

The Diary of Horatio White

Mark Souza

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The Diary of Horatio White

There are some who question the reasoning and courage of General McClellan over the events at Antietam Creek. How could an army of ninety-thousand surprise a force half their size and not emerge victorious? Why would a man with that kind of advantage retreat? Was McClellan inept, or was he a coward? Those who ask these questions were not there. They cannot understand. They don't know the true events of Antietam Creek. Perhaps no one ever will.

Though sworn to secrecy by the Federal Army, I have placed an account of those days and my life here on these pages. I have no plans to allow other eyes see these words, so in that regard, I consider that I have maintained my vow. If these words were somehow to be read, who in their right mind would believe them? I scarcely do myself. I question my reasons for this record, as it can do nothing but open me to ridicule. Perhaps the best explanation is that what occurred was so unbelievable that perhaps by putting the events to paper, the fact that they take on physical form, though only ink on a page, can

make them more real, more than the rants of a madman. For I fear I may truly be going mad.

We had pitched camp ten miles northeast of Sharpsburg on September 16th, 1862. Though the days were hot, the onset of fall brought a chill to the night air. I was with the 12th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry under Major Burbank. Our scouts reported that the bulk of Lee's Confederate Army was consolidated in Sharpsburg and we had caught him unawares.

We had marched for days and hadn't had a hot meal in a week. This night was no exception. Dinner consisted of potted meat in jars, apples from a nearby orchard just coming ripe, and stale bread.

After sunset, Major Burbank gathered us around the campfire and gave us our orders. McClellan's plan involved a three prong attack over the three bridges crossing Antietam Creek. Our regiment was to attack from the north at first light. We were a diversion to occupy Lee's attention while the bulk of the army led by General Burnside, attacked from the south. The Major said we were to be the tip of the sword and could end the war by our efforts on the morrow. We'd finally caught Lee with his pants down.

We looked at one another and I think we all saw the same thing. Tears glossed our eyes. Some shook with nerves. None more than Billy Gillespie, a seventeen year-old kid from Danvers who hadn't yet sprouted his first whisker. My mouth went dry. The Major was a good man and well intentioned, but how could he think we would be happy to receive this news?

We were quiet. He delivered his orders with the fire and conviction of someone sure we would end the day triumphant. And although he compared us to the tip of the sword, none of us believed it. Swords don't bleed, and tomorrow we certainly would. We were green and really hadn't seen battle. We'd had training, but till now we'd been held in reserve as a reinforcement unit. Tomorrow would be our first real test. As we looked to one another, we realized for many of us, if not most, these were our last hours.

After Burbank left, we couldn't sleep. We listened in as the order was delivered to the Pennsylvania boys over at the next campfire by their commander, Colonel William Christian. What a waste of hide he was. He cared more for his horse than his men. His regiment used to joke that it might be a service to the army if Christian was shot in the back, but that there was little chance of that as he was the type who liked to lead from the rear. They fell as quiet as we had upon hearing the news.

We settled around the fire. Those of who could write wrote letters to mothers and wives trying to set everything to rights. I wrote to my Cora. Henry Talbot offered me a sip of his whiskey. He somehow always managed to maintain a supply. He was an educated man, a school teacher from my hometown. He got it in his head that he should stand for the cause and be a part of history as it was being made rather than just reading about it. He volunteered like the rest of us, each man for his own reasons. But in the face of the reality of it, he had had second thoughts and taken to drink. Talbot's teeth were black at the edges and looked like old corn rotting on the cob. I respectfully declined.

During the wee hours of September 17th, the officers roused us to our feet. We moved out under cover of darkness. The hike was good for the men. It worked out some

of the nerves we'd built up the evening before. Marching was definitely better than thinking. We worked our way to edge of the East Woods using the trees for cover. As far as we could tell, we hadn't been discovered. And that was the end of our luck. We stopped at the edge of the forest and reconnoitered the situation facing us.

The terrain on the far side of Antietam creek rose sharply to a bluff. Over half a mile of open ground stood between the edge of the wood and the bluff, broken only by an expansive field of corn. A single narrow bridge crossed the creek creating a choke point without any cover. It was an ideal killing ground. We'd be spotted the moment we stepped from cover and would draw fire the entire way. We'd be easy pickings. My hands began to tremble and I clutched tighter to my rifle. I craned my head around and checked the others. Their eyes were wide and faces pale with tension. The situation didn't need to be explained to them. They could see it as plainly as I.

"This ain't good, is it corporal?" young Gillespie asked. I shook my head. "Maybe we should find another place to cross."

