

# Whither Thou Goest

*Sisters Held Captive by America's Pioneer Serial Killers*

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This is a work of historical fiction. Although it is based on real people and events, liberties have been taken for literary effect.

WHITHER THOU GOEST

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Written by Robert G. Huffstutler.

*A special thanks to my lovely wife for what she has done. I am a better writer and a better man because of her.*

Doing chores—most folks consider it a rite of passage for every young boy and girl. Some children fight it. Others accept it as part of growing up. Johnny faced his rite of passage with glee. When told what he would do, Johnny jumped around the cabin chanting, “Feed the chickens. I’m gonna feed the chickens.”

His older sisters, Susan and Betsy, laughed at Johnny’s misplaced excitement about him doing his first chore. What began as jumping quickly turned into a quirky chicken dance that caught Pa off guard. Pa sprayed his drink across the table to avoid choking. Even Mama, expecting another baby, found it difficult to scold her husband for his mess, since she too, laughed at her son’s antics.

As bedtime neared, everyone heard Pa tell one of his tales. That time, they heard a story about pirates chasing after a pot of gold. A new twist to the story had a young boy capturing a chicken so he could feed the starving heroes. Afterwards, Mama tucked in her children and kissed them goodnight. As sleep overcame them, Johnny thought of that day as a good day. Oh, if only his next day lived up to its promise.



## Chapter One: The Battle at Robert's Folly

On a typical chicken farm, one would hear the familiar crowing from a rooster as the first rays of daylight rose above the horizon. Things happened differently at the Roberts' chicken farm.

The General, a muscular, statuesque, and regal-looking rooster with a persnickety disposition chose when everyone should rise and shine. The fowl's inner clock, not the light of day, led the rooster to break forth with his peculiar call. It began as a low, raspy "cock-a-doo". Then after a pause, the "dle-doo" screeched out as if someone had scraped their fingernails across a small slate board, the type children used in a classroom.

The bird's ungodly and incessant call could be heard almost any time during the day or night, but never, never at dawn. Nobody could make The General stop, nobody except for their dog Samson. His deep bark could make The General stop. The family dog and the rooster had faced each other before, and Samson always won.

John and Anne immediately regretted giving the children permission to name the rooster. The Roberts Family had an illustration of the newly formed country's first president above the fireplace. Betsy had noticed a distinct similarity between The General's beak and Washington's nose. John and Anne knew they had lost the debate at that point. Luckily, for both rooster and president, John and Anne nixed calling the bird by the name *Washington*.

*The General* satisfied everyone since the rooster strutted like one. Giving pet status to "that damn bird," as John often complained, confounded the parents. Anne once thought of serving him up for a Sunday dinner but quickly dropped the idea. How could she say to her children, "Eat up. We're having The General for dinner." Besides, with such a mean temper, she doubted The General would taste delicious. The bird had found his niche in the world.

The family never understood why the rooster acted strangely until a traveler stopped by for a bite of food and a place to rest. Upon spotting the yellow-necked rooster, the man enthused, "That there's an English Gamecock. He's a fightin' bird." The man, an avid gambler who made a living betting on cockfights, went on and on about what a fine specimen of a rooster they had.

The talk of entering The General in a cockfight or two appealed to John. It reminded him of an earlier life, a life he often missed. The traveler offered to buy the rooster, for a good price too. However, since the children considered The General as a pet, Anne would not hear of it.

Owning a farm, even a chicken farm, took hard, backbreaking work. John hated it. Anne, on the other hand, felt very comfortable living a rural life in the Swannanoa Valley. Their home wasn't far from the Black Mountain range in western North Carolina. Farming flowed in Anne's veins and their tiny farm made her happy.

John once talked of going back home to Wilmington now that the War for Independence had finished. He dropped the idea when Anne nearly broke down in tears. She loved their home and vowed to live there for the rest of her life.

When they first bought the land, the couple had some concerns about whether they had enough flatland to build all that needed building. A gully washer blew through almost as soon as they stopped the wagon. Like so many dreamers before them and many dreamers who would come afterward, John and Anne snuggled up and gazed out at their property from the back of the wagon. There, beneath the lightning, thunder, and rain, the two planned out the perfect homestead to complement their promising future. Oh sure, the land had hills, lots of them. However, amid the waves of water rolling down the hillsides, they found an island with enough space for everything they needed to build.

The work needed to create Anne's dream farm didn't bother John so much. The monotony did. Through the years not much changed in their lives—except when some crisis, always bad, drove them further into debt. Every morning of every day, of every month, of every year, John rose from his bed before dawn. It didn't matter how healthy or sick he felt, what weather conditions he faced, or what else needed his attention, he had to work. Time never stretched far enough to do what needed doing.

Early on, they thought of hiring someone to help get the farm up and running, even though they could scarcely afford it. However, in a land where one-seventh of its people lived as slaves, hiring help most likely meant hiring a slave- or one of slavery's second cousins- an indentured servant.

