

# Ty Fisher and the Blood of the Mountain Men

By  
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## CHAPTER 1

My name is Ty Fisher and I'm in one hell of a mess. I'm not sure I will yet live when the sun comes up, 'cause things are that bad. My right leg has been broken in two spots that I know of and I am slowly freezing to death. I am of a sound mind, but my body has gone to hell on me in jess the last few hours. I figure if the Sioux don't kill me, either the weather or my broke leg will. It is not easy to lay here and keep my small fire a-goin' while I listen to every little sound, hoping it is not the Sioux or death coming to meet me personal like. While the odds may be 'gainst me, I am not a quitter and I never have been. If death or the Sioux want me, let them start the dance and they will find I am able to pay the band.

It all started when the Sioux got on my ass a couple of days back. I gave 'em the slip fer a time, but ya cain't ever really lose a Injun. If they want ya bad 'nough, why they just stay on your back trail until they get ya eventual like. I was doin' fine until just a-fore dark when a shot rang out and I was knocked from my horse with a hard blow to my right leg. The bullet went through the leg and kilt my hoss, but if things weren't a-goin' bad 'nough, two Sioux braves charged from the trees. The first old boy I kilt out right with my Hawken rifle, but the second one got in close and me and him tangled a spell. I 'ventually kilt him with my green river knife, but that red bastard was hard on my broke leg. Now, I am forted up in a blackberry briar patch with a fire the size of a teacup. Things ain't lookin' good, but my life ain't never been that easy to start with, so I don't 'spect no easy death either.

Right after I crawled into this briar patch I set my leg as good as I could and wrapped 'er up tight. Now, that hurt me like all get out, but I didn't have much of a choice. If I can survive this night, I fig'er I have a chance to live a little longer. See, most mountain men will tell ya, the first twenty-four hours are the most 'portant when

dodgin' Injuns, or gettin' over a hut. Seems if a man is a-gonna get caught or up and die, why he just natural like does it within that there twenty-four hours. After that it still ain't easy, but them first few hours are the most 'portant.

The wind rustled the briar patch a might so I added another small twig of wood to the dying flames. The fire was small and in a hole in the ground, so I knew it was not a flame easily seen by others. I had learned to keep my fires small, unless I wanted unwelcome company and right now that was the last thing I was up to taking on. No, I wanted to rest and regain some strength while I could. I was so tired my eyes felt like they had sand in 'em. The odds were I would be dead way before the sun came up, especially if them Sioux were still back there.

Some folks don't think Injuns fight at night and that is just plain dumb thinkin'. A Injun will fight when the fightin' is good fer 'em. If he thinks he can win, why he'll fight ya during a lightnin' storm just to see the color of yer hair. See, Injuns don't see life like we do and I don't mean that in a bad way. A Injun is taught from birth to kill to protect his tribe, so killing is a way of life from the beginnin' with 'em. Also, the more fightin' a brave does and the more coups he has, why the bigger man he is among his own people. All this compassion and tenderness the white man wants us all to display towards them folks is just a bunch of hogwash when you apply to the red man. The red man does not understand mercy and he only respects bravery, determination, and a fight to the death. All of that Bible stuff is viewed as a weakness by the Injun's, 'sides most of 'em never heard of no Bible.

I have knowed a few Injuns in my life and most of 'em were good men. They are different, like I just said, but you have good ones and bad ones too. I don't guess no society is much different from 'nother when it comes to good folks or bad ones. What I like most 'bout Injuns is they don't talk yer arm and leg off 'round no campfire, less you have one of them pow-wows a-goin' with a big chief, then them boys can talk fer days and days un-end. They're mostly quiet folk and they are an independent lot when compared to white men. A Injun does what he wants and when he wants too, and he ain't judged harshly 'cause he don't go along with the group. Now, the way I see it that can be both good and bad. Be hard to go to war with a man who don't follow orders, but hell, they do it everyday and they are most likely some of the best fighters in the world today. I guess you have to be a Injun to unnerstand how they think most of the time.

I pulled out a small strip of buffalo jerky and nibbled on the rock hard meat. It wasn't much, but likely to be all I would eat for a few days. I had a few pounds of it in my possibles bag, so I was not likely to starve fer a spell. I suspected I would not have to worry about hunger for long aways. My biggest fear right now was if my leg would fester or not. If it festered I would loose the leg or die, either equaled the other as far as I was concerned.

The night was long and cold as I would awaken at times and add small twigs to my small fire. I had a horse blanket, but it did little to keep the cold from me or to help make me comfortable. What I needed and didn't have was some whiskey to ward off the pain of my leg. Well, I ain't got none, so I will bare the pain the best I can. I ain't the first man who ever had to handle pain without anything fer the pain. Oh, I don't like it much, but what can I do 'bout it? Not a thang, 'cept lay here and take it.

Dawn broke with frost on the ground and stiffness in my good joints. I am only a little over thirty years of age, but too many years a-wadin' cold mountain streams a-

lookin' fer beavers have added a lot of age to me. I am one of the lucky ones, I guess. I have lived long enough fer my joints to ach, while many of my friends have not. Mostly it was the Injuns, the weather, accidents, or big critters that put most of 'em under.

While my leg is still swollen, it does not show signs of festerin' yet. I am not sure how long that festering stuff takes, but this morning, other than a-bein' stiff and in some pain, I am doing fine. I had just added another small twig to my fire when I heard a small noise. I was not sure what it was actually, but something grabbed my attention. It might have been a snapping twig or a rolling rock, but I didn't hear it clearly enough to identify it. I pulled the hammer back on my Hawken rifle and was surprised by the loud click it made as it locked into position.