A deep voice behind me barked, "But that isn't the order, now is it?" It was Major Burbank. He dismounted and leaned against the tree I was using for cover. His eyes scanned the lay of the land. He spoke to me with his eyes fixed on the horizon. "We definitely have the short end of it, don't we Corporal White?" I didn't say anything and he continued. "I think the best we can do is hit this field at a run. We'll lose fewer men that way. That corn is no real cover, but they can't see us in there and it'll give us a chance to regroup. Then we hit the remaining stretch to the bridge at a sprint and give 'em holy hell. Sound like a plan?" I nodded. "Await my signal," he said. He mounted his horse and rode off to deliver his plan to the next group of soldiers. I gathered my men, who between them couldn't generate enough spit to put out a match, and repeated what Burbank had said.

Puffs of dust spurted up from the ground fifty yards in front of us. We'd been spotted. Soft popping noises drifted down from across the creek. The enemy was ranging their rifles, figuring how far their bullets would carry from the bluff. No point in shooting at us until we were within range. Wisps of blue smoke marked their positions. They knew we were here and they were ready for us. They had the high ground and for a while there wouldn't be anything we could do to them. Our bullets would fall short while they pelted lead down on us. We were clay pots on fence posts, defenseless targets plain and simple.

The order to charge was a yell followed by a pair of rounds fired from Major Burbank's pistol. There was a part of me that debated keeping my feet planted right where I stood in the safety of the trees. The same thought was in the head of every man in the woods. But we ran for all we were worth to cross the open expanse between us and the corn. Billy Gillespie dashed out ahead of everyone in a display of athleticism the likes of which I'd never seen.

I heard men fall, usually just an *oof*, like the sound a man makes when taking a fist to the gut. Some shrieked in pain, the ones who died slow. I didn't look back or slow down. There was only the exposure of the pasture, and the sanctuary of the cornfield. Lee's men could only squeeze off so many rounds a minute from up on the hill, and the fewer minutes it took me to make it into the corn, the better my chances of seeing Cora again.

Something brushed my thigh and I knew I'd been hit, but I didn't slow. A few yards from the cornfield, I heard someone scream, "I'm hit, I'm hit." Once safely inside the corn I looked back. Henry Talbot, the school teacher, lay in the grass writhing and

moaning. Major Burbank was approaching fast when he was shot off his mount. The horse kept running, though Burbank lay on his face, motionless in the field.

“Please help me, corporal. I’m bleeding bad,” Talbot begged. He was just outside the corn. “Please, I’m begging you. Don’t let me die out here alone.” I dashed to him, grabbed his collar and dragged him into the stalks. “It’s my back. They shot me in the back. Please stop the bleeding.”

I stripped off his pack and pulled up his shirt. It was wet, though his back was unmarked. I sniffed my fingers. “It’s whiskey you stupid sot.” I left him to dress and pulled down my pants to assess my own wound. The bullet had passed through my thigh just under the skin. The wound oozed and was bruising up, but nothing vital was hit.

“Twelfth Massachusetts, gather round,” I yelled. The men assembled. I did a quick check. It appeared we were only down a dozen men or so. Not bad considering. Bullets tore through corn while I passed orders to my men. We would stay close in a line till we got to the edge of the cornfield. We would then sprint out at the same time and disperse, coming together again once we reached the bridge. The fact that the Rebs couldn’t see us didn’t stop them from shooting. Screams rang out as men were hit. We were still taking casualties.

The sun emerged as we started advancing through the corn. That’s when we saw the glint of their bayonets. Johnny Reb was in the corn with us, at least a squadron of them. It was an ambush. They lowered their rifles before we could react. The volley peppered our line and reduced our number by almost half. They then screamed and charged us with bayonets.

Some of us returned fire, but most turned and ran. There was no time to reload. I tried to pull my pistol but it was trapped beneath the holster flap. I ran too, and could hear the Rebs gaining. As I emerged from the corn, I ran headlong into the Pennsylvania boys. They had their rifles lowered. I dove to the ground as they fired. The volley took out a few of my men, but decimated the Rebs. Colonel Christian’s boys likely saved most of us.

The rebels retreated into the corn and we chased, and though it seemed as if victory was close at hand, it was not to be. Lee had reinforced his squadron and they pushed at us again. Colonel Christian had his mount shot from underneath him and hightailed it for the woods. If I’d had a loaded rifle, I’d have passed sentence on him for desertion right there and then and put one square between his shoulder blades.

