hear it in your voice. You think he’s a spook! Admit it!”

“Well, I’m leaning that way –”

“TOO COOL! I told you this would be a great vacation for you. And how’s your female relative? Still her dorky self?”

T.J. looked across the room at his cousin, sitting in the guest room

window's alcove, deep in concentration as she applied a coat of clean polish to her toenails, her blond tresses cascading over the straps of her pink halter top.

“Hey, are you there, my brother?”

“Yeah, yeah, Bortnicker, I’m here. I mean, we’re here.”

“Oh, I get it, Big Mon. She’s within earshot. I catch your drift. So, back to our Johnny Reb. What’s your plan of attack, if you’ll pardon my pun?” Steely Dan’s “Katy Lied” was playing in the background.

T.J. shut his eyes and took a deep breath, remembering just how annoying his friend could be. Bortnicker was probably perched on his bed right now, surrounded by half-eaten saltines and

dog earned train magazines, watching *History's Mysteries* or *Ancient Almanac*.

“That’s just it. I, uh, want to meet up with this, uh, guy again, but, like, despite everything I’ve been learning down here, I just don’t know enough about his world to relate to him. I’m afraid if I say or do the wrong thing he’ll do some serious harm to me.”

“So, what is it you’re saying?”

“Well, ah, I checked with my uncle and, ah, when could you get down here?”

There was a brief pause. “What time is it now?”

* * * *

The next day was Sunday, and though it was an official day of rest from running, T.J. put the morning to good use by reading some of the books about Gettysburg that Mike had laying around the house. Especially helpful was a picture book entitled *Gettysburg Then and Now* which presented numerous sites as they appeared today versus photos taken immediately after the battle. He was able to start making mental connections to many of the tour bus stops from the previous day.

At precisely 4:00 P.M. he and LouAnne stood together in the Gettysburg town square as the charter bus from Philadelphia disgorged its

contents. Bortnicker was among the last to disembark, an overstuffed duffel bag slung over his bony shoulder. He stepped upon the pavement, dropped his bag, and started warbling a line from *The Dan* about a guy getting insulted about his shoes.

“ ‘Pretzel Logic,’ ” LouAnne stated, stepping up to greet him, her hand outstretched.

Bortnicker turned beet red, his mouth literally falling open. “You...you’re LouAnne?” he managed, his gaze going everywhere at once. “You know...‘Pretzel Logic?’ ”

“From the album of the same name, I believe,” she replied airily.

Bortnicker took her hand and fell to

one knee. “You are a goddess. I am not worthy,” he intoned, as if waiting to be knighted.

“Jeez Louise, Bortnicker,” moaned T.J., “will you cut it out and get up? At least *try* to act halfway normal.”

Bortnicker rose, grinning sheepishly, his bangs hanging in front of his tortoise shell glasses.

“Oh, I don’t know, Cuz,” said LouAnne, hefting the dusty duffel bag, “I think he’s kinda cute.”

T.J. shook his head in disgust. “Don’t encourage him.”

They started back towards Seminary Ridge, Bortnicker’s head continuously swiveling, taking in all the shops,

eateries and bullet-pocked row houses. It was why he did so well in school, despite his eccentricities. Bortnicker had a way of taking a mental inventory of everything around him to the smallest detail, especially if it was of interest to him. And, boy, was he interested.

“How’d you get here so fast?” asked LouAnne as they climbed along Buford Avenue toward Seminary Ridge.

“It was easy. The Internet is such a great tool that I had it mapped out within minutes. I took the New Haven Line into Grand Central, the Amtrak to Philly, and then picked up a tour bus to here. I’d never done Amtrak before. Way cool! Has T.J. told you I’m big into model railroading?”

“No,” replied LouAnne. “We really didn’t have much time for that. Your mom’s okay with you coming down here alone, just like that?”

“Oh, yeah. She likes when I do grownup stuff like this. Plus, I just spent some time with her up in Boston and I think she needed a break from me. I can’t imagine why,” he added wryly, and LouAnne smiled. T.J. just frowned.

“Well, Bortnicker,” she said, “my parents are fine with you bunking with T.J. in the guest room. They were worried that he was getting a little homesick, anyway.” She looked at her cousin who rolled his eyes in embarrassment.

“*Homesick?*” cried Bortnicker. “*Here?* With all this going on? We’ve got a major mystery to solve, it seems to me. When T.J. gave me the basics on the phone, I was so jacked I couldn’t sit still! Even if my mom had said no, I would’ve bugged out anyway. No way I’m missing this. It’s the adventure of a lifetime!”

“Easy, man,” cautioned T.J. “We’ve got to think things through before we decide on a plan of action.”

“Don’t worry, Big Mon.” Bortnicker pulled a loose-leaf notebook from his duffel bag. “As *The Dan* said, ‘the true facts unravel the more one travels.’” He suddenly turned to LouAnne. “Name

THAT one!”

“ ‘Show Biz Kids,’ ” she said sweetly.

“Ooh, you’re good,” he answered, handing the notebook to T.J. “I wrote down a lot of thoughts about this on the train. Check it out.”

T.J. thumbed through the pages, which were mostly filled with Civil War-related minutiae and questions that must’ve come flying into Bortnicker’s mind a mile a minute. He had filled at least twenty pages! “Wow,” he mumbled, “you’re really on it, Bortnicker.”

“Isn’t that why you called me?”

“Guess so.”

“Okay, then,” he said, the physical

exertion of walking causing him to breathe raggedly. Bortnicker hardly ever exercised or gave an effort in phys ed. The one year he'd played little league on T.J.'s team he'd contented himself with instantaneously computing everyone's batting averages and compiling the team's highest on-base percentage by managing to get hit with the ball almost every time up.

“As I see it, here is what we have to do. If this is a ghost we're dealing with, because we're still not sure, I think we should drop in on the foremost expert in town on hauntings. Now, LouAnne, you must know that if you surf the net you'll find at least three different ghost tour

outfits. They've got candlelight tours, sunset tours, walking tours, riding tours, in town and on the outskirts of the battlefield. But the one that's always on the History Channel is run by this guy, Carlton Elway. Know him?"

"We've crossed paths," said LouAnne. "My dad runs into him a lot around town. Seems to me like kind of a know-it-all, but an okay guy."

"Well, he's done a three-part TV series on all the hauntings around Gettysburg, and if anyone has info on our nocturnal cavalier, it's this guy. Unless he's just a big fake, of course. I say we go see him first thing tomorrow."

"You guys will have to go by yourselves," said LouAnne, "I'm

babysitting at ten.”

“Okay then, Big Mon.” Bortnicker smiled, clapping his hand on T.J.’s shoulder. “It’s just you n’me. Hey, are we there yet?” They had been passing Bortnicker’s duffel bag around and it was getting heavier by the minute.

Finally they reached Seminary Ridge and the Darcy residence. Their new lodger introduced himself all around with “Please just call me Bortnicker. Everyone else does,” and the ensuing dinner table conversation over Aunt Terri’s pot roast was lively. Bortnicker could be charming in his own quirky way, and he kept the Darcys laughing with his self-deprecating humor. At one

point, LouAnne was laughing so hard she had to dab at her eyes with a napkin. T.J. felt himself doing a slow burn. He couldn't believe his relatives were finding his friend so entertaining. Especially LouAnne. And then the thought occurred to him. *Can I actually be jealous? Of Bortnicker?*

They lingered around the table till after 9:00 P.M., when Mike pronounced himself ready to hit the sack.

"Me, too," Bortnicker replied with a huge yawn. "I haven't slept in twenty-four hours."

LouAnne and T.J. made arrangements to run the following morning and the boys climbed the stairs to the guest room. Not one word about the real

reason for Bortnicker's presence had been spoken during the meal, as per T.J.'s orders. T.J closed the guest room door behind him, mentally prepared for an onslaught of questions about the mystery, although the three teens had gone over the whole thing on the walk home. Thus, he was unprepared for Bortnicker's opening.

"T.J., do you think there's really such a thing as love at first sight?"

"Wh...what?" he replied, stunned.

"Your cousin is the most enchanting creature I've ever laid eyes on," he said, unashamedly dreamy-voiced. "Surely you've noticed that she's drop-dead gorgeous."

“Bortnicker, man, of course not, she’s my cousin!” T.J. said, somewhat defensively, lying through his teeth.

“Well, Big Mon, my new goal in life, besides of course getting to the bottom of this investigation, is to win the hand of yon fair maiden. That is, if you have no objections?” He brushed the hair from his eyes, which gleamed with expectation.

“Of course not. Why would I?”

“Okay, just checking. It’s just that at dinner tonight you seemed a little edgy, like maybe you weren’t enjoying yourself. Was it because of me? Do you think maybe it was a bad idea I came down here? Because when you called

—”

“I know, I know,” said T.J., raising his hand to stop Bortnicker before his best friend threw it all back in his face. “It’s just...” he paused, searching for the right words, “it’s just that sometimes you come on a bit too strong, like with that kneeling down routine with LouAnne.”

“Well, *SHE* seemed to like it.”

“Yeah, well, at first it’s okay, I suppose, but the novelty kind of wears off after a while.”

Bortnicker made his way to a corner chair and absentmindedly went into perch mode, his chin resting on his knees. “I get what you’re saying,” he mumbled. “As you well know, I don’t have a ton of experience talking to

girls.”

“Like I do?”

“Oh, c’mon, T.J., lots of girls at school like you. I wish I was a quarter as popular as you.”

“You’re overestimating me. Listen, what I’m saying is, just tone it down, at least at first. It’s not like you’re leaving tomorrow or something.”

“You mean you want me to stay?” Bortnicker queried, his eyebrows raised.

“Yes, of course I do. We’ve got a mystery to solve, don’t we?”

Bortnicker sprang from the chair. “Exactly! And it begins tomorrow. One more thing, though. What you saw the other night in the woods. Did it scare

you?”

T.J. thought, pinching the bridge of his nose with his fingers, recalling that awful smell that had signaled the appearance of the soldier. “I’ve never been so scared in my life,” he said finally. Embarrassed over admitting his fear, T.J. excused himself to go brush his teeth. When he returned, the room was dark, his friend already tucked into the second guest bed. T.J. tiptoed to his bed and quietly slipped beneath the covers. There was a gentle breeze blowing, and crickets chirped outside the window.

Bortnicker cleared his throat. “T.J.?”

“Yeah?”

“Did I ever tell you I have a snoring problem?”

Chapter Thirteen

The day dawned, gloomy and chilly, almost a relief from the oppressive heat of the past week. T.J. stealthily pulled on his running gear and tiptoed past a snoring Bortnicker to the staircase where LouAnne sat atop the bottom step, lacing on her Nikes. He was still a bit miffed about his friend's grand entrance of the day before, and hoped his cousin wouldn't mention it. He was wrong.

"So, what's going on with you and Bortnicker?" she asked as they jogged away from the house. "It looked like you had a bug up your butt the whole time during dinner."

“Nothing. Everything’s cool. He just gets on my nerves sometimes. He doesn’t even know he’s doing it, probably.”

“He looks up to you, you know. Did you ever think of that?” she said in an admonishing tone.

“What? Did he say something to you?”

“He didn’t have to, T.J. I can see it in his eyes. You must be his best friend.”

“Only friend,” muttered T.J.

“Which is all the more reason to cut him some slack. And don’t be so quick to put him down when he tries to be whatever he interprets as ‘smooth.’ He needs you to look out for him, not rag on

him.”

“I *do* look out for him,” he cried plaintively. “Like at school this year. Bortnicker liked this girl, Kimberly LaFarge. So we have this eighth grade dance every year near Valentine’s Day, and he had this flower company deliver her a big bouquet of roses that came with candy, the whole nine yards, right in the middle of homeroom! With an invitation, of course, for her to go to the dance with him.”

“And?”

“And she blew him off! What did you expect? The whole day she and her popular girl clique were snickering and passing notes and laughing themselves silly. When he realized that he looked

like a clown he just, like, hid out for a while in the book room. So anyway, we had Spanish together that afternoon and our teacher, Miss Simoes, sent me to look for him before she phoned the office.

“So I went around, checking out the locker room, the boy’s bathroom, the library. Finally I just poked my head in the book storage room and there he was, sitting on a crate of textbooks, hugging his knees under his chin, tears streaming down his face. So then I had to convince him that he wasn’t a jerk, that *she* was the one who was losing out, and that if we didn’t get back to Spanish class soon we’d both be in trouble. Finally, I got

him to come with me. We caught like the last five minutes of the period. Miss Simoes was cool about it. She kinda knew what was going on, and I think she couldn't stand Kimberly LaFarge anyway.

“Now, that should've been my good deed for the day, but no, I took it upon myself to go ream LaFarge out in front of her witchy posse. That led to Kim's Joe-Jock seventeen-year-old brother and his football buddies pushing me all over the playground the following afternoon, which led to me getting totally humiliated while Bortnicker was home running his model trains.”

The last words were no sooner out of T.J.'s mouth that LouAnne stopped short.

He followed suit. “What’s the matter?” he asked.

“You might not believe this, T.J.,” she said, her eyes filmy, “but I’ve been in his position. Lots of times. And in all those times I never had a friend stick up for me the way you did for him.” She learned forward and kissed him on the cheek, as light as a butterfly’s wing. And then she was off like a shot. T.J. had to run double-time to make up the distance, a smile creasing his face.

It wasn’t until they turned onto Seminary Ridge that he realized they’d done almost five miles. He was definitely improving. By the time they’d finished their post stretch in the front

yard it was raining softly and the wind was picking up. Incredibly, Bortnicker was elbow-to-elbow with Aunt Terri at the kitchen counter, slicing bananas into a heaping bowls of cereal for the cousins and gossiping like old friends.

“You’re up? At this hour? What gives, Bortnicker?” said T.J.

Holding a serving spoon aloft his friend said, “Must be the country air. I felt inspired this morning. Guess I under slept by a few hours.”

“He even helped me feed the chickens,” said Terri, pouring them some orange juice. “Now go shower so we can have some breakfast together.”

Some minutes later, they sat around the breakfast nook table, Bortnicker

grinning broadly as he sipped from his ice cold glass of milk. “T.J. and I have a big day ahead,” he quipped with a wink. “He’s gonna show me some of the museum stuff he’s been soaking up.”

“Yeah, Aunt Terri, could you drop us in town?” asked T.J.

“Sure, boys. I’ve got to head over to the hospital anyway. One thing’s for certain. We’ve got enough museums in this place to take up a week of rainy days.”

T.J. shot Bortnicker a look over his cornflakes, and his friend smiled back. Though it was true they were going to log some museum time this morning, their ultimate goal today was to pay a

visit to Gettysburg's most famous ghost hunter.

* * * *

It was clear from the first moment that the Visitor Center and Bortnicker were made for each other. If T.J. had allowed it, they would have spent the entire morning, but Bortnicker grudgingly agreed to a preliminary walk-through with more in-depth excursions to come in subsequent days. Then, Uncle Mike wangled a couple seats on a VIP mini-bus tour for some national scholarship winners on the condition that Bortnicker stay as quiet as a mouse. The boys were treated to a first class tour of the battlefield that was far more detailed

than T.J.'s tour bus trip.

* * * *

“Now listen,” cautioned T.J. as they walked up Baltimore Street toward South, “We’re visitors here. Try not to say anything insulting or outrageous, okay?”

“Who, me?” said Bortnicker innocently, wiping a little mayo from his deli sandwich off his lip. “Wouldn’t think of it.”

But when he started singing “Doctor Wu” under his breath, T.J. could sense he was in true Bortnicker mode, wondering aloud if Elway was crazy, high, or just an ordinary guy.

The headquarters of Gettysburg

Official Haunted Tours was a pale yellow clapboard house on the corner of South and Baltimore. It had a tidy front yard surrounded by a low white picket fence at whose base tiny pink flowers bloomed. If not for the understated Old English-style sign in the front yard that proclaimed “Gettysburg Official Haunted Tours, Carlton Elway, Proprietor” with a contact number, one would never know he’d found the paranormal nerve center of Gettysburg.

T.J. and Bortnicker stood at the gate under a golf umbrella Aunt Terri had lent them. They looked at each other. “You sure this is the guy we want to see?” asked T.J.

“Are you kidding? Even if all this

stuff wasn't going on I'd want to meet this guy. I've watched his documentaries a hundred times. If his findings are true, your soldier isn't the only spirit gallivanting around this place."

"Okay, but listen. Don't tell him anything about what happened to me, or that guy Weinstein. Let's see if our guy comes up in discussion."

"Leave it to me, Big Mon," assured Bortnicker. "Just follow my lead."

They entered the house, a bell tinkling to signal their arrival. An overweight girl with teased hair in her mid-teens sat behind a counter reading a paperback, her gum rhythmically snapping. She looked up to see her

reflection in Bortnicker's oversized glasses.

"First tour's not till 6:00 P.M.," she said dully.

"But we're not here for a tour, not yet, anyway. My friend and I are from the Bridgefield High School newspaper, and—"

"The what?"

"Oh, excuse me. We're from Bridgefield High School in Connecticut, and we've come a long way to interview Mr. Carlton Elway for our school newspaper. You see, many students in our school are interested in the paranormal, and Mr. Elway's TV specials are quite popular. So, it's natural that we do a story on him." He

suddenly produced his tattered notebook and a pencil as T.J. wandered off to a far wall that was filled with cubby holes of travel brochures for the local attractions. “Now, I wouldn’t want to leave you out of the article, so would you be so kind as to give me your name?”

In response, she pointed to the plastic tag pinned to her Gettysburg Official Haunted Tours golf shirt that read “Tiffany.” She never stopped snapping her gum.

“Yes, Tiffany,” said Bortnicker, dutifully recording her name in the notebook. “That’s great. Now, is Mr. Elway available?”

“You’ve found him,” said an elfin, bearded man with thinning brown hair and twinkling eyes as he casually leaned against the doorjamb of a background office.

T.J. sidled up alongside Bortnicker, still playing the role of cub reporter, who said, “Mr. Elway, it’s truly an honor. We represent—”

“I heard you from my office, son. You two can come on back. And Tiffany, a shipment of Part One DVDs just came in. Could you restock the shelves in the gift shop and please check the hoodie sweatshirts? I think we’re low on size small.”

She slowly nodded, folded back a

page corner in her paperback, and waddled off to the side room that served as the gift shop.

The boys sat down across from Elway's desk which was cluttered with books, ledgers and a personal computer. Elway settled into his well-worn office chair and rearranged some papers. "I'm sorry about Tiffany. She's not the most, ah, ambitious member of my staff. Actually, the woman who handles the weekday early shift is home sick today. We have a small staff of ten guides who handle our tours. All are well-versed in the town's history and the battle, and we pride ourselves on being the most authentic of the tours. We even wear period clothing, as uncomfortable as that

might be, to help transport our customers back to the 1860s. Now, what can I do for you boys?”

“Well, sir, I’m Bortnicker—”

“Bortnicker?”

“Yes, sir, with a B, and this is my friend T.J. He’s the nephew of Mike Darcy.”

“The park ranger?”

“Right. We’re visiting from Connecticut and would like to ask you some questions about your business. Would that be okay?”

“Well,” the man smiled, displaying uneven, yellowing teeth, “as long as I don’t have to disclose any trade secrets. There is a lot of competition for the

tourist dollar in this town, you know.”

“No, no, nothing like that,” answered Bortnicker.

“Our questions are paranormally related,” said T.J.

“Well, I’ll answer what I can. Now, what made you come to me?”

“Mostly your documentaries,” said Bortnicker. “I’ve watched them numerous times, and I know them pretty much by heart.”

“You’re very kind. So what do you need me for?”

“Well,” said Bortnicker, searching the ceiling for the right words, “what would lead the average TV viewer to believe that all the stories you tell are authentic, and not a lot of hooey?”

The ghost hunter regarded the bespeckled boy, his eyes narrowing a bit. “That’s a fair enough question. Let me try to answer it without being too verbose.

“I majored in history at the University of Maryland after growing up not two miles from this spot. Throughout my childhood I heard tales from different townspeople, including my parents, about sightings on and around the battlefield. This made me concentrate on Civil War studies at Maryland, and led me back here. At the time jobs were scarce, so I took a position at the wax museum in town and started putting together some of the stories I’d heard for

a book on Gettysburg paranormal phenomena.

“Well, just from casually asking around, the tales started piling up. Townsfolk, tourists, rangers, lots of people were seeing things that had no plausible explanation. From orbs flying around the cemetery to ghost regiments marching in broad daylight, to the sounds of voices and small arms fire in the woods. Then there were all the private dwellings in and around town that served as battlefield hospitals, places of untold suffering and death in the days during and following the battle.

“So, I purchased really good film equipment, as well as ultra-sensitive audio recorders, and went all over the

place shooting footage and recording sounds at all the sites I'd heard about."

"Even at night?" T.J. cut in.

"Well, that's a touchy subject," said Elway, one eye closing a bit. "As the nephew of a battlefield park ranger, I'm sure you're aware that nobody is allowed on the grounds after dark. But I have gotten some images at dusk and dawn that are quite interesting."

"I'll say," said Bortnicker. "But not only outdoors. I remember in Part Two when you investigated the report of a Union soldier gliding down the stairs of some woman's home—"

"That was Part Three, actually, but yes, she had seen such an apparition.

Too bad it wouldn't manifest itself for me, but I intend to keep trying. So far, I've only been able to capture orbs, dark forms or milky shadows, though other people like that woman have claimed to see soldiers plain as day. Unfortunately, when they try to make contact the apparitions have either vanished or walked away through walls or whatever. I've also captured some disembodied voices, which was included in Part Three." He settled back further into his chair, tenting his fingers before him as he spoke.

"As you may have learned from the documentaries, there are two types of hauntings: residual and intelligent. Residual hauntings involve a scene from

the past replaying itself like a film loop, over and over, with the spirit or spirits involved being oblivious to their surroundings. That's how different people, including an entire tourist group from Germany, could see soldiers marching through the Peach Orchard in the dead of winter.

“The intelligent hauntings are far more rare. That's where a spirit or ghost tries to, in some fashion, make contact with us in the present time.”

“Why?” asked T.J., inching forward.

“Well, most of those soldiers who died during the three days of Gettysburg were young, or in the prime of life. They were violently wrenched from this

world way before their time. Many were rolled into shallow graves, either whole or in pieces, some to be subsequently reburied, others to be forgotten; that is, if they weren't dug up by scavenging animals. There are hundreds of men out in those fields we don't even know about. There might be men buried in your Uncle Mike's backyard, for all we know. Now, if you were one of those poor souls, wouldn't you want to tell someone your story?

“But, little by little, the land does give up its secrets.” Elway's voice dropped to where it was barely above a conspiratorial whisper. “Just a few months ago after a hard rain a ranger conducting a battlefield tour spied a shin

bone protruding from the ground out near the railroad cut, where there was some heavy fighting the first day of the battle. A team of archeologists investigated the site and unearthed an entire skeleton, minus the bottom part of one leg, a tattered leather belt with cartridge box encircling the skeletal waist. Yes, the dead are everywhere in this place.

“Anyway, to get back to the business, I got my book published locally, which led to some national recognition, and other books. Then, somebody from the History Channel contracted me and asked if I had enough footage to help fill out a one hour program. I said sure, if they could supply actors and reenactors

to help tell the story of each vignette.

“The rest, if you’ll pardon the pun, is history. There are now three installments of the documentary that are regularly aired on TV and sold on DVD via the Internet and just about every tourist shop in the state of Pennsylvania. The capital that’s generated has enabled me to begin, and then expand, our ghost tour business. During the warmer months we’re booked solid every night, seven days a week, with multiple groups operating simultaneously. The explosion of paranormal investigation-type shows on TV has only heightened the interest.”

“Like *Gonzo Ghost Chasers*?” asked T.J., thinking back to his encounter with the bewildered Mike Weinstein.

“Oh, *them*,” sniffed Elway. “It’s TV shows like theirs that give paranormal science a bad name.”

“How so?” asked Bortnicker.

“Well,” said Elway, “and this is not for publications, boys, but those guys are rank amateurs. How can anyone take seriously a bunch of pumped-up twentysomethings in skin-tight tee-shirts screaming admonitions to ghosts to ‘come out or else’? And do you notice not an episode goes by that they don’t get some kind of response, usually unintelligible garble on their EVP recorder that they claim is a disembodied spirit intelligently answering their queries? And if one

more of those morons mistakes dust particles for energy orbs...”

Elway noticed the boys staring at him and immediately composed himself, again the smiling academic. “Well, it could be worse,” he joked. “At least they’re not as bad as those yahoos over in Britain. You’d think they’re having a weekly ghost convention on *their* show, getting scratched, kicked, possessed and whatnot.”

“So, if one of those *Gonzo Ghost Chasers* told you he saw a real apparition out there, you’d just disregard it?” asked T.J. “Because they were in town a week ago.”

“Yes, yes, I know that,” snapped Elway, a bit testily. “I’d take anything

they said with a grain of salt. No, a bowling ball of salt.”

“So, what you’re saying,” Bortnicker ventured, “is that you, personally, have yet to see a full-bodied apparition that’s more than a silhouette or some whitish gas?”

Elway’s congeniality faded immediately, his lips forming a straight line. He absentmindedly pulled at the bottom of his beard.

“Yes,” he answered evenly, “in my case. But other witnesses have seen actual soldiers.”

“Just not anybody who happens to be among your competition,” said Bortnicker, polishing his glasses

casually.

“May I ask you a question?”

“Of course, Mr. Elway,” said Bortnicker.

“If you two are doing a newspaper article, how come you haven’t written down a word I’ve said? Or produced a tape recorder?”

Bortnicker slid his glasses back into place with great care, looked Elway in the eye, and tapped the side of his shaggy head. “No worries,” he assured the ghost hunter, “it’s all in here.”

They strolled out together, Bortnicker quipping, “Like *The Dan*, I have seen the glory of ‘The Royal Scam.’ ”

Chapter Fourteen

Later that day at General Meade's Luncheonette on Steinwehr Street, Carlton Elway looked up from his egg salad sandwich to see Chief Al Warren slide onto a nearby stool and pluck a laminated menu from its chrome holder on the counter. He picked up his plate and moved next to him, trying not to spill his iced tea in the process.

"Hope the rain stops for tonight, Carlton," said the chief as he slipped on his reading glasses. "Your ghost tour customers are going to be pretty soggy. How's the egg salad today?"

"Go with the meatloaf. And don't

worry, Al, we'll be out there, rain or not."

"Yeah, I guess ghosts don't know the difference anyway."

"Very funny."

Warren chuckled at his own joke then ordered the meatloaf with extra gravy on his fries. Out of the corner of his eye he spied Elway watching him. "Something on your mind, Carlton?"

"Well, kind of," said Elway, brushing some egg salad off the lapel of his Gettysburg Official Ghost Tours windbreaker. "I had a weird visit today."

"Who was it? Lee or Grant?"

"You're a riot today, Al. No, seriously, these two teenagers came to

question me about the business and whatnot. Said they were with a high school newspaper, but I think that was a bunch of crap.”

“Yeah? So?”

“Well, they were asking about paranormal stuff I might have seen out on the battlefield and all—”

“That’s to be expected, considering your widespread fame.”

“Can you give it a rest, Al? The thing is, the one who did most of the talking was a real geeky kid I’d never seen before. But the other one is Mike Darcy’s nephew.”

“The park ranger, Mike Darcy?”

“One and the same.”

The counter waitress arrived and placed Warren's meatloaf and steaming mug of coffee in front of him. The chief took his fork, lifted the slab of meat's corner from the plate underneath, and frowned. "So the kids are asking questions. So what?"

Elway let his voice drop to a whisper. "Listen, Al, something's going on around here, I can feel it. Rumors are starting to fly."

"Like what?" said Warren, dabbing gravy from the corner of his mouth.

"Like stuff going on at night on the battlefield, that's what."

"Do tell."

"C'mon, Al. We went to school

together way back when, before you went off to Philly. If there's an opportunity out there—"

"Opportunity? What are you talking about?"

"You know, like...paranormal investigation stuff."

Warren rolled his eyes. "You've been watching too many of your own documentaries, Carlton." But secretly he was worried. Was Mike Darcy blabbing confidential information to his nephew? He'd have to find Bruce Morrison, and fast.

"Well, are you going to let me in on anything if it does come up?" persisted Elway.

"Oh, yeah, Carlton, you'll be the first

one I'll tell. We might even make a documentary out of it. What are you up to by now, part six?"

"Thanks for nothing, Al. You know, I'm vice president of the Chamber of Commerce. I have a right to know anything that might affect my livelihood."

"You want some info?" said Warren. He looked both ways then whispered, "Don't order the meatloaf. That stuff'll kill ya."

Chapter Fifteen

The next morning Mike Darcy followed his usual ranger routine, preparing for the first of five days on, followed by two consecutive days off, on a rotating schedule. He rolled out of bed at the crack of dawn, performed a series of stretches designed to loosen up his chronically stiff back then did three sets of sit-ups, crunches and leg lifts to combat the onset of a middle age spare tire. Darcy managed to work out three times a week on a weight machine he'd installed in a gym he'd built in the garage. As for his legs, they got all the work they needed from the continuous

walking he did performing his daily duties at the battlefield.

Mike showered, filled a travel cup with coffee that Terri had prepared in the percolator the night before and went outside into the light of a promising June morning. The previous day's rain had taken the edge off the humidity for the time being and birds were singing in the trees. As he entered the driveway beside the house he could hear Bortnicker's snoring from the second story bedroom. Lord, that boy could saw wood. But he was happy to have the kids visiting. They provided a diversion for his daughter, whom he sometimes felt worked too hard during her time off from school.

As he started the truck he thought about his nephew. T.J. was a good kid, but there was this kind of melancholy and lack of self-confidence that always seemed to be trailing him. The death of his mother had been devastating and his father's girlfriend had become a divisive force. Maybe Mike could spend some quality time with him this week.

Before he knew it he was pulling into the Visitor Center lot. Lifting his still-hot coffee from its cup-holder, Mike entered the rangers' office door, went to his locker and opened it. Inside were taped small photos of Terri and LouAnne, and one of himself circa 1974 in his Michigan State home green jersey,

scowling at the camera. He was staring into space when he felt a tap on the shoulder.

“Hi, Mike. Got a minute?” said Bruce Morrison.

“Sure, Bruce. Something the matter?”

“I’m not sure. Come into my office.”

Mike didn’t know what it was, but Bruce Morrison’s room always reminded him of the principal’s office of a school: degrees and commendations filling the walls, photos with visiting dignitaries. There was no doubt that his boss knew his stuff; he was featured on virtually every modern historical documentary about Gettysburg, but Mike found him dry and pedantic, not the enthusiastic teacher/coach type he’d

been in his previous career. As a result, the two sometimes clashed over inconsequential things, though there remained an underlying respect for the knowledge each possessed about the Civil War and Gettysburg's role in it. Perhaps their mutual discomfort stemmed from the fact that Mike was a "townie" who had grown up on his family's property on Seminary Ridge, while Morrison was an interloper from South Dakota, where he'd overseen the Little Bighorn massacre site for a few years in the '80s before moving up to the most prestigious battlefield park in the land.

Morrison gently closed the door

behind them and moved to his desk. “Glad the humidity broke,” he said to get things started.

“No doubt,” agreed Darcy. “It’s been brutal out there lately.”

“Listen, Mike,” said Morrison, absently toying with a paperclip, “I’ll get right to the point. You’ve been a great asset to our ranger community. Nobody outworks you and you manage to, as they say in sports, ‘bring your A game every day.’ And I appreciate that, though I sometimes wonder if you care that I do.”

“It’s much appreciated, Bruce,” Mike replied.

“Well, good. But we might have a situation here, I don’t know. I’d like

your input.”

“Shoot.”

Morrison winced at the word. “Funny you should say that. As I understand it, you’re rather a local authority on black powder guns. You’re part of a shooting club and all?”

“Well, not a formal club, per se. It’s more of a group of enthusiasts who get together and practice at the firing range over in Bonneville.”

“Are these guys collectors? Reenactors?”

“Some of them. I just happened to come by my firearms by chance. You see, my grandfather’s family purchased the property in 1880, and when he was a

young man he was given a Sharps rifle and a Colt pistol by an elderly neighbor who claimed he'd taken them from the woods in the days just after the battle. For a long time they were stored in the attic. Then, after my dad died and we were sorting out his stuff, my mom led me upstairs, opened this long wooden box and there they were, not much the worse for wear.

“I was still teaching and coaching back then, of course, and I had no idea I'd end up getting so involved with the town's history again or end up a park ranger.

“But in the early '90s I started researching the pieces and found out they were quite valuable. I took them to a

local gunsmith who offered me a nice buck for them, which I could've used on my teaching salary, but I simply had him refurbish the mechanical parts. Another teacher at my school who later passed away was a black powder shooter, so he showed me the ropes and that's how I met the guys. We try to get out every few weeks. It beats playing golf, I guess. And, I think it gives me better insight into the people I talk about every day in my job. Sometimes when I'm shooting...I don't know, this sounds corny, but I can almost imagine myself as a soldier on the field, staring down the barrel at an oncoming enemy charge." Mike stopped talking, wondering if he'd let his tongue

run away with him. This was already the longest conversation he'd ever had with his superior.

“So, you, above all of us, must understand the damage that was inflicted upon the victims of these shootings.”

“Of course. At close range a Colt .44 cavalry pistol is devastating.”

“And that's the model you own?”

A realization was beginning to dawn in Mike Darcy's mind. “Bruce, you don't think...that I could be involved in all this!”

“No, no. What's happened here is purely coincidental. But I wonder if you'd care to explain why your nephew and his oddball friend were in Carlton Elway's office yesterday pumping him

for information about nighttime activities on the battlefield?”

“I guess it’s ‘cause that’s what Carlton does,” Mike reasoned.

“So what you’re saying is you haven’t breathed a word of our staff meeting to your family? And that your nephew’s questions were just another coincidence?”

“Must be,” was Mike’s reply, though he couldn’t fathom T.J.’s actions, either.

“Well then, I guess we’re done here, Mike. You wouldn’t mind me coming to you if I have any further weapons questions?”

“No, that would be fine, Bruce.”

“Okay then, have a good day out

there.”

And with that, Mike Darcy walked out of Morrison’s office, his simple summer day not quite as bright.

* * * *

That same morning, about the time Mike Darcy was arriving at the Visitor Center, there came a light tapping on the guest bedroom door. T.J., never a sound sleeper, was confused. The night before, they’d filled in LouAnne about their meeting with Elway and Bortnicker had cracked, “If he’s a bigtime ghost hunter, I’m Brad Pitt.” The cousins had agreed that a day off from running was in order. LouAnne sometimes suffered from shin splints and didn’t want to overdo it. T.J.

gratefully agreed. So, he was surprised when Aunt Terri poked her head in the door. “Are you decent, T.J.?” she whispered.

“Yes, Aunt Terri. What’s up?”

“Your father’s on the phone from Paris.”

“Oh, okay. Give me a sec.” He pulled on a pair of sweatpants and padded downstairs to the kitchen, where his aunt handed him the phone.

“Hey, big guy, what’s doing?” asked Tom Jackson, Sr.

“Not much,” yawned T.J. “What time is it there?”

“We just finished lunch and we’re back at the apartment. I’m looking out my window at Notre Dame Cathedral as

we speak.”

“Neat. Uh, how’s Wendy?”

“She’s fine. This is a great place, but like any foreign city it takes some getting used to. And neither of us is exactly an expert of the language. But it’s a beautiful city.”

“Uh huh. How’s the project going?”

“It’s going. We’ve hit a few snags here and there with contractors and whatnot.”

T.J. groaned inwardly. “So you’ll be there longer than you planned?”

“Not much, hopefully. Hey, I emailed you about all this, a couple times.”

“I forgot my laptop at home.”

“Oh, I see. Did Uncle Mike tell you I

called a week ago?"

"Yeah. He gave me the message."
T.J. was having a hard time masking his disappointment.

"So, what's going on over there? Anything exciting?"

Oh, nothing much, Dad, except maybe this ghost I ran into the other night.

"Bortnicker's here."

"What? Bortnicker? How come?"

"Uncle Mike said he could keep me company. Besides, he loves all this Civil War stuff, and LouAnne is busy most of the time. She's got like fifteen jobs."

"I hope you're not excluding her, son. You've always considered her a

little nerdy. You're at least taking notice of her?"

No problem there, Dad. "Yeah, Bortnicker and I have been hanging out with her. She's not so bad." He could hear Wendy rummaging through some drawers in the background. Obviously, they were sharing the apartment. Yikes.

"Well, I've gotta get going, son. As soon as I have a handle on when this project's going to get done, I'll let you know. A few more weeks, give or take. Until then, have fun and try not to get bored. I'll think of something exciting for us to do when I get back. Just you n'me, okay?"

"Sounds great."

“Okay then, be careful. Take care of Bortnicker and be nice to your cousin.”

“Right, Dad.”

“Love ya.”

“I know.” T.J. gently replaced the receiver of the wall phone. He turned, met the eyes of Aunt Terri who was regarding him from the sink, then shuffled back upstairs to wake Bortnicker.

Chapter Sixteen

“Bortnicker, you’re amazing me,” said LouAnne as she lifted a forkful of blueberry pancakes to her lips. “Where did you learn to make these?”

“My mom,” he said proudly, carving the edges from his own stack so it resembled a Rubik’s Cube. “She likes to cook, and I like to eat, so I help her whip up stuff at home.”

“Do you cook, T.J.?” she asked, turning to her cousin who was forking some country ham onto his plate.

“Nope. I just eat.”

“Yeah,” cracked Bortnicker, “you’ve gotta see T.J. and his dad when they get

going. There's like sparks coming off their silverware!" Even T.J. had to laugh at that one. It was true. One of the most fun things father and son did together was order out humongous amounts of Chinese or Indian or Mexican food, mix a huge pitcher of iced tea, and have at it. Usually there was so much surplus that Bortnicker had to be called in to assist.

They were busy putting a dent in the pile of flapjacks when Aunt Terri (who'd supplied the blueberries for the batter) came in, her gardening overalls dirty at the knees. She wiped some sweat from her forehead with a working gloved hand, leaving a smear of dirt across her eyebrow, smiled, and rolled something across the table to T.J. "For

you,” she said. “Souvenir of Gettysburg.”

Bortnicker recognized the item immediately. “Wow! A Minié ball! Where’d you get it?”

“Oh, they pop up from time to time in the vegetable patch,” said Terri, pouring herself some orange juice. “Year after year, we’re good for a few.”

“Why do they call it a Minié ball?” asked T.J., holding it to the light between his forefinger and thumb.

“They named it after the guy who invented it,” said Bortnicker. “If it struck bone you were cooked. It would splinter the bone, and you’d probably have to have an amputation, if it was an arm or

leg.”

“What if it just hit flesh?”

“Then you’d probably die of infection,” said LouAnne. “That’s how I kill off my brother sometimes at the Charney Inn.”

“Well, enjoy it,” said Aunt Terri. “I’ve got to get back outside.” She put her glass in the sink and returned to the garden.

The three teens were again alone. “So, guys, what’s your plan?” said LouAnne. “Are we going ghost hunting?”

“Not yet,” said Bortnicker. “I’ve gotta do some research first. T.J., can we pay another visit to the battlefield and the museums?”

“What do you think I’ve been doing

every day since I got here, man?” he moaned.

“Yeah, I know that, but I want to look for stuff about Confederate cavalry in the battle, since your ghost buddy seems to be a mounted Reb.”

LouAnne looked at the wall clock. “Well, guys, I’ll clean up in here. It’s the least I can do after that feast our gourmet chef cooked up.”

Bortnicker gave a slight bow and said, hopefully, “You’ll be joining us?”

“Fraid not. I promised Mom I’d help her clean the chicken coop. Besides, you don’t need me. T.J.’s becoming quite the expert.”

Her cousin blushed, which did not go

unnoticed by his friend. “Yeah, let’s go into town and try to hook up with Uncle Mike,” he said. “Maybe you’ll see some stuff I didn’t.”

“Could we come to the Inn tonight, LouAnne?” asked Bortnicker. “I haven’t seen your act yet.”

“Sure. It’ll break the monotony. But listen, no silly questions, okay?”

“Who, me?” said Bortnicker, grinning slyly.

* * * *

Bortnicker proved to be correct upon their second, more comprehensive Visitor Center Museum expedition. T.J. kept finding things he’d missed before.

They started in an area devoted

solely to the strategy of the battle, Bortnicker's thick glasses reflecting the cases that displayed documents and maps. He started what would be a continuous stream of consciousness, talking to himself as much as his friend.