Anne, an indentured servant herself, ran away and married after completing only part of her multi-year obligation. The authorities would have returned her to her owner if she were ever caught. She never wanted a life where others controlled what she did, where she went, or how she behaved. How could she do that to another living soul? No, as a couple they decided to stay away from owning another person to do their work for them. The idea of hiring help never came up again.



MILKING THE COW STOOD atop the list of things John needed to do that day. He made his way to what one would generously call a barn. The Roberts family, always short of cash, did what they could when they built it. Other expenses were more pressing, but the cow and team of horses needed a dry spot during the winter. John had built it out of scraps of lumber, leftover nails, hinges, and whatnot. Truth be told, it looked more like an oversized lean-to than a barn.

On his way back, John shooed away the cat, Millie, before placing the bucket of milk on the porch for his wife to retrieve. The feral cat had shown up one day begging for milk and piqued John's interest. He squirted a stream of milk from the cow's teat into a depression in the ground. The cat devoured the milk in seconds. Ever since then, John shared a little milk with his new companion. She gave him someone to talk to while everybody else still slept.

To the chickens' disappointment, John chose to change his daily routine that morning. He grabbed an axe and began splitting wood.

According to a self-proclaimed local farming expert, John needed to cut up to forty cords a year to have enough wood for cooking and to heat up a fire in the winter. Thanks to a large stand of evergreens and deciduous trees, his woodpile, halfway down the small incline on the east side of the cabin, never lacked for wood. Still, the cumbersome task of chopping down and splitting wood remained an exhausting chore and John spent a good portion of the day at the woodpile.

The family treasured their own personal forest; for hidden between the trees ran a brook with a small waterfall. The brook apparently came from an underground stream located beneath a nearby hill. In the middle, a small pool of fresh-flowing water gave them a place to bathe and frolic whenever the weather cooperated. The tiny brook eventually dumped into a creek which fed into the French Broad River.

After splitting the wood, John turned toward the chicken coop, located west of the cabin. The coop, a rather elaborate affair, stood out as the finest building on the farm. It was built before their cabin and served as their initial shelter. Their first child, Susan, was born there.

When John and Anne started farming, they depended on Anne's expertise since she alone knew anything about chicken farming. Anne designed and supervised the building of a chicken coop. Unfortunately for them but fortunately for the chickens, Anne's recollection of how one built a coop depended on her childhood memories; and to a young child everything seems larger than reality.

With Anne in charge the coop grew and grew and grew. It took some neighborly help from a couple of men from the Davidson clan to complete the building. Anne took a perverse pride in the chicken coop's name when the men called it, "Roberts' Folly". Curious travelers went out of their way to see it after hearing of the Folly. To Anne, her coop stood as her masterpiece, not a folly at all.

John pulled a bag of feed from the specially designed storage bin. The bag weighed at least twenty pounds. At last, the flock of birds believed their hunger would soon disappear. John raised the bag high for all the chickens to see. The birds took one step forward, and in unison raised their heads high. They stared blankly at the farmer. This amused John as he carried the bag of feed back to the cabin.

He said to himself, “Dumb clucks!” and placed the bag on the porch for his son. He noticed a popped-up nail on the porch and made a mental note of its location. He decided he would get to that later as he entered the cabin for breakfast.



SOMETIME LATER, LITTLE Johnny jumped out of bed realizing time had passed him by. A full-blown morning, not dawn, awaited him. He overslept and already regretted his error. The cacophonous rumble from the chicken coop made the lad move faster. Johnny slipped on his pants and clamored down the ladder from the loft he shared with his sisters.

Mama, anticipating a quick getaway, said, “Eat your breakfast” before the boy could reach the door.

As expected, Johnny whined, and for his effort, he heard a more adamant, “Eat!”

Dejected, Johnny sat and ate as quickly as possible. Anne’s anxious son got up from the table. She instructed him that Pa left him a bag of feed on the porch. Johnny opened the door; a good-sized dog of no particular breed entered.

Seeing Samson enter with his tail wagging reminded Anne to give one final command, “Oh, and tie up Samson to the tree out back. I don’t want him spookin’ the chickens.”

She stared at her son when he pleaded, “Mama!”

Giving up, Johnny turned to his four-legged companion and said, “Come on Thamthon.”

“S...S...S...Samson” came the correction from the voice now behind him.

Johnny turned back to his mother one last time, and with a big, impish grin said, “Come on BOY.” Off they went before hearing anything else.

The time for Johnny to face his challenge finally arrived. The bravado he showed the night before now waned in the light of day, especially since his pa had already left to do his own chores, and his ma relegated Samson to behind the cabin. Johnny felt lonely.

The lad wrapped his arms around the bag and heaved. Nothing moved. Again, still nothing. Johnny tugged and pulled, pulled and tugged, until the bag finally gave way. Ever so slowly, the boy maneuvered the burlap bag to the edge of the rickety porch. As he pulled one more time, the bag snagged on the nail. The boy ended up falling backward and landing on the ground. So too, did the bag.