Talbot was next to me when he took a bullet. It hit him in the side and pierced his lungs. He reached down and clutched his coat where it was wet, but this time it wasn’t whiskey. He stared at the blood on his palm in disbelief. He looked at me as if he wanted to say something, as if he wanted me to help him. I couldn’t. In the end he said nothing. He crumpled to his knees and toppled over.

The battle raged on well into the afternoon. We must have taken and lost that damn cornfield a dozen times. We kept going back and forth over the same ground like a crosscut saw. I have never hated a place so much. By noon most of my men were dead or wounded. I myself had taken another wound to my hand.

During the course of the day, a fog of gun smoke thickened over the field. The thick blue haze tasted oily and burned the throat. We could no longer see the bridge or the bluff beyond. We had nearly trampled the corn flat.

Fatigue had beaten me numb. The eyes of those around me were glazed with exhaustion and apathy. They seemed to have reached a point where they didn't care whether they lived or died. Each retreat found us stepping over the bodies of friends and acquaintances, over bodies of strangers, over the bodies of an enemy that looked like us save for the color of their uniforms. I doubted I would live out the day and had reached that point where I no longer cared. Each man has his time, and I figured mine was on its way and close at hand.

Each side reinforced as the battle turned against them, and it would turn again in their favor. I didn't recognize anyone I fought with anymore. I ran with and fought with men in blue, and shot at men for no other reason than they wore gray, and I waited for my turn to die.

At four in the afternoon, a confederate captain rode down from the hill carrying a white flag. He had no interest in surrendering, he wanted to talk. His uniform was clean and ornate, the buttons polished to a shine. He had a neatly trimmed beard and reminded me of Christian. I wondered if his own men wanted to shoot him in the back. He proposed a ceasefire to allow both sides time to remove their wounded and pay respects to the dead.

We were a ragtag bunch, remnants and survivors from nearly a dozen regiments. Our ranking officer was a lieutenant from Maine, Prescott I think. I don't know whether that was his name or the town he came from. The lieutenant said that sounded fine to him. For the next hour we dragged out our dead and wounded to our side of that damned field of corn.

The Confederates sent down slaves in leg irons to do the same. I had never seen a black man before. They wore tattered clothes that didn't look like they had that many more days left in them. Most were the color of strong coffee. A few were lighter skinned like they had cream in their coffee. Their hair was unlike anything I'd seen before. It made me curious to touch it to find out how it felt. I'd once seen an elephant in a circus, and that's how these men were, chained leg to leg like circus animals. A group of soldiers remained in the cart and kept rifles trained on them lest they consider running. As they worked they sang, two dozen voices working in a harmony as sweet as any church choir.

They laid their dead in a neat row, singing the entire time. They stacked the mortally wounded with their dead. It seemed they had no use for them. Maybe in their eyes, they were as good as dead. The rest they loaded into wagons to wheel up the hill.

Then things got peculiar. The slaves started dancing, their chains clanking. The tenor of the music changed from sweet hymns to a primitive chant. Their movements became jerky and malevolent. Many of the men stopped to watch, every bit as enthralled as I. They sprinkled powder they kept in leather pouches over the corpses. The ones that weren't dead screamed out as the powder hit them and stopped moving shortly after. Lieutenant Prescott barked at us to get back to work.

After all the wounded been had carted up the hill, a last cart came for the slaves and hauled them back separately, as if the white soldiers wanted nothing to do with them.

I found Billy Gillespie stacked among our dead. He'd been bayoneted through the gut. Surgeons did what they could for the boy, but he bled out while being treated. It was common. We had about 1,500 casualties. The confederates maybe double that. Lieutenant Prescott tried to arrange to have the wounded carted out, but we were short on horses. We

sent a request for more animals up the chain of command, but McClellan wanted to keep all his stock hitched to artillery so it could remain mobile.

In my book we'd accomplished what we were sent to do. We'd had Lee's full attention for most of the day and had the casualties to prove it. And through it all, where the fuck was Burnside? He was supposed to crushed Lee from behind and put an end to our slaughter. Yet there was no sign of relief or Burnside. As our wounded were being hauled away on stretchers, I began to ask people if they'd heard anything, if they knew where Burnside was.

That's when we heard the first cry, "They're moving!"