Many slow and long minutes pasted before I heard a low voice, "Ty, you there?"

I knew immediately it was old Pack, and I was one happy mountain man to hear the sound of his rough and graveled voice. I answered in just above a whisper, "I'm in the briar patch, almost dead center."

"I smell yer smoke, but damned if-un I can see ya."

"Just keep walking. I got a broke leg and I cain't come to ya."

A few minutes pasted and looking up I noticed the dirty and unkempt face of Pack looking down at me. He gave me a big smile and I saw he had lost a few more teeth, most likely from fighting and drinking, knowing Pack.

"Well, old son, yer in a fine mess. I came on yer dead hoss back there and 'spected ya was holed up some place. I saw a lot of blood and two dead Sioux, so I knowed you had made a fight of it." Pack spoke as he got down on his knees and crawled into my rough shelter.

"Pack, you got any trader's whiskey on ya? I hut a bit and it would take the edge off of the pain."

"I got some, but let me look at ya furst. If you get to festerin' there will hell to pay." Pack spoke as he pulled the rough bandage back and checked my broken leg. I could see by looking at the relief in his eyes that things were all right.

"How's it look?"

"Looks jess like a broke leg. I'll go and get that whiskey fer ya and be right back. There was two Sioux on yer back trail, but I done 'em in. I don't know if-un there was others 'hind them, but you ain't gotta worry 'bout them two fer sartain." I watched as the big man wiggled out of my briar patch and disappeared. He was only gone for a few minutes when he returned with a small jug of trader's whiskey and a beat up old tin cup.

Smiling, Pack said, "Some fellers will do damned neart anything fer a free spot of whiskey!"

I had to give a light chuckle as the course amber liquid burned a trail down my parched throat. That one drink struck my belly like a bolt of lightening and I could almost feel an immediate dullness in the pain. Then again, it might have just been relief of having another person beside me. There is something comforting in having another person with you when you are seriously hurt and I could feel either the alcohol or relief fill my whole being. I might just survive this after all.

"Pack, what in tarnation are you doin' up heah? Last I heard, you was down by the Low Water trappin' fer pews."

“Me and Hatch got runned out by them damned Blackfoot. They kilt old Hatch, so I made a bee line to the mountains where I could hole up a spell. I came ‘cross yer hoss and here I be. Not much to ‘er really.”

“Well, I am sorry ‘bout Hatch, he was a man to walk the river with. Good man. But, I am glad ya found me. If you hadn’t, I’d be a gone beaver by now with them two Sioux on my trail.”

“Waugh! Who is to say. I have knowed men to survive much more and you’re one to do the same. I hated to lose old Hatch, me and him go back a few years, but you and me both know in these mountains a man is on barrowed time.”

“Pack, we gotta move. I ‘spect more Sioux are on my backside and it will only be a matter of time a-fore they come lookin’ fer me serious like.”

“I hear ya and I knows it to be true. I will have to leave some gear, ‘cause I only got one riding horse and one packhorse. Mayhap we can make it to Butterfield’s Tradin’ Post, if we ride long and hard. The thing is, can ya ride with that busted up leg?”

“Pack, I ain’t got not choice, either I ride, or I die right heah.”

Pack gave a light laugh and said, “Well, let’s do ‘er. This is a’gonna hut ya some old coon, but they ain’t no gentle way to do this. I’ll pull ya outta these briars, load ya on the hoss, and then we’ll make tracks fer Butterfield’s.”

The next few minutes were some of the most painful in my life. I even bit a green twig in two pieces to keep from screaming. At one point I must have pasted out, because I came to on the packhorse. The rest of that day was spent in pure hell as I experienced a bone jarring ride like I have never felt before. Most of the time I was semi-conscious, but I could feel the horse moving smoothly under me. The problem was the slightest jar or jolt and I would get a sharp pain up the entire broken leg to my lower back. It was after dark before Pack finally lowered me to the dirt beside a campfire and covered me with a buffalo robe. I vaguely remember him feeding me broth of some kind and then I drifted back to sleep.

It was not until almost noon the second day I was able to carry on a conversation of sorts, “How much further we got to go?”

“I fig’ure we’ll be there some times tomorrow, if the weather stays clear. But, there are some rough clouds hangin’ over by the mountains. Now, we can ride long and hard today or stop early and hole up. Which you want to do?”

“Keep ridin’, as much as it huts it gets makes me that much closer to hep and relaxin’. I’ll do ‘er all right.”

Pack leaned over and spit a dark stream of chewing tobacco juice into the dirt as he said, “I was hopin’ you’d say that. I ain’t been comfortable since them damn Blackfoot got on my butt. And, you have the Sioux on yer-un, so thangs ain’t goin’ too good fer us right now. I fig’er the sooner we get to the Tradin’ Post the better off we’ll both be.”

We rode until late that night and finally stopped in a grow of pines at the base of a large mountain. I knew where we were and I guessed we would finally be at the tradin’ post a little before noon the next day. Well, unless we had problems between then and now. One thing ‘bout a-livin’ as a mountain man, things could get down right excitin’ at times.

Over a small fire we shared the last of Pack’s coffee and I was able to eat and keep down a bowl of his stew. Even in the best of times Pack’s stew if hard to keep

down and as hurt as I was right then it was a real chore. See, when you eat Pack's stew you are constantly throwing gristles, bones, and even fur from yer bowl. He tends to skin a critter jess 'nough to get to the meat and doesn't worry much 'bout anything else that ends up in the pot.