“After Lee won at Chancellorsville in May of 1863, he took his army through the Shenandoah Valley into the North. He wanted to get to Harrisburg or even Philadelphia because he felt the Northerners would be dispirited enough to give up on the war and maybe work out a treaty. Also, he needed food and supplies badly, and wanted to get the devastation off southern turf, at least in the East, ‘cause at the same time Grant’s army was pounding the Rebs in

Vicksburg, Mississippi. It was a pretty bold move, but Lee was at his strongest for a northern strike.

“By the time everybody got lined up you had like 165,000 troops...infantry, cavalry, artillery, the whole deal. The Confederates were overmatched in numbers, but they had Lee. This guy, George Meade, was the Union commander at the moment, ‘cause Lincoln kept changing his commanders of the Army of the Potomac due to their losing.”

“The luncheonette in town’s named after him,” offered T.J.

“Man, *everything* in this town is named after someone in the battle,

probably down to the municipal parking lots.”

“So, why did the battle have to take three days?”

“Well, Day One was mostly getting regiments into position and establishing the front lines. As I think I told you a while back, Lee actually approached the town from the northwest, Meade from the south. There was some fighting, and the Union troops got pushed around some.

“That’s when General Reynolds got killed,” said T.J., recalling the monument in the woods near where he’d met the ghost rider.

“Right you are. So on Day Two, Lee started pounding the Union lines all

over. Little Round Top became a major strategic point because the Union could put their artillery there and blast down on the Rebs. So you had these areas like Devil's Den, the Wheatfield, the Peach Orchard, Culp's Hill and Cemetery Hill...fighting going on all over the place."

"I've run past all those places with LouAnne," mused T.J. "Bussed past them, too."

Either Bortnicker didn't hear him or was so zoned-in that he passed over this and just kept going. "So the Union held their positions on Day Two, which led to one of the major turning points of the war. Lee basically rolled the dice and

threw the kitchen sink against the center of the Union line on Cemetery Ridge.”

“Pickett’s Charge!” called out T.J.

“Right again, Big Mon. They almost broke through, but the Federals finally threw them back. And that was it, more or less, for the Army of Northern Virginia. Even though they managed to drag it out for two more years. Hey T.J., come look at this.”

They were in front of the Confederate uniforms display. “If you remember what we did in Mr. O’Neill’s class, the Northern soldiers had much better equipment because most of the heavy industry was there. So they had real pants, jackets and shoes. Some had outfits that were kinda out there, like

those Zouave units from New York.”

“Those guys in the red balloon pants?”

“Yep. But, by and large, they looked like an army. The southern soldiers, on the other hand, were a real mishmash. Some wore gray, some wore brown. They wore the same uniforms year round with no replacements. They’d take shoes off dead guys to replace their own. Same thing with weapons.

“But the Confederate cavalry officers, like the man you ran into, were big into fancy uniforms, which made sense because a lot of the officers came from wealthy families and could afford to have their stuff custom tailored. Do

any of these look familiar to you?”

They slowly shuffled sideways, T.J. looking for similarities to what he remembered from that dark night. The Confederate showcase stretched the length of the room, with so many more variations than the Union's. Suddenly he grabbed Bortnicker's shoulder. "Whoa. Wait a second. This looks close."

The uniform before them was a medium gray, with a three-quarter length frock coat topping a pair of gray breeches with pale yellow stripe down the side. The coat itself had gold cuffs and a standup collar with an attached gold star. There were also gold embroidered designs swirling upwards from the cuffs to the elbow, and a double

row of brass buttons down the chest. Cream colored gauntlets, spurred black knee boots and a plumed hat pinned up on one side rounded out the impressive display.

“Wow,” said Bortnicker. “Your boy was *styling*. Imagine wearing this getup in the middle of summer? The duds in this case must be mucho funky.” He pursed his lips for a moment. “What about sidearms and that kind of stuff?”

“Well,” remembered T.J., “he had a sword and a pistol, but the pistol was in a holster.”

“Let’s peruse the weapons section, then.” Again, they scanned a dizzying array of guns, pausing here and there,

when T.J. saw something that looked familiar. “I think, that one,” he said finally, pointing to a menacing-looking pistol.

Bortnicker read the placard underneath. “.44 caliber Colt Army Revolver. There’s a Navy model right under it that’s similar, but it’s a .36 caliber. Hard to tell which one he had ‘cause like you say it was holstered. Good for you he didn’t take it out so you could get a better look.”

“You got that right.”

“Now, as far as the sword, was the scabbard—the holder—curved or straight?”

T.J. thought hard. “Curved.”

“With a piece to kind of shield your

knuckles?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay, then. So here’s what we’ve got. The soldier you encountered in Reynolds’ Woods was anywhere from a lieutenant to a colonel, probably from a well-to-do family, with first rate weapons which he either bought himself or plucked from a fallen enemy.”

“What next?”

“A little Internet research when we get home later. I think I might be able to narrow down the particulars on this guy.”

“No way. Out of the thousands of soldiers who were in this battle? C’mon, Bortnicker.”

“Hey, let me work on it.” He held up his hands. “These fingers are like magic on the keyboard.”

“Well, look who’s here!” The boys turned to find Mike Darcy. “Some mean looking blades there.”

“Seriously,” agreed Bortnicker.

“I’m doing a tour bus group in ten minutes. Cub Scouts from New Jersey. Want to ride along?”

“Sure!” piped Bortnicker.

“Okay then. If I get tired, T.J., you can take over.” They started walking toward the front hallway where the tour groups assembled. “Heard you guys were over at Carlton Elway’s House of Ghosts yesterday.”

The boys looked at each other nervously. “Yeah, Mr. Darcy, that’s mostly because of me,” said Bortnicker. “I can’t get enough of all those ghost shows on TV. Have you ever had an experience here?”

“Nope, though you’d think every Gettysburg ranger in history has, by what you see on TV. That doesn’t mean I don’t think this place has an aura about it. I mean, I feel that every day. And I do have shivers go down my spine at the oddest times while I’m out there, especially in the cemetery. But no, no sightings, encounters, whatever. And, don’t take this the wrong way, fellas, but I suggest you don’t go searching out any

for yourselves. If you've learned anything from those shows, which I believe are mostly crap anyway, it's that these things happen when you least expect it, not when you try to manufacture it."

"We gotcha," said T.J.

"Glad we're straight on that. Ah, there's Troop Six awaiting us. Let's get on it!" He led the group of forty or so fresh-faced youngsters in their neckerchiefed uniforms onto the bus, got them settled and they were on their way. The day had become oppressively humid and T.J. felt his eyelids drooping almost immediately, for he'd done the tour a handful of times by now.

"Good afternoon and a hearty

welcome to the scouts of Troop Six from Lodi, New Jersey!”

Cheers rang out.

“Okay, I’m Ranger Mike Darcy, and today we’re going to tell you about a dark period in American history, and a battle that was both glorious and tragic, a battle that helped shape our country as we know it today...”

That would be the last thing T.J. remembered until Bortnicker nudged him awake some ninety minutes later. “Hey, Big Mon, we’re back. You z’d through the whole thing!”

“Whoa, sorry,” T.J. mumbled, blinking in the sunlight as he rose and stretched.

“Let me shoo the scouts off the bus and we’ll go for an ice cream in town,” said Mike. “This is my last assignment for the day and I’m craving a strawberry shake. Sound okay to you guys?”

“Great!” the boys said in unison. They climbed off the bus together, Mike’s muscular arms draped over the teens’ shoulders. They almost ran right into Bruce Morrison, who was standing outside the Visitor Center entrance, clipboard in hand.

“Good tour?” he said to Mike, eyeing the threesome.

“Too cool!” blurted Bortnicker. “Mr. Darcy’s the man!”

“Easy, Trigger,” said Mike. “Bruce,

this is my nephew, T.J., and his somewhat excitable friend, Bortnicker. Bruce is the chief of rangers here, guys.”

“Pleased to meet you boys,” said Morrison evenly. “So, you’re liking our little corner of the world?”

“Way cool!” said Bortnicker.

“I’m learning a lot,” agreed T.J.

“Well, great,” said Morrison. “We’ll be seeing you around.”

“No question!” chimed Bortnicker.

Somehow, Mike was sure his superior didn’t like the boy’s answer.

Chapter Seventeen

Saturday began with a fine run down the Chambersburg Road in which LouAnne and T.J. took turns pacing each other. Conversation was minimal; it was clear that with T.J.'s improvement their casual jaunts had become more competitive. Of course, no dialogue could be conducted without talk of Bortnicker, who was still blissfully asleep after a late night on the computer. As T.J. had nodded off, his friend was still clicking away madly, trying to dig up information on Confederate cavalry movements during the battle.

LouAnne asked about Bortnicker's

family life, and T.J. tried, as tactfully as he could, to describe the eccentric, feng shui-dominated existence of mother and son. LouAnne had a lot of questions, but she wisely stopped short of getting into T.J.'s own current situation with his parent and his father's girlfriend. Why ruin a beautiful morning workout?

All five inhabitants of the Darcy house were enjoying Aunt Terri's homemade granola cereal when Mike asked, "So, who wants to go shooting with me?"

"Yuck," was LouAnne's reply.

Mike turned to the boys and patiently explained, "The princess here doesn't like to get black powder on her fingers."

"Or face. Or hair," finished

LouAnne. “And let’s face it, Dad, a couple of those guys you hang out with at the range are a little out there. It’s like the annual reenactment is their Christmas. I hope you’re not going to actually suit up with them again this year.”

“You’re a Civil War reenactor?” said Bortnicker, milk dripping down his chin.

“We try to discourage him,” chided Aunt Terri, “but every couple of years they talk him into it.”

“But Dad’s kinda weak about it,” continued LouAnne. “Instead of tenting on the field with his wacko friends he sneaks home and showers and sleeps in

his own comfy bed. Am I right?"

Mike frowned, his face coloring.

"Well, I for one think it's cool, Mr. Darcy," said Bortnicker. "You're keeping history alive and all that."

"So, does that mean you want to come shooting with me?"

Bortnicker thought for a moment, then said, "Ah, no. Not today. Besides, I've already promised LouAnne I'll help her with some weeding this morning." He said it with a smile, as if he would have agreed to eat the weeds as well if she'd asked.

"Is that so?" said T.J., an eyebrow raised.

"That is so," Bortnicker slyly replied.

“How about you, T.J.?” asked Mike.

The boy could see the hopefulness in his uncle’s eyes. “Yeah, sure, Uncle Mike. I was kinda wondering what it would be like to shoot one of those guns anyway.”

“Great!” he replied. “I’m bringing my Colt .44 revolver today. It’ll be quite a challenge for you. Just make sure to wear some grubby clothes ‘cause you’re going to get dirty.”

“*Very* dirty,” echoed LouAnne, taking her empty cereal bowl to the sink.

Mike sighed and went out to the garage to pack up the equipment. Within minutes they were headed out of town towards the shooting range in

Bonneville.

“So how’s work been?” said T.J., making conversation as cornfields flew by.

“Not bad. As you can tell, the town is swelling a little more each day. The crescendo will come soon enough during the reenactment days. But you two boys have been really busy, I take it.”

“Uncle Mike, you have no idea. Bortnicker can’t get enough of this stuff. We’ve been to the Visitor Center museum twice already, and he wants to hit every museum in town, even the sketchy ones, as well as the souvenir shops. The bus tour people are gonna be on a first name basis with us. I hope you don’t mind that we use your name.”

“No problem. I’m glad you guys are so busy, and so into it. And Bortnicker’s okay. Poor kid, he follows LouAnne around like a lost puppy dog.”

“Yeah,” said T.J. uncertainly, recalling Bortnicker’s open-mouthed rapture at the Charney House during LouAnne’s presentation the previous evening.

“Well, it’s to be expected. This whole trip is probably like a big adventure to him. I get the impression he doesn’t get out much.”

“Um, I’d say that’s pretty accurate.”

“You know, even though I was kind of in the jock group in high school and college, I tried to have all different kinds

of friends. Did LouAnne mention that in high school I was in the chess club?”

“Get out.”

“No, really. Of course, a lot of it was because I liked this girl who was also in the club.” He stared straight ahead as if going back in time. “Ellen Redgate was her name. T.J., this girl was so smart it wasn’t funny. But she was sweet, too. I think she ended up going to M.I.T., full boat.”

“Wow.”

“The thing is, some of the kids in the chess club ended up being my lifelong friends, whereas a lot of my high school teammates just faded away. There were actually some guys who were jealous when I got the scholarship to Michigan

State. Thought it should've been them. Oh well. But what high school taught me was that it takes all kinds. That's why I can appreciate you having a pal like Bortnicker."

"He's really not so bad," said T.J.

"I'm sure. Just stay out of trouble, the two of you. Don't get too adventurous, okay? You're still visitors in a strange land," he grinned.

"You got it."

They arrived at the firing range and were greeted by Mike's ragtag shooting cronies. "Okay, T.J. This is Matty, Bobby, and Eddie. They all belong to the 72nd Pennsylvania Regiment." All of the guys wore orange or traditional hunting

camos, and a couple were chewing tobacco.

“What kept you, Darcy?” admonished Matty, a burly, good-natured man who T.J. thought might have also been a football player in his youth.

“The usual. Family stuff and whatnot. But enough with wasting time. I want to show my nephew how to shoot a Colt .44. So let’s stop lollygagging and get after it!”

“Yes, Coach Mike!” piped Eddie, the smallest one, in his best high school nerdy voice.

Uncle and nephew entered a “booth” fashioned from primitive plywood sheets that looked out toward a paper target. There was a particleboard table

before them resting upon two sawhorses. “It’s not exactly first class,” said Mike, reading T.J.’s mind, “but nobody really bothers you.”

BOOM!

T.J. reflectively put his hands over his head, feeling like an artillery round was coming down on them. In the next booth Bobby cackled, “Got ‘im!” and the stench of sulfur wafted over to their booth.

“Bobby shoots a replica Enfield rifle. They were imported from England and used mostly by the Southern troops, but they were basically the same as the Union model.”

“If Bobby’s in a Union reenactor

regiment, how come he's shooting a Southern rifle?"

"Oh, this is just one of the firearms Bobby keeps around. He also likes his Sharps carbine, which is quicker to load. My other gun, which I left at home today, is a Sharps as well. It's a real one, too, as is the revolver you'll be shooting today."

"Aren't these guns a little old to be used?"

"Well, I had them both refitted awhile back, so they can fire modern ammunition. Anything older has the potential to screw up the inside of the barrel." Mike pulled out a pair of padded earmuffs and some goggles and handed them to his nephew. "These will

help until you get used to the sound and whatever.

“Okay, so let me give you a brief history on the firearm you’re gonna be using here. The 1860 Colt .44 Army sidearm is called a revolver, not a pistol, because it’s a multiple shot weapon. Both armies used versions of this gun. Since the Union had far more industry, there was always a shortage of arms for the Confederates, and they stripped the dead of their firearms whenever possible. These revolvers were prized, especially among cavalry officers.

“All the handguns in the Civil War used black powder, as my daughter so

tactfully alluded to this morning. They also used caps to fire the main charge.” He placed one on the table in front of T.J. It looked like an eraser-sized metal drinking cup. “These guns could fire bullets or balls, the balls obviously being more round. A .44 caliber bullet like this one is almost a half inch in diameter.” He placed a bullet next to the cap. “Again, notice that this is a new bullet. Theoretically, the gun could fire old ones, but it’d be risky, and as an original this is a very valuable weapon.”

“Gotcha.”

“Finally, you need the paper cartridge which contains the black powder. During the Civil War the governments of both sides supplied their

troops with paper-wrapped cartridges to speed up the loading of weapons during battle. A cavalry soldier would have a cartridge box attached to his uniform belt filled with enough rounds to load his revolver anywhere from six to nine. His caps would be in there, too.” Mike produced a roll of thin paper whose bottom section contained a measured quantity of powder. Attached at the top was a bullet. “Many cartridges had a greased bullet or ball, which caused the cylinder in the gun to revolve more smoothly. So now we’re ready to load up. And here’s our bad boy.”

He pulled from his bag an object wrapped in oilcloth, which he peeled

away in layers to reveal a perfectly preserved Colt .44 revolver with brass trigger guard and walnut grip. Ever the thorough teacher, Mike pointed out to T.J. (who just wanted to *shoot* the darned thing) the front blade sight, loading lever, cylinder release tab, six-shot chamber, hammer, and nipple upon which the cap would be placed. “Here, heft this and get a feel for it,” he said, carefully handing over the weapon. The two-pound, nine-ounce gun immediately made T.J.’s hand droop.

“Wow,” he muttered. “You had to be strong to use this.”

“No question. I think the real reason your cousin dislikes shooting isn’t the powder thing, it’s that she has a hard

time controlling it.”

T.J. wondered if he could do any better than LouAnne. This thing was *heavy*.

“Okay, ready to load it?”

“Me?”

“T.J., the average Civil War soldier was an illiterate farm boy. C’mon, I’ll walk you through it. We’re not talking about brain surgery here.”

“All right.”

Again the patient teacher, Mike instructed T.J. in the insertion and seating of the cartridges and the capping of the nipple. It seemed to take a long time. “I can’t imagine doing this in the heat of battle,” T.J. said, preparing the

final cylinder.

“Yeah, there are reports of soldiers who got so crazy and scared with their rifles that they just kept ramming charge after charge down the barrel, which caused the gun to either misfire or blow up.”

“Ugh.”

“Which brings me to my last point.” Mike waited until his buddies had each let off another round. “Black powder revolvers when discharged will produce a considerable flash of fire. It’s not unusual for sparks or even flames to shoot out the barrel of the gun. One of the reasons they used grease with the paper or wadding was to prevent the flame from burning backwards and into

another unfired chamber. A multiple chain fire could occur with all the rounds going off at once.”

“Thanks for telling me,” T.J. said with a hint of sarcasm.

“Don’t worry. I specially prepared your rounds. Now, put on your earmuffs and glasses, stand a little sideways, take aim and have at it.”

“No ‘shooter crouch’ and two-handed grip like on TV?”

“That’s modern stuff, T.J. This is the 1800s we’re talking about. Be careful ‘cause it’s gonna kick.”

“Oh. Yeah. Okay, here goes.” He raised his right arm, tried to sight down the wobbling barrel, and let off a round.

As Uncle Mike had predicted, there was a flash that accompanied the explosion, and the revolver kicked upwards so violently that T.J.'s wrist stung. Acrid smoke filled the air as Mike's friends cheered from their booths.

"Think I hit the target?" said T.J. feebly.

"Only if you was aimin' for ducks flyin' over!" bellowed Matty from the other side of the plywood.

"Hey, enough, you hammerheads," said Mike authoritatively. "He's just learning." Then he turned to his nephew and smiled. "Want to try again?"

T.J., determined now, said, "You bet."

"Okay, we'll alternate. Watch me."

The boy marveled at his uncle's control as Mike calmly stepped forward, raised his arm and fired, all in one motion.

“Got ‘im in the shoulder, Ranger Mike!” yelled Bobby, who obviously had brought binoculars.

Mike gave T.J. a quick wink and handed back the gun. “See? It’s not hard. Just relax and hold steady.”

And so, they passed the rest of the morning, T.J. improving to the point where he actually hit the target a couple of times. He even became somewhat proficient at loading the weapon.

Afterwards, the group retired to a diner in the heart of Bonneville for some burgers and fellowship. All the men

agreed that T.J., with some practice, could become a decent marksman, which made the boy feel good. “I have a question, though, guys,” he said finally. “A pistol, er, revolver, is meant for close combat, right? Not long range stuff?”

“Yup,” agreed Matty, glopping more ketchup on his double bacon cheeseburger. “Up close that sucker of your uncle’s would tear a guy’s head off.” Darcy’s pals giggled.

T.J. looked over at Mike, who stared at his food, deep in thought.

“Uncle Mike, you okay?” said the boy.

“What? Oh, yeah, sure, T.J. Finish your lunch, and let’s get home before

we're missed." Uncle Mike was much more subdued on the ride back.

* * * *

Just about the time T.J. was squeezing off his first round at the firing range, Bortnicker straightened up from his hands and knees and looked to the skies. "Lord, Lord, deliver me from these weeds!" he implored, arms dramatically upraised.

"Bortnicker, we've hardly gotten started!" admonished LouAnne, her hair tied back in a ponytail. She was wearing a pink man-tailored shirt with the sleeves cut off and a pair of snug, patched-up jean shorts.

"Better watch that you don't get

sunburn on those arms,” cautioned Bortnicker, whose own Boston Red Sox tee shirt was darkening with sweat around the collar. He had to keep removing his glasses to wipe them down.

“Thanks for the advice, Lawn Doctor,” laughed LouAnne. “Now get back to work!”

“How much more of this do we have to do here? Not that I’m complaining.”

LouAnne looked around. “How about we finish this patch here and call it a day. I’ll make you some ice cold lemonade. Sound good?”

“Heavenly.” He went back down on all fours and started pulling.

“Say, Bortnicker, I’ve got a

question.”

“Ask away, my dear.”

“Does T.J. really dislike his dad’s girlfriend?”

“Big time. See, he thinks his dad’s acting all weird around her, like the guys in those ‘Just for Men’ hair cream ads. I mean, she is kind of attractive... I don’t know how much brain matter there is between her ears, but...”

“He really misses his mom, doesn’t he?”

“Oh, yeah. Talks about her once in a while, but you can tell she’s on his mind all the time.”

“Uh huh. Must be tough. Plus, he’s away from his girlfriend.”

Bortnicker turned to face her.
“Girlfriend? What girlfriend?”

“You know, that Katie
Whatsurname.”

“Vickers? Katie *Vickers*?”

“Yeah.”

“Are you kidding? That stuck-up
babe doesn’t even know he’s alive!
She’s going out with some tenth-grader.”

“You mean Katie lies? Can you see it
in her eyes?” she said with a twinkle.

“Good one,” said Bortnicker,
catching the Steely Dan reference to
“Doctor Wu.” “But seriously, he told
you she’s his *girlfriend*?”

“I must have misunderstood. Let’s
change the subject,” said LouAnne,

embarrassed.

“If you say so,” said Bortnicker, as he continued weeding while pondering the intricacies of his best friend’s mind.

* * * *

That evening the three teens strolled around town, stopping for an ice cream cone. LouAnne ordered the chocolate frozen yogurt while T.J. opted for black cherry. Bortnicker, of course, chose the special, “Pistachio Fantasia Surprise.”

“What’s it taste like?” asked LouAnne.

“Hard to describe,” said Bortnicker. “Want to try it?”

“Sure.” She lifted her hair from the side of her face, leaned in and took a

lick, Bortnicker all the while smirking at T.J. with eyebrows raised. “Tastes like plain old pistachio,” she decided. Turning to her cousin, she asked, “So how did you like going shooting with the Hee Haw Gang?”

“Ah, they’re not so weird,” said T.J. “It was kinda fun, and I didn’t do too badly. Took a lot of time to wash up, though.”

“Told you. That black powder’s nasty.”

“So, Dr. Bortnicker,” challenged T.J., “what have you ascertained so far about our mystery rider?”

“Well, based on what we know about the battle, the Confederate cavalry, led by General Jeb Stuart, was basically

a no-show till the third day of the battle. In fact, there are some who kinda blame him for the Confederates getting beat.”

“How come?” asked T.J.

“Well, Stuart was like Lee’s right hand man after Stonewall Jackson got killed.” He turned to T.J. “That would be your father, I believe.”

“Very funny,” T.J. grumbled as LouAnne stifled a laugh.

“And as his cavalry chief, Lee expected him to totally scout out the Union forces they would be going up against for this battle. So, Stuart, promising to keep in constant contact, took off with his eight thousand or so men and proceeded to ride all around the

Army of the Potomac without ever reporting back to Lee until the evening of the second day. By then it was too late to help his commanding officer.

“Now, the last day Stuart’s force got into a big exchange with the Federals.”

“On East Cavalry Field!” LouAnne cut in.

“Right you are, my dear. Old Jeb wanted to make things right with General Lee for going MIA by whipping the Yankees, but it seems the Union cavalry had this young commander you might’ve heard of, George Armstrong Custer.”

“From the Little Big Horn?” asked T.J.

“One and the same. Yeah, they had a pretty intense encounter that went back

and forth. It was pretty much a standoff, not the outcome Stuart had wanted.

“I figure our mystery guy had to be part of Stuart’s cavalry force. But I have no idea of his division, though we’re kinda sure he’s an officer from T.J.’s description of the uniform.”

“So when are we going?” pressed LouAnne.

“When’s your next night off from the Charney Inn?”

“Wednesday.”

“Then Wednesday it is.”

They walked back toward Seminary Ridge, satisfied to have finally chosen a course of action.

Chapter Eighteen

Rudy Herzog dropped the transmission of his police cruiser into DRIVE and left his parking spot near the Rose Farm, where in 1863 some Confederate dead had been dumped in a shallow grave so they would not have to be moved too far from where they had fallen. He was trying to hit a lot of different sites, parking in secluded areas for ten or fifteen minutes at a time then moving on. His four-hour surveillance gig was almost over, and he couldn't wait to get home to his house in Hagerstown for some real sleep.

Since the murder of the relic

poacher, things had been quiet, if one omitted the TV ghost guy. Herzog had his doubts as to the sincerity of the man's account even though Chief Warren was fairly convinced the guy had seen *something*.

The car radio crackled with Spence's familiar voice. "Anyone out there tonight, Rudy? Over."

"Nah, pretty quiet. I'm passing the Trostle Farm and I'll be getting on the Taneytown Road. Over."

"Okay, see you in a few. Over."

"Can't wait." His eyes were getting heavy. At night, particularly when the moon was in and out, your eyes could play tricks on you in this place. Especially some of those equestrian

statues. A few of them, like the one of General Longstreet, were set so low that if you looked quickly you'd swear it was a real mounted soldier.

Herzog was just about to turn left onto the Taneytown Road when he topped a rise and saw the horseman. Or was it a monument? He went through his mental rolodex of statues and came to the realization that the only markers in this area were of the granite block variety, with a couple cannons here and there. So who—or what—was this?

Rudy slowed the car so it was pointed at the figure, which stood upon a hummock near a small copse of trees about fifty yards away. Taking a deep

breath, he flipped on the roof-mounted searchlight. What he saw shocked and awed him. The magnificently clad Confederate cavalier sat astride a coal black horse, one of the most imposing he had ever seen. The soldier turned in his saddle and faced the light as though he had not the slightest grain of fear in being detected.

“Stay where you are!” Herzog barked over the cruiser’s PA system. “You are illegally trespassing on government property! Do not—”

But that was as far as he got because the horseman spurred his steed and took off on a diagonal that would have him passing to Herzog’s right. As he gunned the engine and spun the wheel with one

hand, his left grabbed for the intercom to HQ. “Spence! Spence! I’ve got a sighting! He’s...oh my God he’s by me already! I’m in pursuit! Over!”

“Where are you?” Spence demanded.

“Past the Weikert Farm! I’m going right through the fields! Spence, it’s a mounted Confederate, full uniform, I’d say over six feet. He whooshed by me going the other way and my windows are open and I can SMELL him, just like that Weinstein guy said! Over!”

“Stay on his tail. The other cruiser’s all the way over by Seminary Ridge! You’re own your own! Don’t lose him! Over!”

The police car bumped over ruts in

the earth, rocks and tree branches. Herzog wove the vehicle in and out of monuments big and small which would suddenly loom out of the darkness. Every time he closed to within fifty feet the rider would zig or zag, the magnificent stallion leaping over any obstructions, the rider never looking back, as if he were on a spirited Sunday jaunt.

“He’s making for Little Round Top!” Rudy screamed into the radio as the first boulders at the base of the promontory flew by. “He’s climbing the hill!”

Herzog again pushed the car harder up the paved road that led to the crest, the distance between them gradually shrinking as the horseman was forced to

stay on the narrow shoulder. Rudy lost sight of his quarry for a second as he rounded a bend. He was almost past the parking area and then the downhill slope, where the advantage would be his. He smiled. "Got you now, you no good—"

And that was when he clipped the temporary road work barricade that a maintenance crew had put in place just that afternoon to surround a pothole in the pavement. Herzog fought to stay in control of car, swerved, and crashed through the tree line just below the rocky crest of the hill. Fighting for control, he sideswiped a boulder and finally came to rest not three feet from the edge of the

precipice from which Union artillery had raked the Confederate forces below in Devil's Den and the Slaughter Pen.

After the dust cleared and he made sure he was in one piece, Rudy snatched the radio transmitter off the floor and said, wearily, "Spence, this is Herzog. I lost him. Wrecked the car, too. Over."

"Where are you? Over?"

"I'm going to find out. Over." With that he slid across to the passenger door and shouldered it open, as his driver's side was hemmed in. He half-rolled out of the vehicle upon one of the stony crags of the hill. Had the trees and boulder not slowed his momentum, the cruiser would have rocketed over the edge into the boulder-strewn gorge

below. Above him the statue of General Gouverneur K. Warren silently scanned the battlefield. It was Warren who had saved the Union's bacon on Day One when he scaled Little Round Top, ascertained its advantageous location, and frantically ordered Federal artillery to occupy the hill as quickly as possible. Herzog sank down at the foot of Warren's statue's pedestal, head in his hands, still shaking from his near-death experience. Above the nearby crickets he heard hoof beats, tailing off in the distance, lost on the cool midnight breeze.

Then, for no reason he could explain, he stood up and screamed, "WHO ARE

YOU!”

The sound of crickets was the only reply.

Chapter Nineteen

“C’mon, admit it,” huffed T.J., bent over with hands on knees, “If it was a race I would’ve beat you.”

LouAnne, gasping herself from the last one-hundred-yard sprint of their run, grudgingly conceded that he’d have beaten her. “But not by much, Cuz,” she added. “Tomorrow you’re mine.”

“Says you.” He smiled, proud of how far he’d progressed.

After a much-welcomed shower they gathered at the breakfast table where Aunt Terri and Chef Bortnicker were whipping up a Pennsylvania favorite, eggs with scrapple.

“What’s scrapple?” said T.J., eyeing the gelatinous hunk of brown matter at the end of his fork.

“It’s a sausage-like product made of meat scraps, spices and whatnot,” said Terri, pouring herself a cup of coffee.

“Some things are better left unexplained,” cautioned Bortnicker. “Just try it. It’s really not bad.”

“By the way, boys,” added Terri, “Mike wanted to know if you’d like to join him on a cemetery tour today. He knows you’ve done it already, but today he’s supposed to meet a platoon of Iraq war veterans there. He thought it might be memorable.”

“Sounds cool,” said Bortnicker, and

T.J. nodded.

“Rats, I’ve got to babysit,” LouAnne said with a frown.

“So I’ll drop you guys at the Visitor Center, and you can ride over with him on the golf cart.”

“That would be great, Aunt Terri,” said T.J., appreciative that he wouldn’t have to walk after the taxing morning race with his cousin.

As they exited Terri’s Accord she said, “Try the rangers’ office. He might be there.” Sure enough, Mike was at a desk, going over that day’s itinerary.

“Oh, hi, guys,” he said, looking up. “I guess you’re here for the war veterans’ tour. Should be pretty emotional. They should be arriving at the cemetery in

around fifteen minutes.”

“Great,” said Bortnicker, “because that scrapple mystery meat went right through me. I’ve gotta hit the can, and fast.”

Mike cast a furtive glance to his left and right. “Well, if it’s an emergency, you can use the rangers’ restroom to the right. You’re really not supposed to. Just be quick.”

“No problem there,” said Bortnicker, already in motion. “You coming, Big Mon?”

“Why not?”

The boys pushed through a pneumatic metal door, walked down a short corridor, then made a right into the

surprisingly spacious restroom.

Minutes later they were washing up when the heavy door banged open again, the voices of two men clearly audible. "Let's talk in here, Bruce," said the first voice. "Too many people in the office."

"Okay, Al," said Morrison, whose voice the boys instantly recognized from their previous encounter. "So, let me be clear on this. One of your officers actually had an encounter with the horseman?"

Upon hearing these words T.J. and Bortnicker turned toward each other, their eyes silver dollar wide. And then, T.J. did something he would never be able to explain later. Grabbing Bortnicker by the arm, he half-dragged,

half-pushed him into a stall, latched the hasp behind them, and yanked Bortnicker upwards to where they crouched precariously on each side of the toilet seat, their hands on each other's shoulders for balance.

“That’s the size of it,” said Al Warren, as the men entered the larger area of the restroom. “Rudy Herzog was on night patrol around 12:45 A.M. in the area of Trostle Farm when he spotted him. When Rudy made his presence known, the horseman bolted.”

“He took evasive action?”

“Yup. Rode right past the cruiser and led Rudy on a merry chase. Herzog nearly ripped the bottom out of the

cruiser going through the fields.”

“And he confirmed Weinstein’s description?”

“To a T. Over six feet, full Confederate uniform, on a very big black horse. He got the dead animal smell, too.”

“Holy Toledo.”

“But that’s not all. Rudy chased him all the way to Little Round Top, but he ended up swerving to avoid a road maintenance barrier and wiped out. He almost went over the edge, Bruce.”

“Is he okay?”

“Yeah, as okay as you can be after seeing a ghost.”

“So you believe it’s not an actual human?”

There was a pause. “Listen, Bruce. I believe there’s an explanation for everything, even crazy stuff like UFO’s. But this? I don’t see any other answer.

“The good thing is that this being has only manifested himself at night. The bad thing is that reenactment week is only days away, and I can’t be sure he won’t show up during the daytime. Can you?”

“No.”

The boys heard the sound of a urinal flushing, then water running at the sink and the rattling of a paper towel dispenser. Warren concluded, “We’ll just stay after it and hope for the best. I’ll tell you, Herzog’s pretty fired up over this. He says if he sees this guy

again he's gonna blow him away."

"What did you say to that?"

"Bruce, I almost found myself asking my deputy if he seriously believed his Glock could hurt a ghost. Incredible."

The two men walked out of the restroom, the door whooshing shut behind them. T.J. and Bortnicker allowed a minute to pass then carefully let go of each other and stepped down off the commode, their hearts still pounding. "So it's not just you," said Bortnicker, swallowing hard.

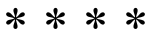
"And I get the feeling it's not just Weinstein, either," added T.J.

They quickly exited the restroom and made for the front desk, hoping Mike hadn't left for the cemetery yet. "So, you

still up for Wednesday night?" said T.J. as they hurried along.

"More than ever," answered Bortnicker.

They caught up with Mike and together took the golf cart to the cemetery, where the soldiers awaited them near the Lincoln Monument. Most were young men in their early twenties, but they seemed older, reserved. Thankfully, none had obvious wounds from their time in action. However, at various points in Mike's presentation the boys could see some of the young veterans tearing up, maybe thinking of their own comrades who had given "The last full measure."



They met up with LouAnne for a late lunch at the house. Aunt Terri was absent, probably running errands. T.J. helped Bortnicker assemble some peanut butter and strawberry jam sandwiches on whole wheat bread, accompanied by glasses of iced milk and a huge communal bowl of potato chips.

“Your father’s got to know what’s going on,” Bortnicker mused, trying to clear the roof of his mouth of the gummy peanut butter.

“That’s probably why he’s always after us about staying clear of the battlefield at night,” added T.J., dropping a handful of chips onto his

plate.

“I agree,” his cousin said, “but we still can’t let him know that we’re aware of what’s going on. One thing, though. If we do meet up with our ghost on Wednesday night, do we tell my dad then?”

“We’ll just have to play that by ear,” cautioned T.J.

“Unless the ghost just shoots us all, then there’s nothing to worry about,” joked Bortnicker.

“Not funny,” said LouAnne.

“Oops, sorry.”

“So how do we get out there?” asked T.J.

“Well, both our bedrooms are on the second floor, but right below is the roof

of the front porch overhang. We go out the window onto the overhang and climb down onto the porch. It's sturdy enough."

"You've done this?" asked Bortnicker.

"Of course," said LouAnne proudly. "Don't you think I have any fun around here?"

"Won't your parents hear us?" asked T.J.

"Not if we're quiet," assured LouAnne. "Their room is across the hallway, so their window opens on to the other side of the porch. No big deal."

"What time do we go?" asked Bortnicker.

LouAnne's brows knitted in concentration. "I'd say to be on the safe side we slip out at ten. Both my parents are 'early to bed, early to rise' fiends. We could be out on the battlefield proper by ten-thirty or so."

"Where should we want to be?" asked Bortnicker.

"Well," said T.J., "if you consider the reports of Weinstein, the deputy and me, this guy is all over the place. I think if he wants to find us, he will. What we have to make sure is that we can't be seen from any paved roads a police car could use."

"Like a woodsy-type area?" asked his cousin.

“Yeah.”

“Hmmm...my choice would be Pitzer’s Woods. It’s at the southern tip of Seminary Ridge. There was some fighting there, although it didn’t involve cavalry. I mean, we could go to East Cavalry Field, but that’s a couple miles from here and I just don’t know how we could get there without a car. What do you guys think?”

“Pitzer’s Woods it is,” said T.J. decisively.

Chapter Twenty

Tuesday was rainy and dreary and seemed to take forever. After an abbreviated run the cousins and Bortnicker sat down with Aunt Terri for some cereal and small talk. LouAnne had a rare day off from babysitting and was traveling with her mother a few miles away to the nearest shopping mall in Hagerstown for back-to-school clothes and a new pair of Nike track shoes she couldn't find locally. Terri asked the boys where they were headed and Bortnicker wondered if she could drop them off at the Visitor Center.

“Again?” moaned T.J.

“I want to check out their research library,” said Bortnicker. Then, quietly to T.J. he whispered, “I have to check some leads on what division our boy is from.”

“Oh, well, in that case, why not?” T.J. agreed.

* * * *

Meanwhile, Mike Darcy had stopped at the General Meade Luncheonette for a buttered roll and was surprised to see his former student, Rudy Herzog, hunched over a steaming cup of coffee, alone in a booth. He was staring into the black liquid and had a vacant look in his eyes that frightened his former teacher. Darcy checked his watch, figured he had

at least twenty-five minutes until he had to check in, and approached the booth.

“Okay if I join you, Rudy?” he asked.

“Oh, hi, Coach. Yeah, of course, slide on in,” the deputy said, beckoning with his hand.

Mike settled into the leather bench seat and looked into Herzog’s haggard face. “Not to be insulting, Rudy,” he began, “but you look terrible. Like when Chambersburg beat us your senior year.”

Rudy managed a tight smile. “Don’t remind me. I was the one who blew the coverage and let their wide-out get behind me, remember?”

“Rudy, everybody on Defense was to blame that day. No one man loses a game. You were one of the best strong

safeties I ever coached. So what's got you so down? Anything I can help with?"

"Nah, Coach. This is beyond you. Maybe beyond any of us in this world."

Darcy looked around, made sure there was nobody near. "Does this have to do with the shootings?"

"Yeah. You know, I had the misfortune of being the first guy at both crime scenes. Three people. It was awful."

"I heard. Maybe you need to take some time off."

"No. I'm a police officer, Coach. It's my job. But, the other night, man, that was just too much."

“What other night?”

Herzog, realizing he'd divulged sensitive information, buried his head in his hands. “Aw, jeez, what've I done now?”

“Hey, Rudy, if you don't want to tell me...”

“No, that's okay. I'm sure you'll find out soon enough. I mean, you guys got briefed by the Chief on the shootings, right?”

“Yes.”

“And the TV guy?”

“TV guy?”

“Yeah, there was this ghost hunter guy from one of those cable shows. He was confronted by the soldier in Devil's

Den.”

“But the soldier didn’t shoot him?”

“His gun jammed.”

“Oh. Hey, Rudy, I know you take your job seriously, it’s just the way you are. But you’ve got—”

“I saw him.”

“You? When?”

“Sunday night. When I wrecked the car.”

“WHAT?”

“I still don’t believe it myself, Coach. But hear me out.” He told Darcy the whole story, at times gesticulating wildly as he described the desperate chase across the battlefield and his near brush with death. Mike tried not to interrupt his former player, who clearly

needed to unburden himself to someone he trusted, someone who knew him and wouldn't think he was crazy. Darcy was concentrating so hard he didn't notice Bruce Morrison, who just happened to be passing by, observing the men through the plate glass window of the luncheonette.

Morrison only paused a few seconds, guessing at the content of Herzog's histrionic-filled monologue. He was still contemplating what he'd witnessed as he entered the Visitor Center and came upon Darcy's nephew and his strange friend sitting on the floor before the glass-encased uniform of a Confederate cavalier. The friend was sketching the

uniform, pointing things out to Darcy's nephew. Morrison crept within earshot and heard the nephew say, "Yeah, Uncle Mike's .44 would blow a mega-hole in you. I can't believe how easily he can control it."

The friend said, "How about the sash around this tunic's waist. Was the soldier's red like this one?"

"Couldn't really tell. It was dark."