My first instinct was to look at the hill. I figured the Rebs were renegeing on the cease fire and mounting a charge under the ruse of a white flag. Then I notice the rows of dead soldiers on the confederate side. They were squirming. At first I wondered if it was a trick of light, perhaps the heat of the day writhing from the ground giving the impression of movement. I wondered, too, if it might be fatigue or shell shock. Then one of the rebel dead wobbled to his feet and staggered in a circle. When he faced us, his throat was missing. A flap of flesh rested on his chest exposing a cavity into his lungs. A sniper from Ohio, a German named Frankel, shot him in through the ribs. A puff of dust blossomed from his jacket. The shot hit dead center. The rebel soldier stopped and we waited for him to fall. He turned toward us; face slack, skin pale showing the blue cast of veins beneath. He started toward us. Frankel scrambled to reload. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. None of us could.

Someone behind us fired. The bullet pierced the abomination's thigh, shattering the bone. He crumpled in a heap without crying out. He then crawled at us, his heavy-lidded eyes brimming with determination. He clacked his teeth together. Saliva dripped from his mouth as if he were a dog eager for its dinner. The other dead rebels found their feet and shuffled toward us. They held rank and marched in a line, as if even in death they were soldiers. Laughter rang out from the hilltop. The Rebs were watching the show while we scrambled.

We were disorganized. Some dropped their rifles and ran. The rest of us fought back, at least at first. We fired a volley. When the smoke cleared, not one of them had fallen. Either we'd all missed to a man, or they were immune to bullets. How do you kill the dead?

They advanced undeterred. We managed one more volley with no more success than the first and then they were too close. We'd never be able to load our rifles in time if we held our ground. We retreated, scrambling like scared rabbits. A group of them stopped at the stack of our dead and pawed through the bodies like dogs through garbage. We were grateful for any distraction, any halt to their advance. Screams rang out. They had Billy Gillespie. The kid wasn't dead after all. Frankel turned and took aim and fired. The bullet struck one of the rebel beasts in the side of the head. It fell and never moved again.

Billy's screams filled my ears as if they were my own. The rest of them gnawed his flesh while he writhed. I raised my rifle with the full knowledge that I could only put an end to one of them. The gun jerked into my shoulder as it roared. My ears rang and smoke obscured my vision. When it cleared, I confirmed that my aim was true. I'd blown Billy's head off. I think if he'd known, he would have forgiven me. In that circumstance, I would want the same to be done for me.

Truth be told, Billy Gillespie was my first confirmed kill. I'd led charges, run in retreat, and fired my weapon for the better part of a day, but I don't know that I'd hit a damned thing until I shot Billy. The army of cannibals was on us again and there was no time to stay and mourn. I ran with hot tears streaking my cheeks not quite sure if they were for Billy Gillespie or for me.

The monsters were slow. We easily outran them. When our lead was large enough, we would pause to reload, fire a volley, and run again. We should have had an advantage, though you'd be surprised how hard it is to hit a target as small as a head when panting like a dog, heart thumping, and hands trembling. We did little to thin their numbers. We repeated this pattern every few minutes. They were unrelenting and a man can only run for so long.

It was an hour before we suffered our first casualty. No disrespect to Billy, but for all practical purposes, we had already tallied him as dead before the rebel hoard got him. We had a fat boy with us, a survivor of one of the New York regiments. I'd noticed earlier that he was beginning to flag. We would stop to reload and he was far behind and walking. We had to take care to shoot around him.

We were in the East Woods dodging trees when the screams rang out. I didn't have to look to know it was him. And I didn't, I just kept running. That's the way it went. We'd run, we'd stop to reload, rest a moment, fire, and run some more. We lost twenty-five men in the second hour, and too many to count in the third. I could tell who was going to be next just by looking into their faces. Hopelessness dulls the eyes and slackens the jaw. It was as if they had resigned themselves to it; lost their will and accepted their demise.

None of us turned when we heard the screams. It's not that we didn't care, though honestly, exhaustion had robbed us of most of our compassion, and to look back was to risk tripping and being next. By the end of the second hour we were all out of powder. Frankel was the first to jettison his rifle. The rest of us quickly followed suit. It was amazing how much easier it was to run without the extra weight. I shucked my pack shortly after.

Our strength was ebbing, as was daylight by the time we reached our camp from the night before. We had lost half our number. The old camp was empty. Those of us that remained could no longer run. Bone weary and exhausted, we barely managed to jog between long spells of walking. My leg wound throbbed. I was sure it was infected. We stopped to rest next to the fire ring. For a long while no one spoke. We sucked in air and tried to recoup instead. Some took off their jackets to dry the sweat drenching their clothes. The smoky tang of burnt wood in the ring reminded me of the smell of bacon. My guts churned reminding me that my last meal was the night before. There was nothing to be done about that. The jerky in my pack was three miles back. Frankel turned to me, eyes sunken, that look of near surrender on his face. "Vut are dose tings?" he said.