The night passed cold, but uneventful for us. The normal night sounds were there and the stars were bright overhead. At one point I could see lightning flash near the mountains and knew that we would be lucky to get off without any rain. But, it passed us by without even a small spatter of drops and the lightening was the only hint of bad weather.

In the morning a check of my leg showed the swelling had gone down and there were no angry red lines of infection. I was more worried about the risk of infection than a quick healing. I knew festering could kill me and I had suffered too much from the injury to consider death that way. It is a painful and horrible death, and one that nothing can be done for the victim. A person just died away slowly and in great pain as the festerin' would spread throughout the body. Pack changed the bandage and rewrapped the leg before he placed me on the packhorse. I was starting to hate that horse, fer all the pain it caused me, but I knew that it beat walkin'.

Just a little before noon we topped a slight rise and saw Butterfield's tradin' post below us beside a shallow river. It was not much to look at, but it was the biggest thing around fer miles and the only tradin' post this side of the Mississippi as far as I was concerned. Oh, there were others, but a feller could trust Butterfield to trade fair and square and not take 'vantage of a man. I knew now I would be laid up for at least two weeks and this was about as safe as it ever got in the mountains. I also knew Butterfield would not charge me room and board like some fellers would, but he would expect me to help him out when I got some strength back in me. I have always been a hard working man, so helping him out to pay for my room and keep would do me just fine.

"Ya know, it shore ain't much to look at, is it?" Pack asked with a low chuckle.

I gave him a crooked grin and said, "It looks jess fine, if yer leg is broke up and ya hut all over. It'll do."

Less than ten minutes later we were in the fort and I was lifted from the horse by a small group of mountain men. They carried me into the trading post and put me in a bed of all things. Hell, I hadn't been in a bed in five years or more. But, there I was in a feather down bed with a patch work quilt over me like I was back on the farm.

"By damn, "Butterfield said as he looked at my injury, "yer a lucky son of a bitch. It that had been a fifty caliber rifle ball and not a smaller one, why you would have lost the whole leg. Looks like the ball hit ya with less powder than a full load too."

I grimaced with the pain and replied, "Well, how come I don't feel so lucky?"

Butterfield gave a deep hardy laugh and said, "Well, now, pilgrim, I guess it all depends of the side of the fence yer on. I can see where you mighten not feel very lucky, but son, you are. Like I said, a big ball would have ruined that whole leg."

I grumbled a bit and leaned back into that big comfortable bed. I realized a big bed like that could make a feller down right lazy if-un he slept in it everyday. I knew right then and there, though, it was perfect for me in my condition.

I glanced up at Butterfield and asked, "Did Pack tell ya 'bout them Sioux on my backside?"

“Yep, he did Ty, but that ain’t much like them Sioux. Oh, they’ll kill a man fast ‘nough, but they usually need a reason. You bein’ healthy and such it is not like ‘em at all. Did you make ‘em mad that you know of?” As Butterfield spoke I could see the concern on his face. See, if the Sioux got stirred up good and ugly, why the whole fur trade was in danger.

“Nope, I had felt them on my trail for a couple of days a-fore the attack. I had no idea it was even the Sioux until I kilt that first man. I saw the way he wore his hair and knew he was a Sioux. I never knew a man what had much serious troubles with the Sioux, unless he asked fer it somehow.”

Butterfield gave a light chortle and replied, “Well, they be fired up now if they attacked you. It just don’t seem like them boys of old Hump’s would be out a-lookin’ fer hair when there ain’t no good reason. Hell, they get plenty of coups a-fightin’ with the Crow and Blackfoot that they don’t need to mess with white men. Unless something has lit a fire unner ‘em.”

“I don’t know Butterfield, but when them two came at me they was as serious as all get-out. They wanted my hair.” I said in a tired voice as I lowered my head to the soft pillow. My last thought before I fell asleep was how comfortable that pillow was when compared to my old saddle.

## CHAPTER 2

Over the next two weeks I spend a lot of time sitting in front of the tradin’ post in an old rocking chair Butterfield kept there. The weather was cool, but not really cold unless I went out too early. Actually, the early mornings were down right cold, until the sun came out to burn the frost from the ground.

I was impatient to move around some. I have never been a man to stay in bed much and spending so much time in that old rocking chair almost kilt me. Now, I ain’t no fool neither, so I knew I had to spend the time I needed to mend properly. I have seen too many men that wouldn’t let a injury heal properly and the dang thang would bother ‘em the rest of their lives. Nope, I would rather take the time to heal right than have a bum leg the rest of my life. Legs and arms ya don’t mess with, not if you want to live in the mountains and do what needed to be done. It took a whole man to live the kind of life I lived.

It was the end of the second week that I started on Butterfield’s stack of fire wood and split more than a few cords for ‘em to pay back the vittles I done ate. While he had never brought the subject up, I would take nothing for free from no man. The least I could do was to work as much as I could to pay for my keep. And, I knew when the colder weather hit, Butterfield would be glad to have the spit wood to warm his tradin’ post. One thing for sure about the mountain, when the cold weather came, she came to stay and stayed until she was ready to leave. I have seen the mountain passes covered with more than ten feet of snow and they stayed covered for many a long month.

It was during my third week with Butterfield, over a cup of his strong hot coffee, I spoke for the first time of leaving, “Hank, if ya will give me somethang’s I need ‘gainst this years pews, I will be out of yer hair come mornin’.”

Butterfield looked me in the eye and gave a grin and said, "You gettin' tired of my cookin' son?"