What’s fun about this? the boy wondered. Like all young boys, he felt duty-bound to make his chore fun. Johnny recalled his pa’s story from the night before, and that’s all it took to create a new storyline. No longer did he carry a bag to feed the chickens. Instead, he protected a bag of gold doubloons from a band of marauding pirates. For Johnny, he had found a worthy reason for pulling the heavy bag. With renewed vigor, he yanked hard. The bag seemed lighter. That’s all the proof he needed to continue surging forward.



Johnny lopped off the head of one, then another imaginary pirate. Swinging to the left and then to the right, with the bag in tow, he grew in confidence. Johnny had become a master at head lopping and he didn't even need a sword.

The General greeted him when he reached the chicken coop. The rooster turned his head, and with one watchful eye studied the lad. The lad studied the rooster.

Was the General really a pirate in disguise? Johnny contemplated. He slowly started to open the gate. At that point, The General flapped his wings, flew up, and for just a second looked right into Johnny's eyes before landing again. Startled, Johnny somersaulted backward, inadvertently pulling the gate open behind him.

"Cock-a-doo...dle-doo" screeched The General, and the Battle at Robert's Folly began. Wave after wave of white-feathered fowl streamed through the partially opened gate. First in line came the matriarchal hens. One did not trifle with those battled-tested birds. Following closely came the fleet of younger hens. The young chicks brought up the rear. Those yellow balls of fluff continuously bumped into things, rolled over, and popped right back up again.

Johnny's heart dropped when he looked back to see where they were headed. A wide path of gold, not doubloons but bird feed stretched back to where his adventure began. Johnny never realized that the nail that snagged the burlap bag on the porch tore open a sizable hole in the bag.

He whirled about and dove toward a nearby hen. The hen, suspecting danger, made one of those now-you-see-me, now-you-don't ninety-degree turns chickens do but people don't. Johnny ended up spitting out dirt and bird feed. The hen pecked him on the cheek just to see if he tasted edible. He didn't. Johnny tried again, and again, and each time met the same result. Johnny hated the pecking. Instead of catching the birds, he became quite adept at entertaining the flock. An uproar of cackling, similar to the thunderous laughter heard in a theater, occurred every time they felt the boy thud. They never had entertainment with their meal before.

As the bird in charge, The General strutted back and forth, crowing his cock-a-doo...dle doo while watching the battle unfold.

If humans understood chicken talk, someone might have heard The General's taunt and believed he said, "Who's the dumb cluck now?"

Johnny knew that eventually somebody would take notice of all the noise coming from the chickens. He assumed correctly.

As Betsy came around the corner of the cabin and saw the chaos, she yelled, "Johnny, watcha' doin'?"

An exasperated, "I don't know!" came back in reply. Betsy, always the leader of the three children, flew into action after dropping the vegetables her mama had planned to use as part of the evening meal. She waved a cloth above her head. Betsy's effort made the chickens scatter, but it didn't force the flock back into the fenced-in area. At least now Johnny had a partner, one he gratefully appreciated.

Johnny prayed to no one in particular, “Oh please, don’t let Mama know! Please, please, don’t let Mama know! Just then, Mama opened the cabin door and stepped out onto the porch, her favorite place for snapping peas and husking corn.

Anne saw a panoramic view of the area and imagined what had transpired. She turned to Susan, her eldest daughter who stood behind her, and said, “Go get Samson. He’s tied up out back.” Susan ran off. Anne looked at Johnny. Johnny would not look back. Humiliated, with his arms covering his head, he laid like a fallen soldier. A large white hen came by and pecked him as if to confirm it.

Susan ran as quickly as she could around the side of the cabin and almost as quickly slowed to a cautious walk when she saw Samson. Live animals made her nervous. Susan preferred them either in a pot or on a plate. To her way of thinking an animal should come with a pot; the bigger the animal, the bigger the pot. Living on a farm and disliking animals created a strange dichotomy she could never adequately explain.

After a stretch of barking, yelping, and whining, Samson had finally called it quits. He couldn’t fathom how anybody would tie him up when something so important took place. He renewed his plea for freedom once Susan appeared. Samson tugged at the rope again. Susan appreciated that the dog didn’t pay a great deal of attention to her. Instead of untying the rope from around Samson’s neck, she loosened the rope at the base of the tree. Samson shot forward with the rope dragging behind him. He didn’t know what he should do, but he knew a mission awaited him.

Susan rejoined the fray by guarding the side of the cabin not already covered by Betsy. She deployed a unique strategy for stopping the forward progress of any bird. She would gain ground by taking a couple of steps, and with a fluttering of her fingers in a repeated outward motion, capture the critter’s attention.

Then, as if talking to a person, Susan would nervously say, “Shoo, you chickens, shoo.” Surprisingly enough, her approach worked.

When Samson appeared, Johnny felt invigorated. He watched how the dog scampered back and forth, herding the birds toward each other. He then followed his canine friend’s lead. Unfortunately for Johnny, and anyone else in the family, nobody could do what Samson did. Every chicken who met Samson face-to-face encountered a bark, or a growl, or a flash of his long canines. The incentive to retreat became more popular by the minute for The General’s army.