The two stripes on my sleeve now put me in charge and I guess that meant I was supposed to have all the answers. I had none, a situation I found frustrating. "Do you think we have anything like that running around Massachusetts? How the hell would I know? I have never seen anything like it. The best I can figure is it must have something to do with that damn powder they sprinkled over them."

"Vether it does or doesn't," Frankel said, "all I know is zat I shot one of zem square in the heart mit a sixty caliber slug, and he kept on coming like I'd only shpat on him."

“The one you shot in the head went down.”

“Vut good is zat going to do us now vithout any weapons.”

“We still have our side arms.”

He crinkled his brow in disbelief, “Do you really vant to get close enough to hit somezing mit dat peashooter?”

He had a point. “No, I guess I don’t.”

“Do you suppose dose tings have stopped chasing us?” he asked.

The others were watching, awaiting my answer. Down the road I noticed silhouettes moving against the gloaming sky closing the distance. “No, they’re here and we’ve got to go.”

Frankel looked over his shoulder. “No, vee just got here. Don’t zey ever stop?”

I snatched up my coat from where it hung on a tree branch. It was still sodden with perspiration. I put it on anyway. It was easier to run with it on than carrying it. Soon it would be dark and the air much cooler. I’d need it then.

Once darkness fell, we would no longer see them coming. We would have to take it on faith that they were still there. I started out at a jog, we all did. Maybe in the dark they would no longer be able to track us. Something inside me knew I was deluding myself. Maybe it was my legs talking, knowing they couldn’t keep this up. They ached. Within minutes I didn’t have the strength to run and slowed to a walk. We found a road I hoped was the Boonsboro Turnpike and followed it north toward where McClellan was encamped.

We hadn’t gone more than a mile up the road before someone started sobbing. In the darkness, I couldn’t tell who, just that they were lagging, trailing most of us by several yards. Something within me wanted to make the sound stop. Something about the hopelessness of it resonated in my soul, and expressed the same fears I struggled to keep at bay.

“Why are we doing this?” he blubbered. “We’ll never get away. It’s only a matter of time. Why are we killing ourselves?”

Then one of the men barked, “Then quit, why don’t you, and buy the rest of us a little more time.”

A wave of guilt washed over me. As commander pro tem, I should have said something and put a stop to it. However, someone had merely put into words what I was thinking and I said nothing. I prayed whoever it was would quit, prayed the monsters would take their time eating him. The sobbing slipped behind us. He had stopped, given up. I started counting and didn’t get to thirty before he started screaming. They had him. Despite all our efforts, only thirty seconds stood between us and death.

I ran again, and as I did, my left leg cramped and the other threatened. My knotted leg felt as if had been replaced by a post. The irony that my gate now resembled the monsters chasing us was not lost on me. Gravel splashed and skittered across the road as the others pulled ahead. I was lagging. How far could I fall behind before the cannibals had me? I could hear them back there. It wasn’t long before the sound of them was louder than my men ahead.

The creatures began to moan. They sensed me weakening and coming closer. It was hunger pangs. Tears stung my eyes, but I would not cry as so many had. When they got me, I would not scream out and embarrass myself. I thought of Cora, and limped faster. Sweat dripped down my back, but I gained no ground. It was as if the promise of a meal

so close at hand had spurred them on. The knotted muscles in my leg began to loosen. My knee unlocked. I ran hard and closed the distance to my men. By the time I'd pulled even I was panting and light headed.

We lost so many men over the next hour, including Frankel. The pattern so eerily familiar; the breakdown and sobbing as their hope cracked, the sound of them slipping behind, and the horrible screams as they were eaten alive, the silent prayers that death would take someone else and skip us. For each victim I counted off the distance between us and them. For those of us remaining, the gap between us and what chased us grew.

We had a two minute lead by the time we reached McClellan's encampment. I gasped for air as I tried to warn them. They looked at me as if I was crazy. Fortunately a captain mustered two lines of men as a precaution and brought forward four Gatling guns.

"Aim for their heads," I warned. And then I ran. I had no faith they would stop them. I heard the shots ring out for another two hours. I managed to run six more miles before my legs gave out. I collapsed in a heap next to the road, a ball of cramped muscles, waiting to die, waiting for that hoard to catch up and finally take possession of my sorry soul.