"Nope, gotta get back to work. The weather is turnin' colder every day now and it won't be long a-fore them pews are all prime."

Butterfield gave a chuckle and asked, "Well, now, who are you winterin' with? Kinda late in the year to be a-goin' out. I thought you'd spend winter with me and I could jess turn ya into a shop keeper fer me."

"Waugh! That would never do! I fig'er to winter with Crazy Wayne, up on Baldy." Then I realized he was pulling my leg, see old Butterfield liked to tease as much as any man.

Wiping the tears from his eyes, but still grinning like a dawg a-passin' a peach seed Butterfield asked, "What do ya need Ty? If I got 'er son, you can have it."

"I 'spect I need some lead, some powder, 'baccer, a big jug of whiskey, some foo-faraw and a blanket 'er two. Of course, I'd like to get that young Injun pony you got out back too. Would there be a problem with any of that stuff?"

"Nope, the trade goods I let ya have fer less than ten dollars, the horse now, that will cost ya might." Butterfield spoke and I could see the tinkle of humor in his eyes.

Knowing how much he enjoyed a good horse trade, we bickered 'bout that pony off and on the rest of the day. Even after the evening meal over a small glass of his rot gut trader's whiskey we argued over the price.

Finally, pretending he had had enough, Butterfield said with a smile, "I got that horse from a Crow 'bout four months ago. All it does is eat and pass gas. You take 'em with ya, if ya can stay in the saddle its your-un. See, he ain't broke in yet. Well, not properly like anyways. He's been ridden, but he don't care much for it and starts every ride with a little heel kicking dance."

Well, I fig'ered there was little this pony could do to me that other horses had not done to me before. I was a bit concerned about the strength in my leg and if it could take the beating the small pony was to give me, but I had to move and make some money. If I re-broke the leg, my winter income was gone. Only, to my way of thinkin', I didn't really have much of a choice. To work I had to have a horse at least until I could find me some Crows or other friendly Injuns that would trade with me. I was never a man who liked to have just one hoss around. If the back trail got too hot, I could always ride one horse and rest the other and switch off as I needed. And, a body cain't do that with only one hoss along.

At dawn the next morning all of my gear was on that pony and Butterfield stood by the hitching post with a grin on his face to beat it all. He knew and so did I, as soon as I sat in that saddle the dance would start. But, time was wasting and I needed to meet up with Crazy Wayne, so I climbed up into that saddle.

Now, that horse suddenly kicked up his heels and started to jerking and jumping every which way. It took all I had to stay on, but in the end he came to realize I was there and I planned on staying there. In less than ten minutes I was moving slowly at a walk away from the trader's post toward the mountains. I felt good to be back in the saddle once more, and on a horse I now owned. Butterfield had simply grinned as I rode away and I suspected he knew I would stay in the saddle. He was a good man Butterfield was.

Four days later I approached a darkened hole in the side of Baldy Mountain and watched it closely. I could see no sign of smoke or movement in or near the cave. But, Crazy Wayne was a shifty man and I knew he would be hard to spot.

Dismounting and tying my horse to a pine limb, I walked slowly toward the entrance to the cave. About fifty feet from the mouth of the cavern I called out, "Hello the cave. It is me, Ty Fisher and I am lookin' fer a no good bastard named Crazy Wayne!"

"Welp, ya found 'em. Come on up, but keep yer hands were I can see 'em at all times, or I'll blow yer haid off. And, if-un yer Ty Fisher you know by God I can do 'er too." There came a loud response from inside the cave almost immediately.

"Wayne, you couldn't hit a bull's ass with a two by four if he was standing in front of ya!" I yelled back

"Hurry on up heah Ty! By God, I knows it's you now."

As I entered the cave I noticed Crazy Wayne standing by the door with his Hawken in his right hand. Two other men I had never seen before were seated by the fire. Wayne gave me a brotherly hug and led me to the fire.

"Bull and Drinkwater, this is Ty Fisher. He's a good ole boy from back in the Missouri hills."

There were nods of acceptance and then Bull said, "I knew a Fisher oncet, he lived in Arkansas."

"Well, I ain't neveh been there before and don't plan to go there now." I immediately didn't like the man. He had small narrow eyes and his nose was too long for the width of his face. I guess what really bothered me the most was how dirty he was. I mean most of us mountain men were dirty most of the time, but his hair looked as if it had never seen water. Nope, while he obviously got his nickname from his size and he was a big feller, I decided right then and there I didn't like Bull.

He gave me a look then turned his eyes from mine as he said, "I was jess askin' is all. No offense meant."

"And, none taken." I quickly replied. Turning to Crazy Wayne I said, "These yer men fer the winter's trappin'?"

Crazy Wayne slowly shook his head as if apologizing for the men he had and said, "Yep, Bull here is on his furst season and Drinkwater is an old hand from way back."

Looking over at Drinkwater I could see the bark on the man. He was a typical no nonsense kind of feller that symbolized most mountain man. Oh, I soon discovered he had a healthy enough sense of humor, but when he first met me he was sizing me up and not in a jokin' mood. He simply nodded at me, so I nodded right back. *He'll do*, I thought at the time.

That night as Crazy stood guard me and him talked a little. He explained that Bull was hired only because he could find no others willing to go into Blackfoot country for pews. He further told me that Bull was lazy and not very woods smart. Seemed to Crazy that Bull was just a big man who had made it this far in his life mainly due to his huge size. Well, I fig'ered the feller would soon learn that in the mountains he had to walk his talk, or he'd go under fast.