Anne worried about the loss of income her family would face if any of the chickens escaped. She waved her apron at the flock. Her effort showed a measure of success at turning them back toward the chicken coop.

She told both Susan and Betsy, “Do like this,” confident she was doing the right thing. She moved out away from the cabin. The mother and her daughters waved their aprons so they fluttered in the wind. With a bit of imagination, a person could believe they watched a Man-of-War with its sails at full mast about to bring reinforcements to the battle.

A hen broke away, then another, and another. Anne noticed the birds and moved to intercept. So too, did Samson. The rope around the dog's neck dragged behind him like a snake slithering in the grass. It spooked the three hens and they dispersed. Anne moved left. Samson moved right. Samson abruptly changed direction in response to the erratic moves of his prey. Then it happened. Down came Samson and Anne with a thud. The dog had wrapped the rope around Anne's legs and the two lay tangled in a heap. Samson's loud yelping captured everybody's attention in a hurry.

With Anne between him and the ground, Samson felt awkward, especially when the rope bound him and the Mrs. together. The rope tightened each time he made a spasmodic move. Looking for traction, all four of Samson's legs kicked high into the air. He thrashed about, but terra firma evaded him. He wasn't hurt. He felt trapped and out of control, unable to complete his mission. Anne could do little, what with Samson on her back and her face in the dirt. She struggled to free herself but the weight of Samson, and the weight of the child inside her stifled her efforts. Even with both daughters coming to her aid, things didn't improve much. The tangled rope had wrapped too tightly around her and the dog.

Betsy finally asked, "Should we cut the rope?" Anne reluctantly nodded her head. Susan jumped up to fetch a knife her mama recently used while cooking. Unable to reach the rope herself, Anne told Susan, "Slide the knife sideways under the rope and then turn the blade up away from me." She told Betsy, "Keep Samson still as best you can."

Susan lacked experience at sawing. She slowly drew the sharp utensil up and down across the thick twine. She made little progress at first, especially when Samson tried to twist away. His sudden jerking caused her to pierce her mother's skin more than once. The knife slipped out of Susan's hands, and when she tried to grab it, she carved out a triangular-shaped chunk of flesh. Anne urged Susan to continue even though she felt considerable pain. The tears welling up in Susan's eyes made seeing where she cut even more difficult.

The task successfully diverted the two girls' attention away from the more pressing concern Anne had, and for that Anne gave thanks. It started when she fell- a small twinge deep within her. She felt this sensation before when she went into labor with her other children. However, this time she knew something wasn't right. Every time the sensation reappeared it lasted longer and increased in intensity. They shared a collective sigh when the twine finally snapped. Samson scampered off to renew his task of herding the chickens.

"Now, can you two help me to my bed?" asked Anne. It took a herculean effort to get Anne on her feet again, to reach the cabin, and to maneuver her into bed. Before going inside, Susan looked back at Johnny and stuck out her tongue. She kicked the door shut behind her. It left Johnny and Samson alone to finish what they started. Johnny knew he wasn't welcome.

Samson, back on the battlefield, turned the chickens toward the coop. Things proceeded much faster. Finally, Johnny shut the gate, and let out a "Phew!" Samson and the boy went searching for any stray birds that might have es-

caped. They found one large hen stuck in the brush under a clump of nearby trees. Johnny brought it back to the coop and opened the gate. He plopped the bird down. Adding a swift kick of dust at the bird helped soothe his bruised ego. The General, seeing the gate open once again, moved forward. The rooster stopped cold when he heard Samson's low growl.

Hearing the cabin door open, Johnny turned to see Susan and then Betsy leaving. Betsy paused and said, "Bye, Mama." She then shut the door behind her.

Johnny came to them and asked, "Where you goin'?"

"To bring Pa his lunch," replied Betsy.

"Can I come?" Johnny asked.

"No!" retorted Susan. "You're in trouble. Ma wants you to stay on the porch."

Dejected, Johnny groused, "Aw!" He kicked the dirt as the two girls ran off with a basket in tow.

All alone again for the second time that day, Johnny sat on the porch with his legs crossed. His head rested on his two fists which pressed against the sides of his face. Johnny reflected on what had transpired. After just a bit of time elapsed, an unbearable period for a boy his age, Johnny stood. He had reached a conclusion of some kind and readied himself to act upon it.

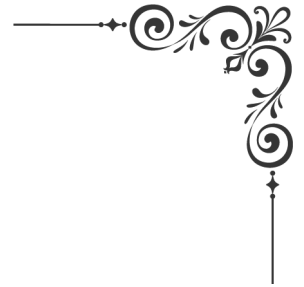
Without an inkling of doubt or fear, he walked off the porch in direct defiance of his mama's wishes. He didn't care. He willingly accepted whatever punishment he might receive. He had something to say, and he wanted the world to hear it.