I awoke on a cot in a tent. I was in Pennsylvania. A pretty nurse told me they found me passed out on the road. My hand and leg wounds had been bandaged. Another stripe had been added to my coat making me a sergeant, though I would never return to duty. I heard while recuperating from my wounds that McClelland had withdrawn, though no one knew why. A man from Washington dressed in a suit visited me the next week. He had me sign a document stating I would never report what I had seen that day at Antietam Creek. I was discharged from the army the very next day.

I thought back to Frankel's question, *what were they*, and I think I now know. They were death personified. If that day had taught me anything, it's that without hope, death will soon find you and eagerly gnaw at your bones.

The Diary of Horatio White Tidbits

This story was first submitted for the Pill Hill Press anthology, *Gone With The Dirt* (Civil War zombies). The premise for *Gone With The Dirt* has an interesting back story. Pill Hill Press had another zombie anthology based on a painting and was taking suggestions for a title (*Rotting Tales* was the title chosen). Jokingly, I suggested ***Gone With The Dirt***. That got the wheels turning in Jessy Marie Roberts head and a second anthology was born.

Of course I had to submit a story for it, it was partially my fault. Luckily, I had already been researching the Civil War for a different story, so I was somewhat prepared. One of the questions that cropped up during my research of The Battle at Antietam Creek was how did the Union Army manage to lose. The Union Army had intelligence on the whereabouts of Lee's army, and a two to one advantage in manpower and artillery. They'd caught Lee with his pants down. The battle should have been won, and the war ended on that September day in 1862. How did the Union Army lose?

The real answer was ineptness. McClellan only deployed half his troops. Poor communication, and sheer bad luck were also major contributors. But when I saw this anthology theme, Civil War zombies, I wondered: *what if the Union Army encountered a platoon of zombies, an enemy that could take bullet after bullet and wouldn't fall, and wouldn't stop advancing?* In an effort to bring veracity to the story, I used actual names, places, and events as much as possible. The battle to take the cornfield (and retake it over and over again) actually happened pretty much as described - minus the zombies, of course. But then again...

About the Author



Mark Souza lives in the Pacific Northwest with his wife, two children, and mongrel beast-dog, Tater. When he's not writing, he's out among you trying to look and act normal (whatever that is), reminding himself that the monsters he's created are all in his head, no more real than campaign promises.

Upcoming Titles

My novel ***Robyn's Egg*** will be released in the spring of 2012
A collection of my short stories, ***Try 2 Stop Me***, will be released in September of 2012
Other **FREE** short stories coming soon:

Cupid's Maze (Already Available)

Murphy's Law (Already Available)

Appliances Included

Second Honeymoon

The Comfort Shack

Connect With Me Online:

My Website: <http://www.marksouza.com>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/#!/souzawrites>

An Excerpt From

The Comfort Shack

By Mark Souza

The mini-van pulled to a stop in the nearly empty parking lot. Its headlights lit a sign mounted to a rustic stone rampart. *Welcome to Historic Fort Cavendish*. A family of four crawled out, stiff and weary. They unloaded the van and followed a concrete walk through a set of gates dragging their roller-bags.

“Mom, why can't we stay in a real hotel?” the oldest daughter complained. “Shut up, Jenny. We're here now and this place has meaning to your father.”

Inwardly, Leanne Brown didn't want to spend a cold night in a drafty pre-Revolutionary-War fort any more than her daughter. But the decision had been made. Her husband, Stu, had ancestors who had lived there during the eighteenth century. To him this was a romantic adventure, a reconnecting with his past. Letting Jenny's mutiny go unchecked would only invite a spat. She clenched her teeth and hauled her bag dutifully, bringing up the rear like a ramrod driving reluctant cattle down the trail.

Light spilled from the office windows casting intersecting crescents of light onto the walk. Panes of wavy glass flecked with bubbles bracketed a heavy door crudely fashioned from hand-hewn timber. Inside, functionality trumped historical accuracy. Overhead fluorescents cast a pallid glow over a heavy wooden reception desk fitted with a computer. The office walls had been finished with sheetrock and painted a cheery yellow.

Behind the counter, a woman looked up from her terminal screen when the door opened. She was young and pretty and had a ready smile. Hair black and shiny as a starling's eye flowed over her shoulders down to her waist, boldly framing a heart-shaped face with high cheekbones and bronze skin.

“Hi, you must be the Brown family. I'm Ellie, welcome to historic Fort Cavendish. We've been expecting you.”

Stu gawked at the girl with a stupid grin on his face. Leanne shot a quick elbow to his ribs to bring him back to Earth.

“Uh, yes, that's us,” Leanne said.

“We have you in the Commandant's Cottage. After you've settled in, would you like the tour?”