Morrison backed away, wondering what in the world was going on with the Darcy clan. Could one of his rangers, or these two kids, be involved in any way with the goings-on in Gettysburg? He'd already had a sit-down with the elder Darcy. Now all he could do was keep a close watch on him and note anything

suspicious. But he would mention what he'd seen today to Al Warren.

Yes, indeed.

Chapter Twenty-One

“What’s with you guys? Something wrong with my fruit salad?” asked Aunt Terri.

“No, it’s great,” assured T.J. “Really.”

“So why are you just pushing your food around the plate? LouAnne, you’re usually ravenous after your morning run.”

“Must be the heat, Mom.”

“Yes, Mrs. D.,” piped in Bortnicker. “Even I, who helped prepare this feast, find myself a little stodgy.”

“Maybe you shouldn’t have chowed that third plate of pasta last night,”

cracked T.J. “You even outdid Uncle Mike.”

Brushing aside T.J.’s remarks, Bortnicker said, “Hey, Mrs. D., find any more bullets?”

“Not lately, but they’ll turn up.” She again regarded the unusually reserved teens. “I know what,” she said brightly. “After dinner, why don’t we all take in a movie?”

The three looked up, alarmed. Terri’s offer hung in the air.

“Ah, we’ll have to pass on that one, Mrs. D.,” said Bortnicker. “You see, the Red Sox are playing the Phillies in an interleague game at seven on ESPN, and T.J. and I bet LouAnne an ice cream sundae the Sox will kill ‘em. But thanks,

anyway. Maybe next week?"

"Well, alright. I'm just worried you boys aren't having any fun."

"Are you kidding?" said Bortnicker. "We were just talking about finishing that garden weeding and going into town for a pizza!"

"What, no battlefield tour today?" Terri asked, cleaning the breakfast plates.

"Even *we* have limits," said T.J. sheepishly.

LouAnne said, "And as for me, I'll be—"

"Babysitting!" cried the boys in unison.

"Alright then," said Terri, "it's the

ballgame for tonight. I'll make a big bowl of popcorn. It'll be fun! Even Mike will want to watch, even though he thinks baseball's a little slow. He'll always be a football coach at heart."

Once outside T.J. wheeled on Bortnicker. "Well, *that* was brilliant. What makes you think I want to do yard work in this heat? And what if the game tonight goes late?" LouAnne nodded in agreement.

Bortnicker kept his cool. "I have *two* answers," he replied dramatically, an index finger upraised. "First, I think a little outside work is a meaningful gesture on our part because, if you haven't noticed, we're clearing out all the produce in Terri's garden with our

gargantuan appetites. Besides, LouAnne has already showered and applied a very fragrant lilac perfume and we wouldn't dare ask her to get sweaty again."

T.J. rolled his eyes and LouAnne blushed.

"And second, our toiling in the hot sun will give us the perfect excuse to turn in early tonight. By the fifth inning we'll have everybody yawning, and we'll be on our way by ten as planned. And, oh, one additional observation. I didn't see either of *you* coming up with anything to shoot down the movie idea. You should be thanking me!"

T.J. frowned and LouAnne shook her

head, smiling all the while. “Gotta jet, guys,” she said sweetly. “And Bortnicker, I hope this means you’re picking up the tab for T.J.’s pizza.”

“Yeah,” added T.J. “I have a feeling I’m gonna be *very* hungry come lunchtime.”

But Bortnicker was already sinking his shovel into the dirt, singing to himself from *The Dan’s* “Bad Sneakers” about burial ditches being dug that they might not see coming.

* * * *

“Wait a minute,” said Bortnicker, applying layers of garlic powder to his pizza slice. “You order a pie with ‘everything on it’ and then you pick off

the anchovies? That's just cruel."

"So sue me," T.J. snapped, lifting a thin brown strip from his portion and eyeing it suspiciously.

"Makes no difference. You can remove the anchovy, but its heavenly taste remains."

The boys immersed themselves in their food, so happy to be in the air-conditioned room that they neglected to notice Carlton Elway's receptionist, Tiffany. She eased into a seat just inches away, separated from their table only by a six-inch high frosted glass atop the wooden partition that bisected the dining area. She'd seen the teens enter and order their food and hearkened back to their recent visit. The one with the

glasses was a dork, though the other was kind of cute, albeit a bit young for her. But what really peaked her interest was the conversation between them and her boss that she'd eavesdropped on, and how Mr. Elway had complained afterwards of them being nosy and up to no good. Perhaps if she could bring some juicy info back to him he'd give her a raise or maybe let her do some ghost tours, where the tips were good.

“Let's go over our plan for tonight,” said Bortnicker.

“I didn't know we *had* a plan,” countered T.J.

“Precisely. Must I think of everything?”

“That’s why you’re here.”

“Point taken. Okay then, let’s say we get to the woods and our ghost shows up. Then what?”

At this point Tiffany fought hard to avoid gagging on her mouthful of meatballs. *What ghost?*

“Well,” said T.J., “I think I’m gonna have to assure him that you guys are okay, that none of us is a threat—”

“But he’s the one with the gun.”

Tiffany’s heavily mascaraed eyes grew wide. *A ghost that shoots people?*

“Yeah, well, it’s because of that we don’t want to anger him. We’ve gotta feel him out, kind of. Find out how long he’s been, you know, haunting this place.

How he got here. *Why* he got here. See if we could help him in any way.”

“Help him? How? He’s dead!”

“Well, you know how on all those ghost shows they talk about spirits who are trapped here, bound to this world? We’ve got to see if there’s a way we could make it possible for him to go where he’s supposed to. His situation must have something to do with the battle. He must’ve died in a way that led to some unresolved business. That’s where you could be valuable. Listen, Bortnicker, nobody knows more Civil War stuff than you. I think that if you could at least get his name and regiment, we could research him and find out more.”

“So, you’re thoroughly convinced this is a ghost and not some crackpot with a Civil War fantasy?”

“The more I think of it, yeah. That and the smell.”

“Hmm, tell me about that again.”

“Not much to tell. Kind of a putrid, decaying, sickly smell. I mean, believe me, you and LouAnne are gonna have to fight it the whole time. But I think it’s so important that, no matter how scared we are, we don’t show it.”

“You know what, Big Mon, I’m more afraid of your uncle finding out than I am of any ghost.”

T.J. nodded. “I believe Uncle Mike knows a lot more than he’s letting on, but

I still think we can't talk to him yet."

"That's where your cousin comes in. She's got him wrapped around her little finger."

"Not as much as you'd think, man. Remember, deep inside him there's still 'Maddog Mike', the linebacker. I don't want him firing out on us."

Bortnicker chewed his third slice thoughtfully. Suddenly he asked, "Think she'd go out with me?"

"Out where?"

"No, *out*. I find myself staring at her so much, I have to look away. Do you think she knows she has that effect?"

"Girls always know," said T.J. "They make like they don't, but they do."

"Like Katie Vickers, right?" said

Bortnicker, raising an eyebrow.

“Katie Vickers? How’d *she* get into this conversation?”

“Well, she’s like your typical hot-looking girl who knows she’s hot.” He brushed his unruly hair out of his eyes. “You can tell in the way she walks, those secret smiles she gives to her witchy friends.”

“I hadn’t really noticed.”

Bortnicker threw down his napkin. “C’mon, T.J., give me a break. She’s your dream girl, and you know it! I remember once you said—”

“Hey,” said T.J., eyeing his friend suspiciously. “How did this become a Katie Vickers discussion?”

“Well, I—”

“Cause it’s over. I never want you to mention her again in my presence.”

“Okay, okay, cool your jets, Big Mon. I’m sorry.”

T.J. frowned at his friend, as though wondering what was spawning all this Katie Vickers talk. “Listen,” he said finally, “let’s solve the ghost problem first, and then we’ll concentrate on your love life.”

“Solid!” said Bortnicker triumphantly. “Tonight the adventure begins!”

“You hope.”

“I *know*. Hey, there’s one slice left. You gonna eat it?”

“Why don’t you bring it with us?”

The two boys pushed their chairs back and exited, Bortnicker holding his pizza in a paper napkin, sporting dribbles of tomato sauce on his tee shirt.

As they left the pizza parlor Tiffany thoughtfully chewed the last bite of her sandwich. Aside from all the junior high romance stuff, she’d gotten some great dirt on these two. She looked at her watch. As usual, she’d overstayed her lunch hour. But Tiffany wasn’t worried.

Elway was waiting for her when she blew in, tossing her handbag on the desk.

“Tiffany,” he began, on the edge of impatience, “do you realize that you’re twenty minutes—”

She stopped him by holding up a pudgy pink hand. “Mr. Elway, before you go any farther, may I speak with you for a moment in your office? I have some information that you might want to hear.”

* * * *

“I knew they were up to something,” Elway said after listening intently to Tiffany’s story. “You’re sure you didn’t leave anything out?”

“Well, they started talking about their love life, or what passes for one at their age. But that’s all the ghost stuff.”

“And Mike Darcy’s daughter is in cahoots with them. Hmm. I can’t believe he’s not on to them by now. Oh well, whatever. Tiffany, you’ve been a real

help. This could mean you're ready to move up the ladder in the business here. What would you say to doing a couple of walking tours this week? See if you like it?"

The girl beamed. "I'd LOVE it!" she squealed, her gum snapping.

"Okay, then. Here's the script we follow for the twilight candlelight tour. You've got to memorize it more or less, and then you'll be good to go."

She plucked the stapled copy-paper booklet from Elway's fingers before he could rethink his promise. "I'll just take this with me," she chirped, practically skipping back to the welcoming desk as an elderly couple entered the building.

Left alone, Elway processed the

information. Although the girl was well-meaning, she was basically incompetent as an assistant. However, she seemed positive in the details she'd overheard.

Al Warren *had* to know about this stuff. Probably Bruce Morrison, too. Why was everyone shutting him out? He was Gettysburg's premier ghost hunter! Well, he'd show them. Tonight he would stake out Mike Darcy's house on Seminary Ridge and follow those kids, armed with every piece of paranormal equipment he owned. This had to be worth at least a one hour documentary...maybe even a book! And maybe, just maybe, he'd finally get to see an honest-to-goodness *ghost*.

Chapter Twenty-Two

The beginning of the interleague game between the Sox and Phillies was everything the teens hoped it would be. By the time the Darcy clan and their two boarders had settled into their cushy leather seats in the family room and begun working their way through bowls of popcorn and Doritos, the Phils had loaded the bases on the Red Sox pitcher, Tim Wakefield.

“His knuckler’s not knuckling,” said T.J.

“You think?” cracked LouAnne.

“How’s the running coming?” asked Mike, changing the subject.

“You’ve gotta see T.J., Dad,” said LouAnne, licking orange Doritos cheese off her fingers. “He’s really improved. I think he could make our varsity team!”

T.J. blushed and LouAnne added, “Of course, I’m still better, but...”

Mike shook his head and scooped up some more popcorn.

Wakefield got out of the inning having given up only one run, and the kids were secretly disappointed. They needed a blowout here, not a nail-biter that would keep the family up until late.

But the Phillies came through for them, tacking on a run here and there. Finally, they broke it open in the sixth inning on a towering Ryan Howard

homer. "That's it," said Bortnicker, "I surrender. The Sox have had it." He stretched theatrically.

"Told you the Phils would smash 'em," chortled LouAnne.

"That Howard is a moose," said Mike admiringly. "Would've made a good tight end."

"See? It always comes back to football," chided his wife.

"I think we'll turn in, Aunt Terri," said T.J., rising slowly from his comfy chair. He kissed his aunt on the forehead. "Thanks for the snacks. They were great."

"I second that emotion, Mrs. D.," said Bortnicker as the two boys made for the stairs.

“Well, I guess this party’s over,” said Mike, clicking off the remote.

“We running tomorrow, Cuz?” asked LouAnne, playing her role perfectly.

“No question. See you at seven.”

“I guess I’ll go up too, then,” she replied.

By 10:00 P.M. the house was dead quiet, save for the window air conditioner humming in the Darcys’ bedroom. At 10:30 P.M. precisely T.J. eased open his window and looked down towards LouAnne’s room. Within seconds her head popped out as well.

“Ready?” he whispered.

“Yeah. I’ve got a flashlight for us. You guys are wearing dark clothes,

right?”

“The darkest stuff we had with us.”

“Then let’s do it.” She eased out onto the porch roof, her sneakers lightly scraping the shingles. T.J. and Bortnicker followed suit, leaving their beds behind filled with pillows to simulate their sleeping bodies “They do that in all the prison break movies,” said Bortnicker.

Once outside, it was a quick climb down to the porch, and then they were in the front yard. The moon was a brilliant orb, the stars twinkling like birthday candles. “Man, it’s bright,” whispered T.J. “Don’t know whether that’s good or bad.”

“We’ll find out soon enough,” hissed

LouAnne. “Let’s make our way down Seminary Ridge, but stay off the road till we can turn off for the woods. We don’t want any passing cars to spot us in the residential area. This is a small town, and word will get back to my dad before you know it.”

“Sounds like a plan,” said Bortnicker.

They set off on their journey, cautiously checking left and right for automobile headlights, their hearts pounding with anticipation and excitement.

As the teens made their way along the tree-canopied street of the residential section, T.J. cut a glance at his cousin

who strode purposefully to his left. Her eyes had that focused look that Uncle Mike might call “getting her game-face on.” Bortnicker, he surmised, was probably frightened to death but tried to play it off, whistling a tune through his teeth.

“Bortnicker,” hissed LouAnne, “Not so loud. And that’s ‘Reeling in the Years’ by the way.” Her remark temporarily broke the tension. Bortnicker had yet to stump her with Steely Dan.

They were almost to the place where the public road ended and Pitzer’s Woods began when a pair of oncoming headlights appeared around a bend roughly fifty yards ahead.

“Into the brush! Now!” said T.J., grabbing his mates by their shirts and diving as one into a clump of bushes.

Suddenly they saw Elway, who had his head down while fiddling with his EVP recorder, frozen like the proverbial deer.

They watched as the police cruiser came to a stop literally at his feet, its driver’s side door opening slowly. The ghost hunter squared his shoulders as though trying not to look stupid.

“Carlton, Carlton, Carlton,” said Al Warren, shaking his head with mock sadness. “Now just what in the world brings you out here at this time of night? Hmm?”

“I, er, um,” was all he could muster.

“And what’s all this equipment for? Looks like you got every gizmo in creation strapped onto you.”

“Sorry, Al,” he managed, looking at his shoes like a third grader. “I know I’m not supposed to be out here.”

“You got that right. Tell you what, Carlton. You get in the cruiser like a good boy and I’ll run you home and we’ll forget this ever happened, okay?”

Elway looked relieved that Warren wasn’t grilling him as to his reasons for being on the battlefield after dark, but he cursed his own stupidity as he dutifully climbed into the car .

As the cruiser’s red taillights faded

in the distance the three youths slowly rose from the bushes. T.J. realized they'd been holding each other's hands in a death grip. They all relaxed and Bortnicker rubbed his palms together. "What was that fake Elway doing out here?" he wondered aloud.

"You got me," said T.J. "No way he could've known what we were doing tonight."

"Are you sure?" asked LouAnne.

"Positive," snapped T.J., annoyed.

"Okay, okay," she said. "So we keep going?"

"Might as well," said her cousin.

They pressed on, entering Pitzer's Woods, picking their way through the trees, underbrush and brambles, using

the flashlight sparingly. Deeper and deeper they went, so that the outside world and its noise and lights seemed not to exist.

“Be lucky if we don’t get poison ivy,” muttered Bortnicker.

Finally, they came upon a clearing and plopped down. Before them was another copse of trees and then a stretch of open space that had probably been farmland in the olden days.

“I’m bushed,” said T.J., “though we haven’t really walked that far, actually.”

“What now?” said LouAnne, rubbing the shin she’d bumped on a fallen tree.

“We wait,” Bortnicker said quietly.

They sat side by side against a large

rock, LouAnne between the boys. The minutes ticked by, crickets chirping occasionally. An owl in the distance hooted once, but apart from that it was eerily still. LouAnne was the first to nod off, her head easing down onto T.J.'s shoulder, the smell of her strawberry shampoo filling his nostrils. Bortnicker was next, though he tried hard to fight it at first, his head bobbing occasionally as he would abruptly regain consciousness before slipping off again. T.J. held out until around midnight then succumbed himself.

It was the vibration that awoke him, faint but unmistakable. LouAnne must have felt him jump, because she came awake, stretching her now-cramping

neck. “What is it?” she yawned.

“I’m not sure. I felt something. Like maybe hoof beats...not too far off.”

“Bortnicker, wake up!” whispered LouAnne, giving the boy a gentle shake.

“I’m up, I’m up. What’s happening?”

“Nothing yet,” said T.J. “Just listen.”

This time there was no doubting it. The hoof beat tremors become more pronounced. Then they actually heard it.

“How does he know we’re here, on this huge battlefield?” wondered T.J.

“Why don’t you ask him?” countered Bortnicker, trying to make a joke.

As the pounding came inexorably nearer, the three teens again held hands.

“Get up,” ordered T.J., remembering

his first encounter with the mystery rider. “We don’t want to be in a position where he’s standing over us.”

“I see him!” cut in LouAnne. “Just past the trees!”

“Holy mother of God,” Bortnicker said with a loud gulp. “How big is that horse?”

All the teens were afforded at this point were glimpses of the rider through the heavy tree cover. LouAnne was the first to catch a faint trace of the smell.

“Remember, don’t acknowledge it,” cautioned T.J., steeling himself for the inevitable confrontation. Standing his ground, gripping the hands of his cousin and neighbor tightly, he had never felt so resolute, so connected, so *strong* in his

life.

And then the horseman was suddenly before them, huge against the summer moon. He gracefully dismounted his ebony steed, tied him to a nearby tree, and approached the trembling trio.

“Young Master Jackson, ah believe?” he said in a deep baritone.

“Yessir, it’s me.”

“And how is your injury?”

“My...oh, my ankle. It’s mending well, sir.”

“And who are your comrades?”

“Well, this is my...closest friend, Bortnicker, and my cousin LouAnne.”

The horseman nodded toward the boy then swept his hat from his head

and, with a flourish, took the girl's free hand and kissed it gallantly. "Ah'm charmed, young miss."

LouAnne, whose knees almost buckled, managed a faint "Th-thank you."

The horseman turned back to T.J. and fixed him with a withering stare. "You should not be here, none of you. Please explain yourselves. Mr. Jackson?"

T.J. cleared his throat. "Well, uh, we are here out of concern for you."

"Concern for *me*? Based upon what?"

"Well, sir, if I may," broke in Bortnicker, "it would seem to us that it is *your* presence that needs to be explained."

T.J. felt the blood drain from his face. The soldier's eyes narrowed and his gauntleted hand began moving toward his holster. "How dare you question—"

"Please, sir," LouAnne cut in, slipping into her finest Charney Inn persona, "what my dear friend means is that while we know you deserve to be here more than any of us, you must surely understand that you are alone on this vast battlefield. We are here to try to help you find some peace... or, are you happy with the existence you lead?"

The soldier shut his eyes momentarily and shook his head, the long black ringlets of hair brushing his

collar and shoulders.

“Sir?” asked Bortnicker, assuming his most masculine tone, “Do you even know what year it is?”

“I know what *day* it is, boy. July the third, 1863.”

“But—”

T.J. flung out his hand to stop Bortnicker short. “Would you be able to tell us your name and regiment, sir?”

The cavalier threw his shoulders back proudly and said, “Please excuse my deplorable manners. I am Major Crosby Hilliard of Charleston, South Carolina, serving under the division command of Brigadier General Wade Hampton, Army of Northern Virginia.”

“Under the cavalry command of Jeb

Stuart?" asked Bortnicker.

"*General* Jeb Stuart, reporting to General Robert E. Lee," he replied evenly.

Just then the horse snorted and began restlessly pawing the ground. "Brutus!" snapped Hilliard, and the animal was calmed.

Sensing their time was short, T.J. asked, "Major Hilliard, we feel that we have been sent here for a purpose, much as you have. That purpose is to reunite you with the brave men of your regiment. Believe me, we mean no disrespect and only want to put things right."

"Are you a God-fearing man like your father?" Hilliard asked.

“My what?”

“Your *father*, T.J.,” said Bortnicker, “General Jackson. Yes, Major, we are well aware how devout Tom Junior’s father was, how he prayed to his Lord before each battle and abstained from drink and other vices as an example to his men.”

The soldier seemed satisfied with this response. “Very well then, young Master...”

“Bortnicker.”

“Yes. We must rendezvous again, for I have many questions to ask.”

“As we do of you, sir,” said LouAnne.

He nodded, set his plumed hat upon

his head, and bowed deeply. "We shall meet again on the field, it matters not where. I shall find you. But I warn you all. If your intentions prove in any way to be duplicitous, you will regret the abuse of my benevolence and wish you were never born. And that includes you, young miss."

LouAnne, displaying uncommon bravery, stepped forward and proffered her hand. "I look forward to our next meeting, Major," she said warmly, a faint smile creasing her lips.

Again he kissed her hand. Then he smoothly mounted Brutus, gave him the spurs, and was gone in seconds.

A seeming eternity passed before anyone could speak. It wasn't until

Bortnicker said, “If that isn’t a candidate for Irish Spring, I don’t know what is,” that they finally relaxed a bit.

“If you can get past the stench,” offered LouAnne, “he really cuts a dashing figure.”

“Yeah, I guess,” said T.J. “But I think he’s as confused as we are about all this. And on top of that, he still thinks, or wants to think, that I’m Stonewall Jackson’s son. So what now?”

“Well,” said Bortnicker, “Now I’ve got a name. It’s time for some heavy duty research time. Back to the Visitor Center Museum Library tomorrow?”

“Looks like it,” said T.J.

“It’s so far out I still can’t believe it happened,” marveled LouAnne.

“Well, it did,” said T.J. “The question is, are we going to be able to do anything about it?”

“You can count on it, Big Mon,” answered Bortnicker. “One way or the other, we’re gonna get Major Crosby Hilliard to wherever he belongs.”

The trio retraced their steps down Seminary Ridge, stealthily climbed the ivy-covered trellis to the porch roof and quietly said their goodnights. As Bortnicker slipped through the window LouAnne stopped her cousin. “You were really brave out there, Cuz,” she said, looking into his eyes.

“Well, it wasn’t my first time,” responded T.J. “I kind of knew what to expect.”

“Makes no difference. You kept us all together.” And for the second time, she lightly brushed his cheek with her lips before padding away to her window.

T.J. stood there a moment in the moon glow, the events of the night flashing by him. He sighed then turned to face the hurt and accusation in his best friend’s eyes.

Chapter Twenty-Three

The next morning T.J. was up a little early to use the bathroom when Aunt Terri intercepted him. “You dad’s on the phone from Paris,” she whispered.

He padded downstairs to the kitchen and took the receiver off the counter. “Hello, Dad?”

“Hey, son! How goes it there on the battlefield?”

“Okay, I guess,” T.J. answered, thinking *if you only knew*. “It’s hot.”

“Same here. But I’ve got good news.”

“Yeah? What?”

“Well, my man, it looks like the

project won't be taking as long as we'd estimated."

"W-what?" T.J. stammered. "I thought you said you'd be away all summer."

There was a pause on the other end. "Son, I thought you'd be ecstatic. The last time we talked you seemed really bummed out."

"Well, uh, I mean, I am happy you're coming back sooner," said T.J., recovering. "When did you have in mind?" he ventured, his mind screaming *Not till we solve this! Please!*

"Well," said Jackson Senior, "I definitely won't be home for the Fourth of July. Maybe a couple weeks after that. Sound okay?"

T.J. breathed a sigh of relief, his forehead resting against the wall.

“Son?”

“That sounds fine, Dad. I’m looking forward to it.”

“Me, too. We’ll go fishing out on Mohegan Lake first thing. Just you n’ me.”

“What about Wendy?”

“I get the impression baiting hooks and cleaning fish might not be her thing.”

“Oh, okay.”

“You taking care of LouAnne and Bortnicker?”

Oh, yeah, Dad. It’s just that I think I’m in love with my own cousin and my best friend now hates my guts. I’m

really taking care of it.

“Sure. We’re having a great time.”

“Alright then. Don’t eat you aunt and uncle out of their house. Speaking of which, I can’t wait to have a good old, fat American cheeseburger. We’ll do some serious grilling when I get back, right?”

“You got it.”

“Seriously, though, is everything okay? You doing alright? I get so worried that you’re bored stiff.”

No chance of that, Dad. In fact, last night I was talking to a one hundred percent authentic ghost!

“Nah, I’m fine. There’s more stuff to do than you’d think.”

“Great! So I’ll call you when I have

a handle on when things'll wrap up here, okay?"

"Sure."

"Alright, Son. Gotta go. Stay safe."

"Will do." T.J. hung up the phone, wondering if he'd be able to keep his promise.

Creeping back into the bedroom past a snoring Bortnicker, he scooped up his running stuff and dressed in the bathroom, meeting LouAnne on the front lawn.

"Did you sleep okay?" she asked while executing a standing hamstring stretch.

"Kinda. How about you?"

"I couldn't get that Major Hilliard

out of my mind. Tossed and turned for hours.”

“Guess I did, too. What are we gonna do?”

“Well, I guess you and Bortnicker have to get a little more info on him, like you said. That poor man. Imagine being trapped like him, not able to get released to wherever it is you’re supposed to go when you die. Ugh.”

“I just don’t know what the three of us will be able to do.”

“Well, we’ve got to do *something*.”

“You’re right, you’re right. I’d feel bad if we just let it drop. But, I don’t know, don’t you feel, like, scared and excited at the same time?”

LouAnne raised her gaze to his.

“T.J., if we live to be one hundred, this is going to be the most amazing thing we’ve ever experienced. I just have a fear that somehow we’re going to get off his good side.”

They started on their run, their strides in sync, side by side. “When Bortnicker and I overheard the police chief and the ranger the other day, I got the impression Hilliard had done some nasty stuff besides just scaring Weinstein. Bottom line, he’s armed and dangerous.”

“The good thing is,” said LouAnne between long, deep breaths, “he only comes out at night.”

“So far. Who’s to say he won’t

manifest in the daytime?”

“You think?”

“Listen, another thing Warren and Morrison were worried about is the reenactment. I don’t know why, but I get the feeling we’ve gotta resolve this thing by then.”

“T.J., that only gives us a few days!”

“I know, Cuz, but don’t you feel like, I don’t know how to put it, *something’s coming?*”

She was silent for almost a quarter mile before she said, “Yes.”

“And you still don’t want to tell your dad?”

“Not quite yet.”

“Okay then. At breakfast today the three of us will sit down and discuss our

next night out to the battlefield.”

“Sounds good. T.J. Do you think Bortnicker’s going to be able to figure this guy out?”

“Well,” he said speculatively, “I think we’ll dig up the history on Hilliard, if you’ll pardon the pun, but I’m really afraid of Bortnicker being Bortnicker and ticking him off so much that he wastes us.”

“You think he would?”

“I know that if I was angry as he must be over his situation, I might have a somewhat short fuse. And my buddy does have a way of annoying people.”

LouAnne giggled, despite the seriousness of the conversation.

“Coming up on the Eternal Peace Monument,” said T.J., who was by now well-versed on the environs of the park. “Race you back?”

They turned and hit it hard for home.

T.J. had expected his best friend to be miffed at breakfast, maybe even sullen, but Bortnicker was one unpredictable dude. He and Aunt Terri were yukking it up while preparing plates of French toast with fresh fruit on the side. After she left to tend to the garden the three conspirators regarded each other eagerly.

“Well,” said Bortnicker, wiping the last traces of maple syrup from his lips, “here’s how I see it. We’ve got this

ghost who thinks it's 1863 and probably always will unless we convince him otherwise. But the key to all this is to find out how he died and, if possible, where he was buried on the battlefield."

"Or if his body was relocated to a Confederate graveyard in the South," T.J. cut in.

"Maybe, but unlikely. He's tied to this place, guards it like it's his responsibility. We've gotta get into the archives today and do some serious digging. I went online this morning and found a lead, but we've gotta follow it."

"Tell us," said LouAnne.

"Okay. Last night Hilliard said he was in Jeb Stuart's cavalry unit under the direct command of Wade Hampton.

“Hampton was born in Charleston, South Carolina to a family of rich planters who owned a lot of slaves. His father served in the War of 1812 under Andrew Jackson, and his grandfather even served in the House of Representatives. His uncle had been a senator and also served as Governor of the state, so he was pretty connected.

“Hampton was a well-educated guy who studied law in college, then took over running his family’s plantation business while entering the political world himself, becoming a state senator. But the whole time he established this reputation as a great hunter and horseman.

“When the war started Hampton felt his first allegiance was to his home state. The Governor made him a colonel in the Confederate army even though he had no military training. Because of his plantation Hampton was loaded, so he personally financed his own unit, which came to be known as ‘Hampton’s Legion,’ and had companies of infantry, cavalry and artillery.

“By all accounts he was a natural cavalryman and leader, but he was never the showboat his eventual commander, J.E.B. Stuart, was. Just a real solid soldier.

“I think to find Hilliard we have to research Hampton’s Legion. Hilliard did

tell us he was from Charleston, so we've gotta look for the connection there."

"Bortnicker, you're amazing," marveled LouAnne.

"Yeah, well, it's what I do," he answered off-handedly, carrying his plate to the sink.

LouAnne gave her cousin a "What's up with him?" look.

T.J. answered with his own "Don't ask me," gesture, though he knew very well.

"Hey, guys," said LouAnne, breaking the awkward silence, "I don't have to babysit at Mrs. Spath's till noon today. Want me to help out at the Research Center?"

"Sure, why not?" said Bortnicker,

rinsing his orange juice glass.

Aunt Terri dropped them off and they headed inside to the climate controlled Research Center where LouAnne knew the director, Dr. Mary Ellen Landon, who had gone to high school with her dad.

“LouAnne Darcy!” exclaimed the portly academic, her hair pinned up in a tight bun. “What brings you to our resource room?”

“Hi, Dr. Landon. Well, my cousin T.J., here, and our friend Bortnicker want to look up a Confederate soldier who was killed in the battle.”

“Hmm. Do we have a name?”

“Yes, Ma’am,” said Bortnicker,

stepping forward. “Major Crosby Hilliard of Charleston, South Carolina, who served in General Wade Hampton’s cavalry.”

“Well, that’s a start. Let’s pull up the Confederate Order of Battle and any information related to Hampton’s command.”

Things were a little slow that morning, so Dr. Landon was able to join them, sitting between the two desktop computers as Bortnicker and T.J. tried link after link, to no avail. By the time Aunt Terri came to pick up LouAnne, the boys’ eyes were red and their patience was waning.

“We’re cooked,” said T.J. finally. “I don’t think we’re ever gonna find this

guy. Maybe he didn't really exist, or he isn't who he says he is."

"Nonsense," snapped Bortnicker, rubbing his eyes. "We're just looking in the wrong place. He'd have no reason to lie to us, anyway."

"Well, you don't have to get snippy about it."

Bortnicker turned to T.J. and fixed him with a withering look whose origin was obviously the previous night. "Don't even," was all he said.

Fortunately, Dr. Landon reappeared that very moment. "You boys hit a bump in the road?" she said sweetly.

"More like a dead end," mumbled T.J.

“Well, there is one more avenue we can try. One of the finest Civil War museums in the land is located in Charleston, run by the Daughters of the Confederacy—”

“The who?” cut in Bortnicker.

“Allow me to continue,” said Dr. Landon primly, alerting Bortnicker to his rudeness. “The Daughters of the Confederacy is an organization of descendants of Southern soldiers who keep their memory alive for both scholars and the general public by funding and maintaining museums and other research facilities. Charleston’s is open on a daily basis and is located in an antebellum building directly over the

Charleston Market. A remarkable place, really, crammed to the rafters with artifacts donated from hundreds of veterans' descendants all over the South and elsewhere. I just happen to be good friends with their longtime director, Margaret Thibodeaux. Let me call her over there... I just might catch her at her desk."

Sure enough, within a minute T.J. and Bortnicker were on a conference call in Dr. Landon's office with a decidedly southern belle-ish Margaret Thibodeaux.

"And to whom do I have the pleashuh of speakin'?" she trilled.

"Uh, my name's T.J. Jackson, Ma'am, and I'm here with my friend Bortnicker," answered T.J., taking the

lead.

“Would that ‘T’ be for Thomas, young man?”

“Yes, but sorry, no relation to Stonewall,” he replied respectfully.

“Aw, what a shame,” she said. “Oh well, how can I help you fine young men?”

“Ms. Thibodeaux,” broke in Bortnicker, taking over, “we’re trying to find information on a particular Confederate cavalryman who we think fought at Gettysburg. Major Crosby Hilliard who served—”

“Under Wade Hampton and was himself a native of Charleston.”

“Right! You know of him?”

“Deah boy, the Hilliards are an ancient and noble family whose prominence in Charleston society predates the American Revolution. Their patriarch, Josiah Hilliard, established one of the first major tobacco plantations in the region. He owned hundreds of acres and—”

“Slaves?”

“Yes, well of course, that was considered a necessity in those days, unfortunately. Josiah Hilliard was well-connected within the state and all the way to Washington.”

“So he would have been friends with Wade Hampton’s family?”

“Land sakes, yes.”

“So when Hampton raised his ‘Legion’ it was a natural that Crosby Hilliard would be involved?”

“Yes, of course. Unfortunately, Mr. Bortnicker, the story of Crosby Hilliard is one we might call a bit checkered.”

“How so?” Both boys edged forward on their seats.

“Well, as the story goes, Crosby Hilliard and Wade Hampton frequently hunted together and attended many of the same social events, though Hampton was ten years or so his senior. I think General Hampton viewed Hilliard as a kind of wild younger brother whom he had to take under his wing.

“But despite his best efforts to mold

Crosby into a gentleman planter, Wade Hampton could not manage his protégé's mercurial temper for him.

“There was a young lady in Charleston at the time named Mary Londoner, who by all accounts was both beguiling and flirtatious. She unfortunately found it entertaining to pit two of Charleston's most eligible bachelors, Winthrop Barry and Crosby Hilliard, against each other, allowing each to escort her to various gatherings and balls in the area. As you can imagine, their patience for each other grew thin, fueled by the machinations of Miss Londoner.

“Then, one day it spilled over, in the middle of Market Street not fifty yards

from where I now sit speaking to y'all. Crosby Hilliard came upon Mr. Barry and Miss Londoner arm in arm, promenading in public and, if accounts are to be believed, whispering sweet nothings in each other's ears.

"This was more than Crosby Hilliard could take, apparently, and he challenged Winthrop Barry to a duel right there and then."

"Wow," said T.J.

"Wow, indeed," she answered. "So on the appointed day the two suitors and their seconds met out near what we call the Battery today and had their duel."

"What happened?" said Bortnicker.

"According to local legend, the men

hefted their pistols and stepped off. But it gets cloudy here. Some say that Hilliard killed Barry fair and square with a bullet through the heart. Other reports have Barry's pistol jamming and Hilliard shooting Barry as the latter was raising his off-hand to alert Hilliard to the situation."

"Ouch," said Bortnicker. "So what happened to Hilliard?"

"What happened? Why, nothing, deah boy," Thibodeaux said assuredly. "It came down to one man's word against another's, and the Hilliard family's status in Charleston precluded any charges being brought. Besides, duels were not governed by conventional law. That's not to say, however, that word

didn't leak out that Crosby Hilliard had not acted in the most admirable manner. In any event, whatever relationship he'd planned to forge with Mary Londoner was dashed, but Crosby Hilliard was about to be saved by divine intervention."

"What was that?" said T.J.

"Why, Fort Sumter, of course," said Ms. Thibodeaux. "From the very area where Hilliard shot Barry dead, Confederate artillery commenced shelling Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor on April 12, 1861. The conflict was underway, Wade Hampton snapped up Hilliard and made him a lieutenant, and off to war they went."

“Do you know what happened to Hilliard after that?” asked Bortnicker eagerly.

“Let me put my staff of two on it, and by tomorrow this time we should be able to provide further information on Crosby Hilliard. Shall I call you at this number?”

“Well, you could email us, if that’s easier,” said Bortnicker.

“I’m sorry, young man, but I try to avoid email or texting or Tweetering or whatever you call it... It’s all too cold and impersonal. I’d much rathuh speak to you wonderful gentlemen again. Do we have a date for, let’s say, ten tomorrow morning?”

“Yes, Ma’am, thank you,” said T.J. in his best choirboy voice as Bortnicker frowned. She clicked off just as Dr. Landon popped in.

“Any luck?” she said hopefully.

“I think we’re in business,” answered Bortnicker with a smile. “But Ms. Thibodeaux needs us back here tomorrow to take her call. Is that okay?”

“Oh, sure,” said Landon. “And meanwhile, you tell that Michael Darcy that I said hi. You know,” she said, patting the side of her bun, “we were quite the item for a little while our sophomore year.”

The boys kept as straight a face as they could, at least until they exited the

Research Room and fell all over themselves, temporarily putting their differences aside.

* * * *

That afternoon, as the boys helped Aunt Terri clear a section near the back of her lot for a new compost heap, Mike returned from lunch to find Mary Ellen Landon pushing a utility cart of hanging file boxes past the ranger office. Though they worked in the same building, Mike tried to cut her a wide berth because, frankly, she never failed to embarrass him with semi-suggestive remarks that harkened back to their high school days. As far as he was concerned it was ancient history, but Mary Ellen never

failed to give him the creeps.

“Well, hi there, Ranger Mike,” she said coquettishly.

“Lo, Mary Ellen,” he mumbled.

“Guess who came to visit me this morning?”

“I haven’t the slightest idea.”

“Why, your very own lovely daughter, your nephew, and their somewhat interesting friend.”

“Really? What for?”

“Well, it appears they’re researching a Confederate cavalryman who fought in the battle.”

Darcy felt his stomach flip. “Did they have a name for this guy?”

“Oh my, yes. Major Crosby Hilliard of the Army of Northern Virginia, under

the command of Wade Hampton.”

Mike closed his eyes and counted to five, his way of calming himself down. *What on earth were those kids up to?*

“Something wrong, Mike?”

“Nah, Mary Ellen, just a summer allergy headache.” He managed a smile. “Did they find what they were looking for?”

“Yes and no. The trail went cold in our resource room, but I put them in touch with a friend of mine in Charleston who’s trying to help them.”

“I see.”

“Oh my, have I spoken out of turn? I assumed you were aware of the kids’ research project.”

“Don’t worry, Mary Ellen, I know they’re working on something. Thanks for helping them.”

She laid a hand on his shoulder. “Oh, Michael,” she cooed, “you know I’m always here to help. Just give a holler.” With that she grabbed the cart and eased off down the hallway, whistling through her teeth.

So that’s what’s going on, he thought. It all made sense now. The visit to Carlton Elway. Bruce Morrison questioning him and giving him funny looks. *They know.* But how did they find out? And how did they manage to ascertain the horseman’s identity? Most importantly, why hadn’t they confided in

him? Darcy and his daughter had never kept secrets. He and Terri had even disclosed all the details of LouAnne's adoption while she was still a child. Why the secrecy now? And were those kids putting themselves at risk somehow?

Darcy was in a quandary as to how to get them to come clean with him. He had never used the heavy-handed approach when he was teaching and didn't want to start now. On the other hand, he didn't want the kids getting in over their heads to the point where he couldn't help them.

As Mike mounted the tour bus for his afternoon presentation he decided to wait for that evening's dinner gathering

to see if the teens would be forthcoming or if he'd have to pry it out of them, which he had been quite good at in his teaching days. One way or another, he had to get to the bottom of this.

Chapter Twenty-Four

“This is some amazing goulash,” said Bortnicker as he crammed a forkful of dripping noodles into his mouth. “All that digging out back has made me ravenous.”

“Yeah. Great eats, Aunt Terri,” agreed T.J.

“You boys worked hard out there,” said Terri, “so eat as much as your heart desires.”

“Pass the rolls, please,” said Mike, eyeing the teens. He cleared his throat. “So, you guys do anything exciting today? Besides digging in the yard, that is.”

All three simultaneously stopped chewing. LouAnne, trying desperately not to be caught in a lie, ventured, “Um, Daddy, we were at the museum today, doing a little research.”

“Really? On what?” said Darcy, nonchalantly twirling some egg noodles on his fork.

“Well,” volunteered Bortnicker, “I’ve always been kinda fascinated by the role of cavalry in the Civil War, and since Jeb Stuart is blamed a lot for losing the battle, we were, you know, looking into that angle.”

“Uh-huh. Any names in particular jump out at you?”

All three stared at their dinner plates.

“Would somebody please tell me what’s going on?” said Terri.

“Shall I begin?” said Mike. “We’ve got a situation here that I believe involves these kids. One where everyone involved is guilty of not sharing information. Am I right so far?”