When I told him 'bout the Sioux he was suddenly very concerned, "I ain't never heard of no Sioux after a man like they was after you. Are you shore you didn't piss them boys off in some way?"

"Not unless I rode over some sacred ground or some other such nonsense. Hell, the last time I saw a Sioux was last spring, and me and him drank some whiskey together. I got no idea what had 'em stirred up like a hornets nest."

"The red man can be hard to fig'er out at times. I am shore though, if-un you didn't get 'em mad, someone else did. They are like us in that way. I mean, hell, all whites look alike to 'em, so they 'spect any they kill will be the right ones. Some of our men are the same way. You know the kind, they don't know a Sioux from a Crow, so they shoot 'em both and that way they get the guilty ones. Plain ignert is what it is."

I slowly stood and wiped the dust from the back of my pants as I said, "Well, I am headin' fer the robe. Does this Bull feller pull guard too?"

"Yep, he pulls 'er, but I don't trust 'em much. First night out I caught him sleepin' on dooty, and that don't work with me."

"I'm surprised you didn't kill 'em."

Crazy Wayne gave a low laugh and said, "I damned shore thought 'bout it. But, I needed him then and I still do. When you sleep, sleep lightly Ty."

As I rolled up in my blankets I thought of this man Bull and the lack of trust I had seen in Crazy Wayne's eyes. My last thought before I drifted off to sleep was how dumb I was for joinin' up with a crew like this. Not good at all.

It was later that night when I awoke. I am not sure what caused me to awaken, but it might have been a small noise or movement. I opened my eyes and looked around the dark interior of the cave. I saw nothing out of place and the fire had burned down to small red eyes in the darkness. Looking at the entrance I could faintly see the outline of Bull setting on a large rock. I wasn't sure, but he looked to be sleeping to me.

I made my way to Crazy Wayne and gently touched his right arm. His eyes instantly came open and looked at me. I know he expected trouble, but he slowly shook his head when I pointed out Bull's chin resting on his chest. The man was breathing deep and at times a small snore would be heard. Now I knew what had awakened me.

"Crazy sumbitch!" I heard Wayne mumble as he stood and pulled the hammer back on his pistol. Walking right up to Bull, Wayne aimed out the entrance and pulled the trigger. The sound was unbelievably loud in the small confines of the cave and Bull instantly jumped to his feet, his eyes huge with fear. He knew he had been asleep and as he looked around he realized *we knew* he had been asleep as well.

Crazy Wayne put his pistol back in his belt, looked at Bull and said, "Go back to bed Bull and in the mornin' yer outta here. I warned you once before Bull and I will have no man along I cannot trust."

"I twernt sleepin' I was restin' me eyes."

"Well, mayhap ya was, but ya was restin' 'em too loud son. Hell, ya woke Ty up snorin'. I want you gone in the mornin'."

"Where in the hell am I to go this time of the year? I got no place to go now!" The big man screamed as he looked first at Crazy Wayne then at me.

Drinkwater, who had come out of his robes at the sound of the shot gave a light chuckle and said, "Ya was warned young pup, but I guess it didn't take. I 'gree wid Crazy heah, if we cain't trust ya, we don't need ya."

Looking hatefully at me, Bull said, “And, it’s yer fault this all happened. I was not asleep and ya know it. Ya jess don’t like me is all.”

Crazy Wayne added some wood to the hot coals and said in an even voice, “Bull, you will be gone at first light. I saw and heard you sleepin’ with my own eyes and ears. Ty said nothin’ ‘gainst ya at all. You was warned a-fore son.”

As the hungry coals ate at the wood flames soon started dancing in the cool night air. Bull had moved off to his buffalo robe and in the firelight he looked like a spoiled child to my way of thinking. While he was physically big, I suspected his mind had some growin’ up to do. I couldn’t understand how he could sleep, knowing he was responsible for the safety of all of us. Maybe he thought this was all one big and grand adventure, like one of them cheap books back east. Well, unlike them books, if ya made a serious mistake out here you usually died a-fore ya realized it. And, to sleep when you was to be guardin’ was just askin’ to die. *Nope*, I thought as I looked over at the big man, *we’re better off without Bull, much better off!*

Daylight found Bull packed and silent as he moved around the cave, but you could feel his anger, ‘cause it hung heavy in the air. Finally, he approached Crazy Wayne and said, “I am goin’ Wayne, but to my way of thinkin’ you did me wrong. And, Wayne, I don’t never forget a wrong done to me. Never.”

Crazy Wayne pulled his pistol from his belt and the sound of the hammer locking back was loud. Looking Bull in the eyes Wayne said, “Son, if that is a threat, well, you jess start it right now. If it’s just bullshit talk, hit the trail. I don’t have time to wipe yer butt nor play yer kids games. But, the next time I see you Bull, your ass is mine. I suggest you head back east with the rest of them damn pork eaters.”

I am still not sure if it was the loaded pistol or the look in Crazy Wayne’s eyes that convinced Bull to keep his mouth shut. Nonetheless, he pulled his hat down a little lower and quickly walked from the cave.

As soon as he left Drinkwater said, “You keep watch on yer backside Crazy. That sumbitch will kill ya furst chance he gets and you should have kilt ‘em right now when you had the chance. His kind will neveh face ya man to man when he tries to do ‘er either, he’ll jess shoot ya in the back.”

Wayne un-cocked his pistol and placed it back in his belt as he said, “Let ‘em try to kill me Drink, but he’ll find I don’t die easy or fast. If his furst shot don’t do the job, he’ll never get a second shot. I’ll be on his ass like ugly on old Ty here!”