“Sure,” Stu said.

The girls rolled their eyes. They remained silent though their posture sagged like snow burdened willows. Under other circumstances Leanne would have taken them to task, but it was late, everyone was tired, and it was enough that they didn't complain.

The receptionist picked up on their reluctance. “I promise to make it fun,” she said. “Let me show you to your cottage.”

She led the Browns out the door and across the courtyard on a lit cobbled path. Suitcase wheels clattered as they bounced over the joints in the walkway and no one

spoke. A stone cottage jutted from the interior bulwark. Ellie held the door while the Browns shuffled inside.

The Commandant's Cottage was better accommodation than Leanne expected. A wood fire burned in the hearth of a massive river-rock fireplace. Oil lamps lit the space. The front room had an upholstered sofa and two leather club chairs, antiques, though not old enough to be authentic to the fort by a long stretch. A short hallway led to a bathroom with a tub-shower combination and modern plumbing. Leanne was glad to see some concessions had been made in the name of guest comfort.

On either side of the hall were bedrooms. The one on the right was furnished with a pair of twin beds and an antique armoire. The girls shuffled in and chose beds without a fight. The room to the left was nearly identical in size, and furnished with a queen-size bed. The mattress was smaller than Leanne was used to, but for one night, it would do.

"I'll give you a few minutes to get settled and we'll start the tour," Ellie said. She closed the door and left them. The Browns unpacked.

Leanne answered the light rap at the door fifteen minutes later. Ellie stood on the stoop holding a set of brass pans fastened to long wooden handles. She set them down next to the fireplace, folded back the lid on one, scooped up embers from the hearth, and clapped the lid shut.

"In the old days, people used these to warm their beds before they climbed in. Your beds will be nice and toasty by the time we get back." After placing the bed warmers, Ellie joined the Browns in the main room.

"Are we ready?"

The girls looked less than excited. Leanne didn't feel much enthusiasm either and tried to come up with a graceful way to beg off. It had been a long drive, the hour was getting late, and the cottage was warm.

"Who wants to hear about the slaughter of 1759?" Ellie said.

Lisa shot a hand in the air and looked over at her older sister who was trying to decide. Slowly, Jenny's arm crept above her head. Ellie smiled.

"All right, the tour starts now. Fort Cavendish was built in 1750 by the British to protect Cavendish Bay and the towns nearby from French marauders, and Indian attack. Cavendish Bay was a major seaport at the time. Ships left for England heavy with tobacco, furs and cotton. They returned with supplies like cloth, tea, and gunpowder.

"This cottage was the home of Commander Jonathon Smythe. The only record we have of what happened is from the diary of his wife, Rebecca. The story of the slaughter centers around a prostitute. Is that going to be okay Mrs. Brown?"

The girls, Jenny fifteen, and Lisa thirteen, smirked with their gaze glued to their mother. Maybe they thought she'd squirm at the word or forbid them to hear the story.

"It's no problem. They're old enough to know what the word means," Leanne said.

"I'm related to Commander Smythe on my mother's side," Stu blurted. "He's my great, great, great, grandfather nine generations back."

The girls looked embarrassed and a little peeved. Initially opposed to the tour, they were now eager to get started and their father was slowing things down. Ellie's story had two elements they were keen to hear; slaughter and prostitution. And they had their mother's permission. Leanne was peeved too, but for different reasons.

Ellie smiled graciously. “Wow, what are the odds? A blood relative of Commander Smythe? That doesn’t happen every day. Welcome home, I guess.”

Stu grinned like a smitten schoolboy. Leanne glared. She muttered under her breath, “She’s half your age, moron.” Stu’s eyes slid toward his wife and his expression soured. He’d heard her.

“Where did I leave off?” Ellie asked.

“Prostitutes,” Lisa chirped. She looked over at her mother with fretful eyes and a wide grin exposing her braces, to see if she was in Dutch.

“That’s right,” Ellie said. “Let’s head outside.”

Ellie pointed out the various buildings scattered inside the fort and explained how the largest structure at the center, the barracks, housed the enlisted men. The cottages along the walls were assigned to officers and their families on the basis of rank. With one exception. Ellie pointed out a small building next to the Commandant’s Cottage.

“That cottage held prostitutes. The army recognized that since the enlisted men were mostly single and weren’t permitted to have anyone live with them, having ready access to prostitutes might relieve tensions before they came to a head.

“It was a cold winter day in 1759 at about this time of year. The days were short and the nights long. A new girl was brought in, a Native American girl named Libby, and that’s when the trouble began...”