Silence fell over the table like a damp cloud. The Darcys’ grandfather clock ticked in the living room.

Mike sighed impatiently. “T.J.? Bortnicker? If I don’t start getting some answers you two coconuts are going to be on the next bus to Connecticut.”

Bortnicker was about to open his mouth when LouAnne cut in. “Daddy? What did you mean exactly when you

said *everyone* involved was guilty? Does that mean you're included?"

Terri looked at her husband. "Mike, I'm still in the dark here. What is this all about?"

Darcy ran his hand over his face, searching for the words. "All right. Starting a month or so ago, there have been some shootings in the Battlefield Park."

"Shootings?" Terri gasped in horror.

"Yeah. First there were a couple kids from the college who were drinking in the cemetery late at night. Then there was this relic hunter who, again, was on the battlefield illegally in the early morning hours.

"Both victims were killed with a

Civil War era pistol, similar to the one I have. Then there was—”

“Weinstein,” cut in T.J.

“Who’s he?” said Aunt Terri.

“This guy from the T.V. show *Gonzo Ghost Chasers*. He almost became victim number three, but apparently the shooter’s gun jammed.”

“And who told you this?” said Mike.

“Weinstein was staying at the Charney Inn, Daddy,” explained LouAnne. “One night he got really bombed and told T.J. and me all about it.”

“So that’s how you got involved in this?”

“Yes, Mr. Darcy,” said Bortnicker.

“That’s when T.J. asked me to come down, because I’m pretty good on Civil War history.”

“So, how did that lead you to Major Crosby Hilliard?” said Mike.

LouAnne frowned. “Well, er, Dr. Landon...”

“That’s what I figured. Now answer my question. How do you know the name of the horseman?”

“Horseman?” said Aunt Terri. “This guy has a *horse*?”

“He’s a Confederate cavalryman, Mom,” said LouAnne.

“A real one?”

“No,” said T.J., “a dead one.”

“*What?*” said Mike.

“He’s a ghost, Uncle Mike,” said

T.J. with a shrug. “It’s that simple.”

“But how do you know?” said Terri.

“Mrs. D., we *met* him,” said Bortnicker.

“Met him? Where?”

“On the battlefield,” whispered LouAnne.

“And when was this?” said Mike, his anger rising.

“The other night,” confessed T.J. “We snuck out after the Phillies game.”

“After I expressly told you to stay out of there at night? Are you all crazy?” By the looks on their faces, Darcy had a good idea his face had turned an interesting shade of purple.

“Honey, please calm down before

you have a coronary,” said Terri. She turned to her daughter. “LouAnne, what is the reason for all this? Why are you three putting yourselves at risk?”

“We want to help him, Aunt Terri,” said T.J.

“How?” said Mike incredulously.

“Daddy,” said LouAnne calmly, “it’s like he’s stuck between this world and, well, whatever comes after it. We’re trying to help him leave this place. Maybe if he does, the shootings will stop.”

Mike threw his napkin on the top of his half-eaten dinner, his appetite lost. “I’m afraid to ask, but what’s your next step?”

“Well,” said Bortnicker leaning

forward excitedly, “we’re awaiting some information on Hilliard from Charleston, which was his hometown. It might be useful in getting him out of here.”

“Whoa, whoa, wait a minute,” said Mike, wagging a finger in their faces. “You don’t think for a minute I’m gonna let you go out there again, do you?”

“Uncle Mike,” pleaded T.J., “the way we see it, we have to resolve this situation as soon as possible. We have a feeling something bad might happen, and pretty soon.”

“Listen, T.J.—”

“He’s right, Daddy,” broke in LouAnne. “We all have this feeling. It’s

hard to explain, but when we met him he was like, so sad, and confused. Daddy, you always told me to help others, to put other people before myself. Well, now we have the opportunity to send this man home, hopefully before he hurts someone else in his misguided way.” She started to cry. “I’ve never been so serious about something in my life. You have to let us try.”

“But he killed—”

“He trusts us, Daddy. I think he knows we want to help. Besides, he thinks T.J. is Stonewall Jackson’s son or something. He could never bring himself to hurt him.”

At that moment Bortnicker suddenly bolted from his seat towards the kitchen.

“What the—” said Mike, exasperated.

Just as quickly the boy bounded back into the room, a Kleenex in hand, apparently, for LouAnne. However, in his haste he caught his foot on the edge of the dining room sideboard and went head over heels, coming to rest at the foot of LouAnne’s chair, where he simply stuck up his hand with the tissue held aloft. Even Mike had to chuckle as his daughter plucked it from the boy’s fingers.

“Listen, you guys,” said Darcy, softening, “I know your hearts are in the right place, but this is dangerous ground you’re on.”

“Do you think anyone else knows what you’re doing?” said Terri.

“Well,” said Bortnicker, “Mr. Darcy’s boss acts a little suspicious, and the other night Carlton Elway was tailing us, I think. But a police car picked him up. It looked like the Chief’s car.”

“Great,” moaned Mike.

“And then there’s always Dr. Landon,” said LouAnne.

“*She’s* in on this, too?” said Terri, “Mary Ellen Landon with her big mouth?”

“She only knows we’re researching the guy, Mrs. D.,” said Bortnicker. “I take it you’re not one of her greatest fans.”

“But she’s one of *yours*, Daddy,” teased LouAnne.

“We’re getting off topic,” said Darcy impatiently. “What do you see as your next move, guys?”

“Well,” said T.J., “Bortnicker and I have to be in Landon’s office at ten tomorrow morning to take a call from Charleston with any additional info on Hilliard. Then, I guess it’s back to the battlefield for another meeting.”

“Not without me, there isn’t,” said Mike, shaking his head.

“Dad, that won’t work!” said LouAnne emphatically. “The last thing we need is you getting shot. You have to let us do this ourselves.”

“Mr. Darcy,” said Bortnicker diplomatically, “let me offer a compromise. Maybe if we could fix it so you’re kinda in the area, there but not really there?”

“And how will we do that, Bortnicker?”

“Let me think it over. I’ll come up with something.”

“Omigod! I’m gonna be late for work!” blurted LouAnne. Indeed, the time had gotten away from them.

“I’ll run you over there, honey,” said Mike. “Let me grab my keys. T.J. and Bortnicker, you stay put. Watch *CSI* or something. And LouAnne, you are *not* to walk home alone tonight. You call me as

soon as you're done and I'll come get you. Understood?"

"Yes, Daddy," she said sheepishly.

* * * *

The rest of the evening passed rather uneventfully, everyone watching TV silently while lost in their thoughts.

When they were back in the guestroom T.J. asked, "You think Uncle Mike is gonna help us or hurt us in all this?"

"Can't tell. Of course, he doesn't want us to get killed, but if he tries to take over the operation there could be a negative reaction by our friend. It seems Major Hilliard has a problem with adults on his turf."

“Yeah, but it’s comforting to know we’ve got ‘Maddog Mike’ on our side.”

“I guess.”

“Bortnicker, I—”

“T.J.,” he said slowly, removing and polishing his glasses deliberately, “let’s just get through this and put everything else aside. And then it will all be over and we can go home to our normal lives.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means that things are different now. But I know *I’m* not going to let anyone down while I’m here.”

“Me neither.”

“Okay then. Goodnight.” And with that he reached over and flipped off the

light switch.

T.J. lay in the darkness, despairing. A couple times he almost said something to his friend, but the words just wouldn't come. Then his eyes began to water, and he felt even more miserable.

What have I done?

Chapter Twenty-Five

T.J.,

Sorry, Cuz, but I'm a little under the weather this morning (I don't think I need to go into detail) so you're on your own. Don't you dare punk out and go back to sleep!

Have a good run.

LouAnne xxx

T.J. crumpled up the note his cousin had left on the floor outside his room, sighed, and ventured outside into the sunlight. “I think I’ll take the route we tried my first day,” he said to himself. “Except I’ll *finish* it this time.” After a

few quick stretches he was off down Seminary Ridge.

The morning air was cool on his face as he got into an easy rhythm. Seminary Avenue led onto Confederate, and then he was on the battlefield proper, heading in the general direction of Little Round Top. It was when he was passing Devil's Den, the scene of Mike Weinstein's near-death experience, that the idea hit him like a Miniè-ball to the forehead.

"Why didn't I think of this before?" he practically screamed, and took off for the Visitor Center to find his uncle.

* * * *

Meanwhile, Bortnicker was loading

the Mr. Coffee machine, singing to himself about a girl who could be having a change of heart when LouAnne padded downstairs.

“ ‘Rikki Don’t Lose That Number!’ ” she cried, causing the boy to do a double-take, spilling coffee grounds all over the granite countertop. Even having just rolled out of bed, she was so stunning in the morning light that his voice caught in his throat.

“D-don’t do that!” he managed. “You almost gave me a heart attack.” He paused to get his bearings, then shot her a look with a squinted eye. “I have two questions. First, how can you possibly know every Steely Dan song?”

“Okay, I’ll fess up,” she said. “My

dad has all the albums. Plays them incessantly in the garage when he's working out. Reminds him of his '70s days at Michigan State, I guess."

"Nothing wrong with that. Steely Dan is *classic*."

"Listen, I'll admit their music is funky, and the older stuff has great guitar solos, too, but their more recent stuff is a little too jazzy for me. I'm more of a rock n' roll person. The Beatles, the early Stones, and a lot of other bands."

"You sure you're not just one of those Jonas Brothers or Justin Bieber fanatics like the girls at my school?"

"Yuck! If I listen to anything today, its stuff like Green Day and The Killers.

But I've got it figured out why you're so into Steely Dan, Bortnicker. It's the lyrics. I don't even think *they* knew what they were talking about. Very mysterious, like you try to be at times."

"Oh really?"

"Yes, really. And your second question?"

"Why aren't you running?"

"Didn't feel like it."

"You? Not run? You sick or something?"

"Nope. But T.J. thinks I am."

"I'm confused."

She nimbly hoisted herself to a sitting position on the counter next to Bortnicker, which made him extremely uncomfortable. "So," she began, looking

down at him, “What’s going on with you and my cousin?”

“What?”

“C’mon, Bortnicker, yesterday was a tension convention between you two, even aside from our after-dinner grilling from my dad. What’s up?”

“Nothing.”

“Bull-tweed.”

“*What?*”

“I don’t know, it’s something my dad says when he doesn’t want to curse around me. Like I don’t hear it at school every day.”

“Listen, LouAnne, everything’s cool with me and T.J.”

“It better be. You guys are like

brothers to each other.”

“Unfortunately, even brothers don’t always see eye to eye.”

“Huh. Well, you better get on the same page quick because we could all get killed if we screw up.”

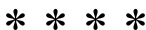
“Yeah, I know. Sorry.”

Aunt Terri saved the day, blowing into the kitchen with, “Oh, you can hunt ghosts but you need *me* to make coffee?”

“Coming right up,” said Bortnicker, spooning in additional grounds.

“LouAnne, you’re not running today? You don’t feel well?” she said, raising a suspicious eyebrow.

“Well, I didn’t when I got up,” she smiled at Bortnicker, “but I feel a lot better now.”



T.J. burst into the rangers' office where he caught his uncle emerging from the rest room.

“Whoa there, Hoss,” Mike said, practically applying a forearm shiver to stop the panting boy. “What’s got into you? And where’s your cousin?”

T.J., doubled over to catch his breath, raised a finger in the air, signaling his uncle to wait a second. Finally he straightened up, breathing more normally.

“Uncle Mike,” he half-panted, “Nobody ever saw or heard of this ghost horseman till recently, right?”

“Yeah. I’d put the first shooting at the

beginning of May.”

“Okay, so there’s a good chance Hilliard has been, like, *dormant* all these years, ‘cause if he wasn’t, chances are he would’ve been shooting people all over the place, for whatever reason. I think something happened that made him appear.”

“Like what?”

“That’s where you come in. Listen, when me and Bortnicker went to see that Elway guy, he told us of some remains being found near the railroad cut awhile back by one of the park rangers.”

“I remember. Boy, did he ever make a big deal out of that.”

“Of course he would. It’s good publicity for his business. But see, this

park must be under constant renovation and whatnot, right?”

“Oh yeah. The idea is to gradually take the landscape back to the way it appeared in 1863. That involves replanting orchards and clearing some other sections. It’s an ongoing process. There’s always some area that’s being worked on.”

“But if the grounds crew finds remains or whatever, they keep it quiet, don’t they?”

“Well, yeah. I would assume the remains are discreetly buried in the cemetery. But what makes you so sure this Hilliard just showed up recently?”

“It’s just a feeling,” said T.J., “like

this is all kinda new to him and he hasn't figured it out yet. Let me give you an example. The first time I met him—"

"I thought you were with LouAnne and Bortnicker."

"Ah, no. There was a previous time when I went for a night run."

"WHAT!" his uncle exploded. "Doesn't anyone listen to me?"

"Uncle Mike, please calm down. Okay, I screwed up and went for a run after dark. It was stupid. But LouAnne was blowing me away in our morning workouts and I couldn't stand a girl beating me."

Mike sighed, closed his eyes and counted to five. "Okay, I can relate to that. Continue."

“Well anyway, I’d turned my ankle in a chuckhole near Reynolds’ Woods and that’s where he found me. So while he’s talking to me a jumbo jet flies overhead and he just stopped what he was doing and stared at it like he’d never seen one before. Makes me think if he’d been around for a long time that wouldn’t even distract him for a second.”

“Makes sense. So how can I help you?”

“Well, do you know the person who’s head of maintenance or whatever?”

“Yes. Frank Staltaro. His son Pat played defensive tackle for me over at the high school.”

“Think he’d tell you if, and more importantly, *where* any remains might have turned up in early May?”

“I think I could get him to share. He should, I got his kid a full scholarship to Rutgers, and the boy wasn’t exactly a genius.”

“Great. Maybe we could all touch base over dinner later?”

“Sounds good. Meanwhile, let me run you home so I can get back for my first tour.”

“I was hoping you’d offer. I’m pooped!”

* * * *

Mike laughed and walked out of the building with his hand across his

nephew's shoulders, unaware that his superior had witnessed, but not heard, their entire encounter from behind the glass door of his office.

Bruce Morrison trusted Mike Darcy, but figured it was time for a check-in with Al Warren anyway, and dialed him up. The receptionist at the police station put him right through.

“Chief Warren. Is that you, Bruce?”

“Hi, Al. Got a question.”

“Hope I have the answer.”

“It's pretty simple. Anything happen the past few nights on the battlefield?”

“Not involving the horseman, and believe me, our patrol cars have been out. But something curious did occur. Couple nights ago I personally picked up

our friend Carlton Elway loaded down with an assortment of ghost-hunting equipment, supposedly on his way to some battlefield night mission.”

“Oh yeah? Where was this?”

“On Seminary Ridge, ‘bout a half mile from Pitzer’s Woods.”

“Near Mike Darcy’s house?”

“Well, in the area. What’s he got to do with this?”

“I can’t tell exactly. But Elway and Darcy’s nephew and his buddy and even Darcy himself are all connected somehow. I’ve spoken to Mike myself and, I don’t know, I get a strange vibe.”

“Think I should pay an official visit to our esteemed ghost hunter? ‘Cause he

wasn't saying squat when I picked him up."

"It's your call, Al."

"Okay. Thanks for the heads-up, Bruce."

* * * *

After a shower and a somewhat hurried breakfast T.J. and Bortnicker caught a ride into town with Aunt Terri to make their appointment, dropping off LouAnne at Mrs. Spath's on the way.

"Call me on my cell if you learn anything!" she said as she exited the car.

"I'm running a ghost hunter car service," lamented Aunt Terri.

They barely made it to Dr. Landon's office in time. She was just making them

comfortable when the phone rang promptly at ten. Landon exchanged pleasantries with Ms. Thibodeaux, punched the conference call button, and left the office to attend to her duties.

“Mistuh Jackson, Mistuh Bortnicker, good morning! Is it as hot in Gettysburg as it is here in Charleston?”

“It’s pretty brutal, Ma’am,” answered T.J. politely.

“Yes. Well. My staff burned the midnight oil looking for our Major Hilliard, and we did have some success, though the findings are somewhat disturbing. Mr. Jackson, I neglected to ask you and Mr. Bortnicker if the major is a relation of yours?”

“No, Ms. Thibodeaux, neither of us,”

said Bortnicker.

“Oh, then I feel so much better about sharing this information.

“Hilliard’s career pretty much mirrored his superior’s early on. Hampton’s Legion first saw combat in 1861 at the First Battle of Manassas, also known as Bull Run, where their maneuvers bought time for Stonewall Jackson to reach the field and turn the tide the South’s way.

“It was during this battle that Hilliard made a name for himself. Hampton was wounded for the first of five times during the war while leading a charge against a Federal artillery position, and Hilliard, though only a

lieutenant, made an instinctive, reckless, spur-of-the-moment decision to step in for his superior and continue leading the men forward. According to eyewitness accounts his uniform and hat were shredded with grapeshot and two horses were shot from under him, but he steadfastly carried on and helped win the day.

“For his heroism under fire Hilliard received a battlefield commission to captain and, as a token of appreciation from his friend Hampton, a beautiful stallion.”

“BRUTUS!” cried Bortnicker.

“Why, yes, that was his name. How could you possibly know that?”

“Uh, I think I read it somewhere,” he

managed before Thibodeaux continued.

“Anyway, this horse of his, like his master, was known for its unflinching fearlessness in the face of enemy fire. By all accounts Brutus was a magnificent animal, as comparatively large in stature as Hilliard, who stood at 6’2” without his riding boots. We have his measurements from the records of his personal tailor, who crafted what was by all accounts a rather flashy uniform that mirrored his sense of dash and drama.

“Hilliard participated in the Peninsula Campaign of 1862, again stepping up when Hampton was wounded in the foot at the Battle of

Seven Pines. His next promotion came in the winter of that same year when he distinguished himself in a series of cavalry raids behind enemy lines that captured numerous prisoners and supplies with minimal losses. So, by the time Lee went north to Gettysburg, he was a highly decorated, and popular major.”

“Wow,” said T.J.

“Wow, indeed,” she answered primly. “But here is where it gets hazy.”

“How so?” said Bortnicker.

“Well, he came through with distinction at the Battle of Brandy Station, the war’s largest cavalry battle, but he was also a part of supreme cavalry Commander J.E.B. Stuart’s ill-

advised ride around the Union army.”

“Which he took a lot of criticism for,” said Bortnicker eagerly.

“Young man,” snapped Ms. Thibodeaux, “though General Stuart has been made a scapegoat for the Southern defeat at Gettysburg, it should be noted that Hampton’s Legion were merely carrying out their orders and were the vanguard of many of Stuart’s glorified campaigns!”

“Yes Ma’am, sorry,” Bortnicker mumbled as T.J. mouthed the words *Shut up!*

“To continue, Hampton’s Legion, as part of Stuart’s cavalry, did not join the fight at Gettysburg until the third day, at

what is today known as East Cavalry Field. There they fought to a draw with cavalry led by George Armstrong Custer.

“But the regimental ledger we have from the battle that lists the wounded, killed or missing displays an odd notation next to Hilliard’s name. Two words, both followed by question marks: Desertion and Cowardice. And that’s where all traces of Crosby Hilliard end. In his official battle report for Gettysburg, Hampton, who had himself sustained a saber wound during the conflict, wrote, ‘One of my most valuable and valiant subordinates, Major Crosby Hilliard, disappeared at the most desperate moment of the

engagement, never to be seen again.’

“And that’s all we know, gentlemen. Of course, Hilliard’s family was mortified, and his father even made a pilgrimage to the battlefield a few weeks later to find some trace of his son. This was, however, a fool’s errand, as all the dead were by that time buried. Unfortunately, as could be expected, there were some tongues wagging in and around Charleston, most notably of Miss Mary Londoner, that nothing less than cowardice could come from someone who would murder a defenseless man in a duel he had himself proposed. With that, Major Crosby Hilliard passed into history, until you decided to find him.

That's all the assistance I can offer in this matter."

"Ms. Thibodeaux, you've done more than enough," said T.J.

"Glad to help. If you uncover any more information, I'd love to hear about it."

"Oh, don't worry, you will. Just one question, though. Do *you* think he was a coward?"

"Mr. Jackson," Thibodeaux said sweetly, "always remember that what you learn in history depends upon who was writing the books. Have a good day."

* * * *

Al Warren entered Carlton Elway's

Gettysburg ghost emporium and took in the racks of DVD's, books, and assorted paraphernalia that constituted his growing empire. Frowning, he approached Tiffany at the front desk. "Mr. Elway in?" he asked casually.

The receptionist, who was buried in a Harlequin paperback while twirling her hair, looked up sleepily, saw the uniform and sat up straight. "No, Chief, he's out of town today for a speaking engagement."

"Oh, too bad. I needed to talk to him about some paranormal-related matters."

Tiffany dramatically looked right and left, then leaned forward and whispered, "Is this about the guy on the horse?"

Warren blinked in surprise. "You

know about this? How?"

"Well," she said proudly, "as Mr. Elway's top employee, I'm in on most important matters to the business."

"Really."

"Oh yeah, plus, I found out some key information for him regarding the ghost rider."

"And how did you stumble upon this, Tiffany?" he said kindly, tipping his hat back and smiling broadly.

"Well, I guess it's okay to tell you, being the police chief and all, 'cause I know you guys are pretty tight."

"We are?"

She nodded. "According to Mr. Elway. Besides, he told me he's helping

with the investigation.”

“Oh yeah, no question,” said Warren.
What a self-important moron!

“So, I found out all this information from this kid T.J. Jackson, Mike Darcy’s nephew. You know, the ranger. Oh, and his sidekick, this dorky guy, Boatnacker or something.”

“They told you all this?”

“Well, uh, I kind of eavesdropped on them, actually. But you guys do that, right?”

“Pardon?”

“You know, wire taps, surveillance and such?”

“Well, yes, that’s correct, I suppose. Tiffany, you could be a real help to this investigation if you’d share with me

what you told Mr. Elway.”

So she did.

* * * *

On his lunch break Mike Darcy hopped in his truck and took the short ride to the park maintenance office where he found Frank Staltaro helping one of his mechanics wrestle a lug nut off a tractor tire.

“Coach Darcy!” he said, quickly wiping his grimy hands on a shop rag. “Haven’t seen you in a while.”

They shook hands and Mike said, “Got a minute?”

“For you? I got all the time you need. Come into the office where there’s some air-conditioning.” Darcy followed the

stocky, barrel-chested sixtyish boss into his office, which was cluttered with work orders and maps.

“Sorry about the mess,” apologized Frank. “We never have a dull moment except maybe in the dead of winter.”

“How’s Pat doing?” asked Mike.

“I gotta tell you, Coach,” said Staltaro, “I had my doubts about him making it in college, especially juggling football and the books. But he lettered all four years and got his diploma on time! Married a nice girl he met up there and he’s working for a marketing firm in Jersey City. And you had a lot to do with getting him into Rutgers. So, what do you need? Name it.”

“Okay, Frank. But what we say here

has to stay here.”

“Done.”

“Alright. When you guys are re-setting walls or clearing land, do you ever find remains?”

“Well, more artifacts than remains. Bullets, shrapnel, even a live shell every so often, which just ends up in the Visitor Center Museum. But, yes, we have turned up bones. See, there were a lot of soldiers who just got dumped into mass graves in the days after the battle. You can’t believe what a mess this place was, and the stench that hung over the whole area.

“They tried to leave markers, thinking the bodies would be dug up and

transferred later on, which most of them were. But some were missed. It's amazing that all these years later, we're still finding bones."

"What happens to them?"

"Well, we call in the National Park Service archeologists after we've discreetly sealed off the area and, unless there's any ID, which is almost never, the bones are quietly interred in the cemetery."

"Find any recently?"

"How recently?"

"Let's say, early May?"

Staltaro pondered a moment, holding Darcy's icy stare, probably conflicted. "Yeah, Coach," he said finally. "Near the Emmitsburg Road we were doing

some roadwork to reset a drainpipe when we found a skeleton which they later determined was a male in his thirties who died of a gunshot wound in the back. There was a huge fracture in the spinal column or something. I don't know how they can tell all that so many years later, but that's what they came up with."

"Could they determine if it was Union or Confederate?"

"Nope. Big guy, though, for that time anyway. Six-one or six-two."

"Huh. Where'd they rebury him?"

"That's just it. They didn't."

"Why?"

"Once the forensic archaeologists

were done, see, they put the remains in a box. The next day they go open the box and—poof! Gone.”

“You’re kidding.”

“Nope. They questioned everybody involved, but all they got is an empty box. Say, I been hearing there’s some monkey business going on in the park after dark. This got anything to do with that?”

“I doubt it. I was just curious, you know. I lead all these tours around the battlefield and I’ve often wondered if there were any bodies they just... missed.”

“Well, Coach, I’m here to tell ya that they’ll still be finding stuff here and there long after you n’ me are gone.

There were *thousands* of men unaccounted for at the end of the battle. True, some just got blown to bits, but others ended up in hastily dug graves or pits. Tell your lovely wife not to dig too deep when she's gardening. You never know!"

"Thanks, Frank, you've been a help," Mike said, rising.

"Anytime, Coach. My door's always open," answered Staltaro as the two men shook hands.

* * * *

With Tiffany's inside information dancing in his head, Al Warren drove back to the station where he found two of his officers lounging by the

dispatcher's desk, needling Rudy Herzog, who had been placed there indefinitely until his nerves settled down. Upon seeing the Chief the patrolmen vanished in a hurry, leaving Herzog to his duties.

"Those guys giving you a hard time, Rudy?" Warren asked gently, removing his Smokey hat.

"Not that bad, Chief," he answered with a reddening face. "It's just that I seem to be in the wrong place every time this cavalry character shows up or does something. Bad karma, maybe. I really need to get off this desk, though. I'm going crazy here."

"Okay, I read you. Why don't we return you to active patrols day after

tomorrow?”

“That’d be great.”

Warren sat on the edge of the desk. “Rudy, you’re one of the best guys I have, maybe the best. But you’ve seen a lot these past few weeks that would test anybody. I just want you to know that you can talk to me anytime if it gets to you. There’s no need for you to feel embarrassed if you feel overwhelmed.”

“It’s just tough, Chief,” complained Rudy. “I mean, I come from this town and people know me, and I don’t want them looking at me funny.”

“I understand,” said Warren. Then he paused. “Rudy,” he began, “you went to the high school, right? I recall you were

a pretty good athlete.”

“Yeah. I lettered in football and wrestling all four years.”

“Really? What position in football?”

“Safety. I was all-conference my senior year.”

“So you played for Mike Darcy?”

A brief look of consternation passed over Herzog’s face, and then it was gone. “Yeah, sure. He was our defensive coordinator.”

“You two still close?”

“We talk.”

“Uh-huh. Well, Darcy’s a good ranger, from what I’m told. Just remember, though, if you need to discuss departmental matters with anyone, don’t hesitate to come to me.”

“I won’t, Chief,” said Herzog, though the look on his face made Al wonder if he’d spilled something to Mike Darcy already.

* * * *

That night over a magnificent meatloaf wrapped in bacon and accompanied by mashed potatoes and peas, the Darcy clan compared the notes of the day, Aunt Terri listening intently as she replenished empty plates.

“So,” said T.J., “there is a chance that it was Hilliard’s remains that were accidentally unearthed just before he materialized.”

“Seems that way,” said Mike, sopping up some brown gravy with a

homemade biscuit.

“What’s weird,” mused Bortnicker, the light glinting off his glasses, “is that here we had this guy who was thought to be some kind of hell-bent swashbuckler in battle, but they were left wondering if he deserted. Then you get this corpse whose cause of death was a gunshot to the back. If you’re leading a charge you don’t get shot in the *back*.”

“I’m sorry,” chimed in LouAnne, “but there’s no way of getting around it. We have to go find Hilliard again. Or rather, if you remember, he said he’d find *us*. I’m thinking Pitzer’s Woods might be too close to civilization. Remember, we almost got caught by that police car.”

“What do you have in mind, then?” asked Mike.

“Daddy, how about this? You drop us near an entrance behind Little Round Top and we make our way to Devil’s Den, where Hilliard found Mike Weinstein. It’s secluded and if we’re inside those rocks we could probably spend a good long time with him and get to the bottom of this.”

Mike Darcy marveled at the chutzpah of his daughter. “And where am I going to be while he’s maybe blowing your heads off? Having a drink at the Battle Flag Tavern?”

“No, Daddy. Listen, I’ll have my cell phone, and you could be there in a flash

if there's a problem. I'm sure you know an out-of-the-way place near that park entrance where you can hang out in the truck."

"And when will this happen?"

"I'm off again tomorrow night," she said decisively. "What do you guys think?"

"Sounds good to me," said T.J.

"Same here," agreed Bortnicker.

"I think you've all gone mad," was Terri's take.

"It's settled then," said LouAnne, brushing back a wisp of blonde hair from her eyes and smiling sweetly. "Hey, why don't you two join me tonight in town? Then we can all walk home together."

Mike raised his hand in protest.
“LouAnne —”

“Daddy,” she said, cutting him off, “I swear we’ll come straight home, right through town. No side trips.”

“Promise?”

“Daddy,” she said with a mock pout, “have I ever lied to you?”

* * * *

After dropping the kids off at the Charney House Mike drove around for a while, first scouting out areas where he could lay low and fly to the rescue if they got in trouble. He couldn’t believe he’d let them talk him into such an audacious plan. Even more incredible was the fact that Terri was going along

with all this.

As he wove his way through the downtown area, he realized that Gettysburg was taking on its yearly lead-up to Reenactment feel. Excitement was in the air, from the tourists to the shopkeepers. The town's economy hinged on a successful summer season, and Reenactment Week was its pinnacle.

Unbeknownst to the teens, he'd already agreed to join his friends in uniform for their 2010 Reenactment. He knew Matty and the others were always thrilled to have him along, though Bruce Morrison only gave tacit approval. But what else could he say? One of his own rangers was proudly displaying his love of history over and above his daily

workload.

Suddenly Mike's truck jerked to a halt as a ghost tour group jaywalked in his path. He realized he'd been so lost in thought that he hardly noticed the hordes of pedestrians on the streets. The only thing close was when he and a bunch of his friends drove up to Cooperstown for the Hall of Fame induction of the Phillies' Mike Schmidt a few years back. Talk about a small town bursting at the seams! There was not a motel room, table at a restaurant or parking space to be had. They'd ended up driving home the same day, getting in well after midnight. The difference was, of course, that there was no huge battle

reenactment involved in the day's festivities, just a sedate, if crowded, ceremony near the Hall of Fame.

Reenactment Week, though it was only four days, would feature a daily schedule of events from roughly 8:30 A.M. to as late as 8:00 P.M. There would be lectures, displays, seminars and weapons demonstrations, hour after hour. The highlight of each day, however, would be the "battle." His unit would be taking part in two of them, Saturday the Third's "Wheatfield-Harvest of Death" and the Fourth of July's "Pickett's Charge" which was scheduled for 3:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M. He fully expected that it would be blazing hot and hoped it wouldn't rain, which

would seriously screw things up, both for the reenactors who waited all year for this event and the thousands of spectators who would pay a pretty penny for the opportunity to sit or stand in the broiling summer sun and watch the men in blue and gray recreate the desperate and pivotal moments that changed the course of the Civil War.

The 72nd Pennsylvania regiment had its own commander and officer. Mike and his buddies were common infantrymen and preferred it that way. The officers, they felt, sometimes got too much into character and became overly bossy, and the guys were not especially pleased with some CPA by day ordering

them around to the point where it ruined the rush they got from just participating in the spectacle. Mike likened it to covering kickoffs back in his football days, but he'd gotten a little tired of having to "stay in character" the whole time and rough it in the tented camps. His daughter was right. He was kind of a wussy reenactor when you came right down to it.

Anyway, Reenactment Week was bearing down on them, and this whole ghost mess just added to his anxiety. He again hoped he was doing the right thing with the kids.

After stopping off to pick up a pint of Terri's favorite black cherry ice cream, he slowly navigated back to Seminary

Ridge. It was dark now and the evening fireflies had been extinguished. There was the smell of rain in the air, and he noted he might have to pick up the kids anyway at the Inn. His poor daughter would be exhausted, but at least she had her buddies to keep her spirits up.

Mike was parking the truck in the driveway when he saw the outline of a figure sitting on the porch swing in the shadows. The light over his front door was out, or had it been unscrewed? Never one to flinch, Darcy approached the porch calmly.

“Who are you and what do you want?” he said firmly. He nearly jumped when his guest briefly flicked on a hand-

held flashlight that illuminated his face. “It’s me, Coach,” said Rudy Herzog. “I don’t think I’m supposed to be doing this, but I’ve gotta talk to you.”

“Where’s your cruiser?”

“I’m off duty. My Toyota’s parked a couple blocks away.”

“Okay, come around back and we’ll talk in the garage after I put this ice cream in the fridge.”

That being done, he returned to the garage side door and let Herzog inside. With a flip of a switch they were in another world. A weight machine dominated the room whose walls were lined with photos from Darcy’s playing and coaching days, along with his framed Michigan State home jersey.

Everything was tastefully done, from the color-coordinated rubber matting on the floor to the walls and drop ceiling.

“Wow,” was all Herzog could manage.

“Yeah, well, this garage was a former storage barn, so when I had it renovated Terri let me have a smaller room for myself. Its selling point was the money it would save me for not having to join a gym.”

Herzog made his way around the perimeter of the room, taking in the framed team photos going all the way back to Darcy’s high school days. His gaze found Mike’s senior photo from Michigan State, a posed shot with the

linebacker on one knee, looking very serious. “Didn’t know you had that much hair, Coach,” he said, noting Mike’s practically shoulder-length locks which shot out in all directions.

“What can I say? It was the ‘70s,” was his somewhat embarrassed answer.

“Am I up on the wall?” said Rudy, fingering a dumbbell rack with pairs of weights from ten to fifty pounds.

“Other side of the room, on the left.”

“Yup. Here’s my senior year. We had a good team.”

“You guys were hard workers, the whole lot of you. And Rudy, you were a good captain. Now, let’s stop beating around the bush. What brings you here tonight?”

“Okay,” said the policeman, jamming his hands in his back pockets the way he used to in high school when he was caught doing something wrong. “The Chief came to see me today. You know, I’ve been on the desk since that incident I’ve told you about when I wrecked the car. Well, he’s taking me off.”

“That’s great. Listen, Rudy, if you’re having any doubts about your abilities as an officer, forget it. You’re this community’s last line of defense.”

“Not a very good one, I’m afraid.”

“That’s bull. Let me tell you a story.

“When I was a sophomore at MSU, we had to go play Ohio State, who had this running back named Archie Griffin.”

“He won the Heisman two years in a row, right?”

“Yeah. Well, I’m playing middle linebacker, and Griffin started shredding our defensive line. Guys were bouncing off him like tennis balls. So during a time out our head coach grabbed me by my facemask and yelled, “Goldang it, Darcy, you’re supposed to be our last line of defense! It’s time for you to step it up, son!”

“So what happened?”

“Well, we still lost, but I ended up with like twenty-five tackles. Far and away my best performance. But what’s more important, when I walked off the field that day I could hold my head high

because I knew I'd done my job. That's all this community asks of you. So don't worry about what the Chief might say or think."

"I appreciate the pep talk, Coach, but that's not what's really bothering me. See, in my conversation with Chief Warren, *your* name came up."

"My name?"

"Yup. It was kind of an intentional throw-in when he was telling me I should go to him first with any issues regarding this case. You're not in any trouble, are you, Coach?"

"Not that I know of. But my own boss, who I know is tight with the Chief, has been keeping tabs on me as well. And he questioned me about the guns I

own and how and when I use them.”

“You have a .44 just like the one used in the murders, right?”

“Yeah, and those guys know they’re free to look at it if they have any suspicions, ‘cause I’ve got nothing to hide.”

“Listen, Coach, I wasn’t suggesting —”

“I know you weren’t, Rudy. And I appreciate that you took a risk coming over here to give me a heads up.”

“You’d have done it for me.”

“Tell you what. If you hear anything from here on out just call me on my cell phone. You’d best not be seen around my house for a while.”

“Okay.”

Darcy clapped his former player on the shoulder, trying to lighten the mood.

“So, you excited for Reenactment Week?”

“This year? I’ll be glad when it’s over. I’ve got an uneasy feeling about it. Like something’s gonna happen. You suiting up this year?”

“Yeah, my buddies talked me into it. Watch, it’ll probably be ninety-five degrees and humid and we’ll be dying out there.”

“Just like two-a-days?”

Darcy chuckled. “Let me tell you something. We coaches hated them as much as you guys. A necessary evil.”

“But they were good days, right?”

“The best.”

The two shook hands and Herzog slipped out the side door and made for his car. Mike was just locking up when Terri poked her head out the kitchen window. “Are we going to eat this black cherry ice cream or not?”

“Be right there,” he said, jogging up the back deck steps to the rear door. When he entered she was waiting for him, hands on hips.

“Who were you talking to?”

“Rudy Herzog. The kid’s pretty shook up. Whenever something bad goes down, he seems to be nearby.”

“And what else?”

“Well, tongues are wagging. For some reason, there are people who think that I, and maybe the kids, I guess, are involved in this ghost business.”

“Well, you *are*.”

“I *know* we are, dear, but it’s not like we’ve been broadcasting it all over.”

“Remember, Mike, Gettysburg is a small town, and in a small town it’s hard to keep secrets.”

“I guess.”

Just then the crack of thunder shook the house. Seconds later, rain began pelting down. “Should I go pick up the kids?” he said.

“Might as well,” sighed Terri, exasperated. “But I’m eating the black

cherry without you!”

He kissed her on the forehead then held her tightly.

“I’m scared for all of you,” she murmured.

“Don’t worry, it’ll be okay,” he reassured her, his lips buried in her hair.

“We’re supposed to be taking care of those boys. They’re our responsibility. But they’re just kids. And our daughter’s the worst of the bunch. She thinks she’s bulletproof.”

“Terri, we’ve raised her to believe in herself and not be timid.”

“But this is different, Mike. When you get them in the truck, *please* tell them to be cautious.”

“Will do,” he said, grabbing his keys

and going out once again. “Call over to the Inn and tell them to tell LouAnne I’ll be picking them up.” The rain was coming down harder as he sprinted for the truck, his wife standing silently in the doorway, offering a weak wave.

He found the three would-be ghost hunters huddled together under an umbrella on the steps of the Charney Inn, deep in conversation. As he pulled up they bolted into the car, trying to evade the steady summer shower.

Before Mike could even open his mouth, LouAnne blurted, “Daddy, you won’t believe what T.J. and Bortnicker did!”

“What was that?”

“They came to my rescue!”

“What?”

“Mr. Darcy,” explained Bortnicker calmly, “it seems a seventeenish patron of the restaurant had one too many cocktails and tried to hit on your daughter during her final performance. T.J. and I had walked around town and bought an ice cream, and then tagged along on the end of one of Carlton Elway’s ghost tours for a bit, which was actually quite entertaining. Luckily we got back to the Inn just in time for the last show, during which this smarmy prepster-type guy with golf shirt, khakis and top-siders asked her a few dopey questions that were so stupid they made

the other people uncomfortable.”

“I tried to divert him without embarrassing him, Daddy,” frowned LouAnne, “but the guy was one of those Ivy League types who’s always trying to show everybody how smart he is. I couldn’t wait for it to be over so I could just get out of there.

“So I finished up and thanked everybody and while the people are leaving he comes over and introduces himself. Get this, his name was Clifford Pangborn III, and he says, ‘but you can call me Cliff.’”

“And then what?” said Mike, his anger rising.

“And then, boom! T.J. and Bortnicker were in his face, and T.J.

says, ‘No, my friend, I think we’ll call you *gone*!’ The guy was so surprised he just kind of slunk away down the stairs.”

Mike chuckled. “Nice job, guys. Good to know my daughter has two bodyguards.” He paused as they stopped at a red light. “Listen, I had a visitor tonight, Rudy Herzog.”

“The cop?” said LouAnne.

“Yes, who used to play for me at the high school. The gist of what he told me is that my boss Bruce Morrison and the police chief have been throwing my name around lately and yours as well.”

“Us?” said T.J. “What for?”

“T.J.,” answered Mike patiently, “I don’t know how small Fairfield is, but

Gettysburg is a *real* small place. Word gets around. You guys have had a run-in with Carlton Elway, who's a notorious busybody, and Mary Ellen Landon, who's a *legendary* one. What I'm saying is, if you three are going to go through with this cockamamie idea of yours tomorrow night, it's got to be done right, like a Navy SEAL mission."

"What do you suggest?" said T.J., his excitement rising.

"Well, I know exactly the right place to drop you guys, but we've got to go through the house and find all the darkest clothes we've got to make you invisible out there."