All three of us laughed at Crazy Wayne and my homely appearance, but something about what Drinkwater had said made sense to me. The big man had been embarrassed in front of other mountain men and he must know that the word about him would soon get out. See, in the mountains we had little time for cowards or lazy men and we would soon spread the word. I’m not sure what Bull thought killing Crazy Wayne would do to change anything, but he had made the threat. And in the mountains such threats were taken serious like.

### CHAPTER 3

That winter was cold, long, and boring. We trapped fer pews ‘til the streams froze solid, then we relaxed in the cave. One of us was always on guard by the front of the cave and with Bull gone we did eight hours of guard duty a day. Usually we did four on and then eight hours off, that gave a man time to sleep when he needed it. I preferred

the night shifts, 'cause I could do a lot of thinkin' 'bout nothin'. I thought often of my past and how I had come to be a mountain man. I think most of us in the mountains came to escape something or someone and I had come for both reasons.

I had owned a small dirt farm in southern Missouri and while my farm was not much, I had been happy. I was married to a beautiful and hard workin' woman too and we had two small boys. Life was hard and difficult for us most of the time, but we had just turned the farm into a bit of a profit that last year. It was then I got into an argument with a man named Wilcox in town over a pig of mine that had gone missin' and ended up on his farm. The words had led to blows and ill feelin's all the way 'round. I had won the fight and gave the situation no more thought after I got my pig back home.

Late one night 'bout a month later four riders hit my small farm and as I ran from the cabin door with my rifle to protect my family, I had been struck in the head by a rifle ball. When I came too, my cabin was burnt to the ground and my family was dead. I had lost all three of 'em in that fire and, ya know I was not the same man for the better part of a year. I took to drinkin' hard and finally one night I got my revenge. I rode out to Wilcox's farm, called him out, and kilt him right there in his barnyard. He had pulled iron on me fast and fired first, but I beat him with my aim. But, unlike Wilcox, I did no harm to his family, as badly as I wanted to. See, I jess could not bring myself to kill those that had nothing to do with the deaths of my family.

I knew the law would soon be on my trail, so I high tailed it out to the shinnin' mountains and I'd been here every since. I miss my wife and I cry at times over the loss of my kids, but I know now I should have kilt Wilcox the first time we fought. I wonder if the situation with Bull and Crazy Wayne will end up sort of like my situation. The more I think about what Drinkwater said 'bout killin' the man when he had the chance the more I 'gree with 'em. Hatred can lead to all kinds of terrible misery in life. I had come to the mountains to forget the death of my family and to escape the law, but I had found a way of life I enjoyed.

Late one night when I was thinkin' of my pa I heard a slight noise. It was late winter and the snow had a light frozen crust on top. It sounded like something had broken through the crust. I didn't think it was Injuns, too cold fer the boys to be out in force, but I was suddenly uncomfortable. I just knew there was something or someone out there. I moved slowly to both Crazy Wayne and Drinkwater and touched their ankles to awaken them. Both men immediately opened their eyes and listened before they quickly moved to cover the mouth of the cavern with their Hawken rifles in their hands.

Many long minutes pasted without another sound. I was beginning to think I had imagined the whole thing when I heard the same sound once more. Whatever it was moving and it was either stalking us or it was injured, because of how slowly it moved. When I looked over at Wayne, he simply shrugged his shoulders as if he had no idea what it was either.

Finally, Drinkwater looked at me and smiled as he pulled his green river knife and pulled his pistol from is belt. Locking the hammer back on the pistol he said, "I will go take a look see. Sounds to me like whatever it is, its hut. I know it ain't no big critter after the hosses, cause it would have done started the dance."

"Drink, you watch yer ass out there. It could be a bunch of Blackfoot out to lift our hair. While I don't think so in this weather, but with them bastards ya can never be

sure. You want me to go ‘long wid ya?’ Wayne asked as he pulled his long knife from its sheath.

“Nope, I don’t wanna have to worry ‘bout ‘nother person. You stay heah and I will be back directly.” And as soon as he had spoken, Drinkwater slipped from the cave into the darkness.

After about ten minutes I heard Drinkwater yell, “One of y’all come and hep me I got a hut man on my hands!”

“I’ll go,” Wayne said as he handed me his rifle, “But, you keep us well covered. It could be a trap and we don’t know what we got heah yet.”

In just a matter of minutes the two men returned carrying a man. Drinkwater had the man’s shoulders and Wayne had his feet. I could see blood on the front of his buckskin shirt and knew he had a wicked wound to the chest. If it had hit a lung, he was most likely a goner.

“Put him next to the fire so I can get a good look at his injury. Was he alone?” I asked as I placed both my rifle and Wayne’s up against the wall of the small cave.

“Yep, he was.” Drinkwater replied.

I added a few pieces of wood to the fire as Drinkwater washed fresh blood from his hands. The man’s shirt was soaked in blood. I pulled my knife and cut his shirt off of him. I immediately noticed he was a big man and in excellent shape and that always helps when a man has been shot.

“Looks like it might have missed his lung, ‘cause he is breathin’ ok, but he has lost a hell of a lot of blood.” I spoke as I rolled him on his right side so I could check for an exit wound. The exit hole was at least twice as big as the entrance hole and I knew I had to stop the bleeding or he was a gone beaver.

“You a-needin’ any hep?” Drinkwater asked as he moved to my side.