At about twenty feet away from the porch he stopped. He brushed off his clothes as well as possible, wiped away much of the grime on his face, and licked down the cowlick at the back of his head. He wanted nothing to distract him, nor did he want anybody else to miss hearing what he had to say. Johnny turned toward the cabin and stood tall.

With what he had experienced, the now more serious Johnny placed the blame for it all squarely on his tiny shoulders. He raised his head and said a serious and heartfelt, "I'm thorry."

Had Anne known, she would have burst with pride over her son's apology. He didn't avoid responsibility, or shift the blame to someone or something else, nor did he need prodding to apologize. He exhibited a level of maturity many adults never grasped. She would have forgiven him.

Too bad—nobody heard him.



## Chapter Two: Best Laid Plans

“Damn!” What John planned to complete that day failed again. The small, metal wedge that held his axe in place on top of its handle fell out. Both the axe and the wedge flew off and disappeared. More and more, minor frustrations like this irritated John beyond what they should have. John threw down the handle and looked about for the two missing parts. He couldn’t find either.

His temper flared. John felt an irrepressible urge to inflict pain on someone or something as a way to punish whoever or whatever made things go wrong. This time he blamed the handle. He lifted a sizable rock to punish it.

He had allowed his emotions to overwhelm his ability to think and act rationally. Thankfully, and just in time too, John realized the stupidity of his idea. He twisted to his side at the last moment so the large stone, already breaking free from his grasp, would miss its mark. The stone did miss the handle. It landed on his foot instead. Without knowing it, John successfully punished the one who caused things to fail.

John howled in pain and rattled off a row of expletives. Each successive curse added more color to his core complaint of the uselessness of clearing rocks from a field when all that appeared to be growing were rocks. John’s questioning of his original idea of buying land grew louder with each passing day.

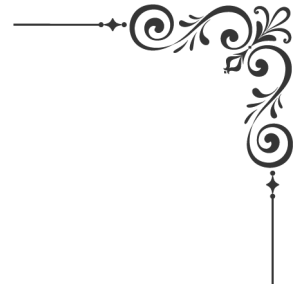
John and Anne had scraped together enough money to buy a piece of land. They’d planned to grow tobacco on it as a cash crop. If all worked as they hoped, it would help pay the bills; and maybe, just maybe they could buy a few nice things now and then. John found a parcel of land that they could afford. The field, strewn with large rocks and a good trek away from the farm, didn’t quite match what they desired. Still, it sidled up to a stream of fresh water, and they didn’t go deep into debt paying for it.

Night after night John would come home after clearing rocks all day, and would say something such as, “That land will be good for growing something, if it would only stop growing rocks.” Anne, always supportive, would offer her husband a sympathetic smile.

John’s foot throbbed, his back ached, and he needed a break. He hobbled over to the nearby creek, gingerly pulled off his boots and socks, and inspected his foot.

“Thank God,” he said after seeing no major damage to his foot. He expected some bruising, but the biggest bruise affected his ego.

“Ah,” he sighed when he dipped his feet in the creek. He enjoyed wiggling his toes into the water’s muddy bottom. He cautiously checked to see if any prying eyes lurked about. Seeing none, John reached under a large rock that jutted out from the creek bed and pulled out a bottle. He took a swig and closed his eyes, hoping to find some relief. Instead, he dreamt a dream that he had dreamt many times before. A dream that plagued him for most of his life.



## Chapter Three: John's Dream

What today we would call Post Traumatic Stress, to John seemed like an oft-repeated dream he could not shake. He often found himself back in battle, terrified and fighting for his life.

"Friend, it looks like you need company. May I?" The man sat without permission.

"Name's Remy, Remy Bonpasse, and you'd be?"

John hesitated for a second then said, "John Roberts."

"Well, Jean Robert," Remy spoke with a mutilated French accent and called John Roberts, *Dzon Rō'ber*. Remy often called people by the French version of their name or some bastardized interpretation that he himself concocted. He was largely French, part Indian, and part frontiersman, which made for colorful conversation.

"Care for some comfort?" He offered John a swig from a half-consumed bottle.

Taking a drink, John asked, "Comfort, is that what you call it?" John handed the bottle back.

"Oui? Wouldn't you?"

"I guess so," replied John.

Over the next couple hours, and through a couple bottles of "comfort", Remy slowly pulled family history and personal stories out of John. His casual nature made John feel at ease. The liquid courage helped, too. John always found it hard to make friends. Acquaintances yes, but friends, not so much. This time seemed different. He appreciated the camaraderie. It felt as if he had found a long-lost friend, or an older brother he'd never known.

"How about family, Dzon Rober?" asked Remy.

"I have a wife. We've been married for almost . . ." John paused and made a "huh" sound slightly to himself once he tallied up how long he had a wife.

"Going on twenty-four months now."

John continued, "She's the most beautiful woman you'll ever see. She has hair as black as coal, and her eyes are a color of blue like you'd see in a cool lake."

"Ooh-la-la" responded Remy. He shook his hand up and down to double note John's choice of women.

"We have a baby girl, too. She's got my looks, though."