"Why don't we just buy some?" asked LouAnne.

“Too obvious, my dear, the wrong people will notice,” said Bortnicker.

“Exactly,” said Mike. “But like we said, I want radio, er, cell phone contact at all times. This may be the only shot you get. Once Reenactment Week starts the battlefield will be crawling with patrollers, if it isn’t already.”

“Daddy,” said LouAnne, “if we get caught, will you get in trouble?”

“Bigtime,” said Mike, staring through the windshield wipers. “But this is important to you guys, and I think it’s also the right thing to do.”

“Alright, Mr. D!” cried Bortnicker.

“Easy, son. That doesn’t mean I’m happy about all this. Neither is Mrs.

Darcy.”

“I was thinking about our visit to the Research Center today,” said T.J., switching gears. “It seems to me that this guy became such a maniac on the battlefield because he was trying to make up for what he was accused of back in Charleston.”

“Shooting that guy in the duel?” said LouAnne.

“Exactly. That’s why I just can’t buy the idea that he wimped out and deserted when things got hot during Day Three. What I think happened is that he did mysteriously die during the battle, but then the people back in Charleston, especially that Mary Londoner babe, spread the dirt about him to justify

blowing him off after the duel.”

“Sounds plausible,” said Mike.

“Also sounds like you want to clear his name,” said Bortnicker.

“Well, if that happens along the way, fine,” said T.J. “But it just proves why it’s so important we talk to him.”

“Alright, then,” said Mike as they pulled into the Darcys’ gravel driveway. “Let’s get a hold of Mrs. Darcy and make us some commando outfits.”

Chapter Twenty-Six

Any doubt that LouAnne's "illness" was lingering was dispelled immediately the next morning when T.J. descended the stairs from his room to find her sitting on the bottom step, lacing up her running shoes. "'Bout time, Sleepy Head," she joked.

"Well, excuse me, Miss Day Off," he countered.

They went outside, where last night's showers had produced a dense fog that had yet to burn off. "Humid, but no sun yet," observed T.J. "Perfect!"

"I have a new route to show you. Break the monotony," said his cousin as

they completed their stretches.

“Sounds good to me,” said T.J., rising from the dew-laden grass of the front yard. They began, as always, with a slow, easy jog that would soon quicken.

“Psyched for tonight?” she asked.

“I don’t know if that’s the right word,” he answered, “but I am kinda excited.”

“How about Bortnicker?”

“Are you kidding? He’s already prepared a list of questions he wants to ask Hilliard. I’m pretty sure none of them are stupid or offensive. I think a lot of it will depend on *how* he asks them. He drives all the teachers crazy back at school.”

“I’ve been meaning to ask, has his mother called or emailed him since he’s been here?”

“Not as far as I can tell, unless he’s just keeping it to himself.”

“What’s up with that?”

“Well, he’d probably say something weak like, ‘She just wants me to learn to be on my own, blah blah blah,’ but deep down it must bother him a lot. She’s just so weird and into herself with all her feng shui stuff that I wonder if she’s even noticed he’s not around.”

“Does she have any boyfriends?”

“There have been a couple guys I can remember, but Bortnicker hasn’t managed to warm up to them. But, put

yourself in their place. If you were dating this lady, who's actually kind of pretty and has an okay personality, and she introduces you to her son, who asks you all kinds of goofy questions and behaves like a weirdo, would you still come around?"

"I see what you're saying." They stepped it up, entering the park near the Culp's Hill observation tower. The first cannons and monuments whooshed by. "You looking forward to high school, Cuz?" she asked.

"Yeah, I guess. Not the school part especially, but seeing my friends and fall track season, that sort of stuff."

"How about Katie?"

T.J. paused, caught himself then said,

“Yeah, her too, I guess. But, uh, I’m sure she’s having a fun enough time on her own this summer. She hangs out at the Westfield County Club mostly with the preppy crowd, playing tennis and stuff. Not my thing.”

“You seem a little down on her. Something happen to change things?”

He turned toward her as they jogged and half-smiled. “Maybe.”

“Well,” she said, “I’m really looking forward to going back. My summer schedule’s so hectic between babysitting and working nights that school’s kind of easy in comparison. And I want to make All-County in cross country this year. I know I’ll only be a sophomore, but it’s

been done.” She waited a bit, as if carefully choosing her words. “I’m really glad you came down, T.J. And Bortnicker, too. It’s kept my summer from being a horrible bore. But this whole ghost thing is like something on the SyFy Channel. I mean, you’ve seen some of those cheesy movies they have where there’s a bunch of kids who end up fighting vampires or aliens or whatever. When I watch them, at the end I always wonder how these kids can just go back to school and go on with their normal lives like nothing happened? Do you worry that this stuff we’re going through is going to change us forever?”

“Well, kinda. I hope it doesn’t. But I really want to get to the bottom of it,

don't you?"

"Of course. I just don't want Dad to get in trouble, or any of us to get hurt... or worse."

"How could you possibly get hurt, Cuz?" asked T.J. "You have two personal bodyguards!"

"Yeah, well there's a little difference between Clifford Pangborn III and a dead Confederate soldier who shoots people."

"I guess. Hey, uh, LouAnne, since I did come down to PA this summer, is there any chance of you coming up to Connecticut to visit?"

"You'd want me to?"

"Sure," said T.J., trying not to

overplay it. “We’ve got lots of room. Maybe Christmas Break?”

“Well, let’s see how this all ends up, but I’d say that’s a possibility. Let’s turn back.”

T.J. soared all the way home.

* * * *

After a quick shower they met again downstairs where Aunt Terri and Bortnicker were putting the finishing touches to a boatload of apple cinnamon pancakes. And there was an added guest as well.

“Uncle Mike, aren’t you gonna be late?” queried T.J.

“It’s my day off. See, we have a rotating schedule, so every so often I

have a midweek day to myself.” He forked a short stack of pancakes onto his plate. “Is it safe to eat this stuff?”

Terri swatted him playfully with a dishcloth. “Of course! You don’t know what you’ve been missing every morning. Bortnicker and I have whipped up some real winners.”

“I think the Food Channel will be calling soon,” said Bortnicker as he sat down before his own steaming stack. “How about this show title: *Breakfast with Mrs. D and Mr. B?*”

T.J. shook his head as he smothered his pancakes with syrup. *Wish Aunt Terri was his mother* he thought. *She’s just what he needs.*

“So, what’re you doing on your day

off, hon?" Terri asked her husband.

"Well, if you don't mind, I think I'd better get another day in at the shooting range before Reenactment Week."

"You're *doing it* this year?" said LouAnne through a mouthful of food.

"Yeah. I figured, why not? Plus, the guys have been after me since I took last year off."

"Bruce Morrison doesn't mind?" asked Terri.

"I don't care if he does or doesn't. Besides, this year the events will be stretched over four days, from Friday the 2nd to Monday the 5th. I'll probably just do the Saturday and Sunday battles."

"Don't those reenactments tear up the

battlefield?” asked Bortnicker, refilling his milk glass.

“They’re not held on the park grounds,” said Mike.

“Where do they have them, then?” asked T.J., stunned at this revelation.

“Well, there are a couple of farms that border the national park. They’ve been alternating between them the past few years. Having the reenactment in the same place every year would just ruin whatever grounds served as the stage.

“You guys don’t live here so you have no idea what a huge undertaking this is. This is the 147th anniversary of the battle, not a ‘major’ one. They come every five years. But even though,

they're estimating like 25,000 spectators will be spread out over the four days. They're building a small town on the donated farm, with event tents, bleachers, sanitary facilities, concession and souvenir areas, police and security, the whole works. I'd hate to be Al Warren while this is going on."

"How long have they been having the reenactments?" asked Bortnicker.

"Around fifteen years," said Mike. "And it gets bigger each time, and a little more commercial as well, sorry to say. Just to get in, spectators have to pay twenty-five dollars and up, and it's usually hot as blazes.

"There will be one 'battle' each day, depicting a specific segment from the

three-day battle that actually happened. Pickett's Charge, the real biggie, is Sunday, the 4th of July."

"How many reenactors will there be?" asked T.J.

"Gotta figure, counting both sides, between 2,000 and 2,500. Plus twenty or so cannons and around one-hundred-fifty mounted cavalry."

"Wow," said Bortnicker.

"Like I said, it's a very big deal. The town's gonna be bursting at the seams, and that's how the Chamber of Commerce likes it. But for the police, local EMTs and hospitals, and even the park rangers, it can be a logistical nightmare."

“Lots of injuries?” said T.J.

“Oh, yeah. You’ve got reenactors falling off horses that get spooked by the cannon, dehydration issues because of the heavy uniforms, and spectators getting heat stroke from getting to their primo location bleacher seats early and then just baking there for hours awaiting the action.

“What never ceases to amaze me are how many reenactors are way overweight. I mean, your typical Civil War soldier was trim, and Lee’s Army was *starving*. These guys show up having poured tons of money into perfectly replicated uniforms and accoutrements, but having no clue as to

what a Civil War era soldier should look like. They figure, ‘Well, I grew my hair longer and have a scraggly beard, so I look the part.’ Then they keel over from the heat. Ridiculous.”

“Well, Daddy, everyone can’t be as buff as you,” chided LouAnne.

“It’s not that, honey. I believe if you want to really pay homage to history and give people the real deal, the least you could do is ease up on the Big Macs for a while, you know?”

“But people don’t actually get shot, do they?” asked Bortnicker.

“No, of course not. Whether our weapons are real like mine, which is extremely rare, or just replicas, they fire blanks. On top of that, nobody under

sixteen is permitted to fire a black powder weapon, and nobody, and I mean *nobody*, is allowed to even carry real ammo as a prop. Then, you have to point your gun at an elevated angle, never point directly at the enemy, and you can't get closer than twenty-five yards."

"So it isn't *totally* authentic," said Bortnicker.

"Nah, not really. You have to use your imagination a bit," admitted Mike, polishing off his last forkful. "Well, I gotta get going. Breakfast was great, Bortnicker."

"What about me?" cried Terri in mock anger.

“You too, sweetie,” he said, leaning over to kiss the top of her head as he went by.

“Hey, Uncle Mike, want some company at the range?” asked T.J.

“Really? You want to go back?”

“Why not? It’ll help the time go by faster today. Get my mind off tonight.”

“Sure thing. I’ll bring the pistol and my rifle, though I’ll only be using the rifle in the reenactment. Only officers are allowed to carry sidearms.”

“I’ll be going into town,” said Bortnicker. “The only shops I haven’t checked out are the ones that supply the reenactors. It should be educational.”

“Oh yeah,” said Mike. “Wait till you

see the prices!”

“You don’t even have to ask where I’ll be,” LouAnne said with a sigh. “But my day will go quickly. Those kids keep me hopping, and Mrs. Spath lets me eat whatever I want!”

As T.J. climbed into the truck with his uncle, Mike handed him a sheaf of papers. “Figured I’d let you read this on the way over,” he said. “It’s all the rules and regulations put out by the organizing committee for reenactors.”

T.J. let out a low whistle as he began pouring over the literature. “So, there are two types of spectator seating for these events?” he asked.

“Yeah. There’s general admission, where people stand or bring their own

lawn chairs, and bleacher seating, which costs extra. I'm telling you, it's a big production."

"Oh, man," T.J. said, eyeing another page. "You've got a pretty lengthy safety code here."

"And for good reason. You don't want some yahoo trying to steal the show by pulling a stunt that puts other reenactors and spectators at risk. Each company appoints a designated Safety Officer, who reports to the Brigade Safety Officer, who reports to the Army Headquarters Officer. There's an inspection conducted prior to each battle."

"What if someone's in violation of

the rules?”

“He isn’t allowed to participate.”

“How’s your unit on this stuff?”

“We’re pretty good. Most of us are veterans and our unit has never had a violation, so we’re not overly scrutinized. There have been some units who have been caught a few times and thus aren’t allowed to attend reenactments.”

“Other battlefields have them?”

“Oh, yeah. All the major ones do it yearly, some of the smaller ones here and there. But this is the big one. That’s why it draws participants from all over the world.”

“What if you’re some guy, say, in England, and you want to come over and

do it?”

“They’ll assign you to a unit, pretty much. You can’t just be running around out there. These battle reenactments are carefully scripted to mirror the actual events, though on an obviously smaller scale. We even know who’s gonna die or get wounded.”

“No way.”

“Yes way. Think about it, T.J. You can’t have a battle where nobody gets killed. So, we volunteer or even draw straws ahead of time to see who goes down.”

“Wow. I never realized it was so organized.”

“It has to be. And if you think it’s

stringent for us infantrymen, just imagine all the additional rules for mounted soldiers and cavalry, or the artillery batteries.”

“So you guys are pretty meticulous about being historically correct.”

“You have no idea. From the uniforms to the weapons to our canteens and eating utensils to our tents and sleeping equipment. If anybody is even a little off on this stuff he gets mercilessly ragged on.”

“But LouAnne said you don’t go in for the camp out part.”

“That’s true, although there are all kinds of designated camps; one for Union troops, one for Confederate, and one for dependents and family of

soldiers where you have men and women reenacting the roles of doctors, cooks, seamstresses, etc. But, just like the soldiers, they have to be well versed on their roles.”

“Did Aunt Terri ever participate?”

Mike gave a short, snorting laugh. “No, your aunt isn’t a big fan of all this. The last thing she wants is to be dragging around in some big hoop skirt on a ninety degree day. She just says, ‘You can go play with your friends, Mike.’ She attends the reenactment as a spectator when I participate, though. Says it’s to make sure I don’t get killed, but I think she gets a kick out of it. And, of course, LouAnne spends her whole

summer reenacting at the Charney House, so she doesn't feel the need to suit up for the battle as well, though she'd be one of the best."

"That's for sure."

They arrived at the range and set up a booth, where T.J. impressed his uncle with his memorization of the loading and firing procedure of the .44. He even hit the target more times than he missed.

Mike was clearly a great marksman, deftly loading and shooting his rifle and hitting the mark consistently. Uncle and nephew joked with each other and thoroughly enjoyed their day of shooting, then retired to the same burger joint for a hearty lunch and gallons of iced tea. It was while they were awaiting the bill

that Mike's cell phone beeped. He clicked it open and read the caller ID. "That's odd. It's my Civil War unit commanding officer," he said. "Wants me to call him. Says it's important. Give me a few minutes, T.J., okay?"

"Sure. I'll just hang out here and watch *SportsCenter*," he said, pointing to a TV over the bar.

Mike returned a few minutes later, grinning from ear to ear, and sat down across from T.J. "Talk about coincidence, this is eerie!" he began.

"What's up, Uncle Mike?"

"Okay, so that was my commander, Colonel Pelham. Actually, his real name is Jack Pelham, and he's a computer

technician with some big marketing agency in Philly. Anyway, his twin sons are our unit's drummer boys."

"Drummer boys?"

"Oh yeah, most units have 'em. Well, it seems these kids are on the same Babe Ruth League travel team that just made their league playoffs, and they have to play in a regional tournament in Pittsburgh during the Reenactment Days. Their dad said they had to make a choice, and they chose the tournament, since both guys are starters. Needless to say, Jack's not happy. So, we're scrounging for at least one drummer boy."

"What do you have to do as a drummer boy?" said T.J., who had an

idea where this was all going.

“Well, technically you have to have had previous experience in reenacting because Gettysburg’s a tough one to start with, but I know I can get my hands on a ‘how-to’ list of guidelines of what your duties would be, both in camp and in the battle. The key question is, can you actually drum at all?”

“Well,” said T.J., wiping away some remnants of black powder from the back of his wrist that he’d missed while scrubbing up in the men’s room before lunch, “as it turns out, both Bortnicker and I played the kettle drum in our school orchestra. See, every kid in our school has to take music lessons or be in

chorus, because Fairfield is a very artsy town. We decided the kettle drum would be the least demanding instrument, except maybe cymbals, so we signed up for it. We're not that great, but we're not horrible, either."

"Are you saying that both you guys would want to do this?"

"I can't speak for Bortnicker, Uncle Mike. Who knows how he'd feel about this? And, to tell you the truth, I'd only do it if he was going to do it, too. Don't want to be the only one making a fool of myself."

"I think you two would be great!"

"I'm not so sure. Could I talk to him about it when we get home?"

"Sure thing. Let's get outta here."

As they drove back to Gettysburg Darcy was bubbling with excitement. T.J. likened his demeanor to a football coach the week of a big game. Which was, of course, exactly what Mike used to be. “You nervous about tonight, T.J.?” he asked finally.

“Yeah. Going shooting actually took my mind off it, but now the butterflies are creeping in.”

“I understand. Here’s what we’ll do. After dinner we’ll sit down together and nail down a plan for our procedures. Try to think of any details we should cover and talk to Bortnicker ahead of time. He should be home by the time we get back. That way you can also talk about the

reenacting thing. I just want to make sure nothing bad happens to you kids out there tonight. You're really sure you want to do this?"

"We have to," said T.J. firmly.

"Alright. You guys seem set on this. My job is to get you in and out of there without being detected. But you have the hard job. You have to reason with this being and try to find out if you can help him. That may be asking too much. And besides, what if he doesn't show?"

"He'll show, I know it," said T.J.

* * * *

T.J. found Bortnicker in their room with his laptop, a box of saltines at the ready, once again going over the

strategic elements of the Battle of Gettysburg. “How many times are you going to read that stuff?” he moaned.

“I’m thinking our guy got killed in one of two places,” said Bortnicker, absently reaching into the box for a cracker, his glasses riveted to the laptop screen. “It was either East Cavalry Field, which would make the most sense, or during Pickett’s Charge.”

“But, wasn’t Pickett’s Charge an infantry battle?”

“Yeah, with an artillery barrage to kick it off. But those are the only two encounters on Day Three. Either he took part in one or the other, or he just plain ran away like it was rumored. But I don’t think he deserted.”

“Me neither. So, how’d your shopping spree go today?”

Bortnicker snapped the laptop shut and plopped himself on his bed. “Man, you won’t believe the stuff they have for reenactors,” he marveled. “You could spend hundreds or even thousands getting yourself suited up for battle. I just lost myself in those places.”

“Places? How many of those stores are there?”

“Well, there are two major ones, the Battle Cry and the Soldier’s Supply Depot. Their prices are about the same. I’m thinking of bringing home a Union infantry cap as a souvenir.”

“I think you could do better than

that,” said T.J., a twinkle in his eye.

“What do you mean?”

T.J. filled Bortnicker in on Mike’s phone call from Jack Pelham and the drummer boy offer. He expected his friend would be sky high at the prospect of participating in the battle. He was therefore surprised and disappointed when Bortnicker frowned and said, “Jeez, I don’t know.”

“What do you mean, you don’t know? I would think you’d be psyched for this! You’re the big Civil War expert.”

“Yeah, I know, but marching around some dusty cornfield beating a drum... can I think about it?”

“Yeah, sure,” said T.J., hiding his annoyance. “Tell you what, let’s get

through tonight and we'll see what we wanna do."

"Sounds good."

"So, you know what you're gonna ask Hilliard tonight?"

"Well, kinda. I'd like to run through it with you first."

T.J. lay back on his bed. "Toss me a couple Saltines," he said. "I'm all ears."

* * * *

At about the same time T.J. and Bortnicker were reviewing their plans for the upcoming evening, Al Warren heard a tapping noise on his office window and looked up to see the smiling face of Doc Lamberg, who reminded him of Orville Redenbacher, the popcorn

guy. He motioned Doc inside and told his secretary to hold all calls.

“I was just in the area, Chief, and thought I’d drop by. Haven’t heard from you in a while,” said Lamberg, settling into a chair and pulling out his pipe. “Mind if I light up?”

“No, go ahead,” said Warren. “I apologize for not keeping you up on things since the Weeks shooting. All in all, it’s been quiet, as far as any violence goes.”

“Which means what, exactly?” said Lamberg wryly as he fired up his pipe.

“We know who the shooter is, because he’s made two more appearances.”

“Then, you’ve picked him up?”

“Not yet.”

“Is he under surveillance?”

“You could say that, yes.”

Lamberg puffed away, then took the pipe from his mouth and pointed the stem at Warren. “You’re being very vague here, Al,” he said. “It’s not like you.”

“Doc, I’m just trying to keep this quiet until after Reenactment Week. Then I’ll have a better handle on it.”

“I see,” said Lamberg, somewhat miffed he’d been left out of the loop. “Don’t you think it’s odd that these three murders were committed with period ammunition?”

Warren’s mouth nearly dropped open. “How did you find that out?” he

asked.

“Oh, come on, Al. You don’t think that when I leave a murder scene I lose all interest in the crime, do you? I have a friend at State Police HQ in Harrisburg who clued me in. Who on earth goes around shooting old ammo like the rounds they took out of those guys? Where do you even buy stuff like that nowadays?”

“Well, I’m sure some of the war relic places around here have them,” said Warren.

“Al, those old bullets were fired from a period .44, as you well know. Don’t a lot of those reenactors use period weapons?”

“Not many, actually,” said Warren.

“Most use reproduction rifles and pistols.”

“So I would assume you’ve asked every shop owner in the area who sells Civil War bullets and the like if .44 calibers had been purchased lately?”

“Of course, Doc. It took weeks, too, because everyone and his mother sells that stuff. I mean, they found barrels and barrels of bullets in ammunition warehouses at the end of the war. If you add in all the stuff that’s been dug up over the years, you have a seemingly never ending supply.”

“Yes, but how many places around here sell the pristine, ready-to-fire bullets?”

The answer was only a few, and although he'd implored those proprietors to call him immediately if any .44 purchases were forthcoming, it seemed moot now because Warren truly believed the shooter had brought his Civil War ammo with him—fresh from 1863.

“Doc,” said Warren patiently, “believe me when I tell you that we’re close on this,” though he wasn’t sure of that at all. “When the case breaks I’ll call you right away.”

“Alright then, Chief,” said Lamberg, slowly rising. “Good luck to you then. I’d hate to be you this week. The idea of Gettysburg being flooded with hundreds

if not thousands of firearms, both real and reproduction, this coming week must be keeping you up nights.”

“You have no idea, Doc,” answered Warren, walking the old coroner to the door. “Hopefully, I won’t have to call you again in the middle of the night.”

They shook hands. “Call me anytime, Al,” said Lamberg, trailing a cloud of pipe smoke behind him as he strolled away down the hall. “It’s all the excitement I get these days.”

As soon as Warren returned to his desk he summoned his secretary, Officer Jo Vigorito, to his office. She was new to the job but thorough and direct, which was just what he needed now. “Call these five stores, Jo, and remind them

that I need to know *immediately* if someone tries to purchase live .44 caliber bullets.”

“I’m on it, Chief,” she replied, snatching the list from his hand and retreating.

When she left Warren slumped forward onto his desk and rubbed his eyes. He knew something was going to happen, and was almost as certain he wouldn’t be able to prevent it. As far as he was concerned, there was only a remote chance of the shooter being human. Speaking of chances, they were taking a huge one by keeping this thing quiet. Everyone from the Mayor on down to the newspaper people and park

rangers who knew the very existence of their town rested on the success of the upcoming week, especially in these troubled economic times. It was a great roll of the dice, and Warren had no doubt who the scapegoat would be if the horseman struck again.

* * * *

Mike Darcy looked across the now-cleared dining room table at the three dark-clad teens as his wife busied herself in the kitchen, too nervous to even be a party to what she considered a half-baked scheme. “Cell phone?” he said.

“Check,” answered LouAnne.

“Charged?”

“Check.”

“Flashlights?”

“Check,” said T.J.

“Tape recorder?”

“Check,” said Bortnicker, “Though if our encounter is anything like Weinstein’s, nothing’ll come out.”

“List of questions?”

“They’re all in here,” said Bortnicker, tapping the side of his head. “T.J. and I went over them this afternoon.”

“How long do you think you’ll have?” said Mike.

“No idea of knowing,” said T.J. “If nobody bothers us, we could be there a while. But, you know, he might not want

to do a lot of talking.”

“Don’t worry, Daddy, the three of us will keep him on track till we get what we want to know.”

“And what is that, exactly?”

“How and where he died, of course,” said Bortnicker.

“How much realization he actually has of his situation, whether he knows he’s, uh, dead,” offered T.J. “And, personally, I’d like to know what being dead’s like.”

“LouAnne?”

“I want to know if he has such a thing as a future plan, or if there’s a way we can free him from Gettysburg, or if he wants to leave at all.”

“He’s gotta want to leave,” said T.J.

“How do you know, Cuz?” she retorted. “He may feel like it’s his responsibility to stand guard over the battlefield or something.”

“Maybe so,” T.J. admitted. “I just hope we don’t blow it.” They all turned toward Bortnicker, who looked hurt.

“What? You think I’ll tick him off or something? You want me to stay in the car with Mr. D.?”

“No, nothing like that,” said LouAnne, placing her hand over his clenched fist. “As long as we all stay calm and forget about how utterly bizarre the whole thing is, we’ll be okay.”

“But also remember,” cautioned T.J.,

“from what we’ve learned, we know he has a mean streak. For that reason I think we should keep the premise going that I’m Stonewall Jackson’s son.”

“Couldn’t hurt,” agreed Darcy. “It will be dark in a half hour,” he said, checking his watch. “We’ll give it another hour on top of that, and then I’ll drop you guys at the Taneytown Road entrance. We’ll be taking Terri’s Accord because it’s navy blue and because everybody around here knows my truck.”

Suddenly, Terri appeared in the dining room doorway, a tray of brownies in her shaking hands. “Dessert, anyone?” she managed.

“I’ll have one of those, hon, and a big cup of coffee,” said Mike.

“Make that four coffees,” said Bortnicker with authority. “I think it’s gonna be a long night.”

Chapter Twenty-Seven

After receiving hugs from Aunt Terri, Mike Darcy and the ghost hunting team piled into Terri's Accord for the short ride across town.

“Stay low in your seats in case we pass anybody,” cautioned Mike. All three slid down, quiet as a mouse. As they approached the Taneytown Road Mike reminded them, “Once you’re at Devil’s Den, shoot me a text so I know you got there. After that, just let me know if you need me.”

“Okay, Daddy,” answered LouAnne.

“And if it looks like this guy’s becoming unreasonable or belligerent,

just get out of there without angering him any further.”

“Don’t worry about that,” said T.J. “We’ll be gone in a flash.”

Mike stopped the car in a secluded area near a park entrance in the general vicinity of Little Round Top. “So, what you’re going to do is skirt the base of Little Round Top. You’ll pass Plum Run and Devil’s Den will be right there. Should take you about twenty minutes. Keep to the woods and away from the paved roads. The moon is in and out, so you’ve gotta be careful. If you see any car headlights, get into the underbrush till they pass.”

“Yes, Daddy,” said LouAnne earnestly, and kissed her father through

the driver's side window.

T.J. flicked on his flashlight. "Let's do it, then," he said quietly, and they were off. They moved as quickly as was possible through the wooded areas, tripping occasionally on tree roots or rocks, but making steady progress. Bortnicker quietly whistled Steely Dan songs through his teeth as he picked his way along, but this was no time to play "Name That Tune." Finally, they crossed over Plum Run, which was barely a trickle in spots, and entered the monolithic boulders which comprised Devil's Den, which had been a stronghold for Confederate snipers during the battle. They made their way

into a fairly sized natural alcove where the rocks rose to twenty feet around, totally obscuring them from the battlefield plain and, more importantly, the road that wound through it. The only sound was an occasional mosquito, which the teens warded off by earlier spraying themselves with OFF.

“Well, here we are,” said T.J. “Might as well have a seat.” Bortnicker started walking toward the far end of the alcove when T.J. stopped him. “Not there,” he cautioned. “Let’s park ourselves closer to the opening. If we go that far in he’d have us trapped.”

“Good idea,” said LouAnne, and they hunkered down nearer to the mouth of the corridor. The rocks felt cool despite

the oppressive humidity of the evening. She pulled a Vitamin Water bottle out of her small tote sack and passed it around as Bortnicker set the palm-sized tape recorder on a nearby ledge. Each of them was lost in thought, willing the being to appear.

A half hour went by.

Nothing.

“Maybe this isn’t the night,” LouAnne whispered. “Or maybe he’s just given up and—”

“Wait,” said T.J. urgently. “Listen!”

And there it was, the familiar far off sound.

“He’s coming,” said Bortnicker. “Oh, God.”

“It’s what we want,” reminded T.J.
“Be cool.”

Within minutes the smell was in the air, declaring his nearness. T.J. looked his compatriots in the eye and quietly gave each a soft fist pound. “Here we go, guys,” he whispered, then shot them a reassuring wink. Bortnicker hit the ON switch of the tape recorder. They heard the galloping hoof beats slow to a canter, then a walk. The smell became stronger. And then, Major Crosby Hilliard turned the corner of the alcove and entered. All three teens immediately stood at attention, LouAnne literally trembling in fear and excitement.

“Young miss,” he began, taking her

tiny hand in his weathered gauntlet, “it is a pleasure to see you again. Please do not be afraid.”

“Yes, sir,” she managed, wincing from the touch of the grave.

“Young Master Jackson, we meet again,” he said evenly. “It seems now that you are purposely seeking me out. I think it is time you make your intentions known to me, as we spoke only briefly last time.”

“How long do we have?” said T.J. bravely.

“As long as it takes,” was the soldier’s answer.

“Well,” said Bortnicker gently, “why don’t we all sit then?”

“As you wish,” said Hilliard, seating

himself on a stray boulder. The teens simply slid down the stone wall behind them and exhaled.

“Major Hilliard,” T.J. began, “since our last meeting, my friend Bortnicker and I have tried to find out as much about you as possible so we could, uh, have a dialogue about your career and the war and...well, all that.”

“Indeed. And where did this information come from?” Hilliard asked, his eyes steely.

“Charleston, sir,” said Bortnicker. “I believe that’s where you’re from?”

“Ah, yes. Charleston. The home of my youth. And what did you find, young man?”

“Well, ah, that you are from a very wealthy family that owns a large tobacco plantation with lots of slaves.” Bortnicker shut his eyes, immediately realizing his potential inflammatory statement.

“A necessity,” said Hilliard tersely. “Continue.”

All three youths breathed a sigh of relief.

“Well, when South Carolina seceded from the Union,” Bortnicker continued, “you sided with your state. After Fort Sumter fell, you joined Hampton’s Legion.”

“Your information is accurate. Wade Hampton is a close associate of my

family. It is an honor to serve with so gallant a soldier. And I think that during our various campaigns I have repaid his trust and loyalty to myself and my family by fighting bravely at his side.” He shot a look at LouAnne that made her shiver, as though her blood had run cold. “Unfortunately, not all who live in Charleston view me in the same light as my commanding officer.”

“Have you enjoyed being a cavalryman?” asked T.J.

“I don’t know if enjoyment enters into the equation,” said Hilliard. “We are sworn to defend our homeland against the invaders from the North who desire to destroy the very fabric of our existence. Life in the saddle is

incredibly taxing, periods of boredom mixed with horrible bursts of terror and carnage. I have seen so much that I would rather forget. Good friends blown to pieces. Strong men calling for their mothers as they are wrenched from this world.

“But I do my duty, and I do it well. I have been twice decorated for bravery under fire, and I would put my record against any man’s.” He paused a moment, deep in thought. “But there *is* a certain romance to being a cavalier. We are modern knights, the vanguard of our army. I could not imagine myself in any other role during this conflict. Thank God for General Hampton who gave me

this opportunity.”

“How did you come to be here, at Gettysburg?” asked Bortnicker.

“It is quite simple,” said Hilliard. “General Lee felt it was finally time to take the fight to Northern soil, as our rich farmland in the Southern states was being destroyed. If we could force the issue by encircling the Yankee capital, perhaps Lincoln would see the light and sue for peace.

“As always, our cavalry would lead the way. Hampton’s Legion, under the overall command of General Stuart, crossed over in Maryland. Our mission was to ascertain the strength of Union forces in Pennsylvania so General Lee could find the most direct route to

Washington.

“Our first major encounter with the enemy was at Brandy Station, where we achieved the most narrow of victories over General Buford’s men, who fought bravely. As explained to me by my immediate superior, General Hampton, our cavalry force had been ordered by General Longstreet, General Lee’s second in command, to protect our advancing infantry’s right flank to the north and east. General Stuart decided he could fulfill this mission by passing around the rear of the Federal Army and disrupting its communications and supply. We had already executed a similar maneuver during the Peninsular

and Sharpsburg campaigns, so spirits were high that we could again outfox the Yankees.

“On June 25th we encountered a Union force heading toward Frederick, Maryland. This forced us farther south, and there were other delays that hindered us from a planned rendezvous with General Ewell’s infantry at York, Pennsylvania. So, we kept moving, skirting the Union force, riding through small towns where, surprisingly, we were greeted as heroes, especially by the young maidens of the area.”

“I would imagine you and your men cut a pretty dashing figure,” said LouAnne, who, like the others, was

adjusting to the cloying, sickly-sweet smell of decomposition that accompanied the soldier.

“Indeed, young miss. Why, in one village we came to a halt and immediately were assaulted by groups of eager young ladies from a local female academy who attempted to cut buttons from our cavalry tunics with knives and scissors.” He smiled at the remembrance.

“But, really, you were cut off from General Lee,” pressed Bortnicker.

“Unfortunately so, by two mountain ranges as well as the Army of the Potomac. But we did come tantalizingly near to Washington, could even see it in the distance. And we were capturing

supply wagons, mules and soldiers from their rearguard. Both Washington and Baltimore must have been thrown into a panic.

“But then, for reasons that only those above me are privy to, we seemed to lose contact with General Lee. The many wagons and mules we’d captured were slowing us down, as were periodic skirmishes with Union cavalry. By the time we got our bearings and made our way to York, General Early had already left. Our men were exhausted and had been pushed to the limit of physical endurance by the time we fought yet another small battle with Union troops near Hanover, Pennsylvania. Finally, on

July 1st a courier from General Lee's headquarters found us near Carlisle and delivered orders for us to proceed immediately to Gettysburg. By this time it was July 2nd and the battle at this place was well underway.

“We found General Lee at his headquarters the night of July 2nd, and as I dismounted with Generals Stuart and Hampton I could sense the unease, bordering on pure anger, of General Lee's staff toward our cavalry command. General Stuart had long been a favorite of General Lee, whom he held in solemn reverence, but on this night, as I observed from the background, Lee merely looked at my commander and

said, ‘Well, General Stuart, you are here at last.’ The rebuke in his words was clearly implied, and I learned later that some on Lee’s staff had even recommended a court martial for General Stuart for failing to be the Army’s eyes and ears at this most crucial time.”

Hilliard’s head drooped for a moment, and he seemed to study the tops of his boots. When he raised his head again T.J. thought he detected traces of tears in the soldier’s eyes. “General Stuart violated no orders,” Hilliard explained. “He simply guessed wrong, on multiple occasions, and in doing so dragged our Legion along with him. I, for one, burned with the desire to turn

the tide of negative sentiment around, and it seemed that, although we'd arrived so late, there was still a chance to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

“Early on July 3rd General Lee summoned General Stuart to his tent and dispatched our force to protect General Longstreet's left flank as he mounted an all-out assault on the center of the Union line. General Hampton, I could tell, was somewhat disappointed that we were being afforded a secondary, though necessary, role in the upcoming conflict. As for me, I was devastated. Perhaps I took too much to heart the looks of accusation in General Lee's camp. And perhaps I was just being a fool and

attaching too much importance to my own role in the conflict. But I chafed the whole way as we rode east on the York Road and turned south to cut off any Federal cavalry in the area. We sent scouts ahead who spotted Bluecoats, and thus we formed our battle lines near Spangler's Farm on the Hanover Road to wait for the enemy.

“It was at this moment that I could contain myself no longer. I approached my immediate commander, General Hampton, and requested permission to take a detachment of men and support Longstreet's assault. I'll never forget the look on his face. It was if my good friend had never seen me before, like he was in the presence of some kind of

madman. ‘Out of the question,’ he snapped. ‘Permission denied. You will rejoin your company, Major, and assist in this maneuver.’

“‘But General,’ I pleaded, ‘please allow me to restore the honor of our Legion by taking part in the assault. Our presence on horseback will only inspire the men.’

“And then my friend, my mentor, looked me in the eye and said, ‘Crosby, the attack of the Union center today is folly. Longstreet himself tried to talk General Lee out of it, to no avail.’ We heard the crashing of hundreds of cannons as the prelude to the assault commenced. ‘Crosby,’ he continued,

‘that farmer’s field that Longstreet’s men are going to try to cross today will be a bloodbath. I forbid you becoming a part of it!’

“Just then bullets began clipping the edges of leaves around us. The Federal cavalry was engaging us. General Hampton said, ‘Now, for the last time, you will obey my orders and rejoin your men!’”

“What did you do?” said T.J., his voice a hoarse whisper.

“I spurred Brutus in the direction of Seminary Ridge and left my post,” Hilliard said, looking forlornly at the moon. “Perhaps I had gone mad, but I felt I could make a difference in the assault, as I had made in others. There

was no personal regard whatsoever for my physical wellbeing.

“By the time I reached General Lee’s staff, who were viewing the battle from the ridge near the Seminary, the carnage was well underway. Wave after wave of brave Southern men crossed the trampled fields only to be mowed down by withering Union fire. The air was full of lung-searing smoke from the artillery barrages of both sides, but I could still make out thousands of men from George Pickett’s and A.P. Hill’s divisions rolling away from Seminary Ridge toward the Union lines one mile away. It was magnificent and horrible at the same time.

“But something besides Union fire was hindering the progress of our brave men,” he continued. “There was a split rail fence that ran the length of a road which dissected the fields through which our men had to advance—”

“The Emmitsburg Road,” said LouAnne. “Sorry.”

“No need to apologize, young miss,” he said tightly. “I could see our men being mowed down as they tried to climb over this roadblock and was amazed that no one else was addressing this matter. Then I spied General Longstreet, slumped against a tree, tears rolling down his cheeks that formed streaks in the gunpowder which coated

his face. ‘General,’ I cried, ‘that fence must come down if we are to have a chance of crossing that field! Our men are being slaughtered!’ He stared ahead as if my words weren’t registering. So, without any regard to protocol, I got right in front of his face and screamed, ‘Permission to attempt to pull down the fence!’ He looked at me with the saddest eyes I’ve ever seen and weakly waved me toward the battlefield.

“Again, I spurred Brutus and we flew past General Pickett, who was impotently clenching his fists and moaning, ‘Oh, my men, my men!’ In a matter of moments, with Brutus leaping over the shattered bodies of our fallen and shells exploding overhead, I reached

the Emmitsburg Road to discover huddled masses of our troops along the embankment below the fence, unable, or unwilling, to climb the fence and thus expose themselves to the Union fusillade. I rode among them as bullets flew all around me, imploring them to get up and help me pull down the fence so our advancing soldiers could pour through. But I was met with wails of terror or catcalls of derision from those too cowardly to join their comrades on the field of honor. One sergeant from Alabama even called up to me, ‘Well, why don’t y’all knock down the fence y’self and we’d be *happy* to follow you through!’ I’d had enough and was livid

with anger and a sense of impotency. A few of the soldiers, out of fear and cowardice, I suppose, began rising and running back towards the rear. This, as the men most forward were actually breaching the Union line! I reached down from my saddle as one ran by and grabbed him by the collar of his tunic. 'Turn around and fight, you coward!' I screamed into his face, which was white with terror and oh, so young. He struggled and yelled, 'Let me go! I'm gettin' out of here!' So I slapped him with my free hand and then...that's when I felt the pain...a searing jolt in my back like a white-hot knife plunged deep. I slid from the saddle and landed face down in the matted wheat of the field

and felt the pounding of footsteps going past me towards the rear. I wanted to scream or call out, but I couldn't. Nor could I move a solitary fiber of my body.

“For hours more the guns boomed and the sun beat down. I went in and out of consciousness, but in those moments of lucidity I wondered, *was I shot by my own men?* I lay there, praying for death, as day turned into night and hordes of flies began buzzing around the thousands of dead and dying on the field. Horribly wounded men and horses were crying out, their screams chilling me to the bone, yet I could not reply.

“The next morning dawned, yet still I lived. And then it began to rain, a hard

and cold torrent which soaked me to the skin. How I did not drown in the position where I lay is a wonder. I thought of my life back in Charleston, my family, the woman whom I'd loved, and the utter futility of my actions on the previous day and was consumed with the feeling of utter despair.

“And then I heard the voices of men, Negro men, who were moving among the dead and nearly dead such as myself. They spoke in casual tones, as if the horror around them was merely an annoyance. Slowly they made their way toward me, and I wanted to cry out with the joy of my possible deliverance. You can imagine how my heart sank when I felt a boot nudge my shoulder and a

voice declare, ‘This ol’ boy’s had it.’ And then, the most chilling sound of all came to my ears, the sound of shovels digging into the rich farmland beneath me, and the sensation of being first rolled into a trough—”

“Omigod,” gasped LouAnne, choking back tears.