“Yep, put yer knife blade in the fire and heat me up some water. Bring ‘er to a boil and then throw in a piece of cotton material I have in my possibles bag. I have found cotton makes the best bandage for ser’ous wounds.” As I spoke I took my fingers and removed small pieces of buckskin from the edge of the injury. See, when a bullet hits a man it often pushes material or other debris into a wound. If I wanted to avoid him festering up, I had to clean all of that trash out.

“Wayne, you get that jug of whiskey too. I ‘spect he’ll be in pain in a few minutes when I start to work on ‘em.” I added as I glance up at the old mountain man.

The blades in the flames were red-hot and I poured a half of cup of whiskey on the injured man’s chest. He arched his back and gave a horrible scream, then lapsed into unconsciousness. At that point I removed one of the heated blades and pressed it flat against the entry hole in his chest. The sick sweet smell of burnt flesh filled the small cave and I fought the urge to gag. With Drinkwater helping me, we quickly rolled him over onto his stomach and I applied the second red-hot blade to the exit hole. Since the hole was larger I smeared the flesh in an attempt to melt it together to stop the bleeding.

Satisfied with my work, I covered both injuries with the cotton material and then wrapped him up tightly. All I could do now was wait and see how the healin’ process went. If the wounds didn’t fester he’d be up and about in a few days. If the wounds turned sour, he’d jess up and die on us.

I washed my hands and poured me a cup of coffee. I noticed my hands were shaking as I lifted the cup, so I added a good inch whiskey to the cup. Looking over at both Drinkwater and Crazy Wayne, I gave them a weak smile.

“Where did you learn to doctor like that?” Wayne asked after I had taken a few sips of my spiked coffee.

“Picked it up runnin’ these mountains after a few years. Believe it ‘er not, I learned a bit of this from a old hoss doctor at the last roonyvoo. I watched him fix up some fellers last year after a run in with the Blackfoot. Either of you fellers know this feller?” I asked as I pointed down at the injured man.

“I seed ‘em ‘round the tradin’ post oncet, I thank.” Drinkwater said as he poured coffee into his beat up tin cup.

“I know ‘em. His name is Barnes and he is a man to walk the river with. I cain’t fer the life of me fig’er what he is a-doin’ way up heah this time of the year.” Crazy Wayne said as he looked over at the injured man.

“He say anything when you found ‘em Wash?” I asked sipping my coffee.

“Nope, he was talkin’, but not makin’ no real sense to me. Keep sayin’ somethin’ ‘bout big or foot. Near as I can fig’er, the Blackfoot must have attacked him.”

Wayne pulled his pipe out and stuffed the briar bowl with tobacco and I could see he was in deep thought. Finally, as soon as he had lighted his pipe, he said, “I think Barnes was winterin’ with two fellers named James and Gee-Gee. Gee-Gee was some damned Frenchman with a hard name to say, so we jess called him Gee-Gee. All three of ‘em were tough men with the bark on, so whatever happened must have been a real ball buster. I cain’t see them feller’s goin’ beaver without a hell of a fight.”

I had seen no sign of others as I trapped so I asked, “You think they wintered near heah?”

“Well, hard to say. Last I heard tell they was headed up to the Snow Cap area and that’s a good twenty mile from heah. But, if the beaver take was small, they might have moved to ‘nother spot. You know how a mountain man is.”

“Not much to go on, so I guess we’ll have to wait fer this feller to come out of it. He’ll most likely sleep most of this day and part of the next, but by tomorrow evenin’ I ‘spect we’ll have some answers.”

The next afternoon the snow was falling with those big flakes the size of silver dollars and the wind had picked up. It was nice and snug in the cave and we spent most of the day fixin’ beaver traps and repairing most of our equipment.

I was putting a shaving edge to my green river knife when I heard the injured man speak, “Water?”

Crazy Wayne kneeled by the man lifted his head and held a tin cup to his chapped lips. I watched his throat muscles movin’ so I knew he was drinkin’. A injury like that makes a man thirsty as all get out. Problem was, you had to give ‘em sips of water or they usually got sick on ya.

“Can ya talk much now Barnes?” Drinkwater asked and I knew he was concerned about what had caused the whole situation.

“Yep, a little, but I am tired, so tired.” Barnes replied with a weak voice.

“What happened?” Wayne asked as he poured a little whiskey in the cup to give to the injured man.

“Couple days back . . . a big man walked into our camp. He was a-wearin’ rags and he was filthy. Said he had been with a group that had been kilt by the Blackfoot. So, we did what any mountain folks would have done, we fed ‘em and put ‘em to bed. That night he got up and kilt James and Gee-Gee with a knife and then shot me. I was able to make ‘er to the woods and ‘ventually lost him on my trail. He was just a pilgrim, but a big one.”

“Listen Barnes, I know yer tired and I’ll let you sleep in a few minutes, but was that man ‘bout six foot six and three hundred pounds?”

“Yep, big bastard.”

“I bet he had brown hair, long thin nose, and a wide face with little green eyes. Mean lookin’ sumbitch?” Drinkwater asked as if he already knew the answer.

“Yep, and said his name was Bull.” Barnes replied in a much weaker voice.

“Here,” Wayne said as he raised the man’s head and placed the cup of whiskey to his lips, “this will hep ya sleep old coon, so drink it all up. I am sorry as hell ‘bout Gee-Gee and James, I knowed ‘em both and they was good men.”

As soon as Barnes had fallen asleep Drinkwater looked at the two of us and said, “We got us a renegade trapper on our hands. He’ll be runnin’ scart now and there mighten not be no end to the death and hurtin’ he’ll ‘cause. He know’s that Barnes heah got away and he ain’t savvy enough to track ‘em far, so he’ll be runnin’ scart.”

