

The saw had bitten again, rasping on the bone. He shuddered, even now on the top of that cursed, pain-producing horse, he whose kind of life in the last years had inured him to any ordinary amount of agony. But the sound...he would never forget that. He didn't know if there was actually a sound or if it was bone induction whose vibrations traveled to his brain or if he had just imagined it. Vaguely he had been aware of the cause, the doctor sawing his leg off but he hadn't cared about that so much. Why hadn't he cared? He could not answer that question. But it hurt. Why did it take so long? Each downward thrust of the saw took a full minute to execute as time slowed with the drug. He swore he could have felt each tooth, each bite, each particle of bone being shaved away from his femur and the concussive rasp of each thrust's fangs.

The tunneled memory had given way to a blurred realization of some image hovering over him. He groaned. His leg hurt like a son-of-a-gun. He reached down and felt to maybe massage the pain away but he could feel nothing below his thigh. He moved up: there was no knee. He mumbled a particularly poisonous curse at the orderly above him who moved away hastily. Then he cursed the doctors and the pile of limbs outside the hospital where his leg lay moldering with the rest of them until it was its turn for cremation. Then he cursed the boy once more, a mantra whose repetition did more for his descent into darkness than anything else. More memory came to him. The drug had faded as his consciousness took over and the man on the horse recalled even earlier.

He had lain in the rain, screaming to the man not to leave him. The man said something vaguely about not killing him and it was up to him to be thankful for it. He didn't understand then and he didn't understand now but accepted the extension of life as an opportunity. An opportunity for revenge. He would never understand the man's foolishness in letting him live but he understood his own undying purpose now.

The Union logistics troops had been cleaning up after the battle of Kennesaw Mountain and had found him lying in the mud. His knee was literally shot to hell and back but through the mercy of the God he denied, it had missed the popliteal artery and he had suffered little bleeding.

He had a vague impression of being lifted up and briefly frisked. Nothing was found on him but his stolen uniform so they assumed he was an officer, a casualty of battle instead of the opportunistic deserter. In these days of wartime communication, a

wanted deserter was very low on the priorities list and his self-assigned moniker, “Johnson,” was such a common name among both North and South to not matter much, even if they thought they could get an answer out of the delirious man. Finally, they gave him the benefit of the doubt simply because for all they knew he was the scion of some upper society daddy they could not afford to offend. The stretcher-bearers just shrugged when he fainted again and carted him off to the new triage area with a “John Doe” tagged to his shirt.

The field hospital doctors took one look at the shattered knee and wartime exigencies promoted an immediate removal of the leg just above the knee. At this point in the war, they knew that the sooner an amputation took place, the better the odds for survival. The doctor also wanted to try a new technique where they pulled the muscle back before cutting it off and then wrapping them back around the bone. The theory was that it made a sort of pad so a prosthetic was marginally more comfortable. *Comfortable!* Johnson snorted and his horse did too, its ears flipping back at him. He remembered protesting feebly and even when fading into chloroform limbo he’d tried to feebly push the healing hands away.

But to the benumbed staffs’ shock, he was most eloquent in his damnation of the man and his boy, whether unconscious, conscious or during the months of healing afterward. Curses they’d heard before and plenty about the “enemy,” “damn Rebels” and “God” and “Fate,” but never had a man such specific and focused hatred for these two. The staff had reached their limits as had he and they were all ready to part once he was physically ready to go.

He spent a few weeks at one of the large hospitals and months convalescing at some reconfigured mansion somewhere. He had no home to go to and made up a convincing story that kept him healing and fed until he could escape the tedium. As a walking injured not going back to the front lines, that lasted much shorter than he had hoped. The cursing kept up and he invented new ones. Even the most altruistic, albeit hardened field nurses avoided contact with him except for all but the most necessary of tasks, thankful that his vitriol was not focused toward them.

Now, with each incessant plop of the horse, each yard they walked and each mile eaten away by patience, he renewed and sustained his hatred. He would find them. Not

for the gold they carried although that was still a figurative burr under his saddle. And lucrative, too, he supposed. But he would make them pay for his leg as well.