“Then finally, the sensation of cool, black earth being thrown upon me, until the world as I knew it ceased to exist.” He stood and looked again at the moon, his brass buttons throwing quick reflections of its light.

Bortnicker squinted sideways at the tape recorder, whose tiny wheels were still spinning. He cleared his throat,

mustered up his courage and said, “Major Hilliard, do you know what year it is?”

The soldier looked down upon him, and for the first time his shoulders seemed to sag a bit. “For me, lad, it is, and always will be, July 3, 1863.”

“What if we told you the year is 2010?” asked T.J., struggling to keep his voice from cracking.

“Then I would suspect that the things I’ve seen in these recent nights are not wild fantasies, but portents of the future.”

“What have you seen?” pressed T.J.

“Fantastic things. Carriages moving under their own power, quietly and with amazing speed, contraptions like giant

glowing birds gliding overhead.”

“Much has happened since July 3, 1863,” said LouAnne gently.

“What could we tell you to help you understand?” said T.J.

“There’s so much. To begin, I would assume our army was defeated in this battle.”

“That’s correct, sir,” said Bortnicker. “Most historians regard this battle as the turning point in the war.”

“I take it we lost.”

“Yes, sir, but not until after two more years of bloodshed. General Lee proved to be a great commander who finally had to surrender because of the Union’s overwhelming numbers.”

“And my dear friend, General Hampton?”

Bortnicker said, “Though sustaining at least five major wounds, he survived the war and went into politics.”

“He didn’t go over to Lincoln’s side, did he?” Hilliard said incredulously.

“He couldn’t have even if he wanted to, sir. Abraham Lincoln was assassinated days after the war ended in April of 1865,” said T.J.

“And what of the slavery issue?” Hilliard asked, absently rubbing his thigh.

“They were freed and slowly were included in American society,” said Bortnicker. “But it took over a hundred

years for them to get equal rights. In fact —”

At this point T.J. clamped his hand on his friend's knee as a signal to stop. He was afraid the revelation that a black man was now President would be too much for the Confederate soldier to take. Bortnicker fell silent.

Hilliard sighed. “All for nothing, all for nothing,” he murmured, shaking his head. “And would I be correct in assuming that, with all the new inventions that have come along, we have found more efficient ways to kill each other?”

T.J. thought for a moment about his twentieth century history studies and said, “You don't want to know.”

“My Gawd,” said Hilliard, sinking down to his seat again, elbows propped on knees, face buried in his hands. “You say that you made inquiries about me in Charleston.”

“That’s correct, sir,” answered Bortnicker.

“How am I remembered there?”

“Well, sir,” Bortnicker began tactfully, “Your disappearance was noted by General Hampton in his battle report. They had no idea what happened to you.”

“Do they think I shirked my duty? That I deserted?”

“There seems to be some confusion about that,” said T.J.

“Obviously, they don’t know about your heroic attempt to rally the troops during Pickett’s Charge,” said LouAnne.

“Pickett’s Charge? Is that what this senseless slaughter goes by?”

“Yes, sir,” she whispered, sorry she’d spoken up.

T.J., trying to change the direction of the conversation, said, “Major, pardon me for asking, but do you have any recollection of, ah, where you were before you reappeared in our time?”

Hilliard took a deep breath and looked up again to face the teens. “It was a void. A nothingness. A darkness. If there is a heaven, or a hell, I visited neither.”

“Do you remember your return?”

“The split-rail fence,” he said dully.

“Suddenly it was night, and I was above ground again, and I was *alive*, and I turned and my beautiful Brutus stood there in the moonlight. I was never so happy to see another living being in my life. So I mounted up and began to traverse the battlefield. I come and I go with no rhyme or reason. I see all the monuments and the statues and the cannon, a mute testament to the horrible conflagration that occurred here. But I have also dealt with those who would besmirch the honor of the gallant men who fell here.”

“If it makes you feel any better,

Major,” offered Bortnicker, “the thousands of men who died here, including yourself, are celebrated for their valor in a host of ways. You can’t just go by the actions of a few idiots.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, for example, besides all these monuments that recognize regiments from both North and South, there are military museums, the National Cemetery, which was dedicated by President Lincoln himself, the reenactments—”

“The what?” Hilliard asked sharply.

Again, Bortnicker had misspoken, but T.J. couldn’t stop him in time, so he carefully went ahead. “Well, sir, every year they, um, commemorate the battle

on its anniversary by holding, uh, staging, uh—”

“A mock battle?” the cavalier spat, eyes blazing. “You are telling me that men actually dress up and play at soldier for the entertainment of others? What purpose could this possibly serve?”

“Well,” said T.J. evenly, “They probably want to show people how it really was.”

Hilliard threw back his head and let out a loud, cynical laugh. “The way it was? They want to show the way it was? These imposters, these...*tin soldiers* actually think they are paying homage to the brave men who gave their lives for a cause they believed was just? And what

does the audience do? Pack picnic baskets and cheer for their favorite side?”

The teens’ eyes grew larger. This was not how they wanted the discussion to go, and Hilliard seemed to be working himself into a frenzied state. As if reading their minds, he fixed his cold eyes on T.J. “Master Jackson, what is today’s date?” he demanded.

“Uh, well,” T.J. stammered.

Hilliard drew his pistol. “Answer me, boy!”

“It’s June 28th, sir,” said LouAnne, summoning all her courage. “And I would be appreciative if you would not try to intimidate us. We are here to find a

way to free you from being bound to this place.”

“Oh, is that so, young miss?” he replied sarcastically. “You give yourselves far too much credit. But never you worry. I shall leave this place, but not before I attend to some unfinished business.”

“Major,” backtracked LouAnne, “We’re only trying—”

“You’ve tried enough, the three of you,” he hissed. “Leave me. Now!”

“Major,” T.J. attempted, “are you sure—”

“Master Jackson, if that is indeed who you are, I am only allowing you to depart out of respect to the memory of General Jackson. You will be wise, all

of you, to never cross my path again.” He drew his pistol and cocked the hammer. “Once more. Leave!”

“Come on,” said T.J., rising to his feet. Bortnicker deftly palmed his recorder and they were off, running for all they were worth out of Devil’s Den, past Plum Run, where Brutus stood pawing the ground, eyeing them suspiciously. They raced through the woods, LouAnne plucking her cell phone from her pocket and flipping it open, telling Mike they were on their way.

After what seemed like an eternity, they spied the concealed car and dove into the back seat. Bortnicker was hyperventilating from the unusual amount

of exertion he'd pushed himself to. Mike pulled out carefully and then they were motoring toward home. "What happened? Did you see him? Did you talk to him? You were out there for hours!" he admonished.

T.J. slowed his breathing somewhat until he was able to speak. "It happened, Uncle Mike," he wheezed. "We found out everything. And it isn't good."

* * * *

While Mike parked the car the exhausted trio huddled on the porch. Suddenly T.J. grabbed the other two. "Listen, guys," he whispered hurriedly, "Uncle Mike's gonna want to know everything, but I think we should leave

out the reenactment stuff.”

“How come?” said LouAnne.

“Just trust me. Bortnicker, you think he came out on the tape?”

“Let’s see. I’ve rewound it all the way.” He pressed PLAY and they all waited breathlessly. There was a brief silence, then LouAnne saying, “Yes, sir,” then silence again. Once T.J. said, “How long do we have?” they knew that Weinstein had been correct. The ghost could not be captured on audio.

“Okay, kids,” said Mike, hustling back from the garage, “let’s go inside and review what happened. All that waiting made me crazy.”

“Bad news, Mr. D,” announced Bortnicker. “No tape recording. But we

can tell you what happened.”

Aunt Terri, clad in her bathrobe, let them in. “Did he show up?” she asked tensely.

“Oh yeah, Mom,” answered LouAnne, pecking her on the cheek.

“Does anyone want coffee?”

Mike looked at his watch. “It’s way past midnight,” he said. “A little late for coffee. Besides, everybody’s too jacked up anyway. Let’s just sit down and get this all out.”

They all took their seats at the dining room table, Terri listening with rapt attention as the teens spun their tale, Mike punctuating their narrative with an occasional “wow.”

T.J. handled the last part of the account, deftly skirting the reenactment part and Hilliard's violent reaction.

"I think you're all incredibly brave," said Terri at the end, relieved that they had returned safely.

"So, he knows how he got here, and he implied that he's going to get himself out," said Mike. "I guess, then, there's nothing else you can do."

"Yeah," said Bortnicker, "he made it pretty clear that this would be our last discussion with him, ever."

"Well, you tried, kids, and I'm proud of you," Mike said. "I just wish he'd let on how he's going to accomplish leaving this place. But, hey, we've all had a long

night. Why don't we all try to get some sleep? I, for one, have work tomorrow morning."

"We running tomorrow, Cuz?" asked LouAnne.

"You know it."

As soon as he'd closed the bedroom door, Bortnicker was after him. "So why didn't we tell your uncle about the reenactment business?" he said, shucking his clothes and lying on the bed.

T.J. slowly reclined on his, staring at the ceiling. "I think you know the answer to that, man," he said tiredly.

"Hilliard's gonna try something during the battle?"

"That would be my guess. Maybe make some grand gesture he never got to

do in real life.”

“But he only comes out at night!”

“Says you.”

“Oh, man. Listen, I’m sorry I let it slip about the reenactment. I didn’t know he’d take it that way.”

“Yeah, well, I probably would have left it out myself, but let’s face it, he’s a loose cannon, no pun intended. Who knew what would set him off?”

“I’ve got a real bad feeling about this, Big Mon.”

“Me, too. I think that one way or another, it’s all gonna end next Sunday at Pickett’s Charge, in front of thousands of people. And we’re the only ones who can stop it.”

“Well,” said Bortnicker, removing his glasses to go to sleep, “I guess there’s only one thing to do.”

“What’s that?”

“We’re going to join the army.”

Chapter Twenty-Eight

“You can’t be serious!” said LouAnne heatedly as they jogged along Seminary Ridge. “You and Bortnicker in Dad’s regiment? And Hilliard showing up in broad daylight to do who-knows-what? This is crazy!”

“Maybe it is, Cuz, but I have a hunch this is how it’ll play out. Your dad invited me to participate and bring Bortnicker along. Neither of us was too keen on the idea of playing drummer boy, but this is too much to pass up.”

“And if he does show up, like you say, and tries to wreak havoc at the battle, how are two drummer boys going

to stop him?”

“I haven’t figured that out yet.”

“Oh, brilliant. And you’re still not going to tell my dad about Hilliard’s reenactment rant?”

“Not yet. Maybe not at all. Listen, Cuz, if your dad knew Hilliard might materialize at Pickett’s Charge, angry and armed to the teeth, do you actually think he’d still want me and Bortnicker out there to maybe get our heads blown off?”

“You’ll be lucky if all three of you don’t get killed. Why couldn’t we live in Florida?” she shouted to the heavens.

* * * *

The boys gratefully accepted a ride

from Aunt Terri into town after dropping off LouAnne at Mrs. Spath's. They found Mike in front of the Visitor Center where he was concluding his first cemetery tour of the day. People were everywhere; the town was busting at the seams, and it was only the beginning of Reenactment Week.

“Hey, guys,” he said, removing his hat to wipe some moisture out of the hatband. “Man, it’s hot today, and it’s only nine-thirty in the morning.”

T.J. looked at the hordes of tourists jostling in and out of the main entrance. “I see what you were saying about the town going crazy during this week.”

“For sure. The hotels are booked solid, and the campgrounds are RV

parks are packed. Tomorrow they'll start setting up the military camps, and whatever reenactors aren't here already will be coming in. It's bedlam."

"Speaking of which, Uncle Mike," said T.J. tentatively, "we've decided we'd like to participate with your regiment on Saturday and Sunday."

"Really? The both of you? Fantastic! I'll give Jack Pelham a call and ask him to email me any drummer boy guidelines he has from his sons. I'm sure they'll let you borrow their drums, which belong to the regiment anyway, but we'll have to scrounge uniforms for you. His boys are both kind of short and squatty, and you'll never fit into their clothes."

“No worries, Mr. D,” said Bortnicker, flashing a plastic VISA card. “My mom said to use this if I needed it, so I guess T.J. and I have to visit ‘Reenactment Supply Central’ this morning.”

“You sure you guys won’t want me along to help you out?”

“Nah. I checked out the main places already, and I think I’ve got a pretty good eye for what’s the most authentic looking,” Bortnicker said confidently.

“Well, okay. Just remember that it’s the 72nd Pennsylvania. You’ll need proper badging for your army hats and such. But I warn you, it’s not going to be cheap.”

“Not a problem, Mr. D.,” said Bortnicker. “Hey, if you’re gonna do this you’ve gotta do it right. People are gonna think we’ve been doing this all our lives!”

“Doing what all your lives?” inquired Bruce Morrison, who had eased in behind the trio unnoticed.

“Oh, hi, Bruce,” said Mike uneasily. “Well, it seems my regiment is a couple drummers short for the weekend and the boys here have volunteered to fill in.”

“I see. Sure they’ll be able to handle all this? It’s easily the most involved battle reenactment in the country. Not exactly recommended for novices, I’m told.”

“Don’t worry, Bruce,” said Mike with an air of determination. “I’ll have them ready.”

“Well, okay, I’m sure you know better than me. I just hate to lose you for an entire weekend, but I know you do it out of a respect for history, so I have no choice.”

“You going to be there?” asked Bortnicker, a crooked smile creasing his face.

“Oh, yes. Wouldn’t miss it for the world,” Morrison answered, all the while his sly smile indicating he was thinking, *they’re up to something*.

* * * *

“The Battle Cry, huh?” said T.J. as

they stood outside the storefront on Baltimore Street with its crossed pistols logo.

“Also known as ‘Guns R Us’,” Bortnicker joked as they eyed some uniforms in the window. “Like I said yesterday, there’s around five stores in town that have this stuff, but a couple of them are really schlocky, uniforms you might wear on Halloween or something. This place is top of the line, but it’s the priciest, too. You can even buy some real stuff, though we don’t have to go *that* far.”

They entered and were immediately greeted by the proprietor, a rotund middle-aged guy whose head seemed too small for his 300lb-plus body. “Help

you boys?” he said, his face florid from the heat despite the huge blade fans that turned overhead.

“We need some Civil War clothes,” said T.J. with some uncertainty.

“You mean, like a souvenir hat? We have both Union and—”

“No, no,” said Bortnicker, holding up his hand. “We need one hundred percent completely authentic Union uniforms for this weekend’s battle.”

“You’re reenactors?” the man asked dubiously.

“Of course.”

“What unit?”

“72nd Pennsylvania Infantry,” said Bortnicker proudly.

“Regular infantry?”

“Drummer boys,” said T.J. with some embarrassment.

“Oh. Well, we can certainly outfit you, but it can get expensive.”

Bortnicker flashed his credit card. “Money is not an issue,” he said grandly. “We need a full uniform from hat to shoes, canteens, and whatever else a drummer boy would be carrying.”

The shop owner grinned, dollar signs dancing in his head. “Right this way, gentlemen!” he said, pointing them toward the more expensive uniforms and accoutrements. The place was stocked to the rafters of its stamped tin ceiling with hats, coats, jackets, shirts,

undergarments, shoes, boots, and every other conceivable article of clothing a soldier on either side might wear. Every rank was represented, and there was also a large civilian section with ladies bustle dresses and men's frock coats. In another room were cases of replica rifles, pistols and swords, and still others of period antiques that could have served as a museum in itself. T.J. also saw mess kits, Bibles, reading glasses, photos, playing cards and other personal items soldiers carried in their knapsacks. This was big business.

It took an hour for the boys to be fitted for their uniform jackets, pants and brogans, as well as their blue kepi caps, to which the shop owner, whose name

was Wyatt Moss, affixed replica brass letters, numbers and crossed swords which identified them as members of the 72nd Pennsylvania. Undergarments and heavy socks followed, as did canteens and leather belts.

“We’ve gotta wear all this out there?” moaned T.J. “We’re gonna die in this heat!”

“You said you wanted to be totally authentic,” chided Moss. “Well, this is what your typical drummer boy wore.”

“You’re right, you’re right,” said Bortnicker with a wave of his hand. “What’s the damage on all this?”

Moss slid behind the counter with a calculator and started punching numbers.

By the time he was done T.J. was grimacing. “That’ll be five-hundred-twenty-six dollars and fifty-four cents,” Moss announced with a smile.

Bortnicker smiled right back and slapped the VISA card on the counter. “No problemo,” he sniffed.

But before Moss could reach the card, T.J. snatched it away. “There’s one more thing we need, though I’m not sure you carry it.”

“Young man, The Battle Cry has *everything*. What is it you want?”

* * * *

The boys walked out together, weighed down by the huge plastic bags full of Civil War clothes and

accessories, and couldn't help running straight into Carlton Elway, who was delivering a large box of DVDs which Moss sold for a commission. As all three of them stooped to pick up items dropped in the collision, Elway said, "Well, it's our two newspaper reporters. How's the article coming, guys?"

"Fine," said T.J. "Almost done."

"Enjoying your stay in Gettysburg?"

"Oh, yeah," said Bortnicker. "Can't wait for this weekend."

"Wait a minute," said Elway, taking in the various articles that had spilled from the bags. "You two are...participating in the reenactment?"

"Of course," said Bortnicker offhandedly. "We figured, why not? Say,

have there been any sightings lately?"

"None to speak of," said Elway, not letting Bortnicker's comment rile him. "But you never know. This event creates an atmosphere that could bring something out."

"You think?" said Bortnicker, who was obviously enjoying himself.

"C'mon, Bortnicker, we've gotta go," said T.J., tugging at his friend's tattered Boston Red Sox tee shirt.

"Right. Later, Mr. Elway," he said over his shoulder as they staggered up the sidewalk.

* * * *

Some twenty minutes later Al Warren's phone rang. He truly didn't

want to answer it, as he'd spent the entire morning overseeing the setup of the police and EMT command posts on the reenactment "battlefield." There had already been various fender benders around town, a shoplifting complaint, and a late night call from the Cannonade Motel manager about a bunch of rowdy reenactors from Arkansas who had gotten stinking drunk and were singing "Dixie" at the top of their lungs. *What now?* he wondered as he picked up the phone.

"Chief? It's Wyatt Moss over at The Battle Cry."

"Oh, hi, Wyatt. What's the problem? Somebody try to lift something?"

"No, nothing like that. You said to

call if anyone came in asking for period ammo?”

Suddenly Warren was all ears. He slid forward in his seat. “What happened?”

“Well, these two boys came in. One kinda looked like a young Paul McCartney—”

“And the other was a goofball with Coke bottle glasses.”

“Right! How’d you know?”

“It’s not important. What’d they buy?”

“Well, besides two complete Civil War drummer boy outfits, which cost a pretty penny, let me tell you, the good looking one bought four .44 bullets and

some cartridges.”

“Repro?”

“Nope. They were period.”

“You’re sure that’s what he wanted?”

“Chief, he specifically asked for ‘never fired .44 pistol bullets.’”

“And you *sold* them to him?”

“Chief, there’s no law against purchasing antique bullets. It’s not like the kid bought a gun to go with it.”

“Okay, okay, thanks for the call, Wyatt. Sorry I was short with you. It’s been a long day.”

“That’s okay, Al, I understand. But you’ve got to pace yourself. It’s only Monday. We’ve got a whole week to go.”

“You’re right,” said Warren, reaching into his desk for some Advil. “Let me know if they come back.”

“Will do.”

Warren washed down three pills with some iced tea and sat back in his desk chair, rubbing his face. How could this day get any worse? As if in reply, the phone rang again. He took a deep breath and picked up. “Chief Warren.”

“Al?” said Carlton Elway, “you’ll never guess who I just ran into.”

* * * *

By the time the boys finally mounted the Darcys’ porch they were exhausted and soaked to the skin. Aunt Terri and LouAnne relieved them of their baggage

and they collapsed onto the living room couch. “I’ll be back in a second with some lemonade,” Terri said, as LouAnne started poking through the various bags. “How much coin did you guys drop on all this?” she marveled.

“History comes at a price,” said T.J.

“I guess,” she said. “But I have good news for you.”

“They’ve cancelled the reenactment?” mumbled Bortnicker.

“Ah, no, sorry. Apparently, my dad called his buddy, Matty, who stores all the regiment’s bulky stuff in his farm’s barn, and ol’ Matt just couldn’t *wait* to drop off your drums and sticks so you can get to drumming. He also emailed Dad some guidelines, which I have

graciously printed out for you.”

“You’re too kind,” said Bortnicker.

“Can I see them?” requested T.J.

“Here you go,” said his cousin, handing over the document.

He started reading through the material, skipping over the part about obtaining the right equipment, tightening the drum heads, etc. “It says here there’s a manual we should read called *Bruce and Emmett’s Fifer and Drummer’s Guide*,” he said with a frown.

“Oh, sorry. It’s in the garage with the drums. Matty left that as well.”

T.J. started passing the printout sheets over to Bortnicker, who did a quick study. “Well,” he said, “because

of all the stuff we had to do in orchestra at school, we know all the ‘traditional grip’ stuff and basic drum rolls and whatnot. In the manual we’ll find the basic pieces like assembly, drummers call and reveille.”

“We’ll need to have the music for some of the songs in here,” said T.J. “Let’s see...there’s some I’ve heard of like ‘Yankee Doodle’ and ‘Garry Owen’ but some of these others like ‘Army 6/8’ and ‘Connecticut Halftime’ I’ve never heard of.”

“I’m burning you guys a CD of those tunes as we speak,” beamed LouAnne.

“Well then, Bortnicker, let’s get out of these sopping clothes, grab a sandwich and get after it,” sighed T.J.

“Might as well.”

After changing they sat down for some tuna sandwiches and lemonade and then ventured into the garage where they found two fairly new Civil War reproduction drums with eagles stenciled on the side, along with the 72nd Pennsylvania logo. After adjusting their cotton slings so that the drum fell around their left hip, they went into the spacious back yard and worked on some basic rolls. LouAnne joined them and set up a beach chair with a mini umbrella attached.

“The manual says that keeping your posture erect is a big thing,” reminded T.J. “These drums are gonna get heavy

after a while.”

They stayed in place for a time, working out the various rolls until they were pretty much in sync. After a while LouAnne looked up from her paperback. “Uh, guys, don’t forget the marching part,” she said sweetly.

“All in good time,” responded Bortnicker through gritted teeth.

Slowly they began, a few steps at first, then ten yards, then fifty, back and forth, stopping occasionally for lemonade refills that LouAnne poured. It was monotonous, repetitive work, and the boys were again dripping sweat, but neither wanted to quit, especially in front of their one-girl audience.

After what seemed like years they

removed their drums and crumpled to the ground, staring at the sky, and never noticed Mike pulling his truck into the driveway. Suddenly he was standing over them. “How goes it, troopers?” he joked, as LouAnne chuckled.

“I don’t know, Daddy, you might want to have these two court-martialed,” she chided.

“Nonsense,” he said, sitting down beside the exhausted boys. “I think it’s cool you guys want to do this. Don’t get too carried away. Just a basic cadence will get you through. All the guys in the regiment will be really appreciative and will help you however they can. They’ll set up a tent for you and everything.”

“Will they install central air conditioning in this tent?” asked Bortnicker.

“Can’t help you on that one. Not authentic. But I’ll tell you what. Seeing how dedicated you guys are to all this, I will suck it up and sleep in the camp as well.”

“Oh, the sacrifice!” wailed LouAnne dramatically, the back of her hand to her forehead.

“How many nights are we talking about here, Uncle Mike?” asked T.J., sitting up.

“Friday and Saturday should do it,” he answered. “We’ll be doing two reenactments: The Wheatfield on

Saturday and Pickett's Charge on Sunday. I worked my schedule so these would be my days off."

"That gives us three more days to practice," said T.J. "I think we've done enough for one day."

"You got that right," agreed Bortnicker. "I'm gonna have to put a pad under my pants to keep the drum from whacking my thigh so much."

"Tell you what," said Mike. "Why don't you guys grab a shower and we'll grill some burgers and stop at the ice cream shop later on?"

"Solid!" said Bortnicker. "You know what they say...an army travels on its stomach!"

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Wednesday and Thursday were pretty much the same. T.J. and LouAnne went for their morning run, they ate breakfast, and then the boys resumed their drumming practice as LouAnne helped her mom with chores around the small barn and henhouse. Mrs. Spath, like many area residents, would be out of town for the Reenactment Weekend, so LouAnne had some time to spend around the house.

With their intense level of repetition, the boys were actually becoming proficient in the basic fundamentals, but by Thursday afternoon they needed a

break.

“I have an idea,” said Bortnicker. “Since we’re gonna be doing Pickett’s Charge on Sunday, what do you think about checking out Cemetery Ridge one last time to see what we’ll be recreating?”

“Not my idea of a break, man,” groaned T.J. “Still, you’re probably right.”

“Hey,” chimed in LouAnne, “know what would be cool? Why don’t we recreate Pickett’s Charge?”

“Say what?” said T.J.

“I mean, let’s walk down Seminary Ridge to the Virginia Memorial. It’s only a couple hundred yards down the road. Then we can walk across the field all

the way to the Union lines on Cemetery Ridge. You can see what Hilliard was talking about.”

“Makes sense,” said Bortnicker.

“I had a feeling you’d agree,” mumbled T.J.

After lunch they strolled along the ridge, noting again the Confederate markers and cannon lining both sides of the one-way road. Finally they came to the Virginia Memorial, an imposing structure with bronze soldiers at the base of a large pedestal atop which sat Robert E. Lee astride his favorite horse, Traveler.

“This has to be the most bigtime Southern monument,” said T.J.

“Correct,” said LouAnne. “Now, if you look straight across, you’ll see some farm fields, then the Emmitsburg Road where they had the split-rail fence Hilliard described, then a couple hundred more yards to the Union lines. All told, the Confederates had to cross one thousand yards of wide open territory, with no trees or other type of cover.”

“That’s like...suicidal,” marveled T.J.

“Yep, I’d say so. Let’s see how long it takes us to walk it.”

The three set out, side by side, striding purposefully. The wheat or whatever it was had been mowed

recently, but the terrain was still uneven, and by the time they reached the Emmitsburg Road they were sweating in the midday heat.

“Okay,” said LouAnne. “Now, in 1863 the embankments on each side rose up a bit, topped by the fence. The road itself was kind of sunken. So you can see how hard it was for them to walk up the bank and climb the fence.”

“They were like sitting ducks!” cried Bortnicker.

“Exactly. It’s no wonder a lot of them were huddled there, afraid to move forward. That’s why Hilliard was trying to get them to push down the fence. But in doing so they would’ve been exposed to all sorts of cannon and rifle fire.”

“Oh, man,” said T.J. “Well, let’s push on.”

They crossed the road, which was now a two-lane blacktop, and resumed their trek on a gradual upgrade toward the Union defense line on Cemetery Ridge. There were monuments and statues all along the ridge, cannons behind them.

“See that bunch of trees?” said LouAnne, pointing to a part of the wall that jutted out a bit. “That’s called ‘The Angle.’ It’s where some Southern troops did actually break through. Let’s head for there.” They completed their journey by climbing over the knee-high loose-stone wall similar to those the boys saw

everywhere in Connecticut. “Now,” she said, “turn back and look at how far we came in just under twenty minutes.”

“Wow,” said Bortnicker. “It took us only twenty minutes, but to those poor guys it must’ve seemed like forever.”

“Those who made it,” added T.J.

“Check this out,” said LouAnne, motioning the boys over to a chest-high stone marker. “This is a rarity, a Confederate monument in the middle of the Union lines.”

“How come?” asked T.J.

“It’s dedicated to General Lewis Armistead, who decided to lead the attack, on foot, as an example to his men. Word has it he stuck his hat on his sword, raised it high, and ran in front of

them, actually making it over the wall into the Union troops. Then he got shot up pretty badly. He died shortly thereafter in a Union field hospital. People come here and, as you can see, leave offerings of coins on the monument. Nobody knows how that got started.”

“Hey, T.J.!” said Bortnicker proudly. “Look here! The 14th Connecticut Infantry was on the front line of defense!”

“It seems like a lot of the units that were here on Day Three were from the Northeast,” said T.J. He took a long look up and down the line, then turned to his cousin. “You know,” he said seriously,

“now I’m glad you talked us into doing this. I can really understand how heroic those guys on both sides were, especially the Confederates. I can also see what Hilliard was trying to do when they shot him in the back. The Confederates didn’t have a chance. But why do they call it ‘Pickett’s Charge’?”

“Well,” said LouAnne, sounding strangely like her father, “Pickett and Pettigrew’s divisions led the way, under orders from General Longstreet, who of course got *his* orders from Lee. As the story goes, Pickett’s troops were so decimated by the end that when he returned to the rear, and Lee told him to re-form his division, he answered, ‘General, I have no division!’ That’s

when Lee must've realized he'd blown it."

They sat for a while, watching the other tourists strolling about. A huge tour bus disgorged a large group who seemed to be from Florida or somewhere tropical, as most had tans and flowered Hawaiian shirts. One boy about their age with a puka-shell necklace approached Bortnicker and said, "Yo, dude, which way is the front line?"

"Thataway, dude," he replied, pointing at 'The Angle.' Then he turned to the cousins and said, "I've seen enough. Let's head out."

They picked their way through the crowd, stepped over the wall and

walked back toward the Virginia Memorial.

At dinner that night they told Mike of their excursion to Cemetery Ridge. He listened intently, nodding as they described the landscape and the impressions they got as to the futility of Lee's attack. "Yeah," he said finally, "you can say that one encounter turned the tide of the war permanently in the North's favor. And just think, we're going to try to do it justice on Sunday."

"I don't know, Uncle Mike," said T.J., "I know it sounds corny, but don't you feel like a, um, *responsibility* to not screw it up, to make it as real as possible?"

"All reenactors do, T.J.," said his

uncle. “I know a lot of people think we get carried away into fantasy land, but most reenactors have a deep, abiding respect for those whom they portray. That’s why I think you two will do great. You two *get it*.”

“So,” said Bortnicker, trying to lighten the mood, “when do we report for duty, sir?”

“Here’s my suggestion,” said Mike. “I have to work tomorrow, and my unit’s not getting here till late afternoon anyway. But there will be a smaller presentation by some other units called ‘Battle for the Brickyard’ that recreates the conflict on July 1st where a Union Army force fought a delaying tactic as

the Confederates surrounded the town. A lot of the fighting occurred near a brickyard close to the Harrisburg Road.

“If Terri doesn’t mind, she could give you a ride over to the farm to watch the battle. It’ll give you a good idea of what’s in store for us on Saturday and Sunday.

“Now, there’s going to be hourly demonstrations and seminars on site in different tents near the battlefield area, so you can get there any time after the gates open and check out whatever interests you all the way up till the battle in the late afternoon. Make sure you put on sunscreen and drink lots of water. And I suggest that T.J. and LouAnne forget about running till after Sunday.

We'll all have to conserve our strength because they're saying both weekend days are going to be mucho hot.

“Then I'll get home from work, load all our uniforms and equipment into the truck, and meet you out there. Our regimental camp should be set up by Friday evening; we'll get you boys squared away and introduce you to Colonel Pelham and the rest of the men. We'll sleep at the camp Friday night, as you two ease into it. Then, our regiment's going to participate in both the Saturday ‘Battle of the Wheatfield’ and the big show on Sunday, ‘Pickett's Charge.’”

“I have to work at the Inn Friday

night, so Mom'll be taking me home after Friday's battle," said LouAnne. "But I'll come spectate on Saturday and Sunday. Dad, is it okay if I suit up for a Saturday night camp visit?"

"As long as you're in full costume, it shouldn't be a problem," said Mike. "And what will you be doing, dear?" he said sweetly to his wife.

Terri shook her head. "Listen," she said, "I'll run the shuttle service, as always, but I think I'll skip the battles this year. I have misgivings about the boys being out there with so little experience."

"Don't worry, hon, I'll keep an eye on them," assured Mike.

"Oh, yeah? And who's going to keep

an eye on you and your kooky friends?”

Mike smiled weakly as the teens laughed out loud.

Chapter Thirty

Friday morning T.J. was treated to a rare pleasure, an opportunity to sleep late. By the time he rolled out of bed at 7:30 A.M., Bortnicker and Aunt Terri were already clattering pots and pans in the kitchen. LouAnne, wearing a Beatles *Rubber Soul* tee shirt and pajama bottoms, drifted downstairs right after him.

Bortnicker, who was frying up some bacon, sang about welcoming people to a place called The Lido for sausage and beer.

““Here at the Western World,”” said LouAnne with a yawn. “Can I have some

coffee please?”

“You know that’s not good for you, honey,” said her mother.

“I’ll put lots of milk, Mom. C’mon, we’ve got a long day of Civil War studies ahead of us.”

“Okay,” she relented, pouring out half a mug. “Oh, boys, Mike said to remind you to pack up all your stuff for the next two days and he’ll bring it to the campsite this evening. I have a heavy duty Hefty bag for each of you.”

“We’d better savor this meal, T.J.,” cracked Bortnicker, setting platters of eggs, bacon and toast on the table. “God knows what we’ll be eating ‘round the campfire the next two days.”

“He’s right,” said LouAnne. “Don’t

expect anything good in a reenactment camp. Dad says the coffee could take the paint off cars and the meat, if there is any, never gets cooked all the way.”

“I think I’ll stick with beans,” said Bortnicker.

“Easy, there,” joked T.J. grimly, “I have to sleep with you in one of those tiny dog tents!”

“Well, there’s always hardtack,” suggested LouAnne.

“What’s that?” said T.J.

“An extremely hard biscuit that you’ll have to dunk or it’ll break your teeth,” said Bortnicker. “During the Civil War the hardtack the soldiers ate was usually infested with weevils.”

“I’ll try to sneak you in some granola bars on Saturday,” offered LouAnne. “It’s the least I can do for my brave boys in blue.”

“How kind,” said T.J. sarcastically.

After breakfast the boys went upstairs to pack, dragging their empty Hefty bags behind them. In went their leather backpacks embossed with the US logo, their shoes, kepi-style hats, white muslin shirts, woolen socks, pants, belts and jackets.

“I’m done,” said Bortnicker. “Can I get in the shower first?”

“Yeah, go ahead,” said T.J. “I’ve still got a ways to go.” He waited until his friend entered the bathroom, then

slipped down the stairs and out the back door to the garage. In Uncle Mike's work table area he found the oblong wooden box in which Mike stored his Civil War weapons. T.J. removed the Sharps rifle, which lay on top wrapped in oilcloth, and pulled up the leather covered box that housed the .44. He gently lifted it out, wrapped it in a small towel, and replaced the empty box and the rifle. Then, he crept back up to his room and packed the wrapped revolver in his knapsack, along with the powder cartridges and antique .44 bullets he'd purchased. He was just cinching the plastic bag when Bortnicker reentered the room, his scraggly hair still damp.

“Jeez, what’re you putting in there?”

All you need is your uniform stuff. They're probably gonna search us for modern contraband, anyway."

"Just double-checking I have everything. We'll just set the drum kit and sticks near our bags in the living room and Uncle Mike'll have no problem loading it in the truck," T.J. said coolly. "I'll take my shower and then Aunt Terri can drive us the Civil War camp."

"Well, enjoy it," said Bortnicker. "That's the last shower you're gonna have till Sunday night. We'll be wearing the same stuff for two days! Ugh!"

They piled into Terri's Accord and made their way down Buford Avenue

toward the town center, which featured some early hotels, including the one President Lincoln had stayed at during his visit to dedicate the cemetery, restaurants, and of course shops.

They were almost to the roundabout circle that was fed by some of the roads leading in and out of town when Terri said, “Now, boys, I want you to get ready, because what you’re going to see will amaze you. We’ve all tried to impress upon you just how big these Reenactment Days are here, but you have to see it to believe it. Well, here we go.”

Immediately the car ground to a halt as they came upon the square which was clogged with every conceivable type of vehicle; compact cars, minivans,

pickups pulling U-Hauls, Trailways-style tour buses, tractor trailers, even some evil-looking Harley choppers.

“I take it they’re going where we’re going?” said Bortnicker.

“Unfortunately,” said Terri. “The ride to the farm where the reenactment’s being held this year is usually a five minute drive. This is going to take us a good half-hour at the least.”

“It’s always like this?” marveled T.J. as they paused to allow a couple in full Civil War era garb cross the street.

“Yup,” said LouAnne. And guys, this is an off year, the 147th anniversary of the battle. In three years is the 150th, and the feeling is it’ll break all records.

Heck, the Reenactment Committee's probably already planning it."

They finally pulled into the farm entrance and were just inside when Terri said, "Okay, here's where you guys get out. LouAnne, I'll be back around six to pick you up. Your dad should be here by then. Enjoy."

Bortnicker was literally shaking with excitement. "Now I've seen everything!" he crowed. "It's Civil War nirvana!"

Indeed, everywhere the teens looked they were inundated with history. A midway of tents had been established with every conceivable type of Civil War era food item for sale—old fashioned kettle corn and candies, beef jerky, hardtack, muffins and cakes,

lemonade and sweet tea and sarsaparilla if you were thirsty. Then there were dry goods merchants, or sutlers, all in period garb, selling hats, shirts, shoes, copper pots and pans, souvenirs like those in town, books that included Carlton Elway's, maps and other ephemera. Mixed in were demonstration tents where blacksmiths, musicians and artists labored. The sound of Civil War tunes like "Cumberland Gap" and "The Bonny Blue Flag" filled the air and added to the cacophony of the thousands of attendees. You could even get your palm read or your portrait taken with an antique camera that would make the image look exactly like the daguerreotypes of the

1860s.

“I say we get our picture snapped tomorrow when we’re all dressed up,” suggested LouAnne.

“Great idea!” said Bortnicker. “I can’t wait to show everyone back at school!”

T.J. just offered a weak smile. All around them, mixed in with the modern day tourists, soldiers and belles walked arm in arm, the men looking very authentic. T.J. was starting to question whether they were in over their head with this reenacting thing. It was true that his uncle said they could handle it, but T.J. wondered if that was just Mike reverting to his football pep talk days.

In addition to all of the buying and

selling, there were genuine scholarly demonstrations and seminars going on in designated tents. One could drop in and learn about Civil War medicine, complete with a display of surgeon's amputation tools, the role of spies in the war, "talks" with actors portraying Robert E. Lee and other key leaders, brass band concerts, even a complete Civil War wedding.

These would go on each day, and postings of the events with their times were everywhere. A prefab command post building sat on the edge of the village, white and blue Gettysburg police cruisers parked outside, along with ambulances. Numerous volunteers

with blue “Gettysburg Reenactment Committee” golf shirts wandered about, speaking into walkie-talkies.

The teens stopped for a time to witness a live mortar firing demonstration, which was pretty cool, and the close-order drill of a small company of Union reenactors from New Jersey.

“So, what do you think, Cuz?” said LouAnne, munching on some kettle corn.

“It’s kinda overwhelming,” said T.J.

“Yeah, and just think. They’re all here to see you guys do your thing. Speaking of which, today’s reenactment starts in about an hour. I suggest we get a good seat in the grandstand, if there are any left. Come on!”

They crossed an open field to where huge sections of bleachers had been erected. To the sides were barrier ropes that stretched for hundreds of yards behind which people with lawn chairs or standees could also view the battle. “Are you serious?” said T.J., scanning the almost full bleachers. “How many spectators are they expecting?”

“Anywhere from 20,000 to 40,000, given the day,” said LouAnne nonchalantly as she scoured the stands for a small opening. “Of course, Pickett’s Charge on Sunday will bring out the most people. Today’s just a warm-up.”

They wedged themselves in between

two Midwestern families and got comfortable. “Hey, don’t you have to pay to get in here?” asked T.J.

“We’ve got connections,” said LouAnne with a wave of her hand. “Half the Committee is in Mom’s church group here in town. They meet year-round to plan this thing and Mom, being Mom, is always dropping off muffins and cakes for them to munch on.”

Bortnicker was smiling broadly. “Just think, T.J.,” he beamed, “Tomorrow and Sunday it’ll be *us* out there! I’m so psyched I can’t stand it!”

The “Battle at the Brickyard” itself began with a PA announcer giving the vast crowd a quick overview of the upcoming action, including the

participating units. The 72nd Pennsylvania would not be among them, although Mike had said that some early birds from the regiment would simply hook on to other units.