“You think he’ll go back east or mayhap to the tradin’ post?” I asked, suspectin’ the man would go east if he had any sense.

“Well, we gotta put an end to him and the two of ya know it. I should have kilt the big bastard when I had my pistol on ‘em. But, hell, I thought he would jess leave and that would be the end of it.” Crazy Wayne spoke as he shook his head in disbelief of what had happened.

“Waugh! It ain’t yer fault a-tall old son. He’s a bad one and that’s pretty much the way his stick floats. If-un he hadn’t gone bad this time it would have happened sooner or later. Now, it could be he thinks old Barnes here is gone unner. If he thinks Barnes is kilt, he’ll not be a-layin’ low like.” I said in an attempt to cheer Wayne up. I understood how he felt, but a man like Bull is a keg of powder jess a-waitin’ to blow.

“All righty, we got us a mad dawg on our hands, but how do we get rid of ‘em? Oh, I know the answer, but we got one man hut here and the weather is as cold as a banker’s heart.” Drinkwater asked as he poured a small amount of the whiskey into his tin cup.

“I think we’ll wait fer the weather to break and let old Barnes here heal a might. Then, we’ll load up and head to the tradin’ post. I jess don’t see Bull stayin’ out in the bush long alone, he ain’t the type. I don’t think the man could survive on his own. He’s big, but he’s dumb.”

The next two weeks passed slowly with the weather finally turning half way decent toward the end. Barnes was up and bout almost a week after we had fixed ‘em up. Oh, he was sore and didn’t have much strength to ‘em yet, but we fed ‘em a lot of red meat and made him use the whiskey fer the pain.

Fifteen days after we found Barnes in the snow, we saddled up, loaded our pews and headed out of the mountains. The trail was muddy and the going was slow, but we were in no hurry. We suspected Bull would be easy to find, ‘cause it’s hard to hide a man his size.

Four days later we tied our hosses to the hitching post in front of the tradin' post just as the sun started to rise. I walked through the door and heard the small bell above it jingle our arrival. No sooner had we entered than Butterfield came from a back room and gave us a worried look.

"What's the matter Butterfield, you look like yer a-lookin' at a ghost?" I asked in jest.

"Well, Bull came in heah 'bout a week ago and said y'all was daid. Said some Blackfoots done kilt y'all up on Baldy."

"Well they didn't. We ain't seen no Injuns in months. And speakin' of Bull, where is that worthless sumbitch? Me and him got us a fight." Crazy Wayne said with a voice filled with anger and murder dancin' in his eyes.

"He's long gone Wayne. He teamed up with a couple of fellers takin' furs back to Saint Louie and he left with 'em 'bout a week ago, the same day he got heah."

"He kilt James and Gee-Gee, mister Butterfield and left me fer daid. Only I don't die easy." Barnes spoke for the first time.

"He came in here durin' the middle of the night with four hosses, said they belonged to some daid trappers he had found in the mountains. He had some other supplies too, but somethin' 'bout the way he said it that made me uncomfortable. Hell, he even traded me a good two hunnert pounds of prime beaver pew a-fore he left. But, he said he was savin' the prime pelts fer Saint Louie."

Barnes slowly shook his head and said, "Them skins belonged to us. I guess after he kilt the others he took what we had and kept it fer his ownself."

Butterfield moved his glasses up on his nose and said, "Barnes, I had no idea them pews was stolt. I thought they belonged to the man."

"I unnerstand mister Butterfield and I don't blame ya one bit, but Bull owes me fer the lives of my friends and the pews he took. Looks like I am a-headin' off to Saint Louie. Did he plan to stay there, or did he say?" Barnes spoke as he leaned weakly against the glass display case in the store front.

"Well, now, he did say somethin' bout a-headin' to Little Rock, Arkansas, if-un I 'member right. Said he had family north of the town. He might be hard to catch with as much as a lead as he has on ya."

"Oh, I'll catch 'em and when I do, he'll pay in blood fer his ways. I'll read over him with the Good Book when I am done." Barnes said as he glanced at the three of us.

"I'll go too." Crazy Wayne stated as if he was discussing a meal instead of the trip that would take weeks.

"I'm in too. Oh, give us a bottle of good rye whiskey right now, mister Butterfield. It's been a spell since we had any good drinkin' whiskey." Drinkwater said as he laid his rifle on a nearby table top.

Damn it, I had not choice but to agree to go on the trip too. I didn't want to go, not really, but the man had wrong us and he had to pay. Mountain justice had long arms and we had to see this thing through now that it had started.

Looking at Barnes I said, "All right, I'll go too. He has to pay fer his wrongs, but he ain't gonna be easy to flush out once he gets back home. Them country folks protect their own ya know."

"Well, now, Ty, that's innerestin' 'cause so do we. The man kilt two of our friends and shot Barnes heah. Rarely have I known a mountain man to start a killin' feud

Ty, but by God, Bull did the job. I do believe the sentence fer that kind of crime is death.” Crazy Wayne spoke and then gave out a loud insane laugh a delayed second later. The hair on the back of my neck stood straight out. *God help Bull*, I thought, *‘cause these sumbitches are after blood.*

“Butterfield, you’d better stock us up with some supplies son, it looks like we’re a-goin’ on trip to Arkansas!” Crazy Wayne yelled as he pulled the cork from a bottle of rye and started filling our tin cups with the amber liquid.