To tease John, Remy said, "Too bad." John snorted in agreement.

'Her name is Susan, but I call her 'Doodles'. You know Cock-a-doodle..."

"Doo?" Remy finished the phrase, and then in a more inquisitive tone asked, "Pourquoi?...um...Why?"

"Because she was born in the chicken coop," John replied.

Remy took a moment to look behind him. John twisted around to see, also. Nothing of interest grabbed his attention, John turned back to Remy and gave his new friend a questioning look.

Remy good-naturedly responded, "Lookin' for feathers. Is she a..." Remy, at a loss for the word chicken inserted its French counterpart "le poulet?" instead.

John unsure what "le poulet" meant responded hesitantly, "Uh, I don't know."

Remy then flapped his arms like a chicken and sounded out, "Baaawk, bawk, bawk. Bawk!"

Immediately, John chimed in, "Chicken." He now understood his new friend's question.

Remy appreciated that the two could communicate with each other despite the occasional misunderstandings.

He responded with a relieved, "Oui."

"Oh! No! no!.no! no! I don't think so," John responded with a serious tone in his voice, as well as an expressionless look on his face. Remy didn't know how to react to John's response. John snickered, and when the snicker developed into a full-blown laugh, Remy joined in the merriment.

On and on it went. The more they talked the closer their friendship grew.

The next day, "Dzon Rō'ber" rang out throughout the campsite. John immediately recognized the voice as that of Remy's. He waved for his new friend to join him. John had just cleaned his long rifle and safely packed away the lead balls he would use in the upcoming battle. A small fire offered some warmth against the autumn chill.

"My grandpapa, he'd be French you know. Grandpapa, he used to say, 'When you talk to a man about somethin' majeur, always bring a bottle.' Here." Remy handed John a bottle and kept another for himself.

"Sounds like your grandpapa was a smart man," commented John.

"He be refined," said Remy, as he accented the "re" of "refined".

John asked, "What's so major?" Remy described a disturbing dream he'd had.

"Mon Dieu. It jest don't feel right to me. Like it's my time to..." Remy finished his explanation by sliding his finger across his neck, while at the same time he made a ratcheting noise.

The two men agreed to tell the family of the opposite person about his demise if either one might pass away. Neither man thought about what to do if both perished.

Once relieved, Remy asked, "Why do you fight, Dzon Rober'?" John pondered a moment. He then told a story about his father's quest for power and control. John's animosity and disappointment poured out as he told of the persecution of some men of the cloth, all because they belonged to a church other than the Church of England. John



blamed his father, the Reverend Jedediah Roberts, a local leader of the Anglican Church, for instigating the persecution. Because of his father, freedom of religion and the right to speak your peace without fear of being arrested topped John's list of reasons to fight.

Remy listened closely, leaned in toward John, and asked, "Dzon, are you fightin' for a new nation or are you fightin' against your papa? Dangerous to be fightin' a personal war," Remy declared.

John stared at the fire, looking for answers among the embers.

Recognizing the importance of a man's private time, Remy slowly started to slip away. John stopped him.

"How about you?" John looked at his friend and waited for a reply.

"Moi?" Remy replied with a smile on his face. "My family's part French you know, so, when possible, we Frenchies like to *câlisser une volée les goddons*. You would say, Give the Redcoats a piece of hell."

"That's it? That's your reason?" asked a surprised John.

"Does one need better? To vengeance!" Remy proclaimed.

"Vengeance!" replied John. They clicked bottles and toasted the night away.

On the day of the battle, Remy jawed away most of the way up the mountain, even when making a sound could spoil the best of plans. Fortunately, a steady rain muffled their approach. They walked alongside a group of volunteer soldiers fighting for freedom. As they neared the top of King's Mountain, hoping to surprise the Loyalists, the soldiers heard Remy spouting off.

"Mustn't be much of a king if this be his mountain and all. Not much of a mountain." King's Mountain actually derived its name from the King family, local residents in the area, not King George. Soon afterward, word filtered back through the lines to stay quiet.

Remy, using what he called his hushed voice but still louder than anyone else's said, "Sorry, Colonel." He continued with nary a pause or change in volume.

"Now, if you want to see mountains, you need come out to where I'm from."

"Damn it, man! Will you be quiet?" whispered a nearby soldier, a fierce-looking man- mentally preparing himself for battle. Remy put his finger to his lips, acknowledging he would stop talking, then lightly jabbed John in the side to get John's attention.

He nodded toward the angry man, and then whispered, "We'll talk later."

John and Remy found a fallen tree to hide behind and readied themselves to kill or to die. Once the Patriots encircled the completely surprised Loyalists, their leader, Colonel McDonald yelled, "Fire!" The shooting began.

King George's troops held the high ground, an important advantage but also their only advantage. The number of wounded or dead soldiers on top of the mountain grew faster than those who shot at them. With the exception of

Major Patrick Ferguson, the commanding officer of the loyalists, every soldier who fought at King's Mountain called America home.