Rebecca Smythe watched the wagon pass through the gates. The buckboard carried supplies up from the harbor. She scaled the wall after hearing the sentry’s call of ‘ship ahoy’ to watch the unloading through a spyglass. The Harbinger set anchor late in the afternoon and wagons off-loaded her cargo, coming and going well into the evening. Rebecca had ordered a hand mirror months earlier and met each wagon as it arrived. Her initial excitement festered into simmering frustration as load after load arrived with no sign of her mirror.

As the wagon drew nearer, she noticed it carried a passenger, a woman. A woman arriving alone meant one thing, a new whore for the *Comfort Shack* - as the men called it. This one was different. She was an Indian. There had never been an Indian whore at Fort Cavendish. And she was young and pretty. Not just pretty, she was beautiful. Unlike the other prostitutes, she wasn’t plump, pimple faced, lazy-eyed, or missing teeth. Men scrambled off the wall and hustled across the parade ground to meet the wagon with stupid leering grins.

“Flies to rotted meat,” Rebecca muttered.

The wagon slowed to a stop in front of the supply house. The driver tipped his hat and offered Rebecca a smile.

“Hello again, Mrs. Smythe.”

She dipped her head in greeting. “You know why I’m here.”

“Yes ma’am and I have it for you.”

Rebecca placed a hand over her chest and let out a relieved sigh. The hours of fruitless waiting had seemed longer than the weeks and months that had come before. But the waiting was finally over.

Soldiers arrived at the wagon and crowded around the sideboard. They jostled for position to be the one to help down the new girl. They behaved like idiots. If her husband

hadn't been away in town, Rebecca felt sure he would have had them put in stocks or had them whipped. Another group of men arrived to unload the wagon.

"May I have it?" Rebecca asked. The driver reached under his seat and pulled out a parcel wrapped in cloth and bound with string. She could tell from the shape it was her mirror. The driver handed it down as a soldier swung the girl off the seat. Rebecca watched in horror as the girl's leg clipped the mirror and it tumbled from the driver's hand. Time seemed to slow. It felt to Rebecca as though she'd stepped outside her body and was unable to react. The mirror ricocheted off the sideboard and spun like a windmill till it hit the cobblestones. When she came to her senses she was still screaming the word, "No."

The soldiers backed away. Some returned to their posts. The new girl looked scared and chewed on her lower lip. She bent down, picked up the mirror and timidly offered it to Rebecca. Rebecca snatched it away and snapped the string with a jerk of her fingers. She peeled off the cloth and threw it to the ground. The silver handle was cold in her hand. Intricate filigree decorated the back. She turned it over. A crack extended diagonally across the glass. The girl shifted her gaze from the mirror to Rebecca, a smug grin on her face.

Rebecca's neck tensed with rage, her words came out in a raspy hiss, "It's ruined, ruined." Her tone scattered the remaining soldiers.

"I will pay for a new one," the girl said.

"What is your name?"

"I will pay."

"Of course you will. What is your name?" Rebecca demanded.

"Libby."

"Your full name."

The team of horses, whose ears pricked up when the commotion started, now folded them back as if checking for a safe path to retreat.

"Libby, ma'am."

"Don't you have a proper name?"

"My name is Libenasequa. White people call me Libby because they have trouble pronouncing it."

"Do you know how long I waited for that mirror?"

"No ma'am."

"Four months. I ordered it in September and it's only just arrived. Can you replace my time?"

"No ma'am."

"So what do you have to say for yourself?"

"I am terribly sorry. I didn't mean any harm. A beautiful woman with golden hair such as you has no need for reassurance from a mirror." The girl spoke softly, her gaze fixed on the ground. From her posture, she looked to be an innocent begging for sympathy. But it was all for show. She was no more remorseful than a cat atop a mouse. Rebecca wanted to slap her.

"Be quiet. I don't want to hear your self-serving blather. The mirror cost two pounds. Pay me."

"But I have no money yet."

"You don't? Then why did you offer to pay?"

“I will pay you as soon as I can. I promise.”

“The promise of a whore. Now I feel better.” Rebecca turned away from the girl and dug through her purse. She pulled out two silver coins and handed them to the driver. “Place another order with the captain the moment you return to the ship.” The driver nodded.

Rebecca held the mirror to her face. The crack split her brow to cheek, one half angled higher than the other. The effect was grotesque. She squeezed the silver handle until the blood left her hand and the mirror quivered.

“I’ll be waiting for my money,” she said. She lowered the mirror and stormed off for home.

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