If this reenactment was only a warm-up, then it staggered T.J.'s mind as to what Pickett's Charge on Sunday would entail. Regiments from both sides marched to their designated positions, drummer boys and fifers leading the way beside the regimental color bearers. When all was ready a few cannon from both sides were discharged, drawing *oohs* and *ahs* from the throng. Then officers on horseback maneuvered their companies into place and the shooting

began. Almost immediately the field was covered with a smoky haze. Here and there a soldier dropped to the ground, either “killed” or “wounded.” The drummers, whom T.J. was keying on, kept up a steady tattoo during the proceedings as the action ebbed and flowed. Obviously those in command of the event had completely choreographed the battle according to actual field reports from July 1, 1863. Uncle Mike was right. If you just used a little imagination, you would swear this was all real.

As if reading his mind, Bortnicker yelled over the din, “You know, I expected this to be a little hokey. But this is really accurate! You can see that

they're just firing caps, but most of the guys are going through the whole loading motion with their rifles. And can you believe how loud those cannons are?"

"Remember, guys," broke in LouAnne, "This is only about half of what's gonna be out there Sunday. I'm not kidding!"

The battle ended in just under an hour, with the Union troops ultimately falling back to higher ground as the Rebels won the day. The crowd, which T.J. guesstimated at around 15,000, applauded wildly as the military units of both sides reformed and marched off to their respective camps, the dead and wounded having dusted themselves off

to rejoin their comrades. With drums and fifes playing and colors flying, they exited the field, bringing an end to the day's festivities.

“So, what do you think, Cuz?” said LouAnne, arching an eyebrow. “Are you ready to go to war?”

“Yeah, I guess,” T.J. managed, not sure if he was ready at all.

“Let's follow the crowd toward the exit,” she said, stretching after a long time sitting on the hard aluminum bleacher seat. “Mom should be there waiting for me.” The teens wove their way through the huge spectator parking lot which was slowly, painfully emptying, with staff volunteers and Gettysburg police directing the traffic as

it crawled out of the entrance. Now T.J. understood what Aunt Terri had said about every hotel within twenty miles being booked for the weekend. Not to mention the campgrounds and RV parks.

They saw Terri waving from a spot just outside the entrance and jogged over. “Have fun?” she asked as LouAnne slid in the passenger seat.

“It was a blast!” sang Bortnicker. “And it’s gonna get better tomorrow!”

“Well, just don’t screw up,” said LouAnne sweetly.

“My husband’s right behind me,” said Terri. “Please don’t let him or his army buddies corrupt you.”

“We won’t, Aunt Terri,” said T.J.,

secretly wishing he could climb in beside LouAnne and get out of here. Why was he having such negative thoughts?

Terri's Accord pulled away into the traffic flow and was replaced seconds later by Uncle Mike's truck, its bed loaded with their equipment for the weekend. He was grinning broadly and obviously excited. "Jump in, guys!" he cried. "We've got to get us registered." He followed a gravel path away from the spectator parking lot to another prefab building on the village perimeter.

Inside was a beehive of activity. Long tables were everywhere, arranged in alphabetical order. The Union reenactors had one side, the

Confederates the other. In the center of the room were huge bulletin boards with regimental postings.

“That’s for guys who don’t have a unit, or whose units are very small,” said Mike. “The committee just hooks them up with another regiment for the weekend. We won’t have that problem. The 72nd Pennsylvania should be rolling in as we speak.” He led them to their respective tables where a photo ID was issued. They also had to sign a waiver, which Mike also signed as their guardian because they were underage, that absolved the event committee of any accidents that might happen to them while on the grounds. T.J. couldn’t

believe all the paperwork involved. “How many reenactors are gonna be here, Uncle Mike?” he asked as he signed the waiver form.

“I’m hearing anywhere from 2,000 to 2,500 by Sunday,” he said. “That’s not including horses.”

After that was taken care of they rode in the truck to the reenactors’ parking field, where T.J. was once again awed by the scope of the event. Many units had rented their own tour buses. Some artillery units even had tractor trailers with their regimental logos painted on the sides. There were horse trailers by the hundreds as well.

“Where do they keep the horses?” asked Bortnicker.

“There’s a special corral for each army,” said Mike. They branched off down yet another gravel road, topped a rise, and were treated to the sight of two very large camps of white tents, separated by an area of woods a quarter mile wide.

“Holy crow!” said Bortnicker. “Who put all these tents up?”

“The reenactors,” said Mike. “Remember, we’re getting to the party a little late. Some of these guys have been here over twenty-four hours already. Let’s find the 72nd Pennsylvania.” They crawled along until Mike spied the familiar faces of Matty, Bobby and Eddie, fully dressed and stacking their

muskets pyramid style in front of a group of tents.

“Well, if it isn’t Ranger Mike!” cried Matty, bear-hugging his friend. “And are these our two drummer boys?”

“Yup,” said Mike. “New recruits. You guys already know my nephew T.J. This is his buddy, Bortnicker.”

“Glad to have you join our unit,” said Matty with a courtly bow. “Let’s give you a hand unpacking your gear.” They easily hefted the big plastic bags as Mike carefully handed down the drums and accessories from the truck bed.

“Let me go park the truck,” said Mike as he slammed the tailgate shut. “Matty, you guys show the boys their tent. I assume I’m bunking with you?”

“Only the best for you, Ranger Mike,” said Matty. “Actually, the three of us did Rock-Paper-Scissors and I lost.”

“Very funny,” said Mike, climbing behind the wheel. “Be back in a few.”

As he crunched away over the gravel, Matty said, “Okay, boys, ready to see your shebang?”

“She-what?” said Bortnicker.

“Shebang,” said Matty patiently. “Like in the phrase ‘The whole shebang’? What would happen is, two soldiers would be issued one-half of a tent apiece. Instead of it being set up like your typical A-frame ‘dog tent’ as they called it, they would take two long sticks

and prop up one side like a flap. This would give them more room, especially on hot days like this where there was little chance of rain.

“Colonel Pelham decided it would be okay for you to borrow his sons’ tent, so we’ve set it up shebang style, at least until tonight. You can peg it down later for some privacy.

“Now, T.J., I talked to your uncle and he said you guys have picked up the basic uniform and a knapsack. We’ve also supplied you with a rubber ground cover and blankets, as well as mess kits and canteens, which will be the most important piece of equipment you carry this weekend. Whenever you get a chance, keep filling it with water.

Dehydration in weather like this is our biggest problem.”

By this time Darcy had returned and was talking to Bobby and Eddie, exchanging pleasantries. “Mike tells me you boys have been practicing hard the last few days,” said Matty. “Being a drummer boy isn’t the hardest thing in the world, but that don’t mean you can’t screw it up. I’m sure you’ll do just fine.”

“Matty,” said Mike, “if you’re done harassing the boys, I think it’s time the three of us suit up. Then I’ll take them to meet the boss.” The teens removed their knapsacks from the Hefty bags and put them in the shebang alongside their drum kits, slung the Hefty bags over their

shoulders, and trudged off with Mike to the long line of porta-sans that bordered the campsite. At the sight of Bortnicker wrinkling his nose Mike said, “Just be thankful we’re not going one hundred percent authentic on the bathroom facilities, or you’d be going potty in a slit trench.”

“Gotcha,” said T.J. appreciatively.

They emerged minutes later, totally transformed to 1860s Union soldiers. Bortnicker had even managed to pick up a generic pair of “granny style” reading glasses that looked infinitely more authentic than his tortoise shell model, though the clarity was nowhere as sharp.

“Well?” T.J. asked his uncle, who was lacing on his brogans.

“Fantastic! Nobody would accuse you two of being farbs, that’s for sure.”

“What’s a farb?” said Bortnicker.

“Someone who cuts corners on their clothes or equipment, usually for reasons of comfort,” said Mike. “It’s the ultimate put-down for reenactors. You don’t want to be caught with modern shoes or cell phones or whatever, unless it’s in the privacy of your tent. But even then, guys who go for cutting corners are missing the point of the whole experience. Speaking of which, I’m going to take you to meet Jack Pelham, *Colonel Pelham* to you. He’s a pretty good guy away from all this, but when it comes to reenacting he’s deadly serious. So, Bortnicker, no

smart-alecky stuff, okay?"

"Yes, sir!" said Bortnicker, snapping to attention.

"That's what I'm talking about, buddy," Mike laughed. "I'm an enlisted man, just like you. You don't have to salute anybody but the officers. Come on."

Colonel Pelham's tent was much larger than those of the enlisted men, with a sturdy wooden cot, camp chair, footlocker and map-strewn table. His saber and sidearm pistol lay on his blanket, and he was adjusting his wide-brimmed hat in a cracked mirror that hung from a peg on one of the tent poles.

"So good to see you, Mike!" said Jack Pelham, who sported muttonchop

sideburns that were streaked with gray.
“And these are the boys?”

“Uh-huh. We have my nephew T.J.,
and his friend Bortnicker.”

Colonel Pelham gave each of the
drummer boys a hearty handshake.
“Mike, why don’t you let me have a few
minutes with these guys to tell them
about the company and whatnot. Okay?”

“Sure,” said Mike. “Listen to what
the colonel has to tell you,” he said,
shooting T.J. a sly wink. “It just might
save your life.” He strolled off in search
of some coffee.

“Have a seat on the cot, boys,” said
Pelham, removing his weapons. He
pulled up his camp chair and turned it

around, straddling its seat like a saddle. T.J. thought his uniform was quite impressive, though not as showy as Major Hilliard's by any stretch.

“First of all,” he began, “I want to thank you two for stepping in to help us out in this battle. I feel a little bad that your first time out is the most challenging one you could find anywhere, but Mike was a teacher, and teachers know when their kids are smart enough, and mature enough, to handle something. He had nothing but great things to say about you boys.”

They both smiled at the compliment and relaxed a bit. But then Pelham leaned forward on the seatback and became quite serious. “As you know,

you're filling in for my sons, who chose to play in a baseball tournament this weekend, which I wasn't ecstatic about, but they didn't want to let their team down. I can understand that.

“But what I want you boys to appreciate is that the 72nd Pennsylvania is a team as well. I organized this unit ten years ago after doing a lot of homework on the men who served in its ranks during the Civil War. It was a valorous and proud unit, and we try to represent them as such. For all I know, these two days upcoming may be your only experience with reenactment. But we attend three or four battles per year, including Gettysburg, and the men are

dedicated to being as true to history as possible. I'll expect nothing less from you. Mike tells me you've been working night and day to prepare on short notice, and that is commendable.

“The spectators and tourists are gone for the day, as you can see, so things are somewhat more relaxed. That doesn't mean, however, that you two can be horsing around on the grounds or in your tent till all hours, and I hope you weren't foolish enough to bring along cell phones or iPods or whatever.”

“No sir,” said Bortnicker, seriously. “We're not farbs.”

Pelham paused, eyeing the boy for a moment, then went on. “I've been told that after dinner tonight some of the

drummers and fifers, such as yourselves, will be meeting near the headquarters tent of the 105th New York. I think it would be a good idea to join them, if only to pick their brains on how to conduct yourselves during the battles. Maybe you'll even learn new rolls or songs or whatever it is you do.

“Now, tomorrow after breakfast we'll fall out for roll call and do a little marching in the field next door, get into the swing of things for the Wheatfield Battle. Then you'll have a few hours to either stay in camp or walk over to the Civil War village. Have you seen it yet?”

“Yes, sir,” said T.J. seriously.

“Well, then you know it’s loaded with things to do and see. And there will be tourists everywhere, the same tourists we’ll be entertaining later on. What I’m saying is, whether they engage you in conversation at the village or even if they wander into camp, which they are allowed to do, be informative, be courteous, but most of all, *be authentic*. Get into character and *stay there*. You’re representing the 72nd Pennsylvania, remember. Any questions?”

“What’s for dinner, sir?” said Bortnicker, warily.

“Oh, Private Bortnicker, I’m sure the mess sergeant will be whipping up his

most special brown beans, salt pork and biscuits for you,” Pelham said, a wry smile creasing his lips. “If there’s nothing else, you guys can get going.”

“What’d you think of the colonel?” said T.J. as they walked back to their tent.

“No wonder those kids went to the baseball tournament!” answered Bortnicker. “Did you see how intense his eyes got during that speech?”

“Kinda like Hilliard,” said T.J.

“Yeah, but when all’s said and done, it’s still make believe, Big Mon.”

“Good point. But I think we should take his advice and attend the drummers’ jam session. Hopefully those guys won’t be jerks.”

“You got it. Hey, I think I smell those beans!”

Sure enough, a cauldron of baked beans with chunks of salt pork was bubbling away near the boys’ tent, with Mike, of all people, stirring the pot. Nearby, a Dutch oven of biscuits was just about done. “You guys, come grab some eats before the rest of the regiment comes a-running. They’re like a pack of wolves.”

The boys ducked into their shebang and emerged with tin plates, spoons and cups from their mess kits. After opting for water over coffee, Mike plopped some pork and beans into their plates and tossed each a still-hot biscuit. By

then the rest of the unit, which numbered between 25-30 men, engulfed Mike, so the boys retreated to their shebang and took a seat on their blankets.

“Um-mmm!” said Bortnicker with mock delight. “Just like great-great-great Grandma used to make!”

“Bortnicker, remember what Uncle Mike said,” warned T.J. “Try not to embarrass us, okay?”

“You have my word. Hey, do you think there’s a dessert?”

* * * *

After everyone had wolfed down their food and the men had settled around small campfires to brew some more coffee, T.J. and Bortnicker picked

up their drums and ventured forth to find the 105th New York's campsite. The sun was setting and the tents, which numbered in the hundreds, formed rows of pale silhouettes in the darkening sky. Small campfires were everywhere, and some female reenactors, probably wives of the soldiers, strolled among the hundreds of men. In the distance, whinnying could be heard from the horse corrals. Some Confederates had even trekked over from their camp to visit old friends from past reenactments.

Finally, the boys picked up the sound of fifes and strode toward the music. They found a group of ten or so teens lounging around, drum kits set aside.

Everyone looked up when the new recruits entered the area, which centered around the dying embers of a dinner campfire.

“Hey guys,” said T.J. “We’re with the 72nd Pennsylvania and heard there might be a jam session.”

“You came to the right place,” said a tall, red-haired boy of around sixteen. “I’m Pat Garvey from the 105th New York. These other guys are from all over the place, and Jean over there is even from Quebec. We figured we’d get together and run through some tunes for tomorrow. You guys ever drum before?”

“Just in school. This is our first reenactment.”

“You’re starting with *Gettysburg*?” said a portly boy with bad skin. “Wow. That’s a first.”

“Yeah, well, we’re just filling in, doing someone a favor, kinda. That’s why we came to find you guys.”

“Solid,” said Pat. “So, what should we start with?”

“Anyone know ‘Bodhisattva?’ ” said Bortnicker, trying to be funny. His joke was met with an uneasy silence.

“You’ll have to excuse Bortnicker here. He got hit in the head with a shell fragment at Fredericksburg,” said T.J.

Everyone in the group chuckled, and T.J. shot Bortnicker a look that said *cut it out*. “I’m T.J., by the way. We’ll just

join in with whatever you guys want to play.”

“Okay, then,” said Garvey. “Let’s try ‘Garry Owen.’” The fifers began and the drummers fell in with the jaunty tune.

By the time an hour had passed the boys were thoroughly enjoying themselves, and the musicians laughed and joked freely amongst themselves. Little by little, T.J. and Bortnicker learned about their comrades and why they’d gotten into reenacting. Some considered it quality time with their dads, while others had a true interest in history and were real Civil War geeks like Bortnicker. And most of them were looking forward to the day they’d be able to trade in their drums and fifes for

percussion rifles.

“So, what do we do during the Wheatfield Battle tomorrow?” asked T.J.

“All the drums and fifes will be at the forefront of the Union column,” said Garvey. “Just follow our lead. Then, you’ll break off to your regiment and keep up a roll during the battle. It’s really easy to get distracted, but the good thing is there are two of you. And if you get really tired out there you can always get shot and keel over.”

“Just don’t fall on your drum,” said the portly boy, who looked like he was speaking from experience. “Those things are expensive!”

As they trudged back to their tent the moon was full and things were quieting down. The soldiers, who had either participated that day in the Brickyard Battle or driven hundreds of miles to arrive by the evening, were by and large turning in for a good night's sleep. Isolated pockets of laughter in the dark could be heard.

The boys converted their shebang into the standard dog tent configuration, removed their military tunics, hats and shoes, and lay upon their blankets, exhausted. A wood fire smoldered a few feet away, warding off mosquitoes for the time being.

“That was actually fun,” said

Bortnicker. "And, I think we can hang with those guys musically. Don't you?"

"Yup," said T.J., closing his eyes.

"Well, big day tomorrow. I wonder if they do the bugle thing in the morning."

"We'll find out." As he was speaking, T.J. absently felt the knapsack behind his bunched up jacket that served as a pillow. The pistol was inside, safe and sound. "G'night, Bortnicker."

His friend was already snoring.

* * * *

Later that night T.J. awoke, needing to use the bathroom. He reluctantly pulled on his brogans and tramped to the far side of the camp to the porta-sans.

When he was finished he let the door close gently behind him and then happened to glance at the woods that separated the two sleeping armies. Maybe it was the moon glow, or just his eyes playing tricks on him, but he could swear something was moving between the trees, and it looked like a soldier.

With a plumed hat.

Breaking into a jog, he made his way back to the tent, occasionally looking over his shoulder. And although it was a humid seventy-five degrees, he found himself shivering in his blanket.

Chapter Thirty-One

It was just past daybreak when T.J.'s eyes snapped open to the sight of Bortnicker, perched on his blanket, watching him intently. "What?" he said groggily.

"You had a rough night," said Bortnicker. "I've just been up an hour, but you've been thrashing around. Your blankets and stuff are all over the place. Bad dreams?"

"I don't know," said T.J., sitting up. "Why didn't you wake me up?"

"I was afraid to."

"Oh. Why don't you try to scrounge us some coffee? My tin cup's around

here somewhere.”

“Coming right up.” He grabbed both their cups and wandered out into the gathering light as the camp began to come alive. T.J. could hear the clattering of iron skillets and Dutch oven tops. His stomach growled for food, and he reached into his knapsack for a granola bar he’d sneaked in. He was just finishing it when Uncle Mike popped his head into the tent. “You awake, soldier?” he said with a smile. His brownish-blond beard was starting to grow in around his goatee, giving him that grungy Civil War look.

“I’ll be dressed in a minute. Bortnicker’s out scavenging some coffee.”

“Well, we should have some bacon and eggs on the griddle soon. As you can see, I got pressed into cook service last night as a ‘punishment’ for blowing off last year’s reenactment. But today our regular cook’s on duty. In real life he’s a fireman, so you know *he* can cook!”

It only took T.J. a few minutes to throw on his brogans and hat, and then he was outside among the living. Even at this early hour people were going here and there, preparing for the long day ahead. T.J. brought their tin plates to the 72nd’s campfire, where Bortnicker met him with two steaming cups of coffee. They got their bacon and eggs, which smelled heavenly, and sat down amongst

the troops. As soldiers came and went, Uncle Mike introduced them to the boys. It seemed like the unit was one big happy family, and that the boys' relation to Mike earned them instant acceptance into the club.

They were just finishing their meal when Colonel Pelham approached the gathering, looking all business.

“Okay, men, it seems like most of us are here. Let's meet in the field to our right in ten minutes for a little drilling.” After some playful groans the men drifted toward their tents to stow their mess kits and suit up.

T.J. and Bortnicker slipped their drum slings over their shoulders and grabbed their sticks before a quick walk

to the field where the 72nd Pennsylvania was assembling. A sergeant formed the unit into four lines of six men apiece and had the boys bookend the front lines next to the U.S. and regimental flags.

“At ease, men,” began Pelham, and the troops relaxed. “First, I want to welcome you all back for another year at Gettysburg. It looks like we’re going to have two fine days for reenactments, though it will be very warm and humid, so remember to drink water whenever possible. Just about everyone’s here, so no introductions are necessary, except that we will have two new drummers replacing my sons, Mike Darcy’s nephew T.J. and his friend Bortnicker.”

At that, Bortnicker did a quick drum roll that drew a few chuckles. T.J. merely turned and waved meekly to the assemblage.

“As I was saying, we will be formally participating as a unit in today’s and tomorrow’s reenactments. Some of you who got in early today were able to hook on to other units for the Brickyard Battle, and I’m sure you represented us admirably. So, let me give you an overview of today’s action, which they’re calling ‘The Wheatfield—Harvest of Death.’

“On the morning of July 2, 1862, Robert E. Lee was liking his army’s chances at Gettysburg. His men had

driven the enemy from the field and now occupied the town. The Union forces held the high ground south and east of town. Lee decided to try a flanking maneuver, with General Longstreet's 1st Corps engaging the Federals on Little Round Top, and General Ewell's 2nd Corps hitting the Federals on Cemetery Hill and Culp's Hill as a diversion.

“Unbeknownst to Longstreet, the commander of the Union's 3rd Corps, General Dan Sickles, ordered his men off the rocky hill and positioned them in the fields in front of the Round Tops. Why he decided upon this tactic is a subject of debate to this day.

“So, when Longstreet's troops

arrived on the afternoon of July 2nd, he was surprised to find Federal troops in the Peach Orchard, the Wheatfield, and Devil's Den. Longstreet launched his attack and found that Sickles had left his flank open by abandoning his superior position. He took Devil's Den and moved in on the Wheatfield. Sickles desperately sent for reinforcements to bail him out and General John Caldwell's division of the Union 2nd Corps rushed to the rescue. They were immediately engaged in fierce hand-to-hand combat. Six times the field changed hands in just over two hours, and two of the Union brigade commanders were killed.

“In the end the Federals held off the Southerners, and units from Pennsylvania were among those who saw action. But by the end of the day the Confederates had lost about 1,400 men and the Union around 3,100. It was some of the most furious fighting of the war.

“We will try to capture the essence of that struggle for the thousands of spectators who will be attending. As always, we will be coordinating with units from New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts and New Jersey, among others. I will be attending a commanders’ meeting after we’re done here.

“So, right now let’s get in some

close order drill so we can look good entering the field this afternoon. Our forces will be assembling at 4:00 P.M. sharp on this very field. Are there any questions? Okay. And one more thing. Make sure you have brought a plentiful amount of percussion caps for your rifles. Last year too many soldiers ran out, and there's not much else you can do after that but become a casualty. Which brings to mind another minor problem we had last year. Fellows, I know this is Gettysburg, the event everyone looks forward to, but we can't have an authentic battle without some casualties. We've never had to resort to drawing straws or things like that before. So, now I'll ask you: who'd like to

volunteer to be killed or wounded in today's battle?"

Slowly, about one third of the men's hands were raised.

"Great. That should do it. And one last thing. Don't feel the need to apply any fake blood if you're shot. The spectators are so far removed that they'll never see it. Sergeant McAllister, are you ready to give the men a little workout?"

"Yes, sir!" piped a beefy veteran whose leathery face reflected many days of reenacting in the hot sun. "Company...forward, march!" They started moving, and Colonel Pelham barked, "Let's hear those drums, boys!"

T.J. and Bortnicker looked across at each other, nodded, and began an easy tattoo.

The 72nd went forward, left, right, front and back. It was hot, boring and tedious, but within minutes they began looking like the veteran unit they were. The boys were proud to be leading the way. After a half-hour McAllister had them form a line, shoulder-width apart, to practice “loading” and “firing” their weapons. It was at this time that the unit held its weapons inspection in accordance with reenactment rules. Only a couple of the men had vintage rifles, including Darcy’s Sharps.

“Still using that, Mike?” said

McAllister, checking the gun over after Mike had ‘presented arms.’ “Not afraid to ruin it?”

“It’ll be fine, Sergeant,” smiled Mike. “It’s not like we’re firing live rounds, you know.”

“True, but you have a priceless antique here. It was used in the actual battle, right?”

“Which is precisely why I should use it, sir!” smiled Darcy.

“Touché,” said McAllister, handing it back and moving onto the next man.

The regiment re-formed for dismissal by Colonel Pelham and then returned to camp. By this time tourists were all over the place. T.J. noticed that he and Bortnicker were getting quite a few

looks from young ladies, and Bortnicker really played it up, taking a page from LouAnne's Charney House routines. They wandered around the village, stopping for a snack here and there and interacting with the other attendees. It was great fun to be the center of attention.

"I'm really starting to like this soldiering thing," said Bortnicker, waving back to a high school-aged girl with pink hair who'd winked at him.

They finally returned to their tent and lay down for an hour to rest. The midday heat had become oppressive, and both boys had drunk numerous tin cups of water from the regimental jugs that had

been set up near the headquarters tent before sacking out.

It was Uncle Mike who woke the boys with a hearty “Up and at ‘em, lads, the Rebs are coming!” They popped up smiling, pulled on their tunics and hats, slung their full canteens over their shoulders, adjusted their drum kits and made for the pasture.

It was an awesome sight to see upwards of a thousand men assembling into their regiments, forming ranks. Momentarily confused, T.J. was relieved to see the smiling Pat Garvey motioning him over to where the drum and fife corps was preparing to lead the column onto the field. They hustled over and fell in next to each other, their hearts

pounding.

“Good luck, T.J.,” said Bortnicker, who was sweating profusely.

“It’s gonna be fine,” he replied. “Remember, we’ll just join the 72nd when they break off from the column. As long as we stay within earshot of either Pelham or McAllister we’ll know what to do.”

“Gotcha.”

And then, officers on horseback rode to the front of the column, the musicians struck up *Garry Owen*, and they were off to battle.

As they entered the “battlefield” the crowd erupted in anticipation. The boys easily blended with the other drummers

and marched proudly, their heads high. *It's so much easier when you know you're not gonna die*, thought T.J.

Suddenly, a few cannon, which had been placed to the rear of the entering armies, opened up. T.J. had to keep himself from flinching every time one discharged. Now mounted officers were everywhere, deploying regiments to their prearranged areas. T.J. caught sight of Colonel Pelham and the 72nd and the boys made a beeline for their group.

Across the field the Confederates, who numbered roughly as many as the Federals, were doing the same. They wore a variety of outfits, especially the enlisted men. A few of the officers were

dressed as elaborately as Hilliard, though this was primarily an infantry engagement.

The boys took their place alongside the regimental colors, which were held aloft by a guy named Jerry who was by day an auto mechanic in Harrisburg. Then the shooting commenced, and it became a blur of action, with the unit moving forward, then falling back, to mimic the actions of the Union troops on July 2, 1863. The rolling volleys of percussion caps were incessant, and the smoke stung their eyes. Here and there a soldier suddenly clutched his chest or leg or head and went down, some immediately lying still, others writhing in agony and screaming.

“You dyin’?” Bortnicker asked, rat-tat-tatting away.

“Not today,” answered T.J. He was having too much fun. And yet, the whole time he kept scanning the Confederate lines, wondering if it could even be possible that Crosby Hilliard would show up to join the battle. Suddenly, Uncle Mike, who was a few yards to the side, gripped his stomach and keeled over, deftly laying his antique Sharps rifle in some tall grass as he fell onto his back. T.J. reflexively ran over and looked down into his uncle’s face. “You okay?” he panted.

“Sure,” said Mike, smiling. “I’m just gassed. Man, it’s hot out here. Besides,

I'd rather die today than tomorrow. Hey, get back to drumming!"

T.J. grinned and rejoined Bortnicker, just as Jerry the color bearer got shot. "Don't let the colors hit the ground!" cried Bortnicker and, shucking his drum strap, caught the pole on the way down.

"Good catch!" said Jerry, lying on his side.

"What do I do now?" said Bortnicker, in a panic.

"Ah, just wave it around and stuff!"

He didn't have to say it twice. Suddenly, Bortnicker was running back and forth, exhorting the 72nd Pennsylvania forward. Sergeant McAllister, caught by surprise, said,

“Well, lads, you heard the boy. Forward we go!” And with that, Bortnicker led a charge into the line that ended with some realistic looking hand-to-hand combat with a unit from Alabama.

T.J. couldn't help but smile. You had to hand it to Bortnicker. He always managed to make things interesting.

Finally, after about an hour, the Confederates began to fall back. Union soldiers squeezed off a couple more rounds, then raised their hats and cheered “Huzzah!” As the spectators roared, the Union column once again formed up and the boys—after Bortnicker had returned the flag to Jerry, who had made a miraculous recovery—joined the front of the column to lead the

victorious Union force from the field. The PA announcer reminded the crowd to drive safely.

Back at camp, the 72nd Pennsylvania was still on a high. Remarks like “One of the best ever!” and “I didn’t want it to end!” filled the late afternoon air. Colonel Pelham told the troops they’d turned in a fine performance, “...including our heroic drummer boy, Private Bortnicker!” to which Bortnicker took a deep, theatrical bow as the men laughed uproariously. Uncle Mike just shook his head.

As the boys returned to their tent, recounting the events of the afternoon, they were met by the vision of LouAnne

Darcy, in her full costume, holding a frilly umbrella aloft to shield her fair skin from the sun. “Oh, it is my valorous defenders, who have returned from the bloody battle safe and sound!”

“You saw me out there?” said Bortnicker. “Pretty cool, huh?”

“Of course, though I watched it from the rear with the rest of the civilian reenactors. Mom dropped me off just as the fighting started. You guys did great. Now, let’s go get some cold lemonade. I’m dying in this dress!”

The boys stowed their drum kits and slung their tunics over their shoulders as they escorted LouAnne around the grounds. Once they’d had their fill of lemonade, they were off to the

photographer's booth, where the two serious looking recruits, holding repro pistols for effect, stood behind the seated LouAnne, who struck a coquettish pose. It was a really interesting process. The photographer, a bald, whiskered old gent in period garb, lost himself under the curtain attached to the rear of the huge daguerreotype camera, which was perched on top of a tall tripod. "Hold the pose for at least six seconds!" he cried before taking the shot. Then he retrieved the negative and laid the blank film in a bed of chemical solution. As if by magic, an image began to take shape. The finished vignette couldn't have been more authentic looking, right down to the

serious faces sported by the boys.

“It’s perfect!” trilled LouAnne as she paid the photographer, who secured the 8x10 inch photo in a large cardboard envelope. “This is going on the living room mantel!”

Back at camp, Mike was somewhat surprised to see his daughter strolling in with the regimental drummers. “Well, well, well,” he said, arms crossed over his chest, “what have we here? The belle of Charney House has seen fit to join us lowly soldiers in our humble camp?”

“But of course, Father,” she replied with a dramatic curtsy. “Now, where can a girl get a decent meal around here?”

“Yeah,” agreed Bortnicker, “we’re starving after a long day of fighting!”

Mike just rolled his eyes. “Well, if you two heroes want to grab your mess kits, the stew they’re cooking should be done in a few minutes.”

The teens made their way over to the dog tent, which Mike had thoughtfully converted into a shebang to air it out. Nevertheless, LouAnne wrinkled her nose at the accommodations. “No, thank you!” she said daintily.

“Well, it’s only for this one more night,” said T.J. with some relief. “We can get through it.”

“I’ll be thinking of you guys when the AC’s humming in my room tonight.”

“Kill us some more, why don’tcha?” joked Bortnicker.

They gathered with the regiment for heaping plates of beef stew and biscuits, which were washed down with tin cups of sun tea. LouAnne ate carefully so as not to spill any gravy onto the lacy front of her robin’s-egg blue dress. “You have no idea how expensive it is to get this dry cleaned!” she moaned.

“What’s dry cleaning?” countered T.J., reverting to his 1860s character.

“Very funny.”

As the sun set many of the soldiers, and a few of the female reenactors, pulled up camp chairs or wooden kegs to use as seating in a large circle around

the crackling regimental campfire. Some of the men were passing silver flasks around, which T.J. suspected were filled with a liquid much stronger than sun tea. No matter, they were entitled after a long afternoon in the field. Then, one of the ladies produced a fiddle and began a beautiful rendition of “Ashokan Farewell,” the mournful tune made famous in the Ken Burns Civil War documentary.

“I love this song!” said Bortnicker.

“Incredible,” said LouAnne. “And it’s not even Steely Dan!”

Another reenactor, an infantryman from nearby Cashtown, produced a banjo and the duo launched into an impromptu performance of the Civil

War's greatest hits. When they began "Cumberland Gap," a real toe-tapper, some of the troopers began to polka with the women. Mike Darcy presented himself before his daughter. "May I have this dance, young miss?" he said gallantly.

"If you promise not to break my toes," she giggled. Soon he was whirling her around to the music, the assembled participants clapping in time. LouAnne couldn't have been more radiant. Her long hair, tied back with a simple blue ribbon, shone in the firelight as she threw her head back and laughed in delight with her father, who was most definitely a very proud man.

As the song ended the dancing couples bowed to each other as the banjo player said, “And now, one of your all-time favorites, I’m sure!” and stuck up “Garry Owen.” T.J. looked up to see the wondrous LouAnne standing in front of him, her hand extended. “I believe this dance is ours, Cuz,” she said, her face flushed with color.

“C’mon!” said Bortnicker, pushing him off his stool. “It’s time for *T.J.’s Got Talent!*”

He rose uncertainly and took her hand as other couples joined in. “Just keep up with me,” she advised, and they were off, her skirts swirling, her hair flying, he struggling mightily to keep up.

The soldiers clapped in time and the song seemed to go on forever. But T.J. didn't care. It was the happiest moment of his life.

* * * *

When it was over he bowed and she curtsied again, obviously pleased with their performance. "Daddy," she said to Mike, who had obviously had quite a few pulls on the flask, "I'm going to call Mom on my cell phone to come pick me up. Is it okay if T.J. walks me to the entrance?"

"Sure, honey," he said, stifling a yawn. "I'll have Bortnicker escort me to my tent."

"Watch it, Ranger Mike," joked

Matty, “we need you to be in full fighting trim for tomorrow!” This drew loud guffaws from everyone.

“I need to talk to you,” said LouAnne as they crunched along the gravel path that led to the farm entrance.

“About what?” said T.J. warily.

“Tomorrow. You have a bad feeling about it, don’t you.” It was more of a statement than a question.

“Is it that obvious?”

“Every time I looked up tonight, you were deep in thought,” she said. “Is it that you think the Major’s going to appear?”

“Well, tomorrow’s Pickett’s Charge, Cuz. If he’s ever gonna do it, that’s the time.”

“And what do you plan to do if he tries to do something...dramatic?”

T.J. stopped walking and looked her in the eye. “I’m gonna stop him.”

“Why do you feel it’s your responsibility?” she said, exasperated.

“I don’t know,” he answered. “It’s just like, I feel that this whole deal, me coming down to Pennsylvania and all, was for a reason. And when he appeared to me that kind of sealed the deal.”

She squeezed his hand. “You *can’t* get hurt,” she said, the emotion rising in her voice. “I won’t let you!”

T.J. held her gaze for a moment, then started walking again, never releasing her hand. “I’ll be fine,” he assured her,

“and if it gets weird, Bortnicker and your dad will be nearby. Will you be there?”

“I’ll be around, don’t worry,” she said enigmatically as Terri’s Accord pulled into the entrance. They waved to her and she drove over, putting the driver’s side window down.

“You two okay?” she said, sensing their tension.

“Yeah, sure, Aunt Terri,” said T.J. “It’s just been a long day.”

“Well, only one more to go,” she said brightly. “I might even spectate. Did you have fun tonight, hon?” she asked her daughter.

“No doubt, Mom,” LouAnne said, sweetly. “And you should see T.J.

polka! Very impressive!” She released his hand and walked around the car to the passenger door. But before she got in, she gave him a hard look over the roof and mouthed *be careful*.

He nodded gently. Then the car pulled away and T.J. was alone in his gloom.

* * * *

When T.J.’s eyes opened around 2 A.M. he found himself looking into the very wide-open eyes of his friend.

“You smell it?” said Bortnicker.

“Yeah, at least I think I do.”

“Wanna check outside?”

“Might as well.”

After pulling on his brogans T.J.

gingerly ducked out of the dog tent, Bortnicker at his side. It was very dark, but they could make out a figure not far away, standing beside the opening of another tent. It was Bobby, one of Uncle Mike's shooting buddies. He turned toward the boys and half-whispered, "What in the Sam Hill is that smell?"

"Don't know," said T.J., trying to stay calm.

"It's coming from over yonder," Bobby said, pointing to the trees that separated the two camps, "like somethin' up and died in those woods."

"Think we should check it out?" said Bortnicker uncertainly.

"Heck, no," said Bobby. "I ain't going in there in the dark. Well, g'night,

boys. Try to get some shuteye. It'll be daylight before you know it."

The boys crawled back to their blankets and lay down, silent until Bortnicker said, "Think it's him?"

"He does have a distinctive odor," answered T.J., weakly attempting levity.

"So, what's the plan?"

In the darkness of the tent, T.J. told him.

Chapter Thirty-Two

July 4, 2010 dawned, hazy, hot and humid. The boys awoke at first light, never falling into a deep sleep after the previous night's event.

“Let's find some sinks and try to wash up a bit,” said T.J. “I feel disgusting.”

“Me too,” said Bortnicker. “It doesn't help that it's like a thousand degrees already.”

By the time they returned from cleaning up and visiting the porta-san, the campsite was alive with activity. The troops of the 72nd Pennsylvania were already checking their rifles, cap

boxes and other equipment. Pots of coffee and biscuits with ham and gravy were cooking on the campfire, which brought Mike and Matty out of their tent, trying to stretch the soreness out of their bodies.

“Too many hits on the whisky flask last night, Ranger Mike?” said Eddie, as Matty chuckled.

“Something like that,” said Mike, shaking the cobwebs.

“Well, at least you slept,” said Bobby, tying his bootlaces. “I got woken up by the most god-awful stink around 2:00 A.M.”

“What kind of stink?” said Mike, suddenly interested.

“Hard to describe. Kinda sweet and

putrid, you know?”

“Well, don’t look at me,” said Matty, making light of the situation, “I made sure to bring a change of socks.”

Everyone laughed at Matty’s joke. Except Mike.

None of this was mentioned as the boys joined his little clique around the breakfast campfire.

“Bortnicker, son, I’ve never seen someone take to camp food like you,” said Matty as he watched the boy pop a gravy-sodden biscuit into his mouth.

“A soldier’s gotta eat,” was his reply.

* * * *

Sergeant McAllister was making the

rounds, dropping in on the clusters of men. “We’ll have a regimental meeting at 1:00 P.M. Fellows, do an equipment check, and the Colonel will address the unit.”

“Let me guess, Mac,” said Matty, “Pelham’s gonna tell us the story of Pickett’s Charge for the hundredth time?”

“It must be a great responsibility being the regimental malcontent,” was McAllister’s sarcastic reply. “Let’s just be good boys and humor the Colonel, okay, Matty?”

“Sure, Mac.”

“There’s a good lad.” He winked and moved on to the next group.

“He’s not a bad guy, Matty,” said

Mike.

“I’m just having fun with the good sergeant,” Matty replied. “I’m quite content being a lowly infantryman, thank you.”

Mike used his morning free time to stroll over to the command post building where he found Rudy Herzog and some EMTs huddled around a coffee maker. Banks of walkie-talkies were being recharged on long tables, and the day’s timetable, with the names of those assigned to what areas, was posted on a whiteboard in the center of the room.

“Hey, Coach,” said Rudy, waving Mike over.

“Hi, Rudy,” said Mike, shaking his

hand. “How’s everything going at the Nerve Center?”

“I’ll tell ya, Coach,” said Herzog, “It’s been a relatively quiet weekend.” He quickly leaned over and knocked on a nearby wooden table. “A few turned ankles and one broken wrist from the obligatory fall off a horse. The EMT’s have been hopping with heat exhaustion cases, however. Military and civilian. We should have a shuttle bus to the hospital just for that.”

“Well,” said Mike, “No matter how much you tell people to hydrate, it can still sneak up on you.”

“Yeah. Now I can appreciate how you coaches gave us regular water breaks during summer practice. None of

that ‘water makes you weak’ baloney.”

“Well,” explained Mike, “I had enough sadistic coaches in the ‘70s to know better. So, you guys ready for the grand finale today?”

“I think so. The Chief and I will be on hand to observe. I think I heard your boss will be showing up, too, though the park rangers have nothing to do with these events.”

“Yeah, but Bruce can’t stay away from this stuff. Deep down we’re all history junkies.”

Rudy laughed. “Is the missus attending?”

“Well, you know she’s not thrilled about all this,” said Mike, sweeping his

hand across the room. “Thinks it’s too big a production. Maybe she’s right. But I’ll bet that when the cannons open up this afternoon she’ll be in the stands with LouAnne, like always.”

“Well, have a good battle, Coach,” said Rudy as his radio began crackling.

“You too,” said Mike, backing away with a wave so Herzog could attend to business. As he left the building Mike could hear Rudy call out, “We’ve got a guy in the Confederate camp, 16th Mississippi Volunteers, who just dumped scalding coffee all over his leg!”

“We’re on it!” said two fuzzy-cheeked EMTs as they hustled out a side

door.