John looked to his left and watched in amazement as the enemy fixed bayonets to their Brown Bess muskets. In a crisp line, the trained soldiers, dressed in their bright red uniforms, charged down the hill toward the patriots.

Unwilling to give up, the patriots retreated down the mountainside out of reach of the Loyalists. Standing behind trees, they aimed their long rifles and fired. When the British forces returned to the top of the hill, the patriots then returned to their original position. The strategic maneuver happened repeatedly, like an absurd minuet.

The patriot's long rifles could shoot farther and had greater accuracy than the British muskets. John worried about their defensive position. He wondered if lying on the ground behind a fallen tree would adequately protect them if the enemy, standing directly in front of them, chose to fix bayonets and charge.

He pointed to an ongoing attack on their left and asked Remy, "What happens if they charge like that here? Can you get up fast enough?"

"Sacré bleu! I can run like a jackrabbit when I hafta', but I ain't gonna' move when I don't need to. You can get your head blowed off that way." John tried to put the possibility of a bayonet charge out of his mind.

John and Remy fell into a pattern as the battle increased in intensity. While one shot, the other reloaded. With Remy covering the left flank and John covering the right, they felt they had a pretty good chance of surviving.

While reloading, Remy chimed up saying, "Like shootin' turkeys at a turkey shoot." "Oui, like shootin' Tur..."

A musket ball punched a hole about an inch in diameter as it entered just below Remy's left eye. It exited by cracking open the back of his skull as if someone cracked an egg for breakfast.

It took John a complete cycle of firing, reloading, and firing again before he asked, "What did you say?" John swung all the way around to look at Remy when he didn't hear a response.

Being a preacher's son, he had seen death before when attending numerous funerals. He had even faced death as a boy when his mother died. However, never, never before had he seen one man wreak such violence on another man. It sickened him.

John stared at Remy's body for what seemed the longest time. Somehow, the thrust of the bullet repositioned Remy so it looked as though he sat relaxing against the tree trunk without a care in the world. John couldn't understand. Why should Remy die? John turned to his religious upbringing. One particular Biblical passage jumped out at him, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" It felt like a hollow phrase from a hollow God.

Did Remy have it right? Could all the fighting and dying wrap around some lofty dream of a new county? Remy believed there could be a different purpose, something far less pure. Did he know something that others didn't? At that moment, John knew his new friend lay dead, and something needed doing about it before his heart broke. He turned and fired. He would do the stinging and hope he'd not get stung. Vengeance!

With the fighting complete and the Patriots winning the day, John longed to get away from that God-forsaken place—a land others would later call “hallowed ground.” He longed to be in the arms of his wife again, to make love again. He wanted to wipe away the memory of Remy’s death, and John’s taking the life of others out of vengeance. This memory refused to fade away. It burrowed deep into his mind and would haunt him forever.

Just as he could not force his mind to leave it all behind, he couldn’t physically leave either. Close to three hundred bodies needed to be put underground. Scores of wounded needed tending to, and over five hundred prisoners needed watching. Tensions ran high as they moved the prisoners.

Like a pot boiling over when placed over a fire too long, emotions boiled over against the Loyalists. A kangaroo court convened and soon thereafter, scores of those on the losing side found themselves in line for hanging. Nine soldiers’ bodies laid out on the ground before the travesty came to a halt. Their lives or deaths depended solely on the reason they gave for siding with England. This too would someday haunt John in another way.

Fulfilling the promise John made to Remy challenged him. He had promised to notify Remy’s family. He felt weary- weary from loneliness, anguish, and guilt over surviving when Remy didn’t. He felt physically fatigued, too. Hunger, lack of sleep, and autumn’s falling temperatures wore him down. John continued his journey, for a vow was sacrosanct. One couldn’t ignore a vow.

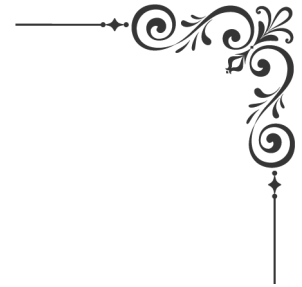
It turned out that visiting Remy’s family at White’s Fort provided the only bright moment from those days. At that place, later called Knoxville, he envisioned a future that better fit what he wanted for himself and his family.

When Anne opened the door that night, she found a broken man. It took most of the winter to restore him physically. She could do little to help him emotionally. No longer did John act as good-naturedly as he did when they first married. The new John grew irritated at the smallest of things. His mind sometimes drifted off to some far-off place. John’s tendency to fall into a state of melancholy worried her most of all.



JOHN’S DREAM ENDED abruptly when he heard the sound of a flock of birds flapping their wings to escape some perceived danger. He knew who approached when he heard the high-pitched giggling.

He placed the bottle back under the rock and thought to himself, “It’s time to talk to Anne about moving out west again.”



## Chapter Four: By the Side of the Creek

The girls slowed to a leisurely walk when they could no longer see Johnny and he couldn't see them. They hardly spoke a word but somehow broke into spontaneous laughter at the same moment remembering Johnny's antics. They felt some foreboding that someone would get a whuppin', but they felt relieved that the punishment would most likely be for Johnny and not them.

"Don't go tellin' Pa 'bout what went on today, you hear?" Betsy warned.

"Why not? He'll hear 'bout it sooner or later," quipped Susan in response.

"Uh-huh, but not from either of us he won't. Johnny was jest tryin' to do what Pa wanted him to do," Betsy replied.

Betsy expected her sister to embrace her advice. Susan really wanted to tattle on her brother. She knew she shouldn't, but in some convoluted way she thought tattling on Johnny would put her in good stead with her pa. It would make her feel more secure. Susan worried that Betsy would tell about how she accidentally cut her ma. After all, if she tattled on Johnny... They both felt the tension as they walked side by side.

Betsy broke the silence, "I won't tell Pa about you cuttin' Ma neither." Susan hugged her sister. Both sisters knew they would have to worry about the knife incident later.

"Do you think she's alright?" Susan asked.

"Hope so," Betsy responded.

"Me too," added Susan.

Anxious to change the subject, Betsy said, "Race you."

Susan complained, "That's not fair. I'm carryin' the basket."

"So," teased Betsy, and off she ran. Susan gave chase. Betsy reached a clearing first. Susan caught up.

Betsy chose to ignore her sister's complaint about the fairness of the race and declared, "I win." She then stuck her tongue out at Susan. Susan did likewise. They giggled at the silliness of it all.

Betsy took the basket away from Susan as she said, "Gimme." She marched up the final hill before they reached their pa. Susan stayed put.

Noticing that Susan hesitated, Betsy walked back to her sister and asked, "What's wrong?" No response. Betsy knew that Susan and her pa didn't get along. Susan always needed encouraging. She reached out and took her sister's hand, "Come on." Susan reluctantly followed her sister until they found their father sitting by the side of the creek.

"Hi, Pa. We brought you lunch," Betsy explained. Susan said nothing. She took the basket from her sister and set the food out on a flat rock beneath a large tree.

"She made cornbread for you," exclaimed Betsy, while pointing with her head toward Susan.

Betsy whispered to Susan, "Tell him."

Susan finally spoke up, "Mama taught me how today."

John knew he ought to say something positive. He responded with a bit too much zeal. "Wonderful! I love cornbread. Thank you, Doodles." He cringed the second that last word came out of his mouth. What little self-esteem Susan acquired from his comment quickly evaporated when she heard the detestable nickname.

Susan once asked her mother how she got the nickname "Doodles." Anne had that special talk to her daughter and explained that she was born in the chicken coop. The easily embarrassed thirteen-year-old grew even more embarrassed.

Betsy watched her sister wilt, so she pushed the conversation in another direction. Betsy asked, "Why you soakin' your feet?" John went on to tell of his foolhardy escapade. He made a special note of his own stupidity hoping somehow it would make up for the calling Susan, "Doodles." John then asked the girls to help find the missing parts of the tools. Both girls, already barefoot, started looking. Susan searched in the creek while Betsy looked around the tree.

Betsy yelled out, "Found it." She found the axe. They never found the wedge. Her pa then asked Betsy for the rope she used as a belt. He foolishly thought he might tie the axe to the handle somehow and still keep working.

Susan, enjoying the water swirling around her feet, stayed in the creek. She noticed something shimmering beneath a rock and picked it up. "What's this?" she asked as she held up a bottle.

Immediately embarrassed, John yelled, "Susan!" which startled the girl. Susan naturally let go, and the bottle fell from her hands. It broke open once it hit a rock.

Susan's clumsiness drove John's patience beyond its flashpoint. He had only brought that one bottle.

John moved with surprising quickness despite having put only one boot back on. He pounced on Susan. The second he reached her, he angrily yelled right into her face.

"You stupid girl! Why can't you leave things alone that aren't yours?" John shook the girl like a rag doll. Susan, too afraid to resist, took the abuse.

Betsy protested, "Pa, stop it!"

John continued, "Stupid girl." He then slapped Susan.

Betsy would not accept any more of that. She stepped in the water, and grabbed her pa's arm while yelling back, "Stop it, Pa. I'll tell Ma." Betsy's threat tempered John's anger. He let Susan go and left her standing in the creek with tears rolling down her cheeks.

After his anger subsided, he felt guilty over how he had mistreated his first-born daughter. Words failed him. Instead of apologizing and repairing his relationship with Susan and Betsy, he tried tying the axe to the handle.

Betsy pulled Susan from the creek and said, "We gotta get back. Ma's feelin' poorly." She waited for a response from her father. Hearing none she continued, "Ma's feelin' poorly. She wants you to come back soon, too." John still didn't respond. "Pa?" John finally nodded his head but showed no signs of leaving so the girls went on ahead.

When the sisters were out of sight of their father, Betsy asked, "Are you alright?" She paused for Susan to regain her composure.

A weak smile appeared on Susan's face when Betsy said, "Come on. Let's pick some blackberries for Ma. It'll make her happy."