* * * *

T.J. had waited until Mike was far in the distance to attend to his battle preparation. With Bortnicker standing guard at the front of the tent, he got on his knees and gently lifted Mike's towel-wrapped .44 Colt from his knapsack. Carefully he loaded the weapon, drawing upon his memory of those times at the shooting range. He had tremendous misgivings about what he was doing, and was sure his uncle would kill him when he found out, but in his mind he had no choice.

*Enough of taking the easy way out.
Gotta roll the dice on this one. I just*

hope this old ammo doesn't make the gun blow up in my hand.

“You done in there?” said Bortnicker nervously. “I think I see your uncle coming. Hurry up!”

His fingers shaking, T.J. hurriedly re-wrapped the pistol, cursing himself for only chambering one round. He heard Bortnicker say, a bit loudly, “He’s right inside, Mr. Darcy,” and covered the leather knapsack just as Mike stuck his head in the tent.

“I want to check out a couple of the exhibit tents. Why don’t you guys keep me company?”

“Sure thing,” said T.J., realizing he couldn’t say no.

The three soldiers made the rounds

of the village, checking out a Civil War worship service and a “medical demonstration” that left many of the spectators cringing. After munching on some peanuts and other Civil War snacks, it was time to get back to camp to dress for the regimental meeting and inspection. T.J. hoped he’d have time to load another couple bullets, but there was too much activity now. He had a sinking feeling that he was doomed to fail.

By the time the 72nd Pennsylvania dressed their lines for inspection, the merciless sun was beating down hard and the men were already sweating. Sergeant McAllister did a thorough

firearms check, which seemed to go on forever, and then he nodded to Colonel Pelham, who stepped forward, visibly excited, to deliver his Final Day speech.

“Men,” he began, “just the phrase ‘Pickett’s Charge’ brings forth a multitude of vivid images. This was a battle that displayed the most terrible aspects of war: artillery barrages, brutal hand-to-hand fighting, and waves of Confederate soldiers being chopped to pieces by a hail of canister and musket fire into which they so bravely marched.

“After an artillery attack to soften the Union line, the proud forces of the Army of Northern Virginia, in lines a mile long, stepped off to attack the Federal lines a mile away. These men of the

South were crossing open fields with nothing to shield them from what promised to be nothing short of total annihilation.

“But, if they could just cause one breach in the Union line of defense, they could punch through and perhaps link up with Stuart’s cavalry, who, unbeknownst to them, were being stalemated by a mounted force led by George Armstrong Custer and his Michigan Wolverines.

“The task of carrying out the assault fell primarily upon two brigade commanders, General James Pettigrew and General George Pickett. Because of his somewhat flamboyant stature in the Army of Northern Virginia, Pickett

ended up having his name lent to this valiant effort.

“As we all know, though the Confederates did actually reach, and, in spots, penetrate the wall, they were beaten back, incurring horrific casualties. Entire units were virtually wiped out.

“It is our task today to portray for the immense crowds they are expecting the desperate fighting that occurred on that day. Our unit will be situated practically dead center of the line.”

Here Pelham paused to let his words resonate as his men, including T.J. and Bortnicker, lifted their hats aloft and cheered. This was the premier spot to occupy during the reenactment, and the

72nd had merited such favorable positioning based on their past performances.

“We will enter the field behind the 32nd New Jersey, and the 44th New York will follow us. These are good, solid units, so I am confident we will acquit ourselves admirably.

“Now remember, people have to go down in this battle. I will expect at least half of whoever didn’t fall yesterday to do so today. Again, make sure your cap boxes are full and your canteens as well. The Southern artillery barrage begins in an hour, which will be followed by the Union response. Therefore, we will reform in thirty minutes to await the signal

to take the field. Any questions?"

Nobody spoke up, though the air crackled with tension.

"All right then. Let's give them a good show today, boys!"

With that, the 72nd let out another cheer. McAllister dismissed them, and everyone returned to the campsite to use the bathroom or fill their canteens.

With Bortnicker again guarding the entrance to the tent, T.J. hurriedly unbuttoned his blue woolen tunic, slipped the revolver from his knapsack, and secured it as best he could in the waistband of his blue trousers, which he'd cinched with a leather belt. Since his drum would hang off his left hip, he

had no choice but to place the gun on his right side.

He emerged from the tent and looked Bortnicker in the eye. "It's done," he said quietly.

Bortnicker nodded and then smiled. "It's like *The Dan* says, Big Mon. Even with a gun, you are who you are, just the same."

Suddenly, bugles blew. They slung on their shoulder straps and drums and hustled out to the head of the Union column where the other boys waited.

"This is gonna be wicked cool!" said a boy from Massachusetts.

"Just keep it under control," cautioned the veteran Pat Garvey. "Listen for your unit commander's

orders.”

Regimental flags, along with the Stars and Stripes, were unfurled. Mounted officers scurried about, getting everyone in line. As far away as they were, the slight hot breeze carried the opening monologue of the PA announcer.

“Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the 147th Anniversary Reenactment of Pickett’s Charge.” The raucous response of thousands of spectators just amped up the soldiers even more.

Suddenly a somewhat rotund, gray-bearded general appeared at the front of the column, looked through his field glasses for what was obviously a signal,

and then turned back to the musicians who fronted the extremely long line. “Fifers, I think we’ll go with ‘The Battle Cry of Freedom’ today.” He lifted his saber, which glinted in the afternoon sun, then let it drop. “Forward...march!”

And so, off to the final battle they went, stepping proudly, sergeants to the sides of the column calling off the cadence, mounted officers cantering in the wings. At the sound of the music the din of the crowd grew louder and louder, until the head of the column finally entered the field of battle, and then it was sheer bedlam.

One by one the units marched to their positions across the expansive Union lines. The boys broke off to join the

72nd's regimental color bearers. Colonel Pelham and Sergeant McAllister barked orders, and everybody was hyped. There wasn't a cloud in the sky.

Did any of those soldiers notice the clouds that day? T.J. wondered. Would you try to drink in every detail of what might be your last moments on earth?

Pelham's harsh voice broke his reverie. "Off you go, lads!" he yelled. "Take your places and let's hear those drums!"

They took their position behind a knee-high wall fashioned from loose field stones. T.J. and Bortnicker found themselves to the extreme left of the regiment, near the flags; Mike was

farther down the line to the right, almost obscured by the twenty-five or so troops in between. T.J. looked over his shoulder to see artillery placements some fifty yards behind their lines, and still behind that, grandstands chock full of spectators sipping cool drinks and fanning themselves furiously. To the sides of the stands thousands of others sat in lawn chairs or stood three or four deep, and these sections stretched for fifty yards apiece. The enormity of it all made him a bit queasy.

As T.J. beat a steady tattoo he peered through the summer haze across the expansive fields and was awed by the sight of hundreds of men clad in gray and butternut brown, in long parade lines,

poised to step off one wave at a time. He kept drumming, his heart hammering as the anticipation built.

“This is awesome!” cried Bortnicker, who despite his excitement managed to keep in sync with T.J. “I can really feel what those guys were dealing with. Wondering if it was their last minute on earth... T.J., my legs are wobbling!”

“Stay cool, man,” cautioned T.J., barely in control of his own emotions.

“Jeez, guys, you’re not gonna wet your pants, are you?” a high-pitched voice cried from behind them. They both turned to find a soldier not much older than themselves, his hat tugged low over

his eyes, which were obscured by old-fashioned granny glasses. He held a fife, but T.J. wondered why they hadn't heard it on the march over. Then he looked more closely into the dirt-smeared face, which was trying to mask a mischievous grin.

“Cuz, is that *you*?” he said incredulously.

“Ssshhh!” she nodded quickly. “You didn’t think I’d let you have all the fun, did you?”

“You’re nuts!” said Bortnicker. “Your dad’s gonna kill you when he finds out you’re here!”

“I’ll handle my dad. Now, get back to your job and don’t give me away, you morons!”

“Listen,” said T.J., “I really think you’d better—”

Whatever he said was immediately lost as the Confederate artillery, which was spread across a distant ridge behind their infantry lines, opened up, the cannons firing down the line at two second intervals. It was like rolling thunder, and the ground started shaking. Almost immediately the soft breeze, which was blowing toward the Union lines, began carrying the thick haze of smoke toward them. The spectators started applauding wildly, happy to finally see the action commence.

“Stand your ground, men,” bellowed Colonel Pelham dramatically, so that the

crowd might hear him. “They are just trying to soften us up. The attack will come soon! Be brave!”

Again and again the cannons roared in syncopation. Soon there was so much smoke that the Rebel army was obscured. And then the cacophony stopped, followed by a deep, rousing cheer that emanated from the Confederate masses and rolled across the fields. The Rebel yell.

“They’re stepping off!” announced Pelham, peering through a telescope. “Remember to listen for my signal to commence firing. Stay disciplined!”

T.J. and Bortnicker kept drumming, their tempo increasing as the first waves of enemy troops began their long march

across the fields toward them. Their ears had barely stopped ringing when the Union batteries responded, causing their bodies to shudder from the concussion.

LouAnne crouched behind the madly drumming boys, searching the fields for Hilliard. There were a few mounted Confederate officers, but they stayed closer to the rear so as to help the lines remain formed until they stepped off. But with every passing second the clouds of cannon smoke permeated the field, making it hard to see anything, much less pick out a specific soldier on horseback.

“Steady men, steady...” said Pelham, his voice unwavering. “They’re almost within range... Prepare to fire... FIRE!”

With that, the entire Union line, including the 72nd Pennsylvania, unleashed their first volley, the air ripping with sound. The boys couldn't help but flinch from the concussion, and it was now becoming impossible to maintain their drumbeat.

“My eyes are killing me!” cried Bortnicker.

The first wave of Confederates was closing, one-hundred yards...seventy-five yards. With each cannon blast and rifle volley men fell, but the line simply closed up and they kept coming, just like in 1863. T.J. marveled at the courage that enabled those waves of Southern farm boys to march into the jaws of

death as their comrades were blown apart around them. Though this was only a reenactment and there was no Emmitsburg Road or picket fence to navigate, he could just imagine the panic and fear of the soldiers huddled by the fence that Hilliard had disgustedly described.

I would have been right there with them, he thought. *No way would I be brave enough to keep going forward.*

The Union troops, Mike Darcy included, fired round after round. The volleys became more disjointed as the Confederates came closer, the action more confused. Now only a handful of attackers from the first wave remained, and were threatening to breach the wall

of defense.

“Keep pouring lead into them, boys!” yelled Pelham, waving his hat. Here and there a Federal soldier crumpled to the ground, and when one burly trooper fell forward across the wall, the youths were fully exposed to Mike Darcy’s field of vision. His mouth literally fell open when he saw his daughter poised between the drummers. Mike started gesturing wildly for her to fall back, but LouAnne stared straight ahead, feigning that she hadn’t seen him. All the while reloading and firing, Mike started creeping sideways along the wall in the melee, trying to reach them.

Now the few Confederates who had

been chosen to get the farthest started to clamber over the wall, and one grabbed Mike around the shoulders, trying to “wrestle” him to the ground. “Lemme go!” he grunted, which made his attacker struggle all the harder, trying to put on a good show.

Then LouAnne screamed. “I see him!” She pointed between the boys’ shoulders.

There, riding hard parallel to the last wave of Confederate troops, Major Crosby Hilliard spurred his beloved Brutus, clearly the most formidable animal on the field, to speeds that had his “comrades” diving out of the way.

But LouAnne was not the only spectator who sensed something was

happening.

* * * *

Carlton Elway, who had staked out a choice spot dead center on the bleachers, spied the pointing trooper—*could that be a girl?*—with the drummer boys gesturing wildly, and followed her line of vision to a striking cavalier who was churning toward the Union center at a pace far too fast for reenactment standards. The moment had arrived! For the first time, he was viewing a genuine ghost! In broad daylight! He zoomed his hi-def camcorder on the rider, who was clearly not a reenactor but a one-hundred percent authentic Confederate

cavalryman, galloping right out of 1863 and toward *him*, dead ahead.

“I got you now!” he screamed with glee, spectators nearby shrinking back in fear of the man with the cameras who seemed to have lost his mind.

* * * *

At the same time Chief Al Warren, who was leaning against his cruiser with Rudy Herzog and taking in the whole scene through field glasses from roughly two-hundred yards away, noted some strange movements in the drummer boys, whom he'd been keying on from the get-go. Something was going wrong out there. “Rudy, come on!” he yelled, grabbing Herzog's uniform sleeve.

“Chief!” gasped the patrolman, jogging along behind his boss. “We can’t just run into the middle of a battle!”

“Oh yes we can! Stay close!” But Warren knew he was already too late. They’d never be able to close the gap to the front lines in time.

“This is it!” cried Bortnicker. “He’s coming straight for us!” Indeed, Hilliard had hung a sharp left and now was on course for the center section of the Union line occupied by the 72nd Pennsylvania. Wave after wave of remaining Rebels parted as he blew through their lines. When Hilliard was less than fifty yards from the wall he drew his revolver, Brutus’ reins tightly clenched in his

other hand.

“No!” screamed LouAnne, and before T.J. could react she was by him, scrambling over the wall in Hilliard’s direction. Just as quickly, Bortnicker threw off his drum and bolted after her, displaying incredible speed and athleticism that he’d pulled from some unknown source.

Momentarily frozen, T.J. now sprang into action, following the process he’d gone over so many times in his mind the previous days. Shucking his drum kit, he reached inside his blue tunic for Uncle Mike’s .44 Colt, praying that he’d loaded it correctly in the tent that morning, praying that he’d have the nerve to fire it, praying that his aim

would not fail him. But this wasn't a calm summer day at the range with his uncle. He was in the eye of a maelstrom, men "fighting" hand-to-hand all around him, sweat and smoke stinging his eyes and his head pounding from the incessant gunfire. He wished he had time to really aim but there *was* no time. His foolish cousin and best friend were about to be run down by a ghost on a maniacal mission to validate his heroism. They were almost twenty yards away from the wall when Bortnicker finally caught LouAnne from behind, bringing her down with a waist-high tackle. As they fell forward T.J. raised the revolver, his hand refusing to stop shaking. Hilliard

seemed to look him dead in the eye, a sneer curling his lips as he recognized the boy he'd thought was the son of Stonewall Jackson, garbed in Yankee blue. He leveled his weapon and—

Boom!

A rifle cracked next to T.J.'s right earlobe, deafening him and causing his own weapon to discharge straight into the air. The rifle bullet struck Hilliard high in the chest, and reflexively he threw his arms skyward, a red flower blossoming amid the brass buttons of his uniform front. At that moment he literally exploded, the tremendous flash of fire causing everyone in the immediate area to crumple to the ground. T.J., paralyzed with fear, turned to see his uncle,

breathing hard, lower the Sharps rifle from his shoulder. Then he was off, vaulting the wall like a linebacker hurdling a pulling guard, sprinting toward the last place he'd seen his daughter before the explosion.

“I’m right behind you, Uncle Mike!” the boy yelled, dropping the revolver and following in his wake as the Confederate attack realized its high water mark.

By the time they reached the fallen teens LouAnne had turned Bortnicker, who had shielded her with his own body as Hilliard attempted to trample them, over onto his back. She knelt at this side, sobbing. “He’s dead! He’s dead! Help

me somebody!” Her army cap had flown off amid the chaos and her blond locks swirled around her shoulders. But the reenactors from both sides who surrounded her barely noticed. The show was nearing its conclusion, and as the Confederates began falling back, there were “wounded” crying out all around.

Mike Darcy grabbed his daughter’s uniform jacket and pulled her away as T.J. slid in alongside his fallen friend, whose glasses were broken and his sooty face streaked with blood. “Bortnicker! Bortnicker!” he screamed above the tumult, shaking his shoulders. There was no reaction.

He started to cry. It was all his fault, leading his cousin and his best friend on

an impossible quest to deal with forces he had no comprehension of. By this time LouAnne had pulled free of her father and was behind T.J., hugging him, crying into his shoulder as Mike stood helplessly at their side.

“It’s all my fault,” whispered T.J. “I’m so, so sorry, Sam.” His shoulders heaved spasmodically.

Bortnicker’s right eye fluttered. Then his left. And then a crooked grin creased his dirty lips. “So, let me get this straight,” he said tiredly. “I’ve gotta *die* to get you to call me by my first name?”

“You’re alive!” wailed LouAnne, throwing herself upon the fallen drummer boy and clutching him tightly.

“This isn’t half bad,” he croaked. “I should get killed more often!”

At that moment Al Warren, wheezing mightily, and Rudy Herzog pulled up alongside Mike and the kids. “Coach,” said Rudy, a look of consternation on his face from the realization that he and the Chief were sticking out like sore thumbs in the last moments of the battle, “is, uh, everything alright here?”

Mike looked down at the three laughing teens engaged in a celebratory dog pile. “Couldn’t be better, Rudy. So, what brings you and the Chief here?”

Warren wasn’t amused. “Mr. Darcy, would you and the kids please come with us,” he managed, bent over with his

hands on his knees.

“Sure, Chief. C’mon guys, show’s over,” he said with resignation while the immense crowd thundered its applause for the conclusion of the 147th Anniversary Reenactment of Pickett’s Charge.

The group wound their way through straggling Union and Rebel soldiers who were now shaking hands, exchanging pleasantries, posing for photos or gathering equipment discarded during the throes of battle. Spectators streamed toward the parking fields, the realization suddenly upon them that they were back in 2010. Horses and cannon were led to trailers, and concessionaries on nearby

fields did a brisk business in cold drinks and ice cream.

Warren was the first to speak when they reached the cruiser, which was now surrounded by a host of interested parties, including Bruce Morrison, Colonel Pelham, Matty and his brothers, and Aunt Terri. She'd been unable to stay away and had viewed the entire drama from a corner of the grandstand. "Just tell me, straight out. What the hell was going on out there?" he barked.

"As far as what?" said Bortnicker innocently.

"You can just zip it, young man," said the Chief, pointing his finger at the teen. He turned to Mike. "Mr. Darcy, could you please explain what these

three adolescents were doing out there in the middle of a dangerous situation?”

“Well,” said Mike cautiously, “the boys were enlisted as drummers. As for my daughter,” he said with a hint of anger, “I have no idea.”

“This is most uncommon,” broke in Colonel Pelham. “It in no way reflects the practices of the 72nd Pennsylvania Regiment!”

“Oh, blow it out your keester, Jack,” said Matty. “The kids just got carried away. It’s easy to get caught up in the excitement of a battle.”

“I got it on tape! I got it all on tape!” crowed Carlton Elway, juggling a clattering collection of video

accessories as he came running up breathlessly.

“Got what?” said Bruce Morrison.

“The horseman! The Gettysburg ghost rider! I filmed him during the battle! He was attacking the Union line and Darcy shot him!”

“*What* Gettysburg ghost rider?” said Pelham and the other soldiers in unison.

“Let’s take a look, Carlton,” said Warren patiently. They all crowded around the ghost hunter as he rewound the videotape.

“And I’m not the only one,” Elway said confidently. “There had to be *hundreds* of people who captured him on video before Darcy here blew him away.”

“Carlton Elway,” threatened Aunt Terri, “how *dare* you accuse my husband of doing anything else than just playing his part as a reenactor?”

“Yeah? Then why was your *nephew* over here, who’s supposed to be a drummer boy, waving a Colt .44 at the same ghost?”

The assemblage immediately turned en masse to T.J., who offered an embarrassed, “Oops.”

“Okay!” said Elway triumphantly. “Here it is! Just watch *this!*”

They leaned in to view the 4x6 inch screen, Rudy Herzog holding his Smokey hat over the camcorder to cut the sun glare.

If nothing else, Carlton Elway was a skilled video photographer. He quickly had focused the lens and narrowed the scope of his subject to follow the magnificent cavalryman as he'd galloped along, and then through, the lines of his fellow Rebels in a headlong dash toward the Union center. But as much as they squinted hard and concentrated, none could see Major Crosby Hilliard execute his doomed charge. While it was clear that *something* had made the Confederates scatter in every direction, and that hundreds of spectators and reenactors would return from Gettysburg that weekend to tell of the dashing cavalier who had "stolen the show,"

Elway's video footage, and the footage or photographs of every shutterbug present that day, would fail to reveal a trace of the ghost rider. There was, of course, that confounding flash of light at the end. But, hey, wasn't this a battle reenactment? Who was to say some overzealous participant hadn't sneaked in an explosive of some sort? It could be *anything*. The group did, however, get a few laughs from Elway's gleeful cry of "I got you now!" that had so frightened his companions in the grandstand.

"Yeah, that was *wonderful*, Carlton," said Warren, mopping his brow in the late afternoon heat. Elway sank back against the police cruiser, utterly defeated.

“Listen, Chief,” said Mike, “if you don’t need us anymore, I’d like to get the kids home. It’s been a long day.”

“Yeah, sure, Mr. Darcy,” Warren replied with a wave. “Thanks for your cooperation.”

“No problem. See you around, Rudy,” he said, shooting a wink to his former player, who tried mightily to suppress a smile. “Bruce, see you Monday?”

“Sure, Mike,” said Morrison with a pained smile. “Nice to see you, Mrs. Darcy,” he added politely.

“Likewise, Bruce,” said Terri. “Now, can we all go home and get you out of those disgusting uniforms?”

As they walked toward the campground Matty eased over to his friend. “Hey, Ranger Mike,” he whispered, “what was the deal with the guns? I picked them up when Warren led you off the battlefield. Both your Sharps and the boy’s pistol had fired live rounds. What gives?”

“Matty,” Mike said, “it’s, uh, hard to explain.”

“Hard, my butt,” said Matty. “I was playing dead at the time so I was just lying there against the wall, enjoying the action. I had the best seat in the house, Mikey. I saw the guy you shot plain as day, and the coal black stallion he was riding. Then, poof! Gone!”

“Gee, Matty,” said Mike earnestly, “I guess you’ve got me. Maybe you should just report me to Colonel Pelham.”

Matty threw back his head and laughed.

* * * *

The ride home in Mike’s truck was eerily subdued. Aunt Terri drove and he sat up front with her, staring out at the slowly moving traffic. They were all soaked in their heavy woolen uniforms and the air conditioner hardly made a dent in their discomfort. But still no one spoke. All were lost in their thoughts of what had occurred that sultry afternoon.

When they pulled into the driveway it was Aunt Terri who broke the silence.

“Now you all listen to me,” she began seriously. “I want everyone to get out of those horrible clothes, take a shower, and we’ll meet on the front porch. I’ll make some lemonade and sandwiches and we’ll sit and sort the whole thing out. Now get going!”

LouAnne went in first to the hallway bathroom while Mike used the master bathroom’s shower. This left T.J. and Bortnicker, band aids covering the cuts above his eyes, exhausted yet still tingling from their exploits.

“I think it’s fair to say your uncle’s ticked off,” said Bortnicker, throwing his filthy army jacket to the floor.

“No doubt,” agreed T.J. “But we had to do what we did. It was the only way.

I'll tell you what, though. What you did, running out there after LouAnne, that took a lot of guts."

"Thanks. I still can't believe I caught her. Must've had a massive surge of adrenaline."

"That, and the fact that you care about her."

"We both do, T.J." he said with an air of resignation. "It is what it is."

By the time the family reconvened on the porch a breeze had kicked up, and with the ice cold lemonade and turkey sandwiches it was quite pleasant. Fireworks from nearby backyards went off here and there, reminding everyone that it was the Fourth of July.

When she was sure everyone was served, Terri sat next to her husband on the bench swing and gave him a nudge.

“Okay, guys,” he said quietly. “As you can guess, I’m really upset about today. You don’t know how lucky we are that nobody got killed or thrown in jail. So I’ll start with you, T.J. What made you take my gun and try to play hero?”

“Well, Uncle Mike,” said T.J., relieved that his uncle wasn’t screaming at him, “the other night on the battlefield we brought up the reenactment to Hilliard, which made him go ballistic. When Bortnicker mentioned Pickett’s Charge was going to take place, I saw

this strange look in his eyes, and I could tell he was gonna try his best to be there for it so he could...I don't know...make up for his failure, clear his name, whatever. And I felt it was my responsibility to stop him, because I started this whole thing by going for a run on the Battlefield that first night.

“I figured, if the guy still thinks it's 1863 then the only way to send him back would be to kill him with an old bullet fired by an old weapon. So I borrowed your revolver and hid it in my knapsack. What I hadn't figured was that I'd only get one shot, 'cause I got interrupted in our tent before we marched to the battlefield. I know it was stupid, and that it could've gone off inside my jacket or I

could've hit somebody accidentally out there, but I was desperate to do this. If I just left Gettysburg without trying to end this whole mess, I would've felt like I chickened out. As it turns out, it wasn't even me who shot him, so I don't know if I accomplished anything at all."

"Well, I think you were incredibly brave, T.J.," said LouAnne. "If you—"

"Excuse me, dear," said Mike to his daughter. "Let me handle this. Yes, T.J., what you did was foolhardy at best. And if I hadn't accidentally come across the empty pistol case while I was getting my rifle ready, I never would've known what you were up to. But once that gun went missing I more or less figured it

out. My decision to bring some old bullets was just a lucky guess. Fortunately, I have a small stash of period ammo that I've accumulated over the years. So, I decided to keep an eye on you two out there and help out if it was necessary, which obviously is what happened.

“While I'm furious at you for not letting me in on all this, I realize I would have forbid you from setting foot on that battlefield with a loaded gun. And I have to give you credit, you stared down that guy and probably would've shot him if I didn't do it first. I don't know if you understand anything about football, but you could play on *my* defense anytime.”

T.J. felt his eyes brimming as his

uncle went on.

“I’ll tell you one thing, though. That’s the last time I’ll ever fire a gun, or do any reenacting, for that matter. For that one instant, I knew what it was *truly* like to be in a battle, and I don’t care for it at all. I think it’s time I took up golf.”

Mike turned to his daughter. “And as for *you*, young lady, I don’t know where you get off thinking you can just do whatever you want, whenever you want. I don’t even want to know where you got your hands on that uniform. You put everyone at risk this afternoon, and if it wasn’t for Bortnicker making like Lawrence Taylor, you would’ve gotten trampled out there.”

Bortnicker, who had a mouthful of potato salad, waved off the compliment. “It was nothing, really, Mr. D,” he said with mock modesty. “All in a day’s work.”

Even Mike couldn’t help but smile, and the tension lifted.

“All I know,” said LouAnne, holding back tears, “is that you are the bravest two guys I’ve ever met. I don’t know what else to say.”

“Well, *that’s* a first,” said Aunt Terri.

“Uncle Mike,” said T.J., “do you think it’s really over?”

“Time will tell,” said Darcy, “but my guess is that we’ve seen the last of

Major Crosby Hilliard. Hopefully now he'll rest in peace."

At that moment the phone rang inside. "I'll get it and come back with dessert," said Terri. "Apple pie with ice cream sound okay?"

"You know it!" said LouAnne brightly, dabbing at her eyes.

But seconds later, Aunt Terri reappeared, without the dessert. "This day just doesn't end, it seems. T.J., your dad's on the phone from Paris. He doesn't sound too good."

T.J. ran inside and scooped up the receiver. "Dad? What's going on?" he asked.

"Well, son, looks like I'll be flying home tonight. The local office will be

taking over the project from here, and it'll be in capable hands."

"What about Wendy? Is she okay?"

"Ah, Wendy. Well, T.J., it seems that she's taken a fancy to a young Frenchman, a waiter in our hotel, in fact. She's going to be staying on, I'm afraid." He sounded crushed.

"Oh," said T.J. "But, hey, Dad, that means we'll just have more time to spend together. We're going fishing, right?"

"Uh-huh."

"And lots of barbequing."

"Sounds good to me. And will Bortnicker be joining us?"

"Of course!" T.J. smiled inwardly.

“And Dad, when you get back, we have a seriously amazing story to tell you on the ride home.”

“I can’t wait. But, looking back, I feel a little foolish, T.J. I hope you’re not mad at me for dumping you at Uncle Mike’s for so long and running off with Wendy.”

“Mad? Are you kidding? This was the best trip ever!”

* * * *

“I’m glad you’re so excited about your dad coming home, T.J.,” said Aunt Terri as she served the boys a second helping of pie. “Too bad the thing with his girlfriend didn’t work out.”

“There will be others,” said Mike

with confidence. “The Jackson men are regular chick magnets. Right, T.J.?”

“Daddy, you’re such a butt,” said LouAnne, but they all noticed she was blushing.

“Hey, Cuz,” said T.J., “we running tomorrow morning? Last chance.”

“Are you sure you two are up to it, after all you went through today?” asked Terri.

“No problem, Mom,” assured LouAnne. “As long as Bortnicker and you cook one last breakfast feast together.”

“Consider it done,” said Bortnicker, heaping a spoonful of vanilla ice cream onto his pie. “And I assure you, there will be no scrapple served.”

Chapter Thirty-Three

That last morning it was hot and dripping with humidity, the same as it had seemingly been for T.J.'s entire stay.

The two cousins stretched in the shade of an oak tree and then set off down Seminary Ridge toward Reynolds Woods and the Battlefield Park entrance.

"Think your dad's really gonna give up reenacting?" said T.J., gliding easily over the pavement.

"Well, when he says he's gonna do something, he rarely changes his mind. I guess he'll just stick to being a really good park ranger." They went a ways

farther and she added, “And I don’t know how much longer I want to do the Charney Inn thing. I mean, it’s good money, and I’m good at it, but sometimes I feel this whole town is just cashing in on other people’s tragedy. I don’t know if I’ll ever get over this whole thing with Major Hilliard. He was only one minor story in a war where thousands upon thousands died. I know they all felt they were fighting for a just cause, but it’s all so senseless and sad.”

They wound through the battlefield, silent cannon, monuments and statues in their wake, and T.J. wondered if he’d be able to look at social studies class—or life in general—the same way again. One thing was for sure, he’d pay

attention from now on. To everything.

As the cousins reached the Darcy front yard and slowed to a walk LouAnne said, "I wonder how many miles we've put in since you've been here?"

"Too many to count," said T.J., wiping his brow with his tee shirt.

"You've gotten a lot better, Cuz," she said with a smile. "Remember how you were sucking wind that first day?"

"Don't remind me. It was embarrassing."

"Maybe so, but I think I won't be the only one making All-County in the near future."

"Uh, Cuz, there's something I've

been meaning to ask you,” said T.J. uncertainly.

“What is it?”

“Well, you’ve asked me a lot about my life and my family and such, but you’ve never mentioned the fact you’re adopted. Do you ever wonder—”

“T.J.,” she cut in, “I was put up for adoption when I was like one day old. I don’t know what the circumstances were, and I don’t care. My parents weren’t able to have kids so they adopted me, and I couldn’t have asked for a better life than I’ve got. Mom is like my best friend. She’s really soft-spoken, but she’s a strong person inside, and a great listener. And as you can see, I’m pretty much the center of Dad’s

universe. They've brought me up with a pretty good set of values, I think. So, I consider myself one hundred percent Darcy." She paused and shot him a wink. "Well, ninety-five percent anyway."

Suddenly T.J. stopped short. "Omigod," he said. "There's something we gotta do."

"Before we even eat breakfast?"

"Before we even shower. Something we should've done last night. Come on!" He grabbed her hand and they ran inside, scooping up LouAnne's cell phone from the kitchen counter on the way.

* * * *

"Dude, no way!" said Mike Weinstein from Michigan, where *Gonzo*

Ghost Chasers was filming at an abandoned insane asylum. “You actually saw the Confederate cavalryman?”

“And talked to him!” said LouAnne proudly.

“So I wasn’t delusional after all.”

“Not in the least,” said T.J.

“Wow. Far out. Well, that just means I’ve got to keep on chasing ghosts for a living till I actually get one on tape. Hey, you think this guy’ll ever come back to Gettysburg? The cavalry dude, I mean?”

“Nah,” said T.J. “We’re pretty sure he’s moved on.” He smiled and LouAnne gave him a wink.

“Well, cool,” said Weinstein. “Listen you guys, if you ever want to do a guest spot with my team, you know,

like a *Junior Gonzo* thing, just let me know. We'd love to have you aboard."

"Thanks," said LouAnne, "but I think we'll leave the ghost chasing to the experts."

* * * *

Aunt Terri and Bortnicker outdid themselves on this day, with Belgian waffles smothered in whipped cream and fresh strawberries.

"Bortnicker, when are we ever gonna eat like this again?" said T.J., pouring himself a huge glass of milk.

"Don't know, Big Mon," replied Bortnicker, forking waffles onto his plate. "We must've gained ten pounds apiece." Everyone cracked up,

especially Mike, who for once had decided not to be the first person at work.

Tom Jackson, Sr. arrived as Aunt Terri was cleaning the breakfast table. After a bear hug from Mike and a kiss from Terri, he did a double take when presented with their daughter.

“LouAnne?” he asked. *“Is that you?”*

“Of course, Uncle Tom, who’d you think I was?” she answered, giving him a hug.

Over her shoulder Tom looked at the boys, who both gave “cat-that-ate-the-canary” smiles.

“Hope these two characters here haven’t been too much trouble, Terri,” he said as she handed him a cup of

steaming coffee.

“Oh, stop it,” she said. “It was a pleasure. I’ll just miss my assistant chef,” she added, mussing Bortnicker’s permanently mussed hair.

“Tom,” said Mike Darcy, “I think having the boys with us was the highlight of the summer.” He threw a muscular arm around his nephew. “You’ve got quite a kid here. Same thing for Bortnicker. I hope they come back to visit.”

“You can count on it!” said Bortnicker. “And speaking of visits, Mr. Jackson,” he added slyly, “any chance of us hitting the Strasburg Train Museum on the way back to Connecticut?”

“I think we can arrange that,” said Tom as T.J. rolled his eyes.

* * * *

Finally the boys were packed and their bags were loaded into Mr. Jackson's SUV. They'd left their Civil War uniforms behind, except for their caps, as a donation to the 72nd Pennsylvania Infantry. As the adults chit-chatted about Paris and possible future visits, the three teens stood apart, all feeling awkward and empty.

As was her nature, LouAnne broke the silence.

“Bortnicker,” she said, poking his chest and looking him in the eye, “you'd better keep in touch with me. I want to

know about all the girls who are chasing you in Connecticut.” She pulled him close and whispered, “Thanks for saving me. I owe you one.” They parted, Bortnicker a dark red from embarrassment, and maybe something else.

Then LouAnne turned to T.J., her eyes wet with emotion. “Well, Cuz,” she said, her voice wavering, “this is it for now. Tell that Katie Vickers if she doesn’t treat you right, I’m coming after her.” And with that she kissed two of her fingers and pressed them to his lips.

T.J., overcome, swallowed hard. “See you at Christmas?” he managed.

“You never know,” she said with one last maddening toss of her hair. Then,

without missing a beat she put her arms through theirs and led them to the SUV, where they hugged Mike and Terri goodbye and then climbed in.

They slowly drove through the still-crowded town on the way to the Interstate, T.J. and Bortnicker pointing out places of interest to the elder Jackson. “Man, you two could be tour guides here,” said Tom. “I had no idea you’d like it this much.” They came to a red light and then, suddenly, Carlton Elway, who’d been crossing the street with the ever-present Tiffany, marched over to the car. T.J. hit the window button and it slid down.

“Answer just one question for me,”

he said. “Did it happen?”

“Oh, without a doubt,” said T.J. Then the light changed and both boys snapped Gettysburg’s most famous ghost hunter a military salute as they pulled away.

“So,” said Tom, eyeing the boys suspiciously in his rearview mirror, “I believe you have a story to tell me?”

“Allow me to begin...” said Bortnicker.

Author's Note

Gettysburg has been one of my favorite places since my first visit as a Cub Scout in the 1960s. I have returned many times and consider it a powerfully mystic venue. It's no wonder a story involving Gettysburg's history has always been percolating in the back of my mind. During my most recent visit in 2010, my college-aged daughter, Caroline, and I walked the route of Pickett's Charge and even paid a nighttime visit to the National Cemetery and other parts of the battlefield, just to appreciate the atmosphere that T.J. and

other characters experienced. If you ever get the chance, I strongly suggest you visit the Gettysburg Battlefield Park, as well as those others whose place in history is no less formidable: Antietam, Fredericksburg, Manassas, Shiloh and Vicksburg to name a few. It will only enhance your appreciation and enjoyment of this novel and of American History. And while you're there, don't be afraid to ask questions of our national park rangers, whom I have always found to be extremely knowledgeable and friendly. The dedication of the character, Mike Darcy, to his profession is surely not an exaggeration.

As for the events portrayed in the story, Major Crosby Hilliard is purely

fictional, but the unit in which he served, Hampton's Brigade, was much distinguished in various campaigns and battles throughout the war. Its movements in the novel before and during the battle of Gettysburg are completely accurate.

About the Author

Paul Ferrante is originally from the Bronx and grew up in the town of Pelham, New York. He received his undergraduate and Masters degrees in English from Iona College, where he was also a halfback on the Gaels' undefeated 1977 football team. Paul has been an award-winning secondary school English teacher and coach for over 30 years, as well as a columnist for *Sports Collector's Digest* since 1993 on the subject of baseball ballpark history. Many of his works can be found in the archives of the National Baseball Hall

of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. His writings have led to numerous radio and television appearances related to baseball history. Paul lives in Connecticut with his wife, Maria, and daughter, Caroline, a film screenwriter/director. *Last Ghost at Gettysburg: a T.J. Jackson Mystery* is his first novel.

Website:

www.paulferranteauthor.com

Also Available
From Melange Books

Happily Never After
by Missy Fleming

*There's no such thing as
happy endings.*

Savannah, Georgia is rumored to be the most haunted place in America. Quinn Roberts knows it is. She's felt the presence of spirits her entire life, investigating and photographing them with her best friend. Only none of those

encounters ever turned violent, until now. The menacing darkness feeding off her stepmother has promised she won't live to see her eighteenth birthday.

After a chance meeting Quinn reluctantly allows actor Jason Preston into her life, which has complications of its own. She's not used to letting people get close. Falling for him while fighting for her life, and her family's legacy, only complicates things more. Jason shows her exactly what she stands to lose, especially when she's being attacked by the mysterious entity. Each attack is more violent and terrifying than the last.

With Jason's help, she dives into the Roberts' family history, searching for a link between a woman who went

missing a hundred and fifty years ago and what's happening now. What they find is a brutal murder and that the ghost doesn't just want to hurt Quinn, it wants revenge.

It wants her life.

Also Available
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An Age of Mist
by Mathias G. B. Colwell

"An Age of Mist" is set in an alternate world where the sun never shines and the land is covered in mist and fog nearly all of the time. What begins as a classic tale of another world develops into something much deeper. As we follow the protagonist, the young Santori, it becomes apparent that he faces a far more menacing element to

this world than simply the absence of sunlight. It recounts Santori's coming of age as he struggles to protect his family, and the battle for their survival against an unimaginable evil. It is a story of myth and legend becoming nightmare and the indomitable spirit of mankind to live and fight another day.

Also Available
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Alfred C. Bogeyman
by M. Allman

Since his father's deployment, Adrian feels he has to be the man of the house. So when the boogieman scares his little brother, Sam, every night, he and his friends, Ralph and Sean, are determined to find the boogieman and give him a taste of his own medicine. With the help of Socks, Sean's dog, their search leads them to small cottage behind the park

where they encounter Alfred C. Bogeyman and the forces of fear, bravery and evil collide.

Also Available
From Melange Books

**The Well-Told Tale of Kaity
Monday
by Eddie Jones**

A biased, sometimes meandering account of a girl who wished to be something she wasn't, *The Well-Told Tale of Kaity Monday* is first and foremost a tale, one that is well-told.

Kaity Monday is the only girl in history to have experienced life as a tree. Before this, she lived underground

with parents who made it abundantly clear, through telling her, that they didn't love her. When it is suggested to Kaity that she go above ground and never return (by her father, Grey, and her mother, May, both of whom hate Kaity) she finds it offensive, exciting, and then tiring.

Coming into contact with a man named Mildy, who is undeniably and obviously evil, Kaity makes the immediate mistake of trusting and following him, only to find that the next days of her life would be spent in the body of what many passersby have described as an oak.

Also Available
From Melange Books

Beyond the Cell
by Sara Tribble

Sixteen-year-old Sonata Wilde is living in Hell.

Not literally Hell, more like a prison stashed away in the mountains known as The Cell. All mythical beings were banished to live here nine years ago, segregated from the humans. Being trapped in captivity is breaking her down and the temptation of escaping

grows stronger, regardless of what it might cost her.

No one has ever made it out of The Cell, not with the extreme voltage on the wires and constant guards on patrol. It's damn near impossible, minus one loophole. Sonata has a plan ready to set in motion, along with help standing by to make sure it all goes accordingly. The taste of freedom is within her grasp and she's ready to embrace it once again.